


Rawr: Kitchen, rage, Judith and I¹

Maud Ceuterick
University of Bergen (Norway) ✉ 

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ENG Abstract. Through aggressive repetitions and superimpositions of sound and images, this video (essay) proposes to give an audiovisual form to Judith Butler's theorisation of gender as a performance made of repetitions of stylised acts. This experimental film creates a formal or 'autopoetic' manifestation of the rage that generations of feminist theorists and filmmakers have expressed at the idealised and uninhabitable embodiment of gender.

Keywords: abjection; domestic space; experimental video-essay; gender roles; sexist violence.

ES Rugir: Cocina, rabia, Judith y yo

Resumen. A través de repeticiones y superposiciones agresivas de sonido e imágenes, este video ensayo propone dar forma audiovisual a la teorización de Judith Butler del género como una actuación compuesta de repeticiones de actos estilizados. Este film experimental crea una manifestación formal o 'autopoética' de la rabia que generaciones de teóricas y cineastas feministas han expresado ante la encarnación idealizada e inhabitable del género.

Palabras clave: abyección; espacio doméstico; roles de género; videoensayo experimental; violencia machista.

Summary. 1. Written statement. 2. References.

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1. Written statement

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and [...] must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. [...] The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts. [...] The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity or a parodic repetition that exposes the fantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction (Butler, 2006, pp. 191-192).

Through this convoluted assemblage of Judith Butler's (2006) words, I have aimed to express the absurdity of gender embodiment which Butler calls

'performance' (Butler, 1993; 2006). As Butler (2006) explains, a conjunction of stylised acts makes up our everyday bodily gestures and movements. These repeated acts reinforce a historical and cultural construction of gender which one is forced to embody and ultimately inhabit. However, as Butler writes, this embodiment supposes unachievable ideals and that gender is radically 'uninhabitable' (Butler 1993: 25).

I can feel rage and anger in Butler's text, a rage that haunts many feminist texts as well as my video essay which, in turn, materialises it through a hammering of repeated words and images. This video essay is meant as a «radical alteration in all those assumptions underlining our lives» just as Audre Lorde (1981, p. 8) calls for. By repeating acts that are not expected, these women mobilise their rage as a destabilisation of gender norms.

In putting myself on screen, interacting with Butler's words and using superimpositions of images

¹ Chanse Era-Net Programme.

and sound as an audiovisual technique, I aim to create a continuity in feminist movements and between generations of angry women. By bringing women together in a single frame and focusing on their long hair, the video essay gathers women rising against Western models of femininity, thereby creating a united rebellion against patriarchal oppression. Women cutting their hair has indeed been used as a political gesture against oppression, and most recently against the Iranian Islamic regime during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement after the brutal murder of Masha Amini (see Chafiq, 2022). In the first section of the video essay, Chantal Akerman appears as the only woman with shorter hair, watching the other women on screen while also watching herself in the mirror in a scene extracted from Akerman's short film *Saute ma ville* (1968). Her gaze towards herself and the other women questions the social pressure to comply with the performance of gender but is also meant as a gesture of support, of a woman watching other women's rage, understanding it, and, ultimately, inhabiting it herself. While the four white cis-women on screen «examine the particulars of their lives» and their expected habitation of the domestic space and the kitchen in particular, their abject gestures aim to manifest an opposition against the oppression of all women just as Lorde (1981, p. 8) advocates.

Asbjørn Grønstad (2011, pp. 195-196) theorises entropic or unwatchable cinema as creating confrontational moments that «inflict violence upon the viewer», phenomenologically and ethically «destroying the sensibilities» that they have acquired through decades of cinematic experiences and history. All three films included in this video essay, *Saute ma ville* (1968), *Kitchen Sink* (1989) and *Grave* (2016), include unwatchable moments whose task is to disconcert but also to «open up spaces of reflection that are more vital than the film itself» (in Grønstad's words, 2011, p. 203). This video essay causes uneasiness in the viewer who is forced to watch with masochism women having manic episodes in the kitchen or with a male partner. Put together, these moments manifest rage against the establishment of women in roles of care for their own appearance and for others. These films and many more such as *In my skin* (dir. Marina de Van, 2002), *Home* (dir. Ursula Meier, 2008), *Swallow* (dir. Carlo Mirabella-Davis, 2019) or *Titane* (dir. Julie Ducournau, 2021) transgress

gender expectations and deny viewers the cinematic pleasure of watching the beautiful. Through repetitions and superimpositions (of both sound and images) this experimental video essay creates an intense rhythm which assaults the viewer. More than providing «[complete] or [finished] tropes» of meaning, it perhaps becomes what Grønstad (2011, p. 195, italics in original) identifies as «*autopoetical*, [...] engendering a form of conceptual thought». Grønstad (2011, pp. 195-204) identifies autopoetical moments as aesthetic forms of excess that emerge from the encounter of «phenomenology and ethics» and provoke a dialectical relation between the film and the viewer as they upend «culturally hegemonic conventions and expressions». The assemblage of Butler's rhetoric on gender and the increasing superimposition of abject sounds and images produces a parallel with the political use of rage –from its most articulate, to its most visceral expression–. Through this, the video essay aims to give form to a radical alteration of conventional images of women and to the rage of generations of women against pervasive gender roles from the 1970s to today.

2. References

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