

OVERGADEN.

Oreet Ashery
Party for Freedom
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Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album: Geert Wilders Triptych*, 2013, video still

The Unfinished Revolution: Oreet Ashery's Party for Freedom

By TJ Demos

In "Geert Wilders Triptych", track 8 of Oreet Ashery's hour-long video *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album* (2013), a man is shown chasing a woman around the grass, grunting "Geert" as they go. Both are naked and on all fours. Tracking his female prey in this bizarre tale of sexual experimentation and political theatre – "Geert" references Dutch rightwing politician Geert Wilders – the man kicks like a donkey, and eventually succeeds in grabbing her leg and bringing her down face-first on the ground, as a dog looks on and appears miffed by the curious display. Reminiscent of the scene of the nude chase in *The Idiots*, Lars von Trier's 1998 comedy-drama film in which characters attempt to get in touch with their inner-idiot in a related critical acting-out of European libertarianism-become-libertinage, Ashery's ribald allegory of humans-become-animals offers a subversive mimicry of Wilders'

extreme-right Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom). As such, her moving-image work, constituting ten interconnected tracks, reveals what Fredric Jameson would call the "political unconscious" of rightwing political discourse, exposing its underlying "problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production."¹

Coming after two years of research, Ashery's video interweaves complex elements of experimental performance, nude theatre and political satire, punk music and trash aesthetics, in order to deconstruct, via cutting parody, the paradoxical ideology that joins the freedoms of sexual transgression to the xenophobic and murderous intolerance of outsiders. Some of these concerns follow Ashery's related recent performances and interventions, including her *Naked as a Jaybird*

(2011) for which a group of figures stripped naked in a supermarket in London, exploring connections between biopolitics and bare life in relation to migration, citizenship, and outsider status; and her *Monkey Bum Factory* (2011) which continued this engagement in Bourges, France, through further public displays of nudity and bodily abjection, doing so in relation to diverse historical precedents of body art, the use of humans as paint brushes, and sexual politics by such artists as Yves Klein and Annie Sprinkle.

One key reference for this cycle of works, and which is particularly significant for Ashery's *Party for Freedom* video, is Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1918/1921 play *Mystery-Bouffe*, which relays the story of the Clean and the Unclean, updated by Ashery, as per the Russian playwright's wishes, to the political context of the moment. In her creative appropriation, the play is made to respond to the current-day struggle between European neo-conservatism and the perceived threat of the influx of Islam, contextualized by the populist demagoguery of racist nationalism, and the recent murders of outspoken politico Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh, events definitional to Holland in the years following 9/11 and the politicized rhetoric around terrorism, western values, and the clash of civilizations. The video also explores connections between the current-day defense of freedom and its relation to earlier twentieth-century movements around nudism and sexual emancipation. It does so by drawing together a diverse range of references, recalling the history of counter-cultural naturalist movements, select moments in body art (such as that of the Viennese Actionists, who worked through the trauma of WWII via controversial, staged rituals of bodily punishment), and visceral musical forms like punk, introduced in the video by those parts of the soundtrack written and performed by the all-girl band Woolf. In each case, aesthetic forms – such as DIY video, avant-garde nude performance, naturalist photography, and hardcore music – are shown to be highly unstable politically, all overdetermined sites of paradoxical values.

The discourse of freedom is one such conflicted site, which can join individual liber-

ties to vengeful intolerance, especially as they come together in the Party for Freedom, founded in 2005 by Geert Wilders and now the third largest in the Netherlands. Wilders developed his model of populist neoliberalism and anti-multiculturalism following the highly mediated murders of van Gogh and Fortuyn, who had recently joined libertarianism, nationalism, and anti-immigrant (and particularly anti-Islamic) ideology in an agenda that has defined Dutch politics in the era of "War on Terror" globalization. The video's track 3, for instance, includes appropriated media footage of Fortuyn speaking at a publicity event in Almere (a planned city near Amsterdam), where he discusses his commitment to "fighting Islam" and his support for "enlightenment" and "humanism." "Imagine the army of Ali Baba, here in Europe!," he explains to a roaring crowd of supporters. As a response, he contends that the "guest cannot take over the house," which has become a motto of the Dutch right, as its position neatly summarises anti-immigrant legislation and the fantasy of controlling Holland's and Europe's borders in the name of its rightful property owners. As Dutch anthropologist Peter van der Veer points out, "the Dutch feel that they have recently freed themselves from Christian conservatism [during struggles in the 1960s] only to be confronted again by Islamic injunctions [in the 1990s and 2000s]."² That said, it was the politically-motivated murders that brought this discourse to national attention: Fortuyn was killed in 2002 in Hilversum by animal and environmental rights activist Volkert van der Graaf (who wanted to stop Fortuyn from treating Muslims as scapegoats), and his violent death, a week before the elections, catalyzed a huge win for the right. Although Fortuyn was a staunch Marxist in the 1960s (his first job was lecturer in Marxist sociology at University of Groningen), his later transformation into a vocal neoconservative spokesman against the perceived threat of foreigners contributed to the rightwing surge that has spread across Europe, led by such analogues as Jörg Haider in Austria, Filip de Winter in Belgium, and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France.

Rather than rely on direct footage of the likes of Fortuyn, Wilders, and van Gogh,

rer Asherys video deres sammenflettede politiske positioner ved hjælp af spøgefulde allegorier og performative fremstillinger af psyko-seksuelle dramaer og lege. Disse fremstillinger afslører dybtliggende aspekter af den højreekstremistiske ideologi, som, på én og samme tid, hylder individuel seksual frihed (retten til at være homoseksuel, at være nøgen, at dyrke ukonventionel sex) samt udtrykker en racistisk harme over immigranter og deres påståede forsøg på at "overtage huset" og indføre deres egen teokratiske kultur baseret på islamisk shari'ah. Dette paradoks af frihed og undertrykkelse dramatiseres igennem hele Asherys video. "Frihed" fremstår her som en relationel og dybt konfliktfyldt praksis, ifølge hvilken frihed for nogle er uløseligt forbundet med ufrihed for andre. Den pointe, som Ashery udvikler i værket, præciseres af den politiske teoretiker Wendy Brown: "Frihed er hverken en filosofisk absolutthed eller en håndgribelig enhed, men en relationel og kontekstuel praksis, der dannes i opposition til, hvad der lokalt og ideologisk måtte opfattes som "ufrihed".³

I Asherys video udfolder denne spænding sig i relation til kroppen og tilnærmer sig, hvad van der Veer kalder for "modsatningsfyldt begærspolitik" i forhold til den

hollandske højreorienterede kulturelle og politiske diskurs.⁴ I hendes værk bliver kroppen – som et territorium med grænser og overgange mellem inde og ude – selektivt åbnet og reguleret samt krænkert seksuelt og politisk. I forskellige dele af videoen ser man fx skikkelser, som leger nøgne i grupper i det grønne område bagved landsbykirken i Suffolk fra det 12. århundrede, der tjener som kulisse for størstedelen af værket. De opfører en psykedelisk udendørs "love-in" og en nøgen-seance i forsøget på at kommunikere med van Gogh og Fortuyns ånder ved hjælp af et ouijabræt. Parvis og i grupper af tre indtager de seksuelle softcorestillinger såvel som stillinger og bevægelser, der antyder dyreagtige transformationer af den menneskelige krop. Disse scener med animalisme, primitive ritualer, gruppesex, børnelege og vanvidsteater udtrykker en frigjorthed fra kropslige konventioner og overskrider heteronormativ, pandomineret seksualitet såvel som profan eller religionsbaseret etik. "Piano Rim"-sekvensen i spor 6 er den mest avantgardistiske og seksuelt eksplicitte. Den viser en ung mand, der spiller klaver stående, mens han slikker røv på en androgyn skikkelse, der er placeret foran ham på alle fire, mens en ung kvinde, der er optaget af sin lap-top, sidder henslængt på klaveret i baggrunden. I denne frihedsakt overskrides



Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom* | *Audivisual Album: Posing Improvising*, 2013, videostill

occupied with her laptop on the piano in the background. Boundaries between human and animal, self and other, public and private, normative and unconventional sexuality, are here violated in this act of freedom.

Meanwhile, a corresponding and opposite desire for the annihilation of the body of the Other – approximating the phantom-object of rightwing resentment regarding the non-western Islamic immigrant – transpires in scenes such as the fourth vignette, “Untitled [Fantasy]”. The passage shows a group of bloodied Arabs, one wearing a traditional keffiyeh headdress, others with religious skullcaps, all lying dead on a public bench outdoors. As if victims of neo-fascist violence, they are objectified in a state of complete domination, a scene resonant with the anti-immigrant brutality that has taken hold in European countries from Holland to Greece, France to Italy, in recent years. A few moments later, the actors emerge from their lifeless slumber and wash off the fake blood, revealing themselves to be white European-looking actors dressed in costume, thereby exposing the constructed basis of the fantasy. In this regard, Ashery’s engagement with migration and politically-attuned performance recalls the artist’s past work, for instance, *Portrait Sketch* (2006) for which she inhabited stereotypes of Jewish and Islamic identities and had herself drawn by street-based portrait artists in Delhi. Similarly, her concern for immigration and displacement continues her past investigations into the politics of citizenship and border regimes in her native Middle-Eastern context, as in *A Gathering* (2006) for which she held a banquet in London for Palestinians prevented from returning home by Israeli restrictions; and *Welcome Home | Memorial Service* (2006) a collaborative performance project for which three Palestinian voices recited the names of 369 Palestinian villages that were destroyed during the war around 1948 when Israel was created.

As in these works, and especially in the related projects of *Naked as a Jaybird* and *Monkey Bum Factory*, it is the body that is shown to be one of bare life: a site where sexual de-politicization and political exclusion collide, exposing an oscillating paradox

of freedom and unfreedom, the one built on the other.⁵ The contradictory politics of desire ascribed to the Party for Freedom exists in the sense that one type of freedom (individualist, liberal, sexual) excludes other kinds of freedoms (those of migration, multiculturalism, religious freedom), yet each appears constituted by the exclusion of its other. As a result, sexual freedom, tolerance of difference, and democratic principles are revealed to inspire an opposing state of control, flipping into intolerance, repression, and illiberal governance. In terms of that fantasy of control, Ashery’s political allegory echoes other contemporary artistic projects that have critically taken up European populist politics to critical ends, such as Jonas Staal’s *Art, Property of Politics III: Closed Architecture* (2011).⁶ The design-based and conceptualist piece reconstructs the prison architecture of Dutch politician and Geert Wilders-confidant Fleur Agema, who dedicated herself to designing the ideal penal complex for her MA thesis in Interior Design at Utrecht School of Arts. Reproducing a visual model of Agema’s prison that draws out its logic of the biopolitical control of subjects who fail to integrate into Dutch social conventions, Staal writes of it: “the whole of society” becomes “a model for detention: everyone is trapped in their own social conditions, poor and rich alike.” Sharing the ambition to deconstruct rightwing political ideology, Ashery’s project distinguishes itself by animating the psychosexual imaginary of the Freedom Party’s fears and fantasies of transgressed boundaries, particularly when such a carceral society of control breaks down and engenders ever greater urges for control and domination.

Providing a response to Jameson’s call to historicize the political unconscious of contemporary ideological formations, Ashery’s video locates the precedents of contemporary freedom discourse in nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberation movements, communes, and experimental sexual practices. The genealogy is relayed explicitly in track 10, “I Can’t Bring You Back,” even while this complex history’s legacy is present throughout the video. There, Ashery’s group of nude actors are shown attempting to communicate with the spirits of Fortuyn and



Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom* | Audiovisual Album: *Don't Take over the House Now*, 2013, video still

van Gogh, as the video adds a pedagogical, male voice-over beginning with a description of the *Nachtkulture* (naked culture) and *Lebensreform* (life reform) movements in modern Germany. The embrace of nudism in rural nature, we learn, was once viewed as an antidote to industrialization and urbanization, initially seen as a progressive departure from Christian prohibitions and conservative cultural restrictions. As such, it was approached as initially suspect by the Nazis when they came to power in the 1930s, although they eventually embraced naturalism under the state-controlled leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength Through Joy) – as long as communists and Jews were excluded. German naturalism underwent further ideological revaluing as it migrated to California, sparking groups like the Nature Boys, a 1940s subculture of proto-hippies that prepared the ground for later counter-cultural formations in the 1960s, formations that were further inverted in a post-emancipatory return-to-order in subsequent decades. The magazine *Jaybird*, for instance, begun in Southern California during the 1960s, initially dedicated itself to carefree family nudism, aligned with the counter-culture movement, but increasingly took to supplying softcore porn to the erotica market, replacing nudists with paid models, its anti-establishment

revolt adopted to post-60s capitalist liberalism. As Ashery's narrative points out, the vicissitudes of freedom discourse ended up not only in commercial spectacle, but also in the perverse violence of rightwing hate, as exemplified in Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik's act of killing 77 Labour Party supporters. He justified the rampage in his militant creed, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, the anti-Islam, anti-feminist, and anti-Marxist text he distributed over the Internet on the day of the attacks. Here, the necropolitical basis of far-right extremist claims on freedom, as allegorized in Ashery's video, is concretely glimpsed.⁷

Focused on these political and aesthetic contradictions, *Party for Freedom* offers a tale of dreamworld and catastrophe, utopia and tragedy, radicalism and recuperation. On the one hand, sexual freedom was partly emancipated from oppressive traditions of monogamy, pro-creation sexuality, and Christian intolerance, although even twentieth-century counter-cultural movements tended to reaffirm patriarchal and heteronormative structures, as Ashery is keen to point out. On the other hand, the outgrowth of emancipatory body politics has come, in some extreme forms, to correspond to the

repressive, racist, and murderous politics of current-day neoliberal freedom crusaders.⁸ In Ashery's video, we witness nudism become commodified sex and pornography; feminism become patriarchy; socialism become authoritarianism; liberation become xenophobic repression – contradictions played out as well in further scenes of parodic allegory. In track 3's "Don't Take over the House Now," a "house wife" played by an Asian woman dressed in a sexually objectifying maid outfit swats flies in her kitchen, intimating in the artist's coded sign language that immigrants are no better than filthy and invasive insects in need of extermination. Yet the video's gaudy depiction of the host exercising her right to walk around naked in her own house – and more broadly the right of the Dutch to sexual freedom in their own country – resonates with tawdry scenarios of pornography. As such, sexual "liberation" connects with the "freedoms" of sexist exploitation, calling up Holland's infamy as European capital for sex tourism. The woman's Asian appearance, furthermore, raises the spectre of trafficked women from outside Europe, whereby non-Dutch others are accepted as long as they keep to their allotted place and accept Dutch values. In this sense, sexual liberation and the blackmarket enslavement of women explosively connect.

Ashery's psycho-political dramas of objectified Asian women, murdered and bloodied Arabs, and bestiality and zoophilia stage various binaries between self and Other that oscillate between sexual desire and murderous loathing. As such, the video explicitly calls up the hysterical structuring of the rightwing cultural imaginary as displayed in *Submission* (2004), van Gogh and Aayan Hirsi Ali's video that presents their stilted and one-sided view of Islam. In one section of the short, infamous video that has been broadcast on Dutch TV, a topless woman is shown in transparent clothing and a black veil standing on an oriental rug in a dark lusty boudoir, praying to Allah. The clichéd set is complimented by an autobiographical commentary in which the woman narrates her life of subjection to her violent husband, the fruit of an arranged marriage, as Middle Eastern music and the sounds of a cracking whip play in the background. Shots of her bleeding, violated body, intercut with views of her skin covered in calligraphic inscriptions of the Koran describing the necessity of submission, relay her savage treatment, based also on tales of repeated rapes at the hands of her husband's brother. The horrid stories make the fact that the character attempts to justify her self-hating obedience via religious conviction all the more hor-



Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom* | *An Audiovisual Album: Geert Wilders Triptych*, 2013, video still

rendous – a kneejerk response that is the ideological effect of the video. As such, the work articulates a propagandistic condemnation of Islam, swinging between a neo-orientalist lasciviousness and a punishing racist contempt, its script written by Hirsi Ali, who herself fled Somalia to escape an arranged marriage and landing up in Holland as a staunch critic of Islam and eventual poster-child of the far-right. In referencing the video, Ashery's *Party for Freedom* points out that Hirsi Ali's partner is the British conservative economic historian Niall Ferguson, whose 2011 book *Civilisation: The West and the Rest*, dedicated to his wife (just as Ashery's first track, also called "Civilisation", is dedicated to Ferguson), has been attacked for its neoliberal triumphalism, Western-centric chauvinism, and implicit racism.⁹ The reference is also important in that it shows how rightwing populism extends throughout Europe, even if its particular instantiations are not identical (Ferguson's homophobia, for which he recently apologized in the media, for instance, conflicts with some Dutch rightwing discourse).

Ashery's video responds to Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's provocation with her own imagined scenario of pleasure and disgust, particularly in track 8's "Geert Wilders Triptych". The scene is set outdoors amidst trees and greenery, with a young woman shown sitting on a swing, attended by a young man, proposing something of a Fragonardian pleasure garden à la Marquis de Sade. As the woman's libertine partner feeds her some sort of raspberry mush, he smears the substance on her bare chest. She consumes the food to excess, only to vomit it out, followed by a self-satisfying smile. The abject material consequently functions as a transitional object, at once outside and inside the body, part and not-part of the self, provoking alternating signs of desire and repulsion. Translating van Gogh and Hirsi Ali's propagandistic video act into a dismal display of shit-spewing logorrhoea, the passage also recalls Pasolini's notorious scene of coprophagia in his 1975 film *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, a like-minded allegorical drama of fascist sado-masochistic excess set in the late-stages of WWII Italy. It is ultimately that psycho-sexual state – between

narcissistic hedonism and loathing abjection – that Ashery's film locates as the structuring political unconscious of the Party for Freedom, expressing its underlying desires, its unacknowledged fears and fantasies.

Infamously, van Gogh referred to Muslims as that "secret column of goat-fuckers," and Fortuyn confessed "he liked fucking young Moroccan boys but did not want to be restrained by backward imams".¹⁰ This tendency to animalize and sexualize the Other informs the emphasis in *Party for Freedom* on the becoming-animal of humans. Consider the shot of the naked woman dressed like a roasting pig, and the frequent inclusions of images of nonhuman primates, dogs, and insects. In addition, the video's frequent shots of human bums – revealed for the camera, displayed often from below, and dutifully held in place for inspection – position its subjects in so many animal postures, whereby the piece develops a conflictual politics of anality. In Ashery's scatological tale, the human backside figures as indeterminate signifier – as the object of sexual desire; the suspect site of the biopolitics of security (particularly in the strip and cavity search scene, intercut with shots of incandescently coloured clown faces expressing disgust); and the orifice for the excrescence of wretched substances (food expelled from the anus-mouth, implying the ejection of outsiders from the country). In this way, bodily desublimation flips into political expulsion, and sexualisation correlates with fantasized extermination.

While Ashery's critical mimicry clearly attacks the Party for Freedom, it is not simply, in my view, a deconstructive dramatization of the underlying psychology that drives rightwing ideology. Ultimately, by inhabiting past forms of avant-garde transgression and emancipatory politics, the project returns to sexual liberation and multiculturalism as unfinished revolutions, which await an eventual reckoning, if not ultimate resolution. Its transgressive elements – particularly its sexual experimentation and gender-questioning playfulness – might yet be re-radicalized, the video suggests by re-animating these forms, which points toward the embrace of a post-heteronormative, pro-polymorphous

perversity. As such, the project identifies the progressive elements of a potential state of pluralist living-together, albeit in a non-programmatic way, although it provides no answer to the thorny question of what a reconciliation between the freedoms of sexual liberation and religion would mean or look like, or even if the artist would support such a reconciliation.

A further key is the project's grassroots distribution form, according to which institutions, businesses, and groups of a minimum of ten people are invited to host *Party for Freedom's* live performance event, *Party for Hire*, which includes nude displays and screenings of the video. Ashery describes the project as "somewhere between a travelling cinema and theatre troupe, a kiss-a-gram and a takeaway delivery service."¹¹ The one-hour event comprises the display of select parts of the video, during which nude actors, both women and men, complement on-screen passages by performing various live vignettes, including cavorting around the room, wrestling in an inflatable boat, caressing a paint-splattered pig sculpture, and riding each other like animals. (One of the more memorable scenes from the performance at UCL's Centre for the Study of Contemporary Art on May 15th, was of a woman posing on all fours holding a banana in her mouth that sprouted a lit sparkler, with another such pyrotechnic device inserted in her bum, creating a spectacular display of sexual objectification and animalization).

The performance exerts a seductive invitation to the audience to join in and get naked themselves, even while the video reveals the over-determination of the body as a contradictory and unstable site of freedom – both as a white, heteronormative, and youthful privilege (exemplified in Ashery's typological determination of the actors' body-types and identities to correspond to a select range of appearances), and coded within radically divergent ideological formations, including emancipatory libertarianism, counter-cultural subversiveness, fascist purity, neo-nationalist xenophobia, and murderous hate speech. The viewer, then, comes to inhabit the affective site that rotates between desire and disgust, attraction

and repulsion, as s/he witnesses the spectacle whereby the illusion of nude abandon reveals how the body is situated within relations of power, and where freedom itself crumbles as an innocent pleasure or essentialized category. Sexuality is thereby denaturalized, becomes radically unstable, and as a result, viewers experience a state of estrangement from their own body, and that of others, which precipitates a powerful questioning – at once critically conceptual and viscerally affective – of sexual dynamics, nudity, and their relations to freedom claims, especially as the final track delivers the short history of the modern transformations of that discourse.

Reliant upon and encouraging the self-organising capacity of audiences and supporters of the project, the *Party* also proposes and provokes an informal network of activity and resistance, which constitutes a further politically progressive element, however modest and undefined. Additionally, the launch of Ashery's project occurred on the symbolically significant date of May 1st – International Workers Day – and at the site of Millbank Tower, the location of the Tory headquarters and of the massive anti-government protest in 2010 that saw a flood of demonstrators (including the artist) break into the building in a spectacular act of anti-austerity-budget rebellion (another unfinished revolution). As Ashery writes, "holding the event in Millbank is another way of reclaiming the space, re-visiting the building and asking what new strategies of resistance are available to us. When does intervention become cooption? Can art resist cooption now?"¹² Including live musical performances, naked body art, and the screening of the *Party for Freedom* video, the launch resonated with the carnivalesque energies of recent political protests, which, in the era of alter-globalization demos sparked by the 1999 "Battle in Seattle" anti-WTO uprising, have increasingly offered a mixture of the creative visual aesthetics of resistance, performative displays, and theatrical activism.¹³

On that opening night, the audience was introduced to what Ashery terms a "democracy of sound", comprising diverse approaches to music, including the cham-



Oreet Ashery: *Party for Freedom* | *Party for Hire*, 2013, performance at Asylum, Peckham

ber-orchestral modernism of Finnish composer Timo-Juhani Kyllönen, the experimental sounds of Yakutian-Russian musician Chyskyryai, the punk noise music of the four-piece band Woolf, and the hardcore-jazz fusion of Morgan Quaintance's band. These constituted a diversity of approaches to sonic experimentation that one finds as well on the video's soundtrack.¹⁴ As such, Ashery's project advances further its positive proposal: Turning away from the failures of multiculturalism and its problematic "tolerance" for difference, which all-too-often dissembles discriminatory views¹⁵, it suggests a modelling of cultural co-existence that acknowledges both strangeness within all (rejecting the very opposition between self and other), and the ever-potential manifestations of social antagonisms between subjects. It also invites the reinvention of socio-sexual organization in ways not bound to the conventions of heteronormativity, appropriative desire, and couple-dominated, monogamous relations.¹⁶ In this regard, the *Party* cultivates practices below and outside the all-encompassing policy directives and totalizing governmentality of institutional-

zed multiculturalism.¹⁷ It does so by taking into account and expressing the unconscious of subjects, rather than repressing those fantasy and fears and thereby inviting violent forms of acting-out. If there is a utopian element in Ashery's approach, then, it is located in the project's implicit emancipatory proposals that decline to systematize their practice or codify their procedures. Rather, the project defines spaces where the inevitable differences between people and social groups are negotiated in informal, spontaneous, and collectivist ways, reliant on a shared commitment to creativity.

Finally, Ashery's project includes a month of related discursive events during May-June 2013, such as "People vs. Freedom on land, animals and women" at the Swedenborg Society with feminist-activist Silvia Federici; "People vs. Freedom on being offensive, UK visas, immigration profiteering and state control" with Shaista Aziz, Manick Govinda, and Kenan Malik, Corporate Watch, and Precarious Workers; and "People vs. Freedom in conversation," with Tirdad Zolghadr. As much as *Party for Freedom*

attempts to reproduce and thereby negate the political unconscious of recent forms of far-right extremism, it also presents us with a principle of hope that such people-centred creativity, grassroots cooperation, and artist-activist networks will not only subject the populist discourse of intolerance to critical scrutiny and discussion, but also invent future ways to move beyond such a repressive politics, reconnecting with and advancing further the unfinished revolutions of the past.

TJ Demos is an art historian, writer and critic. The essay is written on occasion of the presentation of Party for Freedom | People vs Freedom in London in May/June 2013, an Artangel commission.

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 13.
2. Peter van der Veer, "Pim Fortuyn, Theo van Gogh, and the Politics of Tolerance in the Netherlands", *Public Culture* 18:1 (2006), 120. He writes further: "the main issue in the murder of van Gogh is not Islam but Dutch culture" and the paradox of tolerance and liberal values. He points out that Dutch tolerance discourse goes back to Spinoza, a history increasingly forgotten owing to right-wing financial cuts to the Dutch educational system (112-13).
3. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.
4. Peter van der Veer, "Pim Fortuyn". Also see: Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).
5. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998).
6. For further artistic models that critically examine political populism in Europe today, see "Enacting

Populism in its Mediascape", the 2012 exhibition project at the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris, curated by Matteo Lucchetti, which Ashery references in *Party for Freedom*.

7. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture* 15:1 (Winter 2003), 11-40.

8. See David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

9. See Pankaj Mishra, "Watch This Man", review of Niall Ferguson, *Civilisation: The West and the Rest* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), in *London Review of Books*, vol. 33 no. 21, (3 November 2011), 10-12.

10. Peter van der Veer, "Pim Fortuyn", 111 and 120. In addition, Ashery points out that Wilders has acknowledged forming his low opinion of Arab cultures after visiting Israel and Egypt as a child. During the trip he contracted a stomach bug in Egypt, and this childhood trauma allegedly determined his adult political views – a story that informs the sentence "How can such a small thing get so big" found in Ashery's video.

11. See the artist's website: www.oreetashery.net.

12. Email to author, 24 April, 2013.

13. See Claire Tancons, "Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility", *e-flux* 30 (December 2011).

14. Conversation with the artist, 2 May, 2013.

15. For Brown, "tolerance discourse" – as a form of governmentality that regulates social, cultural, and political groupings – often works to "restore the hegemony that state-sponsored egalitarianism threatens to undermine." See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), nt. 2, 208.

16. For diverse theorizations of such recent possibilities of non-normative sexual practice, see Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Dossie Easton, *Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 2011).

17. See Alana Lentini and Gavan Tittle, *The Crises of Multiculturalism* (London: Zed Books, 2011), which offers a complex reading of the highly complex valences, practices, and effects of multiculturalism. They write: "The idea that too much relativism has allowed culturally regressive minorities to endanger the fight against sexism and homophobia suggests that these are purely struggles between the West – the birthplace of democracy, human rights, and singular achievements in gender equality and sexual freedom – and the rest, most problematically those illiberal subjects who have been allowed to live among us. Multiculturalism – not the institutionalised sexism, patriarchal structures or homophobia that affects all societies – can be blamed for the persistence of domestic violence, or the violation of gay rights." <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/alana-lentini-gavan-tittle/crises-of-multiculturalism>.

CV

Oreet Ashery (b. 1966, Jerusalem) is a London based artist. She recently presented a major commission by Artangel, titled *Party for Freedom | People vs Freedom*. Her work has been shown at the Liverpool Biennial; Venice Biennial; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Tate Modern, London; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Pompidou Centre, Paris; Freud Museum, London; DEPO, Istanbul and the National Review of Live Art, Glasgow. Publications include *The Novel of Nonel and Vovel*, a graphic novel in collaboration with Larissa Sansour published by Charta, the monograph *Dancing with Men* published by the Live Art Development Agency and *Staying*, published by Artangel. Ashery is represented by the Other Gallery, Shanghai and Beijing, and she is an Honorary Research Fellow at QMU, and a lecturer in Art at Goldsmiths.

EVENTS

Sunday 15 September 3-4pm

Guided tour

Overgaden invites you to a guided tour of the current exhibitions in the company of Thomas Ladeby, a member of Overgaden's curatorial staff. Afterwards we serve coffee and cake. The event will be in Danish.

Saturday 26 October 3-4.30pm

Talk

This afternoon, Oreet Ashery will be joined by writer and curator Omar Kholief and art historian and critic Mathias Danbolt to discuss the show and related themes.

THANK YOU

Oreet Ashery would like to thank Laura Godfrey Isaacs for the use of Rishangles Old Church and everyone who took part in this project and those who relentlessly helped it from the outset and throughout.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: www.overgaden.org

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

Friday 15 November 2013 Overgaden presents the exhibition *Ice Script – Meltingtime #17* by Kirsten Justesen. The last day of the exhibition is 25 December 2013.

The exhibition is supported by:

Artangel (commission), Art Council England, Kone Foundation, Performance Matters (A collaboration between Goldsmiths University of London, University of Roehampton, and the Live Art Development Agency, financially assisted by the Arts & Humanities Research Council).



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Overgaden.

Institute of Contemporary Art
Overgaden neden vandet 17
DK-1414 Copenhagen K

www.overgaden.org
+45 32 57 72 73