

SHE'S MY MAN  
Some reflections on female  
masculinities

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艺术中国  
ART.CHINA.CN

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# Context and caveat

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## ◉ Preliminary reflections

- *Are masculinities the exclusive preserve of biologically male subjects?*
- *What are the ways in which female subjects lay claim to masculinity?*
- *What are the impacts of this on unfixing the relationship between biological sex and gender and in enabling alternative discourses around masculine bodies?*

## ◉ Multiple female masculinities: 'lesbian' sexualities and genders

## ◉ Masculinity re-signified through particular lesbian masculine expressions

# Locating female masculinity

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- ◉ Understanding of hegemonic masculinity
- ◉ Co-construction of masculinity and femininity
- ◉ FM as historical fixture in the construction of model masculinity
- ◉ Masculinity, power and the denial of FM
- ◉ Destabilisation: binaries, 'naturalness' and meaning



# F/M as challenge and challenged

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- ◉ Not as imitation: 'a copy of a copy'
- ◉ Assumptions: forms, functions and representations of masculinity
- ◉ Authentic, essential masculinity that is marked by and through male bodies
- ◉ Vigorous disavowal and violence

# Multiplicity, alterity and possibilities

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- Breaking open masculinity: alternatives, contradictions, discordance, space for pluralities
- Destabilise hegemonic forms, modalities and rationalities of gender

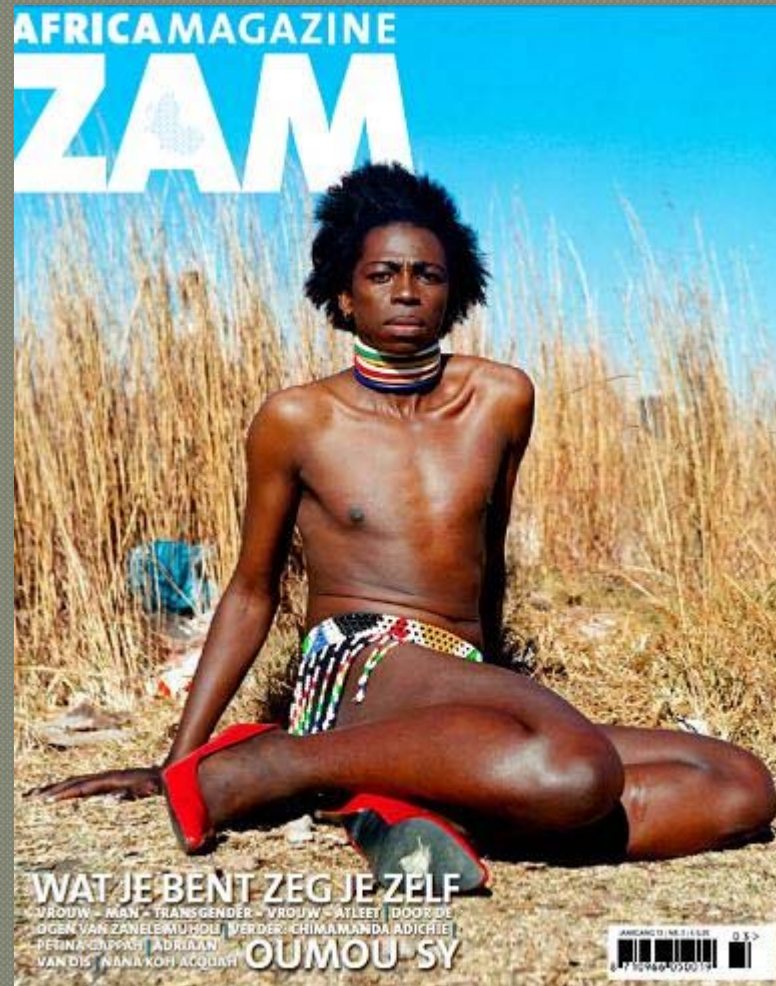


# Masculinity as performance

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- Butler : “performativity as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names.”
- Performativity allows for ‘becoming’: disrupts the ‘is’ that is required for gender/sex to exist





*Miss D'vine*

Zanele Muholi, 2009.



# Culture and tradition

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- Invoking possibilities: hegemonic patriarchal cultures and traditions and the possibilities to unfix/subvert these.
- Where there is socially constructed power, there is always resistance (Foucault, Butler): agency in defining who we want to be

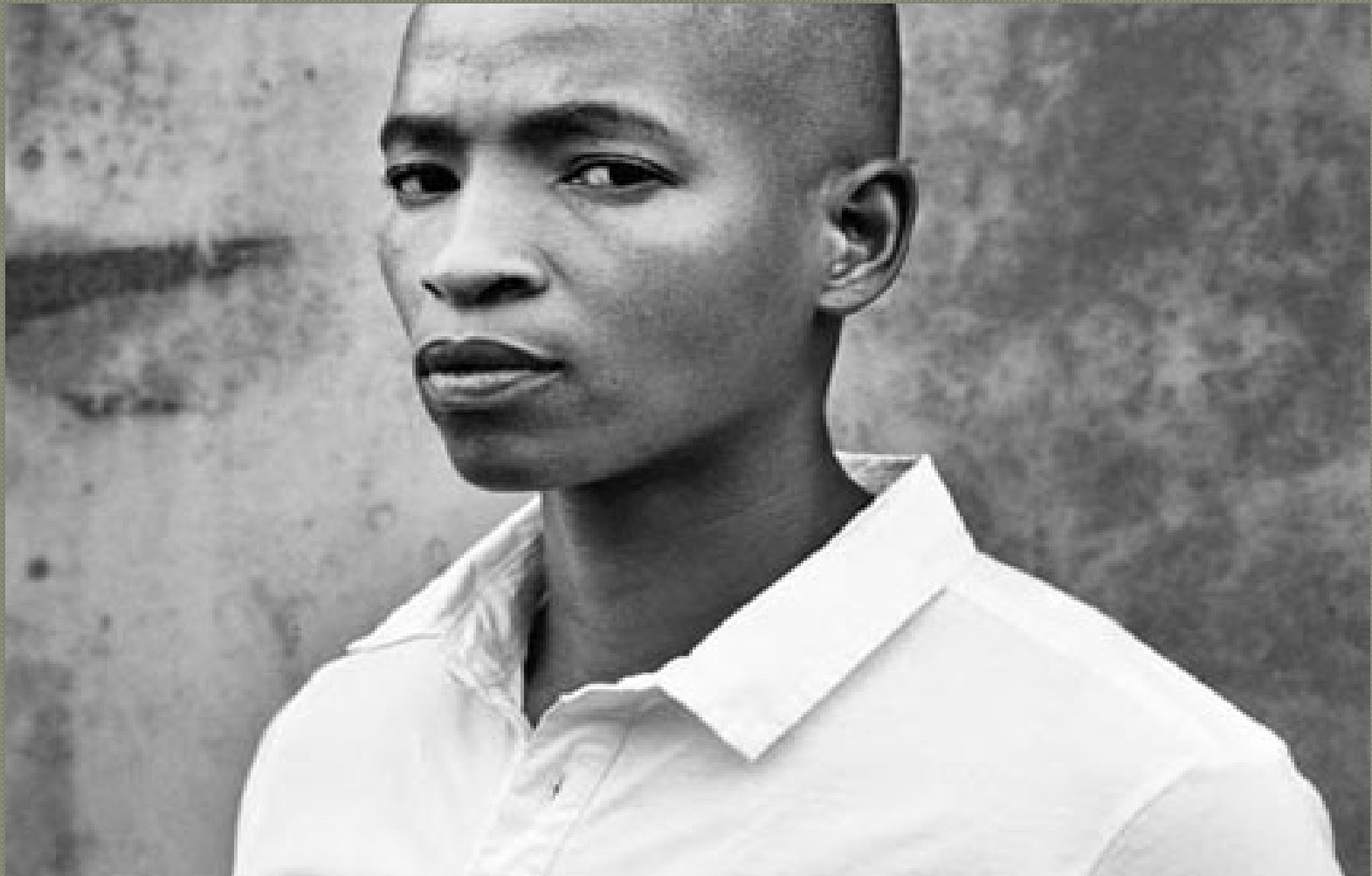
# Subversion and possibility

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“Ultimately, photography is subversive not when it frightens, when it repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.”

- *Roland Barthes*





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*Faces and Phases (2010)*

'I wished for us to stare back as black lesbian-identified women, to resist and challenge the idea that our bodies can be researched, understood, displayed for heterosexual and western consumption' (Muholi, 2009: 4-5).

# Concluding remarks

A caution: “Ultimately alternative masculinities will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent that they fail to be feminist, antiracist and queer.”





# Imagination and play

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“The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is - it’s to imagine what is possible.”

- *bell hooks*

# Fluidity/ambiguity as possibility?

