

**In Response to: Olympia's Maid –
Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity*, Lorraine O'Grady**

Preface

Olympia's Maid- Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity by Lorraine O'Grady employs a tone of criticality towards contemporary standards of critique itself. As a "performance artist in a crisis of the body" (O'Grady 157), O'Grady searches for a subjectivity that appears to be erased in the West, a black woman's subjectivity. While the West's stronghold on a binary, rooted in the white male's foundational theory of psychoanalysis, promotes and creates the "either:or" logic, where does the black woman win back the position of the questioning subject? The predicament of the critique drives O'Grady to declare and assert her subjectivity in *both nature and culture*, the personal and the political, mind and body, sexuality and intellect. Relying on her senses, she constructs a subjectivity that is not only able to negotiate between "centres: not-centres" but also one that contains a multiplicity of "centres", where all the boundaries are fluid and constantly leaking into one-another. (O'Grady 165)

Working with O'Grady's dismissal of the binary in her subjectivity, my script titled ***both:and:between*** retraces the structuralist idea of the binary opposition in *the presence-absence* dichotomy. In Western thought *presence* implies a dominant

position over *absence*, because it is considered as a by-product of *presence*. In other words, *absence* only exists in lack of *presence*. In a society where one end of the binary governs the other, what then becomes of liminal existence?

In ***both:and:between***, the main character *subject* exists outside of the *life and death* binary and is suspended in a permanent state of liminality. While in fixed liminality, *subject* is seduced into being integrated into “life” by *Agent V*, a voice that *subject* hears as coming from their palms. At the same time *Agent Dheu*, a voice coming from their soles, maintains that *subject* should be integrated into “death”. *subject* views liminality as a holistic healing of the psyche and is tormented by the *agents’* aggressive influences. In its strange format, ***both:and:between*** questions “how do we measure the spatial and temporal dimensions of liminality” and plays with hints of Jungian notions of self-realization in a liminal space.

both:and:between

a screenplay by Jessica Gaba

both:and:between

Characters:

subject

Agent V

Agent Dheu

In a dark room, void of furniture/personal belongings, SUBJECT stands at its very centre. They are wearing a thick, white linen gown that covers their entire body. They shift slightly to the right, then slightly to the left. Two "strings" of light suspended in air flood the room, as SUBJECT remains still and undisturbed. A stronger, concentrated yellow light traces SUBJECT's body, beginning with their feet, and inching to the top of their head. SUBJECT then sits on the ground, with soles and palms stiff and facing the audience.

VOICEOVER: Here sits *subject*, suspended, still, fixed. "Subject" is a loanword to their communitas of existence because the author of this script didn't have a better word. *subject* doesn't know it. Is it right now that *subject* is inoperative but *subject* doesn't think so. *subject* doesn't think, breathe, dance, sleep, drink, eat, fight. It is right now that *agent V* finds out of *subject*.

The concentrated yellow light now focuses on SUBJECT's palms. SUBJECT turns their head towards their palms and stares uninterrupted. The palms become animated and appear to speak.

AGENT V: How long have you been like this?

SUBJECT: I was and was never otherwise.

AGENT V: Is this a deep well or a tunnel?

SUBJECT: This is *both:and:between*.

AGENT V: Is this of *aether*? Are you of *quintessence*?

SUBJECT: I am of *both:and:between*.

AGENT V: Come with me. Abandon this. I am the agent of *Anima Mundi*. I am the agent of *Ousia*. I am Agent V.

SUBJECT: What's in it for me?

AGENT V: *Essence* and *Substance*. You will have a form. I can't allow you to be formless. You will have bodies to dance with, food to eat, air to breathe, a mind to think, dreams to dream.

The palms rise and SUBJECT's body follows. The palms lead and direct the body of SUBJECT around the stage in a disorderly manner. The concentrated yellow beam of light is still focused on the palms, animating them. SUBJECT's body is aggressively treated, pushed against the walls, yanked, thrown against the floor and towards the audience. Although SUBJECT doesn't fight this, they are stiff and appear displeased.

VOICEOVER: *subject's dissolution is nearly, impossibly here. subject plunged into "life".*

The yellow light goes off. The room is dark once again. We hear loud thumps. It is SUBJECT's feet stomping with great weight

until the feet rest firmly into the centre of the room. Their body tries to pull away from feet's firm contact to the floor. They use their hands to pull the feet off the ground repeatedly but fail every time. The yellow light returns, focused on the feet. SUBJECT sits on the ground, with the soles of the feet facing their face. The light remains focused on the soles, animating them.

AGENT DHEU: Life will cease, I am certain. Consciousness will cease, I am certain.

SUBJECT: I plunged into "life". I consumed it. I dreamt a dream.

AGENT DHEU: You cannot consume me. I am the agent of *Oblivion*. I am agent of *Nothingness*. Eternally yours, I am Agent DHEU. You are coming with me.

SUBJECT: Have we met before? Perhaps with Agent V?

AGENT DHEU: That is impossible. It is *either* I or Agent V.

SUBJECT: Perhaps, in my dreams. I died in my dreams.

AGENT DHEU: That is impossible. I am not a dreamless sleep.

SUBJECT: You must be *Space* with no *Consciousness*?

AGENT DHEU: I am nothing at all. You can "plunge" into *Nothingness* with me.

SUBJECT: What's in it for me?

AGENT DHEU: *Eternity*. No beginning, no end.

All lights go off. SUBJECT lies in the centre of the stage, on their side, while facing the audience and making uninterrupted eye contact. Their palms and soles are facing away from the

audience and their body is stiff. The previously concentrated yellow light becomes diffused and lights SUBJECT's entire body.

VOICEOVER: Like a film stopped at a particular frame, *subject* remains fixed, in liminal crisis between Agent V and Agent DHEU. *subject remains realized. Certainties are lost. Essence is lost. Substance is lost. Oblivion is lost. Nothingness is lost. Lost but here.* They are *ALL* here, floating above. You can see them too, if you "unplunge" and remain perfectly fixed and still.

THE END