

THE
BODY
BUILT
A LIFE

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Introduction

This essay explores problems of gender in art, specifically in painting and performance. Why the two ways of representing the body meets resistance and avoidance, how this is connected to certain type of power relations of our time.

With an interdisciplinary method, I start with a historical overview how the female body and nature has been connected and how this dichotomy was changed with the development of science, modernism and capitalism. Then I will continue with the witch hunts, as it was a reaction to women's resistance at the dawn of capitalism, where women still had power over their sexuality, control over reproduction and their ability to heal. These important elements of women had to be transformed and used according to the new standards, where reproduction and sexuality became an economic resource.

Then through the lens of psychoanalysis and theories of Julia Kristeva, I look into how modernism challenged and changed our connection to the body. Resulting alienation and isolation, not only from ourselves but others. Kristeva emphasises the importance of being able to deal with loss, separation, that happens first time when we separate ourselves from the maternal body. According to her, these anxieties are not fully accommodated and dealt with as modern societies neglect the importance of social bond, connectedness, constitutive dimensions of separateness.

At the end I analyse how all this is illuminated in the arts. Through works of Marcel Duchamp and Yves Klein -how the female body is represented and approached by these male geniuses and all this is referring back to a more deeply rooted psychological, historical context. How all of this can cause the lack acknowledgement of female artists dealing with the corporal.

This approach to the body and each other brings us towards the malady of the modern man: anxiety, depression, loneliness and melancholy.

Part One Nature, women and socio-economic changes

Nature as nurture : Controlling imaginary

“ The world we have lost was organic ”

Until the 16th century, The Earth and Nature were strongly connected to the female figure, and this had a central position in the organic cosmology that determined the common world view.

This organismic theory emphasized the interdependence of an individual from the cosmos or parts of the human body to the lowliest stone of the universe.

This views nature as a nurturing mother, either as a kindly beneficent female, who would provide all the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe or as a wild, uncontrollable nature that could render violence and chaos. Both are identified with the female sex.¹

The Elizabethan view of nature was a kindly and motherly caring provider. A manifestation of a God, who had designed order to the world. Each organic creature was responsible maintaining its place within the natural order. Understanding its place, dictated within the cosmic and social order, and then maintaining it with a reasonable balance towards harmony. But Nature functioned without knowledge and it was really God who were the author of Nature.²

A dialectical image of nature as a unity of opposites in tension.

Shakespeare's King Lear pictured these two main types of Nature. King Lear, a human nature, a Renaissance man, who's place was determined by a bigger

¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s.127

² Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 6-7

whole and social order. He symbolized the medieval Renaissance cosmos, whose patterns must not be violated.³ Lear's daughter was the utopian nature, as the ideal unity of opposites: passion and order, innocence and maturity, daughter and mother, maid and wife, defencelessness and strength. She represented the impetus, to move society towards a new ideal.⁴

Renaissance pastoral poetry and art presented nature as a female- an escape, a refuge from the urban life, from the ills and anxiety. Here nature was depicted as gardens, rural landscapes or a peaceful fertile scene often as a calm, gentle female.

This female represented fulfilment of human needs, nurture by making her a passive, gentle lady, who could be used as a commodity and manipulated as a resource.⁵

Before the 16th century, this imaginary served a controlling function against bigger, more violent interventions against mother nature. Miners had to perform ceremonial sacrifices, sexual abstinence and fasting before entering mother earth's vagina, as minerals and metals were ripened in the uterus of the earth mother. ⁶

Because of technical development, the needs and purposes of society were changing and therefore the organic unity of the cosmos and society was undermined.⁷

³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 7

⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 7

⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 8-9

⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 39

⁷ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 181

By the modern era, the dominant organic mentality was diminished and replaced by a mechanically oriented approach that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative manner.

At this time, commercialism and industrialisation were developing hence the shift of the controlling imaginary. By the 16th century these structures were incompatible with the new activities.⁸

Disorder. The world had to be disenchanted

Wild, uncontrollable nature was also associated with the female. Just as it was a nurturing mother, it could also become a witch. Uncontrollable nature, just like a rebellious woman, needed to be controlled.

Unruly nature was the dark side of woman. Women were seen as closer to nature than men, lower in the social hierarchy than their male counterparts and charged with a far greater sexual passion. Little Death, or the male sexual drive, was also a corruption of the male- tempted by the female- that shortened this life by a day. Female sexual lust provided the basis of witchcraft.⁹

The first witch trials started around the mid 15th century, an age of revolts, epidemics and feudal crisis. Later, the combined impact of land privatization, high taxation and an increasing level of state control on social life.

The witch hunts weakened the resistance of the European peasantry and deepened the division between men and women. An institutionalized state's

⁸ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 41

⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 134

control over women's bodies with massive back up from the fathers of modern science, like Francis Bacon who justified the exploitation of nature for the sake of economical advantages.¹⁰

Witch as a form of revolt

Witch trials tried to control and maintain the social order and women's place in it.¹¹ Witchcraft was a threat to the current social order, as it was a way of control and revenge of the physically and socially powerless. Personal animism, the world of the witches was anti-hierarchical and infused with spirits. They didn't depend on hierarchies of demons or celestial powers. Nothing stood between the witch and her will, hence the popularity of witchcraft among oppressed women of the time. Witchcraft provided escape from a world that lacked human comfort or hope of salvation.¹²

The discoveries of the new science, the social revolts together with the release of people's animal and sexual passions, and the Reformation all pointed towards disorder in nature. The geocentric approach started to fade out when Copernicus displaced mother earth from the centre of the cosmos with the masculine sun. Before that, Johannes Kepler claimed that, he was aiming to prove that the celestial machine was to be compared not to a divine organism but to a clockwork.¹³

¹⁰ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 164

¹¹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 173

¹² Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 140

¹³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 128-129

Reactions like this against women hold symbolical meaning as a symptomatic response to the social upheavals of women who were overturning nature's order.

In early modern Europe, the assumption of a nature-culture dichotomy was applied as justification for keeping women in their place, below men, the established hierarchical order of nature. It was also reinforced by Protestant leaders, like Calvin, in his Book on Genesis, where man would function as a ruling intellectual head, while the woman is the body that would assist him.¹⁴

The birth of modern science was also dated around the 16th century. The "fathers of modern science" who cultivated rationalism were also occupied by the subject of witchcraft. Therefore science was brought forth as a form of naturalistic explanation in defence of women accused of witchcraft.¹⁵

The independent woman

The witch hunts are really significant in the history of the European proletariats, though it is also the most understudied phenomena. It was first the feminists who recognized how big a threat, women posed to the social structure during the early development of capitalism.¹⁶

Witchcraft was considered a female crime. Witches were also associated with control of reproductive skills, contraception and abortion. Therefore it seems possible, Silvia Federici argues, that witch hunts were also an instrument to

¹⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 146

¹⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 165

¹⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 164

turn the female body and reproductive skills to the service of population increase.

Witches were midwives, healers or wise-women, they were the guardians of women's reproductive knowledge and control. Men were locked out from the rooms where women gave birth. Until the beginning of the 17th century where the first male midwives appeared and overtook obstetrics. Women were excluded from the profession of controlling their own body's reproductivity and men midwives (as doctors) took over the ruling positions.¹⁷

The female personality that had developed over the revolts for freedom and political justice had to be put under control. These women were not only midwives but symbolized independent individuals, who also organized the peasantry against their lords (from the heretical movement) and became a growing challenge to male authority.¹⁸

There are many logical explanations for the witch hunts, but, as Federici puts it, "the sexual sadism displayed in the tortures reveals a misogyny that cannot be accounted for any crime".¹⁹

It not only legitimized male supremacy but also made men to fear women and look at them as destroyers of the male sex.²⁰

All in all, it alienated men from women, broke class solidarity and undermined their own collective power.²¹ The new patriarchal code was developing, where

¹⁷ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper One, 1989, s. 152

¹⁸ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 184

¹⁹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 185

²⁰ ²⁰ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 188

²¹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 189

physical incompetence was a manifestation of moral incompetence, the erosion of male authority over women. Impossible to realize the new type of bourgeois family model where the male is the king and the female is under his dominion. Sexual passion was also a no go, since it undermined men's authority over women at the same time, as one lost one's capacity for self-governance, risking losing that precious Cartesian head.²²

The witch hunt also resulted in clean sex between clean sheets, the transformation of female sexuality into work, procreation and service to men. At the same time, banned and exorcised the non-productive, non-procreative forms of female sexuality. They also contributed to the criminalization of all kinds of sexual activity that threatened procreation, the transmission of property within the family and took time away from work. Homosexuality, dances, nudity, anal coitus and so on.²³

With this overview I drew the outline of the history of women and nature and how these two parts have been used, in order to maintain power relations and economical profit.

These inherited contours have been deeply integrated in our common view and formed our modern picture of the body. Which is slightly different than the founding fathers of modern science and religion mediated to us.

²² Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 191

²³ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2014 s. 194

If the fathers of modern art seek to reformulate this, they fail, since they are repeating the centuries old formula but this time it entangled with the new epidemic- depression and melancholia.

Part Two The Psychoanalytical aspect

Julia Kristeva is an interdisciplinary thinker whose work is ranges widely from psychoanalysis to politics, semiotics to literature.

I chose Kristeva's thoughts and writings to refer back to and also to understand the psychoanalytical frames of my subject in this essay. For this, I am mostly referring to a book by Sara Beardsworth written about Kristeva's practice, where her main theories are explained.

In the beginning of the book, Beardsworth quotes Kristeva that psychoanalysis is witnessing a weakening of psychic life. The reason for this is an unacknowledged suffering typical to modern western society, which is failing to maintain self-relation, social and symbolic existence.

The Semiotic and the Symbolic, abjection in between

Kristeva's structure of constituting the subject goes as follows:

The semiotic stage- Lacan's pre-mirror stage, Freud's pre-Oedipal. Here the new born is tied to instincts, without to be able to talk or distinguish itself from the other. This stage is preverbal and lacks structure and meaning. Here the semiotic, exhibits pre-symbolic capacities, that gives access to signifying

capacities.²⁴ The second level is when the infant separates him/herself from the maternal body. This the most primitive moment of presymbolic subject-formation. Here occurs what Kristeva calls, abjection.

*"Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non- existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safe- guards. The primers of my culture."*²⁵

Abjection reveals the primitive moment of separateness in the earliest structure of subjectivity. It is the most unstable moment of maturation: it is a struggle with the instability with the inside/outside border, that is to say, with spatial ambivalence that turns on the need of a place for the "ego" to come into being.²⁶

With Lacan, this is how the subject corresponds to the imago - it is an imaginary act. For Kristeva, it is long before the imaginary appears, this struggle is between the inside/outside border in relation to the mother's body.²⁷

Abjection is an act of differentiation, where the child needs to differentiate from the mother's body in order to be.

²⁴ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva Psychoanalysis and modernity, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 56

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS New York 1982 s. 2

²⁶ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva Psychoanalysis and modernity, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 81

²⁷ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva Psychoanalysis and modernity, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 81

The negative aspect of abjection is the collapse of selfhood, the other and the world.

Abjection is a presymbolic imperative for separation, not one coming from an external source (paternal law) but something that drops out with the connection to the maternal body. It is a border, without space and a corporeal inscription of the maternal hold. The abject becomes an object of the infant's attempt to break away from the mother's body.²⁸

By this permeable limit Kristeva means the abjected mother- prior to and as a precondition for the object.²⁹

The abjected elements capture the inarticulate, at the limits of society- these are exactly the thing modern society pushes out of site: death, illness, old age, the messy stuff.

The third stage as the symbolic stage/order.

This symbolic order originates from Levi-Strauss, describing that society is structured by laws, arranged relations and relationships.

Symbolic order is an important pillar in the process of construction of the subject. It is through language that the process takes place.³⁰

The symbolic the paternal law. It is associated with the masculine, structure, law. Lacan also emphasised that psychoanalysis puts too much weight and

²⁸ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 84

²⁹ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 57

³⁰ Paula Murphy, Jacques, Jacques and Jacks: the shifting symbolic in Derrida and Lacan *Textual Practice* 19(4), 2005, s. 510

importance on the semiotic, to the imaginary, at the expense of the symbolic.³¹

The symbolic is not controlled by biology nor genetics, but it controls the subject. It has the controlling, separating, judging function. If it fails its function, childhood phobia appears.³²

This psychoanalytical approach appeared in social and political theory, and emphasized the problems of the modern social being.

Self-relation is overly promoted in a linguistic universe, alienated from the physical and corporal.³³ This is illustrated with the figure of Narcissus (primary narcissism: in a prior state of a child, where the self is not differentiated himself/herself from the world) and thinks that all sources of pleasures stems from within. When the infant finally can make a distinction between the world and the self, a feeling of loss, otherness, separateness arise.³⁴

According to Freud, the narcissistic position is prior to the self's symbolic capacities and its relation to others. Later it shows up where these capacities are weakened or have collapsed.³⁵

These anxieties need to be worked thorough in the symbolic phase to be able to manage a well functioning self relation, connection with others and social

³¹ Paula Murphy, Jacques, Jacques and Jacks: the shifting symbolic in Derrida and Lacan *Textual Practice* 19(4), 2005, s. 510

³² Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 84

³³ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 57

³⁴ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 56

³⁵ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 59

bonding. This is what the modern western society neglects. To give access and tools to people to be able to deal with that trauma. According to Kristeva, that is why art- literature plays an important role of discussing topics of love, loss and separateness.

*"An unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside. Religion, Morality, Law... Contemporary literature does not take their place. Rather, it seems to be written out of the untenable aspects of perverse or superego positions. It acknowledges the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and Law—their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming. Like perversion, it takes advantage of them, gets round them, and makes sport of them."*³⁶

But with the arrival of the modern era, capitalism, the incorporation of the mechanical in every aspects (also the body) and the new intellectualised forms of art modern man is stuck in the phase of primal narcissism.

I find this thought fairly relevant for this essay's discussion.

In the first chapter, as Carolyn Merchant writes: "we have lost the world as an organic".

This sentence seems to express the lost interconnectedness of nature and humans, creating a division between the two, but also the loss of certain values and tools that functioned as guidelines for humans to be able to manage relations and relationships between the self and each other. In this

³⁶ Julia Kristeva, Powers of horror, An Essay on Abjection, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, New York, 1982, s. 16

dimension, nature refers to the lost nature of human beings, the loss or the feminine and the maternal - according to Kristeva.³⁷

By the division of culture-nature, certain types of life approach are cultivated - modernism, rationalism, the dominion of science, patriarchic structure that results in the exploitation of natural resources and women -whom got reduced to their reproductive capacities.

*"The primacy of the market economy over the body is certainly something to worry about, perhaps even to get dramatic about, to protest before things are firmly established, before it is definitely too late."*³⁸

Our modern world rejects certain things that reminds us of our mortality. Elements that would suggest the body's fragility, uncertainty but also its sliminess, uncleanness, its desire and the risk of dependency. These elements we don't talk about, and as it is going to be shown in the next chapter, the new tendencies of art also neglects and stigmatises them. We can only talk about them in a manner of distance, irony or overly intellectualised ways- how we inherited it from the fathers of modern art, who inherited from the fathers of modern science.

With the rise of capitalism, domination, accumulation, consumption also appeared to be the influencing force in society:

It also includes separateness, division: me and the rest of the world.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Stabat Mater*, Duke University Press, 1985

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, Columbia University Press, 2000, s. 9

Narcissistic constriction is the symptom of the failings of modern institutions to accommodate the corporal dimensions of separateness and connections with others.³⁹

Abject is something rejected that one can not separate from. To deal with abjection, the symbolic has to be able to give access to secure the distinction of subject/object.

Abjection appears where the symbolic's function, supporting object-relation, relationship to an other, is failing or absent.⁴⁰

That is why we need the imaginary father - one that can help to establish separation. The authority of the paternal law. But the maternal and the paternal have to work in synthesis in order to develop a subject, that rests only on pure misidentification of the mother.⁴¹

Before modernism (the appearance of nihilistic thoughts), religion and art could serve the task of codification of abjection. Abjection appearing as abject- in the secular western societies is a clear indicator of how the symbolic structure fails to navigate in subjectivity.⁴² With the appearance of the avant-garde this loss was rediscovered and attempted to reconnect. But somewhere in the male artists' brain, it transferred more into the abstract thoughts, moving away from the corporal by the intellectualisation and dematerialisation

³⁹ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 57

⁴⁰ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 90

⁴¹ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 74

⁴² Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva *Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 93

of art. Artistic tendencies were defined by the current socio-political tendencies as mechanisation, industrialisation and rationalisation. Hence casting the physical, corporal, material aside.

By this loss, we are unable to manage certain things, which is illuminated in the problems of the modern man: separation, anxiety, dealing with love and loss, death.

That is how also art fails to serve. By the intellectualisation of art, the prioritisation of artworks that does not cut too deep down to these abjected topics, these modern problems keep on haunting us. In the same time, it legitimises gender problems, resistance of certain kind of artists and artworks, upholding the rational, scientific type of thinking about life, art and connectedness to each other and the world.

Kristeva's lost nature and the feminine

Kristeva's main texts on nature, women and feminism are *Sabat Mater* and *Women's Time*, where she evaluates her thoughts on the feminine, lost nature, lost past and motherhood. Kristeva also draws a parallel line between nature and women, just as we seen in the first chapter of this essay. According to Beardsworth, Kristeva also acknowledges women's and nature's fate as a feature of modern nihilism (as a product of modern society, in terms of the the loss of meaning and purpose) in terms of exploitation, objectification and loss.⁴³

⁴³ Sara Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva Psychoanalysis and modernity*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 220-221

Sara Beardsworth argues that these two fates are meant to be understood in the concept of the crisis of modernity; by the maternal body Kristeva means the claim of lost nature, lost past. So, when she puts it under the scope of psychoanalysis, the maternal body is situated in the phantasmaties. By phantasmaties she means the fantasy, our subjective perception, that defines objectivity. Hence this fantasy is also distorted.

That is where Kristeva's feminism lays: she emphasises the importance of the feminine, to name, articulate an authority, other than the paternal law. Against the phallic monism, Kristeva would like to know if we can find some traces of the immermorial semiotic authority.⁴⁴

Both nature and woman, confined in phantasmaties- at least in modern western societies.

Kristeva's interest in the semiotic and the imaginary: showing the reassertion and the confinement of lost nature in fantasy, as well as evoking the need to bring the feminine out of this confinement.¹⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, Marcel Duchamp couldn't find his female, maternal figure through his works either. We will discover how this search for the lost connection to nature, was dealt with and reworked through his artistic practice. What he found in his phantasy was a stripped bride, stripped off her clothes and human features, becoming an metallic structure.

⁴⁴ Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva Psychoanalysis and modernity, State University of New York Press, New York, 2004 s. 224-225

Part Three Cotton gloves Disposable Gloves No Gloves

In this chapter, I would like to use artworks by Marcel Duchamp and Yves Klein as relevant examples of illustrating a modern man's approach to himself, nature, women and life in general and to art as well.

This chapter will contain episodes from Duchamp's biography and artistic decisions to highlight the changes and tendencies that formed art history towards the well-known movements and approaches to the current position of painting, especially gender specificity in painting, which help explain the dominant art tendencies of our time.

Later on I go through Jane Blocker's book written about performance to connect some ideas and approaches performance and painting have in common, namely the hoped for (gendered) body and all the attributes connected to it that refers back to the corporal connotations of painting.

Duchamp and the avant-garde

As Jerrold Seigel writes in his book about Duchamp, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, a critical turning point was the year of 1912. The artist returned to Paris from Munich, starting a new chapter of his practice. He began working as a librarian and also distanced himself from the cubists. He already had a bigger work in mind, *The large glass, The Bride Stripped bare by her Bachelors, Even*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 86

Before the First World War, ideas about motion seemed very rich and Duchamp had also got engaged with them.⁴⁶

Motion meant the modern world, the cities, science, all the new technological inventions. The human mind was also discussed, and framed according to the new inventions. How could it deal with the novelties of the time. Henri Bergson was one of the most prominent philosophers, whose main interests were motion, creative power, constant energy in the psyche. His ideas combined scientific attributes with the mind's activities, hence his new formulas gained great attention among many artists and other thinkers. The Bergsonian way of looking at the inner self appealed to the avant-garde, where the soul was a scene of great creative power, but since people also had to live in the outside world of material objects, they could not always experience it, but they learned to analyse and manipulate it.⁴⁷

Guillaume Apollinaire was a poet and one of the main supporters of the avant-garde. He wrote a manifesto for his adored friends, whom he claimed were the most prominent personalities among the new painters.⁴⁸

Guillaume Apollinaire merged the creative workings of the mind and the interest for the inner with a modernist approach to the new world of technology and science. This simultaneism represented the spiritual and the technological, separate but an interrelated states of being.

Apollinaire wrote a text, *On the subject in Modern Painting* where he claims that the new modern painters (his friends) are aiming for something more real

⁴⁶ Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 56

⁴⁷ Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 56

⁴⁸ Guillaume Apollinaire, *On the subject of Modern Painting*, 100 Artists' Manifestos, Penguin Classics, s. 27

than real, that “the subject no longer counts, or if it counts, it counts for very little.”

Artist’s paint something that can not be seen with the eyes, their real subject might be a sublimated reality, not nature that is seen with our own eyes, but a transcended subject, that is made by the genius of a painter.⁴⁹

In this framework, an intellectual approach appeared, works on movement and constant flow executed by the male genius. Seigel mentions two well-known works of Duchamp from this period, the Sad young Man, on a Train and Nude Descending a Staircase.⁵⁰ The two share a common topic, namely a body separated from itself, gaining the illusion of motion, movement. They could very much appeal to the up-to-date imagery of a camera but they also could represent Duchamp's state of mind.

The large glass, The Bride Stripped bare by her Bachelors, Even

The concept of this piece was the transition from virginity to marriage. Duchamp has been occupied with the idea before, but now the linear physical movement was taken over by purely abstract intellectual thought.⁵¹

The work is also a unique representation of Duchamp’s fascination for engines, mechanics and the rational.

Siegel translates The Large Glass as a purely psychological experience of Duchamp. Feelings of sadness, desire, disillusionment. Abandoning physical

⁴⁹ Guillaume Apollinaire, On the subject of Modern Painting, 100 Artists’ Manifestos, Penguin Classics, s. 27

⁵⁰ Jerrold Seigel, The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 57

⁵¹ Jerrold Seigel, The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 60

movement and reaching for a deeper self, a purely mental movement, detached from space and time.⁵²

Seigel analyses this piece on many pages of his book, regarding features of irony, Duchamp's complex symbol system, which serves to keep his audience outside anyways, making the work impenetrable. What is important to us now is how the bride, the female body is represented here, as a barometer or a mechanical object. She is hanging there, somewhere stuck between space surrounded by her "splendid vibrations"⁵³. The bachelor section is precisely worked out, but they only seem to function in a mechanical way. The female body suspended with splendid vibrations, energy around her, where the bachelors are in motion.

Or just looking at a very physical act as the stripping, linked with many possible sensations, feelings, the corporal, represented here as acting like machines, structures, made from the hardest, inorganic materials. Cold, not living, artificial elements, loaded with energy. Alienated from the bodily experience but still so many ideas, fantasies, side-notes. All controlled and made by the thinking, rational man's head. An intimate scene still so empty, one-sided, lonely.

The stripping does not take place, only the title suggests it, nudity only exists in the fantasy or spheres of fantasy and the bride remains untouched by the imaginary bachelors. Duchamp distributes the fantasy or the desire to the female. There is also an another feature here, the waiting, the delayed act that

⁵²Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 60

⁵³ Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 94

will never happen. Stripping, nudity, desire, fulfilment in the head, that delirium that never takes place in this dimension. The total separation of the body and mind. Where all the corporal experience transformed, thought into an almost spiritual act, presented with hard mechanical lines and arrangements, looking more like an engineer's floor plan than a (imagined) sexual act between one female and more male actors. To emphasize the delay or the displacement of dimensions and the never ending suspension, Duchamp puts the action onto a glass plate, where the bride's part is hardly measurable.⁵⁴

Stripping could also be a metaphor for getting rid of the burden of being a human, all emotions, desire, the skin and other organs, reducing humans into a mechanical structure, metal. A machine, that serves man's needs, functioning at commando. Something which is controlled, because it is too dangerous if it is let to be driven by her instincts. Women are more sexual, loaded with desire and sexual energy that threatens men's rationality, and effectivity. They are dangerous to the system- distort capitalist production, the creative man's mind, they cause revolt and chaos and lure the rational man into the hidden parts of the rational head.

The bachelors part is more understandable to our dimension, they are in one dimension less than the bride, making them seen "ultrathin" in relation to her.

How does this work seek for the sublimation of art into life? Duchamp transcends the body into an unreachable dimension, that does not have

⁵⁴ Jerrold Seigel, *The private worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, s. 101

anything to do with reality or the corporal. The subjects become characters of his mind, in a fully intellectualized physical act- the stripping.

The hoped for body

At the beginning of the 20th century a new sun's shine appeared on the mechanically structured horizon. Namely the avant-garde, as a revolutionary approach, filled with hope for the sublimation of art into life. The avant-garde aimed at this unification and its hope was based on erasing the previous separation of life and art, which at those times was rooted in a bourgeois modernism of the 19th century.

The avant-garde did not succeed in merging art and life together. How could it have succeeded with its men-dominated art practices? How could they unify art together with nature with the constant separation of I and it, where I is the male artist, the active head and it, as nature as the inactive female body? Nature had to be reclaimed, and, if we accept that framework where nature is feminized in the terms of Julia Kristeva, then the female body had to be reclaimed, by female artists, who can reframe and merge nature into art. Of course, the avant-garde's primary goal was to set a critical approach to the current political and social status quo. It emphasized problematics of art being commercialised, putting big importance of the value of paintings and the commodification of art.

Carol Rama the avant-garde Witch

Carol Rama started her artistic practice in the 30's surrounded by the fascistic movement all over Europe. She born and died in Turin (Italy), she stayed in

the city most of her lifetime, isolated in her apartment, inhabited by memories and stories- in the shapes of objects, clothes and books. She never really got involved with the wider artistic scenes of her lifetime. The work of Rama gives another dimension to the post avant-garde: As it is written in the introduction of *The passion* according to Carol Rama:

*"Feminine and sexualised, the work of Rama belongs to the other half of the avant-garde, because of both her gender and the artist's ability to escape the expectation dictated by the norm."*⁵⁵

Carol Rama's first exhibition was censored as obscene by the Italian Fascist Government in 1945. All 27 watercolour paintings were withdrawn and some of them destroyed. Her motifs were all the things we could call abject: institutional confinement, disability, illness, body that would not fit in to the somathopolitical norms. Around the mid 50's she became interested in organic abstraction, as she would call it: abstract war, but escape the censorship of her time. Some kind of energy was transformed into the works, with help of an apparatus- the body: movement, flux, the earth's energy, emotional energy, the brains energy into graphs.

She did use bodily fluids to challenge patriarchal idealism and reclaim the female gaze - one might say: to reclaim the female body. She does it with a unique subjectivity, where her motifs are somewhere between the male and the female, animals or organic creatures, a half adult but still childlike woman,

⁵⁵ Anne Dressen, Beatrice Preciado, *The passion according to Carol Rama*, 2015

with an active power. Her/his/its body here is not passive and objectified, but an energized organism, that shits, masturbates, a subject that desires and not desired, a political active agent.

She also used artificial objects, bicycle tyres, inorganic materials, fake eye lashes, hair, skin, etc. in her works. These objects- alienated from the organic by mechanical processes speak about how the human body is transformed into something inorganic, maybe modern. When her human like figures are penetrating bears, wolves and other kinds of animals, I would not define it as perverse, but would emphasize the connection with the organic, or, as ironical point and on witches being accused of having sex with the beast (devil).

I chose Carol Rama's artistic practice to show how she sublimated life into art, how her subjectivity is a true compass into art and how it serves as an antidote to her time and the acknowledged artistic trends. Carol Rama's work is essential because she is addressing the problems of this thesis: How the ways of representing the body meets resistance and avoidance, how this is connected to a certain type of power relations of our time. And where do these abjections arise from.

Performance (by male artists) as a longed for (female) body

Doing performance in the 60's and 70's served the same goal as the avant-garde, namely artists freeing themselves from the art gallery system, from the object, commodity, the tired tradition of painting. Peter Bürger wrote about how the avant-garde failed and suggested a reintegration of art into life. For

Bürger, the avant-garde was a reaction to the separateness between art and life.⁵⁶

From this argument, Jane Blocker finds loss, hope and desire are fundamentally interconnected in the avant-garde. Jane Blocker argues that from the mid 50's to mid 70's, the success of performance must be regarded as a consequence of the discursive desire for, appropriation of, and distancing from the feminine. In the need to introduce the living body into art one had to manage its implications carefully, through conceptual, rhetorical or methodological means (exploiting it) and the same time avoiding its taint.⁵⁷ Blocker acknowledges that in performance, the drama of postmodern love is performed again and again, aiming for an ideal body, what thinkers call: "the body in general" or "the body". This is a body that is hoped for, longed for, but, at the same time, literal, physical, loaded with signification: it is familiar, knowable, pure, and yet distant, elusive, impossible. Blocker highlights how it is also rooted in a patriarchic tradition: the longed body is genderless, yet presumably masculine, sexually undefined yet straight, racially neutral yet white.⁵⁸

This body also has both literal and figurative meanings, that according to Paul de Man, they are mutually exclusive to each other.⁵⁹

What is the relation between the two? How is meaning invested in this figure and by whom? The body we see in performance is the performative production

⁵⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, 1984

⁵⁷ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004

⁵⁸ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004 s. 15

⁵⁹ Paul de Man, *Semiotics and Rhetoric*, *Diacritics*, Fall 1973, Vol. 3(3)

of a rhetorical figure, the dramatic portrayal of patriarchy's fantasy of the hoped for. Jane Blocker concludes that "the body in general" in performances are substitutions or "surrogations"⁶⁰ for the literal body presumed to be female. The body hoped for, but at the same time rejected as well.

Hope as such as a driving force in performance and art is an important element since the avant-garde. The stressed uncertainty about life⁶¹, nature and the body. In this uncertainty, authenticity becomes important. The truth of experience is in the body. The body becomes the proof of certainty and authenticity in the age of doubt.

Anthropometrie sans titre

Many artworks tried to reestablish this connection between body and nature, body and life. For instance Yves Klein's *Anthropometrie sans titre* (1960). Despite its importance and notoriety in our art history, I believe it is a work that is just not succeeding very well in emphasizing the importance of the connection and relationship of nature and human, or to reestablish a way to sublimate art into life. Blocker describes thought how Klein's performance emphasizes how the body in this work represents the wild, unknown nature, it is a portrayal of an unfathomable quality of the body.⁶²

According to what we learnt in the previous chapter, this work could also reassure the tendency where the genius male artist uses his intellect to command, control and fulfil his desire towards the female body, or, specifically,

⁶⁰ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004, s. 16

⁶¹ Udo Kultermann, *Art and Life*, Praeger Publishers, 1971

⁶² Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004, s. 57

the torso, he is interested in.⁶³ Receiving accomplishment and fame for what he achieved by this revolutionary act. ⁶⁴Blocker also adds later in her book, how Klein challenged the old painterly traditions, where he wanted to move away from the messiness of it, using only his pure intellect, and other tools (female body) to create an artwork. That messiness, slime, is gendered as female, that it is desired and hoped for still rejected and stigmatized. Klein also genders nature with the female. In principle, he could also use any other "forces" of nature to mark his canvas. Instead he chose the female models to act as he wished for. If nature is female, then nature is still controlled. Not talking about the stereotypical representation of females as the nude muses. He calls it a complete collaboration between him and nature; 50 years later it is misogyny.

The other typical feature, the intellectualized tone, the white tuxedo and Klein's intellectual audience. Everyone stayed clean except the living brushes, women. They got dirty and slimy, covered with their own sweat and also paint. The hoped-for body is reenacted again; but its threatening, contaminating features are also highlighted. This body is fertile, and pure. It is hoped for, but, in the same time have to kept in its place, under guidelines, just the way the male genius thinks its best.

⁶³ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004, s. 56-57

⁶⁴ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, Minneapolis, 2004, s. 65

Carolee Schneemann

What could work as an antidote to Klein's performance is Carolee Schneemann's work.

Carolee Schneemann was a modernist, feminist performance artist, who worked with the body's concrete and immediate aspects. The body with its pleasures and sensations, also the body as it is embedded in different social codes in popular culture. She was highly critical of the so-called sexual revolution in the USA of the 60's, claiming that women and men became vulnerable in a marketplace where gender roles were more defined than we ever imagined. The newly revolutionized sexual desire for sexual fulfilment were manipulated and misused by companies to create a mean circle of dissatisfaction by manipulating habits of consumption.⁶⁵

Schneemann had received much sexist treatment from the art world together with the other feminist artists of the 1960's and 1970's. She made works where she was reclaiming her body, as a tool of making art, put in a strictly feminine way.

Her work called *Interior Scroll* (1975 and 1977) is a feminist claim against the sexist structure that her and many female artists experienced. In this piece, she is playing a female nude, who is also an artist, painting on her own body. At the same time, she reads up from a scroll of paper, that she pulled out of her vagina. The text was taken from a super 8 film, *Kitch's Last Meal*. Parts of a discussion between her and a male structuralist filmmaker, him criticizing her

⁶⁵ Elise Archias, *The Concrete Body*, Yale University Press, London, 2016 s. 81-82

work, which he says, may be sexual and pleasurable, but lacks conceptual substance.

Schneemann always worked with the body's concreteness and its physicality, putting it in a feminist vantage point, emphasizing the problematics of her time both as an artist and a female. Her works- (Eye Body- 1963, Meat Joy-1964) reclaim her body- freed from stereotypes and expectations. Another side of Yves Kleins Antropometrie sans titre (1960).

Schneemann is the active creator and the material object of her own work, in her own will. There is no male genius that would instruct her how to get the paint onto her body and then to the clean prepared canvas. Her "product" as an art piece is simultaneous and dirty, where Yves Klein's paintings got framed and sold on the market.

Schneemann emphasizes female eroticism, a spiritual power that plays a definitive role in her art as well as other female artist's practices. These artists use the body as a one to one unit, a simultaneous element, let driven by its desires, needs but it also functions as creative power. These elements are what is limited repressed or hidden in intellectualized works made by the male artist written about in this essay.

They successfully sublimate art into life and vice versa, not like their avant-gardeist colleagues nor the modernist artist, who thrived on transcending the so-called body into a higher or deeper spiritual level-from nothing into nothingness.

Under the tendency of intellectualizing art, painting was declared dead. This declaration was made by conceptual artists, who regarded painting as an old-fashioned ideology of humanism, manifested in capitalism, brand names, commodities, etc.⁶⁶

As we can also acknowledge it, painting has a direct reference to the corporal, as the paint or a brush mark is an index for the human essence, trace.

Victor Burgin was a very skeptical art theorist who stated the end of art theory and was extremely critical towards painting. In *The End of Art Theory* he suggested the abandonment of painting means the abandonment of the many centuries old humanism- a Western belief in exchange and individuality.⁶⁷

Blocker writes about Victor Burgin's skepticism towards the body, whose presence leads paintings legitimacy (paint and brushstroke as the trace of the body) since it is connected to patriarchy, mastery and logocentrism.⁶⁸ Blocker connects this with Frueh where she writes: "The modernist myth of genius constructs the artist as a man lauded for making a mess: the avant-gardist 'messes' up canons of beauty, and his habits and sex life 'mess' with bourgeois conventions... Within modernist discourse and modern life, the woman artist who 'makes a mess' has not experienced success equal to men's. This is because tidiness has been and remains a norm imposed by culture on women".⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Victor Burgin, *The absence of presence* , *The end of art theory*, Macmillan, 1986 s. 29

⁶⁷ Victor Burgin, *The absence of presence* , *The end of art theory*, Macmillan, 1986 s. 35

⁶⁸ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, 2004, s. 70

⁶⁹ Jane Blocker, *What the body cost*, 2004, s. 70

Marlene Dumas

Marlene Dumas is one of the most acknowledged living female painter of our time. She is 65 years old, born in South Africa, studied in the Netherlands, still based there.

The Tate called her contemporary portrait artist, on the occasion of her show in 1996, in Tate Gallery, where she had a show with her works on paper.

Her works often called provocative: dealing with certain political issues, sexuality, guilt, race, violence. I don't think her works are specially provocative. She is dealing with questions, few people dares to, with an open and honest way. Exactly the things Julia Kristeva writes, the inarticulate elements of society, that gets pushed out of sites- the abjects: illness, old age, messy stuff, death.

Dumas does it with a clever and indirect manner though; she is a hoarder or newspaper articles, photos, photocopies, etc. Working from a famously big archive of these materials, that she uses as original sources of her paintings.

She addresses the most relevant topics of our time, her gender and being a female painter included. Her often humorous or rather peculiar writings or artist talks, openly mark these problematical points. One of my favourite texts of hers goes the following:

I paint because I am a woman.

(It's a logical necessity).

If painting is female and insanity is a female malady, then all women painters are mad and all male painters are women.⁷⁰

In this text she summarises many of the frames women had been put into.

Stereotypes on women: the insane woman, the religious woman, the blond woman, the stupid woman, the witch, woman as the second sex, the housewife, woman with Oedipus complex, the dirty, messy female painter. She claims she is all, she is all the woman we can think of, with a man gaze. This text is not provoking either because she writes it in a clean, but still light and funny way. It is also comical, still true, tragicomical.

Dumas' main focus is on the human, the existence of our modern time. Exactly the elements Kristeva means, are neglected and rejected. But we still face them in Dumas' practise, because she transforms them, partly with her own subjectivity, partly because she is using images we have already seen. She is using material that has gone through "censorship", the mass media. These images are available for everyone, probably most of us have seen them already.

Dumas' argument is that a photograph of a corpse certifies that the corpse is alive as corpse, as a living image of a death thing, it is metaphorically transformed into a living thing.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Marlene Dumas, *Women and Painting, Sweet Nothings*, Koenig Books, London, 2014, s. 76

⁷¹ Richard Shiff, *Less Dead*, Cornelia Butler, Marlene Dumas-Measuring your own grave, *The museum of contemporary art*, Los Angeles, 2008, s. 146.

Therefore I believe, her paintings are not rejected immediately. She is also giving a great deal of contextualising of her works, making them more acceptable to our rational minds. They might not be embraced and celebrated in the same way as other works of other contemporary male artists like Peter Doig's *The Architects Home*, or Gerhard Richter's *A B Still*.⁷²

But Marlene Dumas' practise is counts as the most successful among female painters of our time.

Conclusion: Stay clean and wear anti-respirators

Conceptual art emphasizes painting's messiness. Conceptual artists stay clean, while painters get messy and dirty. They reject it, these bodily fluids, the slime, that could pop up in our head when we look at paintings. It is closely connected to the disliked nasty bodily fluids, abjects. That is where messy women with their messy paintings meet the literal body in performance, they both suffer the western cultural heritage and norms imposed on them.

Just like we saw how first the wild nature, then the heretics followed by the witches, had to be tamed and controlled, now it is painters, female painters and artists whom misogynist artists feel threatened by.

Duchamp might not have wanted to sublimate art into life and life into art. He, and others sharing the same approach, might have wished to transcend the body, to get out of it, instead of getting into it, accepting it with all the slime, dirt, blood, or dribble.

⁷² Dr Clare McAndrew, *The Art Market 2017*, Art Basel and UBS, 2017 s. 174

The body, the physical, together with nature is strongly attached to the female body. This inherited association is deeply rooted in Western culture, which keeps haunting us and bubbling up through paint and fluids onto the surface every time artists deal with the corporeal or just simply paint without an abstract intellectual concept. It seems as if an artwork digs too deep down it meets resistance, disgust or professional rejection. These kind of artworks faith is the same as the female body- abjected, stigmatised.

They are like memorial monuments, that remind us of something terrible, that happened in the past and needs to be dealt with. Some don't like to be reminded of the horrible past and our common future, hence keep resisting, rejecting, burrowing down somewhere deep. But the body is still alive with working unconscious and it keeps reminding us that we need to deal with the repressed. Just like painting claimed to be dead. Painting is not dead, never was and will never be. It is a trace of a human touch. To touch and to be touched. To be alive, to feel. To relate to others and to connect. To be here together. To be separated and unite again.

Painting and arts can still sublime these issues into meaningful content and help us to reestablish a subjectivity that got transformed into an individualist modern man's rationality. Our bodies became either housing containers of our highly appreciated minds or reproductive units of capitalism. We got alienated from our bodies and each other.

This problematic approach to the corporal makes it difficult to connect, which brings us towards the malady of the modern man: anxiety, depression, loneliness and melancholy.

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