

Lectio Praecursoria

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Figure 1

Honoured custos, honoured opponent, honoured audience.

Zhao Xiangzi led a party of a hundred thousand hunting in Zhongshan, trampling the growth, burning the woods, fanning the flames for miles. A man emerged from a rock wall and bopped up and down with the smoke. Everyone thought it was an apparition. Then when the fire had passed, he ambled out as if he hadn't been through anything at all.

Xiangzi thought this strange, and kept him for observation. His form and features were those of a human, his breathing and his voice were those of a human. “How did you stay inside the rock?” he asked; “How did you go into the fire?”

That man said, “What is it you are calling ‘rock’? What is it you are calling ‘fire’?”

Xiangzi said, “What you just came out of is rock; what you just walked on was fire.”

The man said, “I didn’t know.”

When the Marquis Wen of Wei heard about this, he asked Zixia, “What kind of man is that?”

Zixia said, “According to what I heard from Confucius, harmony means universal assimilation to things; then things cannot cause injury or obstruction, and it is possible even to go through metal and stone, and walk on water and fire.”

Marquis Wen said, “Why don’t you do it?”

Zixia said, “I am as yet unable to clear my mind of intellection. Even so, I have time to try to talk about it.”

Marquis Wen asked, “Why didn’t Confucius do it?”

Zixia said, “Confucius was one of those who was able to do it yet was able to not do it.”

Marquis Wen was delighted. (*Liezi* as quoted in Cleary, 2005, pp. 133–134)

This passage from *Liezi*, one of the foundational texts in Taoism, depicts events that supposedly took place two and a half millennia ago on the Zhongshan mountain near the present-day Nanjing. Even though my doctoral dissertation investigates predominantly such cultural issues that are specific to our time, I find that this ancient story embodies rather effectively some of the characteristics of the notion of egress I am presenting in my study. I will come back to the

story later, but first I will give an overview of my doctoral research regarding its background, objectives, and key concepts.

A central concept informing my dissertation is that of *psychiatrization*. It has been used in a variety of ways by different authors, but I use it here for referring to two distinct, yet interconnected, mechanisms. On the one hand, it refers to

the event of a human subject becoming an object of psychiatry, and on the other hand, to the dissemination and infiltration of psychiatric knowledge, theories, and ideas about the (human) mind beyond the immediate domain of psychiatry and throughout the wider culture and society. The early psychiatry and the asylum institutions in the West did not only influence the governmental and architectural arrangement of other institutions ... such as educational, military, and correctional systems, but it applied itself to the wider discourses of public safety through establishing a myth regarding the essential proximity between madness, crime, and violence (Foucault, 1999/2003). (Koivisto, 2019, p. 26)

In my study, I maintain that psychiatrization is a phenomenon that has been insufficiently addressed by art education. I suggest that the field should acknowledge psychiatrization as a relevant cultural issue to be discussed through art pedagogical practices in terms of how it operates through art and visual culture. In addition, psychiatrization should be recognized as an ideology which has informed art education in profound ways. As other scholars have previously observed, art education has predominantly depended on art therapy and special education as the primary frameworks for understanding disability.

Over the last decade or so, significant advancements have taken place in terms of developing disability studies -informed art education theory and practice. Nevertheless, art education's long-standing adherence to art therapy and special education results in inertia which hinders the

attempts at reorienting the field. This reorientation requires further engagement with critical disability studies, but in order to tackle psychiatrization, it is also necessary to explore the theoretical potential offered by mad studies. Fortunately, scholars like Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson and John Derby have critiqued the field's conventional orientation to disability, offering alternative ways to address questions of mental and psychiatric disability—and this approach is what I call *a pedagogy of depsychiatrization*.

Tackling the question of psychiatrization, this dissertation is my own contribution to the pedagogy of depsychiatrization. It focuses on the manifestations of psychiatrization in the conventions of representing psychiatric disability. More specifically, the emphasis is on such archetypal cultural images and stereotypes that conflate psychiatric disability with violence, and portray madness as a source of threat, risk, danger, and horror; such images we immediately recognize in films, tv-series, or any cultural text. The objective of the dissertation is to address the problematics of

representing a group of people as essentially abhorrent and repulsive: dangerous, antisocial, dishonest, unreliable, needy, unproductive. [It] is dedicated to examining how these stigmatizing representational processes can be recognized, elucidated, and countered. The stigmatization is approached from the categories of disability and race, but regardless of the specific focus on certain subject positions in this dissertation, its implications might be useful in other contexts. The practice of demonizing people with mental disabilities has been at work for centuries. The recent centuries have also witnessed extensive vilification of groups of people through representational strategies. Such strategies were used, for example, ... by the Third Reich, and [towards the end of the century] in Rwanda. ... [I]n these historical events which involved extensive propaganda campaigns paving way for genocides, the material that fueled the propaganda consisted of stereotypes, preju-

dices, and myths that had permeated the dominant culture in complex and profound ways—and in some cases this process had continued for centuries, or even millenia. It is, then, necessary for art education to acknowledge the necropolitical potential in stereotypical and stigmatizing practices of representation (Koivisto, 2019, p. 92)

In the dissertation, I take up the metaphor of discursive and representational mechanisms as confining structures. I introduce the metaphor of the lobster trap which shows cultural imagery as something that surrounds us, something which we enter unknowingly and involuntarily, similarly to the way we are introduced to the language and culture into which we are born, which we adopt and internalize way before we have the capacity to analytically contemplate on this process. Furthermore, the lobster trap is supplemented by the metaphor of microplastic, which complicates the notion of cultural imagery as an architectural structure surrounding us. In the same way that microplastic intrudes the bodies of marine crustaceans, we keep inhaling and ingesting the debris, the cultural microplastic, which is so prevalent and omnipresent that we cannot avoid it, and which is difficult to even observe.

In order to explore ways to resist such intrusive representational confinement, this dissertation investigates artistic practices, acts of representation and performance, as possibilities of resistance. As a response to the spatial metaphor of confining imagery, such resistant or subversive artistic gestures are called *egresseses*. Initially, I was interested in artists that used their art for disclosing their experiences of disability, *coming out* as disabled. This stance is informed by the view held by many disability artists and disability studies scholars that first-person narratives produced by disabled people themselves can be used to resist the objectifying mainstream representations that primarily operate on simplistic stereotypes.

In rap music, I recognized an approach which adheres to, but also problematizes this autobiographical approach. I started with horrorcore rap, a genre which employs tropes of horror cinema and literature in graphic depictions of violence—and which more often than not in-

corporates the imagery of madness in this configuration. I found myself intrigued by the way the horrorcore rappers were using artistic practice for conveying their lived experiences, but at the same time playing with prevalent cultural conceptions, stereotypes and myths regarding mental disability and madness, and conflating these perspectives—the autobiographical and the stereotypical. In spite of incorporating autobiographical elements, the artworks appeared as demonstrations of tactical engagement with the imagery that frame the ways in which the experience of disablement can be addressed.

The artists I explore in the dissertation demonstrate a capacity for such expression, self-representation, and performance that simultaneously, or almost simultaneously, embody and reflect the representational infrastructure, the subject caught in it, and the act of coming out. In this entanglement, an impossible assemblage, the inseparability of the structure and the subject is expressed in the most lyrical manner.

Even though the artist discussed in the [dissertation] draw from the culturally prevalent negative stereotypes associated with psychiatrized people and Black people, the reading [I] put forward ... implies that what is at stake here is not a complicity. ... incorporating the stereotypical imageries into the artworks does not simply replicate the imageries, but rather points to them, exposes them, and rejects them through parodic strategies. ... The artists assume the stereotypes imposed on them by the dominant culture; they adopt the very images according to which they are expected to behave and act, to conduct themselves. The artists work with the images until they are amplified and saturated beyond recognition, finally becoming incapable of conveying anything more than their imageness. What might appear as complying with the public pedagogy of psychiatrization—such as reproducing the imagery of people with mental disabilities as violent—can, in fact, serve a pedagogy of depsychiatrization. (Koivisto, 2019, pp. 92–93)

I started my speech by reading a passage from *Liezi*, a story about a mysterious man who was seen on the Zhongshan mountain by a hunting party thousands of years ago. According to the story, he was able to walk through the rocky mountainside like a ghost, and walk through the burning forest without any injury whatsoever. As he was questioned by Zhao Xiangzi, it became evident that the man did not know what fire is, or what rock is.

Later, when Marquis Wen and Zixia discuss this incident, the latter explains that the capacity of this man to surpass material constraints derived from not clinging to conventional knowledge. Paraphrasing Confucius, Zixia says that “harmony means universal assimilation to things; then things cannot cause injury or obstruction, and it is possible even to go through metal and stone, and walk on water and fire” (*Liezi* as quoted in Cleary, 2005, p. 134).

The artists whose work I have studied in my dissertation are, in a sense, similar to the mysterious man encountered by Xiangzi and his hunting party; we can witness them passing through the rigid boundaries of images, identities, and subject positions. However, their approach is more similar to the one attributed to Confucius who, as Zixia explains, “was one of those who was able to [transcend physical obstacles] yet was able to not do it” (*Liezi* as quoted in Cleary, 2005, p. 134). The artists demonstrate that they are well aware of the boundaries they are crossing, and therefore their capacity to egress derives from something else than not-knowing; the artists are capable of both demonstrating the solidity of the imagery by crashing against it, and still they are capable of passing through them as they will—like ghosts.

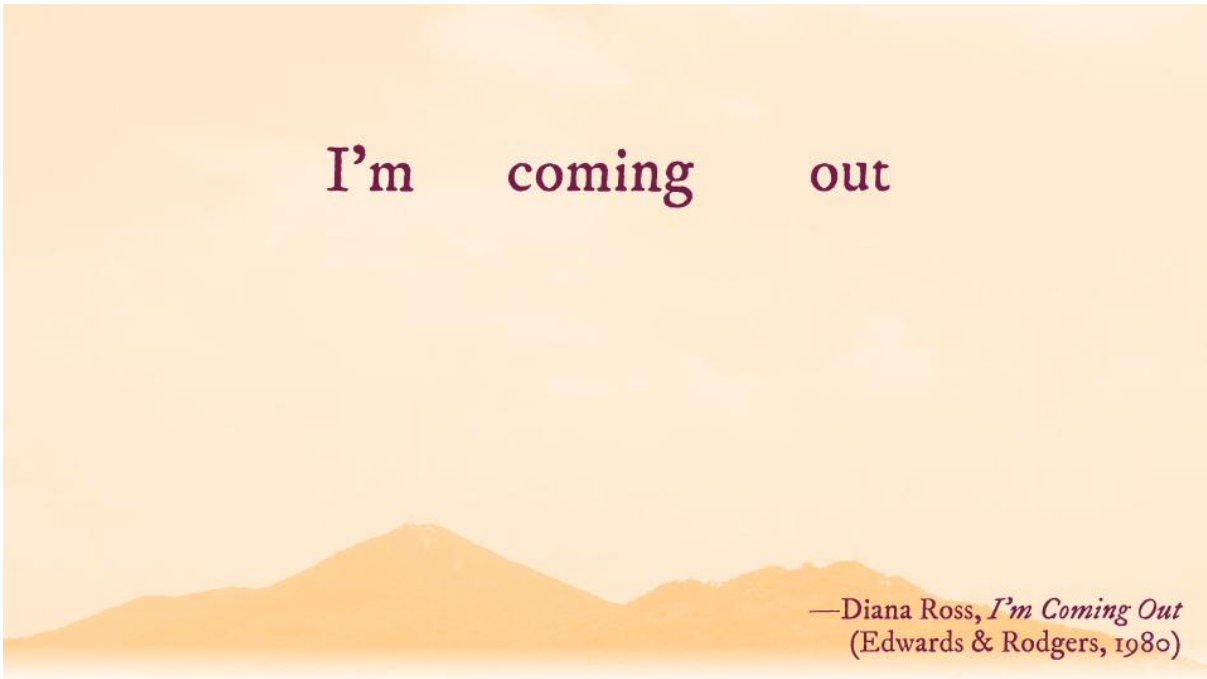


Figure 2

As is perhaps self-evident, the way I formulate egress is partially informed by the notion of ‘coming out,’ as it is used in the politics of sexual and gender minorities. In her 1980 song, Diana Ross famously sings “I’m coming out” (track 1), and I appreciate this song as a celebration of an outward movement that defies socio-cultural confinement and oppression. However, the same era has produced songs that unbalance this “I” who is coming out by taking the image of coming out as an escape from something, and reformulating it as an approach towards someone. This is what Joe Jackson (1982) addresses with his song “Steppin’ Out.” It expands the view from the first-person narrative to an exploration on the second-person form, the *you*:

Me, babe, steppin’ out into the night, into the light. You, babe, steppin’ out into the night, into the light. (Jackson, 1982, track 5)

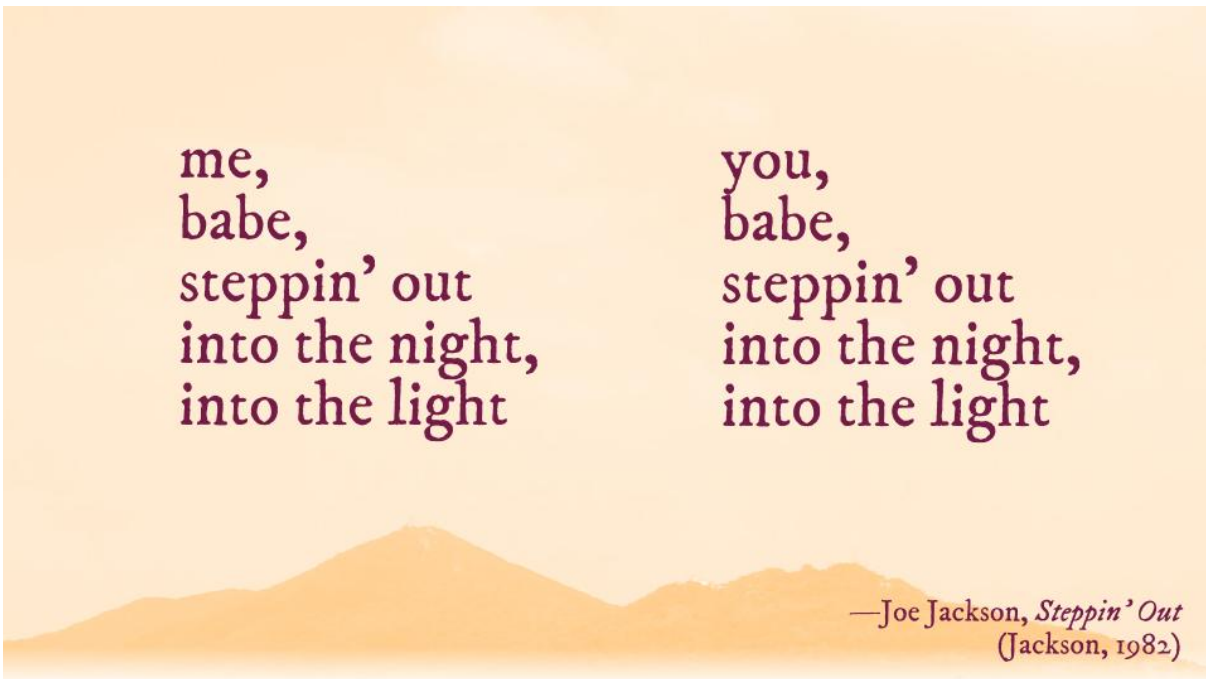


Figure 3

Jackson's song discusses getting out—egressing—as a collaborative effort, which would be worthy of further exploration in the context of depsychiatrization. This stance is perhaps even more eloquently expressed in a song written by Foster, Weil, & Keane (1984), and famously recorded by Chaka Khan (1985, track 8). Taking up the image of passing through fire that is central in the story from *Liezi*, the song does not explore the gesture of going out, but that of *coming through*, and, most importantly, approaching someone, *coming together*. Chaka Khan powerfully asserts that she is willing to go through the fire, through whatever, for a chance to be with You—the second person, that is. In the end, getting together might be even more essential than getting out, and instead of focusing merely on being free, an egressor should perhaps be concerned with being *for*, and this *being for* could bring about modes of interdependence, communality, and care that enable more profound and radical forms of liberation from oppressive cultural forces and structures.

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Notes

¹The original image: "Purple Mountain" by Farm, used under CC BY-SA 2.5 modified from original https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Farm#/media/File:Nanjing_XuanWuLake_Purple_and_Mountain.jpg