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Blending in and Standing Out – Camouflage and Masking as Queer Tactics of Negotiating Visibility

The logic of camouflage is predicated on the assumption that *not showing up* is, at times and places, both a strategic necessity and a worthy aspiration.

Hanna Rose Shell, *Hide and Seek*¹

Queers have always been troubled by the idea of unqualified visibility. To be constantly observed (if only in the public sphere), utterly recognizable, visible to the point of standing out – seems to constrict rather than broaden potential political initiatives and alliances. Although demanding visibility in the public sphere (understood as the possibility of showing one's non-normative sexuality in public) became one of the most important demands of the lesbian and gay, and later queer, movement, fears of the consequences of concentrating political efforts on a politics of visibility and positive representation have been voiced by queer theoreticians and activists since the early 1990s. As Lee Edelman, Peggy Phelan, Rosemary Hennessy, and others have claimed, demanding total visibility and equal representation in the public sphere (including popular media and other spheres of visual culture) may be treacherous for a number of reasons.

One of possible critiques of visibility politics is that the fight for “fair and equal images” may lead to the sanctioning of a specific type of representation, exemplary of an essentially defined “queer identity,” and the resulting exclusion of bodies, preferences, and styles not adhering to this type. This aligns the proponent of fair images of non-normative identities with the “conservatives patrolling the borders of museums, movie houses, and mainstream broadcasting,”² “the enforcers of homophobic norms.”³ The conflict between the progressive iconophile and the conservative iconoclast arises out of a shared faith in the capacity of images to generate predictable political outcomes. “Both



Jack Smith, *Jungle Island*, 1967.
Courtesy of Jack Smith and LUX,
London

invisible the capitalist divisions of labor that organize sexuality [...]. In so doing, queer spectacles often participate in a long history of class-regulated visibility."⁷

If visibility is mired with so many reservations, can the response to these be other than an unfortunate return to a previously occupied site of invisibility (within queer theory and practice conceptualized as the closet)? This is also an especially pertinent question because not all queer subjects have a closet to hide in, or – to put this in a more straightforward way – not everyone has the possibility to pass as normative. Although visibility remains a highly contested topic within queer theory and politics, the concept itself has not been subjected to a process of queering as often as other normative concepts, such as time,⁸ history,⁹ space,¹⁰ or orientation.¹¹

What would it mean to queer visibility?¹² The aim of this essay will be to offer one possible answer to this question through an analysis of camouflage and masking – two visual mechanisms that question the undisputed emancipatory potential of visibility while simultaneously offering new, tactical, and conditional modes of existing in the public visual sphere. As practices deriving from domains alien, or sometimes even hostile, to queer experience – the military and the ritual – camouflage and masking might seem like strange candidates for providing inspiration to queer politics.¹³ Regardless of their point of origin, I will argue that camouflage and masking have the potential of queering visibility and that they achieve this goal in contrasting manners: the first by allowing the subject to become invisible to subjects defined as hostile while simultaneously remaining visible to others; the second by maintaining the subject's visibility, or even granting her a certain hyper-visibility, while concealing valuable details of her identity. Mindful of Judith Butler's definition of queer as a contingent term, a term that "takes on new meanings that cannot now be anticipated," and as "a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance,"¹⁴ I do not claim that camouflage and masking are always and already queer, but only that they may act as an inspiration for developing new models of queer visibility. Also, although the artistic uses of camouflage and masking I analyze will be almost exclusively drawn from the work of artists identifying as queer or working on the topic of non-normative sexuality, my hope is that they may also serve as models for extending the scope of



Jack Smith, *Jungle Island*, 1967.
Courtesy of Jack Smith and LUX,
London

sides believe that greater visibility of the hitherto under-represented leads to enhanced political power," writes Phelan in the opening pages of *Unmarked. A Politics of Performance*, published in 1993.⁴ The introduction to a book published only a year later, Lee Edelman's *Homographesis*, also denounces the troubling alliance of "gay advocate" and homophobe:

The liberationist project can easily echo, though in a different key, the homophobic insistence upon the social importance of codifying and registering sexual identities. Though pursuing radically different agendas, the gay advocate and the enforcer of homophobic norms both inflect the issue of gay legibility with a sense of painful urgency. [...] Just as outing works to make visible a dimension of social reality effectively occluded by the assumptions of a heterosexist ideology, so that ideology, throughout the twentieth century, has insisted on the necessity of "reading" the body as signifier of sexual orientation.⁵

Within queer theory and activism, the arena of representation – understood both as mandate to act on behalf of a group and as a domain of cultural denotation – remains a site of constant struggle over the widest possible inclusion of subjects, orientations and positions.⁶

Simultaneously, however, a different angle of critique has emerged within queer theory – one differentiating between the types of observers to whom the queer subject is visible. The role of the observer may be occupied by a number of actors – corporate, governmental, or military. As she becomes a potential consumer, suspect or voter, the queer subject is prone to incorporation within different regimes of power. In her work on the commodification of sexual identity in late capitalism, Hennessy examines the mechanisms through which non-normative subjects became embraced primarily as consumers. The production of gay and lesbian consumers through such practices as creating product lines and advertisements aimed specifically at gay audiences draws a line between those queer subjects who can and those who cannot afford a certain product or lifestyle. According to Hennessy, "the construction of a new homosexual/queer spectacle perpetuates a class-specific perspective that keeps



Jack Smith, *Jungle Island*, 1967.
Courtesy of Jack Smith and LUX,
London

queerness. In other words, that other non-normative subjects will be able to organize, seek refuge, comfort, and new spaces of collective organizing in the realm provided by the queer visual sphere.

blending in

For most of the twenty minute 1967 film *Jungle Island/Reefers of Technicolor Island* by underground filmmaker Jack Smith, the viewer can't be sure of what she sees.¹⁵ Shot in New York with a 16 mm camera, *Jungle Island* employs myriad cinematic tools to destabilize the viewer's field of vision and render the world on screen as visually equivocal as possible. The only normative element, which becomes a temporal guide and functions as an attention-holder preventing the viewer from completely dissolving in the visual phantasmagory of the image, is the soundtrack of melancholic Hawaiian pop tunes. From the first seconds of the film the viewer is immersed in a colorful, tropical environment, a jungle island, which presents itself in shaky ambiguity. The film – in which not a single word is uttered – consists of extreme close-ups of flowers, roots, bodies, stems, discarded consumer objects, the earth and sky, water, elements of attire – all filmed with a trembling camera on scratched film stock. At times, we are able to distinguish a human figure resting amongst plants and objects. The unnamed character – played by Mario Montez – remains motionless throughout the first part of the film. It is the camera that moves – it circles Montez's body, rotates to produce an upside down image, pulls up dramatically to reveal the blue sky and elements of a decayed urban landscape, approaches and then distances itself from chosen objects. Although we know the camera – or sometimes only its lens – is moving, we can rarely discern what it's moving toward or pulling away from. The film switches from vivid brightness to almost complete darkness and the screen is often filled solely with glimmering colored textures.

Although *Jungle Island* consequently defies the viewers' normative need for narrative – granted they have one, of course – it does offer pleasurable moments of identification of the film's glamorous and mysterious character. Judging from what our eyes can put together, Montez is dressed in a long black and white striped summer tube dress, which ends at the cleavage and displays his back. Bright-colored flowers, both tropical and common garden blossoms, adorn his body and



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz,
Toxic, 2012. Courtesy of the artists

full curly hair. Further close shots reveal more colorful details – fiery red feathers in Montez's hair, sparkling blue eyelids, flower jewelry, green, purple and gold beaded necklaces... If Maria Montez was the Queen of Technicolor, then Mario Montez surely deserved the title of the Princess of Technicolor Island.¹⁶

Montez may be a feast for the eyes, but the longest he stays on screen during the film is an even twenty seconds (in the third minute of *Jungle Island*). After the exposition of the main character, the film continues with a series of blurry shots. The exciting boredom is interrupted by a change of scenery in the sixteenth minute, when we find ourselves gazing upon a flat water surface. After a minute, we see a handsome young man (Irving Rosenthal) with flowers in his tangled hair and beads around his neck, swimming in a pool of water. In the next shot, we see Rosenthal and Montez standing on the shore of Technicolor Island. As this “synopsis” shows, through most of *Jungle Island* the viewer's eye is invited to participate in a game of hide and seek. We're meant to look for traces of Montez in the extreme close-ups, as we're supposed to try to separate the figure from the ground, and attempt to establish the relation of the camera to the reposing star. There are moments when the viewer – at least this viewer – begins to doubt whether she ever saw Montez at all. *Jungle Island*, a filmic reverie on *what we see and simultaneously fail to see* can thus be interpreted as an active practicing of the “logic and poetic of camouflage”¹⁷ – both in the world of Technicolor Island and on the level of the film medium itself.



1944 *Cobra Woman* trailer, starring Maria Montez (YouTube)

Camouflage, or protective concealment, can be defined as a visual tactic designed to confuse the seeker and to prevent him from determining the “size, direction, speed, and identity”¹⁸ of the one hiding. The history of human camouflage – a military technique that uses tools developed within visual and decorative arts – consists of multiple encounters and negotiations between artists, military men and women, and a number of visual tools – painting, photography, film, and digital imaging systems. As Hanna Rose Shell argues in her fascinating book *Hide and Seek. Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance*, the appearance of camouflage in the beginning of the 20th century



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Toxic*, 2012. Courtesy of the artists

was both a response to photography's practical and theoretical effects on biology, military technology, and the arts and an instigator of its further development. [...] To combat th[e] new and in a sense increased threat of being seen by the reconnaissance lens [...] *camoufleurs* brought to bear craft skills from backgrounds as diverse as taxidermy, architecture, set design and portraiture.¹⁹

The need to blend into the natural background emerged as a response to the advancement of visual technologies, which increased the capability of seeing more accurately from a larger distance. Shell proposes to distinguish three forms of camouflage – static, serial, and dynamic – which developed historically in relation to specific visual media – photography, aerial photography, and film. Paradoxically, to become a part of the natural scenery the *camoufleurs* needed to employ both artifacts (patterned clothing and equipment,²⁰ nets) and natural elements (twigs, mud, grass). Equally important as external covering was an adequate state of mind, one that French architect Jean Labatut, in his Princeton lectures during World War II, called “camouflage consciousness” – the state of awareness of being observed and the skill of seeing oneself from the viewpoint of the observer. In the practice of a good *camoufleur*, “full consciousness becomes literal self-observation.”²¹ The implementation of a successful camouflage thus necessitates a reconceptualization of the relation between figure and ground, subject and nature, but perhaps also subject and cultural background.

One of the most interesting – although scientifically debatable²² – conceptions of camouflage was developed in the late 19th century by Abbott H. Thayer, an American painter and amateur ornithologist. Through the use of multiple visual media, including stencils, collage, photography, and painting, Thayer proposed a revision of the belief, dominant amongst naturalists and biologists, that only mildly colored species possessed the ability to protectively conceal themselves. According to Thayer, all species (apart from humans), including highly visible animals – such as colorful tropical birds and fish – practice camouflage through “countershading” (darker coloring on the upper side and lighter on the under side of the body) and “disruptive patterning” (a pattern that breaks up the outline of the animal). Camouflage is simply not a permanent state



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz,
Toxic, 2012. Courtesy of the artists

but a temporary tactic, employed by the animal when most needed. The key to understanding how and when an animal uses camouflage is to examine at which moments it is most vulnerable. "The purpose of these patterns [is] that they conceal their wearer most of all from the viewpoint of the very eyes that we believe this wearer most needs to avoid,"²³ writes Thayer. The animal becomes invisible only from a very specific viewpoint (the predator or the prey) and only at a "crucial moment," to employ the phrase Shell coins to describe Thayer's model of static camouflage.²⁴ Thayer also differentiated between protective coloration and mimicry: "Mimicry makes an animal appear to be some other thing, whereas this newly discovered law makes him cease to appear at all. [...] The markings on the animal become a picture of such background as one might see if the animal were transparent."²⁵ To translate this into anachronistic, but perhaps inspiring terms – through the use of camouflage the subject doesn't need to try to *pass as* "some other thing," but can maintain her identity, while simultaneously escaping the sight of the other by dissolving into the background.²⁶

As a visual model, camouflage opens the possibility and (perhaps utopian) potential of negotiating and queering the visual sphere. It allows us to imagine a situation in which a queer subject would remain visible to other queers and true to her identity (however temporary and unstable), and capable of tactically "blending" into the background when needed or desired. While pondering this utopian proposition, let's return to *Technicolor Island* and its camouflage consciousness. It is perhaps clear by now that the film offers a reflection on camouflage on at least two levels, which are as tied together as figure and ground in a successful moment of concealment. The first is the camouflage of Mario Montez, who, through "creative use of the features of natural landscape,"²⁷ perfectly fuses with the background. The second is Jack Smith's use of the cinematic medium itself to create a sense of visual camouflage and, as an effect, to hide Montez from the eyes of the viewers, or rather to demonstrate the possibility of hiding such a conspicuous and flaming creature. The image shakes and quivers, operates at extreme close-ups, making it difficult for the viewer to gather a sense of direction. The camera seems engaged, perhaps too engaged, as if it wanted to devour the image it was supposed to present. When at times it does pull back, the effect can be intimate and touching. In a wonderful sequence towards the end of



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz,
Toxic, 2012. Courtesy of the artists

the film, as the camera glides downwards from the sky, the viewer is once again thrown into a hazy image of warm colors. After a moment, the camera pulls back and reveals the subjects of the close-up – Montez's tropical head closely tucked under the arm-pit of the well-built young swimmer. The camera lingers, declining to pull back, so that the viewer can appreciate this perfectly, if unconventionally, framed scene of affection.

If Smith's film could be qualified as an expression of camouflage, it would certainly be a long way from Thayer's static camouflage experiments. It could, however, be compared to the dynamic camouflage work created by the second hero of Shell's *Hide and Seek* – the avant-garde filmmaker Len Lye, director of the famous military instruction movie *Kill or Be Killed* (1943), as well as films with such quirky titles as *Rainbow Dance* (1936) or *Trade Tattoo* (1937).²⁸ In his pre-war experimental work, Lye operated on film stock in order to obliterate the distinction between figure and ground, “experiment[ing] with painting, scratching, and pasting stenciled shapes onto discarded pieces of film,” as well as with cutting holes in the film, “painting and drawing over frame lines.”²⁹ In *Jungle Island*, Smith dissolves the figure-ground distinction by controlling the movement of the camera and performing extreme close-ups, but also through directly manipulating the film stock itself. He often uses superimpositions, making Montez's face hazily appear as a backdrop to the landscape (turning the figure into the landscape) or creating the effect of multiple backgrounds and thus confusing the viewer as to what's really “at the bottom of this.”

Camouflage is thus achieved directly on the surface of the film stock, an effect further reinforced by the scratches and glitches appearing throughout the film, most probably as a result of using discarded film stock. The scale of objects featured in the film is also denaturalized, as they grow and shrink in between shots – an effect achieved through extreme close-ups and almost invisible montage. If a typical landscape, be it painterly, photographic, or filmic, is a genre, which organizes space and the world in front of us into a stable



Len Lye, *Rainbow Dance*, 1936
(YouTube)

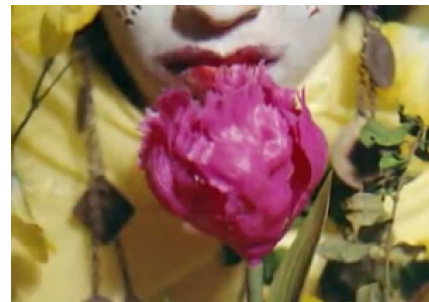


Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz,
Toxic, 2012. Courtesy of the artists

and understandable form,³⁰ then Smith's *Jungle Island* is a landscape rendered queer.

What is this natural landscape that we get lost in searching for Mario Montez? And why does Jack Smith take us outside into nature anyway? In her persuasive polemic with Susan Sontag's claim that "nothing in nature can be campy,"³¹ Juliane Rebentisch argues that "camp of the Smithian kind does not simply sever a relation to nature, but dialectically rescues it as a moment of history."³² Rebentisch interprets Smith's films as meditations on perishability, decomposition, and the "ruins of late capitalism."³³ Like *Normal Love* (1963) and *Flaming Creatures* (1963), *Jungle Island* also features affectionate portraits of discarded consumer objects – an old blue kitchen cabinet, plastic containers, dolls, flashbulbs, food packaging – rotting away in natural scenery. The last moments of the film show the young swimmer and Montez gazing into the sky, their eyes following a plane high up above. The scene – with a rusty water-tower hovering in the distance – has an apocalyptic feel to it, as if Montez and his lover were the last living inhabitants of Technicolor Island. As all images of ruins, these ones are also prone to nostalgic interpretations, in which objects, landscapes and buildings become bearers of a romantic longing for an idealized past. Against this sort of reading, Rebentisch proposes a bold political interpretation of nature and ruins in Smith's work:

I want to argue that camp—via its double recognition of history in nature, *and nature in history*—is committed to the potentiality in what are, namely, if only indirectly, the future possibilities of what is. To recognize the moral world in the mirror of its creatures and consumer capitalism in that of its ruins means to read the present state of affairs not in terms of a history that installs itself as indisputable second nature but instead as something that proves to be transient itself.³⁴



Mary Jordan, *Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis*, 2006 (YouTube)

Smith's vision of political utopia, a utopia which grows out of the "coincidence of a critical stance and melancholy,"³⁵ is often articulated through a vision of human coalescence with forms of nature – a nature from out of this (Western) world. Exotic and tropical themes were a key inspiration for Smith, crucial in developing his unique visual sensibility. Naturally, these images were rarely derived from original

sources (whatever those might have been), but were filtered through popular mediations, through images which Hélio Oiticica, Brazilian artist and a participant in the New York underground, called “pop-tropicália” or “tropicamp.”³⁶ *Jungle Island*, featuring Mario Montez on Technicolor Island, may be interpreted as Smith's fantasy of his favorite star, Maria Montez – “a spectacular, flaming image”³⁷ – resting in her natural environment: Technicolor film. According to Oiticica, Smith's use of tropiclichés – from the “incarnated images”³⁸ of Maria Montez to tropical paraphernalia and scenery³⁹ – possessed an emancipatory potential and were more than just “a simple nostalgia for fox[-trot] and latin american [sic] music.”⁴⁰ This conviction is echoed by Juan Suárez in his essay “Jack Smith, Hélio Oiticica, Tropicalism:”

Smith forged imaginary worlds out of this world but he also rooted his tropicalist fantasies in the here-and-now, aligning his exotic-aquatic pursuits with various ethnic and cultural marginalities. [...] These, however, [are] treated as iconic repertoires rather than as complexly layered historical agents. But such lack of specification may be a radical political stance. It adopts “difference” at large, rather than one particular strand of difference. Lack of definition is central to Smith's practice. Avoidance, refusal, and evasion, along with fragmentariness, provisionality, and failure, allowed him to elude conceptual closure. And avoiding closure amounted to rejecting the fossilization of identity.⁴¹

This potential, I believe, is also uniquely realized in *Jungle Island* through the practice of camouflage, through which a queer subject blends into tropical scenery, disappearing from our field of vision and then hauntingly appearing again. The space of *Jungle Island* is a space of transparency, which allows for a negotiation of the normative regime of constant visibility. Smith's choice of tropical backdrop allows us to suggest yet another path for interpreting camouflage as a model for queering visibility. This tropical path would lead us to the claim that queer camouflage practices may also be filled with the utopian potential of imagining and negotiating a better nature,



Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite: Fag Face Mask*, October 20, 2012, Los Angeles, CA. Photo by Christopher O'Leary. Courtesy of the artist

a queerer nature we can dwell in and at times blend into – in Smith's work embodied by the idea of the exotic and tropical.

Such promise hidden in camouflage is hinted at by José Muñoz in his analysis of Andy Warhol's day-glo *Camouflage Self-Portrait* (1986), which depicts the artist's face painted over with the popular US Woodland camouflage pattern adopted by the US Army in 1981.⁴² Diverging from psychologizing and reductionist interpretations of Warhol's camouflage portraits as expressions of the artist's desire to disappear, and a self-disgust with his own looks,⁴³ Muñoz proposes to see the day-glo camouflage portrait as an image through which "the natural world [...] is rendered impossible or utterly unnatural."⁴⁴ Following this interpretation, one should ask about the location of nature in the camouflage paintings. The *Camouflage Self-portrait* confuses the viewer's sense of figure and background, which – in the visual schema of camouflage – is usually occupied by natural scenery. It achieves this effect, however, not through a process of coalescing the figure into the backdrop of the canvas, but through radically severing the connection between the subject's head and the primary black background (achieved by applying a silkscreened Polaroid photo onto the canvas) and then pushing the foregrounded head into the background by silkscreening it over with a camouflage pattern. Although at first glance the pattern seems to have been applied only to Warhol's head, a closer look reveals that it extends onto the black background, but has not been painted in the colors chosen for the artist's face. On the surface of the painting, the role of the potentially utopian space would actually be played by the black space upon which the artist delicately silkscreened the camouflage pattern *as if* for the viewer to fill with color. Contrary to the process of designing military camouflage, during which the pattern of the figure is conceived so as to blend in with the background, in Warhol's queer camouflage project the viewer is invited to model the "natural" backdrop after the queer subject. Perhaps this is what Muñoz means when he writes of "a desire to reproduce nature with a difference."⁴⁵ Through the use of camouflage, the self-portrait becomes a model for utopian potentiality, one that extends beyond the politics of queer subjects towards a broader project of queering nature.

standing out

Obviously, we arrived too late – the party is already over. Golden glitter is smeared on the floor, a glossy purple curtain shimmers in the back of the room, a pair of

black tights dangles from a huge screen, as if hastily discarded in a moment of frenzy. Potted tropical plants, amongst them flamingo flowers and orchids, frame this post-celebratory scene and, simultaneously, our field of vision. The image comes from Pauline Boudry's and Renate Lorenz's film installation *Toxic* (2012), although it could also be a production shot from the set of a Jack Smith film,⁴⁶ revealing the aftermath of a long night of playful filming.

The potted banana plants are no longer playing the parts of their bigger and more "natural" rooted cousins from a tropical jungle; parts of costumes are lying around, and the creatures from the film... Well, they must have been arrested for illicit behavior, as their photographs are now projected on a double screen in the familiar form of the mugshot photo – one side photographed *en face*, the other in profile. A change of photograph is audibly signaled with a clicking sound of the camera shutter. The first three mug shots reveal the faces and figures of two queer characters (the excessively womanly Werner Hirsch and the butchy Ginger Brooks Takahashi), the following ones show the same figures (as far as we can tell), but with their faces concealed underneath masks. Continuing our imaginary filmic encounter between Smith and the artistic duo from Berlin, we might say that after being spotted in their tropicalia camouflage and subjected to a violent form of visual power (the police mug-shot), Smith's creatures found a different way to escape the oppressive eye. In this part of the essay, I propose to look at the use of masks as another potential way of queering visibility.

Masks stop the eye of the observer on their opaque surfaces. They force us to puzzle over the meanings of the substitute face. The ten masks in *Toxic* simultaneously incite and frustrate our curiosity – each is made of different material and evokes divergent connotations. Their common denominator is suggested in the title of the piece – the masks seem to have been produced out of materials associated with uncleanliness and toxicity – bird feathers, old plastic bottles, animal fur, used stockings, medicine packets. By putting on masks fabricated from the toxic leftovers of a modern urban jungle, the already queer



Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite: Fag Face Scanning Station*, reclaim:pride with the ONE Archives and RECAPS Magazine, Christopher Street West Pride Festival, West Hollywood, CA, June 8, 2013. Photo by David Evans Frantz. Courtesy of the artist

subjects turn into cross-specied masked toxic subjects. Their masks, instead of hiding their wearers' non-normativity, further affirm their marginal position and bring into view other minoritarian figures and features, thus establishing a bond between a range of toxic subjects and objects. The supposed toxicity becomes externalized in the form of the mask. Boudry and Lorenz ask, "Might the discourse on toxicity, which installs violent hierarchies, also be able to introduce new subjectivities and new queer bonds (between people and people but also between people and objects, people and masks)?"⁴⁷ In *Toxic*, new queer bonds are introduced not only between people and masks, but also *through* the use of the masks. The illegible subjects on screen stand in stark contrast to their historical ancestors – the homosexual and transvestite men photographed by the Parisian police in the 1870's, whose photographs are presented as part of the *Toxic* installation.⁴⁸

In times of extensive visual surveillance, having your mugshot taken is only one of many possible moments of being subjected to a camera operated by some form of power – be it governmental, corporate, or military. It is also a situation that, unlike most violent forms of contemporary surveillance, the subject is fully aware of. The event of having one's mug shot taken as a result of being arrested constitutes the final stage, and often the result, of a long process of invisible surveillance techniques to which contemporary subjects are submitted. Perhaps precisely because it is nowadays often impossible to imagine oneself "from the viewpoint of [one...] whose sight is to be deceived"⁴⁹ – to evoke Thayer's first rule of camouflage – it is masks and masking that, for many contemporary artists and activists, become tools for defying oppressive forms of surveillance. Masks are material objects that simultaneously save our faces from being read, circulated, and archived *and* enable the subject to stand her ground in the public sphere.



Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite: Feminist Imperceptibilities*, conversation performance, The New Romantics Eyebeam New York, NY, April 25, 2014. Photo by Christine Butler. Courtesy of the artist

Facial Weaponization Suite (2011–present), a project by American artist Zach Blas, was conceived as a “protest against biometric facial recognition and the inequalities these technologies propagate”⁵⁰ and is carried out by organizing workshops on facial recognition, which conclude with the production of a mask composed on the basis of facial data collected from the participants. The end result is a single colored amorphous mask, which makes the subject undetectable to biometric recognition machines.⁵¹ The first type of mask produced – a pink *Fag Face Mask* – originated as a response to a 2008 article from the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, a result of a study in which faces of gay men, deprived of any cultural signifiers such as piercings or tattoos, were presented to participants for short exposure times. On the basis of the experiment, the authors suggested that people are capable of recognizing male sexual orientation in as short a time as 50 milliseconds.⁵² Regardless of whether these findings are accurate, the study remains congruous with a widespread desire to be able to recognize, at a single glance, the sexual, ethnic, or class identity of a subject.

In an essay titled *Escaping the Face* Blas asks, “what are the queer tactics of defacement to refuse standardized measurements of sexuality?”⁵³ The term Blas offers – politics of escape – aptly captures the affective dimension of the proposed political actions. However, upon closer investigation of the mechanisms of *Facial Weaponization Suite*, it becomes obvious that a politics of escape, understood as a radical rejection of the system, is achieved through confrontational and subversive means. First of all, the project directly engages the critiqued tools of oppression and turns them against their primary use. During the workshops, Blas uses a 3D facial scanning tool and 3D modeling software to collect data and design the masks. However, instead of averaging the data to create a “typical” queer face, Blas amasses and exaggerates them, so that the ultimate effect is illegible and excessive. Furthermore, the masks are supposed to engage the eye of the surveillance camera in a direct way, by presenting the materialized effects of control in its field of vision. The production of the mask as a material object, made through vacuum-forming plastic, is an important element



Zach Blas, *Face Cage #1*, 2014. Photo by Christopher O’Leary. Courtesy of the artist

of the project, as it renders tangible the inconspicuous workings of digital surveillance technologies. This is even more visible in Blas's *Face Cages* (2013–present), in which he turns biometric facial measurements into three-dimensional metal structures and mounts them on his face, materializing the violence of everyday encounters with cameras. This act of visualizing the invisible open-secret of governmental, corporate, and military surveillance is similar to mechanisms employed by artists' groups such as the Surveillance Camera Players, who organize actions during which they try to establish communication with the camera by addressing it through signs with messages.⁵⁴ As Lauren Berlant writes,

One of security culture's open secrets is [...] that there never were free sovereign subjects of politics or the market, but rather monitored subjects who are permitted to pass by and get on with things if their comportment does not go awry. A second open secret addresses the presumption that the ambient body politic of mass democracy enjoys a right to anonymity in the everyday.⁵⁵

By actively engaging surveillance cameras – nowadays often equipped with biometric scanning tools – SCP, Zach Blas and many other artists and activists “refuse [...] technology's capacity to seem neutral.”⁵⁶ In *Facial Weaponization Suite*, Blas not only addresses cameras, but also confuses the biometric eye by sending an illegible signal, impossible to read and classify.

The project also enters into an interesting dialogue with the dynamics of stereotyping and politics of averaging characteristic of contemporary techniques of governance. While biometric facial recognition is based on collecting data and calculating the typical features of certain identities – women, men, ethnic groups (and maybe soon, if studies like the one quoted above continue, sexual identities) – and then using them to interpret faces of surveilled subjects, in Blas's project data is collected from participants (sometimes, but not always, identifying themselves as a group with a common identity, e.g. queer men) and then, instead of creating an average type, produces a *single* face-image for all of the participants.⁵⁷ This way every participant can “wear the faces” of *all* those who gathered for the occasion of the workshop. The fact that everyone has the same



Karol Radziszewski, *Fag Fighters in Tallinn*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist

“fag face” or “black face”⁵⁸ is both a play on the stereotypical imaginings of the homophobe or racist, as well as a way of forging a new collective – a collective of subjects who choose to remain unidentified and who thus have the same tactical goal. As Blas writes, “within these antinomies of visibility, queer defacings occur—both performatively and utopically—expressing ways to relate, be together, and live that no capitalist state or biometric can contribute to or foster.”⁵⁹

Karol Radziszewski's *Fag Fighters* (2007) also features queer subjects with faces hidden behind pink material – plastic is replaced here with wool – and, similarly, negotiates visibility through engaging a stereotype of gay identity. Whereas Blas turns the cliché of gays looking alike against itself, Radziszewski takes another stereotype, that of the hypersexualized and promiscuous gay man, to its limit. In *Fag Fighters*, the young Polish artist invents a fictitious “fag guerrilla,” consisting of a group of gay men, who wear pink balaclavas and roam the streets of Eastern European cities, wreaking havoc, painting graffiti, taking explicit photos of themselves, and committing acts of sexual violence against straight men. Radziszewski not only radicalizes (and ridicules) the stereotype of excessive gay sexuality, but also directs it against subjects who, within the logic of the stereotype, are the most endangered by predatory and insatiable gay desire – heterosexual men. The fag guerrilla is thus a manifestation of a conservative's worst nightmare and, Radziszewski seems to suggest, it may also be the embodiment of his ulterior and repressed fantasy. Simultaneously, the masked fag fighters don't really “look gay.” Quite the contrary – their clothes, language, and style bear a resemblance to members of groups who still overtly express homophobic statements in the Polish public sphere – radical football fans and members of radical right-wing movements.⁶⁰ The photos and films presented as part of the *Fag Fighters* installation are strangely familiar to these subjects, presumed to be homophobic, as they resemble cultural images circulating in popular media and cinema of how “the bad boys party”.⁶¹ The crucial difference between excessively masculine hetero-boys and the fag fighters is the pink balaclava. A double shift is introduced through the use of the mask. First of all, a shadow of homoerotic sociality is cast upon cultural images of straight boys manifesting their power. Secondly, gay and queer boys – often depicted as timid



Karol Radziszewski, *Fag Fighters*, installation at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, “I've Always Wanted” solo exhibition, 2007. Courtesy of the artist

victims – are here portrayed as capable of poaching the attitude of those who usually act as oppressors, and of activating a potential aggressiveness, which may erupt when least expected. It's important to note that the fag fighters achieve their goals by acting as a collective of concealed identities. It is the masks that allow them to take revenge by performing it as an embodied, faceless stereotype. If, as Richard Dyer writes, “the role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible,”⁶² then in *Fag Fighters* the mechanism of stereotyping is rendered painfully perceptible (especially for the tormented straight men).

Radziszewski fabricates his dream of masked revenge through the construction of a number of artifacts – the work consists of amateur-quality videos⁶³ and photos, but also of graffiti and obscene slogans (“Fuck heteros up the ass”) painted on gallery walls, a fictitious tabloid with a front page devoted to the group (“This is How Perverts Have Fun”), an interview with the group published in *DIK Fagazine*,⁶⁴ a reconstruction of an underground passage splattered with paint, graffiti and posters, and interventions in public space.⁶⁵ The use of



Karol Radziszewski, *Fag Fighters: Prologue*, video still, 2007. Courtesy of the artist

vernacular media and genres suggests the artist's will to blur the borders of fantasy and reality, fiction and document, art and activism. The objects most strongly pointing to these ambiguities are the woolen pink balaclavas, which, as the *Fag Fighters: Prologue* shows, were knitted by the artist's grandmother.⁶⁶ The fifteen minute film demonstrates each step of the laborious process in detail, focusing on the grandmother's hands and their handling of subsequent machines – a wool winder, sewing machine, a simple needle and thread – needed to make the balaclavas. We hear the older woman doubting her skills, explaining the process, complaining about the machines and the cost of heating. The film closes with her handing the artist (hidden behind the hand-held camera) a finished balaclava, seemingly satisfied with the end result.

The Grandma-knitted wool balaclavas assume a tender provinciality when compared to Blas's vacuum-formed plastic masks designed with the use of modern technology and for a digital media environment. While both projects are doubtless embedded in their local settings – medium-sized Eastern European cities (Radziszewski's hometown, Białystok, and Warsaw, where he lives and works) and

American urban environments – instead of concentrating on the relation between material and locality, I'd like to point to the role of the familial in Radziszewski's *Fag Fighters*. How should we interpret the artist's gesture of inviting his grandmother to participate in a radically queer art project, a subversive utopia of gay opacity and emancipatory violence?

The motif of the familial, comprising family members, domestic architecture, as well as Catholic songs and images, often function as a nostalgic, but also inescapable network of reference in the young Polish artist's work.⁶⁷ In this context, it forces us to pose questions about the challenges of queer visibility projects, the inescapable attachments and interfering frames of reference, which have to be accounted for. When do we put on and when do we take off our masks?



Karol Radziszewski, *Fag Fighters: Prologue*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist

Whom do we hide from and how do we determine the margins of opacity? In *Fag Fighters: Prologue*, the line is clearly drawn – it is the viewer who never sees Radziszewski's face, as the film ends abruptly right at the moment when we'd expect the artist to turn the camera in his own direction, as he tries on the pink balaclava. The cut frustrates the wish to see the artist's face as does the only other visual document of the collaboration – a photograph showing the fag fighter and his grandmother sitting together on a flower patterned couch. Both look into the camera, but only her face is visible.

Through the dialectical capability of showing and hiding embedded in them, the masks allow queer subjects to manifest their presence without being incorporated within dominant regimes of visibility. Crucially, the masks forge solidarities and enable the creation of new, potentially active collectives. In the projects presented, the mask becomes a vehicle for a multiplicity of groups – human and non-human toxic subjects, random participants of workshops, as well as boys who just wanna have fun – creating collectives that are queer not because of the shared, essentially defined sexual identity of their subjects, but precisely because of their status in the visual sphere.

In lesson three of Hito Steyerl's *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational MOV File*, the viewer learns "how to become invisible by becoming a picture." Among the seven ways listed are camouflage and masking. We see the artist posed against a background of rapidly changing visual compositions from digital and analogue media environments – a white and gray color palette, a television test pattern, a resolution test chart. The artist presses her fingers against her face, coloring it with neon green streaks. As the background changes color and texture to synth pop rhythms, so do the chameleonic marks on the artist's face. Like many of Steyerl's work and essays, *How Not To Be Seen* is characterized by a certain fantastic surplus. Simultaneously anachronistic (through its reference to obsolete media) and from the distant future (presenting technologies of digital camouflage that haven't yet been invented) Steyerl's aesthetic invokes a timeless utopian space of potentiality. Camouflage and masking become models of speculation, of imagining a relation to the world where one can, and maybe should, "withdraw from representation."

The demonstration comes to an end when the artist starts rubbing her face energetically, covering it with translucent paint. Gradually, she becomes a picture – a very queer picture.



Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational. Mov File*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and the Vanabbemuseum in Eindhoven

Footnotes

1 Hanna Rose Shell, *Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 10.

2 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. A Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

3 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis. Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem.

6 On the conflict over representation within the LGBT movement see also: José Muñoz, "Queerness As Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," in idem, *Cruising Utopia: The Politics and Performance of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) and Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

7 Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 138. This statement is echoed by Hito Steyerl in *Spam of the Earth* (translated into Polish in this issue of *View*), who writes, "While every possible minority was acknowledged as a potential consumer and visually represented (to a certain extent), people's participation in the political and economic realms became more uneven." See Hito Steyerl, "Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," *e-flux* 32 (2012), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-spam-of-the-earth/>, accessed May 3, 2014. See also Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire. Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

8 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

9 There have been multiple inspiring publications reflecting on the methodology of writing queer history. See for example Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007).

10 *Mapping Desire. Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell, Gill Valentine (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

11 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

12 One possible answer is offered by Nicholas de Villiers through his use of the category of "opacity" in relation to the work of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and

Andy Warhol. See Nicholas de Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

13 This is of course not to say that queer subjects don't function in these domains and that despite their dominant heteronormative structure these domains can't be queered. An example of such practices is the recent emergence of queer artists interested in rituals, shamanism and polytheism. See for example the exhibition curated by AA Bronson in Witte de With Contemporary Art Center entitled *The Temptation of AA Bronson*, and the accompanying event entitled *The Ritual of Queer Rituals*, convened by AA Bronson and Carlos Motta, <http://www.wdw.nl/event/the-temptation-of-aa-bronson/>, accessed April 16, 2014.

14 Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" in eadem, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 230.

15 The film was originally screened as a part of Jack Smith's film program entitled *Horror and Fantasy at Midnight*. It is known under two titles – *Reefers of Technicolor Island* (the title referring to the cannabis plants, which appear in the film) and *Jungle Island* – and is the only film from the series, which is considered a "stand alone" film. In this essay, I will be using the title *Jungle Island*. I would like to thank Natalia Sielewicz from the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw for organizing a screening of the film in Warsaw during the Kinomuzeum festival, and for all her help in finding material for this article, as well as the employees of Lux agency for granting me access to the rare film and stills.

16 Often called the "Queen of Technicolor," Maria Montez was a Dominican actress and star of Technicolor exotic adventure movies in the 1940's, amongst others *White Savage* (dir. Arthur Lubin, 1943), *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (dir. Arthur Lubin, 1944), *Cobra Woman* (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1944). I will return to Montez's image and Jack Smith's love of tropicalia later in the article.

17 Shell, 23.

18 Brenda Richardson, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Warhol's Camouflage," in ex. cat.: *Andy Warhol, Camouflage* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1998), 16.

19 Shell, 15.

20 Almost all scholars writing on camouflage quote a conversation between Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso from 1915, during which Picasso – after seeing a military tank painted in different colored geometrical forms – exclaimed that it was the cubists who invented camouflage. See Shell, 18. Shell's book is a polemic with the dominant view in art history that camouflage grew solely out of modern art. According to Shell, popular visual media – such as photography and film – as well as discussion within biology and evolution theory had a much more significant influence on the development of military protective concealment.

21 Shell, 157.

22 On opposition towards Thayer's theory of camouflage see Shell, 59–63.

23 Abbott H. Thayer, "Camouflage," *The Scientific Monthly* 7 (1918): 481. Thayer's findings are compiled in *Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom*, on which he worked together with his son. See Gerald H. Thayer, *Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom: An Exposition of the Laws of Disguise Through Color and Pattern; Being a Summary of Abbott H. Thayer's Discoveries* (New York: Macmillan, 1909).

24 As Shell convincingly shows, Thayer's concept of camouflage was directly tied to his use of photography. Not only were his arguments supported by staged photographs, but also the way he imagined hunting prey – and hiding from the predator – was based on a static model of observing: as in photography. Thayer's "crucial moments" could be analyzed in relation to Henri Cartier Bresson's "decisive moments." One of the strongest criticisms waged at Thayer was precisely the fact that neither animal hunting nor modern warfare are static, but dynamic.

25 Abbott H. Thayer, "The Law That Underlies Protective Coloration," *The Auk* 13 (1896): 125, 128. The phenomenon of mimicry has a large literature in the humanities and especially in psychoanalysis. Most famously, it has been employed by Roger Caillois in his work on psychasthenia and by Jacques Lacan. See Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. J. Shepley, *October* 31 (1984) and Jacques Lacan, "The Line of Light," in idem, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 91–104.

26 On the politics of passing see Adrien Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," in eadem, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1: Selected Essays in Meta-Art*

1968-1992 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996). Available online:
<http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/Passing.pdf>, accessed April 27, 2014.

27 Shell, 140.

28 In *Rainbow Dance*, "a city dweller [...] blends in with a rural landscape. [...] Like a chameleon, the dancer's signature changes from hunter green, to apple green, to white specked with yellow, and so on throughout the visible spectrum." See Shell, 160. *Trade Tattoo*, a film about, as a title card announces, "the rhythm of work-a-day Britain," uses punctured film stock and animation to paint a portrait of labor in the UK. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o5Br_5kMQE, accessed May 1, 2014.

29 Ibidem, 135-136. Lye later used his experimental film skills to create one of the most successful and captivating instructional films about camouflage.

30 On landscape as a seemingly natural, but in fact highly ideological, form of visual representation see: *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002) and Martin Warnke, *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

31 Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," in eadem, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 279.

32 Juliane Rebentisch, "Camp Materialism," forthcoming in *Criticism* 56 (2014), special issue titled "Jack Smith Today", ed. Marc Siegel. I'd like to thank Juliane Rebentisch for sending me her essay.

33 Ibidem.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem.

36 Hélio Oiticica, "MARIO MONTEZ, TROPICAMP," *Afterall* 28 (2001). The original text was published in the Brazilian journal *Presença* in 1971. For the fascinating story of Oiticica's relationship with the New York underground see: Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, "TROPICAMP: PRE- and POST-TROPICALIA at Once: Some Contextual Notes on Hélio Oiticica's 1971 Text," *Afterall* 28 (2001).

37 Jack Smith expressed his love for Maria Montez in the beautiful and wacky manifesto *The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez* from 1962. As he wrote, "Those who still underrate Maria Montez, should see that the truth of Montez flix is only the truth of them as it exists for those who like them and the fact that others get anything out of them is only important because it is something they could miss and important because it is enjoyment missed. No one wants to miss an enjoyment and it is important to enjoy because it is important to think and enjoying is simply thinking – not hedonism, not voluptuousness – simply thought. [...] There is a world in Montez movies which reacting against turns to void." See: Jack Smith, "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith*, ed. J. Hoberman and Ed Leffingwell (New York and London: High Risk Books, 1997), 25–35.

38 Oiticica.

39 For an exhausting list of Smith's exotic motives and uses see: Juan Suárez, "Jack Smith, Hélio Oiticica, Tropicalism," forthcoming in *Criticism* 56 (2014), special issue titled "Jack Smith Today," ed. Marc Siegel. I'd like to thank Juan Suárez for allowing me to read the essay and Marc Siegel for providing me with materials from the forthcoming *Criticism* issue.

40 Oiticica.

41 Suárez.

42 The Woodland Pattern, also known as the M81 General Purpose Pattern, was a four color pattern (sand, brown, green, and black) worn by most US Army units from 1981 to 2008. In 2008, it was replaced by the Universal Camouflage Pattern, a pixelated pattern, also known as "digital camouflage." The M81 pattern quickly spread not only to other national armies (Polish soldiers still wear a version of the Woodland pattern – Pantera Woodland), but also to popular culture and street fashion. Warhol's use of the M81 in 1986 can thus also be interpreted as a reaction to a new dominant image in American visual culture. The artist also created camouflage pattern paintings and camouflage wallpaper, often presenting the paintings hung on same-patterned wallpapered walls.

43 Muñoz does not mention any interpretation of Warhol's camouflage self-portraits other than his own. I am referring here to Brenda Richardson's analysis

from her essay published in the *Andy Warhol: Camouflage* catalogue. Richardson interprets the series as an expression of Warhol's desire for invisibility, a desire driven by the uneasiness about his looks and the artists simultaneous shyness and sense of grandiosity. She writes, "Andy Warhol himself is the subject of the Camouflages. In a very real sense Warhol painted nothing *but* self portraits. The Camouflage paintings, however, cut very deep. [...] Warhol hated how he looked, but lived surrounded by mirrors. [...] Andy Warhol lived in camouflage" See Richardson, 28. This interpretation seems to result from Richardson's concentration exclusively on the figure, instead of analyzing – as I have tried to in this essay – the constant negotiation between figure and ground in camouflage images.

44 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 138. For Muñoz's analysis of Smith as a utopian artist see pages 169-171.

45 Muñoz, 139.

46 *Toxic*, like a number of other Boudry and Lorenz's works, was inspired by Smith's films and performances.

47 <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/toxic/>, accessed May 1, 2014. On the racial and sexual character of the contemporary discourse on toxicity see Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

48 In this context, it is worth recalling the acts of opposition towards being photographed in the early days of the police mug-shot practice. In *A Subject for the Rogues Gallery* (also known as *Photographing a Female Crook*), a short film from 1904, a woman is brought into the police station to be photographed. When placed in front of the camera she starts making faces and grimacing to make it impossible for the police to photograph her. See *Subject for Rogues Gallery*, dir. A.E. Weed, 1904, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VxGqjtuJuE>, accessed April 29, 2014.

49 Thayer, *Camouflage*, 484.

50 <http://www.zachblas.info/projects/facial-weaponization-suite/>, accessed April 30, 2014. On biometrics as a tool of visual surveillance and control see: Kelly

Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

51 As Blas notes, every participant of the workshop receives a mask to take home. See Alicia Eler, *The Facelessness of Tomorrow Begins Today. An Interview with Zach Blas*, <http://hyperallergic.com/73888/the-facelessness-of-tomorrow-begins-today/>, accessed April 30, 2014.

52 Nicholas O. Rule, Nalini Ambady, "Brief Exposures: Male Sexual Orientation is Accurately Perceived at 50 ms," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008): 1100-1105.

53 Zach Blas, "Escaping The Face: Biometric Facial Recognition and the Facial Weaponization Suite," *Journal of the New Media Caucus* 9 (2013), available online: <http://median.newmediacaucus.org/caa-conference-edition-2013/escaping-the-face-biometric-facial-recognition-and-the-facial-weaponization-suite/>, accessed April 30, 2014.

54 See the SCP website: <http://www.notbored.org/the-scp.html>, accessed April 30, 2014. Similar surveillance performances, although without presenting their own bodies to the cameras, are carried out by !Mediengruppe Bitnik, who hack CCTV cameras and propose their operators a game of chess. See <http://chess.bitnik.org/about.html>, accessed April 30, 2014. On surveillance art see *Conspiracy Dwellings: Surveillance in Contemporary Art*, eds. Outi Remes, Pam Skelton (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

55 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 243.

56 Ibidem.

57 The obvious context for biometrical facial recognition are the nineteenth century photographic practices of Alphonse Bertillon and Francis Galton – two differently conceived methods of documenting and archiving the photography of different "types" of people. Paradoxically, Blas's merging of thirty "queer men's faces" into one could be seen as similar to Galton's method of creating composite portraits based on superimposing faces of the same "type." However, through creating an amorphous un-human mask, Blas escapes this comparison. On the

different techniques of Bertillon and Galton see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 3-64.

58 The black mask was also created by Blas as part of the project. As the artist writes, the mask "explores a tripartite conception of blackness, divided between biometric racism (the inability of biometric technologies to detect dark skin), the favoring of black in militant aesthetics, and black as that which informatically obfuscates." See <http://www.zachblas.info/projects/facial-weaponization-suite/>, accessed April 30, 2014.

59 Blas, *Escaping*.

60 Homophobic chants are still common in Polish stadiums. Over the past few years, Poland has also witnessed a growing alliance between radical football fan groups and nationalist and right-wing political groups. See Małda Szcześniak, "Tęczowe szaliki, czyli za cztery lata będzie za późno," *Konteksty* 3-4 (2012): 145-152.

61 They resemble, for example, popular Polish gangster films from the 1990s.

62 Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes," in idem, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 16.

63 One of them, *Fag Fighters in Tallinn*, can be viewed here: <http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/radziszewski-karol-fag-fighters-in-tallinn>, accessed May 3, 2014.

64 *DIK Fagazine* is a bilingual queer art zine edited by Karol Radziszewski. See <http://www.dikfagazine.blogspot.com/>, accessed May 1, 2014.

65 The underground passage – a typical urban space, usually codified as dangerous – was constructed for the first presentation of the project, which took place in the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw in 2007 as part of Radziszewski's first major solo exhibition titled "I Always Wanted."

66 All nine balaclavas used in the project were made by Radziszewski's grandmother. See: Karol Radziszewski, *Fag Fighters: Prologue*, 2007. The film can be viewed here: <http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/radziszewski-karol-fag-fighters-prolog>, accessed May 1, 2014.

67 See for example another video, which the artist collaborated on with his grandmother, entitled *Praise the Flowery Meadows, 2007*, <http://vimeo.com/87481145>, accessed May 2, 2014.