

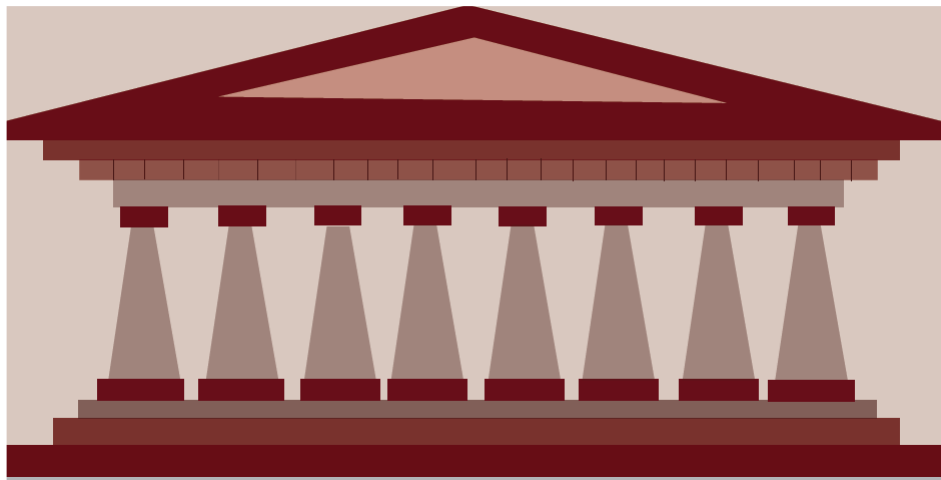
# Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 2

Published by the Athens Institute

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April 2025

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## Front Pages

MARK KONEWKO

[How a Virtual Choir Enhances Social Capital](#)

DION MALCOLM EABY-LOMAS

[“Amapiano to the World”: A Movement in Afrodiasporic Space](#)

SUYASHA SINGH ISSER

[Contemporary Boundaries of Women and their Modifications](#)

MARTA MIQUEL-BALDELLOU

[Revisiting Suburban Gothic Narratives: Intertextualities, Gender, and the Invisible Trope of Old Age in The Stepford Wives and Edward Scissorhands](#)

CAROLINA REZNIK

[The Decoration of the Oinochoe at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Theatrical Painting?](#)

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ISSN NUMBER: 2241-7702 - DOI: 10.30958/ajha  
Volume 12, Issue 2, April 2025  
Download the entire issue ([PDF](#))

<a href="#">Front Pages</a>	i-viii
<a href="#">How a Virtual Choir Enhances Social Capital</a> <i>Mark Konewko</i>	135
<a href="#">“Amapiano to the World”: A Movement in Afrodiasporic Space</a> <i>Dion Malcolm Eaby-Lomas</i>	147
<a href="#">Contemporary Boundaries of Women and their Modifications</a> <i>Suyasha Singh Isser</i>	171
<a href="#">Revisiting Suburban Gothic Narratives: Intertextualities, Gender, and the Invisible Trope of Old Age in The Stepford Wives and Edward Scissorhands</a> <i>Marta Miquel-Baldellou</i>	199
<a href="#">The Decoration of the Oinochoe at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Theatrical Painting?</a> <i>Carolina Reznik</i>	225

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The current issue is the second of the twelfth volume of the *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts (AJHA)*, published by the [Arts, Humanities and Education Division](#) of Athens Institute.

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
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- Submission of Paper: **12 May 2025**

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## How a Virtual Choir Enhances Social Capital

By Mark Konewko\*

*This paper examines the link between social capital and a virtual choir. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, with an intensified perception of alienation, community, church, and university choirs used the format of a virtual choir to continue the singing and performance practice of choral music. Created by a user-generated choir with uploaded videos and audio, a virtual choir is the final synchronized mix of these various files producing a unified performance. The challenge is to maintain and grow the virtual experience. A living sense of community and connection with others is a characteristic of the choral music process. Obstacles to overcome in the preparation and execution of a virtual choir participation include familiarity and facility with current technologies, the alienation of individually learning, preparing, and performing the singer's part and the lack of the traditional choral experience of interacting with individuals on a personal and sonic level. Using testimonials of singers involved in a virtual choir experience and current research regarding varied examples of developed choral practices, a clear demonstration of social capital is evident. Social capital is the value created by social relationships with likely returns in the form of good will, sympathy, and social networks.*

### Introduction

The virtual choir is a web of singers that sustain a distinct identity and shared purpose. It is not a network of singers in the traditional sense that interacts with each other in a common physical space but a shared virtual reality of digital choral art. It is a cooperative artistic creation that can involve thousands of singers from numerous points on earth. Twenty-first-century technology and skill have eradicated the boundaries of countries, regional communities, and traditions. The conventional approach to choral art of teaching, learning, rehearsing, and performing with a group of people in a common room has been transformed with the new choral art practice of the virtual choir—a piece of music is executed in the isolation of a singer's home. The traditional performance of choral music has morphed into a mixed multi-track online video sharing format such as a YouTube and Vimeo performance video that exists in the World Wide Web.

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\*Director, Marquette University Chorus & Professor, Department of Digital Media and Performing Arts, Marquette University, USA.

## The Virtual Choir

On March 21, 2010, Eric Whitacre, the originator of the virtual choir concept and realization, released *Lux Aurumque* the first virtual choir. It involved 185 singers from twelve countries. The inspiration came when in May 2009 Whitacre received a video from devotee Britlin Losee singing the soprano part from the composition, *Sleep*. Whitacre, impacted by the gesture and beauty of her singing initiated a social media experiment. Whitacre sent out a call online to his fan base, a young adult and teen group, encouraging them to learn the music, sing their part, and upload the outcome. Singers followed an online version of Whitacre conducting the piece to synchronize the singing. The uploaded files were first put together by Scott Haines who edited the audio and video and generated the first virtual choir.

The singers never met each other, never rehearsed together, and never knew each other. The entire traditional choral format of meeting in a common space, singing together, and creating a choral piece of music in the moment had been completely bypassed. All the personal interactions, communication in real time, and relationships built in the common construction of choral music were abandoned. The sonic interaction of singers learning a piece of music and blending a unified sound was also discarded. In the first two months after Virtual Choir 1, *Lux Aurumque* was launched, it received over one million hits on YouTube and since its release has been watched online by nearly five million people.

Released April 6, 2011, the second Whitacre virtual choir, *Sleep* included 1,999 singers from fifty-eight countries. This choir included children and senior citizens. Virtual choir three, *Water Night*, was released on April 2, 2012, with 2,945 singers from seventy-three countries. *Fly to Paradise* the fourth virtual choir released on July 11, 2013, involved and impressive 5,905 singers from 101 countries. The fifth virtual choir *Deep Field* was released on November 16, 2018, using 3,939 singers from 126 countries with the youngest singer of age four and the oldest singer of eighty-seven years. *Sing Gently*, released on July 19, 2020, the sixth virtual choir, includes 17,572 singers from 129 countries. Remarkable is the fact that the phenomenon of the virtual choir success has grown both in singers and countries involved. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of singers from a wide selection of generations that participated in this innovative artistic expression.<sup>1</sup>

Developing technologies have given rise to a new art form in the virtual choir. The lack of the traditional choral format has evolved into a novel form of a twenty-first-century choral reality. The above examples are the work of Eric Whitacre. After his first release of *Lux Aurumque* there were other examples of virtual choirs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many examples of virtual choirs, virtual orchestras, and virtual bands. Virtual dance performances, theater performances, and other artistic ventures also flooded the Internet during

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1. Whitacre, Eric. *Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir*.

the COVID-19 pandemic. Unable to meet in person led to the necessity to express and perform online. Evolving technologies gave growth to businesses that offered the assistance of mixing individual files and producing a unified virtual performance. Do-it-yourself videos also had a presence in the virtual performance information stream. The virtual presentation venue kept people working while continuing numerous art forms. The corporate creation of art online is flourishing.

In the choral field groups like an Australian Pub Choir's Couch Choir, the Barcelona Soul Choir, two Italian singing groups Il Coro Che Non C'è and Coro Saint Cecilia, Boston Children's Chorus, the Camden Voices from the United Kingdom, the Stanford Talisman Alumni virtual choir, Vancouver's Universal Gospel Choir, Lucerne, Switzerland's Molto Cantabile, and Fox Point, Wisconsin's St. Eugene Liturgical Choir to name a few, all engaged in the virtual choir performance phenomena.<sup>2</sup> All of these efforts were accomplished with the aspirations to connect and build social capital through a project that could be realized during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.

The social interaction included in the virtual performance space is also thriving with blogs, chat groups, and testimonials that support and grow the online virtual community of art performance. Whitacre, for example, offers and maintains a "location" for virtual choir participants to share their experiences online on his website. The page is called VC Family where those who have contributed to a past virtual choir are invited to share their stories. This social capital that is a part of this growing development of virtual performance is also expanding.

## Social Capital

The phrase "social capital" carries varied connotations and implications dependent on who and how it is used. It can be an economic and cultural capital where networks of individuals are vital to social interchange, trust, and cooperation. Coleman presents a bidimensional aspect of social capital:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure...Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons.<sup>3</sup>

Collective social capital and individual social capital<sup>4</sup> are two approaches that, in some way, appear in the presentations of Putnam and Coleman.<sup>5</sup> This

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2. Tori Cook, *Chorus Connection* (2020); Tom Metzger, *Top 10 Virtual Choir Videos of 2020* (Choirgenius, 2020).

3. James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 302.

4. Joonmo Son, *Social Capital* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020).

bifurcation of the term social capital has been a component since its initial stages. Putnam states, "Unlike conventional capital, social capital is a 'public good,' that is, it is not the private property of those who benefit from it."<sup>6</sup> According to Putnam, social capital is both personally and publicly good—at the same time.

One of the measures of collective social capital is trust. "Trust is a psychological trait that helps initiate social contacts, exchanges, and durable relations with other human beings. And such contacts, exchanges, and durable associations comprise social networks and social capital."<sup>7</sup> Bonding networks that are formed to increase social capital and influence trust are the framework for reciprocity. Miyata, Ikeda, and Kobayashi state, "bridging networks that connect diverse individuals sustain a sense of generalized reciprocity and general trust. Through social exchanges among diverse members, people tend to obtain a sense of generalized reciprocity."<sup>8</sup> The Internet is a place where networks expand, and people potentially can meet other individuals. It also has the potential to diminish the significance of physical attributes, gender, race, and appearance. The Internet can also diminish and eliminate the importance of physical distance. Miyata et al. suggest, "participation in online communities encourages formation of diverse social networks."<sup>9</sup> The measurement and management of this burgeoning beast is still in its infancy. Research, measurement, and supervision is also an explosive field of work.

Regarding managing social networks, those online, Koput states, "A long tradition of social research has demonstrated that we form ties with others with whom we share attributes or affiliations. That is, we interact socially with others with whom we have common interests, which may be based on our demographics, location, or participation."<sup>10</sup> The social networks that are the foundation of social capital, if managed skillfully, can produce fulfillment. As in reality, individuals are drawn toward others of similar interest and behaviors—the norms for social capital significantly existed before the Internet was created.

It is the intent of this paper to demonstrate social capital was present in the preparation and completion of a virtual choir. This work adds to the existing choral investigation and literature by offering research on the choral population and the relationship to the virtual choir experience. It has the potential of

5. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990.

6. Putnam, "Social Capital and Public Affairs," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 47 (1994): 10.

7. Son, *Social Capital*, 2020, 37.

8. Kakuko Miyata, Ken'ichi Ikeda, and Tetsuro Kobayashi, "The Internet, Social Capital, Civic Engagement, and Gender in Japan," in *Social Capital: An International Research Program* (eds.) Nan Lin and Bonnie H. Erickson, 206-233 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 210.

9. *Ibid*, 208.

10. Kenneth W. Koput, *Social Capital: An Introduction to Managing Networks* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2010), 22.

benefiting the study of social capital within and outside the choral world. An overriding significance of this study is to bring attention to the value of singing in a choir, traditional or virtual, and shed light on the effects of digital technologies on choral creativity and the collective creation of art. It is possible that singers and others will see the relationship between singing together and the act of creating choral music strengthening connections, relationships, and improving communities. This research displays the direct connection between a virtual choir and social capital.

### **Building Social Capital with the Virtual Choir**

Building social capital with a virtual choir is inherent in its design. As Coleman states, “A major use of the concept of social capital depends on its being a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes.”<sup>11</sup> A population in pandemic lockdown will experience long-term social stresses unless there is a novel design to support social interaction. “Another form of intentional organization is a voluntary association which produces a public good.”<sup>12</sup> The administrative leader of any organization possesses a clear concept and objective of the outcome. In an example of a singing group, the organizer, not necessarily the conductor but many times it is the conductor who is the driving force behind a virtual choir, must have the vision and desire to realize a project.” Social capital requires investment in the designing of the structure of obligations and expectations, responsibility and authority, and norms (or rules) and sanctions which will bring about an effectively functioning organization.”<sup>13</sup> Apply a functioning organizational model on a choral setting—with any organization, responsibilities and opportunities, accountability and control, and standards and restrictions actuate functionality. When these attributes are in place in a virtual choir, by this inherent design, social capital is a natural by-product of the shared purpose.

The organizational complexities of a virtual choir primarily include a musicality factor. The music selection must be accessible, understandable, and within the technical range of the chosen demographic. Each singing group has various skills and ranges. Musical choice is of paramount importance. Superior communication skills to engage the necessary financial support, singers, and technicians for the project ensure a successful outcome. The positive relationship between the director and singers is key to building trust that the projected goal is realistic and attainable. Some singers may need assistance with the learning of the music or the technical aspects of recording their files. A support system of either the director, in a smaller setting, or other structures of assistance are crucial. Not every person has a similar skill set. Technological issues are the greatest obstruction to the artistic process for many. Whatever guidance offered for those

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11. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990, 312.

12. *Ibid.*, 313.

13. *Ibid.*

with roadblocks related to technology that can be available the better. It is curious that the very technologies that give us the possibility of virtual performance can also be the biggest obstruction.

“Good for me and good for you” is also an inherent factor with social capital. The public good aspect of social capital is not like physical capital where property rights or ownership are the goal sought after. For those who are embedded in a virtual performance, social capital is not the individual property of anyone who gain from it.<sup>14</sup> It builds on itself by a public good contribution. Coleman writes,

The kinds of social structures which make possible social norms and the sanctions to enforce them do not benefit primarily the persons whose efforts are necessary to bring the norms and sanctions into existence, but all those who are part of the particular structure. . . . The public-good aspect of most social capital means that it is in a fundamentally different position with respect to purposive action than are most other forms of capital. Social capital is an important resource for individuals and can greatly affect their ability to act and their perceived quality of life. They have the capability of bring such capital into being.<sup>15</sup>

Coleman emphasizes the empowerment of those within the structure or organization are generating social capital for social good. Creating a thing of beauty with choral music or any art is a gift of service to the public thus bolstering the social capital outside the given structure. The power of the virtual choir to influence, in a positive way, public trust is evident.

## Methods

The thirty-three-voice chorus sampled was from a private university in the Midwest of the United States. The chorus is a non-required elective for academic credit in an institution that does not have a music major—thus the students registered for the class were motivated to be in the class because they had a propensity and desire to sing. Involved students studied nursing, engineering, digital media, education, and business. Some were musicians who had sung in choirs before, some never sang in a choir, a few were instrumentalists and composers while others could not read a note of music. Students met twice a week for a seventy-five-minute rehearsal. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the university initially had a mandatory online class format. The first quarter was an exclusively online recorded synchronous class. Students could return to the recording of the class and review their voice part if needed. The literature prepared for the virtual choir was a twelve-minute, three movement American work of the twentieth century with a medium degree of difficulty. Students

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14. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990.

15. *Ibid*, 317.

learned the music through online sectionals and group singing during class time and their personal review of recorded class. Because of latency with the programs used for synchronous online class meetings, students were unable to hear each other. Singers were isolated in their own personal space learning and singing their part while listening to the instructor demonstrate their individual voice part. At times the entire harmonic structure within which their part interacted was played allowing students to “hear” their part in the harmonic whole.

The second quarter was divided into online and face-to-face classes. Complying with the university and the American Choral Directors Association recommendations for singing, highly controlled smaller groups of six to eight singers met for fifty to twenty minutes singing with masks and physically distanced from each other by twelve to eighteen feet. For the first time students could hear their part as they were singing along with the other parts of the piece. These face-to-face meetings were paired with the online recorded synchronous class format.

Singers were given detailed instructions and information regarding participation in a virtual choir. Once the music was learned the next major hurdle for the students was to record their part while listening to a master track. The master track is used to synchronize the audio tracks with the video tracks. Individually, students would sing along with the master track numerous times with the goal of feeling comfortable, singing alone. Participants were then instructed to find a quiet space and set up their video recording, prepare lighting that would show their faces, and consider the background of the recording space. If they were singing in their bedroom suggestions were made to be attentive to any disarray in the room. Using headphones or ear buds, students would then record their performance to a smart phone or other device such as a computer. The final instructions given were to upload the audio/video file to a drop box that was accessible to technicians and the instructor. Once all files were uploaded the process of mixing and synchronizing the files into a whole would begin.

Data collection began in November 2020. Students were asked to write reflections on a series of questions. For this paper their name and gender have been withheld. There were three areas of inquiry, the first was the functionality of the class; for example, what worked, what didn't work? The second area contained more personal questions such as, did you feel connected to the group, did you make friends, did you feel alienated? The third area of interest was about the reason they sing, why participate in a virtual choir, and would you do this again. There was a 100 percent return of very thoughtful reflections on the questions posed.

The structure of the class at this university of the chorus is unusual in that it is a student run organization and an academic class. There is an executive board of students that organizes social gatherings such as dinners, parties, and get-togethers. Even during the pandemic, students would organize online parties, campfires, and meetups. This is noted here because it is a social component of the choral experience—singers not only gather to sing but also to connect socially with each other through gathering and various social activities. The interface of

singers before, during, and after a rehearsal is crucial for singers to connect with each other on a non-musical level.

The role of participant observation was practiced throughout the class portion and the data collection. The focus of the written reflections was to uncover feelings and behaviors that were authentic within a choral class setting and sharing of the lived experience of the same preparation of a virtual choir. It is important to understand the shared experiences so that a deeper understanding concerning the features of the phenomenon can be discovered.<sup>16</sup> The trend of interest here is the growing number of virtual choirs and the social capital that is part of the experience and reinforced in the process.

## Results

The first question category of data collection concentrated on class functioning, management, and delivery methods used for learning material in class. For the limited scope of this paper it will not be included. The data collected from the second and third categories, the thoughtful reflection on self, community, belonging, and purpose for individual singing, are addressed. Students were given two weeks after their audio/video files were uploaded to complete their written reflections. After the completion of their thoughts, they would download them to a university system of data capture.

During the coding and analyzing of the reflections, there were eight key areas in the second category regarding personal experience that are prominent: making new friends, the feeling of being connected to the group, a sense of alienation because of the pandemic, wanting/missing physical proximity with other singers before, during, and after rehearsals, a sense of inclusive belonging, social exchanges, shared purpose, and personally good and group good. These eight areas were all addressed individually in the students' responses. The third category of interest focusing on the reason the singer sings, there were three areas of prominence: singing as a part of life, singing to relieve stress, anxiety, and emotional release, and the desire to repeat the virtual choir experience. These three areas were also addressed individually. Personally good and group good require concise clarification. Personally good includes a sense of well-being and purpose, accomplishment, and happiness. Group good consists of a perception of family belonging, meaningful connections with others, and teamwork with a common purpose.

These data demonstrate that 21 percent of students made a new friend through the semester. One student commented, "I'm very glad to have met the new friends I made through chorus." Another student wrote, "I felt sad that I did not get to connect with everyone I was hoping to." Under the area of students

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16. John Ward Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 60.



feeling linked to the group 52 percent stated that they felt connected to the class. One student commented, “despite the pandemic, I feel that I became more connected with the other members of the chorus.” That student also wrote, “I have found my place within the community.” The third area of interest was the sense of alienation felt either by the pandemic or the online rehearsal structure. Twenty-four percent of students felt a slight sensation of alienation. “At times I did feel alienated because the only time we communicated as a group was online. Not being able to see other people physically just lends itself for people to feel alienated.” Seventy-six percent of students missed the physical proximity of rehearsing together in the same space, clearly a significant number. These students missed and longed for the traditional physical proximity format of a chorus. The fifth area centered around the feeling of being included in the chorus—was the chorus in this online teaching format inclusive. Fifty-five percent felt that they were included in the chorus and welcomed. Most of the students articulated that if there was an issue with the semester it was not because of the chorus participants but rather the lack of physically being in the same space with other singers singing. The next area was entitled social exchanges implying the many times when students socially exchanged dialogue, messages, or made contact. In this category 61 percent could identify if they were engaged in social exchanges. In the penultimate area, 91 percent of students said they had a shared purpose. Some of the insightful comments included, “Although I believe that nothing will ever come close to a live musical performance, I felt comforted knowing that everyone was going through the same challenges that I was going through. This semester, that was the “community” that the Chorus was.” Another student wrote, “Choral music is such a magical inexplicable thing. The fact that it is impossible for a single person to perform a choral work on their own, requiring multiple people to join and participate.” The eighth and final category in this section was the awareness that the experience was personally good and good for the group. Ninety-four percent stated that the experience of the virtual choir preparation and recording was a good one for the individual and good for the group.

The coding and analysis of the third area of interest included three topics, why do you sing, what is the purpose of singing, and future participation in another virtual choir. Seventy-three percent of students stated that they had always sung, whether in a family setting, church choir, or school choir, they always remember singing—it was a part of growing up. Seventy-nine percent articulated that singing was a stress and emotional reliever. One student said, “The simple answer for why I sing is because it makes me happy. Singing and music have always been a way to get in touch with and release emotion and stress which especially helps during stressful times like the pandemic we have been going through this year.” Another, “I sing because I love the freedom of expression that it provides, it’s therapeutic and allows for an outpour of emotions.” Two students used the same words, “I sing because it is a release.” Yet another singer wrote, “Singing brings me joy and makes me feel complete.” The final topic point asked

the question, would you participate in a future virtual choir. Eighty-two percent said they would participate in a future virtual choir. Comments included, "I put in the effort to make virtual choir work because I was determined to not let COVID-19 stop me from engaging in activities that helped me find peace of mind." One senior member wrote, "I still think that even if we cannot be in person, we are still able to create such beautiful art together." One singer summed up her thoughts with, "In a way, the music brings us together even when we cannot be physically near to others."

## Discussion

If indeed there is a rise of social capital in what Lin refers to as cybernetworks then the virtual choir is joining the list of networks that are prolifically constructed in cyberspace. Lin focuses on defining measurement of social capital on embedded resources within networks.<sup>17</sup> The increase in participation in the virtual choir from 185 singers from 12 countries with *Lux Aurumque* to the participation in *Sing Gently* with 17,572 singers from 129 countries is evidence there is an ascent in social capital in cyberspace. Lin proposes two hypotheses: "(1.) Social capital in the form of cybernetworks is clearly on the rise in many parts of the world, and (2.) The rise of cybernetworks transcends national or local community boundaries: therefore, its consequences (both positive and negative) must be assessed in the global context."<sup>18</sup> This uptick in networks in cyberspace has outcomes away from societal or national borders.

The data demonstrate that 91 percent of students involved in a virtual choir experienced shared purpose, a hallmark of social capital, and 94 percent of students articulated the bidimensional aspect of social capital regarding good for the individual and good for the public. The virtual choir experience provides social capital to a global "market" carrying the beauty of the choral art presented with enticing and engaging video technology. Lin asserts,

These "virtual" connections allow users to connect with others with few time or space constraints. Access to information in conjunction with interactive facilities makes cybernetworks not only rich in social capital, but also an important investment for participants' purposive action in both the production and consumption markets.<sup>19</sup>

There is no longer a restriction of time or space with the creation and expansion of social capital. The virtual choir has opened a new potential, using the choral art, increased levels of social capital with the possibility of global reach.

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17. Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 211.

18. *Ibid*, 212.

19. *Ibid*, 215.

Intriguing that not once did the data show the word trust. Not one student used the word trust, yet trust is the expectation that is a component of a community of truthful, routine, and mutual behavior. "Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it."<sup>20</sup> The sheer splendor of the virtual choir is embedded in its structure, a common shared purpose within a framework of directions. Each singer releases themselves to the structure of the music and joins the others, virtually, creating a thing of beauty. "The most useful kind of social capital is often not the ability to work under the authority of a traditional community or group, but the capacity to form new associations and to cooperate within the terms of reference they establish."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the students put their unspoken trust in the chorus director or the process of choral music. Perhaps they put their unspoken trust in each other to work hard for each other to produce the virtual choir. Perhaps they put their unspoken trust in themselves to use singing as a tool to make something beautiful together. Indeed, they have put their trust in making an artistic statement—so succinctly stated by one of the students, "Choral music is such a magical inexplicable thing. The fact that it is impossible for a single person to perform a choral work on their own, requiring multiple people to join and participate."

## Conclusion

The virtual choir is a network of singers that sustain a distinct identity and shared purpose online. No longer are there limitations of time or space with the creation and progress of social capital through the virtual choir experience. Intrinsic in social capital is the matrix of relationships between persons and individuals that occur online. The virtual choir experience includes a community aspect where social capital is inherent. Participants in a virtual choir are predicated by a general interest in singing, bringing musicians together to learn, rehearse, record and upload audio and video files. Coleman<sup>22</sup> bases his theory of social capital on relationships with people. In the virtual choir experience, the relationship between singers, in this case, occurred during class and in break-out rooms online, after class in chat rooms and on blogs. The bifurcated nature of social capital is central in the virtual choir experience—the virtual choir is good for self and good for the society. The ability of the virtual choir to inspire public trust is apparent. The virtual choir enhances social capital.

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20. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 26.

21. *Ibid*, 27.

22. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990.

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## **“Amapiano to the World”: A Movement in Afrodiasporic Space**

By Dion Malcolm Eaby-Lomas\*

The phrase “amapiano to the world” is often used by practitioners to refer to the power of the musical form to travel across national boundaries and its potential to become a global phenomenon like hip hop or house music. Using Xavier Livermon’s conception of Afrodiasporic space which argues that Africa is a “constitutive and continuous site of diaspora” and that those constructed and represented as indigenous are equal parts of such a diasporic space<sup>1</sup>, as well as Gavin Steingo’s “point-to-point” connectivity rather than the often represented “frictionless musical flow”<sup>2</sup>, I examine amapiano’s position in the world, noting how local music scenes are connected through global point-to-point networks<sup>3</sup>. I discuss this in four sections titled; “Taking up Afrodiasporic Space: Kwaito in the world”, “Whatsapp Groups: Music and Noise”, “Amapiano from the World: Afrodiasporic Influences and Intertextuality in Banyana” and “Amapiano in the World: Constructing Local Meaning”. The first outlines notions of local and global in the kwaito literature. The second examines the use of digital spaces in the dissemination of amapiano, specifically Whatsapp group chats, and criticizes the notion of “frictionless musical flow” by highlighting the role of spam in obtruding the musical message. The third section examines the trajectory of Columbian singer Totó La Momposina’s *El Pescador* and *Curura* through various localizations of meaning in European dance spaces into DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU’s song *Banyana*. The final section examines spaces outside of South Africa’s appropriation of amapiano in the AMAFest festival hosted annually in the UK, the Nigerian form “Afropiano” and American hip hop and R&B stars use of the genre. Amapiano represents a local youth form which offers a “creative resistance to the forces of globalization”<sup>4</sup>, while simultaneously using such forms to disseminate music, reworking them to create local meaning and playing an active role in the construction of new forms in Afrodiasporic space.

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1. Xavier Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 30.

2. Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito’s Promise: Music and the aesthetics of freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 121; 138.

3. Gibson Boloka, “Cultural Studies and the Transformation of the Music Industry: Some Reflections on Kwaito,” in *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, eds. Herman Wasserman, Sean Jacobs (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003), 97-107.

4. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.

## Introduction

*"Amapiano will be a household name in its own right. A force to be reckoned with, the goal is for the sound to be recognised like pop, hip hop, house etc. 5 years from now we will continue to work as a collective to get it there or at least close to there." – DJ Maphorisa*

"Amapiano to the world" is a popular phrase used to refer to amapiano's exponential growth in popularity, specifically its ability to travel across the world. It comes with the proud affirmation that practitioners are world-class and contemporary and can be read as a call to take up global space by South African black youth. Rather than opposing forces of globalization, these youth use such forces to disseminate their music, create local meaning and shape globalizing spaces using their own self-definition.

The above quote is taken from DJ Maphorisa<sup>5</sup>, a veteran South African producer and DJ who has been an important part in both the growth of amapiano through his collaboration with founding artists like Kabza de Small, and to its global impact through his connections with artists throughout the world. His assertion, that amapiano will be a "household name", reveals an aim to share the South African sound with the world. It implies a contribution to a wider, interconnected space, a musical form which transcends national boundaries, and the potential for a plethora of localized meanings throughout the world.

In this chapter I argue that this is an assertion of the agency of young black South Africans in a broader musical/cultural space. In this discourse on the expansion of the genre across the world, amapiano practitioners are insisting on their own place in Afrodiasporic space, a creative resistance against placing Africans in the past. A study of the contacts also reveals their nature which are often characterized by interactions between isolated points rather than global flows. They are also seldom frictionless and contain various forms of misrecognition and noise. I also examine the localization of meaning across spaces, noting how music scenes adapt music which has arrived through the 'global' (usually the internet) to suit the needs of their locales.

The chapter pivots along two significant theories from the kwaito literature, specifically Xavier Livermon's Afrodiasporic space<sup>6</sup> and Gavin Steingo's point-to-point critique of "frictionless musical flows"<sup>7</sup>. In his chapter on Afrodiasporic space, Livermon discusses Beyoncé's *Run the World* (and her work with Mozambican pantsula dance troupe Tofa Tofa) and Boom Shaka's performance of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, and how these demonstrate kwaito's role in circulating black cultures. This frames young (black South) Africans as equal participants in Afrodiasporic space, rather than simply remnants of the past for cultural imperialists to mine. Steingo,

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5. Maphorisa in Megan Townsend, "Amapiano hasn't even reached its full potential", *Mixmag*, June 16, 2022.

6. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*.

7. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*.

on the other hand, critiques notions of musical flow for their implication that music flows unhindered. He also observes that contact seldom resembles 'flow' in the sense that contacts are usually made between isolated individuals.

To begin, I will introduce the music form of amapiano, how it sounds, the context in which it emerged and its relationship with the earlier music form kwaito. This study forms part of my master's thesis<sup>8</sup>, which examines amapiano as a "post-kwaito" phenomenon. The next section discusses how the local and global were understood and constructed in the kwaito literature. While notions of local and global in kwaito music are a helpful starting point for this discussion, amapiano functions differently in these spaces, well exemplified in the notion "amapiano to the world", which implies an intention to reach the world. Second, I examine the role of WhatsApp groups in disseminating the musical form across space, while also paying attention to "noise" (spam) in these spaces. The long history of influence which resulted in DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*<sup>9</sup> is the subject of the third section as it demonstrates the Afrodiasporic, point-to-point nature of amapiano's contacts with the world. Finally, I investigate the appropriation of amapiano in locales outside of South Africa through the AMA Fest festival in the UK, Afropiano in West Africa and American hip hop and R&B references to the form.

### Amapiano and/as Post-Kwaito

Amapiano is an electronically produced dance music which emerged from South African townships around 2012 and has since grown to become the most consumed music in the country at present. It forms part of a long history of black township music, from early appropriations of jazz to the adaptations of bubblegum pop in the 1980s, to the post-apartheid forms of kwaito and gqom. With influences from several of these musics, as well as new international influences such as deep house, the music plays at around 112 beats per minute, is produced on computers with live instruments being rare, and features a variety of vocalizations including singing, chanting, rapping and wordless improvisations. Literally translating to "the pianos", amapiano is proud of its relationship with underserved township locales while simultaneously celebrating new forms of black consumptive freedom, and wider forms of Afrodiasporic connections. Easily identifiable due to its characteristic shaker which lies at the center of its percussive introduction which

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8. Titled *Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa township and the World*, my thesis examines the history, aural arrangement, the role of sensory experience in imagining/constructing future freedom and we-formations, amapiano in the world, and amapiano's representation of the township. Available upon request ([EBYDIO001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:EBYDIO001@myuct.ac.za)).

9. DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU, "Banyana," 2021, Track 1 on *Banyana*, NEW MONEY GANG, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY>

builds through the addition of sonic elements until its peak where its unique bass instrument, the log drum, features prominently. Examples of this sound can be heard in Focalistic's *Ke Star*<sup>10</sup>, Young Stunna's *Adiwele*<sup>11</sup> and Sha Sha and Kamo Mphela's *iPiano*<sup>12</sup>.

South African townships are the result of the racial segregationist policies apartheid. The system of institutionalized separation of ethnicities introduced by the National Party in 1948 was enacted under the guise of protecting cultural differences, and specifically ensuring the 'purity' of white, Afrikaner (Afrikaans-speaking) nationalism and culture. Ethnicities (or more accurately linguistic groups) were further divided to ensure that the black majority could not unite in the fight against the system. This was usually done through forced removals into Bantustans or "homelands", where people groups who shared language (such as the "Xhosas" or the "Zulus") were grouped. However, these were often rural and far away from the larger cities which required the exploitation of a black labour force, which resulted in the creation of townships. Framed as providing an opportunity for "separate but equal development", the townships were instead employed to limit black movement in urban spaces and to provide unlimited labour to the capitalist machine. They are characterized by harsh socio-economic conditions, including unemployment, poor access to services, limited mobility, overcrowding and poor levels of education. They are still almost exclusively populated by black populations (including the category of coloured people, an apartheid-instituted racial grouping based on mixed ethnicity).

Several musics have originated in township spaces, notably for this paper being kwaito in the latter part of the 1980s and became immensely popular by the turn of the century, following the first democratic elections in 1994. These elections were the first time that the black majority of the country were granted the right to vote and saw the election of the first black president of the country, Nelson Mandela. This moment was characterized by a hopefulness for a brighter, freer and more equal future for the country. However, the clear disparities between racial groups that were instituted under the regime are still obvious today, almost 30 years later.

I have argued elsewhere that kwaito shaped the landscape for musical and cultural forms which followed<sup>13</sup>. I see forms such as amapiano and gqom as post-kwaito, as they emerge as the result of kwaito (and many other converging influences), take the shape of kwaito, but also respond to and change the form, creating something that is new and independent of the older music. Not only do amapiano and kwaito share a common township history and characteristics, but

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10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSVEoHVhLUI>

11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PSyVSfMWHO>.

12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFVgBsjWgPk>.

13. Dion Malcolm Eaby-Lomas, "Historicising gqom as a post-kwaito phenomenon," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 18, no. 1 (December 2021).



many of the issues that have been raised in the literature on kwaito remain relevant to discourse on amapiano.

### **Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom**

This work is the fifth chapter of my masters thesis titled "*Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa Township and the World*" (available on request). The work examines amapiano as a form of sensory experiences and how these allow youth to navigate the meanings of 'freedom' in a contemporary South Africa. Currently no academic literature exists on amapiano, and so I chose to begin my study by using kwaito's literature as a lens through which to study amapiano. Kwaito marked a particularly important point in the study of popular South African musics as it correlated with the significant history of the official end of apartheid. Kwaito, then, became a useful tool to examine the shifting experiences of South Africa's black township youth. While I discuss many of their common themes in my thesis, this chapter will examine the relationship between the local and the global and various layers in between.

Besides a thorough reading of the kwaito literature, my work is also informed by ethnographic engagement in Langa township including making music with local musicians and interviews; in-depth analysis of the music and its associated media (for example, music videos); and engaging with newspaper articles, social media posts, performances, interviews, documentaries, amongst others.

### **Where in the World was Kwaito? Taking up Afrodiasporic Space**

Authenticity in terms of localness has been a topic of contention in kwaito music in all forms of its discourse, both popular and academic. The form was often dismissed as simply an appropriation of hip hop or house music. This section begins with the notions of local and global as they are found in the kwaito literature, concluding with two important theories for my discussion. Once more, I have chosen to study amapiano through the lens of kwaito's literature and theories used to understand this phenomenon, taking note of how amapiano functions similarly but also re-imagines kwaito's contributions.

In '*Kwaitofabulous: The study of a South African urban genre*, Thokozani Mhlambi asks

Can kwaito – a genre that is largely influenced by certain kinds of music from the United States of America – be considered a distinctively South African music

genre or is it just part of a mass expansion of a world youth music genre, clothed in South African forms?<sup>14</sup>

To answer this Mhlambi points to the local emergence of kwaito from older South African forms as well as the use of "African signifiers", such as instruments, izibhongo praise poetry and local languages to argue for its localness<sup>15</sup>. However, he also confirms the international influences of American and European music<sup>16</sup>. In a similar vein, Sharlene Swartz compares South African hip hop and kwaito in her paper titled *Is Kwaito South African Hip-Hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who It Matters To*, arguing that the question of distinguishing hip hop and kwaito revolves around "origination, authenticity and influence"<sup>17</sup>. Swartz goes on to quote Thandiswa of Bongo Maffin who said that kwaito "is about showcasing out [sic] Africanness, about showing off our continent, our culture and our country"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the conversation also forms part of popular discourse surrounding kwaito. Take for example kwaito artist Zola 7's *Ghetto Fabulous*<sup>19</sup> which praises local township spaces or "Ase Mo States" (this is not the States) by kwaito group Brothers of Peace which criticizes South African hip hop artists for appropriating American forms<sup>20</sup>. Despite Brothers of Peace's criticism, several members of the group went on to be involved in South Africa's 'Americanized' hip hop scene, as Sabelo Mkhabela notes<sup>21</sup>.

Mhlambi (rightly) criticizes Simon Stephens for his lack of knowledge of kwaito's township culture, implying that an understanding of the local was required to understand the form<sup>22</sup>. Xavier Livermon highlights earlier conversations about the local and global in kwaito literature in the introduction to his book *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa*<sup>23</sup>. Here he mentions an earlier "vindication" of kwaito, which emphasizes "the 'South Africanness' of the musical form and its connection with South African's polyvalent pasts" and thus focused on cultural imperialism and authenticity versus imitation<sup>24</sup>. Livermon also points to a shift in scholarship which is "premised on

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14. Thokozani Mhlambi, "'Kwaitofabulous': The study of a South African urban genre," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 1, no. 1 (2004): 116.

15. *Ibid.*, 125.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Gavin Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," *African Music* 8, no. 2 (2008): 17.

18. Pan (2000): 74, cited in Sharlene Swartz, "Is Kwaito South African Hip-hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who it Matters To," *The World of Music* 50, no 2 (2008).

19. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcn3sgGlr-8\\_](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcn3sgGlr-8_)

20. Sabelo Mkhabela, "Hip-Hop & Kwaito's Long Love-Hate Relationship," *OkayAfrica*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.okayafrika.com/south-african-hip-hop-kwaito-long-love-hate-relationship/>

21. *Ibid.*

22. Mhlambi, "Kwaitofabulous", 117.

23. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*

revealing the multiple global dialogues of Black South African youth and evidencing the significance of these global dialogues within local contexts” and thus began to focus on shifts in global political economies and new technologies to discuss the relationship between local and global.<sup>25</sup> An example of this is Steingo’s somewhat exaggerated position that “the triumph of neo- liberalism and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s were more significant events (or series of events) in the history of kwaito than the end of apartheid”.<sup>26</sup>

Important to note here is that while kwaito was (is) not to be dismissed as an appropriation of global youth culture, it was still intimately connected to it. Livermon notes how sounds, fashion and dances revealed connections to wider, circulating forms of black styles and performance<sup>27</sup>. Simultaneously, it was a thoroughly local form, with a local history, local languages and most importantly, local meanings. It is thus local and global. Livermon states, “To the extent that kwaito could be linked to the local, it represented a form of creative resistance to the forces of globalization, and thus was worthy of being admitted to the lexicon of South African popular music”.<sup>28</sup> This is certainly not unique to kwaito and post-kwaito forms. In an age of increasing contacts through ease of travel and most significantly through the internet, musics emerging contemporarily present increasingly complex relationships between the local and global. Speaking somewhat more generally, Boloka posits “the global has not replaced the local, but the local has become a path through which the global has to travel”.<sup>29</sup>

How can we analyze this relationship, then? Which kwaito theories could help me to understand the role of amapiano in local versus global spaces? I offer two later kwaito theories, namely, Livermon’s notion of Afrodiasporic space and Steingo’s model of point-to-point nodes as opposed to frictionless musical flow.

Livermon argues that kwaito can be located in and is constitutive of “Afrodiasporic space”<sup>30</sup>. Rather than interpreting the global aspect of kwaito as the unfortunate result of Westernization or globalization, the author insists that this form of South African youth culture forms part of a wider, complex interplay of cross fertilizations<sup>31</sup>. Two important contributions of Afrodiasporic space<sup>32</sup>, as it is used by Livermon, are an insistence on Africa as a “constitutive and continuous site of diaspora” rather than framing Africa as the past, and that those constructed and represented as indigenous are equal parts of such a diasporic space<sup>33</sup>. The

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25. Ibid.

26. Steingo, “Historicizing Kwaito”, 80.

27. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 4.

28. Ibid., 17.

29. Boloka, “Cultural Studies,” 97.

30. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 29.

31. Ibid.

32. Livermon’s notion of Afrodiasporic space is informed by Gregg (2001:266-267), Jaji (2014), Pierre (2008, 2012), Young (2006), Fabian (2002) and Brah (1996).

33. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 30.

latter also confirms that Africa itself is a diasporic space and that Africa and its diasporas inherit the same "conceptual and ideological space, which forms the basis of knowledge production and intellectual inquiry."<sup>34</sup> Thus, Livermon is responding to a view that Africa is simply a site of static culture ready to be mined by cultural imperialists by situating Africans as integral parts of a reciprocal global space in the contemporary.

Furthermore, Livermon argues that the study of contemporary African cultural practices focuses diasporic studies on "processual, circulatory, and polyphonic" movements, rather than linear, historical flows of earlier engagements<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, Steingo argues against a "frictionless musical flow"<sup>36</sup>. Using James Ferguson's work on finance<sup>37</sup>, Steingo argues that notions of flow and scape fail to take into account the friction of physical and technological mobility<sup>38</sup> in township spaces and that these contacts are better understood as connected through selective global points in a "point-to-point connectivity that bypasses and short circuit's scalar mappings".<sup>39</sup> He also notes that forms of offline distribution travel differently, in a "slowly expanding web".<sup>40</sup>

What, then, does Afrodiasporic space refer to as it is used in this chapter? It is a polyphonic, non-linear space which connects potentially infinite nodes in point-to-point contacts on local, national and international levels which is constantly re-made by those in Africa's diaspora as well as Africa itself. Rather than unpacking the local meanings of the form, this chapter focuses on the national and international contacts that amapiano has caused, even intentionally. It is to this I now turn.

### Where in the World is Amapiano?

While kwaito illustrates the complicated relationship between the local and the global found in contemporary youth musics, as well as confirming notions of Afrodiasporic space and point-to-point contacts, I would argue that amapiano takes these to new levels. While local spaces are being increasingly influenced by global cultures, many amapiano practitioners simultaneously aim to reach a more global audience, as evidenced by DJ Maphorisa's statement at the beginning of this chapter. In this chapter I use several case studies (in a similar fashion to Livermon's chapter) to demonstrate the circulation of Afrodiasporic youth cultures, specifically how amapiano has positioned itself within these contacts as

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34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 31

36. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 121.

37. James Ferguson (2006): 38, cited in Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 138.

38. The examples used focus on lack of access to transport and sufficient internet, amongst others.

39. James Ferguson (2006): 42, cited in Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 139.

40. Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 139.

a creative and constitutive force. I posit that the genre's practitioners, similarly to those of kwaito although perhaps more outspokenly, have employed a "form of creative resistance to the forces of globalization"<sup>41</sup>, while simultaneously using such forces to disseminate their music, reworking them to create local meaning, playing an active role in the construction of new forms in Afrodiasporic space and to define themselves on the world's stage.

More so than kwaito, amapiano's presence in spaces outside South Africa has been significantly shaped by the internet. This has allowed for increasing contacts between distinctive locals through various forms of communication, many of which have and continue to shape amapiano.

Under the headings which follow I will discuss various examples of contacts between amapiano produced and consumed in various locales in South Africa and the world in order to demonstrate its function beyond the borders of the township and the country more broadly. I will discuss WhatsApp groups as a seemingly frictionless digital space which is in fact more often characterized by "noise". I will examine how a Columbian tune travelled the world to influence several amapiano songs to show music's point-to-point travels across digital spaces. I will highlight localized amapiano spaces outside of South Africa, demonstrating music's capability of generating multiple meanings and show how South African agents are involved in these spaces exemplifying amapiano producers' agencies in global youth spaces.

### WhatsApp Groups: Music and Noise

Youth musics are increasingly disseminated through virtual spaces on social media platforms. The internet is often assumed to be a space of unrestricted access to the world; however, it is often plagued by inaccessibility, failure and spam. Both Livermon<sup>42</sup> and Steingo<sup>43</sup> note the use of other technologies for the transference of music (Bluetooth and detachable hard drives) because of poor internet access. Here I wish to examine one type of virtual space frequented by amapiano fans to share and receive music: the WhatsApp group. I use it to challenge the assumption of frictionless flow in digital spaces, while simultaneously demonstrating some of amapiano's unexpected contacts with the world.

As part of a hybrid approach to fieldwork, I sought out digital spaces occupied by fans of the music. Early research revealed that Meta-owned instant messaging mobile app WhatsApp has become a crucial part of the dissemination of amapiano. The main vehicle for this is WhatsApp's group chat. With an upper limit of 256 participants, these create spaces for the sharing of new music and

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41. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.

42. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 118.

43. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 146.

other music-related information (discussions about music, music production advice, etc.) from cellphone to cellphone across any distance. These groups may be dedicated to a specific type of amapiano (such as private school), a particular artist ("JazziQ Forever") or the musical form generally ("Amapiano Hits" "Amapiano Is a Lifestyle"). At first glance the use of these virtual spaces gives the impression of a "frictionless musical flow" but are in fact more often characterized by "noise" or spam, and inaccessibility.

In *Noise: A Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali defines the word "noise" as "a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission"<sup>44</sup>. Specifically, I use the term here to refer to interferences to the sharing of music (the intended message) in these virtual spaces.

Joining these groups was surprisingly easy. I found links to a long list of groups on a website dedicated to sharing WhatsApp group links and joined a few that weren't currently full. If one wanted to join a group that was full, you wouldn't have to wait long as members frequently leave and join. In fact, I was struck by the constant changes that took place in group membership, group description and group name, as well as the number of messages shared. I would wake up in the morning to find over one hundred messages on a single group and to find that a group dedicated to amapiano was now titled "Dee Mand Mack mixtapes" and accepted a music genre called "nostalgic". I was also surprised to scroll through the participants list to find that many of the members were not South African. The majority of these were from sub-Saharan African countries with notable amounts from Nigeria, Botswana and Mozambique, but also included one member from the United States and one from the United Kingdom. This was unexpected given that no language unites all these countries. One group had managed to bypass the group limit to host 511 participants, which meant that a single message would be sent to 510 locations simultaneously, potentially around the world. Although this gives potential for intercontinental contact, the majority of these members resided in Africa. This digital technology and amapiano had converged to make way for an Afrodiasporic, or perhaps more accurately a Pan-African, space.

However, relatively few of these messages are even related to amapiano. My original intention was to conduct informal interviews by opening discourse on the group and then monitoring the responses. I kept this informal as not to stand out in the group, but also made my intentions clear. I tried different approaches on different groups, such as trying to open a discussion on one group and asking another to send private messages with responses. However, I did not receive any responses. I believe there are two main reasons for this. The first is that these groups do not primarily function as discursive spaces. Several factors contribute to this, such as the wide array of languages spoken, the emphasis placed on music

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44. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 26.

dissemination as the purpose of the group and the number of participants. On the second point, most messages on these groups consist of general requests to send songs, or to identify and send a song from another piece of media (commonly TikTok videos are shared to identify and obtain the song in the video). Because of the large number of participants, messages outside of this purpose are often considered irrelevant (spam<sup>45</sup>) and conversations are usually shut down by the other participants on the group to conserve data and avoid the annoyance of streams of useless messages. Thus, group members likely avoided my messages out of fear of causing spam.

This brings me to the second reason I did not receive responses; spam. If the purpose of the group is to disseminate music, this could be considered music's opposite: noise. While I have mentioned one form of spam already, there are several others. These take four main forms; advertisement and wealth related 'opportunities', malware, religious texts and pornography. The first involves advertisements to join cryptocurrency/stock trading groups or to get free data to browse the internet. Given amapiano's links to under resourced areas, these take advantage of limited data usually to gather personal information which is sold to advertisers. The second type involves files which are shared on these groups under enticing names (most common was a file claiming to be a PDF containing the cellphone number of every woman in a specific area, but instead contains malware software). The third is equally common, although usually from a smaller number of senders and involves videos and PDFs of sermons, usually relating to the end of the world or warnings against 'seductive women of the devil'. The last category is illegal as there are no age restrictions to joining the group and the content is unsolicited. This involves sending links to pornographic groups and websites, as well as sending pornographic content directly. Several examples contained animals or school students. Many group descriptions warn against posting pornographic content with the threat of being removed from the group, although this seldom happens. Several artists also use these spaces to advertise their own music (often not amapiano).

The model of the WhatsApp group demonstrates how music is disseminated through virtual spaces. A group chat is a platform which creates a web of contacts through which, as can be seen above, people from distinctive areas can be connected. However, these groups are in no way "frictionless musical spaces". Noise significantly outweighs music on these groups. While these spaces allow for contact between isolated nodes across Afrodiasporic space, they do so with a significant amount of friction.

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45. Mariam-Webster dictionary defines spam as "unsolicited usually commercial messages (such as emails, text messages, or Internet postings) sent to a large number of recipients or posted in a large number of places" (*Definition of Spam*, n.d.).

### **Amapiano from the World: Afrodiasporic Influences and Intertextuality in "Banyana"**

DJ Maporisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*<sup>46</sup> illustrates the point-to-point connectivity of music travelling across the globe. Specifically, it shows how distant and distinct physical locations can be connected to share cultural products, in this case music. This example links Afrodiasporic Colombia to South Africa's popular music scene through a series of isolated connections, rather than large-scale cultural flows. I trace this trajectory from its origins, examine how each contact re-works the same material for its local and how the result (which may, in fact, not yet be the result) represents a convergence of every influence, thus representing an intertextual web of contacts.

Our story begins in Colombia with José Barros from El Banco, composer of many beloved Columbian songs<sup>47</sup>. One such song was a cumbia titled *El Pescador*, translated "The Fisherman", which offers a tribute to Colombia's hardworking fishermen and their connection with nature.<sup>48</sup> The cumbia is a rhythm, dance and costume which is said to represent "the mixture of Indian, Spanish and African influences" as it is said to have originated as a courting dance between African men and Indian women.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most famous version of this song was sung by Columbian-born Totó La Momposina and recorded by Real World Studios in August 1991<sup>50</sup>. The song was then released alongside her own song *Curura*<sup>51</sup> on the album *La Candela Viva* in 1992. Totó herself is said to embody "that fertile place where Colombia's African, Indigenous Indian and Spanish cultures mingle to create a unique musical tradition", describing her music as both African and Indian with a strong emphasis on percussion.<sup>52</sup> The song itself can be seen as the result of Afrodiasporic contacts through the transatlantic slave trade. Her exposure to "El Pescador" would have occurred due to its position in Columbia's local repertoire.

Through WOMAD she has played festivals throughout the world and notably in Europe, where the next important step of the trajectory toward *Banyana* takes place. *La Mezcla*<sup>53</sup> was originally released by Swiss producer Michel Cleis in 2009. The title roughly translates to "mix" which could simply refer to the fact that it is a remix or might imply the mixture of two local cultures resulting in

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46. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY>.

47. "El Pescador," *Totó La Momposina Biography* (n.d.), <https://www.totolamomposina.com/el-pescador/>

48. Ibid.

49. "Biography," *Totó La Momposina Official Site* (n.d.), <https://www.totolamomposina.com/about/>

50. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wN5YcDTx0Y>.

51. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr6HhSgY9Es>.

52. Ibid.

53. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7D8eUjMc>.



a new cultural product. The song sampled the two aforementioned songs by Totó, *El Pescador* and *Curura*. On Cleis's remix, the Spanish vocals on *El Pescador* are sampled over the flute part of *Curura*, as well as percussion, likely used from one of the two songs. The flute can be heard from 0:08 and the vocals from 0:30, respectively. The tempos of *El Pescador* and *Curura*, originally 82 and 96 beats per minute, respectively, are sped up to match *La Mezcla*'s 127 beats per minute. At this speed the percussion drives an almost frantic rhythm, an effect increased by his addition of a kick drum. Comparing this to *Hey Lady Luck*<sup>54</sup>, another popular song by Cleis, one can see that sampling and strong, sped up percussion are two important components of his style. His remix, then, can be seen as a repackaging of Totó's song for his local context. Interestingly, the percussion sampled from Totó La Momposina's songs contains a prominent shaker serving a similar function to the shaker found in amapiano, even playing a similar pattern, albeit with different accents.

Cleis's *La Mezcla* has furthermore been remixed several times. One such remix was done by British producer Charles Webster, titled *La Mezcla (Charles Webster's Club Mix)*<sup>55</sup> from 2010. This title points to the intention behind the remix, to recontextualize it for a club setting. His mix, then, slows down the tune to 120 beats per minute and adds many elements which give it its dance/electronic feel. Totó La Momposina's flute sample is only heard at 1:36, and her voice singing *El Pescador* only appears at 2:07. The song begins with a quarter note kick, a shaker and a clap sound, to which more percussion is soon added. Webster also adds a new bassline (heard from 0:32) and chords (0:47) which harmonize the *El Pescador* melody.

The gradual addition of elements, and even the order (percussion, bassline, chords, melody, vocals) closely resemble a typical amapiano introduction, albeit at a different speed using different samples. This may simply represent the connection between house musics and amapiano, perhaps the influence that older songs like Webster's club mix had on the emergence of deep house, which would later influence the South African form. However, the song itself had a significant influence on South African electronic spaces. The majority of YouTube comments on Webster's remix are from Southern Africans and various South African artists have used various elements of this song in their own. Why?

In conversation with fellow master's student Cebolenkosi Zuma, he told me that Charles Webster's remix had been featured on a Soul Candi playlist. Soul Candi began as a record store in Johannesburg with the intention of finding the best house music for South African DJs.<sup>56 57</sup> One such song that was widely shared was Webster's remix. One example of the song's influence is South African hip

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54. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGA4RRLNxck>.

55. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDEZU8tf0Cs>.

56. Cebolenkosi Zuma, personal communication, August 31, 2022.

57. "Our History," *Soul Candi*, retrieved September 5, 2022, <https://soulcandi.co.za/>.

hop artist Kwesta's song *Mayibabo*<sup>58</sup> which makes use of Webster's chord progression throughout, as well as Totó's *Curura* flute melody for the vocals at 1:14. Important to note is that DJ Maphorisa is credited as a featuring artist on this song.

Finally, our trajectory ends (for now) in DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*<sup>59</sup>. The title translates to "children", but also "girls" and the context suggests the latter. *Banyana*, released in 2021, begins with a typical amapiano beat introduction, with a shaker and various syncopated percussion, followed by an off-beat synth lead. The first reference to *La Mezcla* is heard at 0:34, where Webster's bassline is quoted using a house bass instrument with a slightly different rhythm. It is also more prominent in the mix. The next reference comes at 0:50 with the entry of Sir Trill's vocals. The melody line is borrowed from *El Pescador*, but the praises of Colombian fishermen in Spanish are replaced by Zulu lyrics describing a club with many women present. Both the solo and call and response part of the melody are used. At 2:00 a new melody is introduced and the influence of *La Mezcla* can only be faintly heard in the bass line, until the entry of the log drum at 2:17 which outlines the bassline with a characteristically syncopated rhythm.

The change in titles in this example illustrates the changes in context for which the different versions were intended. *El Pescador* is intended to celebrate humble fishermen, using 'traditional' music to celebrate a 'traditional' role in the community. *La Mezcla* refers to Cleis's use of the "remix" to recontextualize the material for his own electronic dance scene, thus re-working Totó La Momposina's local to suit his own. *La Mezcla (Charles Webster Club Mix)* does the same, this time for his local club culture. Finally, *Banyana* now reworks Webster's track to suit Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's local context, that of the amapiano party, positioning partying "girls" at the center.

*Banyana* does not directly sample any earlier material as Cleis and Webster do. Instead, it simply uses the melodies on new instruments and with new vocals and words. DJ Melzi's *La Melza*<sup>60</sup> uses the same approach. The keys which enter at 0:34 outline the chords of Charles Webster's club mix, with a much smoother sound with less high end. The second melody of *El Pescador* is introduced at 1:42, sung again with Zulu lyrics, closely resembling those of *Banyana*. The response part is clearly heard, with a less obvious reference to the call part heard in Totó La Momposina's tune. At 2:17 a second set of keys enter, and we hear a whistled melody resembling an inversion of the flute part from *Curura*. The log drum, which enters at 2:52 also outlines Charles Webster's bassline, however, less strictly. Blaqnick & MasterBlaq's remix of *La Mezcla*<sup>61</sup>, on the other hand, samples the flute directly, which can be heard at 1:42.

58. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIRXntOOIYw>.

59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY>.

60. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdu2RYuH5ns>. The name of the track is likely a reference to the producer's name and carries no particular meaning of its own.

61. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbfpDiPWIGg>.

This trajectory begins and ends in what could easily be categorized as Afrodiasporic. The melodies themselves can be described as Afrodiasporic as they emerged through contact between indigenous people groups and African slaves, with Totó La Momposina positioning herself at this intersection. The trajectory then ends on the African continent, produced by those constructed and represented as indigenous who thus play an equal part, to paraphrase Livermon<sup>62</sup>. Steingo's notion of point-to-point connectivity is well illustrated in this example, as the process connects individuals, rather than genres or larger spaces. Thus, rather than a global flow, this represented chance contacts to distant spaces. For example, Michel Cleis may have used the vocal samples of a different singer, in a different country if he had not heard "El Pescador", and either way those living around him not involved in his local music scene may have never heard either version of the song.

Amapiano's position at the end of this timeline is significant as it directly opposes any form of diaspora study which places African agents in the past. It is also important to note that in this case practitioners have reworked global club culture for their own context and thus demonstrate how they fit into a wider youth culture which is the result of globalization but are still actively defining themselves in resistance to it. However, our notion of Afrodiasporic space seems to be stretched when the Colombian tunes are used by two European producers in their localizations. That said, the amapiano practitioners have still re-localized these forms for their own context, not to mention the plethora of Afrodiasporic influence on electronic dance scenes through black musics such as disco, house and hip hop.

This example is also not as smooth and fluid as the above description makes it seem. Livermon notes the presence of misrecognition in Afrodiasporic movements<sup>63</sup>. Scrolling through the YouTube comments by a majority South African audience of Charles Webster's mix reveals that most fans would not know the origins of these melodies. In a sense, through the European obscuring and the new meanings created, these sounds have lost their earliest meanings, especially that which made them Afrodiasporic in the first place. Few South Africans would be able to understand the praise of Columbian fishermen and perhaps fewer would care. However, many comments mentioned how the song inspired *Banyana*, *Mayibabo* and *La Mezla*, thus functioning as local cultural products which have generated local meaning.

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62. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 30.

63. *Ibid.*, 32.

## Amapiano in the World: Constructing Local Meaning

Maphorisa's excitement for amapiano becoming a "household name" is well on its way to fruition. Amapiano has made a significant impact on various music spaces throughout the world. In this chapter I will examine several examples of amapiano in locales outside of South Africa. Returning to Boloka's position that "the global has not replaced the local, but the local has become a path through which the global has to travel"<sup>64</sup>, I will examine examples of amapiano's localizations outside the country to demonstrate both the increasingly Afrodiasporic nature of the music and how local practitioners assert themselves in such spaces. I will also briefly investigate the response of amapiano artists and fans to this growth.

### AMA Fest

3 September 2022 marks the date for the second annual "AMA Fest". This festival, dedicated to amapiano, hosts a majority of South African musicians at the South of England Showground, around 60km south of London. The festival will feature South African DJs and performers such as Cassper Nyovest, Kamo Mphela, Young Stunna and Uncle Waffles, alongside UK-based DJs including Mixolis, DJ Fistoz and Via Seri, each of whom advertise themselves as "Amapiano DJs" and perform regularly throughout the United Kingdom. While the event will also include gqom, kwaito, afro house and soulful house, amapiano will be played on all three stages, with the main stage playing the music exclusively. Production trio European 305, who will also perform, have created their own music combining the amapiano sound with House and Funky from the United Kingdom. Considered to be "the largest Amapiano festival outside South Africa", the festival last year hosted "thousands", aiming to "shed light on the sound of Amapiano, positioning the music genre on a higher pedal stool [pedestal] and increasing its outreach to those that love it most"<sup>65</sup>. The event will also include other South African cultural elements, including food.

The festival aims "to create a community and gateway for local fans and members of the diaspora to unite through song and dance"<sup>66</sup>. Here, it becomes clear that amapiano is also functioning in a broader, Afrodiasporic space. South African artists and DJs are constitutive of that space through music, fashion, food, language, amongst others. However, AMA Fest also aims to "create a community", or perhaps to construct a local. In this sense, Boloka is right. Local culture moves

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64. Boloka, "Cultural Studies," 97.

65. "About us," *AMA FEST 2022*, n.d., retrieved September 1, 2022, <https://www.Amafestival.co.uk/about-us>.

66. "AMA Fest Ticket Sales," *Dice*, n.d., retrieved September 1, 2022, <https://dice.fm/event/5yp2l-ama-fest-2022-amafest2022-3rd-sep-south-of-england-showground-haywards-heath-tickets>.

through the global to reach new locals. South African artists move into local space (in the sense of a distinctive, confined, physical space) dedicated to amapiano in the United Kingdom which will have its own cultural elements apart from the adopted ones.

How then, did amapiano travel to the United Kingdom? Lee Nxumalo, writing for Bubblegum Club, suggests that this is due to amapiano's success in Nigeria which then extended into the United Kingdom because of the large diaspora there<sup>67</sup>. The author notes the similarity between UK Funk and amapiano as pointed out by artists Valee Music and Donae'O as another reason for the popularity of amapiano in the UK<sup>68</sup>. Valee Music describes her first exposure to amapiano through Scorpion King's 2020 song "Emcimbini".<sup>69</sup> She goes on to say:

I think it was a natural transition. Afrobeats has been doing so well for so many years and the thing about being [on this] side [of the world], there is always a hunger for something fresh. We had a time where American R&B was the go-to sound in the '90s and then we had bashment, we had reggae and funk before we got into West Africa with the Afrobeats style. So it was only natural that Southern African music would be next. Now everyone is going crazy for the sound here and amapiano is rising and more artists are delving into the sound. It's still fairly new but we're starting to see a lot more collaboration and growth of the genre.<sup>70</sup>

Here, Valee Music points to the various localized contributions to a wider Afrodiasporic popular music space. She locates these black genres within black communities, for example Afrobeats in West Africa and American R&B, each of which 'take turns' contributing to the wider space. Thus, all participants of the Afrodiasporic space are equally active members.

Amapiano's success in the UK may also be partially the result of gqom's presence there. Specifically, gqom has enjoyed popularity in the European experimental underground, by those who produce their own electronic, youth-orientated music in the form of grime and lofi-minimalism, in a similar fashion to gqom using home computers with cracked (illegally downloaded) software<sup>71</sup>. This resulted in various contacts and collaborations, such as UK rapper Stormzy's trip to South Africa to investigate gqom and Zulu culture with South African

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67. Lee Nxumalo, "How Amapiano made its way across Africa and to the UK – Bubblegum Club," *Bubblegum Club – A Cultural Organisation Working across All Platforms and Mediums*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.okayafrica.com/south-african-hip-hop-kwaito-long-love-hate-relationship/>.

68. Ibid.

69. Valee Music, quoted in Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Marcus Barnes, "'It Speaks to an ancient history,': Why South Africa has the world's most exciting dance music," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/21/south-africa-dance-music-afrohouse-gqom-amapiano>.

musician Muzi<sup>72</sup>. DJ Scratcha DVA also combined gqom and UK Funky, to create a "UK gqom"<sup>73</sup>. Jackie Queens suggests that "it speaks to an ancient history, whether it's something that comes from the family they're born into or the communities they live in"<sup>74</sup>, implying that UK fans are drawn to the music because of ancestral links with amapiano and gqom's place of origins. This, once more, would reflect the importance of the African diaspora.

### Afropiano: Amapiano in Nigeria

What, then, was the reception of amapiano in Nigeria? Here, the local form has once again travelled through global point-to-point contacts to find itself localized in Nigeria. Afrobeats (borrowing the term from Fela Kuti's Afrobeat and with Nigeria also playing a large part in its origins) is used as an umbrella term for West African pop music. The genre is often cited as the most popular music form in Africa<sup>75</sup>. The School Drillers website ranks the ten most popular Afrobeats artists in the world, eight of which are Nigerian. Wizkid and Burna Boy are at the top of this list. Contacts between the South African and Nigerian popular scene have a history which is exemplified in the collaboration between self-proclaimed "Kings of Amapiano" Kabza De Small and DJ Maphorisa (credited as Madumane) and Afrobeats stars Wizkid and Burna Boy on the amapiano song *Sponono* in 2020.

Amapiano has since grown in popularity in Nigeria and has resulted in a new musical form which offers a combination of amapiano and Afrobeats aesthetics, aptly named Afropiano. These songs are characteristically shorter in length than South African amapiano tunes with less build ups and afrobeats-style vocals, samples and rhythms. Examples include Mozambican Dj Tarico and Nigerian Burna Boy's *Yaba Bukulu*<sup>76</sup> which use a synthesized bass closely associated with amapiano and a log drum alongside Afrobeats vocals and other sonic elements, and Kizz Daniel and Tekno from Nigeria's more light-hearted and brighter *Buga*<sup>77</sup> which features a snare pattern and drum fill (0:16) often found in amapiano. Songs such as KDDO's *eWallet* also feature South African artist Cassper Nyovest, demonstrating that local cultural agents are still actively involved in the creation of this Afrodiasporic sound. A similar crossover genre has emerged combining Kenyan hip hop offshoot gengetone and amapiano, with producers like DJSlime254.

The most popular West African contribution to amapiano so far was Nigerian Goya Menor and Ghanaian Nektunez' *Ameno Amapiano Remix (You Wanna Bamba)* which has been used in almost three and a half million TikTok videos, has over 27

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72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Jairus, "Top 10 Biggest Afrobeats Artist in the World," *School Drillers*, February 21, 2022, <https://www.schooldrillers.com/biggest-afrobeats-artist/>.

76. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xWd-SpMo0Y>.

77. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLF90M96m2Q>.

million views on YouTube and twelve million on the music video. Closer to an amapiano song, but still with a short introduction, this song samples from ERA's 1996 song *Ameno* which contains meaningless Latin-sounding lyrics sung in a plainchant style. The music videos are set in Medieval Europe and the song was successful across several European countries. What might seem like a jarring juxtaposition, the widespread musical influences converge into a dark but fun song which reveals a map of point-to-point contacts.

## TikTok

Much like WhatsApp mentioned earlier, social media platform TikTok has become an important part of disseminating amapiano media, especially that of dance. Premised on the sharing of short videos containing built-in music and with over one billion users worldwide, TikTok has become an important site in the dissemination of amapiano trends across South Africa and to the world. A popular use of the application is the sharing of dance videos. Songs usually have associated dance moves which are recorded and posted in high numbers when they are trending. Given amapiano's close association with dance, this has become an important site for the emergence of such trends.

While TikTok dance videos serve an important local (and national) function as discussed in the chapter 3 and 4 of my thesis, they also perform Afrodiasporic functions. TikTok users such as @shosco1 and @isaacmik have posted videos comparing dance moves from various countries, notably Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa (both amapiano and gqom dances), or simply demonstrating popular dance moves from another country. These are usually in celebration of each dance move (not to demonstrate one being superior to another).

## Amapiano and Global Hip Hop

One last example begins with another DJ Maporisa collaboration, the 2016 song *One Dance* by Canadian hip hop icon Drake. DJ Maphorisa is credited alongside Afrobeats artist Wizkid as a producer and the song samples heavily from UK Funky artist Kyla Smith, specifically her song *Do You Mind*, and thus connects artists from various Afrodiasporic musical spaces discussed above. As an artist, Drake has explored several popular diasporic genres including dancehall, Afrobeats, UK Funky, and various forms of house music. His latest album *Honestly, Nevermind* is rumored to have been inspired by, or written for, amapiano artist DJ Uncle Waffles<sup>78</sup>. Rolling Stones author Mosi Reeves claims that the album "mines

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78. Privie Kandi, "Uncle Waffles Inspired Drake's New Album': Mzansi Reacts to Drake's 7th Studio Album, 'Honestly, Nevermind'," *Briefly*, June 17, 2022, <https://briefly.co.za/entertainment/music/129228-uncle-waffles-trends-after-amapiano-song-drakes-album-honestly-nevermind-he-is-trying-impress/>.

deep house styles like amapiano and gqom".<sup>79</sup> A good example of this is the break at 0:48 of *Currents*<sup>80</sup> which shows clear gqom influence (which featured South African producer Black Coffee). However, there are no clear amapiano references on the album.

Chris Brown, on the other hand, is a much clearer example. He also recently collaborated with Nigerian artists Lojay and Sarz on the song *Monalisa*. The song contains clear similarities to amapiano, again including a log drum. Coming from an American R&B background (another Afrodiasporic genre), Chris Brown features as a vocalist. It should be noted that Chris Brown's collaboration was with Nigerian musicians, rather than South Africans. I would suggest two reasons for this. The first comes from Antii (Yamnkela Kope), a producer in Langa who noted how Afropiano was more accessible to a wider audience because of its familiarity to Afrobeats, and thus I would suggest that the Nigerian sound may have been better suited to the collaboration.<sup>81</sup> However, this may also have been the result of the nature of contacts, specifically that of point-to-point connectivity. It is likely that the networks created by Afrobeats would allow for a wider reach of Nigerian produced Afropiano than South African produced amapiano. There are also more likely pre-existing contacts between the older and more widely disseminated form and American hip hop and R&B artists. This may, however, cut out South African producers from global record label opportunities.

While the influence of amapiano within American-centric mainstream forms such as contemporary and commercial R&B and hip hop is only slight in the above examples, it does show the wide-reaching nature of the form and its function in wider Afrodiasporic spaces.

### Amapiano to the World: Final Thoughts

How is this global flow perceived by South Africans? Katlego Malatji on Sony Music Entertainment Africa has commented on the two opposing responses regarding this expansion; a purist approach which rejects new elements and those looking toward global success. Yamkela of Bridges Academy expressed regret that others were profiting from the South African sound often without local practitioners being sufficiently remunerated<sup>82</sup>. There is much concern in this sense as worldwide opportunities increase. But as can be seen above, South African producers are actively involved in this Afrodiasporic youth space, actively resisting by taking up space, exemplified in the artists present at AMA Fest and

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79. Mosi Reeves, "Drake's 'Sticky' Offers a Comforting Rap Respite on His Unexpected Dance Left Turn," *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/drake-sticky-song-review-1369892/>.

80. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1puG2H1QOBA>.

81. Yamnkela Kope, personal communication, July 21, 2022.

82. Yamkela, personal communication, December 2, 2021.



frequent collaborations with Nigerian artists. As the movement grows, they will need to continue to do this.

On the other hand, many express pride and celebrate the sound's presence in the world. This chapter was originally inspired by a TikTok of an amapiano song sung in French which proudly claimed that this was proof of the genre's ability to travel. After further investigation I found that the song was actually recorded in South Africa by a bilingual South African. However, fans were still excited at the sound's expansion. Producer Azile Manxiwa (DJ Blackish) from Langa proudly shared DJ Maphorisa's earlier assertion that amapiano would become a widely recognized global genre.

The extent of amapiano's travels also seem to differentiate it from kwaito and gqom. I have found little reference to kwaito outside of South Africa in the kwaito literature. Gqom garnered international attention from small record labels which aided in its dissemination.<sup>83</sup>

The examples above demonstrate a pattern to amapiano's worldwide travel which reflects Livermon's notion of Afrodiasporic space and simultaneously Steingo's point-to-point contacts. Amapiano's sound travels through digital networks, most notably social media, from one locale to another. For example, it travels from South African local spaces to Nigerian ones, or from Nigeria to the United Kingdom. These create networks through which media (music, dance, fashion, etc.) continues to travel and in turn create more networks. Over time and through experimentation new cultural forms begin to emerge, illustrated in new forms of music such as Afropiano, but also new cultural spaces, such as AMA Fest. These forms are Afrodiasporic in nature, both explicitly (see AMA Fest's mention of the diaspora above) or implicitly (black spaces in the United Kingdom constructed around a music from Southern Africa). In this model, South African agents are obviously not passive consumers of globalist culture but are instead at the front of new forms of cultural creation. They also demonstrate just how active the Afrodiasporic space is, with media travelling at disorientating rates across long distances.

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83. Eaby-Lomas, *Historicizing Gqom*, 106.

Thulani Headman (DJ Fosta). A big thank you to the interlocutors and friends that I have had the pleasure of working with there, especially Azile Manxiwa (DJ Blackish) and Yamnkela Kope (Antii). Finally, a special thank you to the support of my parents, family and my wife Danielle, who has had to listen to the ideas above more often than anyone else and will still make time to hear it again.

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## Contemporary Boundaries of Women and their Modifications

By Suyasha Singh Isser\*

*The article attempts to exhibit the position of women in contemporary times based on the concept of liberty and equality advocated by Rousseau. It argues that the present system is still struggling and has an indifferent attitude towards this section which forms an important part of society. To make it work, women have adhered to the social norms which make their area of activities limiting. The public-private dichotomy brings out the tussle between 'independence' and 'care' that women face to live their authentic selves. The debate surrounding the construction of 'Self' plays an important role because its significance does not constitute the entire humankind but divides them based on sex and is looked at with a particularistic functionalist approach. I will explore the relevance of the liberal model and the evolving patriarchal practices together with the effects it has on reproductive capacities, and psychological oppression along with the interpretation of female sexuality and autonomy which would help in asserting equal representation with the help of the method of consciousness-raising. Therefore, women in time developed an uninterested attitude towards the state as they did not get to exercise the ideas of justice and equality in their day-to-day lives.*

### Introduction

Jean Jaques Rousseau was an 18th-century philosopher whose works influenced the idea of a modern individual while redefining the definition of freedom in the world. His unique vision for society is reflected in his well-known works. Rousseau conveyed that everyone in the eighteenth-century European society lived a superficial existence by always competing against each other which caused moral degeneracy. This unstable establishment made him vouch for something higher.

He called for a steady familial establishment where everyone was focused and motivated in doing their work. To express these thoughts, he wrote two of his most celebrated books. First *Emile, On Education* mainly conveyed how moral education should be given to men and women demarcating specific gender roles where an educated woman for Rousseau was not fit to be an everyday companion. Chastity and honour were the two values that must be essentially associated with her. In his other novel, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise*, the protagonist lets go of her passion for her lover to settle down with an aristocratic match where motherhood and maintenance of her estate become the purpose of her life. In *The Social Contract and Discourses on Inequality*, he promotes the idea of humans possessing the passion to survive in the state of nature and later in the

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civil society, applied reason along with passion to exercise morality to function. He gives contradictory opinions for both sexes in this context. He argues that women have reason in the private sphere to form relationships in the family but do not have it in the public sphere. This is the reason why they do not have an active will to participate in the functioning of the state. He ignores the fact that the private sphere must be recognized for playing an important role in the common good since moral and social habits are cultivated in the family, which helps in maintaining political health. By analysing the ideas which Rousseau used to subjugate women in the first place, this work tries to highlight those efforts and thoughts that were about women being forged into that model.

The paper attempts to locate the normative claim of feminism in Rousseau's work. The normative claim concerns itself with drawing a background conception of the moral position and justice. According to Rousseau, natural inequality was replaced with institutionalized differences from the state of nature to society affecting the status of women.<sup>1</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau in almost all his works has always presented a submissive status of women. Even when he is envisioning a state, he adorns a veil of a mediocre moral standard of women. We believe that his misogynist ideas are incoherent with his political vision. They also in a way distort his life-consuming quest to foster political reform. A fresh perspective is needed to navigate his ideals as they have been divided into public and private in the context of the sexual division of labour. There are also concerns about equal participation.

### **Social Identity in *The Social Contract***

Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract is underlined by the trust that people can have in each other as they are protected by law. Rousseau tried to establish parity based on the General Will where everyone had to give up some part of their freedom for a steady establishment. The social contract theory advocates people being autonomous agents of morality since they are the ones who are legislating as citizens. People in such a society are self-sufficient and exercise an active voice. Rousseau believed that it was necessary to protect each other's dignity and resources while abiding by the law. However, it led to the systematic exclusion of women because of the gender-discriminatory nature of his philosophical work. The same norms had to apply to the dignity of women which was not done in their case as they were underestimated in the collective conscience of the society. Women were thought to be lacking the skills to conduct themselves in a democratic setup. Their requirements were not taken seriously enough to place their voice in the common role.

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1. Susan M. Okin, "Rousseau's Natural Woman," *The Journal of Politics* 41, no. 2 (1979), 398.

According to Rousseau, an act of affiliation forges a shared identity that develops into a morally upright group. Further explanation is needed to clarify that this shared identity should extend to the state and family as well as all other aspects of a person's life. People who belong to it collectively go by the name of people and are referred to as subjects who are subject to state laws and citizens who share in sovereign power. When people are striving toward a common goal, they are moral actors. Women ought to be regarded as one. However, with Rousseau that is not the case with his differing point of view. "Instead of saying that civil society derives from paternal power, we ought to say, on the contrary, that paternal power derives its main force from society"<sup>2</sup> demonstrates the patriarchal nature of the family structure, where girls possess the virtue to abide by the rules and regulations of the father and then the husband.

He makes the effort to demonstrate in the *Discourses On Inequality* and *Emile* that women's subjugation was a natural and essential order of things, independent of customs or biases against them. He sees them as the origin of evil. Penny Weiss claims that Rousseau's notion that men and women should be classified according to their social utility is the foundation for his division of the sexes.<sup>3</sup> "The moral side of love is an unnatural sentiment, born of social custom and honored by women with much care and skill to establish their power over men and so make dominant the sex that ought to obey,"<sup>4</sup> says Rousseau, distinguishing the moral and physical aspects of love. This demonstrates Rousseau's misogynistic nature, according to which women are expected by society to fulfill the role of moral agents but lack the will to actively participate in public life.

The family is the main social structure in political society. Fathers and those who are parents are related to the ruler. According to Rousseau's family's conception, the woman will take care of the house and child, while the father will offer all financial assistance. The son will have the most freedom in this arrangement, while the girl will follow in her mother's footsteps. Rousseau's female characters, Sophie and Julie, are enslaved by their circumstances and relationships. They both have to answer to their husbands and have completed the required amount of schooling. Their abilities are limited to housekeeping. Julie marries her father's pick for a husband without having the opportunity to choose him herself. These desirable qualities are inescapable for these female personalities. Therefore, it is their nature to give up their freedom and become slaves.

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2. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, ed. Franklin Philip, trans. Patrick Coleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74.

3. Peter Critchley, "Rousseau: Autonomy and Authority," Academia.edu, June 9th, 2019, p. 19.

4. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, in Franklin Philip (ed.), trans. Patrick Coleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 49.

He says, quite honestly, that “woman is made for man’s delight.”<sup>5</sup> The obligations of a woman for all time are to be pleasing to him, to earn his respect and affection, to raise him from infancy to maturity, to counsel and console, and to make his life pleasant and happy, and these are the things she should be taught.<sup>6</sup> The concept of control seems to be the driving force behind both sexes’ relationships. A woman can gain their husband’s attention and favors in this way. Only by keeping them at a distance will they be able to manage them. He also downgrades the standard and quality of education of a girl stating that her mind is incapable of processing learning. “She has a taste without in-depth research, talent without art, and judgment without learning, her education is neither ostentatious nor disregarded. Although her mind lacks knowledge, it is capable of learning. How charmingly ignorant you are!”<sup>7</sup> “A house without a mistress is like a body without a soul that quickly degenerates: a woman without her home loses all her charm and presents herself indecently, stripped of her true treasures.”<sup>8</sup> Since men and women are socialized and groomed to lead different lives, they are not permitted to enjoy the same forms of entertainment, which would conflict with their obligations to their families. Their stepping out of the house is looked down upon hampering her ability to exercise her agency as a liberated citizen.

The Social Contract theory also presupposes exchanges with each other. However, in terms of men and women, the exchange is not mutual and equal. It is about men getting more than they require out of the contract that is utilizing the functionalities available to them without being held accountable for what they receive i.e. not paying heed in the private realm and terming it as a ‘right’. Unlike women, they do not always have to push for the enforcement of their rights. The problem that existed in Rousseau’s works and was reflected in the society at that time is something that is still felt. Despite systems in place, the law and order have to be constantly reminded to people and enforced in society because the boundaries of women are not usually respected which makes them very volatile. Most of the time, women have to agree to terms that are not to their advantage. They lack the capacity of ‘choice’. Just as the right of a monarch was considered to be established for life, similarly the rights of husbands were considered to be the same. The superior party will give a false sense of protection that they are going to provide for women as they are stronger and more capable of doing so. They falsely disarm the needs of the weak and present them with a contract. “Alternatively, sides could be seen as bearing a burden; the slaves have to work

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5. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, edited by Francois Richard and Piene Richard (Paris, Editions Garnier 1964): 446

6. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bllom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 328.

7. *Ibid*, 340.

8. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. M. Cranston (Harinondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 191.



(to obey), and the masters bear responsibility for the slaves' welfare."<sup>9</sup> Here, Rousseau fails to recognize that women also have reason and therefore can act as moral agents.

According to David Peetz, there is a reinforcement of ideas by powerful groups that create social values and norms. This happens through,

1. Socialisation: it may occur within the home; within the primary and secondary education systems; through religious institutions and within the workplace.
2. Contestation: it may occur as objective circumstances raise doubt about the validity of dominant values like social movements, challenging the interest of powerful groups, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Society is constructed based on social identities. People conduct their behavior as per the demands of society. Rousseau talked about the liberal approach in his idea of governance. This article shows the position of women in contemporary times based on this approach. Various feminist philosophers have given their interpretations of Rousseau. They have also talked about the main attributes attached to women which are scrutinized time and again like their reproductive capacity, sexuality, psychological oppression, and autonomy by the public domain. The article deals with institutionalized differences between the two sexes. It is crucial to learn how they have taken different forms over time in the current debate. Liberal democracy has sustainably expanded in the past 20<sup>th</sup> century and has become one of the predominant political systems. After going through the historical narratives on the ideas given by Rousseau, it is crucial to understand how it has played out for women in contemporary times. The paper attempts to identify the major challenges that women are facing in the current times which are not only political in nature but also social, psychological, and cultural. The framework that Rousseau had set up contributed to laying the groundwork for the functioning of a state and society.

### **Literature Review**

This article dexterously combined a hypothetical model of feasible good governance following Rousseau's works like *Emile* (1763), *Social Contract* (1762), *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), etc. It discusses how he had included women enjoying similar entitlements and doing similar public roles as men with the present-day feminist critique reflecting on challenges faced by women on being

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9. Carole Pateman, "Contract, the Individual and Slavery," in *The Sexual Contract*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 61.

10. David Peetz, *The Realities and Futures of Work Book*, (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 214.

accorded unequal political and public space. Jan Garrett (2001) and Kurt Mosser (2020) indicate Rousseau provides contradictory viewpoints on women's standing in society. He gives them ethical roles and moral standing but also takes that away from them. The nuances in both the public and private spheres are different for him. Virtue for women is defined to be sacrificial in nature by giving up their freedom to fulfill obligations for others.

Alice Ormiston (2002) pointed out that the political system gives a glimpse of a biased aspect where the adoption of cultural circumstances is indifferent towards women. It does not make each part of a unity as moral adaptation to virtue is not the same for women. Brenton Wilmer and Penny Pasque (2020) say that domestic upbringing and conditions bring about a dysfunctional approach to the identity of women as they lead their lives along the lines of what has already been set for them. This identity conflict affects them psychologically as well as Rousseau in a way promotes how ideal should a society be to function. Jessie I. Embry (2005) indicates that women find it difficult to meet the expectations of being a citizen and a person at the same time. Since women are situated at a regressive level in a social institution, their comprehensiveness of the environment is also diminished.

Christophe Salvat (2008) argues Rousseau advocates for a marriage based on theological and societal expectations. His romantic happiness constitutes predefined gender roles. The moral identities of women are partial and different from men since women decide on an artificial system, they are not moral beings anymore. This sense recedes the ideas of care and nurture and emphasizes an authoritarian approach.

## **Methodology**

This work is qualitative in nature and therefore I am employing conceptual analysis, text-historical method, and critique of Rousseau's works. It is essential to find a clear consistency and rational notions to conclude the philosophical approach to women especially related to unjust arguments formed against their equal standing in society. There will be an attempt to build bridges among similar cases by critically studying their position in both the private and public spheres. This work is not about negatively criticizing Rousseau but is an attempt to question his opinions in the text. The issues associated with it like bias, position, and viewpoints are required for understanding. The work has tried to illuminate the tensions and predicaments present in the object of research. This study intends to uncover the dynamism that exists within the broad framework of patriarchy. It also draws on a wide range of contemporary resources that identify with the stereotypical traditions. It employs perspectival approaches since the categories of reading are overlapping.

## Discussion

According to Rousseau, a constituted contract guarantees greater good than particularistic freedom. Practicing civic virtue helps in elevating oneself to moral liberty. But here he commits offense against women by politically excluding them and expecting them to sublimate their desires.

Susan Moller Okin seeks the restructuring of the public and private to accommodate the representation of women. Okin in Rousseau's work *La Nouvelle Heloise* says that Julie positions herself as a Christ figure who stands as an epitome of virtue as she gave up her desires, even her life for the honor of the family. General Will aims to draw a moral body collective where individuals maintain collective responsibility. If interests are given greater importance, then it will focus only on particular benefits excluding unanimity in opinion and leading to the disintegration of public welfare. Rousseau focuses on restoring Emile as an autonomous individual rather than burdening him with the responsibilities of being an ideal husband and father. "At least Rousseau allows a man can be either an individual or a citizen. He does not allow woman to be either."<sup>11</sup> In a family, he underlines one's notion of 'Self' which primarily comes out concerning the roles one holds in a family.

When depicting the perfect existence of a family which is internally flawed Rousseau is affecting the authenticity of philosophical issues. Even though women are described as the moral centres of the family, they are unable to distinguish between public and private and 'Self' and the Other. They are always under an internal conflict between following their calling or moving with the traditions. This is an impossible task to accomplish because down the line, it will be an adulterated existence for them. Sometimes situations demand women to make choices based on false consciousness, yet they are also expected to preserve their authenticity at the same time. Rousseau projects the identity of a man to be a virtuous, upholder of law and convention and carer of the well-being of the community, and a woman's identity as full of attachments, maternal and passionate. Nicole Fermon reads Rousseau to attribute a maternal image to the state because he wanted to depict this egalitarian system as free of corruption.<sup>12</sup> Depiction of this kind of image symbolizes a sense of authenticity to the state where there is fairness and justice as the virtues of women are understood to be honourable and upright. For Rousseau, men and women are equal in different aspects. They are equal to husbands and wives and not as citizens.

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11. Susan Moller Okin, "The Fate of Rousseau's Heroines," in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Lynda Lange (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 110.

12. Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions, Women and Nation*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 3.

### Some Evolving Patriarchal Practices and Counter Movements

Christian Fuchs (2020) identifies social movements as, “When citizens are engaged in politics as part of non-government organizations, movements, and practices, and when they discuss politics in public, then they are part of the public sphere.”<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt have talked about the intersectionality that exists between social identity and discrimination.

The history of organizations for social movements for any cause in politics or society displays the relationship between exploitation and supremacy. When looked closely women's isolation is also economic in nature. For Karl Marx, alienation institutes a universal subjugation where the party does not have control over the system that regulates their life.<sup>14</sup>

This also alienates them from collective decision-making. Marx has not dwelled in the discussion on the role of women, but he has surely provided a lens to study the relationship of women with the socio-economic context in the twentieth-century feminist theory<sup>15</sup>. Frederick Engels writes that the first division of labour starts with the propagation of children between men and women.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter, domestic labour and the acquisition of private property led to institutionalized inequality. Marxism suggests that the maintenance of a family comes under productive labour. Feminist suggests that conditions for women can be set to improve if their work is recognized in the private sphere.

According to Hannah Arendt (1958), Action leads to beginnings that are unexpected and can never be done in isolation. "What people do creates both stories and effects not just visible to other people but visible in the response of other people....Public action of this kind is basic to forming a common world.

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13. Christian Fuchs, “Political Communication in the Public Sphere,” in *Communication and Capitalism*, (London, UK: University of Westminster Press, 2020), 197.

14. Ibid, 198.

15. Within the layer of capitalist social relation, there exists a social relation of a household. The relationship between husband and wife within the privatized household has inherited gender roles where the exchange value of the reproductive labour of the women is not counted and is primarily under the control of men.

16. This is indicated as the development of antagonism for the first time between men and women in marriage which coincided historically with the first-class opposition. This coupled with slavery and private property has significantly widened the division where growth and prosperity for some is achieved on the misery of another. These contradictions in society are fully active. Friedrich Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan (International Publishers, 1972) [1884], via Marxists Internet Archive, ISBN 978-0-7178-0359-0, 187.

Our promises, for example, become the bases for institutions; repeated narratives establish standards of judgment."<sup>17</sup>

Arendt suggests that a private sphere is the opposite of social and not political as it is designed to be more intimate and closer. Any kind of movement powered by people with an agenda is driven by overlapping social identities with diverse experiences. This kind of intersectionality of social identities creates different strata of discrimination.

Mary Astell (1996) asks, "If all men are born free, how is that that all women are born slaves?"<sup>18</sup> One of the historical influences in the gender role is the concept of obligation to which women have automatically adhered. According to Carol Gilligan, this happens because women think about moral issues more in terms of relationships rather than in terms of rights. This thought has played a crucial role in redefining the landscape of their social life in the modern world as they put 'others' before 'self.' This model is also responsible for sustaining dominated private aspects for so long.

Nancy Hirschmann (2007) emphasizes the idea of 'personal is political.' "Apart from justice, equality and freedom even family, workplace and sexual pleasure are also considered political by feminists."<sup>19</sup> They emphasized that women's systematic exclusion from the concepts of justice and equality to focus on family led them to reconsider their status in front of the state and law. The same regulations cannot be enforced in the private sphere, but they must be modified to fit women's needs.

The approaches of Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Social Feminism (along with Equity and Difference Feminism) display varied forms of thoughts, ideas, and practices taken up by feminists over time. These are different interpretations of different experiences of diverse categories of people. These altered social relations conceptualize the behaviours/conduct of people. Experiences based on reproductive and household labour have re-defined the social relations of women. This epistemic foundation provided the opportunity to understand and give different accounts of their experiences in the incoming sections. Therefore, the study of feminism needs to be open-ended, fluid, and not closed.

One of the four cardinal virtues was stated as justice. It is between the agent and the recipient. In terms of relationships with women, Iris Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* says that there is a 'difference' in the application of feminist thought on women as they belong to various social categories. "The location of differences within various cultural identities meant that justice should be thought

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17. Barbara Couture, "RECONCILING PRIVATE LIVES AND PUBLIC RHETORIC: What's at Stake?," in *Private, the Public, and the Published*, ed. Barbara Couture and Thomas Kent (Utah: USU Press Publications, 2004), 29.

18. Mary Astell, "Reflections upon Marriage," in *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 149.

19. Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Feminist Political Philosophy," in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 145.

of not as something that is owed to others, but as a series of relations between the groups that make up the social landscape."<sup>20</sup> This should be an intrinsic form of an arrangement where deprivation of justice should be termed as unfair.

There are two different dimensions of justice in political philosophy:

1. Transitional justice: justice for victims of actions perpetrated by overturned regimes.<sup>21</sup> Ex- rape as an act of war, forced impregnation of women.
2. Restorative justice: the goal of making restoration to the victims economically, emotionally, and socially rather than simply punishing offenders. Ex- domestic violence, sexual assault.<sup>22</sup>

Patriarchy resorts to the socialization of women's mind in the sense that women choose to have those things which men want them to have. Women in this way think that their selections are autonomous.<sup>23</sup> Instead of doing these women should follow their internal directions rather than be pushed by their environment. To understand their freedom and autonomy women need to identify their true authentic selves by suffusing barriers of subjugation.

### **Claiming Autonomy**

An autonomous life means a self-determined life; it is to live one's life in one's own chosen manner.

Autonomy is one of the main principles of Western Liberal philosophy. It can be traced back to the ideas of seventeenth-century thinker John Locke, especially to his idea that individuals have basic human rights that the state should respect and protect.<sup>24</sup>

Kant along those lines places autonomy to be a way of life with rational deliberation.<sup>25</sup> According to him, one should act on their own will despite whether

20. Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 89.

21. Juan Mendez, "Accountability for Past Abuses," *Human Rights Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1997), 256.

22. J. Haley, "Crime Prevention Through Restorative Justice: Lessons from Japan," in *Restorative Justice: International Perspectives*, ed. Burt Galaway and Joe Hudson (Monsey, NY; Amsterdam: Criminal Justice Press and Kugler Publications, 1996), 353.

23. SJ Khader, "The Feminist Case Against Relational Autonomy," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 17 (2020), 4.

24. Karen Vintges, *A New Dawn for the Second Sex* (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 60.

25. H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 107-108.

the result will be moral or not. They must act for duty for duty's sake. However, Simone de Beauvoir (1948) has criticized Kant in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that a person making choices cannot be of universal embodiment rather she is an embodied self in distinct communities which influences her experiences.<sup>26</sup> One's morality should be consistent with one's circumstances. Martha Nussbaum (1995) is a liberal feminist philosopher who advocates that the idea of global feminism should be based on Autonomy underlined by mutuality.<sup>27</sup> There should be respect for rights for each other where everyone is working together.

This idea has been forwarded by freedom theorists Nancy Hirschmann, Drucilla Cornell and Wendy Brown says that,

Freedom needs to be understood as a feature of socially situated beings attending relationship between the inner forces of desire and external forces of social conditions. For women, this requires a recognition of ways in which women's desires have both been historically constituted for them by men, "socially constructed: by patriarchal institutions, customs, and practices; and yet have also resisted such constitution and been pursued under conditions hostile to their expression."<sup>28</sup>

Foucault focuses on power relationships expressed through language and behavior. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis expands on this idea,

Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations who inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of his subjects they seek to govern.<sup>29</sup>

There are numerous examples of floating feminine ideals of holding relationships present everywhere which lead women to internalize any kind of responsibility for the actions present in it. This assumption makes women victimize themselves. Using discourse as a social practice will help accommodate cultural variables and construct a context-specific value. "...a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of

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26. Simone De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948), 34.

27. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995), 252.

28. Nancy J. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Drucilla Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Wendy Brown, "States of Injury: Power and Freedom" in *Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), quoted in Hirschmann, "Feminist Political Philosophy," 152.

29. Chris Weedon, *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 108 quoted in Jenny Pinkus, "Foucault," accessed on June 4, 2020. <https://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/theory/foucault.htm>.

resistance."<sup>30</sup> It becomes essential for women to realize their autonomous agency by excluding the external conditions in which they live. This will increase a rational decision-making power to act on one's motives and values. Women have to navigate in the social field to resist dominance about power-sharing. This means that whether in a state or a family, women must keep their agency on hold.

### Relevance of the Liberal Model in Rousseau's Works

Liberal theory constitutes two aspects that display a complex project of public-private dichotomy. In a new liberal discourse, this distinction encompasses a market and a state address. In the classical discourse, this distinction was between *oiklos* (domestic sphere) and the *polis* (public sphere). The liberal conception cannot be used to bring out this character of women's emancipation because it is flawed in nature itself.<sup>31</sup> Feminists long have treated the aspects of government, institutions, and social structures as a residual category. In the dichotomous relation between liberal and classical conception, the former displays free individuals working on equal footing. While the classical conception reveals a natural inequality.

The liberal state has been criticized for coercing norms and laws that reinforce a male point of view in design. The feminists assert that the structure between law and society has male jurisprudence. "The rule of law and the rule of men are one thing, indivisible, at once official and unofficial...State power, embodied in law, exists throughout society as male power at the same time as the power of men over women is organized as the power of the state."<sup>32</sup> The liberal theory engages with the construction of a rational individual with moral reasoning and women for that matter are characterized to be of the opposite nature by being dependent and emotional without reason. "These two issues are linked to women's status as primary carers. Neither the process of caring and nurturing nor the status of carers and nurturers are theorized in liberal theory."<sup>33</sup> The liberal social contract reorganized patriarchy in a certain sense. The liberal theory is somewhat of an ideal theory that does not deal with the complex problems of the social world.<sup>34</sup>

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30. Irene Diamond & Lee Quinby, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, (Boston (MA): Northeastern University Press, 1988), 185 quoted in Jenny Pinkus, "Foucault," accessed on June 4, 2020. <https://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/theory/foucault.htm>.

31. RE Groenhout, "Essentialist Challenges to Liberal Feminism," *Social Theory and Practice* 28, no. 1 (2002), 55.

32. Catherine A. Mackinnon, "Consciousness Raising," in *Towards a Feminist Theory of State*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 170.

33. Judith Squires, "Public and private," in *Political Concepts*, ed. Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 134.

34. Lisa H. Schwartzman, *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 98.



One of the most influential critiques of the social contract is given by Carole Pateman. She says the same social contract which establishes policies for political freedom itself entails subordination. It needs space to accommodate a sexual contract. Pateman talks about the psychological, economic, and physiological capitalization and natural subordination in marriage, prostitution, and surrogacy of women. She argues about the importance of consent in everyday life and how women's position stands always evasive because their standpoints are always taken to be consenting. This argument stands in context to the lack of choice and dominance of responsibilities of others in their lives<sup>35</sup> (Mackinnon 1991, p. 1285). The pre-determined life plan for them fails to accommodate their interests and passions into this model. Even leisure for them is a luxury that is also connected to their economic and social standing in society. Since they are caught up with the aspects of survival and household work, it gives them limited time to indulge in socialization and self-care. Denying women the sense of freedom confines them more to the domestic sphere as they cannot participate in forming independent relations outside. Ice puts,

In making a woman dependent upon the opinions of men (until a man recognize her, she is nothing), Rousseau denies her individual liberty (psychological independence). This dependence on the opinions and judgments of others for one's sentiment of existence, the denial of psychological liberty as well as economic, material and physical liberty leaves women not only socially alienated, but psychologically alienated.<sup>36</sup>

To overcome this, the relegation of rights is not the only solution for a state, but it is important to keep checks and balances as to what extent those laws and rules are implemented in disadvantaged sections of society. Their basic idea is that the private sphere is a space for personal freedom. But this can be said for men and not for women as they are not free because they are subjected in that space sometimes to care work, violence, and subordination. Their Equality and privacy law assumes that women have the same freedom just like men which is not the case.

### **Interpretation of Female Sexuality**

Sexuality is a form of experience and expression sexually by people through thoughts, behaviour, and feelings. It is personal and is an essential part of identity. It is a fluid and not a concrete notion. Cornell (1998) defines conscience as the 'sanctuary' of personality, guiding our choices and commitments. It is not a

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35. Catherine MacKinnon, "Reflections on Sex Equality under Law." *The Yale Law Journal* 100, no. 5 (1991): 1285.

36. Tamela Ice, *Resolving the Paradox of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Sexual Politics* (Plymouth, UK: University Press of America, 2009), 42.

moral faculty but a guide to living life on its terms.<sup>37</sup> To overcome external factors, one should have a normative existence and reserve freedom. Our story, including love and family life, begins within the limits imposed upon the state. Similarly,

Rousseau argues that women are childish in terms of handling their sexuality. This lack of maturity in women makes the state come up with a form of social-sexual construct.<sup>38</sup> In this, the importance is given to "*Perfectibilite* – faculty of becoming (or the ability to become) other than what one is."<sup>39</sup> But Tamela Ice points out that "this faculty of *perfectibilite*, the behaviors (and beliefs) of females (and males) can be manipulated, and females can *become* what Rousseau thinks they *must* become in the civil state. That is, females can become 'woman.'"<sup>40</sup> She says that it is not the case that Rousseau denied the same education of men to women, but he argued that the qualities of men if cultivated in women along with their qualities will make them incompatible with each other making it unmanageable. Rousseau is not interested in what a woman could become and make of herself but is interested in what she *should* be. First, Cornell argues that "how can a person take responsibility for one's life, design it as she imagines it should be, if the most intimate decisions about sexual and familial life are thrust upon her by the state?"<sup>41</sup> A moral being for Rousseau stands as one who holds a position in society in terms of one's proprietorship fulfillment of duties and maintaining relationships with others. He has relegated the moral status of women encompassing moral, social, and political order to motherhood where "woman's civil rights are a mother's rights."<sup>42</sup>

Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* has reinterpreted and questioned the political thought on how women have been systematically excluded from the original contract. "The sexual contract is a repressed dimension of contract theory, an integral part of the rational choice of the familiar, original agreement."<sup>43</sup> For her civil freedom is supposed patriarchal right in Rousseau's Social Contract. A new form of patriarchy is established when the exercise of the political right is in the sense of a patriarchal right to legitimize the binding authority of state and civil law where social relations take this form.

A sexual contract is understood as a marriage contract. This makes an impression that sexual and social contracts are different as the former pertains to the private sphere and the latter to the public sphere. However, on the opposite,

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37. Drucilla Cornell, "Freed up: Privacy, Sexual Freedom, and Liberty of Conscience," in *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex & Equality*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 38.

38. JJ Lewis, "Rousseau's Take on Women and Education," ThoughtCo, July 14, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/rousseau-on-women-and-education-3528799>.

39. Ice, *Resolving the Paradox of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Sexual Politics*, 3.

40. Ibid, 4.

41. Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex & Equality*, 62.

42. Ice, *Resolving the Paradox of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Sexual Politics*, 5.

43. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, IX.

patriarchy dominates both the orders. Classical theorists give a subtle suggestion that there were masculine attributes to the contract as the owning of the property was confined to men. The sexual contract begins with the construction of the individual. The understanding of them not being 'individuals' made women lack the capacity of having natural freedom therefore not having civil freedom as well. This non-acknowledgment of them not being individuals in the contract deprived them of basic social and legal expression. Pateman puts up that civil society puts a distinction between public and private and concerns itself only with the former and treats it as having a political interest thereby ignoring the latter.

"The private sphere is part of civil society but is separated from the 'civil' sphere. The antinomy private/public is another expression of 'natural/civil and women/men.'<sup>44</sup> The sexual contract encompasses both spheres and men possess the liberty to pass back and forth from both. The upheavals that a woman goes through in a marriage are not endorsed and there is no compensation paid for the care work she does and the sacrifices she makes. So, the civil contract ignores this aspect in terms of social and political rights. Women's position in a sexual contract is identified as being sexual beings. They hold different connotations which subject them to first becoming daughters, wives, and then a mother. Her position is being undermined by her sexuality. The biological structure for women is fixed which demands their unsaid submission to a social institution.

For a long time, men were considered to hold a superior position to women based on strength. It is widely held that,

The body of the 'individual' is very different from women's bodies. His body is tightly enclosed within boundaries, but women's bodies are permeable, their contours change shape, and they are subject to cyclical processes.....women lack neither strength nor ability in a general sense, but, according to the classic contract theorists, they are naturally deficient in a specifically *political* capacity to create and maintain political right.<sup>45</sup>

The development of relationships based on sexual differences begins in a patriarchal family. "Women, their bodies, and bodily passions represent the 'nature' that must be controlled and transcended if social order is to be created and sustained. In the state of nature, social order in the family can be maintained only if the husband is master."<sup>46</sup> Women's sexuality has been time and again used as the reason for her inability to exercise political rights. Rousseau says that women cannot develop morality to work for the maintenance of civil society because she has uncontrollable desires which she cannot keep in check which would eventually lead to disorder in society while men can do so as they can reason because of which they can control their passions.

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44. Ibid, 11.

45. Ibid, 96.

46. Ibid, 100.

A politically free person can have their life plans. Introducing hierarchy socially and politically reduces one's place to be a free person. The recognition of a person as politically free also leads them to draw their boundaries and utilize the space of the imaginary domain. The hindrances to this position on women are imposed by the reproductive capacity and being restricted to the private sphere. When cultural, or religious norms are imposed on women regarding their mandatory implementations of reproductive capacity, then their freedom and self-representation are undermined.

The problem with most theories of justice, from a feminist perspective, is that they have not adequately addressed conditions of inclusion because they have failed to address the relationships between the ideal of the free person and the project all human beings have of orientating themselves as to their sexuate beings. An equivalent law of persons would clearly demand that the scope of distributive justice be sufficient to ensure the right to the self-representation of each person's sexuate being"<sup>47</sup>

Drucilla Cornell says that it is our demand for freedom that will put us in an equal position. Kant also argues that one can live the way that makes one happy unless it is not infringing on the rights of others. There must be harmonization of freedom with each other to not coerce it on others. This is the way to live in a politically liberal society and be part of a moral community. As a sexual being, the treatment should not be equal, but importance should be given to the treatment of all as they are.

Identity politics argues for recognition and demands for basic rights. Foucault terms this as political innovation.<sup>48</sup> It helps to understand better how gender is linked to oppression and act accordingly. Coming together women and talking about it will authenticate their experiences and explain different connotations attached contextually. Men created sexuality as a power structure. To change that it is required to identify and reconstruct female sexuality. This means that it is necessary to negate overriding body image and motherhood concepts away from them which confine them to the private sphere as they underline experience and theory. Sexuality is natural and unconditioned. It takes a societal form only when applied during specifics. It is specifically divided amongst culture. Girls are taught to stay in the reality of danger whereas boys roam free with freedom.

### **Reproductive Capacity and Psychological Oppression**

Women have been systematically subjugated based on the deep-rooted societal mechanisms which have induced psychological oppression which is grounded on the control of the reproductive capacity of women. Societal norms

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47. Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex & Equality*, 26.

48. Michael Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. S. Lotringer & L. Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997a), 173.

have structured prioritization on the reproductive capacity rather than the agency of women. The autonomy of women has been repeatedly infringed through forced pregnancies, coerced sterilizations, and reproductive slavery which have perpetuated their feelings of powerlessness.

Mary O'Brien argues that women are trapped in their reproductive capacity.<sup>49</sup> She states various interpretations to justify this standpoint. She points out that even if women share reproductive consciousness<sup>50</sup> but having it does not mean that they need to bear children to apprehend themselves as a 'woman.' Men are free from reproductive labor and they just acknowledge the task of parenthood, unlike women who have to do both constantly. So, rights must be related to actual social relations between people, and it is in these social relations that the question of responsibility arises<sup>51</sup> (Brien 1983, p. 56). She argues that parenthood has both moral and political obligations for men in public as well as private. A good father is appreciated on ethical grounds along with a reward in the domestic sphere and recognition in public. Whereas a good mother is natural and there is a structure in society that ensures that it stays so.<sup>52</sup> This male appropriation claims rights over the child. Reproductive labour creates value that is socio-historical in nature. Men have two natures, biological and cultural. But women have only one i.e. biological because they are taken to be closer to nature.

Carole Pateman argues that in civil society, men get access and control over women through the marriage contract. She presumes two arguments: First, is that man considering them the matters that have brought the civil law into being? "The men who make the original pact ensure that patriarchal political right is secured in civil society."<sup>53</sup> Second, this kind of subjugation can come into play when women have been conquered as subjects. This way their status gets perpetuated as weaker due to them being independent subjects because the weak economic status of women is also linked to reproductive subjugation. Women's financial dependence on men has made them more vulnerable to being controlled and exploited. Due to all this, their sense of self-esteem and identity gets eroded leading them to feel alienated and valueless. A sense of fear and anxiety is created amongst women as they must navigate through the pervading norms and expectations that have tried to exploit their bodies.

Tamela Ice explains that women are not born psychologically oppressed but become one because of the unequal power structure which induces effects on life

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49. Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, (Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 26.

50. Procreative consciousness is defined as a state of being within a reproductive realm of fecundity, contraception, pregnancy, abortion, childbirth, and children. William Marsiglio, "Male procreative consciousness and responsibility: a conceptual analysis and research agenda," *J Fam Issues* 12, no. 03 (1991), 270.

51. O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 56.

52. *Ibid*, 48.

53. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 48.

and behaviour underlined by ideology and laws. The problem deepens when the oppressed internalize the oppression about themselves and add it to the value system. Women are made to believe that they must “understand the utility of subordination and that they are valued as wives and mothers, that they will be respected, they will desire the status of motherhood and their social alienation. Women will desire the abdication of liberty.”<sup>54</sup>

The historical contexts and cultural norms have reinforced the idea that a woman’s primary value lies in becoming a mother which has heavily influenced their choices, opportunities, and self-perception. The traditional gender roles reinforce the notion that woman should prioritize their natural ability to nurture and care for others rather than pursuing their natural interests and careers.

### **Asserting Equal Representation**

Feminists claim that gender stereotypes serve to uphold patriarchy and place boundaries upon women’s lives. From an early age, gender is constructed in a way that deliberately undermines the status of females and puts them at a disadvantage throughout their lives.<sup>55</sup> Representations should not be seen as providing special status but holding the representation by being the way they are. Women have been historically denied free representation in the institutions by justifying that this was for the greater good of the state. As seen in the previous sections, to develop any kind of procedure it is essential to develop a universal approach that must encompass everyone. The problem arises when this orientation gets into conflict with various sexualities and the struggle that arises to accommodate them. Women have been accustomed to the idea of what is just and not what is decent.<sup>56</sup> This has led to the deprivation of their natural rights. It is necessary to identify a woman's being before embarking on a path to seek the concept of justice and rights to reimagine a space to understand the sexual difference. Whenever we address our differences in terms of sexed bodies, we decide our persona based on it. The pertinent gender hierarchy molds the social meaning of individuals. This thereby claims our existence as legal and social beings with rights.

Being elevated from laid down intersections of a role helps one to fully realize their potential. The exploitation of one party over the other leads to the deprivation of rights. bell hooks and Cornell talk about taking up different sexual

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54. Ice, *Resolving the Paradox of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Sexual Politics*, 45.

55. "Feminism: Gender Stereotypes," tutor2u, November 6, 2018, <https://www.tutor2u.net/politics/reference/feminism-gender-stereotypes#:~:text=Feminists%20claim%20that%20gender%20stereotypes,a%20disadvantage%20throughout%20their%20lives.>

56. Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794), ‘On Admitting Women to the Rights of Citizenship’, 1790,” in *Tolerance Book Subtitle: The Beacon of the Enlightenment*, ed. Caroline Warman (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 20.

representations in an imaginary domain to imagine their end. Cornell says, "This ideal representative was imagined as from the other space and thus could come to embody the self not ensnared in the matrix of abuse."<sup>57</sup> For bell hooks, art classes gave her space where she could be in her imagined domain. The concepts of equality and gender are underlined as aspects of discrimination. Women are not similarly 'situated' with men. "Human rights, including women's rights, have implicitly been limited to those rights that men have to lose. This may be in part why men persistently confuse procedural and abstract equality with substantive equality for them, they are the same."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, space must be reimagined to understand personal agency not drawn on distinct gender notions.

### **Feminist Method: Consciousness Raising**

Consciousness Raising is a feminist method that aims to reconstitute the meaning of women's social experience as they live through it. It draws awareness on the restrictions at home and workplace based on sex and focuses on the social reality of being a female.<sup>59</sup> Women are subjected to denigrated treatment, which makes them perceive themselves as responsible for it. In the household, women remain invisible due to their responsibility to care for the same thing repeatedly. Sexism is an accepted form of habit, and being a woman can be defined as socially about their personal and public relations. The exercise of power by men defines them and women respectively, and when this power is challenged, it is sometimes seen as a threat to the identity and definition of men. Power is perceived socially as a male form, and it is not only that men treat women badly but also that it is their choice whether or not to do so. Co-operative rationality aims at participatory democracy and the common good, while instrumental rationality results in particularism and fascism.<sup>60</sup> In class societies, there is a history of antagonisms between instrumental and cooperative rationality, with dominant classes and groups developing new methods of exploitation and domination.

Consciousness Raising tried to strike a redefined meaning of social relations and reconstitute the meaning. It acknowledges that one form of male power is inside women and that it is both natural and unchangeable. To overcome these hindrances, women must set new conditions and choose their determinants.

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57. Cornell, "Introduction: Feminism, Justice and Sexual Freedom," in *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex & Equality*, 9.

58. Catherine A. Mackinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of State*, 229.

59. *Ibid*, 88.

60. *Ibid*, 93.

### **Unconscious Bias and Intersectionality: Personal and Professional Realm**

Feminism encompasses diverse theories and practices that have a common goal to achieve gender equality. One common thread that runs through them is intersectionality. It brings into purview how individual experiences differ based on intersecting ideas of sexuality, race, class, etc. Intersectional Feminism reflects how it is equally important to address the simultaneous discrimination of marginalized communities. It talks about the separate inequality that arises from overlapping levels of oppression. These inequalities strike each other in the forms of racism, poverty, sexism, etc.

To increase women's representation in the workplace, politics, home, and leadership positions, it is important to provide more access to opportunities for training and learning development programs to help them navigate career goals and acquire necessary skills. A common word that is used is 'othering.' Human beings are influenced by a wide range of unconscious biases and dispositions based on age, sex, class, etc. The effects that they entail seem to be very small but the repercussions that follow are huge because it becomes disadvantageous to certain members of the group. Women face unconscious bias in various forms. Despite the efforts towards gender equality, they are ingrained in the societal attitudes which lack awareness on how to treat women. There are two categories - Stereotype threat and Implicit Biases. The former talks about how a group membership would affect their performance negatively and the latter talks about "the unconscious biases that affect the way we perceive, evaluate, or interact with people from the groups that our biases "target."<sup>61</sup>

Implicit Bias - A schema is a mental construct that is consistent with the behavior of an individual or an event. They are dispositions that arise in our responses to different circumstances. A schema-based explanation of women evaluates men to be more competent than women in professional excellence.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes stigmatized groups don't hire women where they have biased perspectives.

Stereotype Threat - Stereotypes include their incapability to take up leadership positions and only restrict themselves to caregiving roles. This exhibits underperformance since they are unconsciously preoccupied with confirming the stereotypes associated with that group. Subtle comments and actions reflect microaggressions.

Both biases will put more stress on the already tough personal and professional scenario making their position weaker than men. Women in the workplace are less

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61. R. Marcus, "Unconscious Bias," That Marcus Family, 2022, [http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course\\_Websites/Readings/Saul%20-%20Unconscious%20Influences.pdf](http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Readings/Saul%20-%20Unconscious%20Influences.pdf).

62. R. Marcus, "Unconscious Bias," That Marcus Family, 2022, [http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course\\_Websites/Readings/Saul%20-%20Unconscious%20Influences.pdf](http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Readings/Saul%20-%20Unconscious%20Influences.pdf).



hired, and not judged for promotions, and women in the personal realm will consider themselves inferior.

The need to address these issues does not always involve a macro-level intervention but a micro-level when we adapt them to everyday lives. The foundational barrier intervenes with the agency of the women which is communicated verbally and non-verbally. It is widely felt that macro-level state judgments could help to solve the challenges of stereotypes and prejudices that mar the society but until and unless interventions on a foundational basis cannot take place the challenges can never be solved. Taking this into consideration time plays an important role. Whatever has been achieved in the past two hundred years has to be ensured that we do not regress in the demand for gender equality and keep moving forward embracing and solving more newly emerged issues and developments in humanity.

At the workplace, there are blind spots for women. There is a need to attain gender parity and increase gender diversity. Corporate organizations feel that since women must deal with pregnancy, motherhood, and marriage, they become less productive than men. In the future, their commitment towards family and children supersedes their position in the workplace and sometimes ends up them to leave. Apart from quantitative exclusion, women also face qualitative one. Everyday forms of gender discrimination like uncomfortable comments, jokes, unwanted touch, questioning their capabilities, judgments, and sexual harassment create an atmosphere of discomfort for women.

The lack of infrastructure in jobs like construction, police, and military further pushes down their inclusivity since the tools, and armour is not built to their body structure. The need to promote gender diversity creates new claims, discoveries and practices, unique ideas, and perspectives. Increased representation of women will also lead to new investments and diverse upcoming enterprises that are gender inclusive and cater to the needs of women. This will advance sustainable development practices.

To overcome these issues, the salary structure must be kept transparent. The employees and the leadership must also be trained to deal with discrimination and sexism in the workplace. It is important to be assertive in gender nuance and question the instances when discrimination has taken place. Unconscious bias needs to be addressed. The increased networking of women is extremely important for discussing diverse topics and exchanging information about the issues that affect them the most. It ranges, from the workplace, and family to motherhood and their roles across different industries. The enhanced social connection would lead to the creation of a positive environment to live and work.

Another discrimination against women that is taking a stronghold is the motherhood penalty where pregnant women and mothers have slow-paced professional advancement. Workplaces are unable to accommodate the demands of working mothers and don't understand the challenges that they face. Sometimes, these companies fail to provide flexible work timings and childcare centers.

It has become the need of the hour to offer a flexible approach for working parents to enable them to balance their family lives and jobs. Organizations like Bumble have 85% women staff. They have kept a flexible interpretation of working hours which acts as an amplifier for them. Rather than working constantly the whole time, it does not follow the conventional attitudes of work-life balance. Pay Transparency is a huge step toward achieving equity to increase efficiency across all races and genders and promote a sense of inclusivity.

The idea of 'having it all' is tough. To manage it, one needs to strike a balance. This is something which is a tough balancing act as being working parents and raising healthy and happy children at the same time. This becomes tougher with the sacrifices that come along with it. It becomes 'double binding' since women want to be successful in the professional realm but at the same time, they have to devote the necessary time and fulfill the requirements of the family members. The emotional and psychological support that they provide is indispensable. The attainment of both at the optimum level is not possible and therefore, attaching unrealistic expectations is not doable.

Despite the beliefs and expectations attached to the idea of a woman, one must let go of the expectations that each of these ideas could be fulfilled. Self-determination can be achieved and authenticated when a woman realizes her feelings and perspectives. Subordination in any social setting is a political issue because claims and standards are identified by the society, therefore it is important to identify the evaluation of claims must be validated by the community and inquiries have to be socially determined.

## Conclusion

Rousseau's liberal approach to governance has been criticized for its contradictory views on women's standing in society. Women's moral identities are partial and different from others, as they decide on artificial systems rather than being moral beings. This study uses qualitative methods, including conceptual analysis, text-historical method, and critique of Rousseau's works, to examine the challenges women face in contemporary times, including political, social, psychological, and cultural aspects. The aim is to uncover the dynamism within patriarchy and explore the overlapping categories of reading.

Justice is a key virtue in feminist thought, focusing on relationships between agents and recipients. It can be divided into two dimensions: transitional justice and restoration justice. Patriarchy socializes women, causing them to choose what men want them to have. Autonomy, a principle of Western Liberal philosophy is a self-determined life that involves rational deliberation and action. Freedom theorists like Nancy Hirschmann, Drucilla Cornell, and Wendy Brown emphasize the importance of understanding the relationship between inner and external forces of desire. Foucault's discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of power

relationships expressed through language and behavior. Women must recognize their autonomy by excluding external conditions and constructing context-specific values. The liberal model, as portrayed in Rousseau's works, is flawed in its ability to bring out women's emancipation due to its inherent inequality. The liberal state has been criticized for reinforcing male jurisprudence, and feminists argue that the liberal social contract recognized patriarchy.

Rousseau argues that women are childish in handling their sexuality, leading to a social-sexual construct. Carole Pateman critiqued social contract and argued that women's position is evasive due to their dependence on men's opinions and the lack of choice in their lives. Pateman also discusses the interpretation of female sexuality, which is a fluid and essential part of identity. Pateman questions the political thought on how women have been systematically excluded from the original contract, arguing that civil freedom is supposed to be a patriarchal right in Rousseau's Social Contract. She argues that the sexual contract is understood as a marriage contract, but it is not recognized as an individual, denying women basic social and legal expression. Pateman suggests that civil society treats the private sphere as a political interest, ignoring the civil sphere.

Men have traditionally held a superior position over women due to their physical strength and ability, while women's sexuality has been used as a reason for their inability to exercise political rights. This is due to their patriarchal family structures and cultural norms that restrict women's reproductive capacity and self-representation. Feminist theories of justice have not adequately addressed conditions of inclusion, and harmonization of freedom with each other is necessary for a politically liberal society. Identity politics argues for recognition and demands for basic rights while addressing psychological oppression based on women's reproductive capacity. Mary O'Brien argues that women are trapped in their reproductive capacity, and rights must be related to actual social relations and responsibility.

Feminists argue that gender stereotypes uphold patriarchy and place boundaries on women's lives. They argue that representations should not be seen as providing special status but as being the way they are. Women have historically been denied free representation in institutions, and this has led to the deprivation of their natural rights. Consciousness Raising is a feminist method that aims to reconstitute the meaning of women's social experience, acknowledging that one form of male power is inside them and is both natural and unchangeable.

Intersectionality is a common thread in feminism, addressing the simultaneous discrimination of marginalized communities. To increase women's representation in the workplace, politics, home, and leadership positions, it is important to provide more access to opportunities for training and learning development programs. Unconscious biases, such as stereotype threat and implicit biases, can negatively impact women's performance and personal and professional situations. Addressing these biases is crucial for achieving gender equality and promoting equal representation for all. Addressing gender equality requires micro-level interventions, addressing

stereotypes and prejudices, and promoting gender diversity in everyday life. Women face both quantitative and qualitative exclusion in the workplace, with discomfort and discrimination often resulting from their commitment to family and children. To promote gender diversity, transparency in salary structures, training for employees and leadership, and addressing unconscious bias are essential. Balancing work and family is a difficult task, and women must let go of unrealistic expectations and seek self-determination. Validating claims and standards in social settings is crucial for achieving equity and promoting inclusivity.

Men have traditionally held a superior position over women due to their physical strength and ability, while women's sexuality has been used as a reason for their inability to exercise political rights. This is due to patriarchal family structures and cultural norms that restrict women's reproductive capacity and self-representation. Feminist

Rousseau tried to prove that the Social Contract setup is impeccable. But the main criticism lies in the fact that it is not moral at all. In a political system, a person must be a good citizen. He is trying to bring in the same model in the private sphere, but it is failing because, in both, men have a fair share of women. According to Rousseau, if this direction is not followed then it will prove to be destructive for everyone. Even though it preserves the harmony of good governance, it is marred with injustice towards an important section. His idea of the state will fail in the long run because non-contribution by women will affect its development. His strong ideas on masculinity will bring in a rigid stand towards schemes. When we say Morality is held by exercising virtue, in Rousseau's model women make decisions based on an artificially laid out system. So, can we say that women are moral beings? A biased attitude towards another party (women) will bring in a discriminatory approach towards good governance. This flawed approach creates a sense of tension and takes away the 'Morality' of the state. It also recedes the 'CARE' attitude out of the authorities and injects an 'Unopposed' rule. The method of Consciousness Raising highlights the issue of women looking at their personalities from a male gaze and expecting men to give meaning to their holistic lives. To become autonomous beings, women need to set and condition their boundaries.

This work exhibits that the relationship between citizenship and womanhood is flawed in Rousseau's world as it is not gender-neutral due to a lack of active participation. This division is further widened economically because of the existence of a dichotomy between employment and family. The latter is assumed to hold no significance politically. Social power is derived from that which has relational property associated with factors like class, wealth, status, etc. The said model is susceptible to the crisis in case the variables existing in it do not abide by them.

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## Revisiting Suburban Gothic Narratives: Intertextualities, Gender, and the Invisible Trope of Old Age in *The Stepford Wives* and *Edward Scissorhands*

By Marta Miquel-Baldellou\*

*Suburban Gothic fiction explores the latent dysfunctionality that lies beneath residential areas despite their apparently blissful image upholding the ideals of the American dream. Insofar as suburban Gothic is rooted in domestic Gothic and, by extension, female Gothic, it underscores the inextricable relation established between gender and aging, particularly with regard to the Victorian trope of arrested development, which acquires different connotations along gender lines. As representative of the early origins of suburban Gothic, Ira Levin's novel *The Stepford Wives* (1972) portrays the arrival of a female newcomer at a conservative community comprising suburban housewives who never seem to grow old. As a postmodern exponent, Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) tackles how an eternally young and androgynous humanoid is introduced in a suburban neighbourhood of middle-aged residents and their adolescent children. This article aims to analyse the intertextualities between these two paradigmatic narratives of suburban Gothic and, in particular, in relation to gender and aging—bearing in mind that, as suggestive of the metaphor of arrested development, the trope of old age remains invisible—and how these narratives evince either submission or rebellion with regard to gender and age conventions.*

### Introduction

In the last decades, there has been a proliferation of novels, films, and series that fall under the denomination of suburban Gothic. From early forerunners, such as Shirley Jackson's novels and David Lynch's films, to more contemporary exponents, comprising novels like Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) and Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train* (2015)—both of them also adapted to the screen—, the subgenre of suburban Gothic has attracted significant interest from its classic representatives, such as Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999) and the immensely popular television series *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012) to its most recent manifestations to date, comprising Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) and Olivia Wilde's film *Don't Worry Darling* (2022), which give evidence of the enduring revitalisation of the genre.

Ira Levin's novel *The Stepford Wives*, published in 1972, which was adapted to the screen by Bryan Forbes in 1975 and by Frank Oz in 2004—both films being significantly different in tone, since the former is a horror story, whereas the latter is a dark comedy— and Tim Burton's film *Edward Scissorhands*, released in 1990, may be taken as narratives that respectively represent the early stages and

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subsequent postmodern reinterpretations of the genre. In Levin's novel, Joanna Eberhart and her family settle down in the idyllic town of Stepford, where female newcomers notice that all the women in town conform to the subservient role of contented housewives and look significantly younger in comparison with their husbands. In Burton's film, as a grandmother, Kim Boggs recollects her memories of youth about a young man named Edward who had scissor blades for hands, and came to live in the suburbs where he faced the predicament of adjusting or diverging from conventions along his process of socialisation onto adulthood.

What follows is a comparative analysis of Levin's novel and Burton's film with the aim to highlight the significance that the discourses of gender and aging acquire in suburban Gothic narratives, insofar as individuals are coerced into conforming or dissenting from established conventions. In terms of gender, in both narratives, main characters, as paradigmatic of alternative femininities and masculinities, are exposed to traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities to which they are made to conform, although Levin's novel underlines the individual's being forced to succumb to social pressures, whereas Burton's film rather accentuates the individual's dissent from prevailing discourses. As inextricably related to gender, the discourses of aging become pervasive in both narratives, since the compulsory or rebellious tendency not to grow older is interpreted differently according to gender, insofar as, in Levin's novel, Joanna is pressured not to age in order to conform to the prevailing gender dictates established for women, whereas, conversely, in Burton's film, Edward's inability to grow older is taken as symptomatic of his social ostracism and his deviant masculinity, although both narratives envision old age as an invisible trope, insofar as the main characters never grow old.

This analysis will comprise a brief overview of its theoretical framework, particularly in relation to suburban Gothic and its precedents in the genres of domestic Gothic and female Gothic, the legacy of Victorian discourses of gender and aging that prevail in suburban Gothic—especially in relation to the notion of arrested development—, the influence of gender theories from second-wave and third-wave feminist movements, and the notion of gender and age performance that reveals how these discourses are culturally constructed and are susceptible to be transformed. Furthermore, according to Julia Kristeva's narratological concept of intertextuality, and Gérard Genette's categorisations of transtextuality concerning the hypotext and the hypertext—since textualities are transformed from preceding to subsequent paradigms—and given the significant parallelisms existing between Levin's novel and Burton's film, this analysis will also address the intertextualities that both narratives present together with the contrasting conclusion that they eventually reach, taking into consideration how the discourses of gender and aging become pervasive in both narratives and remain inextricably related and influence one another.

## From Victorian Domestic Fiction to Suburban Gothic: Gender, Aging, Performance

Ira Levin's novel *The Stepford Wives* and Tim Burton's film *Edward Scissorhands* are representative narratives of suburban Gothic. As Catherine Redford claims, suburban Gothic tackles "the anxiety lying beneath the surface of idealized suburban communities,"<sup>1</sup> with the particularity that the agent that threatens to disrupt the apparent placidity in these residential areas is commonly identified as internal. Given the prevalent impression that there is some danger lurking within these idealised residential areas, Bernice Murphy refers to the play on words between the terms 'suburbia' and 'disturbia.'<sup>2</sup> Suburban Gothic fiction flourished in the United States during the postwar period, in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when prosperity and social mobility were extolled as part of the American Dream, and found correlation in the mass suburban development of American homes inhabited by nuclear families comprising fathers with a white-collar profession and contented mothers who looked after their children. As Redford further explains, although the early exponents of the suburban Gothic subgenre emerged in the prosperous American society of the mid-twentieth century, the latent sense of menace and unease arising from suburban development could be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth-century in the expanding suburbs of London and found its fictional counterpart in the contemporary genre of domestic Gothic fiction, which reached its peak of popularity in Victorian times.

In Levin's novel and Burton's film, the life in domesticity in suburban communities lies its roots in Victorian precepts about the ethics of domestic life, which reveals conventional notions about the separation of spheres along gender lines, inasmuch as the main characters in these narratives are exposed to traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities. Domestic Gothic fiction—written from a female perspective and addressed to female readers—tackled women's fears and concerns as a result of their oppressive situation within the household in the Victorian period. As Elaine Hartnell-Mottram explains, the values attached to the home triggered the increasing disjunction between domestic and commercial interests, which also entailed a separation of spheres according to gender, whereby women were assigned the private sphere and men worked outside the domestic space, thus involving that women were removed from remunerative employment.<sup>3</sup> The home was considered a shelter for privacy where women embodied domestic values to the extent that female confinement

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1. Catherine Redford, "Suburban Gothic," in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (eds.) W. Hughes, D. Punter, and A. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 658.

2. Bernice Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

3. Elaine Hartnell-Mottram, "Domestic Gothic," in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (eds.) W. Hughes, D. Punter, and A. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 184.

became a requirement not only for the preservation of labour division and family ethics, but also for women's respectability.

Insofar as domestic Gothic mainly addressed women's anxieties about their household confinement, theorist Ellen Moers (1976) coined the term female Gothic. As Diana Wallace explains, Moers argues that, in its early stages, the genre of female Gothic presented two developments, which respectively addressed a particular thematic focus.<sup>4</sup> In the first development, usually represented by Ann Radcliffe's novels, female Gothic novels revolve around anxieties arising from marriage and sexuality, insofar as a heroine is threatened with imprisonment in a castle or a manor by a male despot, who symbolises a patriarchal figure. In the second development, traditionally epitomised by Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), female Gothic narratives address the birth myth, whereby a hideous progeny escapes the creator's control, thus tackling repressed horrors related to procreation. Levin's novel and Burton's film respectively explore these two stages of development in female Gothic, inasmuch as, in the former, Joanna is confined in life in domesticity at her husband's request and, in the latter, Edward is a humanoid created by a male inventor who must find his way in a disaffecting environment.

Bearing in mind the dyad of gender and aging, Claudia Nelson's notion of arrested development in Victorian narratives becomes relevant, as it pervades Levin's novel and Burton's film. In *The Stepford Wives*, Joanna is disallowed to grow older as a woman owing to prevailing conventions, whereas, in *Edward Scissorhands*, Edward is coerced into growing up and adjusting to conventional displays of masculinity in spite of his reluctance. To use Nelson's terms, Victorian middle-class society is organised "to keep its females perpetual children, sexually innocent, financially dependent, adorably helpless,"<sup>5</sup> whereas "the man who carries juvenile characteristics into adulthood is often perceived as posing a threat" to the extent that "the arrested child-man often carries with him an aura of the pathologically damaged."<sup>6</sup> Hence, in Victorian narratives, female characters are often encouraged to remain perpetually young in appearance and attitude, thus being precluded to grow old, whereas male characters who embrace arrested development are portrayed as necessarily deviant. This gender-differentiated notion responds to the prevailing ethics of separate spheres as a result of gender conventions.

The discourses of gender remain prevalent in these two narratives, although each of them presents a different approach owing to the historical context in which they were created. Levin's novel was published in the context of second-wave feminism, as represented by theorists like Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Carol Hanisch, Germaine Greer, and Gloria Steinem, who respectively encouraged women to

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4. Diana Wallace, "Female Gothic," in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (eds.) W. Hughes, D. Punter, and A. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 232.

5. Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 72.

6. *Ibidem*, 43.

gain awareness of the stifling quality of domesticity, the patriarchal control of women's sexuality, the political dimension inherent in women's personal concerns, the relation between patriarchy and consumerism, and the visibility of women's bodies from their own perspective. All of these issues and concerns are tackled in Levin's novel. An excerpt from Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), taken as the volume which inspired the creation of the second-wave feminist movement, precedes *The Stepford Wives*, and explicit and implicit references to other feminist theorists of the period also recur throughout Levin's novel. In her seminal volume *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan gave voice to the unsatisfied lives that housewives often led owing to the fact that their confinement in the domestic sphere limited their aspirations in life. In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett drew attention to the crucial part that patriarchy played on the discourses of sexuality, which relegated women to a secondary role. Hanisch's seminal essay "The Personal Is Political" (1970) claimed that gaining insight into women's personal concerns was as important as taking political action. In her volume *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Greer argued that the suburban consumerism and the nuclear family contributed to women's repression and, in *The Change: Women, Ageing, and the Menopause* (1991), Greer unveiled the myths around the climacteric and suggested that this stage in women's life could turn into a source of female empowerment.

In comparison, Burton's film was released in the context of third-wave feminism, whereby critics like Rebecca Walker, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti drew attention to issues such as the notion of gender as culturally determined, the generation gap that differentiated them from their feminist predecessors, and the concept of the cyborg that transcended the human condition, which are addressed in Burton's film. Walker called for the need to inaugurate the third-wave movement to re-evaluate the aims of feminism in her book *To Be Real* (1995), thus acknowledging the differing approach between older and younger generations within the movement. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler deconstructed the essentialist concept of gender identity and introduced the notion of gender performance as a series of repeated acts that trigger the possibility of transforming how gender is perceived. Braidotti coined the notion of the posthuman subject and the cyborg, along with Nina Lykke, in their book *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs* (1996), as they envisioned the gendered subject as the embodiment of flexible and multiple identities.

Besides, the discourses of gender are inextricably linked to those of aging, as evinced by the fact that, decades after publishing *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir would write *La Vieillesse* (1970). Butler's premise of gender performance which envisions gender as a series of repeated acts that are liable to change, thus paving the way for transforming gender conventions, acquires special relevance in these two narratives, particularly insofar as gender performance is revealed to be inextricably related to age performance. In Levin's novel, upon reaching middle age, Joanna is symbolically precluded to grow older according to gender conventions established for women, whereas, in Burton's film, Edward is coerced into growing older upon reaching adolescence along gender conventions addressed to

men. Drawing on Butler's notion of gender performance, Anne Basting (2001) claims that the discourses of aging are also performed insofar as they are culturally constructed. Based on Basting's premises, cultural gerontologists such as Kathleen Woodward (2006) argue that age can be performed inasmuch as gender is performed, while Margaret Gullette (2004) has drawn attention to the possibility of acting age—that is, acting younger or older—according to established age conventions. In Levin's novel, Joanna is triggered to act younger as a middle-aged woman, whereas, in Burton's film, Edward is forced to act older as a male adolescent.

### **Intertextualities: From Plot Parallelisms to Literary Influences**

From the early notion of dialogism to that of intertextual function, Julia Kristeva coins the concept of intertextuality to refuse the idea of a text as a self-contained and autonomous entity in favour of envisioning it as a site of intersection and existing only in relation to other texts. Subsequently, for Gérard Genette, intertextuality becomes a category within the broader concept of transtextuality, which he defines as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."<sup>7</sup> In particular, Genette introduces the relation between the hypertext, which transforms an earlier text that is known as the hypotext. Insofar as Levin's novel and Burton's film are narratives pertaining to suburban Gothic, they present significant intertextualities, comprising plot parallelisms, themes, character types, settings, aesthetics, tropes and motifs, narrative voices, and literary influences. Furthermore, inasmuch as Levin's novel is representative of the early origins of the genre, whereas Burton's film turns into a postmodern paradigm, it may be argued that, to use Genette's term, Levin's novel functions as a hypotext and Burton's film can be described as a hypertext, since Burton's film revisits, but also reverses, premises related to age and gender that are addressed in Levin's novel.

In terms of their plot, both narratives portray a tripartite structure comprising the arrival of outsiders at a suburban community, the predicament between retaining their individuality and conforming to prevailing conventions, and the final outcome of joining or departing from the community. In Levin's novel, it is not out of her will that Joanna moves to live in Stepford, but she rather follows her husband's initiative, while, in Burton's film, it is Peg Boggs who enters Edward's palace and entices him to come to live in the suburbs. Although Joanna has professional ambitions as a photographer, she is gradually made to conform to the ethics of domesticity prescribed for women in Stepford and, despite Edward's own ways as a result of his upbringing in isolation, he is also triggered to comply with the conventions of life in suburbia, thus engaging in the dynamics

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7. Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 83-84.

between adjustment and exclusion. Notwithstanding these parallelisms in terms of plot, both narratives display a differing conclusion, inasmuch as Joanna is forced to succumb to the constraining dictates prevailing in Stepford, while Edward feels rather excluded and resumes his secluded existence.

Drawing on Joseph Campbell's inventory of character typologies following Jungian archetypes, Levin's novel and Burton's film comprise the characters of the hero or heroine, the mentor, the ally, the herald, the trickster, the shapeshifter, the guardian, and the shadow. Levin's novel revolves around a central heroine, Joanna, who is called to adventure by the figure of the herald, personified by her husband Walter. In her new context, Joanna befriends Bobbie, her ally, who helps her find her way, but also becomes acquainted with Dale Coba, the head of the Men's Association, who is evil and stands for the shadow. In the course of her adventure, Joanna meets Ike Mazzard, one of the members of the Men's Association, who prevents her from achieving her purpose and personifies the character of the guardian. Conversely, Joanna resorts to the help of symbolic wiser and older women, such as Doctor Fancher, who acts as her mentor. Joanna also comes across characters like Charmaine Wimperis, who initially shows loyalty to her, but eventually transforms into another Stepford wife, thus fulfilling her role as a shapeshifter, while Joanna also identifies some of the women in Stepford as promoters of comic relief in their part as tricksters, as is the case of Carol Van Sant. Analogously, in Burton's film, Edward is triggered into change by his herald, Peg Boggs, who takes him with her to live in the suburban community. It is there that Edward is assisted by Kim, who becomes his ally, while Edward meets his shadow, who is embodied by Kim's boyfriend, Jim, whom Edward must learn to defeat. Edward recollects the teachings of his old mentor, the late inventor who brought him into life, but also meets characters who trample on his well-being, as is the case of Esmeralda, who prevents Edward from being accepted in the community and stands for the figure of the guardian. Edward realises that Joy, who initially supports him, subsequently betrays him and accuses him of abusing her, thus arising as the shapeshifter in the story, while other characters that represent the community, such as Bill Boggs, ultimately turn into tricksters that entice Edward to reassess his situation.

In terms of narrative voices, in Levin's novel, an omniscient narrator unfolds the story which remains focalised on the main character, Joanna, whereas, in Burton's film, it is a homodiegetic narrator, Kim, who also plays a major role in the main narrative, the one who tells the story that remains focalised on Edward. From a narratological perspective, the choice of an omniscient narrator in Levin's novel reveals the social component of the narrative, which symbolically portrays the latent social concerns arising from women's increasing demands of power and authority. As a homodiegetic narrator unfolds the plot in Burton's film, the narrative acquires a mythical quality and follows the conventions of a fairy tale, as Kim identifies Edward as the enthralling character who is responsible for making it snow in a land that used to have a mostly temperate climate.

Both narratives address themes that are distinctive of suburban Gothic, such as the relation of the individual and society, the issue of conforming to social conventions, the role of consumer culture and capitalism, the increasing technification of society and its subsequent dehumanising effects, the categorisation of bodies as normative or extraordinary, and the prevalent cult of life in domesticity as legacy of Victorian domestic fiction. As individuals, both Joanna and Edward display some artistic gifts—since she is a successful photographer and he creates fabulous topiaries in his garden—that characterise them as individuals who stand out from the crowd. Nonetheless, they must come to terms with social conventions, when Joanna leaves behind the anonymity of living in a conurbation like New York, and Edward abandons his existence in isolation in order to embrace suburban life in a tightly-knit community. The residential areas where Joanna and Edward live turn into microcosms reflective of capitalist and consumerist ideas prevailing in the American society, insofar as Joanna and her female neighbours meet in the supermarket, and Edward frequents the shopping mall with his foster family. The technocracy that controls these communities is reflected in the literal and symbolic process of roboticization befalling the women in *Stepford* on behalf of their husbands—most of whom are leading scientists—and Edward’s condition as a humanoid created in a laboratory by a male inventor who dies before completing his creation. In communities where appearances define personal identity, bodies acquire particular significance as signs of conformity or disconformity with the prevailing discourses, since, in Levin’s novel, non-normative female bodies are made to conform, while, in Burton’s film, Edward’s robotic body makes itself stand out from the rest of standardised bodies. In these suburban communities, both Joanna and Edward are coerced into embracing the ethics of domesticity exemplified by their respective neighbours, which is symptomatic of the American way of life in mid-twentieth-century.

The juxtaposition of settings in both narratives reinforces the dichotomy established between the community and the individual, public and private spheres, and exposure and concealment, which signify the moral dilemma that the heroine and the hero must confront as individuals who inhabit transitional spaces that symbolise their progression. The gothic palace that Edward inhabits becomes the epitome of the individual and remains apart from the colourful houses that make up the suburban community. In Levin’s novel, the Men’s Association’s Manor also arises as an imposing and ancient building, but, in contrast with Edward’s castle, it belongs to the residential area and symbolises the reactionary ideals lying at the core of the town. In Levin’s novel and Burton’s film, the schism between separate spheres is portrayed by means of the contrast established between private settings, such as bedrooms and kitchens, and public locations where families get together in social gatherings, such as gardens and commercial centres. The pulse between exposure and concealment is enacted in both narratives by means of settings such as attics—in which the Men’s Association exhibits the idyllic families in *Stepford*, and Edward displays the ice



figurines he carves with his scissorhands—and cellars and locked rooms—insofar as, in her cellar, Joanna finds an old newspaper which informs her that the town used to have a Women's Club, while Edward falls into the trap of breaking into Jim's father's locked room, which precipitates his fall from favour in the community. In the course of their progression, Joanna and Edward traverse transitional places, such as staircases and laboratories, which symbolically envision their condition as individuals trapped in intermediate spaces that physically signify their struggle between social conformity and personal insurgence.

In terms of aesthetics, Levin's novel and Burton's film establish a visual contrast between the multicoloured suburban communities and the black-and-white expressionism characterising the imposing manor house of the Men's Association and Edward's gothic palace. Nonetheless, in terms of connotations, if, in Levin's novel, the Men's Association's Manor is portrayed as an eminently evil place in contrast with the comforting houses in suburbia, in Burton's film, this tendency is subverted, since, in spite of its bleak appearance, Edward's gothic palace proves to be more convivial than the residential area from which he is eventually expelled. Frames from Burton's film depicting the suburban cottages and their adjacent gardens present a significant parallelism with some of David Hockney's paintings describing life in suburbia. Besides, Edward Hopper's paintings depicting the isolation of life in domesticity are evoked in Forbes's film adaptation of Levin's novel, particularly Hopper's paintings portraying women situated behind windows, which find correlation in Joanna's lonely domestic life. In contrast with these pastel-coloured designs, the chiaroscuro lightning in the films, legacy of German expressionism—thus, depicting sharp angles, stylised shapes, and distorted figures—suggests the estrangement of individuals entrapped in mechanised and alienating locations. German expressionistic cinema influenced Edward's spectral features and the depiction of the laboratory in Burton's film, along with the mechanical transformation of the Stepford women into robots in Forbes's and Oz's film adaptations of Levin's novel.

Finally, both narratives display intertextualities with Gothic fairy tales and Victorian narratives. Insofar as women's presence is banned from the Men's Association's Manor, Levin's novel is evocative of Charles Perrault's fairy tale "Bluebeard" (1697). Furthermore, the multicoloured fantasy world that conceals the suburban community of Stepford, in which women's bodies are transformed, acquires an unreal dimension that is evocative of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Analogously, Burton's film is also suggestive of fairy tales, such as Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's "Beauty and the Beast" (1740), as it depicts the platonic love between Edward and Kim. Insofar as Edward is unable and unwilling to succumb to the prevailing discourses of gender and aging, his perpetual youth is also evocative of James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan; or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904), since, like Peter Pan, Edward is also unable to grow older and, instead, cherishes the myth of eternal youth.

## Constructing and Subverting Gender and Aging

Having considered the numerous intertextualities existing between these two narratives, this comparative analysis will now focus on the relevance that the discourses of gender and aging acquire in both of them. As Redford notes, suburban Gothic usually portrays the menacing undertones of “the father working hard in a white-collar profession for his family” and “the contented mother looking after her home,”<sup>8</sup> thus referring explicitly to gender conventions. Nonetheless, in relation to gender, the discourses of aging also become prevalent insofar as suburban Gothic lays its roots in domestic Gothic and, in particular, in female Gothic, which usually addresses momentous transitions at different stages in the course of women’s life. Insofar as suburban Gothic hints at the sinister connotations lying at the core of gender discourses, it could be argued that suburban Gothic also unveils the latent threat of culturally-determined aging dictates, given the mutual influence that gender and aging exert on each other.

### Between Gender Orthodoxy and Dissention: Androgyny, Conventions, Performance

According to Melanie Waters, in twenty-first century suburban Gothic fiction, there is the tendency to feature older women who reject domesticity for the sake of professional success in contrast with younger women who are reluctant to give priority to their careers and rather appear to embrace domestic duties.<sup>9</sup> As illustrative of the early origins of the genre, Levin’s novel already reflects this duality between feminism and domesticity on the basis of aging, as older female characters extol the ideals of second-wave feminism, while their younger counterparts seem to conform to the ethics of domestic life. Also, in Burton’s film, middle-aged women, like Peg Boggs, have a profession of their own outside the home, while younger women, like Esmeralda, hold on to highly reactionary discourses of gender. Characters like Joanna in Levin’s novel and Edward in Burton’s film are acquainted with the predicament between complying or dissenting in relation to gender conventions, while their own gender identity also influences the divergent outcome of their respective situations. Taking into account this dilemma in terms of gender, this comparative analysis will address the embodiments of alternative femininities and masculinities that the central characters represent, their exposure to traditional femininities and hegemonic

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8. Catherine Redford, “Suburban Gothic,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (eds.) W. Hughes, D. Punter, and A. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 659.

9. Melanie Waters, “The Horrors of Home: Feminism and Femininity in the Suburban Gothic,” in *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture* (ed.) M. Waters (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 59.

masculinities, the pressure to conform to gender dictates, the metatextual references to gender discourses, instances of gender performance, and the final resolution to embrace or discard gender dictates.

### *Embodiments of Alternative Femininities and Masculinities*

As Joanna and Edward join their respective suburban communities, they symbolically become epitomes of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque body. On the one hand, both characters arise as agents of insurgency that destabilise the homogenous and conservative societies they encounter. On the other hand, they turn into grotesque bodies, which are defined as a source of becoming and open to change as opposed to the aesthetically standardised bodies inhabiting their respective communities. As personifications of the carnivalesque body, Joanna and Edward turn into embodiments of alternative femininities and masculinities.

Upon their arrival at their respective suburban communities, Joanna and Edward immediately stand out in the crowd, since their physical appearance—in particular, their dark hair, pale complexion, and black clothes—remain at variance with the homogenous, albeit colourful, looks of the rest of the members in the neighbourhood. They feel out of place in the suburbs, since it is at her husband's request that Joanna moves from New York to Stepford, where women reveal an obsessive adherence to domesticity, whereas it is Peg Boggs who takes Edward away from his cloistered existence in the palace on top of the mountain so that he may adopt the lifestyle and gender conventions prevailing in the suburbs.

Both Joanna and Edward look androgynous in comparison with the surrounding overstated displays of femininity and masculinity. If Joanna looks masculine according to the prevailing gender conventions in Stepford, as she often wears casual clothes and prefers comfort to sophistication, conversely, Edward's looks acquire a feminine quality, adopting a meek and passive role, which has conventionally been associated with traditional femininities.

Besides, as artists—since Joanna is a photographer, and Edward trims shrubs and creates topiaries—they are portrayed as individuals who observe society, but remain detached and turn into witnesses rather than participants. In contrast with the women in Stepford, who are used to incarnating the object of the male gaze, to use Laura Mulvey's term, as a photographer, Joanna is in command of the gaze and adopts the role of the observer who has traditionally been assigned to the male. Analogously, Edward's scissorhands, as indicative of his alternative masculinity, are revealed to be an agent of disruption and change that turns the standardised suburban gardens, which are an extension of their conservative owners, into unique and creative topiaries with an identity of their own.

### ***Exposure to Traditional Femininities and Hegemonic Masculinities***

In the suburbs, Joanna and Edward become exposed to embodiments of traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities which appear to be rooted in Victorian discourses of gender. Theorists like John Ruskin referred to the philosophy of separate spheres, whereby women were considered more suited to the domestic sphere, while men took their professional responsibilities in the public sphere. As Maureen Moran observes, cultural assumptions were made on the basis of the biological differences between women and men, which were interpreted as contributing to fixing social expectations.<sup>10</sup> The politics of separate spheres was reflected in domestic Gothic in the Victorian period and perpetuated in suburban Gothic as its current genre counterpart.

Joanna soon realises that the women in Stepford appear to be “completely absorbed in household duties”<sup>11</sup> and “work like robots all their lives,”<sup>12</sup> thus looking satisfied in their domesticity despite being deprived of professional ambitions. In contrast, their husbands occupy important positions in leading technological companies, while their wives stay at home and take care of the children. In the evenings, the men join together at the Men’s Association’s Manor, which is described, in eloquently masculine terms, as rising “up on the hill” as a “square old nineteenth-century house, solid and symmetrical, tipsily parasolled by a glistening TV antenna,”<sup>13</sup> thus symbolically evoking the phallus in a portrayal redolent with hegemonic masculinities, particularly insofar as women’s presence within its walls is categorically banned.

In Burton’s film, social roles are also perceived as gender-differentiated, as is shown when the Boggs family organise a barbecue in order to introduce Edward as a new member in their suburban community. As men gather round, they entice Edward to take part in their games involving strength and dexterity, hence bringing to the fore the schism existing between the hegemonic masculinity that they represent and Edward’s alternative manhood symbolised by his scissorhands which exclude him from taking part in men’s games. Conversely, as women detect Edward’s helplessness upon eating, they exhibit their maternal instincts, overprotective predispositions, and cooking abilities—values associated with traditional femininities—to nurture him even to the extent of competing among themselves so that he tries all the meals that they have cooked for the occasion.

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10. Maureen Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), 35.

11. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 2.

12. *Ibidem*, 64.

13. *Ibidem*, 45.

### ***Pressure to Conform to Gender Dictates***

As Joanna and Edward settle down in apparently idyllic suburbia, they are made to conform to the prevailing clearly-differentiated gender dictates. Susan Sontag has drawn attention to the diverging configuration of female and male bodies according to conventional gender discourses. As Sontag claims, femininity has traditionally been associated with caring about one's physical appearance, whereas masculinity has often involved not caring about one's looks, at the same time that it is assumed that, if men's bodies develop, women's bodies are rather forced to remain unchanged as long as possible.<sup>14</sup> Gender conventions thus coerce bodies into conforming to culturally-determined configurations clearly differentiated along gender lines.

Although Joanna's husband, Walter, initially exposes his compliance with gender equality, his perspective begins to emulate that of his male associates when he begins to spend longer evenings at the Men's Association, which has effect on his changing views about the way his wife should look and behave. As he tells Joanna, "it wouldn't hurt you to look in the mirror"<sup>15</sup> and "I'd just like you to put on a little lipstick once in a while,"<sup>16</sup> so that he gradually reveals he would like his wife to adjust her looks to match those of the rest of Stepford women. Among the members of the Men's Association, Joanna identifies Ike Mazzard as the illustrator of gorgeous female figurines that she used to admire in her adolescence. As Joanna sits down in her living room, she notices that Ike is drawing her sketch, but, when he shows it to her, she realises that it is an idealised image that she will never be able to match, in resemblance with the projected images that she was raised to attempt to emulate in her teenage years. Reluctance to conform to gender dictates is met with profound displeasure among the male community in Stepford. When Joanna tells her husband that she wishes to leave Stepford to avoid the same fate that has befallen her closest friends, Charmaine and Bobbie—who have eventually embraced the traditional femininities characterising all the women in Stepford—, Walter advises his wife to visit a psychiatrist, hence categorising her reluctance to conform to prevailing gender dictates established for women not only as non-normative, but also as pathological.

Analogously, when Edward abandons his isolated existence in favour of a suburban way of life, Peg Boggs, who turns into his foster mother, orchestrates Edward's socialising process, which involves erasing the signs of his unrestrained upbringing in order to adopt, instead, the appearance and attitudes epitomising the figure of a dandified gentleman. To this purpose, as an Avon saleswoman,

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14. Susan Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging." *The Other within Us: Feminist Explorations of Women and Aging* (ed.) Marilyn Pearsall (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 24.

15. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 86.

16. *Ibidem*, 88.

Peg tries cream lotions on Edward's scars to disguise them and give him the appearance of a clean and smooth complexion. Furthermore, she provides him with formal clothes and even attempts to train him to use cutlery at meals, which only serves the purpose of highlighting his inability to fit in the established conventions of etiquette. Conversely, when Kim's boyfriend, Jim, discovers Edward's ability to open locked doors with his scissorhands, he coerces Edward into taking part in illegal activities, thus triggering him to adopt a kind of rough masculinity for which he also feels mostly unsuited. Edward thus feels equally detached from displays of traditional femininities and hegemonic masculinities. As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues, the hedges that Edward encounters function as "symbols of middle-class conformity that exist to be either transformed into art or trampled to the ground."<sup>17</sup> As Edward trims these hedges and gives them heterogenous shapes, he exhibits his discomfort with the standardised gender patterns that prevail in suburbia.

### *Metatextual References to Gender Discourses*

Throughout the narratives of *The Stepford Wives* and *Edward Scissorhands*, self-conscious references explicitly draw attention to the discourses of gender. In his treatise on Gothic fiction, American writer Stephen King refers to Levin's novel as a book "which has some witty things to say about Women's Liberation, and some disquieting things to say about the American male's response to it,"<sup>18</sup> thus revealing the self-aware gender discourse pervading the novel in the context of second-wave feminism. Burton's film rather arises as a postmodern suburban Gothic narrative, set in the context of third-wave feminism, in which gender difference goes beyond the conventional dyad established between male and female. As Carol Siegel claims, "Edward is different from the others and part of his difference is that he cannot hold Kim [...], cannot consummate their love, cannot give her a child [...] in the time-honoured mode of heterosexual marital reproduction."<sup>19</sup> As representative of postmodern gender discourses, Edward evokes notions related to gender deconstruction, transgender, and the posthuman cyborg.

Once they have moved to live in Stepford, in their home cellar, Joanna discovers a piece of yellowed newspaper, which is not only evocative of Gilman's classic feminist piece "The Yellow Wallpaper," but also informs her that there used to be a Stepford Women's Club, which was founded many years before the Men's Association was instituted. As Joanna and her closest friends, Charmaine

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17. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, "Mainstream Outsider: Burton Adapts Burton," in *The Works of Tim Burton* (ed.) Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10.

18. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner Books, 2000), 192.

19. Carol Siegel, "Tim Burton's Popularization of Perversity: *Edward Scissorhands*, *Batman Returns*, *Sleepy Hollow*, and *Corpse Bride*," in *The Works of Tim Burton* (ed.) Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 203.

and Bobbie, get together to found a new Women's Club in town, references to the Women's Liberation movement—and their claims of women taking control of their reproduction rights and liberating themselves from domestic constraints—along with allusions to second-wave feminist theorists, such as Kate Millett, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, become pervasive. As a case in point, when she becomes acquainted with her domesticised neighbour Carol Van Sant, Joanna tells her husband that “next to her [...] my mother is Kate Millett.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, Joanna finds out that “Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, addressed members of the Stepford Women's Club.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, when Joanna must rise to the occasion when she has the members of the Men's Association as guests at home, she cheers herself up saying “*move over, Gloria Steinem.*”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, despite the feminist ideas that Joanna, Bobbie and Charmaine embrace and their intention to found a Women's Club, as soon as they try to find supporters among their female neighbours, Joanna and her comrades realise that the women who used to support this organisation have abandoned their ideals in order to embrace traditional femininities.

Likewise, as Edward spends his days with the Boggs family, he also recollects memories from his early years, when he would sit and listen to the Inventor who brought him into life, as he read excerpts from different sorts of books that initiated him into gender premises. The Inventor used to read conduct books in order to teach Edward how to behave, although he often switched to poetry, which he regarded as more liberating and contributed to unleashing Edward's imagination to become an artist. From his childhood, Edward was exposed to the classic dilemma of nature and nurture, positioning himself in favour of the former, and thus being ostracised by some of the members of the suburban community, such as Esmeralda, whose strict puritanical upbringing leads her to consider Edward a “hideous progeny of nature.”<sup>23</sup> As Edward undergoes his process of socialisation, he is exposed to clearly gender-differentiated discourses that modulate his appearance with the purpose of either femininizing or masculinising him. As Siegel notes, Edward is made to turn into a “bifurcated persona,”<sup>24</sup> but he resists by means of evading established and constraining gender categorisations. In the context of third-wave feminism, Edward's androgynous body recalls Butler's precepts about deconstructing clearly-differentiated gender patterns, while, his condition as a humanoid, also brings to the fore Braidotti's precepts about the interaction between the human and the

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20. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 9.

21. *Ibidem*, 37.

22. *Ibidem*, 27.

23. Tim Burton (dir), *Edward Scissorhands* (20th Century Fox, 1990).

24. Carol Siegel, “Tim Burton's Popularization of Perversity: *Edward Scissorhands*, *Batman Returns*, *Sleepy Hollow*, and *Corpse Bride*,” in *The Works of Tim Burton* (ed.) Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 204.

robot as embodied by the figure of the cyborg, which also contributes to reconstructing traditional gender dictates in favour of multiple gender identities.

### *Displaying Gender Performance*

From Joan Rivière's seminal notion of womanliness as masquerade to Sontag's statement that being a woman involves being an actress, since "being feminine is a kind of theatre, with its appropriate costumes [...] and stylised gestures,"<sup>25</sup> gender is proven to be performed. According to Butler (1990), gender involves a repeated series of acts that reveal their constructed nature and their performative quality. Drawing on Butler's precepts about gender being performative, Levin's novel and Burton's film display instances of gender performance.

As she observes the women in Stepford, who take delight in life in domesticity and try to match the idealised image of the perfect housewife, Joanna has the impression that all of them behave according to an unwritten common script as if they were women actors. As Joanna states, "that's what they *all* were, all the Stepford wives: actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants. Pretty actresses, big in the bosom but small in the talent, playing suburban housewives unconvincingly, too nicey-nice to be real."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a member of the Men's Association, Claude Axhelm, requests Joanna to participate in an experiment in which she is required to record herself reading a series of sentences, as if she were rehearsing for a theatrical role. As women are made to emulate a specific image, behave in a particular way, and even talk in a precise manner, it is suggested that they are required to perform gender according to established dictates that are culturally determined.

In Burton's film, as Edward comes of age and takes part in a socialising process, established gender dictates trigger him into performing his masculinity, mostly by means of highlighting his interaction with women. When he realises that Edward feels attracted towards Kim, Jim roughly grabs her and takes hold of her in an attempt to show Edward how to perform his hegemonic masculinity. Besides, Joyce, one of the women in the suburbs who is categorised as a *femme fatale*, sets Edward as her new target and tries to seduce him and unleash his latent manhood as she emphasises Edward's masculine traits in the process. Nonetheless, the spectre of androgyny haunting Edward is ironically made explicit when Edward's sharp blades turn into a grotesque counterpart to Joyce's long polished nails, which she perceives as a sign of hyperfemininity and female sex appeal. Besides, as Edward gains in popularity as an artist, Pegg takes him to a talk show where he exhibits his scissorhands as the source of his uniqueness, while some of the enthralled women in the audience ask him whether he has any

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25. Susan Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging." *The Other within Us: Feminist Explorations of Women and Aging* (ed.) Marilyn Pearsall (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 22.

26. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 43.



girlfriend. Edward feels embarrassed and, as he leans forward to hold the microphone, he unwillingly produces a short circuit that leaves the question unanswered. Edward is thus gradually exposed to how masculinity is performed according to gender dictates, although he refuses to succumb to gender categorisations, which makes it difficult for him to find his place in suburbia, where social roles are determined by gender conventions.

### *The Dilemma of Conforming or Dissenting*

Although both Joanna and Edward are pressured into adjusting to the gender dictates prevailing in the suburbs, they meet different outcomes, insofar as, in Levin's original novel, Joanna is made to abandon her feminist ideals and conform to the ethics of domesticity, whereas Edward dissents from the prevailing gender dictates and resumes his former secluded existence in his palace.

Initially, Joanna, together with her friends Charmaine and Bobbie, arise as elements of discordance in Stepford, insofar as their appearance, attitude and principles differ from the homogenous traditional set of values and beliefs prevailing in suburbia. Nonetheless, as time progresses, Joanna realises that Charmaine "was wearing an apron over slacks,"<sup>27</sup> she had abandoned her habit to play sports like tennis and, as regards her husband, she states that "Ed's a pretty wonderful guy, and I've been lazy and selfish."<sup>28</sup> Analogously, when Joanna visits her friend Bobbie and finds her looks rather changed, she accuses her of having turned into another Stepford wife, although Bobbie justifies herself, claiming, "I simply realized that I was awfully sloppy and self-indulgent, and now I'm doing my job conscientiously, the way Dave does his."<sup>29</sup> When the time comes, Joanna is also made to surrender her feminist ideals and succumb to the gender dictates prevailing in Stepford. Her friend Ruthanne, who has recently arrived at Stepford, marvels at Joanna's unusual "fine figure," her "thick-lashed brown eyes," and "her complexion pale rose and perfect"<sup>30</sup> while she is doing the shopping in the supermarket, which confirms that Joanna has eventually transformed into another Stepford wife.

Conversely, although Edward is also exposed to gender dictates and is made to adjust, in contrast with Joanna, he is unable to fit in the established gender categorisations and abandons life in suburbia—which is characterised by orthodoxy and constraint—for a life on his own, in which he can enjoy liberty and give full vent to his creativity. Edward realises that his relationship with Kim is unfeasible owing to his extraordinary condition and, keeping apart from each other, their love acquires a platonic dimension. Moreover, by means of defeating his shadow,

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27. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 52.

28. *Ibidem*, 52-53.

29. *Ibidem*, 90.

30. *Ibidem*, 120.

Jim, who symbolically arises as an embodiment of rough masculinity, Edward reaffirms that he embodies a kind of alternative masculinity that differs from the traditional masculinities mostly prevailing in the suburban community. In order to bring this resolution into effect, Edward literally and allegorically takes off the clothes he was made to wear, which he regards as unnatural to him, and goes back to his palace in order to embrace his aloof existence whereby he can enjoy his individuality free from gender constraints.

### **Pervasive Aging: Transitional Moments, Arrested Development, Invisibility of Old Age**

Gender conventions condition the discourses of aging insofar as the conceptualisations of age also influence the way that gender is perceived. Along these premises, Sontag even refers to a prevailing double standard of aging whereby, in contrast with men, women have conventionally been more exposed to ageist discourses whereby they are perceived to grow older earlier than men, thus revealing a latent sense of displeasure with women's process of aging in contrast with that of men. On the basis that aging conditions gender and that the discourses of aging acquire equal relevance in these suburban Gothic narratives, this analysis will revolve around the presence of older characters, metaphors of transitional moments and references to time, the Victorian notion of arrested development along gender lines, instances of age performance, and the invisible trope of old age.

#### *The Presence of Older Characters*

Although the role of older characters appears to be mostly peripheral in both narratives, their incidence acquires relevance, since they are portrayed as mentoring figures that the main characters admire and revere, but also consider them as adopting a differing attitude from that of their own. As Herbert Covey claims, old age has traditionally been associated with wisdom, as elders in the community and scholars were presumed to stand above and hold spiritual and cultural knowledge that they could pass on to younger generations.<sup>31</sup> This conventional characterisation of the elderly is revisited in these two suburban Gothic textualities.

In Levin's novel, Joanna becomes acquainted with some older women in Stepford whose energetic and rebellious ways differ from the compliant and orthodox attitudes of most of the younger women who live in Stepford. These older women are the only females in Stepford who feel eager to join Joanna and her comrades in their project to found a Women's Association. As Joanna notes, they were "one eighty-five-year-old widow who dragged me through her door"<sup>32</sup>

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31. Herbert Covey, *Images of Older People in Western Art and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 61.

32. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 22.

and “a plump quick-moving white-haired woman named Mary Migliardi.”<sup>33</sup> Joanna thus realises that the older generations of women in Stepford display a radically feminist approach to life which appears to be more in accordance with the current times. As Joanna realises, when women reach a certain stage in life, they undergo a symbolic change that manifests in their physical appearance, but also in their attitudes, which acquire a marked reactionary turn. Conversely, the women from older generations seem unaffected by the effects of this transitional moment and, thus, enjoy a higher degree of freedom in comparison with their younger counterparts.

Conversely, in Burton’s film, older characters rather represent traditional values from which Edward deviates, as is visually symbolised by the fact that Edward will never grow old. When she tells her granddaughter Edward’s story as a contemporary myth that explains the origins of snow in such a sunny area in the country, Kim declares that she is an old woman, whereas it is inferred that, given his extraordinary condition as a humanoid, Edward will remain young ever after and unaffected by the effects of old age. Owing to the age gap between them, Kim adopts the role of an aging mother in relation to Edward, which is evocative of the Inventor as the older man who brought him into life. As older characters, in addition to symbolic parental figures, the Inventor and Kim act as mentors whose old age contrasts with Edward’s youth and whose values diverge from those of their younger disciple.

### *Metaphors of Transitional Moments and References to Time*

Both *The Stepford Wives* and *Edward Scissorhands* can be interpreted as narratives of aging that focus on different transitional moments in the lives of the main characters. Furthermore, aging acquires a latent presence in both narratives as indicated by pervasive references to the passage of time.

When she befriends a younger newcomer in Stepford, Ruthanne, Joanna blatantly confesses that she feels old in comparison, thus revealing that she is gradually gaining awareness of her own aging process. When she tells Ruthanne about Ike Mazzard, the popular illustrator whose stories she admired in her youth, and realises that Ruthanne has never heard of him, it is stated that it made “Joanna feel very old.”<sup>34</sup> Joanna refers to the iconic term of ‘the change’ to refer to the manifest transformation befalling her friends Charmaine and Bobbie, while she keeps track of the months that it takes for women to undergo this rite of passage. As Joanna and Bobbie speculate on the origins of this change, Bobbie affirms “it’s some kind of hormone thing,”<sup>35</sup> thus suggesting that, inasmuch as the conversion that the Stepford women undergo is related to a biological

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33. Ibidem, 49.

34. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 74.

35. Ibidem, 57.

process, it symbolically turns into a metaphor of menopause or climacteric, which feminist theorist Germaine Greer precisely referred to as 'the change' and, according to established ageist dictates, has conventionally been interpreted as the turning point that marks women's transition from middle age to old age.

In contrast, Burton's film rather revolves around the life stage of adolescence, insofar as Edward befriends Kim, along with her brother Kevin and her boyfriend Jim, who are all undergoing this transitional moment from childhood to adulthood. Kim's father, Bill Boggs, explicitly and ironically, refers to adolescence and the impact it has on teenagers, stating that "they reach a certain age—they develop these gland things—their bodies swell up,"<sup>36</sup> thus describing the biological process befalling them that accounts for what he perceives as their peculiar behaviour. In subtle terms, Bill suggests that the menarche or first menstrual cycle may be responsible for the eccentric conduct and emotional outburst that young women must learn to repress in order to comply with the conventions prevailing in conventional suburbia. The biological transition befalling the teenagers in the suburbs reverberates by means of allusions to the passage of time and the preparations for the Christmas season. When Edward is hosted at the Boggs home, he occupies Kim's bedroom, since she is away at a campsite with the rest of her friends, thus taking part in activities which categorise her as going through the phase of adolescence. Conversely, when Edward leaves and Kim realises that their relationship is unfeasible, it is during Christmas time that she learns to leave behind her fantasies and embrace adulthood, as opposed to Edward, whose exclusion from the community ratifies his expulsion from the world of adults and his symbolic and perpetual adherence to childhood.

### *The Victorian Notion of Arrested Development along Gender Lines*

Sontag's reference to the double standard of aging according to gender precepts is rooted in Victorian notions of age that were influenced by gender conventions. Although *The Stepford Wives* addresses the transitional moment of the climacteric, which has often been interpreted as the interim between middle age and old age, and *Edward Scissorhands* focuses on the interlude between childhood and adulthood, both narratives evoke the Victorian notion of arrested development, which bears different connotations for women and men.

As Joanna and her female comrades approach the stage of menopause, which has traditionally been interpreted as the advent of women's later years, their projected change onto old age is reverted, as not only are the Stepford women prevented from growing older, but they also appear to look significantly younger than before. The fact that women are disallowed to age correlates with their willing submissiveness to their husbands, who adopt the role of a paternal figure with regard to their younger wives. As Nelson argues, in Victorian fiction,

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36. Tim Burton (dir), *Edward Scissorhands* (20th Century Fox, 1990).

the notion of arrested development often befalls young female characters,<sup>37</sup> who are infantilised and encouraged not to grow older so that they remain under the rule of a male figure, such as their father or their husband. In Levin's novel, women's arrested development is enacted as, when women reach their menopause, their bodies are exchanged for that of robotic and compliant women, who look perpetually young and eager to submit their will to that of their husbands.

In Burton's film, when Peg finds Edward in the attic of his palace and stares at his scissorhands, he blatantly declares that he is "unfinished."<sup>38</sup> Owing to the premature death of his creator, it is suggested that Edward was brought into life too soon, as his scissorhands constantly evince, thus patently exposing an arrested process of development. As a result of these circumstances and his isolated upbringing, in spite of looking like an almost grown-up man, he truly possesses the innocence of a young child, which renders him unable to fit in a suburban community mostly made up of adults. According to Nelson, although the notion of arrested development is praised in young female characters in Victorian fiction, it is considered most disturbing when it characterises young male characters,<sup>39</sup> insofar as it is alleged to deprive them of the manly qualities they are presumed to acquire along their aging process. Edward defies the cultural conventions of aging, inasmuch as, when Peg meets him, his adolescent looks stand in contrast with his childish attitude, while, as time goes by and Kim tells Edward's story as an older woman, it is revealed that Edward's everlasting youthful body, which is unable to grow old, will never truly reflect his chronological age. Edward is thus unaffected by the cultural conventions of age and gender prevailing in suburbia and remains under the notion of arrested development, which allows him to enjoy eternal youth, but inevitably disallows him to join the life in the suburban community.

### *Snapshots of Age Performance*

On the basis of Butler's premises about gender performance, Basting refers to age as also being susceptible to be performed in correlation with gender. According to Basting, it is in the impossibility of exact repetition that performance allows entry into age transformation.<sup>40</sup> These premises have led critics like Gullette to claim that it is possible to act younger or older,<sup>41</sup> thus laying bare the performative quality of

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37. Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 71.

38. Tim Burton (dir) *Edward Scissorhands* (20th Century Fox, 1990).

39. Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 42.

40. Anne Basting, *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 7.

41. Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 163.

aging in resemblance with that of gender. In Levin's novel and Burton's film, Joanna and Edward also gain insight into how aging may be performed.

As soon as Joanna arrives in Stepford, she is welcomed by a woman whom she describes as "working at youth and vivacity (ginger hair, red lips, a sunshine-yellow dress),"<sup>42</sup> thus acting younger than her chronological age. As the Stepford women go through the change, not only does their attitude become progressively submissive and compliant, but they apparently succumb to an everlasting performance of youth. At this juncture, Joanna symbolically faces the dilemma of growing older naturally, like her dissident friends Charmaine and Bobbie, or denying the natural effects of age, as the rest of Stepford women do, by means of wearing girdles and bras that shape their bodies to suit the prevailing dictates of age and gender. If women are pressured into acting younger than their chronological age, conversely, husbands are allowed to act their age, since Joanna notices that her husband Walter "was gaining weight—and below his wonderfully blue eyes pouches of flesh had begun to form."<sup>43</sup> When Joanna begins to record herself reading some sentences at Claude Axhelm's request and she looks at the idealised portrait that Ike Mazard sketched for her, she realises that she is approaching the change that, literally and metaphorically, also befalls her friends and prevents them from growing older and, instead, urges them to engage in an everlasting performance of youth.

Accordingly, when Edward embraces suburban life, in the course of his process of socialisation, he is exposed to how age is performed and the way age performance is necessarily influenced by gender conventions. As his foster mother, Pegg, takes care of him and nurtures him, she treats him like a child and infantilises him. Conversely, his foster father, Bill, urges him to establish his own business, once he realises Edward is capable of applying his artistic skills to gardening and hairdressing, thus encouraging him to become self-sufficient at an early stage in life. Pegg thus coerces Edward into acting younger, whereas Bill triggers him to act older than his chronological age, thus displaying conflicting models of age performance. Subsequently, Edward rather chooses to act younger, since he becomes disaffected with the social pressures that urge him to grow up.

### *Invisible Trope of Old Age*

Even though *The Stepford Wives* and *Edward Scissorhands* respectively portray the transitional moments of the advent of aging and adolescence, in both cases, Joanna and Edward arise as embodiments of the invisible trope of old age in narratives in which aging paradoxically acquires momentous relevance. As legacy of the Victorian notion of arrested development, old age remains virtually invisible

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42. Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002), 1.

43. *Ibidem*, 103-104.

in both Levin's novel and Burton's film, except for the peripheral, albeit important, role that some older characters play.

In his novel, Levin envisioned the horrific male-gendered response to the demands of second-wave feminist theorists, as the latter claimed to be treated as independent adult women entitled to take control of their own bodies. In Stepford, the members of the Men's Association, who are all leading scientists, join efforts to develop some machinery whereby the aging bodies of their wives are replicated and substituted by youthful female robots. As families arrive in Stepford, women are made to leave behind their professional aspirations in order to conform to the reactionary mindsets that infantilise them and lead them to accept a patronising treatment on behalf of their husbands. The Stepford wives apparently live in permanent bliss and joy in their eternal youthful bodies, although they are deprived of their will and volition, insofar as, from older women, they are reverted back to helpless female children dependent on their more experienced husbands. Even if Joanna meets some aging women, whose feminist attitudes she also shares, female old age remains mostly absent in Stepford.

In his film, Burton addressed the internal conflicts that adolescents must bear as they move from childhood to adulthood and are exposed to different discourses that both discourage and propel their aging progression. Edward is infantilised, but is also pressured to conform to the prevailing conventions of age and gender established for young men along his process of socialisation. His body looks older than his chronological age, but, as he comes of age, it is evinced that his young appearance will never match his chronological age, thus symbolically suggesting that he will look young ever after. Edward's incapacity and unwillingness to succumb to the established dictates of age render him an outcast who feels compelled to abandon his life in suburbia and resume his secluded existence in his palace. In Burton's film, old age is also almost reduced to an invisible trope despite the presence of older characters like the late Inventor and Kim characterised as an aging narrator. Despite the fact that, in his memories, he evokes the presence of his creator, Edward immaturely explains to his foster mother that he did not wake up, hence implying that his creator is dead. Moreover, when Kim finishes her story and her granddaughter suggests the possibility that she should meet Edward again, she replies, "I'm an old woman—I'd rather him remember me the way I was."<sup>44</sup> Kim thus cherishes the myth of eternal youth that Edward personifies and, in so doing, she also contributes to rendering old age virtually invisible. As the Inventor is already dead at the beginning of the narrative and, as an aging narrator, Kim only appears at the beginning and end of the framed narrative, old age mostly remains on the margins of the narrative.

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44. Tim Burton (dir), *Edward Scissorhands* (20th Century Fox, 1990).

## Conclusion

The prevalent intertextualities existing between *The Stepford Wives*—as representative of the early stages of suburban Gothic—and *Edward Scissorhands*—as a postmodern reinterpretation—reveal the evolving resurgence of suburban Gothic narratives, which extends to current times. Both textualities evince how the discourses of gender and aging influence each other, insofar as they are both culturally constructed, also displaying that their performative quality paves the way for transforming the premises on which they are based. Insofar as they reveal the legacy of Victorian conventions, mostly by means of the notion of arrested development—which elicits a differing interpretation along gender lines—these narratives underscore that the precepts of Victorian domesticity depicted in domestic Gothic are resumed in contemporary suburban Gothic textualities. Nonetheless, despite their similarities, *The Stepford Wives* and *Edward Scissorhands* also present some differences, since they reflect the times in which they were respectively produced. Levin’s novel gives priority to its social content as a response to the rise of second-wave feminism. It focuses on the character of Joanna and the biological transition that she is about to undergo—the change or climacteric—which acquires literal and symbolic connotations. As a social horror text, Levin’s novel underscores the conformity to which Joanna and her comrades are forced to succumb as a result of the patriarchal response to women’s increasing demands. Conversely, Burton’s film turns into a cinematic allegory which arose in the context of third-wave feminism and revolves around an androgynous character who subverts the established gender identities and personifies the notion of the cyborg. As a postmodern fairy tale, Burton’s film focuses on Edward’s process of socialisation and coming of age, as he undergoes the symbolic transition from childhood to adulthood, which Edward challenges in order to embrace childhood and its resulting defiance of the gender and age conventions characterising a society made up of adults. Despite their respective emphasis on conformity or dissent, as exemplified by Joanna and Edward, both narratives reveal old age as an invisible trope, which is symptomatic of social pressures to prevent women’s bodies from growing old, but also of the male fantasy to embrace the myth of never growing up.

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## **The Decoration of the *Oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Theatrical Painting?**

*By Carolina Reznik\**

The *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is a prime example of the analytical challenges posed by the ceramic iconography that decorates Greek vases. There is currently no agreement about its interpretation, nor is there a defined thematic scope. Even though there are different ways in which ancient iconography is linked with theatre, all of them are circumscribed to the theatrical realm. But what happens when we note theatrical elements in paintings that are also related to other realms? This article aims at providing an alternative interpretation of the artifact's decoration, framing previous analyses within the realm of theatre. We argue that, given its iconographic elements and thematic relations, it is possible to include the scene depicted in the vase within the group of the so-called theatrical paintings.

Examining the ceramic iconography that decorates ancient Greek vases is not easy. Although it is possible to observe repeating patterns and identify certain iconographic conventions, their interpretation—as that of any given painting—is not univocal. This is related to the way these paintings are conceptually understood: a reflection or an image of reality whereby a direct relationship is sought by considering the context in which these paintings were created, or as a result of the work of a painter/artisan. The possibility of artistic freedom is thus acknowledged, either to catch a consumer's attention or to provoke a comic effect, precisely by an inversion of what occurs in reality. According to Bundrick, Athenian vase painters were storytellers, but they were also businessmen who wanted their products to be appealing to both locals and foreigners. This is why it may be erroneous to seek a single definitive interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

A link with other sources of that period, be they images or texts, remains an aspect that may help suggest a specific interpretation. In the case of textual sources, the issue must be addressed with caution, given that it is a different language and an extrapolation of its rules should be avoided. Despite these sources holding primacy and authority in studies of antiquity, the decoration of

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1. S. D. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous in The Metropolitan Museum of Art', in *Athenian Potters and Painters II*, ed. J. H. Oakley and O. Palagia (Oxford 2009) 33. The author observes that it was the viewer of the piece who determined its meaning. This meaning varied in accordance with social status: it was different for a member of the elite than for a member of the demos. Mitchell argues that 'Greek vase painting is an art of *raccourci*, it gives few but significant details to understand a scene'. See A. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour* (Cambridge 2009) 65.

Greek vases contradicts and also confronts interpretations from textual evidence.<sup>2</sup> Literary evidence, though highly significant, ‘can never substitute for careful attention to the iconographic language vase painters actually employ, which may not agree with what appears in texts, especially those written in prose’.<sup>3</sup> The relation to other kinds of sources certainly enriches this analysis, revealing both common semantics and heterogeneous meanings. Therefore, this relation should not constitute the prime element when analysing a painting; it is necessary to rely on tools specific to the discipline.<sup>4</sup> The link with other sources must enrich the analysis and complement it, both to underscore common semantics and heterogeneous meanings, albeit without conditioning it.

The possibility of establishing relations with other paintings is an inevitable methodology that can be applied by identifying iconographic features or thematic subjects, but also by addressing aspects related to the artifacts’ shape. Certainly, these relations—when relevant—contribute to their analysis and interpretation, yet they do not amount to an infallible method. As explained above, painters enjoyed freedom to innovate, either creatively or commercially.

The *oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> is

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2. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 64.

3. For methodological issues regarding the visual language analysis of ancient vases, see R. F. Sutton, ‘Family Portraits: Recognizing the “Oikos” on Attic Red-Figure Pottery’, *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004) 327–50 (329–30).

4. For different historical interpretations of the link between dramatic literature and ceramic iconography (e.g., philodramatist and iconocentric), see O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles 2007) 22–27.

5. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.11.19: BAPD 539; G. M. A. Richter, ‘Two Athenian Jugs’, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 34 (10) (1939) (231–32), fig. 2; H. R. Immerwahr, ‘Choes and Chytroi’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77 (1946) 247–50; G. van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Leiden 1951), no. 761, fig. 117; G. M. A. Richter, ‘The Department of Greek and Roman Art: Triumphs and Tribulations’, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 3 (1970) 73–95 (35), no. 2, fig. 157; M. Maas and J. McIntosh Snyder, *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece* (New Haven, 1989) 115, 132, fig. 7; E. Keuls, *The Reigns of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (California 1993), 67, fig. 48; B. Sparkes, *The Red and the Black. Studies in Greek Pottery* (London and New York 1996) 60; J. Neils, ‘Others Within the Other: An Intimate Look at Hetairai and Maenads’, *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden 2000) 210–11, fig. 8.3; Parisinou, ‘“Lighting” the World of Women: Lamps and Torches in the Hands of Women in the Late Archaic and Classical Periods’, *Greece and Rome* 47 (1) (2000) 19–42 (20–23) fig. 1; Sutton, ‘Family Portraits’ (n. 3 above) 331–32, fig. 17.3; Bundrick, ‘Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous’ (n. 1 above) 27–35, fig. 1; Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 65, fig. 20; J. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life on Athenian Vases* (Madison 2020) 8–9, fig. 1.2. Although it has not been possible to attribute it to any painter, the artifact’s shape and the painting’s style have served to date it back to the last quarter of the fifth century BC.

a prime example of the challenges posed by certain paintings when it comes to their analysis. The piece—dated between 430 and 420 BC and unique for various reasons, especially because of its depicted scene—has not been attributed to any specific painter. Domestic scene, gender-based theme, comic or social commentary—there is currently no agreement about its interpretation or a defined thematic scope.

Figure 1. Red-figure oinochoe, unattributed, ca. 430–420 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.11.19, Fletcher Fund, 1937



Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This article aims at offering an alternative interpretation of the painting that decorates the vase. We argue that, based on a variety of iconographic elements and thematic relationships, it is possible to identify this painting with the theatrical realm and, more precisely, to include it among the so-called theatrical paintings. Before delving into our analysis, in the first two sections we will present what is traditionally understood as a theatrical painting and how the *oinochoe*'s decoration has been interpreted.

### The 'Theatrical Paintings'

Theatrical paintings represent scenes<sup>6</sup> related to theatre that adorn ceramic

artifacts. They are the only visual record of the Classical period that is linked with ancient Greek theatre.<sup>6</sup> Taplin argues that this is an exceptional case of interaction between theatre and visual arts. It should be noted that it is precisely an interaction, not a subordination, that involves an interplay in both senses; that is, these disciplines are on an equal footing. Thus, the appreciation of the paintings is enriched by the theatrical experience in the same way that the reception of a piece is favoured by knowledge of the painting.<sup>7</sup> This may seem evident, but for a long time these interrelations were understood as part of a hierarchy in which literature held primacy. The relation between ceramic iconography and theatre was valid only if it could be linked with a particular theatrical piece and therefore corroborate that relation.

This is problematic in several senses. First, because in the case of ancient Greek theatre we should take into account the fact that many theatrical texts of that era have been lost. While sometimes it is possible to learn about some of them through fragments or testimonies, evidence is incomplete. Second, because this mainly involves a logocentric conception of theatre that makes it dependent on literature.<sup>8</sup> Theatre, however, has a convivial quality, as can be witnessed in the unique moment when representations, production, and reception simultaneously converge.<sup>9</sup> It is a performative activity, composed of different signifier systems in which the text is but one of them, although not the most important.

The study of ancient ceramic iconography related to theatre must contemplate its disciplinary specificity and implement tools specific to the discipline in order to engage in its analysis. Its relation to theatrical activity must stem from those meanings created from its specific iconographic processes, and not from the possibility of corroborating such a relation from the existence of a dramatic text.

We will now explain the different ways in which ceramic iconography relates to the realm of theatre of that era. There are different modalities, and the relationship between the two does not always stem from a particular theatrical piece. On the one hand, the link may be established with a particular theatrical play, either a dramatic text or its representation. On the other, it may be related to the theatrical spectacle in general; that is, to the spectacular realm. Last, they may also be connected to the theatrical realm, be it offstage or related matters, as in the

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6. For the significance of ancient ceramic iconography as a visual theatrical record of that era, see J. R. Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32 (1991) 15–50 (20–21).

7. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above), specifically refers to ceramic iconography related to particular tragic pieces. On our part, we expand this definition to include links between iconography and theater as a whole.

8. As regards the study of ancient theater, this logocentric conception follows the premise that the theatrical text is one of those elements that last throughout time. This statement is untrue because material evidence is preserved as well and is as important as theatrical texts.

9. This characteristic is typical of all performative arts such as, for example, dance.

case of Dionysus and his entourage.

Difficulties exist in linking paintings with tragedy, not only because of the iconographic convention employed but also because of the plot of the theatrical pieces themselves, although both questions intertwine. The convention in tragic paintings involves a depiction of what the theatrical piece represents; that is, the dramatic illusion (Fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a realistic effect takes place. With the exception of specific cases, no elements related to the theatrical spectacle are present in most of these paintings. According to Csapo and Slater, painters ignored drama's signifiers and underscored what they signified instead.<sup>11</sup> Given that this genre weaves plots from the mythic tradition, the lack of specific elements makes it difficult to define a relationship between theatre and painting.<sup>12</sup> Taplin states that, particularly in the case of Western Greek paintings,<sup>13</sup> there are certain indicators

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10. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 82270: BAPD 9036827; A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia* (Oxford 1978) 167.13; Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 61–62, fig. 7; M. L. Hart, *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (Los Angeles 2010), 59–60, fig. 2.1; A. M. S. Karatas, 'Key-Bearers of Greek Temples: The Temple Key as a Symbol of Priestly Authority', *Mythos* 13 (2019) 1–48 (9–10), fig. 4. The base was attributed to the painter Black Fury by Trendall. Although iconography does not exactly match any of the play's scenes, the combination of characters leads Taplin to believe it may be linked with the Delphi scene in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above), 61–62.

11. According to the authors, this is what the artifacts connote; that is, the effects of dramatic illusion, not of performance. See E. Csapo and W. J. Salter, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 2001) 53–57.

12. As an exception, we could mention the case of *Medea*. Filicide is an innovation by Euripides. As a result, paintings linked with this story that include dead children have an unquestionable relation with Euripidean work (Fig. 3). Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1991.1: BAPD 1002926; LIMC I 1981, s.v. Agamemnon, p. 260, no. 14a; Tompkins 1983, pp. 76–79, no. 14; LIMC III 1986, s.v. Erinys, p. 837, no. 101; LIMC V 1990, s.v. Iason, p. 635, no. 71; Kozloff 1991, p. 72, Carpenter 1991, fig. 283; Turner 1992, p. 76, no. 1; LIMC VI 1992, s.v. Medeia, no. 36, pl. 199; Taplin 1993, pp. 16–17, 22–23, 26, 37–38, 116–117, nos. 1.101, 1.102; Aellen 1994, p. 39, no. 39; Easterling 1997, p. 79, fig. 12, Revermann 2005, pp. 3–18; Storey and Allan 2005, p. 152, fig. 2.4; Cassimatis 2005, pp. 48–49, fig. 2A–B; Goldhill 2007, p. 22, fig. 4; Taplin 2007, pp. 122–123, fig. 35; Hart 2010, pp. 72–73, fig. 27.

13. Regarding the spatial-temporal source of archeological evidence, in general the origin of these artifacts is divided between Athens and Western Greece. Most paintings related to tragedy date back to the fourth century BC and come from Western Greece, especially southern Italy and Sicily. They belong to a time when theater spread from Athens and reperformance of plays began. In other words, after the apogee of Athenian theater and the early tragic performances. This is significant because, parallel to the development and growth of theater, the red-figure technique also reached its peak during the fifth century in Athens. It is striking to note that there are virtually no traces left of the interrelation between this technique and theater from that place and time. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 28–29. Out of the few fifth century Athenian vases we may relate with tragedy, only one shows a theatrical spectacle: a choir and behind-the-scenes

that may allow for such an identification with theatre.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Athenian paintings, however, there is no system of implicit signals of theatricality that may be systematized, mainly because of the insufficient evidence preserved<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, this lexicon—as the author calls it—does not represent infallible evidence, since many of these elements also belong to other realms (myths, symposia, etc.). In addition, a painting linked with a myth may be influenced by a tragedy without becoming a pictorial representation of that play<sup>16</sup> Likewise—particularly in the case of fourth-century objects, when dramatic plays were reenacted outside Athens—pictorial representations may include elements corresponding to scenic variants from the original plays. It is necessary to consider that, in many cases, the choice was to paint key scenes that summed up the meaning of a specific play and not the situations it portrayed, as is the case with tragedies.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, there are also iconographic elements that are added from the ceramic decoration, without it precluding a link with the theatrical piece.

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representations. In the case of later vases from Western Greece, we find a rich variety and different modalities of pictorial representation.

14. Taplin gathers these signals into two groups: those shared with tragedies and those related to the extradramatic. In the first group, we find special outfits—including both highly ornamented clothing and nude characters present in scenes alongside fully clothed ones—and kothurnoi, porches and structures with columns, rocks in the shape of arcs that may correspond to a scenic resource representing the entrance of a cave, “silent witness” characters, pedagogues, Furies and similar creatures, and suppliant scenes. In the extradramatic group, the author includes the presence of tripods—because of their relation to prizes in theatrical contests—and Attic inscriptions. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 28–43. Green, on the other hand, includes the presence of a double-flute piper as a distinctive feature of Athenian evidence. See Green, ‘On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre’ (n. 6 above) 22. The double-flute piper accompanied the choir and was the only source of music in theatrical representations. See P. Wilson, ‘The Musicians among the Actors’, in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. P. E. Easterling and E. Hall (Cambridge 2002), 39–68.

15. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 32.

16. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 35.

17. Green, ‘On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre’ (n. 6 above).



Figure 2. Painting related to Eumenides, Apulian Red-figured Volute Crater, attributed to the painter Black Fury, ca. 360 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 82270, acq. date n/a



Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

Figure 3. Final Scene of Euripides's *Medea*, Red-figure Calyx-krater (mixing vessel) attributed near the Policoro Painter, ca. 400 BC. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1991.1, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1991



Source: © Cleveland Museum of Art

The situation is different in comedy. That genre's paintings involve an iconographic convention that evinces theatrical representation and scenic materiality. The platform acting as stage (and, in many instances, the steps leading up to it), the doors (which are clearly part of the staging), and other devices are painted over, and characters are represented as actors wearing costumes and masks (Fig. 4).<sup>18</sup> These paintings are easily recognizable, and their relation to theatre, unquestionable. Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify which comic piece is being represented in the artifacts. This genre bases its plots on the everyday life of the audience, is filled with nods to it and its immediate context, and makes use of contemporary events and characters, both anonymous and of renown (Socrates, for instance). Taplin argues that, unlike tragedy, which draws on the mythic tradition, plots in comic plays are inseparable from their staging. Thus, if no inscriptions or specific elements identifying a painting with a comic piece are visible—e.g., a choir—it is not possible to determine which play the painting is related to.<sup>19</sup>

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18. London, British Museum, 1849,0620.13; M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton 1961) fig. 491; A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London 1971) IV, 35; Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia* (n. 10 above) 4/252; O. Taplin, *Comic Angels* (Oxford 1993) 61–62, fig. 12.6; J. R. Green and E. Handley, *Images of the Greek Theater* (Austin 1995) fig. 28; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 116, fig. 53. Reckoned by Trendall to be close to the Choregos Painter's time, although slightly later. Among the group of figures, the young man standing to the right is the only figure not wearing a mask, comic costume, or phallus. It does not have an identifying inscription. See A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (London 1991).

19. Pictorial representations in comedy date back to the mid-sixth century BC, and they remain unchanged in terms of style, unlike the series of transformations that comic theater experienced from then on. According to Green, this is evidence that comedy is a preexisting genre. This abundance may be associated with the convention in comic paintings, which—unlike tragedy—is fully explicit about its relation to theater and, as a result, easily recognizable. See Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre' (n. 6 above) 22.

Figure 4. Comic, red-figured wine bowl (bell krater) attributed to the McDaniel Painter, ca. 380–370 BC. London, British Museum, 1849,0620.13, 1849



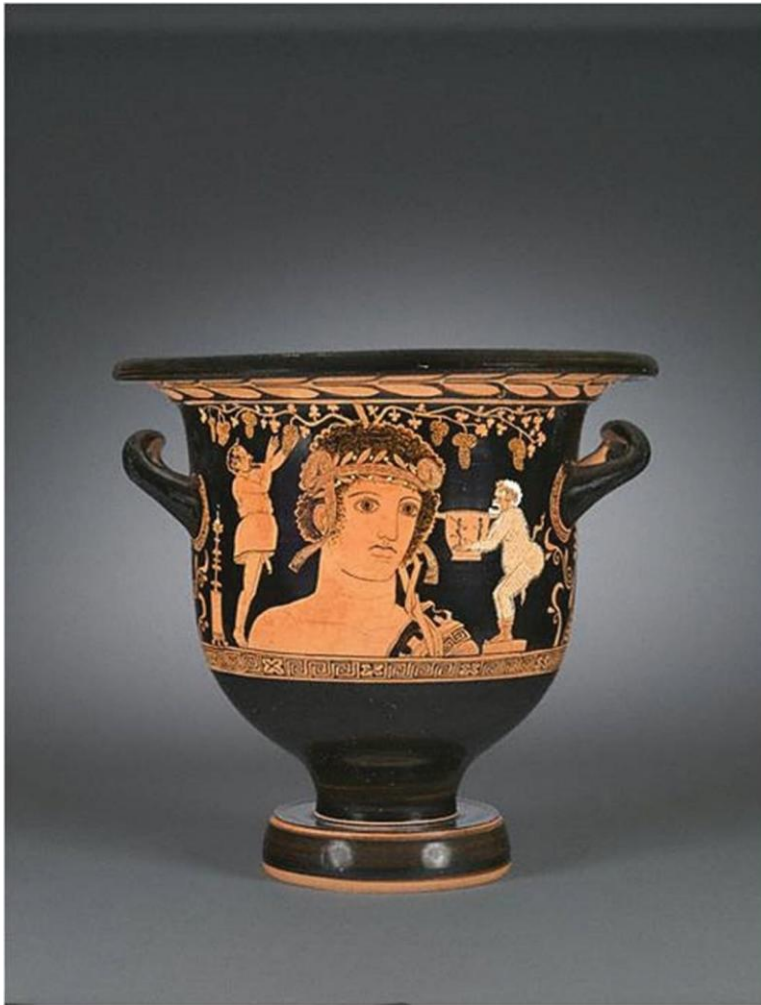
Source: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 5. Actors and members of a choir resting, red-figured vase attributed to the Pronomos Painter, ca. 400 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 3240, acq. date n/a



Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 6. Dionysus and comic actors (satyrs), red-figured bell krater attributed to the Choregos Painter, ca. 390–380 BC. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1989.73, John L. Severance Fund, 1989



Source: © Cleveland Museum of Art.

In turn, paintings related to the theatrical realm present a broader and less problematic scenario. These paintings include offstage representations as well as mythic or related aspects. The former depict actors warming up before or resting after acting and show individual or group scenes (Fig. 5).<sup>20</sup> The latter portray the

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20. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 3240: BAPD 217500, ARV2 1336.1; N. Heydemann, *Die Vasensammlungen des Museo Nazionale zu Neapel* (Berlin 1872) 546–50, no. 3240; W. Hahland, *Vasen um Meidias* (Berlin 1930); P. Arias, B. Shefton, and M. Hirmer, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London 1962) 377–80; J. D. Beazley, *Paralipomena, Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, 2nd edition (Oxford 1971) 480; J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Classical Period* (London 1989) fig. 323; *Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge 1997) 73, fig. 7; F. Lissarrague, *Greek Vases: The Athenians and Their Images* (New York 2001) 217, 219–20, figs. 177–179; J. P. Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (Cambridge 2003) 62, figs. 34–35; S. D. Buxton, *Music and Image in*

mythic tradition linked with theatre, in particular with Dionysus and his entourage of satyrs (Fig. 6),<sup>21</sup> represented as satyr actors and mythological creatures.

Thus far, we have briefly explained the ways in which the links between ceramic iconography and ancient Greek theatre are conventionally understood. We will now focus on the decoration of the *oinochoe*. First, we will delve into how this artifact has been traditionally examined, and then we will put forth an alternative analysis. We will see that a link with the realm of theatre is possible from certain specific elements. In this regard, we ponder if said links correspond to those commonly suggested or whether it will be necessary to establish a new category altogether.

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*Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2005) 177, fig. 102; A. C. Montanaro, *Ruvo di Puglia e il suo territorio, le necropoli: i corredi funerari tra la documentazione del XIX secolo e gli scavi moderni* (Rome 2007) 51, fig. 17; *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*, eds. O. Taplin and R. Wyles (Oxford 2010), figs. 0.0, 0.1–0.2, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3–6, 10.1, 12.1, 13.1, 13.3; E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Malden 2010) 18, fig. 1.9; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 94–95, fig. 44; *A Companion to Greek Art*, eds. T. J. Smith and D. Plantzos (Malden 2012) II, 559, fig. 28.7; T. Mannack, *Griechische Vasenmalerei, Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt 2012) 156, fig. 104; I. C. Storey and A. Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, 2nd edition (Chichester 2014) 161, fig. 3.1; R. Osborne, *The Transformation of Athens Painted Pottery and the Creation of Classical Greece* (Princeton and Oxford 2018) 44, fig. 2.8. Attributed to the Pronomos Painter by Hahland. Scholars agree that the Pronomos Vase is the most important and complex artifact available to date that is directly related to ancient Greek theater and, more specifically, to an offstage setting. See Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*. Decoration depicts a play's full staff: actors, choir members, musician, his assistant, and the choregos. It is striking to see the aulos player, Pronomos. See P. Wilson, 'The Man and the Music (and the Choregos?)', in Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*. Likewise, the presence of a playwright, easily identifiable by the papyrus rolls, is peculiar for that time. His name is also visible. See E. Hall, 'Tragic Theatre: Demetrios' Rolls and Dionysos' Other Woman', in Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*.

21. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1989.73: BAPD 1002927; E. H. Turner et al., 'Notable Acquisitions', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 78 (3) (1991) 63–147 (73); *The Burlington Magazine* 133 (1054) (1991), 65, II; Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (n. 18 above) no. 1/125; Trendall, 'Selected Acquisitions', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79 (2) (1992) 63–147 (63–83) no. 1; J. R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London and New York 1994) 86–91, 95, figs. 3.23, 3.24; O. Taplin, 'The Beauty of the Ugly: Reflections of Comedy in the Fleischman Collection', in *A Passion for Antiquities: Ancient Art from the Collection of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman* (Malibu 1994) 15–27 (25), fig. 5; J. Neils and G. Walberg, *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (Cleveland 2000) 50–51, pl. 92–93; P. E. Easterling and E. Hall, *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge 2002) vii; M. Revermann, 'The "Cleveland Medea" Calyx Crater and the Iconography of Ancient Greek Theatre', *Theatre Research International* 30 (2005) 3–18, notes; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 16–17, 107, fig. 3. A. D. Trendall, *Myth, Drama and Style in South Italian Vase-Painting: Selected Papers* (Uppsala 2016) 113, 115–17, figs. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 11. Attributed by Trendall to the Choregos Painter. It is unclear whether the Dionysus bust actually represents a prop used on stage or whether it is symbolic of his relation to theater. In this case, the typical satyr entourage accompanying Dionysus is one composed of satyr actors.

### Some Interpretations of the *Oinochoe*

The *oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an artifact painted using the red-figure technique against a background of black gloss. Its iconography represents a man and a woman separated by a door. With the exception of the door, the roof tiles at the top, and what appears to be a step at the bottom, the scene is empty. Their attitudes show that the man is standing outside, pounding on the door with an unlit torch, while the woman is indoors, holding a lamp, looking scared.<sup>22</sup> Their clothes reveal some additional information: she seems to be a respectable woman,<sup>23</sup> whereas he—virtually nude—may be returning from a procession, celebration, or symposium, and is drunk. He is also holding a *barbitos* in his hand and wears a crown on his head and a shroud over his shoulder—all characteristic elements of these types of activities.

Despite its apparent simplicity, the scene has sparked numerous and diverse interpretations. The represented scene is at an inflection point, neither static nor resolved, which raises all possibilities. An analysis of the scene must be centred on the represented figures alone, given the lack of other identifiable elements—with the exception of the door, the roof tiles, and the step—that could provide a more substantial interpretation of the backdrop of the scene itself. The scene has been described as domestic, as specifically linked with life in the *oikos*, as related to gender issues, or as a sort of social commentary. Nevertheless, all of these interpretations have limitations. To carry out and support these analyses, attempts were made at establishing links with other pieces of that period, but these yielded no positive results, for the represented scene is unique among preserved vases.<sup>24</sup> In the same vein, literary sources have been used to corroborate this interpretation, and these have shown a dependence on logocentric approaches over iconographic ones.

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22. In many cases, the woman's presence by the door does not clearly indicate whether she is inside or outside. It is therefore necessary to rely on other elements such as furniture or the characters' attitudes. See Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 65–66.

23. Boardman claims the "respectable woman" to be a cliché. In ancient iconography, women are usually represented indoors, sitting, spinning or holding perfumes, wearing long dresses, and with their hair up under a *sakkos*. See J. Boardman, 'The Phallos-Bird in Archaic and Classical Greek Art', *Revue Archéologique* (2) (1992) 227–42 (240). This image is conveyed by Xenophon (*Oec.* 7.30). However, there are also iconographic representations of women out in public spaces. For the role of women and their statuses, see S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1975); S. Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (London 1995); L. O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece* (Cambridge 2003). For women and iconography, see E. Keuls, 'Attic Vase-Painting and the Home Textile Industry', in *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography: Fourth Burdick-Vary Symposium of the Institute for Research in the Humanities*, ed. W. G. Moon (Madison 1993); F. Lissarrague, 'Intrusions au Gynécée', in *Les mystères du gynécée*, ed. P. Veyne (Paris 1998) 155–98; S. Lewis, *The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (London 2002).

24. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 27.

Those analyses arguing the painting on the *oinochoe* represents a domestic scene are based solely on the presence of the door. According to Bundrick, when a door is depicted on fifth-century Greek ceramics, it is always within a domestic setting with references to life in the *oikos*. Its presence in the painting is accentuated by the roof tiles at the top. In addition to the marriage bed, there is no more powerful a symbol of the *oikos* than the door, denoting the boundary between the inside and outside worlds.<sup>25</sup> Although it is uncommon to see a full household represented,<sup>26</sup> it is worth noting that both elements—door and roof tiles—are depicted with an ‘unusual perspective’, which may have possibly been inspired by a stage production.<sup>27</sup> The way these elements are rendered leads us to describe this painting as theatrical. We will delve deeper into this question in the following section.

Sutton has some reservations about identifying the painting with an *oikos* setting and clarifies that the domestic setting has far wider implications than the narrowly identified *oikos*. He claims that, owing to a lack of a clear connection with a funerary or nuptial ritual, representations that are traditionally linked with the *oikos* tend to include some of these features: a domestic setting, defined by architectural elements; furniture or other household equipment; the presence of women engaged in domestic activities, usually spinning; or the presence of children.<sup>28</sup>

The analysis of the human figures has given way to interpretations that suggest that the scene is a sort of social commentary or is concerned with gender issues—both closely related matters. Some of these interpretations point out that the man is a *κωμωστής* (reveller): he is nude, holds a musical instrument in his hand, and wears a crown on his head.<sup>29</sup> The fact that he is wielding a torch, though unlit, indicates—along with the lamp the woman is holding—that the scene takes place at night, which would imply the man is returning from some sort of celebration. Some scholars have also stated that the shape of the *chous* reveals the man is a participant in the Anthesterias, a festival celebrated in Athens honouring Dionysus. Yet the *choes* used in these festivals are rather small, and the one analysed in this article is larger in

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25. Bundrick, ‘Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous’ (n. 1 above) 32. Doors appear mainly in nuptial scenes or scenes depicting women performing domestic chores.

26. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 8.

27. Sutton, ‘Family Portraits’ (n. 3 above), 331.

28. Sutton, ‘Family Portraits’ (n. 3 above) 330–31. Scenes depicting women involved in childcare, and even those showing both parents with a child, are rare (see also 337–38). For nuptial scenes, see J. H. Oakley and R. H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison 1993); R. F. Sutton, ‘Nuptial Eros: The Visual Discourse of Marriage in Classical Athens’, *JWalt* 55–56 (1997–1998) 27–48; and V. Sabetai, ‘The Transformation of the Bride in Attic Vase-Painting’, in *The Ancient Art of Transformation: Case Studies from Mediterranean Contexts*, eds. R. M. Gondek and C. L. Sulosky Weaver (Oxford 2019) 33–51. For funerary issues, see H. A. Shapiro, ‘The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (4) (1991) 629–56; J. Oakley *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Lekythoi* (Cambridge 2004).

29. Bundrick, ‘Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous’ (n. 1 above) 27–28.

size. It does not bear any iconographic elements that could be attributed to these festivals—as is usually the case with other artifacts—such as the depiction of a pitcher or a food basket.<sup>30</sup> It has also been argued that the man is Dionysus himself,<sup>31</sup> but the fact that he is holding a musical instrument is an argument against this claim, since it is usually the members of his entourage who do so.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to observe that the man's body features—especially his overweight—may suggest he is not the typical *κωμαστής*, a 'lithe, elegant figure'.<sup>33</sup> The contrast between his lack of physical fitness and his infibulated genitalia is notable: the latter is typical of a sort of social status, because it alludes to the *gymnasion*, whereas the former would mean excess or lack of moderation, incompatible with said status.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, his face is depicted in a sort of grimace that sets him apart from the ideal of the aristocratic man. In line with it, an attitude of *hybris* can be observed in him, pounding a door, likely drunk, in the middle of the night.<sup>35</sup>

These particularities in the male figure suggest a critique—or at least the evincing—of certain social and gender stereotypes. The scene has been linked with Aristophanes's *The Wasps*,<sup>36</sup> precisely because of the reference to certain aristocratic vices, such as drunkenness.<sup>37</sup> Sutton has qualified the scene as comic,

30. See R. Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria: Athenian Iconography and Ritual* (Michigan 1992) 83–121.

31. E. Simon, 'Ein Anthesterien Skyphos des Polygnotos', *AntK* 8 (1963) 6–22 (16–17).

32. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28. There are some exceptions in ancient iconography: for example, Cup by the Brygos Painter, Cab. Méd. 576 (ARV2 371,14). See also Bundrick, *Music and Image* (n. 20 above) 108, fig. 62.

33. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28. Overweight figures are uncommon in Athenian vase paintings.

34. For infibulation as a practice related to athletes, see W. E. Sweet, 'Protection of the Genitals in Greek Athletics', *AncW* 11 (1985) 43–52; R. Osborne, 'Men Without Clothes: Heroic Nakedness and Greek Art', *Gender and History* 9 (1997) 504–28 (515–17). For infibulated satyrs, see *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. J. Winkler, F. Zeitlin, and D. M. Halperin (New Jersey 1990) 59–61. For gluttony, see D. Steiner, 'Indecorous Dining, Indecorous Speech; Pindar's First Olympian and the Poetics of Consumption', *Arethusa* 35 (2) (2002) 297–314.

35. According to Bundrick, 'even the komast's barbitos could be read as a sign of immoderation. An instrument linked with amateur performance, the barbitos recalls the importance of musical training in the traditional aristocratic education, and thus establishes the komast's social class'. See Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28.

36. Aristophanes, *The Wasps*. The play was performed in 422 BC at the Lenaia festival and was awarded the first prize. The plot is about Bdelycleon's father, Philocleon, who is addicted to participating in Athenian trials as a jury member to enjoy the attention and favors granted by the aristocracy in their bid to reach a favorable verdict. To help him overcome his addiction, his son decides to stage a tribunal in his own home for his father to participate as a jury member.

37. Bundrick specifically relates this to vv. 79–80, referring to the excess of drinking and its association with the well-born. See Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31; Mitchell, however, mentions the play but in relation to the female figure. See



claiming it plays with gender stereotypes opposition, clearly articulated in Xenophon's work, although 'the precise nature of their interaction and of the joke is not now obvious'.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, if his attitude were to imply the prospective rape of the woman, his infibulated genitalia would make the scene comic or at least ironic.

The female figure seems less polysemic, but the key question is whether she is a respectable wife or a prostitute.<sup>39</sup> Buxton argues that her social status is harder to define than that of her male counterpart. Yet her clothes leave no room for doubt that she is a respectable wife: she is neither nude nor scantily dressed. The setting against which she is represented is also typical of said social status: the inside of a household.<sup>40</sup> Mitchell identifies her with the image of a discreet wife portrayed by Xenophon.<sup>41</sup>

As regards the possible relation—if any—between the two figures, there is no element in the scene that may suggest such a link with any certainty. The scene has been traditionally described as a domestic dispute, assuming this is a situation related to life in the *oikos*. Yet, given the woman's attitude of fear, it could be argued that the man is someone unknown to her and, in that case, we would be witnessing a 'potential criminal act'.<sup>42</sup> If the possibility that the woman is a prostitute who is not at work at the time—and hence not dressed as such—is accepted, then it could be claimed that the man is a client coming out of hours.

So far, we have succinctly exposed how this piece has been traditionally analysed. Disagreement over its interpretation or the variety of interpretations should not come as a surprise because the painting is multivalent. Multiple meanings suggested by ceramic iconography should not be seen as an obstacle either; rather, because of them, its reception and the understanding of the culture that produced it are enhanced. Moreover, in matters of antiquity, new evidence could always be found to reframe preexisting interpretations.

We will now propose an alternative approach, which does not necessarily exclude the aforementioned analyses but rather frames them within the theatrical realm.

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Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above). Bazant suggests a connection with comedy in general. See J. Bazant, *Les citoyens sur les vases athéniens du 6e au 4e siècle av. J.-C.* (Prague 1985) 52.

38. R. F. Sutton, 'Family Portraits: Recognizing the 'Oikos' on Attic Red-Figure Pottery', *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004) 327–50 (331–32).

39. There are two main types of female prostitutes, the *pornai* and the *hetairai*. See Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 63–67; L. Kurke, 'Inventing the "Hetaira": Sex, Politics, and Discursive Conflict in Archaic Greece', *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1) (1997) 106–50. For women and social status, see fn. 23 above.

40. Buxton, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31–32.

41. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 64.

42. Buxton, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 32.

### The *Oinochoe*: A 'Theatrical Painting'

The relationship between a painting and theatre may respond to either thematic issues or iconographic features and, in many cases, they both lead to such an interplay. In the case of the scene decorating the *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both characteristics serve as a link with the world of theatre. Nevertheless, the way the door and the roof tiles are portrayed strengthens the semantics of the whole and directs it toward that realm.

When observing the scene, it is striking to see the use of two different iconographic conventions.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, human figures are represented using a realistic convention, which copies an external referent. The objects—door and roof tiles—are depicted using a convention that evinces their character as representations, and therefore they are not presented as a continuity of reality. This is neither a minor nor an accessory matter, for it highlights the objects thus represented, turns the gaze toward them, and conditions the semantics of the whole. In other words, a lack of harmony in the representation of the elements in the scene does not create a rupture. Instead, that very interaction determines the overall meaning.

The door and roof tiles are positioned at the centre, dominating the scene, and are the only nonhuman figures visible. They are represented in a way that reveals their artificiality, which therefore highlights these elements. It is possible to identify these iconographic characteristics with those of comic paintings.<sup>44</sup> These features allow for a possible identification with a theatrical performance. As mentioned above, Sutton argues that the scene is likely inspired by a stage production.<sup>45</sup> This is the main reason, however, to support a description of the *oinochoe* painting as 'theatrical'—both because of the way these objects are portrayed and because this type of representation makes the whole acquire a semantics with clear connections to theatre.

Of all the ways in which ceramic iconography may be related to theatre, we believe that those elements referring to scenic materiality are the most powerful because they permeate the whole with a kind of artificiality. Furthermore, they are the most accurate, since theme-based relations, with no specific iconographic signs, run the risk of being confounded with mythic tales that were also staged. The fact that no theatre-related pieces have been preserved, whose existence would aid in establishing a link with the painting we are analysing, cannot be used as an argument against this interpretation because the evidence preserved is

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43. The combination of different conventions in "theatrical paintings" is not rare; cf. fig. 7, Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 248778: Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (n. 18 above) 7–8, 1/124, pl.1. 3–4, 67; Taplin, *Comic Angels*, 55–63, fig. 9.1; D. Guilula, 'The Choregoi Vase: Comic Yes, but Angels?', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995) 5–10; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 107, fig. 3.3.

44. See p. 5 of this article.

45. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 38 above) 331.

incomplete and an iconographic analysis cannot be contingent on a logocentric one. This is not to say that this painting may be related to a lost piece, but rather that an analysis should not be disregarded on such grounds.

If we compare the way in which the door and the roof tiles are depicted on the *oinochoe* with other artifacts unrelated to theatre, it is possible to observe that it bears artificial features or at least features of an ‘unusual perspective’ that liken it to a stage production.<sup>46</sup> Even though it is uncommon to see a full household represented,<sup>47</sup> in paintings related to the domestic realm, the door is depicted through the use of different techniques that confer it perspective and depth, making it more realistic. In the *pyxis* of red figures, representing women weaving and performing domestic chores (Fig. 8),<sup>48</sup> the open door reveals a bed with cushions. The fact that we are able to see the inside of the house—and some of its furniture—grants the scene and, more precisely, the door, a sense of perspective and depth. As a result, the scene is identified with the corresponding external referent and the door acquires volume. Moreover, while the section of the roof coincides with the edge of the artifact’s mouth, it is attached to the door, creating a solid and unified effect.

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46. Sutton, ‘Family Portraits’ (n. 38 above) 331.

47. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 8.

48. Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA 587: ARV2 104; G. M. Richter, *The Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans* (London 1966) 135, fig. 640; Beazley, *Paralipomena* (n. 20 above) 449; L. Clark, ‘Notes on Small Textile Frames Pictured on Greek Vases’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 1 (87) (1983) 91–96 (95, pl. 16, fig. 8); Keuls, ‘Attic Vase-Painting’ (n. 23 above) 222, fig. 14.31; A. Kauffmann-Samaras, ‘Deux vases de mariage du V siècle av. J.-C.’, *Revue du Louvre: la revue des musées de France* 2 (2001) 33–44 (40, fig. 16); F. Lissarrague, ‘Réflexions sur l’image dans la céramique de Grande Grèce’, in *Vasi, immagini, collezionismo: la collezione di vasi di Intesa Sanpaolo e i nuovi indirizzi di ricerca sulla ceramica greca e magnogreca. Giornate di studio*, ed. S. Ch. Gemma (Milan 2007) 278, fig. 9; G. Hoffmann, *Naître et devenir Grec dans les cités antiques: VIIIe-IIIe siècles avant notre ère* (Paris 2017) 312–13, 406, fig. 106. Attributed to the Painter of the Louvre Centauromachy by Beazley.

Figure 7. Aegisthus alongside comic choregoi and Pyrrhias, Apulian bell-krater, ca. 400–380 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 248778, acq. date n/a



Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 8. Women engaged in weaving and other household activities, attic red-figured pyxis attributed to the Painter of the Louvre Centauromachy, ca. 460–440 BC. Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA 587, 1983



Source: © María Daniels.

The door depicted on the *oinochoe*, however, is completely flat, without perspective or depth, which gives artificiality and simplicity to the structure and reminds us of a stage device. Likewise, the tiles representing the roof are not connected

to the structure of the door and, as a result, the construction seems fragmentary. In addition, the interior space bears no elements identifiable with a domestic setting. This feature increases the fragmentary and artificial effect of the iconographic representation of the door, which presents itself as an isolated element disconnected from the house.

The method of giving depth to the door—and, therefore, an increased realism—from the portrayal of interior elements is also present in nuptial scenes,<sup>49</sup> one of the traditional themes in the iconography related to the οἶκος, a realm that has been associated with the painting we are examining. In Figs. 9<sup>50</sup> and 10,<sup>51</sup> the open door offers a glimpse of a section of furniture and half of a female figure peering out, respectively.

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49. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 330–31. For nuptial paintings, see fn. 30 above.

50. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.802: BAPD 15815; R. F. Sutton, *Daidalikon, Studies in Memory of Raymond V. Schoder*, S. J. (Wauconda 1989) 335–36, 338, 340–42, fig. 1, pls. 29–33; *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. A. Richlin (Oxford 1992) 27, fig. 1.10; Oakley and Sinos, *Wedding in Ancient Athens* (n. 28 above) 51, 109–1–111, figs. 1, 105–7; *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, ed. E. Reeder (Baltimore 1995) 165–68, no. 24; Sutton, 'Nuptial Eros' (n. 28 above) 34, n. 53; Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 329, fig. 17.1; Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above), 190, fig. 9.1. This wedding scene portrays the groom as a young immature man and the bride as a mature woman. While it was usually the groom who was older than the bride, in this case, the representation corresponds to the classic ideal of a young and beautiful couple. Sutton relates the scene to the abduction of Helen by Paris. The vase's decoration is damaged, and it is not possible to see the interior of the house through the open door. Nevertheless, this can be appreciated more clearly in the Beazley Archive drawing. We were able to access the drawing through a reproduction in Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 329.

51. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.11.1: BAPD 350478; Richter, 'The Department of Greek and Roman Art' (n. 5 above) 84, 86–87, fig. 29; Beazley, *Paralipomena* (n. 20 above) 66; D. von Bothmer, 'Greek Vase Painting: An Introduction', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 31 (1) (1972) 4, 22–23, 69; D. von Bothmer and A. L. Boegehold, *The Amasis Painter and His World: Vase-Painting in Sixth-Century B.C. Athens* (Malibu 1985) 40, 182–84, 201, pl. 4; S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford 1998) 42; J. M. Padgett, 'The Stable Hands of Dionysos: Satyrs and Donkeys as Symbols of Social Marginalization in Attic Vase Painting', in *Not the Classical Ideal*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden 2000) 43–70 (50–51); *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*, eds. J. Neils, J. H. Oakley, and K. Hart (New Haven 2003) 128, fig. 19; Bundrick, *Music and Image* (n. 20 above) figs. 104–5; L. Bodiou, 'Le Mariage: le flamboiement des sens', in *Rituels grecs: une expérience sensible*, eds. Evelyne Ugaglia and Adeline Grand-Clément (Toulouse 2017) 20–21, 34–35, fig. 6; Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 202, fig. 9.13a–b. Attributed to the Amasis Painter by Beazley, this is the earliest and most complete known representation of an Attic wedding. The scene portrays the nuptial procession from the bride's home to the groom's, which represented the transition from life as a couple to life as husband and wife. The woman peering out the door is the groom's mother, who welcomes the bride and her parents. Although this painting dates back to a previous century than the one we are examining, the same device is used: the open door offers a glimpse of a human figure inside a house.

*Figure 9.* Attic red-figured loutrophoros depicting a bridal procession, unattributed, ca. 440–430 BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.802, Francis Bartlett donation, 1903



Source: © Museum of Fine Arts Boston

*Figure 10.* Attic black-figured lekythos, country wedding procession employing carts, attributed to the Amasis Painter, ca. 550–530 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.11.1, Purchase, Walter C. Baker Gift, 1956



Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art

If we focus on the thematic dimension of ceramic decoration, it is possible to describe the scene as comic from the identification of specific social stereotypes. As mentioned above, this has led some scholars<sup>52</sup> to establish a relation between the painting and Aristophanes's *The Wasps*, the interplay between the risk of rape and its impossibility because of the male figure's infibulated genitalia aims at creating a comic effect, corresponding to the imaginary of that genre.

However, it is the male figure, along with its description as *κωμαστής*, that offers the most interesting, albeit slightly veiled, key element. The noun *κωμαστής* refers specifically to a participant in the *κῶμος*, a procession that may have its origins in a rural celebration linked with Dionysus. Moreover, the same term is used as an epithet for Dionysus in Aristophanes's *The Clouds*.<sup>53</sup> Although it is not altogether clear, it is possible to assume from several literary and iconographic testimonies that this procession was accompanied by music and dance.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, this may be considered a pre-dramatic or early dramatic celebration related to the origins of Athenian theatre.<sup>55</sup>

This interrelation also encompasses the linguistic sphere. The word *κῶμος*, besides referring to processions linked with the origins of theatre, is the etymological origin of the noun *κωμωδία*—comedy. This term may have two

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52. Buxton, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31; Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 68.

53. Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, vv. 606. The play was first performed in the City Dionysia in 423 BC and tells the story of Pheidippides, son of Strepsiades, who is a horse enthusiast and acquires large debts on behalf of his father. To avoid paying them, Strepsiades attempts to make his son go study with Socrates to learn about the art of argument. Pheidippides refuses, and his father attends in his stead.

54. E. Csapo, 'The Earliest Phase of "Comic" Choral Entertainments in Athens: The Dionysian Pompe and the 'Birth' of Comedy', in *Fragmentary History of Greek Comedy*, eds. S. Chronopoulos and C. Ort (Heidelberg 2015) 66–108 (73–74).

55. For *κῶμος* and *κωμασταί*, and their relation to the origin of theater, see E. Csapo, 'Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction', *Phoenix* 51 (3/4) (1997) 253–95 (262–64); J. Rusten, 'Who "Invented" Comedy? The Ancient Candidates for the Origins of Comedy and the Visual Evidence', *American Journal of Philology* 127 (1) (2006) 33–66 (41–55); K. Rothwell, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses* (Cambridge 2007); Csapo, 'The Earliest Phase of "Comic" Choral Entertainments' (n. 54 above) 83–91. Artifacts depicting processions linked with the origins of theater are called "Komast vases," which date back to the period between the seventh and early fifth centuries and represent padded dancers or mask-wearing figures. See T. J. Smith, 'The Corpus of Komast Vases: From Identity to Exegesis', in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, eds. E. Csapo and M. C. Miller (Cambridge 2007) 48–76; C. Isler-Kerényi, 'Komasts, Mythic Imaginary, and Ritual', in Csapo and Miller, *Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond*, 77–95; J. R. Green, 'Let's Hear it for the Fat Man: Padded Dancers and the Prehistory of Drama' in Csapo and Miller, *Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond*, 96–107; and Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above), 19–27.

possible etymological origins: either the union of *κῶμος* and *ῶδή* or that of *κῶμη* and *ῶδή*.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the interpretation of the heading of IG II<sup>2</sup> 2318<sup>57</sup> has led some scholars to claim that the word *κῶμος* refers to the theatrical choruses of all ancient dramatic genres (comedy, tragedy, and satyr drama).<sup>58</sup>

As we have seen thus far, the analysis of the iconography that decorates the *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art evinces a polysemic interplay with the theatrical realm that comprises iconographic, thematic, and philological aspects. It is, however, the way the door is depicted that conditions one's gaze and directs the reception of the painting toward the theatrical realm. This creates a strangeness effect, both because of its difference with the human figures and specifically because of its artificial character, which makes the receiver wonder if it indeed is a scene inspired by daily life, spontaneous as any other. When we delve into the thematic aspects, we are able to confirm the scene is an episode with multiple and rather uncommon meanings connected to the realm of theatre.

### Final Considerations

The decoration on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *oinochoe* hints at the theatrical realm based on specific iconographic features as well as thematic and philological links. This does not mean it cannot be related to other realms as well. Ceramic decoration is traditionally classified as belonging to a single thematic realm. Therefore, once a painting is catalogued as belonging to a particular realm—and this is accepted and legitimized—new perspectives are challenged and resisted. Nevertheless, we believe that in some cases certain elements exist that hint at different realms, without this representing a contradiction. In other words, a painting is polysemic, and it is always open to multiple meanings that complement each other.

Even though there are different ways in which ancient iconography is linked with theatre, all of them are circumscribed to the theatrical realm. But what happens when we note theatrical elements in paintings that are also related to

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56. Aristotle refers to this in *Poetics* III, mentioning also the verbal form *κωμάζω*, which means “[to] revel, make merry,” “[to] go in festal procession.” See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, With a Revised Supplement* (Oxford 1996) *s.v.* For etymological issues, see P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris 1968) *s.v.*

57. Called the *Fasti*, these are twelve white marble fragments found in the vicinity of the Agora in Athens, bearing inscriptions that refer to records of yearly dithyrambic and dramatic contest results from the City Dionysia, likely near the late sixth century BC. See E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 2001) 40–41; B. W. Millis and S. D. Olson, *Inscriptional Records for the Dramatic Festivals in Athens* (Leiden and Boston 2012) 5–58.

58. A. Wilhelm *Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Athens* (Vienna 1906) 12; F. Rodríguez Adradós, *Fiesta, comedia y tragedia* (Madrid 1983) 79.



other realms, as we have seen with the analysis of the *oinochoe*? Limiting the possibilities of establishing such a relation only to paintings strictly belonging to the theatrical realm involves negating the possibility of establishing crossovers or common grounds between the different realms of ordinary life and culture of that era. Ancient Greek theatre was not a private activity attended individually; rather, it was an event that took place in civic and religious festivals that were attended by the whole city.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, it is to be expected that the theatrical would pour into realms that were not strictly its own and that the decoration of ceramic artifacts would reflect such an interaction. The presence of such elements by no means rules out previous analyses or involves the exclusion of painting from a specific realm, nor does the painted scene correspond to a theatrical spectacle or a lost piece; rather, this presence complements and enriches existing analyses and underscores new meanings.

We believe it is necessary to open up the ways in which the links between ancient ceramic iconography and theatre are understood and thus accept the emergence of elements that refer to theatre in painted scenes that are not specifically theatrical. Here we refer to inherently iconographic issues in terms of procedures and ways of representing certain (human and nonhuman) figures as well as semantic ones, and not to the narrative aspects of a painted scene. Certainly, it will be necessary to broaden the analysis and delve into the question of whether it is possible to note such an emergence in other artifacts or whether it is simply an isolated case.

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59. We offer a generalization to substantiate the present argument. We have not considered debates surrounding the composition of the audience in ancient Greek theater. Cf. D. K. Roselli, *Theater of the People. Spectators and society in Ancient Athens* (Austin 2011).

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