

Digital Disidentification:

What the Potential of 3D Software could mean for Minoritarian Queer Representation

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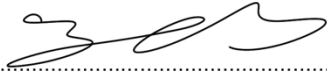
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Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: How do the history and politics of Traditional Queer spaces influence and differ from virtual queer spaces, like that of Jacolby Satterwhite’s?	8
Chapter 2: How does Jacolby Satterwhite use 3D animation software to achieve Disidentification?	18
Chapter 3: How do Queer musicians like Arca, use collaboration to perform disidentificatory world-making?	28
Conclusion	37
Figures	40
Bibliography	48

Introduction

“By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where “world,” like “public,” differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright.”¹

Lauren Berlant

The above quote describes the principal characteristics of the queer world building practice. Most importantly, its complexity and potential, which will be explored in this piece in the context of digital spaces. In a world that can be dangerous for queer bodies, creating any safe spaces that house them, continues to be a crucial form of social survival. José Esteban Muñoz recognizes this struggle writing, “I am - in awe of the ways in which queer children navigate a homophobic public sphere that rather they did not exist.”² Notably, not everyone within the queer ecosystem has equal experiences. Queer people of colour and other unique backgrounds have arguably vastly different experiences from their majoritarian white counterparts. Muñoz stresses that the “survival of children who are both queerly and racially identified is nothing short of staggering.”³ The leading concept Muñoz uses to analyse these minoritarian queer experiences is his theory of “*Disidentification*”. In the context of fine art, performance, or world-building, disidentification identifies the various ways in which minoritarian subjects find their identity through these practices. Muñoz describes disidentification as “a lens to elucidate minoritarian politics that is

¹ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. “Sex in public.” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 547-566. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448884>.

² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 37.

³ *Ibid.*

not monocausal or monothematic”⁴. The principal characteristic of this theory is its intersectionality, as it “discerns a multiplicity of interlocking identities and their social effect.”⁵

Traditionally, the focus of the life world building practice has mostly been in the physical world, still very essential for the survival of LGBT+ individuals. *Ballroom culture* and *Paradise Garage* are amongst some of the most well-known and influential forms of queer world-building. However, with the advancement of 3D software, it could be argued that the digital world offers a more personalized alternative. A notable example of this is the work of Jacolby Satterwhite, a black queer artist who, “uses digital sculpting and world-building techniques to create computer-animated characters and immersive environments.”⁶ Using the 3D animation software *Maya*, Satterwhite’s worlds are presented as surreal films reimagining the many motifs displayed in early queer club culture. Combined with the African American experience and mental illness among other themes from the artist’s personal life. For this reason, the first chapter will analyse to what extent, Satterwhite’s work can facilitate a space that functions as a physical queer life world. Giving a glimpse of what embracing technology can mean for the future of queer life worlds. As a minority working in the field for a long time, Satterwhite’s 3D world building is also an exemplar for achieving Disidentification in the digital space. He affirms, “To survive as a queer person in this world, you extrude a fantasy and commit to it... I create safe spaces to stay sane.”⁷ A statement that very much aligns with Muñoz theory of *worldmaking*. In the second chapter,

⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

⁷ Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

Satterwhite's work will be examined for its disidentificatory qualities. Thirdly, this dissertation explores the recent collaboration of the experimental musician Alejandra Gherzi (Arca) and the 3D designer Frederick Heyman. Similarly, to Satterwhite, they have built a 3D space based on Arca's experience as a transwoman in conjunction with her Venezuelan roots. It accompanies *Kick i*, her first full feature, visual album after she started transitioning is the first in a series of 4. The title, like the project itself, carries what I believe is a call to digital disidentificatory world-building. The artist explains that titular kicking refers to a womb and the first manifestation of a child's will. She sees it as "a metaphor for individuation, for choosing to differentiate yourself... a rallying cry to kick against categorization. If it is oppressive, kick against it."⁸ Therefore, this work will examine how artistic collaborations with 3D specialists, could also achieve disidentification.

This dissertation aims to broaden the current knowledge of the queer world building practice. By analysing the novel technology utilized by Satterwhite and Gherzi, to craft intricate virtual spaces. Which has garnered an increased level of commercial access. As artists of a minoritarian background, their virtual worlds carry symbols that embody their multiple identities and experiences. Offering works that can bridge a gap within our knowledge and understanding of how said minoritarian subjects feel about current society. In this dissertation, I will demonstrate how these traits within their work achieve disidentification despite its commerciality. Muñoz defines disidentification as "a mode of reading and performing... ultimately a form of building."⁹ Holding within it, the ability to build a "utopian blueprint for a possible future while, at the same

⁸ Philip Sherburne, "Live from Quarantine, It's the Arca Show," *Pitchfork*, May 20, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/features/interview/live-from-quarantine-its-the-arca-show/>

⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 200.

time, staging a new political formation in the present.”¹⁰ Therefore, I will first determine the functional differences between virtual and traditional queer life worlds, examining how the digital format can inspire social change with its increasing accessibility.

¹⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 200.

Chapter 1: How do the history and politics of Traditional Queer spaces influence and differ from virtual queer spaces, like that of Jacolby Satterwhite's?

The fantastical imagery Satterwhite creates for his pieces, takes from traditional queer life-worlds such as Harlem Ballroom culture and 1970s Paradise Garage. In this chapter, Satterwhite's *Country Ball* and *Blessed Avenue* will be analysed for its references to traditional Queer world-building. Examining how a virtual queer world can heavily reference the traditional physical spaces, while remaining functionally different, due to its new digital format.

Country Ball is a 12-minute video piece, featuring an array of colourful characters in a vast space of memorabilia. Featured throughout the piece are old family videos and his mother's drawings, (an aspect that will be analysed further in the second chapter) integrated within the architecture or inspiring the look of the furniture. Satterwhite describes *Country Ball* as, "the attempt to recreate a home video from the late '80s of my family's Mother's Day cookout."¹¹ As the camera in *Country Ball* pans, Fiona Buckland's description of the 70s (to 90s) queer dance clubs bear a great resemblance to the space Satterwhite has created. "Every time I walk into a club," Buckland recalls, "It's like entering a city in an unknown country... what orients me is not bricks and mortar, but the beat and bodies, both fashioned by producers to produce certain effects."¹² Indeed, several copies of Satterwhite's silhouette are seen dancing in this space. The artist made sure to differentiate the clothing for every take, achieving the illusion of several individuals, dancing in

¹¹ *Country Ball*, Jacolby Satterwhite, Vimeo, Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/38621657>

¹² Fiona Buckland, *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 66.

enjoyment. At around the [00:41] mark, the clothing has a significant effect on the manner the dances are performed [Fig1]. For example, on the right, 6 figures of Satterwhite donning the same red beaded suit participate in synchronized dancing like go-go dancers, in front of a KFC takeout menu. On the left-hand side, individual dancers don geometric patterned jumpsuits, improvising and moving as free agents. Satterwhite creates a dance club dynamic, which parallels that of the 1970's gay clubs. As Buckland describes, "I noticed dancers on podiums, go-go dancers, and how those around them oriented themselves in relation to them."¹³ Between the [01:10] and [03:40] mark, the camera pans through a visually noisy display of moving bodies [Fig2]. They crowd the room but are careful not to overstep each other, forming a collective neural network of ordered chaos. A phenomenon that once again mirrors that of queer dance clubs of the 1970s. Buckland continues, "Dancers simultaneously worked with fellow dancers, but could also retreat into a world of their own."¹⁴

Satterwhite is vocal about his dance style developing alongside the green screen technology but his early influences should not be ignored. He asserts, "I hung around with my voguing friends as a kid—they went to balls and stuff. The influence is real."¹⁵ This inspiration comes from the *Ballroom* scene - an underground traditional queer life world, that housed mainly African and Latin American members of the LGBTQ+ community. Traditional balls, as they existed in 20th century America, consisted of a white homogeneity that rarely awarded people of colour. Therefore, in retaliation Ballroom culture created a space for the excluded. Marlon Bailey

¹³ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 90.

¹⁴ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 94.

¹⁵ Jarret Earnest, "Jacolby Satterwhite: In Conversation with Jarrett Earnest," *SFAQ/NYAQ/LXAQ*, May 17, 2016. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.sfaq.us/2016/05/jacolby-satterwhite-in-conversation-with-jarrett-earnest/>.

documents, its “members, like other marginalized communities throughout the African diaspora, use ritualized performance as a form of cultural labour to create an alternative, more egalitarian, social existence”. Members used to refashion themselves to navigate “the hegemonic gender and sexual norms of majoritarian society”, where they are still marginalized and largely excluded.¹⁶ In the virtual world, Satterwhite and his copies perform *Vogue* - the dance (or a version of it) was one of these crucial rituals [Fig2]. Its name references *Vogue* magazine, mainly due to the moves mirroring that of models posing during a photoshoot. This makes for the prominent use of hand gestures and moves that may appear feminine. In a conversation with Lasseindra Ninja, the daughter of Willi Ninja (who is regarded as the grandfather of voguing), she expresses that Voguing is a way to communicate one’s fabulousness and creativity.¹⁷ She continues, “it is also about yourself and how you’re going to bring yourself to the world. It is not that one thing can be fabulous. It’s that a lot of people can.”¹⁸ Muñoz identifies this collective fabulousness as a “strong trace of black and queer racialized survival... in the face of conspiring cultural logics of white supremacy and heteronormativity.”¹⁹ This concept of survival applies not only to systemic racism but the impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic had on queer lives. Lobbermann identifies queer ballroom life worlds, “as a real-world narrative of survival”, in the face of this epidemic.²⁰ Embracing the imminent presence of death, which has “characterized gay culture since the onslaught of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, but it also transcends death to celebrate gay/queer

¹⁶ Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps* (University Michigan Press, 2014), 184.

¹⁷ Madison Moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (Yale University Press, 2018), 211.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity. Sexual Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 80.

²⁰ Andrew M. Fearnley and Daniel Matlin, *Race Capital? : Harlem as Setting and Symbol* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2019), 222.

life and creativity.”²¹ Bailey identifies the communitive effect the epidemic had on the Ballroom; providing a safe space, group support and preventative measures. Bailey describes how the Ballroom community used to “create a counterdiscourse (through social epistemology), provide social support (kin labour)... and produce balls in order to reduce Black queer people’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection through competitive performance.”²² By taking so heavily from the ballroom aesthetic, *Country Ball* arguably presents a form of counter-discourse - visualizing a safe space for the queer bodies.

Sound also plays a vital role in the queer world-building of Satterwhite’s *Country Ball*. Visually incoherent elements are made more cohesive with the party-like chants added throughout. The same can be said for the music playing in the background of *Country Ball*. Posing prominent similarities to 1970’s Paradise Garage, according to Buckland. It features the dance music genres of “Garage, Hard-house, and Hi-NRG: all... common in the clubs I visited implied a historical continuity with gay parties of the 1970s.”²³ Garage music was, “developed in New York City in the legendary club Paradise Garage on the turntables of DJ Larry Levan.”²⁴ The sound of Paradise Garage was characterized by its inclusion of vocal samples, on the four beats and sampling of disco tracks. This style would become the progenitor of the Chicago House Sound (The Warehouse), created by Levan’s close collaborator, Frankie Knuckles. Satterwhite himself recognizes the influence *Paradise Garage* has had on his work. When asked what gay scene he

²¹ Andrew M. Fearnley and Daniel Matlin, *Race Capital? : Harlem as Setting and Symbol* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2019), 222.

²² Marlon M. Bailey, “Performance as Invention: Ballroom Culture and the Politics of HIV/AIDS in Detroit”, *Souls* 11:3, no. 3 (2009): 259.

²³ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 67.

²⁴ Ibid.

would have wanted to visit, he listed, “Studio 54, Paradise Garage, Limelight, Area, Danceteria, and the Tunnel.”²⁵ The underground club scene whether it be in Chicago or New York, although quite different, housed many Queer African American dancers, like Ballroom. Salkind describes the 1986 scene, writing that “the city that birthed the sounds, spaces, and social cultures of house music was a city transformed by new generational cleavages, cultural arrangements, and structural changes.”²⁶ Another similarity they shared came in the impact of the HIV/AIDS virus, as it “wreaked havoc in Chicago’s queer of colour social dance communities, devastating the potent social cultures that had been fundamental to house music’s earliest advances.”²⁷ The devastation of the AIDS/HIV epidemic came not only in the form of death but political ramifications that would lead to the closure of many queer clubs around the USA. Buckland documents, that in the 80s and 90s “gay neoconservatives had a new stick with which to beat club life.”²⁸ Claiming that their “practices of promiscuous sex and drug-taking resulted in AIDS.”²⁹

The history of *Ballroom* and queer club culture adds a symbolic dimension to *Country Ball*. The artist documents, “I come from planet Earth, and I live under the consequences of the past 400 years of black American history... real human politics.”³⁰ In many ways, *Country Ball* being a digital space aligns greatly with themes of queer survival and group fabulousness. The hardships that Ballroom and queer clubs faced are not present in Satterwhite’s 3D world. Rather, it could be

²⁵ “Cruising, BDSM, and Grindr: An Interview with Artist Jacolby Satterwhite.” *The Standard*, July 8, 2016. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.standardhotels.com/culture/jacolby-satterwhite-grindr>.

²⁶ Micah Salkind, *Do You Remember House? : Chicago's Queer of Color Undergrounds* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 130.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making* (Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 136.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David Toro Lauren Boyle, “Adjust Opacity”, *DIS Magazine*. Accessed April 1, 2021, <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/61413/adjust-opacity/>

argued that *Country Ball* fulfils a similar role that Ballroom did and became a safe place for minoritarian queer bodies. Musser describes Satterwhite's creations, as "an altered reality... a form of afro-fabulation... a practice of survival because it brings into being modes of existing and relating that are aslant to that of dominant culture, producing what I describe as an elsewhere."³¹ *Country Ball* adopts those traits while filling the space with copies of the artist, allowed by green screen technology [Fig3]. Without the presence of other queer lives, an argument can also be made that *Country Ball* is just a video representation of the community, instead of sustaining the community being referenced. Muñoz writes, "the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian."³² Therefore the viewer may extrapolate that within this queer life world, that mostly Satterwhite is represented rather than a group of queer individuals. *Country Ball* is pivotal in proving that traditional queer life world aesthetics and visuals (Voguing and Paradise Garage) can successfully be implemented in a 3D space. The piece also would prove to be a unique case in Satterwhite's body of work as it is one of the few to feature only green screens of the artist himself. *Blessed Avenue* among other future works, see Satterwhite using other queer bodies within his spaces. Raising the question of to what extent 3D space, can facilitate a queer life world like that of a traditional one.

³¹ Amber Jamilla Musser, "The Limits of Desire: Jacylby Satterwhite and the Maternal Elsewhere", *The Black Scholar* 50, no. 2 (2020):37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2020.1727195>

³² José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. *Sexual Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 99.

In *Blessed Avenue* Satterwhite explores the practices of bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism (BDSM). The artist approached this aesthetic, because of his desire “to be like a factory.”³³ He explains it as, “a tongue-in-cheek, sartorial decision—mostly about nudity, not sexuality.”³⁴ Leather-clad models of *Blessed Avenue* dance and interact on harsh rusty scaffolding or floating structures, influenced by futurism. Beyond the hazardous fence is a desolate world, featuring poisoned skies and empty, “hellscape afflicted by climate change or war.”³⁵ BDSM paraphernalia – “leather, harnesses, whips, gags, and chains” are featured throughout the piece.³⁶ Through the inclusion of digital tendrils that frantically move from masters to slaves and vice versa, this aesthetic is pushed even further [Fig4]. Satterwhite cites the BDSM-influenced fashion of Helmut Lang, attributing the cohesiveness of the actors and CGI space to his designs. He asserts, “Lang’s minimal harnesses... lend themselves to the mechanical aesthetics of my 3D animations. The gear improves the possibilities for me to subvert and integrate my actors into CGI space.”³⁷ In comparison to *Country Ball*, the standout element of *Blessed Avenue* is his inclusion of other living people acting in the space. Satterwhite himself is featured doing his hybrid vogue dance style among the chaos of the scene. Interactions come in the form of being whipped with tendrils or occasionally carried on the backs of other actors [Fig5]. Paired with the imagery of the fence and empty environment, a gated community is created. As if the artist made a great effort to facilitate

³³ Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mahfuz Sultan, “Interview: Jacolby Satterwhite on How Video Games, Art History, and Sleep Deprivation Inspire His 3D Interiors,” *Pin-Up Magazine*, Fall Winter 2018/19. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/interview-3d-queer-artist-jacolby-satterwhite-on-video-game-environments>

³⁶ Amber Jamilla Musser, “The Limits of Desire: Jacolby Satterwhite and the Maternal Elsewhere,” *The Black Scholar* 50, no. 2 (2020):37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2020.1727195>

³⁷ Ibid.

a room of interactions cut off from the rest of the world and the stigmas that it produces. It is no one else, just the actors performing in communion.

Arguably with the diverse array of queer bodies playing an integral role in their interactions, *Blessed Avenue's* digital space blurs the lines with that of traditional and digital queer life worlds. Capone expands on this point in a conversation with Satterwhite. He interprets *Blessed Avenue* as a Queer life world engaging in uniform BDSM play. From, "the bondage gear, the way they strike alluring poses and discipline each other, working each other's bodies... the end product... implements in a soft machine or biomechanical contraption", Capone wrote.³⁸ A study of queer participants by researchers; Speciale and Khambatta, found that many view, "the kink community as a place where they were free to safely nurture and explore their desires without heteronormative judgment."³⁹ One participant had a perspective of BDSM that aligns very closely with Capone's theory of what *Blessed Avenue* represents. The participant said, "so many queer and trans people are drawn to BDSM, open relationships, and alternative sexualities... I think that leads to having more creative interactions with people."⁴⁰ Like Capone, the viewer may therefore interpret a queer world-building project that uses BDSM as a tool for self-exploration and group interaction [Fig4]. Capone said to Satterwhite, "With *Blessed Avenue* (2018), you dramatically expanded the variety of actors you work with. You've said that you hate when people compare the spaces in this video to a nightclub, but I do think of it as a virtual pleasure dome."⁴¹ The artist

³⁸ Sean Capone, "Jacolby Satterwhite," *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

³⁹ Megan Speciale & Dean Khambatta, "Kinky & Queer: Exploring the Experiences of LGBTQ+ Individuals who Practice BDSM." *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 14, no. 4 (2020): 349. DOI: 10.1080/15538605.2020.1827476.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Sean Capone, "Jacolby Satterwhite," *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

goes against this interpretation, opting for a piece that does display queer community but for the sake of a grander narrative. Satterwhite rebuts, “it isn’t really about pleasure... they are naked and have BDSM gear... but that’s more about the slave-master binary.”⁴² Therefore, Satterwhite’s digital queer life worlds differ from traditional spaces by being used as a tool for directorial storytelling. The artist describes his process writing, “I’ve captured everyone on green screen. I direct the choreography, film them, and add them to my archive... Then I make these architectural sites and inhabit them with whatever creates a harmonious composition and makes the image move elegantly and express what I’m trying to say.”⁴³ It is debatable to what extent a traditional queer life world is facilitated through Satterwhite’s process of green screening the individual actors. However, the queer lives in *Blessed Avenue* are at the very least integral actors to a grander narrative in the artist’s film. Similarly, to how traditional queer life worlds like Ballroom would create a counter-discourse, the artist uses personal symbols to critique the state of the world. Satterwhite demonstrates that digital space gives him the ability to take these varying real-world elements, such as queer culture, and recontextualizes their symbols to share his personal minoritarian experiences in the form of a disidentificatory *Counter Public* (to be explored next chapter).

In summary, the 3D technology that the artist uses gives him full control to arrange elements in a way he sees fit. Providing Satterwhite with the ability to tap into the fantastical, seamlessly

⁴² Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

⁴³ Mahfuz Sultan, “Interview: Jacolby Satterwhite on How Video Games”, Art History, and Sleep Deprivation Inspire His 3D Interiors,” *Pin-Up Magazine*, Fall Winter 2018/19. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/interview-3d-queer-artist-jacolby-satterwhite-on-video-game-environments>

direct actors, and digitally create surreal queer worlds. Free from the violence and many physical ramifications that plagued 20th-century ballroom and queer clubs. For this reason, Satterwhite's digital queer worlds can house narratives very specific to his personal experiences. He describes himself as "an African American dealing with my mother's mental illness, outsider art, alternative sexual practices, sadomasochism, and... the complex nuances of the desire spectrum. So obviously everything about my work is a delineated queer experience."⁴⁴ The technology fortified has allowed him to share perspectives and experiences that the public let alone the queer mainstream might not relate to. Satterwhite's digital approach to queer world-building may depart from the physicality ubiquitous with many traditional queer spaces. But like *Ballroom* (among other traditional queer life worlds) he is creating a counter-discourse in his digital world as a direct critique to the state of the real world in a film format. This film director role he adopts in his 3D spaces allows for the performance of *Disidentification*.

⁴⁴ Mahfuz Sultan, "Interview: Jacolby Satterwhite on How Video Games", Art History, and Sleep Deprivation Inspire His 3D Interiors," *Pin-Up Magazine*, Fall Winter 2018/19. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/interview-3d-queer-artist-jacolby-satterwhite-on-video-game-environments>

Chapter 2: How does Jacolby Satterwhite use 3D animation software to achieve Disidentification?

Muñoz's theory of disidentification focuses on how, "dominant signs and symbols, often ones that are toxic to minoritarian subjects, can be reimagined through an engaged and animated mode of performance or spectatorship."⁴⁵ This approach to queer world-building is demonstrated clearly in Jack Smith's film, *Jack and the Destruction of Atlantis*. In the world created in Smith's film, dumpster diving became treasure hunting where "dime-store glitter became diamond dust."⁴⁶ Smith's approach to queer world-building heavily inspired Muñoz's theory and was especially useful for describing what he calls "the worldmaking power of disidentificatory performances."⁴⁷ When used by artists who are well versed in the field, 3d world-building carries a level of immersion that can place the viewer into the minoritarian subject's reality, performing a similar instance of *Disidentification*. Costs and limitations associated with a physical performance space can be condensed to a green screen, while digital crowds usurp the need for background actors. In the case of Jacolby Satterwhite, he uses *Maya* to successfully craft worlds enriched with his minoritarian narratives. The first chapter analyzed *Country Ball* for its use of queer references. This chapter, however, will examine Satterwhite's pieces for their disidentificatory qualities, including *Country Ball*, *Healing in my House* and *Love Will Find a Way Home*.

⁴⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 169.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), ix.

When isolating the digitized drawings in *Country Ball*, the commitment to detail is visible in the meticulous tubing work done to recreate his mother's style. The hand-drawn forms are paired with the written notes his mother left next to the original drawings. For example, the car object, in the beginning, has the words, "for parking" pointed around its bottom wheels while an arrow pointing from behind says, "A camera in the back" [Fig3]. The influence of his mother runs beyond the visual level. The artist has expressed that her sketches also play an important role in structuring the narrative of his animations. He states, "I concoct a narrative in a surrealist way. I write a list of 30 items in my mother's drawings... then I put them into Microsoft Word, and I try to fill them in and make sentences out of that list... and allow that to guide the landscape I'm building in the animation."⁴⁸ His inclusion of African American Queer world-building would already fall within the bounds of disidentification. As Muñoz writes, "The phenomenon of "the queer is a white thing" fantasy is strangely reflected in reverse by the normativity of whiteness in mainstream North American gay culture."⁴⁹ However, the symbolic nature of Patricia's drawings and the old home video playing on the screens of the environment, combined with ballroom elements creates a queer retelling of Satterwhite's past. Muñoz identifies this minoritarian retelling of the past as a common trope used for achieving Disidentification writing, "Queer restaging of the past helps us to imagine new temporalities that interrupt straight time."⁵⁰ The inclusion of vogue and club music references the African American queer experience. Patricia's sketches perform a similar symbolic function. For example, the abundance

⁴⁸ Jarret Earnest, "Jacolby Satterwhite: In Conversation with Jarrett Earnest," *SFAQ / NYAQ / LXAQ*, May 17, 2016. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.sfaq.us/2016/05/jacolby-satterwhite-in-conversation-with-jarrett-earnest/>.

⁴⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 12.

⁵⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 171.

of material objects scattered throughout the piece, as Kathy Noble describes, “play out narratives of contemporary capitalism, seen through the lens of queer subjectivity.”⁵¹ Satterwhite is open about the fact that Patricia’s drawings operate as a door to explore themes of capitalism. He writes, “My mom made drawings about objects, materialism, and capitalism — ‘I want to have a house,’ ‘I want to have a picket fence,’ ‘I want to have a raincoat.’”⁵² Patricia’s interpreted capitalist messages warrant further analysis when her battle with schizophrenia is factored in. Satterwhite continues, “The burden of capitalism is the underlying subtext of the whole project, considering that it drove my mother crazy – drawing inventions as an outlet for the fantasy capitalist empire that she wanted to live in.”⁵³ Satterwhite’s openness about his schizophrenic mother lends to a disidentification that allows for an examination of mental illness and capitalism, told through a black queer lens. This approach to disidentification and examination of these themes are expanded upon with works such as *Love Will Find a Way Home*.

Love Will Find a Way Home, finds Satterwhite utilizing his mother’s old 150 cassette recordings to create an electronic album. Beforehand, he used to utilize only 3d software (*Maya*) to create his worlds. However, in *Love Will Find a Way Home* the artist expands his practice with the use of *Ableton Live* music software. With this degree of control, Satterwhite has created accompanying music that has meaning as rich as the visuals. Like *Country Ball*, this electronic

⁵¹ Kathy Noble, “Performing the Future,” *Art Basel*. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.artbasel.com/news/performing-the-future-how-two-young-artists-use-robots-and-vr-to-explore-alternative-realities>

⁵² Mahfuz Sultan, “Interview: Jacolby Satterwhite on How Video Games”, Art History, and Sleep Deprivation Inspire His 3D Interiors,” *Pin-Up Magazine*, Fall Winter 2018/19. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/interview-3d-queer-artist-jacolby-satterwhite-on-video-game-environments>

⁵³ Sarah Gooding, “Jacolby Satterwhite’s monumental solo show is a cathartic and immersive queer fantasy,” *I-D*, October 16, 2019. Accessed April 1, 2021, https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/qvqgxm/jacolby-satterwhites-monumental-solo-show-is-a-cathartic-and-immersive-queer-fantasy

album is a combination of Satterwhite's queer lifestyle, and the work created by his mother Patricia. The artist describes his process - "We digitized them and have been using every genre of electronic music – dance, noise, drum and bass – in experimental cacophonous arrangements to make as many tracks as possible."⁵⁴ Those production elements of the album that surround Patricia's vocals are evocative of his earliest memories clubbing at the ages of twelve or thirteen. He reminisces, "they would take me to really amazing gay clubs that were completely underground. My synaesthesia for gay pleasure comes from that vibe, that acid house... Paradise Garage period, and the histories behind it."⁵⁵ This makes for an album that combines glistening, almost fairly like synth noises with long or rhythmic dark bass movements cutting through the mix. Beyond those club influences, *Love Will Find a Way Home* occasionally treats the listener to synthesized acoustic or orchestral elements, such as flutes, horns, violins, to evoke a familiar feeling. Patricia's low fidelity recordings contrast in both tone and time era with the rest of the experimental production. As poppy, as her influences were, lyrically the songs, were expressions of her suffering. Satterwhite recalls her "155-track anthology of American south folk recordings emulating standard top 40 Billboard songwriting... but at the end of the day she was expressing genuine pain through heartfelt lyrics."⁵⁶ The accompanying visuals Satterwhite created further expand upon the contents of the music, making for a "fast-paced and sensual psychedelic sci-fi world."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Evan Moffitt, "Body Talk," *Frieze*, March 11, 2016. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.frieze.com/article/body-talk-0>

⁵⁵ Mitchell Kuga, "How artist Jacolby Satterwhite transformed family recordings for his new album," *The Fader*, October 25, 2019. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.thefader.com/2019/10/25/how-artist-jacolby-satterwhite-transformed-family-recordings-for-his-new-album>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Amber Jamilla Musser, "The Limits of Desire: Jacolby Satterwhite and the Maternal Elsewhere", *The Black Scholar* 50, no. 2 (2020):37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2020.1727195>

Take, for example, *Healing in my House* - an early track that has been changed drastically upon the commercial release of the album. The audio visual starts with a bell-like arpeggio and mellotron in the background of Patricia's vocal performance. Visually the audience is presented with several flying machines operated by BDSM labourers. With leather harnesses and chains, they blur the lines of pain and pleasure as they do their part in operating the varying mechanisms [Fig6]. Except for a few queer bodies, Satterwhite is the main occupant of the world. For interior scenes, he dons loose-fitting fabrics to extremely tight leather shorts in homage to acid house. Randomly, pieces of footage featuring Satterwhite in various real club-like locations, usually with just him dancing or interacting with the area, pop up in between shots. As the piece progresses, the line between the digital and real spaces start to blur. At the [04:07] mark Satterwhite dancing alone in a real club space swipe transitions into a huge 3D space populated by more queer lives, donning a similar colour scheme to the real club he was just in [Fig8]. The real-world locations in *Healing in My House*, "was partly filmed at the previous *Spectrum* location, on Montrose Avenue in Brooklyn."⁵⁸ As a club that faced closure, Satterwhite is immortalizing *Spectrum* in this 3D world. Freeing it from real-world forces, which allowed it to face its closure. Although used sparingly, Patricia's drawings are still present, mostly as furniture or written messages. For example, at the [03:18] mark, the digital bathroom space has, "for the bathroom Spit in Bowls", written in Patricia's style [Fig7]. Reinforcing Patricia's influence beyond the music and throughout the world. Outside this mega-club structure is an alien world decorated with floating crumbling rocks, pink/green skies, and flying extra-terrestrials [Fig10]. Evoking imagery of a Sci-fi reality,

⁵⁸ Kurt Osenlund, "Jacolby Satterwhite Evokes Queer Spaces of Every Kind in Epic Tribute Album to His Late Mother," *Out Magazine*, March 10, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2017/3/10/jacolby-satterwhite-evokes-queer-spaces-every-kind-epic-tribute-album-his-late-mother>

more specifically afro futurism, “which has historically involved black people finding safe spaces for their bodies beyond this world.”⁵⁹

Healing in my House is a combination of queer acid house aesthetics and a soundtrack composed around Patricia’s vocals. The piece fulfils Muñoz’s theory of Disidentification, by evoking his notion of disidentificatory “worldmaking”. Worldmaking delineates how performances, “both theatrical and everyday rituals – can establish alternate views of the world.”⁶⁰ Allowing the artist to present a counter-world, that otherwise would not be attainable due to the social structures that hold minorities back. Worldmaking can be achieved through, “performative acts of conjuring that deform and re-form the world.”⁶¹ Building a counter-discourse by taking pieces of our reality as, “it proliferates ‘reals,’ or... worlds, and establishes the groundwork for potential oppositional *counter publics*.”⁶² Satterwhite takes elements from the real world - Patricia’s recordings and his green screen performances and uses them to reconstruct an ideal 3D world. Arguably, this practice is a virtual version of disidentificatory worldmaking. In the context of current capitalist society, Patricia’s cassettes would have simply been the recordings of a schizophrenic woman and therefore have value only to the artist. However, in *Love Will Find a Way Home*, her vocals are the star of the piece. Satterwhite’s 3d world is acting as what Muñoz would describe as a “counter-public” by transforming Patricia into the biggest pop vocalist in the vast space he has created. Satterwhite describes the immense effect his mother had when creating his world. He

⁵⁹ Kurt Osenlund, “Jacolby Satterwhite Evokes Queer Spaces of Every Kind in Epic Tribute Album to His Late Mother,” *Out Magazine*, March 10, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2017/3/10/jacolby-satterwhite-evokes-queer-spaces-every-kind-epic-tribute-album-his-late-mother>

⁶⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 195.

⁶¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 196.

⁶² Ibid.

writes, “someone trying to be larger than life, who represents an adversary you can identify with, they usually become something that you look at... while you’re trying to escape places that aren’t necessarily safe.”⁶³ Inspired by Patricia’s “obsession with pop songs, it felt like a natural progression to turn himself into a quasi-pop star figure as well”, Sarah Gooding wrote.⁶⁴ The utopic world created is not only for Patricia but the variety of queer bodies seen throughout *Healing in My House*. The bleak realities faced by the LGBTQ+ community in our hegemonic world structures are not present in Satterwhite’s virtual space either. On the contrary, the queer individuals donning BDSM gear, for example, are needed to power the city. The alien world outside has intergalactic beings that also sport overtly kinky gear. At the [06:22] mark, a person on a machine that visually alludes to ovaries and phallic imagery is seen [Fig9]. In stark contrast to a homophobic world that is still feeling the ramifications of the AIDS/HIV epidemic, Satterwhite presents a universe that is openly queer and open to alternative sexual practices. As analysed by Osenlund, Patricia, “used her own music to cope, much like acid house music emerged as a coping mechanism for queer people living through the AIDS crisis.”⁶⁵ *Love Will Find a Way Home* is a utopic counter public for his mother and queer bodies, free from oppression and in some cases the laws of physics, as suggested by the lack of gravity in *Healing in My House*. Essentially, the artist critiques the state of the world by presenting a reality that could be achieved only symbolically. Satterwhite himself recognizes the utopic quality of his works. Implying that the reasoning behind his galactic-looking disidentificatory counter-public is rooted in the desire to

⁶³ Sarah Gooding, “Jacolby Satterwhite’s monumental solo show is a cathartic and immersive queer fantasy,” *I-D*, October 16, 2019. Accessed April 1, 2021, https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/qvgxgm/jacolby-satterwhites-monumental-solo-show-is-a-cathartic-and-immersive-queer-fantasy

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kurt Osenlund, “Jacolby Satterwhite Evokes Queer Spaces of Every Kind in Epic Tribute Album to His Late Mother,” *Out Magazine*, March 10, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2017/3/10/jacolby-satterwhite-evokes-queer-spaces-every-kind-epic-tribute-album-his-late-mother>

create a safe space for the people who have heavily affected his life. He writes, “I was born and raised by a mentally ill woman who was in a mental institution, I had two gay brothers, and... heavy involvement in nightlife since I was 13—all of these safe spaces, alternative space.”⁶⁶ Satterwhite outlines his work as “a metaphor for the safe space that I only understand being someone who was constantly externalized.”⁶⁷ Satterwhite has arguably told this minoritarian account in this digital utopian space. By creating a world that omits the social structures that harmfully effect his mother and queer bodies he performs disidentificatory worldmaking. Critiquing the state of this world by crafting a counter-public that shows a world that symbolically could be through animation.

Healing in my House alongside Satterwhite’s other works are usually uploaded on *Vimeo*, by him and or the gallery that displays his works. Some of these uploaded pieces are a small part of a bigger ensemble. However, works such as *Healing in My House* have a music video quality that allows stand-alone online viewing to be immersive, nonetheless. Satterwhite is open about this influence writing, “when I was a kid, what got me excited was Nick Knight’s music video for Bjork’s “Pagan Poetry.” I loved her and wanted to make shit like that.”⁶⁸ *Love Will Find a Way Home* was also uploaded to streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music for commercial consumption. With the personal and anti-capitalist messages that Satterwhite incorporates in his work, there is understandably a perceived conflict. Uploading music to these streaming

⁶⁶ Kurt Osenlund, “Jacolby Satterwhite Evokes Queer Spaces of Every Kind in Epic Tribute Album to His Late Mother,” *Out Magazine*, March 10, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2017/3/10/jacolby-satterwhite-evokes-queer-spaces-every-kind-epic-tribute-album-his-late-mother>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

platforms, utilizing the music video format, and using *Maya* may appear as part-taking in the commercialist culture the artist is critiquing. This applies not only to Satterwhite but digital queer life worlds that are seeking to critique capitalism or the problems it perpetuates. However as identified by Muñoz, minoritarian accounts can still be disidentificatory even when it is a product of a commercialized environment. Take for example *Real World* by MTV. Muñoz believed that despite its commerciality, the few showings of queer activism displayed still achieved disidentification. He recalls an HIV/AIDS activist, who worked for MTV, and “still managed to find ways to do this work despite the corporate ethos that ordered the program.”⁶⁹ In other words, Satterwhite’s minoritarian account can still be effective as a disidentification piece and probably even reach a wider audience by utilizing these commercial format and distribution measures. Satterwhite has even employed his 3D worldmaking techniques to be one of the directors in Solange Knowles’s album *When I Get Home*. Bringing mainstream attention to Satterwhite’s work while visualizing the musical workings of Solange, touching on African American Southern culture.⁷⁰

Overall, Satterwhite’s relationship with his schizophrenic mother and her work creates a disidentificatory piece regarding capitalism and its effects on mental health and black bodies. Jacolby Satterwhite is not the only queer artist that uses 3D world-building and more commercial methods, such as music streaming and a music video style to achieve disidentification. As technology progressed, so did the number of queer artists (and musicians by extension) in the

⁶⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 144.

⁷⁰ Thea Ballard, “GARAGE Fusions: Solange x Jacolby Satterwhite,” *Garage*, November 8, 2019. Accessed April 1, 2021, https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/8xwgi4/garage-fusions-solange-x-jacolby-satterwhite

mainstream. With the assistance of 3D specialists who have a similar skill set to Satterwhite, increasingly they have been given the ability to build their own digital spaces based on their subjective minoritarian experiences. This has led artists, for instance, Alejandra Gherzi (Arca) to use 3D space to explore themes of non-binary identities and transitioning. If Satterwhite was the builder of the 3D space that housed many of his mother's art and later in his career, the work of Solange Knowles. The next chapter will explore how disidentificatory 3D world-building can be achieved with that collaborative relationship in inverse.

Chapter 3: How do Queer musicians like Arca, use collaboration to perform disidentificatory world-making?

Alejandra Gherzi, also known by her stage name “Arca”, is an electronic experimental artist whose work has occupied many digital spaces, thanks to her past collaborations with animator Jesse Kanda. Kevin Lozano examines Arca’s sound as “one of chaos and contortions, further defined by the unsettling visuals of morphing bodies... made with... Kanda.”⁷¹ Gherzi’s digital worlds and music have always referenced themes of non-binary thinking. However, since 2018 when she came out as trans, her work has taken a more overt direction. The collaborative effort that created distorted, shifting, and mutant bodies (with the assistance of Kanda) was last seen in her 2017 self-titled album *Arca*. This marked not only the last album before her transition but what Gherzi describes as a jumping-off point for the work to come. The artist writes, “there was a long time where I identified a desire in me and wasn’t sure I had what it takes or the bravery to express that.”⁷² She then cites the opening track – *Piel*, from the *Arca* album, which features the lyrics, “take the skin of yesterday off me.”⁷³ Although not known at the time these lyrics would be a pivotal mantra coming into her post-transition work. Her process involves feeling, rather than knowing the exact meaning of the lyrics. She explained it as her intuition permitting her “to finally venture into the unknown with all the risks that it would entail.”⁷⁴ This chapter will explore how Arca’s experiences as a Venezuelan Non-Binary Trans woman uses digital space to perform

⁷¹ Kevin Lozano, “Arca: Arca,” *Pitchfork*, June 30, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/arca-kick-i/>

⁷² Matt Moen, “Arca: Embracing the Flux,” *Paper Magazine*, April 7, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.papermag.com/arca-transformation-2645630264.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

a form of disidentificatory world-making with the assistance of current collaborator Frederick Heyman. Mostly focusing on her recent works - @@@@ and *Non Binary*.

@@@@, serves as a precursor for her *Kick i* album. The piece, which traditionally would be an album, was published as 62-minute single acting as a collection of songs with an accompanying visual to build out her digital queer space. @@@@ is different from other songs because of the physicality needed to interact with it. If the listener hopes to listen to their favourite track within this 62-minute piece, they would have to pan through its length by hand, dropping their cursor in a precise spot on the progress bar like, “aiming the needle of a record player at a specific groove.”⁷⁵ If a digital musical playlist, as seen in streaming services such as *Spotify* and *Apple Music* contains the song, the listener may be surprised when the usual 2 to 3 minutes songs are interrupted by the 62-minute piece. Sasha Geffen also identifies this physical aspect of @@@@ piece and its disruption of “the inscribed habit of letting Spotify’s impartial code do all the work.”⁷⁶ Similarly to Satterwhite, Arca is utilizing a commercial platform but working against its conventional functionality in a way that challenges the audience to intently engage with the contents. The music itself features many of the artist’s usual experimental motifs and while vocal performances are used sparingly, they carry with them reference Arca’s transitioning process. Matt Moen outlines her sound as transcending gender - “in the span of a single song, you can sometimes hear her vocals wildly vacillate between an operatic falsetto and a booming

⁷⁵ Sasha Geffen, “Arca: @@@@,” *Pitchfork*, February, 26, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/arca-aaaa/>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

baritone before being altered into an alien register never heard before and back again.”⁷⁷ This is also demonstrated in the various lyrics and chants layered throughout @@@@. For example, during the song *Psychosexual* which roughly sits in at 23 minutes of the single, “a digitally deepened and abraded voice invites the listener to ‘shake that pussy, bitch...I don’t care what genital you were born with/You can shake that pussy.’”⁷⁸ In her analysis of the track, Sasha Greffen believes that, “pussy is rendered as a construct, a state of mind rather than of biology”, in this given context.⁷⁹ A few of these lyrics see Arca speaking her native tongue also, making these moments feel very personal. At the [33:59] mark of @@@@ the track *No Me Digas* begins. The words, “No lo digas/No lo digas/A menos que lo sientas/Porque no quiero que haya resentimiento” (‘Don’t say it unless you feel it, because I don’t want resentment’), are on repeat.⁸⁰ While her words beforehand featured a philosophical take on gender binaries, this sees Arca emotionally opening about the insecurities, her transition brings.

The accompanying visual of @@@@ sees Arca combining themes of gender and transitioning with a futuristic landscape. In collaboration with 3D artist Frederick Heyman the animation lasts for 1 minute and 19 seconds but loops to cover the entire 62-minute song. In the very intro of the animation, mechanical, natural, and dystopian aesthetics are all at the forefront. On top of a destroyed car lies Arca’s digitally scanned body with intricate mechanical details covering her sexual organs [Fig11]. At the [00:22] minute mark a blue projection, as if it is desperately trying

⁷⁷ Matt Moen, “Arca: Embracing the Flux,” *Paper Magazine*, April 7, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.papermag.com/arca-transformation-2645630264.html?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1>.

⁷⁸ Sasha Geffen, “Arca: @@@@,” *Pitchfork*, February, 26, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/arca-aaaaa/>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

to pick up a transmission, starts to flash until it is kept on at the [00:27] mark onwards. The projected transmission features a dancing Arca on a virtual stream, with an extremely feminine, almost dominatrix style to her revealing piece of clothing [Fig12]. She strikes poses that either seem feminine, sexual, or even abrasive which coincides greatly with the music in the background. This animation sees Arca completely reinventing herself in digital space, displaying versions of herself that she simultaneously wants to be viewed as. Chal Raven explains that the artist set her “inner alien free... a being of her own creation, beyond traditional binaries, part human and part machine. Using the camera and her body to reinvent herself for our (and *her*) pleasure.”⁸¹

In conjunction with the music being transmitted in @@@@’s virtual reality, Ghersi makes this 3D world a disidentificatory one by revealing that it is inspired by her past as a Venezuelan citizen. Arca recalls a specific practice by the leader Hugo Chavez, “who would force all television networks into his live feed.”⁸² *Cadenas* or, “Chains is a fitting name because basically it would tie everyone up to watching the same thing — him talking... It was insufferable”, she said.⁸³ In retaliation, citizens would initiate a sonic protest but with pots and pans, resulting in a “massive metallic cacophony.”⁸⁴ She suspects, that because it happened so often it must have, “left some unconscious mark on me of what it means to protest through sonic.”⁸⁵ @@@@ is a reflection of how this particular experience informs the way she chooses to spread her message. In an

⁸¹ Chal Raven, “Arca: Kick i,” *Pitchfork*, June 30, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/arca-kick-i/>

⁸² Matt Moen, “Arca: Embracing the Flux,” *Paper Magazine*, April 7, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021.

<https://www.papermag.com/arca-transformation-2645630264.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

extremely busy and loud world, she constructs a 3D reality that viewers can choose to tune into. Engaging with her messages of gender and trans politics, in stark contrast to the way that Venezuelan citizens had to listen to Chavez. Unlike him, she does not want to force anyone to listen to her message writing, “I’m trying to create a space rather than take over another.”⁸⁶ Arca’s approach to evoke what would be considered the everyday experience of a Venezuelan immigrant, rather than the mainstream’s cultural perception of one is another way minoritarian subjects can achieve disidentification. Muñoz claims that “the roles that are available within dominant culture for Latino/a and other minority identities are narrow... static, and fixed. These accounts of mainstream identity are, in most instances, unable to account for specificity of black and queer lives or any other collision of two or more minority designations.”⁸⁷ Therefore it can be argued that Arca, “is predicated on transparency and the everyday instead of the more familiar models of minority identity that invoke exotic colours and rituals.”⁸⁸ Ghersi’s distinct memories of growing up in Venezuela, escapes the public’s (people who live outside Venezuela) fixed perception of its citizens. @@@@ then takes this memory and recontextualizes it by combining it with her recently embraced non-binary trans identity through cyborg aesthetics.

Kick I, which came shortly after @@@@ is Arca’s first feature album, post coming out as trans. The artist employed the assistance of 3D multimedia artist Frederick Heyman once more to build a disidentificatory space that embodies her extremely unique minoritarian struggles. A counter public made widely available on music and video platforms for a general audience to stream. Her

⁸⁶ Matt Moen, “Arca: Embracing the Flux,” *Paper Magazine*, April 7, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.papermag.com/arca-transformation-2645630264.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>

⁸⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 166.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

most explicit proclamation of this philosophy lies on the album's opening track *Non Binary* and the accompanying visual. The piece is an anthem over various dystopian cybernetic, "set pieces of Arca in transformation."⁸⁹ Arca's introduction comes in the form of a 3d scan that Heyman has modified. As she lies on a rock, her body appears to be impaled with a large pair of scissors. The pieces of metal attached to her legs and head indicate she is a cyborg but the red vines that surround her, reveal that she has been immobile for quite some time [Fig13]. At the [00:28] minute mark, Arca's 3d scan appears to adopt a birthing pose. She is pregnant but the delivery process appears only achievable through the futuristic technology being used. This setting is extremely evocative of Muñoz's theory of world-making. This scene presents a distant utopian future where technology has advanced to such a degree that people can manifest their ideal bodies, with ideal bodily functions [Fig14]. The pregnancy scene is especially interesting because transwoman must sacrifice their fertility to transition. Arca presents a counter-public where fertility may never have to be sacrificed to achieve your desired gender expression. Arca herself is open about the initial deliberation she had before her transition but accepted that it is what she wanted in the end. She states, "I was trying so hard not to do it, but the image that finally reached me was of the body that I want to leave behind when I die."⁹⁰ In turn, *Non Binary* reflects her pro transition stance. She continues, "I support body modification in all its forms, and I like to think of transness, not as a pathology, or transitioning as a response to a symptom, but rather the manifestation of an expression."⁹¹ In the third scene of *Non Binary*, Arca appears as a "surreal

⁸⁹ Matthew Ismael Ruiz, "Arca: Non Binary," *Pitchfork*, April 30, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/news/arca-shares-video-for-new-song-nonbinary-watch/>

⁹⁰ Marina Abramović, "Arca and Marina Abramović on Divas, Death, and Body Drama," *Interview Magazine*, October 8, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/arca-marina-abramovic-kick-pop-fall-2020>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

rendering of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*.⁹² Arca's real body is green-screened on top of the 3d environment, decorated with flowers and sporting an extremely feminine furry stiletto. Micah Sandman has noted that Venus within the painting, "represents the classical ideal woman."⁹³ Arca's interpretation of the piece can be interpreted as a desire or as suggested by the discomfort she displays, a disdain for such a status [Fig15].

With the final shot, Arca (dressed in black) is seen arguing with a version of herself (dressed in white). The argument appears to be heated, exaggerated with the fiery background behind her and ends with a face full of contempt or sadness before the screen cuts to the title "*Non Binary*" [Fig16]. Arguably, Arca and Heyman present a 3D utopian space, where through modification of Arca's 3D scanned body, technology has come far enough for anyone to achieve their desired body. However, the lyrics on top suggest that all these manifestations of Arca represent her mental state and coexist, sometimes in unison. As Arca writes, "nonbinary is more than just an identity — it's a mentality."⁹⁴ It reconciles, "an amalgamation of contradictions contained within us and coming to terms with the fact that not all questions get an answer."⁹⁵ With lyrics such as, "I don't give a fuck what you think", and the final line of the piece, "What a treat it is to be non-binary", it could be argued that Arca's performance is about self-acceptance as a protest.

⁹² Matthew Ismael Ruiz, "Arca: Non Binary," *Pitchfork*, April 30, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/news/arca-shares-video-for-new-song-nonbinary-watch/>

⁹³ Micah Sandman, "@Aphrodite: Tracking Women's Objectification from Venus pudica to Instagram," *REMAKE*, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://remake.wustl.edu/issue1/sandman-aphrodite>

⁹⁴ Matthew Ismael Ruiz, "Arca: Non Binary," *Pitchfork*, April 30, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/news/arca-shares-video-for-new-song-nonbinary-watch/>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Utilizing the internal turmoil, she faces as a non-binary trans woman, Alejandra Gherzi condenses these personal themes in the music and 3D world of *Non Binary*. Arca's world being as widely available as it is - on *YouTube* and music streaming services, achieves not only disidentification but arguably its intended purpose. Muñoz explains that "disidentification's use-value is only accessible through the possibility of transformative politics that it enables subjects and groups to imagine."⁹⁶ He writes, "Disidentifications are strategies that are called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life... My desire is to perpetuate disidentification and offer it as not only a hermeneutic but also as a possibility for freedom."⁹⁷ Because of their accessibility, her works can inspire and spread a message of self-acceptance as activism in a reality that is still very hostile to it. She has stated that the purpose of these 3D worlds was, "to flourish and bloom and suggest a speculative fictional universe that could be inspiring, just flooded with love."⁹⁸ Satterwhite's utopic worlds are heavily inspired by the safe space Ballroom provided to Black queer bodies. Similarly, Arca's trans predecessors have inspired her to do something similar – a visual simulation of a utopic environment and performing disidentifications with @@@@ and *Non Binary*. The artist cites electronic trans musician Genesis P-Orridge who, as she states, "allowed me to see someone define what works for them, what feels good for them pronoun-wise, who isn't hermetically sealed off from the world."⁹⁹ Someone who has shown Arca that, "You can work in visual art, you can work in music, you can define your personality and find a chosen family that accepts you, and you can have a viable life."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 144.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Philip Sherburne, "Live from Quarantine, It's the Arca Show," *Pitchfork*, May 20, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://pitchfork.com/features/interview/live-from-quarantine-its-the-arca-show/>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

In conclusion, Arca's Music Video format allows her 3D worlds to be accessible, similarly to Satterwhite's work. Spreading a personal message that would occasionally reflect a political one, fuelled by the hardships in their respected minoritarian identities. The way 3D technologies have progressed allows for disidentificatory world making to be accessible to minoritarian creators looking to tell their stories for audience members who would benefit from or learn from the immersion. Arca has also very recently embraced technology such as virtual reality and live-streaming. With tools like these becoming increasingly prevalent, it could expand how queer minoritarian subjects can house interactions in digital space. Sam Miles expands on this writing, "Seemingly freed from real-life hegemonic structures, digital technology advocates hoped to progress more democratic and power-equal structures, in the process opening up conceptual space for gender and sexual experimentation."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Sam Miles, "Still getting it on online: Thirty years of queer male spaces brokered through digital technologies," *Geography compass* 12, no. 11 (2018): e12407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12407>

Conclusion

It could be argued, that for now, digital queer spaces may not immediately replace physical queer spaces, as they are very much still prevalent. There is still a discussion on whether digital life worlds merely represent or facilitate minoritarian subjects in a queer lifeworld, to the extent that traditional life worlds do. As recently as the Covid 19 pandemic, this debate garnered a major resurgence with the introduction of *Club Quarantine*. An hours-long (zoom) video call that, “attracted between 200 and 1,000 participants each evening”, as a virtual stand-in for the queer clubs placed on lockdown.¹⁰² After attending one of the *Club Quarantine* nights, Aurora Brachman wrote, “I found similar comfort in *Club Quarantine*. Historically, nightlife has been one of the few safe spaces for the queer community. It is no surprise that in this time of devastation, queer people have once again sought community in the club, albeit a virtual one.”¹⁰³ This statement is just an example, of how the worlds of digital and traditional queer space are progressively blurring. Indicating that in the far future they could be functionally indifferent.

As discussed in this dissertation, the current stage of technological advancement I have concentrated on, such as the widely available software - *Maya*, *Blender* and *Unreal Engine* can effectively assist in the creation of disidentificatory counter publics in the form of digital queer spaces. Currently, it allows artists with the needed skillset and collaborations to create narrative-heavy, deeply personal, or utopic worlds. Some even combining all those elements as

¹⁰² Aurora Brachman, “Every Night in Quarantine, I Danced with Hundreds of Strangers (opinion),” *New York Times*, September 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/22/opinion/club-quarantine-coronavirus.html>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

demonstrated with the aforementioned artists - Satterwhite and Gheri. Both expanding our perception of the given minority they are representing in a musical, film or VR format. The first examined artist - Jacoby Satterwhite brings the aesthetic elements of *Ballroom*, *Acid House*, and *Paradise Garage* into digital space as intertextual storytelling devices. He combines them with drawings and vocals, of his mentally ill mother. Similarly, to the counter-discourse *Ballroom* and queer clubs created by challenging hetero normative society and providing protection to queer bodies of colour. Satterwhite visualizes a surreal world where members of the LGBTQ+ community and his mother are free from the real-world structures that oppress them. Symbolically starting a conversation about mental illness within the black community and capitalism's perpetuation of it. In the end, the digital worlds Satterwhite created are so layered in meaning that they could only be made (or affordably made) with the digital tools fortified to artists like him.

Similarly, Alejandra Gheri's *Non Binary* touches on both her trans identity and Venezuelan roots in a protest piece about reaffirming one's identity. Her collaborator, Frederick Heyman utilizes 3D scans of Gheri's body and heavily modifies it into the way she desires to look and exist digitally. A counter-public that symbolizes the transition process and can represent the several modes of being that coexist within her. The *Kick i* album (that *Non Binary* is attached to) garnered Arca her first-ever Grammy nomination, undoubtedly assisting in her mission for Trans and Venezuelan visibility in the mainstream.¹⁰⁴ Muñoz's theory of disidentification proves to be an

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Velez, "Meet the First-Time GRAMMY Nominee: Arca," *Grammy News*, February 17, 2021. Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/news/meet-first-time-grammy-nominee-arca-expanding-latin-music-her-terms-electronic-album->

extremely useful tool when analysing these minoritarian virtual worlds. Especially considering that they will increase in number the more accessible these pieces of software become. When discussing if more queer people would embrace digital spaces Satterwhite replied with, “I’m excited as fuck about society moving in such a positive direction, with people getting to share their voices, and the culture becoming more nuanced and demanding more intelligent things.”¹⁰⁵ Hopefully, these messages (with the assistance of social platforms) can spark conversation and campaigns for change in majoritarian society. Making a blueprint for a more inclusive LGBTQ+ sphere and reality at large. As Muñoz concludes in his book; *Disidentification*, “The promises made by disidentification’s performance are deep. Our charge as spectators and actors is to continue disidentifying with this world until we achieve new ones.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Sean Capone, “Jacolby Satterwhite,” *BOMB Magazine*, February 27, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2021 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jacolby-satterwhite/>

¹⁰⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification* (University of Minnesota, 1999), 200.



Figure 3: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Country Ball*, 2012, Medium: Film [00:00] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/38621657>.

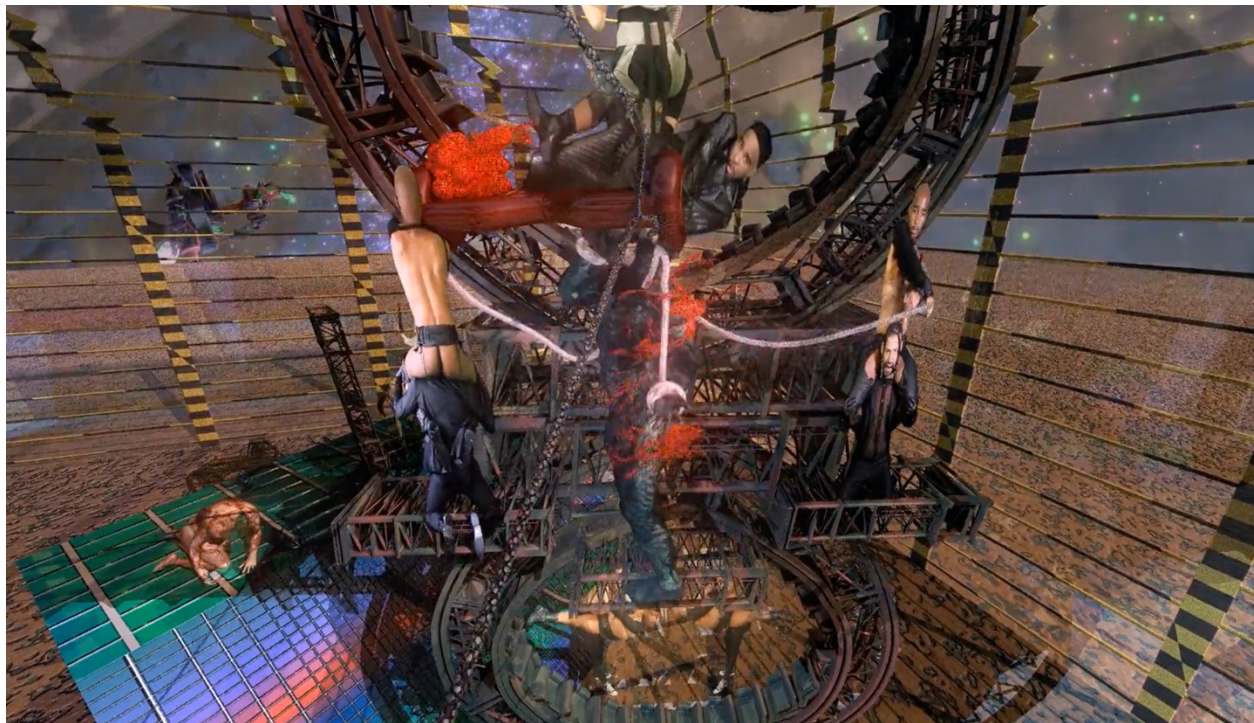


Figure 4: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, 2015, Medium: Film [00:13] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/301079062>.



Figure 5: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Blessed Avenue*, 2015, Medium: Film [00:21] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/301079062>.

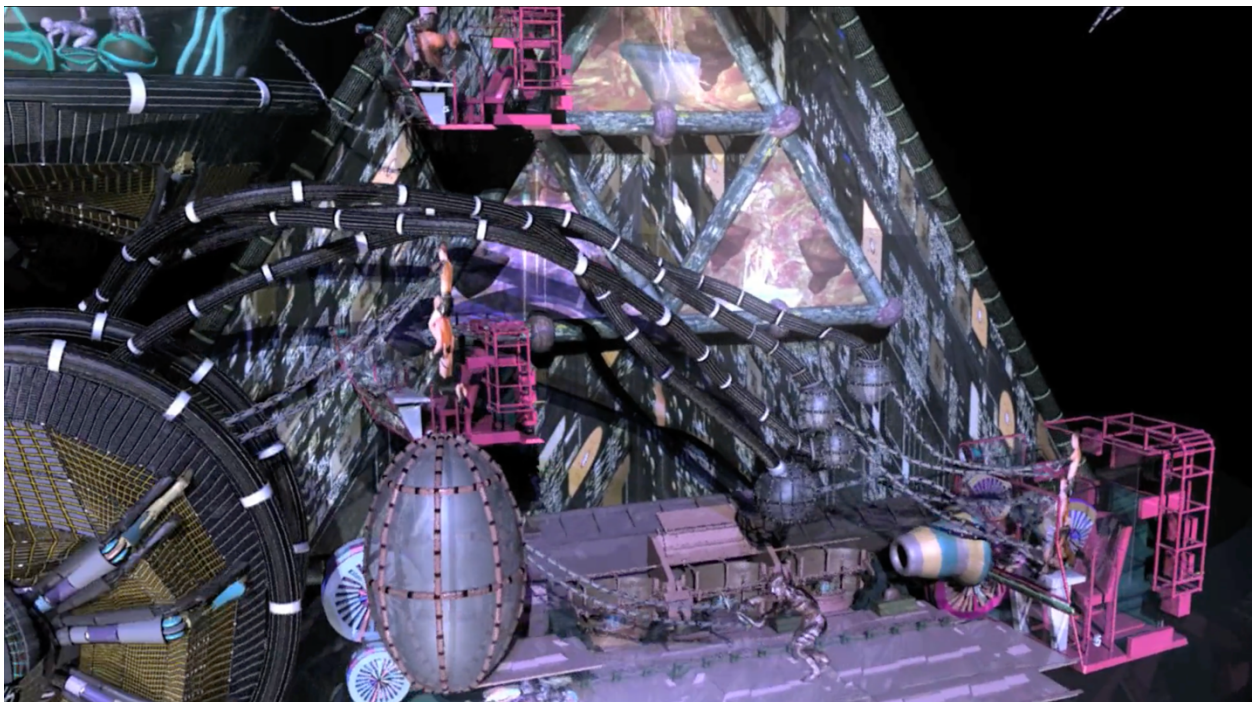


Figure 6: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Healing in My House*, 2016, Medium: Film [01:12] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/284185466>

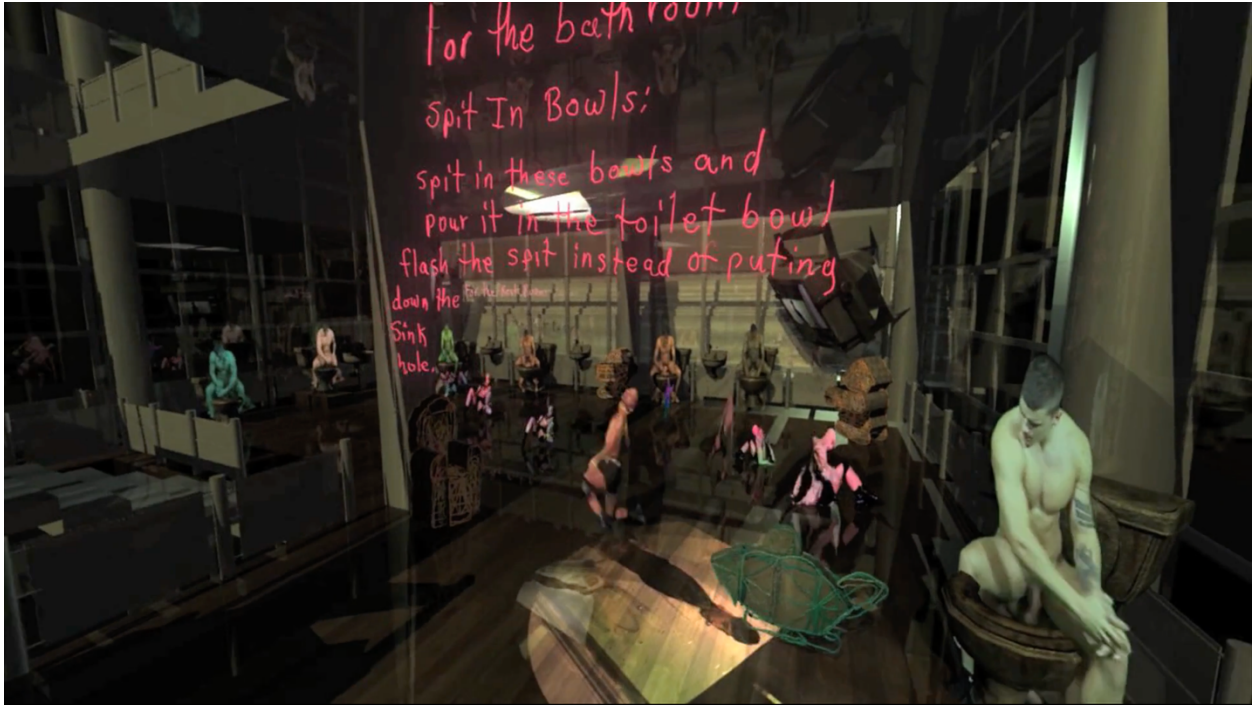


Figure 7: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Healing in My House*, 2016, Medium: Film [03:18] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/284185466>.



Figure 8: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Healing in My House*, 2016, Medium: Film [04:07] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/284185466>



Figure 9: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Healing in My House*, 2016, Medium: Film [06:22] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/284185466>

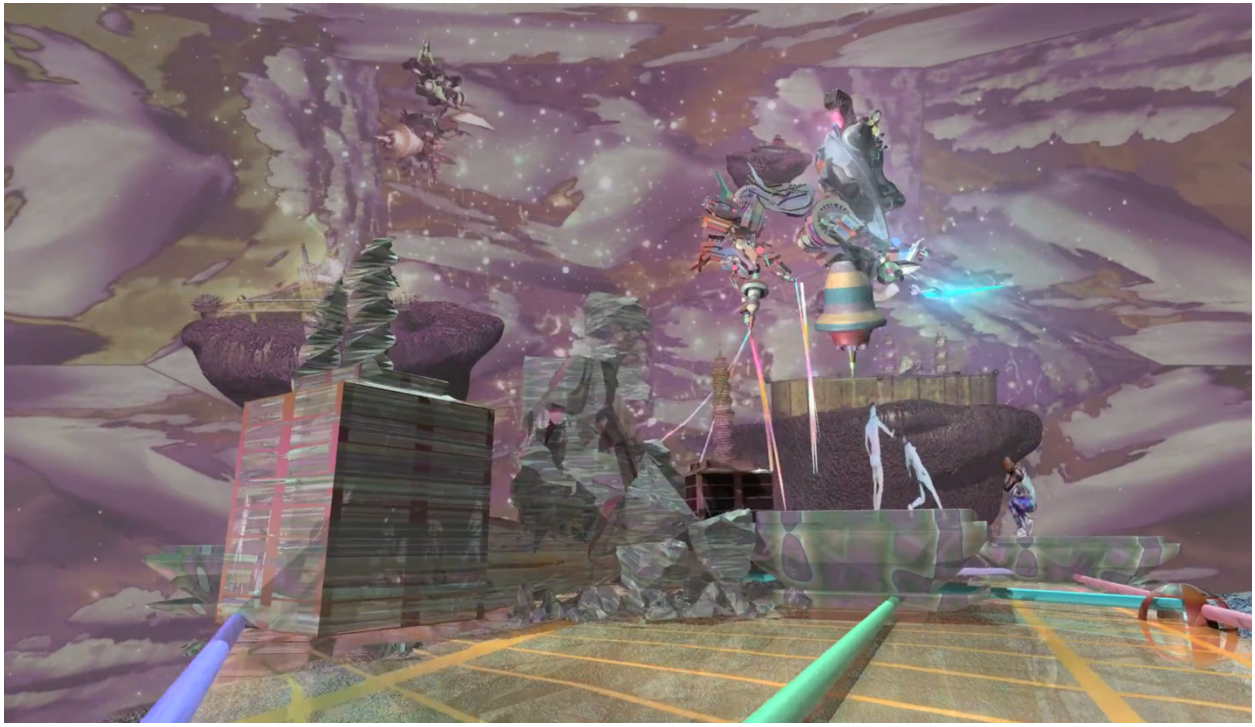


Figure 10: Jacolby Satterwhite, *Healing in My House*, 2016, Medium: Film [05:42] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/284185466>



Figure 11: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, @@@@, 2020, Medium: Music Visual [00:43] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gjlcSZ9cQE>



Figure 12: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, @@@@, 2020, Medium: Music Visual [01:05] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gjlcSZ9cQE>



Figure 13: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, *Non Binary*, 2020, Medium: Music Video [00:15] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfGz4MTQ28I>



Figure 14: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, *Non Binary*, 2020, Medium: Music Video [01:03] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfGz4MTQ28I>



Figure 15: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, *Non Binary*, 2020, Medium: Music Video [01:10] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfGz4MTQ28I>



Figure 16: Alejandro Gherzi and Frederick Heyman, *Non Binary*, 2020, Medium: Music Video [02:05] minute mark, Vimeo. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfGz4MTQ28I>

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