

The image shows three women in white and gold outfits on a stage. The woman in the center is wearing a white short-sleeved top and shorts with a gold chain belt. The woman on the left is wearing a white top and a gold skirt. The woman on the right is wearing a white top and a gold skirt. The background is blue with large white letters 'A' and 'L'. There are pink signs with the text 'Pretty' and 'Woo Ri'.

THEY TOUCHED BEYONCÉ

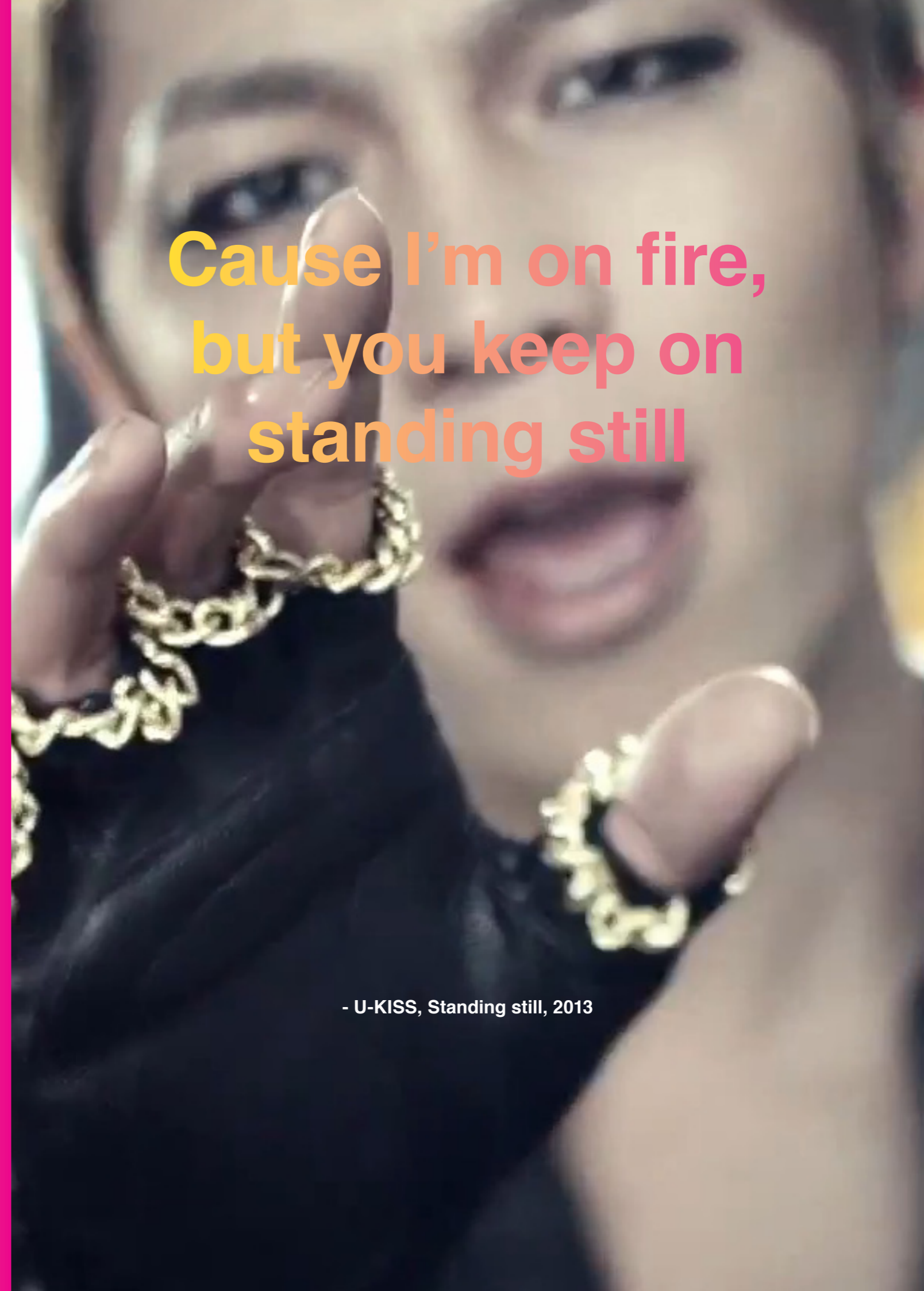
Pop culture
told me how to feel,
now real life has no appeal

**I'm not myself lately
I'm foolish,
I don't do this**

- Beyoncé, Crazy in Love, 2003

**Cause I'm on fire,
but you keep on
standing still**

- U-KISS, Standing still, 2013



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Abstract

This piece of writing represents a process of research and functions as a report for the graduation project of mine at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. It is a visual and textual journey of references and connecting the dots within my artistic practice. The experiments and work I have created this year will be analysed in this thesis and be given their larger context both in art and pop culture. To show and articulate the full process of the project.

The work revolves around the affect of pop culture. How we, in general, or I, myself, interact with pop culture's stimuli. It is in the behavior that I see fascinating things happening. These 'things' I am here to explore. What happens to the audience in a concert, what happens to the performer when they are about to perform. How does one commence performing and what happens after the performance is done? And lastly, can I, as the artist, direct these situations? These are some of the basic questions that started off the project's experiments.

My artistic process is heavily influenced by personal fascinations and themes and although those themes can clash I have been pushing myself to see the commonalities amongst them. I am stating this now so that the confusion will be limited once I start talking about WWII, Korean Pop music and Beyoncé.

The final product of the project will be an installation that will be ongoingly changed (during its exhibited time) in its setup using symbolic elements that reference to staging (lights, fans platform etcetera). During the exhibition I will be presently changing these elements and showing videos as well as live performances I directed. This entire process is shown to the visitor as well as knowingly making them part of the show.



Initial sketches for installations

The stage

The first aspect of performance I took on was the stage. What would happen if I took the tools that create the performance out of their regular habitat (the stage, theater environment) and put them into the everyday life. It started out with a series of photos where I took Artist Portraits in the studio at the Piet Zwart Institute with lights and windblowers. Relating the artistic process of the performer with the process of sitting behind the computer. From doing that experiment I found out that I wanted to continue putting these lights and windblowers into the workspace, but making it more clear what the person is doing. Since an artist is not very recognizable sitting behind a laptop. What interests me about these that through using the symbols of the stage, the lights and the fans, a sense of reality is lost. The lights function as a surreal element that transform the space. This surrealism is what I want to achieve. To create a visual surreal language that came out of the deconstruction of the stage.



Artist Portrait #1, Petra Mllicki



Artist Portrait #2, Marie Woher



Artist Portrait #3, Eleanor Greenhalgh



Artist Portrait #4, David Young



Hair Salon Portrait #1, Daniek



Hair Salon Portrait #2, Sjoerd



Hair Salon Portrait #3, Sai

Next I took the lights and fans into the hairsalon. There are a couple of interesting reasons behind these photos. The obvious one being that the people working in the salon as well as their clients are in a glamorous state of mind. Everything has to be shiny and beautiful while in the salon. Another factor in these photos is that it is the process that becomes the performance here. Not the final product. Whereas hair commercials would light up the beautiful flowing hair here I am presenting the hair while being cut and torn apart, it turns the messy part of it into a glamorous show. At least in the photos it does. In reality during the shooting of these photos it was too much wind and too much light and it was extremely uncomfortable to cut hair that would then blow into your face. Even though Daniek in Portrait #1 was quite enjoying herself as I was telling her to feel like Beyoncé for a second.

The next step was to bring the lights into a recording of a social interaction around a dinner table. These were also recorded on video. In this situation the lights and fans gained a new role. The lights were forcing the subjects to reflect on what they were actually doing in this setting. They could not just sit there doing nothing, they had to at least perform something. So they started playing boardgames. The lights summoned a boardgame to be played.

In the Hair Salon Portraits the lights and fans blend in with the scenery of the photo. Though in live action it was an extremely exaggerated set up with the lights being too bright and the fans heavily blowing hair in the subjects face. Even though this is also an interesting factor in the Home Portrait as well as in the Artist Portraits, the lights are pushed out of their context more in the Home and Artist Portraits.



Home Portrait #1. Rosanna Mulder, Kick Vogel, Steffi Pisa

Surrealism in the Music Video

What flips it back to the Busby Berkeley extravaganza ridiculousness is Korean Pop music videos. When I say ridiculousness I mean the exotic lyrics that are complete nonsense to me except for the occasional english lyric. The constructed emotions and Berkeley referencing choreographies against contemporary pop music beats are the only things I read and is the language I understand. It is taken to a realm where you do not understand the message, you only see the visual language and the behavior, the symbolism.

The interesting experience for me was to share this experience of Korean Pop in 2011 with a couple of thousand fellow individuals. It was the first big Korean Pop concert in Europe and held in Paris and visited by individuals from every single corner of Europe who flew over just to be a part of this first experience. Probably 75% of them do not know Korean. The concert is a mix of several boy and girl bands all from the same record company called SM Entertainment (SM stands for Star Museum). It is complete utopia except for the fact that the entire hall is undeniably hot. Completely cut off from reality. Not understanding a word of anything except for the tunes and choreographies that most of the audience know by heart. The concert was put into the context of several in-between videos that showed the artists smiling cutely with french subtitles that said SM TOWN will forever be your friend.

An endless re-appearing of a new female character to sing a lyric.

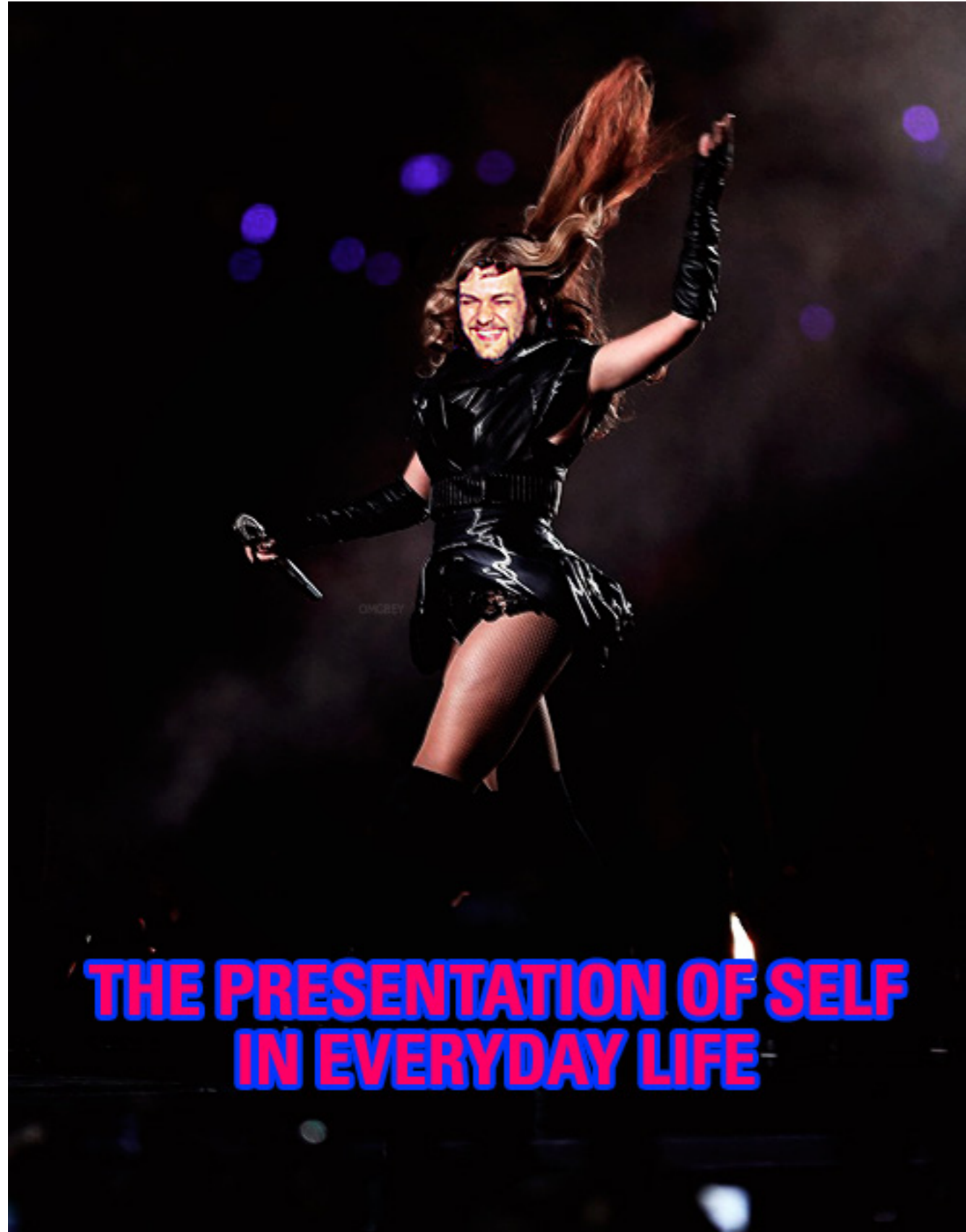
What has always fascinated me about surreal environments are the ones used in music videos. Surrealism here has obtained a normalcy which is interesting to me. The mindblowing happiness that is communicated through the Korean music videos that are popular at this moment that I want to point out.

Where in western pop culture the Britney Spears video on the planet Mars seems like it has happened a hundred years ago. In Korean pop the Oops... I did it again music video is still relevant and referenced to great extent. Prolonging the same act of escapism for years.

It is my goal that all of my work looks as amazing as Korean Music Video do.



Video still taken from the music video *The Boys* by *Girls Generation* in 2011



Selfportrait. Original photo of Beyoncé taken from Superbowl Halftime Show Performance right after she got on the stage. Her face being replaced by mine. This photo was taken during the moment when Crazy In Love's introduction was playing and Beyoncé was strutting to her center stage spot.

Interaction

"However, during the period in which the individual is in the immediate presence of the others, few events may occur which directly provide the others with the conclusive information they will need if they are to direct wisely their own activity." (Goffman 1959, p.1)

Involuntary expressive behavior is what shows an individual in their true self. **With expressive behavior I am thinking of certain types of movements that show a person's personality. It could also mean the showing of emotions.** Through doing conventional and natural signs not directly available to the senses it is difficult to read an individual.

This conventional interaction is interesting. The Apollo interaction, in how Nietzsche describes Apollo and Dionysus in his book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Which happens when an individual offers another a service or product and there seems to be no time and place for expressive behavior.

That's where the subject of professional behavior comes into this work. The transformation in the state of mind that happens when the individual is shutting down their connection to the senses and focus on providing the product or service to the others. What interests me is when this occurs.

As an example I take the fireman. The largest amount of time is spent waiting around in front of the television amongst colleagues. In what I imagine to be quite an expressive environment. Within this environment it seems very clear that the moment when the alarm goes off there would be an alternate state of mind activated which does not allow for any expressive behavior. Most possibly because there is no time for it, which is an interesting observation and quite relevant in the interactive pieces of work I have made. The alarm goes off, a change of clothing is made, and the performance can begin. Firemen perform security. And though it is not the core, the tension between the emotional self and the rational self is a big part of the work.

Conveying expressive information in a traditional way is done through verbal symbols (Goffman 1959, p. 2).

In *Performance Rehearsals #1* I am extracting the traditional verbal symbols out of a performance done by Beyoncé during the 2013 Superbowl Halftime Show as well as adding some choreography to each verbal symbol. In full black, Claire van Lubeeck performs these symbols in a pattern, pausing between each symbol (the Apollo state). Turning them into a surreal set of symbols. It plays with these ideas of the individual and its expressive behavior.



Video still taken from *Performance Rehearsals #1*

Now the trick of the Beyoncé performance, in relation to the fireman or the soldier, is that the performance is completely fueled by unconventional behavior. No sign of Apollo, or any other conventional conversational interaction.

Where once Busby Berkeley made graphical kaleidoscopic choreographies of smiling happy women, stands now a fully trained individual with facial expressions only matched by the most feral of creatures. She portrays the beast that we are meant to, though cannot, be in interaction with others. An individual in full expressive glory that reaches us through proprioception and timing. Initiated by a loud bass. Putting every fibre of her being into every single movement, even if it were just a hand move to the left, the entire body shivers to the left. While oozing sex through every flick of hair.

I was thinking of a person being in a depression.

There is actually no desire or awareness, I believe, for interaction with other people. Therefore the performance self is shut off. Even in the company of others, this person is still alone. There is no more desire to perform, maybe not even a need to. "It evokes that mysterious circle of mist which Nietzsche said envelops any living thing and without which life becomes withered, hard and barren." (McKenzie, p.3) And then it's followed by another Nietzsche quote: "Even every man, who wants to become ripe needs such an enveloping madness, such a protective and veiling cloud."

This reminds me of the mindset that arises around the military.

Soldiers are at a high level of having to perform all the time, at moment's notice. There is no slot of freedom to lose the "mysterious mist".

There's a sense of losing all human aspects, that are considered weak. There's no room to be emotional.

There's a constant requirement to perform.

It is something like 'having your guard up'. And I guess that's why this reminds me of (my impression at least) wartime. And I don't think there are many documentaries or movies about the second world war that I have not seen.

~Written while reading 'The invisible actor'

Noh theatre, subtlety and indirect suggestion of feeling

Kabuki theatre, display the actors' physical, vocal, and emotional prowess.

~Written while reading 'Another Publication'

"Since one cannot blame a notion for the use that people make of it, Other is innocent." [p. 13]

~ The soldier

~ Home video pieces

The video MARLEEN (or DSC0046) and the Home Portraits

First Live Performance

As a try out I organized the first live performance event of the project during the Open Day. Not only to get feedback on the work, but also to see how live performance works out. Since me and Claire have been working together so closely it was interesting to bring it to an audience for the first time. It is the excitement that makes the work worthwhile. It is the same performance as in the rehearsals with the addition of the blue screen that frames the platform and the dancefloor tape shapes. It was also the first time where I started working with Yoana who documented the event. This was the first piece where I directed. It started to feel quite natural to move away from the camera and solely focus on what is happening in reality, letting go of the camera frames. The gallery (in this case the studio) now is my frame. And I guess this is what I wanted to achieve in the Piet Zwart Institute. To move from photography and video to the actual space and make people move.

The directing aspect of this performance is of the most important. It speaks to the notion of power, power of the audience, power of the performer, power of the director. Both the performance itself and the marks on the floor are communicating a sense of direction. As soon as the performer lets out a roar or starts standing on the table she is demanding attention. She has the control to change the mood of the space. She controls the space.

It was a great first step to further embark in. I feel like I had to start in a abstract way, that was the first step. And after this I am ready to tell the story I want to. It all felt really new and has to be explored further.

At the moment I am working on a soundpiece together with Tobias Groot to create a loud bass that vibrates from one corner of the room to another, going back and forth. Thus giving the performance a rhythm and the audience a queue that a change is happening within each travel of sound.



Promotional image for the event



Space overview with dancefloor tape



Screenshot of video documentation



Beyoncé

Being well aware of the fact that quoting Wikipedia is not the most intellectually responsible way to go, I think it actually contributes to the way I work and get my information. Which consist of the internets most sleazy corners, which are probably written by my fellow members of the infamous Beyoncé fanbase.

“Crazy in Love” is the debut single by R&B singer-songwriter Beyoncé Knowles, featuring rapper and now-husband Jay-Z. Producer Rich Harrison, Knowles and Jay-Z wrote the song for Knowles’ debut solo album, *Dangerously in Love*. “Crazy in Love” is an R&B love song which incorporates elements of hip hop and 1970s-style funk as well as soul music. The track features a sample from The Chi-Lites’ 1970 song “Are You My Woman (Tell Me So)”, used as the song’s horn hook. The lyrics reference a romantic obsession that causes the protagonist to act out of character.

This last sentence is the catalyst for me to explain my obsession. The simplest way for me to slightly start to apprehend the essence of my fascination for the pop artist that is Beyoncé.

[Beyoncé was my first encounter when thinking about the different selves.](#)

In 2003 an MTV Diary video was broadcasted starring Beyoncé. This television series is about releasing information about the daily life of artists in a behind the scenes kind of way. Usually involving preparations for events like the MTV Video Music Awards or the Grammy’s and behind the scenes footage of music video’s.

There was a moment in this episode where Beyoncé first mentioned her alter ego Sasha. This short moment of the mind and body when adrenaline takes over and a transformation takes place. The nerves introduce the moment, and the transformation is activated when the music begins. Then the performing beast takes over.

After only a few more mentions of the Sasha persona, in 2008 the studio album “I Am... Sasha Fierce” was released. Making Sasha into the product it was meant to be. The album makes a two disc divide, a Beyoncé and a Sasha side. Sasha being the extravagant performer side, and Beyoncé being the soft, intimate and personal side, naturally.

Back to the song. When stripped to its core, to the individual with the message. It all comes down to the obsessive desperation of one single feeling that is love.

Going above conventional expressive behavior. That is what interests me here. This same song was once covered in a live performance by Anthony and the Johnsons. Completely stripped down. Solely using the lyrics, with an orchestra of harps and strings behind them. No more heavy beats, nothing catchy. But even more so, sung with a feeling of despair.

There is a large factor of risk involved in a performance.

Performance reviews

To perform is to do certain actions to reach a goal.

Rolemodel Obsessive Compulsive Escapism and Structuralism



This is going to be my conclusion I guess. I have no clue how to begin this chapter in the thesis yet, since I have not yet laid out the actual work I will show during the exhibition. Once I do that (that will be done this week actually) I can finish this off clearly.

Introduction to this chapter would be this:

Aleksandra Domanovic, Turbo Sculptures

happened because of an identity crisis after the Yugoslav war of the 1990s. After the once functioning multi-ethnic unity collapsed.

that the history of Yugoslavia is being erased and replaced by western pop culture.

Explains Turbo Folk, a music genre originated in ex-Yugoslavia. The term came from pop singer Rambo Amadeus. "Folk is the people, turbo is a system of injecting fuel under pressure in the cylinder of a motor. Turbo Folk is a burning of a nation. Turbo folk is not music. Turbo Folk is the beloved of the masses, a wakening of the lowest human desires. I did not invent Turbo Folk, I gave it its name".

The video explains the term Turbo Folk as being two contradictory concepts, Turbo, an image of modern industrial progress. And Folk, a symbol of tradition and rural conservatism.

Turbo Sculptures is about the Western celebrity monuments placed within former Yugoslavia.

Identifying with celebrities. Looking to them as rolemodels when lack there of. A large amount of the gay subculture thrives on this.

messed up identity seeking



Selfportrait. Former couple Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez, whose face I replaced with mine.

Mass Ornament
Choreography
Modernity, Industry

Idolization
The Beyoncé altar

Power
The commander performance

Re-enactment
The male Beyoncé performance

Communism
The communism performance



Drag

For Performance Rehearsals #2 I am working with Lesley Quist who has been doing drag since this year. I am interested in creating these works that are about how rolemodels are channeled through our actions. Their influences in our bodies. Drag culture is an obvious and fascinating subject for that. At this point I am creating lots of material that will consist of the construction and transformation to an actual piece that links to the age old tradition in drag culture that is lipsyncing or a recent term faceography. The role of queen goes hand in hand with a taking of power. These are a few things I want to express with these video and installation pieces.



Previous practice

Recurring themes in my work have been identity, gender, the body, pop culture and escapism. Each project always begins with a certain fascination for certain behavioural patterns people have.

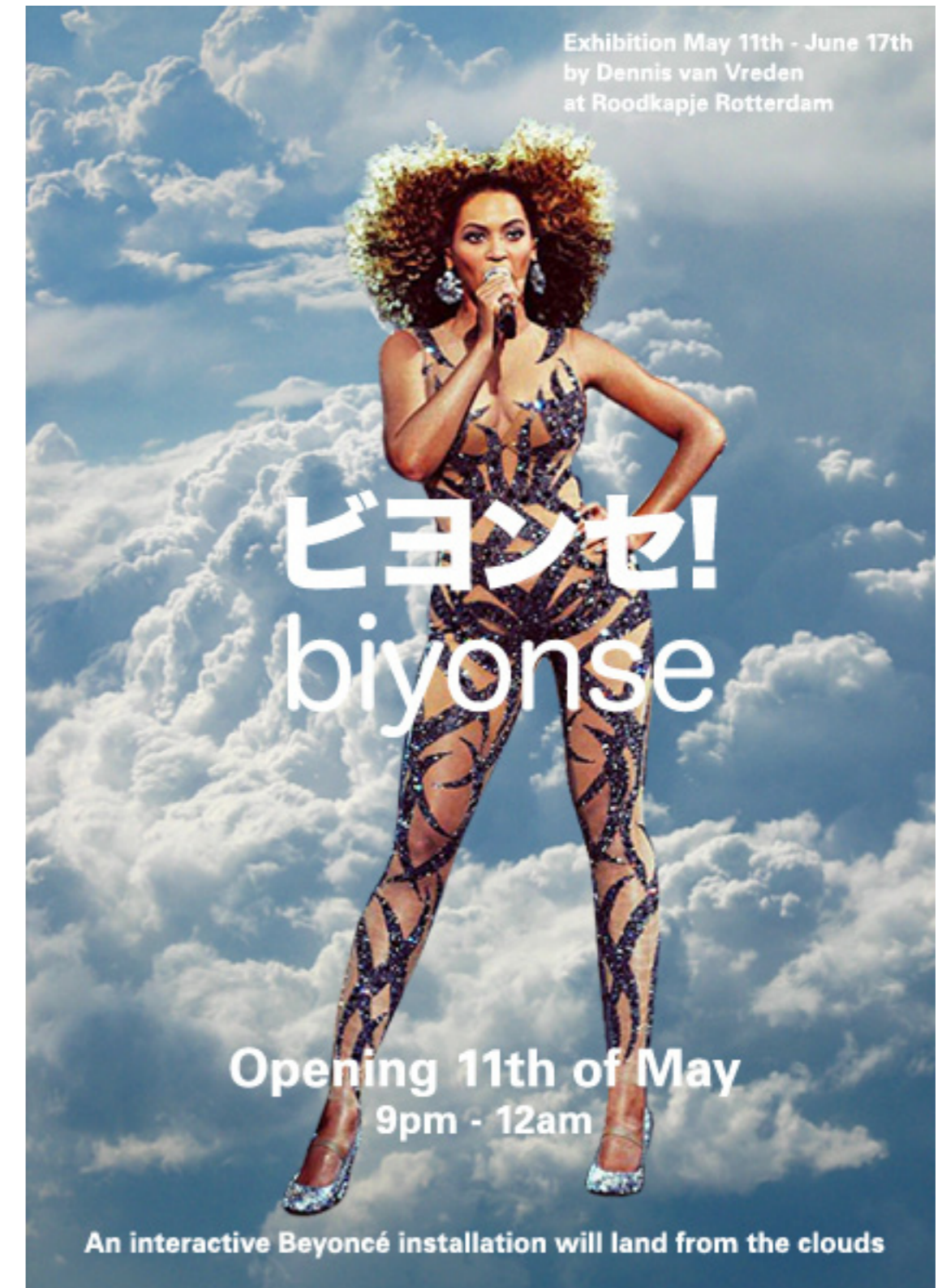
I have been interested in the stage. The affect of it. The stage gives the opportunity to transform and it is that short transformative moment that fascinates me. The work I did last year is an example of that.

The Wonderful Media Design Technicolor Experience and ビヨンセ! Biyonse are two interactive installations. Both the installations The Wonderful Media Design Technicolor Experience and ビヨンセ! Biyonse had the same setup, but were different in topic. They were set up with a projection and a Kinect underneath it. They also both had music and a center spot facing the projection where the 'user' gets in the Kinects radius.

The installations used the Kinect to recognize the users skeletons and movement. The user enters the room not really knowing what will happen. As soon as they approach the center spots laid out in front of the projection the Kinect immediately reads the user and either Beyoncé (ビヨンセ! Biyonse) or Dorothy (TWMDTE) pops up in the screen and reacts to every movement of the user. The techniques that were used in the animation and Kinect were Processing and Animata. TWMDTE was developed to coincide with the Musical Symposium that took place during the Open Day at the Piet Zwart Institute to represent the Media Design department. Biyonse was a follow up installation to see it in a gallery space and watch the response. There is something quite fascinating to see people react when all of a sudden whatever they do is reinterpreted by technology and acted out into a superstar.

Biyonse turned the gallery into a stage. Creating a center spot was mostly to send the visitor into the radius of the Kinect, but also functioned like the infamous 'Idols' spot where contestants were supposed to show their talents.

Biyonse explicitly invited the visitor to assume over the top poses to make the virtual Beyoncé respond to their movements in unnatural ways. A small movement is of course not of interest, but the Kinect requires some extremity in the skeleton to see a response. TWMDTE version was used in a more extreme way. Since Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz are such classics they were interesting to take to extreme movements that physically aren't possible. To make Dorothy as glitchy as possible. Since the programme I used does not use a 3D model of Dorothy, the moment you



turn around for example it remains a flat image and becomes stretched out. Beyoncé being a music artist therefore asks the visitor to actually dance. As if you are choreographing Beyoncé to do your bidding. Fucking her up also happens, but not like the Dorothy version. Of course the music acts as a huge catalyst for dancing. Beyoncé's being very up tempo. Dorothy's being quite slow (with music from the original soundtrack).

When I created these works I found out that I was interested in making immersive works and would like to continue refining it. In both installations it is clear to me that I want to let the viewer/participant to get swallowed up into a world I present them and give a few short experiences. The moment the viewer walks in the radius and forgets everything around them, and the short moment when the viewer rejoins their friends or the crowd is an interesting part of this that I will continue exploiting by making new works.

Another project of mine that is related to what I am doing now is Musicaloke. I created it during the Factory Reset trimester with Florian Cramer. Musicaloke is an interactive virtual product allowing the user to choose a character/celebrity/moviestar they want to become in their own virtual reality. This product works with the Kinect to recognize the users movement. It's functions are based on a Karaoke machine. You choose a song and the character you want to become. You take a spot in front of the machine and start moving to the music and basically live your own fantasy life for a minute. Musicaloke is there to envision your fantasies in a musical way. Creating your own virtual reality as well as experiencing it in reality. It is originally designed as a machine for companies to use during breaks, but was presented in the Factory Reset exhibition as a nomadic kit that encases a laptop and lets you run the program wherever you want.

This project resonates to the photo experiments I did mentioned in the plan. Basically bringing fantasy realities into the workspace and creating a relationship with the perform state of mind to the work state of mind. An awareness of the moment when you start performing or assuming a role. being quite slow (with music from the original soundtrack).

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From watching the documentary Paris is Burning I became extremely interested in the drag queen culture. The documentary is a seven year project by Jennie Livingston and shows the lives of drag queens during the 80s in New York City and the society they created for themselves. It gives a great perspective on subculture. In my work there are often two layers. The extreme and affective layer, often Beyoncé related, and behind that there's the content. I am interested in how this relates to the drag culture. The flamboyant, extravagant outside is often overlooked as funny and superficial, but behind that facade is some very interesting content and emotion.

balance between inner and outer self

Inspiration does not
come from a studio,
it comes from life

- Marina Abramovic, The Artist Is Present, 2012

Relation to larger context

Warhol

In Andy Warhol's Screen Tests I am fascinated by his interest in the personality of the person in front of his camera. It is an extensive research of behavior and mimicry. This corresponds with what fuels my work, which are behavioral patterns.

Paris is Burning

Paris is Burning is a documentary by Jennie Livingston about drag culture in New York City. How they created their own families and have competitions in balls where they dress up to see who can for example portray the most believable executive.

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Marina Abramovic

Marina Abramovic has a similar feeling when she performs. In a 2009 interview with James Franco she speaks about the lower and higher self. The higher self being the state of mind she has while performing.

Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present

A documentary about the show in MoMa named The Artist Is Present. The documentary talks about Marina's past works and how they all link to this retrospective exhibition. The film features the process of creating the exhibition until the ending as well as showing an interesting workshop Marina did with the performers who recreated her most historical performances.

Pilvi Takala, The Real Snow White

The absurd logic of the "real character" and the extreme discipline of Disneyland become apparent when a real fan of Disney's Snow White* is banned from entering the park in a Snow White costume. As visitors are encouraged to dress up and a lot of costume-like merchandise is sold at the park, the full costumes are only sold for children. The Disney slogan "Dreams Come True" of course means dreams produced exclusively by Disney.

Beyoncé

Beyoncé is an American music artist. She rose to fame being the lead singer for the RNB formation named Destiny's Child and started a solo career in 2003.

PEEKASSO

I have also gotten a large amount of references from my tutorials with Thomson and Craighead including Moriko Mori and Kota Ezawa. Moriko Mori is a Japanese multimedia artist. Works such as Nirvana show her as a goddess, transcending her early roles via technology and image, and abandoning realistic urban scenes for more alien landscapes. She plays with the anime aesthetic. Kota Ezawa makes works that completely flatten and reinvent video footages of famous television moments in a highly stylized pop art way, but keeping the audio. Allowing the viewer to completely reinterpret the content in an almost disturbing way.



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Perform or Else, Jon McKenzie

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman

Thanks to

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