Contagion thus takes the place of recognition, which is a central element of normalization, by making norms and regulations acceptable for subjects. Contagion instead of recognition then also allows for speaking when one is not authorized to speak, for instance when one is not taken as someone who would have something to say about concepts of gender or as someone who even has a voice in society at all. Queer-artistic practice in this way also speaks without authorization, even when it speaks publicly and to others.

I would like to use the term "drag" to name the methods of queer-artistic works that makes such distance possible: radical drag, transtemporal drag, and abstract drag.

drag – radical, transtemporal, abstract

How can artworks pick out bodies, gender, and sexuality as their topics without providing a body for identification, disidentification, or counter-identification? How can a body be "there" if distance from the body is simultaneously suggested? How can the boundaries of what seems conceivable in terms of change – for instance with respect to knowledge about bodies and possible bodily practices – be extended?

I am bringing in the term "drag" here to try to get at what queer-artistic works (at least the ones discussed here) produce. In the context of a queer art theory, drag may refer to the productive connections of natural and artificial, animate and inanimate, to clothes, radios, hair, legs, all that which tends more to produce *connections* to others and other things than to represent them. What becomes visible in this drag is not people, individuals, subjects, or identities, but rather assemblages; indeed those that do not work at any "doing gender/sexuality/race," but instead at an "undoing." If "I," as Judith Butler has written (2004: 15), am always constituted through norms that I myself have not produced, then drag is a way to understand how this constitution occurs, and to reconstruct it on one's own body. But at the same time, drag is a way to organize a set of effective, laborious, partially friendly, and partially aggressive methods to produce distance to these norms, for instance to the two-gender system, to being-white, to being-able, and to heteronormativity. In so (un) doing, drag proposes images in which the future can be lived.[2]

Drag, then, is fabricated by sets of bodily characteristics and actions. While it may indeed take on and thematize norms, it is nonetheless not restricted by them. The combination of fiction and documentary, of lies and claims, of reenactments and inventive experiments, and of conspicuously different bodily characteristics and artistic parts produces

bodies that do not match up any dichotomies between "true" or "false" and "normal" and "other." I would like to understand drag as an artistic work that, as Kathrin Sieg writes (2002: 2), "denounces that which dominant ideology presents as natural, normal, and inescapable, without always offering another truth." The work of taking up distance is thus also a kind of sexual labor[3] of desubjectification – a process that I see as central to practices of denormalization, and thus to queer politics.

The elements of drag also make it possible to go back into the history of a production of knowledge about bodies and their emotions, affects, and desires – to pursue traces of history and to work out alternatives at the same time – precisely because drag means retracing processes of construction on one's own body. Costumes, wigs, makeup, props, posed photographs and film scenes, stagings, and (possibly) fraudulent narrations connected to "appearances" take up expectations, evidence, stereotypes, and violent histories without facilitating their repetition.

The relations produced also encompass those of the viewers. In the film *N.O.Body*, there is a brief moment in which the performer looks at the camera, making it clear that the body that s_he presents in the film – and that is similar to the one in the historical photograph shown in the film – is part of a communication. The connection with the material from the past occurs in order to produce and sustain another connection: that with the viewers as participants in the artistic process. The cinematic depiction does not provide access to the body of another (of the one depicted by the photograph or of the performer). Instead, an exchange takes place – a negotiation about the depiction, about seeing and "reading" bodies (including the body of the viewer). The name "drag" is meant to address the fact that the photographs, films, and installations being discussed here do not represent "deviant bodies," but instead they show or refer to bodies that are always "other" (not "other than normal" but "beyond") – in "another time" and "elsewhere." Drag, then, is a set of queer-artistic methods and practices and, at the same time, a mode of making public and of negotiation.

In this sense, I draw not only on performance but also on various artistic formats, even if the term drag originates in the context of (subcultural) performance. I am concerned here with a (queer) theory of (queer) contemporary art. Drag, nevertheless, facilitates the production of a particular reference to the practices of shows, of freak shows, of male and female impersonators, of cakewalks, of epileptic dances, as well as crossdressing (to name only a few formats that drive and have driven gender, sexual, and anti-racist activism and which have tested out and

reproduced practices of estrangement and practices of distantiation from norms and normality).

Analytically, I distinguish three modes of drag in this book, modes that do not mutually exclude one another, and which can appear together. The first is "radical drag," a term that has been introduced in recent years to characterize drag appearances that do more or do something different than staging a transformation from "man" to "woman" or "woman" to "man"; that, for instance, work with contradictory gender markers or bring elements into embodiment that disrupt any interpretation within the two-gender system. I use this term for certain visualizations of bodies that may indeed thematize the dichotomies of man/woman or able/non-able, as well as other categorizations, but at the same time do not endorse these dichotomies and instead propose corporal images that cannot be made addressable, accessible, or intelligible within these criteria. "Transtemporal drag," the second mode, designates embodiments with a focus on chronopolitics, which represent an intervention in existing concepts of time and establish temporalities that counter, interrupt, or shift an advanced economic or scientific development or a heteronormative course of life. Finally, I use the term "abstract drag" for visualizations of bodies that show no human body at all and which instead use objects, situations, or traces to refer to bodies.

freak theory

If I call the theory to be developed here "freak theory," it is not my interest in identifying, for instance, the protagonist of the film *N.O.Body* or her photographic model as a "freak." Rather, I would like to reinforce the possibilities for agency that are built upon the knowledge of the dual history of the historical freak shows and of being-freak: on the one hand, of the violent history of staring at and exhibiting people, which produces an ethical challenge, and on the other, the practices already mentioned of "being other" and "acting differently," which cannot be captured within the logic of norm and deviation. Freak theory should not (only) be concerned with the history "of the freaks," but should "be" freaky – acting and analyzing freakily. Freaky would thus need to change the status of knowledge and negotiation. This practice, if we let ourselves get infected by N.O.Body, would mean to laugh instead of argue, so to speak. But we mustn't forget that it remains unclear who in the film is laughing about whom. Who is this N.O.Body? And is it s_he who is laughing about us the viewers, who s_he seems to examine over and over again? Or does s_he think that those appearing in the project-