Punctured and stitched: Derrida's *pointure* and intertextual polyphony in dandyism meets Athi-Patra Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania*

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ABSTRACT

The "*pointure*" theme, as informed by Jacques Derrida's (2009 [1978]) appropriation of this term, speaks not only of fusion but also of the interrelationship between two entities that are conjoined, though they may be in conflict with each other. This could be read as a form of intertextuality – Derrida's text is indebted to Martin Heidegger's essay, titled "The origin of painting" (2008 [1950, 1957, 1960]), though he works at critiquing and subverting its content. The process of intertextuality is one that informs dandyism, a mode of strategic dress where the wearer is forced to operate with an existing or dominant sartorial syntax. In this way, the dandy's mode echoes Derrida's proverbial "rereading" of Heidegger's text "against the grain". For this reason, dandyism is characterised as a product of what Sima Godfrey (1982:28) terms 'intertextual polyphony', involving a tricky renegotiation between a dominant sartorial syntax and a subversion of it. Athi-Patra Ruga's artistic practice evokes the dandyist mode; not only does he work with a sartorial vocabulary but pushes it to its logical limit, affecting a subversion thereof. However, is it possible to interweave a discourse between his performance works, dubbed *The Future White Woman of Azania* (2010-2013), the form of intertexual polyphony inherent to dandyism and the subject matter and mode of Derrida's text on *pointure*? Or will the form of definitional crisis attached to each of these ideas, bodies of work or texts prevent a smooth dialogue? Does the act of *pointure* that Derrida advances inherently bring about a definitional crisis?

Keywords: dandyism; intertextuality; race; gender; identities, fashion; performance.

Introduction

It is the crudeness, the manner in which Martin Heidegger's academic rigour gives way to facile illustrations as he interweaves his thesis on "The origin of the work of art" (2008 [1950, 1957, 1960]), that prompts Jacques Derrida (2009 [1978]:301) to appropriate and apply the antiquated word "*pointure*" in his rebuttal. As both a synonym for "prick" and a term used by the printing fraternity to describe the sharp action of a blade as it fixes the page to the tympan, it aptly captures the rough ideological imposition(s) that Heidegger assumes to conjoin, as well as the process of intertextuality – a scheme whereby new texts are drawn from existing ones or influenced by them (Worton & Still 1990:1). Intertextuality stems from the idea that texts are neither self-sufficient nor closed systems; not only are they shaped by preceding texts, but by social structures or ideologies (Worton & Still 1990:1).

Derrida's text is overtly intertextual because it relies on Heidegger's as a primary reference, although his intent is to upturn or "unpick" some of Heidegger's content through (critical) rereading and rewriting. Derrida (2009:301) is so dismayed by Heidegger's mode that goes so far as to label Heidegger's text 'barbaric', thus evoking the 'violence' and messy edges that seemingly 'protrude' from his text. It could almost be described as an unsuccessful form of *pointure*. Once uttered and fixed to the page, the text and the insights it communicates, assumes a seriousness and finality that appears to deny its intertextuality and the fact that it is an open system. Via his own self-reflexive musings, Derrida "opens up" Heidegger's text and weaves it into his own, though he allows the faultlines – the rough seams between ideas, illustrations and differing rhetorical voices – to remain visible.

Embracing this spirit of critical transparency, in this article, I interweave a discourse on Athi-Patra Ruga's series of performances, dubbed *The Future White Women of Azania* (2010-2013), with theories on dandyism – a sartorial phenomenon that originated in nineteenth-century Europe – and Derrida's notion of "*pointure*", allowing any disjunctures between these theories, texts and visual "texts" to remain discernable. The notion of intertextuality, which *pointure* indirectly evokes, facilitates this "dialogue" and smoothes the edges, as does the idea of the dandy as a product of 'intertextual polyphony', in the sense that this strategic mode of dress is the result of playing with two discourses at once (Godfrey 1982:28).

Given that both Derrida and Heidegger's arguments around the ontological status of art centre on artwork/s (although Heidegger never identifies a particular work) by Vincent van Gogh featuring a pair of shoes, the sartorial-centred theme of this article

seems appropriate; although in Ruga's work there is no actual frame around his garment, which is worn and animated during performances, unless one considers the performance itself and the places where some of the performances have concluded (art galleries) as those "framing" devices that would allow it to be dubbed an artwork or an act of representation.

Both Heidegger and Derrida are concerned with the ontological status of art, which drives them towards identifying different classes of objects, and furthermore, with exploring the differences between an art object and a functional object. This may be clearly an over-simplification of Heidegger's philosophy, and of Derrida's critique thereof, however, in the context of this article, this pursuit is useful in highlighting a definitional crisis – it is the pursuit of dandyism and is manifest in Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania* series.

Dandyism presents an 'exemplary faultline', proposes Christopher Lane (1994:48), in that the manifestations of this strategic deployment of dress not only signals both the 'cause and effect of social decline', but those that utilise or perform this subversive grammar of dress similarly claim a position 'inside' and 'outside' the social body, 'pushing the limits of each toward a profound definitional crisis'. This crisis could be linked to Heidegger's pursuit of identifying the "origin of art" and arriving at a definition of what it might be: discerning between this art "thing" in relation to other "things".

"Definitional crisis" is also an apt phrase to describe the effect of Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania*. Concealed behind an outfit fashioned from balloons, Ruga is both familiar and unthreatening – balloons are associated with children's parties and celebrations. However, as his face is concealed, he also looms as an unknowable figure of ambiguous gender and race that has surrendered to "pure surface" – a trait linked to the dandyist, who assumes to abolish his internal existence via immersion in the external self (Figure 1).

Utlising both dress and performance as his mode of expression, Ruga's artwork bears a close relationship to dandyism, which relies on mobilising the semiotic signification of garments. Stated plainly, to attain their goals, both the dandyist and Ruga use dress in such a strategic manner that the resulting ensembles could be perceived as "art" – through which process the boundaries between the classes of those objects involved, and thus, by extension, the disciplines of fashion and art, collapse. Ruga's work draws from the rhetoric of fashion, though he stretches it to its logical conclusion– this is a characteristic of the dandyist mode (Lane 1994:37), in which case his work may be deemed to be both a product of "meta-fashion" and performance art.

FIGURE Nº 1

As part of his *Performa Obscura* performance at the National Arts Festival in 2012, Athi-Patra Ruga traversed Grahamstown in his distinctive balloon outfit that would come to define his White Women of Azania character.

Courtesy of the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown.

Driving a further link between Ruga's work, dandyism and Derrida's text, is Heidegger's position on the nature, or perhaps even the function of art. Heidegger asserts that it is through art that a garment, or a product's explicit appearance, which, for him represents "the truth of its being", can be disclosed (Schapiro 2009 [1968]:298). This presents an interesting statement through which to juxtapose the function of clothing in the dandy mode and Ruga's representation of a garment. In his role as the White Woman of Azania, Ruga does not *per se* wear a conventional ensemble, barring fishnet stockings and platform shoes. His character is identified by a collection of brightly coloured balloons that are joined to appear like a garment that covers his upper body. This balloon costume could be read as a signifier of a universal garment revealing an underlying "truth" underpinning the function of all clothing.

This costume also obscures the "truth", which in this context might refer to the identity of the wearer, and, as in all façades, it is part of a semiotic enterprise invested in the deceit of its artifice. However, considering the balloons' fragility and their short lifespan

– they can be burst and punctured easily when they come into contact with other things – this is not a conventional garment, and the artificial screen, which is only temporary and fragile, can only sustain this game of misdirection for a limited period.

This paradoxical interplay between revealing and concealing is a characteristic of the dandyist mode, which through 'careful self representation may also have encouraged an ontology of deception that turned the dandy's complete emotional repression into a corollary for this extra-ordinary emphasis on material exhibition' (Lane 1994:37). Extreme sartorial expression regularly functions as a form of misdirection and self-erasure; however, because this sartorial syntax is rooted in an exaggerated (re)quotation of this language of dress, it operates as a "truth-bearing" exercise that is engineered to unveil the rules not only governing dress, but the social codes in a particular society.

At its core, dandyism is a citational system, in the sense that its vocabulary is grounded in quotation – or re-quotation of styles, silhouettes, and embellishments. Dress codes are duplicated and repeated through the lens of distortion, or the act of exaggeration (Miller 2009:1). Of course, all clothing conventions 'make visible the structure and organisation of interaction within a specific social context' (Rubenstein 2001:9). However, dandyism is not simply a basic form of cultural duplication, it is a more complex form of mimicry that haunts or revises the dominant political or social order and thus questions it. Establishing a link between the strategy Ruga embraces in *The Future White Women of Azania* performances and the dandyist mode, therefore largely (there are numerous other factors) rests on identifying whether he manipulates hegemonic social or sartorial conventions.

A "definitional crisis" manifests at different levels of the discourse being developed here, implying that the acts of *pointure* being advanced – this suturing, weaving and fusion – remains clumsy, in that the ideas, texts, discourses or syntaxes being married inherently resist clean unification.

Dandyism and its definitions

The dandy is wired to resist conventions or fixed rules, thereby challenging the very conditions that are used to define him. For this reason, the definition of the dandy is more elusive than models of this approach, Sima Godfrey (1982:23) suggests. Echoing this sentiment, the Algerian author Albert Camus (cited in Godfrey 1982:24), describes dandyism as 'a singular spirit of negation'. This phrase appropriately captures the dandyist's compulsion to cancel out the properties that fix him (historically the dandy

was a male character). Nevertheless, the etymology of the word marks out a clear historical narrative charting the emergence of dandyism that I argue remains relevant to an approach in artmaking that relies on the strategic mobilisation of dress.

Historically, the dandy is a social phenomenon of nineteenth-century Britain. The word was coined in France at the height of Anglomania in 1816 to describe an Englishman with a preference for flamboyant dress (Godfrey 1982:25). In those times, this eccentric dress sense was characterised by a starched collar, an extravagant tie and corseted waist (Godfrey 1982:25). The dandy's dress was not only a tool of self-definition or redefinition but also an expression of his exile or rejection of a shifting socio-political context. The emergence of this sartorial phenomenon in the 1800s is attributed to a response to dramatic socio-economic and class shifts brought on by the rapid expansion of technology and the onset of the industrial age that prompted the emergence of a middle-class bourgeoisie 'preoccupied by material accumulation' as a means of claiming status that was once only reserved for the landed gentry (Lane 1994:36). It was the first time that people's status was no longer fixed; it could be attained through accumulation not only of objects, but also clothing, providing artful wearers with the opportunity to experiment or project new identities.

Also defined by his 'impertinent manner of speech' and keen wit, the dandy's persona depended on his performance of being a dandy, though this figure was haunted by the notion that he was all style and no substance (Glick 2001:131). This notion is attributed to the dandy's assiduous cultivation or mastering of his external appearance, as well as, perhaps, his predilection for idleness, pursuit of beauty and rejection of anything useful – attributed to his rejection of the social values that the rise of capitalism instilled (Godfrey 1982:27).

Yet the dandy's ethos is also positioned to be politically rebellious and transgressive. It is his subversion of prevailing dress codes that speaks of resistance, articulating what Barbey d'Aurevilly (cited in Glick 2001:131) calls 'the revolt of the individual against the established order' that upturns 'heterosexual norms, materialism, industriousness and utilitarianism'.It is this dimension of the dandy, or dandyism, his mode of dress and performance, and his representation by 1830 (as in the works of Musset, Balzac and Barbier) that the dandy evolves into something more complex (Godfrey 1982:27), and is transformed from a "mindless model" to an intellectual rebel. Yet in order to mimic and subvert the prevailing model, the dandy is compelled to work within an established sartorial syntax.

Dandyism as intertextual polyphony

Working from within the system is risky: the dandy can and does so easily become complicit with it, and his necessary immersion within it is a result of the dandy deriving pleasure from it, luxuriating in the aesthetics of dress.

These two contradictory aspects of the dandy are in conflict, positioning him as 'a privileged emblem of the modern, who embraces the aesthetics of the commodity, beauty and pleasure and style, while protesting against the commodification of modern life and the drive toward production' (Glick 2001:131). Yet, as indicated earlier, as the dandy's language is derived from the dominant culture, his subversion of it cannot be enacted outside of it. For this reason, Godfrey (1982:28) suggests that the dandy is inherently a product of an 'intertextual polyphony' in the sense that he plays with two discourses at once; the everyday language of the dominant culture and his own idiosyncratic interpretation of it, which relies on inverting the former in order to 'echo it at a distance'.

This intertextual vocabulary, or approach, speaks quite directly to the "*pointure*" thematic, which is predicated on fixing, conjoining not only the text to the page, as per its literal meaning, but also weaving two texts together, with one responding to the other, as per Derrida's (2009) retort to Heidegger's essay (1950). It is this aspect, which allows its intertextuality to be perceived, though of course, all texts are inherently intertextual – Julia Kristeva, who coined the term, asserts that no text is hermetic or self-sufficient (Worton & Still 1990:1).

It is the manner in which Derrida subverts Heidegger's text, the self-conscious approach that echoes the dandyist's deliberate intertextual polyphony. Stephen Melville (2009:274) identifies Derrida's process as one of deconstruction that:

> presents itself as, in general, a practice of reading, a way of picking things up against their own grain, or at their margins, in order to show something about how they are structured by the very things they act to exclude from themselves, and so more or less subtly to displace the structure within.

This idea coincides with the way the dandy works within an existing sartorial code, inverting and subverting it, "reading" it against the grain, so to speak. Intertextuality also relies on mimicry; as texts directly or indirectly build on previous texts or social systems, they are inherently copies of those that precede them (Worton & Still 1990:3). This form of imitation, however, can become the:

> means of forging one's own discourse … Imitation is not repetition, but the completion of an act of interpretation – and a mode of interpretation which is, as Gadamer says, a highlight in which the reading and writing translator declares her/himself, while also engaging in the process of self-alienation (Worton & Still 1990:6).

Once again, this echoes the dandyist approach, which while concerned with self-definition, also brings about self-alienation. This is attributed to the dandy's emphasis on material exhibition, which works at annihilating the self and suppressing the truth about the wearer (Lane 1994:37).

Ruga and dandyism

Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania* performances have not been uniform; they take place in different settings, which impacts on their meaning, and have, at times, included processions. These processions or journeys see the performance artist starting the work at one venue and concluding it elsewhere – such as in Grahamstown in 2012, where the work began in a township on the outskirts of this Eastern Cape hamlet and ended in the centre of town, or in 2013 when Ruga and five other "Azanians" journeyed from the Drill Hall to the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg. A number of common elements, however, unite the *Future White Women of Azania* performances, such as the character's outfit – fishnet stockings, stilettoes and the balloon 'garment', which obscures the wearer's entire upper body. The resulting appearance consists of a large balloon body supported by a pair of legs, resembling 'a stylised cartoon character, a kind of hybrid object/subject being … a faceless character that presents us with the apotheosis of otherness' (Corrigall 2012b).

Hence the costume is a misleading façade; firstly, the balloons cover the wearer's head, acting as a camouflage; secondly, the fishnets and shoes evoke a female subject, though mostly, in this series of works, the wearers are predominantly male. As a result, the outfit obscures not only the identity of the wearer but his or her gender and racial profile – the fishnets are worn over a set of coloured stockings that conceal the legs. Being hidden behind a wall of balloons is a liberating experience for the artist: 'I can't see a thing through that costume, but it gives me so much freedom. I like going back to this character that doesn't have the restrictions of an identity. I just want to perform without any limits' (Ruga 2012a). The name of the character (and performance) is also misleading and/or unclear, as it situates the performer/s as supposedly white females of an imagined place – Azania, a utopian African state where presumably indexes of race and gender are no longer relevant.

The ambiguity of the "White Woman of Azania" character and the temporal uncertainty surrounding Ruga's conception of Azania coincides with Lane's (1994:37) characterisation of dandyism as an extreme exhibition facilitating an 'ontology of deception'. Ruga negates every aspect of his identity other than that of performance artist. This ambiguity recalls the illusiveness that Albert Camus (cited in Godfrey 1982:24) identifies as 'a singular spirit of negation'.

Monica Miller (2009:11) prefers to situate this element of the dandyist mode as the means for the subject/wearer to propose more fluid identities. In other words, the contrived façade is not necessarily designed to misdirect the viewer, but rather to allow the wearer to transcend indexes of race, gender and class. Miller's (2009) reading of this element of dandyism is rooted in her focus on what she terms 'black dandyism', a phenomenon she traces from black slaves to Enlightenment London, and through to the sartorial approaches embraced by prominent black hip hop artists in contemporary "Afro-cosmopolitan" New York. The result is a loosening of dandyism from its occidental genealogy that allows the term and the sartorial mode to be linked to arbiters of style who engage in a deliberate or self-conscious act of reconstruction or deconstruction of masculine identity that is 'relative to negotiations of race, sexuality and class' (Miller 2009:5). In this way dandyism is no longer about resistance to rapid expansion of new technology that was transforming European society in the later 1800s (Lane 1994:36), but becomes a response to an ambivalent relationship to any social shifts that have ramifications for identity. It also offers a means of resistance to or reversing of prevailing power relations.

Azania and the "psychic seam"

Most of Ruga's characters – since he began performing in 2007 he has done so under the guise of different personas – are products of a violent society (Ruga 2012a). The garments that costume these various characters operate both as a protective barrier, a necessity for survival, while at the same time – because they attract attention and constitute a spectacle – also invite ridicule, and possibly attract violent responses from the intolerant society that Ruga aims to both tease and challenge with a façade that denies easy categorisation. In response to the attacks on young women wearing mini-skirts at the Noord Street taxi rank in Johannesburg in 2008, he put a lampshade on his head and, in a mini-skirt and stilettoes, and under the guise of the character he dubbed "Beiruth", wandered around a taxi rank before boarding a taxi.

Part of Ruga's *modus operandi* is to confront viewers (the public), with overstated manifestations that provoke prejudice, thereby drawing attention to it. His preference for performing *White Women of Azania* outside galleries and embarking on processions down busy city streets and through townships, demonstrates his interest in addressing society, and the public, although this work is less confrontational than previous performances. The balloon façade shifts attention to the character's vulnerability to the external environment – the balloon can pop if someone brushes up against it – and emphasises the wearer's sensitivity to violence.

The title of the work and its character evoke a future generation that are products of the current socio-political context; the marginalised and persecuted rising to claim their rightful place in the public domain by putting their otherness or difference on display in an effort to celebrate it, even though, of course, it is a façade. Ruga (2012b) refers to this imagined population as being the offspring of the victims of the xenophobic attacks of 2008 – the setting for the procession through the inner city prompted this reference as the majority of residents in this area are African nationals. However, in a new body of work for a solo exhibition at Whatiftheworld Gallery that opened at the end of 2013 titled *The White Women of Azania Saga*, where through photographs and tapestries the artist expanded on his vision of Azania, the ballooned figure reads as one that might embody the euphoria and ideals attached to the concept of the 'rainbow nation' or could represent an Africa state where whites no longer exist. This possibility is intimated through the series *The Night of the Long Knives* (2013) (Figure 2), which refers to the myth that following Nelson Mandela's death, all whites would be annihilated. As with Camus's observation that the dandy constantly works at undermining that which might define him, the *White Woman of Azania* character has become a malleable tool in Ruga's hands, which he employs to evoke a variety of socio-political conditions, myths or ideals.

On his blog Ruga (2013b) maps the etymology of the term "Azania" from its Greek origins to its appropriation by the black consciousness movement 'as a pre-colonial utopian black homeland – this Promised Land, referenced in struggle songs, political sermons and African Nationalist speeches' is a staple of struggle rhetoric and has shaped perceptions of what the "new" South Africa would be like. Ruga (2013b) was inspired by Cold War pop culture, such as Marvel Comics' *Black Panther*, where Azania appears 'as a fictional backdrop to a Liberation story that bares a close resemblance' to apartheid South Africa. In this light, the Azanians that feature in Ruga's performance are of the past and the future; they are a displaced population, hailing from a dream and a nightmare. This paradox recalls the figure of the dandy whom Lane (1994:37) suggests represented 'a complex hinge between the fulfillment of a sublime ideal and the jaunting embodiment of a reprehensible social failure'.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Athi-Patra Ruga, *The Night of the Long Knives III*, 2013. Archival inkjet print on Photorag Baryta. Edition of 5. 150 x 190 cm.

Image courtesy Whatiftheworld Gallery.

The liminal space that Ruga, or the dandy, occupies points to the kind of 'terror' that Ashraf Jamal (2010:121) characterises as more than an actual act of violence but 'a pervasive and variegated psychic seam' that is rooted in a desire for 'a sense of place … but recoils before its lack of substance'. In this way, Ruga's reference to a hallucinatory projection of both an imaginary utopian future or a dystopian past is forced into a hyper-real existence, manifest in this artificial ballooned façade that is at once both pleasing, evoking celebrations and parties, as well as menacing; it is false, conceals the truth and cannot be sustained – the balloons will contract or pop. Hence the outfit and the performance operate as a parody of a 'sublime ideal' that speaks of a utopian black homeland that has become an echo of what has existed before – apartheid and the concomitant prejudice and violence. For this reason, the façade is a cheap and empty display. The colourful balloons and accessories have a visual impact, but the fishnet stockings and high heels are sluttish, evoking a

prostitute. This aspect to the character was highlighted during the performance of the *Future White Women of Azania* in Cape Town (2012), where Ruga and fellow performer, Jade Paton, performed in a shop-front lit with neon lights:

> It is like a scene from Amsterdam's red light district, but for the fact that not a single inch of their bodies is on display and they are not stereotypical female personas, but The Future White Women of Azania – an unknown population still in the making. They appear like mannequins, too, though they totter from side to side, like inebriated whores, struggling to remain inert as their heels slide on the neon liquid released from the balloons as they pop (Corrigall 2012a).

The rough seams – disjuncture between dandyism and Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania*

In this context the performance is centred around disclosure – the big "reveal" (to use reality makeover-show parlance) – where the wearer's identity is revealed during 'a gradual "striptease", each burst balloon promising to bring us closer to the identities concealed behind the wall of bright plastic' (Corrigall 2012a). In this way Ruga undoes or reverses what the outfit is intended to achieve: concealment, misdirection or a sense of liberation from a fixed identity. This literal "puncturing" of the façade appears to be at odds with the dandyist mode, even though it conforms to its characteristic interplay between the exterior and interior. However, dandyism depends on denying an interior state, coinciding with the view that an overstated exterior implies the dandy is 'all style and no substance' (Glick 2001:131). While Ruga promises to reveal what lies behind the wall of balloons, he delivers a performer covered in sweat. In this way, it is not as if the viewer has "penetrated" or been given access to what lies beneath; as stated earlier, Ruga and the performers end the performance at that point; they "give" nothing of themselves. In this light, the *White Women of Azania* performance might be said to draw attention to the absence of interiority – a factor that is emphasised when the "curtain is drawn back" to reveal nothing of interest.

Another significant disconnect between the *Future White Women of Azania*, the intertextual polyphony that Derrida's text evokes under the banner of *pointure*, and the dandyist mode, is the fact that the balloon outfit is neither a conventional nor recognisable garment. As mentioned previously, the intersection between dandyism and the notion of *Pointure* as an intertextual mode depends on the fact that Derrida's text (2009) is an overt product of Heidegger's text (1950), although it is subject to reinterpretation and subversion and is thus an intertextual product. This form of

intertextuality echoes the manner in which the dandy also works with the everyday language of dress of the dominant culture, while also subjecting it to interpretation and an inversion (Godfrey 1982:28).

Intertextuality, dress and art

Balloons may be deemed to be part of a visual vocabulary, though not one conventionally connected to dress. Given this fact, one may ask what syntax is Ruga drawing from and playing with, and does it belong to a dominant culture?

The balloon ensemble may not be part of conventional sartorial expression, but it could perhaps be read as an abstract representation of the function of dress. Roland Barthes (1983:3) distinguishes between a garment and a representation thereof. Within the context of his study of these two aspects, the representational rendition of a garment is not only a photograph of a garment worn by a model, but is also realised in the description of the garment – in other words, the text that represents the garment. Barthes (1983:3) draws a distinction between his concept of 'image-clothing' and an actual garment, which he claims cannot exist at the level of language: 'for as far as we know, language is not a tracing of reality – real clothing is technological – the result of a manufacturing process'. To further illustrate this point, Barthes (1983:6) compares the structure of the actual garment to the mother tongue, while suggesting that the image-garment functions as a translation into an iconic structure through a process of transformation or transition when the actual garment is transformed into a 'representation'.

Ruga's balloon ensemble is not an actual garment in a structural sense. As Barthes proposes, "real" or actual clothing is the product of a specific technological process – a process that this ensemble has not been subjected to (certainly while the balloons are products of mass-production they were never intended to be worn). Ruga has manipulated the balloons in such a way that they are translated into an iconic language that evokes the hyper-embodiment of a garment, any garment. On a base level, Ruga's balloon ensemble is nothing but an eye-catching artificial façade that can only temporarily obscure the identity of the wearer, yet, despite its contrived nature, Ruga suggests nothing concrete exists beyond it. This state could be said to apply to all clothing.

The dandyist mode is driven to push the logic of culture to its limits (Lane 1994:37). Ruga's balloon outfit could be considered as an extreme manifestation of a garment, if one had to apply the logic behind clothing to its limit. It is this subversion that brings to mind Godfrey's (1982:28) notion of the dandy ensemble as a result of intertextual

polyphony, except that in this instance, with the exception of the fishnet stockings and high-heels, Ruga deems to disrupt fashion, or clothing itself, rather than a specific set of signs. Yet the fact that the various elements that make up the ensemble are familiar – balloons are everyday objects – but have been combined in such a way that they appear unfamiliar and strange, evokes the manner in which the dandy inverts the syntax of the dominant culture so that it 'echoes it at a distance' (Godfrey 1982:28).

This effect of the dandyist mode allows its products to present and occupy an 'exemplary faultline', for this kind of ensemble, which is both familiar and unfamiliar, exists both inside and outside the social body; a condition which 'pushes the limits of each toward a profound definitional crisis' (Lane 1994:48). It is this subversion of the logic of culture that permits this to occur. The definitional crisis that the dandy, or in Ruga's context, the artist, creates, links up with the disturbed 'psychic seam' (Jamal 2010:121) that is the result of a yearning for a place that does not exist and one that cannot be escaped – the apartheid past which reverberates through violent acts, perversions and prejudice in the present. *The Future White Women of Azania* series embodies this 'psychic seam', this hallucinatory projection of an unattainable future place. The elegiac tone of the performances, and the processions in particular, which appear funereal, speak of this mourning for this unattainable "dream" and the "nightmare" of apartheid that lingers.

The definitional crisis could be said to occur or be the product of intertextual polyphony, which through interpretation of a linguistic or cultural text, occurs at the level of language and the melding of the everyday and an extreme version thereof. For Heidegger (cited in Harries 2009:73, emphasis added), the transformation that occurs is what allows an object to become deemed an art object, or something more than just a representation of an object: 'The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself, is, *allo agorreuei* … it is an allegory'.

In this way, Ruga's ensemble (and performance which activates it) operates as an artwork; it articulates ideas beyond what it is; its visual signs are designed to communicate. However, the fact that it is worn on the body and embraces the spirit of the dandy in the sense that he takes 'delight in the dissolution of boundaries' (Lane 1994:29), together with Ruga's preference to locate his acts in public spaces rather than in galleries and to destroy the main part of the ensemble at the end of each performance, allows the ensemble to exist as that which cannot be claimed or contained. It seems fitting then, that the balloon ensemble depends on air to give it substance.

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