



HyperCultura

Biannual Journal of the Department of Letters and Foreign Languages, Hyperion University, Romania

Print ISSN: 2285-2115

Electronic ISSN: 2559 - 2025, ISSN-L 2285 - 2115

Vol 2, no 2/2013

Identity and Conflict in Cultural and Geo-Political Contexts (Part I)

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Recommended Citation:

Ciobanu, Estella Antoaneta. "Iconicity and the Invisible Crisis of Reclaimed Gender Identity: The Case of Agora and the Visible Human Project". *HyperCultura* Vol 2.2 (2013).

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Abstract

The final decades of the 20th century witnessed the advent of theories and practices committed to radical revisionism of received epistemic paradigms vis-à-vis formerly marginalised groups. While the impact of gender, race, postcolonial and subaltern studies has been felt beyond the academe in everyday interactions, the backlash has not been tardy, either. In what follows, I investigate gender identity representation in two vastly dissimilar contemporary projects which ostensibly reclaim women's place in society and thinking alike, and whose dissemination is far and wide, hence their iconicity, too. In chronological order, they are the US National Library of Medicine's Visible Human Project (1989–95) and Alejandro Amenabár's film *Agora* (2009). The VHP prides itself in providing data sets for the scientific study of the human body as both male and female. *Agora* reclaims a voice for Hypatia, the female philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and teacher of Alexandria, who fell victim to the patriarchal intolerance of early Christianity. For all their merits in drawing attention to women, the two projects can also be faulted for their biased identity representations. While examining the literature on the VHP and resorting to Said's *Orientalism* in Amenabár's case, my comparative analysis aims to uncover and analyze gender-related conflicts and identity displacements at work within both.

Keywords: the Visible Human Project, Hypatia (*Agora*), Marc Quinn, patriarchy, gender identity crisis, iconicity

Introduction

While so much critical ink has been spilt on identity, especially gender identity, without reaching much of a conclusion, I would like to investigate identity as performance (in Judith Butler's terms)¹ in two vastly different projects, a Spanish English-language film and a US National Library of Medicine anatomo-medical project, whose cognitive ramifications bear on identity issues. I will start my analysis with *Agora* (2009), directed and co-written by Alejandro Amenabár, which ostensibly recuperates an outstanding feminine figure for her active involvement in the agora and the academe alike.

To understand the (controversial) gender iconicity which both projects, despite their different agendas, generate, it is worth noticing, with Benedikt Feldges, that in a pictorial symbol system, icons "acquire characteristic contours through repetition" (2), which moreover distinguish between the icons, and that "depending on the degree of exposure they are granted..., such icons consequently also aggregate semantic depth" (2). In fact, icons "accumulate a pictorial biography with new layers of meaning added by each pictorial narrative in which they appear", so that they "successively aggregate to form sophisticated pictorial terms" which generate together a pictorial vocabulary (Feldges 2). Representing a woman, Hypatia, as a philosopher and mathematician, a free

¹Briefly stated, Judith Butler delineates *performativity* in the context of describing (rather than defining and thus reifying) the body in conjunction with gender, so as to challenge the traditional essentialist view that they are substantive phenomena. On the contrary, she contends, the gendered body exists in and through *the public performance of rules of gender identity*: "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler, "Performative Acts" 523; see also 521, 526–8; Butler, *Gender Trouble* xiv–xv, 32–3, 41–4, 143, 170–80).

thinker and supporter of human rights, in one film (Amenabár's *Agora*) cannot be instantly conducive to the iconicity of either Hypatia or women. Representing Hypatia, alongside a host of other powerful or outstanding women, also in art (such as Judy Chicago's installation *The Dinner Party*), yet also reinforcing the message in various verbal media (such as Judy Chicago's books², let alone feminist writing and teaching) certainly draws attention to that particular woman and more generally to women, gender representation and perhaps also to gender inequity. Furthermore, as we shall see, purporting to visualise the human body as both male and female, as the US National Library of Medicine does with its Visible Human Project, can in principle, at least with some audiences, bring gender identity – and a long tradition of neglect or downright bias – to the fore.

According to Feldges, individual familiarity with visual symbols can, under certain circumstances, be coterminous with *collective visual literacy*, construed not in broad terms, viz. as "a knowledge base that enables comprehension of visual information", but more strictly as "a collective knowledge of icons, emblems, and other generic visual symbols" (2). The two conditions to be met simultaneously for the generation and cultivation of such a collective vocabulary of visual terms are: (1) the dissemination of these pictures to a large audience, and (2) their repeated featuring of "a number of icons, emblems, and other generic symbols, so that audiences can recognize and share in the process of developing their significance" (Feldges 3). No wonder the broadcast medium – the TV and the Internet – acts as the main generator of (inter) national visual literacy. Is gender identity, especially with the aid of its supporting feminist discursive practices both inside and outside the academe, becoming iconic for the turn of the millennium West, or is it merely the site of overt and covert conflicts and tensions?

***Agora* (2009): From Conflictual Gender Identity to Conflictual Ethnic/Religious Identities**

Agora's protagonist, Hypatia, the philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and teacher of Alexandria, did not fall victim to the patriarchal intolerance of Christian zealots without a fight. Although banished from public life, Hypatia resolutely denounced the anti-Jewish policy of the Christian monk-warriors, the Parabalani, and demanded their restriction by the local Roman authorities (*Agora* 01:12:48 – 01:13:59); she did not flee from the Library of Alexandria without trying to save its scrolls from Christian attack; nor did she ever abandon her research pursuits, either. Does Amenabár's film thereby champion a woman (or women?) or gender identity revisionism? Of course, that is not what feature films ought by definition to have on their agenda, yet certain elements in *Agora* do warrant an investigation of its identity politics and, as I hope to demonstrate, bifurcate it into gender and ethnic/religious identities.

In the 1970s, Hypatia (c. 370–415/416) re-emerged from historical oblivion into favourable light courtesy of Judy Chicago's researches: she is one of the 39 guests of *The Dinner Party*³ (1974–79). Indeed, Hypatia has returned in force since 1985, when the American journal of feminist philosophy proudly bearing her name finally appeared as the spin-off of the Society for Women in Philosophy (see Gruen and Wylie). Hypatia's is also a compelling case of the return of the repressed – patriarchy's repressed – for popular consumption, at least with the 2009 release of *Agora*.

In the light of modern attempts at re-inscribing the female philosopher into history, albeit with the aid of truncated testimony from biased late ancient sources (Wider 52, 55–7), Hypatia appears to have been as much the victim of male jealousy of her intellectual accomplishments⁴ and

²Judy Chicago. *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (1979), *Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* (1980), and *Beyond the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975).

³Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* is a collaborative multimedia installation that celebrates female figures excluded from conventional androcentric historiography, whose endeavours, accomplishments and/or legendary powers may serve as an empowering example for women. For an overview of the controversies around the project, see Ciobanu.

⁴Hypatia's writings were lost when the Library of Alexandria was destroyed in 640 (Wider 55).

leadership of Alexandria's Neoplatonic school, as of "political jealousies" (Socrates Scholasticus) between the Roman authorities and Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria. Such tensions Hypatia was blamed – *calumniously* (Socrates Scholasticus) – for fuelling. Perhaps both forms of rivalry become intelligible when framed as gender frictions within kyriarchy (in Schüssler Fiorenza's terms), including the hegemonic religion's branding of other faiths decadent and effeminate⁵.

In modern times, Hypatia's biography has been a matter of historical speculation mostly by prejudiced males since the 19th century⁶ (Wider 21–6, 54–5). With Chicago's *The Dinner Party*⁷ and Amenabár's *Agora*, however, the interest in Hypatia has shifted to a larger audience, whose professional interests are not scholastic, and which goes to the museum or the cinema for pleasure seeking. It is my contention that both media, the museumified multimedia installation and the feature film, provide for the ready iconisation if not of a particular individual (which *Agora* does, however), then at least of a class: suppressed women and their discourse.

Understandably, *Agora* does not aspire to the status of historiographical metafiction, in Linda Hutcheon's terms. Nonetheless, the trailer gestures towards re-establishing historical truth, when it claims that *Agora* presents "a true story" (01:33) about "the courage of a woman" (01:39)⁸ and (in biblical idiom) "the fall of man" (01:43) (<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOXKF1mb9Hc>>), the latter presumably through the fall of Hellenistic Alexandria, i.e. the repository of classical wisdom. Yet, not only does *Agora* fail to provide the revisionist, women-empowering story it may be mistaken for by unwary audiences mindful of the film's politically-correct historicising captions, but it recycles biased old lies in equally biased, romanticised garb, especially as regards Hypatia's death⁹. According to Socrates Scholasticus's *Ecclesiastica historia* (c. 439), one March day during Lent Hypatia was waylaid by a Christian mob¹⁰ led by Peter, Cyril's reader, dragged from her carriage to the church/ Caesareum and stripped naked; they "raze[d] the skin and ren[t] the flesh of her body with sharp shells" (qtd. in Wider 58); her body thus flayed, they quartered it and "took her mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them"¹¹ (EH 7.15). Continues Socrates Scholasticus:

⁵*Agora* intimates no less in the Christian "vassalage" episode (01:25:12–01:28:37) where Orestes (Oscar Isaac), the historical Roman prefect of Alexandria, is forced to listen to Cyril's (Sammy Samir) reading of an excerpt from the First Epistle to Timothy (*attributed* to Paul) precisely on the submission women owed men (1 Tim 2.11–14; *Agora* 01:25:12–01:26:22)!

⁶An exception is language philosopher Fritz Mauthner, whose novel *Hypatia* (1892) "extend[s] his audience's vision of the epistemological value of philosophy, not just to offer a feminist critique of a woman's restricted position as philosopher", thereby "anticipat[ing] contemporary analyses of the relationship between institutions and discourses" (Arens 48).

⁷Judy Chicago positions Hypatia in Wing One as the last of the outstanding ancient women: the embroidered runner depicts Hypatia's death through limb rending and "four crying female faces from youth to old age that represent Hypatia in the Coptic style"

(http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/hypatia.php).

Her portrait after a Coptic image shows a woman whose mouth has been restrained by a harness-like band which loops into Hypatia's initial

(http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/image.php?i=13&image=476&b=ps).

For Chicago, Hypatia is, emblematically, the muted woman – or perhaps the strong woman forever silenced.

⁸"One woman – a legend – ahead of her time, stood to unite mankind" (*Agora* trailer 00:22–00:30). "Mankind" re-instates women's invisibility!

⁹My insistence on the film's historicity derives from certain scenes which indicate historical documentation. Thus, the Serapeum episode where Hypatia rejects Orestes' advances (*Agora* 00:24:20–00:24:55) draws upon Damascius (ll. 6–32, qtd. in Wider 53), the biographer of Hypatia's alleged husband, Isidorus the philosopher. For a poetic fictionalisation cum gender-revisionist account of Hypatia's death, see Molinaro.

¹⁰Wider (57) speaks of "a mob of Christian monks" that killed Hypatia "in a vicious and blood-thirsty way".

¹¹The translation available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.x.xv.html> omits the flaying detail, unlike the one provided in Wider (58). Likewise, the 1854 *Ecclesiastical History of Socrates* glosses over the exact manner of "murder[ing] her [Hypatia] with shells" (349). While the URL of Christian Classics Ethereal

"This affair brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril, but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort"¹².

Who would expect a doctrinal account to fully expose to prejudicial publicity the very institution whose encomium it writes and which sponsors (on pain of banning) the enterprise?

What could Amenabár's romanticised version of Hypatia's death possibly contribute to my concern with the conflicts and crisis of gender identity? After all, *Agora* has successfully made the historical Alexandrian female philosopher its protagonist. How could the politically sanitised demise of the heroine bear on *identity* issues? To answer this, let us review Amenabár's script. Davus (Max Minghella), her former slave and, unbeknownst to her, loving admirer, humanely smothers Hypatia (Rachel Weisz) to circumvent the ignominious death by stoning that the Parabalani are preparing for her¹³. Why did Amenabár shy away from using violent special effects for gore to depict her death as reported in some early sources?¹⁴ I would read such reticence along with another *Agora* oddity: the Parabalani/Christians are acted by racially marked actors – such as Galilee-born Ashraf Barhom (Ammonius), Jerusalem-born Sammy Samir (Cyril) or London-born Clint Dyer (Hierax) – seemingly for the sake of historical accuracy. However, the cast for historically dark-skinned personages, including Jesus, does not follow similar lines in other recent productions. For instance, of the largely Italian cast in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), a film which purportedly restores the historical local color by recourse to Aramaic, only two Temple guards have "Arab" names, Adel Bakri and (Tunisian-born) Abel Jafri. It is my contention that despite its efforts to secure Hypatia her place in the 21st century imaginary, "Agora" succeeds better at restoring conflict as the critical point where identity – beyond gender identity – is staked.

To state it otherwise, "Agora" implicitly uses Hypatia and gender identity to insinuate a more crucial form of identity crisis in our times, rather than hers alone: ethnic identity, with a bearing on the (re)configuration of the Western imaginary of who the enemy is after 9/11. Why do the Parabalani's attacks on the Jews ("Agora" 00:58:45 – 01:00:19; 01:11:23 – 01:12:50), through the ploy of historically verisimilar costuming, head-gear and complexion of the actors, rather smack of the War on Terror rhetoric of here's-what-the-Arab-out-there-is-up-to-if-we-left-him-to-his-devices? (By contrast, Hypatia's mathematician slave, Aspasius (Homayoun Ershadi), has the features of the "tame", understanding and supportive Oriental.) Why do many shots juxtapose the fair-skinned, white-robed polytheistic Alexandrians – clean-shaven men, yet "Oriental"-looking women – with the bearded, dark-skinned, turbaned Christians and black-robed Parabalani ("Agora" 00:07:00 – 00:07:48; 00:28:10 – 00:31:20; 00:31:50 – 00:32:44), including bishop Cyril (00:58:29 – 00:58:39), even as Hypatia's students are also shown several times to be ethnically and racially diverse (00:03:26 – 00:03:32)? Why are the various clashes between Christians/Parabalani and non-Christians likely to tip the balance of "terrorism" in the direction of the former (the fire trial, 00:08:35 – 00:09:19; caption, 00:56:53 – 00:57:01; attack on Orestes, 01:30:04) even when the conflict is started by the latter (Serapeum custodians, 00:26:05 – 00:26:36; the Jews in retaliation for the Sabbath attack, 01:07:17 – 01:09:00)? Why does the trailer focus on violent clashes, show Cyril's

Library renders Philip Schaff's involvement implicit, neither of the other sources identifies the English translator.

¹²See Drake (esp. 34–6) for a balanced account of the rise of extremist Christian militancy by the end of the 4th century in response to Emperor Julian the Apostate's rescinding of the Constantinian settlement, which provides the context for understanding in part Hypatia's death.

¹³Originally, the hermit-warriors sadistically contemplate flaying Hypatia, consistent with Socrates Scholasticus's account: "She'll scream alright when we skin her alive" (*Agora* 01:50:41 – 01:50:42); however, Davus averts such torturous demise by invoking the anti-feminist issue of polluting blood (*Agora* 01:50:50); another Parabalano advises stoning instead (01:50:55 – 01:50:56).

¹⁴The final caption series provides a half-historicising epilogue about Hypatia's lost works (*Agora* 01:53:59 – 01:54:06) and demise: the body being dragged through the streets, then burnt (01:53:39–01:53:45).

ominous promise to "purify" Alexandria against the raising of the Bible and followed by the image of a Jew being pushed off a cliff (00:40 – 00:45), and quote at length Hypatia's admonition to the council that unless it acts now, the Parabalani "will continue to do the same over and over again" until Alexandria has been depopulated – uttered against more images of violence perpetrated by "Arab"-looking males (00:56 – 01:09)? On the face of it, the "terrorists" are identified in the film, accurately from a historical perspective, as early Christians – to the dismay of literal-minded Christian congregations watching *Agora*. However, the Parabalani's quasi-inexistent headquarters¹⁵ elide this group not with Christians but with bushmen, i.e. people beyond the pale of "civilisation" as represented by the Alexandrian philosophers, whose library the Parabalani storm and turn upside down (00:51:02 – 00:52:52, esp. 00:52:19 – 00:52:33). Coincidence? *Day Night Day Night* (2006), written and directed by Julia Loktev, features as a would-be suicide bomber an anonymous 19-year-old woman (Luisa Williams, born Luisa Colon) whose non-descript ethnic identity, from facial features to accent, nevertheless echoes the typical Western stereotype of the Muslim "Oriental" (woman) as critiqued by Edward Said¹⁶.

Are racial and religious displacements necessary in a film that purportedly recuperates the voice and work of Hypatia as both a model of ethics and a strong woman? Arguably, with the re-inscription of Hypatia into the *mainstream* discourse of knowledge through her mathematical and astronomical research (and her circumscription within the Euclidian geometry of the council room to speak up for spiritual freedom), she is made to espouse a *modern* Euro-American identity based on the Enlightenment myth¹⁷ of rationality-for-progress. My contention is that Amenabár's Hypatia stands for Western civilisation at odds with the fanatical religious zeal and homicidal deeds of the Parabalani/fringe people/terrorists. She articulates her ethics, "I believe in philosophy" (*Agora* 01:21:11 – 01:21:12), in response to a councillor's provocation (in the context of coerced Christian conversion) that Hypatia "believe[s] in nothing" (01:21:00 – 01:21:09). Read rather: "I believe in reason, science, and human progress and freedom" – the Enlightenment project extolled by Habermas yet found wanting by postmodern philosophers like Lyotard. Contrariwise, the Parabalani flaunt a destructive ethics, encapsulated in Ammonius's answer to Davus's frightened ethical musing after massacring the Jews of Alexandria:

Davus: Do you ever think we're mistaken? ...

Ammonius: We're still alive. Why? Because it was His will to save us from the [Jews'] stones. God wants us to do here what we do. (*Agora* 01:17:58 – 01:18:00, 01:18:48 – 01:19:01)

Such *argumentum ad verecundiam* – so frequently deployed in Christian and more generally in religious discourse to legitimise oppression of the other – thus forestalls any ethical reconsideration of the Parabalani's savage acts to ensure religious conformity.

¹⁵The Parabalani cart the dead to the funeral pyre in a desert place on the shore by a fortress (*Agora* 01:17:10 – 01:17:58). In fact, *Agora* never indicates where/what the Parabalani's "headquarters" might be – apart from the church-converted Serapeum (01:36:40 – 01:37:04; 01:42:03 – 01:42:25). Early in the film, Ammonius preaches God to the mob gathered in the agora right in front of the Serapeum (00:15:00 – 00:16:38).

¹⁶As the Russian American director confesses, her idea of the Times Square threat came from a Russian newspaper article about a young female Chechen suicide bomber walking down a main street in Moscow; Loktev, however, was interested "to make a film that ... isn't about how something looks from the outside but feels from the inside" (qtd. in <http://www.mediasanctuary.org/event/day-night-day-night-w-filmmaker-julia-loktev>). Nonetheless, the unnamed protagonist's vague, though "Oriental" identity in *DNDN*, alongside her mute "terrorist" engagement, arguably gives vent to the American fears of "the enemy within" in the wake of 9/11.

¹⁷My explanation resonates in part with Killings's; however, his hinges on how some Enlightenment thinkers, e.g. Voltaire, deployed Damascius's account of Hypatia's death to craft a discourse of Christianity's hostility to the freedom of enquiry (Killings 52–3).

Understandably, repelling the righteous thinker – once recuperated *into* and *for* the Western mainstream – cannot go as far as showing her being flayed in punishment for being the “witch” (*Agora* 01:27:00; 01:30:47; 01:37:05; 01:49:50; 01:50:56) and “whore” (01:37:05; 01:50:31 – 01:50:33; 01:50:36) whose scheming makes a Hamletian indecisive Orestes waver in wholeheartedly pledging his allegiance to the church. For all her feminine allure, *Agora*'s Hypatia is masculinised to become the mouthpiece of Western rationality fighting against terror and obscurantism, the always already external(ised) other of the West. Her embrace of philosophy as the discourse of truth which by its nature allows, even requires, questioning, unlike the discourse of faith (01:45:10 – 01:45:21), as she warns bishop Synesius of Cyrene (Rupert Evans), her former student, nods to the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion – the distrust of all grand narratives (according to Lyotard) – while def(lecting) from the political towards a philosophy of truth seemingly beyond socio-political imbroglios. Yet in the wake of 9/11 and the War on Terror (another Holy War?), it is hard to distinguish shades of (ir)rationality from geopolitical and religious skirmish.

The Visible Human Project (VHP)

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1.27 NKJV). So did the US National Library of Medicine: Visible Male and Visible Female it created the Visible Humans of its much acclaimed project – the “macroscopic” twin of the “microscopic” Human Genome Project (Waldby, *VHP* 6–7). On the face of it, introducing a scientific project like the VHP by a biblical quote is preposterous. Yet the contents bear such striking similarity as virtually to allow the analogy, though, I must insist, not in male-*and*-female terms. The VHP is demonstrably cognate rather with the other Genesis version (Gen 2.7, 2.18, 2.21–22) and the more habitually quoted one, whether in religious or secular contexts, the latter often at the level of implicit, taken for granted assumptions: “Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (Gen 2.22).

The Visible Human Project¹⁸, with its many applications (see <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/applications.html>), has been hailed as a state-of-the-art learning and training device which permits studying the human body (male and female) thanks to quasi-realistic imaging techniques and animation software, yet at a remove from any physical inconveniences – odours, microbiological threat, cadaver supply and timing dissection strictures – as traditionally encountered by medical students. “Today’s high-tech version of the hospital basement cadaver is the visible human project” (Johnson 145). This is so because the actual cadavers were scanned (both fresh and after cryosectioning) and the resulting images digitised and archived into a virtual anatomical atlas that permits “reshuffling” of individual images as well as “fly-through” animations; various applications simulate body movement, fluid dynamics, trauma and surgery. Furthermore, the data’s re-use is virtually inexhaustible, unlike a cadaver’s. Here is the NLM official presentation of the VHP, worth quoting in full:

¹⁸“The Visible Human Project is an outgrowth of the NLM’s 1986 Long-Range Plan. It is the creation of complete, anatomically detailed, three-dimensional representations of the normal male and female human bodies... The long-term goal of the Visible Human Project is to produce a system of knowledge structures that will transparently link visual knowledge forms to symbolic knowledge formats such as the names of body parts” (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible>). “*The Visible Human data sets are designed to serve as a reference for the study of human anatomy, to serve as a set of common public domain data for testing medical imaging algorithms, and to serve as a test bed and model for the construction of network accessible image libraries.* The Visible Human data sets have been applied to a wide range of educational, diagnostic, treatment planning, virtual reality, artistic, mathematical, and industrial uses by nearly 2,000 licensees [organisations and individuals] in 48 countries. Several applications have been developed at the National Library of Medicine or under the direction of the National Library of Medicine” (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/visible_human.html; emphasis added; see Waldby, *VHP* 16–17).

The Visible Human Male data set, released in November 1994, consists of MRI, CT, and anatomical images. Axial MRI images of the head and neck, and longitudinal sections of the rest of the body were obtained at 4mm intervals. The MRI images are 256 by 256 pixel resolution with each pixel made up of 12 bits of gray tone. The CT data consist of axial CT scans of the entire body taken at 1mm intervals at a pixel resolution of 512 by 512 with each pixel made up of 12 bits of gray tone. The approximately 7.5 megabyte axial anatomical images are 2048 pixels by 1216 pixels, with each pixel being 33mm in size, and defined by 24 bits of color. The anatomical cross-sections are at 1mm intervals to coincide with the CT images. There are 1,871 cross-sections for both CT and anatomical images. The complete male data set is approximately 15 gigabytes.

Higher resolution axial anatomical images of the male data set were made available in August 2000. Seventy-millimeter still photographs taken during the cryosectioning procedure were digitized at a pixel resolution of 4096 pixels by 2700 pixels. These images, each approximately 32 megabytes in size, are available for all 1,871 male color cryosections.

The Visible Human Female data set, released in November, 1995, has the same characteristics as the The Visible Human Male. However, the axial anatomical images were obtained at 0.33 mm intervals. Spacing in the "Z" dimension was reduced to 0.33mm in order to match the 0.33mm pixel sizing in the "X-Y" plane. As a result, developers interested in three-dimensional reconstructions are able to work with cubic voxels. There are 5,189 anatomical images in the Visible Human Female data set. The data set size is approximately 40 gigabytes. (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/visible_human.html)

Highly sanitised "cadaver" handling for educational-training purposes is thus possible because the Visible Humans are mere *data sets of 15, 32 or 40 GB*. (Medical schools and hospitals also use simulators to give the students and staff a "real" feel of the body with the aid of built-in VHP, actually VM, applications.)

Furthermore, VHP users implicitly learn from the official NLM website the traditional anatomical *obliteration* of the identity of the male and female individuals whose cadavers were turned into the digital anatomical atlas. The first VHP cadaver belonged to a convicted criminal, 39-year-old Joseph Paul Jernigan, who had donated his body to science prior to his execution. By contrast, all that is known about the second cadaver, that of a 59-year-old anonymous "Maryland housewife", are the death cause, heart attack, and the circumstances of cadaver donation, a likely donation to science by the woman herself yet, according to an unconfirmed rumor, a bequest explicitly to the VHP by her husband (Waldby, *VHP* 1, 13, 56). These Caucasian cadavers were later joined by that of yet another anonymous premenopausal woman (Johnson 145)¹⁹.

Criticism of the VHP has addressed several salient factors, such as the *ideological violence* of this anatomical project (Waldby, "Virtual Anatomy") and its creation of "impossible anatomies" which, as "technically constituted and corporeally interstitial" new "models for the body-in-itself", will "produc[e] a set of norms that is in excess" and reconfigure biomedicine's power relations (Thacker, "Lacerations"). Other critics have also objected to the modern culture's laws of intelligibility for their

¹⁹After the public release of Adam and Eve, as the Visible Male and Visible Female are dubbed both within and without the VHP (Waldby, *VHP* 21), the NLM planned to image a premenopausal female body, as well as an infant or foetus; had the latter been done, it would have made "the Visible Family a viable reproductive unit" (Cartwright, qtd. in Waldby, *VHP* 18). I cannot overlook the irony of Cartwright's remark, and complete it with a personal observation: that such a new, secularised yet salvific Holy Family would still feature Joseph – what an uncanny nominal coincidence! – as the more valuable member than the nameless woman in tracing human genealogy and/as worth, on the pattern of the Tree of Jesse, which traces Jesus's Davidic genealogy through his adoptive father Joseph (Matt 1.1–18) all the way back to Adam, the son of God (Lk 3.23–38). Ironically, ADAM is also the acronym of the *Animated Dissection of Anatomy for Medicine* programs based on the VHP archive, e.g. *ADAM Interactive Anatomy* (1997) and *ADAM: The Nine Month Miracle*, with their essentialist conceptualisation pre-eminently of the female body (and sex organs) as meant for reproduction (Moore and Clarke 71, 85).

denial of *aisthesis* as the body's inherently irreducible differend (Curtis). While the substitution of pixels and voxels for "flesh and blood" is merely a high-tech travesty of the historical transcodings into 2D representations in anatomy books and 3D wax or plastic models, there also emerge here cognitive dangers: pixellation which blurs the vision (at best) and addiction to the virtual interface to the effect of rendering the interface cognitively transparent (at worst). In her comprehensive critical study of the VHP, Catherine Waldby broaches the thin disguise of historical anatomical techniques and cognitive patterns, such as the very connection with the criminal (Jernigan's) or socially marginal (the anonymous women's) body, offered to scientists to be literally used up through dissection, or the nonchalant destruction of the marginal's body to better know and heal the bodies of the socially well off; or the disturbing cognitive and eschatological implications of the virtual "whole" - body revenants.

Yet what strikes me is the popularity of the Visible Male in virtual applications²⁰, with the attendant always already "natural" synecdochical substitution of *human* for *male* in labelling²¹, despite the higher resolution of the Visible Female data (Waldby, *VHP* 15, 17). Perhaps the first step was taken by the NLM itself: its webpage link to the VHP (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/onlineexhibitions.html>, as of 17.05.2011; <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/digitalprojects.html>, as of 17.05.2013) features the "generic" *human* icon as recognisably *male* through both arm musculature and adlocutionary gesture²². Furthermore, the VHP webpage *icon* turns out to be a color cryosection through the thorax of the Visible Male (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/photos.html>). Likewise, two application projects masterminded by the NLM, AnatLine²³ and the AnatQuest Project²⁴, acknowledge – or do not (the latter) – using images from the VM data set: "AnatLine, in its prototype phase, stores images processed from anatomical structures of the Visible Human male thorax... Pull-down menus allow the user to select the gender and media type of the image. For the purposes of this prototype, only digital color images relating to the male specimen thorax are available (<http://anatquest.nlm.nih.gov/Anatline/GenInfo/index.html>)".

²⁰See also Johnson for a critique of how the minimally invasive surgical simulator replicates the traditional anatomical outlook on the sexes. The surgical simulator uses for its model, at least in part, the Visible Male data set (Johnson 142). Modern simulators have "gendered understandings of the body built into them" (Johnson 144) which "simultaneously represent and reproduce" society's "underlying values and understandings" (146) as *legitimate*; simulators also reproduce certain medical practices as legitimate (Johnson 145).

²¹"Fly-through" and "melt-through" animation demos of the Visible Male (misnomer: Visible Human!) data are available at and downloadable from <http://collab.nlm.nih.gov/webcastsandvideos/visiblehumanvideos/visiblehumanvideos.html>.

All VHP samples on the NLM project page actually use the VM data set (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_gallery.html).

²²See Harcourt (44) on the iconography of the postures in Vesalius's *Fabrica's* illustrations, whose "normative nature is implicit in their antique form", e.g. the "Marchese del Vasto *en écorché*, which reproduces a common Roman type (the *adlocutio*, a mode of imperial military address) as transmitted through Titian's portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos, and the ninth figure in the mythological series, which must derive from a model closely related to the so-called Capitoline Antinous".

²³AnatLine is "a prototype system consisting of an anatomical image database and an online browser developed at the National Library of Medicine" (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible>).

²⁴The overall goal of the AnatQuest Project (<http://anatquest.nlm.nih.gov/Anatline/BodyMap4/BodyMap.html>) is "to explore and implement new visually and compelling ways to bring anatomic images from the Visible Human dataset to the general public" (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible>), yet its images come, if unacknowledged, from the VM.

Equally striking, for me, is the persistence of universalising cognitive habits whereby the (male) white Western individual is presented to the world as genotypical – which denies racial differences²⁵ (Moore and Clarke 71, 86) in a country whose infamous “one-drop rule” used to describe racial identity in divisive terms of blood “purity” and, once enforced as law in the early 20th century, effectively denied civic rights to the emancipated black. And this is just to look at things in black and white, race-wise. As Moore and Clarke (62) cogently argue, digital dissemination of distinctly white Western body models and cognitive technologies of “human” anatomy ultimately *globalises* Western bodies and epistemology²⁶.

Phenotypically too, the VHP is deeply flawed in its presentation of Jernigan’s digitised body scans as the Visible Male, considering not just the information loss characteristic of the entire project through the cutting of the cryogenised cadavers into four blocks each to be fitted into the sectioning machine (Waldby, *VHP* 14). The VM data set is inherently incomplete and thus scientifically misleading since Jernigan undertook several organ removal operations during his lifetime, most illuminating for the project being not tooth extraction or appendicectomy but the surgical removal of one testicle. The typical man – young, healthy, white and Western – is but a “half” man, considering the paramount importance attached to the *visible* male sexual organs from anatomical representation to Freud’s psychoanalysis! As Waldby (*VHP* 17–18) and Moore and Clarke (78) wryly note, the detail has passed conveniently hushed, as has the high resolution Visible Female data set because of the woman’s post-menopausal condition – post-procreative, hence post-normal!

Nor is the VHP an exceptional case of how the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy shapes human anatomical identities scientifically. Moore and Clarke’s analysis of cyberanatomies reveals “re-media-ted”²⁷ continuities [of information in the genital anatomies project presented in digitised form, e.g. on CD-ROMs and the Internet] with older visual cultures” (61) which stress *heteronormativity*, “the female body as reproductive and not sexual, and the biomedical expert as the proper and dominant mediator between humans and their own bodies” (87). That such expert mediation is not exclusively a blessing is suggested by Emily Martin’s saddening conclusion to the comparative analysis of destruction-regeneration processes – the stomach and uterus lining, and egg and sperm production – as described in anatomy books in the 1980s (“Medical Metaphors”), on the one hand, and educated vs. undereducated women’s description of menstruation (“Science and Women’s Bodies”; “Medical Metaphors”), on the other: masculinist science inoculates us from an early school age with positive images about male anatomy and physiology (with inherently “masculine” traits) and negative images about the female ones, as well as being silent over similarities of a “feminine”

²⁵Curtis, Waldby (“Virtual Anatomy”), and Johnson fail to broach the import of racial and social intersectionality implicit in the choice of cadavers for scientific constructions of the “human” – in fact, Caucasian male – specimen.

²⁶True, *ADAM Interactive Anatomy* (1997), an application of the VHP, purports to be inclusive of difference beyond the fairly generous Language Lexicon options: it accommodates racial difference through the skin color, facial characteristics and hair options for the body model used in the session – Black, Asian, olive. Nonetheless, such racial adaptation fails to alter the body too, “thus suggesting that race is only surface” (Moore and Clarke 71). A similar skin tone option (alone) features in *ADAM: The Nine Month Miracle* (73).

²⁷Moore and Clarke’s “re-media-tion” draws on Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept; for the latter, *remediation* describes “the ways in which any historically situated media always re-mediate prior media, and thus also re-mediate prior modes of social and cultural modes of communication” (Thacker, *Biomedica* 8). Any mediation of the body, in this sense, renders the body the object of communication; however, with Thacker (9), I am wary of Bolter and Grusin’s ontological distinction between body and technology. For Thacker (10), “the body as a remediation also means that it is caught ... between the poles of immediacy [i.e. the phenomenological concept of ‘embodiment’ or lived experience] and hypermediacy [i.e. framed by sets of knowledge on the body, including medicine and science]”; “the zone of the body-as-media” is *perhaps* lodged within the “incommensurability between ... embodiment and technoscience”.

sort which would jeopardise the androcentric heteronormative model of "human" identity (see also Hird 36–43).

By way of verification of the gender and racial identity bias – the traditionally concealed crisis of identity representation – in contemporary discursive practices of human anatomy, let us consider a series of works by British artist Marc Quinn. Most clearly related to the VHP, both for the historical connection between the two human projects and for their view of identity, is the genomic portrait of the scientist who led the British arm of the Human Genome Project research team. *Sir John Edward Sulston* (2001) was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, London, with the support of the Wellcome Trust Sanger Centre, Cambridge, to celebrate would-be Nobel laureate (2002) Sir John Sulston, the centre's founder-director (1992–2000) and an outstanding geneticist. The NPG website notes that Sulston's "is the first entirely conceptual portrait to be acquired by the Gallery" (<http://www.npg.org.uk/about/press/genomic-portrait.php>). What *concept* underlies the portrait, then? Here is the "sitter":

The portrait is the result of a standard laboratory procedure, transposed into the setting of the Gallery. Does this change of viewpoint alter our perception of the object, and of the techniques that gave rise to it? The portrait contains a small fraction of my DNA, so it's only a detail of the whole, though there is ample information to identify me. Each spot in the portrait is a colony grown from a single bacterial cell containing a segment of my DNA. (John Sulston, <http://www.npg.org.uk/about/press/genomic-portrait.php>)

And here is the artist:

What I like about my portrait of John Sulston is that, even though in artistic terms it seems to be abstract, in fact it is the most realist portrait in the Portrait Gallery since it carries the actual instructions that led to the creation of John. It is a portrait of his parents, and every ancestor he ever had back to the beginning of Life in the universe. I like that it makes the invisible visible, and brings the inside out. With the mapping of the Human Genome, ... we are the first generation to be able to see the instructions for making ourselves. This is a portrait of our shared inheritance and communality as well as of one person.

(Marc Quinn, <http://www.npg.org.uk/about/press/genomic-portrait.php>)

Even more to the point I'm making in this paper is Dr Charles Saumarez Smith, director of the National Portrait Gallery:

One of the great strengths of this work is that it asks the questions "What is a portrait?" just as, in considering DNA and the Human Genome, one is faced with the question "What is a person?" Marc's portrait of John Sulston represents the ultimate integration of the sitter's identity, in a genetic sense, with the material of the portrait, allowing for a discussion regarding conceptual art practices. (<http://www.npg.org.uk/about/press/genomic-portrait.php>)

Indeed, what's (in) a portrait? The NPG website fails to mention the DNA source, even as the Gallery's director sounds so enthusiastic ontologico-epistemologically about this portrait. Not a fallen hair, nor nail clippings but Sulston's sperm (van Rijsingen 188) has supplied the DNA (allegedly, the alpha and omega of one's identity²⁸) – superb, though *invisible*, reinforcement of what constitutes one's gender/human identity through genetic material! The portrait thus participates, perhaps unwittingly, in a compensatory move able to restore the Visible Male's half-manhood to full potency and all-human representativity. Had Marie Skłodowska-Curie (1864–1934) been living now, would her pioneering research on radioactivity, with its medical applications studied first under her

²⁸ See Hird (43–9) for a critique of the excessive controlling power bestowed on genes by mainstream scientific and media accounts, blurred as their vision has been by traditional gendered assumptions.

direction, and ensuing two Nobel Prizes have earned her a *genomic* portrait and, if so, would it have been displayed in a portrait gallery²⁹, let alone having a DNA source comparable to Sulston's?

Indeed, Sulston's is not the only genomic portrait by Marc Quinn. The artist has also created the *DNA Garden* (2002), a set of 77 plates of cloned DNA coming from 75 plants and 2 humans (male and female?)³⁰, and *Family Portrait (Cloned DNA)* (2002), whose DNA comes from all four members of Quinn's family. Nor is DNA the only organic "pigment" ever used by Quinn to probe artistically "what it means to materially exist in the world" (Quinn, <http://www.marcquinn.com/exhibitions>). In 1991, Quinn started his *Self* series – life-size models of his head cast in his own frozen blood (encased in a Perspex display window fitted with refrigeration equipment). The 1991 version has been purchased by Saatchi; the 2001 is now in the National Portrait Gallery, London. Yet the series has gradually moved away from organic experiments. In 2008, Quinn created *Carbon Cycle*, a chromed bronze *memento mori* (literalising the pushing-up-the-daisies idiom!) that aesthetically hearkens back to the Green Man motif in its disgorging-of-vegetation version; in 2009 he cast *Frozen Head*, an 18-carat gold version of the 1991 *Self* that is rather consistent with traditional masculinist ambitions of immortal fame!

Beyond the ego gratifying self-portrait series which use oneself³¹ for raw matter, not just as the "sitter", Marc Quinn has also created sculptures of people with disabilities. The idea struck him on a visit to the British Museum, on seeing the damaged ancient sculptures on display. Hence he sculpted the 2000 series, whose *Alison Lapper and Parys*, *Helen Smith*, *Catherine Long*, *Alexandra Westmoquette*, *Selma Mustajbasic*, and *Stuart Penn* are white marble pieces which follow the ancient canon of classical (female) beauty and (male) dynamism, despite the sitter's infirmity. Nevertheless, *Tom Yendell* transgresses canonical constraints of harmony: the male sitter's body looks positively grotesque in Bakhtin's sense, as does the pregnant body of the phocomelic artist-sitter in *Alison Lapper (8 Months)*, a marble statue that once occupied the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square (Sept. 2005 – Oct. 2007). Indeed, the very names of the disabled sitters suggest that Quinn has moved beyond ethnic homogeneity, even as the racial unmarkedness of the sitters' faces, at least in the official photos on the artist's website, belies it.

Just as ambiguous a treatment of inherited ideas of gender identity and roles receives Quinn's Sphinx series (2005–2007) featuring British model Kate Moss. The white painted bronzes challenge as much the tradition of marble sculpture as that of what white women can be represented to do in high art, even as the contorted bodily poses are appended names alluding to Greek mythology – ultimately hegemonic white culture at its most patriarchal. From *Sphinx (Siren)*, 2005 – reduplicated as *Sphinx (Laocoon)*, 2006, and the 18-carat gold miniature *Siren* (2008) – to *Sphinx (Caryatid)*, 2006 – itself reduplicated as *Microcosmos (Endless Column)*, 2008 – and from *Sphinx (Venus)*, 2006 to *Sphinx (Victory)*, 2006, *Sphinx (Fortuna)*, 2006, and *Sphinx (Nike)*, 2007, the series shows Kate Moss (b. 1974) as classically young, beautiful and serene, yet performing her "artistic" identity – as envisioned by Quinn – through an acrobatics never associated with "respectable" white women or canonical art, and sometimes virtually impossible in physical terms, e.g. the *Siren* and *Venus* postures.

To sum up my overview of the Marc Quinn works, can we confidently state that his impressive palette of sitters and postures has successfully challenged the traditional identitary game which posits the white male as the paragon of humanity? Quinn has certainly not been complacently/

²⁹Indeed, Marie Curie, the first female professor at the Sorbonne, is interred in the Panthéon, yet only since 1995!

³⁰*DNA Garden* (2002) aims, in Quinn's own words, at a "re-enactment" of the Garden of Eden Genesis myth through the single-cell central image of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504) as the origin of life (Anker et al. 292).

³¹*Lucas* (2001; Tate Liverpool) is a sculpture of Quinn's son's head made from the baby's placenta and umbilical cord (requiring refrigeration equipment).

normatively masculine in his choice of subject matter and aesthetic models or techniques. Nonetheless, the abiding sense of an inherently masculine prescription of identity haunts these works, especially apparent in the clash between title and composition in the Sphinx series and in Sulston's genomic portrait. And the whiteness of marble or of painted bronze is a tell-tale sign of the whiteness of "humanity". Quinn's works still gesture towards the Western crisis of gender and race identity in representation.

Conclusion

My comparative analysis suggests that these postmodern works' attempt, if not agenda, to *re-store her in the story* – to recover *herstory* from the shards of *history* after the advent of postmodern suspicion – through gender iconicity, is neither fully successful nor methodologically flawless. If, as both H. R. Jauss and feminist writers argue, meaning is not inherent in the artwork or image but is constructed – partially and provisionally, as Elisabeth Grosz cautions (qtd. in Meskimmon 384) – through the "reader's" interaction with the work, then *Agora* and The Visible Human Project may as much cater for the feminist concern to recover women in history and scientific representation, as they undermine such politico-epistemological agenda by reinforcing traditional malestream identity stereotypes which elide men with humankind (the VHP) or displace Western conceptualisations of self and other from male vs. female to Western vs. non-Western and civilised/rational/enlightened vs. barbaric/irrational/narrow-minded³² (*Agora*). Such interpretative interaction with remediated gender icons, moreover, is necessarily framed by Western socio-cultural presuppositions undergirded by the current politics of representation (both in a particular medium and at large) and resonates with larger political concerns within the social. In the case of *Agora*, the political context and spectatorial familiarity with related films further complicate *herstory* through its embedding within a heterological discourse whose own *history* extols hegemonic Euro-American phallogocentrism. In the case of the VHP, the politically correct explicit agenda of the US National Library of Medicine is belied at every turn in both internal and external applications that draw upon the centuries-old equation of male with human in the normative representation of the body.

³² For such conceptual overlaps, see Cixous (63–4).

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