

Jasmine Star (2011744)

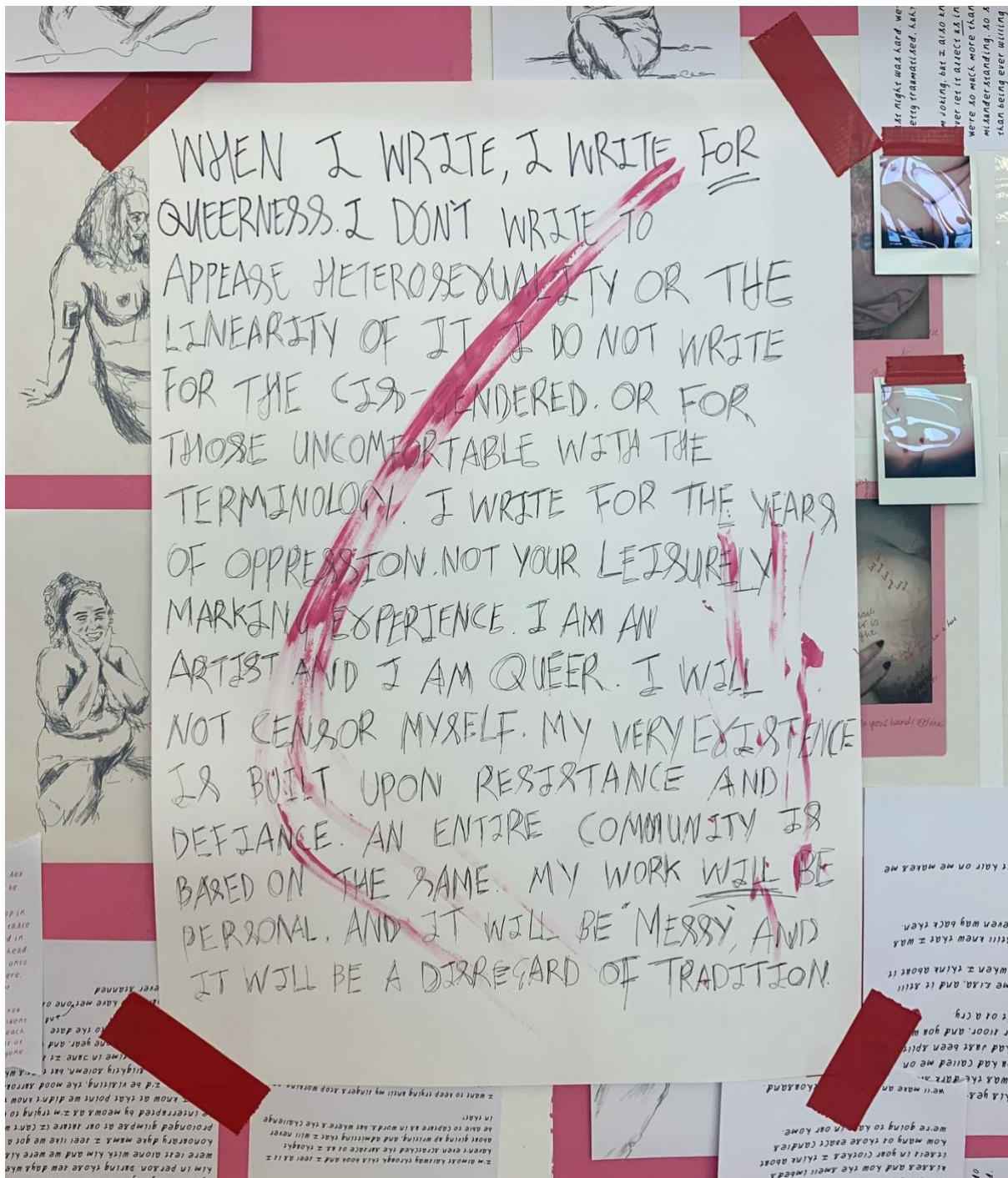
5417 words (excluding bibliography)

Queerness, Time and Resistance: A Love Triangle

How Queer Artists and Writers Defy Chrononormativity in Order to Produce Work That is Inherently Resistant

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
BA (Hons) University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea

10th of December 2021



[1] Star, J (2021) Disclaimer, pen and paint on paper

"When I write, I write for queerness. I don't write to appease heterosexuality, or the linearity of it. I do not write for the cis-gendered, or for those uncomfortable with the terminology. I write for the years of oppression, not for your leisurely marking experience. I am an artist and I am queer. I will not censor myself. my very existence is built upon resistance and defiance. An entire community is based on the same. My work will be personal, and it will be 'messy', and it will be a disregard of tradition."



Contents

I.	<i>“THIS LOOKS MESSY”</i>	4
II.	<i>“ARE YOU STILL A VIRGIN?”</i>	6
III.	<i>“I’M NOT AGAINST IT, I JUST DON’T SEE WHY IT SHOULD BE SHOVED IN OUR FACES”</i>	10
IV.	<i>“THAT TERM MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE”</i>	14
V.	<i>“I LOVE YOU, YOU BIG DYKE”</i>	18
	<i>Bibliography</i>	20
	<i>List of Figures</i>	22

NOTE: All chapter titles have been taken from relevant things that have been said to me – the author - personally. They are crucial to the content and structure of this essay as they speak to the importance of autoethnography within a queer practice. Additionally, hand drawn red lines act as dividers throughout – their purpose is to be reminiscent of my visual work. Any text segments presented in the colour pink are written purely by me. They may be transcripts of visual work, things that I feel important to note/make known to the reader(s), or interludes that are intended to be more creative in their style of writing.

“THIS LOOKS MESSY” (a preface, of sorts)

My personal practice is closely tied up in the strings of academia. They run along parallel tracks, two trains of thought hurtling through tunnels of passion and production. I utilise my own experiences and memories as well as personal milestones in order to speak to wider cultural, social and political happenings. Carolyn Ellis, in her publication *The Ethnographic I*, defines this as **autoethnography** (Ellis, 2004). It is important that I establish an early understanding of this with the reader before I embark on entangling further threads of **queerness, time** and **resistance** as it is integral to both the format and content of this essay. It is intended to be personal, and indistinguishable from my visual art practice. The outcome of this essay should not look out of place in my studio space (see [2], below) and should instead act as an extension of my continuing research.



[2] Star, J (2021) Studio space 4/11/21

Through my independent research, I have made note of the seemingly glorified relationship between queerness and messiness that becomes apparent when the boundaries of the personal and academia are blurred. Queer academics encourage a disregard of the normal, and celebrate the many ways in which the researcher forms much of the research itself. In his 2019 thesis titled *When The Lights Are Shining On Them: Drag Performance and Queer Communities in London*, queer-academic Joe Parslow establishes the idea of ‘the queer side-eye’. He states that the queer side-eye is “an overarching methodological framework and tactic that recognises the complex’s and contingent ways in which the researcher is imbricated in the research” (Parslow, 2019). While this describes his native drag community, it is well acknowledged and accepted that the queer experience is idiosyncratic yet universal. We can therefore apply this idea to queer art and literature – both of which I will be discussing in this essay.

It is also important to note the works of Alyson Farrier and Stephen Campbell here. In their paper *Queer Practice as Research: A Fabulously Messy Business*, both conclude that “[queer] projects are structured by keeping processes messy, personal and liquid precisely to resist the normative impulse for cleanliness” (Campbell & Farrier, 2015). Through interpreting messy as creative, personal as autoethnographic and normative as un-queer, I am encouraged to to form an exploration that is anything *but* clean. If I am queer then my subjects will be dirty and my structure will be filthy. I will stack stained quotations on top of a dusty layout in order to encapsulate my queerness and my practice as a fine artist. Author Michael Warner argues that we (queer individuals) must:

“Find a new engagement with various traditions of social theory in order to articulate [my] aims” (Warner, 1993).

This is my attempt at that.

Through analysing the works of relevant and influential practitioners, I shall seek to form an understanding of **how queer artists and writers defy chrononormativity in order to produce work that is inherently resistant.**



I would also like to make clear that although I am queer, I am also white. I am aware that this grants me a privilege that queer POC do not have. I will strive to stay conscious of this fact when writing, and would encourage readers to do the same. Understanding one form of historical oppression does not mean that you are privy to another.



“ARE YOU STILL A VIRGIN?” (Written)

When one is queer, traditional life markers – lovers, marriage, children – become a non linear reality. Those first sloppy teenage kisses are postponed; sex feels foreign into your twenties; matrimony is neither holy nor used as a precursor to children. It defies tradition, and rejects Freeman’s idea of **chrononormativity** which she explores in her publication *Time Binds, Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Freeman, 2010). Within a heteronormative world, acts of discrimination and repression along with other distinct marginalisations – gender, race, class – cause a disruption to the ever mutating paradox of the queer time line.

It is what Cuban American queer-academic José Esteban Muñoz (1967-2013) calls a rejection of “straight time”. In his 2009 work *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, he describes it – chrononormativity – as a renunciation of the “here and now” and an insistence on the “there and then”. He resolves that pure, unadulterated queerness is something that we have yet to truly experience, and chooses to frame it as an eventuality laden with hope.

“We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (Muñoz, 2009) Muñoz writes, emphasising that queerness is made up of the perseverance and adurance for another world – a wholly *queer* world that can emerge from the “prison house” of now. He portrays it as a horizon, carefully crafting his theory that though “we may never touch queerness”, we are able to “feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009).

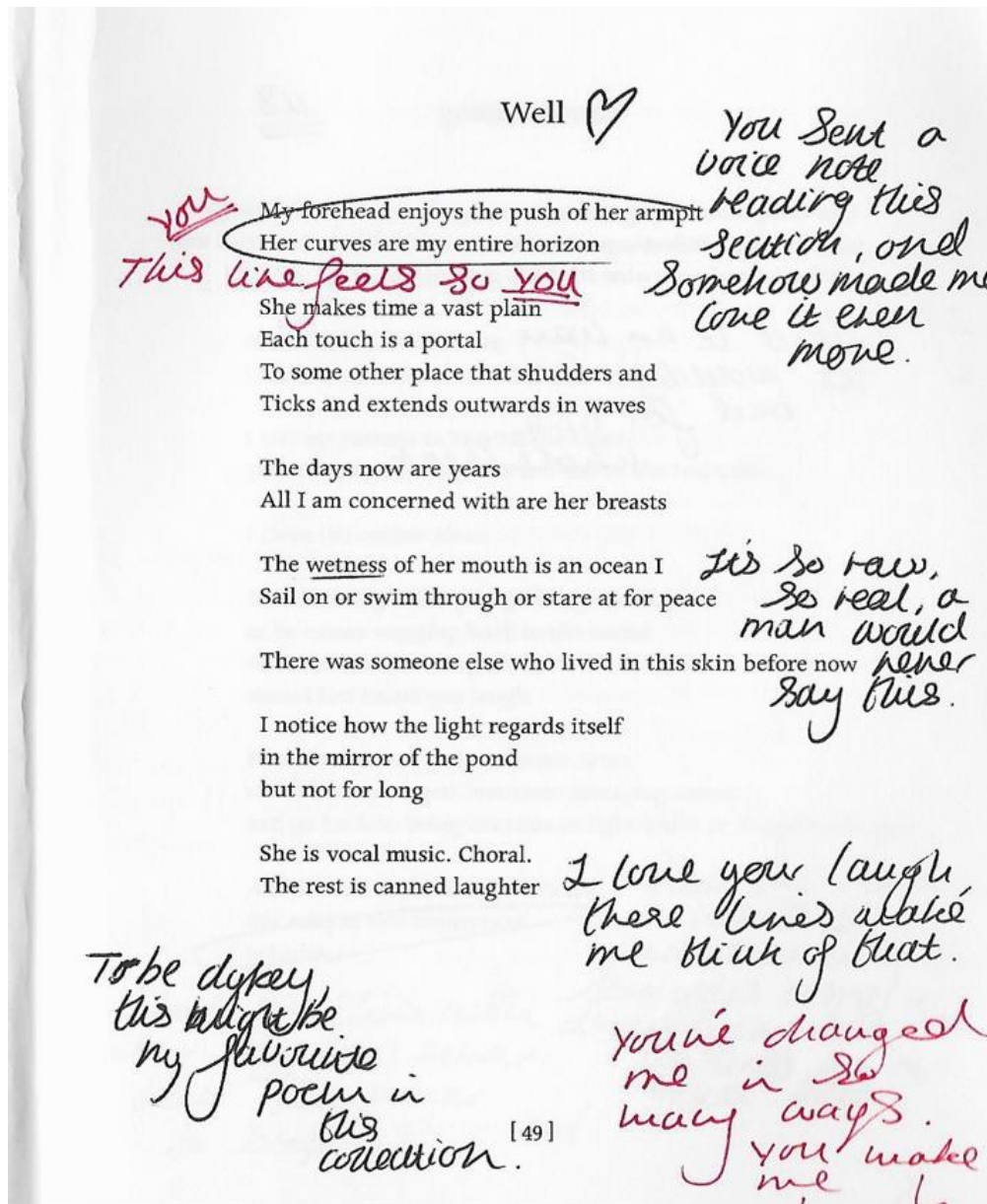
It is the analogy of the horizon which I shall be discussing further. I am intrigued by the delicate yet defiant nature of his words that are reminiscent of prose and performance, how they bathe the queer experience in a startling softness. It reads akin to poetry, and could be said that through the use of his aureate language, he has sought to gild the queer experience – which can be and often *is* treacherous – in beauty. English spoken word artist, poet, novelist, recording artist and playwright Kae Tempest (1985-present), a non binary and queer individual (Beamont-Thomas, 2020), has arguably sought to achieve something similar with their work.



I’m in my bedroom. It’s dark outside. I’m *yearning*. I miss you. I miss your touch and your body and the way you’d be curled up next to me if you were here – but you aren’t. You’re a train journey away, ten days in the future from me seeing you next. I think of our favourite – Kae Tempest – and how surprised I was when you first sent me a copy of *Running Upon the Wires* way back in February. I think about how they talk about their lover’s body and shiver, because I write about you in a way that’s startlingly similar. I sigh, and reach for the same copy that sits well-loved on my bookshelf. Pages are folded and the spine is worn in. It feels like us. I grab a pen too. Red, this time. I begin making notes, and write on top of the black that already decorates each page. They understand, I think to myself. They get it. No amount of time with you is ever enough. You make it move too quickly.



In their anthology *Running Upon the Wires* (2019), Tempest draws on their own experiences of loving women in order to form a cohesive collection of poems. Made up of three parts, each section focuses on the beginning, middle and end of love respectively. Within this evident display of autoethnographic queer work lays “Well” (pp.49), which I shall analyse more thoroughly.



[3] Tempest, K (2018) *Running Upon The Wires*, “Well” pp.49
 (Annotated copy by J Star)

The poem, which consists of much metaphoric language, speaks to Tempest’s physical relationship with a lover. “Her curves are my entire horizon” they write, emphasising the work’s autoethnographic nature through the use of the first person perspective – this can be seen in the repetitive use of “my” and “I” throughout. Their language is as ornate as Muñoz’s when portraying their lovers’ body, first making reference to Muñoz’s choice of word

“horizon”, and then expanding to explain that “she makes time a vast plain... Each touch a portal” (*Tempest*, 2019). The use of “vast plain” and “portal” elude to Muñoz’s theory of queer futurity in the way he phrases it as an ideality and something that is imbued with potentiality. They both write with an air of grandeur about their subjects, despite the fact that Muñoz’s work is to be applied to a broader queer context in comparison to Tempest’s poem that is tethered to a world of lust and sex that they are submerged in with their partner.

In the shorter third stanza, Tempest elaborates further. “The days are now years”, they state, before echoing the immensity of their earlier words in the fourth stanza – “the wetness of her mouth is an ocean I sail on or swim through or stare at for peace” (*Tempest*, 2019). They maintain a sense of calm and tranquility throughout, which acts as a pleasant contrast to the enormity with which they discuss the passage of time. It begs the question if, as Tempest crafts their poems and describes their lovers’ body, are they are subconsciously seeing the potential of a comprehensively queer futurity within it? Where Muñoz argues that “the future is queerness’s domain” (*Muñoz*, 2009), is Tempest also deliberately and intentionally depicting queerness as defiance in itself and declaring ownership of the future – *their* future with their lover – in the same way? It could be said that Freeman’s ideas of chrononormativity are also ingrained in how Tempest characterises queernesses – in their relationship with both intimacy and time.



When I first read *Artful* by Ali Smith, we were nothing more than friends. We spoke every day, told each other everything – but we were nothing more than friends. I read that masterclass in queer autoethnography with baited breath, savoured each paragraph as if the pages were going to turn to dust in the palms of my hands. Now I reread it, and gasp at each word with an understanding that was inconceivable before *loving* you. Time changed us. Time formed us. Time allows us this luxury of being queer together.



The novel *Artful* (2012) came to fruition through a tetralogy of lectures that Scottish academic, playwright, journalist and author Ali Smith delivered as a visiting professor at St Anne’s College, Oxford as a member of the Weidenfeld Visiting Professorship in European Comparative Literature. Smith, when converting these lectures into the form of a novel, shaped a compelling tale of time and queerness through five key chapters – On time, On form, On edge, On offer, and On reflection. Within them, she assumes a character. She acts as a widow seeking to come to terms with the death of her long term lover, and is thus plagued by a mythical apparition of her. Smith notes that the lover irritatingly displaces objects in the home that they formerly cohabited, and seeks to form conversations with her in Greek – which she is understandably perplexed by (*Myerson*, 2012).

Smith, as an openly queer individual, contemplates how time can be simultaneously healing and restrictive through drawing on her own relationship with filmmaker Sarah Wood (*Winterson*, 2003). Her viewpoint is one that is both explicit and inherent in its queerness, yet reviewer Lydia Davis inaccurately labels the narrative of the novel as Smith dealing with “the return of a dear departed friend” (*Davis*, 2012). There is much to be said about this

assumption, as it could be argued here that due to the undeniably autoethnographic nature of the work, she is able to speak to the process of bereavement in a manner that someone un-queer could not. Fellow author Lev Rosen believes that a queer writer is able to write effectively for a queer audience, where a ‘straight’ (heterosexual) writer would be writing a queer story for the straight gaze. It would be diluting the ferocity of the queer experience, thus making it more palatable for those with a differing – not queer – perspective. Rosen states:

“When a straight person is telling a gay story, they’re almost always telling that for a straight audience through the ‘straight gaze’” (Rosen & Kheraj, 2018).

Smith’s identity as a queer woman is therefore intrinsic to *Artful*’s authenticity. She is not a straight writer telling a tale of queer love and loss purely for the straight gaze. She is a queer woman, utilising her own experiences and personal relationships in the same way that Tempest does within their work in order to present frank depictions of intimacy and grief. Smith tackles both of these in the section *On time*, through depicting the failed first encounter of sleeping with another woman following the death of her character’s lover out of apparent loneliness. She reminisces on an intentionally misspelt tattoo that was influenced by her late lovers reverence for literature, and notes that the other woman had been unwilling to read enough of the inking to realise that herself. Following this, Smith’s character leaves hastily, and is able to acknowledge the lack of linearity within healing – where she had began the novel writing “There, I thought, I’m okay... and thought of something other than you. Time heals all wounds,” (pp9) she ends it realising that she is *not* ok yet, but she will be; “the sky will become more blue” and “a lemon tree will bloom in the neighbourhood” (pp189-192) (A Smith, 2012).

It is this evident lack of linearity that allows us to make the connection with Freeman’s idea of chrononormativity. Is Smith – an openly queer woman – recognising that queers must embody a grieving process that is neither linear nor predictable? It could be said that she is implying that a queer grieving process diverges from that of an un-queer one, therefore asserting that the eventual ‘blue skies’ that will emerge are a horizon of hope for a queer futurity – where she will have processed her loss. This falls in line with Muñoz’s theory. Much like Tempest, Smith may also be conscious of the impact that a queered sense of time and experiences have on intimacy and relationships. If not, I am interweaving these sources for that very purpose. I am singling them out to put on the same timeline towards *the* queer horizon – whatever that may be.



I’m waiting in a queue at a coffee shop. I’ve just ordered a peach iced tea. You’re standing next to me, thumb discreetly brushing my hip beneath my coat. I have a small lesbian flag pin secured through the lapel of it. I love it – the people standing next to us don’t. I’m always hyper aware, you’re careless more often than not. I notice them long before you do, and turn away from your touches. I fold the lapel of my coat over so the badge cannot be seen. The eyes of the people leave, but the ache in my chest doesn’t.



**“I’M NOT AGAINST IT, I JUST DON’T SEE WHY IT SHOULD BE
SHOVED IN OUR FACES” (Visual)**

While Tempest and Smith both channel their queerness through the written and spoken word, performance artist Alex Baczynski-Jenkins manifests his visually. Baczynski-Jenkins (1987-present) splits his time working between Warsaw, Poland and his hometown of London. By utilising his speciality as a choreographer, Baczynski-Jenkins succeeds in his intentions of producing overtly autoethnographic work – creating and existing as a queer individual – through the use of space, movement and touch. In conversation with fellow artist Eliel Jones, Jones states that through working closely with collaborators, Baczynski-Jenkins “mediates relationality and the politics of desire, producing experiences of queer time and space” (Baczynski-Jenkins & Jones, 2018).

Through assessing two 2018 pieces by Baczynski-Jenkins, titled *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)* and *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, we can further understand the depths of his artistic practice and how it evolves directly from queerness – a development which he proclaims is resistance. When discussing his work with Eli Hill, Baczynski-Jenkins highlights the importance of the impact of queer nightlife in Warsaw. He describes the effervescence of LGBTQIA+ spaces, and how they have led him to consider themes including but not limited to collaboration, indeterminacy, and adaptations of different pieces depending on space and time (A Baczynski-Jenkins & E Hill, 2019).



[4] Baczynski-Jenkins, A (2018) *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)*



[5] Baczynski-Jenkins, A (2018) *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*

When Baczynski-Jenkins performed [5] *Untitled (Holding Horizon)* at the Venice Biennale, his objective was to reflect upon the rawness of bodily movements and togetherness. He aimed to investigate how a queer safe space can be borne out of shared pleasure, in the same way that it is able to produce a comforting sense of “collectivity”. The performances – due to the live nature of the sound and lighting in addition to the altering structures that the performers are able to move through – all differ from one another. This results in a progressive increase in subjectivity. As the performers tackle enthrallingly slight choreography, a simple intimacy is formed alongside dynamic community; dancers master the ‘box step’, borrowed from a variety of historically popular dances. Upon confessing his inspirations behind [5] as well as [4] *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)*, we discover that their autoethnographic contexts are irrefutable. Both pieces were developed throughout the summer months of 2018, when Baczynski-Jenkins, as part of a queer feminist collective, held a series of congregations under the name of *Dragana Bar*. On this, Baczynski-Jenkins proclaims:

“This experience of running the night with the collective had a direct impact on making *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*” (Baczynski-Jenkins & Hill, 2019).

By understanding Baczynski-Jenkins’ narrative, parallels with the likes of Smith and Muñoz are able to emerge. Comparative to how Smith and Tempest write from their own experiences living and loving as a queer individuals, Baczynski-Jenkins creates visual, performative works from his. Their mediums may deviate, but their outcomes are one and the same in function and representation. *Artful* exists as a direct consequence of Smith’s relationships, as do Baczynski-Jenkins’s communal portrayals of queerness. When creating pieces, Baczynski-Jenkins states that his intention is to “queerly fabricate the real, producing an intensified queer experience” (Baczynski-Jenkins & Jones, 2018), and it could be said that Smith and

Tempest have sought to do the same – true to the ideas of Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*. Subsequently, it could be easily justified that through titling his piece *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, Baczynski-Jenkins is also conscious of how his position as a queer artist could be serving as a pivot towards the horizon of a queer futurity. It may be said that he, along with other current creators, are recognising that it is *them* that are the hope, and them that shall carry us towards the horizon where we may be truly queer.



I don't think I'm particularly *good*, or skilled at painting, but I like to do it anyway. Not often, but when the need to paint itches at my skin, I scratch it, and soothe it with layers of oils and acrylics and gouache. I paint you – your arms in soft peaches and your eyes in azure. Your nipples in rose dust pink and your nails in whatever colour you have them that week. I paint you – and then my skin is calm.



[6] Fratino, L (2019) *Kissing Couple*

Louis Fratino (1993-present) creates work – primarily paintings and the occasional drawing – that recalls isolated memories. By using visual languages that range from modernism to distinct antiquity, he produces visual manifestations of queerness that depict landscape, interior spaces, and the body. In the same way that Baczynski-Jenkins has an affinity for the mundane, Fratino focuses on the queerness that can be found in the gestures of everyday life (*L Fratino, 2019*). From April 18th to May 24th 2019, *Sikkema Jenkins & Co.* hosted Fratino's exhibition *Come Softly to Me*. Its premise was to be an autobiographical show that enabled Fratino to tell a story of himself – to himself. This was achieved by curating an expansive series of self portraits and interior paintings that showcased New York City. According to Fratino, the works are a portrayal of those he has met and loved in the most recent years of his life – family, friends, lovers (*Fratino & Hill, 2019*).

Kissing Couple (see above, [6]), a painting featured in *Come Softly to Me*, presumably illustrates Fratino and a lover, caught in carnal clutch. The desire is unassailable in the oscillating proportions, as well as the alluring red that Fratino uses to border the couple. It echoes and emphasises the shadows on their bodies, and encompasses their faces – the imitations of which he keeps in a realm that is loose and abstract, somewhere not *quite* real. When discussing his practice with journalist Eli Hill, Fratino notes that memory – thus making his work autoethnographic – has the largest impact on his work. He claims that it is the actual content of his art, and that each recollection dictates how he accords the body. When explaining this, he states:

“I will redistribute the shapes of the body to highlight this element, the way a memory does. I think memory is an excellent beautician” (*Fratino & Hill, 2019*).

It is possible here that one might assume that Fratino's aim is to beautify the queer experience in the same way that Muñoz's idea of queer futurity does, as both are attempting to adorn it - be it with otherworldly, ornate language or delicate, divine brush strokes. Despite this, Fratino is also able to acknowledge the historical strife of the queer experience that is still present by ensuring he is aware of his modern-day privilege. In conversation with Russell Tovey, Fratino rationalises that “I have the good fortune to live in a time where it makes sense for me to be out and open”, before adding “although queer artists have always made work, it wasn't always allowed into the same venues that my work is shown in” (*Fratino & Tovey, 2020*).

This tells us that Fratino and Tovey may both share an understanding that the creation of queer art made by queer artists is a display of political resistance in itself. In a time where Tovey claims we are seeing a “renaissance in queer art” (*Fratino & Tovey, 2020*), the likes of Fratino, along with writers – Smith, Tempest, others – are only succeeding in amplifying it. They are writing books for lesbophobic shelves, reading poetry for queerphobic audiences, and painting portraits for galleries that would have discarded a queer application before so much as even reading the proposed title less than a few decades ago. It emphasises that progress has been made but there is still progress to be done, and it exists as a far off horizon that is imbued with hope and potentiality for a wholly queer future.

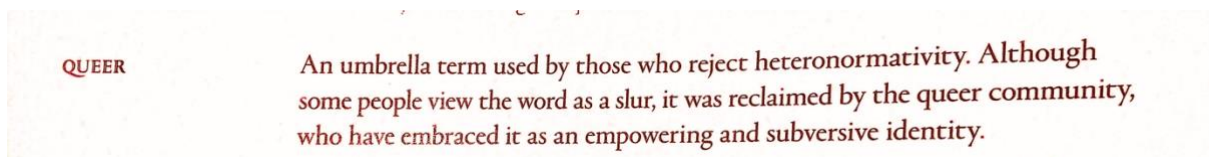
We are on a boat of almost-queerness, and each creation rows us further through the sea of chrononormativity, closer to an island that is made up of queer sand and queer water and queer skies.



I never used to like calling myself a *lesbian*, because it felt too brazen. It felt alien, dirty – people said it was vulgar. I used gay more often than not to describe myself, because gay was safe and gay was understood. It was an umbrella term, but it never kept me dry. There were shelters where lesbian did belong, and houses where it was encouraged. Now I am queer and I am a *dyke*. I am happy to be alien. I am happy to be vulgar. These are better umbrellas.



“THAT TERM MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE” (Activism)



[7] Allen, S & Nakamori Y (2020) *Zanele Muholi Exhibition Book*

Included in *The Tate* exhibition catalogue of visual activist Zanele Muholi is a glossary of terminology used when describing their work [7]. The definition of the term *queer* is the one that resonated with me the most, and is the most relevant to the content and explorations being undertaken in this essay. It is for this reason that it felt appropriate to begin this chapter with it, where I will be utilising the other aspects of Muholi’s work in order to discuss the resistance that is so seamlessly knitted together with queer art, in alliance with the ongoing reclamation.

The term “resistance art” was originally coined in the midst of the 1970s. As a result of the Soweto uprising that was centred around resisting apartheid, it was cultivated in order to honour black excellence rather than diminish it. Artists publicly flaunted unwavering political messages through graffiti, murals and banners with the aim of conveying the realities of segregation in South Africa (*Tate.org*, 2021).

During this time, visual activist Zanele Muholi was born (1972-present), and echoes of this very type of resistance are now prominent in the work that they produce. Having worked with photography since the early 2000s, their images detail the lives and experiences of black lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, intersex and trans communities. Featured in the 50th issue of *Tate Etc.*, *Repertoires of Resistance* delves further into the context behind Muholi’s work. Author, scholar and curator Oluremi C. Onabanjo writes that Muholi “fiercely challenge(s) dominant ideologies, offering powerful and reflective ‘accounts of expression and resistance’” (*Onabanjo*, 2020). By making colour a scarcity within their work, Muholi presents a startling portrayal of queer history. Each individual image is striking, sensational,

and is representative of the depths of discrimination which their contexts hold. Muholi makes the conscious decision to show their participants as they are. They are proudly black and queer, bold in order to portray “lived experiences that have long been marginalised, and even erased” (Haynes, 2020). On their work, Muholi has also stated:

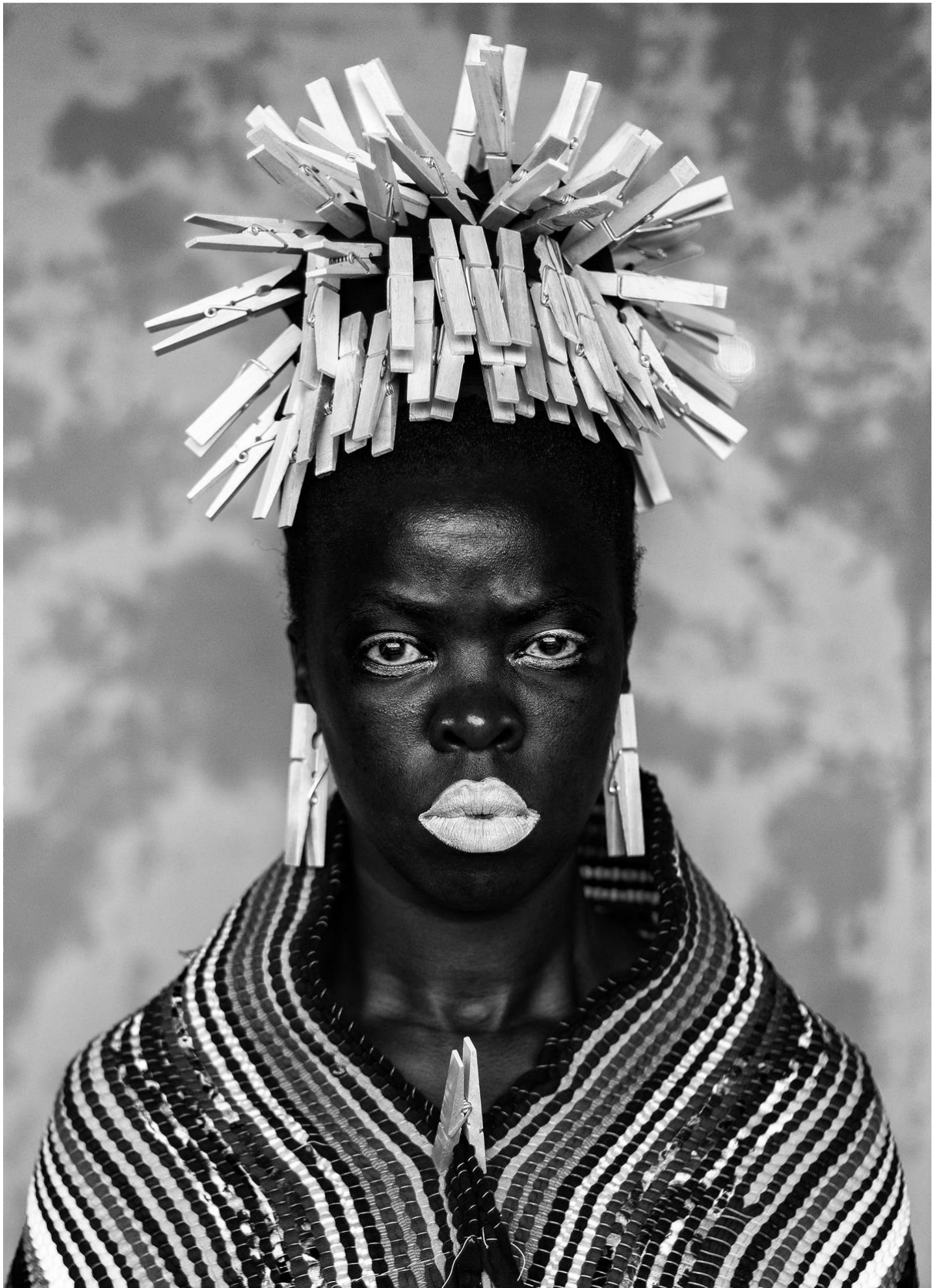
“I have the choice to portray my community in a manner that will turn us once again into a commodity to be consumed by the outside world, or to create a body of meaning that is welcomed by us as a [queer] community. I choose the latter path” (Muholi, 2020).

By interpreting the ‘outside world’ as the ‘straight world’, and thus the ‘chrononormative world’, it could hereby be argued that Muholi is recognising the progress that is still to be made when it comes to queer – and in their case, because of their multi-layered identity, black – acceptance. Muholi establishes that their work is made not for the un-queer gaze, but for the wholly queer one. It may therefore be attainable that they are viewing their work as a contributor towards that queer horizon, where queer art will no longer be seen as a commodity and will instead be understood as a commonality.

Between Muholi’s earlier works and their present creations, there has been an irrefutable aesthetic growth. See *ID crisis* [8] and *Bester 1, Mayotte* [9].



[8] Muholi, Z (2003) *ID crisis*



[9] Muholi, Z (2015) *Bester I, Mayotte*

Through observing both photographs, one might be inclined to imply that Muholi – in the decade between capturing both – became progressively more secure with the challenge of unmasking the historical turmoil of their native community. *ID crisis* exists in a land of ethereal ephemerality – the subject’s face is not focused on the camera, the light glaring in from the left casts a haze upon the figure, and the stance appears relaxed. While they exist purely for themselves, *Bester I, Mayotte*, does not. The 2015 image exists as high contrast resistance – hard and stern and unmoving in their multi layered identity as proudly black and queer. Muholi, to a queer viewer, has deliberately decided to keep the modern day queer experience unobscured, while also recognising the impact that historical repression has had. “The present is so much informed by the past” (*Muholi, 2020*) they say, supporting Muñoz’s theory that queerness must be distilled from yesterday. Their works depicting community run in a similar vein to the physical performances of Baczynski-Jenkins, yet we are unable to gloss over the harrowing rawness that is only visible in Muholi’s. It is as if Muholi, unlike Tempest and Fratino, does not *want* to beautify the queer experience, and instead wishes to illustrate the arduous parts of queerness with candour and veracity. Muholi does not wish to sugar coat, and instead hopes that the grit will carry us towards that horizon of queer futurity, where their work will be seen as ‘the norm’.



In your bedroom, you have a series of prints that I made for you, hung up in a satisfying lilac triptych. One says *do not deny us*, another reads *femme as fuck*, and the last is an Audre Lorde quote – *your silence will not protect you*. It’s one of my favourites, but the irony isn’t lost on me that in some countries, I’d have no choice but to be silent. In 43 countries, I am a criminal because I am queer. In 11 of those, I would be dead.



Muholi, although informed by the past, also recognises that queer resistance is greatly reliant on the private and the personal. When discussing those whom they capture in their photographs, Muholi chooses to call them ‘participants’ rather than what one may traditionally call a ‘subject’. On the matter, Muholi states “these are not [just] subjects, these are my people, this describes the person I am” (*Muholi, 2020*). They photograph those whom they know and understand, those from within their black, queer communities in South Africa. Muholi proclaims that their work exists *for* those people, to “encourage individuals in my community to occupy spaces” (*Muholi, 2020*).

In their *Repertoires of Resistance* cover piece, Muholi further establishes that their aim – when discussing queerness and blackness – is “to reclaim it for ourselves – to encourage people to use artistic tools such as cameras as weapons to fight back” (*Muholi, 2020*). In line with what has been explored throughout this essay, we could take this as Muholi recognising that the creation of queer art is an act of resistance in itself. One could assume that they are reiterating the importance of including the personal, for it could be a vehicle towards a queer futurity, where Muholi’s participants shall be able to occupy spaces that have historically exiled them. Cassie Peterson’s manifesto that considers queer art gives credence to this

notion. She claims that “the queer body, in all of its connotations, is a critical site of resistance” (Peterson, 2012), highlighting the importance of autoethnography within a queer practice – be it written like Smith and Tempest, performed akin to Baczynski-Jenkins, or in the form of Muholi’s photographs.

When summarising their work, Muholi proudly states that their main agenda when going forward is “to queer, to blacken, to open, and to occupy spaces” (Muholi, 2020), and this is an outlook which I shall seek to embody. I will *queer*, because it is what I am and what I can speak to. I will support those in their quests to blacken – because it is what I am not and all I must do is amplify those voices. I shall open, and occupy spaces, because by doing so, we are likely to see a wholly queer futurity come to fruition.



“I LOVE YOU, YOU BIG DYKE”

When one is queer, chrononormativity, heteronormativity and resistance are constantly at play. They dictate everything one does – from traditional life milestones, to activities that someone un-queer might see as menial and mundane. Sarah Ahmed discusses a distinctly queer scenario in her book that I believe is important to note in order to bring this exploration to a close. She writes:

“A queer experience: You are seated with your girlfriend, two women at a table, waiting. A straight couple walks into the room and is attended to right away: sir, madam, over here, sir, madam. Sometimes if you do not appear as you are expected to appear, you do not appear” (Ahmed, 2017).

In order to put this quotation in perspective, I see it fit that I also briefly introduce theorist James Penney. In his book *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics*, Penney makes the radical claim that queer discourse has run its course, that it is obsolete. He argues that we must rethink the ways in which queerness is politicised, but I – and presumptively, those whom I have featured in this essay – disagree (Penney, 2014). If we are to make it to this fantastical queer horizon, we must politicise the queer experience. To not politicise it would begin another form of silence, another act of repression. It would stunt the growth that the works of queer creators such as Smith, Tempest, Fratino, Baczynski-Jenkins and Muholi have sought to enact. It would sink the boat that is carrying us towards the horizon of queer futurity, dim the blue skies that are blossoming, and ensure that we never reach what queerness could truly be. If we are to get there, then we must keep sailing. We must keep producing art that defies chrononormativity, is reliant on autoethnography, and is at its core – *queer*. If we do not do so, we may never appear as we are expected to appear.

We may never appear at all.

That is the all-encompassing plight of this essay, and whether the reader believes in it or not, queerness is *here* and queerness is moving – potentially to something even more.



[10] Star, J & Harrison, K (2021) *The End*, Screenshot in Black and White

Bibliography

Ahmed, S (2017) *Living a Feminists Life*, Duke University Press

Allen, S & Nakamori, Y (2020) *Zanele Muholi Exhibition Book*, Tate Publishing, UK

Art Term: Resistance Art, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/resistance-art>, [Accessed: 7th of October 2021]

Audre Lorde 1934-1992, Poetry Foundation 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/audre-lorde>, [Accessed 2nd of November 2021]

Baczynski-Jenkins & Hill, E (2019) *15 young LGBT Artists Driving Contemporary Art Forward*, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-15-young-lgbtq-artists-driving-contemporary-art-forward> [Accessed: 6 October, 2021]

Baczynski-Jenkins, A & Jones, E (2018) *A Queer Politics of Entanglement: Alex Baczynski-Jenkins*, CONVERSATIONS, Mousse 68, Mousse Magazine

Beaumont-Thomas, B (2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/06/kate-tempest-announces-they-are-non-binary-changes-name-to-kae>, [Accessed: 3rd of October 2021]

Campbell, A, Farrier, S (2015) *Queer Practice as Research: A Fabulously Messy Business*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883314000601>, Cambridge Press [Accessed 8th November 2021]

Ellis, C (2004) *The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*, Walnut Creek, AltaMira Press

Fratino, L (2019) *Come Softly to Me exhibition*, Sikkema Jenkins Co., New York, New York

Fratino, L & Hill E (2019) *15 Young LGBTQ Artists Driving Contemporary Art Forward*, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-15-young-lgbtq-artists-driving-contemporary-art-forward> [Accessed: 6 October 2021]

Fratino, L & Tovey, R & Hicklin, A (2020) *Russel Tovey and Louis Fratino ponder the queer gaze and the necessity of creativity in the age of the coronavirus*, Conversations, DOCUMENT, Issue No. 16

Freeman, E (2010) *Time Binds, Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Duke University Press

Haynes, S, Muholi, Z (2020) 'The Archive Means We Are Counted in History.' Zanele Muholi on Documenting Black, Queer Life in South Africa, <https://time.com/5917436/zanele-muholi/#:~:text=Zanele%20Muholi%2C%20via%20Stevenson%20and%20Yancey%20Richard>

[son%20Against,so%20much%20informed%20by%20the%20past%2C"%20they%20say,](#)
[Accessed: 2nd of November 2021]

Kheraj, A & Rosen, L (2018) *does it matter who writes queer stories?* i-D, VICE, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/8xeg4b/does-it-matter-who-writes-queer-stories [Accessed: 1 November 2021]

Knight, Christopher J (1999) *"An Interview with Lydia Davis"*, Contemporary Literature

Muholi, Z, Onabanjo, O, *Repertoires of Resistance: Zanele Muholi*, September 2020, The Tate, https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-50-autumn-2020/zanele-muholi-repertoires-resistance?utm_source=emarsys&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CRM_Feb_w1_L_GBTHistoryMonth_Engaged_12pm&sc_src=email_2617467&sc_customer=2201026&sc_lid=17_0400175&sc_uid=LiPkcMbpx3&sc_lid=40183&sc_eh=a7fd10bfc6f796c51, [Accessed 8th of October 2021]

Muñoz, JE (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, NYU Press, New York

Myerson, J (2012) *Artful* by Ali Smith – Review, The Observer

Penney, J (2014) *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics*, Pluto Press

Peterson, C (2012) *But, What Is Queer Art?: A Paradoxical Manifesto*, Culturebot, <https://www.culturebot.org/2012/06/13763/but-what-is-queer-art-a-paradoxical-manifesto/>, [Accessed: 4th of November 2021]

Smith, A (2012) *Artful*, UK, Penguin

Smith, A & L, Davis (2012) *Artful*, UK, Penguin

Tempest, K (2018) *Running Upon The Wires*, Pan Macmillan, UK

Warner, M (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press

Winterson, J (2003) *Ali Smith*, The Times, <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/journalism/ali-smith/> [Accessed: 29th October 2021]

List of Figures

- [1] Star, J (2021) *Disclaimer*
- [2] Star, J (2021) *Studio space 4/11/21*
- [3] Tempest, K (2018) *Running Upon The Wires* (Annotated by J Star, 2021), "Well", pp.49, Pan Macmillan, UK
- [4] Baczynski-Jenkins, A (2018) *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)*
- [5] Baczynski-Jenkins, A (2018) *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, Frieze Artist Award, Frieze Art Fair, London
- [6] Fratino, L (2019) *Kissing Couple*, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York
- [7] Allen, S & Nakamori, Y (2020) *Zanele Muholi Exhibition Book*, Tate Publishing, UK
- [8] Muholi, Z, *Bester I, Mayotte* (2015)
- [9] Muholi, Z, *ID crisis* (2003), Gelatin silver print on paper, 32.3 x 48.5 cm
- [10] Star, J & Harrison, K (2021) *The End*, Screenshot in Black and White