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## **Queer of Color, Becoming (with) Nonhuman**

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## ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER'S DEGREE IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES



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## MA Thesis

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### Abstract

This thesis project explores the significance of visual entanglement, based on an examination of the ontological closeness between humans and nonhumans. I write through the mediation and with the materiality of a Chinese queer photographer's works, Ren Hang. First, I want to recognize and articulate, quite speculatively, the psychic role of the nonhuman for queer of colour people. I am interested in seeing the roles of the nonhuman for the ontological articulation for queer of colour people. The chapter ontological anxiety gives an account of my own bodily experiences and serves as the affective mediation in my reading of Hang's photos. I describe a XXX feeling and suggest to read it as a way of "speaking" based on the materiality of Hang's photos. I recognise this feeling viscerally. The XXX feeling is not read through an individualised bodily account and is intended to follow Muñoz's project of affective mappings.

In the same time, I centre on the materiality of Hang's photos, with an attempt to recognize and articulate a visual existence and its materialized effect that have the potentiality to exceed whatever framings discourse may perform. I am interested in seeing the roles of nonhuman in disrupting racialized/racializing gazes of Chinese queer bodies. Relying on the new materialist ontology of matter and a quantum thinking of the perceptual field, I find possibilities in the thinking of the materiality of race in the perceptual space which is ontologically indeterminate. Further, I ask, what is specific of a (self)-representation that might be read as performing a self-de-humanization? With an examination of the different phenomenological arrivals of the two forms of the "otherness" in the making of the Western Humanness, I argue the visibility of queer of color people and the nonhuman entanglement may re-direct, direct and/or, indeed, suspend the field of (de)humanization. This thesis aims to recognize a specific form of solidarity between queer of colour people and the nonhuman, in the visual and/or in the psychic. Following Muñoz's affective mappings, I hope this recognition may engender a feeling of belonging in a larger collective scale.

## Resumen

La presente tesis explora la importancia del entrelazamiento visual fundamentada en una examinación de la cercanía ontológica entre lo humano y lo no-humano. Escribo a través de la mediación con el material de Ren Hang, artista de fotografía queer de China. Desarrollo una orientación específica hacia el trabajo de Hang que representa un entrelazamiento entre lo humano y no-humano. En primer lugar, quiero reconocer y articular, de forma muy especulativa, el rol psíquico de lo no-humano para personas queer de color. Tengo interés en observar los roles de lo no-humano en la articulación ontológica para las personas queer de color. El capítulo sobre ansiedad ontológica considera mis propias experiencias corporales y sirve como mediación afectiva en mi lectura del material fotográfico de Hang. En este proceso describo lo que he denominado como “sentimiento XXX” y que sugiero leerlo como un mecanismo para “hablar” fundamentado en la materialidad de las piezas de Hang. Reconozco este sentimiento de forma visceral. El “sentimiento XXX” no se examina a partir de un acercamiento corporal individual, sino que se propone seguir el mapeado afectivo propuesto por José Esteban Muñoz.

Al mismo tiempo, ubico la materialidad de las piezas de Hang con el objetivo de reconocer y articular una existencia visual y su efecto materializado, lo que tiene la potencialidad de exceder cualquier marco que el discurso sea capaz de performar. Tengo interés en observar los roles de lo no-humano en la ruptura de miradas racializadas/racializantes sobre cuerpos queer de origen chino. Haciendo uso de una ontología que se nutre del nuevo materialismo y del pensamiento cuántico propio del ámbito perceptual, delinearé posibilidades en el campo de la reflexión sobre la materialidad de la etnia en el espacio perceptivo, el cual es ontológicamente indeterminado. Asimismo, cuestiono: ¿qué es lo específico de una (auto)representación que pueda ser leída como una performance auto-deshumanizadora? Por medio de un análisis de las diferentes llegadas fenomenológicas de dos formas de “otredad” en la producción de la “humanidad occidental”, propongo que la visualidad de personas queer de color y el entrelazamiento de lo no-humano puede ser capaz de re-dirigir, dirigir y/o incluso suspender el campo de la humanización. La presente investigación tiene como finalidad reconocer una forma de solidaridad específica entre las personas queer de color y lo no-humano dentro del ámbito visual y/o psíquico. Siguiendo el mapeado afectivo de Muñoz, espero que dicho reconocimiento genere un sentimiento de pertenencia dentro de una mayor escala colectiva.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 The Photographer and I

Ren Hang was a Chinese queer photographer and poet, born in the Jilin province, a north-east part of China in the year 1987. He ended his life on the 24th Feb 2017. I first saw Hang's works in the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre in Beijing on the summer of 2014. The display of these photos evokes a fluid rhythm, like ocean waves in their uncertainty and certainty, resonating with the bodies in Hang's photos: a rhythmic composition of naked human bodies, in their entanglement with nonhuman: animals, plants, and stones.



*Image 1. On-site view (2014)*

Hang died by suicide on the 24th February 2017. The death of the photographer inevitably structures any retrospective readings of him as a person and perhaps is also informing the perceptions of the photos in their encounters with viewers, at least to some degree. Within a Levinasian ethical framework, Judith Butler (2006:131) argues that being addressed by one's name reveals a very fundamental function of discursive forces. If I follow Butler's (2006:130) ethics, to be addressed by one's name and/or calling upon one's name gives us a sense of our conditions of being in the world. I am expressing my awareness that here I am calling upon a name whose addressee cannot "face" the calling any more. Further, I do not center the writing through death, either literally or philosophically. Muñoz (2011:191) once points out, "work about life itself is often most poignant for its ability to represent death-in-life". Hang's photos may indeed represent a

moment of death-in-life. The writing is not meant to be a mourning, but an exercise like the one described by Jacques Derrida (1994: xvii): “learn to live with the ghost”.

This writing is charged with a sense of hope, which is inseparable from an immersive living/dying experiences in the negativities. Muñoz (2009:16) regards queerness as a temporal arrangement where the past becomes a field of possibility in which the subjects act in the service of a queer futurity. Giorgio Agamben’s (1999:178-181) notion of potentiality is crucial in Muñoz’s (2009) thinking of queer temporality: “unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present sense”. Agamben’s articulation of potentiality troubles the linear sense of temporality, which in turn complicates our thinking on causalities. My understanding and usage of hope in this thesis is not so much of a possibility that is charged by probabilities, it is based on Agamben’s notion of the potentiality. Further, one of the aspect of my thinking of queer and/or queerness is inseparable from Muñoz’s (2009:1) articulation of queerness as “the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world”. My aesthetic of the queerness in particular is an act of lingering around in the here and now, and between orientation and disorientation. I put effort in articulating this temporal and spatial dimensions of queerness so as to imagine the lived/living life otherwise. If queer temporalities involve ways of moving backwards and/or sideways (Cvetkovich:2014,21), what about the experiences of not being able to move and/or not moving at all? Muñoz’s notion of queerness incorporates an explicit intention<sup>1</sup> in terms of working against/towards something. Differently, I do not indicate an explicit sense of intention in the queerness I am cruising now, which may not be simply interpreted as the temporal absence or blurring moment in terms of the intention, but rather I aim to leave this conceptual space open to its own various manifestations.

Hang and I, we have some common friends and both lived in the Chinese capital Beijing for some time. I met one of his friends Fan Popo this year in Berlin. Popo is a queer filmmaker who makes queer films. “Are you planning to develop a base in Berlin?” I asked. “No”, he answered firmly and continued, “just a temporal escape, you know, nowadays, living in Beijing is difficult. People are leaving.” We talked about Hang and his parties in Beijing. The queerness (read: sexually) of Hang is explicit in his on-line

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<sup>1</sup> My notion of intention is drawn from Judith Butler. Butler (1993, 30) explains the phenomenological usage of “intentional” which does not mean voluntary or deliberate, but is rather seen as a way of characterizing consciousness (language)’s directing towards an object which may or may not exist”. I thank Deirdre for directing me towards this quote.

diaries “My depression”. However, I do not claim that all human bodies in Hang’s photos identify as queer, they may or may not. I think there is already something fundamentally queer in the visual act “becoming with nonhuman”. I regard this visual act transgressive as it unfollows the normative forms of intimacy. This is one of the locus where I draw my reading of the queerness of queer people of color. It seems to me that this form of queerness does not find its receptions easily in the discursive productions in and outside of China.



*Image II. Untitled (2014)*

Hang’s photos are the medium and material of my analysis. Although I acknowledge the discourse occurring/occurred around them, I put effort not so much on discursive analysis, but in recognizing, through a seeing from my embodied position, a way of speaking, a speech conditioned by the bodily presence of the queer people of color in the photos. Hang’s photos are the material—not only do they appear as the object/subject of the study but more importantly, provide structuring forces throughout the whole process, before the writing, in the writing rupture and during the writing. In my “ethico-onto-epistem-ological” (Barad:2007) approach of Hang’s photos, the line between the human bodies in Hang’s photos and myself are not stabilized, not only because of the identification processes happen between us and that we are in a sense ontologically inseparable (Butler:2009) but also because my carefulness in speculating the individualized account of the human bodies in Hang’s photos. The materiality of

Hang's photos is essential in my writing, but materiality is fabricated as "an active factor in/of the process of materialization" (Barad:2003,827). I am retrospectively trying to account for a lack of direct analysis of Hang's photos in this work. I do not put Hang's photos as a mere static object of study, the "intra-activity" (Barad:1998) between us renders a variety of effects, which I try to depict and materialize into this writing.

## 1.2 The role of the body in the writing

The intellectual works that I once relied on and/or am relying on have undergone some radical changes over time. These changes happen along with the different knowledges I get access to and the reflections of my positions. Broadly speaking, I am concerned with knowing, or more precisely, getting intimate again with the speaking and non-speaking "I". Here, I am responding to Gloria E. Anzaldúa's (2006) letter, "Speaking in Tongues, A letter to Third World Women". Gloria wrote, "it is not easy writing this letter. It began as a poem, a long poem. I tried to turn it into an essay but the result was wooden, cold. I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing" (161). I actually do not dare to use the adjectives Gloria used. My difficulty of speaking in tongues will be explained in the section on ontological anxiety.

I tried to build up the theoretical framework from feminist new materialist/materialism theorists. The force of their influences is still very much present in my writings and I find a need to rely on their thinking and to build dialogues between us. Moreover, it is my intention to include some personal narrative to see how and what the "I" get constituted from the cultural context I grew up in, ghostly and/or presently, may, to some extent, resonate with some theories from feminist new materialism, with certain relations or not.

I take the situated-ness of the writing seriously; the people, the environment, and the events that are going on around me. On the one hand, to register the bodily sensations and emotions in the writing is for me to recognize their forces in the intellectual works I draw on. Ann Cvetkovich (2012:15) writes, "the sensations so invisible and yet so spectacular that I feel compelled to honor them with description". I think Cvetkovich makes it successful in her practices to "craft new forms of writing and knowledge that come from affective experiences, ordinary life, and alternative archives and that don't necessarily follow the usual methods of cultural critique" (2012:23). Very encouraging.

After all the body, its sensation and feelings are for me very present in sustaining this labor of writing.

On the other hand, what I learned of the body is not a mere substance but has dynamic agency throughout the different relational encounters. I offer an example here. I brought some black and green tea from my hometown. I put the black tea in a porcelain cup and the green tea in glass. What I choose to drink is relied on some specific feelings in my stomach that I learned to associate with the quality of tea from a very young age. Those associations may arrive as an effect of different historical events that get surfaced as everyday knowledge. I was told to drink warm/hot water by my Mom when I was young. Whether there is any truth in this preference, to ask this question is in the very first place to assume the role of the body as static and passive. The stomach develops, evolves, interacts, adjusts over time and has achieved its own knowledge in its own times. Perhaps I won't fully achieve in a satisfying way to bring the body into the writing, however, I make it visible the effort in doing so and I honor that effort. This writing project is written through a queer body of color, whose body will be made visible and sensible in the writing.

### **1.3 Methodology: Choreography, or Transversality and Diffraction**

I have had a difficult time with the thesis methodology in terms of its establishment and articulation. I adore the metaphor of choreography. Choreography to me is an on-going process imbued with different modes of temporalities (implicated with different forms of bodies), an indeterminate yet not unrestricted field involved with a variety of actors, a sequence of movements, an enacting and resolving process of rhythms. This sense of choreography can be seen as the aesthetic of how I carry on this project. To some degree, there are identifiable elements in my writing that may indicates a mode of methodology resonates with the ones emerged/emerging from the feminist new materialism. I sketch "transversality" and "diffraction" as two features of new materialism. The "transversality" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin: 2010) describes approaches that cross disciplinary boundaries. A new materialism gesture that "cuts across or intersects dual oppositions in an immanent way" (159). Diffraction is crucial in this gesture. Van der Tuin (2014) sketches the genealogy of making "diffraction" a methodology for feminist new materialism based on works by Donna Haraway and Karan Barad. According to Van der Tuin, Haraway coined "diffraction" as a feminist research tool into the material-semiotic in the 1990s, so as to see and examine the roles of the interference patterns in

the meaning making process (234). Basing herself on Trinh T. Minh-ha's works on "inappropriate/d otherness" as the locality of the critical and deconstructive relationality, the productivity of diffraction in Haraway's works comes from elsewhere which exceeds the dualist rationales (Van der Tuin:236). The critical tool of diffraction radically re-works notions of difference. The following quote of Haraway comes from Barad's 2003 writing: "[F]eminist theorist Trinh Minh-ha . . . was looking for a way to figure 'difference' as a 'critical difference within,' and not as special taxonomic marks grounding difference as apartheid. . ." (Haraway:1992,300). Accordingly, a diffraction pattern maps where the *effects* of differences appear (300). In my understanding, difference is inverted on an individual's account as a potentiality in its on-going materialization.

Following Van der Tuin's genealogy of diffraction, Karen Barad in her 2007 book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* zooms in on diffraction as an object and method of study based on a physical understanding of diffraction (Van der Tuin:234). Diffraction entails the entanglement/superposition of different times and spaces (Barad: 2011, 154). For Barad, diffraction makes it possible to move away from "representationist trap of geometrical optics" and illuminates the "indefinite nature of boundaries" (2003:803). Using diffraction as a metaphor and critical tool describe the approach in which insights are read through one another, where "the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter" are attended and responded (Barad: 2011, 71). In Van der Tuin's reading of Barad, diffraction is essential to Barad's proposal of "onto-epistem-ology", where ontology is subject to change with epistemology and epistemology is "obliged to attend very closely the windings of reality" (Van der Tuin: 2014, 235). Barad defines onto-epistem-ology as "the studies of practices of knowing in being" (2003:829). For Barad, the practices of knowing are not "human"-based activities (2003:818). Within her agential realist account, Barad invites collective investigations to the question, "what about the nonhuman when it comes to performative accounts of abjection, subjection, agency and materialization? (2011:124). This post-humanist account of performativity does not aim to single out "nonhuman" as the subject and object of study. Barad makes a clarification that, "my subject matter is not nonhuman performativity per se but the materializing practices of differentiating, where one cannot take for granted that all the actors, actions and effects are human" (2011: 124). What at stake is the boundary-making process, that results in the distinction between the "human" and the "nonhuman" in the

first place. Following Barad, the distinctions between the “human” and “nonhuman” are ought not to be seen as inherent and stabilized, which does not mean the erasure of this distinction, but rather, it is a politically acute calling to see and examine the intra-activity of the distinction between the human and the nonhuman in a post-humanist performative manner. Indeed, Barad’s notion of intra-action, in contrast to the word interaction, does not presume pre-existing independent entities (2011:125). Throughout the thesis, I share Barad’s post-humanist perspective of the world: “‘we’ are not outside observers of the world. Nor we are simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (2003:828).

I have briefly sketched some possible articulations of the methodology in this thesis through new materialism, diffraction and transversality. To some degree, the nature of “transversality” and “diffraction” of new materialism prevent itself from being a stabilized point of reference. It seems rather ambivalent if I make a claim that the methodology in the thesis is articulated through new materialism. What I describe in the section “The Role of the Body in the Writing”: the act of bringing into the personal narrative part, is in some sense, intended to make visible and examine the roles of the “interference pattern”. Am I an inappropriate/d other in relation to the new materialism, its theoretical developments and its more-than-theoretical practices? Or am I already, an inappropriate/d other, whether I willing to or not, in the mostly white theorists’ works I am engaging with? These difficulties will be further described in the section “My Embodiment in English language”.

## 1.4 Theoretical Developments

The theoretical development of this thesis which is divided into different subtopics—at and behind the arrival of my reading Hang’s works, the materiality of race, a XXX feelings, and the phenomenological reading of Hang’s photos—is based on the materiality of Hang’s photos. I have had some difficulty thinking through the materiality of photos, the materiality of a human body, and the materiality of race. However, I find it challenging to give an affirmative account of materiality per se. My approach to “materiality” bears the influences of new materialist ontologies of matter, where “materiality is an active factor of/in process of materialization” (Barad:2003,827). I rely heavily on Judith Butler’s works. I agree with Xin Xu (2015:435) and many others that there is arguably a tendency in Butler’s theorization, towards the hermeneutic enclosure of the system of signification. It seems to me that Butler’s works are characterized by, for

instance, “the failed materialism” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin: 2010, 153); “the linguistic take on embodiment” (Arun Saldanha: 2004, 9). However, in my approach, I follow Butler’s works (along with other theorists’ works) with an effort to find ways to articulate it beyond this “enclosure” and/or see the “enclosure” differently.

My thinking of “the materiality of X” is indebted to Barad’s works. Barad (1998:106) reworks Butler’s notion of performativity “from iterative citationality to iterative intra-activity” in her theorization of agential realism. It is clear to me that Butler writes in a rather humanist perspective, and in so doing, the complexity of the human psyche is elaborated into her account of performativity. Barad includes the agential roles of the nonhuman into her theorization. The not pre-determinate and indeterminacy of the material dimension of regulatory apparatuses, to my understanding, is one reason that makes Barad’s notion of temporality to be “implicated (with)in an ever changing agential reality” (1998:104). The notion of temporality in Butler’s performativity, is not implicated in an ever changing reality. It is yet also not a “simple succession of distinct ‘moment’” that are equally distant from one another (Butler: 1993, 244). Butler underscores the “effect of sedimentation” and “congealment of the past”, which, according to her, are implied in the temporality of construction (244). What about the construction of the material sites in Butler’s theorization? Unlike a human subject, whose “past” consists “which is refused from construction, the domains of the repressed, forgotten, and the irrecoverably foreclosed” (245), the material site seems to have another “past”, or indeed, another temporality. For Butler (2015:7), the nonhuman, “the organic and inorganic object field that exceed the human”, is the site where a human subject’s emergence and living, involuntarily rely on. It is the constraining and conditioning roles of the nonhuman that is in Butler’s concern, for which she argues, “‘I’ am nowhere and nothing without the nonhuman” (7). After a diffractive reading between Butler and Barad’s notion of performativity, I do not think there is a significant rupture or quantum leap happens between their theorizations, though they do have a different emphasis in terms of the roles of the nonhuman in their theorizations. The interest in the psyche and the acknowledge of the very essential force of the nonhuman in my writing, makes me rely on both Butler and Barad’s works.

The material dimension of regulatory apparatuses is essential to agential realism (Barad: 1998,108). Agential realism foregrounds the materiality of phenomena, in which materiality is conceived of as the process of materialization in and through time (108). Following Barad, Hang’s photos are the materiality of the phenomena I am intra-acting



with, which are themselves material-discursive phenomena “materializing in intra-action with other material-discursive apparatuses” (2003:819). The word material-discursive illustrates Barad’s point of view that material is always and already material-discursive (823). What at stake is “the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices” (823). Drawn on Bohr’s insights, Barad gives her definition of apparatuses, which are not “mere static arrangements in the world”, but are “dynamic (re) configurings of the world” without “inherent outside boundary” (816, emphasis original). Further, apparatuses are “productive of (and part of) the phenomena produced” (819). According to Barad, apparatuses are (re)ontologised as a doing which are “open-ended practices” (816). I rely on the materiality of Hang’s photos to think through two questions: first, how may Hang’s photos speak about a specific sense of racial performativity in China? Second, what is behind and what are the effects, in terms of the visual phenomena of the human-nonhuman entanglement? The act of centering the materiality of Hang’s photos in my analysis is in light of Barad’s works. I am curious of the consequential effects and the different possibilities of this act.

My examination of the materiality of race is inseparable from my daily experiences: the intra-activity of my non-white and non-black skin/appearance with the different parts of the world that I experienced-am experiencing. Speaking as such, it is not my aim in this thesis to examine the historical relations between “race, racism, and racialization”. I collect and base the examination on the loops of feedbacks from the exposure of my skin/appearance in “the sea of whiteness” to use Sara Ahmed’s term (2007). In Arun Saldanha’s (2004:9) observation, race becomes “a problem in language” in contemporary theory as “an ideology, a narrative, a discourse”, after all, the epistemological problem. I am not interested into “re-onlogising race” as Saldanha did in his article “Reontologising Race: The Machinic Geography of Phenotype”. My interest in examining the materiality of race is more in line with Liu Xin (2015:433), who asks, “where and when is the transformation of racial thinking located if the perception of race is always structured by and circumscribed within the racialized visual episteme that constructs whiteness as humanness?” How might Barad’s post-humanist perspective of the world’s ongoing iterative performativity sheds light in this examination? I am especially curious of Barad’s claim that all bodies, human and nonhuman, come to matter, “not only of the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very ‘atoms’ of it being (2003:823). How can the very atoms

of the body plays a role in the seemingly always and already problematic visual perspectives of the human life?

Weheliye (2014) urges us to recognize how the racializing assemblages is one defining visual modality of the Modern Human Body. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2006:102) argues that race is an effect of racialization. Ahmed (2004) has offered a phenomenological view of the economy of this effect, what she names affective economies. By centering the materiality of race, I do not intend to suggest that there is something tangible and visible about it, though it seems like it. “The materiality of race” should not become an enclosed construct in terms of having stabilized evocations. Perhaps it is a good thing to have a moment of confusion when we talk about “the materiality of race” and precisely because of this sense of fuzziness and/or its ought not to be stabilized-ness, it’s crucial for feminists’ interventions and examinations. In my project, I want to see it closer and to find some ruptures along with or even before the landing of this effect of racialization. In the meantime, I bring Barad’s conceptualization of materiality in my approach. As I described earlier, materiality is re-conceptualized as the process of materialization in and through time. What is the material dimension of the ongoing phenomena of racism-racialization? If the materiality of race is always and already in the process of racialization, how might the new materialist ontology of matter shed light on the interrogation of the process of racialization? My arguments proceed with several cross readings among Karen Barad, Alexander G. Weheliye and Nikki Sullivan.

The chapter titles “A XXX Feeling” comes after the discussion on the materiality of race. Hang’s photos channel some specific feelings to me. I want to give an account of this feeling in my bodily capture. It is my intention to code this feeling as XXX<sup>2</sup>. After all, how can I easily name a feeling if I (suggest to) read it in a suspended space? I have spoken in a Baradian vein to suggest that the materiality of photos is the materiality of the phenomena I am intra-acting with, and it is itself material-discursive apparatuses in its open process of materialization. To put differently, Hang’s photos are the apparatuses of my research and I am the apparatuses intra-acting with Hang’s photos. I have described earlier that in Barad’s theorization of the apparatus, it does not have an inherent stabilized outside boundary. I definitely have some confused moments in differentiating me as the apparatus and Hang’s photos as the apparatus conceptually in my intra-acting with Barad’s works. I do see the implications of conceptualizing the separation as non-pre-determined and it is an object of study. Barad argues that intra-actions “cut things

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<sup>2</sup> I will decode the XXX feeling at the end of the writing of this chapter.

together-apart in one movement”, what she terms “agential cut” (2011:125). In other words, the agential separability is enacted by intra-actions, that results in “the local condition of exteriority-within-phenomena” (125). What falls in-between the “together” and “apart”? Does this in-between-ness matter?

Based on the specificity of Hang’s photos, my confusion arrives as one of the effects of the complex process of identifications. The difficulty in differentiating two forms of apparatuses in my visual encounter with Hang’s photos is inseparable from the persistence (not fully in a negative sense) of the singular and enclosed articulation of the “I”, ontologically and materially. This sense of difficulty will appear and resolve at different points of the thesis writing.

In this chapter, I approach, together with Judith Butler, the materiality of human body with the mediation of the materiality of Hang’s photos. I explore the relationships between these two forms of materiality in this specific situatedness. Drawing on Butler’s writing on gender performativity and the materiality of the body, I center and interrogate the mediating role of the materiality of Hang’s photos. This XXX feeling, read through the materiality of Hang’s photos, is not intended to be read through an individualized bodily account. I am thinking here together with José Muñoz for a moment.

Muñoz’s (2006) theorization on a particular Latina affect in a political, ethical, affective and embodied position of “feeling brown, feeling down” is generating to mention at this point. Muñoz (677) alters Spivak’s question “can the subaltern speak” and asks “how does the subaltern feel? how might subalterns feel each other?” (677). Brown feelings, as one historically coded racial performativity in Muñoz’s account is not meant to be perceived as an individualized affective particularity. Indeed, Muñoz utilizes Spillers’ notion of “displaceable attentiveness” and situates the aim of his project in “a larger collective mapping of the self and other” (679). Muñoz articulates a racial performativity through affective mapping<sup>3</sup> where he moves away from an identitarian model of relationality to describing a political being, doing and becoming that is non-neutral to the racial particularity (2006). Throughout the discussion in this chapter, I also arrive at the point to suggest that the XXX feeling act as a “speech” that may speak about a political being and doing at a particular space-time without reading it through an individualized bodily account. This is, in part, made possible by centering the role of the materiality of Hang’s photos, which is different but not totally unrelated with Muñoz’s

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<sup>3</sup> According to Muñoz (677), Jonathan Flatley made some amplification and amendment on Fredric Jameson’s (1981) theory of cognitive mapping, where the interest in “affective particularity in relation to the social” is characterized as “affective mapping”.

attempt at the affective mappings that carries the aim to bring the body outside of the identitarian model of relationality. Further, I argue, though the XXX feeling is read beyond an individual account, it nevertheless suggests a moment of how the bodies are constituted by a cluster of discursive forces following Judith Butler (2015:5). In this section, I argue that one dimension of reading the XXX feeling is that it can be seen as the materialized effects of queer people of color's being acted upon by discursive forces.

In chapter 5, "A Phenomenological reading of Hang's photos", I turn to the materiality of Hang's photos to approach and articulate the visual phenomena of the human and nonhuman entanglement. My thinking of the making of the human bears the influence from works of Judith Butler and Karen Barad.

According to Butler (2004:2,30), the understanding of a human is dependent on, the legibility of its race, the recognizability of its morphology, the perceptual verifiability of its sex, the categorical understanding of its ethnicity and "it is the inhuman, the beyond human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality". The subject, in Butler's views, are performatively produced, not only by the force of the regulatory norms, but also by the force of exclusion and a set of abject beings which are foreclosed in the cultural intelligibility (1993:1-3). The domain of the "abject" is constituted by the "unlivable" and the "unthinkable" aspects of the social life which operates through "a set of foreclosures" and "radical erasures", such that they are the "founding repudiation" of the subject (4-5). With this "exclusionary matrix", Butler asserts that the claim that the human is constructed is not sufficient, as the "construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human', the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable" (8).

Within Barad's agential realist account, the ontological claim of the human does not pre-exist as an enclosed construct, indeed, the category of the "human" is (re)conceptualized through the post-humanist performativity that it is already and always in the "dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/re-articulations" (Barad:2003,818). As I mentioned earlier, the post-humanist motif of destabilizing the category of human lies in the recognition that the neglect of nonhuman "actors, actions and effects" has significant impacts (2011:124). Therefore, Barad asks "what about the nonhuman when it comes to performative accounts of abjection, subjection, agency and materialization? (2011:124). In my understanding, to construct a conceptual apparatus that actively attempts to recognize the force of the nonhuman has two main reasons. On one hand, humans are constituted of and constituted by various

nonhuman forces, it is politically potent to think of the constraint and/or possibilities entailed in this recognition. On the other hand, the human-centric logic may easily slip into another form, human superiority. For Barad, the logic of “human superiority”, which results in the devaluation of the nonhumans, in the first place deploys the very same calculus of racialization (2011:123). The recognition of this *epistemological violence* towards the nonhuman, in its repetitive forms, and the risk of reinforcing and being complicit in its reproduction, give rise to Barad’s emphasis on the importance of the examination of the differential constitution of both the “human” and the “nonhuman” in the ongoing boundary making practices (2011:123).

In Barad’s writing, she exemplifies the importance of the (re-)examination of the logic of human superiority by illustrating the tactic of dehumanization, which produces the forced identification of an oppressed group of humans with despised nonhuman others (2011:122). To some degree, the lack of critical examination of the domain of nonhuman animals gives rise to the availability of the temporal equivalences between some humans and the nonhuman, which are very often violent and carry significant negative impacts. In Nikki Sullivan’s (2012) writing “the Somatechnics of Perception and the Matter of the Non/Human: a critical response to the New Materialism”, a certain sense of the ontological privilege of matter in new materialism is under scrutiny. Seeing matter such as in a Baradian vein, Sullivan regards it problematic in the sense that it might generate a universalizing epistemic of matter (299). Sullivan points to all that matters in the passage of someone’s engagement with matter, which can be seen as the mediating activity in theorists’ engagement with matter. Sullivan examines the field of perception through the eye, in the visual field, in response to feminist new materialism’s engagement with matter, for which she argues, “‘matter’ is inextricable from the I/eye that perceives it: perception makes ‘matte’ matter, it makes ‘some-thing’ (that is no-thing) (un) become as such, it makes ‘it’ intelligible” (300).

In light of Sullivan’s observation, I am rather cautious in terms of the epistemological issues in the engagement with the nonhuman. Michael Marder, whose description of the vertical configuration of a house, a plant, and a human, appears very intriguing and may help illuminate some important aspects in my approach of the “nonhuman”. He writes,

“Needless to say, the vertical configurations of a house, a plant, and a human are quite distinct. A house is a statically vertical being, inserted into a given place

within the natural landscape or a cityscape, which it, at the same time, molds. A human is a mobile vector of verticality, persistently negating the place occupied at the moment on the way to another transient place. A plant is a dynamic vertical ensemble of growths, embedded in a particular locale and expanding outwards from it in such a way that its lived interpretation of environmental conditions constructs a sense of place from its own phytophenomenological perspective.” (2016:231)

The full stop between different vertical configurations of a house, a plant and a human, instead of a comma, or a semicolon, appear to be very suggestive to me. With the conceptual mediation of the verticality, Marder reads very affirmatively of a house, a plant and a human, without making reference of one from another, which gives a sense of an ontologically unmediated relationality among a house, a plant, and a human. It’s important to make a claim that, though my research interest is driven by some ontological mediation between human and nonhuman, I am very much in line with Michael Marder to preserve in the first place a sense of singularity among human, vegetal beings and stones before they get into the analytical entanglement.

In my visual reading of Hang’s photos, I use the term nonhuman as an umbrella for nonhuman animals, vegetal beings and stones. I ask, does the visual act of queer of color people’s becoming with nonhuman engender a self-dehumanizing effect and if so, what might be the materialized effects of this self-dehumanizing effect in the perceptual field? Or perhaps at this moment, the line between humanizing and dehumanizing refuses to be clearly drawn. I benefit a lot and will rely heavily on Mel. Y Chen’s theorization of the animacy and animacy hierarchy (2012) to think of this seemingly ceaseless line between human and nonhuman. Chen’s notion of animacy does not reside within a normative (Western Humanities) understanding of “dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object, speech/nonspeech, human/animal”, but is intended for a radical remapping of those zones (3). Importantly, this remapping is not intended to “reinvest certain materialities with life<sup>4</sup>”, instead, it aims at digging into their (always) sexualized and racialized conceptual and operational interconnectedness in the production of the Western Humanness(11). To put differently, this sense of interconnectedness is seen through the distribution of animacy, whose distribution is shaped by race and sexuality. Indeed, Chen

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this claim can be read together with Sullivan’s assertion of the problematic of the universalization of matter.

emphasizes the animacy hierarchy according to this racialized and sexualized distribution of animacy.

In Butler's (2006:140) discussion of the relationship between humanization and representation, she emphasizes the critical domain where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly. Levinas' notion of face is not exclusively a human face and it is regarded as the condition for humanization which reveals a precarious dimension of human life (141). Along with her reading of this Levinas' argument (representation is one condition of humanizing), Butler examines the domains where the media usages of face perform and aim at effecting a de-humanization. I agree, following Butler's reading of Levinas, "face and discourse are tied" (138). However, in my analysis, I center the materiality of Hang's photos, with an attempt to recognize and articulate a materialized force that may have the potentiality to exceed whatever framings discourse may perform. The human-nonhuman entanglement in the materiality of Hang's photos, I argue, may engender a perceptual field where humanization and dehumanization occur simultaneously and perpetually. A potential site of re-ordering might happen in and through this visual experience.

### **1.5 From the Psychic roles of the Nonhuman to Affective Mappings**

"Using my body as a reference in the creation of the works, I am able to transcend myself in a voluntary submersion and total identification with nature" (Mendieta: 1978).

With this stubborn linkage between woman and nature, which often bears some ambiguous, if not negative, implications, it is necessary to make some clarifications in my thinking of the ontological identification with the nonhuman from queer of color positions. I would claim, in light of other scholars' works, there are some interconnected logics between the subordination of "nature" to "culture" and the subordination of the "woman" to the Man. The repetition of the word subordination is aimed to imply that, to some degree, nature/woman is socially regarded as the passive background for the Hu/Man to act up on. The former subordination in the West is inseparable of the construction model whereby "the social unilaterally acts on the nature and invests it with its parameters and its meaning" (Butler:1993,4). We can easily come up with some parameters that rationalize this action that may characterize the analogous and interrelated logic I seek to address, for instance, the "Mother" and the "Motherhood", the relational

logic of “lack” and etc. In my project, firstly, my thinking of the ontological closeness between queer people of color and the nonhuman is situated in a (post) colonial context, which means, the backdrop of my speaking is the making of the Western Human as the Human. Secondly, there is one significant tension in the thesis writing between the bodily knowledge and the theoretical knowledge in terms of the mediation space (physical, psychic) between my body/the self and the nonhuman. My experiences growing up in a non-west political and cultural context left marks and generates ongoing forces. I am suggesting that though I base the writing of the philosophical notion of nonhuman in the Western context, I am aware that the roles of nonhuman (material, social, psychic) in my bodily knowledge are rather different from the ways they are articulated in the Western context, at least different from the ones I get exposed to.

I adore Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta’s works. I put her quote in the previous paragraph, not only in the aim of making some clarifications in relation to the women-nature complex in the representational field, but also because it intrigues my following question. Is it politically potent to recognize the queer of color and nonhuman entanglement as a form of solidarity? Both in the visual field and this sense of the reality, of the lived one, day and night. What does it mean to think of the possibility of an ontological identification with the nonhuman from a minoritarian position? I would say that a psychic desire of identifying with nonhuman does not necessarily relate to the psychic desire of not wanting to identify with the human. With knowledge/experiences of different ritual and religious practices, there are moments I would identify as the exercises of the identifications with nonhuman. What interests me here is specifically a psychic desire of identifying with nonhuman from minoritarian positions. Minoritarian position is to be understood in the domain of “the inhuman, the beyond human, the less than human” as the constitutive outside that secures the human in its ostensible reality” (Butler, 2004:30). Is the psychic desire of identifying with nonhuman, to not want to, at least temporally and partially, fully secure the identification as a “human”? I am aware my argumentation presumes certain social and ontological conditions which make the agential claim “not want to” possible. Is it possible to conceptualize it as one radical way of resistance, at least at this very psychic level?

I won’t fully resolve the interest of this psychic desire on an individual level. But I think this psychic desire in the visual act of human-nonhuman entanglement may be felt in certain ways by some viewers and those moments of getting felt may have some significant political implications. I am here referring to what Achille Mbembe (2016)



describes as the politics of viscosity. Following Muñoz, my project carries the aim of a larger form of mapping, by the articulation of the “XXX feeling” and the act and desire of becoming (with) nonhuman, which I hope may speak and give force (a belonging feeling )to some queer people in and outside of China<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the articulation of the ontological mediation between queer of color people and the nonhuman is meant to generate an ontological space as one dimension of self-articulation for marginalized people.

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<sup>5</sup> My thinking of national border and its identity is quite casual. I use ‘casual’ to relax different tensions that might come along. Practically also because there is not so much space in this thesis to satisfyingly articulate this tension. But indeed, this tension is still very present in the thesis, in terms of the dynamic relations I experience to my Chinese-ness and in the sense of the hierarchal order of the making of Human.

## Chapter 2: At and Behind the Arrival of My Reading Hang's Works

In this chapter, I want to give an account of my orientation of Hang's photographic works where I notice the portray of the human-nonhuman entanglement. I analyze this orientation from two aspects: the affective condition speaking from my embodied position and the examination of the identifications with the nonhuman from marginalized positions. I respond affirmatively to the affective condition of myself, which is centered on and around the description of ontological anxieties. First, I reflect on my embodiment in the linguistic sites following Trinh T. Mihn-ha's insights on the gendered dimension of writing. I discuss, as a response, the suspended linguistic hailing of "woman" and "third world woman" which bears the attempt and effort in seeking for a self-articulation, ontologically. The failure of this attempt, which lies in the difficulties of capturing the sense of "ontological instabilities", drives me in line with Karan Barad's articulation of the post-humanist notion of "ontology". I then move to Judith Butler's (1997) discussion of the subject's performative re-articulation of the self as a subject, exploring the site of the discontinuity of the subject's psyche. I try to rework the temporal dimensions of the ruptures and/or breaks in an attempt to open up the space for an articulation of the identification with the nonhuman from marginalized positions. I write through my own bodily position, a queer of color body.

### 2.1 Orientation in Hang's Works. The Space between Orientation and Disorientation

Among Hang's photographic works, I have a specific orientation. I paid immediate attention to the ones which portray a human and nonhuman entanglement. As Sara Ahmed (2006) would put it, what I see is shaped by a direction that I have taken and the direction shapes what is available in the sense of what I face and what I can reach. Then, what I notice and am exploring in this thesis project, the human-nonhuman entanglement in Hang's photos, is not quite an accident. There are politics and something non-phenomenological about that, in the psychic, and with a specific sense of ethics. My sense of orientation may be read normatively as disorientation. Indeed, as a queer of color person who live in the West, I am interested in disorientation more than orientation. I am, to some degree, compelled to explore, the failure of an orientation, momentarily and/or periodically, what does it feel like, its shape, its temporal articulations and what might emerge from that. In her chapter, "Disorientation and Queer Objects", Sara Ahmed

(2006:158) urges us “to think about how queer politics might involve dis-orientation, without legislating disorientation as a politic”. Ahmed is pointing to a range of lived disorientated experiences, some of which can be defensive and the politics which proceed from that dis-orientation can be conservative (158). My question arrives differently. I ask: does the failure of orientation necessarily lead to disorientation, either in an immediate fashion or in a delay? I would rather hold on to this question. In this act of holding on, I feel myself in some suspended space, which may neither belong to orientation nor dis-orientation. Then, how can I approach and articulate this space? Does the word dis-orientation already have the capacity to indicate that space, of what is in between orientation and dis-orientation?

Ann Cvetkovich (2014) foregrounds the concept and the lived experience of “impasse” in her project “Depression: A Public Feeling”. Cvetkovich describes, “the material dimensions of being stuck or at an impasse are important to its more conceptual meanings and suggest the phenomenological and sensory dimensions of depression, which can literally shut down or inhabit movement” (20). She conceptualizes the impasse as one dimension of the embodied experiences of depression, which I agree with and am careful not to neglect. The experience of impasse is one that might happen between orientation and dis-orientation. Further, I would say, these experiences and the articulation of this in-between space runs at the limit of our linguistic capacities. I encounter Lauren Berlant’s articulation of impasse through the reading of Cvetkovich. Berlant (2011:199) describes impasse as such: “an impasse is a holding station that doesn’t hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog-paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional—in the unbound temporality of the lag one hope to have been experiencing all along (otherwise it’s the end), it marks a delay”. Berlant approaches the “impasse” with a specific sense of temporality along with a spatial sense of decomposition. I find the description “that dog-paddling around a space whose contours remains obscure” very intriguing. What is mattering “in” this space-time, using Karen Barad’s “space-time-mattering” (1998), remains curiously obscure for me. The contour seems a proper passage to approach this space-time-mattering. Here, I make a move from approaching the space between orientation and dis-orientation to its “contour”. I will describe this in-between space further in this chapter. I make a suggestion to understand queer people of color in Hang’s photos with this phenomenological aesthetic without specific affective attributions: a wondering space, a space does not belong to the linear time, suspended. If we take into consideration certain

relationships between the writing (language) and the body, what kinds of writings the body may do if the living body is going through a rupture?

In this thesis, I practice some specific sense of aesthetics. An aesthetic privileges a form of fragmentation that allows the leaking and interrogation of the in-between space, an aesthetic that does not strive for a totalizing coherence, an aesthetic acknowledges the space for non-relationality at some designated temporal dimensions. Alexander G. Weheliye (2014:2) notes that the lexicons of agency and resistance have the tendency to assume “full, self-present, and coherent subjects working against something or someone”. This form of agency, its ideal-ness comes from white discourses, and very often function to privilege One from the others (or indeed some others do not get recognized as the other at all). Within its idealness, the complex lived experience of a subject that differs from time to time is also downplayed. The subject in my writing has their lived experiences. Weheliye’s suspicious attitude towards the very often self-evident notion of agency and resistance helps me to articulate the implications of lingering around in-between spaces, observing these fragments, not privileging wholeness, seeing the relational as well as non-relational making processes in the writing. It is an invitation to see agency and resistance of a specific body through its writing, otherwise.

## 2.2 My Embodiment in English Language

For when she builds and builds only (positivist affirmation), she runs the risk of expanding his property at her own cost; and when she unbuilds, and unbuilds only (nihilist negation) she tends to fall into the habit of negating for the sake of his alter ego (Minh-ha:1991,187)

After a long break: tough, bold, depressed, detached. Here I am typing again, facing a courtyard, with trees in their transformations from winter nakedness to spring spreading. Sometimes, sticking to a linear imagination is hopeful.

Writing is difficult. The more I get connected to the colored skin, the more difficult I find the writing to be. Not only what happens around me in a vivid presence but also what happened in the past, chains of retrospectively eventful moments, they start to re-emerge in another tonal that I find painful to access in a just way.

For this part of the writing: there are moments that I feel everything I try to speak out has been repeated here and there by generations of feminists. By trying I mean a

process of connecting to the matter of the body and translating/formulating/incorporating its force in the writing. It is not that I want to expose the self through the body as such; it is, after all a rather painful process. However, I realized that without making that visible it was/would be difficult to engage with the theories I rely on. This sense of difficulty come from less from technical issues than from the emotive ones. This personal narrative part, it functions like a mediation, with the aim to mark a distance in the first place, and to relax the tension of writing as an “Other” in relation to the mostly white theorists that I have been exposed to and will engage with. I think it’s worth devoting a chapter to that.

These days I’ve come to the realization that I am obsessed with thinking ontologically. Part of the reason is that I’ve lost the sense of who I am or I sometimes even doubt whether “I” am allowed to ask this question in the first place or not. Surely, I am gradually building up a capacity to articulate the self as a feminist of color body with and through the English language. I want to start the other way around, to talk about my reading experiences in English. I took two literature classes in Budapest and I remember I expressed the frustration in reading English writings that are non-theoretical, “it’s weird but I find it much easier to read theoretical works in English than those in literary forms”. It seems I just cannot enter an imaginative space to appreciate these writings. Maybe I hold too tight to the mind that I cannot enjoy the literary moment of losing, maybe all the strange vocabularies block my way, maybe the vocabularies I recognized cognitively did little to me in the sense of enabling/evoking an emotive bodily response, or the bodily response did not in turn get registered in a recognizable way. I don’t know why I am writing to find an answer. I was losing the bodily connection with myself, losing by censorship, in shame, with doubt and fear, and in confusion. I am glad to talk about this experience in a past tense. I am also saying that not going through this process is a big privilege.

I got/am trapped between the theory and the bodily experiences. What got/gets in-between is unknown. To be able to claim the existence of such space is already an achievement. I have had a difficult time thinking and writing structurally in this thesis. I don’t know how to talk about things that exceed the embodied experiences of the self. It seems to me that Donna Haraway’s (1988) proposal of situated knowledges is a condition of my speech, other than a critical reflexive option. For I have to rely on the substance of the body so as to speak in a way that feels real to myself, which in turn makes them worth speaking.

I was reading Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991), “L’Innecriture, Un-writing/Inmost Writing\*”. In her discussion of the gendered dimension of languages in literature, she cites Marie Cardinal, whose opinion on the causal relations between “an inner censorship” and the usage of “technical languages” inspires my thinking. In Minh-ha’s reading (124), Cardinal analyses the asexual dimension of technical languages and how “it allows nothing of the body of those who are using it to pass through”. My reflection yet started from the position as a reader and it has not yet arrived at an articulable end. “To evoke the name of Laure is to relieve all the vibrations and flaying of a relentless struggle against the loss of one’s own substance” (131). “The loss of one’s own substance”, what a cruelty, or can it be a celebratory moment as well? How to trace and mourn the loss of one’s own substance? I’d rather not ask the latter question. However, it is only after asking this question that I realize there is an attempt to trace and perhaps also mourn, by writing, the loss of one’s substance in the previous writing. Minh-ha asks further, “how is it possible not to slip or skid when one has to walk along an abyss and at the same time measure its depth?” (131). The reality that gets framed in this question is so brutal but also such a relief to measure it in such a poetic framing. I would add that the length and depth of the abyss is constantly changing/getting changed, and that there are bad weathers, foggy days, storms, and the measurement process can get rather miserable.

“Woman can never be defined. Bat, dog, chick, mutton, tart. Queen, madam, lady of pleasure. MISTRESS. Belle-de-nuit, woman of the street, fruit woman, fallen woman. Cow, vixen, bitch. Call girl, joy girl, working girl” (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1986: 96). Trina T. Minh-ha writes this sentence in a book chapter called “Difference: “A Special Third World Women Issue.” This sentence comes back and forth to me, it even becomes a radical singular existence, thus it gains my own usage. The word “woman” in its singular sense appears repetitively in this sentence, yet its each appearance necessarily marks an irreducible difference to the other. I did not notice the singular tense of the usage of woman for quite a while and when I noticed it, I appreciated it. If the sentence begins as “women can never be defined”, then the effort in naming that follows would lose its force in enacting a sense of infinity. Further, as in Minh-ha’s notices, “‘woman’ more often than not reflects the subtle power of linguistic exclusion, for its set of regents rarely included those relevant to Third World ‘female persons’” (97). The category of woman, following Judith Butler (2004:529), commenting on Gayatri Spivak’s argument on the necessity of an operational essentialism, needs to be thought along with the notion that the “multiplicity and discontinuity of the referent mocks and rebels against the univocity

of the sigh”. Butler marks the difference between the usage of the term “woman” along with the acknowledgment of its ontological insufficiency that she defends, and “another” feminist political agenda that “celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or a shared cultural reality which cannot be found” (529). Indeed, to make a claim of the celebration or emancipation of an essence or nature in terms of gender is quite absurd following Butler, because it neglects the institutional and discursive means through which the constructive process of gender is constituted (530).

I still have a feeling of being called up on and am willing to act upon the calling of “women”, which means I get mobilized by its political force. However, never have I had a smooth sense of belonging, not ontologically but in its political mobilizing operation force for me. Following Butler (1997:95), the Althusserian notion of interpellation describes the situation that a subject is constituted by “being hailed, addressed, named”. Butler argues, “as Althusser himself insists, this performative effort of naming can only attempt to bring its addressee into being: there is always the risk of a certain misrecognition” (95). It seems necessary to construct thinking in relation to the categorical hailing of “third world women” here. If this sense of necessity sounds odd to you, perhaps it is a point for you to reflect on some privileges. To stick “woman” with “third world” would necessarily make the word “woman” appear in a plural form for me, which means the term “third world woman” only has its force on me by its political force, not ontologically. The claim “third world” is quite arbitrary to me in the sense that I cannot really think of a “third world” geographically. I honestly never conceive myself publicly or secretly through the combination “third world” and “woman”. I doubt and cannot firmly deny that I might still be haunted by the negative aspect of the forces that the term “third world women” brings along and acts upon me. I do conceive myself as queer people of color. The reason of a self-articulation through queer of color instead of third world woman is complicated which is inseparable from the thinking of the materiality of race and the construction of nationhood. It is depending on, how I get constituted by the variety of discursive forces and (the different possible space of) my responses to that.

The question “where are you from” is a frequently asked one by curious strangers in my everyday life. “My” nationality changes. Sometimes, it depends on my mood. I am amazed by the stubbornness of the perpetual “recognition” of the “otherness” in/of the visual perspectives of the human life. My usage of recognition here is not in its affirmative sense, but rather I am pointing to the very often subtle moment when the difference

“of” someone in a daily situation occurs and gets noticed. Sara Ahmed (2006:135) has acutely describes this moment, “but non/white bodies do inhabit white spaces; we know this. Such bodies are made invisible when we see spaces as being white, at the same time as they become hyper-visible when they do not pass, which means they ‘stand out’ and ‘stand apart’”. I would add up that there are plenty of other possibilities that fall between the recognition of being invisible and hyper-visible. The more “deviant” you are from the lines of the heteronormativity and the whiteness and the able-bodied-ness and etc., the more complicated the situation may become. As I have described earlier, my interest in examining the materiality of race is based on the knowledge I acquire from daily lives. This knowledge, which I locate at the visual modality of human lives, is constituted by the perpetual reminder from people in terms of “my” “otherness”. To some degree, I might unwittingly internalize the exterior question “Who are you”, internalizing as the question “Who are you” / “Who am I”.

The discussion of “woman” and “third world woman”, which turns out to be a failed attempt in seeking for an affirmative account of the self is charged by the sense of ontological anxiety. It seems I am exercising a lot of agency here to make certain ontological decisions of things that exceed my control. Am I allowed to do so? In a very Butlerian framework (2015:4-5), there is no a singular and an embodied “who”, that is responsible for answering this question. I am certainly aware and get reminded here and there especially by Butler about the conditions that guarantees my arrival as a human being, or not that fully as a human being. After all, “whether I accept it or not, the natures of I, i, you, s/he, We, we they, and wo/man constantly overlap” (Minh-ha 1991:94). I think there is a feeling of paranoia, with the realization of (once) negating the self, quite non-voluntarily, you get stuck to the self at least for a while, and want to articulate something authentic of/from this self. My thinking of authenticity privileges its temporal dimension and radically rely on the body, which perhaps could be articulated through Barad’s (1998) notion of agential realism. Barad’s (1998:104) notion of temporality is “implicated (with) in an ever changing agential reality”. I am here regarding my body as apparatus in a Baradian vein<sup>6</sup>. I would say that there is a strong sense of Asian philosophy in Barad’ usage of “ever-changing”. I would also say Barad’ s quantum thinking of the temporality gives space to articulate a singular embodied temporality. When a body, for instance, is going through a period of “impasse”, the body’s experience with the temporality has a big possibility to get deviated from the Capitalistic and Colonial mode

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<sup>6</sup> A friend Deirdre Sarah reminds me that Barad’s notion of apparatuses indeed includes the human body.



of the time. I have tried to conceive the self through a sense of ontological instability, however, it seems to me that only the “I” in the constant attempt of escaping from any captures could be characterized with ontological instability along the way. A capture is likely to be an illusion and may prove and produce itself the desire to leave, then similar stories happen. As I describe earlier, ontology in Barad’s post-humanist account, is ontologically subject to change, in its perpetual re-configuration in/of the materialization of the agential reality. This is the moment that my ontological anxiety arriving as the effects of “its” instability meets with Barad’s post-humanist perspectives of the world in its ongoing materialization.

### **2.3 A Possible Psychic Space for the Identification with the Nonhuman**

Judith Butler (1997) talked about the instability of the subject position in her co-reading of Foucault and Lacan. Following Butler (94,99), a Foucauldian subject is repetitively constituted in subjection and this possibility of a repetition simultaneously constitute the condition of the subject’s “de-construction”. Then, Butler adds that, “a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or re-articulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject’s incoherence, its incomplete character” (99). In this sense, the failure of the subject’s being a subject is always and already in the shadow of the subject’s performative maintenance of the self as a subject. Butler reads Jacqueline Rose who writes in a Lacanian vein that, “the unconscious constantly reveals the ‘failure’ of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved...Failure is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories” (1997:97). In my understanding, the temporality of the failure in the subject’s psyche is “implicated” in the subject’s psychic life. Further, Butler (2015:6) writes, “our formation does not suddenly fall away after certain breaks or ruptures”. In her view, this subject structure may happen in the junction of discursive demands, “a crossroads of cultural and political discursive forces” where the “possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed” (2011:124). To my understanding, Butler is referring to a temporal state of the subject formation that is characterized by “rupture” and/or “break”, whose occurrence seems to be conceptually located outside of the conditioned psychic failure, its instability, following Jacqueline Rose’s point of view. By “outside” I mean that the state of rupture seems to form a contingent relationality with the perpetual psychic

failure, however, not along with and/or within it. Is there any chance that “we” can make an “intervention” in the constitutive perpetual failure of the psychic life? To put differently, how can the temporal dimensions of the ruptures and/or breaks get re-worked?

Throughout the writing process, the interest in the psyche is always present. The visual language of human-nonhuman entanglement in Hang’s photos catches my eyes and gives me therapeutic feelings. I am curious of the psychic desire of ontologically identifying with nonhuman from marginalized positions, following which, the usage of “with” in the phrase “becoming with” would almost get erased as it goes to the direction (through a desire) of becoming non-human, quite ontologically. I strive to find an articulation of a psychic space for the identification with the nonhuman as a radical re-working of the self’s subject formations. Can I find it in the space-time between the subject’s (re) articulation of the self as a subject, or does it occur, quite unpredictably, somewhere along with the perpetual state of the failure of the psyche? My interest of the psychic desire of identifying with nonhuman lies at the very fundamental scale of the subject’s ongoing becoming process, which is implicated in the subject’s ongoing materializations.

In a Butlerian vein (1997:94), discourses not only constitute the domains of the speakable but are themselves bounded through the production of a constitutive outside: the unspeakable and the unsignifiable. Following this, the psychic desire of identifying with the nonhuman may be found in/of discourse themselves at the “site of the constitutive outside that secures the ostensible human reality” (Butler 2004:30). How might we account for the significance for such an individual’s psychic desire? And how might this individualized desire in turn generate effects on the discourse? I am unable to answer these two questions directly in this thesis. As I described earlier, I attempt to open up the conceptual space to generate this way of self-articulation, however, I won’t resolve fully this psychic dimension on an individual scale. The second question will partly get resolved in the final chapter.

Let me ask another set of questions without a direct engagement with the psyche. How can we account for the act of seeking for coherence through incoherence? What might happen if one is not seeking for a sense of coherence? My aesthetic privilege of the incoherence does not mean a perpetual state of seeking for the incoherence as one is constituted with/through the incoherence. For the specific interest of this thesis, this sense of coherence would be specified as the coherence of the self-articulation as a fully human subject from marginalized positions. I do not situate the thinking of coherence and

incoherence in a binary opposition. It is indeed a painful experience, where the subject's experience of incoherence is not a by-product, nor does it appear in a threatening ghostly form in relation to some part of the psychic life of the subject, but the subject is living through this incoherence, such that the incoherence not only surfaces here and then but remains at the very surface for a considerable amount of time. The reasons of one's not seeking for a complete sense of coherence vary: one may be deprived of the capability of doing so or one may consciously desire an incoherence, etc. Is the psychic pursue of a sense of coherence as something one can actually claim to give up, and to what degree? Can that actually happen, at least partly? Does one get diagnosed as psychotic when one does (or wants to do) that? It is rather a huge privilege to have this moment of not wanting to. I am thinking of Frantz Fanon's writing at the crossroads of psychiatry and decolonization. In Butler's (2015:10) reading, Fanon emphasizes the living conditions of some beings who are destroyed prior to their living/dying in the world. Some beings, as non-being, have to break up with the racialized condition, so as to break into the category of the human. While some beings, not fully as non-beings, yet ontologically not fully secure with the category of the human, may want to declare that not fully human condition and break up by not making every effort to secure that constitutive relationality with the human.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to articulate a form of building that occur in the ruptures, which have a capacity to claim its own "authenticity". I move from describing an ontological anxiety where I ends up in line with a post-humanist articulation of "ontology" to the discussion of subject formations where I try to open up the space between/along the subject's performative re-articulation of the self as a subject where the identification with nonhuman might be found.

## Chapter 3: The Materiality of Race

In this section, I will discuss “the materiality of race”. Basing myself in Barad’s works, the materiality of race is conceptualized as one components of the materiality of the phenomena of racism in its ongoing materializations. I have asked the question: how can the very atoms of the body leads us to approach the racializing/racialized visual perspective of human lives differently? I will explore the roles of the “very atoms of the body” based on Brian Massumi’s work. In the *autonomy of affect* (1994), Massumi claims that there is always something untraceable that escapes at the moment of an affective body’s exposition to the others (human and nonhuman). This process happens quite involuntarily and this untraceable something which escapes nevertheless leaves a “mark” on the living body. Massumi’s notion of the autonomy of affect is inseparable from a thinking at the quantum scale, which in my understanding demonstrates effectively “how matter comes to matter” as the quantum-material constraints of everyday lives (Barad 1998:90).

I move the discussion to the perceptual field of the materiality of race by thinking about questions of mediation. My turning to “mediation” is inseparable of Barad’s theorization of apparatuses which do not have an inherent stabilized outside boundary. Perhaps, one “thing” that is ontological about the materiality of race is its ongoing materialization in the perceptual field. Sullivan (2012:302) describes perception as “the vehicle and effect of a particular situated Somatechnics”. The term “soma-in-technes”, altered from Somatechnics, will play a key role in this line of argument.

Relying on the new materialist ontology of matter and a quantum thinking of the perceptual field, I find possibilities in the thinking of the materiality of race in the perceptual space which is ontologically indeterminate. Towards the end of this section, I orientate the analysis of the perceptual field between a West viewer and the materiality of Hang’s photos from a localizable encounter (the perceptual field) to the sphere of the ethical and the ontological following Judith Butler.

### 3.1 A thing-in-phenomena

For Karen Barad, phenomena are one constitutive part of reality which are considered as the primary ontological unit (2003: 818). Reality is composed of “things-in-phenomena” instead of “thing-in-themselves” or “thing-behind-phenomena” (Barad:1998,104). Phenomena is the effects of power-knowledge systems (106). Here Barad is also

suggesting that the smallest union when we think of causality retrospectively and/or in an on-going event, should not be “independent” things. Indeed, Barad’s agential realism does not “posit some fixed notion of being that is prior to signification” (104). How can I think of the materiality of race at this point? Is it a “thing” that is only thinkable to the extent of its intra-action in a discursive phenomenon? Or is it, at least in part, already itself a thing-in-phenomena?

The second asked question casts light of Weheliye’s (2014) theorization of racializing assemblages which represents the visual modalities in which dehumanization is practiced and lived. According to Weheliye, racialization is one parameter which determines the hierarchical assembly of modern human into “humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (8). For him, there exists no modern human that is not subject to racialization (8). Weheliye’s project examines how race becomes pinioned in human physiology, for which he argues, “there can be no absolute biological substance, because in the history of modernity this field always already appear in the form of racializing assemblages” (65). Weheliye sees race, racialization, and racial identities as “on-going set of political relations” (3). This repudiation of the possibility to speak of an unmediated biological substance is framed in Weheliye’s sketch of the genealogy of modernity, which in part situated in his reading of Sylvia Wynter, where Wynter diagnoses a mutational shift of the modernity that processes from the anatomical model of sexual difference to the physiognomic model of racial/cultural difference (40). Weheliye finds Wynter’s remarks on modernity unsatisfying and argues that anatomy and physiognomy are in a contingent yet non-reversible order, following the modern assemblage which “requires the physiognomic territorialization of atomic qualities” in the sphere of racial and sexual difference (41). So far, if I follow Weheliye, then it seems to me that whatever efforts that are put into conceptualize the materiality of race, there is one mediation, the racializing assemblages in the service of the making of Modern Western Humanness/Humanity, which requires our critical attention. I asked whether we could conceptualize the materiality of race as a “thing” that is only thinkable to the extent of its intra-action in a discursive phenomenon or is it already itself a thing-in-phenomena. Following Weheliye’s work, I would argue that the materiality of race is a thing-in-phenomena. In Barad’s theorization of the materialization of apparatuses, Barad remarks that this process of materialization is not arbitrary (1998:98) in the sense that it is not a freely floating process. According to Weheliye, it is not only non-arbitrary but indeed is orientated in a rather violent way in the aim to “exclude nonwhite subjects from the

category of human” (2014:3). I am careful not to lose sight of how the materiality of race is already mediated by “racializing assemblages” in light of Weheliye. In the meantime, I take into consideration the material dimension of my analysis and think together with Barad to explore its indeterminate and perhaps also not fully knowable dimension in its ongoing process of the materialization.

### 3.2 Soma-in-techne

In Barad’s articulation of the Bohrian sense of apparatuses, apparatuses are not passive observation instruments but are productive constitutive parts of phenomena (1998:98). Barad notes that Bohr does not directly address the question of where the apparatuses ends (98). I turn to Trinh T. Minh-ha, to try to address the question of where the apparatus ends. In Minh-ha’s (1991:36) film commentary work, she refers to “the meditating activity” between the medium and the mediator. She asserts, “the relationship between mediator and medium or, the mediating activity, is either ignored—that is, assumed to be transparent, as value free and as insentient as an instrument of reproduction ought to be—or else, it is treated most conveniently: by humanizing the gathering of evidence so as to further the status quo”. Minh-ha highlights the space between the mediator and the medium, which included a dimension of a constructed/constructing politics. I use Minh-ha’s description of the relationship between mediator and medium to think with Barad, about the relationship between nonhuman apparatuses and human apparatuses. I think Minh-ha’s description, though situated in her discussion on film productions, the mediating activity, is an effective conceptual tool if we are to take seriously the productive material dimension of the phenomena in its on-going process of materialization. I would say Minh-ha is perhaps also pointing at the perceptual space. I think one dimension of Minh-ha’s notion of the mediating activity is the site of perception.

For the moment I turn to another theorist’s work to discuss the perceptual site, which I think is essential in the thinking of the materiality of race. Perhaps, one “thing” that is ontological about the materiality of race is its ongoing materialization in the perceptual field. Sullivan (2012:302) highlights the inextricability of soma and techne in the perceptual field, for Sullivan, there is no soma-and-techne but Somatechnics and her account of perception is “the vehicle and effect of a particular situated Somatechnics”. Following a Heideggerian sense, Sullivan thinks techne are not added upon or applied to the body, but “are techniques and/or orientations (ways of seeing, knowing, feeling, moving, being, acting and so on) which are learned within a particular tradition or

ontological context, and function to craft (un) becoming-with in very specific ways” (302). This thinking, areplacement of the logic of the “and”, is rather significant. There is surely a sense of this replacement happening in Weheliye’s theorization of racializing assemblages, where racialization is not added upon the modern human, but the modern human is always and already subject to the law of racialization.

I have some frustration following up Sullivan’s theorization of Somatechnics. My frustration arrives with few reasons: there seems to be no space left in the thinking of the perceptual field to conceive the materiality of the bodily matter that is not contaminated by techne; and I am not so sure whether Sullivan is solely talking about the optical field or not and how she might approach the relationality between the field of visual perceptions and the bodily perceptions. Sullivan situates her conceptualization of the body in an unbounded fashion, that it is always co-habited with human and nonhuman in its dwelling space. However, it seems unclear to me how this co-habited-ness of the body might have effects on the theorization of Somatechnics in its particular situated-ness? Sullivan foregrounds the ontological condition and the historical embeddedness in the perceptual field, which I am careful not to neglect. I agree with Sullivan in terms of the inextricability of soma and techne in the perceptual field. I ask, how does matter make itself felt that could possibly exceed the domain of the human intelligibility? With a literal parody of Barad’s term “thing-in-phenomena”, the word “soma-in-techne” comes to me. Soma-in-techne and Somatechnics, are quite obviously different in terms of their possible connotations. I think the term “soma-in-techne” suggests a relational inseparability of soma and techne which preserves at least a conceptual space of an uncontaminated site of the soma and also opens up a space to articulate the process of its happening.

I am thinking here of Brian Massumi’s articulation of the autonomy of affect. Massumi explains, “the autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual” (1995:96). Situating it in a rather quantum scale of thinking, Massumi’s approach of affect is two-sided, the virtual (the autonomy of relation) and the actual (functional limitation) (96). Massumi gives a spatial and temporal mapping of what could possibly happen in between these two locus and what falls into the actual site. He describes, “the escape of affect cannot but be perceived, alongside the perceptions that are its capture” (97). Massumi suggests that the effect of the simultaneous escaping in the relational site, where something gets un-actualized, leads to the “dis-orientating” aspect of emotions (97). Indeed, Massumi regards emotion as the most intensive form of this capture (97). I find

Massumi's arguments very hopeful because they give space to think/imagine a pre-discursive moment of the perceptual field that is not yet racialized, in the meantime, we find a perceiving/the perceived body whose mode of being and doing is not entirely determinate. My question of how the materiality of race may exceed the racialized/racializing schemas is, at least partly, resolved at this point. Massumi's notion of the autonomy of affect is inseparable from a thinking at the quantum scale, which in my understanding demonstrates effectively "how matter comes to matter" (Barad 1998:90) as the material constraints of everyday lives (91).

The thinking of the not entirely traceable effect of the virtual in the actual site opens up, spatially and temporally, the term Somatechnics. Perhaps, Somatechnics could be seen as the knowable effects of the field: soma-in-techne. To reiterate my intention in bringing up the word, soma-in-techne, firstly, I argue that it suggests a relational inseparability in terms of the soma and techne. Secondly, it enables a conceptual space of an uncontaminated site of the soma. Indeed, these pre-discursive moments of the body's affectivity open up some temporal and spatial dimensions between the vehicle and the effect in Sullivan's account of the perceptual field. What gets in-between the vehicle and the effect may not be fully articulable, however, I think it is necessary to recognize these moments.

### **3.3 The Ethical Dimension in the Perceptual Field of the Materiality of Race**

If I follow Massumi, then it seems to me that in whatever name we might come to term the sensations and/or emotions, the viewer is always and already haunted by a sense of dis-orientating, at the atomic scale. It seems impossible for me to argue further in this line of thinking in terms of where and how can we locate this sense of dis-orientating. For me, it at least suggests a constitutive dimension in the human perception, which is productively pre-discursive. I will take a quantum jump here by entangling the understanding of Massumi's articulation of the disorientating sense and Judith Butler's discussion on loss. In her writing in "Violence, Mourning, Politics" (2006), Butler describes the constitutive roles of loss and the transformative effects of loss in the public dimension of the human body/life. The contexts of their arguments are rather different between Massumi and Butler. However, I find it generating to bring together these two theorists' works through a perpetual shifting of the locus and the scales of the thinking. I will come back to this point in the following chapter. Following Butler, the public



dimension of the human life, its vulnerability and its exposure, would necessarily render the disposition of ourselves outside ourselves, which could also be seen as a mode of being dispossessed, “a way of being for another or by virtue of another” (24,25). Massumi traces the functional limitation of the actual site through tracing the autonomous relationality between the virtual and the actual, which render the ontologically indeterminate perspective of the actual site. To invite this portion of Butler’s work here would add up the ethical and ontological thinking of the human life. It is loss in its more-than-human and/or less-than-human dimension that gains my focus. Butler’s (2006) thinking of the impersonal dimension of the body’s materiality is inseparable of her engagement in the social-ontological dimension of an individual person. This thinking of “loss” following Judith Butler will constitute the ethical dimension of the question, “how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well” (2006:24). Massumi’s (1995) articulation of the more-than-human dimension of the body’s materiality is based on his engagement with the indeterminate quantum scale of the bodily life. A speculation of the convergence of these two different sites of the bodily life seems productive and necessary to me. If the materiality of race in the perceptual do have a moment of escaping the racialized/racializing schemas, how might we respond to that, in a larger mapping of the relationality of the human, the more-than-human, and the nonhuman. I claim that there is a productive more-than-human dimension in/of the body’s perceptual site that is both constraining (the effect of how “matter comes to matter”) and enabling (the possibilities of an ethically future re-working).

## Chapter 4: A XXX feeling

In this chapter, I want to explore the relationship between the materiality of the human body and the materiality of Hang's photos in my perception of the materiality of Hang's photos through the XXX feeling. I start the examination of this question by targeting on the specific roles of the materiality of Hang's photos in mediating a visibility of the materiality of the human bodies. Butler (2015) claims that the materiality of the body is perhaps the site of our linguistic failure. I provide one aspect of this sense of linguistic failure by speaking from a queer people of color position. Along my lines of thinking, I turn to the dual aspects of Butler's notion of the performativity, the speech act and the bodily acts. I proceed from here by thinking of my own relationship with the English language in light of Spivak's (1988) famous question "can the subaltern speak". I describe a "speech" in a non-verbal way mediated by the XXX feeling. In my reading, it is delivered through the bodily "acts" of the queer of color people in Hang's photos. This XXX feeling is explicitly not read through an individualized bodily account. First, because I resist the act of making any individualized claims. Second, it is inseparable of the mediating role of the materiality of Hang's photos.

### 4.1 The materiality of the body

Butler (2011:2) suggests it is crucial to understand performativity as the "reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effects that it names". If I solely rely on this Butlerian framework of performativity in my encounter with the materiality of Hang's photos, what comes to me is: this XXX feeling perhaps could be seen as what Butler terms as the "effects" of the discursive production of bodily beings. I am shifting between the materiality of the human body and its visual existence through the materiality of photos. These two forms of materiality have significant phenomenological differences, however, if we think at the quantum scale, for instance, by situating the thinking in the perceptual field of soma-in-technes, the line seems difficult to be drawn. Partly to follow Barad, I don't set a separable line between these two forms of materiality in the first place, which does not mean the act of line-drawing won't happen and this line is nevertheless not permanent and stabilized.

For Butler (1993:9), matter is *thinkable* to the extent of it being in "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and

surface”. Karen Barad (2003) critiqued Butler at this point for re-inscribing matter as a passive discursive product and proposed to think of matter in her agential realist account as substance in its intra-active becoming that stabilizes and destabilizes in its ongoing historicity. I think there is a big chance that Barad neglects and/or overlooks the relationship between language and the body in Butler’s thinking. Butler (2015:18) would respond in her way that, “to claim, for instance, that the body is fabricated in discourse is not only to figure discourse as a fabricating kind of activity, but to sidestep the important question of ‘in what way’ and ‘to what extent’”. For Butler (2015:21), “the body escapes the linguistic grasp, but so, too, does it escape the subsequent effort to determine ontologically that very escape”. To put it simply, we are contaminated by language but the body is not contained within language (21). In other words, we cannot really think of bodily matter in an un-mediated way, but this does not link to the conclusion that *all* bodily matter are discursive products and there is no explicit suggestion that they are passive.

In Butler’s conference talk (2015) titled “why bodies matter”, Butler argues “. . . perhaps what we call the body’s materiality is what constantly escapes whatever names we might give it...So whatever the body is, it is never captured by any particular name...the body is perhaps the limit of our conceptual schemes, perhaps it is the site of our linguistic failing”. Following Butler’s different works, we can find different theoretical lines to proceed this thinking that “the body is the limit of our linguistic failures”. For instance, the performative aspect of the body’s being interpellated moments in her works following the Althusserian interpellation. In the chapter the ontological anxiety, I have given effort in response to the hailing of the term “third world woman” and showed how it fails to capture my lived reality. In this specific talk, Butler (2015) intrigues us to ask another set of questions: what historical frames of the conceptualization of the body are we referring to when we point at one body part with the attempt of naming, whose bodies are included here and under what aim etc.

Following Butler, we can never quite talk about the materiality of the body in an un-troubled way. I think there is a difference between a dimension of the body that escapes the linguistic grasp and that part of the body, its materiality, in its perpetual escaping of the linguistic grasp. Following Butler and Barad, this line between “escape” and “escaping” could perhaps be seen as performatively made in its materialization in the body’s being and doing in the world. Further, there are obvious differences among bodies in terms of their different relationships with the linguistic site. In my understanding,

Butler (1997) would argue from the psychic knowledge that the body that escapes linguistic grasp nevertheless bears the effect of discursive makings. In this sense, we can never quite *talk* about the materiality of the body in an uncontaminated way, which does not deny the existence of the materiality of the body. The materiality of the body that constantly escapes the linguistic grasp will nevertheless have effects in our “ways of seeing, knowing, feeling, moving, being, acting and so on” and we may articulate their effects in different effective ways. Butler’s discussion on the materiality of the human body is inseparable of the linguistic dimension of human life, which seems to me renders this argument one ontological fact of the human (or modern Human?). In other words, there seems to me very limited space left to articulate the differences among humans in the mediation of the body’s chiasmus relationship to language.

I am meanwhile thinking of what I have suggested in the previous chapter of the conceptual space of the uncontaminated site of soma, which is uncontaminated by *technes* in the perceptual space (ways of seeing, knowing, feeling, moving, being, or acting) in Sullivan’s sense. As I articulated in the previous section, the term “soma-in-*technes*” is intended to suggest a relational inseparability of soma and *technes*. Language is one constitutive criteria of *technes* though the arguments cannot be made otherwise. Based on my previous engagement with Brian Massumi, I would make a similar argument in light of Butler’s (2015) articulation in terms of the relationship between the body and the language, to say that the being and doing of soma in the perceptual space is contaminated by *technes*, but not contained by it. And perhaps it is also important to ask questions like “in what way” and “to what extent”.

Obviously, Butler situate her thinking of the body in relation to the chains of linguistic significations. Massumi’s writing of the autonomy of affect describes the body, the autonomous perspective of the body (the more-than-body dimension of the bodily life), its perpetual escaping of the bodily grasp. To mention Massumi’s works here is in the aim to move beyond the chains of significations in Butler’s thinking. The materiality of the body that constantly escapes/escaped the bodily/linguistic grasp will nevertheless have effects in the perceptual sites whose effects have a more-than-human dimension that exceeds our full knowingness and we may perhaps still find possibilities to articulate these effects in different effective ways.

## 4.2 Body-Language and beyond

In the following, I will situate the “thinking” of the body’s materiality in the perceptual field. There are some clarifications that need to be made. Firstly, my usage of perception at this point is not totally in line with Sullivan’s (the vehicle and effect of a situated Somatechnics). As I have attempted to open up the temporal and spatial dimensions of the occurrence between the “vehicle” and “effect” by the articulation of the term “soma-in-technes”. Secondly, even though my analysis is centered in the visual field, I do not make a determinate separation between different registers in the field of perception, of seeing, knowing, hearing, etc. Thirdly, the feelings of the materiality of the body of the self are quite different from the feelings of the materiality of the body of others and there is an individualized difference on how we might feel the materiality of our own body. The perception of the materiality of other bodies is my main concern here. Fourthly, Brian Massumi’s articulation of affect, feelings, and emotions are not ontologically separate from each other and they seem to follow certain temporal orders. I would follow this differential when I engage with Massumi’s works.

Partly following Sullivan’s theorization of the Somatechnics at this point, those feelings in the perceptual field are not neutral to the discursive forces. Based on the reading of Massumi of the constant escape of affect and its effect in the affective site of the body, there are already non-discursive space in our knowing through a degree of unknowingness and the functional disorientating force that occurs in the perceptual field. At this point, I want to explore the possibilities of theorizing the undoing of a racialized/racializing schema by centering the thinking from the non-linguistic sites even if we are confined within the linguistic sites.

It would be necessary to keep following Butler’s articulation of the relationship between the body and the language, to see what the body do in the linguistic sites and how some body’s failure of doing in the linguistic sites, in terms of speaking and being heard, may require a conceptualization and theorization of speaking and hearing in some alternative ways. In Butler’s reading of Shoshana Felman’s article “The scandal of the Speaking body”, Butler (2004:199) argues, “the body gives rise to language, and that language carries bodily aims, and performs bodily deeds that are not always understood by those who use language to accomplish certain conscious aims”. What is at stake here is the “chiasmus” relationship between performativity’s dual aspects, one of speech act, the other of bodily acts: “there is always one dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language” (199).

Butler's interest of this "not fully representable bodily dimension" is driven by its relationships with speech act, to the extent of articulating the excess of bodily significations in relation to the subject's intentions in language. Butler seems to be in favor of this Lacanian reading of the speaking body and gives an explanation that the arrival of language is conditioned by the presence of the body, what the body does during the happening of the speech is where the "exceeding" happen (Butler: 2014,199). I think there can be a huge difference among different bodies in terms of the subject's relationship (embodiment, intention) with the language. I am here thinking of Spivak's (1998) question "can the subaltern speak". Indeed, is queer of color people conditioned to have a language to speak that could possibly get heard in the West?

### 4.3 A XXX feeling

In my encounter with the materiality of Hang's photos, it seems to me that what the body does, is one crucial point to think of the speaking of the queer of color people. Indeed, in my perception of the materiality of Hang's photos, I feel the feeling of "XXX". Is this feeling, channeled by the bodily acts of queer of color people in their entanglement with nonhuman, a way of speaking, and to whom? Perhaps it is not a question of to whom it is addressing but instead, to a big degree, to whom this "language" can be de-coded, or to say, recognized.

To articulate this statement in a theoretical way would require a further examination at the linguistic site. Is vocalization one defining condition of delivering a speech? Surely it is not, there are bodily signs that obtain the mechanism of being translated into articulable linguistic forms. Going back to my examination of the materiality of the human body and its visual existence, I claim that the visual field is no exception of the discursive field, therefore, the effects in the discursive production can certainly be seen and/or felt and get articulated there. Importantly, following Butler (2015:5), the effect of the materialization of the body ought not to be seen as coming along and arriving with a singular and deliberate act of discourse. The mediating role of the materiality of Hang's photos in my previous analysis gives rise to the articulation of the XXX feeling as a specific way of speaking without reading through an individualized bodily account.

One that interests me here is the function of camera in capturing the body at a specific moment. To what degree does the camera capture the body and what might escape? To what relation of those bodies can I, if I attempt to, spatialize the

“depressed/deathly feelings”? For Butler (1993:2), “what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect”. Is this XXX feeling captive in the fixity of the body or in the contours of the body that constitute the fixity of the body? Do the contours of the body gain certain quality of fixity as well, and to what degree? This chain of questions is driven by another set of questions, to put simply, am I the only person who feels this and is making an effort to theorize this XXX feeling? I would argue perhaps that this feeling in my articulation, are the site of the “barely seen, and the unseen; in the between, the margins, and the borders of visible reality; and through the power of blanks, holes, silences, and empty spaces” (Trinh T. Minh-ha: 2016,132).

The XXX feeling, it seems to be immaterial at first glance. However, when I return to the materiality of Hang’s photos, I feel something, the something in my capture, they appear as the “depressed/deathly” feeling. At this moment, I decode this feeling XXX in my bodily capture. Perhaps I could give myself an account here, I have recognized some dimension of the “I” in Hang’s photos, and it is my identification with the bodies, at least partly, in Hang’s photos that condition my recognition of the “depressed/ death feelings”. This mode of identification does not rely on the identitarian mode of relatings, but instead it is based on visceral feelings. To my bodily perception, they are just there, I feel the pain. My body not only enables all the feelings coming to me, but in the meantime goes through a quick process of intensification, resolving with a sense of relief. It is a body in pain, a body in shame, a body in resistance that condition the happening of this process. Here I am moving from a specific body to anonymous bodies. I would make an imitative argument following Butler, in the mediation of the materiality of the visual representation of Hang’s photos, those bodies give rise to a sense of depressed/deathly feelings, at least to me. The depressed/deathly feeling I get called upon, they are inseparable with the materiality of the bodies in Hang’s photos. They carry some messages of the body, intentionally or not. These feelings are perceived in my bodily encounter with Hang’s photos, or even before their arrival in my bodily perceptions. The claim of the latter is to ask who might get called upon by these feelings. What at stake here is a matter of recognizability, but recognition is driven foremost by the visceral conditions.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that one dimension of the XXX feeling is its being read as the materialized effects of those queer of color people’s being acted upon/acting in the

discursive field of China. I use “being acted upon” and “acting” simultaneously, which bears a mark of the understanding of Judith Butler (2015:6). Even if I do not elaborate too much of this point, it is my intention to bring it in the writing so as to not lose sight of the discursive forces that constitute the subjects. I situate the analysis in the perceptual field an engagement with the complex relations between the embodiment and the language. I decoded the XXX feeling at the end of the chapter based on a visceral engagement. I did not spend much time engage directly with this XXX feeling in this chapter, but instead, I put effort in crafting a conceptual space to articulate this XXX feeling in a politically effective way. It is one of my intention to move this moment of visceral recognition to a collective scale, which is inseparable from the inspiration from Muñoz’s affective mapping. As I described earlier in the introduction, Muñoz (2006) sketches a form of affective mapping which aims at describing one historically coded racial performativity, as a political being, doing and becoming. Muñoz’s approach does away with the individualized model of relationality. Similarly, throughout this chapter’s discussion, I suggest that the XXX feeling may describe a form of “speech” that speaks about a particular political being and doing without reading it through an individualized bodily account.



## Chapter 5: Phenomenological reading of Hang's photos

In this chapter, I interrogate the constructed/constructing lines between the Human and the Non/Human in my reading of Hang's photos. I emphasize and articulate two forms of "otherness" in the visual experiences in relation to and in the production of the Western Humanness through a phenomenological reading of Hang's photos following Sara Ahmed. I argue that the convergence of these two modes of "otherness" may engender a perceptual field where humanization and dehumanization occur simultaneously and perpetually. I center the materiality of Hang's photos, with an attempt to recognize and articulate a materialized force that may have the potentiality to exceed whatever framings discourse may perform. I ask, if, according to Levinas, representation is one condition of getting humanized, how can we account for the specificity of a (self)-representation from marginalized positions that might be read as performing a self-de-humanizing? Towards the end, I argue the visibility of queer of color and nonhuman entanglement may do something that would re-direct, direct and/or, indeed, suspend the field of humanization.

### 5.1 A Phenomenological reading of Hang's photos

Ahmed would say that the arrival of this visual entanglement of human-nonhuman is not purely an accident, because the nearness of an object is not simply given. As she argues (2006:40), "an arrival takes time and the time that it takes shapes 'what' it is that arrives". If I follow Sara Ahmed (2006), behind "what gets shaped" is a complex matter of bodily tendencies, the availabilities and the reachability of the object, the bodily affectivities and the performative production of the subject and object spatial relations. To speak more explicitly, I am suggesting that what we might see as the complex and sometimes playful entanglement between the human body and nonhuman bodies in Hang's photos, this entanglement carry its own historicity. Similarly, Butler (2015) examines the problematics of seeing the human body as the ground or condition of seeing and the seen in Merleau-Ponty's sense and points to the impersonal dimension of the persisting enabling condition that makes the reversibility, for example, between seeing and being seen not fully possible (165). In this light, one of the main focus of my reading of Hang's photos is the discursive dimension of "our" lives.

Ahmed suggests that "bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit" (2006:53, my emphasis), what makes bodies different is how they inhabit space,

and spatial relations between subjects and objects are produced through actions (2006:25). What kind of spatial relations may emerge following this performative understanding of the production of spatial relations in the act of becoming “one” with nonhuman in the materiality of Hang’s photos? In her article, a phenomenology of whiteness, Ahmed (2007) articulates a spatial relation through a recognition of “whiteness” as one dominating force in this production. Whiteness in Ahmed’s theorization is an orientation, thus not being in line with whiteness results in not being orientated in a smooth way. Or rather, the action of re-orientation can become a rather conscious one. Hang’s photos in my analysis is materialised through the force of “whiteness”.

In the following, I will try to give an account of the spatial relations behind the human-nonhuman entanglement based on a recognition of whiteness as one of the constitutive discursive force from my embodied positions. I share my practice of a non-hierarchical perception when I am made to feel as/like a non-white body in certain spaces. By non-hierarchical perception, I refer to a non-human-centered perception, a seemingly mashed-up sense in my perceptions of the surroundings. It is a choreography of the surroundings forces: the reflections in the window, the temperature of the light, the human bodies, the texture of the voices that travel away, a small corner bottle, the line of its shape and what it tells, the rhythmic movement of dirt in the air; indeed, the rhythms of all that surrounds me. I am also surrounded by my body, the bones, the skin, noticing their movements. I feel allied. I submerge myself in the space so as to inhabit the space. I transform the space, sometimes playfully. This happens when, I notice or not, I am/might not to be orientated, however, neither disoriented (before the actualization of the sense of disorientation). I would say, there is a temporal sense of dissolving of the self and the surroundings happening in my practice of this non-hierarchical perception as my survival skills in terms of the daily “hyper-visible or invisible” experiences. I borrow the words “hyper-visible” and “invisible” from Ahmed (2007), which I think is an effective naming of such situations.



*Image III. Untitled (2014)*

Further, Ahmed (2006:126) describes how, if we see whiteness as an orientation, it orientates towards something, “we can see how making ‘the strange’ familiar, or the ‘distant’ proximate, is what allows ‘the West’ to extend its reach”. There is a fantasized lack in the Western psychic that constitute the desire to the distant to the “here” (114). She argues, “rather than othering being simply a form of negation, it can also be described as a form of extension” (126). I would say the degrees and forms of negation may differ followed by different aims and the way it extends the West will in turn arrive differently.

## **5.2 Animals as the Other**

I want to specify the phenomenological understanding of the different forms of the “otherness” in the productions of the Western Humanness in my reading of the materiality of Hang’s photos. It’s necessary to discuss the roles of the nonhuman in the making of the Western Humanness to proceed the thinking of this question.

In Martin Huth’s discussion on the phenomenology of human-animal relations for an analysis of “our being-with-animals” (2016:155), he notes that in Western philosophy “there is hardly any philosopher...that does not mention animals and the role they play in human life and self-understanding”. Martin Huth explains that the act of making a comparison between human and animals is driven by the desire of “identifying similarities and/or differences between them” (157). He concludes that the Human’s self-understanding as the “master and possessor of nature” renders animals being treated and

interpreted as “Humans minus X” (157). In other words, it is through a relational-making through a logic of “lack”, that animals are conceptually constructed in the West conditioned by a desire to put the human being above all other beings.

Further, if we read the philosophical status of animal as Humans minus X<sup>7</sup>, what is the constructing/constructed line between Human and animal in the first place? In Achille Mbembe’s reading of the Hegelian dialectic of becoming the Subject, the Human first negates nature and secondly transforms the negated elements through works and struggles (2003:14). It seems to me that there a sense of suggestion in this Hegelian dialectic that the first act of negation can never be quite complete, and what follows, the process of the transformation is to some degree involuntary. Together with this limited reading of the Hegelian dialectic of becoming a Human subject and Martin Huth’s phenomenological account of the philosophical status of animals as Human minus X, I would say that the negation on nonhuman animals seems to be intended in a complete fashion in the aim of the emergence of the Human subject. However, this operation of the negation is always and already under contestation and it seems that it is never actualized.

What about the role of stones, vegetal beings in the production of Western Humanness? Mel. Y Chen’s theorization of animacy as a specific affective and material construct critically recognizes the continuum of stones, nonhuman animals, human and the Human (2012:5). Stones, which are discursively considered as inanimate objects, in Chen’s view, are not entirely excluded from the participation in the animacy hierarchy (5). Following Chen’s lines of arguments, the linguistic site is one that is constitutive of the affective and material construct of animacy. Chen illustrates the roles of stones through linguistic examples/analysis (2).

I find Chen’s notion of animacy effective in examining the roles of the nonhuman in the making of the Western Humanness. However, this remapping through animacy does not effectively response to my act in differentiating the phenomenological differences of the two forms of “otherness”. Indeed, my intention in differentiating in the first place is under the aim of examining the effects of their convergence in Hang’s photos. I will return to Chen’s notion of the animacy and the animacy hierarchy in the end of this chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> I acknowledge there is a risk of over-simplifying the heterogeneity of the roles of animals in the “West”.

### 5.3 A disruptive potentiality in the human-nonhuman entanglement

Based on my interest of the different workings of the “otherness” in the perpetual field between a Western viewer and the queer of color people, and a Western viewer and the nonhuman, I have tried to describe how their productions are different. I have described there is a sense of negation based on a fantasied/ eroticized “lack” in the psychic and the colonized/colonizing mode of knowingness towards queer of color people. And there is another sense of negation which seems to me is intended to be complete, based on the desire to construct the Human, in the first place. I would say these two forms are both constituted by and effect on a sense of extension of the Western Humanness. The examination of the different modes of the production of the otherness, is aiming at seeing the discursive limit(s) differently in the viscosity of the human-nonhuman entanglement. I argue their convergence, materialized through the visual entanglement in Hang’s photos, may reveal, in some sense, the limit of the Western Humanness.

It is one of my aim in this writing to show how might the materiality of Hang’s photos represents human bodies in a way that shows the failure of discursive productions in the representation field. I ask, does the visual act of queer of color people’s becoming with nonhuman engender a self-dehumanizing effect and if so, what might be the effects of this effect in the perceptual field? Following Chen’s notion of animacy, the first association that comes to me is the operational stereotype of Asian people, especially Asian woman, whose appearance in the West seems to operate through a sexualized and racialized perceptual schemes, which may be characterized by passivity. This association with “passivity” may result in Asian women’s residing in the less animate spectral if I read through Chen’s conceptual apparatuses of the animacy hierarchy. Does the viscosity of queer of color people and the nonhuman entanglement intensify this sense of passivity? I would clearly say no but I also find a hard moment to answer exactly how and why. What might occur if a negated/being negated subject/object negates the self in a way that simultaneously reveals another set of epistemic violence which may involve the domain of the viewer’s self-reference as the human subject? The perceptual field between a Western viewer and the materiality of Hang’s photos, I argue, has the radical possibility to evoke a destabilized ontological field: the human figure, the nonhuman figure, the Human viewer, and the dynamic flux of what slips away from each ontological position. This destabilized visual perceptual field in my speculation ought not to be articulated in a stabilized manner. One at stake here, is the psychic dimension, in terms of the visual identifications and dis-identifications and what falls in-between.

The visual entanglement of queer of color and nonhuman exposes the strangeness of the Other in a way that might work disturbingly at the limit and/or the rupture of the Human intelligibility. Indeed, it may appear as visual noise that refused to be articulated. Perhaps at this moment, the line between humanizing and dehumanizing, as the discursive dimension of its on-going materialization, refused to be clearly drawn. This working, as a (potential site of) re-working, to a big degree, has the potentiality to exceed the discursive forces of framing. In other words, I argue the materiality of Hang's photos, carries itself a radical disruptive potentiality, where humanization and dehumanization occur simultaneously and perpetually. Mel Y. Chen's theorization of animacy and animacy hierarchy is effective to think through the process of the indeterminate visual perception field where humanization and de-humanization become ontologically indeterminate.

In the end of the section the materiality of race, I have attempted to orientate the analysis of the perceptual field between a Western viewer and the materiality of Hang's photos from a localizable encounter (the perceptual field) to the sphere of the ethical and the ontological following Judith Butler. This shift is made possible by centering a disorientating sense. Again, I feel the necessity to move the discussion to the sphere of the ethical. Butler (2006:28) describes, "if I don't know what seizes me on such occasions, and if I do not always know what it is in another person that I have lost, it may be that this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that expose my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary sociality". If this sense of the unconscious imprint of one's primary sociality reveals one's complicit roles in a set of structured/structuring epistemological violence, how can we account for that moment? I am moving from a phenomenological analysis of Hang's photos to the field of the ethics. My notion of ethics is in line with Judith Butler (2015:12), who claims that "the ethics does not primarily describe conduct or disposition, but characterize a way of understanding relational framework within which sense, action, and speech become possible". What kind of sense, action, and speech might get demanded according to Butler's notions of the ethics? I think my act and mediating roles in the reading of the materiality of Hang's photos is, to a big degree, an effort in generating such a demand, where the Others' unknowingness is recognized, freed from the captivation of the violently appropriated strangeness, and it will be ethically re-ordered.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the thesis, I write with my own body and Hang's photos, which I consider as one illustration of "queer of color, becoming (with) nonhuman". I make an effort in translating the roles of the nonhuman and their forces in the writing process into the writing, which I hope might be felt by some readers. I take seriously the body's role in the writing. Speaking in a Baradian vein, it is the material dimension of this writing process and the apparatus of my reading of Hang's photos. The relationship between the body and the language has been frequently touched upon in this thesis, in the personal narrative part and the theoretical development. Its occurrence does not come along within my intentions. Perhaps this fact speaks about the ontological condition of mine.

In the beginning of the thesis, I claim that among the substance of Hang's photos, I have a specific orientation. I do not speak to one specific photo of Hang, but rather I develop different traces in giving an account of this orientation. It is one of my aim to open up an ontological space for marginalized people based on an understanding of the ontological closeness between queer of color people and the nonhuman against the backdrop of the making of the Western Humanness. I put effort in recognizing and articulating the political solidarity between queer of color people and the nonhuman at two scales, the psyche and the visual. With an engagement with Butler's (1997) writing on the performative aspect of the subject's psyche, I describe a possible psychic locus for the identification with nonhuman. I made a move from the exploration at the psyche to a larger mapping in light of Muñoz (2006). Following which, I put efforts in the theorization of the XXX feeling as a form of "speech" that may speak about a particular political being and doing which can get viscerally felt in a larger scale.

Further, I examine the material dimension of racism on the bodily scale with the aim to interrogate the process of racialization. Drawing on Barad's (1998) agential realism and Massumi's (1995) notion of the autonomy of affect, I claim that there is a productive more-than-human dimension in/of the body's perceptual site that is both constraining (the effect of "matter comes to matter") and enabling (the possibilities of an ethically future re-working). In the final chapter, I sketch the differences between the arrivals in terms of queer of color people and the nonhuman, as the Other, in the making of modern Western Humanness. I do not/cannot describe in what ways the queer of color people and the nonhuman entanglement would generate disruptive forces in the perceptual field in their Western perceptions. I ask the following question. What might occur if a negated/being negated subject/object negates the self in a way that

simultaneously reveals another set of epistemic violence which may involve the domain of the viewer's self-reference as the human subject?

This thesis involves several moments of a quantum leap and the argumentation does not follow a linear order. Resonances appear among ruptures, fragments and traces. "The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finitude subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one" (Trinh T. Minh-ha 2009:2).



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