Identity Politics and the Performative: Encounters with Recent Jewish Art

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Abstract

My research explores the interplay between identity politics, as it has emerged in Britain since the early 1980s and Jewish identity in the visual arts. I ask why there has not been a movement to make Jewish art visible within mainstream art practice and why Jewish experiences in art have been invisible under the rubric of cultural diversity.

My thesis has four main interpretive themes. The first theme is a comparative study of the strategies employed by Black and Asian artists and institutions and Jewish artists and institutions. Here I explore some of the different forces at play within the histories of the two forms of curatorial practice. The second theme examines some of the key thinkers who have framed the debates on Black identity. Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer and Frantz Fanon inform my understanding of the development of the elision of Jewish identity within identity politics, premised upon debates grounded in geographical specificities of post-colonial diasporas and hierarchies of oppression as understood through the assumed corporeal visibility of blackness. Judith Butler offers a way of thinking about difference that is not premised upon markers of visibility. In the third theme, through Butler's reworking of Althusser's interpellation theory I question the lack of choice in how a subject forms his or her identity. Finally I study the practice of three artists, Oreet Ashery, Ruth Novaczek and Deborah Kass who, by using the cipher of an avatar, undermines any reliance on reading of self through the visual in their work.

By questioning the visible and the visual in the formation and/or recognition of Jewish identity I argue that the issue has wide implications. By problematising the reliance on the visual or visibility, identity politics can reach beyond the reliance on definition and categorization which continues to exclude as much as include.

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Foreword

Racism is the cornerstone of my political awareness. The reasons are probably twofold - the ethos of my family of equality and justice, but also because racism has always implicated me. My first brutal awakening to this was as a primary school child being taunted over a protracted period of time and eventually physically attacked with my younger sister by other children from the neighborhood. I grew up within a religiously orthodox Jewish and fairly closed community and had no concept of Jewish Identity that was separate from Judaism the religion, so when I gave up on religion I gave up on Jews. Difference was divisive and I embraced universalism. It took me a while to see some of the differences conferred by my upbringing and even longer to work out what to do with them. Those tensions are heightened within institutional settings, and what has sometimes been most distressing is that there is generally so little knowledge about the difference of Jewishness that there is no route to channel the frustration. Any complaint and you are being 'hysterical' and any misunderstanding is your own fault – the term anti-Semitism dare not even be mentioned. The anti –Semitism I have encountered as an adult is generally more covert, unstated and often unacknowledged.

Introduction: From Assimilation to Difference

Why after 20 years of art exploring identity politics are there so few artists who are Jewish, working with, or even acknowledging their identity as Jews in their art making? Why do those who do, feel their work is not taken seriously? What does this reveal about the place of contemporary Jewish identity in the West? In this thesis I examine the works of three artists working at the threshold of Jewish identity and developing a critical language through which to theorize their work. The artists are Ruth Novaczek, Oreet Ashery and Deborah Kass. I have investigated their work through published writings; interviews with the artists and through scrutinizing their art and modes of practice. My critique is informed by the post-colonial debates[1] as the most cogent to the artists' influences as well as writings on Jewish identity[2].

I have long been concerned with the question of Jewish identity in art practice. From my MA research on Mark Rothko and the changes in the way his work was interpreted from the formalism of Clement Greenberg through to the Jewish mysticism of Thomas Hess. I embarked on the PhD research because, through the MA I had became intrigued by the ways in which my artwork, reading and research influenced each other, in my thinking, making and writing.

One of the issues for modern Jewry is the tension between assimilation, acculturation and separatism. There is generally confusion between the

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[1] Debates such as those expounded by Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pluto Press 1986; Homi Bhabha, *the location of culture*, Routledge, 1994; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso 1993.

[2] Writers such as Bryan Cheyette, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Jews and Jewishness in the writings of George Eliot and Frantz Fanon', *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the gravity of history*, (eds.) Ansell, Pearson, Keith, Parry, Benita, Squires, Judy, Lawrence and Wishart, 1997, pp. 106-126; Jonathan Boyarin, 'The Other Within and The Other Without', *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, Laurence J Silberstein and Robert L Cohn, (eds.), New York University Press, 1994, pp. 424-449; Daniel Boyarin, 'Goyim naches: The Manliness of the Mentsh' in *Modernity, Culture and The Jew*; (ed.), Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, Polity Press, 1998, pp. 63-90; Juliet Steyn, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999

terminology of assimilation and acculturation. Alex Gordon, a writer about contemporary Jewish identity,[3] explains that assimilation is often used as a conflation of acculturation and assimilation in common parlance and I will use it thus in this thesis. Gordon explains that Herbert Gans, the American sociologist, suggested that assimilation, 'refers to inter-ethnic social relationships, including marriage, while the latter "is concerned with the giving up of the ethnic culture in favour of mainstream American [or whatever mainstream] culture"[4]. There is no agreement amongst Jews as to where they stand in relation to this debate. Different solutions are found within different contexts. However this seeming manoeuverability has a profound effect on the way the Jewish 'community' is seen, or not, as well as the attitudes of individual Jews. The debates in relation to Jewish identity have been in direct contrast to those circulating around Black and Asian identity in Britain[5]. In some ways the issue of assimilation that much of Jewish identity interest rests on has given way to a politics of difference that could be characterized as invisibility vs. visibility, which is at the core of much of what is at stake for me in this paper. The binary distinction between the visible and invisible other is fundamental to the position of Jews in the contemporary West. In my understanding of visibility and invisibility I am building on the distinction made by Frantz Fanon.

> The Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behaviour are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed...But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I

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[3] Gordon, Alex, 'From Ambivalence to Contradiction: Post-modernity, Time and American-Jewish Identity' *in New Voices in Jewish Thought* , Volume Two, Jonathan Webber (ed.), Limmud Publications, 1999

[4] ibid., p. 24

[5] As an artist who is practicing in London, I have chosen to focus primarily on Britain for this research. I will also be referring to the United States to some extent as the research into Jewish identity there is more developed than here.

> am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance.[6]

According to the *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: the Parekh Report,* commissioned by the Runnymede Trust, 'Jews in Britain are often characterised – by the media and politicians and by some Jewish leaders – as a single community'.[7] The notion of community is a contested issue, constituted through discursive contexts with no homogeneity. There are, of course, no longer the certainties of the fully-fledged essential self and I need to approach Jewish identity from a position of complexity. To make it even more difficult there is no geographical specificity, and no agreement as to whether Jewry is an ethnicity, religion, or as some say, a people. The concept of diaspora is one that would offer a framework for understanding the character of these complexities. However the term itself is now used in many contexts and not necessarily understood in a way that describes the particular difficulties of understanding Jewish identity.

The statistics of the Board of Deputies of British Jews' of approximately 280,000 Jews in Britain relies on affiliation to Synagogues for its definition of Jews (this includes Orthodox synagogues, United, Reform and Conservative) and there are other formal affiliations such as Zionist Youth Groups, The Jewish Socialist Group and the Jewish Council for Racial Equality[8]. However, many Jews would consider themselves Jews, culturally only, that is they have no formal affiliation to Judaism but have a Jewish parent or Jewish upbringing and so 'feel Jewish'. And of course there are Jews who would not willingly identify as Jewish at all but would still be considered Jewish, according to Jewish law, as the line of descent is matrilinial.[9]

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[6] Fanon, Frantz *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pluto Press 1986, p. 115-116

[7] *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report,* The Runnymede Trust, 2000, paras. 3.13, p. 32

[8] The Board of Deputies of British Jews was set up in 1760 to represent the interests of British Jews. The delegates are voted for through the synagogues of Britain inhttp://www.bod.org.uk/community_aboutbod.shtml

[9] Any formal categorization of 'race' in a post holocaust world will have the shadow of the holocaust and the eugenics project over it, although this law predates eugenics by approx. 2 thousand years, and has no mandate to murder or punish those who do not fulfil the prerequisite criteria. In contrast according to Katya Gibel Azoulay the *halachic* (lawful) insistence on a matrilineal descent of Jewry inscribes acknowledgment

For the purposes of this paper, when I write about the Jewish community I will be referring to the community in a conservative sense as that identified by the Jewish Board of Deputies as people formally affiliated to a synagogue.

In the Census of 2001, the questionnaire asked the population of Britain to describe their religion for the first time in over 150 years. According to the statistics analysed by the Jewish Policy Research Group, 266,740 people put Jewish in the religion box. The Jewish Policy Research Group adjusted the figure to a minimum of 296,000 and a maximum of 342, 000 after a survey of London Jews where they found that '6.4% of Jews said they did not report their religion as Jewish, putting either, "None" or putting nothing at all, ...the equivalent NRR (no religion reported) in the Leeds survey was even higher at 8.5%'[10].

So there is little agreement amongst Jews themselves as to what constitutes a Jew. This disagreement makes choices of recording and visibility even more difficult. A further issue regarding ethnic monitoring forms and the recording of communities is that state monitoring was largely set up as a way of identifying need and the distribution of resources. Jews in Britain and the United States are commonly considered to be middle class and living in the leafy suburbs. As such they are not seen to need state resources. The census starts to reveal the flaws in these assumptions, for example, in London, there is no Borough that has no Jews, including some of the poorest in London such as Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney and according to the American newspaper, *The Jewish Week*, 'one third of the Jewish population in New York City is at or near the poverty level'[11].

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of impurity into the heart of Jewish identity, Azouley Katya Gibel, 'Jewishness after Mount Sinai: Jews, Blacks and the (Multi) Racial Category', *Identities* Vol. 8 (2), p. 226.

[10] Graham, David, 'So How many Jews Are there in the UK? The 2001 UK Census and the size of the Jewish population', *JPR News*, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Spring 2003, p. 4

[11] http://www.thejewish week.com/news/newscontent

In part the predicament of British Jewry is that it operates within an outmoded ethos of difference, through the model of assimilation[12]. Zygmunt Bauman suggests,

> the age into which a minority is emancipated will to a large extent determine the priorities of its self-identification, not only at the time of emancipation itself but into the future as well[13]

In the paper *Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation*, Bauman outlines some of the expectations and limits of the assimilation project, pointing out that the 'legal emancipation of Western Jews took place in the heyday of the Enlightenment'. [14] But yet social emancipation is a different matter. He cites various examples of the delusions of the Jewish assimilationist of being accepted fully as fellow countrymen by their gentile peers,

> Under the double pressure of gentile resentment and the inner paradoxes of the assimilatory drive, the assimilated culture enthusiasts manoeuvered themselves into a situation exactly the opposite of the one they sought[15].

Assimilation, as outlined in Bauman's paper is a particularly middle class project, as opposed to the revolutionary project, which came out of a working class community of Jews who sought a different kind of universalism, of change for

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[12] Apart from the Haredi community. See also p. 72 for statistics on levels of Haredi poverty in Stamford Hill London.

[13] Bauman, Zygmunt, "Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation", *Telos 77*, p. 52, quoting Mosse, George L, "Jewish Emancipation: Between *Bildung and Respectability*" in The *Jewish Response to German Culture: From The Enlightenment to the Second World War*, Jewuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (eds.), (Boston University Press of New England, 1986 p. 1

[14] Assimilation went hand-in hand with emancipation. In recent years it has been heavily critiqued by Homi Bhabha, Zygmunt Bauman and many others on the basis that assimilation requires conformity to rules set by the dominant community at the expense of the minority community. However, in the 19th and early 20th Century in Jewry at least, it was considered to be a deliverance from oppression.

[15] Bauman, op. cit. p. 54

everyone. [16] Bauman mainly uses the experiences of 19th Century Germany as his model and quotes Frederick Barth, who outlines three different strategies for minority groups reacting to their inferior status within a society; the first is to pass, in other words to assimilate into the wider community; the second is to accept minority status but work within it, maintaining ethnic particularity within a protected or private sphere; and thirdly, to play up the ethnic particularity to strengthen the power base of the group and make spaces for the group within the dominant society. [17] How much of this stands today?

Broadly speaking, I would suggest, the Jews in Britain, have overwhelmingly chosen the second option, that is to say, of being a Jew (culturally and/or religiously) within the home and British[18] in the outside world, although of course there is every shade of attitude in British Jewry from strict orthodoxy, which maintains a 'ghetto' life, to an eschewing of any particularity.

The division of public and private in relation to the status of the Jewish community was first established with the French Revolution, when the Jews (and others) in France became citizens. They were the last group to be enfranchised - on September 27, 1791 - three days before the closing of the National Assembly, but this was achieved for Jews *as* individuals, not *as* Jews, as a member of the French National Assembly stated at the time "to the Jew as an individual everything: To the Jews as a people, nothing"[19]. Jewish leaders had petitioned the National Assembly on the basis that civil rights are independent of religion. They argued, on the grounds of being a religious group only, that they should be

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[16] Steyn, Juliet, also states this in her book *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999, 'assimilation was, after all, a middle class project'. She makes this point to elaborate on how the Jewish community policed itself against elements deemed more of a risk to incurring anti-Semitism from the gentile population. This became particularly urgent at the time of the Royal Commission 1902-3, which was the precursor to the first aliens act p. 39

[17] Barth, Frederick, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Bergen: Universitets Forlaget, 1969, pp. 14,17,31, (Bauman, ibid., p. 68)

[18] That is, in the perception of such Jewry, to not appear obviously Jewish in behaviour, which implies an incompatibility of the two – that is, you cannot 'appear' Jewish and be fully British.

[19] Quoted by Azouley Katya Gibel, 'Jewishness after Mount Sinai: Jews, Blacks and the (Multi)Racial Category', *Identities* Vol. 8 (2), p. 229

granted the right to be citizens.[20] Since then Western Jewry has generally concurred with this argument. This is reflected in ethnic monitoring forms where the category Jew is mainly absent (except in Hackney) and also in the British Census forms where the recent addition of "Jewish" as a category is listed under religion.

While much of post 2nd World War Jewry has identified either with Israel or the Holocaust as a way of defining Jewishness (either outside of or in addition to Judaism), there is a shift taking place both in the need for those identifications and in the desire to assimilate. [21] This stems, in part, from a plethora of other examples of how to be a member of an ethnic minority other than the conventional Jewish model as outlined above. Not surprisingly, this attitude is also replicated amongst artists. The artists who I interviewed all said that their involvement with multicultural debates and literature had had a formative influence on them and their art practice however they all expressed disappointment at the lack of Jewish voices in those debates.

As an artist I have always been interested in and felt a certain affinity with artists whose work deals with issues emanating from identity politics, such as Sonia Boyce and Keith Piper (who are the same generation as me). Despite this, in the 1980s it did not occur to me to bring my preoccupation with racism or identity politics into my own work. It took until the early 1990s for me to have the courage to introduce a little 'Jewishness' into the art[22] – and even then I was wary, at first making works with covert references, precisely because I felt like the first one doing it and also because of the 'don't make trouble' line that I had grown up with as a Jew.

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[20]Stratton, John, *Coming Out Jewish*, Routledge, 2000, p. 39

[21] *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report,* The Runnymede Trust, 2000, paras. 3.15-3.16, p. 33

[22] I have always been aware of how my upbringing has given me a particular view on the world and read a lot about Jewish identity but felt too self-conscious to put it into my art work.

There have of course been many Jewish artists, especially in the United States, but most of them subscribed to what could be characterized as mainstream practices and concerns in their work. There have in Britain been some 'Jewish' artists such as Mark Gertler (fig. i), David Bomberg (fig. ii), Joseph Herman, artists who have celebrated Jewish life or at least incorporated it into some of their imagery. But these artists are from a different time and conceptual framework than that of today.

Kitaj (fig. iii) was probably the first to try and articulate a contemporary Jewish position as an artist in Britain His *First Diasporist Manifesto,* published in 1989 aimed to give an explanation of his work within a broadly Jewish framework, that identifies not only as Jewish but incorporating the action of exile[23]. His resisting of a hierarchical, or special take on diaspora is laudable but it reads almost like an apologia. For example, in the prologue page, right up front, is a quote from Philip Roth in his book, *The Counterlife*, "The poor bastard had Jew on the brain'.

The hesitancy of Kitaj is echoed as recently as 2000 in a book published by Routledge called *Coming Out Jewish*[24]. Implicated in the title is an awkward revelation, which speaks of the continuing lack of confidence in Britain and particularly in British Academe, to be visible as a Jew, which, considering Jews are not officially a marginalized community in Britain seems somewhat strange[25].

Jewish identity as a field of academic enquiry is much more developed in the US. In this thesis I argue that in Britain, the politics of Blackness and Post-Colonial discourses are much more developed than Jewish identity discourses. Few Jewish academics in Britain have chosen to problematise the construction

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[23] Kitaj, R.B., *First Diasporist Manifesto*, Thames and Hudson, 1989
[24] See Stratton, John, *Coming Out Jewish*, Routledge, 2000
[25] See p.14 of this introduction re: ethnic monitoring.

of the Jew as a mainstream figure. Only Bryan Cheyette[26] as a literary critic, Juliet Steyn[27]and Griselda Pollock[28], in art history spring to mind. Art practice reflects this also. While there is a developed Black art discourse and institutional support for the development of these forms of production, artists, critics or art historians commenting on Jewish identity have never had the same kind of impetus to develop a discourse in the same way.[29] What I hope to do in this study is to examine the history of this and begin to propose some future artistic and critical directions for study and art practice in which Jewish identity plays a part.

Of the generation of artists born in the 1960s, the norm amongst artists of Jewish descent is to remain invisible as Jews in the art world – arguably a familiar place from which to operate as there have been a significant number of Jewish artists at the center of art in Western modernism but not artists who identify as artists as Jews. There are relatively few artists in Britain who make work dealing with "Jewish issues" and the artists who do, tend to make work that is more concerned with ritual or history; that is the 'lost' ghetto or the holocaust. These include Rachel Lichtenstein, whose work mainly involves excavating the Jewish East End of London as a vehicle to explore her own journey to Jewish identity, Miranda Lopatkin whose work plunders her family history, Verdi Yahooda, whose photographic work shows Yemeni Jewish rituals or views of the Israeli desert and Lili Markiewicz who explores a metaphorical terrain, to deal with memory of lost Jewry and the Holocaust. I am in no way

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[26] A few examples -Cheyette, Brian, *Constructions of 'The Jew' In English Literature and Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993; *Modernity, Culture and "The Jew"*, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, (ed.), Polity Press, 1998.

[27] Steyn, Juliet (ed.), *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics & Art*, Manchester University Press, 1997;Steyn, Juliet, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999

[28] Pollock, Griselda, 'Is Feminism to Judaism as Modernity is to Tradition: Critical Questions on Jewishness, Femininity and Art', Grodzinski, Vera, Bohm- Duchen, Monica (eds.), *Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity In Contemporary British Art* , Lund Humphries, 1996, pp.15-28; *Issues in Architecture, Art and Design*, Vol. 5 No. 1, Gender and Ethnicity, University of East London, 1997, 'The Presence of the Future: Feminine and Jewish Difference: Intricate but I Hope Not Incoherent thoughts on Identity and Art' p. 37-63

[29] I explore this in greater depth in Chapter 1.

prescribing a 'correct' path for artistic/creative enquiry but what interests me and drives my research and practice is the need to investigate the complexities of being a Jew in the contemporary world. The artists I have chosen to look at in the final chapter of the thesis, who are Ruth Novaczek, Oreet Ashery and Deobrah Kass, all grapple with the difficulties of contemporary Jewish representation. They each reveal the impossibility of a simple reading of self and identity through a performative strategy of the avatar.

The question of what is Jewish art is not one that I am particularly interested in, however in relation to terms used in this paper, I would say that 'Jewish artist' is an artist who deals with questions of Jewish identity in their work while 'an artist who is Jewish' is an artist who makes no overt enquiry into this subject in the work but is of Jewish descent.

Some of the questions that I felt needed answering when I embarked on this research were to do with the possibilities and limits of an art practice that explored contemporary Jewish identity. Bound up with that question was the further enquiry into what contemporary Jewish identity is or could be in Britain, as opposed to the kind of community in which I grew up. Much of the inspiration to articulate this I have derived from Black identity politics as well as from some of the writers that I will be critiquing in the following two chapters[30]. What I have been looking for is a forward looking, questioning, politically radical identity that places itself alongside other minorities rather than the choices that have seemed open to me – either to assimilate or to live within an inward looking orthodox community – neither of which are options I have wanted to take up.

Over the last few years, there have emerged two new expressions of Jewish identity, or ways in which Jews can think of themselves as Jews. The first is

[30] The three artists that I interviewed, Oreet Ashery, Ruth Novaczek and Deborah Kass all articulated the same point.

YaD ,[31] which was set up by Josephine Burton and Jonathan Walton in May 2000 and is primarily concerned with music, although it has aspirations to work with all forms of art, including visual arts. It presents itself as a hybrid multi-vocal organisation. They run club evenings using musicians and bands who are either middle eastern in origin or a mix of influences from both Eastern and Western, Jewish and non-Jewish sources. The club evenings have been very popular both within the young Jewish community and others, so much so that they have regular club evenings at the *ICA* (London) as well as the nightclub *Cargo*, in Hoxton, London.

> We aim to provide a relevant point of cultural reference for Jews in a modern day, multicultural Britain. By presenting the contemporary face of ethnic Jewish culture to the British arts scene, and promoting inclusivity among ethnic communities through joint cultural events, we hope to challenge received perceptions of identity.[32]

The public nature of this venture; that it is advertising itself as inclusive and is presenting at what is perceived as a 'trendy London venue', is new, and exciting and shows a new-found confidence and pride in Jewish identity.

The second is the comedian Ali G, who provided a pivotal moment in my research[33]. This character, invented by Sacha Baron Cohen, got me thinking about performing, and a way of theorizing the decoupling of race [34]from appearance, through Performativity. I wondered what Ali G said about

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[31] *Yad* means hand in Hebrew and, similarly to Muslim cultures, is a symbol of comradeship, peace and a ward against 'the evil eye'

[32] http://www.yadarts.com/about/index.htm

[33] Ali G is a comedian who was introduced to the British public via Channel 4's *11 O'clock Show*. In December 1998, Ali G left the programme after series 3 to broadcast his own show called *The Ali G* Show in March 2000.

[34] 'Race' is not a term I feel particularly comfortable with as it implies distinct and fixed classifications and essentialises the self. See Gilroy, Paul, *Between Camps, Nations Culture and the Allure of Race*, Allen Lane, 2000 for a thorough explication of this theme.

contemporary British Jewry, where it saw itself and through the responses to Baron-Cohen's character, how Jews are perceived by non-Jews. The indeterminacy of Ali G reflects the wider Jewish situation (I also explored this visually in my piece, 'What Am I To You'). I felt there was something significant in the indeterminacy that allowed for a rethink, not just of Jewish identity but about identity as a whole. Judith Bulter's theorizing has allowed me to think about the way we live out an identity through social conformity[35] and to ask the question of how to step outside that conformity rather than live a life that has been prescribed by those limits. I had to look at who and how one is prescribed or interpellated into their 'race' or community as well. It seems it is a two way street. In the landscape of Identity politics the emphasis is still on definition and self-definition[36]. In trying to think through the mechanics of definition and self definition through interpellation I do not make any great claims, I merely hope to find some room for manoeuvre in the so-called race debates, some 'agency' so that the choices are more than the either/or of assimilation and community orthodoxy[37] or in other terms, passing or a retreat into ethnocentric conservatism.

I would like to add that for all the theorizing, there is a lived reality which may often contradict one's finest ideals – that is to say that I don't expect to eradicate racism here (would that it were so easy!). I am aware of both a rise in the optimism and activity of the British National Party and a retreat to easy essentialisms in much of the media. For example, the cacophony of 'big butt' adulation on TV documentaries[38] and the complicity of so called left wing

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[35] This can be through the conformity of the 'community', the wider community or the state or a combination or all of these.

[36] We can see this articulated through the ethnic monitoring forms and in mission statements of organisations catering for 'culturally diverse' artists, for example (see ch. 2, pp. 52-55).

[37] Community orthodoxy is distinct from religious orthodoxy.

[38] 'Buteous Gluteious: Human Bottom as an icon and the part it plays in different cultures' (Parabulum Productions) was broadcast on 13th April 2003 on Channel 4, which foregrounded a woman having plastic surgery to enhance her bottom for the pleasure of her boyfriend. The commentators were a range of black men talking about how black men liked big bums and white men liked big breasts. There was no attempt at contextualisation or critique whatsoever.

members of Parliament in the age old 'blame the victim' policies on immigration disgusts me. Both these instances, in my view herald a new acceptability of racist views in quarters where this would have been unacceptable until recently. But while activism is necessary there has to be a place for theory also or a place to think through the issues abstractly.

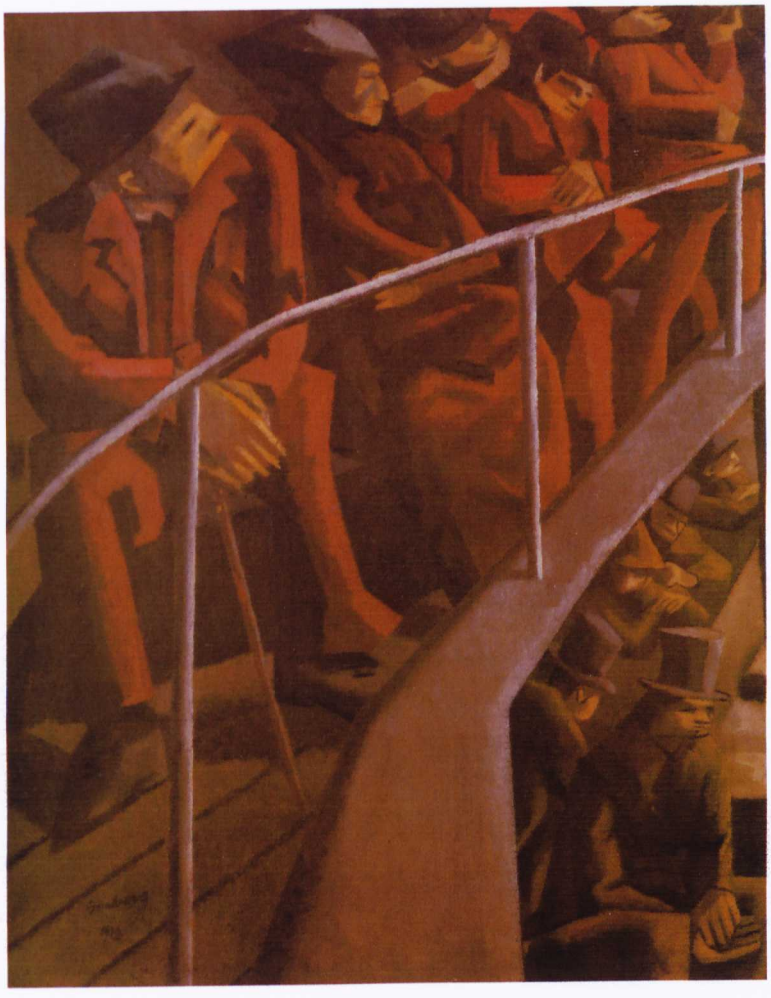
The paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter examines some of the histories of curatorial practice in Britain, comparing the growth of the Black Art movement from the 1980s to the present with some pertinent points within the history of Jewish art in 20th Century Britain, its role of within the Jewish community and the mainstream. The chapter questions the role Jewish art institutions have played in continuing marginalisation of Jewish identity in art practice and the marginalisation of Jewish identity in the field of cultural diversity in the arts. I suggest that within the Jewish community the problem lays in "cultural insiderism" and that within the world of cultural diversity in the arts such as the Institute for the International Visual Arts (InIVA) the elision has been unwittingly set by debates within cultural studies.[39] The second chapter critiques the growing conflation of the terms Black and ethnic minority within the cultural studies debates, which empowered one group while excluding other groups. In the third chapter I consider the politics of visibility and invisibility. I site my thinking through the notion of interpellation as foregrounded by the philosopher, Louis Althusser in the 1960s and rearticulated by Judith Butler in the 1990s to try and find ways of thinking about difference, subjectivity and agency that are not premised on skin colour as the primary factor. In the fourth chapter I look at three contemporary Jewish artists Ruth Novaczek, Oreet Ashery and Deborah Kass, whose work deals with issues of camouflage, performativity and otherness in relation to Jewish identity before drawing some conclusions.

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[39] Cultural insidersim as outlined by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993, p. 3, is the term first used as 'ethnic insiderism' by Sollors, Werner, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1986. See p. 42, footnote 98 for a fuller description of the term.



(i) Mark Gertler, *Rabbi and his Grandchild*, 1913,
oil on canvas, 50.8 x 45.9 cm,
Southampton City Art Gallery



(ii) David Bomberg, *Ghetto Theatre*, 1920,
oil on canvas, 75.2 x 62.5 cm,
Ben Uri Art Society, London



(iii) R B Kitaj, *The Jew Etc,* 1976-unfinished
oil and charcoal on canvas, 152.4 x122 cm
collection of the artist

Chapter 1.1: Curatorial Choices

When looking for precursors to an art practice that explores issues of Jewish identity in Britain one would probably need to look back to the early part of the 20th century. Artists such as Mark Gertler (fig. i) and David Bomberg (fig ii) painted the Jewish world around them – of the East End, the families, the rituals. The next generation of artists, such as those who made up the London School, such as Leon Kossof, Frank Auerbach and R B Kitaj, chose instead to work within the high Modernist ideal of what they considered to be an internationalist artistic language. Kitaj more recently has broken ranks and depicted the Birkenau edifice in *If Not, Not,* (1976), painted *The Jew, etc* (1976-79) (fig. iii) and wrote *The First Diasporist Manifesto* in 1989. However, Kitaj is an exception, and having received such antipathetic reviews for his retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1994, he has since moved back to the United States of America, blaming his move on anti-Semitism in the British art world.

What is Jewish art anyway? It cannot now simply reflect the community - that would be to ignore much of the discourse and the shifts in practice within the avant garde over the last 40 years, namely Conceptualism, (but also including the broad range of practices within feminist art and the Black Art movement in the 1980s in Britain), not to mention a more critical understanding of visual representation in which art is no longer a 'reflection' or 'expression' of society and community but a site for its imagining and production[40]. These movements built on one another: Feminist art fought to expose male hegemony in the art work (but often took for granted Western and white aesthetic hegemony[41]).

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[40] All these terms have contested meanings, depending on who is framing the histories. I call them movements here for convenience sake but often it was not that clear cut.

[41] Feminism was probably the first discourse of difference but it wrote out any cultural difference in the 1970s, see Bloom, Lisa 'Ethnic Notions and Feminist Strategies of the 1970s: Some Work by Judy Chicago and Eleanor Antin' – Souslouff, Catherine, M. (ed), *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*, University of

'Black arts'[42] broke new ground as it developed a language of plurality and forced the acknowledgement of white, cultural hegemony.

Black art draws on debates of post colonialism, exile, diaspora and racism and so for artists wishing to explore the issues of Jewish identity from radical perspectives there is much to learn. Although these are discourses that tend to exclude or elide the Jewish experience, so, in Britain at least Jewish artists dealing with these issues are caught up in a paradox of working within a framework of double exclusion [43]: invisibility from the mainstream *as Jews*, and exclusion from the Black art world *as white.*

It is not my aim here to deliver a comprehensive historiographic mapping of Black Arts of the 1980s[44] but to look at the limits of the debates on Black arts through its curatorial strategies and how Jewish art is elided in this context and why. In looking at the development of Black arts, or indeed the growth of any art practice, one has to look at curatorial practice. Eddie Chambers identified very early on in his career, at art school, that a key concern was to make Black artists visible: it was necessary to organize exhibitions of Black artists work in order to put Black art on the art map and as such it needs to be acknowledged that the decisions made by the artists was a result of real politik.[45] .

California Press, 1999, pp. 135-163. See also Judith Butler's debates on the universal woman in the first chapter of Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge,1990.

[42] I refer to 'Black arts' as the group of artists who made work exploring Black identity in the 1980s and showed their work within the framework of the Pan Afrikan Connection; the BLK Art Group and subsequent related shows. This is by no means an all-inclusive term- art by Black artists did not begin during this period (see for example Khan, Naseem *the arts Britain ignores: The arts of ethnic minorities in Britain*, (1976) and some artists during this period did not wish to be included within the agenda of this 'movement'. Furthermore, like any movement, there were different perspectives within it and it has a contested history).

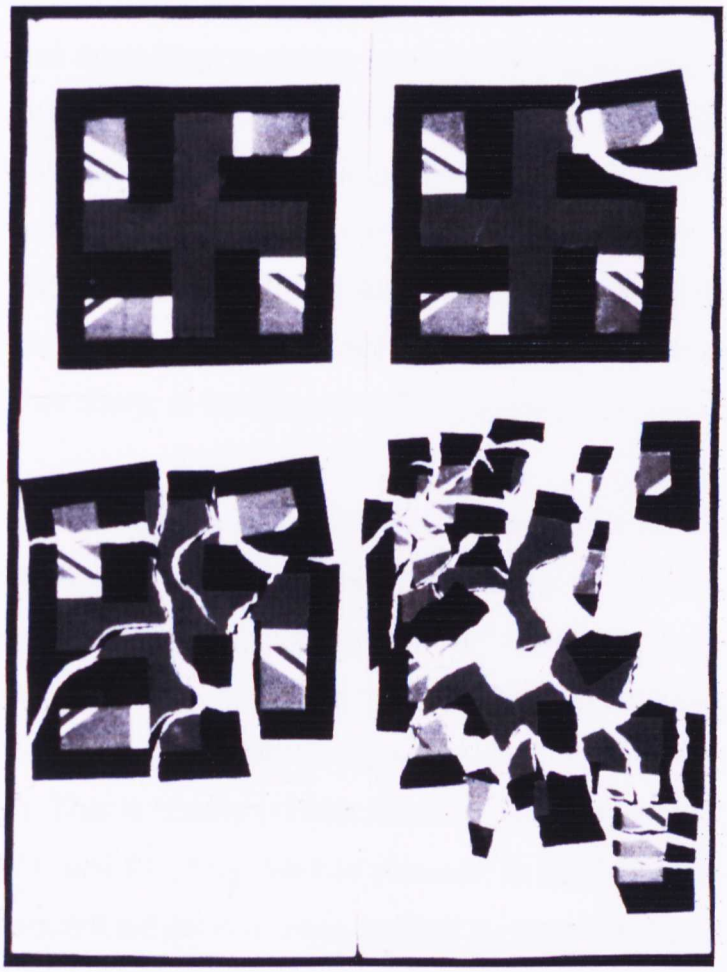
[43] For example, the term 'diaspora' in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Hellen Tiffin (eds.), Routledge 1998, completely ignores the Jewish diaspora, apart from acknowledging that the term's etymology is Greek there is no allusion to any diaspora before Western Colonialism.

[44] Chambers, Eddie and Joseph, Tam, *The ArtPack: A History of Black Artists in Britain*, Haringey Arts Council, 1988, and the introduction to, *Welcome to the Jungle,* Mercer, Kobena, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1994; Sirmans, M.F. (ed.), (1997), *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean artists in Britain 1966-1996,* amongst others, do the era justice.

[45] Chambers, Eddie, Joseph, Tam, *The Art Pack: A History of Black Artists in Britain*, London Borough of Haringey, 1988, p. 9



(iv) Keith Piper, *Reactionary Suicide: Black Boys Keep Swinging (or Another Nigger Died today)*,
6ft x 4ft. mixed media, courtesy of the artist, 1982



(v) Eddie Chambers, *Destruction of the NF* , collage,
4 panels, each 35 x 30 cm,1979-80

The *Pan Afrikan Connection* was set up by Donald Rodney, Eddie Chambers and Keith Piper. The BLK Art Group was subsequently set up by Chambers, Piper, Rodney, Claudette Johnson and Marlene Smith in 1981[46]. One of their main aims, was to counter the 'invisibility'[47] of black artists by organizing their own exhibitions. The work was overtly political, a call to arms[48] – an implicit critique of the Modernist model of a universal art aesthetic[49], each artist working with issues of representation of Blackness in the West with direct titles such as *Reactionary Suicide: Black boys keep swinging (or Another Nigger Died today)* [50] by Keith Piper, (fig. iv) in 1982 or *Destruction of the NF* by Eddie Chambers (fig. v) in 1979-80.[51] Within a few years a whole run of group exhibitions were organized in a range of venues and many more artists were brought into this orbit, for example, *The Thin Black Line* at the ICA exhibited 11 artists (1985), *From Two Worlds: 16 Artists of Non European Background (1986)* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (1986) and *The Other Story*, at the Hayward Gallery which showed 24 artists (1989).

Whereas the earlier shows such as *Black Art an done: An Exhibition of Work by Young Black Artists*[52] were organized and initiated by the artists themselves[53], (in fact Chambers himself doggedly stuck to his policy of independence from 'the white institution' and continues to work freelance, initiating and curating his own exhibitions with the artists he wants to work with, such as the retrospective, Tam Joseph: *This is History* (1998); *Bowling on Through the Century* (1996) an exhibition of Frank Bowlling; Mildred Howard: *In the Line of Fire* (1999)), many of the subsequent exhibitions were curated by black artists who were

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[46] Mercer, Kobena, ibid., p. 14
[47] Chambers, Eddie and Joseph, Tam, ibid., p. 4
[48] Ibid., Keith Piper quotation, p. 9
[49] The term Modernism is itself contested.
[50] According to the catalogue of 'The Other Story' the title of this piece is, *Keep Singing (Another Nigger Died Today)* but Keith Piper, stated in an email to me on 18th August 2003 that the title is as in the text.
[51] Their discourse was very much reliant on the African-American discourses of the previous decade.
[52] *Black Art an' done*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Wolverhampton Polytechnic, 1981
[53] Chambers, Eddie, Joseph, Tam, *The Artpack: A History of Black Artists in Britain*, Haringay Arts council, 1988

themselves chosen by white curators; so for example the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield selected Lubaina Himid and Pogus Ceasar to choose artists for an exhibition in that gallery[54]. Eddie Chambers was not slow in critiquing both the manner in which these shows were organized and the motives for putting on these exhibitions. Already, in 1986, in the article 'Mainstream Capers: Black Artists White Institutions', he considered that 'political expediency and liberal posturing'[55] was responsible for the curatorial choices that fought shy of one-person shows in favour of group, survey shows[56]. According to Chambers' reporting, these survey shows had been justified by the white curators as being 'a foot in the door' but, he contested, they were really a way of keeping the black artists out of the mainstream.

By 1989 some of the artists agreed with Chambers, already finding this type of exhibition confining. Gavin Jantjes, for example criticized the reductive nature of this type of curatorial practice.

> Many will call this exhibition a Black Art Show. They do so for the wrong reasons; wishing to marginalize and disqualify it from the realm of mainstream exhibition activity[57]

Chambers solution, in 'Mainstream Capers', can be read as a retreat. According to him, focusing the attention on the white art world was a 'mis-direction' of energy: the artists should turn their attention towards the Black community. Chambers saw Black art as art for the Black community and his

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[54] ibid., p. 10

[55] Chambers Eddie, 'Mainstream Capers: Black Artists, White Institutions', *Run Through the Jungle: Selected Writings by Eddie Chambers*, inIVAnnotations 5, 1999, p.16. Coco Fusco talks of this in relation to the US in 'Fantasies of Oppositionality', in *Art, Activism and Oppositionality*, Duke University Press, 1998, p. 63

[56] This was still going on well into the 1990s, for example, The Barbican Art Gallery had a dual exhibition in 1996 – on one floor was a retrospective of Derek Jarman's painting and on the top floor was an exhibition of photographers from the African continent.

[57] Jantjes Gavin, 'Red rags to the bull' in *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in post-war Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London. South Bank Centre, 1989, p. 125

contention was still being argued out in some quarters as recently as 1998 at a talk organized by the 198 Gallery in Brixton that I attended. The mainstream (a convenient catch all rather like 'the media') was still the yardstick by which the artists at this talk measured their performance as artists even while they were arguing for art for the Black community. There still did not seem to be a way out of the either/or situation of ghetto or mainstream.

Jean Fisher wrote about the 'survey' show in 1995 and again in 1996, in general agreement with Chambers and Jantjes, she points out:

> To those of us watching the response of the galleries and museums, it has seemed as if the demand to end cultural marginality could be solved simply by exhibiting more non-European artists (although on a selective and representative basis) provided that they demonstrated appropriate signs of cultural difference' [58]

The issue of the relationship with the mainstream is a problematic one. The 1980s generation of Black artists, wanted visibility as a way of empowering themselves in relation to the art world. They felt the 'burden of representation' as

> defenders and critics of modernism but mindful of their historic obligation to interrogate the dubious legacies of occidental modernity premised on the exclusion of blacks[59]

Black art in the 1980s was seen as oppositional and critical by its main spokespersons, namely, Stuart Hall, Rasheed Araeen, Eddie Chambers,

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[58] Fisher, Jean, 'Some Thoughts on "Contaminations"', Editorial, *Third Text*, No 35, Autumn, 1995, p. 4
[59] Gilroy Paul, 'Cruciality and the Frog's Perspective, An Agenda of Difficulties for the Black Arts Movement in Britain', *Third Text*, 5 Winter, 1988/9, Kala Press p. 38

Kobena Mercer[60]. Kobena Mercer in 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora Based Blackness'[61] signals the shift in the next generation of bBack artists who have eschewed the need to represent and see themselves as autonomous artists pursuing their career, free of the 'burden of representation'. In this article, Mercer talks of a 'hypervisibility' as opposed to Jean Fishers ironic, 'appropriate signs of cultural difference' and evident in the kind of commercialization of Black signifiers (Nike trainers/Gangsta Rap) with the institutionalization of 'difference', (by which Mercer means the obligation of public funders to have a remit to serve the ethnic minority communities through the local government, publicly funded galleries and institutions like inIVA) or was it just a sign of the times? The artists of the early 1980s had been working in the wake of an era of artistic activism, which pretty much disappeared (or was sidelined) during the 1990s. Public funding was slashed, lecturing in art schools – a mainstay of income for many artists was cut. It was an era of crass commercialism and many in the art world found new strategies in order to adapt to the new climate both in working practices and strategies for getting exhibited.

With many changes in funding structures and dwindling money made available, artists again began to exhibit in makeshift do-it-yourself spaces, such as *City Racing* or *Transmission*[62]. However, these galleries did not see themselves as being oppositional but as a means to gain visibility and make the first step on the ladder towards fame[63]. By and large Black artists were not part of this

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[60] Hall, Stuart, 'New Ethnicities', *ICA Documents*: *Black film, British Cinema*, BFI Production, 1988, p.27; Chambers, Eddie; Joseph, Tam, *The Art Pack: A History of Black Artists in Britain*, London Borough of Haringey, 1988; Mercer, Kobena, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1994, Araeen, Rashid, 'New Internationalism: Or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans', *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Jean Fisher (ed.), Kala Press, 1994, pp. 8-10

[61] Araeen, Rasheed, Cubitt, Sean, Sardar, Ziauddin,(eds), *Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, London Continuum Press, 2002, pp. 116-123

[62] Artist-run DIY spaces are not anything new. They have been an aspect of the art world since the late 1800s in France

[63]See my article, 'City Racing', *everything magazine 2001*, Issue 3.4, pp. 2-7, for an account of the 1990s London art scene.

scene[64], which was marked by an anti earnestness, almost an anti-intellectualism that went against 'the burden of representation' that earlier, political movements in art had grappled with[65]. This may be a false opposition, however, as Eddie Chambers recently wrote in a monograph devoted to Donald Rodney[66] about the misunderstanding of Rodney's work in relation to the mainstream. He wrote that Rodney worked in dialogue with rather than in opposition to Western art history and the mainstream. Quoting Rodney, he writes,

> When I went to Trent [College of Art], I'd been brought up in the tradition of painting. I knew how to paint. I knew the history of painting. I knew my Picassos, my everything. I wanted to be a Black Picasso. Not because I thought being Black was important. It's just that I wanted to be famous.[67]

There were clearly different ambitions amongst the artists themselves and the theorists. Oppositional may have been a pragmatic decision in a climate where to be mainstream and politically Black offered little else.

Meanwhile the survey show for Black British artists– while rarely ventured, still happens. In July 1999, *The Whitechapel Art Gallery* hosted the exhibition, *Zerzerozero,* which brought together artists with very different experiences, artistic influences, cultural backgrounds and from different generations all gathered under the umbrella of 'Asian Art'. While the project had lost the earnestness of earlier survey shows and presented itself as funky and young (the whole of the downstairs was given over to a stage and makeshift nightclub where Asian bands would play) the Whitechapel Art Gallery had fallen into

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[64] Although Janette Parris showed with *City Racing* towards the end of its run and *BANK* included Sonia Boyce, Henry Obuabang and Virginia Nimarkoh in their projects.
[65] Roberts, John, 'Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art', *Third Text 35,* Summer, 1996, pp. 29-42
[66] Chambers, Eddie, 'The Art of Donald Rodney', *Doublethink*, Autograph, 2003, pp. 21-41
[67] ibid., p. 25

some of the same pitfalls as had the earlier shows[68]– clearly lessons had not been learned.

However there have been institutions and curators who have worked towards different models of politically engaged exhibition within the rubric of identity politics. For example, Richard Hylton curated *Imagined Communities* at the South Bank Centre in 1995, Alana Jelinek, curated the exhibition *Empire and I* at the Pitshanger Manor in 1999 and Keith Piper and Sebastian Lopez, were selectors at *EAST International* at the Norwich Art Gallery in 2000.

Imagined Communities, follows the model of the subject specific show where artists are asked to respond to a conceptual stimulus or work is chosen to elaborate an idea[69]. In this case the Benedict Anderson book of the same name was the initial springboard. Hylton's view, that the 'the authoritative voice of the community has been undermined' by the divisiveness of the Thatcher government questioning of the whole notion of society, is the 'starting point for this exhibition'[70]. Hylton brought together nine artists who dealt with ideas of community in a broad sense[71]. Gillian Wearing and Sophie Calle made work that was not about a marginal voice or about discrete sections of the community, but questions the very boundary marking of community. In Calle's *The Hotel* (1981), parading as a chambermaid, she secretly photographs the belongings of guests in the hotel rooms in which she was working. The scrutiny of objects begs the question of how we reveal who we are through the objects we carry with us. The anonymity of the owners of the belongings doesn't allow for any verification of speculative identity formation that the viewer may want to impose. The contents of people's drawers reveal more about consumer capitalism coupled with individual idiosyncrasy than any notion of community.'

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[68] See Hylton, Richard, 'Global v Local', *Art Monthly*, No 230, October, 1999, pp. 7-10

[69] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983

[70] Hylton, Richard, *Imagined Communities*, catalogue, SBC, 1995, p. 4

[71] The artists in this exhibition are, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Denzil Forrester, Sophie Calle, Gary Simmons, Komar and Melamid, Guiseppe Pene, Christian Boltanski, Yinka Shonibare and Gillian Wearing.

The artists in the exhibition had no neat link of geographical specificity or ethnicity but a conceptual problematic. The inference in the choice of artists involved was that this problem is everyone's problem, not just the concern of those from minority communities. (In contrast to *Empire and I* where every artist involved was from a recognized diasporic group.) The exhibition was not aiming to give answers but to pose questions. In the document that arose out of the accompanying symposium, Hylton referred directly to the confusion around assumptions of cultural belonging and ethnic purity, using a photograph of Jimi Hendrix playing to a Black audience and contradictory comments about him as an example.

> The questions that motivated me were directed against over-simplification and assumptions about community and the problems which occur when people do not know their 'place'.[72]

In this model there is room for previously excluded marginal voices but in Britain there seems to have been very little acknowledgement of Jewish otherness in shows concerned with identity issues. *Imagined Communities* included four artists of Jewish descent – Sophie Calle, Kumar and Melamid and Christian Boltanski. The Jewish experience was a silent shadow to the debate. The artists of colour in the exhibition namely, Denzil Forrester, Yinka Shonibare and Gary Simmons all contributed work that explored, on some obvious level, an aspect of their own cultural identity, and their work was framed by Kobena Mercer in the catalogue with this in mind. Boltanski, Calle and Komar & Melamid, did not engage with any aspect of their own ethnic background in the work they presented. Mercer did not bring up any possibility of thinking about the problematic of the 'Jewish community' within Britain or Europe (or anywhere) within his essay either.

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[72] Hylton, Richard, 'From Where I'm Standing', Nikos Papastergiadis (ed.) Annotations 1: *Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, inIVA, 1996, p. 73.

All of the artists of Jewish descent who are in the exhibition have made work that is specific to their ethnicity elsewhere[73]. I'm not expecting any Jewish artist to necessarily make work exploring Jewish identity but given the subject of the exhibition, that of how notions of community are constructed, the contrast and divisions are stark: that Black artists will make work about their ethnicity; white artists will make work exploring the community at large; Jewish artists are invisible (as Jews) and work which deals with those issues are not represented and many other others absent. Feeding into the curatorial choices is the assumption that 'traces of ethnicity ' will somehow always adhere to 'Black work' and not to the white, which here, clearly includes Jews, although, I have no way of knowing whether this was to do with the curators or the artists or both. However, given the proposed subject of the exhibition there lies an opportunity lost. The fact that of the four Jewish artists mentioned, three of them have only made work of Jewish nature for specifically Jewish contexts leads me to draw the conclusions that given encouragement these artists would possibly have made more work exploring such themes, although this is merely conjecture...

Alana Jelinek is an artist and curator who is Jewish. She sometimes includes her own work in the shows she curates and other times not. In her own art work she has made an internet art piece entitled *A diary of racism – me - you – them*, (2001-2004) in which she has acknowledged her own Jewish identity in some of her entries and the way it has impacted on her attitudes[74]. Otherwise there is no trace of any Jewish subject matter in her projects. All of the exhibitions she has curated have shown an engagement with post-colonial ideas, however, she has not engaged with Jewish identity in any one of them. Furthermore, in her curatorial project at the Pitzhanger Manor gallery, *Empire and I*, she chose to

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[73] Sophie Calle made a piece for the Jewish Museum in New York, exhibited in 2001, called *Public Spaces – Private Places*, Komar and Melamid made *Symbols of the Big Bang,* which was shown at the Yeshiva University Museum, Center for Jewish History in New York 2002 and Boltanski, work such as *The Jewish School of Grosse Hamburger strasse*, 1938, 1944 or *The Barmitzvah Project* which was commissioned by the Jewish Museum in New York.

[74] http://www.alanajelinek.com/, a website diary, citing incidences of racism from or towards her.



(vi) Alana Jelinek, *The Spectators*, Oil on Canvas, 1999, 7ft x 12ft
courtesy of the artist

contribute a painting called *The Spectators (1999)* (fig.vi), which depicted 'white tourists' in the Australian desert [75]. It is understandable in an exhibition about the British Empire that she should focus on cultural tourism in relation to Australia as a legacy of that Empire. However, the absence of Jewish critique is particularly striking in the exhibitions that she has curated in the East End of London where there is no awareness or critique of the presence of Jews there, neither past nor current. The flexibility to make work within a broad framework is important. It is not that Jelinek should always concern herself with Jewish issues but it is the complete absence of them within her curatorial projects, despite her obvious and consistent interest in classic post colonial issues that is curious and revealing, given her own ethnicity.

Arguably the *EAST international 2000* show falls into the trap identified by Chambers[76], as the curator Lynda Morris' role demonstrates. Each year Morris (who is white) invites an artist to select the exhibition from an open submission. Keith Piper was chosen for 2000, who in turn chose Sebastian Lopez. (Chambers advocates Black artists organizing for themselves). However this exhibition was probably the most challenging to questions of identity. Set up as an open submission to be chosen by guest curators Piper and Lopez curated an exhibition that incorporated artists engaging with ideas across different strategies. Many in the exhibition were Black or Asian and some were artists often identified with the Black discourses for example, Simon Tegala, Erika Tan, Janaan Al-Ani. However, there were also represented white artists who had never shown within a Black Art context, such as Arnaud Desjardin who exhibited a hand made exact replica of a guillotine and Veronique Chance, who exhibited a video of herself and her parents morphing into each other on a continuous loop. There was included in the exhibition white artists who dealt with issues of race and racism such as Peter Zangrillo, Carl Jaycock and *Art in*

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[75] http://www.ti3.org.uk/eI.htm

[76] the trap of a Black curator being chosen by a white curator as an authoritative voice, or a person 'in the know' about Black art.

Ruins. There were also artists of colour in the exhibition whose work explored conceptual issues with no relationship to cultural identity, such as Brendan Fan, whose work owes a debt to *Art & Language* rather than, say, Keith Piper. The exhibition also included a piece of my own work, *So You Think You Can Tell,* which, as far as I am aware was the first time art with Jewish subject matter has been included within a show exploring identity politics in Britain.

All the exhibitions cited so far have offered either a symposium, conference or talk prompted by the curatorial ideas. Although the pressure of educational remits within the art institution has led more and more to such exegeses generally, this trend seems to have been spearheaded particularly around exhibitions of so called cultural diversity. There seems to be a need to explain the art work through a parallel exploration from art critics, theorists and others as if the work cannot stand for itself. Maybe it is borne out of an anxiety that the work may be read reductively and also, possibly, out of the needs of a community of artists wanting to explore issues of their own marginality. A third and more cynical reason could also be the availability of provision from funding bodies under the remit of educational support. Or is it to explain the art to the bewildered white folk? But what does this perpetual socio political framing do for the artwork itself? Should the work fall into the socio-political discourse around it? It's as if the work always needs to be seen in dialogue with theory.

Documenta11 (2002), is the largest of the recent exhibitions addressing post-colonial issues, globalization, cultural diversity, although not exclusively. The curator of *Documenta11* was Okwui Enwezor who chose six co-curators, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Suzanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavia Zava.

The initial intention was clearly to situate art practice within a discursive context. Okwui Enwezor's previous exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and*

Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994 shown at PS1 in New York (February 10th – May 5th 2002), was an exhibition that looked at the link between art and politics very directly. The exhibition unashamedly mixed documentary news footage with artworks. The purpose of the exhibition was clearly to inform the viewers about the political context of the art works but in a way that leveled out the relationship between the two – in effect the artworks were secondary to the fullness of information (documentary news footage and newspaper bulletins, photographs and text) that filled the gallery space.

The approach to *Documenta11* allowed for the contextual debate to direct the thinking around the artwork. Instead of a conference to run concurrently with the exhibition (although there were talks which ran alongside the final exhibition), the conferences ran ahead of the show and had equal status. Each conference was to be published subsequently in book form. So even before entering *Platform 5* - which was the exhibition of *Documenta11*, the terms of reference had been set for the viewing public through a system of categories. In some ways though, this was a gift, as the sheer volume of artists showing made the curatorial choices difficult to make sense of. It was difficult to resist the temptation to make life easier by looking at the artists' work you knew. Much has been made of the predominance of video work and particularly documentary practices but then this is not surprising given the general prominence of video work in Western art currently.

On the face of it, Gilroy's plea in 1988 to 'shift the centre of debates on the modern experience away from Europe and look at it from a more supposedly "'marginal" perspective' [77]seems to have been finally addressed. The platforms were 1. *Democracy Unrealized*; 2. *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation*; 3. *Creolite' and Creolization*; 4. *Under Siege*; 5. *The exhibition.* The platforms took place in Vienna, New Delhi,

[77] Gilroy, Paul, 'Nothing But Sweat Inside my Hand: Diaspora Aesthetics and Black Arts in Britain', *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents, BFI Production, 1988, p. 46

St Lucia, Lagos and Kassel respectively. The curatorial team clearly took pains to represent works from as many different cultures as possible.

In fact the power of the art market was everywhere in the exhibition which to some extent made a mockery of the seeming 'widened participation' of the show. The rigour of a single vision that marked *the Short Century* was lost, and the ideology was of a managed pluralism. There were many hierarchies, for example, Steve McQueen had two films in the exhibition, one of these was 'Western Deep' a film that was shown in a purpose built stepped cinema. Viewers were only allowed to enter the 'cinema' before the film began. This film was a linear piece and warranted a cinema (although when it was shown by ArtAngel in London later in the year, there was no seating in the cinema), but then so did Seifollah Samadian, Black Audio Film Collective and Yang Fudong, all of whom made linear films which needed watching from beginning to end but whose films were shown in inadequate walk-in- and- out spaces with little or no seating.

Igloolik Isuma Productions, an Inuit group that showed a series of videos documenting Inuit life as a shield against the culture disappearing[78], was shown in such a way as to render their work almost invisible[79]. Thirteen monitors flanked a corridor at above head height. You could either watch them from the corridor or walk straight through, without looking at them at all. However, every time I visited the Brauerei, where it was housed, (I visited three times) it was so crowded and noisy in the corridor that it was very difficult to concentrate on these pieces or give them any respect at all. At the other end of the scale Louise Bourgeois had a room to herself where only 10 people at a time were

[78] According to the Documenta 11 'Short Guide', Hatje Cantz, 2002, its aims are 'to preserve the oral narratives of the Inuit past and to protect the realities of social life in the face of modernization' p.118

[79] This is reminiscent of the Royal Academy shows in the 19th century where works considered to be of lesser importance were hung higher up the wall.

allowed to enter for reasons of insurance[80] ensuring everyone had to wait in a queue for quite a while, blocking other work.

Furthermore, the artists from Great Britain were all artists of some stature, as were those from the United States, many of them operate within blue chip commercial galleries such as *Victoria Miro* (Isaac Julian), *Stephen Friedman* (Yinka Shonibare) or have been nominated for the Turner Prize, again Isaac Julian, Steve McQueen – the same few artists of colour who are getting the institutional support already. So even here, 'the tokenism, the patronage, the nepotism, and the competitiveness that are becoming intrinsic to the commercial policing of Black culture' prevailed[81]. By contrast Black Audio Film Collective has no institutional support. Their film *Handsworths Songs* was showing. It is an important film and it was great to see it again, however it was made in 1986. Although the film collective is now defunct, John Akomfrah, the director, is still involved in film production but recent work was not represented, let alone commissioned for Documenta11, unlike much of the other work on display, which was commissioned for the event.

In terms of the artists who are active outside of the Western spheres of privilege in the art world, I was confused about how I was to understand the work - what context were they made in, for what audience. In that sense, for all the background information (and I didn't attend the other platforms) the work wasn't adequately conveyed here. The Western 'art world' structures were so evident (even the means of showing the work generally followed a Western model - as discreet one-person shows in many white cubes in a bigger box) that it was difficult to know what I, choosing here to speak as a Western woman, was understanding in some of the work. It mainly succeeded in exposing just how British the art practice of artists such as Yinka Shonibare, Zarina Bhimji, Mona Hatoum and so forth are in the sense that the work is formed by the

[80] This was according to the member of staff who was policing the numbers entering the space.
[81] Gilroy, Paul, ibid.

discourses prevalent in Britain. Furthermore, the exhibition served to reveal just how beholden *Documenta11* is to the Western art world, the Modern white cube gallery and the global structures of the art market. There were examples of artists working outside of the white cube framework, most notably Thomas Hirschorn, who spent 3 months working with local people on a housing estate in the city and Jens Haaning whose piece, *Turkish Jokes* was played from a loudspeaker in an inner city neighborhood of Kassel. In the main, however, the majority of artists worked within the institutional structures in an unproblematised way.

In effect the exhibition undermined its own aims by a) the impossibility of negotiating different cultures and b) of choosing the Western artists to show who already had power and fame within the Western commercial art world.

Juliet Steyn in 'Yids, Mods and Foreigners', explores the politics of cultural differentiation in Modernism, and following Raymond Williams, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, suggests that [82],

> the aspiration to 'equality in difference' cannot stand up...It can only serve as an ideology of domination whose goal it is to hide that domination[83].

Under the guise of an exhibition which explores productions of meaning and positions itself critically in relation to the changing political forces in the world, the overwhelming 'ideology of domination'[84] here was the art market, that is the commercial dealers and big institutions. It is to be welcomed that there were many artists from minority cultures in *Documenta11* and it is telling that so many Black artists from the West now choose to work within the gallery system and

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[82] Steyn, Juliet, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999, pp. 98-113
[83] ibid., p. 111.
[84] Ibid.

that the institutions that deal expressly with minority arts see their role as bringing minority artists to the attention of the mainstream. This strategy can be seen in the way that organizations such as InIVA and Autograph, mount exhibitions, where they can, in mainstream institutions, as opposed to an earlier model of minority specific venues such as the Black Art Gallery. Is this an assimilationist position in another guise? Is it all any of us really want as artists – to make it - to have an audience, sell work and be famous?

1.2 The "J" Thing

There has been some history, however, to Jewish art in Britain. Juliet Steyn in *Yids, Mods and Foreigners*, writes about the *Twentieth Century Art* exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1914. This exhibition, which was the last in a series of showcase exhibitions of Modern art influenced by the French Impressionists on British Artists, included an enclave of works by Jewish artists curated by David Bomberg, and included Mark Gertler and Jacob Kramer amongst others.

> The positioning of the Jewish artists – outside the inside – was important. For in that place, differentiation could occur and hierarchies be negotiated and enforced. The Other is never exclusively outside: The Other is inside too. Structures of power, forces of domination and resistance, mix and intermingle. The one is implicated with and in the other[85]

Steyn's conclusions have implications for contemporary Jewish artists and also for thinking about Black and other ethnic minorities – just as an enclave of Jewish artists was set up in 1914 to differentiate between art and ethnic art, there are still today enclaves of Black art amongst the institutions of art – *InIVA*

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[85] Steyn, Juliet, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999, p. 112

and *Autograph* for example, both set up to serve the interests of under represented artists, both of whom work hard to exhibit artists of colour in mainstream institutions with limited success. Both are dependent upon the grace of public funding bodies and other, more powerful institutions[86]. Furthermore, although the idea of representation of Black artists in the visual arts has been acknowledged institutionally up to a point, the story of art is still overwhelmingly white. To some extent the coalescing around geographical specificity has given way to special issue based exhibitions of 'minority interest' from time to time, (such as the recent *Veil* exhibition)[87], so the place of Black artists work is still "outside the inside".

The Ben Uri art gallery, the main outlet for 'Jewish art' historically, founded in 1915, has a collection of its own, of early 20th Century works, which it has often shown. Every few years the Ben Uri puts on exhibitions, aimed at reaching younger audiences – these are all open submission shows such as the *Ben Uri Open* and *Discernible Traces?*' [88]. At the time of its founding the aims were,

> to form a permanent collection of works by Jewish artists that would enrich and enoble the Jewish population and to offer a platform for Jewish artists, local and often émigré to exhibit and to demonstrate to the Establishment and the wider public their potential contribution and influence[89].

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[86] Although InIVA receives the second largest grant from the Arts Council, the largest grant is to the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

[87] *The Veil,* curated by Zineb Sedira, Jananne Al-Ani, Gilane Tawadros and David A Bailey, funded by inIVA and showing at Walsall Art Gallery, Liverpool City Art Gallery, and the Museum of Modern Art Oxford, in 2003

[88] *Discernible Traces?* (1991) was an open submission exhibition, which had a young jury (they were all students at the time). The remit of the exhibition was to pose the question of whether there was a 'Jewish art' or not. The exhibition was very mixed in terms of work- there were many young artists involved in the exhibition.

[89] http://www.benuri.com/History.htm

So the Ben Uri's aim was, like InIVA today, to persuade the Establishment to be inclusive. Whether the Ben Uri Gallery has fulfilled the function of Jewish artists 'demonstrat(ing) to the Establishment and the wider public their potential contribution and influence' when it was initially set up is not within the scope of this paper. However this statement does signal two things (at least). Firstly the view 'to enrich and enoble the Jewish population' sets the terms for an art that celebrates and affirms its community rather than critiquing and problematising the nature of its community or art, thereby excising any responsibility towards much contemporary art practice. (The Ben Uri Art Galley has no intrinsic responsibility towards contemporary art practice as such, except that which the mission statement suggests. They also state on their website that 'The Ben Uri continues to cherish these principles'.[90])

Secondly, as for offering an opportunity to show how potentially influential such art is demonstrates a naïve lack of understanding of the power bases within art curatorship, collection and sales. It also sets itself up as outside the mainstream – the Establishment. It is imbued with well meaning assimilationism or rather a confused assimilationism as the majority of the works in the collection are of obvious 'Jewish interest' – of Jewish ritual, Jewish life and the East End. It is interesting to note that the Ben Uri gallery was set up just a year after the Whitechapel *Twentieth Century Art* show, since it continues its agenda as explored by Steyn; that is, as a site 'which works to differentiate them from the 'norm',[91]

This may be part of the problem of the conception Jewish art in Britain. For example, the art shown in the Ben Uri is perceived as being of marginal interest and the gallery is little known outside Jewish circles. It is interesting to note that the links on its website are all within the Jewish community i.e. the Jewish organization, *Bnei Brith*, the British Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Chronicle*

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[90] ibid.
[91] Steyn, Juliet, ibid., p.8

and the web based magazine, *Totally Jewish*[92]. It has no links with any other arts organization, and seems to have no dialogue with any either. None of the names in the list of Trustees, (with the exception recently of Anthony Julius) are known to the general art world and certainly none have any office in any arts organization elsewhere. David Breuer-Weil and Julia Weiner have been involved in specific capacities – Julia Weiner was the education officer at the Courtauld Institute and David Breuer-Weil, worked for Sothebys. I do not mention this to criticize the Trustees themselves but more to ruminate on why the Ben Uri Art Gallery should have aspirations only within the mainstream Jewish community. I would suggest that there is little interest by the Jewish members of the art world (ie collectors, dealers, art historians) in working with such an institution and be allied to its insular conservatism. As for the people already involved in the institution itself, they are more interested in its links with the mainstream Jewish community and so called 'Jewish continuity' and the preservation of Jewish heritage, than engagement with contemporary issues within art practice or identity politics. The emphasis for the Ben Uri is on community rather than art. In this way the Ben Uri is complicit in what Werner Sollors coined as ethnic insiderism, being 'in the know' as a privileged position[93] in what he maintains is a way of reinforcing differentiation through a *"You will never understand me. Don't you understand"*[94] position that legitimizes personal experience of descent as the core of interaction. By privileging a certain kind of art and a certain kind of thinking, it engenders an artificial boundary, which implies absolute distinctions and no chance of dialogue with any one else. Furthermore it is a distortion of art history, as the art within the Ben Uri collection for example is in dialogue with aesthetics and concepts other than merely the Jewish subject matter, whatever that may be.

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[92] Since initially writing this the website has been changed and now (19th August,2003) there are no links at all on the website.

[93] Sollors, Werner, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.12

[94] ibid., p. 13

By contrast, at the Jewish Museum in New York, artists have been invited to show who are of international renown and part of the recognized avant-garde, as well as lesser-known artists. They show artists who depict Jewish life and they also show artists who adhere to a range of aesthetic and conceptual values, such as Barnett Newman, Richard Serra or more recently Sophie Calle and Christian Boltanksi,

All this raises many questions and also begins to explain some of the reasons for the distinctions between the so-called Black arts and Jewish arts. I will explore those issues later on in this chapter but first I would like to turn to two of the temporary 'Jewish' exhibitions, which have been curated by freelance curators: *Rubies and Rebels:Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art* (1996) and *Either/Or, Neither/Nor* at the Ben Uri art Gallery (2002).

In 1992 the then newly appointed Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks commissioned a report on women in the Jewish community[95]. Artists were not included in this report until a later stage when Vera Grodzinski, an art dealer, was asked to address this issue. She invited Monica Bohm-Duchen to co-curate an exhibition, which was to be called *Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity in Contemporary British Art.* This was to be the first large-scale exhibition of contemporary Jewish women artists works in Britain. Many artists were looked at and the line-up changed considerably from the inception to the final selection. The curators' final decision in this exhibition was to present artists with explicit Jewish content[96]. Bohm-Duchen's defense of this is curious.

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[95] Bohm-Duchen, Monica, 'Taking Stock: Critical Responses to the Rubies & Rebels Exhibition', *Issues in Architecture, Art and Design*, Vol. 5 No. 1, Gender and Ethnicity, University of East London, 1997, p.17

[96] The artists in the exhibition were Angela Baum, Carole Berman, Judy Bermant, Sandra Brandeis Crawford, Abigail Cohen, Edori Fertig, Rachel Garfield, Julie Held, Lynn Leon, Rachel Lichtenstein, Liliane Lijn, Barbara Loftus, Jenny Polak, Sarah Raphael, Marlene Rolfe, Hilary Rosen, Anne Sassoon, Gillian Singer, Jessica Wilkes, Verdi Yahooda. The exhibition took place at the Barbican Concourse Gallery, Leeds Metropolitan Gallery & Leeds University Gallery, Hove City Art Gallery, 1996-97

> There are numerous Jewish women artists all over the world, whose perception of their own complex otherness finds more generalized expression in works dealing with issues of dislocation and displacement, unease and rootlessness. But to have included on this basis, British artists like Jacqueline Morreau, Laura Godfrey-Isaacs or Leslie Hakim-Dowek would, we felt, have diluted the impact of the exhibition to the point of amorphousness[97]

The use of the word 'amorphousness' is interesting, meaning having no definite form or character; it reveals a fear of there being no discernible difference, or that to be distinct there has to be obvious motifs to that difference. The assumptions behind this statement recall the claim to 'ethnic insiderism' where the emphasis is on absolute distinctions of motif and influence rather than thinking about the dialogue between artists[98], such as the relationship between different kinds of Realism, or Feminist art practice, Conceptualism and so forth and how this relates to Jewish artists working with a multiplicity of influences. This is the trap that a previous exhibition fell into, *From Chagall To Kitaj* at the Barbican Art Gallery, which Avram Kampf guest curated and Monica Bohm-Duchen researched. Juliet Steyn, critiques this exhibition arguing that it sought to establish a particular lineage of art history through which Kampf, 'could speak of the "essential" truths of European culture and the *Jewish* experience'[99]. Eddie Chambers has also recently railed against reading art reductively ignoring the '"critical interaction" between Black Art practitioners and established notions and presumptions of "history" and "art history"' in relation to Donald Rodney specifically[100]. It also recalls Jean Fisher's critique of curatorial response to 'difference' that institutions encouraged exhibitions of ethnic minority work,

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[97] ibid., pp. 18-19

[98] This term was first used by, Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1986, to describe a position whereby ethnic difference is based on descent and absolute distinctions, often 'exaggerated out of proportion' (Sollors, 86: 13), in order to have exclusive rights over a certain history, oppression or understanding.

[99] Kampf, Avram, *From Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in 20th century Art*, Preager, 1991 see also Steyn, Juliet, *The Jew Assumptions of Identity*, Cassell, 1999, p.7

[100] Chambers, Eddie, op.cit. p.25

'provided that they demonstrated appropriate signs of cultural difference' [101]. The impact of difference is often at some cost to the integrity of the art works themselves subsuming complex artistic and conceptual influences under the weight of the needs of power brokers to make their own points or salve consciences.

The context is important however, for example, within the *Imagined Communities'* exhibition, explicitly Jewish content, would have been challenging but within an exhibition exploring Jewish Female Identity such as *Rubies and Rebels*, a broader remit may have thrown up different questions that are just as pertinent to the Jewish community, such as visibility vs. assimilation; the place of memory within a contemporary identity and the multivalent inflections of identity within art works.

The exhibition was open to much criticism (see particularly the Amanda Sebestyen review in Make magazine)[102]: On the one hand, as the first of its kind in Britain it was groundbreaking – but in relation to the discourses on otherness and identity, which were prevalent in art discourses by the mid 1990s the exhibition seemed a retrogressive step of many counts.

Rubies and Rebels was hitting first base only. Norman Kleeblatt in his paper, 'The Other Edge: Representing Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality' mentioned that one of the earliest 'Identity' shows was the *Jewish Themes/Contemporary American Artists* show at the Jewish Museum, and while it was a laudable and

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[101] Fisher, Jean, 'Some Thoughts on "Contaminations", Editorial, *Third Text*, No 35, Autumn, 1995, p. 4. See also p. 23 of this chapter

[102] 'Different Currencies: What is the price of a good woman?' a) Anson, Libby 'Treading over borders' b) Sebestyen, Amanda, 'The Cost Perhaps Too High?' *MAKE* no 73, Dec 1996 - Jan 1997, pp 17-19. See also, Steyn, Juliet, 'Rubies and Rebels Or Missionary Positions' in *Third Text*, Winter 96, vol. 37, pp. 98-99; Morrison, Blake, 'Women By Themselves', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1996, pp. 90-91.

groundbreaking exhibition it relied on personal experience for its power and the works did not question or problematize their subjects[103]

I will return to the issue of problematizing the subject later. What is pertinent here, however, is that two of the first shows that Norman Kleeblatt remembers on 'Identity' - *Extended Sensibitilites: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*– and the *Jewish Themes* show are generally not cited.

> This is perhaps why such shows as Extended Sensibitlities and Jewish Themes, with their emphases on subject matter rather than representation, traditional media rather than photographic based or other technologically situated modes, have been consigned to the sidelines of the identity canon[104].

One of the main flaws of the *Rubies and Rebels* exhibition was that the curation was more concerned with community than identity in art and that much of the art was completely out of step with the modes of production and questions arising within art practice at the time as well as with the current Identity debates as mentioned earlier. As Amanda Sebestyen said of those **not** chosen for the exhibition

> All of this work seems to me to be deeply engaged with specifically different ways of knowing that arise from being Jewish and female. It is a kind of art located in the present rather than a nostalgic or Schindlerised past; experimental in its use of materials; and situatied 'outside' a community defined by religion and family[105].

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[103] Kleeblatt, Norman, *Issues in Architecture, Art and Design*, Vol. 5 No. 1, Gender and Ethnicity, 'The Other Edge: Representing Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality', University of East London, 1997, p.23
[104] ibid., p. 26
[105] Sebestyen, Amanda, 'The Cost Perhaps Too High?' *MAKE* no 73, Dec 1996 - Jan 1997, p. 18.



(vii) Anna Finchas, *Shulchan Aruch*, lead and wood, 84x260x100 cm, (2002)
courtesy of the Ben Uri Art Gallery



(viii) Nellie Agassi, *Sand it Better,* from *Embroidering Light*, 2002,
video, 4.min loop

There has recently been an exhibition at the Ben Uri gallery, which can be seen as a departure. The artists in the exhibition are of varying ages and practice. The exhibition, although it came out of a previous 'open' exhibition, was curated thoughtfully by a young curator Alona Pardo, who has recently completed an MA in creative curating at Goldsmiths College of art. The curatorship made no attempt at survey and the work spoke obliquely of issues but could be read within a wider discourse of art. It wasn't celebratory but reflective of issues of identity within ethnicity, place and in some instances, Feminism. There were five artists in the show[106] and of the five, only the work of Anna Finchas, can be read unequivocally within a specifically Jewish framework. For example, her work had titles that were explicitly of Jewish content, such as her piece *Shulchan Aruch* (fig.vii). She also included in her work accompanying texts on the wall, explaining the meaning and context of the work. *Shulchan Aruch*[107] consisted of a lead covered table, title and accompanying text. Without the text and title the work could be read predominantly within a minimalist trajectory and a major influence is Eva Hesse. Wiith the title, other inflections have to be taken on board, such as the centrality and sanctity of food to Jewish culture; how the table is likened to the sacrificial altar within the Temple of biblical times and so forth. All the other work was framed as Jewish merely by dint of the context of the Ben Uri art gallery. Nellie Agassi, for example, a young Israeli artist who trained at Central St Martins, showed a video installation called, *The Palace of Tears – Face In/Smile/Sand It Better/Peel.* The work consisted of four monitors. On each monitor was a woman from the elbow up, enacting different body rituals. *Peel*, for example showed her rubbing her chest with sandpaper;*Smile* showed her simply smiling; *Sand it Better* (fig. Viii), showed her 'washing' her face with sand. The work strongly referenced the endurance art of live artists such as Nigel Rolfe and Carolee Schneeman but within the context of the Ben Uri it could also be seen through metaphors of suffering and the redemption of

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[106] The artists included in the show were Susie Darvish; Anna Finchas; David Huglin; Eitan Buchalter; Nellie Agassi; and Healther Libson

[107] The *Shulchan Aruch*, is the 'Code of Jewish Law', a common users guide to everyday Jewish law written by Rabbi Joseph Caro in the 1560s. The term means literally, 'set table'.

land. The amorphousness that Bohm-Duchen feared is not present in this exhibition. The works can breathe with all their complexities, metaphors and references – sometimes 'Jewish', sometimes not.

In comparing the curatorial practice of Jewish shows in Britain and so-called Black shows one can begin to see some distinctions emerging. In the first instance Black arts in the 1980s was an artist led phenomena which was aiming to address invisibility and exclusion in the art world. Although this tendency was subsumed by the white institutions, and there are still many issues at stake,(not least of which is that the power bases in the art institutions are still overwhelmingly white) it was successful in that it identified a need that was acknowledged by the mainstream funding bodies and there are now avenues through which Black artists may be supported and introduced to an art viewing public. The 'Jewish' shows have all been organized from within the Jewish institutions, and funded from within the community. The community therefore sets the agenda. And without the interlocutors, such as curators and writers, who also work within the mainstream, who could take a mediating role, and vouch convincingly for challenging work, the decisions with regards to funding and curatorship are often left to the most conservative of agencies and this is reflected in the work chosen for such exhibitions in most cases. It is not then surprising that the exhibitions of 'Jewish Art' are often set outside the discourses of professional art practice.

The issue of invisibility and exclusion is always a complex one within the Jewish community, which is both included and excluded. The community in general is relatively small and inward looking and the few Jewish arts institutions that exist have tended to bias towards what is called Jewish continuity rather than any critical engagement with ethnicity. There are many Jewish artists (although not many in Britain, which is still WASP dominated. There are more in the US) but few make work 'as Jews'; in that sense Jewss are present but invisible. Many

Jews (and so Jewish artists) are deeply ambivalent about 'visibility' for many reasons, some historical and some personal. Whereas Black artists often saw themselves as oppositional, critiquing white racism[108]. Jewish art seems to have no function institutionally other than celebrating difference or Jewish life. Organizations such as inIVA and Autograph see themselves as enablers, with part of their remit to make links with other organizations and institutions. In the first year of activity inIVA had already set up relationships with Oldham Art Gallery, The National Maritime Museum and the Whitechapel Art Gallery[109] and soon developed a wide-ranging and innovative educational programme. By contrast within the Jewish institutions there is little impetus to work within a wider discourse, maybe the fault of self sufficiency or maybe distrust of the wider non-Jewish community – the two are related - and neither the Ben Uri nor the Jewish Museum seems to have developed links with other institutions in the wider community. Without that relationship they will always be marginal and parochial entities. And the question remains for artists who are Jewish of how to make work as Jewish artists and be taken seriously as professional artists.

What is at stake here is the way in which the processes of curatorial strategy enact a process of democratizations and accountability. One of the key elements of the Black art movement of the 1980s was to demand public funds as citizens of Great Britain; the Jewish community has not demanded that right, seeing itself generally as grateful for the benevolence of the Government and Queen. The pride the Jewish community takes in self-sufficiency means that there is no accountability as there is with public funding. It also lets the public funding bodies off the hook and reveals the lack of confidence or even pride in demanding one's due right. In a liberal democracy the access to power is through access to public provisions and the structures of government. For all the faults of the public funding system and the often cynical motivations for

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[108] See p. 27 for comments on oppositionality in the arts. Also many Black artists now don't see themselves as oppositional necessarily.
[109] inIVA annual report 1994/95

managing communities, it also ensures that a broad range of artists' work is exhibited in spaces that the wider public have access to; that the agendas are set by a larger range of people whose policies can be challenged

Chapter 2: Categorizations

Paul Gilroy has written about the dialogue between Black and Jewish intellectuals and expressed his frustration at the missed opportunities for understanding and alliance[110]. To some extent this missed opportunity has come from foregrounding one's own experience as a way of understanding the world, although in some ways also a necessary step towards empowerment and emancipation. For Jews this has meant highlighting European Jewish suffering, arguing for the uniqueness of the Holocaust and not making conceptual leaps between oppression of Jews, and Jewish oppression of Palestinians and so forth[111]. More recently there have been some academics who have been closely reading and learning from writings on the Black experience[112]. However while acknowledging the debt, they have been concerned at the elision of Jewish suffering and the Jewish contribution to the debates on diaspora and racism for example.

Nick Mirzeoff in his book *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*[113], reflects on the United States where there is established a focused Jewish studies tradition in academe. The issue there is not invisibility but a jostling for central position of paradigmatic minority,

> What is at stake is the claim to a metaphorical and rhetorical position as the absolute Diaspora, perceived as a singular and exclusive condition[114].

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[110] Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993, pp. 205-217

[111] This issue has been addressed by some theorists, namely Jon Stratton in *Coming Out Jewish*, writes about Aboriginal peoples of Australia and non-white immigrants there, Jonathan Boyarin in his chapter, 'Europe's Indian, America's Jew' from *Storm from Paradise* and Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity, Consent an Descent in American Culture*.

[112] Bryan Cheyette, Sander Gilman, Ella Shochat, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, John Stratton, Juliet Steyn.

[113] Mirzoeff Nick, ed., *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, Routledge, 2000

[114] ibid., p. 5, Stuart Hall has effected a similar manoeuvre with regards to diaspora in Jonathan Rutherford's book, *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, 1994 where he redefines diaspora in opposition to the Jewish diaspora.

In Britain slightly different forces are at play and the debate is not as developed but there are worrying signs of similar battles taking place, although there is not a Jewish academe to speak of[115]. The sheer invisibility of the Jew in discourse in Britain (except as victims of the holocaust) is the main factor at play. Of course it is unfair to compare Britain and the US in many ways, as the historical context is different; in the US, an immigrant culture, many groups have assimilated (equally, many have not)[116], which, whilst this has happened in Britain, the foundational myth of Britishness is not one of an immigrant culture but one of a homogenous culture[117]. The point here however is the jostling for power amongst different groups, which can be seen not just between Jews and Blacks but also Korean Americans too in the US[118] (and amongst these groups themselves). One of the effects of this is the emphasis on *difference from* rather than *similarities to*, for example, a hierarchy of victim-hood and its relationship with skin tone as the trope of difference.

In this chapter I will be looking at some of the writings of Kobena Mercer, Stuart Hall, Bryan Cheyette and Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin. By highlighting some of the Jewish critiques of Identity politics my aim is to bring some better understanding of the language of difference between groups to the discourse of art criticism. I will be exploring some themes within the history of the Black art movement of the 1980s through the organizations set up to document Black art practice and the language of the writers who framed this period theoretically. The writers I cite in this chapter have all made significant contributions to the

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[115] There are a few academics, Steyn, Pollock, Josh Cohen and the Parkes institute at Southampton University. There are recently a few younger academics beginning to surface but compared to the United States this does not constitute an established discourse.

[116] Brodkin, Karen, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race In America*, Rutgers University Press, 1999

[117] Paul Gilroy has excavated this myth in relation to *The Black Atlantic* in the book of the same name.

[118] See by Sumi K. Cho, 'Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction' in *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising*, Robert Gooding-Williams (ed.), Routledge, 1993, p.196 - 301

understanding of the Black experience in Britain and while I suggest that their theories unwittingly served to create further exclusions I in no way want to take away from the contribution they have made.

In addition to the issues of exhibiting, the need to document the work of Black artists was identified early on by the artists themselves. Without documentation art is lost to history, thus visibility is tied to documentation. As Eddie Chambers noted,

> As Black people, we ourselves ought to, and need to, document our own history, and this much include the history of our art and artists[119]

As well as setting up exhibitions, the artists saw it as important to establish and work within groups to develop archival possibilities as well as places to exhibit. Of these Autograph, Aavaa, and Panchayat are still going concerns. The most recent and by far the most powerful of these is the Institute of the International Visual Arts (*inIVA)*[120]. The context for the inception of these organizations gives a background to the shifting politics of Identity and the Arts: The early groups, such as the Pan Afrikan Connection and Aavaa were set up by artists themselves, as part of the politics of self empowerment and, of course, in the absence of any other alternative. By contrast the Arts Council set up Autograph and InIVA, when it was realized that provision had to be made for 'marginal voices' in the arts.

Kobena Mercer articulates this shift from self-empowerment to reliance on public institutions, in *Welcome To The Jungle*, where he states,

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[119]Chambers, Eddie; Joseph, Tam, *The Art Pack: A History of Black Artists in Britain*, London Borough of Haringey, 1988, P. 4

[120] inIVA was set up in 1994 by the Arts Council of Great Britain and is still funded by them. http://www.iniva.org/general/index. It is the second largest funded organisation by them according to Mark Sealy, director of Autograph (interview with Mark Sealy 14th April 2003)

> The re-articulation of /black/ as an empowering signifier of Afro-Asian alliances was initially a subversive act of disarticulation in which the nodal metaphor of racist ideology (white/not-white) was displaced out of its fixed and centred position and appropriated into a counter-hegemonic discourse of black community resistance. By the mid-to late-eighties, in the difficult negotiation with the institutional structures of the state the term was re-appropriated by the dogmatic discourse of official left wing antiracism, and became subject to a kind of bureaucratic essentialism in which "black" simply replaced "ethnic minority" as a category for the rationing and allocation of public resources and democratic rights[121]

The language used by the organizations I have cited, to explain and publicise their practices also reveals the limits of the debate; InIVA's mission statement has changed over the years, currently it offers support to artists from 'culturally diverse backgrounds', Autograph was set up in 1988, *as a centre to promote photographers in Britain who are of African, Caribbean and South Asian origin'* .In the mission statement it broadens this to, *Our primary role is to develop, exhibit and publish the work of photographers and artists from culturally diverse backgrounds*[122] (Mark Sealy, the director explained that more recently the term changed from 'Black' to artists who are marginalized through race, religion, disability and so forth). Aavaa alone has remained specific and particular – the intention inscribed into its name - The African and Asian Visual Artists Archive. This, it seems, represents a shift in the language and politics of identity and the arts in general. Panchayat, without any explanation, gives out very different messages within one web page[123]- in the initial few lines it states,

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[121] Mercer, Kobena, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies, Routledge,* 1994, p. 256. Although this statement referred to the then GLC and local government, I feel it can apply just as well to the Arts Council of England.

[122] http://www.autograph-abp.co.uk/

[123] http://www.panchayat.co.uk/panchayt.html

> *Panchayat* seeks to promote the work of artists within education and the wider community, and equally represent the work of visual artists facing marginalisation due to race, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and or class.

Further down it states that it has an extensive resource for, 'all those who are searching for the artistic contributions made by contemporary non-European artists' and to further confuse they later state,

> *Panchayat* houses an International slide library with work by contemporary artists based in Britain, Europe, the Asian Sub-Continent, Continental America, but originating from across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Caribbean and work by the indigenous peoples of Australasia and the Americas.

Panchayat , while taking great care not to leave anyone out does just that. It leaves out those marginalized groups already resident in Europe before the large influx of Caribbean's arrived in Britain in the 1950s[124]. In identifying who they are for, Panchayat are also defining what they understand as marginal, which rests on debates around perceptions of access to power. Their aim here is not to exclude but by naming certain groups as marginal there is an unwitting separation, which implies privilege to those not included in the list. Can one be marginal and privileged at the same time? How can one acknowledge difference and need without being prescriptive and essentialist?

[124] Of course there were communities of Afro-Caribbeans and Asians in Britain before this but they are covered by the later arrivals as being of the same ethnicity.

Panchayat's list of inclusion, like most post colonial discourse relies on a geographical [125]categorization. This form of categorization does not apply to Jews, nor does it apply to the Roma for example or indeed peoples of the African Diaspora, many of whom, through slavery have been through multiple 'homes' since Africa[126]. Jews, according to the Boyarin brothers constitute their ethnicity through a temporal narrative : Non-attachment to the place of abode is built into the Jewish narrative. Bauman tells of Hannah Arendt meeting German Jewish exiles on the border of France, who said, " We have been exemplary Germans there's no reason why we could not be exemplary Frenchmen"[127]. In this way post-colonial discourse sits on top of Western nationalist theories of origin. As Zygmunt Bauman has stated, the Jews,

> were the epitome of incongruity: a non-national nation, and so cast a shadow on the fundamental principle of modern European order: that nationhood is the essence of human destiny[128].

Furthermore, even the term 'culturally diverse' is misleading. The referent is still geographical, as in the Panchayat website or the *Documenta11* catalogue for example,[129] and the term actually means the same as earlier definitions; that is people of colour. I have anecdotal evidence to suggest that InIVA have been approached regarding exhibitions involving Jews and have been given sympathetic advice, however, it is clear that inIVA's main remit lies elsewhere. In their library they have 5 books of Jewish interest, (one of which was sent by me). The list of artists, they hold on their website includes 3 artists known to me

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[125] Boyarin, Jonathan, 'The Other Within and The Other Without', from *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, (eds.), Laurence J Silberstein and Robert L Cohn, New York University Press, 1994, p. 428

[126] See also John Stratton, 'Historicising the Idea of Diaspora' (ch. 5) in *Coming Out Jewish*, pp. 137-163, Routledge, 2000

[127] Bauman, Zygmunt, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern' from *Modernity Culture and 'the Jew'*, (eds.), Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, Polity Press, 1999, p.153.

[128] ibid., see Gilroy's criticism of Bauman's Eurocenticity in *The Black Atlantic*, p. 213-4

[129] In the catalogue of artists showing, all artists were described by country of birth and country in which they now live only as descriptors.

as Jewish – Choreyh Feydjou, cited as an Iranian, Guillermo Kuitca, as male and Gustave Metzger likewise. So where any so-called cultural specificity is cited, Jewish identity is elided into the country of origin. Certainly neither Autograph nor Aavaa have Jewish artists represented[130]. This lack of representation may not be to do with any conscious exclusion. When asked Mark Sealy informed me that he had never been approached by a Jewish artist, indeed five or six years ago, Sonia Boyce invited me to join the Black Womens' Group that was run from Aavaa.

However there is more at stake here than individual anecdotes or concessions. What is at stake is a language of difference, which fosters unhelpful misconceptions and makes subjects through a particular framework, which may be reductive for all. This language of exclusions is not peculiar to the art world but borrows from sociological and political discourses that have recently been critiqued. It is the political debate that interests me in the final event but for the purposes of this chapter it is the relationship between the two above and its implications for art production and exhibition that concern me. First I will look at the elision and why it matters.

Jon Stratton in his recent book *Coming Out Jewish* addresses the question of why British Cultural Studies has no Jewish voice. He looks particularly at the development of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (BCCS) [131]and how the notion of race and Blackness became one and the same[132]. He identifies Matthew Arnold as the ideological father of cultural studies in Britain. Matthew Arnold's project was to identify an English culture and in doing so, occluded

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[130] I received this information from Mark Sealy, director of Autograph and Pauline de Souza who is on the board of AAVAA, respectively. Mark Sealy has written about the Isreali artist Didier Ben Loulou but not under the auspices of Autograph.

[131] The BCCS was important for developing the cultural studies debates in Britain and was founded in 1964, http://bitbucket.icaap.org.

[132] Gilroy undoes this particular coupling in his recent book 'Between Camps' arguing that the contemporary language of race harks back to the formation of this lexicon formed by Eugenics.

Jewish culture except as an historicized origin of Western culture[133]. Raymond Williams was to take up and develop this project as a route to arguing for an English culture, which would bind the classes into an overriding "we". Thus Williams, as a Marxist of his time, sacrificed 'race' into class as the pivotal factor of identity. The Jewish community it seems by and large made the choice to assimilate, or at least to assimilate as far as was allowed[134]. However, even the notion of assimilation is a dubious term relying on a homogenous existing community[135](Despite the assimilationist tendencies, however there was no lack of anti-Semitism) Thus, this "we" was as a class distinction only, until Stuart Hall brought 'race' onto the agenda, working to develop a language of difference and an important understanding of the way in which the representation of the Black community is shaped by the forces around it. Hall's main focus was, the plight of Afro-Caribbeans at that time. John Stratton describes Hall's conflation of race and Blackness *in Policing The Crises*[136]. For example, I would suggest, Hall takes only a cursory look at the history of press reporting and press panic, without referencing the moral panic at earlier immigration periods and the crime that was feared and engendered by the press in the 19th Century and early 20th Century. It is an understandable elision given the cogency of his main argument, however it has shaped the understanding of difference in Britain ever since.

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[133] "Speaking as a Jew in British Cultural Studies" in *Coming Out Jewish*, pp. 35-52. Stratton describes Arnold as identifying Hebraism and Hellenism as the two sources of British Culture, Hebraism represents rules and the law and Hellenism represents culture. Arnold argued that the bourgeois emphasis on Hebraism was the reason for the dearth of culture in England and argued for jettisoning that model in favour of Hellenism.

[134] Although this is a somewhat simplistic analysis of the Jewish community – there is and has been a significant anti-assimilationist strain throughout European Jewry. See for example David Feldman, 'Was Modernity Good for the Jews?' in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, Bryan Cheyette, Laura Marcus (eds.), Polity Press, 1998, pp. 171-187

[135] This is just one of Jonathan Boyarin's objections to the notion of assimilation. op. cit. 1994, p. 431. Bauman in 'Modernity and Ambivalence' also critiques the notion of assimilation from the position of power relations between the assimilator and the liberal state.

[136] Stratton, ibid., p. 36

This elision can also be seen in the arena of art criticism in Hall's paper 'New Ethnicities' in *Black Film, British Cinema* [137]. In 'New Ethnicities', Hall cites the moment when politically

> black was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. In this moment, politically speaking, 'The Black experience' as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course disappear'[138].

Hall here acknowledges the way in which the language of anti-racism in the forming of alliances of different groups constellated around the dominion of the Black experience over other groups, this, I would suggest served to foreground anti-Black racism as the only form of racism or marginalization to be countered.

> Just as masculinity always constructs femininity as double – simultaneously Madonna and Whore – so racism constructs the black subject: noble savage and violent avenger[139]

Hall stresses the importance of contesting terminologies, for example the way the term ethnicity had been tied to nationalism, particularly British nationalism, and applauds that 'we are all ethnically' located - but in such a way that,

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[137] This was given at the conference *Black Film, British Cinema*, at the ICA and published in a book of the same title, 1988
[138] ibid., p. 27
[139] ibid., p. 28

> it is not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities[140].

Yet he has marginalized, and elided minority groups not deemed Black, such as the Irish and the Jews – both groups previously (and since) victims of racial abuse[141]. Although he states at the beginning of the paper, that he is dealing specifically with Black cultural politics, the whole slant of the paper works to act as if no 'difference' existed in Britain before the *Windrush* and there was no racism in the 1970s and 1980s save anti Black racism.

Kobena Mercer in 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation'[142] outlined some of the complexities of a Black art practice in Britain. In the *Third Text* version he critiques Paul Gilroy's 'populist modernism' and the burden of representation[143]. In the book, *Welcome to the Jungle,* Mercer has broadened the stakes of language where he talks of

> Bakhtin's insights into the social multiaccentuality of the sign may be deepened and extended to demonstrate how, in the making and remaking of Diasporic identities, the displacement of the proper name - from Negro, to Colored to Black in the United States; or closer to home, **from Immigrants, to Ethnic Minorities to Black Communities** – reveals that the struggle-in-language entails an interminable discursive antagonism in which subjectivity and identity are at stake[144]. (my own emphasis)

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[140] ibid., p. 29
[141] See page 60, footnote 161 of this paper for citation of Sander Gilman on the Jews body being identified as Black in Europe historically.
[142] Mercer, Kobena, *Welcome to the Jungle: new Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1994, pp. 233-258, it was first published by *Third Text* (10), Spring 1990, pp.61-78
[143] ibid., 1990, p.77
[144] Ibid., p. 255

Mercer critiques this shift (in language) with regards to it being tokenistic, that is as a means to the "rationing" of public resources, or worse, it being appropriated by contemporary Fascists themselves,

> ... that our enemies have been able to take the words out of *our* mouths and appropriate them to *their* semantic and expressive intentions, as much as we have appropriated theirs...[145]

Yet he fails to question the logic of the slide from immigrant to Black. Colour has become the only marker of difference. This is an example where the struggle-in-language very definitely is at stake for the Jew. According to Stratton this is because of the myth of a homogenous Britain that the Caribbeans entered. I would add that this notion of Britain suited the host country that already had a lexicon of xenophobia and racism from the 19th Century mass immigration of Jews and before. Every new wave of immigration brings a new wave of knee jerk xenophobia and racism – it matters not who the new group is and whoever is already 'here' is always seen to be part of the homogenized whole in relation to the newcomer according to the anti-immigration myth.

Mercer continues to make the case for blackness later in his book *Welcome to the Jungle*, where he describes the "redefinition" of Black identity.

> The naturalized connotations for the term /black/ were disarticulated out of the dominant codes of racial discourse, and rearticulated as signs of alliance and solidarity among dispersed groups of people sharing common historical experiences of British racism[146].

Although he articulates the term specifically as having moved away from the biological model to a political one this model still includes only people of colour

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[145] ibid.
[146] ibid., p. 291

'of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent' [147]. Mercer argues for a historical reading of the term and the alliance and the importance of understanding that 'black' came out of a particular juncture in time and place, invoking American, and post '68 politics, he doesn't acknowledge some of the problems of this wholesale importing of ideology – cited by Mirzeoff of the struggle of paradigmatic diaspora. Furthermore, while he quotes Chantal Mouffe as saying 'The longer the chain of equivalences set up between the defense of the of the rights of one group and those of other groups, the deeper will be the democratization process', like Hall, he fails to bring in equivalences to develop his argument or broaden the concerns[148].

More recently Stuart Hall has written about the changing nature of the Black British community from the 1950s through to the present[149], specifying that at one time there was a need for Afro-Caribbeans and Asians to be called Black as both groups were 'often treated in exactly the same way'[150]. He continues to say that the Afro-Caribbean community is now confident in itself as a cultural entity in Britain

> There is no longer a prevailing sense that what is British constitutes an ideal to which black culture might want to aspire or assimilate. Thus it is the very meaning and stability of Britishness itself which has been inflected by black culture. It's this *reversal* which signifies a culture confident in its own difference. Black culture in Britain does not now aspire, in what many who are older know of as a deep legacy of the colonial relation, caught in Fanon's phrase – 'black skin white mask' – to mimic or echo Britishness[151]

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[147] ibid.
[148] ibid., p. 296
[149] Hall, Stuart, 'Aspiration & Attitude...Reflections on Black Britain in the 90's' in *New Formations*, no. 33 Spring 98, p. 39
[150] ibid., p. 40
[151] ibid.

This is an interesting comparison to the Jewish community because in relation to the kind of confidence that Hall is alluding to, there is no question that the Jewish community in Britain does not have nearly that confidence: the centrality of the issue of assimilation is a testament to this lack of confidence. The Jewish Policy Research Group published a paper in 1999 entitled, *Cultural Politics and European Jewry*, where it stated that although in the US having a hyphenated identity such as American –Jew is not seen to compromise one's loyalty to the United States, in Europe, say to be an Anglo-Jew, 'can be a difficult balancing act'[152]. That is to say, there is not yet the perception amongst European Jews that they can demand their rights as citizens, to be different and still British in public, (although an organization like YaD heralds a shift)[153].

Stuart Hall's elision is also present in Frantz Fanon. Bryan Cheyette investigates Fanon's attitude towards Jews in *Black Skin, White Masks.*[154] He teases out the inconsistencies of Fanon, who at first draws comparisons with the situation of the Jew and the Black, recounting a phrase of his professor's, *Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you*[155]. However, Fanon also situates the Jew as 'white', referring to the Pogroms and Holocaust as *little family quarrels,*[156] although I would add, he does not adequately explain what constitutes family. Was the Spanish Inquisition which tortured and murdered Moors as well as Jews just a family quarrel? He states in the same paragraph,

> The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am

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[152] This situation has changed for South Asian-Americans, or Arab -Americans post September 11th, 2001.
[153] See Chapter 1, page 18 of this paper.
[154] Cheyette, Bryan, 'White Skins, Black Masks: Jews and Jewishness in the Writings of George Eliot and Frantz Fanon', from, *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the gravity of history*, (eds.) Ansell, Keith Pearson, Benita Parry, Judith Squires eds. In association with *New Formations*, pp. 106-126
[155] Fanon, Franz, *Black Skin, white Masks*, Pluto Press, 1986, p.122
[156] ibid., p.115

over-determined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance' [157]

While at first Fanon draws together Jews and Blacks as brothers in oppression, he does so only in the final analysis to make absolute distinctions primarily on the basis that Jews are white and so European in order to reinstate a hierarchy of oppression, where the Jew is an intellectual threat and the 'Negro symbolises a biological danger'[158] I would add that Fanon in turn is drawing from Sartre's *Anti Semite and Jew*, where the only identity the Jew has is the identity the anti-Semite makes for him and that historically the Christians 'created' (Sartre's term) the Jew by preventing them from assimilating in the middle ages[159]. Thereby implying that Jews could disappear unlike Blacks. Furthermore, Sartre uses the term 'over-determined' in relation to Jews, stating that, 'their [The Jews] conduct is over-determined from the inside'[160]. By using the same term in such a way Fanon seems to be building upon Sartre's usage to emphasise the difference between Jews and Blacks.

Bryan Cheyette picks up Sander Gilman's research into the history of the representation of the Jews' Body to highlight the flaws in Fanon's thinking - that of the construction of the Jews' body as disease ridden and feminised for the men, exoticized and louche for the women, decidedly different from the Aryan body and in many cases also identified as Black[161]. Cheyette states, that what is at stake is the racialisation of categories, which *too often reinforce notions of an essentialised victimhood*[162]. By exploring the ambivalence of the Jew, who is both Black and White, inside and outside Western culture, we can begin *to expose the*

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[157] ibid., p.116
[158] ibid., p. 165
[159] Sartre, Jean Paul, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Schocken, 1976, p. 68
[160] ibid., p.95
[161] Gilman, Sander, *The Jews Body*, Routledge, 1991 and *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Cornell University Press, 1985
[162] Cheyette, p. 124

tensions at play between the fixed antitheses that define 'the West[163]. I would add that while Fanon at least acknowledges the place the Jew holds in the Western imaginary -Hall makes no mention of it at all.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century many Black intellectuals showed a keen interest in the Jewish writings on the diaspora[164]. There seemed to be a shared lexicon based on a mutual recognition of a history of oppression. Zionism seemed to be an apposite site of enquiry for thinking about a Pan-African identity. Today the Black debates have diverged from the Jewish debates and it is now Jews who find the post-colonial debates apposite. Meanwhile Jews are invisible in the post-colonial world except in regards to the Israel/Palestinian situation (the latter is beyond the scope of this paper).

However, according to Bryan Cheyette and Jonathan Boyarin[165], post–colonial thinkers have also been relying on monolithic binaries of their own. Cheyette asks why there is so much anxiety in bringing the narratives of post-Holocaust history and post-colonial history together. Jonathan Boyarin looks at Edward Said to suggest, *although Said identifies the Eurocentric imperial vision as "the idea of white Christian Europe", nowhere does he direct his attention to those inside Europe who were not Christian*"[166], this lack of attention says Boyarin and the emphasis on positing the Other as the colonised non-European, *ironically complements ethnography's ingrained repression of the Other inside Europe*[167]. In *Orientalism* Said does, in fact, reference the Jew as having been tainted with the same discourse but makes a similar manoeuvre to Fanon. He includes the Jew as a subject of Orientalism when talking historically, for example in his critique of

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[163] ibid

[164] Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso 1993, pp. 205- 216, describes some of the relationship between Jewish and Black debates historically. Also for more insight into this history there is an excellent book called *Jews in Black Perspectives: A dialogue,* (ed.) Joseph R Washington Jr. Associated University Presses, 1984 in the arena of art The Jewish Museum in New York put on an exhibition called, *Bridges an d Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*, in 1992.

[165] Cheyette, Bryan , op. cit.,1997; Boyarin Jonathan, op. cit., 1994

[166] Boyarin, Jonathan, op cit., 1994, p. 428

[167] ibid., p. 429

Renan, and when he talks of colonial powers protection of minorities for their own purposes, he includes Jews in amongst the Druzes, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Armenians and Kurds. However, later in the text when Said talks of the contemporary situation, the Jew is decidedly Western, *thus the Arab is conceived of now as a shadow that dogs the Jew*[168] which ignores the complexities of the Jewish positions both in the West and the Middle East, in the past and now. According to Cheyette and Boyarin, Said fails to problematise the West, by making the modern Jew of the West, Said makes Europe white so that the East can be Black, which has the effect of colluding with the European project of 'whiting' itself and of 'whiting' Jews[169] - eliding the history of Jews within Europe as the other and modern anti-Semitism as well as denying Jewry's global population. This is still very much a live issue if we consider the position of the Romanies in Europe even now, or the Muslims in former Yugoslavia, Kosovo.

In this chapter I have been looking at the way in which the need to categorize in order to make a case for political action or access to power comes out of a need to categorize in turn required by the state and institutions in order to, as Kobena Mercer says, "ration funds". Zygmunt Bauman, who has written extensively on Modernity, and Jews, states,

> Modern practice stands out from other practices for its obsessive preoccupation with ordering, and all ordering is about neat divisions and clear-cut categories and therefore casts all ambivalence, automatically, as the prime and the most awesome of weeds.[170]

Jonathan Boyarin also takes up the question of 'ambivalence' in relation to post-colonial studies, he brings to bear several arguments to explain the occlusion of Jewish otherness as well as undermining the use value of excluding it. In making

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[168] Said Edward, op. cit. p. 286
[169] Cheyette, ibid., pp. 107-127
[170] Bauman, Zygmunt, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern' from *Modernity Culture and 'the Jew'*, (eds.), Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, Polity Press, 1999, p.153

his argument he relates experiences across different communities. For example, he suggests Spivak and Said as exemplars of the post-colonial voice: both are, at the same time excluded others in relation to their place of birth and scholarly privileged in relation to their standing as intellectuals. This he says has a direct parallel with the bifurcated position of Jews in Europe, as both victims of abuse and their central position in the development of modern European culture. His main argument in relation to the shift in regard towards Jews since the Second World War, from being a reviled other to being white in the US, is that the popular place of the Holocaust in contemporary culture incurs an empathy with Jews as victims of that Genocide and therefore serves to occlude Jewish difference.

> Thus, for example, in popular- culture representations of "the Holocaust," the particular horror of the Nazi genocide is emphasized by an image of Jews as normal Europeans, "just like us." In fact, we can only "empathize with," *feel ourselves into*, those we can imagine as ourselves. Thus, in the television docudrama "Holocaust", the Jewish protagonists are a middle-class, German-speaking nuclear family'[171]

Boyarin then continues to critique the term empathy through Karl Morrison's book excavating the history of the use and meaning of the term. He cites Augustine's comparison with Jewish carnality and Christian spirituality and takes this to Fichte's anti-Semitism where *for spiritual empathy to take place, those who are trapped in base carnality must be removed*'[172], although Morrison himself only recognizes the term 'empathy' as' "Greek", not "Jewish" or "Roman"' (but as we have seen with Stratton's critique of Arnold, these are not innocent terms). Boyarin's analysis ties the term of empathy to domination (unlike the Jewish

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[171] Boyarin, Jonathan, 'The Other Within and the Other Without' in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, Silberstein, Laurence J & Cohn, Robert L. (eds.), New York University Press, 1994, pp. 434-435

[172] Ibid., p. 436

commandment of 'Love your neighbour as yourself' which according to Boyarin emanates outwards from the love of your family)[173]. Alain Finkelkraut considers this in his book *The Imaginary Jew*, where he cites the 1968 demonstration where the French shout 'We are all German Jews'. He states,

> our frantic masquerade sought to appease bad conscience, to deny the gap between our enjoyment of baby-boom comforts and the momentous, terrifying events of the recent past [174]

What is at stake for me in pointing out some of the inconsistencies of the writers who have formed the post-colonial debates, is to understand the blindspots, which show the limits of the debate. While the journey to develop a discourse of difference has been an important step within politics and access to political power, in some ways one exclusion has led to another. Visibility is the key to the debates on difference, as Fanon said 'I am over determined from without'.

There is the assumption that Jews can disappear which rests on a logic based on a hierarchy of skin tone – the blacker the skin the more different. Furthemore the importance of skin tone to the logic of difference relies on the notion of choice – that if you are visibly different you cannot choose not to be. The terms Black and White are essentialist terms relying on an unchanging essence. For example, if you "pass" the very term implies that you **really are** Black. Sander Gilman has shown us that the Jews and the Irish were once seen as Black. This shift in categories exposes the political nature of the terminology. Even within a supposedly benign situation of a liberal democracy this terminology is political and difficult. Nowadays we (as in everyone) may name ourselves, ostensibly, in ethnic monitoring forms for example. This is both liberating and restrictive. It seems that the old term Black was linked to one's position in relation to the dominant community, which here means, British. Now the naming is linked

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[173] ibid., p. 437
[174] University of Nebraska, 1994, p. 21

directly to appearance of skin, which fixes the meaning in absolute terms. Are the refugees from Kosovo or Croatia considered Black, for example, as the refugees from Idi Amin's Uganda once were? I am not advocating a return to previous demarcations or a disavowal of any subjectivity at all. There is still a considerable investment in homogenising the West which these debates unwittingly collude in at the expense of newcomers be they asylum seekers or economic migrants.

Chapter 3: The Power to Choose

In this chapter I will be discussing the notion of choice, visibility and invisibility in relation to Identity formation. I will be looking at Judith Butler's[175] and Peggy Phelan's[176] thinking on performativity as a way of talking about the possibilities of agency in relation to the debates around identity politics, especially with regard to Jewish Identity. Judith Butler developed her theories through thinking about gender being constituted through performativity. Butler's position outlines how gendered behaviour and sexuality is learned, and proposes that in order for the subject to adopt heterosexuality they must reject homosexuality. Equally, in order for the subject to adopt 'female' behaviour they must reject 'male' behaviour; there is therefore no originary, all is a copy of a copy. Performativity clearly has a use value in relation to ethnicity if it is considered as a citational and temporal 'act', as Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin suggest[177]. Later in the chapter I will introduce Althusser's interpellation theory, which will help me think through the issues and ramifications of the artists work that I will be exploring in the next chapter. Butler's reading on Althusser comes from his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*[178], and I will be considering Althusser through Butler. Louis Althusser, in this essay, brings psychoanalysis into the field of Marxist politics to rethink the notion of the subject. He posits that we are all Subjects and that ideology is set and maintained through institutions that are state controlled such as schools, the Church, Parliament, the Police etc. These institutions propagate state ideology. According to Althusser, we are all born into, live within and through ideology; that is, our existence is inscribed in actions that are rituals

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[175] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, 1997, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All" YFS 88, *Depositions*, ed. Lezra Yale, 1995, pp. 6-26

[176] Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993

[177] Boyarin, Daniel & Jonathan, 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity', *Critical Enquiry*, Vol.19, Summer 1993, pp. 693-725

[178] Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Monthly Review Press, 2001, pp. 85-126. (from now on referred to as ISA)

defined by the ideological state apparatuses - 'Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects'[179].

Althusser explains his theory of interpellation through a series of vignettes, the final and most famous is where a policeman hails a man from across the street. The man turns round, "who me?" and becomes a subject, that is, who, in Althussarian terms lives within ideological structures. However Althusser states that we are interpellated into subjects before we are born even, by societies attitudes towards a boy or girl-to-be for example.

While I am not advocating a wholesale reintroduction of Althusser into the language of art theory, his notion of interpellation, does have some use now through Butler's reworking, particularly when the splintering of groups and subgroups ultimately seem to serve the ideologies of the hegemonic powers more than those of the groups themselves. The institutionalization of identity politics[180] with regards to art practice[181], while much needed, should also be approached with some skepticism. I suppose, as Lawrence Grossberg wrote in "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?"[182], I want to move beyond 'models of oppression' for thinking about identity in order to find some way of thinking about power and agency within a broad political framework and suggest that maybe thinking about identity through subject formation rather than the specificity of particularist positions may offer a fruitful way of thinking through some of the difficulties that have arisen in identity politics, outlined in Chapter 2.

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[179] Ibid., p. 115

[180] See p. 51-55 in chapter 2. Kobena Mercer in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Routledge, tackles this theme in detail, particularly chapters 8, 9 & 10

[181] This has a broader remit than the scope of this paper allows as art practise in general in the UK is highly institutionalised, while artists themselves often take pride in an autonomy that doesn't actually exist.

[182] Grossberg, Lawrence, 'Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall, Stuart, Du Gay, Paul, (eds.), Sage, 1996

In the article I wrote on Ali G[183], I was exploring the question of indeterminacy of ethnic identity, the politics of appearance and the position of the contemporary British Jewish Community. One of the pivotal issues evolved around the question of choice. The category "Jew" (amongst many others) should not be included in ethnic monitoring, according to the Commission for Racial Equality. In the Ali G article I suggested that it was because,

> the notion of self-definition for Jews has long been portrayed as one of a choice that Jews *already have*, whereas for others, the normative view is of choice as *something (yet) to be conferred by benign authority.*[184]

In the previous chapter I argued that the language of difference as formulated by key figures[185] is premised upon skin colour or rather as Blackness being the signifier of otherness (this includes Asians here) [186]. Inherent in this view is that racism operates upon visible difference alone. Any other forms of racism are as invisible in this discourse as they seem to be to the eye. No matter how much Hall and Mercer for example, make a case for a non-essentialist subject they still get caught within the same defining trap.

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[183] ibid., p. 63-70

[184] Garfield, Rachel, 'Ali G: Who Does He Think He Is?' *Third Text* 54, Spring 2001, p. 65

[185] These were Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, Frantz Fanon. John Stratton has argued that Homi Bhabha also makes this assumption in *locations of culture*, in Stratton, John *Coming Out Jewish*, Routledge 2000, pp.60-62. This is particularly odd given the physical particularity that the Jews have been deemed to possess in Europe until after the Second World War. ` It also has contemporary implications for example, at Idi Amin's death recently, the British media reported extensively on the expulsion of Asians from Uganda but not of Amin also targeting Jews for expulsion.

[186] The body itself is not an unencumbered object as in Western thinking it is identified as passive and feminine within a Cartesian dualism. Racist discourse has historically marked Jews and Blacks (and other others) through this dualism. According to Butler, (Butler Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1990, p.129), even Foucault cites the body as a 'surface and the scene of a cultural inscription'. However, Sander Gilman in *Smart Jews: The construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence*, Univ. of Nebraska Press 1997, shows that racism is not confined to the body.

The problem with the Jew for this discourse is that he/she is not considered different enough [187]but as just plain white, (or sometimes more white than other whites[188]).

By the same token the so-called Jewish debates on Otherness have their own set of co-ordinates, which are formed by their own particular position in the West and focus on notions of assimilation, their own ambivalence, the position of Jews historically in relation to the 'host' community and the history of persecution (I am thinking particularly of Bauman and Levinas, and of course there are many others - all Ashkenazi Jews)[189].

It is difficult to step outside the language of exclusion when talking about identity politics, as each discourse is premised upon particular experiences of the group concerned[190]. Furthermore, as Paul Gilroy has explored in detail in *Between Camps: Nature, Culture and the Allure of Race*[191], the language of race is

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[187] Jews are not included in ethnic minority monitoring forms for example, except in the London Borough of Hackney. Conversely " In the US in 1987 the US Supreme Court ruled that Jews and Arabs were racially distinct from Caucasians, based on nineteenth-century definitions *and therefore* were entitled to file appeals against *racial* discrimination", Azoulay, Katya Gibel, Jewishness 'After Mount Sinai: Jews, Blacks and the (Multi) Racial Category' *Identities,* Vol. 8 (2), p.218, although Jews in the US still have a lot of investment in being White which this article begins to unpick in relation to the race debates in general in the US.

[188] Dr Nadia Valman (a Jewish woman) at the *Womens' Study Network* Conference in 1994 was given a hostile reception in the Black Studies strand where she had been scheduled to give a paper on Anti-Semitism in 19th Century British literature. Dr Valman commented to me that an Hispanic woman was comfortable and included in the 'group' whereas she wasn't, which she found strange as in her view they were as 'black' as each other. I worked at the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW) in the early 1990s, I was invited to join the *Black Workers Group* by the membership secretary. When my case was discussed at the full meeting (in my absence) my entry was refused, although there was a member of the group who was Portuguese and the Chair was Greek.

[189] There is of course snobbery and prejudice within the Jewish community that ignores the contribution of Sephardi and Mizrachi Jews.

[190] A few examples of this are - Werner Sollors, cites this as a problem in the introduction to *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, pp. 12-14; Gilroy, flags up the dangers of this "ethnic insiderism " (of Sollors), which he calls "cultural insiderism" in the introductory chapter and of *The Black Atlantic:Modernity and Double Consciousness*,pp.1-40; also in the section of the same book entitled, 'Children of Israel or Children of the Pharoes?', pp. 205-216; Ella Shochat and Robert Stam also critique this in their article, 'The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age' in *Art & Design, Art & Cultural Difference*, A&D 1995, p.10. Another piece decrying the black/white binary and the hierarchies of victimhood is by Sumi K. Cho, 'Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction' in *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising*, Robert Gooding-Williams (ed.) Routledge, 1993, p. 196-301

[191] Gilroy Paul, Allan Lane, 2000, p.7

problematic whatever the politics espoused, be they the British National Party or the Nation of Islam to name two extremes, the logic of the race debates are premised upon the same spurious science of the 19th Century: that of eugenics.

The inability to choose a position may render the subject as victim. The ambivalence of the Jewish position (that they are perceived as having choice of 'visibility') means that any claim to victimhood is seen to be disingenuous. As the status of ethnic minority is premised upon being a victim and Jews are now perceived by many as perpetrators of Colonialism (in Israel) and as having achieved a certain status in Britain and the US[192], then Jews are definitely not an ethnic minority in the victim sense. Moreover, the Jewish community is perceived to be overwhelmingly middle class, however there are considerable pockets of poverty within the Jewish community. For example the Stamford Hill community is the largest Jewish Community in Europe and the third largest in the world after Israel and New York[193]. A recent study of the Haredi community in Hackney identified that 58% of households below retirement age receive a means tested benefit; 66% of households find it difficult to pay at least one bill; 24% of households have had one or more utility bills disconnected; over 40% of households have borrowed money in the past year to meet day to day costs [194]. Stuart Hall recently stated that 'Black' in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, wasn't about what colour your skin was but was a political alliance based on a marginal position - but other groups were marginal at that time and were not part of this formulation [195]. So then what are the criteria?

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[192] A few recent and apposite examples of this are Tam Dallyell's comments about the "Jewish influence" in the *Vanity Fair* interview in May 2003 and the *Panorama* documentary about "The War Party" which claimed to be investigating the "neo-conservative" influence on the White House but dwelt exclusively on the Jewish "neo-conservatives", broadcast on 18th May 2003 on BBC 1

[193] Statistics are from Alan Finkel at the Industrial Dwellings Housing Trust

[194] Holman, Christine, Homan Naomi, *Torah, Worship and acts of Loving Kindness: Baseline indicators for the Charedi Community in Stamford Hill*, De Montford University, November 2002.

[195] Stuart Hall in conversation with Mark Sealy, Royal College of Art, 18th March 2003

If, as I argued in *Ali G: Just who does he Think He Is?* , the discourse of Blackness is predicated on the lack of choice[196], there are clearly examples of difference where this is not so clear-cut - where the look of a person is not in keeping with whom they are 'meant to be'. Some artists and performers have explored this issue in their work. Sacha Baron Cohen is a comedian but he was exploring the issue of indeterminacy of appearance and what is at stake when one's ethnicity is not easily decipherable from a 'look'. Adrian Piper has explored this as a light skinned African-American, Sandra Bernhard in 'Without You I'm Nothing', and more recently Nikki S Lea in the US.

Judith Butler, within a feminist discourse, famously renounced essentialism in gender, through her notions of performativity. Unlike, say, Homi Bhabha's writings, which describe a particular social formation in relation to British colonialism in India, Butler, taking Foucault further, disavowed any *a priori* notions of identity that weren't an effect of social construction.

In *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990, Butler began to outline some of the flaws, as she saw it, in Feminist discourses to date. She draws heavily from Foucault, particularly *The History of Sexuality (part 1)*, although she begins with a phrase of De Beauvoir, 'One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one', to critique the essential, natural woman. In the first chapter she establishes her main thesis to argue that as systems produce the subject, then sex is culturally determined. Butler decouples sex and gender and postulates that for example, the construction of 'men' will not necessarily be in a man's body. Gender is a regulated practice with fixed borders to ensure heterosexual hegemony.

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[196] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* Pluto Press, 1986 p. 116 *I am the slave not of the 'idea' that other have of me but of my own appearance*

There are clear parallels with ethnic identity here. Her ideas have percolated through and been much rehearsed within political discourses on Identity, but also within discourses on art[197],

Although I do not want to overplay the influence of performativity on Jonathan and Daniel Boyarins' project, it is important to acknowledge the part that Butler has played in their theorizing to open up possibilities for rethinking some aspects of Jewish identity and some of the flaws in identity thinking in general. Jonathan Boyarin, in his book, *Thinking In Jewish*,[198] suggests that feminist theory is at the forefront of critical thinking today and therefore vital to "thinking in Jewish".[199]

The Boyarin brothers offer a new approach to Jewish identity, which is aiming to recuperate a sense of community through practice and genealogy. They also argue in *Thinking In Jewish* that markers on the body, such as circumcision and wearing a *kippah*[200] are binding signs of community, somewhat reminiscent of Gilroy's anti-anti essentialism, where he states that Black identity is,

> Lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires[201]

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[197] See for examples, Stephenson, Andrew & Jones, Amelia (eds.) , *Performing the Body Performing the Text*, Routledge, 1999; Burrows, Dave and Rogers, Henry (eds.) *Performing Culture in Politics, (Performativity and Performance in Contemporary Politics and Art Practice)*, Article Press, 2000; *Gestural Politics: Identity and the Performative*, Royal College of Art, 2001. Within so-called Jewish discourses Jonathan Boyarin in 'Before the Law there Stands a Woman: In Re Taylor v. Butler (With Court-Appointed Yiddish Translator' from *Thinking in Jewish*, Chicago, 1996, pp. 87-107, Daniel & Jonathan Boyarin, 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity', *Critical Inquiry 19* (Summer 1993), pp. 693-725, Bell, Vikki, 'Mimesis as Cultural Survival: Judith Butler and Anti-Semitism', *Performativity and Belonging*, Sage, 1999, pp.133 -162

[198] see, Boyarin, Jonathan, 'Before the Law there Stands a Woman' in *Thinking in Jewish*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 87-107, and previous footnote.

[199] Ibid., p. 92

[200] Ibid., 'Self Exposure as Theory: The Double Mark of a Male Jew', pp. 34-62

[201] Gilroy, ibid., p. 102

Gilroy posits this in relation to the polar opposites of essentialism and anti essentialism: the former dangerous and the latter too insubstantial. The element of choice is important here, Gilroy stresses that it is not a passive relationship but one where, say the musician and the crowd are held within a 'reciprocal relationship'[202] Jonathan Boyarin also reminds us in his essay that the notion of choice is tied to the Protestant (and I would add particularly American) redemptive ethic of "self-making"[203] of the "self-made man" variety, as if every human being was born anew. Their use of performativity, allows for new insights in terms of genealogy which take us away from blood lines also as they reflect on the citational aspect of identity to bring a temporal rather than a geographical reading to identity formation[204].

Gilroy also acknowledges Butler's contribution when he states that,

> We can use Foucault's insightful comments to illuminate this necessarily political relationship. They point towards an anti-anti-essentialism that sees racialised subjectivity as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it[205]

The Boyarin brothers suggest that Judaism (the religion, as opposed to Jewishness), in its ritual, produces the effect of identity, in its placing the importance on action rather than belief (if you keep all the 613 commandments and don't believe in God, you are still a good Jew, according to the Rabbis), suggest that Judaism in its ritual, produces the effect of Jewish identity. (According to strict orthodoxy if you do not keep the commandments you are not a Jew, although the overwhelming majority of Jews do not take up this position.) Within orthodox Judaism, tradition is of equal status to the law of the *Torah*, this

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[202] ibid., p.102
[203] Boyarin ibid., pp. 37-8
[204] Boyarin and Boyarin, 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity', *Critical Enquiry 19* (Summer 93), p. 702
[205] Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993, p. 102

builds mimicry[206] of the previous generation into the present where it is elevated as cultural survival. Mimicry here is redeployed from within the community.

In fact, Vikki Bell in 'Mimesis as Cultural Survival: Judith Butler and Anti Semitism' invokes Adorno and Horkheimer[207]. Her description of their formulation of mimesis, I would suggest, takes away the stigma of assimilation, that of the counter-hegemonic pull of performing that identity for the cultural survival of minority identity. This she suggests is a political act of survival. The Boyarins, however, go further back, to rabbinical Judaism, arguing a position of flexibility, which is not usually associated with Jewish religious orthodoxy today, that can be an insular Judaism.

> Diaspora culture and identity allows (and has historically allowed in the best circumstances such as in Muslim Spain) for a complex continuation of Jewish cultural creativity and identity at the same time that the same people participate fully in the common cultural life of their surroundings. The same figure, a Nagid, an Ibn Gvirol or a Miamonides, can be simultaneously the vehicle of the preservation of traditions and of the mixing of cultures. This was the case not only in Muslim Spain, nor even only outside of the Land. The Rabbis of Jewish traditional culture at the same time that they were very well acquainted with and an integral part of the circumambient antique culture. Diasporic culture teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from "mixing" but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such "mixing"[208]

However the Boyarins seem to be making an argument for a reading of Jews, which is embedded within Judaism (as opposed to Jewish culture). Few Jews

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[206] I use the term here after Vikki Bell's reading on Adorno and Horkheimer's use (see footnote 14, p.10 for reference) rather than Homi Bhabha's formulation as no subversion or ambivalence is intended here
[207] See footnote 14, p. 12 for ref.
[208] ibid., Boyarin & Boyarin, p. 721

would position themselves as embedded within Judaism today as it is often seen as a repressive force, regulating the behavior of the community. Although it is generally recognized that Judaism has been largely responsible for the cultural survival of the Jewish people, most Jews do not want to participate fully in the religion and resist the seeming conformity and passivity that they think it requires. Many do not want to participate at all. Therefore for the Boyarins to link Jewish identity so firmly with Judaism is to set up a false universalism of Jewry as only a small proportion of Jews would identify with religion. Judith Butler began her argument in *Gender Trouble*, by critiquing the attitude of the universality of women in feminist thinking, while making some insightful and valuable contributions, the Boyarin brothers are also in danger of replicating this mistake, in their paradigm of citational, temporal performativity in Jewish identity.

Many who are not familiar with Judaism often assume a rigid structure which is not strictly so. The Boyarins, while making a good case for the flexibility of Jewish law do not make clear that the law can be manipulated but not broken. If we take a simple example of the law against using electricity on the sabbath, you can use a time switch and the law is intact, but if you turn lights on yourself you are breaking the law. This type of logic runs throughout Judaism. Although there is some flexibility – at base it has a regulatory immovable structure, which are the 613 commandments.

While they argue that this is how it is - that the law is the law and therefore there is no choice, one is bound by tradition and history, (you are given the responsibilities of a Jew at the age of barmitzvah/batmitzvah even if you convert to another religion, or leave the community – you are born a Jew and so you die). Within the framework of Jewish thought and law that is correct but within a neo liberal society, of course, ultimately it is one of individual choice according to the

law of the land[209]. The Boyarins would counter that male circumcision is profoundly embedded in the psychic formation of Jewish Identity which is hidden in the United States as it has become a normalized state for men there. They cite an anecdote that was told at a family circumcision. The presiding rabbi asked what choice an 8 day old infant could have with regards to circumcision, and responded by explaining that when the infant becomes a man and has his own child circumcised he then takes on the 'choice' of his own circumcision through his son, therefore there is no choice to *not* circumcise or *not* be a Jew - the only choice is to be a Jew.

Ultimately the Boyarin brothers' view would be that what may be regulatory within the community may be subversive in the wider community. Thus to be an orthodox Jew is counter-hegemonic in the West – whatever it may be within the Jewish community itself. However, much of their project is concerned with pointing out the conflations and elisions within Western Christendom that have hidden and denied Jewish difference while at the same time stigmatizing the Jew. What saves the Boyarins from "ethnic insiderism" is that they take care to situate themselves in relation to other debates and other positions, which, taking up Kobena Mercer's point from Chantal Mouffe of broadening the chain of equivalences, is a key device that deepens the democratization process[210]. For example in 'Self-Exposure as Theory: The Double Mark of the Male Jew' in recounting anecdotes in relation to circumcision and *kippah* wearing, they state that,

> The point of each of these stories is that there is no *a priori* reason to assume that marks of group identity do more to isolate their

[209] If you adhere to the 'law of the land' as opposed to the Rabbis (*Beth Din*) within the community you risk complete ostracization from the community - see 'So You Think You Can Tell', Rachel Garfield, 2000, DVD

[210] See p. 60 in Chapter 2 for full quote and for the reference see footnote 148

bearers from members of other groups than to multiply the possible channels of relation between them[211].

Judith Butler, having established a critique of gender and the body continues to expand her field of enquiry. In *Excitable Speech* and related articles[212], Butler turns her thinking more directly to some issues that I have found useful in rethinking my ideas in relation to ethnicity and choice through Althusser's framing of the subject through interpellation.

On the face of it Althusser seems a strange choice of thinker to turn to, as he was a promulgator of late scientific Marxism, which stated that we are 'always already subjects'. There is not choice here as the subject lives through ideology, which is embedded in the material world in direct contrast to the glimpse of the possibility for a freedom from ideology that performativity can give us. (If you are aware of performing your identity, then that in-built critique of an essentialist self may bring a freedom from the tyranny of the ideology of that identity). However, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler would state just that – that the subject is constituted through reiterative rituals of gender, which are already present in heterosexual (that is 'normative') society. Performativity is also important because it enables a view of the construction of the subject as citational, so the self is not longer fixed and immutable but re-iteratively and temporally formed. The 'performance' of subjectivity is a formative 'act' rather than a 'mask' that can be taken up and cast off at will.

Both Foucault and Althusser are anti-humanist. Butler goes to Althusser for answers that Foucault hasn't found[213].

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[211] Boyarin Jonathan, *Thinking in Jewish*, Chicago, 1996, p. 59

[212] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, New York and London, 1997; "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", YFS 88, *Depositions*, ed. Lezra, Yale University, 1995; Bell, Vikki (ed.), 'On Speech, Race & Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Performativity & Belonging*, Sage, 1999, pp. 163-175

[213] Bell, Vikki (ed.), 'On Speech, Race & Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Performativity & Belonging*, Sage, 1999, p. 164

> This being hailed by another, at least it produces the possibility of a subject not answering, of a subject being constituted along certain kinds of fault lines...My interest is in Althussarian problem of how, one might say, a speech act brings a subject into being, and then how that very subject comes to speak, reiterating the discursive conditions of its own emergence[214].

However, if, according to Althussesr, 'you and I are *always already* subjects[215]', where does agency come in, where can we act? Are we fixed within an immovable structure of ideology[216]? Stephen Heath wrote in *Questions of Cinema*, that the problem with the *ISA* theory is that according to Paul Hirst, the subject must have some cognition of what it means to be a subject before it is interpellated into the subject.[217] It can be argued that this apparently immovable structure and Paul Hirst's argument were the reasons for, artists, filmmakers and art theorists in Britain turning away from Althusser in the late 1970s and early 1980s[218]. However, Judith Butler[219] has recently gone back to the essay on *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISA)[220] and has identified some room for manoeuvre.

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[214] ibid., pp. 164 -165

[215] ibid., p. 117 (Althusser's italics)

[216] We are subjected to ideology, subjects of ideology but also constituted through ideology. So that for example as a woman I am the subject of sexism but also subjected to rules governing women such as not being allowed into a 'men only' club, or being made to wear pink as a child. All of this makes me who I am.

[217] Heath, Stephen, *Questions of Cinema*, McMillan, 1981, p. 102

[218] Stuart Hall intimated this in, Hall, Stuart, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' Stuart Hall, & Paul du Gay, (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publishing, 1996, pp. 7-8. I am also relying on anecdotal evidence from artists/filmmakers who were active in these debates at that time.

[219] Judith Butler is one of the post-Lacanian theorists who have rethought Austin's linguistic term of performativity in terms of gender behaviour. Her Foucauldian reworking detached gender from biology and began a whole plethora of theorisations on performativity. She has more recently traced back her theoretical genealogy to Althusser in order to rethink the power relations between the person addressing and the person addressed.

[220] This article very soon became known by its acronym 'ISA'

> The turning around is an act that is, as it were, conditioned both by the "voice" of the law and by the responsiveness of the one hailed by the law. The "turning round" is a strange sort of middle ground...that is determined both by the law and the addressee, but by neither unilaterally or exhaustively .[221]

So in the moment of hailing there is complicity of the subject. The subject can choose not to be responsive according to Judith Butler, (a spy, for example, would ignore the call). Stuart Hall[222] has drawn similar conclusions to Butler, that the subject is not only 'hailed' but also 'invests in the position'. It is a two way process, therefore, an 'articulation', according to Hall. This view maybe bypasses the problem of Paul Hirst as mentioned earlier[223].

Stuart Hall, in his essay entitled 'Who Needs Identity?' identified Judith Butler and her work critiquing the limits of feminist identity politics and the fractured subject as crucial for developing the debates around ethnic identity.[224]In this paper Stuart Hall reappraises the use value of Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* against the criticism of the time. In the 1970s (certainly amongst artists), the interest in Althusser in Britain focused on structures of ideology. In the wake of what some saw as the failure of '68 there was much disillusionment amongst the intellectual Left.[225] Action seemed to have failed them and so a Marxism, which 'blamed' ideology rather than the individual subject was sought out with alacrity. Althusser was initially introduced to artists through film criticism, which was itself a new discipline. Ben Brewster, who was the editor of *Screen,* was also a translator of Althusser. Althusser introduced Lacan to the British art world through the *ISA* paper. Laura Mulvey, also in film studies brought Lacan to

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[221] "Conscience doth Make Subjects of Us All", YFS 88, *Depositions*, Yale University, 1995 p. 7
[222] Hall, Stuart, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, (eds.), Sage 1996, pp. 1-17
[223] Heath, Stephen, *Questions of Cinema*, McMillan, 1981, p. 102
[224] Hall Stuart, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', Hall, Stuart & du Gay, Paul (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publishing, 1996, pp. 1-17
[225] The reasons for the failure is a much contested issue

the fore in her now seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'[226]. Until recently, (after Althusser was dropped) psychoanalysis and particularly Lacanian theory has dominated much art criticism and artists' interests who came out of a post '68 Marxist art practice in Britain[227]. The turn to psychoanalysis could be seen as a retreat from the difficulties that politics presented at the time and a retreat from some of the difficulties presented by the Althusser paper. According to Hall's paper we need both the psychic and the political discourses to understand the formation of the subject. This is precisely the area in which Butler operates (and others such as Peggy Phelan or Slavoz Zizek) and why she might return to Althusser.

Whereas in earlier readings of the *ISA* paper, focus was on the role of ideology and the institution in relation to the subject, Butler is focusing specifically on the moment of interpellation.

There is no indication in "Who Needs Identity" that Hall was aware of Butler's burgeoning interest in Althusser but they draw remarkably similar conclusions – Hall returns to Stephen Heath's critique of the *ISA* article and concludes that there is still room for further investigation into this theory and that the 'notion of a subject – in – process' which was lost in Heath's critique and may point a way forward. Butler in the article, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", (written in the same year as Hall's introduction), examines the mechanism through which the individual will turn to the voice of the law, which must involve conscience, submission and the analogy of the divine. In this article, she states that

> To become a "subject" is, thus, to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. And because this declaration is not a single act, but a status incessantly reproduced, to become a

[226] First printed in *Screen*, 16:3, Autumn, 1975, pp. 6-18. It has since published in many anthologies on film theory.
[227] Roberts, John, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and The Everyday*. Manchester University Press, 1998, pp.152-153

> "subject" is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt[228]

Stuart Hall identified Judith Butler and her work critiquing the limits of feminist identity politics as crucial for developing the debates around ethnic identity.[229] Not only that but in his definition of identity he uses the language of Althusser, for example: -

> I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'[230]

If, then, identity is premised upon the interpellation into a subject and interpellation is met half way by the subject - Jews having choice and Blacks having no choice as the indicator of ethnic status is clearly a false logic.

> 'It is not as if the ready-made subject meets its limits in the law, but that the limits that the law sets decide in advance what will and will not become a subject'[231]

On the other hand – if the subject becomes a subject through the limits of the law then the subject as Jew (vis-à-vis the ethnic monitoring forms) does not exist in the contemporary language of otherness and the dispute in the Jewish community is one of whether to retain the choice, which allows for the freedoms

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[228] op cit. 'Conscience' p. 16
[229] Hall, Stuart & du Gay, Paul (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', Hall Stuart, Sage Publishing, 1996, pp. 1-17
[230] ibid., p. 5-6
[231] Butler, Judith, 'Agency of Style for a Liminal Subject', *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, (eds.) Gilroy, Paul, Grossberg, Laurence, McRobbie, Angela, p. 32

that invisibility affords. The Jewish community (and here I specifically mean the mainstream community, headed up by the Board of Deputies of British Jews) is by no means in agreement about whether or not it prefers to be to be 'invisible' or an ethnic minority[232]. Part of the reason for this is historical. The Jews fought hard in the West to be emancipated and their route at the time was to convince the governments that they could assimilate and that to be Jewish was merely a matter of private religion which would not leak outside of the home[233]. It is a contested issue whether assimilation has in fact served the Jews well. Anti-Semitism is present in Britain[234]. Despite this – to those who have flourished in this country it seems an anathema to go back to a state of what seems to be voluntary marginalization, especially for the generation who grew up during and immediately post 2nd World War[235]. Invisibility even for Jews is relatively recent in Britain. And it still does not apply to orthodoxy - the markers of clothes and *kippah* (which, as stated earlier, according to Jewish law are not a choice) are highly visible. Furthermore, invisibility of the law is not always matched by everyday invisibility – in the artwork "What Am I To You"[236], I contested the assumption of the invisibility of the Jew through my own experiences of repeatedly having the question 'where are you from?' directed at me by new acquaintances.

The challenge of Ali G was that the person behind the character was never identified as white (before it was revealed that Sacha Baron Cohen was really a middle class Jew) – that it is indeterminacy rather than invisibility that marks the

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[232] Robert Mendick reported in *The Independent On Sunday*, newspaper, (26 March 2000), that *The Jewish Policy Research Group* published a report recommending that the Jewish Community in Britain apply for ethnic minority status. Several members of the Board walked out in disgust.

[233] See Stratton, John, *Coming Out Jewish*, Routledge, 2000, p.39 and Steyn, Juliet, "Neither/Nor: the Schackmns Portrayed", The Jew: Assumptions of Identity, Cassell, 2000, pp. 212-41

[234] According to Bihku Parekh, at a talk to organised by the *Jewish Council For Racial Equality*, Jews were not initially included in the report until they were already involved in collecting data. Parekh was so alarmed (his words) at the levels of anti-Semitism the team was encountering that he asked Anthony Lerman from the *Jewish Policy Research Grou*p to take part in the report. However, at the back of the report are detailed statistics none of which include Jews. See also *A Very Light Sleeper: anti-Semitism in Britain'*, published by *The Runnymede Trust* in 1994.

[235] There has been a steady decline in Anti-Semitism since the 2nd World War. According to *The Runnymede Trust* there has been an 85% increase in reporting of anti-Semitic incidence between 1984 and 1992. ibid., p. 1

[236] Rachel Garfield, 2000

Jew. In marking himself as another (through his performance) he was begging the question of who he looks like, forcing visibility upon himself.

Adrian Piper also talks of the dilemmas of indeterminacy in 'Passing for White, Passing for Black'[237]. She describes her parents gently suggesting that she not fill out the ethnic monitoring form in the admittance procedure to a top graduate college in the United States so that she would be certain to know that she was selected on merit. Piper considered that to be "passing" and duly filled out the form. However, on arriving at the college she was directly accused by two academics in the institution of not really being Black at all, thereby implying that she had falsified her entrance criteria to her advantage – punishing her for not passing as white.

It is probably timely to ask the question – what are the advantages of invisibility? Does invisibility have to be a sign of shame (not 'out and proud' to borrow from Gay culture)? The scene of interpellation seems to rest on the policeman being able to recognize (or think he recognizes you) in the first place. As a formulation – the recognized can refuse the call but he is still called, although Butler reminds us that,

> It is important to remember that the turn towards the law is not necessitated by the hailing; it is compelling in a less than logical sense, because it promises identity[238].

In other words, the subject needs not be named by the law in order to be the subject – there is a payoff in visibility in that you become **someone,** (although as discourse is reiterative there is always already an anticipation of the hailing to come). So the need to be recognized as other is not necessarily premised upon

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[237] Piper, Adrian, 'Passing for White, Passing for Black', *Out of Order, Out of Sight, vol. I: Selected Writing in Meta-Art, 1968-1992*, MIT Press, 1996, p. 280

[238] Butler, op. cit. p. 8

the law identifying you but there is something in the 'promise' of identity, which confers status. Butler goes further than this even - she states

> One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects[239]. (original emphasis)

According to Butler here, visibility is crucial to being called, without it you (the subject) don't exist. You have to be 'recognizable'. In the above phrase Butler seems to be close to Alexander Garcia Duttman who critiques the desire of the subject to be recognized as a reinscription of his/her marginalization[240]. To be recognizable is highly problematic. How do you recognize a Jew, Romany, or an Asian for example? Before the event, 'in a prior sense', without having some universalized, essential notion of whom you think they are – which can never be more than a fantasy – a 'misrecognition', racist.

Peggy Phelan another post-Lacanian theorist suggests that there is considerable power to be gained in invisibility. Her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* is examining, in her words, 'the implicit assumptions about the connections between representational visibility and political power'[241]

Phelan, like Butler, uses Lacanian formulations to think through the politics of visibility. She states that there is a conflict between the politics of visibility within identity politics discourse and the psychoanalytic distrust of visibility that needs to

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[239] Butler, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, 1997 p. 5
[240] Duttman, Alexander Garcia, *Between Cultures: Tensions in the Struggle for Recognition*, Verso, 2000
[241] Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked, the politics of performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 1

be resolved. She focuses on the reciprocal gaze; the inequality of that gaze and how visibility and invisibility are bound together in a tight grip. While the reciprocal gaze is sought after, Lacan acknowledges the imbalance of power within this alleged reciprocity. She states, again using Lacan, that the gaze towards the other is a desire to regain the Imaginary, that moment when the self and other were not separate but that even that moment was illusionary as the mother merely returns the gaze of her own lack (of the phallus). So the other inevitably represents the perceived lack of the self.

> Visibility is a trap ("In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap"': Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts: 93); it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession[242].

Phelan argues that visibility politics leaves the power structures unproblematized and intact - rather like Zizek's view of multiculturalism. In Zizek's terms post modernist identity politics would be explained as being in accordance with capitalist structures – or at least not challenging those structures but fitting in within the social structure at large[243]. Maybe visibility only reinforces other exclusions with every new inclusion. Phelan offers a kind of negative dialectic to the politics of visibility as she explains.

> With every mark, the unmarked summons the other eye to see what the mark is blind to – what the given to be seen fails to show, what the other cannot offer. The dramas of concealment, disguise, secrets,

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[242] ibid., p. 6

[243] Zizek, Slavoj, *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, 1999 pp. 208-9. Phelan was certainly aware of Zizek's work when she wrote *Unmarked*, as she references him in her footnotes, however, *The Ticklish Subject* was written after *Unmarked,* which was published in 1993. There is no evidence to suggest any influence flowing the other way, however they both use Lacanian theory to think through political problems.

> lies, are endemic to visual representation, exactly because visual representation is "not all"[244].

In *Unmarked*, Phelan locates her examples within the visual arts. Crossing differences she writes on Mapplethorpe and Sherman, Adrian Piper and Yvonne Rainer. Her analysis of Piper's work is particularly useful here. Much of Adrian Pipers work knowingly disrupts reliance on the visible to describe race[245]. Phelan gives the example of 'Cornered' where Piper, uses statistics of miscegenation to explode the myth of racial purity in the US, and invoking the 'one drop' policy to ask the viewer who presumes they are white (and I paraphrase) 'now you know you are black - what are you going to do about it?' Phelan argues that it is this that forces the spectators to scrutinize their own assumptions regarding racial difference. Representation for Phelan, 'always conveys more than it intends and is never totalizing' Because of these two laws Phelan considers that scrutinizing the logic of representation can 'produce psychic resistance and, possibly, political change'[246]. Piper uses her own invisibility to make apparent the invisible in others. She reminds us in 'Cornered' and 'My Calling (Card) #1' for example that we (as in all people) are never only what we appear and always more than we appear. In these two pieces Piper reminds us that white may not be that white from both sides of the binary.

Like Butler[247], Peggy Phelan writes about drag in relation to the ethnographic documentary film, *Paris Is Burning* by Jennie Livingstone. The film focuses on the Black and Hispanic drag balls in Harlem, New York. Phelan makes the point that lack of power drives the desire to be 'normative' or 'unremarkable' and so invisible. Phelan herself remarks upon the remarkable similarities between the responses to colonialism in Homi Bhabha's formulations of mimicry and the

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[244] Ibid., p. 32

[245] Works such as *Cornered, My Calling (Card) #1, Self–Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features*, and writings such as 'Passing for White, Passing for Black' (1992).

[246] Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 2

[247] Butler, Judith, 'Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York &London:Routledge, 1993, pp. 121-140

"hybrid" and the "transsexuals" of Harlem[248]. The ambivalence of the transsexuals, complicit with whiteness in their positing it as the ideal of beauty while at the same time critiquing the 'norm' of whiteness in the exaggerations of the appropriation, is itself a formulation easily recognizeable from within post –colonial theory. What is at stake for Phelan however is the suggestion that while passing highlights the normative sense of the same, the binaries may be beginning to break down and the relative privilege of the one performed may be called into question. Phelan cites the examples of Matthew Barney, the artist, as a straight man passing as gay, or Madonna passing as a lesbian, as signals that, despite the,

> self-aggrandizing self-promotion that attends them, the philosophical and psychic performances necessary for these attempts to pass continue to provoke my interest. For if the ascendent term in the binary hetero-homo is beginning to shift, if only in these limited instances, perhaps too the binary visibility-invisibility will also shift[249].

So, on the one hand Phelan, is clear that the desire to 'pass' is not to *be*, and that passing offers a chance to make visible what is invisible (the normative as normative) and invisible what is visible, as she states,

> The allure of being unseen when visibility has meant (and continues to mean) violence, imprisonment, death[250].

Phelan also quotes Venus Xtravaganza, one of the characters in the film, as stating that she wants to 'be a spoiled, white girl'[251] and that Phelan herself having abandoned wanting to be a 'spoiled, white girl' confirms her own privilege as

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[248] Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked the Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, footnote 3, p. 187-8
[249] Phelan, op. cit. p. 97
[250] Phelan, ibid., p. 104
[251] Phelan, ibid., p 109

being just that. At the end of the film, Venus Xtravaganza is murdered. Livingstone's message, through this ending, is that passing is ultimately impossible and punishable by death. But Phelan asks the question, did Xtravaganza get murdered because she passed or didn't pass fully – that women routinely get murdered for not being men, either heterosexual or homosexual, which implies, even more depressingly that unless you are a white heterosexual Protestant man, you are damned if you do and damned if you don't.

If visibility leads to further exclusions – or new boundary markers, can invisibility circumvent the judgment call of the law? Both Butler and Phelan look towards transgressive forms of being to test the laws of inclusivity. Maybe the question need not be so starkly either/or. Is it possible to be sometimes visible and sometimes invisible? In many of the contemporary debates of the subject the fractured, unstable subject is taken for granted. So why should the ethnic identity be so fixed as Other or not/visible or not. As Kobena Mercer points out

> Just like women, the colonized participated equally in the war effort against fascism, and in this respect were interpellated as "equal" in one set of discourses, while the terms of social democratic concensus repositioned them – in the labour process, in the political process, in social relations – once more as "unequal"[252].

Judith Butler has been criticized for being too abstract in her theorizing[253] but it is precisely this abstraction which may take us out of some of the pitfalls of the past, of victimization claims and competing subjectivities that have so marked the discourses on identity and stunted the development of anti racist thinking.

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[252] Mercer, Kobena, *Welcome To The Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1994, p. 275

[253] Bell, Vikki, 'On Speech Race and Melancholia: An interview with Judith Butler', in *Performativity and Belonging*, Vikki Bell (ed.), Sage 1999, p.164

Chapter 4: Performing Jewish

> If the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, then language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject, and not merely its instrument of expression[254].

In this chapter I will be writing about three artists, Ruth Novaczek, Oreet Ashery and Deborah Kass. My approach to their work is not intended as a comprehensive survey either of Jewish artists or of each of these artists. Apart from Ashery the artists oeuvres have encompassed a larger body of work and a greater range of issues than that of Jewish identity, however I am focusing on this issue as pertinent to my main thesis. I have chosen these artists particularly as they are all, working with strident, often confrontational imagery in order to come to terms with the lived complexities of being a Jew now in the West, in London and New York. All three of these artists are questioning the self through using a 'stand in', or avatar, as a way of exploring these complexities[255]. Furthermore, I have adopted a similar strategy recently in my own art practice[256].

For those artists who see themselves as critiquing Jewish identity as their major practice, there is often much frustration expressed, as the Jewish community does not generally support this work, often preferring historical subjects in work such as Rachel Lichtenstein's[257] or emotionally charged work celebrating

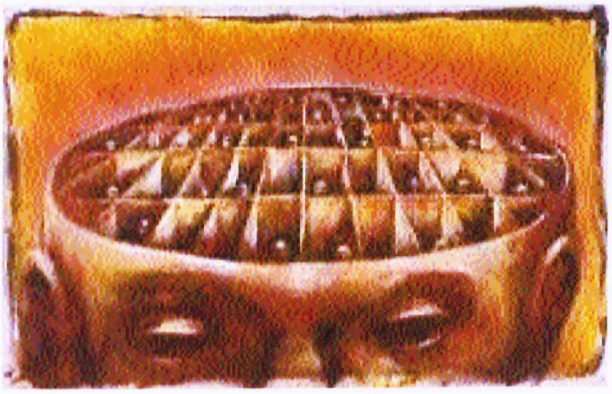
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[254] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, 1997, p. 28

[255] There are other artists using the avatar in their work such as Nikki S Lee, Adrian Piper, Cindy Sherman and more. Deborah Kass curated an exhibition in 2002 entitled 'Enough About Me', which explored just this issue at *Momenta Art* in Brooklyn, New York.

[256] See my video installation 'Unmade Up'.

[257] Lichtenstein made a piece, which was exhibited in *Rubies and Rebels*, entitled *Kirsch Family* (1996), where she used mosaic pieces from an archaeological dig in Israel to make a mosaic taken from an old family photograph of her own family in pre-2nd World War Central Europe. Grodzinski, Vera, Bohm-Duchen, Monica (eds.), *Rubies and Rebels: Jewish Female Identity In Contemporary British Art* , Lund Humphries, 1996



(ix) David Breuer-Weil, from the series *Extremes*, 6ft x 10ft, 2002

victimhood such as David Breuer Weil (fig. ix)[258]; the mainstream in Britain does not show work critiquing Jewish identity and the world of 'cultural diverse' art does not engage with it either (see Chapter 1)[259]. This does beg the question, who is the artwork being made for if there is no audience?

A few years ago ideas for a group exhibition were discussed with Ashery, Novaczek, myself and another artist Anna Sherbany, but the question of how to present ourselves in a single exhibition without our work being reduced by the container of four Jewish artists was never resolved and the plans weren't pursued to fruition. In the wake of the critiques of Black art survey shows in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s it is unlikely that any group identity based on ethnicity will be desired or established amongst contemporary artists[260]. As in the refrain of Michel de Certeau quoted both by Jean Fisher and Griselda Pollock, "Where I am visible I cannot speak", too much visibility of a certain kind clouds both interpretation of the art and the places the art can penetrate institutionally[261]. Not enough visibility means non-existence.

In the United States, or at least New York, Los Angeles and Chicago - Jews can be simultaneously visible and invisible as many of the icons of Jewish popular culture are also icons of American popular culture. There are many reasons for this and it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore them here. Deborah Kass uses Jewish icons such as Barbra Streisand repeatedly in her work. In Britain visibility possibly needs to be more extreme, as the general public have much less awareness of the Jewish community than in the United States. Oreet Ashery

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[258] David Breuer-Weil makes large expressionist, symbolic paintings, recently shown at the Boundary Gallery (24th January – 22 February 2003)

[259] What would seem to be an exception was *Colored Folks* an Artsadmin funded piece in June 2001. Oreet Ashery and Shaheen Merali, "blacked up" and "whited up" respectively. However, in this piece of work both Ashery's Jewish identity and Merali's East African Asian identity were elided into a generic Black and white binary. Also Deborah Kass, in the United States has shown extensively but feels she would have got further if the work had not been about her Jewish identity, see pp. 118-119

[260] See chapter 1 for a critique of the survey show.

[261] Fisher, Jean, 'Some Thoughts on" Contaminations" Editorial', *Third Text*, no 35, Autumn 1995, p. 4, Pollock Griselda, *Issues in Architecture, Art & Design*, University of East London, 1998

performing as an orthodox Jewish man may be the only way to gain 'recognition' as a Jew – the beard and the clothes are probably the only recognizable tropes of Jewry to an audience unfamiliar with Jews or the nuances of Jewish cultural identity (apart from the anti-Semitic stereotypes such as hook- nosed etc).

But is visibility what Jewish artists want? Perhaps, as I began to outline in the previous chapter, according to Peggy Phelan, the ideology of visibility is an impoverished way to talk about identity, it reduces the community represented as well as propping up racist assumptions of purity. For example, an article from the New York Times highlights the problems of defining blackness. A quota system has recently been set up in Brazil for entry to University. The difficulty, according to this article, is that the delineations are more fluid in Brazil where there are more than 300 terms to designate skin colour and racially mixed relationships are the norm. Katya Gibel Azoulay, of Black Jamaican and Ashkenazi Jewish parentage, cites examples of her daughter being marked as white in hospital ethnic monitoring forms by hospital staff even though she (the daughter) identifies herself as Black and the frustration this brings when she is 'seen' as white by the white hospital employees, even after being corrected on this repeatedly[262].

Phelan's critique is also useful for thinking about the position of the less visible 'other'. Peggy Phelan identifies four assumptions in what she calls the 'ideology of the visible'. Put simply, the first assumption is that if you see someone like you in the media that you will know that you are one of them, for example, if I see the Jewish character 'Dorian' in 'Birds of A Feather'[263] on the TV, I will feel included and so empowered and more interested in the programme. There is no acknowledgement that I as a Jew may not feel any solidarity with 'Dorian' at all; secondly, the person you see who *looks* like you *is* like you. I may strike a

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[262] http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/05/international/americas/05BRAZ.html. (5th April 2003). Azoulay, Katya Gibel, 'Jewishness After Mount Sinai: Jews, Blacks and the (Multi)Racial Categories' *Identities*, Vol. 8 (2), 2001, pp. 214-215

[263] Birds of a Feather is a sitcom on ITV which portrays two sisters living in a North East London suburb, they have a neighbour, 'Dorian', who is portrayed as a Jewish character.

passing resemblance to Dorian such as dark hair, olive skin and dark eyes but, again, just because I may look like her doesn't make me like her in character, political affiliations, class etc; thirdly if you don't see anyone like you then its not about you, so that if the Dorian character was not in the script or she was, say an Indian woman, I, as a Jew, would not be at all interested in the programme as having no relevance to my own life and finally, that increased visibility gives you increased power – Phelan here gives the example that if that were so, semi-naked women would rule the world.

Where does that leave Jewish artists? I argued in 'Ali G: Just Who Does He Think He Is'[264], that Sacha Baron Cohen destabilized the four assumptions that Peggy Phelan sets out for visibility politics because it is impossible to know who Ali G 'really' is, therefore who he is really representing. Maybe this masquerading is one way to comment on fixed and reductive readings of identity.

In the paper, 'Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity' Jonathan Katz, in relation to the queer theory debates is developing arguments around the notion of silence as oppositional, which may be useful to pick up on here[265]. Katz begins by describing how difficult it was to move on from what subsequently seemed a confining lesbian and gay post Stonewall identity. Even the term *Queer*, he suggests is another form of the same thing. What he thus proposes (in certain contexts) is a return to silence.

> I'm referring to silence, a specularized, peformative silence – a form of political engagement now distinctly undervalued, if not actively frowned upon in our post-Stonewall context[266].

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[264] Garfield, Rachel, 'Ali G: Just Who Does He Think He Is?', *Third Text* 54, Spring 2001, pp. 63-70

[265] Katz, Jonathan, 'Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity', *Making a Scene: Performing Culture into Politics*, Burrows, David and Rogers, Henry (eds.), ARTicle Press, 2000, pp. 97-104. From the paper delivered at the Conference at UCE Birmingham 5 June, 1999, subsequently published as above.

[266] Ibid., p.99

Silent resistance has a cultural memory within many minority groups as the only weapon of the oppressed. Katz, however, argues that it is positive, not the silence of subjugation. He sees it as a way of resisting without naming the source of that resistance. If we were to look at this in the Butlerian reworking of interpellation it would constitute a not turning around. There would be no 'who me?' but a dogged walking on in defiance of the policeman. In certain situations silence can be oppositional where speech can be appropriated and engulfed within the structures of power. Silence can teach many lessons - it is unfixed and can make a statement while eschewing binaries. Whereas visibility politics is additional[267] silence can be transformational. It can convince sometimes where disputation and disagreement sometimes cannot. Katz uses the example of a student of his who 'came out' as a Lesbian to her mother who was completely antipathetic to her daughter's sexuality. Instead of engaging in battles with her mother, the daughter withdrew and refused to engage with her. The mother relented in the silence and embraced her daughter - sexuality included. However, Katz is theorizing primarily for the visual and performing arts where he cites Andy Warhol, John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg.

By masquerading, the subject is hiding another persona and using the given persona as a mask. The subversive function of this position is that what is visible here is containable in a way that what is masked or hidden cannot be.

This is somewhat akin to Phelan's active vanishing. Both theorists stress that it must be an active silence/vanishing not *silenced* - but that power lies in the subject to *refuse* visibility and speech.

> I am speaking here of an active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility. For the moment

[267] op. cit., Phelan, Peggy, p. 11, Phelan argues that it does not change society or one, but results in what she calls 'me-ism'

> active disappearance usually requires at least some recognition of what and who is not there to be effective[268].

In other words there needs to be some level of privilege, a privilege that may even be present in one context alongside victimhood in another, such as middle class Blacks, Jews, white Gay men etc. This may seem obvious but Judith Butler recently felt the need to point this out in the *London Review of Books*,

> No political ethics can start from the assumption that Jews monopolise the position of victim. 'Victim' is a quickly transposable term: it can shift from minute to minute, from the Jew killed by suicide bombers on a bus to the Palestinian children killed by Israeli gunfire[269].

The positing of a multiple or uncertain identity is figured in the work of all the artists I will be looking at in this paper. They are all either mimicking someone else or many others, sometimes they use a stand in or icon. Either way there is an element of 're-presenting'[270]. Two of the artists employ cross-dressing as a strategy and the third employs multiple personalities (which may also include cross-dressing). All question the stability of the self, of the feminine and through this, their ethnic identity. They all explicitly reveal a Jewish identity, but an identity replicated and re-iterated that cannot be totalizing and as knowingly 'borrowed' cannot reveal an essential self. Each questions 'the self' and the need for or use value of representation in their borrowing and their relationship to the persona (or personas) they represent. In that respect these artists are questioning the assumptions as outlined by Peggy Phelan below and posit new possibilities for understanding the subject through art practice.

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[268] op. cit. Phelan, Peggy, p. 19.

[269] Butler, Judith, 'No, it's not anti-Semitic: Judith Butler defends the right to criticise Israel', *The London Review of Books*, 21 August 2003, p.19

[270] Of course all representation is actually re-presenting, but by using an avatar in their work, these artists are making obvious the re-presentation of representation.

> In conflating identity politics with visibility, cultural activists and some theorists have also assumed that "selves" can be adequately represented within the visual or linguistic field...The danger of staking all on representation is that one gains only re-presentation[271].

Ruth Novaczek, Oreet Ashery and Deborah Kass would each call themselves lesbian, which may well have influenced their choice of 'gender bending' in taking on other identities. It may have increased their interest in taking on new identities, as the question of how gay men and women dress, act, speak etc, has not only been used as a means of repression and exclusion by the mainstream, but also in response to this constitutes a source of survival, recognition and pride for lesbian and gay men. Working with shifting identities as a device is not entirely new. Cindy Sherman is a famous example of an artist who works with the impossibility of representing the self as does Adrian Piper and more recently Nikki S Lee to name a few examples. Within Jewish popular culture also there has been a history of making oneself as another other[272]. As I argued in the Ali G paper there were a disproportionate number of Jews 'Blacking up', but that aside[273] – more recently Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1982) and Sandra Bernhard's *Without You I'm Nothing'* (1990), and of course Sacha Baron Cohen as Ali G. This could be said to be a response to living in a Diaspora for a millennia and the response to the assimilationist tendency in modern times of adapting to the dominant society, and like the response of lesbians and gay men a source of survival [274].

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[271] Ibid., p. 10

[272] See footnote 255 in this chapter for details of artists working with this device.

[273] The subject of Jews Blacking up is discussed at great length in Rogin, Michael, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigration and the Hollywood Melting Pot*, California University Press, 1996.

[274] All peoples have had to adapt and migrate throughout history, however Jewry has this consciousness welded to its cultural awareness or what Jonathan Boyarin calls 'rediasporization', Boyarin, Jonathan, *Storm from Paradise, The Politics of Jewish Memory*, University of Minnesota Press, 1992

Drag, according to Judith Butler, questions the authenticity of gender formation, it is not surprising then that performing others would be a useful strategy to undo assumptions about ethnic formation, since drag is a device grown in part from a necessity to hide ones otherness in the outward appearance of the opposite gender. The allure of performing another other or gender must be precisely in undermining assimilation through its very devices of hiding.

> Indeed part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary[275]

Butler, in the later book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), modifies this view and cautions against the automatic linkage between drag and subversion in her analysis of the film *Paris is Burning*[276]. Indeed she even asks whether drag cannot just reinscribe 'hegemonic norms'[277].

Much of the work produced now that is critiquing identity could not have been made without the earlier explorations of art practice through feminism, conceptualism and the turn to politics generally in 1970s art practice. This is partly to do with expanding the field of what can be covered in art practice, or 'radical anti modernist concepts'[278] (the personal is political) and the development of Performance as an accepted mode of expression. Certainly there are traces of these modes and concepts in the approaches of all three artists - which I will signal when talking about each of the artists in depth later in the chapter.

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[275] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1999, p.175
[276] Butler, Judith, 'Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York & London:Routledge, 1993, pp.123
[277] ibid., p. 125
[278] Cottingham, Laura, *Seeing Through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art*, G+B Arts International, 2000, p. 55

In "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation" which was a round table discussion in response to the 1993 Whitney Biennale[279], Hal Foster, in his critique of the shift from class to race echoes Judith Butler's critique of 2nd generation feminism in *Gender Trouble* – that there is a universalizing assumption about the particular groups which essentialises them within that group.

> What disturbed me is that the project of the art is often to critique identity, but the subject is almost always presumed, either as the subject that addresses or the subject to be addressed, or both. So there is a turn to autobiographical identity often in the very moment of its questioning how productive a paradox is it?'[280]

My proposition is that in masquerading, both the subject addressed and the subject who addresses can be destabilized through a series of mis-recognitions, which gives rise to uncertainty and questioning in the one who is addressed.

Oreet Ashery

Oreet Ashery is an Israeli woman who lives and practices as an artist in London. She trained at Sheffield Hallam University and completed an MA at Central St Martins School of Art. I first became aware of her work in 1998.

The core of her work is a character called Marcus Fisher, an orthodox Jewish man of her invention that she 'becomes' as a Performance. In the last few years, Ashery's work has developed from performances, which entails her/him masturbating on stage with a prosthetic penis to complex performed interactions with a range of voluntary subjects. Her work is presented as video documentary,

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[279] Foster, Hal; Buchloh, Benjamin; Kolbowski, Silvia; Krauss, Rosalind; Kwon, Miwon, 'The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial', *October* (66), Autumn 1993, pp. 3-27, October Magazine Ltd & MIT Press

[280] ibid., p. 7



(x) Oreet Ashery, *Self Portrait as Marcus Fisher*, no. 5, 2000
originals are Iris prints 150x100 cm approx. from 10x8 polaroid
courtesy of the artist

photographic portraits and performance. A few key works signal the identity bending position of artists such as Nikki S Lee, but the effects play out distinct themes[281].

Ashery is making her character a cipher to be seen as more visibly different, more *Jewish*. Sacha Baron Cohen, as Ali G, is marking Jewishness as other through a different, more visible other, Ashery's cipher is through marking a more marginal form of Jewish identity, arguably the only unequivocally visible Jewish otherness. Perhaps they are both making the point of the indeterminacy of the Jew through different means. Is Ashery merely 'exoticizing ' the Jew or is real transformation involved? In other words, is there a questioning of the subject or is it presumed?

Ashery dresses up in the generic tropes of orthodoxy[282], beard, black hat, *payers* (sidelocks), *tzitzit* (fringes) etc. - the most visible but also the most hidden and introverted form of Judaism (fig. X). However, it is really an approximation – the orthodox community is riven with factions – especially Hasidism which is a form of Judaism, with dynastic rabbis (each group has its own *rebbe* from its own part of Poland/Russia or wherever the group originally came from. This would be an anathema to other forms of orthodoxy). Each sect has its uniform, a certain silk wrap (*kittel*), fur-lined hat (*streimel*). Some *chasids* wear white stockings, some wear black, some wear trousers and so forth. That Ashery doesn't pay that much attention to the detail suggests that her interest lies in addressing those who don't know the difference – the generic art world, gentiles and non-affiliated Jews.

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[281] I wrote a piece on Ashery's work in the context of representation of the orthodox Jewish Male in European Jewish Culture entitled, *Oreet Ashery: Transgressing the Sacred*, published in,: 'Alter Ego' as catalogue for exhibition in CD Rom, curated by Wibke Behrens, Berlin, 2002 and in *The Jewish Quarterly'*, no. 186, pp.11-13

[282] Orthodoxy is full of schisms, the most well known of which is Hasidic, and Mitnaged. Hasidism began in 17th Century Poland by the Baal Shem Tov and is an ecstatic form of Judaism. The Mitnaged form of orthodoxy originates from Lithuania and is a scholastic orthodoxy. Both these forms of orthodoxy are collectively known as Haredi, which also includes Sephardi and middle-Eastern orthodoxy. There is no evidence that Ashery's character is Chasidic but would be recognised as Haredi as opposed to Modern orthodox.



(xi) Oreet Ashery, from *Marcus Fisher's Wake* 1999
courtesy of the artist

Ashery's work incorporated mainly photography and performance until 2000, when she made 'Marcus Fisher's Wake'. This mock documentary is approximately 20 minutes long and describes the life story of Marcus, his turning away from a secular Israeli family at a young age, delving into ultra-orthodoxy and later into the confusion of the young man who attempts (and fails) to resolve his existential angst by becoming an artist. Through such devices as a cheesy fake American narrator and the filming of what is obviously Ashery's family and history, fiction and reality get overlaid.

The video opens with a view of Israel, a description of gender roles within the family presented and the 'fact' that the mother ran away from Jewish orthodoxy as a young woman. The documentary describes Marcus Fisher growing up, in a voiceover narrating what is a mixture of incidental footage of scenes of children playing in Israel, views from a bus of the Mea Shearim[283], and that of Ashery's family (the viewer presumes) presented as the family of Marcus. Later, the narration explains Marcus' fascination with orthodoxy – the description is of an obsession with rituals such as laying *tefillin*, a practise observed by adult males every morning, which consists of wrapping leather straps around the left hand and arm and head as a preparation to prayer. The narrator describes this in explicitly sexual terms while the camera is focused, for the duration of this explanation, on a young, muscled man laying tefillin in the street thereby, exultantly fetishizing Jewish orthodoxy (fig. Xi). Later in the video, the narrator describes Fisher going to art school. Documentary footage of Art performances of Oreet Ashery on stage as Marcus Fisher is weaved into the 'life story' of this video; performances, or what Ashery calls live interventions are presented as part of the narrative of the video, and as photographic pieces in the video (Ashery made a series of photographs of herself as Marcus, which are shown in this video). Built into the structure of 'Marcus Fisher's Wake' are questions of how to 'read' the subject of the documentary.

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[283] A neighbourhood of Jerusalem, which is well known as the orthodox Jewish quarter.

It is the narration that gives special meaning to the footage. The narrator has full control of our understanding of the artist. The viewer doesn't even see the artist, (that is Ashery or Marcus) until about half way into the video and neither the artist nor performer speaks. The first we see of her as him is in footage of Ashery sitting in a café in Soho, a signal to those in the know that this is a fiction. (An orthodox man would never have a coffee in a non-kosher café.) A Jew with an orthodox background would know this to be transgressive, a non-Jewish viewer, probably not. Oreet's whole project however is premised upon knowing Fisher's gender is 'fake' and therefore the whole persona of the Orthodox man.

> For the "I" to launch its critique, it must first understand that the "I" itself is dependant upon its complicitous desire for the law for the possibility of its own existence. A critical review of the law will not, therefore, undo the force of conscience unless the one who offers that critique is willing, as it were, to be undone by the critique that he or she performs[284].

In this video the artist never speaks but allows him/herself to be interpellated by a narrator, who explains and also judges, (at one point the narrator admonishes Marcus Fisher as too "New Age"), so the artist becomes the subject through the hailing of the narrator in this way the subject is "undone by the critique that she performs". But the narrator interpellates Fisher into the Jew. The complicity of the subject is clear. Ashery is dressing up. She wants to be 'The Jew' (her own police uniform, as she is controlling the narration). She is hailer and hailed. Towards the end of the film the viewer sees a performance by Fisher in which 'he' lets his trousers down and the thighs of a woman are revealed, thus making sure the viewer knows that Marcus Fisher is a conceit – is really Oreet Ashery and just in

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[284] Butler, Judith "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", YFS 88, *Depositions*, ed. Lezra, 1995 Yale University, p. 8

case the viewer still has not 'got it', the image of Duchamp as Rrose Selavy comes on to the screen with an explanation by the narrator.

> This turning toward the voice of the law is a sign of a certain desire to be beheld by and perhaps also to behold the face of authority [285].

This subject is fixed – Marcus Fisher is fixed as confused orthodox man, Jewish artist and as the archetypal 'Jew' subject to an essentialist reading - the most conservative of constructions of Jewry. Yet the knowledge of the viewer that Marcus Fisher is only a construct that he is really Oreet Ashery, the non-orthodox female, Jewish artist, undermines that reading. But does knowing this 'undo the critique that she performs'? Not knowing how seriously to take the 'autobiography' in the mock-documentary goes a long way to address Hal Foster's criticism of a turn to a stable subject 'often in the very moment of its questioning'[286]. With Ashery its almost the other way around – she is goading the viewer into making her a Jew while at the same time defiling the perceived holiness of that vision of the Jew (the *Chasid*). She is working at the limits as a way of questioning what the 'norm' may be.[287] Furthermore, while the viewer is told what a Jewish family is - through the implied fiction and the conflicts arising there is the possibility for the viewer to question their own stereotypes of Jews, Judaism and gender, just as Jewish viewers are forced to look at their own prejudices regarding orthodoxy. Maybe.

The editing of the video is gauche and some of the effects are badly done and reveal the limitations of the editing package used. For example, the stills within

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[285] Butler, ibid., p. 11

[286] Foster, Hal, *October,* see p. 99, footnote 279

[287] Butler, Judith 'Agencies of Style of a Liminal subject' in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall,* (eds.) Gilroy, Paul, Grossberg Lawrence, and McRobbie, Angela, 2000. Butler in this paper, looks at sadomasochism to reflect on sexual and gendered norms, she states that 'it may be that this apparent "aberration" lays open something central to the operation of the norm' p. 33. also Bauman *Culture, Modernity and the "Jew"*, p. 147. Bauman states that the Jew is Christendom's 'alter ego' marking the boundaries of the Christian civilization.



(xii) Oreet Ashery, *Self Portrrait as Marcus Fisher, No 4,* 2000
originals are Iris prints 150x100 cm approx. from 10x8 polaroid
courtesy of the artist

the video, such as that of Duchamp as Rrose Selavy, are constructed so that they drift repeatedly in minute circles, and the slow motion passages judder. The cuts are jerky jump cuts and the footage reads as a chaotic collage of arbitrary edit decisions – silences that are inexplicable within the logic of the piece and the ending is no ending but a stoppage without signal and without even credits. All this serves to furnish a 'home-made' aesthetic, sometimes associated with reality. No slick, no gloss, an intentional gaucheness that would suggest the work of an amateur and a carefully constructed nonchalance. Yet it is plainly highly constructed – an issue which itself belies an ambivalence

Ashery's self portraits owe a debt to Cindy Sherman. There are some compositional similarities, with regards to staging and the use of prosthetics. Sherman is probably an obvious place to look for an antecedent of Ashery and there are many readings on Shermans work, but pertinent to this discussion is Phelan's argument that 'Sherman's work suggests that female subjectivity resides in disguise and displacement'[288] and it is in the taking up of the uncontainabiltity of the 'self' through the visual that Ashery's photographic work is most closely allied to Shermans.

Gender is crucial to the reading of Ashery's work. In the photographic piece *Self-Portrait of Marcus Fisher* No 4 (2000) (fig. xii), the image is of Ashery, dressed in orthodox clothing as Marcus the man who is holding his breast, which is a woman's breast, or is it a prosthetic?[289] Unlike *Marcus Fisher's Wake* these self-portraits are slick studio portraits. The image is larger than life- size, with the a blank, background of a studio shot, although the figure is close to the picture plane, cut off at the knees and halfway up the hat. Fisher/Ashery is not looking at the camera but is self –absorbed. From the way he is holding the breast out to the viewer and the way he is looking closely at it – it is as if to invite us to scrutinize the object as evidence to confound the expectations of the image as male. The

[288] Phelan, op. Cit., p. 60



(xiii) Oreet Ashery, *Self Portrati as Marcus Fisher* No. 3 ,2000
originals are Iris prints 150x100 cm approx. from 10x8 polaroid
courtesy of the artist

dildo as penis in *Self-Portrait of Marcus Fisher No 3* (2000) (fig. xiii) makes the viewer wonder about the breast. Which gender is real? This confusion of gender can be seen within a complex history of Jewish masculinity.

The "Jew" is always is a man. Sander Gilman has written extensively regarding the feminization of the Jewish male in Europe, possibly deriving originally from the symbol of circumcision as castration but really invented and fuelled by anti-Semitism. There are even examples of 15th Century texts alleging the menstruation of Jewish men[290]. Thus the Jewish man is not really a man and the Jewish woman is invisible (but acknowledged in the gender bending of the Marcus Fisher self portraits).

According to Daniel Boyarin however, the narrative of the emasculated Jewish male is entirely Christian, "Precisely the qualifications that would render a young man fit to be a monk within European Christian culture, scholarliness, quietism, modesty and a spiritual aptitude are those that qualify him to be a husband in this (18th Century, Hasidic) Jewish culture". It is interesting to note here the 'gender reversal' of Marcus Fisher's parents in *Marcus Fisher's Wake* where the father does all the cooking and the mother is in charge of the finances. Is this in keeping with the 20th Century Jewish self-image of the "domineering wife, henpecked husband" that I would suggest has been appropriated through a highly assimilated Western Jewish community[291]? Or could this seeming gender reversal be seen within a different model of gender roles developed in the 'otherness' of the diaspora where the model of European modernity does not apply.[292] Daniel Boyarin's suggestion is that what in Christian thought is held to be a failed masculinity is highly valued in Jewish orthodoxy. Oreet's alter ego of Marcus

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[290] Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism*, Harper Collins, 1992, p. 55

[291] See Prell, Rive-Ellen, *Fighting To Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation*, Beacon Press, 1998, for an in depth study on the effects of the pressure to assimilate on the stereotypes of women from within the Jewish community in 20th Century America.

[292] Boyarin Daniel, 'Goyim naches: The Manliness of the Mentch' in *Modernity, Culture and The Jew*; Ed, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, Polity Press, 1998, p. 73



(xiv) Oreet Ashery, *Still from Marcus Fisher's Wake*, 1999
courtesy of the artist

Fisher could thus be seen as a rejection of the 'Macho' Israeli image of masculinity in favour of a more gentle and sensitive manhood.

A further reading on the gender reversal of Ashery can be offered in *Marcus Fisher's Wake* where the narrator describes both the camaraderie Fisher feels with the Turkish men (fig. xiv) and the fetisization of the *tefillin* donning man, and a further scene where Fisher is lazing in Soho square and the narrator is making a sexual evaluation of a young blonde man next to Fisher. Ashery here is giving clear homo-erotic signals, which, knowing that Fisher is really Ashery, the woman confuses the reading on the self even more than merely performing as a drag act.

In her more recent work Ashery has moved further into staging fictions. She moves from live performance on stage (and in the street) to intimate encounters in a bedroom, replicating the confessional or the therapy room. In her piece, *Say Cheese* , she invites people, anyone, into a bedroom, one at a time, where they encounter the artist lying on a bed dressed as Marcus Fisher. The punter can choose various physical starting points (i.e. sitting at the foot of the bed, standing by the bed, sitting). This can be (and has been) used as a vehicle for the punter to role play break-ups with partners; explore Fisher's ethnicity or talk about their own identity. Fisher is the passive respondent. In this scenario, who is interpellating who, and what are the power structures? Ashery is playing a Jew; the punter is playing something else. Each is bringing manoeuverability into their status as a subject.

It could be said, however that Ashery is making a passive subject to be treated in any way by the punter, putting her character in a subordinate position to be interpellated according to the whim of the punter – the one with the power. In *Say Cheese*, Ashery sets up a confessional, borrowing from the Roman Catholic

tradition to stage an encounter that may reveal a new understanding of attitudes towards her character, Marcus Fisher, the Jew[293].

Foucault in *The History of Sexuality (Part 1)*, states that on the contrary,

> The confession is ...also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession[294].

Within this formulation Ashery maintains all the power. What confounds this power dynamic is the dressing up. The priest in Catholicism, is also dressed up but his costume represents the real authority invested in him by the community he serves and the Church who appoints him. Ashery is masquerading as an oddity. A Jew, who has no power in and of himself, all that he is invested with is the fantasy of the punter. He does not even draw on support of his apparent community as he doesn't belong to the community to which Ashery ostensibly adheres through the costume (The Haredi). In this fake scene, Ashery is not really the orthodox Jew, everyone knows this, else she wouldn't be in this situation, (unlike the priest in the confessional who is at home there) .The image of Ashery is rendered invisible as the needs of the punter is paramount in some scenarios. In others it is the stereotype, that is the punters fantasy of the Jew, which they are forced to deal with (as is Ashery).

In a talk given recently at the Bluecoat Gallery, Ashery gave many examples of the different way she was 'used' by the visitor.

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[293] Ashery could also be said to be borrowing a scenario from the therapeutic model as a way of exploring psychological responses to Marcus Fisher as Jew.

[294] Foucault, Michel, *The Will To Knowledge, the History of Sexuality: 1*, Penguin, 1976, p. 61

> In Ljubljana a woman asked Marcus to hug her and pretend that he was her best friend and knew everything about her...another person pretended that they were meeting the Jewish God and confessed to be a catholic whore...Marcus was also told by another participant, a German woman about her feelings of guilt and responsibility in relation to the holocaust[295].

The self-naming of Ashery as a visible Jew as a conscious choice to give someone else the opportunity to name for themselves, is an empowering act for both. While Ashery is calling the 'punter' into the subject by inviting them into the room, the punter is interpellating Ashery into a Jew, but then as the fiction is complicit, the knowing misrecognition gives rise to new possibilities for the speaking subject.

> If the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that he or she speaks, then language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject and not merely its instrument of expression[296]

So although according to Judith Butler, language has a prior existence to and exceeds the speech act – to speak a new language gives rise to new possibilities, possibilities which may allow each party in this encounter to move beyond assumption.

However this is a 'safe house'. Each party knows they have nothing to fear. The visitor has been given permission to speak by Ashery, by the institution in which it is housed and by themselves, in coming into the space. In the ISA paper, Althusser was looking at how structures of power disseminate and propagate ideology on behalf of the state. What ideology is being disseminated here?

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[295] From transcript of talk at the Blucoat Gallery (30th January 2003) kindly supplied by Oreet Ashery
[296] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, 1997, p. 28

Ashery is demanding the right to be different, or at least to the right to assume different identities and so unfixing the subject.

Ashery's work can also be thought about in relation to the Boyarins' formulations of the orthodox Jew as counter-hegemonic. They argue that the Jew has been both denied difference and reviled[297]. Ashery is making visible what is usually considered invisible – in a turning away from so called normality both as an Israeli and as an assimilated Jew[298]. However Ashery is not only transgressing the Western demand for normalcy, she is also transgressing the Orthodox Jewish demand for clear boundaries: It is forbidden for men and women to wear each other's clothes; it is forbidden to masturbate (or simulate it), it is forbidden to expose your body, or eat/drink in non-kosher establishments[299] – all of which Ashery does, as Marcus Fisher. So in a sense she is counter hegemonic from all angles, offensive to Jewish Orthodoxy, offensive to those who want everyone to be the same[300].

Ruth Novaczek

Ruth Novaczek is a film-maker living and practicing in London. Novaczek began artistic life as a painter and has practiced Performance and been making films since the early 1980s. Her oeuvre therefore is varied. Her influences are found in the beat poets such as Robert Lax or film makers such as Bruce Connor, Jack Smith and Ron Rice. She also cites Carolee Schneeman, Malcolm Le Grice and Andy Warhol as influences, although there are, as with Ashery, shades of Sherman through the use of the image of women as reproduced through types[301].

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[297] See Ch. 2, pp. 64-65. of this thesis.

[298] The Zionist project was partly intended to 'normalize' the Jew by setting him up with a nation state like other nations

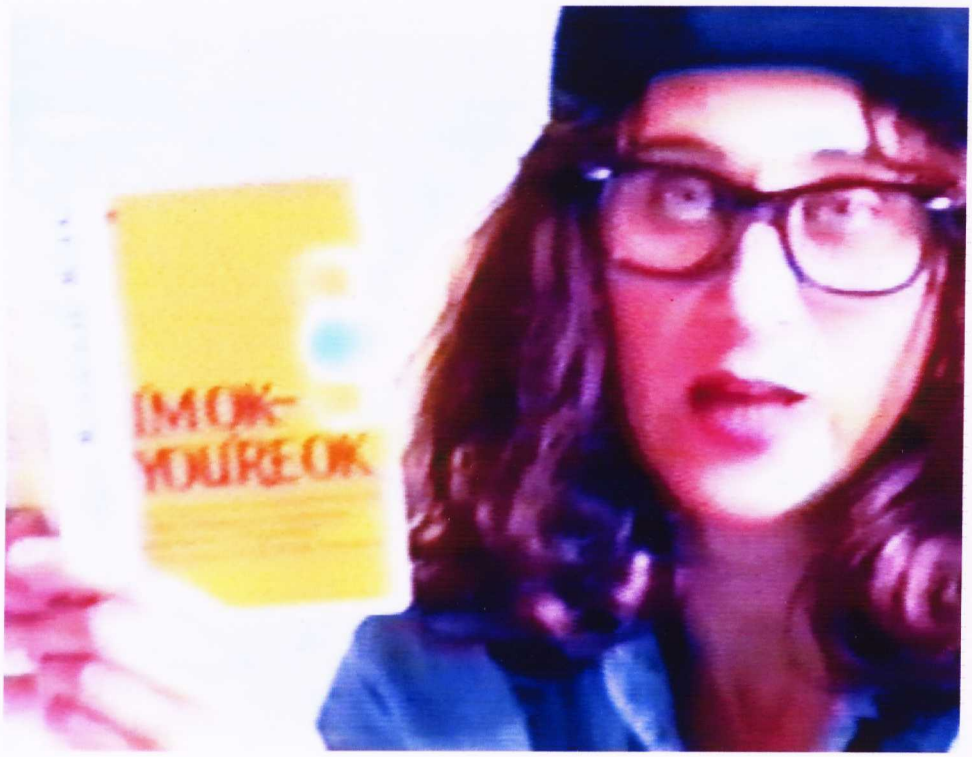
[299] In *Marcus Fishers Wake*, Ashery as Fisher, drinks coffee in a Turkish coffee house in Berlin and in a Soho bar, both of which are non-kosher establishments, which in turn makes the coffee non-kosher.

[300] For a more detailed reading of Ashery through the Boyarin brothers and Jewish culture see Garfield, Rachel, 'Transgressing the Sacred: The art of Oreet Ashery', *The Jewish Quarterly*, Summer 2002, pp. 11-13

[301] See Phelan, op. Cit., p. 60-61



(xv) Ruth Novaczek,still from *Cheap Philosophy*, (1993)
courtesy of the LuX



(xvi) Ruth Novaczek, from *Cheap Philosophy*, (1993)
courtesy of the Lux



(xvii) Ruth Novaczek, from *Cheap Philosophy*, (1993)
courtesy of the Lux

However Novaczek has had a long-standing interest in Jewish identity and exploring in film what this means to her, a Jewish woman.

In *Cheap Philosophy (1993)*, for example, the structure is made up of a series of snippets of conversation from many people. Most of these people are Novaczek herself dressed up as different stereotypes of Jewish women. She intersperses these with other Jews, some of whom look remarkably like Novazcek herself (fig. xv). There are various representations of what could be recognized as the 'neurotic therapy junky' (fig. xvi), the 'European glamorous diva' (fig. xvii), the 'revolutionary'. She also appears as an orthodox Jewish man, reminiscent of 'Yentl', (the gender bending film made by Streisand), although she takes care to juxtapose herself as a man with a 'real' man, boasting about conquests with women, the archetypal swaggering lad. None of the characters have a complete story to tell, what narrative exists is made up of disjointed phrases. The snippets build up a composite picture of uncertainty, doomed affairs, vulnerability and lesbian love but all bound closely with ideas of the representation of Jewish identities - identities derived from a variety of sources such as the *stetl*, American films directed by Woody Allen, or made by Sandra Bernhard, as well as lived experience and fantasy.

At one point she, or one of her characters, states 'this is a hall of mirrors'. The text, or snippets reflect the conversations in Western Jewish culture, the pressure to be a certain kind of person without actually knowing who or what that might be - the interpellator is invisible here and all we have is the results of that calling - 'behind arrogance is vulnerability', 'I don't care about bagels, I don't care about chopped herring! ,'change, progress, revolution!', ' I never even ate chopped herring', 'Go back to the stetl, jerk!'. The refrain 'don't call me neurotic!' is repeated out of many mouths (although all Novazcek) punctuated throughout the film like a dominant mantra. Clearly this is an anxious film. It is funny, in the vein of Woody Allen or Sandra Bernhard, slightly desperate, too revealing and

uncomfortable. The anxiety of who to be, how to be, how to feel secure and loved stems from the conflicting messages, the lack of heterogeneous role models.

> The more one seeks oneself in language, the more one loses oneself precisely there where one is sought[302].

Like most of her films this one is made up of fast edits and quick shifts between characters suspended in an uncertain time and space. Some of the footage is in sepia tones, some in colour. Sometimes the characters are depicted in a garden but mostly against a blank wall, or sitting at a table, sometimes they even sing.

One of Novaczek's key devices is to degrade the quality of the image, she copies and copies the film until it is blocks of tone, fuzzy and painterly. The loss of detail within the image gives rise to meanings of uncertainty where broad sweep gestures are more important than the details in narrative. The footage switches between colour and black and white. The colour footage is often heightened to look rather like a Warhol screen print, but slightly too sharp in colour and off key, enhancing the sense of anxiety. However there seems to be no logic to the sequencing of colour adding to the general sense of chaos. The awkwardness of the editing could invite comparisons with Ashery except for the acknowledged artifice - here there is not semblance of the real, furthermore Novaczek is actually holding a microphone in some of the shots. She knows this is a performance.

Like Warhol's screen prints, where there is slippage between the line and tone of the image, in *Cheap Philosophy*, the lip -sync has gone awry, and the movements of the people are wooden - all due to the relentless degrading of the image. The image degrading lends a painterly quality to the image, which heightens the sense of unreality – this is a cabaret on film. Indeed, there is a theatricality to the multiple

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[302] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge 1997, p. 30

voices that throws doubt on any being real. They come across in places like puppets, manipulated by the apparatuses of ideology, although some are less degraded than others, so the images shift around in vision and in character and sound. Never to be still, never dwelt on long enough to be sure of who is who.

The viewer is never certain who the subject is, she could be any one of these cameo performances. The film compels us to consider who is the real Jew amongst all these Jews, and can there be any one real Jew or is there only representation? I know that somewhere in the performance is the artist, but again, who is the real Ruth Novaczek, – they are all equally valid. Do I, the viewer have to choose? If I can't rely on who the subject is in the film, can I rely on who I am? Maybe I am all of these, people and maybe Novaczek is too – or indeed none of them.

> One is still constituted by discourse, but at a distance from oneself. Interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark, it requires the recognition of an authority at the same time that it confers identity through successfully compelling that recognition. Identity is a function of that circuit, but does not pre-exist it. The mark interpellation makes is not descriptive but inaugurative[303]

The invisible interpellator here, is confounded and confounding, reminding me of Jewish folklore from Eastern Europe where babies were given "false" names to ward off the evil eye, so that if the child was commanded back to the other side (ie. they died), the evil eye would be confused by the false name, searching in vain for the real name and the child would be saved.

Cheap Philosophy is typical of Novaczek's films of that period, the shifts between the existential and the personal, the degraded or tinted image and disembodied

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[303] ibid., p. 33

voice are all present in *Talk Israel* and *Rootless Cosmopolitans (1993)*. Particularly in the latter, there is no temporal or geographically fixed location; the past blends into the present and the footage of London could equally be Cairo, it is hard to tell, the camera moves too quickly and the music and tinting of the footage confound an English siting – even when the river Thames is recognised. The 'actors' accents are all different, sometimes 'real' and sometimes caricatured, Novaczek is fond of performing a mock American accent, thereby accentuating the invisibility of the British Jew but also not taking seriously the given, Hollywood representations of Jewry. The clothes are sometimes 1950s, sometimes contemporary, some references are urban some are Middle Eastern – as in *Cheap Philosophy*, the shifts between black and white, sepia tint and colour further confuse – as does the music which is Eastern and Western but recognizable as probably Jewish. The pace throughout each film is the same and the devices are similar. Repetition is common in her work generally both with the voiceovers and imagery, inferring the idea of a copy of a copy that calls into question the 'original'. The endless reiteration of imagery gives rise to an accumulative sense of claustrophobia - there is no escape from this world - and is also where she is closest to some of the Beat poets like Robert Lax or Bruce Connor.

> The public display of injury is also a repetition, but it is not simply that, for what is displayed is never quite the same as what is meant, and in that lucky incommensurability resides the linguistic occasion for change[304].

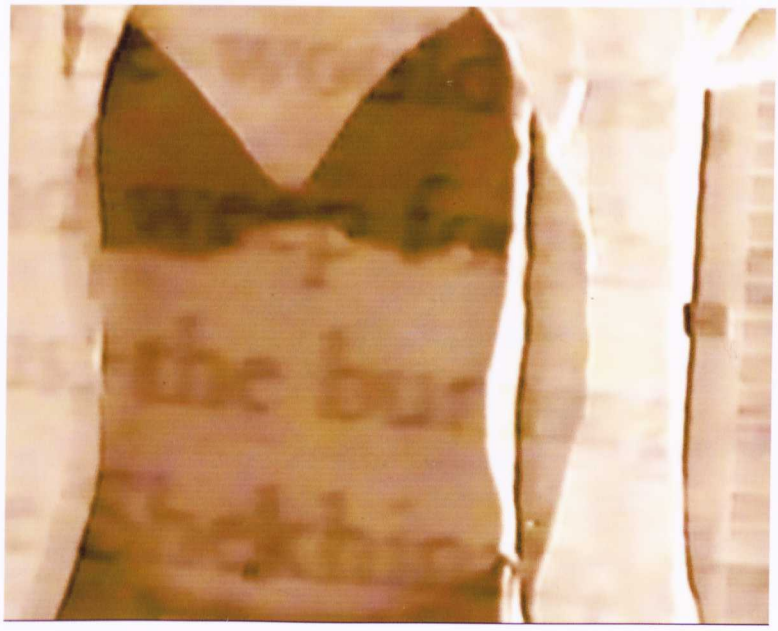
Novaczek's more recent films, use the same devices of degraded image, voiceover and fast edits to confound expectations, but she has refined the language so that the theme is recognizeable while having less obvious characters. In fact the characters in the work take a back seat to swirling, fast cut,

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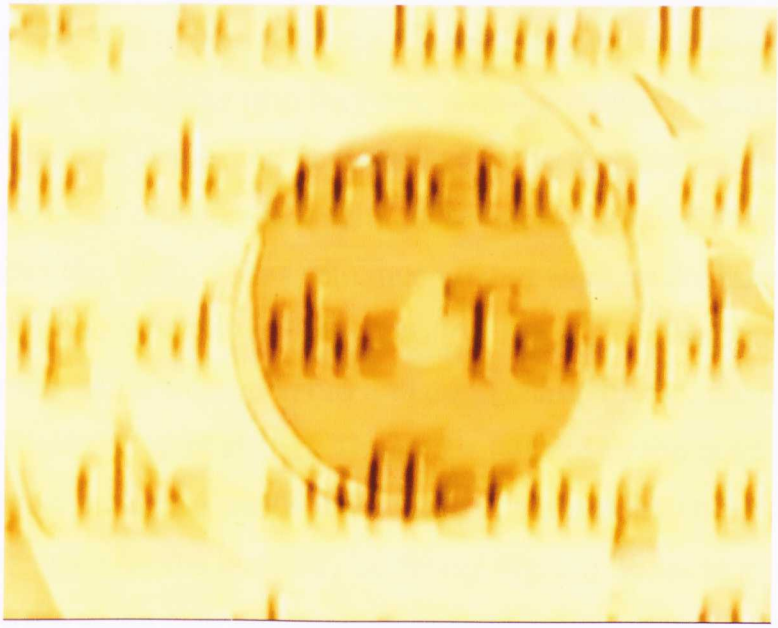
[304] ibid., p. 102



(xviii) Ruth Novaczek, Still from *series 1*, (999)
courtesy of the Lux



(xix) Ruth Novaczek, from *series 1*, (1999)
courtesy of the Lux



(xx) Ruth Novaczek, from *series 1*, (1999)
courtesy of the Lux

city scapes, voice over and objects. In the vignettes, which run from *1.1* to *1.5* and *2.1* to *2.5* (1999) the shifts from the existential to the personal are less pronounced and more integral. The images have taken over, and the narrative is slightly less apparent, more like little chunks of thinking, or as the narrator says in *1.4,* 'memory, fragments glimpsed'. But these are urban memoires - road movies, the camera is filming from the car in many of the scenes, shifting from London, to New York, to the Middle East. As in her earlier films where the character destabilises the settled, the viewer is never sure where they are being taken by the camera. This figures in all the *1* series, the only characters appearing are fleeting, we don't know who they are, a woman running from behind, a face, half of which only is visible and so degraded in the footage that it looks like a bad photocopy – all one can see is the thick frizzy hair and glasses, a foot walking on the cracks (fig. xviii). *1.4* as with much of her work, makes use of montage – the camera keeps returning to a black coffee in a cup, viewed from above, sometimes with a woman in bra and open shirt (fig. xix), dancing, melting into it, text overlaid on top of all that. The text is flashed by too quickly to read it fully, all I could make out of the words were a few phrases each time, 'destruction of the temple', 'weep for the burning', 'suffering' (fig. xx). What to make of this haunting image – the voice over which every now and again states 'I thought this was a love story' signals a double reading of the text, and the city becomes a site of romance and lost love both literal and metaphorical as well as marking the 'rootless cosmopolitan' who is the "Jew".

The *2* series is more overt again in its Jewish references and tends to use found footage instead of the purposefully shot footage as in many other of her films. Although there is always a narrative to be found, Novaczek here has jettisoned any semblance to linear narrative - there is no beginning and no end - just interventions. *2.1* introduces the Jewish motif with the voiceover of Jackie Mason on one of his, 'you look Jewish, you *dreck'*, 'you look Jewish, you'll be lucky if you don't get hit by a truck' shticks, over images of the Statue of Liberty, and



(xxi) Ruth Novaczek, from *series 2*, (1999)
ourtesy of the Lux



(xxii) Ruth Novaczek, from *series 2*, (1999)
Courtesy of the Lux

American cars driving in an American street[305]. *2.2* for example, shifts between the image of a can of *tcholent*[306] (fig. xxi), Woody Allan about to eat a chicken leg, French toast and a cowboy. The voiceover is repetitive, of found sound of a woman with an hysterical edge to her voice, saying 'I'm taking a course in laughing and I'm studying Protestant cookery' interspersed with a man shouting, 'don't'. The seeming non-sequiteurs of this imagery speak to a confusion of messages but the sheer absurdity of it mocks its own seriousness and relieves the tension in the relentless questions of identity. The humour in *2.2* is also an important juxtaposition to the earnestness of *2.3* (fig. xxii), in which Novaczek uses found footage of the *Shoah*[307], again much degraded but this time in slow motion, which puts some distance between the 'event' (of the *Shoah*) and the viewer, as the footage becomes an orchestration of browns and reds, adding a certain romance, which sits uncomfortably with such subject matter. However what rescues the imagery from a sentimentality is the voiceover, of Novaczek making comments which are difficult to hear but sound like, 'they tell us to forget', 'get over it', 'on and on', 'being Jewish' repeated over and over, a reminder of the need to keep remembering and at the same time, a reminder of the over representation of a certain kind. Much of the sound in this series is distorted so much that you can hardly decipher it, as if Novaczek is struggling to find a voice, or more, struggling to get her voice heard.

The last in the series is *2.5*, which returns to the road movie theme of the *1* series. The voiceover explains a little more of the choice of imagery. 'I have a tendency to fragment, I like to get into a car and drive' and 'the driver asked me where I was from, I said I am from the Diaspora'

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[305] *dreck* is Yiddish for dirt

[306] *tcholent* is a type of stew, that Ashkenazi Jews who observe the Sabbath traditionally eat on Saturday for lunch, its main distinguishing feature is that it has to be one third cooked before Sabbath and then it slow cooks over the Sabbath period until the lunch time of the Saturday when it is eaten.

[307] *Shoah* is Hebrew for the holocaust.



(xxiii) Ruth Novaczek, from *series 1*, (1999)
courtesy of the artist and the Lux



(xxiv) Ruth Novaczek, From *Series 1*, (1999)
courtesy of the artist

In many of these vignettes the motif of travel and displacement is strong, where there are no swirling cityscapes there is an airplane overhead, a beach, any place could be anywhere, a world of city and global movement figures in this work but also claustrophobia and frustration which is figured in the repetition of the airplaine motif and the car – the need always to get away.

Novaczek questions the politics of visibility through positing all her women in the films as Jewish even though from a 'look' other assumptions are often made – a woman viewed from behind who 'looks' black with a head wrap (fig. xxiii), an Asian 'looking' woman sitting in the car (fig. xxiv), a Jewish 'looking' woman. Where there are specific figures they are 'other'.

'I thought of you as home' she states in *2.5* at the woman in the car – a plaintive cry - for in Novaczek's work the main feature is lack of home, the hope of looking but despair of never finding this home, either in people or place is the poignancy of the diaspora in her films

Deborah Kass

Deborah Kass is an artist who lives and works in New York. Her work first emerged in the 1980s at a time when the so called bad boys and girls, such as Jeff Koons, David Salle, Nan Goldin and Sue Williams, were all gaining prominence. A new Pop came to the art scene. The 1980s also saw a rise in concern about the 'death of the author' mainly through the readings of Barthes and his famous essay 'The Death of the Author'[308] and of Baudrillard's theories on the simulacrum which were circulating widely amongst artists at that time[309]. Although artists like Jasper Johns with the flag paintings and Robert Rauschenberg, who famously rubbed out a De Kooning drawing, had previously

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[308] From Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, Fontana, 1977

[309] Crow, Thomas, 'The Return of Hank Herron', *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, & MIT Press, 1986, p.12



(xxv) Deborah Kass, *Before and Happily Ever After* 1991
oil and Acrylic on canvas,
collection of Susan Rice and Susan Shaffer, New York

covered the territory of authenticity in relation to the artists' brush stroke and representation, in the mid 1980s these ideas took on a new lease of life with artists such as Sherrie Levine and Ross Bleckner, the former particularly an influence on Kass.

The work of Deborah Kass has long been concerned with patriarchy in the visual arts and the representation of women through art history. Her early work consistently referenced other male artists, David Salle, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock. Kass juxtaposed imagery and painting languages within a single canvas in an iconoclastic gesture to question the patriarchal language of painting and the messages contained within Western culture, for example, *Puff Piece* (1992) and *Before and Happily Ever After* (1991).

Kass states that *Before and Happily Ever After* (1992) (fig.xxv), was the first Jewish painting she made. The painting is of borrowed imagery from two sources, the top two thirds is taken from Andy Warhol's *Before and After, 3*, 1962 which depicts a profile of a woman before and after a 'nose job'. Across the bottom of the painting is another borrowing, from Walt Disney, of Cinderella having the lost slipper placed on her foot by the prince. It talks of the promise of marriage to the girl who conforms to the mores of American (ie WASP) beauty. According to Michael Plante, Kass' use of Warhol here is a critique of his 'assumptions of female beauty'[310]. I suspect that Warhol is here being ironic and as critical as Kass – the Warhol image is drawn in a highly stylised illustrative language. The juxtaposition of the Warhol with the conservative project of Disney gives a nuanced reading of the pressures upon women. Kass has clearly increased in size the Warhol image and painted it from a projection and thus has changed the relationship of mark to ground. The reproducing and changing of the image of Warhol alludes to a kind of Chinese whispers of representation and of cultural mores, where rituals (including 'nose jobs') become *de riguer* and

[310] Plante, Michael, 'Screened Identities, Multiple Repetitions and Missed Kisses: Deborah Kass' Warhol Project', *Deborah Kass: The Warhol Project*, Plante, Michael (ed.), Tulane University, 1999, p. 44

divorced from the original source of meaning. Rhinoplasty, was originally felt to required by some in order to assimilate, to appear more of a WASP, however the 'nose job'[311] then became incorporated wholesale by the Jewish community as a mark of beauty for Jews[312]. By contrast, the painting by Kass of the Disney scene is more akin to the original, radiating the pervasiveness and power of this Disney figure and his telling of those much older and more ambiguous fairy stories. Kass identifies this painting as her first Jewish painting.

> I made this as a feminist painting but then I looked at it and thought holy shit! This is a big Jewish painting. I think I was tired of making paintings about my 'absence'. This painting was about my presence[313].

As a New Yorker, the context for Kass' Jewish identity is slightly different to the other two artists whom I have chosen to write about here. British Jews often look longingly over the Atlantic as an example of Jewish pride, Jewish community, multivalence, erudition and so forth. One of the big factors in this difference is that in New York there are many more Jews – 972,000, whereas in London there are only approximately 150,000[314]. However according to Deborah Kass, some of the 'problems' for artists here are replicated over there – of marginalisation in the art world[315].

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[311] According to Sander Gilman, 'the nose job' has been embraced recently by the Korean American community as a favourite 17th birthday gift for young women in that community. 'Making the Body Beautiful: Jews and Aesthetic Surgery', talk given in November 1999, as part of the *Jewish Textualities* series, at Senate House, London University, organised by Dr Nadia Valman and Josh Cohen

[312] Gilman, Sander, 'The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job', *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, Laurence J Silberstein and Robert L Cohn, (eds.), New York University Press, 1994, pp. 364-401

[313] Interview with Deborah Kass, 25th April 2003

[314] *Jpr news*, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Spring, 2003, p. 5; *The Gotham Gazette* published the figures of the United Jewish Appeal – Federation of New York, written by Alexander Grant on June 17th 2003. The figures were www.gothamgazette.com/citizen/ jul03/russian-jewish.shtm

[315] While Jewish artists per se are not marginalized in the United States, Kass is talking here specifically about artists exploring their Jewish identity.

Kass is very insistent that putting Jewish subject matter into work is the 'kiss of death' in New York and she quotes a conversation with a collector of hers in 1992 at her first exhibition of what she calls 'the Barbra series',

> One of my collectors, who bought a painting out of the first Barbra show at Simon Watson's Living Room in 1992, said to me, now we're very good friends, but this was ten years ago when I first met her, she said "you have two things going on which are great, you've got the strong woman thing, and the Hollywood thing", I said " well aren't you forgetting something" and she said "what?" I said, "The Jewish thing" and she said, "that's just between us"[316].

The exhibition, *too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, in 1996 (the same year, interestingly, as *Rubies and Rebels,* in England) was the first exhibition in the United States [317]that critiqued Jewish Identity, Jewish stereotypes, or the pressure to be a certain type of Jew (as opposed to celebrating community)[318]. In the catalogue, Norman Kleeblatt, who was the curator, writes about the invisibility of Jews; the need to assimilate,

> A publisher recently reflected that when he began his career in 1958, the industry "still thought of itself as a respectable profession, The business was being run for the most part, by men in suits or donnish tweeds, with pipes, who ere either Ivy League WASPs or Jews whose highest ambition was to be mistaken for WASPS"[319].

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[316] Interview with Deborah Kass and author, 25th April, 2003

[317] See Kleeblatt, Norman, '"Passing" in to Multiculturalism', *too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, Norman Kleeblatt.(ed.) the Jewish Museum, NY and Rutgers University Press, 1996, pp. 3-7

[318] See Chapter 1

[319] op cit., Kleeblatt, Norman, p.5.

Maurice Berger who curated the exhibition *Ciphers of Identity*[320] in which Kass' work was shown, continued this theme.

> Mr Berger said this exhibit is one of the first multi-cultural art shows to deal with issues of Jewishness. "For a long time Jewishness was embarrassing to artists"[321]

Nevertheless, *too Jewish?* In its ability to critique, represented a more confident community than Britain where *Rubies and Rebels* was exhibiting a mainly celebratory rather than critical Jewishness. The confidence of a community is also borne out in support of the artists - Deborah Kass, one of the exhibitors of *too Jewish?* and *Ciphers of Identity* has achieved more success, with regards to sales, exhibiting opportunities and publicity[322] than any of the artists showing in *Rubies and Rebels* in Britain, although this, she qualifies in relation to her own peers in New York.

> I went pretty far dealing with this in the project. A lot of people and institutions own the work. But there is a limit as to what kind of rewards an examination of Jewish ethnicity will bring. Assimilated or assimilating Jews don't want to see themselves as other and are historically uncomfortable drawing attention to them selves[323]

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[320] *Ciphers of Identity* showed at the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, 12 November 1993 – 15 January 1994, curated by Maurice Berger

[321] Greenberg, Melinda, 'The Art of Being Barbra', *Baltimore Jewish Times*, vol. 21 No 7, December 17, 1993, p. 67

[322] Kass, between 1991 and 1998 had work in 21 public collections, regularly had between 4 and 8 group shows a year, and between 4 and 28 citations in publications a year, op cit. Plante, Michael (ed.), pp. 99-103. Kass has also sold all her Barbra series apart from those she wanted to keep, in her words ' I sold hundreds', interview with the author 25th April, 2003

[323] Interview with Deborah Kass and author, 25th April, 2003

Kass' work has signifiers that are relevant to her subjectivity as a woman, as a Jew and as a lesbian. However here, I will be concentrating particularly on the ethnic critique within her work.

Whereas the other two artists confuse the subject, Kass, fulfils the classic requirement of the 'ideology of visibility' (to use Peggy Phelan's phrase). She puts the Jew into the picture, or as she states, she puts herself into the picture. She makes visible what was once invisible. She does this through the appropriation of an artist who never chose a Jewish icon to image[324]. Andy Warhol, a seminal figure in Pop art, the most famous of his generation.

Not only did Kass put a Jew in the picture but the first Jew to *be* a Jew, Streisand, the Jew who didn't change her name or get her nose 'fixed', who didn't *pass*[325]. In fact, according to Deborah Kass, Streisand is a Jew who many of the older generation of Jews finds an embarrassment due to their own ambivalence towards their identity[326].

However Barbra Streisand is not Deborah Kass and not just a Jew but an international star. In order to have the position Streisand holds, the fan base must be much wider than Jews (and according to Kass, most Jews spurned Barbra in any case), and so is a clear example of Phelan's assumptions of the visible, as outlined earlier in this chapter[327]. Identity is not totalizing[328], Streisand, transcends particularity in her stardom both different and not different, she transcends the everyday, as Kass herself said, 'I've circled in close but I've never wanted to meet her'[329]. So although ostensibly Kass puts herself into the picture, it is not just her

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[324] Although according to AM Homes, in their review in *Artforum International* (March 1993), Warhol made the portraits for anyone willing to pay $25,000.

[325] For a detailed analysis on the self hatred within Hollywood, see Gabler, Neil, *Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, Virgin, 1989

[326] Interview with Deborah Kass and the author, 25th April 2003

[327] see pp. 93-95

[328] This is Peggy Phelan's phrase, as explained on p. 88

[329] ibid.



(xxvi) Andy Warhol, *Triple Elvis,* 1964,
aliminium paint and printer's ink silkscreened on canvas, 82 x 71 cm
Virginia Museum of Fine Ars, Richmond, VA, Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis.



(xxvii) Deborah Kass, *Double Double Yentl (My Elvis)*, 1992
silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2 panels- each 72 x 72 cm
collection of Eileen and Peter Norton

and does not just speak to Jews, as the collector said, she has "the Hollywood thing and the strong woman thing".

A major component of the Barbra series is Barbra as Yentl from the film of the same name. Kass made a whole series of Yentl's, inspired by Warhol's *Elvis* series[330], although close in form to Andy Warhol's *Triple Elvis* (1964) (fig. xxvi) and retaining much of the format of the originals. Deborah Kass replaced the figure of Elvis with the figure of Yentl. The Elvis who is gun toting and actively defiant is replaced by a quietly defiant Yentl, standing with one arm in her pocket, the other 'armed' with her *siddur* (prayer book) looking out at the viewer, announcing, 'this is who I am'. The Elvis is overlaid as in a quick edit of a film whereas the pace of the Yentl's is slower, they are individually placed, sometimes merely touching as in *Triple Silver Yentl* (1992), or not touching at all as in *Double Double Yentl (My Elvis)* (1992) (xxvii), which gives them an iconic power. Slowing down the pace allows the viewer to take in the full extent of the reference – the making of an icon, the erotic charge[331], the cross-dressing.

The cross dressing is important, as I outlined in relation to Oreet Ashery. Issues of visibility are not just present in the mainstream, the visibility of women is an issue within the Jewish community also – the fact that Yentl figures so powerfully in Kass' work is a comment on the invisibility of Jewish women in the world (as opposed to in the home)[332]. In an earlier paper of mine on Ashery, I wrote about how the representation of the "Jew" as a man and how the woman's role in Judaism is relatively passive compared to the man's as one of the possible reasons for Ashery's cross-dressing.

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[330] Deborah Kass, email July 10th 2003

[331] although Kass states that she doesn't want to fuck Barbra she wants to be Barbra – interview 25th April 2003

[332] This becomes even more explicit in her series, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women* (1994-5)

> How can a woman be a Jew when to be a "Jew " is so obviously a man's job? To *be* a Jew does one have to become a man? And what kind of man can a Jew be anyway?[333]

This is further complicated by the feminization of the male in Western discourse and the lauding of different tropes of manhood in traditional Eastern European Jewry[334].

It is therefore important that Kass has chosen the image of Streisand from the film *Yentl* through whom to represent the image of the Jew in the picture. *Yentl* was made in 1983 by Barbra Streisand, who produced, directed and acted in it. The story is based on an Isaac Bashevis Singer story about a woman who was so desperate to learn Talmud that she pretended to be a male in order to be able to do so (In traditional orthodoxy women were discouraged from learning more than was needed to run a home, although there are many exceptions to this rule, most notably Rashi's daughter)[335].

So in her *My Elvis* series, paintings like *Triple Silver Yentl (My Elvis),* 1992, Kass is not only lauding the cross-dressed Barbra, and reminding the viewer of the invisibility of Jews. Kass is also reminding us of Jewish patriarchy.

Above all Kass' project is a feminist one. That is what she goes back to time and again. At a time when, for many women artists, engaged in a feminist practice, to paint seemed a reactionary manoeuver and photography was the new way forward, Kass continued to paint. In all her work Kass informs us that to engage with painting is to engage with the legacy of patriarchy.

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[333] Garfield, Rachel, 'Oreet Ashery: Transgressing the Sacred', *The Jewish Quarterly*, no. 186, p. 12

[334] For a detailed analysis of anti-Semitic references to Jewish bodies see Gilman, Sander, *The Jew's Body*, Routledge, 1992. Philo-Semitic texts also tended to posit Jewish men within this rubric, see Cheyette, Brian, and Bauman Zygmunt

[335] *Rashi*, whose full name was Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak (1040-1105) is one of the most revered commentators of the Bible.



(xxviii) Deborah Kass, *Chairman Ma (Gertrude Stein7)*, 1993
silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 46 x 42 cm

> I always refer to that Adrienne Rich quote: "This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to speak to you"[336].

However, Kass' contribution is to subvert this language of the white male. By choosing Warhol as the icon to appropriate she is making more apparent the critique of Warhol in his work - his play with fame and the icon, with the power of celebrity, money and class. By keeping 'My Elvis' in the title, for example, which is the reference to the original icon, she is acknowledging her homage to Warhol. Her homage is so keen that if she had had the formula for the exact colours Warhol had used, Kass would have used them too[337]. Her work is as much a tribute to Warhol as it is a critique of the white men who dominate the art world, owning Jewishness as a Jew and owning painting as a woman.

> I think its urgent that women paint. I think its urgent that women open up painting to our meanings or else painting really is dead[338].

If we look at the Kass' work from a Butlerian Performative view, she is presenting the self as an effect of social construction. She is citing her forbears, and re-appropriating them to serve a new context. Like the others she is using the forbears as a cipher of identity. Gender here is a porous configuration. In the *Yentl* series, she is taking an image of Elvis Presley, a male hero as macho and replacing it with a female figure as a man; in the 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man' Kass is putting her own image, in the place of Warhol himself. The *Chairman Ma (Getrude Stein)* (1993) (fig. xxviii) series, is also presenting gender as cross over. Is she presenting ethnic identity as equally porous? There is not

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[336] Interview with Deborah Kass and Mary Anne Staniszweski, June 1998, quoted in Mary Anne Staniszweski 'First Person Plural: The Paintings of Deborah Kass', Plante, Michael (ed.), *Deborah Kass, The Warhol Project,* Tulane University 1999, p. 25

[337] Interview with Deborah Kass and author, 25th April, 2003

[338] Laura Cottingham, interview with Deborah Kass, Balcon, p. 168



(xxix) Deborah Kass, *Camouflage Self Portrait*, 1994
silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70 cm.
private collection

the same slippage here as with gender – the work simply swops one for the other – Warhol for Kass, Elvis for Barbra, Chairman Mao for Gertrude Stein.

> But for all these jugglings of her and him, she remains as masked as Warhol and, in some cases as camouflaged. For all her self-outings as a lesbian Jew, she lets Warhol's own camouflage patterns impose upon her self a screen of secrets[339].

This endless parade of familiar iconography is a testament to the instability of the subject. Kass camouflages herself through the lens and language of impenetrable others – Warhol and Streisand, both celebrities both seen through the veil of the media. The self-portraits are a case in point as they rebut an easy reading of self. The *Camouflage Self-Portrait* (fig. xxix) series from 1994 where, again after Warhol she literally prints camouflage over her face, or *Self-portrait* from 2000 where it is difficult to tell whether it is in fact Deborah Kass or Elizabeth Taylor, the self is over determined, the self as a copy of a copy of someone else. There is no 'real' Jew, just the endless representations revealing nothing much.

Hal Foster in his analysis of Warhol's use of repetition states 'the Warhol repetitions not only *re*produce traumatic effects; they also *produce* them'[340]. Foster was talking particularly about the silk screens such as *White Burning Car*, while, he argues, the poststructuralists read Warhol as disinvesting meaning from the symbols through reiteration, (and Thomas Crow argues that Warhol is outraged by the "complacent consumption" of America) Foster, through a Lacanian reading states that the object is both deinvested and reinvested with meaning. Butler, however, using Spivak's term of "enabling violaton" to describe

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[339] Rosenblum, Robert, 'Cards of Identity', *Deborah Kass, The Warhol Projec*t, Micheal Plante (ed.), Distributed Art Publishers inc., 1999, p. 16

[340] Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, 1996, p.132

the effect of being named, acknowledges that repetition can be a force for affirmation[341].

> induce a destructive repetitive compulsion, it seems equally possible to acknowledge the force of repetition as the very condition of an affir-mative response to violation[342]

In Kass' reworking, the meaning is reinvested in theWarhols, which were themselves taken from popular imagery – she is producing an identity for herself through icons that define her identity as gay and Jewish, a different Jewish from the assimilationist Jew, the suburban Jew etc. According to Kass a more positive view, a proud Jew, with a distinct cultural language – "Jewtude"[343].

However, in appropriation there is a silence. The image is always subordinate to what went before, Warhol, the man, the American, or the Pole - more so than Barbra ostensibly the icon. Just as Warhol's Jackie Onassis is always Warhol rather than Jackie first and foremost in this way Kass is also deinvesting in the image in relation to her position as a Jewish woman.

> The divine name makes what it names, but it also subordinates what it makes[344]

Surely this means then, that Warhol is the 'policeman', the divine namer, in Althusser's formulation of interpellation. Does this imply that the West invented the Jew for its own ends? (although the West as we know it could not have existed without Judaism). Many Black artists have put their own image in the work as a statement of visibility, "now I am here", but Kass has put a media

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[341] Cited in Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Routledge, 1993, p. 123
[342] Butler, Judith, ibid., pp. 123-4
[343] This is a term coined by Kass herself – interview with the artist 25th April 2003.
[344] Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, 1997, p. 32

produced icon in the picture, whose vision of Jewry (as played out in *Yentl)* is a highly sentimentilised construct of Jewry of the past in the *stetl*, a representation hidden behind clichés of Jewishness. In the end of the Streisand film, Yentl is seen singing on a ship, bound for the United States where she can truly be free, so not only is the 'old country' sanitized but the 'new country' holds all the answers. Although according to Kass herself it is just camp. I would hope that in the multi-visiblity and repetition of Yentl in the Kass' paintings and of Warhol, there is, as Foster suggests with the 'original' works, both a reinvestment and deinvestment of the image and its baggage.

In all three of the artists' work I have looked at there is an element of self parody. The opening narrative in Novacek's *Rootless Cosmopolitans* is 'So what is a Jew? Lets face it its not trendy to be a Jew', Kass's refrain is that she is just a fag and that Barbra is fabulous, Ashery uses the least humour but nonetheless the narrative voiceover in the documentary 'Marcus Fisher's Wake' holds some self reflexive doubt and humour. In this chapter I have explored three artists who question the 'law' through performative gestures[345]. All of them take, and manipulate, what seems to be conformist representations of Jewishness in order to question and destabilize the expectation to conform to that image. As Judith Butler states in *Bodies That Matter*,

> Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioural conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it. Here the performative, the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that

[345] I do not mean the law in the strict sense of the judiciary but in the wider sense of the relationship between conformity and the judiciary. However, in cross-dressing they all transgress Jewish law in the narrow sense.

> exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law. Interpellation thus loses its status as a simple performative, an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers, and creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent[346].

While the institutions of power remain by and large intact these artists reflect and work towards change by challenging our expectations of the subject. All the work, no matter how straightforward the device, gives rise to readings that take the viewer's expectations beyond any simple reading of self. That question of 'Who me?' remains unanswerable.

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[346] Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, 1993, p. 122

CONCLUSION

My research has been driven by long standing concerns regarding the limits and possibilities of an art practice that contemplates contemporary Jewish experience. The questions about my practice have sprung from the underlying concerns of how to be a Jew in contemporary Britain in a way that is not defined by assimilation or a conservative insularity that seems to characterise much of the Jewish community in the wider world - a politically radical option does not seem open any longer within mainstream Jewry. My enquiry has been into an unfolding art practice and way of being in the world, which is never static or complete.

The artists I have chosen to write about enabled me to unpack a key contemporary Jewish experience; that of the tension between different conformities – assimilation or orthodoxy; of a subjectivity that is not 'known' outside of certain specific signs; and of what is prescribed behaviour for a woman both in the Jewish community and the community at large. All three artists in some way or other question the fixity of the subject and in so doing the work questions the stability of an identity that is presumed via various strategies of the performative.

In the first two chapters I examined the development of identity politics in the visual arts in Britain from two vantage points, the curators' and writers. Movements are created and defined through those mediations and I wanted to understand the process through which groups were included and excluded from the rubric of identity politics. It is important to state again here that whilst the Black arts movement of the 1980s can be seen as a major and radical development within the art world, it simultaneously embodied a number of problematic characteristics: despite high profile 'stars' such as Chris Ofili and Steve McQueen, tokenism still abounds, and there remains a dearth of Black

gallerists, art lecturers, and curators in British cultural institutions. However, despite all this, the language and understanding of difference in the 1980s and 1990s reflected certain attitudes and assumptions that now need to be unpicked.

Identity politics, as formulated by the key thinkers discussed in chapter 2 seems generally premised upon three contested issues – the politics of appearance; an experience of victimhood; lack of choice. As I have noted in the thesis, there are many writers who have questioned these premises for thinking about difference, but nonetheless, the assumptions seem to persist. The aims within these discourses are for an exclusive place in the collective imaginary, which runs counter to the aims of equality and so inadvertently perpetuates racism.

The thinkers that I have worked with most insistently in this paper are all committed to finding a more productive way of understanding difference - Paul Gilroy, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan. They each have distinct methodologies, however with their help I have articulated a position that grapples with the complexities of indeterminacy, subjectivity and performativity to find a point where both sameness and difference have a place that the self and the universal can embrace. To be able to be visible and invisible, self and other, victim and powerful is dependant upon an acknowledgement of the uncontainability of the self, the visible and the other. The artists I looked at all 'embody' this desire in their work. Within the multivalent readings and the camouflage of the avatar, the work embraces the need to be many things as well, while also exploring the impossibility of defining a self at all.

It was difficult to find artists whose work is dealing with contemporary Jewish questions and those that I found were almost all women. I think this is partly to do with the space that feminist practice opened up for women as artists, but also

because in Judaism, as with most other religions women are doubly invisible. In researching this area I became more aware of how nascent the field of Jewish contemporary art is. Most of the young artists I met who are dealing with Jewish issues, some still art students (and here I am only talking of a handful) were keen to speak to me and complained of isolation. Again this is not unique to Jewish artists and many students of colour feel isolated for similar reasons. By contrast I am also aware of and have witnessed the pressure that some art students of colour feel to explore some assumed otherness by well meaning white tutors, when that is not their main concern.

Although Jewish identity in its indeterminacy can problematise and destabilize fixed notions of Black and white as markers of identity, it is apparent, in the way I have approached my thesis and in talking to other artists, that, in the last fifteen years (since the mid to late 1980s) the debates around Black identity have been a rich source of ideas for Jewish thinkers and artists to explore. Writings on Black identity have therefore been the partner in this thesis to thinking about Jewish issues. I hope that dialogue based on the shared understanding and resource of intellectuals and artists will develop. Unfortunately as so much of the institutional interest in Black arts is only fed by the requirements of the institutions to fulfill its remit to local diversity this dialogue will have to grow from the bottom up. On the whole it is currently a one sided debate. It has been beyond the scope of this work to look more fully at the issues of Black and Jewish relations beyond the exclusions noted in Chapters 1 and 2.

The issue within the identity politics debate on art practice about the relationship with the so called mainstream and the need to find a voice in relation to one's own cultural background, in a way that does not marginalize the ability to be read, exhibited and appreciated continues to be pressing. The refrain of Donald Rodney of wanting to be a Black Picasso is apposite here. One could argue

that Chris Ofili or Yinka Shonibare in Britain have achieved this kind of fame on their own terms – as artists exploring tropes of Black identity. However, there remains an imbalance between the Black artist/white powerbroker dynamic. In Britain the dynamic in relation to Jewish artists is almost the converse, as there are a few Jewish curators (such as Esther Windsor or Norman Rosenthal), many dealers (such as Rene Gimpel, Benjamin Rhodes) and a few critics (such as Andrew Renton) in the art world, yet, with the possible exception of Andrew Renton, those powerbrokers have yet to be convinced of the merits of artists exploring Jewish identity – there is still the question of marginality in visibility for artists exploring an identity of otherness in their work and the tension between marginality and mainstream is yet to be fully resolved. Furthermore the institutions that have a requirement to cater to cultural diversity don't recognise Jews as being within their remit.

In conclusion, the questioning of the visible and the visual in the formation of Jewish identity has wider implications than art or Jewish identity. If notions of Jewish identity destabilise binaries of black/white; visibility/invisibility, marginal and mainstream then what is at stake is not to re-inscribe other differences but to acknowledge indeterminacy generally. It is not new to say that identity is fluid, in process and ever changing. However, I suggest that by problematising the reliance on the visual or visibility, identity politics can reach beyond definition and categorization. After all, what is at stake in exploring any identity is to endeavor to radicalize readings of existing perceptions and in so doing bring forth the possibility of change for all.

> To negate Jewishness fully and without ambiguity would have had the same effect as an unequivocal affirmation. Being a Jew could develop from a political-social circumstance into a personal, individual problem only for persons who, for whatever reason equivocally wanted 'to be Jews and at the

same time not to be Jews' (as the contemporary liberal theologian H. E. Paulus once brilliantly phrased it). *As a personal problem the Jewish question was insoluble*[347]

[347] Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt,* Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 68

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