aesthetics and gender

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Preface

Combining aesthetic theory with gender analysis opens a large and diverse territory to explore. Both familiar issues in philosophy of art and new, expanded questions about the influence of culture on imagination and identity have become subjects of feminist research. Film, literature, graphic arts, advertising, and the legacies of history all contribute to the forces that shape self-image, desire, behavior, and social role – as well as the ability to imagine possibilities for change. This issue brings together an international group of scholars from several disciplines who explore gender and femininity, sexuality and its several iterations, and the politics of everyday life and culture.

Research concerning gender and aesthetics has expanded enormously since the advent of feminist scholarship, which initiated philosophical perspectives in aesthetics in the 1970s and 1980s. The authors here situate their own thinking in relation to earlier feminist work, to history and the classics of philosophy, and to several emerging research perspectives that point to future investigations. Some of the early efforts of feminist scholarship remain of interest and continue to provide fruitful avenues for exploration. Artists and their works sometimes escape familiar stereotypes and expectations, presenting modes of being that the contemporary scholar can revisit and examine. Thus historical works of art, literature, and philosophy continue to provide room to explore the conceptual frameworks that have shaped our ways of life. The import of such studies extends beyond historical exercise, for the texts of women writers and artists, some of them neglected or dismissed as insignificant, often disclose recognizable details of the lives of women in the present day. The authors in this issue investigate texts and artists of the past and present to

probe different visions of women's roles and female identities, both their differences within and between societies and the threads of commonality across history and culture. Mindful of the political and economic factors that frame artistic creativity, they note that what may seem conventional in one context might be liberating in another.

Just as politically minded analysis strives to uncover – and elude – the limits of social formation of gender identity and behavior, so it must acknowledge that such forces are to a degree inescapable, since one never exists outside of culture. Noting their effects nonetheless opens our minds to what might be possible and desirable for the future. These authors review the history of feminist approaches to aesthetics, critique some predecessors, and revise ideas to fit a changing world. Together, their efforts promote the further questioning of ideals at a time when gender is being simultaneously promulgated, undermined, and sometimes radically altered.

In the last few years, many philosophers of aesthetics have turned attention to the "everyday," that is, to aspects of quotidian life that have traditionally fallen outside philosophical attention. Interest in everyday experiences is rooted in critiques of standard approaches to aesthetic culture, which formerly attended almost exclusively either to fine art or to experiences of nature. The ordinary domestic or work routine did not seem to offer a great deal of scope for theoretical probing. However, scholars of both aesthetics and feminism have explored ordinary, seemingly insignificant experiences and found creative voices and activities, perhaps especially from women whose traditional roles have situated them outside the realm of high culture.

A question persists for the study of gender and for feminist approaches to aesthetics in its various forms, namely: To what degree does a "feminist" perspective overlap with what can be considered a "feminine" approach to cultural values? This is a tricky issue to dissect, since social framing of character traits that are designated proper to females has long been recognized as constricting opportunities for education and employment, not to mention personal development outside conventional stereotypes. And yet at the same time, so-called feminine traits may also be ones that the dominant culture undervalues, and hence many feminists seek to reclaim them. Moreover, gendered characteristics are partially formed by the domestic arrangements that obtain in different societies, and so generalization about what is to count among desirable traits and roles needs to take social context into consideration.

Thus this complex question is far from settled, and it continues to prompt fresh thinking about cultural possibilities and social values. The essays in this journal issue contribute to unraveling its meanings and keep alive the promises, hazards, and possibilities inherent in its potential answers.

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Chick Lit in India: Possibilities for a Feminine Aesthetic in Popular Fiction

Abstract

Implicit in the primary project of traditional aesthetics is the distinction made between "high" and "low" culture via standards that feminist critics have argued bar creative work by women from entry into the artistic canon. Since the mid-1990s these standards have been evident in the critical reception of the genre known as "chick lit" which is largely written by women using a distinctly feminine style and address. While the question of chick lit's merit as a form of women's writing and its claim to literary status remains undecided, chick lit has travelled a long way since *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the conclusions drawn about Western chick lit cannot be seamlessly mapped onto chick lit's others – its racially inflected and transnational iterations. Drawing on theories of feminine aesthetics, life writing, performativity, confession and memory, this paper moves from a consideration of the main arguments surrounding the aesthetic possibilities of the Western chick lit novel to the distinctive creative expression present in Indian chick lit to argue that the answer to the question of the genre's aesthetic value may be found in some of its global transformations.

"Feminism and philosophy share an interest in the question of how the nature and boundaries of art are shaped by context,"[1] write Peggy Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer in their introduction to *Feminism and Tradition in*

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[1] P. Brand, C. Korsmeyer, "Introduction: Aesthetics and Its Traditions", [in:] *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, eds. P. Brand, C. Korsmeyer, Pennsylvania 1995, p. 14.

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Aesthetics. Charting the development of an analytic tradition in aesthetics and its similarities to the feminist critique of "patriarchal aesthetics," Brand and Korsmeyer note a tendency in both schools to move away from a fixed universalist definition of art to attention to "a variety of facets, determined by the historical moment and particular character of an experience"[2] in order to answer the question of what constitutes art. This move is important given that historically, as Richard L. Anderson notes, "'*aesthetics*' refers to theories about the fundamental nature and value of art,"[3] implying a separation between that which is art and that which is not, with the former falling into the domain of "high" culture and the latter into "low" culture. A number of feminist critics have argued that the standards by which these distinctions have been made bar work by women from entry into the exalted artistic canon and preclude women from being tastemakers.[4] Since the turn of the millennium this division between what counts as art and what doesn't has been starkly evident in the critical reception of the genre known as "chick lit."

Defined by Heather Cabot as books featuring "everyday women in their 20s and 30s navigating their generation's challenges of balancing demanding careers with personal relationships,"[5] chick lit spread to television and film with similar visions of feminine subjectivity and storytelling emerging across the world. The influence of what is arguably chick lit's founding text, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*,[6] is evident not only in the novel's commercial success, but also in the outpouring of discussion surrounding Bridget Jones. She became "an icon, a recognizable emblem of a particular kind of femininity, a constructed point of identification for all women."[7]

[2] Ibidem, p. 14.

[3] R. L. Anderson, "From Calliope's Sisters", [in:] *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, ed. C. Korsmeyer, Massachusetts 1998, p. 19.

[4] C. Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, Bloomington 1949; C. Korsmeyer, "Gendered Concepts and Hume's Standard of Taste", [in] *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, eds. P. Brand, C. Korsmeyer, Pennsylvania 1995, pp. 49–65; E. K. W. Man, "Chinese Philosophy and the Suggestion of a New Aesthetics", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 23, (Spring) 1997, pp. 453–466; R. Parker, G. Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts", [in:] *Aesthetics: The Big Questions,* op. cit., pp. 44–54.

[5] H. Cabot, *'Chick Lit' Fuels Publishing Industry*, [online] http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=129475&page=1 [accessed: 3.08.2015].

[6] H. Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Basingstoke and Oxford 1996.

[7] R. Gill, *Gender and the Media*, Cambridge 2007, p. 227.

In addition to its cultural implications, chick lit, as a genre by and for women, also merits evaluation as an aesthetic phenomenon. Although chick lit is largely written by women drawing on their own lives and experiences, and using a distinctly feminine style and address, the question of the genre's potential as a form of women's writing and its claim to literary status remains undecided. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young observe that the discourse surrounding chick lit has been polarised, attracting on the one hand "the unquestioning adoration of fans" and on the other "the unmitigated disdain of critics."[8] The critical dismissal is evident in the genre name, which lacks the gravitas and timelessness expected of art, thus relegating work within the genre from the outset to the domain of the popular and the frivolous.

In a rare article tackling the question of chick lit's literary value, Juliette Wells notes that

> [...] perceptions of the genre are affected by entrenched views that women's writing is inferior to men's and that women readers prefer lightweight novels to literary ones. To judge whether an individual work of chick lit, or the genre as a whole, has literary merit is to participate in the long tradition of discounting women writers and their readers.[9]

Nevertheless, Wells's opinion of the genre's claim to literary pedigree is not optimistic and she concludes: "Chick lit amuses and engrosses, but does not richly reimagine in literary form the worlds that inspire it."[10] This is an unambiguous answer to the not-oft-posed question of chick lit's aesthetic value, but the standards by which this conclusion was reached are less obvious. Even if one were to accept Wells's dismissal of the aesthetic qualities of the genre in its classic Western form, chick lit has travelled a long way since *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its ilk, both literally and figuratively.

Chick lit and its particular feminine subjectivity in the West emerged at a moment when a number of formerly closed economies around the world were being pried open by structural adjustment programmes designed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In India, the post-1991 economic liberalisation provided increasing opportunities

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[8] S. Ferriss, M. Young, "Introduction", [in:] *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction*, eds. S. Ferriss, M. Young, New York 2006, p. 1.

[9] J. Wells, "Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History", [in] *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 67.

[10] Ibidem.

for educated young women from the middle and upper-middle-classes to find work in the corporate workplace[11] and for the formation of new neoliberal subjectivities whereby individuals are conceived of as entrepreneurial actors.[12] I would argue that relative financial independence and growing exposure to Western ideas of companionate love made the chick lit protagonist a workable model around which a certain kind of modern Indian woman could concretise her identity, expressed in the chick lit novels written by Indian women from 2004 onwards. Further, I would suggest that the conclusions drawn about Western chick lit cannot be seamlessly mapped onto chick lit's "others" – its racially inflected and transnational iterations. In this regard, this paper will move from a consideration of the main arguments surrounding the aesthetic and literary possibilities of the typical Western chick lit novel to an analysis of the distinctive creative and aesthetic expression in Indian chick lit.

Women's aesthetics

To evaluate chick lit's aesthetic value, it is useful to revisit arguments advancing the possibility of a female aesthetic practice. The idea of a distinctly female form of writing or *écriture féminine* has been closely identified with the group of theorists knows as the "French feminists".[13] Perhaps the most potent statement of *écriture féminine* comes from Hélène Cixous in *The Laugh of Medusa* in which she exhorts women to proclaim the "unique empire" of their own bodies, sexuality and limitless imaginary, so as to unleash what is repressed in the masculine economy.[14] For Cixous, women's writing is infused with musicality, with low defences against the drives, and with proximity to the mother. To write, particularly as a woman is "precisely working (in) the in-between", inhabiting a bisexuality which stirs up differences rather than effacing them.[15]

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[11] P. S. Budhwar et al., "Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: The Case of India", *Asia Pacific Business Review* 11 (2), 2005, pp. 179–193.

[12] W. Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy", [in:] eadem, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton 2005, pp. 37–59.

[13] J. Kristeva, "Women's Time", [in:] *French Feminism Reader*, ed. K. Oliver, Maryland 2000; L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca 1985.

[14] H. Cixous, K. Cohen, P. Cohen, "The Laugh of Medusa", *Signs* 1 (4), (Summer) 1976, p. 876.

[15] Ibidem, p. 884.

Renée Lorraine's conception of a gynecentric aesthetic follows similar lines in proposing artistic activity that adapts rather than dominates nature, that narrows the distinction between intellect and emotion, that expresses the erotic as a vital force, and that is accessible to all.[16] An emphasis on organic and communitarian production of art also permeates Suzi Gablik's proposal of a new aesthetic based on social and environmental responsibility which represents "a shift from *objects* to *relationships.*"[17] The *écriture féminine* tradition and the paradigms proposed by Lorraine and Gablik are open to the charge of being essentialist; however, it is important to note that while they propose a paradigm that emphasises certain qualities that have been historically associated with women, they do not insist that only women adopt this paradigm. However, these proposals presume a level of formal experimentation that might not easily be embodied in a popular cultural form, even as some of them argue for the accessibility of art. Nevertheless, their stress on the body, relationality and an ethics of care could find resonances in chick lit and could be explored further.

Meanwhile, Marilyn French's argument for a feminist aesthetic, which focuses on writing in particular, could have greater applicability to chick lit and provide clearer standards by which to assess the genre.[18] French is the author of the bestselling novel *The Women's Room* that has been both celebrated for its narrativising of "the personal is political" and critiqued for not being literary enough.[19] She proposes how a popular form might be both literary and political, identifying two fundamental principles of feminist art: "First, it approaches reality from a feminist perspective; second, it endorses female experience."[20] The narrational point of view, she says, ought to demystify or challenge patriarchal ideologies. It may depict patriarchy but should not underwrite its standards. It must endorse and present women's experience wholly, attending to experiences considered trivial in the past, including "the inability to live happily ever after."[21]

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[16] R. Lorraine, "A Gynecentric Aesthetic", [in:] *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, eds. H. Hein & C. Korsmeyer, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1993, pp. 35–52.

[17] S. Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, New York 1995, p. 7.

[18] M. French, "Is There a Feminist Aesthetic?", [in:] *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, op. cit., pp. 68–76.

[19] I. Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From* Sex and the Single Girl *to* Sex and the City, Basingstoke England 2005.

[20] M. French, op. cit., p. 69.

[21] Ibidem, p. 71.

Like Gablik and Lorraine, she notes that "feminist work often focuses on groups, community, people as part of a context, and helps to remind us of a reality alternative to the Western tradition of individualistic, alienated man."[22] Finally, she argues for accessibility of language and style in a world in which women have been locked out of high culture for generations. While it would be a stretch to argue that chick lit might comprise feminist art as such, it would be interesting to assess the subversive and aesthetic potential of chick lit novels by Indian women using French's criteria.

Autobiographical realism

Ferriss and Young state that chick lit is both indebted to women's literature of the past and independent of it. They note that chick lit differentiates itself from its precursor, the Harlequin novel, through its realism, with the writers often drawing on their own personal and professional lives resulting in "the perception that chick lit is not fiction at all."[23] In writing fiction that allies itself closely with the condition of their own lives, chick lit authors fulfil French's requirement of art that intimately relates to women's everyday experiences, even those aspects that have been historically considered trivial. The down-to-earth style of the chick lit novel could be read, as Whelehan suggests, as a "deliberate strategy to expose those unwritten truths of women's contemporary lives rather than an inability to cope with more 'sophisticated' and fashionable literary styles."[24]

The resemblance between the life of the author and the protagonist she creates is evident in Indian chick lit novels when the details of the storyline of the novels are compared with the short biographies of the authors on the back covers. The novels share a strong overlap with autobiographical writing given their chronicling of loosely fictionalised life histories, coupled with the almost ubiquitous adoption of the first-person narrative. Here, feminist studies of autobiography can offer insights into the aesthetic and political import of these novels. While autobiography has been critiqued for its assumption of an individualistic, masculine, bourgeois selfhood, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that women's

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[22] Ibidem, p. 73.
[23] *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction*, op. cit., pp. 3–5.
[24] I. Whelehan, op. cit., p. 65.

autobiography, with its emphasis on "collective processes" has been used by "many women writers to write themselves into history."[25] Thus, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that for women and minorities "writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech."[26] The appropriation of a literary form associated with Enlightenment and colonial masculine selfhood has the potential to be a transformatory gesture in the postcolonial context, but in Indian chick lit, the question of how far the genre goes in shattering the "cultural hall of mirrors" remains. In the more recent neoliberal context that has re-newed privileging the unified and empowered self, the "I" claimed by the author of chick lit cannot be simply seen as subversive as the feminist critics above have suggested. A closer look at two Indian chick lit novels – *Keep the Change* by Nirupama Subramanian[27] and *You are Here* by Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan[28] – might provide an insight into the kinds of selves being rehearsed in Indian chick lit. Given these novels' adoption of a life writing form and certain narrational strategies typical of chick lit, analysing them can also respond to the question of chick lit's aesthetic merit.

Confession in *Keep the Change*

While almost all Indian chick lit utilises a first-person narrative or point of view, *Keep the Change* explicitly employs the epistolary/diary format. Tracing the origins of the adoption of the diary form by women in the nineteenth century, Catherine Delafield notes that as a private and coded domestic document, the diary was seen as a suitable form for women that offered limited possibilities of self-expression.[29] As it is taken up by chick lit, the diary turns confessional under the cover of fiction, allowing the writer to articulate thoughts that cannot easily be publicly voiced. In this,

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[25] S. Smith, J. Watson, "Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices", [in:] *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, eds. S. Smith, J. Watson, Madison 1998, p. 5.

[26] S. S. Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", [in:] *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, op. cit., p. 76.

[27] N. Subramanian, *Keep The Change*, Noida 2010.

[28] M. Reddy Madhavan, *You Are Here*, New Delhi 2008.

[29] C. Delafield, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Farnham 2009, p. 6.

the novel allies itself with the women's movement which Rita Felski observes played a role in "'personalizing' the literary text" by foregrounding the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" which are then tied to experiences that bind women together.[30] This is evident in chick lit novels, most classically in *Bridget Jones's Diary* where the protagonist has come to be seen as a twentieth-century Everywoman. However, in comparison to what Whelehan terms the "consciousness raising novels" of the 1970s, which politicised the personal, chick lit novels are less overtly political.[31] On the one hand, the use of first-person narrative and the diary format could be seen as breaking away from being the object of the male gaze as signified by the use of third person narrative. On the other hand, writing the self could signal a move from external to internal surveillance, from, as Gill argues, objectification to "subjectification."[32]

Drawing on Foucault's work, feminists have noted how the "postfeminist" subject in many chick lit texts is exhorted to continuously engage in self-surveillance through body and fashion policing, discourses of career advancement and regimes of sexuality.[33] Their work situates chick lit amid a rising tide of neoliberalism, which Wendy Brown has argued "involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*" and which "normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life."[34] Anthea Taylor has suggested that postfeminism is "neoliberalism gendered feminine"[35] and Gill has pointed out that "to a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen. Could it be that neoliberalism is always already gendered, and that women are

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[30] R. Felski, "On Confession", [in:] *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, op. cit., pp. 83–85.

[31] I. Whelehan, op. cit.

[32] R. Gill, op. cit.

[33] L. S. Kim, "'Sex and the Single Girl' in Postfeminism: The F word on Television", *Television & New Media* 2 (4) 2001, pp. 319–334; A. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*: *Gender, Culture and Social Change*, London 2009; P. Thoma, "Romancing the Self and Negotiating Consumer Citizenship in Asian American Labor Lit", *Contemporary Women's Writing* 8 (1), 2014, pp. 17–35.

[34] W. Brown, op. cit., p. 40.

[35] A. Taylor, *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism*, London 2012, p. 15.

constructed as its ideal subjects?"[36] Two aspects are prominent here – the responsibility of individual women to construct themselves appropriately and, in doing so, to make the "right" choices.

In the Asian context, however, the neoliberal pressure on women is complicated by the difficulty of attaining a fully individuated selfhood, resulting in what Youna Kim terms "precarious selfhood."[37] While female individualisation in Asian societies faces limitations that prevent it from being fully implemented, it plays out at the level of self-reflexivity.[38] As it is embodied in diaries and self-narration in chick lit, reflexivity offers women the chance to reflect upon and sometimes critique the social order, a process facilitated by the consumption of transnational media.[39] In *Keep the Change*, the epistolary/diary form is used to draw attention to the precarious processes of subjectification and particularly the pressure to conform to neoliberal standards of success, both in career and romance. While some Western texts, most famously *Bridget Jones's Diary*, also do so, *Keep the Change* makes its critique of and resistance to this pressure explicit.

The novel opens with a letter from the protagonist Damayanthi addressed to "Dear Victoria," who only at the end is revealed to be an imaginary friend; the one-sided letters to Victoria thus function analogously to a diary. What Damayanthi imagines as the life of the glamorous Victoria who "changes her boyfriend and designer handbags every week and lives a wild bohemian life in London" is counterposed to Damayanthi's own bland and manless existence in conservative Chennai.[40] In her first letter to Victoria, Damayanthi, disoriented after a large stuffed elephant falls on her head, says "a whole world of possibilities opened up" including being "a best-selling author who has just won the Booker, a stunning supermodel with a string of diamonds and boyfriends, a famous talk show hostess who turned ordinary people into instant celebrities."[41]

The opening of the book thus showcases the kind of selves an educated young urban Indian woman might aspire to. Damayanthi's intermittent fantasies of the ideal life are reminiscent of those of Ally McBeal,

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[36] R. Gill, op. cit., p. 443.

[37] Y. Kim, *Women and the Media in Asia: The Precarious Self*, Houndmill, Basingstoke 2012, p. 1.

[38] Ibidem, p. 14.

[39] Ibidem, p. 17.

[40] N. Subramanian, op. cit., p. 353.

[41] Ibidem, p. 1.

the protagonist of the eponymous TV series. The incorporation of day-dreams and fantasy sequences into the TV series has been both lauded as a revolutionary means of endorsing the female sensibility and critiqued as a representation of female incompetence as Ally's fantasies often occur during her work, including important court cases, and notably centre around her wish for romantic fulfilment and consciousness of her biological clock ticking.[42] In contrast, Damayanthi's fantasies are more varied, largely encompassing visions of career success as well as romantic experiences. *Keep the Change* then employs the trope of the interior monologue to enable its protagonist to envision a variety of non-traditional futures and narratives of self.

While self-fashioning has many nodes, for young women career and romance appear to be the focal points, with an emphasis on the latter. The genre of chick lit might be seen as an attempt to work through the anxiety surrounding women's capacities to achieve the two normative neoliberal targets of career and reproductive, or at least partnered, success. Damayathi's journey in *Keep the Change* traverses these two planes, but it is the quest for a husband that dominates. Damayanthi's first letter to Victoria is written amid a pall of gloom in her household due to her unmarried status on her twenty-sixth birthday. Under pressure to get married, a fairly typical scenario for an Indian woman her age, Damayanthi critiques marriage as "always a losing proposition for a girl. You give up freedom, independence and full control of the remote for a life of subservience under a man who is never worth it and in-laws who never appreciate you," but she also wants a man. Damayanthi's articulation of her need for "the perfect man – who now appears to be a creature as mythical as a flying unicorn"[43] and her invocation of romantic heroes such as Mr Darcy echoes the dominant discourse that insists that highly educated young Indian women are being excessively choosy, evoked in her mother's accusation that she has "become spoiled by all those English books you have read and all the silly English movies you see."[44] Damayanthi's resistance to the traditional marriage route resonates with Kim's observation that young Asian women embrace, "a 'do-it-yourself' identity" which includes the quest for a marriage that does not entail sacrificing their independence.[45]

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[42] L. S. Kim, op. cit.

[43] N. Subramanian, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

[44] Ibidem, p. 12.

[45] Y. Kim, op. cit., p. 42.

While she herself is implicated in patriarchal standards, Damayanthi is not entirely complicit. In describing the experience of being emotionally blackmailed into marriage, she adopts a humorous and self-deprecatory tone that is typical of chick lit. More crucially, her portrayal of the expectations of good Indian womanhood is satirical and her rounds of the Indian arranged marriage circuit are peppered with subversive commentary. For example, having been harried by her mother into attending a wedding clad in a sari and a satisfactory amount of gold, she writes of being appraised by two older women: "Vision of myself with a large sticker on my forehead saying 'Bride Available,' and a cardboard sheet listing my golden virtues around my neck."[46] She describes one prospective husband as "a specimen who deserved to spend the rest of his life in a jar of formaldehyde on a laboratory shelf."[47] While Damayanthi is treated like a commodity whose virginity must be preserved, "a precious gem to be gifted to your lawfully wedded husband on your wedding night,"[48] her fantasies reveal her to be sexual being. In the Indian context, where the majority of marriages are not companionate but rather are arranged by families, the romance narrative in chick lit takes on a different inflection from its Western counterpart. In satirising the traditional marriage route and giving voice to her own desires, Damayanthi is offering a critique of patriarchy as she experiences it most immediately and oppressively.

While singleness in Western chick lit novels is a problem to be solved, in Indian chick lit, this is ostensibly so, but close reading reveals that here singleness is a window of opportunity that allows space for self exploration. Significantly, the Indian chick lit heroine recognises that the first step towards accessing the option of choosing her own spouse is economic independence. Kim notes that "work identity is a central feature of women's modern life" whereby "work satisfaction can build a renewed sense of self."[49] In this sense, the goals of the young woman and neoliberalism coalesce, as the protagonist seeks to gain the room to evade the traditional fate of the good woman. The pursuit of a career takes Damayanthi away from her hometown to the bigger more cosmopolitan city of Mumbai and affords her a degree of agency. Noting the trend of young women in China, Japan and Korea leaving their countries for studies or tourism overseas,

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[46] N. Subramanian, op. cit., p. 17.

[47] Ibidem, p. 25.

[48] Ibidem, p. 62.

[49] Y. Kim, op. cit., p. 37.

Kim terms these women, who veer away from traditional marriage via transnational mobility, "a knowledge diaspora."[50] Damayanthi's move is not transnational, but mirrors the growing numbers of upper-middle-class women in India moving away from their hometowns for work, which offers them a measure of autonomy.

Damayanthi's "clarion call" comes in the form of a quiz in *Cosmopolitan* magazine that urges her to "Take Control of Your Life. Choose Your Destiny. Stop Whining and Start Mining the Gold in You."[51] This neoliberal slogan spurs her into compiling her first story of the self, a biodata – "a short history of nearly everything in my life, and I could barely manage a paragraph of it"[52] – that is polished by a resume consulting company which creates a new persona for her. Having embarked on singleton life in the big city, however, Damayanthi proceeds to satirise the corporate workplace with its daily grind of pointless emails and Powerpoint presentations, the parochialism behind the global façade and the male-dominated work culture in which she feels herself a misfit. While feminists have criticised the chick lit heroine's career incompetence epitomised by Bridget Jones's fumbling in the workplace and the fact that it is usually the (male) hero who saves the day, Damayanthi's narrative can be read not so much as failure to succeed than as a rejection of neoliberal corporate culture. It is significant that at the end of the novel, having shown up the seamy underside of corporate India, she opts for a more meaningful role in microfinance, working under a female boss.

While *Keep the Change* ends with the protagonist suitably partnered and thus does not challenge heteronormativity, the satirical tone applied to both traditional demands of womanhood as well as the capitalist workplace can be seen as a defiant stance. The Indian chick lit heroine is adopting the Western model for her own purposes, a chance at life with a partner who she believes is compatible with her own interests. That this is a constrained and imperfect choice is acknowledged in *Keep the Change*; however, dating and choosing a life partner oneself is perceived by these young women to offer greater possibilities for emancipation. In this sense, then, while the novel does not fulfil French's demand that feminist writers exhibit characters who do not crave the typical happily-ever-after, *Keep the Change* does demonstrate a limited agency within the constraints of

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[50] Ibidem, p. 31.
[51] N. Subramanian, op. cit., p. 29.
[52] Ibidem, p. 38.

the desire for a happily coupled ending. The use of epistolary confession combined with satire and social critique in *Keep the Change* can be seen as an emerging literary aesthetic in the expression of precarious selfhood.

Memory in *You Are Here*

A more experimental approach to self-construction through life writing that jettisons the conventional happy ending can be found in Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan's *You Are Here*.[53] Madhavan's widely read blog The Compulsive Confessor chronicling her adventures as a singleton in the city, including her sex life, earned her fame and the title of India's Carrie Bradshaw before she published her first novel *You Are Here* loosely based on the blog. In a sign that the novel follows the confessional ethos of the blog, its protagonist Arshi writes: "The words are collecting at the tips of my fingers and if I don't shake them out over the keyboard they could go backwards and form word clots around my heart."[54] Thus, from the first chapter, the narrative exposes itself as an exercise in self-reflexivity which scholars have pointed out is characteristic of subject formation in late modernity.[55]

Although confession might be the obvious lens through which to view *You Are Here*, the novel can also be usefully analysed via the paradigm of memory, which Linda Anderson employs to understand autobiography. Citing Freud's and Breuer's diagnosis of hysteria – "hysterics mainly suffer from reminiscence"[56] – Anderson suggests that the preoccupation with memory that characterised the female (according to Freud and Breuer) condition of hysteria could be a form of nostalgic longing, not just for a past but for an imagined future. While Freud and Breuer read the obsession with memory as a pathological failure to detach from the past and develop heterosexually, Anderson highlights Elizabeth Grosz's proposition that the appeal to memory could be a defiant gesture towards a symbolic system that denies women a subject position.[57] Anderson suggests that

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[53] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit.

[54] Ibidem, p. 1.

[55] S. Budgeon, *Choosing a Self: Young Women and the Individualization of Identity*, Westport, Connecticut 2003; Y. Kim, op. cit.

[56] L. Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures*, London 1997.

[57] Ibidem, p. 9.

"it might still be possible to rescue memory from nostalgia and to think about home as a destination – something yet to be constructed – and not as an origin we can only ever desire in retrospect."[58] Drawing on Luce Irigaray's writings on memory, she argues that "memory could also provide a space in which the subject can create herself, or that it contains a future we have yet to gain access to, could also change the knowledge we already have."[59] Given that young women today face the neoliberal exhortation to create a self entrepreneurially, the semi-autobiographical medium offers them the opportunity to blend fact and fiction while mining memory. Indian chick lit novelists, for whose protagonists the creation of a modern, individualised selfhood is "precarious," make explicit the process of creating a self through the ordering of memory.

Madhavan's project in *You Are Here* could thus be read as the reconfiguration of memory towards the articulation of a future selfhood. The novel, while billed as fiction, is a memoir of a certain period in the author's life based on the real-life details in her blog. This reconstruction, however, is undertaken in a whimsical and non-linear mode in which time moves back and forth with the tense switching between the present of narration to a number of different pasts and the first-person voice spiralling into ever-deepening circles of interior monologue. In the first chapter, Arshi moves from stating the impetus for telling her story to a number of philosophical musings on life to introducing the two major issues she faces – predictably her boyfriend (or lack thereof) and her career – to her own indecision, to a recipe for Potato Pickle Surprise, to her family. The episodic narrative continues throughout the novel, which seems to proceed plotlessly.

The self constructed through these reminiscences is a bricolage that readers (and the narrator) are invited to cohere. More importantly, the self that emerges is a relational one through which Arshi situates herself within concentric circles of relationships. Arshi considers her propensity to see herself through other people as a weakness, and while this does pose challenges for subject formation, relationality need not be a problem. Rather, the relational self that emerges in the novel offers clues to chick lit's preoccupation with romance. As she views other people's romantic relationships from the outside, what resonates with Arshi is the sense of belonging they evoke:

[58] Ibidem, p. 10.
[59] Ibidem, p. 11.

> If we are put on this planet with the aim of figuring out who we are, and the only way we can figure out who we are is through someone else – either the person we wind up with or the person we create – then what hope does my generation, my we-don't-need-nobody-dude generation, really have?[60]

Arshi thus points to the anxiety created in an individualistic society, where the traditional support systems have declined or are required to, and the only permitted dependency for an adult is on one's chosen romantic partner.

The self expressed by Arshi might embody what Cixous calls "desire-that gives."[61] This ability to give of oneself is most cogently expressed in chick lit's portrayal of female friendships. *You Are Here* chronicles three strong female friendships – between Arshi and her oldest friend Deeksha, with her roommate Topsy, and with a relatively new friend Esha. In fact, Arshi comes close to elevating friendship to greater significance than romantic partnership when she asks: "Why do we save our best, most childish, most impetuous love for our lovers? It's a fabulous way to be, passion-filled and spontaneous, exuberant, sometimes unreasonable, and I'm sure our friends deserve it way more than our lovers."[62] It is thus fitting that at the end of the novel, the typical chick lit happy-ever-after is granted not to Arshi but her friends. Deeksha gets married, but at one of her wedding ceremonies, another important ritual is re-enacted and the pact of friendship reaffirmed, when the two women deliberately let themselves get soaked in a downpour and Deeksha's wedding make-up is washed off. The novel does not end with the chick lit heroine pledging her love to the hero, but with Topsy, a Hindu woman from a conservative family, opting to have sex with her Muslim boyfriend, a deeply transgressive choice in the Indian context. It is rare that a chick lit novel does not end with the protagonist suitably partnered, but the newness of the form in India and Madhavan's status as a popular blogger seemed to have allowed for this.

On her blog, Madhavan gained both acclaim and censure for her frank discussions of sex and the single life. The novel's focus on relationships could be read as a continuation of this project, whereby Madhavan chronicles the existence of the sex life of the young urban Indian woman. Arshi's unabashed enactment of desire could be seen as answering the French feminists' call to write the body as a subversive gesture. While critics have

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[60] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit., p. 85.
[61] H. Cixous, K. Cohen, P. Cohen, op. cit., p. 893.
[62] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit., p. 215.

pointed to the commodification of sexuality in chick lit,[63] Madhavan's depiction of sexuality is more intuitive; her descriptions of early sexual awakening and the awareness of sexual difference have an innocence that is absent from the worldly-wise enactment of sexuality in chick lit that Stephanie Harzewski has termed "late heterosexuality."[64] In Arshi's description of losing her virginity, sex is an act of perseverance towards the goal of becoming a certain kind of person: "So even though my thighs hurt and I was sore in areas I didn't know existed in my body, I felt like quite the diva, straight out of Hollywood, talking to the man lying next to me in a slightly husky voice, blowing smoke rings into the air."[65] It is notable that Arshi is conscious of herself as being both "surveyor and surveyed."[66] By foregrounding her protagonist's own act of self-surveillance, Madhavan heightens its performativity and thus defamiliarises it.

Madhavan's choice of metaphors, such as the twisted bra strap to signify life, while not exactly literary, also serve to underscore her representation of womanhood as a bodily experience, as do her descriptions of menarche and menstruation. Even as Arshi bares her own bodily and sexual experiences, she acknowledges that these experiences are confined to a certain India. The lifestyle that she enjoys, which involves smoking, consuming alcohol and sometimes drugs, partying all night and dating, is not available to all women, and when it is, it often has to be performed in secret. Thus, Arshi says: "Sure, we're second-generation liberated and all that, but there are still people among us who talk about rape victims in the most uneducated way [...] it's not really the twenty-first century in parts of India, and it's not just the small towns I'm talking about."[67]

Arshi is conscious that she belongs to an elite group of Indians, usually people who use English as a first language, who share common cultural references, and who she describes as "my tribe." The white relatively wealthy viewpoint in Western chick lit translates into an upper-middle class English-speaking one in Indian chick lit, although Madhavan tries to counter this by depicting women outside her own milieu, albeit through her own lens. Sidonie Smith suggests that in the confessional text, there is a reciprocal relationship between audience and author: "An audience

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[63] S. Harzewski, *Chicklit and Postfeminism*, Charlottesville 2011; R. Gill, op. cit.

[64] S. Harzewski, op. cit., p. 11.

[65] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit., p. 77.

[66] J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London 1972.

[67] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit., p. 31.

implies a community of people for whom certain discourses of identity and truth make sense. The audience comes to expect a certain kind of performativity that conforms relatively comfortably to criteria of intelligibility."[68] The self that is being performed in *You Are Here* is an aspirational subjectivity, an imaginable future reconstructed through fragments of the past for the author and her readers, albeit one that might be out of reach for the masses of Indian women. What is significant about the self Madhavan presents, despite its limited applicability, is its refusal to conform entirely to neoliberal subjectification even while adopting some of its tropes.

Conclusion

To return to critics' dismissal of chick lit from the field of literature, Wells notes that chick lit lacks literary elements such as "imaginative use of language, inventive and thought-provoking metaphors, layers of meaning, complex characters, and innovative handling of conventional structure" and "only in its deployment of humour can the best of chick lit stand up favourably to the tradition of women's writing, and humour – perhaps unfairly, as many have argued – has never been the most valued and respected of literary elements."[69] Why humour should be dismissed so easily though satire remains an important literary form when wielded by men is not clear. As the analysis of *Keep the Change* has demonstrated, chick lit does perform a satirical function, especially in the Indian context where it is used to critique patriarchy in its recently neoliberalised form.

Moreover, while the writing in *You Are Here* may not meet high literary standards, Madhavan's disjunctive and fragmentary memorialising makes evident the work of self-construction. Her writing of the body and desire in ways that evade neoliberal subjectification can be seen in line with the *écriture féminine* tradition. Her avoidance of tying up all strands of the plot neatly, particularly that of the protagonist, fulfils French's demand for women's writing that does not conform to the patriarchal diktats of the happy-ever-after. Rather, the novel ends with the protagonist's discovery that she was done being one of the victims who "thrive on having

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[68] S. Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance", [in:] *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, op. cit., p. 110.

[69] J. Wells, op. cit., p. 64.

our minds messed with, our hearts constantly in a drum of adrenalin."[70] The novel is, then, a manifestation of Harzewski's contention that "chick lit novels are ultimately romances of the self,"[71] but here a self that plays with the boundaries of its becoming. With its deviation from the strict conventions of the genre through experimental writing, Madhavan's debut novel indicates the potential of chick lit to expand as a genre.

Shari Benstock argues that "contrary to claims that chick lit has run its course, the genre still has room to grow, to enhance its cultural relevance and acknowledge the complexities of women's changing lives and experiences."[72] She questions the verdict on chick lit in literary studies, leaving it to subsequent generations to judge whether it is "literary junk food" or has "literary significance."[73] While the time-will-tell approach might provide the definitive answer to the question of chick lit's aesthetic value, Indian chick lit, and other chick lit novels on the margins of the global publishing industry, might be indicators of where this value can more fruitfully be sought.

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[70] M. Reddy Madhavan, op. cit., p. 255.

[71] S. Harzewski, op. cit., p. 57.

[72] S. Benstock, "Afterword: The New Women's Fiction", [in:] *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction*, eds. S. Ferriss, M. Young, New York 2006, p. 256.

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Noelle Leslie de la Cruz*

The Weeping Woman in the Graphic Memoir: A Derridean Inquiry into the Traces/Trait(s) of "Self"

Abstract

In this paper, I examine how women graphic memoirists – Marjane Satrapi, Alison Bechdel, and Roz Chast in particular – attempt to draw that which remains fleeting, absent, and abyssal: the so-called "self." I thus extend Jacques Derrida's critique of what he has called the "metaphysics of presence" in philosophy to autobiographical comics, a popular medium that is heavily prefigured by his analysis of the self-portrait as a ruin. I believe this endeavor will help fill the gap in studies about the gendered aspects of Derrida's work *Memoirs of the Blind*, as well as the potential of autobiographical comics to illuminate philosophical issues concerning the self. Finally, through my analysis of women's graphic narratives, I hope to point to the possibility of a larger project, that of a feminist Derridean critique of sequential art.

Key words

Jacques Derrida, graphic memoirs, comics, sequential art, *Memoirs of the Blind*, autobiography

Introduction

In this paper, I would like to bring together two topics whose relationship with each other, to my knowledge, has not yet been sufficiently explored. On one hand, there is the prolific French philosopher Jacques Derrida's remarks about the act of drawing and the metaphor of blindness, in his book *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins.* On the other hand, there is the rich literature of graphic memoirs – life-writing in

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comics form – whose range of themes and artistic styles resonates indeed with Derrida's (re-)visionary ideas.

Through an analysis of sketches depicting blind subjects, Derrida calls attention to the inherent paradox of drawing. Sight is crucial to the act of drawing; while history is replete with blind musicians, singers, poets, and sculptors, there seem to be hardly any blind draftsmen or draftswomen. Yet drawing itself involves a type of blindness, a destabilization of the privileged relationship between sight and knowledge. For instance, in order to draw someone or something, the artist must turn away from the subject, retracing what had been seen not through direct perception, but through memory.[1]

Although Derrida mainly addressed the works of well-known masters from the Louvre collection, I believe his insights may be extended to the work of three contemporary women graphic memoirists: Marjane Satrapi in *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* (2004), Alison Bechdel in *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2007), and Roz Chast in *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* (2014). These poignant works deal with the unspeakable, the traumatic, or the un-representable through the medium of sequential art, to use Will Eisner's term for what is more popularly known as "comics." Satrapi tells the story of her cultural exile as a privileged Iranian woman educated in Europe during the height of the Islamist revolution in her home country. Bechdel frames her experience of coming out as a lesbian against the story of her relationship with her closeted gay father, who commits suicide when the author is 20 years old. Lastly, Chast narrates her years of caregiving for her nonagenarian parents, detailing the obstacles they faced as an elderly couple and their drawn-out deaths at a hospice. The emotional impact of these experiences, and the great challenge that these authors must surely have faced in trying to render it in drawing, call to mind Derrida's insight about the elusive object of the self-portrait, as well as how the self-portraitist or memoirist is transformed into a visionary or seer through the blinding act of weeping.

In this paper, I examine how women graphic memoirists – Satrapi, Bechdel, and Chast in particular – attempt to draw that which remains fleeting, absent, and abyssal: the so-called "self." I thus extend Derrida's critique of what he has called the "metaphysics of presence" in philosophy

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[1] J. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind. The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas, Chicago and London 1993, p. 47.

to autobiographical comics, a popular medium that is heavily prefigured by his analysis of the self-portrait as a ruin. I believe this endeavor will help fill the gap in studies about the gendered aspects of Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*, as well as the potential of autobiographical comics to illuminate philosophical issues concerning the self.

Derrida on blindness and the act of drawing

Memoirs of the Blind constitutes Derrida's notes for an exhibition specially commissioned by the Louvre that ran from October 1990 to January 1991. Here he puts forward two hypotheses: first, that drawing itself is blind; and second, that "a drawing of the *blind* is a drawing *of* the blind."[2] The formulation of these hypotheses is in keeping with his signature style of resorting to puns and wordplays, as well as the deliberate conflation of the literal and the figurative, in order to underscore the complexity of meaning. For the Louvre project, he chose to critique a series of sketches of blind subjects, many of which have religious and literary themes, by artists such as Antoine Coypel, Jacques Louis-David, Rembrandt, Peter Paul Rubens, and others.

Derrida's preoccupation with blindness may be seen as part of his project of questioning Western philosophy's traditional association between seeing and knowing, encapsulated in the Greek concept of the *eidos* or the idea. This association runs clearly through Plato's allegory of the cave, in which knowledge is understood as a journey of enlightenment, of leaving behind shadow images in order to see things as they really are. The sun simultaneously symbolizes the cause of sight and the eye itself. In Plato's genealogy, the sensible sun is related to the intelligible sun (i.e. the Good) in the way that "the son is related to the father who has begotten him in his own likeness."[3] (This invocation of masculinity is of a piece with the Derridean diagnosis of philosophy as phallogocentric, i.e. as being biased for both masculinity and rationality.)[4]

According to Plato's theory of forms, reality as such inheres in an otherworldly realm of the perfect Forms of being, which the soul has full

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[2] Ibidem, p. 2.

[3] Ibidem, p. 15.

[4] For the main sources for Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, see *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena*, all published in 1967.

access to via reason. This idea is only one example of the metaphysics of presence[5] that Derrida rejects. For him, being can never be fully present or pinned down due to the work of *différance*. This French word refers simultaneously to how meaning arises from (1) the differences between signs, and (2) the perpetual deferment of a final form. Derrida's anti-metaphysical stance thus leads to a radically new way of thinking about presence, identity, subject, and other key concepts.[6] His philosophy emphasizes becoming over being, change over constancy, the event over the non-temporal structure, and difference over identity.[7] His project is no less than the attempt to think the unthinkable, to say the unsayable: the absence of Being or its trace/trait.[8]

We see now why Derrida chose blindness as an analogy for the act of drawing, since for him it is a doomed attempt to depict anything in concrete form. *Memoirs of the Blind* begins with the observation that blind persons are usually drawn with their hands outstretched. "If to draw a blind man is first of all to show hands, it is in order to draw attention to *what one draws with the help of that which* one draws."[9] Compare this with the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave, who are represented as motionless:

> Never do they stretch out their hands toward the shadow (*skia*) or the light (*phós*), towards the silhouettes or images that are drawn on the wall. Unlike Coypel's solitary man, they do not venture out with outstretched hands in the direction of this *skia*- or *photo*-graphy, their sights set on this shadow- or light-writing. They converse, they speak of memory. Plato imagines them seated, chained, able to address one another, to "dialectize," to lose themselves in the echoing of voices.[10]

Against the logocentric idea that drawing records or gives form to that which is fully available to the gaze, Derrida writes that the draftsman or

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[5] This may be understood in several ways: (1) presence as *eidos* or form (Plato), (2) presence as substance, essence, or existence (Aristotle), (3) self-presence as the Cogito (Descartes), and (4) presence as transcendental consciousness (phenomenology) (T. Baldwin, "Presence, Truth, and Authenticity", [in:] *Derrida's Legacies. Literature and Philosophy*, eds. S. Glendinning, R. Eaglestone, London and New York 2008, p. 108).

[6] Royle N., *Jacques Derrida*, London and New York 2003, p. 79.

[7] Stocker B., *Derrida on Deconstruction*, London and New York 2006, p. 30.

[8] For Derrida, the trait or drawing, as will be explained shortly, constantly takes leave of itself, appearing only as the absence of itself.

[9] J. Derrida, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

[10] Ibidem, p. 15.

draftswoman actually mimics the gesture of a blind person.[11] In the execution of his or her art, he or she does not see. Derrida explains this in terms of the three aspects of the "powerlessness for the eye" in the act of drawing.

The first aspect concerns the "aperspective of the graphic act," whereby there remains a gap or abyss between the thing drawn and the drawing, or the object and its representation, which has the potential to "haunt the visible at its very possibility."[12] In his discussion of mnemonic art, Baudelaire refers to the artist's reliance on memory at the moment he turns away from his model and toward the surface of the canvas. He "breaks with the present of visual perception in order to keep a better eye on the drawing."[13] This, and in reference to Merleau-Ponty's last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*,[14] asserts the paradox that visibility itself involves a non-visibility.

The second aspect is the withdrawal or the eclipse of the trait.[15] In the English translation of Derrida, the French word "trait," which literally means "line," has been preserved. For Derrida, nothing belongs to the trait or the drawing, which joins and adjoins only by separating. The drawing is the linear limit, an ellipsis that is neither ideal nor intelligible: "The outline or tracing separates and separates itself; it retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation."[16] (In the abstract terms of geometry, for instance, the line – which is infinitely thin – occupies no space, yet makes visible the figures *of* space.)

Finally, the third aspect refers to the rhetoric of the trait, which involves the seeming dependence of the meaning of the drawing on words or speech. Verbal language imposes itself on the drawing, which rarely goes without articulation, order, or name.[17] This phenomenon is especially evident in the self-portrait, a genre that reveals the paradox of spectatorship. For the viewer to interpret a portrait as an illustration by the artist of himself or herself, a label must indicate it to be so. The title announcing a work as a self-portrait thereby has a "juridical effect" that calls for a witness (here Derrida makes a comparison to the memoir genre, which features the reverberation of several voices). On the other hand,

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[11] Ibidem, p. 43.
[12] Ibidem, p. 44.
[13] Ibidem, p. 47.
[14] Ibidem, p. 49.
[15] Ibidem, p. 53.
[16] Ibidem, p. 54.
[17] Ibidem, p. 57.

despite the crucial role of the inscription or label to meaning-generation, it is still "a verbal event that does not belong to the inside of the work but only to its parergonal border."[18]

Derrida's discussion of Henri Fantin-Latour's self-portraits is key in my application of his ideas to the graphic memoir. Derrida pays special attention to the different processes of looking involved in the making and viewing of a self-portrait. To emphasize the conjectural nature of these processes, he refers to the hypothesis of sight (i.e. that the drawing of an object implies a spectator) and the hypothesis of intuition (i.e. that the self-portrait could only have been generated through the use of a mirror.)[19] Of Fantin-Latour, Derrida writes, "it is only *by hypothesis* that we imagined him in the process of drawing himself facing a mirror, and thus doing the self-portrait of the draftsman doing the self-portrait of the draftsman."[20] Despite the apparently solipsistic nature of this act, however, the existence of the other inhabits the very vision of the self-portrait (or shall we say, to use contemporary parlance, the *selfie*). This is because in looking at the mirror, the draftsman occupies the space we occupy, necessarily creating a "self-portrait of a self-portrait only for the other."[21] It is the spectator who ultimately produces the specularity; we are made blind to the mirror or we become the mirror. This also blinds the subject via what Derrida calls the law of blinding reflexivity, according to which the artist's eyes are replaced with those of the spectator.[22] The draftsman no longer sees himself, but the spectator looking at him.

Aside from the centrality of the other-spectator in the self-portrait, Derrida's analysis also excavates its status as a *ruin*. The word "ruin" ordinarily connotes the remnants of something that was historically whole or complete, but is no longer. Subverting this traditional understanding, Derrida[23] asserts that the ruin does not come after the work, but is produced as such, without the promise of restoration: "In the beginning there is ruin."[24] The self-portrait is a ruin on the level of the act of creation:

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[18] Ibidem, p. 64.

[19] Or, we might add, some other means of visually presenting one's own image to oneself, such as a photograph.

[20] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 60.

[21] Ibidem, p. 62.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Ibidem, p. 65.

[24] Ibidem, p. 68.

> As soon as the draftsman considers himself, fascinated, fixed on the image, yet disappearing before his own eyes into the abyss, the movement by which he tries desperately to recapture himself is already, in its very present, an act of memory.[25]

Simultaneously, the self-portrait is also a ruin on the level of the act of viewing: "Ruin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the memory of itself, what *remains* or *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed."[26] Any depiction of oneself by oneself – whether in verbal or visual form – is never the present thing, but merely our memory of it. It is never the (un-representable) originary whole, but always and already the ruin. The ruin encapsulates the "temporal dislocation at the heart of self-portraiture."[27]

In the last part of *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida compares the self-portrait to the memoir, reading Augustine's *Confessions* and Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* as "books of tears." Both these texts associate the vision of the seer with the inward gaze, which in turn is inspired by an experience that causes one to weep. In the case of Augustine, it was the deaths of his friend and mother. In the case of Nietzsche, it was that pivotal moment in Turin when he witnessed a horse being whipped, after which he suffered a mental breakdown. Thus, Derrida connects grief or mourning to truth, making the positive claim that what is proper to the human eye is not sight per se but tears. Compared to other animals, we are the only ones who know how to weep. True vision is located in and through tears: "For at the very moment they veil sight, they would unveil what is proper to the eye."[28] These observations are clearly germane to the graphic memoir, which attempts to illustrate the traumatic or abyssal experiences in a kind of blind draftsman's or draftwoman's vision of the elusive self.

Sequential art and autobiographical narratives

The graphic memoir is but one genre in the vast literature of comics. In a landmark study of this medium, pioneering comics artist Will Eisner – who is credited for the first "graphic novel"[29] – defines it simply as sequential art:

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[25] Ibidem.

[26] Ibidem.

[27] F. Johnstone, "Mark Morrisroe's Self-portraits and Jacques Derrida's 'Ruin'", *Third Text*, 2011, XXV, 6, p. 802.

[28] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 126.

[29] *The Contract with God* series, collected as a in trilogy 2005.

> The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills. [...] In the most economical state, comics employ a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols. When these are used again and again to convey similar ideas, they become a language – a literary form, if you will. And it is this disciplined application that creates the 'grammar' of Sequential Art.[30]

McCloud on the other hand offers a longer definition of comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer."[31] The use of sequential art to tell epic narratives can be dated back to the pre-Columbian era, as evidenced by a picture manuscript discovered in Mexico by Hernán Cortés in 1519.[32] Even before the invention of the printing press, which transformed comics into the form we know today, it had pre-modern precursors: for example, the Beayeux tapestry, which depicts the Norman conquest of England from 1066 onwards, and Egyptian hieroglyphics and paintings.[33] Even individual letters had started out as pictorial images.[34]

What makes comics a distinct art form is how it combines verbal and visual elements in a more integrated way than do illustrated books or picture books.[35] Special attention to the interaction between words and images, which constitutes a new literary language, is key to understanding comics.[36] Viewed in this way, comics can be a site of subversion in regard to the rhetoric of the trait, as described by Derrida. If the verbal inscription dictates the meaning of a self-portrait, the medium of sequential art on the other hand assigns equally crucial roles to images and words. Ignoring one element would lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation.[37] In short, in comics there is no opposition or hierarchy between the verbal and the visual.

Another point of intersection between the medium of sequential art and Derrida's analysis of the trait concerns the interaction between two key comics elements: the panel and the gutter. Eisner compares the comics

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[30] W. Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, Florida 1985, p. 8.

[31] S. McCloud, *Understanding Comics. The Invisible Art*, New York 1993, p. 9.

[32] Ibidem, p. 10.

[33] Ibidem, p. 12–15.

[34] W. Eisner, op. cit., p. 14–15.

[35] M. Bongco, *Reading Comics. Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*, New York and London 2000, p. 46.

[36] Ibidem, p. 49.

[37] Ibidem, p. 55–56.

panel to a movie frame, or a theater stage; it is where the action takes place.[38] A crucial difference is that panels do not move by themselves in the way that movie or theater scenes do, thereby holding the eye captive. In comics the reader's eye has more freedom of movement, which the artist has to control through artful panel sequencing. Moreover, the static nature of the images in comics demands more imaginative and interpretative work on the reader, work that takes place at the site of the gutter or the blank spaces separating the panels. For the story to make sense, the reader has to imagine what takes place between and outside the visible frames, events that are not depicted although they are implied. The medium of comics therefore underscores the significant role played by the absent present (or the presence of absence), which Derrida describes in terms of "the differential inappearance of the trait."[39]

To return to the history of sequential art, what Mitchell calls the "pictorial turn"[40] in the human sciences and culture has led to what we may think of as comics' golden age. Given the current state of contemporary media, Varnum and Gibbons note that the balance of power between words and images may very well have already swung to images.[41] The last century has placed a new premium on visual literacy; "many theorists [are] now arguing that the apparent transparency of pictures is often illusory and that they require specific reading skills."[42] This partly explains the robust scholarly activity currently enjoyed by the rapidly emerging field of comics studies.[43] This is unprecedented in that graphic narratives had not always been perceived as serious works. Groensteen enumerates four reasons for this negative bias against comics: its formal hybridity, the

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[38] W. Eisner, op. cit., p. 40.

[39] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 54.

[40] W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn", [in:] idem, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994, p. 11.

[41] R. Varnum, Ch. T. Gibbons, "Introduction", [in:] *The Language of Comics*, eds. R. Varnum, Ch. T. Gibbons, Mississippi 2001, p. ix.

[42] E. El Rafaie, *Autobiographical Comics. Life Writing in Pictures*, Jackson Mississippi 2012, p. 36.

[43] Various anthologies, journals, conferences, and academic courses continue to be devoted to the study of comics. See: M. Smith, R. Duncan, "Introduction", [in:] *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*, eds. M. Smith, R. Duncan, London and New York 2012; A. Ndalianis, "Why Comics Studies?", *Cinema Journal*, 2011, L, 3, pp. 113–117; J. Heer, K. Worceter, "Introduction", [in:] *A Comics Studies Reader*, eds. J. Heer and K. Worcester, Jackson, Mississippi 2009.

sub-literary merits of many of its stories, its relation to caricature, and its association with childhood.[44]

By the 1950s, however, Eisner was already producing comics with adult themes. A decade later, the labels "graphic story" and "graphic novel" were proposed by Richard Kyle to denote comics that were longer, more mature, and had literary intent.[45] Meanwhile, Art Spiegelman coined the term "comix" to denote the counter-cultural underground comics that became popular in the United States in response to conservative censorship. This neologism disassociated the art form from the "comic" or the humorous while neutrally calling attention to its unique "co-mix" of words and pictures.[46] The "X" at the end of the word also evoked the often salacious and satirical images drawn by comix artists such as Robert Crumb.[47] In 1986, comics' "greatest year," landmark influential graphic narratives were published: Spiegelman's two-volume *Maus*, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.

The graphic memoir has its roots in the underground comix movement, whose subversive and taboo-breaking atmosphere was conducive to "confessionals."[48] Early examples of autobiographical comics were Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin* (1972) and the works of Aline Kominsky-Crumb in the feminist magazine *Wimmen's Comix*. In the mainstream arena, meanwhile, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* series (first published in 1976) challenged the superhero trope in its nonfictional depictions of ordinary events in an ordinary person's life. By far the graphic memoir with the greatest stature is Spiegelman's Pulitzer prizewinning *Maus*, which chronicles the experiences of his father, a holocaust survivor. More recent graphic memoirs of note, apart from those I specifically analyze in this paper, include *Blankets* by Craig Thompson (2011), *Cancer Vixen: A True Story* (1996) by Marisa Acocella Manchetto, *Epileptic* by David B. (2005), and *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2005) by Lynda

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[44] T. Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?", [in:] *A Comics Studies Reader*, op. cit., loc. 348.

[45] R. Duncan, M. J. Smith, *The Power of Comics. History, Form, and Culture*, New York and London 2009, p. 70.

[46] Notably, it is only the English word for comics that has a trivial or slapstick connotation. The French refers to it as *bande dessinée* or literally, artistic strip, while the Italian term is *fumetti* or puff of smoke (an allusion to the speech bubble) (M. Bongco, op. cit., pp. 50–51).

[47] E. El Rafaie, op. cit., p. 31.

[48] Ibidem, p. 36.

Barry. Common to the works in this genre are their serious or heavy themes drawn from life; an explicitly stylized autobiographical "I";[49] and the less rigorous distinction between memory and fiction.[50] On the other hand, in her exhaustive study of autobiographical comics, El Rafaie offers at least three philosophical theses about autobiographical works that emerge from the constraints of the comics medium, involving (1) embodiment, (2) temporality, and (3) authenticity:

> [...] the requirement to produce multiple drawn versions of one's self necessarily involves an intense engagement with embodied aspects of identity, as well as with the sociocultural models underpinning body image. The formal tensions that exist in the comics medium – between words and images, and between sequence and layout, for instance – offer memoirists many new ways of representing their experience of temporality, their memories of past events, and their hopes and dreams for the future. Furthermore, autobiographical comics creators can draw on the close association in Western culture between seeing and believing in order to persuade readers of the truthful, sincere nature of their stories.[51]

My selection of the works of three women graphic memoirists to analyze was determined by several considerations, including their susceptibility to philosophical interpretation and the books' availability. Last but not least, I was inspired by Derrida's remarks about women as the subject of drawings in *Memoirs of the Blind*. He observes that unlike blind men, blind women are usually depicted as saints rather than heroes.[52] While this sounds like the imputation of passivity, toward the end of the book Derrida offers a more ambiguous reading of femininity. After having identified tears – rather than sight – as that which is proper to the eye, he notes the preponderance of drawings of weeping women:

> The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness, the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears. It neither sees nor does not see: it

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[49] M. A. Chaney, "Introduction", [in:] *Graphic Subjects. Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels*, ed. M. A. Chaney. Wisconsin 2011, p. 7.

[50] In the introduction to *One! Hundred! Demons!*, Barry draws herself as the artist seated at her desk and wondering, "Is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of itself are?" She thus coins the term "autobifictionalography" in reference to her work (H. L. Chute, *Graphic Women. Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, New York 2010, loc. 2207–2218).

[51] E. El Rafaie, op. cit., p. 4.

[52] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 5.

is indifferent to its blurred vision [...]. In drawing those who weep, and especially women (for if there are many great blind men, why so many weeping women?), one is perhaps seeking to unveil the eyes.[53]

Might women then have a unique relationship with non-logocentric ways of knowing? A cursory consideration of the main themes of graphic memoirs by female authors would seem to confirm this. I elaborate on this idea in the next section.

Weeping women in graphic memoirs:
Derridean interventions[54]

There are at least three ways in which Derrida's insights about blindness, drawing, and the self-portrait in *Memoirs of the Blind* are reflected in the autobiographical comics by Satrapi, Bechdel, and Chast.

The first and most obvious is how each work addresses limit experiences, through a literally graphic engagement with the taboo, the un-representable, and even the obscene. While any literary articulation attempts to communicate the uncommunicable, what is unique to the comics medium is how it necessarily resorts to drawing to give form to emotions and ideas. The added demand of authenticity in the memoir genre entails a rudimentary realism. However, the richness of experience as rendered in cartoon (as opposed to other forms of visual art, say film, photography, or painting) calls attention to the very bareness and ultimate inadequacy of the line or the trait. Ironically, the self-effacement of the trait underscores the significance of the experience being depicted, whose fullness haunts the page through its traces.

Satrapi's famously minimalist style in *Persepolis* is illustrative. In the first volume in which she tells the story of her childhood, she deals with the evolution of her religious beliefs. To represent God as imagined by a child, she draws the image of a bearded old man. However, she undercuts the stereotype through an irreverent comparison with the visage of Karl Marx, who – as an atheist and a revolutionary – is God's symbolic

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[53] Ibidem, p. 71.

[54] What follows are brief sketches rather than full-scale analyses of the works of Satrapi, Bechdel, and Chast. For a more detailed treatment of women's life-writing in comics, see: H. L. Chute, op. cit.

opposite.[55] A few chapters later, she returns to this caricature of God shortly after her child self hears of the execution of her beloved Uncle Anoosh, a political dissident during the regime of the Shah. Marjane castigates God and banishes him, and the following page shows her adrift against the void: "And I was lost, without any bearings […]. What could be worse than that?"[56] Interestingly enough, this illustration is reminiscent of the scenario described by Friedrich Nietzsche in section 125 of *The Gay Science* (1882), where the madman – having declared that God was dead – paints a picture of humanity lost in an indifferent cosmos. The very notion of God or the name of God, as the sign of infinity or transcendence, is that which exceeds signification itself. In the Jewish tradition, Yahweh's name is ineffable while in the Muslim tradition, Allah is not to be depicted. Thus, the rendering of the idea of God – in the context of a child's faltering religious belief – in Satrapi's bare lines and inks has the effect of magnifying the reader's own childish notions about God, simplistic yet looming large.

A parallel preoccupation with veiling versus revelation/revealing runs alongside the theme of faith versus renunciation in *Persepolis*. Satrapi's satirical take on the veil constitutes her most remarkable contribution to the cultural conversation about Islam and female representation. Just like the name of God, the face and body of a woman are taboo. It is only the eyes, the organs that see, which are allowed to be seen. As a female artist, Satrapi undertakes a double rebellion against this taboo. The first chapter of volume 1 is entitled "The Veil" and tells the story of how her child self was first obligated to wear this covering in 1980. She shows herself and her classmates mauling and playing around with the veil, in the unrestrained way of girls not yet fully inducted into the disciplinary regime of femininity. In volume 2, her adult artist self is shown puzzling over how to draw a female model who, by regulation, is fully covered and appears to be shapeless. She draws herself among the ranks of other veiled female artists gathered around a veiled model, in the act of trying to draw that which they are ultimately forbidden to draw. In the end, Satrapi and her colleagues manage to find a way out of this limitation by meeting in secret to draw the female form. In a larger context, *Persepolis* itself is the visual testimony of Satrapi stripping off the veil. Her illustration of the taboo or the un-representable embodies what Derrida refers to as the withdrawal

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[55] M. Satrapi, *Persepolis. The Story of a Childhood*, New York 2003, pp. 13–14.
[56] Ibidem, p. 71.

or eclipse of the trait, i.e. its capacity to make things appear by its own non-appearance, not unlike the name of God or the face of a woman.

A second way in which Derrida's analysis in *Memoirs of the Blind* may be applied to women's autobiographical comics is in terms of how these works depict grief. Derrida's book concludes with open-ended remarks about the relationship between weeping women and inner vision. In all three works I have selected for analysis – as is true for most if not all life writing – there is a core of grief that is at some point cathartically expressed through a symbolic or literal outburst of tears. Each instance of crying marks the acknowledgement of a deep truth, so deep it goes beyond the mere capacity to see, overflowing as water from the very organs of seeing.

For example, in Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, she depicts herself as unable to cry shortly after her father's suicide. Ironically, the only instance Bechdel shows herself crying is when she is doing so from an uncontrollable fit of hilarity.[57] However, what the panels show is not the absence of feeling but the fullness of it: at that moment, she is finally forced to acknowledge the depth of her grief by another person's question about how her summer was going. The very emptiness and nonchalance of that question, set against the enormity of what she has to deal with, precipitates a fit of laughter which is really a way of weeping. The caption reads, "They say grief takes many forms, including the absence of grief."[58]

Similarly, grief is the absent presence that seeps through the pages of Roz's Chast's memoir about her elderly parents' last years of life. The significance of the book's title, *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?*, is made clear in the first chapter, in which Chast and her parents sit in a living room trying to talk about death but are eventually unable even to say the word. Since this important but depressing conversation is postponed, in the last panel of the same page Chast and her parents are separately shown breathing a sigh of relief.[59] It must be noted that Chast's style, in contrast to Bechdel's more detailed realism, appears cartoonish. Her colorful palette also has the effect of apparently trivializing death, such as in her drawing of the "Wheel of Doom" (a parody of the Hindu Wheel of Life), which enumerates roulette-style choices of absurd ways to

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[57] A. Bechdel, *Fun Home. A Family Tragicomic*, Boston and New York 2007, p. 227.
[58] Ibidem.
[59] R. Chast, *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant? A Memoir*, New York 2014, loc. 11.

die;[60] the many euphemisms for assisted living, such as "Sunset Gardens," "End-of-the-Trail Acres," "Final Bridge Rest Home," and "Last Stop";[61] and the "depressing aisle" at the grocery store, which stocks adult diapers.[62] However, the scrim of humor – indeed, many parts of the memoir are funny – only serves to heighten the sense of the inevitable. Death himself occasionally appears, an innocuous-looking grim reaper, scythe and all; in one panel he is shown backing fearfully away from Chast's mother who is cantankerously telling him to "Back off, mister."[63] Yet despite this carica-turish prosthesis, the character of death is also the memoir's main conflict *and* entire plot. The truly grim reality beyond the filter of the cartoon, glimpsed occasionally as though through a blur of tears, asserts itself in the actual family photographs inserted in the memoirs. It finally shows its face in the pages where, abandoning the cartoonish style, Chast presents her elaborately crosshatched drawings of her mother shortly after her death.[64]

Like Bechdel, Chast does not actually depict herself weeping. A close marker of her anguish is a comic self-portrait that parodies Edvard Munch's famous painting, *The Scream*.[65] Another more significant image is not of herself weeping, but her father. His figure, with eyes unnaturally large and filled with tears, dominates an entire page at the moment of reunion with his wife, Chast's mother, just released from the hospital.[66] Given Chast's explicit admission that she favors her father who is quiet and submissive, rather than her mother who is loud and domineering – frightening both her husband and daughter – it is not farfetched to infer that Chast's weeping father is her own weeping alter ego. While neither Bechdel's memoir nor Chast's shows the author-self crying, both qualify as "books of tears," to use Derrida's phrase.

A third and final connection between Derrida's ideas and the graphic memoir has to do with how autobiographical comics presents ruins of selves, or *ruins of ruins* of selves. Bechdel's work, for example, features ex-tremely accurate drawings of archival materials pertaining to her father: photographs, official documents, handwritten letters. The painstaking

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[60] Ibidem, loc. 36.
[61] Ibidem, loc. 99.
[62] Ibidem, loc. 174.
[63] Ibidem, loc. 198.
[64] Ibidem, loc. 211–222.
[65] Ibidem, loc. 66.
[66] Ibidem, loc. 92.

verisimilitude of these illustrations echoes the clinical presentation of the corpses for embalming at the funeral home that is run part-time by her father. Her memoir then becomes a literary dissection of her father's remains, a detective story about the mystery of his suicide. The incipient loss that haunts the narrative is the closeted identity of her father, which Bechdel connects to her own coming out process as a lesbian. Neither identity – father's nor daughter's – is fully present, even and especially as both characters gaze at themselves in the mirror, mirroring each other.[67] In this panel, Bechdel's young self fusses with her dress, annoyed at how the costume has been imposed on her by her father. He in turn fusses with his cravat as an arrowed caption identifies his suit as velvet. The theme of father and daughter reflecting each other pervades Bechdel's memoir; they forge identities out of transversal desires, for example via his expression of *her* masculinity and her expression of *his* femininity.

It is one of the book's many literary conceits that it alludes to the relationship between Daedelus and Icarus in its first and last pages. In the first page, Bechdel's child self plays the game of "airplane" with her father by hanging onto his levered legs, as though in a swing. A caption reads, "In the circus, acrobatics were one person lies on the floor balancing another are called 'Icarian games.'"[68] In the last page, the same girl is shown having just leapt off the diving board; her father stands chest-deep in the water, poised to catch her. The captions, beginning from the previous page, read,

> What if Icarus hadn't hurtled into the sea? What if he'd inherited his father's inventive bent? What might he have wrought? He did hurtle into the sea, of course. But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt.[69]

In the myth, it is the child who dies and the artist-father who survives to tell the tale. In Bechdel's real life, it is the other way around: she is the artist-daughter and her father is the suicide. This reversal harkens to the self-portrait's debt to the mirror image, as per Derrida's analysis: it is not herself whom the draftswoman sees, but the other who looks at her. In Bechdel's case, her memoir represents the ruin of a ruin in that it is not her own image she portrays, or even her father's image of her. She depicts her image of her father's image of her image. In the chapter entitled

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[67] A. Bechdel, op. cit., p. 98.
[68] Ibidem, p. 3.
[69] Ibidem, pp. 231–232.

"The Antihero's Journey," which is an allusion to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Bechdel traces a connection between her relationship with her father and that between two characters in Joyce's novel, Stephen and Bloom. Bechdel quotes her professor quoting Joyce: "What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Bloom's thoughts about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom and Bloom's thoughts about Stephen's thoughts about Bloom's thoughts about Stephen?"[70] A few pages later, after having come out to her parents, Bechdel receives a letter from her father; here he mistakenly assumes that *she* already knew about *his* sexual orientation. In fact, it is only later that she would find out from her mother that her father is gay. In Bechdel's confusion, she writes, "What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Dad's thoughts about my thoughts about him, and his thoughts about my thoughts about his thoughts about me?"[71]

Ultimately, that what the artist produces is a ruin from the very beginning suggests that the self is but a simulacrum of another's self. There is no one behind the mirror, only a reflection. It is an other/self whose portrait can only be drawn not from visual perception, but from the blurry perspective of memory.

Conclusion

In my analysis of the image of the weeping woman in the graphic memoir, I have described three different modes of inner vision, or ways by which the unseeing draftsman or draftswoman creates art. These are ways of reconstructing the "self" in autobiography by means of negativity, which is the blind work of drawing. The first is the explicit illustration of that which is un-representable. The second is by catharsis, where the un-representable grief is transformed into the clarifying *in-sight* of tears. The third and last is the co-creation a ruin self-portrait, not by looking at oneself (an impossible gesture), but by looking at the other looking at oneself. I hope that through this philosophical reading of the works of Satrapi, Bechdel, and Chast, my paper has been able to point the way toward the larger project of a feminist Derridean critique of sequential art.

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[70] Ibidem, p. 208.
[71] Ibidem, p. 212.

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The Gender Metamorphosis of Narcissus. Salvador Dalí: Metamorphosis of Narcissus

Abstract

This contribution is devoted to an interpretation of the artwork, from a gender point of view, Metamorphosis of Narcissus by Salvador Dalí. Dalí's painting is compared with the Narcissus stories to be found in antiquity, particularly in Ovid's Metamorphoses, with his stress on the beauty of a young boy, and the commensurate concepts of seeing and mirroring. The gender associations of narcissism and their changes are well-documented in the history of art (Caravaggio, Edward Burne-Jones) and in different concepts of narcissism (Sigmund Freud, Gaston Bachelard, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Julia Kristeva). The author focuses on the gender aspects of surrealism, keying in especially to the concept of Anima and Animus (Carl Gustav Jung). Dalí's work is analyzed in terms of associating Narcissus not merely with seeing and mirroring but also with touching and metamorphosis, emphasizing his remarkable skill at transgressing gender divisions in his visionary leap towards androgyny.

Key words

Introduction

Before starting the process of an interpretation of Salvador Dalí's painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, the aim and method of the paper must be illuminated in order to make its structure, content and style more

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comprehensible. The main aim of this paper is to offer an interpretation of the above mentioned artwork from a gender point of view. For that reason, the first chapter presents a description of the most relevant versions of the Narcissus story, which we have at our disposal from ancient times, because they contain differences that are also significant from a gender perspective. As the best-known version of the Narcissus story (which we most often encounter in the history of European art) is to be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and because Ovid and Dalí share the common motif of metamorphosis, we have based our interpretation of Dalí's artwork as set against the background of this rendition. As Ovid sets up the frequent motifs associated with Narcissus in European art history, that is art, beauty, and mirroring, the next chapter is devoted to the way. in which these categories changed their connections to gender in the course of time, as documented by comparing Caravaggio's painting of *Narcissus* with *The Mirror of Venus* by Edward Burne-Jones. However, as the following chapter makes evident, the changes in the gender association of Narcissus occurred not only in art, but also in the realm of theory, especially in the fields of psychoanalysis and philosophy. Here, Sigmund Freud's and Gaston Bachelard's accounts of narcissism are excellent examples. It is interesting to note that psychoanalytically oriented women, such as Lou Andreas-Salomé and Julia Kristeva, stressed different aspects of narcissism than Sigmund Freud – but to explain them is not our target here. The aim of this chapter is to create a reservoir of associations, providing clues for different possible interpretations of the above mentioned painting; that is the reason we do not comment on, explain, nor criticize them. Thus, the first three chapters are meant to serve as material gathered in order to open our imagination and thinking in order to subsequently create our own interpretation, which we offer in the fourth chapter.

Any interpretation is a highly risky endeavor: every artwork opens the space for a number of different possible interpretations.[1] Because we can neither start interpreting from nowhere nor a place of omniscience, each interpretation is partial, and necessarily conditioned by the historical, cultural, intellectual, social (and myriad other) locations of the gendered subject. On the other hand, the very fact that the subject is part of a particular milieu is the condition of his/her capacity to understand the meanings of the world around us, the art-world included. As such, each

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[1] U. Eco, R. Rorty, J. Culler, Ch. Brooke-Rose, *Interpretation and Over-interpretation*, ed. S. Collini, Cambridge 1992.

interpretation can be challenged or criticized from different perspectives for being inadequate, insufficient, not complex, deep, coherent, clear, etc. However, a "critique of interpretation" is not an appropriate word here; according to Umberto Eco, we can produce many acceptable interpretations of any particular artwork, and the only difference we can confidently assert is the difference between interpretation and over-interpretation.[2] That is why we do not compare our interpretation with other interpretations of the same artwork as they are to be found in literature. In accordance with C. G. Jung, we understand each interpretation of symbols, images, and signs contained in works of art as a possible way toward a historical and cultural amplification of their meaning. Jung claims that

> [...] the indefinite yet definite mythological theme and the iridescent symbol express the processes of the soul more aptly, more completely, and therefore infinitely more clearly than the clearest definition: for the symbol gives not only a picture of the process but also – what is perhaps more important – the possibility of simultaneously experiencing or re-experiencing the process, whose twilight character can only be understood through a sympathetic approach and never by the brutal attack of clear intellectual definition.[3]

In this sense, the main value of interpretation is to keep and enrich an artworks' potential to speak to us. However, this is possible only through our own participation in the process of searching for less obvious and transparent meanings of artworks. Interpretation is not the practice of reasoning but the practice of discovering.[4] In the course of our interpretation as offered in the fourth chapter, we found Jung's concept of the *Anima* and *Animus* Archetype, in terms of representing a particular view of psychic androgyny, very helpful; we thus devoted more attention to it in a separate part of the text. Jung's theoretically and historically located concept of androgyny also proved to be useful when it came to illuminating certain problems women surrealists had to face and tackle in their creative work. The text concludes with an example (Remedios Varo) of precisely how women artists might work to overcome them.

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[2] Ibidem.

[3] C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections. An Anthology of his writings 1905–1961*, selected and edited by J. Jacobi, London 1986, p. 44.

[4] N. Davey, "Language and Reason in Philosophical Hermeneutics", [in:] *Studia humanitas – Ars hermeneutica. Metodologie a theurgie hermeneutické interpretace III*, ed. J. Vorel, Ostrava 2010, pp. 61–84.

Narcissus in Ancient Mythology

There are several versions of the story of Narcissus. The oldest is probably the version found in 2004 by W. B. Henry. According to Henry, it was written by the poet Parthenius of Nicaea around 50 BC.[5] The most popular version, however, is that from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was completed around 8 AD. There is also the version written by Conon, living at the same time as Ovid.[6] The latest ancient version is to be found in Pausanias' *Description of Greece* (around 150 years later).[7]

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[5] [...] god-like [...]
[...........................]
He had a cruel heart, and hated all of them,
Till he conceived a love for his own form:
He wailed, seeing his face, delightful as a dream,
Within a spring; he wept for his beauty.
Then the boy shed his blood and gave it to the earth
[...] to bear

Parthenius of Nicaea, [online] http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/news/narcissus.html [accessed: 8.10.2015].

[6] "Ameinias was a very determined but fragile youth. When he was cruelly spurned by Narkissos, he took his sword and killed himself by the door, calling on the goddess Nemesis to avenge him. As a result, when Narkissos saw the beauty of his form reflected in a stream, he fell deeply in love with himself. In despair, and believing that he had rightly earned this curse for the humiliation of Ameinias, he slew himself. From his blood sprang the flower." Conon, *Narrations 24*, trans. Atsma, Greek mythographer C1st B.C. to C1st A.D., [online] http://www.theoi.com/Heros/Narkissos.html [accessed: 8.10.2015].

[7] "In the territory of the Thespians is a place called Donakon (Reed-bed). Here is the spring of Narkissos. They say that Narkissos looked into this water, and not understanding that he saw his own reflection, unconsciously fell in love with himself, and died of love at the spring. But it is utter stupidity to imagine that a man old enough to fall in love was incapable of distinguishing a man from a man's reflection.

There is another story about Narkissos, less popular indeed than the other, but not without some support. It is said that Narkissos had a twin sister; they were exactly alike in appearance, their hair was the same, they wore similar clothes, and went hunting together. The story goes on that Narkissos fell in love with his sister, and when the girl died, would go to the spring, knowing that it was his reflection that he saw, but in spite of this knowledge finding some relief for his love in imagining that he saw, not his own reflection, but the likeness of his sister." Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Classical Library Volumes, Cambridge, London 1918, [online] http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1A. html [accessed: 8.10.2015].

Narcissus is also mentioned in other texts, which have survived since antiquity.[8]

Nevertheless, Ovid's story of Narcissus is the most elaborate and famous one. According to Ovid, Narcissus was a son of the river-god Kephisos and the fountain-nymph Liriope. He was celebrated for his beauty, and attracted many admirers, boys and girls, but in his arrogance he spurned them all. Two of them are mentioned in particular – the nymph Echo and the boy Ameinias. Ameinias, after he was rejected by Narcissus, called to the Gods "If he should love, deny him what he loves!"[9] This plea was heard by Nemesis, who granted her assent. Narcissus then fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool. Gazing endlessly at his own reflection, Narcissus finally understood that what he most loved was his own image. Suffering immensely from this unrequited love, he slowly pined away and was transformed into a narcissus flower.[10]

When comparing these versions from the gender perspective, we might be surprised that Echo is not present in all of them. She appears in only two versions – Ovid and Pausanias. In Ovid's story, Echo is a nymph who does not have the capacity to speak by herself, only to repeat the last words said by others, especially by Narcissus. This was the consequence of her curse by Hera. When she was rejected by Narcissus, Echo faded away in her despair and her bones were transformed into stones; the only thing that remained was her voice.[11] Pausanias describes Echo (in his second version of the story) as a twin of Narcissus.[12]

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[8] All versions are available at http://www.theoi.com/Heros/Narkissos.html [accessed: 8.10.2015].

[9] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, [online] http://www.theoi.com/Heros/Narkissos.html [accessed: 8.10.2015].

[10] See: idem, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford (USA) 2009.

[11] We can parallel the phenomenon of mirroring the face of Narcissus on the water's surface with that of repeating the words of others, in the case of Echo. See also M. Germ, "Dalí's Metamorphosis of Narcissus – a Break with the Classical Tradition or Ovid's Story Retold in an Ingenious Way?", *Cuad. Art. Gr.*, 2012, 43, pp. 133–144. Though, because Echo can repeat only the last words of Narcissus, it sometimes changes their meaning. Echo's repeating with a difference was elaborated by P. Petek in her *Echo and Narcissus: Echolocating the Spectator in the Age of Audience Research*, Cambridge 2008.

[12] Here, the link of Narcissus and androgyny is evident, as Echo is understood as the twin sister of Narcissus, his Alter-Ego or feminine side, necessary for him to become a whole human being. As we will explain later, this aspect also occurs in the modern version of psychic androgyny in C. G. Jung's theory.

Narcissus, Art, Beauty, Mirror and Gender

The narcissist motif of beauty and mirroring is closely connected with the problem of art, especially visual art. Leon Battista Alberti, the Renaissance theorist of art, wrote:

> I used to tell my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who was turned into a flower; for, as painting is the flower of all the arts, so the tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. What is painting but the act of embracing, by means of art, the surface of the pool?[13]

We can find the motif of mirroring and beauty in its Ovidian sense in many works throughout the history of European art, associated with a man as well as with a woman. Changes in gender associations of these categories can be documented by a comparison of the painting *Narcissus* by Caravaggio with *The Mirror of Venus* by Edward Burne-Jones.

Both artists stress the mirroring effects of a water surface. However, in Burne-Jones' painting, the motif of beauty is transformed from a young boy (Antiquity and Renaissance) to a woman (Pre-Raphaelites). In the mirror of a small pond, kneeling women see their beauty reflecting the beauty of Venus (the woman next to Venus directs her eyes towards her). Venus differs from the others as she is standing and she is not looking for her own beauty; she is neither looking at the mirror of the water, nor at the eyes of the other women. She is not even looking for her beauty in the eyes of the viewer; according to the Pre-Raphaelites, her beauty is eternal. Metaphorically speaking, she is the mirror for the beauty of others – all the portrayed women look similar to her. It does not matter where women are looking; wherever they look they find the image of beauty, equated with the eternal beauty of art and woman everywhere, as it multiplies itself in the process of mirroring.

Interpretations of Narcissus in European History

The motif of Narcissus contains rich potential for different interpretations. We can find theoretical exploitations of Narcissus in psychology, especially psychoanalysis, and psychiatry – here 'narcissism' functions as a term referring to an officially accepted type of personal psychiatric disorder.

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[13] L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II, trans. C. Grayson. London 1991, p. 61.
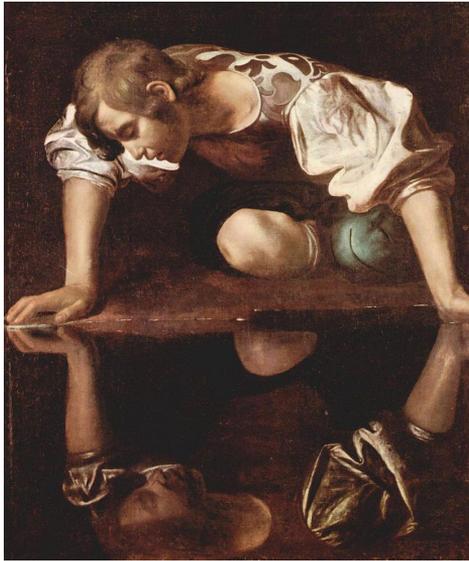
Fig. 1. Caravaggio, *Narcissus*, 1597–1599
Galleria Nazionale D'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy

Fig. 2. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1898
Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal

Fig. 3. Salvador Dalí, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, 1937
Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom

Fig. 4. Remedios Varo, *Exploration of the Source of the Orinoco River*, 1959
Source: pintura.aut.org

This term is also used to describe the overall character of contemporary Western culture, particularly American culture,[14] or to describe postmodern culture.[15]

In the area of psychoanalysis, narcissism appeared as a scientific category in Sigmund Freud's paper *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914).[16] Freud distinguished primary and secondary narcissism. Primary narcissism in the form of loving oneself is described as a first and normal stage in the sexual development of all human beings; we can connect it with the concept of innate bisexuality, as Freud elaborated earlier.[17] Secondary narcissism arises in pathological states such as schizophrenia; in these cases a person's libido withdraws from objects in the world and produces megalomania. The secondary narcissism of the mentally ill is, as Freud suggests, a magnified, extreme manifestation of one's primary narcissism. Freud, however, also articulates a third meaning of narcissism – that is the so-called narcissist selection of an object. Here the issue of gender comes into play, as Freud claims that man and woman differ in their attitude toward the selection of the love object. He writes:

> Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment, which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed upon them in their choice of object. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. [...] The importance of this type of woman for the erotic life of mankind is to be rated very highly. Such women have the greatest fascination for men, not only for aesthetic reasons, since as a rule they are the most beautiful, but also because of a combination of interesting psychological factors.[18]

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[14] Ch. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New York 1991.

[15] J. Tyl, *Narcismus jako psychologie postmoderní kultury* [Narcissism as Psychology of Postmodern Culture], [online] http://www.iapsa.cz [accessed: 7.09.2015].

[16] Some predecessors of Freud also used the term narcissism, such as Paul Näcke and Havelock Ellis.

[17] See: S. Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. by A. A. Brill, New York and Washington 1920 (EBook), [online] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14969/14969-h/14969-h.htm [accessed: 7.09.2015]. In this text, first published in 1905, S. Freud developed the concept of so-called innate bisexuality. He claims that we all have "the original predisposition to bisexuality, which in the course of development has changed to monosexuality" (ibidem, p. 9).

[18] Idem, *On Narcissism. An Introduction*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. from

Freud here (similarly to Ovid) connects narcissism with beauty; how-
ever, in the case of Freud, it is the beauty of a woman (like Burne-Jones),
not a young boy. Concerning the connection to the concept of bisexuality,
Freud is close to Ovid in claiming that Narcissus attracted both boys and
girls; however, he ignored them all.

Psychoanalytically oriented women have sometimes interpreted nar-
cissism differently. For example, Lou Andreas-Salomé in her article *The
Dual Orientation of Narcissism* understood narcissism as "a part of our
self-love which accompanies all phases."[19] She also stresses the dual, am-
bivalent orientation of narcissism, consisting of two desires: "the desire
for individuality, and the contrary movement toward conjunction and
fusion."[20] According to Viola Parente-Čapková, Andreas-Salomé changed
the evaluation of passivity and desire for the fusion characteristic of the
primary phase of a person's development. According to Parente-Čapková,
she "advocated 'an unconscious' with a positive dimension which offered
the possibility of 'regression' to a primal undifferentiation without pathol-
ogy, to 'woman,' whom she defined as 'a regressive without a neurosis,'
remaining 'interested in the moments when the narcissistic undifferenti-
ation was recovered in artistic creativity.'"[21] Thus, Andreas-Salomé chal-
lenged Freud's close connection of narcissism with self-love, illness, and
woman, stressing rather its ambiguity, normality and gender neutrality.

In the 20th century, the notion of mirroring connected with Narcissus
was even elevated to the level of philosophy and used as a symbol of the
world. In this transformation, the capacity of water to mirror the world
plays a very important role. The lake can be symbolically understood as
an "eye" of the landscape, in which the surrounding nature reflects and
sees itself, therefore doubling itself. Gaston Bachelard plays on this ability

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the German under the General Editorship of J. Strachey, in collaboration with A. Freud,
assisted by A. Strachey, A. Tyson, London 2001, pp. 88–89. Freud also compared wom-
en to children and animals, writing: "For it seems very evident that another person's
narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own nar-
cissism and are in search of object-love. The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his
narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain
animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats and the large
beasts of prey." (ibidem, p. 89).

[19] L. Andreas-Salomé, "The Dual Orientation of Narcissism", *Psychoanalytic Quar-
terly*, 1962, No. 31, p. 3.

[20] Ibidem, p. 4.

[21] Ibidem.

of a water surface to double itself in his understanding of narcissism as a general trait of the world:

> But in nature itself, it seems that *powers of vision* are active. Between *contemplated nature* and *contemplative nature*, there are close and reciprocal relations. *Imaginary nature* affects the unity of *natura naturans* and of *natura naturata*. [...] The cosmos, then, is in some way clearly touched by narcissism. The world wants to see itself.[22]

He also develops Jung's thoughts about *Anima* and *Animus*, transforming Pausanias' account of the story for this purpose:

> Narcissus, then, goes to the secret fountain in the depths of the woods. Only there does he feel that he is *naturally* doubled. He stretches out his arms, thrusts his hands down toward his own image, speaks to his own voice. Echo is not a distant nymph. She lives in the basin of the fountain. Echo is always with Narcissus. She is he. She has his voice. She has his face. He does not hear her in a loud shout. He hears her in a murmur, like the murmur of his seductive seducer's voice. In the presence of water, Narcissus receives the revelation of his identity and of his duality; of his double powers, virile and feminine; and, above all, the revelation of his reality and his ideality.[23]

In contrast to Freud, understanding narcissism in the context of bisexuality, Bachelard understands it – similarly to C. G. Jung – in the context of psychic androgyny.[24]

While Bachelard underlines the capacity of water to mirror, Julia Kristeva stresses the aboriginal emptiness and death drive as a primary source of narcissism. Narcissus tried to overcome this emptiness by looking into water; all ancient stories end with Narcissus's death. She writes:

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[22] G. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. from the French E. R. Farrell, Dallas 1994, pp. 27–28.

[23] Ibidem, pp. 22–23. Bachelard develops the characteristics of *Anima* and *Animus* further: *Anima* represents the process of dreaming and *Animus* the set of dreams. In the end, Bachelard elaborates a very complicated conception of the system of the mutual dialectical relations of the real and the idealized *Animus* and *Anima.*

[24] The difference between bisexuality and androgyny can be seen as paralleling sex/gender division (taking into account its ambiguity). However, we understand bisexuality as the sexual orientation of a human being towards both sexes, while androgyny in its modern sense (not as Plato describes it in *The Symposium*) means the psychic level of personality as it is able to combine masculinity and femininity as gender characteristics (it applies to heterosexually, homosexually or bisexually oriented human beings).

"The mythical Narcissus would heroically lean over that emptiness to seek in the maternal watery element the possibility of representing the self of the other – someone to love."[25] Kristeva describes narcissism as follows:

> Always already there, the forming presence that none the less satisfies none of my auto-erotic needs draws me into the imaginary exchange, the specular seduction. He or I – who is the agent? Or even, is it he or is it she? The immanence of its transcendence, as well as the instability of our borders before the setting of my image as 'my own,' turn the murky source *(eine neuen psychische Aktion)* from which narcissism will flow, into a dynamics of confusion and delight. Secrets of our loves.[26]

Salvador Dalí: *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*

The motif of Narcissus has inspired many European artists throughout history. In modern times, Narcissus became the most emblematic figure of Decadent art. He was "explored as a prototype of endless self-analysis and aestheticized androgyny."[27] As Parente-Čapková notes, many women artists "twisted the figure of Narcissus (or its female version Narcissa) and Medusa into empowering symbols, or used them to explore the question of gender."[28]

Let us move from the turn of the 19th and 20th century and from the contexts of decadence and symbolism to the 1930s and 1940s into the context of surrealism. At that time, though Freud's works about narcissism were already available, we cannot claim that the surrealists read them from primary sources.[29] Almost at the same time, Carl Gustav Jung developed his

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[25] J. Kristeva, "Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents", trans. L. S. Roudiez, [in:] *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Moi Toril, Oxford 1990,, p. 257.

[26] Ibidem, p. 258.

[27] V. Parente-Čapková, "Narcissuses, Medusas, Ophelias. Water Imagery and Femininity in the Texts by Two Decadent Women Writers", [in:] *Water and Women in Past, Present and Future*, ed. Z. Kalnická, Philadelphia 2007, p. 198.

[28] For more about the use of the narcissist motif in the works of Decadent women writers, especially from the gender perspective, see: ibidem.

[29] However, Salvador Dalí personally met Freud in 1938 in London and brought him to see the painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus.* Freud later remarked: "Until today I had tended to think that the surrealists, who would appear to have chosen me as their patron saint, were completely mad. But this wild-eyed young Spaniard, with his undoubted technical mastery, prompted me to a different opinion. Indeed, it would be most interesting to explore analytically the growth of a work like this" (C. R. M. Maurell, "Dalí and the Myth of Narcissus", *El Punt*, 25 December 2005, [online] www.salvador-dali.org [accessed: 8.09.2015]).

analytical psychology, as well as his theory of archetypes and of psychical androgyny. In the process of interpreting Salvador Dalí's painting *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, we do not use the context of bisexuality but concentrate rather on the discourse of androgyny, which we found more appropriate to illuminate the meaning of Dalí's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus.*

Although *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* is mainly known as a painting, in fact it is a book consisting of three parts: a short theoretical account of his own artistic paranoiac-critical method; a poem; and the painting.[30] Dalí claimed that this ensemble of three parts mentioned above was the first complex surrealist work ever and "the first poem and the first painting obtained entirely through the integral application of the paranoiac-critical method."[31]

x x x

Man returns to the vegetable state
by fatigue-laden sleep
and the gods
by the transparent hypnosis of their passions.
Narcissus, you are so immobile
one would think you were asleep.
If it were question of Hercules rough and brown,
one would say: he sleeps like a bole
in the posture
of an herculean oak.
But you, Narcissus,
made of perfumed bloomings of transparent
	adolescence,
you sleep like a water flower.

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[30] The book was simultaneously published in 1937 in French: *Métamorphose de Narcisse: Poème paranoïaque* (Paris, Éditions surréalistes), and English: *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (trans. F. Scarpe, Julien Levy Gallery, New York) on the occasion of Dalí's exhibition in Tate Gallery in London.

[31] Ibidem, pages not marked. In this book, Dalí describes the paranoical-critical method as follows: "If one looks for some time, from a slight distance and with a certain 'distant fixedness,' at the hypnotically immobile figure of Narcissus, it gradually disappears until at last it is completely invisible. The metamorphosis of the myth takes place at the precise moment, for the image of Narcissus is suddenly transformed into the image of a hand which rises out of his own reflection." Dalí developed the paranoical-critical method in the early1930's; it was designed to help an artist tap into his unconscious through a self-induced paranoid state. Using this method, Dalí related objects that were otherwise unrelated. He did this through the use of optical illusions and by juxtaposing images with the aim at forcing one to abandon any preconceived notions of reality.

Now the great mystery draws near,
the great metamorphosis is about to occur.

Narcissus, in his immobility, absorbed by his reflection
with the digestive slowness of carnivorous plants,
becomes invisible.

There remains of him only
the hallucinatingly white oval of his head,
his head again more tender,
his head, chrysalis of hidden biological designs,
his head held up by the tips of the water's fingers,
at the tips of the fingers
of the insensate hand,
of the terrible hand,
of the excrement-eating hand,
of the mortal hand
of his own reflection.

When that head slits
when that head splits
when that head bursts,
it will be the flower,
the new Narcissus,
Gala —
my narcissus.[32]

One of the most important symbols in the Narcissus story, as we have already mentioned when dealing with the philosophical interpretation of narcissism, and one with a multitude of semantic networks, is water.[33] Water occupies quite a large space and carries important messages also in the work (both poem and painting) of Salvador Dalí. The concept of water as one of four basic elements making up the world has its roots in the deep past of humanity; in European culture, it is found in the work of Hesiod and Homer, and it was developed in the works of Greek philosophers from Empedocles to Aristotle.[34] In many myths and philosophical

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[32] Ibidem (last part of the poem). As Dalí considered that the poem and the painting formed a single whole, we will also take the poem into account during our interpretation.

[33] According to Ovid, Narcissus was begotten after the river god Képhisos raped the water nymph Liriopé. He then disappeared, and is not present in myth anymore.

[34] In Indian and Chinese culture, water is one of the five elements. See more in: M. Jakubczak, "Earth", [in:] *Aesthetics of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Ostrava 2001, pp. 15–99.

treatises, water represents the "feminine" element (together with earth), while air and fire are seen as "masculine." However, water as a natural element can carry many different symbolic and semantic meanings as well as gender and aesthetic associations, depending on what form, shape, cultural context or theoretical framework, in which it appears; there are differences of symbolical meaning between a drop of dew, a flowing river, a hot spring, the waves of the sea or a roaring waterfall.[35]

In contrast to the story by Ovid, where Narcissus sees his own face in a small fountain hidden in the middle of the forest,[36] Salvador Dalí portrays water in the form of a small lake. The surface of the water is still, resembling the surface of an artificial mirror. The mirroring effects of the water's surface divide the picture into four parts: in the horizontal plane into upper and lower parts, and in the vertical plane into right and left sides. These four parts of the picture "mirror" each other, but not passively. In the seemingly still and reflective water, a dynamic process of metamorphosis is happening. This is the difference between Dalí's interpretation of the Narcissus story and that of Caravaggio or Burne-Jones. Dalí is closer to the ancient concept of metamorphosis. In Dalí's painting, the meaning arises in the multiple processes of mutual reflections of the upper and lower parts and the right and left sides of the painting. We can detect the first gender association here: the left side of the picture is colored with a gold tint, possibly associated with the symbol of the sun, while on the right side, a silver tint prevails, possibly alluding to the symbol of the moon. In most mythologies, the sun represents masculinity (the Ancient god Apollo, for example), and the moon represents femininity (the Ancient goddess Artemisia).[37] We can find support for this gender association in the text of the poem and the picture itself: Dalí describes (and portrays) the metamorphosis of Narcissus as starting from the left (sunny) side and progressing towards the right (silver) side, where the flower is hatching out of the oval of an egg.

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[35] For more about the symbolic-aesthetic meanings of water and its connection with femininity see: Z. Kalnická, *Water and Woman. Symbolic-aesthetic Archetype*, Saarbrücken 2010.

[36] "There was a fountain silver-clear and bright, which neither shepherds nor the wild she-goats, that range the hills, nor any cattle's mouth had touched – its waters were unsullied – birds disturbed it not; nor animals, nor boughs that fall so often from the trees" (Ovid, op. cit., [online] http://www.theoi.com/Heros/Narkissos.html [accessed: 10.09.2015]).

[37] Although the sun is connected with male energy in most cultures, there are some exceptions.

The water space in Dalí's painting functions not only as a medium for multiple mirroring; Dalí also indicates its depth, as Narcissus plunges his hand (and also part of his leg) into the water. In contrast to an artificial mirror, a water mirror always has a certain depth, however shallow it may be. For Dalí, the lake becomes a device by which he maintains a playful tension among the ambivalent relations between depth and surface, visible and invisible. When we look at the painting with a particular type of concentration, as Dalí advises us in his book, following the direction of the metamorphosis, we can "see" how the "real" Narcissus on the left side becomes invisible, letting the right side appear, where a flower emerges from an egg, called by Dalí "my narcissus – Gala." In the poem, Gala is referred to as "narcissus" twice: Narcissus with a capital letter, and narcissus (the flower). However, Gala is called by Dalí "my narcissus," which we can interpret as her appropriation by the artist. Gala's existence is derivative and their relationship asymmetrical – her being depends on the metamorphosis of Narcissus-Dalí who gives her "life." We will return to this problem later when explaining the *Animus-Anima* Archetype in Jung's theory.

Dalí was able to overcome Ovid's account of Narcissus (and Freud's account of narcissism), and to break its connection with beauty and self--love, by downplaying the importance of looking. Dalí's Narcissus does not look at the water surface in order to see his image; we do not see his face. The painting does not follow the myth by showing that Narcissus was seduced by the beauty of the face he saw on the surface of water and subsequently fell in love with an image, which he finally understood as his own. In Dalí's picture, however, the two main protagonists have neither faces nor eyes; what we can find significant is the total absence of looking – with its potentiality to seduce,[38] but also to objectify. The tendency to objectify others by looking at them is an important theme for many authors. Some of them also concentrate on the gender aspect of looking; for example, Carolyn Korsmeyer emphasizes the fact that for a long time in the history of European art, artistic images were closely connected with women and beauty as something *being-looked-at*. She finds the structural

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[38] As Baudrillard claims, the face is the most seductive device because of the eyes: "The seduction of eyes. The most immediate, purest form of seduction, one that bypasses words. Where looks alone join in a sort of duel, an immediate intertwining, unbeknownst to others and their discourses: the discrete charm of a silent and immobile orgasm." J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. B. Singer, Montréal 2001, p. 77.

relation between the person who actively looks, and the person who is being passively looked at to be strongly gendered.[39] In the case of Dalí's painting, the absence of looking opens the path towards overcoming the tendency to objectify others – including gender objectification, which mostly results in a strong division between man and woman. Looking, here, is not only absent within the structure of the painting; there is no look coming from the picture toward the viewer.[40]

It seems that the meaning of Dalí's Narcissus is created through and in relations; unstable borders and relations (see the description by Julia Kristeva) are stabilized and at the same time disrupted in the process of the viewer's interpretation of the symbolical and imaginary structure of the painting (which might differ, depending on whether the viewer is a woman or a man.) We are dragged into the process of metamorphosis, in which the exact point of change is not visible. Metamorphosis is not a "thing;" it is a never-ending process in which each step represents more than it offers at first sight. The question is: what kind of ambivalent relations in their cosmic, human and gender meanings are played out within this seemingly static composition?

Let us first compare the left and right sides of the picture. The body of Narcissus portrayed on the left side is more amorphous and smudged than the shapes on the right side, with the fingers in the foreground, with their shapes more clear-cut. The massive body of stones behind Narcissus resembles a dark cave; we can interpret it as the woman's womb from which Narcissus was born. In this case, the water of the lake can be associated with the amniotic fluid. Its darker and warmer colors, and especially the red color coming out of the cave, can represent blood. Narcissus looks as if he were a "body" created by shades and light, not by precise contours. The position in which he is displayed alludes to the position of an embryo in its mother's womb; this can also imply Narcissus' original indetermination (including sexual and gender.) As noted before, Narcissus is not looking at himself in the water surface; he is somehow convoluted and oriented inward, which contrasts sharply with his long flowing hair. We cannot tell his sexual/gender identity from his visible traits – we take it for granted because of the myth and the poem. Narcissus plunges his legs and hand into the water. Here, in the feminine elements – under the

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[39] See more in: C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics. An Introduction*, New York–London 2004.

[40] We might identify the look toward the viewer with the center of the flower.

water on the left side and the earth on the right – metamorphosis is taking place: the stone hand is coming out of the earth, giving support to the egg from which the new Narcissus (Gala-narcissus-Narcissus) is hatching.[41] At the same time, an egg with a flower (Gala) is placed on something like a pedestal, which can be viewed as supporting Whitney Chadwick's claim that the surrealists were not capable of abandoning the idea of woman as Muse.[42] On the other hand, we can speculate about equitation of a woman with a flower – as a vegetative state which recalls Aristotle's[43] and also Max Scheler's[44] conception of woman as imperfect or as a mutilated man with a vegetative kind of soul.[45]

Within the space of the canvas there are many more "things" helping to create the meaning of the painting. For example, the segment on the right side (which we reach after drawing a vertical line next to the finger) contains – moving from the bottom upwards – a dog eating something bloody, a human figure on a pedestal portrayed from the back and turning his/her head towards the viewer (making the turn from god to animal?), and on the top of the hill – according to the text of the poem – the head of a god (again with long hair). This god, created from the snow covering the top of the hill, is longing for his image-reflection; this causes him to melt. Two streams of his very essence flow down to join the water of the lakes.[46]

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[41] Nevertheless, the process of metamorphosis can continue: the fragile position of the egg balancing on the thumb predicates that we can expect its continuation.

[42] Chadwick writes that Gala Eluard was the first woman to receive the role of a surrealist Muse. She entered the group through her relationship with Paul Eluard and later became the partner of Salvador Dalí. Dalí himself described her as his Muse: "She teaches me also the reality of everything. She teaches me to dress myself […] She was the angel of equilibrium, of proportion, who announced my classicism" (D. Ades, *Salvador Dalí*, London 1982, p. 76, quoted by W. Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, London 1985, p. 37).

[43] Aristotle, "De Generative Animalium", trans. A. Platt, [in:] *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, Vol. 5, Books I., II., Oxford 1912; idem, "Historia Animalium", trans. D'Arcy W. Thompson, [in:] *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, Vol. 4, Book IX, Oxford 1910.

[44] M. Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, introduction E. Kelly, trans. M. S. Frings, K. S. Frings, Evanston 2008.

[45] In his poem, Dalí writes: "Man returns to the vegetable state/ by fatigue-laden sleep," (S. Dalí, op. cit.) which we can interpret as his return to earlier stages of natural development, mostly associated with woman.

[46] Dalí writes: "On the highest mountain, / the god of the snow, / his dazzling head bent over dizzy space of / reflections, / starts melting with desire / in the vertical cata-

The head of the god "mirrors" the head of Narcissus, both taking the shape of an oval-egg. Might these three figures and their placement remind us of the three levels of our world (underground, earth and sky) and their three inhabitants (animals – not by chance represented by a dog, a mythical guard of the underworld, human beings and god)?

On the right side of Narcissus, on a small area of firm ground in the center of the painting, we can see a group of men and women – people with defined sexual identity.[47] They are naked, looking at each other as though they obtain their sexual identity from that look to which they somehow theatrically expose themselves. There is also a small pond in the middle of the group; however, the men and women do not look at the water but whirl or dance with some ecstasy around it, most of them touching themselves.

In his painting, Dalí creates a symbolical structure full of nontransparent signs. By suppressing the objectifying power of looking, stressing the importance of touch, and concentrating on the ambiguity of the process of metamorphosis, Dalí was able to challenge historically and culturally accepted meanings and gendered associations of symbols. He places Narcissus on the left side – traditionally feminine, and Gala on the right side – traditionally masculine. He also challenges the relations of death and life: death, associated with Narcissus, is portrayed as more "alive" than life, represented by the more "dead" flower (the cold colors of the fingers resemble a weather-worn cliff face gradually quarried by ants). Dalí's Narcissus undergoes his metamorphosis into the flower-Gala. We can possibly claim that Dalí was on his way towards androgyny.[48] This claim might also be supported by the fact that he signed his painting *Metamorphosis*

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racts of the thaw / annihilating himself loudly among the excremental / cries of minerals, / or / between the silences of mosses/ towards the distant mirror of the lake" (ibidem).

[47] We can again here use the poem: "In the heterosexual group, / in that kind date of the year / (but not excessively beloved or mild), / there are / the Hindou / tart, oily, sugared / like an August date, / the Catalan with his brave back / well planted in a sun-tide, / a whitsuntide of flesh inside his brain, / the blond flesh-eating German, / the brown mists /of mathematics / in the dimples / of his cloudy knees, / there is the English woman, / the Russian, / the Swedish women, / the American / and the tall darkling Andalusian, / hardy with glands and olive with anguish" (ibidem).

[48] When Dalí was a young boy, he even wanted to be a girl. He also created the painting *Dalí at the Age of Six When He Thought He Was a Girl, Lifting the Skin of the Water to See the Dog Sleeping in the Shade of the Sea* (C. Rojas, *Salvador Dalí, Or The Art of Spitting on Your Mother's Portrait*, Pennsylvania 1993, p. 144).

of Narcissus "Salvador Gala Dalí."[49] In theory, the concept of psychic androgyny was elaborated by C. G. Jung within his *Animus-Anima* archetype. That's the reason we will turn our attention to it now.

Animus – Anima Archetype

The archetype of *Anima* and *Animus* appears in Jung's theory in the context of the concept of individuation, the psychic development of a human being towards a full individuality, a whole.[50] According to Jung,

> Woman is compensated by a masculine element and therefore her unconscious has, so to speak, a masculine imprint. This results in considerable difference between men and women, and accordingly I have called the projection-making factor in women the animus, which means mind or spirit. The animus corresponds to the paternal Logos just as the anima corresponds to maternal Eros.[51]

The *Anima* has two aspects – negative, projected into the figure of the *femme fatale*, and positive, enabling man to connect with his unconsciousness. Whereas the *Anima* mostly appears in the form of erotic fantasy, the *Animus* tends to appear in the form of a hidden "conviction." Similarly to the character of a man's *Anima,* which is determined primarily by his mother, the character of a woman's *Animus* is influenced by her father. The *Animus* is also able to show himself negatively as a demon of death, or positively as the bridge that helps woman to participate in creative activity. According to Jung, a human being who truly deals with the obstacles and antithetical tendencies of his/her psyche arrives at the stage of "Self." "Self" thus becomes a dynamic center of his/her psychical life, able to harmonize inner contradictory (gender) tendencies.

As Emma Jung noticed, calling the *Animus* "spiritual power" carries with it the assumption that women are not able to conduct spiritual and creative activities by themselves; if they did conduct such activities, it would be because of their masculine part, their *Animus.* Lauter and Rupprecht write,

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[49] In this aspect, Dalí is closer to the second Pausanias' version of the story, and G. Bachelard's thoughts.

[50] See more about archetypes in: C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton 1968.

[51] Quotation taken from *Feminist Archetypal Theory. Interdisciplinary Re-visions of Jungian Thought*, ed. E. Lauter, C. S. Rupprecht, Knoxville 1985, p. 8.

"Emma Jung argued that women cannot afford to be permanently satisfied with this state of affairs where their spiritual values are projected onto men."[52]

Moreover, Carl Gustav Jung warns that the incorporation of the *Animus* by women can be dangerous, ending in the loss of femininity. This different evaluation of "adding" the masculine part to the feminine, which is seen as dangerous, and of the feminine to the masculine, which is welcomed, influences the participation of women in the arts and also their artistic "self-image."[53] Viola Parente-Čapková stresses that for a woman, and especially a woman-artist, the process of "androgynization" is not simple: "[…] if a woman would like to function as an androgynous author and subject, she should first become a man and only then incorporate into herself abstract, metaphorized femininity."[54] Thus, the process of "adding" feminine traits to a masculine personality was not – at that time – viewed as having the same value as adding masculine traits to a feminine personality.

We can also apply this claim to women artists within the surrealist movement.[55] The fact that we can find many women within this artistic movement is partly due to the idea of the human being as an integration of all aspects of the soul – thinking, feeling and intuition – which they propagated. The surrealists strongly stressed the unconsciousness as a source of artistic creativity. This idea determined the surrealists' appreciation of femininity, which was traditionally associated with intuition, feelings and closeness to the unconsciousness. However, Whitney Chadwick states that

[52] Ibidem, p. 63.

[53] It is significant that all the analyzed examples of images of *Anima*, as well as *Animus* analyzed by C. G. Jung and his co-authors were created by male artists. See more in: C. G. Jung, M. L. von. Franz, J. L. Henderson, J. Jacobi, A. Jaffé, *Man and His Symbols*, New York 1964.

[54] V. Parente-Čapková, "Žena o ženě v muži – a v ženě. Některé strategie využívání metaforizovaného ženství v díle dvou dekadentních autorek" [Woman about Woman in Man – and in Woman. Some Strategies of Using Metaphor of Femininity in the Texts by Two Decadent Women Writers], [in:] E. Kalivodová, B. Knotková-Čapková, *Ponořena do Léthé. Sborník věnovaný cyklu přednášek Metafora ženy 2000–2001* [Washed in Léthé. The Collection of Works from the Course Metaphor of Woman 2000–2001], Praha 2003, p. 105.

[55] See more about surrealist women artists, for example in: W. Chadwick, op. cit.; L. Sills, A. Whitman, *Visions: Stories of Women Artists*, Illinois 1993; S. L. Aberth,, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, Hampshire and Burlington 2010; S. van Raay, J. Moorhead, T. Arcq, *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, Hampshire and Burlington 2010.

the surrealists on the one hand admired the independence of women, but on the other were not able to stop imagining woman as a Muse, an idea we have already mentioned.[56] They believed that women have a closer relation with intuition and the unconscious, and therefore were used as a guide in their own creative activity. As a consequence of this view, women lost their individuality and were subsumed under the vision of femininity as such, being seen as useful due to their ability to "add" the above-mentioned aspects to men's creative cycle. The male surrealists were thus not able to solve the inner conflict between the visions of woman as passive, dependent and defined by her relation to man, and that of an independent and creative being. They supported "her" individuality but were not able to value it entirely, still stressing the beauty and sexuality of women, mostly as dependent upon the appraisal of a man.[57] This situation was intriguing and complicated for female surrealists as they were confronted with potentially contradicting images of femininity.[58]

When comparing the artworks created by surrealist women-artists with *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* by Salvador Dalí, we found out that many women artists also refused to understand water as a mirror (and to build their identity by mirroring), and stressed, rather, the importance of touch. In theory, the arguments for this turn were put forth, for example, by Luce Irigaray in her *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. In this book, after examining the text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, she claims that Zarathustra's love for the sea is the love of someone, who watches the sea from a distance but does not live in it. "To think of the sea from afar, to eye her from a distance, to use her to fashion his highest reveries, to weave his dreams of her, and spread his sail while remaining safe in port, that is the delirium of the sea lover."[59] Luce Irigaray advises, not only to Nietzsche: "So remember the liquid ground," "Learn to swim,"[60] and "explore the bottom of

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[56] See more in: W. Chadwick, op. cit.

[57] It is known that e.g. the surrealist female sculptor Méret Oppenheim was one of the models for the photographer Man Ray. See more in: ibidem.

[58] Whitney Chadwick writes that although female surrealists were partly supported by their male colleagues, their needs of being accepted as independent and creative artists were not entirely fulfilled. For example, Leonor Fini never joined a surrealist group because she refused to subordinate herself to André Breton. Many female surrealists created their most valuable works after the surrealist movement had peaked and after they had left the group (see more in: ibidem).

[59] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. C. Porter, Ithaca, NY 1985, p. 51.

[60] Ibidem, p. 37.

the sea."[61] She criticizes identifying woman with mirror,[62] and stresses the close connection of women and touch.[63] As we can see within the painting created by the surrealist woman-painter Remedios Varo, she was clearly more adventurous than Nietzsche's great lover of the sea, and she went further than Dalí's Narcissus, who only plunges his legs and hand into the water. Her painting *Exploration of the Source of the Orinoco River* shows her heroine (herself?) undertaking a journey under the surface of the water, diving into the depths of a river while looking there for the sources of her unconsciousness or culturally undistorted "woman's identity;" one which is not derived from man's projection onto woman.[64]

Conclusion

When analyzing the context in which Salvador Dalí created his work *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937), especially Freud's concept of narcissism and Jung's description of the archetype of *Animus* and *Anima*, we discovered that during the period in question (the 1930s and 1940s, in the context of surrealism) the idea of androgyny was still influenced by traditional notions and evaluations of masculinity and femininity.[65] The society and the artistic world in particular, were more likely to be inclined to accept the "feminization" of men-artists than the "masculinization" of women-artists. The latter case was seen as a threat to the basic structure of the patriarchal system. However, in the case of surrealism, the reason behind this attitude might lay rather lay in the fear that women would stop functioning as keepers of unconsciousness, a role which led them to be viewed as the most important and valuable reservoir of creative energy and "soul" for men.

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[61] Ibidem, p. 12.

[62] Irigaray writes: "Her [sea and woman] depth is too great [...] Too restless to be a true mirror" (ibidem, p. 52).

[63] She claims: "Woman takes pleasure more from touching than looking" (ibidem, p. 25).

[64] We can mention other surrealist women artists pursuing the same theme, for example: *The End of the World* by Léonor Fini or *Washed in Léthe* by Edith Rimmington.

[65] We can parallel it with Plato's myth about androgynous people in *The Symposium*: after their division into two, homosexual relations among men were valued higher than those among women. See more in Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. and introduction W. Hamilton, London 1951.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity of Dalí's work opens up a space, which leads to many different possible interpretations of his artwork.[66] This is due to the fact that Dalí suppressed the prevalence of looking as a carrier of meaning and re-evaluated the importance of touch and tactility instead. Narcissus touches water, the thumb touches the egg (the fingers being the most important devices of active touching and transformation of things,) the figures in the middle of the painting touch themselves, as does the figure on the pedestal in the center of the chessboard floor.

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[66] For example: C. Rojas, op. cit.; M. Germ, op. cit., pp. 133–144; M. Heyd, "Dali's 'Metamorphosis of Narcissus' Reconsidered", *Artibus et Historiae*, 1984, Vol. 5, No. 10, pp. 121–131; D. Lomas, *Narcissus Reflected: The Myth of Narcissus in Surrealist and Contemporary Art*, Edinburgh 2011. M. C. Rojas interprets the painting as the portrait of Dalí himself, identifying several versions of Dalí-Narcissus in his search for identity (sorceress's apprentice, true Dalí, authentic Dalí and Dalí-god); M. Heyd looks for the alchemical sources combined with the autobiographical sources of both the picture and the poem; D. Lomas in his otherwise in-depth study argues that despite the explicit identification of the narcissus with Gala in the poem, there is no reason to accept it in the study of the painting; M. Germ explains the parallels and differences between Ovid's and Dalí's view of metamorphoses, without mentioning the gender aspects of it: he agrees with Lomas's claim not to take the poem (in the case of Gala-narcissus) into account. In the case of Echo, he only points to the echoing as a case of mirroring. It is evident that these interpretations of Dalí's artwork *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* do not focus on gender aspects. On the other hand, there are works analyzing the gender aspects of Ovid's Narcissus, such as P. Petek (op. cit.) focusing primarily on the significance of myth for film scholarship; P. B. Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Ohio 2005, examining the interactions between gaze and image in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, from a gender perspective. Nevertheless, they do not interpret *Dalí's Metamorphosis of Narcissus.* This paper aims at filling this gap by offering an interpretation of *Dalí's Metamorphosis of Narcissus* from a gender perspective.

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32. Parente-Čapková V., "Žena o ženě v muži – a v ženě. Některé strategie využívání metaforizovaného ženství v díle dvou dekadentních autorek" [Woman about Woman in Man – and in Woman. Some Strategies of Using Metaphor of Femininity in the Texts by Two Decadent Women Writers], [in:] E. Kalivodová, B. Knotková-Čapková, *Ponořena do Léthé. Sborník věnovaný cyklu přednášek Metafora ženy 2000–2001* [Washed in Léthé. The Collection of Works from the Course Metaphor of Woman 2000–2001], Praha 2003.

33. Parthenius of Nicaea, [online] http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/news/narcissus.html.

34. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Classical Library Volumes, Cambridge, London 1918, [online] http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1A. html.

35. Petek P., *Echo and Narcissus: Echolocating the Spectator in the Age of Audience Research*, Cambidge 2008.

36. Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. and introduction W. Hamilton, London 1951.

37. van Raay S., Moorhead J., Arcq T., *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, Hampshire and Burlington 2010.

38. Rojas C., *Salvador Dalí, Or The Art of Spitting on Your Mother's Portrait*, Pennsylvania 1993.

39. Salzman-Mitchell P. B., *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Ohio 2005.

40. Scheler M., *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, introduction E. Kelly, trans. M. S. Frings, K. S. Frings, Evanston 2008.

41. Sills L., Whitman A., *Visions: Stories of Women Artists*, Illinois 1993.

42. Tyl J., *Narcismus jako psychologie postmoderní kultury* [Narcissism as Psychology of Postmodern Culture], [online] http://www.iapsa.cz.

Zoey Lavallee[*]

What's Wrong with the (White) Female Nude?

Abstract

In "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?" A. W. Eaton argues that the female nude in Western art promotes sexually objectifying, heteronormative erotic taste, and thereby has insidious effects on gender equality. In this response, I reject the claim that sexual objectification is a phenomenon that can be generalized across the experiences of all women. In particular, I argue that Eaton's thesis is based on the experiences of women who are white, and does not pay adequate attention to the lives of nonwhite women. This act of exclusion undermines the generality of Eaton's thesis, and exposes a more general bias in discussions of female representations in art. Different kinds of bodies have been subjected to different kinds of objectifying construal, and the ethics of nudity in art must be extended to take such variation into account.

Key words

female nude, art history, contemporary art, sexual objectification, bias, nudity, race, whiteness

In "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?" A. W. Eaton argues that the female nude in Western art promotes sexually objectifying, heteronormative erotic taste, and thereby has insidious effects on gender equality.[1] Eaton defines the female nude as "the genre of artistic representation that takes the unclothed female body as their primary subject matter."[2]

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[1] A. W. Eaton, "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude? A Feminist Perspective on Art and Pornography", [in:] *Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays*, eds. H. Maes, J. Levinson, Oxford 2012, p. 4.

[2] Ibidem, p. 3.

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A critical premise in Eaton's argument is that the female nude is both *generic* and *ideal*, and consequently bears on the objectification of 'women in general,' as a social group. Eaton appeals to Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton to give an account of how pictures have the power to sexually objectify.[3]

In my reply to Eaton, I reject the claim that sexual objectification is a phenomenon that can be generalized across the experiences of women. I argue that Eaton's thesis is contingent upon a tacit assumption: an account of sexual objectification can be inferred from theorizing the experiences of *white* women. The effectiveness of Eaton's project turns on the justificatory role played by this implicit racial generalization. In her analysis of generic and ideal beauty (and thereby sexual objectification), Eaton does not consider the reification of sexual objectification as it operates in the lives of nonwhite women. This act of exclusion is not a concomitant of Eaton's thesis – it functions as a theoretic foundation.

I intend for my reply to act as a supplement to Eaton's analysis of sexual objectification; I make a plea to extend Eaton's argument to different social groups. I will not be challenging her claim that nudes in Western art are problematic for certain groups in the ways that she described but, her tone gives the impression that these problems apply universally. My goal is to correct that impression. Accordingly, while my project acts as an extension of Eaton's important evaluation, it can't leave her original analysis untouched.

Eaton's appeal to white experience exemplifies a broader trend in what is sometimes called "white feminism" (I will elucidate my use of this term presently) to implicitly deny the role that racial privilege and oppression play in *all* women's experiences of gender inequality. To use a discourse introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, this can be thought of as a single-axis framework of analysis;[4] gender is taken to be the point of departure for the analysis of oppression. Eaton says that "the feminist critique of the female nude depends on a generalization about the *dominant mode* of this genre, namely that it sexually objectifies women."[5] By treating gender as the primary cause of women's experiences of sexual objectification, Eaton's thesis is necessarily racially reductive. White

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[3] Ibidem, p. 4.

[4] K. W. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review*, 1991, 43.6, p. 1244.

[5] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 5.

racial experience silently subsumes that of nonwhite women, and any analysis of racial oppression becomes parenthetical.[6]

The patterns exhibited in certain parts of Eaton's work are illustrative of the problem of employing a single-axis framework of analysis. My criticism of this method of analysis resonates with critiques of what is sometimes referred to as "white feminism."[7] For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this type of analysis as *gender-first.* My objective is not to prove that Eaton as a scholar is an unequivocal representative of the *gender-first* method, but rather to explain how her approach to theorizing sexual objectification participates in a kind of feminist scholarship that fails to successfully address race. This problem is not unique to Eaten. Her paper is presented as an encapsulation of work in analytic aesthetics, written for an academic philosophy volume on art and pornography, and there is no discussion of race therein. Eaton analogizes gender oppression to race oppression in a footnote,[8] but neither she nor the other contributors take up the possibility that the ethical issues of pornography may intersect with issues of ethnicity in important ways. Eaton and the other authors thereby reinforce the notion that gender is the most informative dimension of a woman's experience of oppression;[9] whereas race can be read onto a woman's body secondarily and analyzed accordingly.

One form of feminist discourse that rejects single-axis analysis is intersectional theory. Rather than examining gender, race, class, and other oppressed social identities as ontologically separable and analyzable independently of one another, intersectional accounts theorize

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[6] E. B. Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race", *Signs*, 1992, 17.2, pp. 251–274. p. 5.

[7] For some influential analyses of this trend in "white feminism," refer to the following: P. H. Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection", *Race, Sex and Class*, 1993, 1, pp. 25–45; Crenshaw K. W., "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 1, pp. 139–167; *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy*, ed. G. Yancy, Plymouth 2010; hooks bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Boston 1984; Mohanty Ch. T., "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", [in:] *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Ch. T. Mohanty, A. Russo, L. M. Torres, Bloomington 1991, pp. 333–358; E. V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, Boston 1988.

[8] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., n. 37, p. 294.

[9] Ch. W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, London 1998, p. 115.

oppressed identities as necessarily constituted from multiple systems of oppression – each distinct, yet interlocking and often parallel.[10]

Admittedly, Eaton focuses her critique on the dominant represent-ations of nudity in Western canonical museum pieces, which predom-inantly represent white women's bodies. But the omission of nonwhite bodies within dominant representations demands discussion as well. In my critique, I want to focus not only on how nudes *are* represented in the Western canon, but also on the nudes that are *omitted,* and moreover why the representation of the omitted nudes would raise some different questions than the nudes that come into Eaton's critique.

Eaton's argument is premised on the assumption that at least some aspect of the social dimension of being a woman is homogenous; this as-sumption inhibits her thesis from incorporating racial analysis. Eaton's totalizing message calls for a corrective – a critical analysis of the consti-tutive role that race plays in defining generic and ideal beauty, and sexual objectification. I will attempt this corrective. I argue that the almost exclu-sively white female nude in Western art is not only a source of sexual ob-jectification, but simultaneously upholds the normative valuing of white femininity, sexuality and bodies, over the bodies, sexuality and femininity of nonwhite women.

In a nontrivial way, my paper also focuses on whiteness. Unlike Eaton, I address whiteness explicitly. In doing so, I attempt to make a modest intervention into *gender-first* philosophy. I engage with Eaton's argument in the hope of locating some of the racial blind spots that her and I share as white women philosophers. These blind spots have not gone unex-amined; the matter has received ample attention in fields of philosophy beyond what I am referring to as *gender-first* philosophy (predominantly by nonwhite thinkers). By appealing to some of this literature, I hope to encourage self-critical dialogue within *gender-first* philosophy.

The obfuscation of race in Eaton's paper effectively reduces all wom-en's bodies to the white body. This enables Eaton to discuss sexual objec-tification without reference to race, and consequently, to treat whiteness as a non-racial property. White women simply become women, and these women's experiences are treated as representative of all women's experi-ences.[11] The white body is treated as the raceless norm, and the nonwhite

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[10] P. H. Collins, op. cit., p. 26.
[11] Ch. W. Mills, op. cit., p. 115.

body as a deviation from this norm, thereby racialized.[12] And so, Eaton's interpretation of the female nude cannot detect the ineliminable causal role that race plays in gender oppression – of nonwhite *and* white women. Charles W. Mills addresses this type of problem:

> [...] typically what one gets (insofar as any effort is made at all) is an attempt to piggyback the problem of race on to the body of respectable theory [...] But race is still really an afterthought in such deployments, a category theoretically residual. That is, one is starting from a pre-existing conceptual framework [...] and then trying to articulate race to this framework.[13]

Eaton's analysis is unable to understand gendered experience as always *already* racialized. By discussing women's experiences of oppression *qua* women, Eaton erases the experience of those women who do not have the privilege to theorize gender inequality separate from white domination.[14] Crenshaw contends that the inseparability of nonwhite women's race and gender identities means that when race and gender are treated as mutually exclusive, a black woman's identity becomes defined as the experience of being a 'woman in general' combined with the experience of being 'black in general.' This reduction eliminates the dialectical nature of black women's gender and race.[15] And so, by drawing race-neutral conclusions, Eaton effectively treats sexual objectification as separable from racial objectification. The relevance of her conclusions are then limited with regards to the dialectical experiences of nonwhite women.[16]

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[12] Ibidem.

[13] Ibidem, p. 106–107.

[14] Ch. A. Nelson, *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America*, Minneapolis 2007, p. 15.

[15] K. W. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins...", op. cit., p. 1252.

[16] Throughout my paper the examples I choose – both theoretical and in terms of specific artworks – will primarily address the sexual objectification of black bodies. My own analysis entails that any interpretation of sexual objectification that generalizes across the experiences of women will not be tractable. Accordingly, I not only argue that white and nonwhite women's oppression cannot be generalized, but moreover, that different nonwhite women's experiences cannot be treated as homogenous. This implication extends further when we consider other forms of oppression that particularize women's experiences of racial and gender inequality. For example, classism, ableism, transphobia, fatphobia, whorephobia, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. One upshot of my argument, *inter alia,* is that any definition of sexual objectification will necessarily be noncomprehensive. I focus my examples on anti-black racism with this ineliminable theoretical open-endedness in mind.

Eaton criticizes philosophy of aesthetics for commonly failing to be applicable beyond the scope of pure theory, by "allowing one's theory to hover at such a level of abstraction that it's difficult to see how it speaks to actual works of art."[17] I contend that Eaton's theory itself is subject to a variant of this accusation. Although her argument *does* speak to a host of actual artworks in the Western canon, it is not obvious which actual women Eaton means to address. This ambiguity arises from Eaton's failure to ask one fundamental question: *which* women's bodies are objectified via the particular erotic characteristics delineated in this account of the Western female nude?

Eaton is aware that her argument hinges on the proof that the female nude objectifies (and thereby oppresses) women in general rather than only the specific woman or women whose bodies are represented by the works she references.[18] She says: "with few exceptions [the female nude] would seem to represent individual women in all their particularity; that is, they seem to offer us tokens, not types" which raises the question, "how can a visual representation stereotype women as a whole?"[19] Her response to this claim "has two parts: the female nude in European tradition is almost always both generic and idealized."[20] Eaton argues that the female nude does not represent women as subjects with individuality; but rather, represents woman as an object — this object being the ideal or generic woman. The ideal woman is not real, she is a possibility not an actuality; the generic woman lacks visible individuality and is ultimately fungible. I argue that here Eaton misses a fundamental question that weighs heavily on the strength of her argument: which women's bodies set the standard for what is considered to be *ideal* or *generic*? As I will go on to argue, the ideal and generic woman's body in the European tradition is necessarily a white woman's body.

This inadvertence on Eaton's part has a more deleterious effect upon her argument than it may initially appear. The keystone to Eaton's denunciation of the female nude is her argument that artworks of this genre are made to represent *all* women, thereby sexually objectifying women as a type, rather than being responsible for token instances of the sexual objectification of individual women. In turn, Eaton justifies this argument

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[17] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., pp. 3–4.
[18] Ibidem, p. 14.
[19] Ibidem.
[20] Ibidem.

from generalization by claiming that by being represented as ideal and generic, women are denied individuality and thereby subjectivity. Women in general become object. Ironically, in her attempt to condemn European art for treating women monolithically, Eaton falls subject to the same criticism: she argues that women (as such) have been objectified by the female nude, and in doing so, she treats "women" as a generic. In fact, the ways in which women's bodies have been objectified in Western art has (and continues to have) different harmful implications for different women; this heterogeneity undercuts the success of any monolithic critique.[21] Importantly, the "universal" harms that Eaton identifies are harms against white women.

An adequate account of the generic or ideal woman's body requires that we look at whiteness. Whiteness is the *predominant* shared characteristic of the women's bodies represented in the many examples Eaton surveys. On Eaton's account, the 'generic' and 'ideal' are sexually objectifying traits of the female nude. This claim is premised by her discussion of 'the male gaze': "[T]he female nude, it is often said, is first and foremost characterized by works that cater to male interests and desire [...] 'the male gaze' should be understood as *normative*, referring to the sexually objectifying 'way of seeing'[...] that the work in question solicits."[22]

The problem with this definition is that it treats 'the male gaze' as conceptually isolatable. The 'way of seeing' Eaton attributes to the male gaze turns on her methodological approach – gender difference is the essential factor informing this 'way of seeing.' When 'the male gaze' is treated as a singular social phenomenon, the consequence is that the plurality of ways in which different women are objectified by 'the male gaze' are conflated. The 'way of seeing' nonwhite and white women's bodies is not generalizable. Nor can white and nonwhite men's 'male gaze' be generalized.

The normative 'way of seeing' a *white* woman's nude body is internalized differently by white men (as sexually entitled to her body) versus nonwhite men. And the experience of internalization becomes even more heterogenous when we understand white and nonwhite men intersectionally. For example, black men in the US are delimited to a 'male gaze' that is co-constituted by 'the white gaze' – they are prescribed a masculinity

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[21] C. Korsmeyer, "Perceptions, Pleasures, Arts: Considering Aesthetics", [in:] *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. J. A. Kourany, Princeton 1998, pp. 153–154.

[22] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 12.

that is understood through whiteness as inherently criminal, unintelligent, violent, or sexually dangerous. Thus 'the male gaze' as embodied by a black man does not imply the same entitlement to white women's bodies. A more apt concept is 'the white male gaze.' The way Eaton defines 'the male gaze,' and it's impact on women, reveals a gaze that is defined by implicit appeal to the experiences of white men and white women. The complex and inherently racialized way that 'the male gaze' is prescribed to and experienced by nonwhite folks are erased. When 'the male gaze' is understood as a unitary phenomenon, it is also being understood through the lens of whiteness.

Eaton uses 'the male gaze' as a central premise in her argument, attributing to it a specific function. With reference to the female nude, 'the male gaze' describes "the 'way of seeing' proper to someone in the masculine social role, a role which, it should be noted, is avowedly heterosexual."[23] Here Eaton points to the intersection of gender and sexuality contained in 'the male gaze,' as necessarily both masculine and heterosexual. And yet, race is not addressed as an inherent component of this gaze. In the same way that 'the male gaze' as a normative force is avowedly heterosexual (I would propose 'heteronormative' as a more accurate descriptor here), it is also avowedly white.

Eaton claims that "[her] account of the problems with the female nude will be grounded in the material and historical specificity of the artworks in question."[24] Because the artworks she discusses almost exclusively represent white women, the historicity of Eaton's argument is selectively white. And so, nonwhite women's history of oppression is excluded by virtue of invisibility. In "Reinventing Herself: The Black Female Nude," Lisa E. Farrington explains that due to a US history of white racism, colonization and slavery, presenting the problem of the female nude without reference to race actively excludes implications that apply specifically to nonwhite women. Moreover, it erases the history of nonwhite women's bodies in European art.[25] Nonwhite women are represented in a distinct way, or not at all, in the European female nude. The ways in which nonwhite women internalize erotic norms cannot be addressed by Eaton's argument. Moreover, *different* nonwhite women embody *different* narratives

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[23] Ibidem.

[24] Ibidem, p. 4.

[25] L. E. Farrington, "Reinventing Herself: The Black Female Nude", *Woman's Art Journal*, 2003, 24.2, p. 15.

of how to view themselves through 'the white *and* male gaze.' Both the white female nude, as well as the nonwhite female nude have implications for the objectification of nonwhite women that are erased when gender is the only axis of analysis at play.

By only criticizing the female nude for devaluing women's bodies as sexual objects designed for 'the male gaze,' Eaton indirectly deprioritizes the function the female nude serves to reinforce racial objectification. Again, we see how *gender-first* critiques implicitly sustain the hierarchical valuing of certain women's experiences of objectification over others. In other words, Eaton's thesis incidentally sidelines the examination of how the female nude carries with it the history and perpetuation of white supremacy.[26]

Eaton argues that the female nude "eroticizes, [and] also aestheticizes" the female body.[27] At the same time, it eroticizes and aestheticizes *whiteness.* According to Eaton, the gender hierarchy that is enforced by the female nude is built upon sociocultural myths and stereotypes that work to totalize women's bodies as primarily sexual objects rather than subjects. These tropes are sustained by a patriarchal social context. However, the works of art that Eaton comments on purvey a particular repeating set of stereotypes, which are primarily associated with white femininity. Some of the stereotypes that are portrayed by the artworks Eaton surveys are passivity, innocence, naivety, maternalism, child-likeness, sexual availability and *simultaneous* sexual purity. One of the many examples that Eaton brings up that incite such tropes is Antonio da Correggio's *Venus, Satyr, and Cupid*; it is easy to read each of the aforementioned stereotypes off of this piece.[28]

The problem is, these hegemonic stereotypes about women's bodies are often not applicable to nonwhite women. This is true to differing extents for nonwhite women depending on what other intersecting forms of oppression they experience; classism, colorism, xenophobia, transphobia and fatphobia to name a few. At the same time, Eaton's paper leaves unmentioned many of the stereotypes that work specifically to objectify the bodies of nonwhite women. By not explicitly addressing the ways in which gendered stereotypes are also always racialized, Eaton excludes the ways in which social gender narratives function in the lives of nonwhite women.

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[26] A. M. Mann, "Race and Feminist Standpoint Theory", [in:] *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, eds. M. del Guadalupe Davidson, K. T. Gines, D.-D. L. Marcano, Albany 2010, p. 108.

[27] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 2.

[28] Ibidem, p. 10.

The stereotypes Eaton highlights as examples of objectification are deemed harmful and so it appears that to *not* be stereotyped in these ways is a good, or better, position for a woman to be in. However, many of the objectifying stereotypes or dominant social beliefs about women that come up in Eaton's paper *already* are not attached to the bodies of many nonwhite women. For one example, in the US, black women are generally not stereotyped as passive, sexually pure, modest, or conventionally feminine. Black women instead become subjected to a white-racist ideology that views them as loud, impure, hypersexual, immodest, vulgar, unfit to mother, aggressive and masculinized.[29] These stereotypes are racial, but they are also judgements about black femininity. Gira Grant gives the following example of this interplay of racial and sexual objectification: "For some white women, slut transgresses a boundary they've never imagined crossing. Women of color, working-class women, queer women: They were never presumed to have that boundary to begin with."[30]

In this case, *not* being subject to the objectifying (white) stereotypes that Eaton outlines, is inseparable from *being* the subject of other oppressive stereotypes – stereotypes that are a source of gendered, racial, physical, and sexual violence for many women. Although white and nonwhite gender stereotypes alike are products of patriarchy and white supremacy, the particular consequences of these different stereotypes and who carries the weight of them, cannot be generalized. Nonwhite women are subjected to stereotypes that are distinct from – and oftentimes in direct opposition with – white counterparts.

Another example is the exotification of Muslim women by 'the white male gaze.' In this case, the sexual objectification of many Muslim women is directly linked to a *lack* of nudity, and perceived sexual *unavailability.* Head coverings, for example, become sexualized by the 'white male gaze' in this way. The Muslim woman becomes infantilized and totalized by the white fantasy of colonizing her untouchable, or inaccessible body – a fantasy that turns her into an object of sexual fetish. This idea is articulated in a blog post on *Feminazery*: "It's almost as though their sweet, brown flesh – so inviting – is not their own and, by covering it up, they're depriving these white men of their right to feast upon the exotic beauty."[31]

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[29] L. E. Farrington, op. cit., p. 17.

[30] M. Gira Grant, *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*, London 2014, p. 78.

[31] "Exotification and Infantilisation: Even though the sound of it is something quite atrocious" (*Feminazery*, March 24th, 2010).

Fig. 1. Antonio da Correggio, *Venus, Satyr, and Cupid*, 1528
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Fig. 2. Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
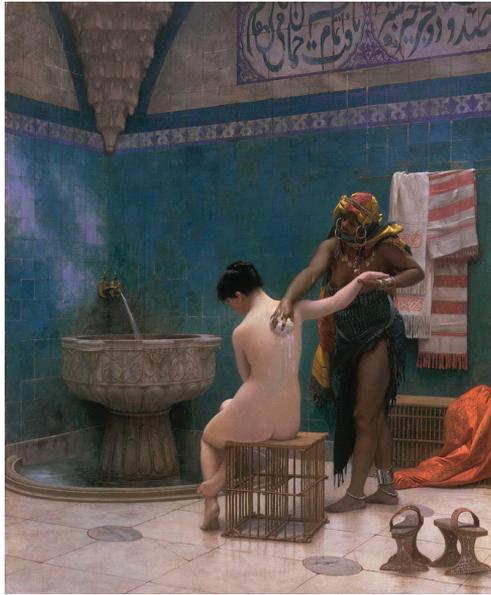
Fig. 3 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Bath*, 1880–1885
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Fig. 4. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Great Bath at Bursa Turkey*, 1880–1885
Private collection

Fig. 5. Reneé Cox, *Yo Mama's Pieta*, 1994 (photography)
New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

Fig. 6. Reneé Cox, *David*, 1994 (photography)
New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
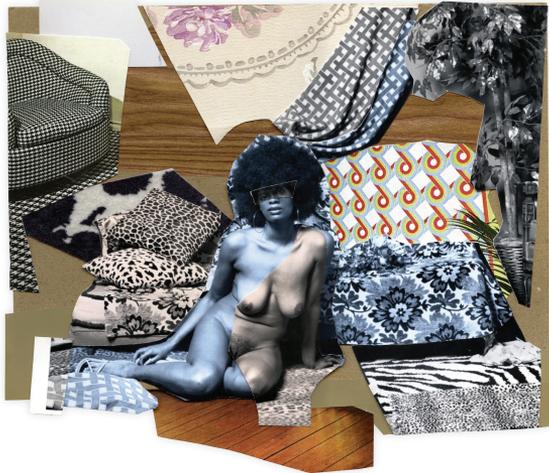
Fig. 7. Mickalene Thomas, *Maya #6*, 2014 (color photograph and paper collage)
Lehmann Maupin and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Fig. 8. Kara Walker, *Sugar Baby*, 2014 (polystyrene core with white sugar coating)
Domino Sugar Factory, New York

What if, for example, Eaton were to have discussed Manet's *Olympia*, rather than his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*?[32] Eaton uses Manet to address "works where a sexually objectified female nude appears with clothed and active men who are not sexually objectified."[33] *Olympia* likewise presents a nude female in the presence of a clothed person; however in this case, the clothed person is a woman – a black servant. This painting offers fertile ground for a material and historical analysis of objectification that addresses both the sexualization of a woman's body *and* the simultaneous prizing of white femininity by contrast to a nonwhite woman's body. The nonwhite body is represented as servile and covered, which relays the message that comparatively, her naked body must lack ideal beauty. Zacharie Astruc's "La fille des îles" (an excerpt of which appeared with *Olympia* when it was first exhibited in the Salon in 1865) highlights the way in which Manet uses a black woman's body (like the "amorous night") to accentuate the ideal beauty of the primary (white) woman (the "day beautiful to behold") in the painting:

> Spring enters on the arms of the mild black messenger / She is the slave who, like the amorous night / Comes to adorn with flowers the day beautiful to behold.[34]

Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Bath*, and his *The Great Bath at Bursa Turkey* demonstrate this same instrumentality of the clothed nonwhite woman's body. Eaton argues that when it comes to high art "it *does* matter who's speaking: the message one gets strolling through the great museums of the world, or even just flipping through an art history textbook, is that women are connected to great art not as its creators, but simply as bodies, as the raw material out of which men forge masterpieces."[35] While this is true, it is also true that (almost) only white women have even *this* location in the Western canon. Nonwhite women's bodies are nearly absent altogether – as both artist and object of art. When nonwhite women's bodies *are* present in European art galleries, the internalization of these representations cannot be solely linked to an erotic taste that caters to men, but also needs to be analyzed as catering to *white* erotic desire. Feminist critiques of sexual objectification that only address the relegation of (white)

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[32] Édouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862–1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

[33] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 17.

[34] A. Pontynen, *For the Love of Beauty: Art, History, and the Moral Foundations of Aesthetic Judgment*, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2006, p. 41.

[35] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 19.

women to the position of object perpetuates the domination of whiteness and the tokenization of nonwhite women's bodies in the Western canon. The simultaneous apparent silence on race and tacit role of whiteness in Eaton's work comes forcefully to light in the following excerpt:

> [T]he individual unclothed females comprising the genre tend to lack distinctive qualities that suggest individuality and set each apart from the rest. Instead, there is a strong tendency for nudes to exhibit qualities common to a group […] female nudes tend to share physiognomic qualities as well. Regardless of time period, nudes are regularly pale and without any trace of body hair […] Facial features are also quite similar, particularly within the context of an oeuvre: for instance, all of Titian's nudes, whether Venus or Danaë or some other goddess, have the same facial features, the same skin tone, the same long blondish wavy hair, and even almost always wear the same pearl earrings […] The resultant nude would be both everywoman (generic) and what every woman should be (ideal). This ideal, I argue, is a sexual object.[36]

Now we return to the concepts of the ideal and the generic. Eaton claims that the women subjects of the female nude are fungible. She points out physiognomic qualities (being pale, hairless, having the same skin tone and long blonde hair etc.) that reoccur in the artworks she references and ascribes them as the traits of an 'ideal and generic woman,' a 'sexual object.' These are physiognomic characteristics of the *white* woman. The ideal type of beauty and the erotic excellence that Eaton criticizes give no reference to whiteness, and yet they are fundamentally inscribed by it. In a cultural context of both misogyny and white supremacy, ideal beauty is framed by a generic femininity that is necessarily white.[37]

A clear case of this double standard can be found in Francisco Goya's *La Maja Desnuda.*[38] Drawing on Eaton's account, Goya's depiction of a naked woman's pubic hair breaks the mold of the predominant female nude. However, for those nonwhite women who are *not* presumed to be "pale and without any trace of body hair,"[39] the depiction of pubic hair fails to challenge the dominant representations of their bodies in Western art.

Another evident example of Eaton's conflation of femininity and white femininity is her use of Paul Gauguin's work. First, she uses Gauguin's

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[36] Ibidem, p. 14.

[37] M. Miller-Young, "Putting Hypersexuality to Work: Black Women and Illicit Eroticism in Pornography", *Sexualities*, 2010, 13.2, p. 228.

[38] Francisco Goya, *La maja desnuda*, 1797–1800, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

[39] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 15.

Two Tahitian Women[40] as an example of an objectifying female nude that "suggests an analogy between a person and an inert thing through visual similarity and proximity,"[41] in this case, by posing women's bodies with fruit. What she fails to consider here is that this artwork represents two women of color, whereas all of the other artworks she notes as examples of this particular trend are white. *Two Tahitian Women* offers an opportunity to analyze the representation of non-white female nudes, but this opportunity is lost via the *gender-first* model of critique. Eaton also mentions Gauguin's *The Bathers*[42] as an illustration of the generic woman's body. However, as aforementioned, in her definition of the generic woman's body, she appeals to physiognomic characteristics that are typically *white.* Gauguin's bathers, then, in fact stands as a counterexample to her description of the generic female nude.

Eaton argues that "through genericization and idealization the object of that sexual objectification is 'woman' as a *type* rather than a particular *token* woman or group."[43] Woman as a 'type' here is by default a white woman. Nonwhite women's bodies are always already determined to be deviant and non-ideal in judgements about beauty. In the context of white racism, genericization and idealization are constructed such that nonwhite women are 'taught' that they both should and never can embody ideal beauty. This process of internalization of hegemonic erotic taste informs both sexual and racial objectification for nonwhite women. This cannot be encompassed by Eaton's treatment of internalization as related to sexual objectification *simpliciter.*

Nonwhite women are perceived through a 'white male gaze' that will always define their bodies as lacking in beauty and erotic excellence, due to their lack of whiteness. The form this 'lack' takes and the extent to which it projects inadequacy upon nonwhite women's bodies varies in accordance with the racial stereotypes attached to different nonwhite bodies. But in all cases, the generic ideal of beauty is necessarily inaccessible to the nonwhite woman.[44] Moreover, the white women who can and do embody this ideal beauty (again, to different extents and in different ways),

[40] Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1848–1903, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

[41] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 9.

[42] Paul Gauguin, *The Bathers*, 1848–1903, National Gallery of Art.

[43] A. W. Eaton, op. cit., p. 15.

[44] M. Miller-Young, op. cit., p. 228.

are in fact granted many social privileges because of it. It is not my purpose to dismiss or belittle the multitudinous ways in which white women are sexually objectified, as gender inequality and the violent effects of misogyny are inescapable by all women. However, many white women also have access to economic and social currency, and power that is not accorded to nonwhite women. This privilege is founded upon the classification of white women's bodies as potentially, or actually, instances of ideal beauty.[45] And so, while sexual objectification has harmful implications for all women, (many) white women are also privileged by the norms and stereotypes that inform this normative perspective. In contrast, (many) nonwhite women experience multiple forms of violence interconnected with sexual objectification.[46]

The upshot of Eaton's conclusion, at least implicitly, seems to be that the female nude in Western art is ultimately harmful. However, she leaves a critical question unanswered. Whether the female nude is deemed to be wholly bad, or bad in particular ways that promote gender inequality, we ought to ask: What reparative possibilities or mechanisms of aesthetic resistance can be discovered in Eaton's conclusion? And what sorts of prescriptive, ameliorative possibilities might we theorize that go beyond the scope of Eaton's thesis? These questions suggest exciting avenues of future research. Perhaps one starting point for developing a normative way forward in this debate would be to examine existing female nudes (or nudes of all genders) that seem to employ anti-oppressive and liberating imaginative resistance. It is not difficult to point to artworks that seem to perform this function, both historical and contemporary. These artworks could motivate questions such as: What can we learn from female nudes that represent non-ideal or non-generic women's bodies? What happens as the artwork of underrepresented women begins to take up more space in high art and visual culture more generally? What are the political possibilities of using feminist parody to challenge the harmful consequences of the traditional female nude?

I won't attempt to answer these questions here. However, keeping them in mind, I'll end with a few examples of artworks that use the naked body to challenge ideals of gender and race in Western art. To do so I will draw on Lynda Nead's *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality.* In her analysis of the female nude, Nead proposes mechanisms in feminist

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[45] Ch. A., Nelson, op. cit., p. 70.
[46] K. W. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins…", op. cit., p. 1265.

art and criticism that can be used to disrupt and redefine the female nude. Nead explains these possibilities for resistance in a powerful statement:

> The patriarchal tradition of the female nude subsumes the complex set of issues and experiences surrounding the representation of the female body within a single and supposedly unproblematic aesthetic category. If one challenges the boundaries of this category, it is at least possible to propose not a single aesthetic register but a range of possibilities and differences – distinctions of race, size, health, age and physical ability which create a variety of female identities and standpoints. In its articulation of differences, an engaged feminist practice necessarily breaks the boundaries of the high-art aesthetic symbolized by the female nude.[47]

In Figure 5 and 6, from Renee Cox's infamous series *Flippin the Script*, Cox exchanges figures in European religious masterpieces with contemporary black men and women; Figure 7, a multimedia piece by Mickalene Thomas, portrays women's bodies that are underrepresented, and discounted by hegemonic beauty ideals; and Figure 8 shows Kara Walker's giant sugar-coated sculpture known as *Sugar Baby*. The complete title is, "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant."

Ultimately, I argue that the success of Eaton's project is inherently limited to *white* women's experiences of sexual objectification and gender oppression. The justificatory role whiteness plays in Eaton's paper renders her conclusions not only insufficient, but also insidious. Eaton's thesis contributes to a *gender-first* discourse in philosophy that fails to self-critically account for the foundational role that white race plays in all gendered experience. This problem cannot be resolved by adding a racial analysis to conventional methodologies. So long as *gender-first* philosophy continues to theorize gender inequality by assuming a universal account of women's experiences of oppression, white domination will continue to infiltrate and overdetermine this work. A. W. Eaton's "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude" falls subject to this concern. Consequently, her analysis of sexual objectification is in need of an important corrective. In my reply to Eaton, I have attempted this corrective work.

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[47] L. Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, New York 1992, p. 33.

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"You've come a long way, baby:" the Evolution of Feminine Identity Models on the Example of Contemporary Language of Advertising

Abstract

The article presents the evolution of the language of advertising from the 1960s to the present, presenting various images of women in advertising. Simultaneously a theoretical analysis has been carried out of the demands of second-wave feminism, which exerted significant influence on the creation of images of women in the mass media. The objective of our comparison of feminist theory with advertising practice is an attempt to answer the question of whether the present media image of women liberated from the binary sexual order and weighted towards the genderqueer and/or transgender phenomena is the desired realisation of the feminist demands for emancipation of and equality for women announced in the second half of the twentieth century.

Key words

language of advertising, gender identity, second-wave feminism, binary sex order, genderqueer

In 1969 the Leo Burnett advertising agency ran a famous advertising campaign for the Philip Morris cigarette company. The advertisement was addressed to strong, independent women, who were encouraged to buy Virginia Slims cigarettes with the slogan "You've come a long way, baby." The 'baby' was supposed to be a modern woman who had won freedom and independence for herself, including the right to smoke cigarettes on

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a par with the famous Marlboro Man. This campaign coincided with the advent of second-wave feminism, which was centred on critiques of the patriarchal social order and rectification of the inequality between men and women in social, political, economic and cultural areas. However, the demands of the second-wave feminists, which had a noticeable influence on the shaping of social consciousness in modern societies, were not fully satisfied. It seems that the main reason behind the subsequent criticism of these demands was the desire to maintain the binary sex order and to create a feminine identity in opposition to what traditionally had been perceived as masculine features. A good example illustrating this critical moment in the development of feminist thought is the language of advertising prevalent in the mass media of the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The woman from the Virginia Slims cigarettes campaign indeed had come a long way; the culminating point was represented by two models of femininity presented in the mass media: a traditional woman, presented as a model housewife and caring mother, and a modern woman, presented as a narcissistic consumer and desirable sex bomb.

The first part of the paper presents an analysis of the main demands of second-wave feminism in relation to stereotypical views of women in the language of advertising; the aim here is to show that both at the level of feminist theory and in the realm of advertising practices, these demands have led to a dead end. The construction of a new feminine image based on the 'male gaze' has brought visible development, from the classical approach to women as mothers, wives and wards of hearth and home to emancipated hedonists, but still has not enabled the independent definition of feminine identity.

The Nike advertising spot "From your first mile to your first marathon," broadcast in September 2015, is the end point of the advertising continuum presented in this analysis. In this advertisement the woman faces the challenge of running a marathon, as the first man did in 490 BC. The woman is no longer a classic sex bomb: she wears no makeup, and is extremely tired and sweaty. We know nothing about her financial status or relationships. It seems that this ad not only contradicts the stereotypical image of femininity in the language of advertising, but also, more importantly, at the level of theory, it presents femininity beyond the traditional binary sex order. Thus, it fits in well with the latest discussion on the developments and trends in creating contemporary human identity.

The second part of the paper presents a new way of thinking about feminine identity, which at the theoretical level is evolving towards the

phenomena known as genderqueer (agender, bigender, genderfluid). The current discourse in the contemporary language of advertising will serve as a practical example of the implementation of demands to move away from a rigid binary division of human identity. On one hand, this departure is associated with the contemporary appreciation of the harmonious coexistence of masculine and feminine elements in every human being, on the other, with the opportunity to exclude any of these elements in one human being.

The overriding problem of the analysis undertaken here is limited to the question of whether a radical departure from the category of biological sex was the real goal of evolution within the process of building feminine identity, as initiated by successive waves of feminism. Isn't the final blurring of the category of biological sex within the framework of the genderqueer phenomena paradoxically another 'demon' which modern feminists will have to face? It appears that blurring of the traditional model of human sexuality, or its complete exclusion as postulated by genderqueer movements, is in fact a negation of the feminist ideal of building an independent feminine identity.

'True' illusion, or, the normative character of advertising

The aim of the advertising industry is to persuade people that the good or service being advertised is something that consumers need and must have. In order to grab the audience's attention, advertisements frequently use images of beautiful men and women. These images, idealised visions of masculinity and femininity, reflect the way the society believes that each gender should behave. Around these idealised images of both genders (sexes) is constructed the essence of advertising, or the so-called 'added value:'[1] the fictional world created around the advertised products. The goal of advertising is to convince the viewer that he or she should desire everything connected with this 'added value,'[2] which is why advertising has real influence on our decisions and actions in the real world. Ad-

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[1] J. Bator, *Wizerunek kobiety w reklamie telewizyjnej* [The image of women in television advertising], Warszawa 1998, p. 5.

[2] Joanna Bator stresses that the persuasive nature of advertising gives it a normative character: through the use of fiction, it creates real needs in human life. See: ibidem, pp. 7–10.

vertising is a fictitious picture that we paradoxically consider to be a true picture – as "the embodiment of normative ideas about 'real life.'"[3] Erving Goffman wrote about the advertisements he had analysed:

> Although the pictures shown here cannot be taken as representative of gender behaviour in real life or even representative of advertisements in general or particular publication sources in particular, one can probably make a significant negative statement about them, namely, that *as pictures* they are not perceived as peculiar and unnatural.[4]

Advertising therefore not only affects customers on an economic (commercial) level, disseminating information about the product or service so as to induce potential customers to act in accordance with the intention of the advertiser, but also fulfils an important cultural function. Advertising in fact stimulates cravings associated with the world of values shared by the part of the population constituting the target group. The illusion created in advertising is aimed at persuading the viewer that by purchasing a given product he or she becomes a citizen of a superior, idealised world.

Given the essence and the function of advertising thus defined, I am saying that advertising is a kind of cultural transmission which reflects selected elements of awareness within a given culture, rather than actively creating them. The strength of advertising is, thus, its ability to reproduce and perpetuate stereotypes existing in the culture, which in addition makes it especially attractive and desirable. In advertising everything acquires a dimension of unusual glamour and beauty; ordinary items become extraordinary objects of desire, and marketed services guarantee significant improvements in the quality of our life.[5] Advertising furthermore perpetuates existing forms of our perception of the world, ideals, and social behaviour, and exerts real influence on the sphere of gender relations. Joanna Bator writes that in advertising "patriarchal gender inequality takes the form of romantic harmony, in which people are indeed completely different, but this difference makes them very happy,"[6] and no one questions the roles assigned to them or the patterns of behaviour and standards of appearance imposed on them. Erving Goffman

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[3] Ibidem, p. 7 (translation mine).

[4] E. Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, New York 1979, p. 25.

[5] In the case of advertising we can talk about the so-called aesthetics of *glamourisation*, whereby daily activities, ordinary objects, and mundane services are beautified and valorised.

[6] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 13 (translation mine).

calls the phenomenon of perpetuation of the existing social order in the world of advertising, which encompasses defined gender roles, 'hyper--ritualisation.' This researcher states that "the standardisation, exaggeration, and simplification that characterise rituals in general are in commercial posings found to an extended degree, often re-keyed as babyishness, mockery, and other forms of unseriousness."[7] Advertising therefore distorts everything that its subject does: it functions as a parasite on existing forms, signs, and cultural messages, giving them the new value desired by the viewer. The easier the 'hyper-ritualisation' of given content, the greater the degree to which that content has already been socially processed and the better the universally accepted stereotypes associated with it are able to function.

Among the stereotypes most firmly established in every society are those associated with both sexes. Moreover, this is true regardless of the culture being considered. In every culturally-shaped community, in fact, certain perceptions of both women and men are reflected at all levels of life: in both the public and private spheres, in the arts, sciences, politics, etc. Nor is the world of advertising indifferent to the phenomenon of cultural perceptions of gender, one expression of which may be the ubiquitous presence of stereotyped images of women which constitutes the subject of this analysis.

Typology of female images in advertising

a) The 'traditional' woman – the patriarchal vision of femininity

In the advertising industry, women play a particularly important role. In most cases, they are both the subject and the object of the advertising message, in which we can distinguish two fundamental images of women: on one hand, the 'traditional' ward of hearth and home, wife and mother, on the other, the 'modern' narcissistic female consumer. This division, cited in accord with many researchers of advertising,[8] was rigidly enforced until

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[7] E. Goffman, op. cit., p. 84.

[8] See: J. Bator, op. cit.; D. A. Yanni, "The Social Construction of Women as Mediated by Advertising", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 1990, No. 1; P. H. Lewiński, *Retoryka reklamy* [The rhetoric of advertising], Wrocław 1999; B. Czerska, "Reklama jest kobietą" [Advertising is a woman], *Aida-Media*, 1996, No. 11; S. Bratu, "Gender Representation

the end of the twentieth century, and even if present advertising trends are gradually evolving (more on this later in the article) it remains one of the most popular advertising strategies.

The 'traditional' woman appears in advertisements in the role of mother, wife, housewife, or several of these roles simultaneously. She is characterised by average looks; little or nothing is known about her job or interests. This woman also falls into the category of everywoman, with whom any average housewife can easily identify. The universal nature of the traditional image of women in advertising is grounded primarily in the patriarchal world order, which is not called into question here in any way. In addition, this type of femininity fits in well with the cultural and social expectations of the dominant male segment of the society. Indeed, for all her vagueness and blandness, the traditional woman has clearly defined objectives: the happiness and comfort of the members of her family. What a woman buying the advertised product or service gains is, above all, the satisfaction of her nearest and dearest – and, as well, her own satisfaction at having fulfilled the social role with which she has been entrusted (this kind of customer satisfaction is, precisely, the already-mentioned 'added value' of the advertisement). It makes no difference whether the family members are children satisfied with tasty snacks (Mum knows that the snack is healthy and nutritious so she gives them to her kids every day), a husband in a snow-white shirt proud of his wife's resourcefulness (she proved her mettle by washing his shirts with the best washing powder), or a mother-in-law who has just been served a succulent roast (she added the magical spice powder to the recipe). The space in which a 'traditional' woman moves is almost always the interior space of the house, in which she finds herself alone (men are somewhere 'outside' or only in the background of the work being done by the woman), and, most importantly, each activity she carries out brings her joy, happiness and satisfaction.[9] In the literature, the phenomenon of the assignment of women to domestic

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in Advertisements", *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 2013, Vol. 12; W. M. O'Barr, "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements", *Advertising and Society Review*, 2006, Vol. 7, Issue 2, [online] https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v007/7.2unit07.html [accessed: 4 January 2016]; S. Craig, *Men, Masculinity and the Media*, California 1997.

[9] On the relationship between gender and space, see: J. Umiker-Sebeok, "Power and Construction of Gender Spaces", *International Review of Sociology*, 1996, Vol. 6, No. 3.

space is classified as a form of gender territorialisation,[10] which in turn is a reflection of the popular stereotype regarding the 'proper' places for women.

The subjects of advertising involving 'traditional' women are most often food products, cleaning products, household goods, medicaments (especially painkillers) and hygienic products (sanitary napkins, tampons). The heroine of these adverts is presented in several well-established stereotypical situations: she is all alone; she finds herself in the company of an 'expert' (most often a male authority in a given area or a personification of the product being advertised); she is spending carefree time with children; she is accompanied by another woman who shares the same problems. The last case is highly symptomatic: the 'between us women' style promoted in many commercials is paradoxically used to perpetuate gender inequalities, as it persuades potential customers that there exists, separate from the realm of men, a hermetic female world.

b) 'Modern' woman: a liberated feminist?

The narcissistic consumer appeared in the advertising world at the developmental peak of the American consumer economy, i.e. in the 1960s. This was also a crucial moment in the development of feminist thought, which was revived then with redoubled strength. The postulates of equality proclaimed by feminists at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, included in many legal codes, were not, however, reflected in practice in the social and cultural spheres. The adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 was undoubtedly the culmination of many years of effort on the part of women to be granted their basic rights in the public sphere, but it brought no marked improvements in the living conditions of the average woman. It was not until the 1960s that women again attempted existence in the masculinised public sphere through joining together in so-called women's rights or women's liberation groups.[11] In addition to the operation of these grass-roots movements, one may cite the emergence of feminist philosophy, which had a significant impact on the development and expansion of knowledge on the subject of women and their perceptions of the world. All these factors contributed significantly to

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[10] Bator, op. cit., p. 22.
[11] See: J. Hole, *Rebirth of Feminism*, New York 1971, pp. 15–166.

an increase in public awareness of the issue of women and femininity to which the advertising industry could not remain indifferent.

Raised at the level of social movements as well as on a theoretical philosophical basis, these demands for emancipation related primarily to the liberation of women and femininity, broadly understood, from the patriarchal status quo. The patriarchally-organised world was based primarily on a binary order regulating all spheres of life. Thus, the efforts of second-wave feminists focussed on breaking down that order and attempting to transcend traditional paired concepts. Carolyn Korsmeyer writes that

> [...] feminist philosophers take note of certain concepts that appear in 'binary' combinations: mind-body; universal-particular; reason-emotion, sense, and appetite; and so forth – including male-female. These are not merely correlative pairs, they are ranked pairs in which the first item is taken to be naturally superior to the second.[12]

Because what was traditionally seen as 'masculine' was automatically evaluated as superior to what was 'feminine,' feminist criticism took two divergent roads. Within the framework of the present analysis, it is necessary to briefly outline the main views on the question of the masculine-feminine binary order in terms of two currents of feminist thought, liberal and radical, in order to justify the claim that, on the level of their practical realisation (in the advertising industry), they did not produce the expected results.

The tradition of liberal feminist thinking has its origins in the classical formulations of Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790)[13] and in the works of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, such as their joint *Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce* (1832).[14] We find its full development in the works of Betty Friedan: *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), *The Second Stage* (1981) and *The Fountain of Age* (1993).[15] While

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[12] C. Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics", [in:] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [online] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/ [accessed: 4 January 2016].

[13] See: M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. C. H. Poston, New York 1975.

[14] See: J. S. Mill, H. Taylor, "Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce", [in:] eidem, *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. A. S. Rossi, Chicago 1970.

[15] See: B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York 1974; eadem, *The Second Stage*, New York 1981; eadem, *The Fountain of Age*, New York 1993.

the eighteenth and nineteenth-century postulates, now historical, are not essential to this discussion, the evolving views of Betty Friedan may be representative of liberal thought on the collection of demands concerning transcendence of the binary order as applied to gender. In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan criticised the lifestyle of white American middle-class women, demanding a departure from the traditional model of mother and wife along with active participation in the public sphere. However, the project of the emancipation of women through adoption of masculinised forms of participation in the public arena met with sharp criticism from the ranks of women excluded from Friedan's analysis. This criticism is accurately summarised by Rosemarie Putnam Tong, who states that Friedan, like Wollstonecraft, Mill and Taylor, sent women into the public world, but did not summon men to the domestic sphere.[16] Less than a quarter of a century later, in *The Second Stage*, Friedan revised her views, stating that equality between the sexes cannot depend on the adoption by women of traits traditionally seen as masculine and the minimalisation of their femininity, but on their appreciation of their femininity, so as to make it an equal force in the public space. As indicated by the title of Friedan's work itself, it was no more than another stage in the evolution of her views, since in *The Fountain of Age* the author encourages both women and men to work on an androgynous model for the future, when everybody will present a mixture, in terms of mentality and behaviour, of male and female characteristics.[17] Modern trends in liberal feminism have picked up on the androgynous ideal of the individual, agreeing that his/ her biological sex should not determine his/her psychological or, above all, social aspect of gender.

Radical feminism, appearing in several distinct varieties, amounts to the assertion that the main reason for the oppression of women and depreciation of characteristics considered feminine is the oppositional system of biological sex/gender. Regardless of the direction of the thought

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[16] R. Putnam Tong, *Myśl feministyczna. Wprowadzenie* [Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction], tłum. J. Mikos, B. Umińska, Warszawa 2002, p. 40.

[17] In focussing on the ideal of androgyny, Friedan moved away sharply from the ideals of feminism toward 'general human' humanism. This controversial shift in the views of this American feminist has become the basis for subsequent criticism of her views, but has also created a foundation for the further development of this current of thought about human identity, echoed in the latest genderqueer and/or transgender theories (agender, bigender, genderfluid). See: ibidem, pp. 45–46.

of radical feminists (libertarian vs cultural trends),[18] their views, as in Friedan's case, revolve around the concept of androgyny. Therefore, the abolition of the culturally and socially well-established division of characteristics into male and female (and the simultaneous depreciation of the latter) depends, according to them, on the realisation of the ideal of the harmonious combination of the two elements in one human individual. Radical-libertarian feminists such as Kate Millet or Shulamith Firestone postulate an androgynous model involving the integration of the best male and female features.[19] On the other hand, radical-cultural feminists such as Marilyn French and Mary Daly postulate a kind of androgyny in which the feminine element dominates the male, though what is traditionally regarded as 'feminine' must first be subjected to criticism and redefined.[20]

The theoretical demands of radical feminists were weighted in favour of an unequivocal rejection of the division of characteristics into male and female, both at the most fundamental level of the constitution of human identity and at the level of the sociocultural superstructure in the form of gender stereotypes. Liberal feminists also took the androgynous model into account, but for them the starting point was the adoption by women of traits traditionally seen as masculine and the assumption of masculinised forms of participation in the public sphere. Here, the foregoing brief discussion of the demands of second-wave feminists enables the referral of theory to the practice of the language of advertising – for example, the Virginia Slims cigarette adverts, marking the halfway point of the continuum presented here, in which the modern, narcissistic consumer takes the place of the 'traditional' woman.

The 'modern' woman in the adverts usually appears as an object of sexual desire, an aesthetic object, or an independent professional with an active career. This type of heroine is portrayed as a physically attractive person (according to the currently applicable canon of sensual beauty) whose highest values are comfort, self-satisfaction and the aesthetics of her own body. Joanna Bator writes that in adverts of this type "the place devoted to mothers of families, wives and housewives is occupied by narcissistic consumers, whose identity goes no deeper than the surface of

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[18] This distinction, and its description, I again take from ibidem, pp. 63–68.

[19] See: K. Millet, *Sexual Politics*, New York 1970; S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York 1970.

[20] See: M. French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York 1985; M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston 1973; eadem, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston 1978.

Fig. 1. 'You've come a long way, baby', Virginia Slims, 1969
Source: *Flavorwire. Virginia Slims 1969 Ad*, [online] http://flavorwire.com/
183675/adman-vs-the-beatles-who-drove-60s-culture/virginiaslims
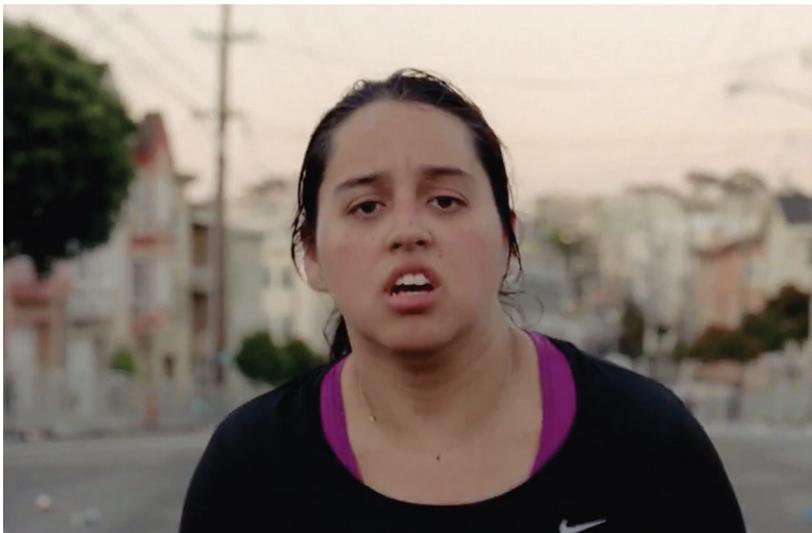
Fig. 2 and 3. 'From your first mile to your first marathon', Nike, September 2015
Source: *YouTube, Nike: Last*, [online]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMZB8X4CG6E

a (beautiful) body," adding that "just as in the case of traditional women one could speak of imprisonment in the domestic space of the kitchen and bathroom, so modern women are locked in the prison of a body that must be constantly changed and beautified according to the latest norms."[21] We note, therefore, that the theoretical project of the second-wave feminists cited above, as implemented in the practice of the language of advertising, failed to produce the anticipated results. The change in image – from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' woman – ostensibly liberated women from their previous enslavement in the patriarchally-ordered reality. The feminist demand for the valorisation of femininity in advertising practice was reduced to an exaggerated image of the 'fair sex' and resulted in the perpetuation of traditional ways of perceiving it. The stereotype of housewife, wife and mother was replaced by the new stereotype of the 'narcissistic sex bomb,' and even if the demands placed on the average woman changed, the principle that restricts her remained the same. The 'modern' woman thus has no chance of breaking free from this particular form of perception. The practice of advertising has never advanced beyond the traditional 'male gaze': the identity of mother and wife has become the identity of the body,[22] which is always seen from the male perspective.

The heroine of Virginia Slims cigarette advertisements is undoubtedly a modern, liberated woman, conscious of her power of choice. The male (yes, these advertisements were created by men!) creators of these adverts attempted to give each potential viewer the feeling that she was responsible for choosing these cigarettes rather than others. One advert recalled a scene in which the men sat down after dinner to drinks and cigars, while the women politely left the dining room: "when after-dinner cigars were passed and the political discussion began, she would rise gracefully and lead the ladies to the sitting room." Virginia Slims cigarettes transformed women's lot: "now you can sit through dessert, coffee and long after with your own cigarette." These cigarettes, 'made just for women,' are therefore a pretext for a better life, since, through purchasing them, a woman gains 'added value,' which in this case consists of freedom, independence and the opportunity to taste the pleasure traditionally reserved for the male world. This advert persuades the viewer, "You've come a long way, baby"

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[21] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 30 (translation mine).

[22] See: Z. Melosik, *Tożsamość, ciało i władza. Teksty kulturowe jako (kon)teksty pedagogiczne* [Identity, body and power. Cultural texts as pedagogical (con)texts], Poznań–Toruń 1996.

– but has she really? For alongside these lovely slogans we see a relaxed, slim, young, well-groomed, fashionably-dressed woman – in a word, one epitomising the canons of beauty current at the time (late 1960s and early 70s). It seems, therefore, that even though a woman is supposed to be the subject desiring the advertised product, she is simultaneously the object of male desire. At this point one reaches the pessimistic conclusion pointed out by William M. O'Barr, that "women are and must be sexual creatures in order to attract attention – whether it is that of other women or of men."[23] Thus, even in an advert for feminine cigarettes, the body and appearance of the woman are the highest values, and thus any attempt to isolate 'modern' women from the context of the relationship between the sexes is rendered impossible. Therefore, writes Joanna Bator, "the image of the 'modern woman' – a confident, satisfied, sensual and actively narcissistic consumer – is only a façade, behind which lurk the same patriarchal values."[24]

The image of 'modern' women promoted in the media of the 1970s, 80s and 90s was thus supposed to convince potential viewers that the emancipation of women had taken place and that women were free and could focus all their attention on their bodies and (mostly dietary!) pleasures. Popular culture immediately absorbed this trend: feminism-tinted slogans emphasising the freedom of women became favourites among advertisers. Zbyszko Melosik notes that "the feminist image attributed to the goods made them sell better (here, feminism is in and of itself a form of merchandise) […] The consumer society is reminiscent of a vacuum cleaner which absorbs every form of criticism, feminist included."[25]

It should be stressed once again that the analysis of the advertising image of 'modern' women exposes the flawed nature of the demands of the second-wave feminists. The traditional stereotype of women as mothers, wives, and housewives was indeed shattered, but the result was the re-enslavement of women to the demanding ideal of a beautiful body, absolute satisfaction with life, and the need to emulate male behaviour patterns. Nor did the criticism subsequently directed at the chief theoretical demands of second-wave feminism omit the language of advertising, which, under the guise of emancipation, remained hermetically enclosed within the framework of the patriarchal and masculinised

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[23] W. M. O'Barr, op. cit.

[24] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 34 (translation mine).

[25] Z. Melosik, op. cit., pp. 261–262 (translation mine).

traditional view. Nor was the feminist ideal of androgyny ever fully real-ised at the practical level. Femininity, as patriarchally defined, became even more prominent in the language of advertising, and the freedom to choose what was traditionally seen as masculine (such as smoking, in the advertisement analysed here) was reduced to the necessity for women to assimilate masculine models. This leads to the conclusion that despite the commitment of second-wave feminists and their attempts to change the language of the narrative in the mass media, "the advertising revolu-tion went sideways: cigarettes in advertisements are once again smoked mainly by men on the prairie or on elegant yachts [...] and the 'era of women' widely praised in the media is limited to various variations on the slogan 'Women of Worth.' Worthy of elegance, beauty, sex appeal, clean bathrooms and sated families."[26]

'Anyone can be a runner?,' or, gender transgression

From the research perspective adopted here, the closure of the presen-ted advertising continuum is represented by the completely new mod-el of femininity promoted in the media in recent years. The advertising campaign of the sports brand Nike, which in September 2015 broad-cast the advertising spot "From your first mile to your first marathon," can serve as a representative example of the new form of recognition of women in the language of advertising. This advert presents an urban landscape in which a marathon is being run, but the viewer cannot see the winner of the race, only the last tired runners. The street is almost empty, the spectators have gone home, the clean-up has begun. How-ever, as it turns out, there is one more contestant in the race. The woman we see has remained at the back of the pack. Running is a challenge for her. Tired and struggling with every step, she has nothing in common with the previously discussed images of 'traditional' and 'modern' wo-men. In the context of this research, it is worth noting several important elements of this advert which will provide a practical point of departure

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[26] A. Pielechaty, "Czasem słońce, czasem deszcz, ale fryzura zawsze idealna, czyli o kobiecie w reklamie" [A little sunshine, a little rain, but her hairdo is always perfect, or, about women in advertising], [in:] "Kobiet-Art. Kobiety w kulturze audiovizualnej" [Women-Art. Women in the audiovisual culture], *Panoptikum*, No. 4 (11), 2005, p. 146 (translation mine).

for theoretical reflections on the new ideal of feminine identity launched in the mass media in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

First and foremost, the heroine of this ad is outside the traditional household space. The street and the view extending over the city suggest that this woman has crossed the border of the private sphere and in this sense is free – that it is she who chooses the place in which she finds herself. Thus, the form of territorialisation of sex so common in the case of the 'traditional' woman collapses. Urban space is just as 'right' for women as household space. It is also worth noting that this woman is accompanied by neither family nor friends. She is alone, and her solitude is her own conscious and free choice. In fact, this woman is free in the most fundamental sense, because she has no patriarchal aesthetic requirements to meet. Unkempt, sweaty, comfortably dressed, she has no need to 'please' anyone. The woman in this advert is a subject, but does not become the object of male desire (as was the case in the Virginia Slims cigarette advert). The previously discussed 'added value,' as an essential element of every advertisement, plays a particularly important role in the context of this analysis. The creators of the advert persuade the potential consumer: "Anyone can be a runner. All you have to do is start running." Thus the value we buy along with the Nike product is freedom of choice: a woman decides, as the heroine of the advert did, whether or not to run her first marathon.

The freedom and independence of the heroine of this advert has one more dimension, the most important in the context of our considerations. This woman seems to be liberated from 'femininity' itself. Indeed, her image transcends the traditional binary order of 'feminine/masculine' and becomes the realisation of the androgynous ideal of second-wave feminists. It seems, however, that the androgyne takes on new significance here. In the present case there is no basis for the assertion that the heroine of the advert embodies the ideal of the harmonious combination of features traditionally seen as masculine and feminine. The non-binary gender identity associated with the androgyny postulated by second-wave feminists is transformed and can be identified as genderqueer and/or transgender. I assert not only that the woman in the Nike advert can decide herself on her gender identity, but, most importantly, that the term *gender identity* is not essential to her. She feels no need to display her femininity or masculine elements; rather, she is characterised by freedom in the creation of her own sexual image.

But can this complete freedom in shaping and choosing gender identity be regarded as the ideal pursued by successive generations of feminists?

Rejection of the binary sexual division at the biological level as a factor in determining gender identity was undoubtedly an essential contribution of feminist thought in historical reflections on human identity. The androgyne postulated by second-wave feminists was intended to strike primarily at stereotypical perceptions of women (and men as well) and thus was aimed at eliminating inequalities between the sexes in all spheres of human life. The contemporary genderqueer phenomena, open to complete freedom in creating one's own cultural gender, can be interpreted as the logical consequence of feminist demands, which, however, seem to have been turned against the feminists themselves. For – if one can freely determine one's own gender identity as (among others) agender, i.e. generally genderless or gender-neutral,[27] bigender, i.e. having exactly two gender identities, either simultaneously or alternating between the two,[28] or genderfluid, i.e. feeling that the ascendancy of one's gender(s) change(s) over time[29] – then the feminist struggle for revaluation of such terms as 'woman' and 'femininity' loses all significance.

Blurring the category of biological sex and replacing it with the concept of androgyny and genderqueer impacts women themselves. Indeed, if the price of freedom in creating one's own gender identity is not only the devaluation of concepts such as women and femininity, but their complete invalidation, then feminist demands for women's emancipation and equality are no longer necessary. On a practical level, more and more

[27] Moreover, people who identify as agender may describe themselves as one or more of the following: gender- neutral (this may be meant in the sense of being neither man or woman, yet still having a gender), neutrois or neutrally gendered, having an unknown or undefinable gender, not aligning with any gender, having no other words that fit their gender identity, not knowing or not caring about gender as an internal identity and/or as an external label, deciding not to label their gender, or identifying more as a person than as any gender at all. See: S. Stryker, *Transgender History*, Berkeley 2008; L. B. Girshick, *Transgender Voices: Beyond Women and Men*, Hanover 2008; *Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, eds. J. Nestle, R. Wilchins, C. Howell, Los Angeles 2002.

[28] These two gender identities can be male and female, but may also include non-binary identities. Bigender people may also identify as multigender, non-binary and/or transgender. See: S. Stryker, op. cit.; *Genderqueer...*, op. cit.

[29] A genderfluid person may at any time identify him/herself as male, female, neutrois, or any other non-binary identity, or some combination of identities. Their gender can also vary at random or vary in response to different circumstances. Genderfluid people may also identify as multigender, non-binary and/or transgender. See: S. Stryker, op. cit.; L. B. Girshick, op. cit.; *Genderqueer...*, op. cit.

often the language of advertising reflects a trend away from the 'tradition-ally' understood feminine ideal. Advertising campaigns exploiting both the 'traditional' and 'modern' image of woman still appear, of course, but the presence in the mass media of women liberated from this imaginary dichotomy has become noticeable in recent years. And since the purpose of any advertisement is to encourage potential consumers to purchase the advertised product or service, advertisers are attempting to respond to these latest gender trends and to ensure that we are also going to buy the freedom to create our own identities.

Modern women undoubtedly want liberation from the 'femininity' imposed upon them in a patriarchally-ordered world. The foregoing considerations tend, however, to assert that this emancipation has taken the form of the complete denial of feminist ideals and led to a situation in which freedom has been turned against women. Thanks to the efforts of successive generations of feminists, women truly have come a long way, but it would seem that today they need to redefine the objective of their chosen path.

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Women as Constellation
in Walter Benjamin's Aesthetics

Abstract

In seeking to combine the concept of the 'Feminine' and 'Aesthetics,' the approach here is to carry out an initial examination of Walter Benjamin's aesthetic theory, then delve into his texts on Eros, leading to his personal correspondence. These combined references will indicate his change of mind, moving from the feminine, as unique, towards its 'constellation formation'. Montage is the medium of leading with quotation as a mosaic incorporating the image of constellation. The use of montage has parallels in certain avant-garde art movements, its purpose being to disrupt a purely linear approach, in order to cope with the reality of the fragmentation of experience. Although we have little evidence of Benjamin's theory being connected to Gender Studies, we can take his theory on Eros as an example of how this philosopher foresaw some of the contemporary questions concerning women, amalgamating these with his Aesthetics theory.

Key words

women, aesthetics, montage, constellation

Introduction

It can be argued that Benjamin's Aesthetics is trans-disciplinary in a critical and methodological way. His theories not only unify different fields of knowledge, but transcend their borders, so overcoming internal limitations. It is possible to think about the feminine, sexuality, arts and

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history through an epistemological principle conceived as an image: namely, the constellation.

The principle point of this article is to bring up Benjamin's speculation on women, not only from the point of view of his studies of modernity, but in relation to the contrast created between his early studies on Eros and a different composition of woman, in analogy to his idea of constellation. This idea, which is methodologically important both for his philosophy of history, as well as for aesthetics, refers to the opposition with the system as an idea of wholeness and unity. When creating the analogy between constellation and the feminine, he changes the idea of women as an erotic natural unity – in order to approximate aesthetics and its fragmentary comprehension. The female figures assembled to the constellation idea keeps its typological differences under tension so as to become complex and fragmentary at the same time, in contrast with the woman image previously understood as cohesive and unique. Graemer Gilloch suggests an "aesthetic engineering" in Benjamin,[1] applicable to different contexts.

> These are precisely the tasks of Benjamin's 'aesthetic engineer'. Objects, edifices, texts and images are fragmented, broken and blasted from their usual contexts so that they may be painstakingly recomposed in critical contemporary constellations. The eclectic engineer juxtaposes disparate and despised artefacts, forms and media, so as to generate an electrifying tension, an explosive illumination of elements in the present.[2]

The metaphor of "aesthetic engineering" to deal with fragments – dialectical tension between the juxtaposed elements, in order to create "illumination" – to reach some kind of truth, is interesting in explaining a method which is not always easily comprehensible. We prefer to recognize this "engineering" as a method, coming from his studies on aesthetics and mainly applied to literature and in his theory of modernity, in which is included the question of the woman's body as the clearest reifying composition of modern capitalism.

Our purpose here is not to repeat his theories on modernity concerning women's bodies under capitalism, but to consider the feminine first by looking at some of his early writings on eroticism, which stand in contrast to an undelivered letter that he wrote to Annemarie Blaupot ten Cate, the Dutch painter. In this comparison, there are three perspectives of the feminine:

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[1] G. Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin – Critical Constellations*, Cambridge 2002.
[2] Ibidem, p. 4.

a supernatural unity, a paradoxical condition – either romantic, beloved, unreachable woman or its opposite, the whore – and, the 'woman as con-stellation.'[3] We hope to demonstrate that his "aesthetic engineering," or the method connected to his aesthetics, is capable of composing a constellation, after the destruction of the idea of women as supernatural unities.

The first two conditions, according to Benjamin, result from male blindness, based on an "atrophy and decline" to what is merely natural or non-natural. In this sense, he brings into opposition historical distance against naturalistic beliefs. *Eros* allows Benjamin to connect historical ex-perience with experience of life, proceeding from the intellectual to the sexual sphere. Thus, it is possible to construe the meaning of his letter to the Dutch painter as a complex description of women, through a private example, set alongside the idea of constellation. First, however, an intro-duction on Benjamin's aesthetic theory would be useful, so as to harness the themes of the feminine and aesthetics, which can then lead on to the idea of perception, fragmentation, mosaic, montage and constellation.

It is also timely to point out that this essay considers a particular as-pect of Benjamin's interest in sexuality and gender. More comprehensive studies have been published by German interpreters, including Sigrid Weigel,[4] who devotes three chapters of her book titled *Entstellte Ähn-lichkeit. Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise*[5] to the subject. In the section 'Leib und Bildraums' ('Body and space image'), she focuses on the issue of gender difference, on the relationship between Eros and genius in Benjamin's early writings, on the language direction related to the gender *ratio* in order to approximate Benjamin to the contemporary feminist discussion on language. According to Weigel,[6] Benjamin, in his early writings on language, based on the Bible, tells us about an "adamic" nomenclature dimension, which is to say that, if Adam is able to name

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[3] This article is a development of a presentation at a conference titled "Aesthetics and the Feminine", in July 2015, in the University of Cork, Ireland. From the aesthetic point of view, my contribution was to present a relationship between these two issues through the eyes of a very important philosopher in the field of aesthetics. It is certainly a male conception of the feminine, but more than a male's fantasy of the female, I aim to show the connection between Aesthetics and the feminine through the idea of constellation.

[4] S. Weigel, *Entstelle Ähnlichkeit. Walter Benjamins Theoretische Schreibweise*, Frankfurt am Main 1997.

[5] Eadem, *Body – and Image – Space. Re-reading Walter Benjamin*, trans. G. Paul, London, New York 1996.

[6] Ibidem, p. 136.

things, for Eve only silence remains. However, in another text from his youth, *Wie Sprachen Sappho und Ihre Freundinnen?* (*How did Sappho talk to her friends?*), Benjamin considers female language as a different kind of eloquence. In short, the author interprets that therein lies an idea of a feminine language that would include performance and body pleasure, as well as a language incorporation of *ratio*. Somehow, this idea of a feminine language should bring Benjamin closer to Luce Irigaray's theory, when she says that women's speech has not yet been established; that the existing language of the female gender operates only through imitation of male speech – i.e., a condition of displacement with no proper place. The author also brings Benjamin close to Julia Kristeva's theory, concerning the relationship between silence and pleasure, as well as the paradoxical relationship between the feminine body as voiceless and the disembodied feminine voice. On the one hand, the absence of language is characterized by the silence; on the other hand, there is a mimesis of male speech by the 'ornamental female.' Finally, Weigel considers that the idea of a spiritual and sexual metamorphosis of men through the silent productivity of women is vital in his reflections on Eros and overcomes the traditional gender polarity. It is even possible to argue that, following the current theories, Benjamin effectively announces a transgender theory. He did not fully develop a theory, as such, but indicated it as an intuition.

In the first section of this essay, the intention is to deal with some conceptions concerning Benjamin's aesthetics as a philosophical basis for the main subject. The second section will then analyze the text on Eros, while the third section lays out our conclusions on Benjamin's feminine perspective as a constellation image.

On image and montage: the idea of constellation

Walter Benjamin has been identified as a "thinker-up" of images (*Denkbilder*). Many of these images have become a source of explanation and are often quoted by readers and interpreters. Indeed, Benjamin would often borrow images from other authors, philosophers and writers, transforming them – as he did famously with Nietzsche's words on Heraclitus – describing the 'Ephesian hermit' as 'a star without atmosphere.'[7]

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[7] F. Nietzsche, "Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen", [in:] idem, *Werke*, eds. G. Colli, M. Montinari, Berlin, New York 1967, p. 834.

He recalls this metaphor for loneliness within an epoch or culture that misunderstands its philosophers or poets at the conclusion of his essay 'On some motifs in Baudelaire,' saying that the poetry of Baudelaire "shines in the sky of the Second Empire, as a star without atmosphere."[8] Beyond a strategy of writing, Benjamin began to develop a critical theory of quotation. In developing this presentation of thought, one of his aims was to shatter the linearity of a story and to awaken the reader, who might thus be liberated from an 'adhesive' empathy to the author's ideas.

The use of quotations is not akin to deference to the past, since when one conjures an image, retrieved in its virtual power, its meaning is destroyed and another meaning arises in conjunction with the present. This is no empty repetition, rather the destruction of a meaning in its original context, which could, however, be redeemed, in terms of the present.

The methodological approach linked to this strategy is the montage, which is explicitly mentioned by Benjamin as a method in the *Arcades Project*. The montage is associated with the technique of quotation, with the idea of mosaic, with the one of constellation, allegory, and finally, with the purpose of expressing philosophy in an anti-totalitarian and systematic way. One can say that montage is a *Zeitgeist* idea and technique adopted by some of the avant-garde art movements, such as Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism. Brecht's epic drama, and the literature of Joyce, Dos Passos and Döblin, is also related to montage. In a different way, films depend on the technique and notion of montage as the most important step in the completion of cinematographic works. Across the spectrum of photograms, the cut and editing of scenes – both still and in motion – the camera frame and other related techniques meant that human aesthetic perception was transformed in such a way that contemplation is no longer possible. This means of perception, prevalent in modern aesthetic theories, emphasizes that an all-encompassing concentration is needed towards the artwork. This current approach, which fragments aesthetic perception, is opposed to the idea of organic artwork. Therefore, for Benjamin, the use of montage in philosophy was a means of interjection, a basis from which one can break away from that all-pervading and systematic thinking, the power of which is to cope with the claims of a reality whose essence has become prey to the fragmentary world.

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[8] W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. IV-I, eds. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppen-häuser, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 138.

This specific feature, closely related to the technique of citation, be-came a major ally in the design of the implosive autobiographical genre held, for example, in his *Berliner Kindheit um 1900*. Firstly, because it tells of a life that is not composed sequentially. Secondly, as a consequence, it interrupts the illusion of the reader which would normally identify itself with the story. The reader's expectations are thrown off course, as he fails to encounter a life story unveiled in typically organic chronological stages: i.e. childhood, youth, manhood and old age. In the course of the narrative, surreal elements are inserted – such as dreams and impressions distor-ted by the child's sensorial perception – which is characterized as both magical and tyrannical at the same time. Strong political aspects are also depicted in fabulous images, such as the one of the moon that invades Berlin during the day, destroying the image of the family compound as in a portrait, shredding its bodies and covering the earth.

Berliner Childhood fulfills the historic project of recovering the past in the present, crystallizing the images remembered by the child as they represented themselves in the memory of an adult. What is presented as an image does not represent the private life of its author in his need for recognition and personal exposure. These are images that could 'crown' the collective social and historical experience circa 1900.

Eros and related matters[9]

When it comes to the relationship between women as constellation, the concepts we refer to are the very basis for our interpretation of Benjamin and his understanding of women, for there is no text written by Benjamin that we could follow step-by-step in scholarly fashion. Sometimes Ben-jamin's interpreters can find themselves identified with him in a similar instance, as shown in that photograph in the National Library in Paris, where we see him hunched over a desk – seemingly all forehead, shoul-ders and arms – pen in hand, reading and writing as though there is not a moment to lose. Remembering his 13 years of intense research in this environment, collecting quotations and configuring thousands of pages for the *Arcades Project*, it is not hard to imagine how so much theory and

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[9] Most of the analysis we present here was previously developed in an article pub-lished in a Brazilian journal for Aesthetics, titled *Artefilosofia*, Ouro Preto, n. 4, January 2008, pp. 54–60.

practice, philosophical principles and raw material from the 19th century could leap from these junctions into various constellations. The constellation we aim to embrace is partly theoretical, and partly connected to his life and his relationship with a special woman.

It seems paradoxical to begin with a short text written by Walter Benjamin in 1920, published posthumously, titled "About Love and Related Matters (A European problem)."[10] Our analysis follows two steps: First, an approach to this text of only two paragraphs, which is part of a series of fragments organized by Tiedemann and Schweppenhäuser under the title "On Morality and Anthropology" (*Zur Moral und Antropologie*), published in the sixth volume of his writings.[11] And, secondly, an approach to the themes of this set of fragments, which encompass the notions of Eros, psychology, perception, body, death, marriage, lies, shame, guilt regarding sexuality, and the figure of the prostitute; as well as a set of oppositions, such as spirit and body, spirit and sexuality, nature and body, pleasure and pain, distance and proximity, among others.

This text confines the concept of Eros to the question of the relationship between genders inserted into the opposition between nature and history. This is not developed as it later appears in the *Arcades Project*, whose complexity focuses on criticism of the idea of history as a natural evolution of society. From the critique of this linear and progressive representation of history emerges the concept of a proto-history (*Ur-Geschichte*), whose character, while arresting the progress, creates a new meaning of Natural History, its intention being to avoid mythical thinking. The text in question ranges from a supernatural image of women and the transfer of the erotic associated with the linguistic to the erotic associated with the intellectual. In other words, on the historical experience of life, stemming from the intellectual sphere in the direction of the sexual one, related to the perspective of history in general and to a subjective history.

Nevertheless, this relationship remains only sketchy. The opening theme takes into account an unprecedented revolution in the relationship between the sexes, possible to be perceived only by the one who is able to observe the actual transformation of centuries-old forms in history. Benjamin's criticism is directed at a false assumption that this change happens

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[10] W. Benjamin, "Über Liebe und Verwandtes. (Ein europäisches Problem)", [in:] idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 72–74.

[11] Idem, "Autobiographische Schriften", [in:] idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 54–89.

only on the surface, based on the eternal laws of nature with regard to the difference between the sexes. In contrast to this type of naturalizing conviction, Benjamin opposes a historical distance.

"But how?" he asks, "can anyone sense the scope of these questions and not know that what history shows most powerfully are the revolutions in nature?"[12] For him, even if we assume an almost metaphysical foundation of erotic and sexual drive in women, this would be found buried so deep that it would be impossible to recognize it in "banal assertions" such as, for example, those related to the supposedly natural gender war (*Kampf*). "Even if this war does belong among the eternal verities, the forms it assumes certainly do not."[13]

Following an argument representing the woman paradoxically, Benjamin affirms that this primordial and supernatural unity woman is sadly hidden by the "truth," which regards her as natural. This "truth" is clearly a masculine perspective and, from his fear and inability to perceive the supernatural unity of the woman arises his failure and impotence. The supernatural life of women – as a result of men's blindness, he says – "atrophies and declines into the merely natural, and thereby into the un-natural."[14] A process of dissolution is at work, the results of which establish the understanding of women in simultaneous images: the one of the prostitute and the one of the untouchable beloved.

Interestingly, it is noticeable by now that the perspective is always masculine, either when he conventionally creates the conflicting paradigms of the two types of woman or when it is he, and presumably only he, who will be able to restore the original meaning of the unity of woman. The figure of the prostitute[15] in this text does not have the same interpretative value as it will receive in his later writings, yet it announces an interest to be developed in the design of the *Arcades Project*, with the admission of the prostitutes and lesbians of Baudelaire's poetry now portrayed as heroines of modernity. For Benjamin, the "untouchability" of women is forged as a figure based on low desire and constrained as the figure of the prostitute. The untouchable woman figure is a male construction evidenced by the romantic love ideal.

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[12] Idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. I, 1913–1926, eds. M. Bullock, M. Jennings, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 1996, p. 229.

[13] Ibidem.

[14] Ibidem, p. 230.

[15] "Whore" would be a closer translation of the German word used by Benjamin: *Dirne*.

The idea that suffering is the unattainable romantic love brand is potently and tellingly expressed in the words of Benjamin when he says: "The great, authentic symbol for the permanence of earthly love has always been the single night of love before death."[16]

This goes for romantic love, which still feels "ownership" of the beloved. For the "young European generation," for whom Benjamin writes, the situation is no longer that, [...] "Only now it is not the night of love, as it was earlier, but the night of impotence and renunciation. This is the classic experience of love of the younger generation. And who knows for how many future generations it will remain the primary experience?"[17]

Returning to the initial part of the text, Benjamin said that the mythicized war between the sexes exists as illegitimate historical form, because of man's disability. There was a decline in what he calls the male "creative act of love" and he affirms: "Today European man is as incapable as ever of confronting that unity in woman which induces a feeling of something close to horror in the more alert and the superior members of his sex, since even they remain blind to its exalted origins."[18] The disability and blindness of man makes women also incapable and blind to their professed supernatural unity.

So, what conclusion does Benjamin arrive at? Being at that time an attentive reader of Plato's *Symposium*, he relates impotence and desire, and says that he found a "new, unprecedented path for the man who finds the old path blocked" – that is, "to arrive at knowledge through possession of a woman."[19] He talks about how to rise up to the knowledge of the essences, starting from the contemplation of a beautiful body with the one night of love before the death of romantic love. The "new and unprecedented path" reverses the dialectical movement of Platonic asceticism: it is not the idea of Eros, but from these ideas to Eros, or rather, the recognition of the idea of women as an intelligible Form going to the sensitive world, i.e., to the possession of her. This inverted movement would determine the male metamorphosis, "the metamorphosis of masculine sexuality into feminine sexuality through the medium of the mind (*Geist*)."[20] In this way, the man becomes similar to the woman, "Now it

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[16] W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 229.

[17] Ibidem, p. 230.

[18] Ibidem.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Ibidem, pp. 229–230.

is Adam who picks the apple, but he is equal to Eve."[21] The similarity, however, ironically, does not guarantee the result: "The old serpent can vanish, and in the re-purified Garden of Eden nothing remains but the question whether it is paradise or hell."[22] We can take all this reasoning as a great irony, but what he assures us of, with this conclusion, is our finding as unacceptable the "natural" (and religious) assumption of eternal war that has developed between the sexes. Based on the idea of a 'tabula rasa' of the differentials for the transformation of male sexuality, we can begin thinking about the existence of such a dispute. It should be noted, however, that Benjamin's perspective remains, in a sense, 'platonic,' as it is grounded in the intellect, its associated gender being male.

This is clearly, however, an attempt by the author to provoke a reflection on men's understanding of women. There are further indications that allow us to identify a development of his reflection. The designed pictures of woman – the supernatural model woman, the male invention of a woman characterized by romantic love, and the prostitute – are not exactly original figures invented by the author. The figure of the prostitute, as already noted, has its meaning in the context of his study of modernity, turning it into an allegory of capitalist society; this allegorical and social characterization reappears in the house-street polarity ("beggars and prostitutes") established in the context of his bourgeois *Berliner Childhood*.

A woman as constellation: Anne Marie Blaupot ten Cate

Now we enter another stage of Benjamin's life and another significant piece of writing in particular. It is a draft of a letter[23] that was never sent to the addressee, written thirteen years after the first text. In this text, we find a transformation of the woman as supernatural paradigm, present at the beginning of the Eros text, into one that approaches the figure of the heroine of modernity as "guardian of the threshold" in the *Parisian Arcades*, along with another final indication of a third figure,

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[21] Ibidem.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] This letter was originally part of the material under the guardianship of the Academy of Fine Arts of Berlin and the Theodor W. Adorno Archive, and was published in the sixth volume of Walter Benjamin's correspondence (*Briefe*, 1931–1934, eds. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main 1998, v. IV, pp. 278–279).

the Sibyl, whose meaning leads us to the idea of another threshold be-
tween life and death.

The draft letter, dated 6th August 1939, was written in exile in Ibiza,
probably intended for the addressee's birthday on the 13th of that month.
According to Gershom Scholem's calculation, it would be Benjamin's
fourth loving relationship: Dutch painter Anne Marie Blaupot ten Cate,
known to Benjamin as Toet. She was a friend of Brecht, and had under-
taken (along with her French husband Louis Sellier) the translation into
French of the text "Hashish in Marseilles", and was an intermediary in
publishing it in the magazine *Cahiers du Sud,* n. 168.[24] The two maintained
a correspondence, exchanging news of a network of friends – at that time
exiles – and talking about their difficulties. Benjamin wrote about her to
Scholem saying: "I have met a lady who is the feminine counterpart of
Angelus Novus."[25]

He first met her in May 1933 in Berlin during the burning of books by
the Nazis, encountering her again during his exile in Ibiza. In the draft of
the letter, he says he loved a woman who was the only one and the best
one. "She remained unique," he repeats. Addressing himself more directly
to Toet, he writes:

> [...] This has now changed. You are what I could never love in a woman, you do
> not have this [this unity], thus you are much more. Your features contain all that
> changes you from a woman to the guardian (*Hüterin*), from mother to whore
> (*Hure*). You transform yourself from one into the other and to each one you give
> a thousand forms. In your arms, destiny would forever cease to surprise me. With-
> out fear and without risk, it would fail to distress me. The deep silence that hangs
> round you indicates how far you are from what worries you. In this silence, the
> change of the figures takes place: within you. They play with each other like the
> waves: whore and Sibyl, expanding a thousand times.[26]

More than just a fourth passion, or a merely biographical aspect, we
find in this draft for Toet a number of ideas that coincide with the figures
that have become iconic in his writings, whether in the analyzed text, in
relation to the narrative of his *Berliner Childhood*, or the figure who is both
guardian and prostitute in *Arcades*. The initial contrast to be noted is the

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[24] *Cahiers du Sud*, n. 168, pp. 26–33.

[25] W. Benjamin, *Briefe*, 1931–1934, op. cit., letter dated 01/09/1933, nº 806,
p. 287. "Ich habe hier eine Frau kennengelernt, die sein [Angelus Novus] Weibliches
Gegenstück ist."

[26] Ibidem, pp. 278–279.

processing of the woman as a whole into a mutant figure composed of different aspects, gelling with the negative description of the angel inspired in Toet, the Agesilaus Santander, described as having "sharp claws" and "knife-like wings."[27] A woman, who is much more than one and who brings together the horrific, the demonic and the enigmatic, as does a Sybil. While she inspires fear, she also inspires security. "Mother," he says, in whose arms destiny would cease to surprise him. As for the figure of the prostitute, some caveats should be offered.

The underworld of the Parisian galleries in which about 10,000 gathered (according to the "census" of that time quoted by Benjamin, in contrast to the 28,000 before the revolution), was made up of revolutionaries and the decadent side of the city. Benjamin speaks of incendiaries disguised as women circa 1830, using, as a refuge, the same galleries. The prostitute is also, as intimated earlier, 'the other side of the street,' outside the bourgeois home in his autobiographical narrative. Above all, in Benjamin's interpretation of the prostitute in the poems of Baudelaire, a dialectical image is created. In one of the most quoted extracts from *Arcades, Paris – the Capital of the 19th Century, Exposé, 1935*, Benjamin emphasizes one dialectical sense present in the image, whose manifestation is ambiguous. Benjamin speaks of the "law of dialectics in immobility," which may sound unorthodox to modern dialectical sense, but, in speaking of immobility, it assumes the imagery manifestation that exposes the object in its dual and contradictory face, giving to it a dreamlike aspect. We can see three dialectical images: the commodity as fetish; the arcades, comprising house and street; and the whore, combining the vendor and the goods.

The figure of the Sybil also composes a dialectical image and refers to an element of those Arcades, not only the underworld and Parisian political scene, but from the depths of the earth; not as a cause of death, but as the guardian of her inevitable passage. Contained among the documents left by Benjamin – compiled in a single document by the researchers of the Walter Benjamin Archive in Berlin (*Walter Benjamin Archive*) – were some postcards with Sybil's images,[28] reproductions of which are composed in a mosaic in Siena Cathedral, Italy. It is known from Benjamin's letters that he visited this city in 1929. In an attempt to interpret the riddle of this

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[27] J.-M. Gagnebin, *Sete aulas sobre linguagem, memória e história*, Rio de Janeiro 1997, p. 127.

[28] See: *Walter Benjamins Archive, Bilder, Texte und Zeichen*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, pp. 236–239.

small collection of postcards, correspondence relating to them and their contents, researchers are believed to have found a possible relation to the same review of Benjamin, quoted above, concerning the poetry of Baudelaire.[29]

In this sense, a dialectic image is created in the image of women merging with death, which results in a third one: the city of Paris itself. The Paris of Baudelaire's poems, Benjamin says, is less the underground and more the underwater city. So, to the second conundrum: inscribed above this extract is a quote from Virgil's Aeneid, which says: *Facilis descensus Averno* (*Easy descent to Averno.*)[30] Averno is, at the same time, a river and the inlet of the underground world. In Virgil's poem, the Sybil leads the hero Aeneas to the underworld. In the interpretation of the researchers: "Without her, he would be lost, for she alone, who has a connection with the dead, can bring back the hero to the surface. In the underworld she guides him through what was, what is lost, to what is forgotten and helps him to see a new domain; she leads him into the past to show him the future."[31] The relationship between the Parisian underworld and underwater makes the poetry of Baudelaire the 'Sybil-conductive' historian knowledge and the representation of the past, present and future of the city.

In the women figures of the unsent letter-draft, there are similar transformations: "from woman to guardian (*Hüterin*)," from "mother to whore (*Hure*)," and in the wave motion, the final images of the whore and the Sybil are magnified a thousand times. Returning to the text that was our starting point, Benjamin directed his speech to "European man," to the new and "future generations." He spoke from the perspective of one who not only notices the changes, but who had the ability to suggest a reversal of platonic "Eros" to form a new understanding of the female by the male and of the male himself. The tone is partly provocative and ironic. In that letter draft, we can glimpse other women's images and, above all, realize the disintegration of the organic paradigm of single figure woman when he transforms her into multiple.

The contrast accentuated between the text and the letter-draft – separated by a decade – aims to show the complete destruction of the unitary idea, the essential and naturalizing of women to counteract the oscillation

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[29] W. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin, Cambridge 2002.

[30] Virgilio, *Eneida*, trad. J. Victorino Barreto Feio, São Paulo 2004, VI.

[31] See: *Walter Benjamins Archive, Bilder, Texte und Zeichen*, op. cit., p. 237.

of different figures in the same and particular woman. It is not unique; it is composed of several women, constantly changing. Her image projected on the sky and sea, in the darkness and in the San Antonio Lighthouse helps him to compose a picture more than paradoxical: one constellate image of Toet as a different kind of beloved, who brings together differences, contrasts and changes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we discussed the feminine in connection to Walter Benjamin's concept of constellation. But what is its relationship with aesthetics? Three different answers could be given. First, taking aesthetics as sensation as a means of understanding Benjamin's reference to Plato's Eros in his early writing. Secondly, aesthetics as perception, as Benjamin had understood it in his Artwork Essay, which he related to a Greek doctrine. Aesthetics as perception, in the Artwork Essay, shows us that distraction – in opposition to contemplation – became the way to perceive what is no longer unique, and to deal in the modern world with fragmentation, where montage appears to be a model of constitution without the pretension of being entire or sequential. Thirdly, and closely related to the second point, that constellation is an idea which stemmed from aesthetics and art, dealing not only with fragmentation, but with 'montage' – a principle that inspired Benjamin's philosophy and aesthetics, the roots of which are to be found in literature and the arts.

The idea of constellation deals with fragmentation, although each unit remains independent, combined as a mosaic. The mosaic is another image that maintains the difference, the oppositions and the tension among its units. In his *Trauerspiel* book, Benjamin uses the idea of constellation and the mosaic to propose a method of investigation and of presentation (*Darstellung*), opposed to the *more geometrico*, that deductive type of philosophical and scientific discourse, so aiming to demolish the traditional epistemology in philosophy, history and in the history of art. Thus, the idea of constellation, coming from an aesthetic and artistic context, plays a large role in the structure of his thought, which can be applied, as a meaningful image, to different circumstances and ideas. This is from where the merging of the constellation image with the feminine emanates; through the comparison of the feminine as a natural and unique entity to the complex image of the feminine suggested in Benjamin's letter-draft to

his Dutch friend, the painter Toet Blaupot ten Cate.[32] In the letter-draft, the different types of women form a constellation – likened by him to the stars in the sky above San Antonio's Lighthouse of Ibiza, intertwining with the sea and its waves below. This complex image that he draws shows there is movement from one type of woman to another, forming an almost cinematographic fusion of the waves with the constellation whose single units are not only fixed and related to each other, but also in transit. Thus, this complex image reinforces our intention to bring closer together the feminine and aesthetics through the idea of a moving constellation.

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[32] See: S Weigel, *Body – and Image – Space...*, op. cit., footnote 16 of Chapter VI, where she refers to Toet Blaupot ten Cate, recommending the conference of Wil van Gerwen: "Walter Benjamin 1932/33 auf Ibiza", given at Benjamin Conference in Osnabrück, June, 1992, published by Klaus Garber and Ludger Rehm, Munich 1999.

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Imagined Hierarchies as Conditionals of Gender in Aesthetics

Abstract

The attributes of gender in the media are disputable. This can be explained by a conflict generated by culturally acquired alternative imagined hierarchies which are not compatible or may be even contradictory. This article is a philosophical enquiry that examines the representation of gender and the environment in which it is conditioned.

Key words

imagined hierarchies, conditionals, media, behaviorism, gender, sex

The visual portrayal of gender in the arts, mass media, social networks or in social media websites create aesthetic conditionals that shape the relative environmental acquisition and representation of gender from culturally conditioned methods. A broad range of visualizations of a particular gender is internalized by a person due in part to that persons availability and exposure to images portrayed in different forms of cultural representation in art (street art, fine art, amateur and professional creations, visualizations, renderings and so on), images, popular culture, media, aesthetics, and other sources of visual description, including pornography. The internalized representations are dependent upon an individual's internal mental environment or belief system, and the external descriptive and visual environment other individuals create, who are in relation with the first individual or who contribute to the visual environment of that individual.

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For example, Philip Zimbardo and Nikita D. Coulombe warned in 2012 that the image of men in mass media has had a major impact on the way men imagine and perceive masculinity and the resulting consequences in shaping their behavior and their mental hygiene are leading to a decline in their overall condition when compared to men of earlier generations or their peers of the opposite sex.[1] In this case, the attribution of masculinity to the behavior of males in the generations and sexes examined by Zimbardo and Coulombe are correlated with a change in the visual environment. This can be described as a set of varying visual and descriptive sources that portray gender within a particular tradition or as a reaction to a certain tradition that an individual has exposure to. Because mass media (especially advertising) formally distributes similar images in popular culture, the portrayal of masculinity has been standardized, so to speak. The exposure to images in mass culture can statistically overwhelm the access to and the availability of any other gender representation in a particular individual's mental heuristics within the Western tradition. This "universal" representation of gender leads to a version of masculine homogeneity that may be normalized and defended or, on the contrary, challenged and questioned. The contradictory representations that challenge the dominating representation of a particular gender, available not only on the Internet but also in other sources an individual has access to, lead to confusion in regards to the representation of masculinity or the "proper" gender role a "real man" should adopt in a particular culture. The belief system an individual has is shaped by these environmental factors, experiences, and by varying representations. The contradicting portrayals of masculinity are not necessarily easily settled within a particular cultural paradigm in an individual's environment, thus the regulatory and normalizing function of male gender roles are paralyzing for men, who cannot resolve contradictory images or decide upon what the male gender looks like and what roles it should undertake or simply distance themselves from culturally constructed roles. According to Zimbardo's and Coulombe's research, culturally constructed masculinity, including heterogenetic images available in their environment, are threatening some men, who may feel confused about their expected gender roles and rather retreat to virtual realties which offer a safe and controlled environment than enter any discourse that is not voiced with

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[1] See: P. Zimbardo, N. Coulombe, *Gdzie ci mężczyźni?* [The Demise of Guys], tłum. M. Guzowska, Warszawa 2015, pp. 11–13.

a "black-and-white" axiology. This can be explained by a conflict generated by culturally acquired alternative imagined hierarchies which are not compatible with each other or which are contradictory. This article is a philosophical enquiry that examines some representations of gender and the environment in which it is conditioned.

The role of gender present in a society is related to the way certain behaviors, symbols and representations function within that society. Limiting this discussion to Western culture, traditional gender roles have completely changed within the last few decades. From the women's suffrage movement onwards, the emancipation of behaviors, symbols and representations from particular cultural stereotypes partially resulted in the creation of conflicts within the social paradigm of acceptable representations and behaviors. Yet, not all abstract symbols are universally interpreted the same way within the same culture, just as symbolism in stories may be interpreted with different conclusions, when using different cultural criteria in making judgments. Different narratives create different descriptive stories about gender and its representation. I would like to make it clear, that not only gender is created by such stories, but it also can include the stories of sex, race, or the way the dis/able body is represented, sexualized, and gendered. However, I will only be focusing on gender as an imagined hierarchy rather than on the (under-/mis-) representation, sexualization or genderization of the dis/abled body or bodies with different abilities.

Some gender representations may claim to be "objective" and refer to facts, while others may contradict such claims. They both believe their respective story to be absolutely (or at least dialectally) true (or negotiated, which is a temporary mode of truth by itself). And, ideologies usually have the regulatory function of claiming how things "should" be.[2] In Poland, the subject of gender remains a controversial topic and is still misunderstood, as the interrupted lecture at the Poznan Economic University in 2013 illustrates.[3] The speaker, Piotr Bortkiewicz, when asked later, claimed to refuse to debate with the so called "gender-scum" and criticized it as not being a field of study but as an ideological dogma aimed at

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[2] See: Y. N. Harari, *Od zwierząt do bogów: krótka historia ludzkości* [Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind], tłum. J. Hunia, Warszawa 2014, p. 330.

[3] See: kai, kid, *Ks. prof. Bortkiewicz o przerwanym wykładzie w Poznaniu: z gender-hołotą się nie dyskutuje* [Fr. Prof. Bortkiewicz on the interrupted lecture in Poznan: don't talk with gender scum], [online] www.wyborcza.pl/1,76842,15095636,Ks__prof__Bortkiewicz_o_przerwanym_wykladzie_w_Poznaniu_.html [accessed: 08.12.2013].

destroying Roman Catholic family models. On the other side of the fence are members of academic circles who contest such approaches as forms of propaganda and as being dogmatic too.[4] In addition, the influence of technology and new media created by advances in technology also widen the schism between expectation and reality when regarding the way in which gender is aestheticized; technological change has been one of the key factors in spearheading change in regards to what is deemed "natural" within cultural norms that regulate the representation of the particular sexes because of its ability to propagate and replicate the distribution of images, representations and aesthetizations created by culture, including the feminist, gay, lesbian, and queer activists and scholarship in the environment of individuals whose mental heuristics internalize different imagined systems of representation, which is a set drawn from the plurification of acceptable bodies, sexualities, and gender options. Such conflicts and contradictions allow for provocative artists to create works and events which challenge the conditionals present in mass society, such as the 2015 Gender in Art exhibition in Kraków, Poland.[5] They also give room for amateur creators to create their own modes of representations in networks like YouTube or images in their personal life, which are influential to their immediate environment. Technology can give new possibilities in the ever growing pluralization of different forms of aestheticizing the body, including artificial limbs and embodiment with mechanical and electronic body parts. It can also give rise to the sexualization of inanimate objects like ones created by the new sex robot industry. Each creator may draw upon different values and representations, which are available to them in their environment, in order to create or copy the aestheticized genders of their choice. The attributed representations of each gender can be carried over to anthropomorphic beings, such as sexualized robots present in the film *Ex-Machina* (2015), which are objects/sentient beings that have been personified.

First, I will focus on the work of Noah Yuval Harari presented in his book "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind". His book describes *Homo Sapiens* as a species that is distinct because of the use of language, or

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[4] See: M. Bryl et al., *List otwarty ludzi nauki w sprawie wykładu ks. Bortkiewicza* [Open letter to scientists in regards to Fr. Bortkiewicz's lecture], [online] http://korabita.salon24.pl/553813,list-otwarty-ludzi-nauki-w-sprawie-wykladu-ks-bortkiewicza [accessed: 09.12.2013].

[5] See: *Gender in Art*, MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, [online] https://en.mocak.pl/gender-in-art [accessed: 27.09.2015].

more importantly – the consequences of using abstract symbolism collectively in shaping life, where cooperation with strangers on a large scale is a key component in the distribution of power. This form of large scale cooperation in the animal kingdom is possible thanks to the power of storytelling in convincing people what ontological and epistemological order is true, hence imagined realities metaphysically shape social structure. This also implies that the field of aesthetics is the study of how the stories told in culture condition and shape the behaviors of its members, including regulatory levels and ethical dilemmas rooted in the values shaped by imagined hierarchies. One of his conclusions or claims is that thanks to language, humans can debate about things that do not exist in the material, physical world. And with that discourse, they shape the reality of different orders of shared imagination, such as the belief in the statement: "real men don't cry," which on biological grounds would disqualify every male on the planet, since anatomically speaking, males create tears and can psychologically suffer from emotional neglect. However, activists do fight with this imagined reality, with non-crying males, by creating films and videos that represent the opposite or fight against such imagery, like in the documentary film *The mask you live in* (2015). In that social movement, the proposed alternative is a belief that a males expression of emotions is not a signifier of weakness, but of being a member of an equal society.

Next, I will elaborate on the consequences of such realities in the field of aesthetics. Thus, aesthetic power inadvertently comes to shape the social structure which leads to the formation of gender and how it is perceived in social circles. Aesthetic behaviorism can describe how the portrayal of gender in the arts is evaluated, judged, and conditioned. The role of new technology is also a major influence in shaping the environment in which people interact with each other and with works of art or representation or creation. Thus, the stories of gender roles condition representations, which also circularly create the cultural climate that reinforce those conditionals as the respective symbols. The Representation Project promotes the film *Miss Representation* (2011), which also addresses the available heuristic in creating an environment that is more populated with images and stories of women in power within mainstream media and culture. Harari makes the claim, that the current state of affairs is neither necessary or historically inevitable nor natural, which means that humans have more power in shaping their belief systems and environment than they may believe, since none of the systems imagined are more legitimate than

alternative versions.[6] The belief systems promoted by such empowering movements can in part inspire communities to make bottom-up changes in their environment in regards to what images and behaviors are acceptable, hoping to eliminate any negative or oppressive models.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, I argue that the environment in which people interact is a key factor that shapes the cultural world of aesthetics and how it conditions the shaping of gender. Thus, a changing environment leads to a changing circle of reinforcement and representation of stories that tell us what it means to be a man or woman or neither or both.

Imagined Hierarchies

Human psychology, and especially imagination, allows for more than one reality to be perceived, as Noah Yuval Harari notes. When experiencing the touch, taste, or smell of a physical object, the perceived thing is considered very real and very much existent. This sensory experience is very intense and seldom questioned, since it is very practical to believe in the reality of eating a meal, or worse the reality of feeling hunger from the lack of food. However, sensory experience may also be fooled, as the research of Mel Slater and others in 2010 shows:[7] a body transfer illusion was created, which fooled biological males into claiming ownership over a virtual female representation of the female body. The belief of ownership in this situation is just as real as the feeling of hunger in "reality." Although images created by virtual reality may not necessarily physically exist in the same way material things do, this electronic or virtual reality is still one that gives significant sensory input data, so that stimulations can override top-down brain processes, and are just as ineffable as data input into sensory organs by photons or other carriers of sensory information. Nevertheless, the physical reality is part of the same reality we can take a picture of, or agree upon its existence, but debate upon its attributes and properties. Still, this reality is not only the intersubjective world of humans. Animals, plants, living things and rocks also can be categorized into this reality. It arises from the real world of material things, of

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    [6] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 292.

    [7] See: M. Slater, B. Spanlang, M. V. Sanchez-Vives, O. Blanke, "First Person Experience of Body Transfer in Virtual Reality", *PLOS ONE* 2010, 5(5), e10564, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0010564.

physical objects. Harari calls this reality the objective reality. In this literal and physical reality, the sex of a man or woman is biologically defined with scientific criteria by the distribution of X or Y chromosomes and other biological conditionals, which may be later used by the imagination in attributing properties in an axiological hierarchy of relevant genders. In addition, this is also the reality in which electronic mediums distribute electric signals in a way which creates patterns and images that are later to be interpreted or recognized as "showing" or representing something or another set of patterns on a screen or visual medium. Any image, in the most basic form, is simply a bunch of spots that need to be interpreted by a mind or pattern recognizing machine.

On the other hand, we also feel the effects of what Harari calls the imagined reality in our everyday social and private lives. This is the domain of nations, ideas, religion, economy, aesthetics, and philosophy. It is also where being a man or woman is culturally constructed, represented and imagined. In this reality, abstract principles may be reflected upon, and nonexistent beings (in the material sense) may be believed to interact with the objective reality. As an example, money, most universally, would be one of the abstract ideas that manifest themselves from the imagined reality into the objective reality and make a significant impact in the way people live, value things, and symbolize other imagined structures. Physically, money is just a stained and dirty cellulose based product or a piece of metal formed into a peculiar shape. It may also be the digital information stored in bank databases (most of it)[8] and represented with many different mediums across cultures (who may or may not have money). Yet, the imagined reality of scarcity (money) allows people to value certain things in the physical reality over others, and especially trust strangers.[9] It also makes the misusage of power possible and shapes the values present in society. Most interestingly, this also means that the imagined reality is an intersubjective reality, as Harari argues. If people believe a certain imagined hierarchy to be true, they can agree upon the abstract attributes that are a part of the particular system of thinking and visualizing. Think of debates fans of Star Wars have in attributing properties and traits to characters such as Darth Vader, where the personal motives of Anakin

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[8] See: M. McLeay et al., *Money Creation in the Modern Economy*, [online] http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/quarterlybulletin/2014/qb14q1prereleasemoneycreation.pdf [accessed: 9.12.2013].

[9] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 221.

Skywalker can be debated upon by fans, even though physically Darth Vader only exists as a meme or in the collective imagination of mass culture. Other fictitious scenarios are played out in pornography, where imaginary roles of particular sexes thrive in a plethora of categories, fetishes, acts, and sexual orientations. However, the make-believe of sex media often corrupts the imagination of men and women in regards to gender roles, who then transfer what is imagined into believing that visualized roles are factious, which is one of the contributing factors in the *Demise of Guys* that Zimbardo and Coulombe study. One of the properties of this intersubjective discourse would be the attribution of certain properties to a particular way of contrasting genders, such as the idea that blue is for boys and pink is for girls, although historically the reverse has also been considered true within the cultural discourse that shaped past imagined realities.[10] Such representation or imagined hierarchies can be a basis for creating new concepts, such as the idea of unisex clothing, as Jo Paoletti writes:

> The sexual revolution and the women's liberation movement affected people of all ages across the spectrums of gender identity and sexual orientation. After all, so much of the way sex and gender are conceived and expressed in our culture is in terms of relationships between opposites or complements. Without a commonly understood gender binary, there can be no unisex or androgyny. Advocates for cultural change recognize this, and so do those who oppose any alteration in traditional gender roles or sexual mores.[11]

In a nutshell, an imagined reality is rooted in the objective reality, shapes the wants and desires of people, is intersubjective, and requires societies to believe in them as something authentic, real and to be true, which results in the prohibition of questioning its hierarchy as being imagined.[12] It is like make-believe taken seriously. Subsequently, arguing that something is "natural" or forbidden by a deity or the laws of nature is a characteristic trait of imagined hierarchies. This naturalistic fallacy is an element of the social hierarchy that regulates which images of a particular gender are acceptable and which cause controversy,

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[10] See: "List of historical sources for pink and blue as gender signifiers", [online] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_historical_sources_for_pink_and_blue_as_gender_signifiers [accessed: 29.01.2016].

[11] See: J. B. Paoletti, *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism, and the Sexual Revolution*, Bloomington 2015, p. 152.

[12] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., pp. 142–150.

disputes, and are considered offensive. They also create the base from which any socially constructed genders may be challenged and create an environment of topics upon which artists and amateurs may criticize, reshape or reinforce. Digital culture is much more accessible in modern society, which also allows the field of art to gain new mediums of transmitting aesthetic representations of the body. Companies such as Alphabet (formerly Google) are making the physical space accessible in digital versions. Most users of the Internet are familiar with Google maps, which is the digitization of the outdoor environment, but the website Google will be adding a feature called Google Indoor, which will map and digitize the interior environment, mostly aimed at businesses, including museums and art galleries. The digital revolution, for the sake of argument, can be held responsible for making access to plurified gender norms, body images, standards and representations much more easily available. But, this does not mean that users will go to sites that challenge their personal imagined hierarchy, since the experience of their immediate environment also has just an impact in creating their own belief system in the way they may identify with gender. Thus, artistic or creative or expressive endeavors of all sorts are equally vital to creating a multitude of imagined hierarchies that particular communities identify with, which ties together the members of such communities, but separates them from members and circles of opposing views on what is acceptable. The strengthening or weakening of the status quo, or dominant imagined hierarchies, depend upon the success of a particular work in replicating itself within a society, which can be accomplished through force or through authentic belief of people in the imagined hierarchy that a particular subcultural claim to be true.[13] Publicity itself is crucial for any idea to gain popularity, which may be viral in nature or forced upon a group of people by means of dictatorial decree, such as a constitution. Even the idea that all people are fundamentally equal is based on myth, as Harari claims.[14] An imagined hierarchy gains success, not because of its real-world truth values, but because they allow a group of people to work together and reach common goals.[15] Thus, the everyday practices performed by non-artists, or (quasi-)artistic, amateur, community-based activities such as drag shows, or other

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[13] Ibidem, p. 144.
[14] Ibidem, p. 137.
[15] Ibidem, p. 140.

subcultures constitute their own imagined hierarchies within a system of hierarchies that compete with each other for survival. However:

> [...] in the end, when the ethics of representation are at stake, it is the image that has the final say in the matter. Not the artist. Because no matter what was originally intended in shaping this image, if that intention is not brought across to the viewer or reader, or if the viewer or reader has a different reading of the image or text, then only analysis of the work proper will yield the decisive argument for attributing meaning.[16]

The criteria for such analysis will be different to each imagined hierarchy. A study by Elizabeth Bloomfield in 2015 titled "Gender role stereotyping and art interpretation" concludes that most participants attribute gender role stereotyping in regards to the written narratives provided by the participants when interpreting the gender of artists when judging paintings.[17]

However, these hierarchies are subject to change. Paoletti makes an interesting remark about the results of fashion of children born in the 1960s and 70s:

> As children of the unisex era grew up, their reaction to ungendered clothing became apparent in the ways they dressed their own children. Not that we are that much closer forty years later to knowing where gender comes from. We're still arguing over gender, gender roles, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Whether the hot topic is marriage equality, the Lilly Ledbetter Act, or gender-variant children, beliefs about nature and nurture in determining our personal characteristics are fundamental to the arguments. Some of those beliefs are based on religion, others on science, but many of them are likely echoes of forgotten lessons learned in early childhood.[18]

Stereotypes in themselves are only mechanisms created by the mind that organize people into a "one of us" and "not one of us" groups at the most fundamental level. From an evolutionary perspective, the hierarchies represented by stereotypes may have proved to be very useful in

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[16] See: R. Buikema, "The arena of imaginings: Sarah Bartman and the ethics of representation", [in:] *Doing Gender in Media, Art, And Culture*, eds. R. Buikema, I. V. Dertuin, New York 2009, pp. 79–80.

[17] See: E. A. Bloomfield, *Gender Role Stereotyping and Art Interpretation*, MA (Master of Arts) thesis, University of Iowa, 2015, p. 52, [online] http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1550 [accessed: 18.01.2016].

[18] See: J. B. Paoletti, op. cit., p. 93.

surviving long enough to reproduce and when evaluating who to trust. It can be maintained that there are no innate properties in stereotypes that are true in the objective reality. Harari says that imagined hierarchies, such as stereotypes, emerge from random historical events, which lead to a certain dispersal of power and value.[19] Those randomly distributed values applied to gender enter society in the form of laws, symbols, and other abstract ideas and representations. In turn, this creates an environment which reinforces the axiology a culture constructs, such as discrimination, and create attitudes that inhibit the free movement of individuals, equalizations or gender identity within a social structure. Cordelia Fine, who describes how gender stereotypes are acquired by infants, shows the environmental associations that take place in creating gender imagery:

> This tagging of gender – especially different conventions for male and female dress, hairstyle, accessories and use of makeup – may well help children to learn how to divvy up the people around them by sex. We've seen that babies as young as three to four months old can discriminate between males and females. At just ten months old, babies have developed the ability to make mental notes regarding what goes along with being male or female: they will look longer, in surprise, at a picture of a man with an object that was previously only paired with women, and vice versa. This means that children are well-placed, early on, to start learning the gender ropes. As they approach their second birthday, children are already starting to pick up the rudiments of gender stereotyping. There's some tentative evidence that they know for whom fire hats, dolls, makeup and so on are intended before their second birthday. And at around this time, children start to use gender labels themselves and are able to say to which sex they themselves belong.[20]

An imagined gender hierarchy is also one the imagined realities that Harari describes.[21] He shows that humans have been universally split into men and women, historically and across almost all cultures in the favor of men.[22] Asides from biological differences, the images and aesthetics associated with masculinity and femininity lack biological foundations.[23] Anything that is possible is acceptable in nature, only culture inhibits or

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[19] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 178.
[20] See: D. Fine, *Delusions Of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*, New York 2010, p. 211.
[21] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 181.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] Ibidem, p. 183.

allows those possibilities to manifest themselves.[24] Nothing can "break" natural laws. Harari observes that no culture worries about making it illegal for men or women to run faster than the speed of light.[25] It is pointless, since it is impossible. Only the human imagination creates structures, which arise from the objective reality, but that limit and regulate what is acceptable for men and women to do, or how they should look, or what is considered normal. The categories of being a man or woman are cultural and a part of an imagined social structure or mythology, and their attributes are intersubjective and constantly change.[26]

When considering the arts, mass culture or other mediums of creative pursuit, the imagined hierarchies are stories present in a culture's axiology. Those imagined stories reinforce, create, and transmit social structures because of their existence within a tradition or particular discourse relevant to believers in particular imagined hierarchies that attribute certain properties to gender. One example is the effect of Disney cartoons on the self-image on girls, which convey influential messages on their self-image.[27] In the book *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation and The Body* by Robert Leppert, the author discusses sexual identity in the aesthetics of the nineteenth century amid other topics. Historically, amongst the fine arts, which were one of the structures that helped propagate a particular historic imagined structure, he points out that "music [...] has always been a contending force in society, not only as it reflects and reacts to social forces but also as it helps shape a society and its culture."[28] He points out the gendering of objects such as the piano in the Victorian era, and the aesthetization of violence towards women in paintings.[29] These processes are part of a larger system of ideas that create a hierarchy of how art in that era is to be perceived, and how each gender relates to it partly because of the commentary that is attributed to certain visualizations. It creates vicious circles similar to the stereotypes that existed a few dec-

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[24] Ibidem, p. 184.

[25] Ibidem, p. 185.

[26] Ibidem, p. 187.

[27] See: A. Bispo, L. Schmid, *Fairytale Dreams: Disney Princesses' Effect on Young Girls' Self-Images*, p. 13, [online] http://dialogues.rutgers.edu/all-journals/volume-9/148-fairytale-dreams-disney-princesses-effect-on-young-girls-self-images/file [accessed: 28.01.2016].

[28] See: R. Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*, London 1995, p. 116.

[29] Ibidem, pp. 119–122.

ades ago, such as the idea that Africans are inferior to Europeans. This in turn created social circles that reinforced this belief, since they would not allow "inferior" people access to education or other activities that give social mobility. With regards to gender, or sexism, certain representations are deemed to be inappropriate for men or women, and the banning of such visualizations reinforce the normalization of a particular imagined hierarchy, since alternatives are publically condemned, at least until they get enough followers, who may "overturn" the existing structure because of a change in the perception of the norm or a change in belief systems. This discriminatory behavior then makes an argument that there are no "black" or "female" lawyers, for example, more plausible in a racist or sexist society, proving a point which is a logical fallacy, a vicious circle. Returning to Leppert's remarks about music, in the Victorian era the piano was like furniture, a domestic instrument, and played mainly by women and girls. Most interestingly, Leppert states:

> [...] musical notation was developed to give people orders to follow. [...] Thus the inability of many classically trained musicians of our own day to improvise is hardly accidental; indeed, it is planned as a 'natural' outgrowth of the felt need to transmit the fully texted traditions of canonic practices. The disgust shown in music schools toward nonschool musicians, especially performers of popular music who cannot read music, is a coin form the same mint.[30]

Summarizing, the ability to talk about things that are nonexistent in the objective reality give rise to imagined realities. These imagined realties are arbitrary and subject to random change and chance. They are believed to be true by the society that has an imagined hierarchy that regulates what is permissible. The imagery created are part of the motors that communities and societies value gender or the gendered body, which includes all images available to the individual within a particular belief system, such as expressions from art, image, popular culture, media, aesthetics, and are not equally distributed because the individual's imaginary hierarchy will vary from person to person, which is why an intersubjective discourse on the role of gender and the aesthetization of the body or objects is even possible. The imagined hierarchies are like stereotypes and are irrational and come from random encounters with environmental associations and conditioning. The conditioned images then can be believed to be models that can or do represent what an imagined hierarchy claims

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[30] Ibidem, pp. 133–134.

to be true. The association of particular images and aesthetics are part of the way a society aestheticizes gender. Next, I will argue how culture can behaviorally manipulate, challenge, change, or maintain the imagined hierarchies in a society in a reward mechanism.

Aesthetic power within a behavioral paradigm

> Aesthetic power is often hidden or overlooked; when one thinks of aesthetic value, the qualifier 'mere' is often implicit, indicating the presumption that practical or moral values not only take precedence over aesthetic value but are cleanly separable from the way something looks, sounds, feels, or communicates emotions and ideas. Arts programs are among the first items to be cut from municipal budgets; they are often classified as contributors to the "enrichment" of public life that may be eliminated without major loss, comparable to skipping dessert with no sacrifice of nutrition. This is a grave error; art and aesthetic taste are powerful framers of self-image, social identity, and public values.[31]

When regarding cultural gender and how it is presented, the imagined hierarchy contains a set of rules that frame the way a man or woman is presented and how mobile they can be within those structures. Even the framing isn't separate from the parameters that set up the structures that represent each gender. In the words of Leppert, who describes framed mottos: "The border decorates, to be sure; but like the frame of a painting, or like a fence, it also articulates a space. It informs us that what is contained within the borders matters and what is outside them does not. It includes by excluding."[32] And as Carolyn Korsmeyer remarks, the framing of a particular aesthetic is a very important factor in setting up values or imagined structures. Such framing can also be understood as association, such as Pavlov's dogs drooling upon hearing a bell. The mechanisms that exist in the objective reality, the biological predisposition to drooling when food is near, can be reconditioned, so that symbols of food seem to be "tasty," so that a dog would drool upon hearing the conditioned stimulus, the bell.

When considering the environment in which art and creation itself exists, it is also framed by a part of social custom that separate it from

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[31] See: C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, London 2004, p. 1.
[32] See: R. Leppert, op. cit., p. 120.

other functions of life. Currently some arts are separate from the intimate lives of people, who spend much more time in the presence of popular culture and the mass media, because it is simply much more accessible. The individual will have varying degrees of contact with the arts in general, because of the way it is framed within a community, and that itself comes from an imagined reality, which conditions how sexualized images are valued. This segregation is a sign that members of a society do not need to value classical artistic endeavors as an integral part of the human experience as understood in the paradigm of classical imagined hierarchies, or in the tradition that philosophers such as Roger Scruton, who accuses modern mass culture as suffering from ugliness and wandering away from romanticized ideals of beauty, which he claims to defend. The former has been in part replaced or completed with participation in pop culture, different subcultures, and other mass cultural and digital cultural roles in creating other gender representations that compete with each other and may spread in viral patterns, such as the role of kitsch, mass culture, rock and pop music and aesthetics in LGBTQ or feminist imaginaries. Each create respective frames which interpret the objective reality within the paradigm of their respective imagined hierarchies. The current capitalistic imagined hierarchy is a belief system that values foremost economic growth. Harari even categorizes consumer capitalism as the only religion (as a system of beliefs) where the followers do for the first time in all of human history what is required of them.[33] Because of the choices of a select group of people, who grasped the most breakthrough technology of their respective era, such as agriculture, the printing press, or the industrial revolution, the imagined systems that frame culture create different social structures. Before machines, rarely have people tied any value to time nor did they care about the precise hour. When late to work, as Harari points out, it didn't impact the work of others.[34] Mass production and the industrial revolution flipped this value system on its head, and all of a sudden, a change in the way society produces its goods changed what was valued. This revolution resulted in weak family households and loose social bonds, a strong government and market, and in strong individuals.[35] An alternative imagined hierarchy with new conditionals that reward different actions, attitudes, and beliefs, which could give rise to new artistic

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[33] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 422.
[34] Ibidem, p. 426.
[35] Ibidem, p. 436.

endeavors and aesthetizations of values. The same can be said of the digital revolution, which further weakens some bonds between communities and strengthens other values. Such systems of belief may give rise to more people, who identify as asexual, or simply feel that gender representation is part of a competing memetic system. Technological advances may even lead to the decline of sexual reproduction, which is a problem in Japan's demographics, in favor of alternative means or in elongating one's own lifetime, as proposed by transhumanists. Similar imagined hierarchies are visible in the valuing of the earth's ecological system, when taking in consideration groups such as The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement. It can also lead to the aesthetization or embodiment of other kinds, since "people attribute personality traits and gender to computers and even adjust their responses to avoid hurting the machines' 'feelings.'"[36]

What is insightful is that only a few members of society need to be capable of changing the reward mechanisms that lead to changes in the conditionals that create regulatory systems of abstract and intersubjective ideas. Famously, behaviorists focus their studies on the actions that their subjects take in response to stimuli. Classical conditioning of dogs to drool after hearing the sound of a bell can be a simplified version of how imagined systems lead people to appreciate or reject certain forms of gender, or any other concepts they imagine. Just as the biological function of drooling is a biological phenomenon rooted in the objective reality, the reaction of drooling to a bell is learned, just as imagined hierarchies need to be learned. Of course, there are no centrally controlled environments that create conditionals, but the social constructs and imagined realities do create the environments that allow people to learn what is desirable or not through social reward systems. Most aesthetic power depends upon how each generation trains itself to react to certain sets of symbols and ideas and how prevalent those symbols are within a society's environment.

Modern men live in the constant fear of not presenting themselves as being manly enough.[37] Many products do service to this fear, and offer products "just for men," who then can assure themselves that being clean is not only an activity that women partake. The same can be held true for women, who could be ridiculed for not having enough femininity, since

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[36] See: S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology And Less From Each Other*, New York 2011, p. 139.

[37] See: Y. N. Harari, op. cit., p. 189.

they may desire a career as an aggressive businessperson and not want to raise children. Many boys and girls learn, according to Warren Farrell, that even the act of sex itself is worse than violence and murder because parents condition them by censoring any nudity on TV but allow them to watch westerns.[38] Most cues in our environment become conditionals that model how a sex should behave as a particular gender. The aesthetization, which is not only the result of the processes but also the frames,[39] of particular properties leads to imagined stereotypes of what an ideal man or woman should hold. Because a certain imagined hierarchy exists, and because that structure impacts the everyday lives of people, artists can choose to negate the existent hierarchies and show alternative imagined hierarchies that create conditionals which would, for example, lead to replication of standards of beauty created by an artist, such as photographers JJ Levine, "Alone Time"; Jon Uriarte, "The Men Under the Influence"**;** Yijun Liao, "Experimental Relationship"**;** Rion Sabean, "Men-Ups!"; or the street art project "Stop Telling Women to Smile" do; or propagating traditional values in essays as aesthetic philosopher Roger Scruton does, who in his article "Modern Manhood" laments over the confusion in gender roles as negative to the imagined hierarchy of marriage.[40] But, change can also happen by accident. Or they could do the opposite and reinforce the existent models in their cultural group to be superior to others because of vicious circles that justify sexism for instance. As a result of such a condition, the emotional responses do not necessarily need to be positive or just. They may, in fact, more often be based around fear of rejection.

Therefore, the consequences of learning mechanisms in a particular cultural environment result in the creation of particular associations, that may be random in causality, that are reinforced within a culture because the stimuli or conditionals serve as criteria that dictate what representations are acceptable for someone to be categorized as a particular gender. Change to an alternate imagined hierarchy does not require the participation of all members of a culture, but only the few that have a greater means of rewarding its participants or in propagating in larger number the imagery that it believes to be proper.

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[38] See: P. Zimbardo, N. Coulombe, op. cit., p. 99.

[39] See: R. Leppert, op. cit., p. 119.

[40] R. Scruton, "Modern Manhood", *City-Journal*, [online] http://www.city-journal.org/html/9_4_a3.html [accessed: 29.01.2016].

Conclusion

The anonymity that the information age has to offer, which is not only responsible for a change in imagined hierarchies, often eases the social tensions related to acting out appropriate social roles and offers more alternative imagined hierarchies than closed social groups do. Usually each person is expected to behave in a certain manner in their respective associated environments. This orthodox mechanism allows for the social construction of gender identity to be more black-and-white and leaves no tolerance for ambiguity. But, with the change of the environment (because of feminist movements or the backlash towards) or technological landscape, the previous groups which had the power to filter out incompatible behaviors and tastes are now losing explicit control. The digital revolution seems to also allow for a greater repertoire of representing the body, sexuality, and gender.

But it also ushers in injustice, alienation, and most definitely is a precursor to the dawn of a new imaginary hierarchy. In our current structure, it is assumed that the individual is the ultimate authority in judging what is right for him and her, regardless of sex. However, with the growing database of knowledge on the psychology of mind and the field of consciousness and artificial intelligence it may very well turn out, that the ultimate authority in deciding what is "best" for a person is not the fallible human, but the power of information technology. It may be safe to speculate that Internet based companies with access to Big Data and powerful statistics may make better judgements for an individual than the people could make for themselves.

One of the humanist religions, or imagined hierarchies, are the transhumanist movement, where many gender identities can be combined into one entity, or create fembots, cyborgs, or designer babies without genitalia. It has been recently been claimed that:

> In the future, transhumanist technology and science will complement the LGBT movement and help push it forward in the face of continued social oppression and closed-mindedness. This is important, since LGBT people are devoted to freedom. They want to be free to do anything they please without condemnation so long as it doesn't hurt others. Transhumanists – a notable number who are LGBT themselves – want the same exact thing. And they can work together to better achieve their goals.[41]

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[41] See: Z. Istvan, *The Future of the LGBT Movement May Involve Transhumanism. Huffington Post*, [online] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zoltan-istvan/the-future-of-the-lgbt-movement-may-involve-transhumanism_b_7657388.html [accessed: 29.01.2016].

Thus, imagined hierarchies play a major role in the aesthetic judgement of a man or woman because of the conditional artifacts they create, which presented to individuals in a social environment, who still need to make decisions for themselves, play a major role in the imagination of the desired traits of a particular gender in that culture. Because of a changing environment, alternative imagined hierarchies are emerging, which condition different standards of beauty that artists elaborate upon, philosophers analyze, and people strive to achieve in their everyday lives.

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(500) Days of Summer:
A Postmodern Romantic Comedy?

Abstract

By considering the film *(500) Days of Summer* a postmodern romantic comedy, we can see the film as offering philosophical insights about the nature of love and its implications for the changing social institution of marriage The overarching idea is that this film is different from many other romantic comedies, and the ways in which it differs are indicative of a change in the genre and are relevant to changes in the concepts of love and marriage. We first consider more specifically the relationship between modern and postmodern aesthetics as well as a brief history of the genre of romantic comedy. Next, we will explore how the film might be read as a postmodern film, considering the plot, dialogue, sound, and look of the film. I contend that the cinematic properties are integral to the emergence of a new romantic comedy genre and to how this change reflects broader cultural changes. All told, this analysis will provide insights into how the currency of the conception of love has changed, which has likewise changed the marriage plot as experienced by new audiences in this new millennium.

Key words

romantic comedy, postmodern love, analytic aesthetic film theory

Introduction

Prior to the opening credits of *(500) Days of Summer*, in a voice-over, the film's narrator warns us: "This is a story of boy meets girl. You should know up front this is not a love story."[1] The implication of this warning is that this film is not going to be one of those horribly sappy romantic

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[1] *(500) Days of Summer*, directed by M. Webb, 2009.

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comedies or, worse yet, melodramatic romances. These genres have been much maligned by movie critics and film theorists alike. In popular culture, these films are simply derided as chick flicks. Nevertheless, *(500) Days of Summer* claims to be different from the very beginning – but not entirely different. After all, the plot structure of "boy meets girl" is the sine qua non of romantic comedies, and the narrator informs the audience straightaway that this is a "boy meets girl" sort of story. The initial setup of the film is a paradox: Could this be a romantic comedy and not a love story? The sense of paradox is foregrounded by what one would expect to be the boilerplate fiction disclaimer: "Author's Note: The following is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely co-incidental." The truth of that rather standard language is belied by the next frame, "Especially you, Jenny Beckman," and any sense of equanimity is erased in the following frame, "Bitch." Given that *(500) Days of Summer* is a film in which boy meets girl but it is not a love story, and the film is labeled as fiction but is also seemingly about Jenny Beckman, it invites us to question the very philosophical presuppositions of this film in order to resolve these paradoxes.

Rich in cinematic artistry, *(500) Days of Summer* serves as a counter-example to the claim that films in which boy meets girl should all be easily dismissed as trivial or unimportant. The idea that something that features a formula must be rejected as simply formulaic is addressed in the ways *(500) Days of Summer* disrupts the very formula of its genre. Noël Carroll has usefully suggested that one might think of works of art within a narrative, and by placing a candidate for the category in relation to those that might function as readily acknowledged works of art, one can help to establish that the candidate in question might indeed be appropriately considered art.[2] If we were to consider mainstream Hollywood romantic comedies as representing a sort of modern epoch of film, then we could be tempted to say that a film that both relies on and questions the conventions and norms might in some sense be a postmodern film. So the postmodern in this sense is not a reference to the age or time when the film was made or released, but rather it stands in relation to the modern as a commentary and reaction to the artistic norms of the modern and as a signal that it still belongs within the genre of romantic comedy.

What is to be gained from considering this film to be a postmodern romantic comedy? I will argue that it will show the film as offering

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[2] N. Carroll, "Art, Practice and Narrative", *The Monist*, 1988, 71.2, pp. 140–156.

philosophical insights about the nature of our understanding of love and its implications for the changing social institution of marriage, even if the label "postmodern romantic comedy" is ultimately not a perfect fit. The overarching idea is that this film is different from other romantic comedies, and the ways in which it differs are indicative of a movement within the philosophical underpinnings of the ordinary concepts of love and marriage. We first consider more specifically the relationship between postmodern philosophy and postmodern film. Then we will explore how the film might be read as a postmodern film, considering not only the plot and dialogue, but also the sound and look of the film or the cinematic properties as integral in the construction of meaning. All told, this will provide insights into how the currency of the conception of love has changed, which has likewise changed the marriage plot as experienced by postmillennials. When I suggest that the conception of love has changed, I want to be careful not to imply that the concepts of love and marriage are monoliths; nor do I want to suggest that all facets of postmillennial love are new, as many of the romance genres have questioned love's nature. My aim here is to describe how the resonances this film has with postmillennial audiences may stem from rather broad changes in the social institutions of love and marriage in the 20th century.

Postmodern Philosophy and/or Postmodern Film

The term *postmodernism* is an inherently difficult term, as its meanings turn on whether one is using it to describe a set of philosophical tenets (and even if one is using it in the strictly philosophical sense, whose tenets should be given the coveted status of "postmodern") or to describe stylistic features of a work of art or other cultural artifact. One place to start is with Jean-François Lyotard in his *Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'*, where he suggests a link between the philosophical and artistic uses of the term. Lyotard writes, "The question of postmodernity is also, or first of all, a question of expression of thought: in literature, philosophy, politics."[3] The postmodern in this sense is critically dependent upon the modern for, among other things, a source of rebellion, even though the normal cause and effect of rebellion is turned upside down. Although one might

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[3] J.-F. Lyotard, *Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'*, [in:] *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. T. Doherty, New York 1993, p. 47.

assume that the postmodern necessarily comes after the modern in terms of chronology, Lyotard claims otherwise. He writes, "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in a nascent state and this state is constant."[4] The idea here is that the postmodern and the modern in a critical sense overlap, much like the mainstream and the avant-garde. When Lyotard provocatively claims that a work must be postmodern first, I take him to be referring to the sense that in order to become mainstream, artistic conventions must first be tried out in an experimental setting. It is, of course, entirely possible that both artistic communities – the experimental and the mainstream – exist at the same time. Another idea implicit in this view is that the modern itself is ever-changing and updating. For example, the director of *(500) Days of Summer*, Marc Webb, has earned a reputation as an award-winning music video director; since music videos are a newer art form than film, it makes sense to call the first music videos in some critical sense postmodern. In part, this is because they used filming and editing techniques that would have been labeled mistakes in a feature film, such as jump cuts, which were becoming part of the standard operating procedures for music videos. Given the director's background in music videos, those aesthetic sensibilities are brought to his feature film as it is produced for Fox Searchlight, whose films are frequently screened at the Sundance Film Festival and Toronto Film Festival. The director's background led to a new artistic feel for a feature film whose uptake was ensured by the target demographic's familiarity with music videos.

The postmodern, however, is not merely a set stylistic choices for an artist. Lyotard goes further when he claims that "a postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work."[5] In short, the position of the philosopher ensures that the artist means something by the artistic choices she makes, and that meaning cannot simply rely upon the received wisdom of established modes of expression. The reason a new form of expression is needed is that what is about to be conveyed represents a departure from the usual or what is usually represented. Lyotard continues, "Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and

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[4] Ibidem.
[5] Ibidem, p. 46.

the writer then are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done."[6] The postmodern in its application to film involves artistic choices relative to mainstream methods of production, and through those artistic choices, the film is imbued with postmodern philosophical meanings. Those philosophical meanings are postmodern if they challenge what is accepted as obvious by modern thinkers or ideas accepted as commonplace—some philosophers regard commonplaces as foundational intuitions. Two modern philosophical ideas are that persons are unique, unified subjects governed by rationality, or that romantic love is felt to be true at first sight. This leads to the view that modern marriage as a social institution requires monogamy and lifetime commitment to one's beloved and, moreover, that being married is one of life's great accomplishments. It should be clear that what is regarded as the "modern" in philosophy or "modern" in terms of what is considered intuitively true may not be the same or be contemporaneous with the modern epoch of film. That this term *modern* seems inherently unwieldy might deter the faint of heart from using it as a point of comparison to the postmodern. Given Lyotard's aversion to any sort of meta-narratives, he would not have it any other way. However, if we think about the modern and the postmodern as being in some sort of conversation, as Carroll would have us do with works of art, then the ways in which modern ideas are portrayed by modern cinema will help us to understand how postmodern ideas are portrayed in postmodern film.

If we think of modern cinema, we would start with classical Hollywood. As David Bordwell notes, "the basic style of the classical Hollywood cinema remains – continuity editing is still assumed to be the norm."[7] Bordwell clarifies this view with an example:

> The scene in *Jaws* (1975) where the young scientist visits the Brodys at home is handled very similarly to the restaurant sequence in *His Girl Friday*; both have three characters at a table and present the dialogue in a series of reverse shots. Clear, linear narrative remains the dominant factor in this type of filmmaking.[8]

This is sometimes thought of as a realist stance with respect to the nature of film because the shot selection created through a series of photographic-like images, aided by conventional film editing, is different from,

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[6] Ibidem.
[7] D. Bordwell, K. Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, New York 1979, p. 312.
[8] Ibidem.

say, images created through cartooning techniques. As a matter of film-making practice, the film industry has moved from a celluloid format to a digital format in order to produce what appears on the screen. However, this does not change the audience's expectations that what is on-screen appears lifelike. The narratives are linear and complete in Aristotle's sense, meaning having a beginning, a middle, and an ending in that order, where the beginning sets the stage for the complication of the story, which signals the middle, and the end is completed by resolving the complication. Linear narratives are purpose-driven.

Modern cinema evokes a patina of realism, naturalism, and teleology that correspond with the central tenets of modern philosophy. In short, the idea is that there is an objective reality where the inherent value of the human subject provides one's life with purpose and naturally gives rise to flourishing cultural institutions. Modern in this sense highlights how the television cartoons *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones* both are set in different times but evoke a type of 1950s sensibility. Fredric Jameson hints at this sense of modern when he rehearses the setting of a Phillip K. Dick novel in which he describes the 1950s: "Main Street, USA: Marilyn Monroe; a world of neighbors and PTAs; small retail chain stores; favorite television programs; mild flirtations with the housewife next door; game show contests."[9] After a list of constitutive parts, Jameson continues, "If you were interested in constructing a time capsule or an 'only yesterday' compendium or documentary-nostalgia video of the 1950s, this might serve as a beginning."[10] Postmodern films reject the modern in a variety of ways, including Richard Rorty's suggestions that the philosophical post-modern is marked by contingency of one's self and language, irony in response to the acknowledgment of one's contingency, and, finally, solidarity with others in the same metaphysical boat so that we can expand one's community and reduce cruelty.[11] In the philosophical postmodern, "absolute truths" are rejected as relics, the self-aware human subject known as Descartes' cogito becomes fragmented, and the distinction between high art and low art is interrogated.

In order to analyze an entire film, Bordwell maintains that films should be analyzed with an eye toward how they function and another toward

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[9] F. Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, North Carolina 1991, p. 280.

[10] Ibidem.

[11] R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, New York 1989.

how film art changes through history and the role that genre has in mak-ing meaning.[12] If the genre in question is romantic comedy, then to articu-late a conception of the postmodern romantic comedy, one must first have a definition of the genre of romantic comedy, as this will provide some ba-sis of comparison for romantic comedies; further, it will help us to see how considering *(500) Days of Summer* a postmodern romantic comedy helps to elucidate its meanings. Tamar Jeffers McDonald defines the romantic comedy genre: "A romantic comedy is a film which has as its central nar-rative motor a quest for love, which portrays this quest in a light-hearted way and almost always to a successful conclusion."[13] This seems right. Mc-Donald captures what the long histories of different romantic comedies have in common, from the screwball comedies to the radical romantic comedy and the neo-traditional romantic comedies.[14] Some of the differ-ences are informed by general societal trends as the meaning of love and the sexual mores change drastically, whereas other changes in the genre are due to changes in narrative and cinematic conventions enabled by the ever-evolving technological capabilities that allow for different artistic choices for how the film looks on-screen. However, McDonald is clear that "it should not be believed that films straightforwardly reflect the attitudes of their particular times [...] as socially created object, they embody com-peting impulses."[15] McDonald continues as she rehearses the view that "films never spring magically from their cultural context. [...] [I]n the case of romantic comedy, it is particularly important to stress how specific films or cycles mediate between a body of conventionalized 'generic rules' and a shifting environment of sexual-cultural codifications."[16] In short, the filmic history of romantic comedies informs the representation of love in other romantic comedies, as it reflects contemporary mores about the ex-pression of love and the evolving nature of relationships.

The screwball comedies of the 1930s and 1940s imply that love is an adversarial sport with films such as *Bringing Up Baby*, *It Happened One Night*, and *My Man Godfrey.* McDonald contends that "the screwball comedy delighted in exhibiting male and female characters clashing and striking sparks off each other."[17] She contrasts the screwball comedy with

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[12] D. Bordwell, K. Thompson, op. cit., p. iv.

[13] T. J. McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre*, New York 2007, p. 9.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] Ibidem, p. 4.

[16] Ibidem.

[17] Ibidem, p. 38.

the sex comedy: "The sex comedy took this theme and implied that such clashing was inevitable: all men and all women were perpetually in conflict because nature had set them up – or society had inspired them – with different goals."[18] McDonald attributes the rise of the sex comedies in the mid-1950s through the 1960s to the publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, the advent of *Playboy* magazine, and the diminished power of the Hays' Production Code of the 1930s. *Pillow Talk*, *Lover Come Back*, and *Sunday in New York* all qualify as sex comedies, but, "there would be no sex enacted in the sex comedy of this period: where sex is implied, there are still discreet fade-outs or visual metaphors."[19] In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a more nihilistic subgenre arose – the radical romantic comedy – with films such as *Annie Hall*, *Harold and Maude*, and *Goodbye Girl*. The subgenre is characterized by self-reflexivity as a film text about romantic relationships during times of radically changing social practices about love and sex. The neo-traditional romantic comedy can be seen as a response to the previous subgenres. McDonald describes the characteristics as involving "a backlash against the ideologies of the radical film alongside a maintenance of its visual surfaces, a mood of imprecise nostalgia, a more vague self-referentialism and a de-emphasizing of sex."[20] *When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, and *You've Got Mail* are all examples of the neo-traditional romantic comedy.

The neo-traditional romantic comedy's heyday was in the 1980s and 1990s, and in its stead, I propose another genre: the postmodern romantic comedy. Just as all of the previous subgenres of romantic comedies both build upon and reject aspects of the subgenres that went before them, the postmodern romantic comedy follows suit. Candidates for this subgenre include films such as *Celeste and Jesse Forever*, *Go Fish*, *Salmon Fishing in Yemen*, *Love Actually*, and *High Fidelity*. They share with the screwball comedies unpredictability, unconventionality, and giddiness, and they share with the sex comedies the idea that love is a battlefield, as well as the mere symbolism of sex-play. They inherit the social upheavals chronicled in the radical romantic comedies, and yet they share the vague nostalgia of the neo-traditional romantic comedies. This new genre arises from "the many possibilities to live one's love life nowadays" and the changes in marriage, which include but are not limited to "the queer critiques of marriage and

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[18] Ibidem.
[19] Ibidem, p. 44.
[20] Ibidem, p. 91.

queer practices of love."[21] What makes the postmodern romantic comedy explicitly postmodern is how the story is told and how the telling affects how the film looks and sounds, and ultimately its meaning.

(500) Days of Summer as a Postmodern Romantic Comedy

The postmodern is sometimes described as occupying a liminal space at a threshold filled with ambiguity and marked by transition. It is this feature of the postmodern that gives rise to the paradoxes where *(500) Days of Summer* is a romantic comedy, but not a love story, whose coincidental nature of its representation inherent in the fiction warning is belied by a calling-out of a specific girl, Jenny Beckman. These paradoxes can be seen as self-referential and embodied as postmodern irony. It is funny that while most acknowledge that even fiction writers are advised to write about what they know, the link between knowledge and the truth is fractured by the formal requirements of labeling one's work "fiction." In the foreword to the published shooting script, Scott Neustadter writes, "while it is technically not a true story in the strictest sense, believe me when I tell you that virtually everything in its pages became true."[22] The absolute truth of the moderns and the quest for certainty gives way to a truth from a particular perspective, and that perspective is gained by remembering and re-remembering. The circular narrative structure calls to mind Homer's *Odyssey*, and in this case our hero, Tom, is set to resolve the loss of his great love. However, while the story is told from Tom's perspective, Tom is not the film's narrator.

Before the credits, during the opening scene, the narrator, who in the shooting script is described as having a "distinguished voice," sets the stage. The next image is a simple intertitle of a number in parentheses, (488). The image on the intertitle is important, as it presents an image of downtown L.A., which will be our guide to telling us where in the seasons of the relationship the action is taking place. It is ironic because Los Angeles geography does not admit of the traditional four seasons. The

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[21] This phrasing was suggested by the journal's reviewer. For an early example of queer critique, see: A. Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Minneapolis 2009.

[22] S. Neustadter, M. Weber, *The Shooting Script: (500) Days of Summer*, New York 2009, p. xi. I refer to the shooting script and check it against the DVD – where they differ, I use the dialogue on the DVD.

aesthetic choice of the intertitle is important because it harkens back to the origins of cinema, when the intertitle's whole purpose was to provide the dialogue in silent film and to advance the narration of the storyline. The intertitles function to clarify the nonlinear narrative as the story proceeds by bouncing back and forth like the free associations of a stream of consciousness through the days of the soon-to-be-doomed romance. How the romance is doomed is not obvious in the establishing shot, where Tom and Summer are sitting on a bench in Angelus Plaza in downtown L.A., as the image slowly changes from charcoal sketch to sepia film to full color. The screenplay calls for "CLOSE On their Hands, intertwined. Notice the wedding ring on her finger. CLOSE ON Tom, looking at Summer the way every woman wants to be looked at."[23] It is, after all, day 488 of this summer romance. The image of this scene will be replayed toward the end of the film, a nod to *Pulp Fiction*, whose famous denouement occurs twice within the film.

The intertitle changes from Day 488 to Day 1. We see Tom sitting at a conference table at what we assume to be his day job. The narrator not only introduces the film as "a story of boy meets girl" but also gives the critical background information that will set up the competing visions of the nature of love. The narrator proclaims, "The boy, Tom Hansen of Margate, New Jersey, grew up believing that he'd never truly be happy until the day he met [...] 'the one.'"[24] The image now features a preteen Tom watching the film *The Graduate*. The film mocks the documentary genre with its sardonic voice-of-God voice-over and continues to diagnose the genealogy of his belief: "This belief stemmed from early exposure to sad British pop music and a total misreading of the movie *The Graduate*."[25] The image changes to what we assume is the same office where Summer is busy doing clerical work. The narrator continues his voice-over: "The girl, Summer Finn of Shinnecock, Michigan, did not share this belief."[26] We then see a teenage Summer in her adolescent bedroom looking at herself in the mirror. The voice-over continues, "Since the disintegration of her parents' marriage, she'd only loved two things. The first was her long dark hair. The second was how easily she could cut it off and feel nothing."[27]

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[23] Ibidem, p. 1.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] Ibidem.

[26] Ibidem, p. 2.

[27] Ibidem.

The narrator has nearly completed setting the stage. He does so by following the first step in the romantic comedy narrative: boy meets girl as well as its postmodern paradox. The image turns to what we assume is the present day, and we see Summer enter the meeting where Tom is sitting at a conference table. The narrator continues, "Tom meets Summer on January 8th. He knows almost immediately. [...] [S]he's who he's been searching for. This is a story of boy meets girl. But you should know up front this is <u>not</u> a love story."[28]

However, *(500) Days of Summer* is clearly about love. Tom begins with a clear idea of what that entails. A philosophical origin of the idea that there is "the one" or that one should be searching for one's other half is found in the Speech of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. Aristophanes suggests a mythical account of the origin of love, in which at one time humans were creatures with two faces and eight arms and legs who were completely happy and powerful. These human-like creatures were becoming haughty with power. The gods were not amused and cut these creatures in half so that they would spend the rest of their days condemned to search for their other half, and this searching is deemed the origin of love. We see an allusion to this story during the opening credits: There is a split screen where parallel images show Tom and Summer in their childhoods, each in their own separate worlds, as the screenplay puts it, "disconnected and yet somehow not."[29] The images look like home movies made with a first-generation VHS tape – the handheld camera providing a giggling and somewhat grainy image. The first image we see is an extreme close-up on young Tom's eye on the left and a matching extreme close-up of Summer's eye on the right. The split screen gives the impression that the two are each other's matching half. The images continue with Summer playing on a swing set and Tom at a beach and as teenagers with Tom playing guitar and Summer turning cartwheels.

The romantic comedy narrative is set within the opening minutes of the film: Boy meets girl. The very next scene occurs on Day 290/500 in Tom's apartment, where his little sister, Rachel, and Tom's friends, Paul and McKenzie, endeavor to comfort a clearly distraught Tom, who is breaking his dinner plates on the kitchen counter. Rachel asks Tom to tell her what happened as we see Tom rehearse the events from earlier in the day. We see a series of images that will be repeated three times throughout the

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[28] Ibidem, p. 3 (emphasis original).
[29] Ibidem.

film. Rachel, Paul, and McKenzie urge Tom to get over her. The scene ends with Tom proclaiming that he does not want to get over her; he wants to get her back. The romantic comedy plot is furthered – boy loses girl – as we are set up to believe that the rest of the film will abide by the formula. And it does, to a certain extent.

We flash back to an earlier time; we see the very beginnings of the courtship. They meet at work and flirt during an office party to celebrate the engagement of a coworker, Millie. Tom and Summer are embarking on a workplace romance where Summer is the new receptionist and Tom has taken a job writing greeting cards to make ends meet, even though he has trained to be an architect. It seems significant that both are working for a greeting card company since the greeting card is symbolic of a facile expression of emotion, as opposed to building their chosen careers or following the oft-given advice of doing what you love and never working a day in your life. Tom will say as much when he quits toward the end of the film. During one of Summer and Tom's first conversations, Summer asks Tom whether he has always wanted to write greeting cards. He replies, "I don't even want to do it now."[30] There are references to many levels and objects of love in the film. After the conversation with Summer, we see Tom begin an architecture sketch as he recalls his vocation – a form of love. Clearly, the idea of love is being expanded beyond the mere romantic love or infatuation commonly associated with romantic comedies.

The intertitle reads "154," and the image of a tree in full, bright green leaf cuts to a scene in which Tom is walking alongside his friend Paul. Tom announces, "It's official. I'm in love with Summer."[31] There is a cut to images that will be repeated two more times in the film. Tom's voice-over proclamations of love can be heard over images of Summer's smile, hair, knees, and eyes. Tom even loves Summer's imperfections, such as the birthmark on her neck. Tom declares, "I love how she makes me feel like anything's possible [...] like life is worth it."[32] There is a moment where Tom is speaking directly to the audience, like Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall*. However, Tom's sentiment is optimistic about love, whereas Alvy's speech embodies a nihilism found in many radical romantic comedies. Paul responds, "This is not good." Later, the film will show the same sequence of images with Tom proclaiming that all the things he previously loved, he

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[30] Ibidem, p. 16.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ibidem, p. 19.

now hates. There is a postmodern element in this repetition of images, suggesting that reality is perspectival. The foreshadowing of the relationship's impending doom is matched as Tom is playing a video game with his sister. She warns him that "just 'cause some cute girl likes the same bizarre crap you do doesn't make her your soulmate."[33]

The nonlinear narrative continues as we flash back to Day 28, when we are introduced to Summer's nihilistic views about love during a workplace party at a karaoke bar. McKenzie plays the wingman. He asks Summer if she has a boyfriend. She replies that she does not want one because "I just don't feel comfortable being anyone's girlfriend. I don't want to be anybody's anything, you know?"[34] When McKenzie confesses his confusion, Summer continues, "Okay, let me break it down for you. I just like being on my own. Relationships are messy and feelings get hurt. Who needs all that? We're young; we live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I say, let's just have as much fun as we can and leave the serious stuff for later."[35] Tom furthers the conversation by asking, "What happens when you fall in love?" Summer laughs the suggestion off; her position is clear – "There is no such thing as love. It's just a fantasy."[36] Summer suggests that they "agree to disagree." They all continue drinking. Later, Tom sings his desire for Summer by performing the Pixies' song "Here Comes Your Man." The evening ends with McKenzie being escorted to a cab, so drunk that he slurs as he reveals that Tom likes Summer. Summer verifies that Tom likes her as a friend. The scene ends with Tom and Summer parting ways – "just friends." During the very next scene, near the photocopy machine at work, Summer kisses Tom. It can't be love because Summer has already said that she doesn't believe in it. What is it then? The relationship is neither fish nor fowl, and it cannot be easily defined because no ready-made label is apt.

When describing what he calls the comedy of remarriage, Stanley Cavell compares it to the genres of old and new romantic comedy. The old romantic comedy "shows a young pair overcoming individual and social obstacles to their happiness, figured as a concluding marriage that achieves individual and social reconciliations."[37] Cavell claims that this

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[33] Ibidem, p. 20.

[34] Ibidem, p. 27.

[35] Ibidem.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] S. Cavell, *Pursuit of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1981, pp. 1–10.

subgenre of romantic comedy can trace its genealogy to Shakespeare. We could name any number of Nora Ephron films that meet this mark. In comparison, new romantic comedy "stresses the young man's efforts to overcome obstacles posed by an older man [...] to winning the young woman of his choice."[38] At first glance, *(500) Days of Summer* seems to have more in common with new romantic comedy, as the plot focuses on Tom and his obstacles. However, we should be clear that the new romantic comedy from Cavell's perspective has a happy ending because the hero, indeed, overcomes his obstacles. We know from the very beginning of the film that Tom does not.

Cavell introduces the comedy of remarriage where "casting as its heroine a married woman; and the drive of the plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*."[39] The idea of remarriage foregrounds "the fact of marriage in [that] it is subjected to the fact or the threat of divorce."[40] What I am calling the postmodern romantic comedy is likewise deeply informed by the threat of divorce in that the social institution of marriage as stemming from something like Aristophanes' love must be redefined if divorce becomes as common as marriage itself. Love cannot mean "never having to say you're sorry," as the tagline suggests from the 1970s *Love Story*. I am arguing for a new genre of romantic comedy. The postmodern romantic comedy recognizes that love is messy and imperfect and that happily ever after is really only the beginning or that there may be no happily ever after. Moreover, love for a variety of things, from pancakes to Ringo Starr and even Los Angeles, help to round out one's humanity. This is not the full-blown nihilism that the character Summer suggests in the first conversation about the nature of love at the workplace karaoke night, but instead love means something different for both the individual who experiences love and the coupling it allows. One might fall in love, but there is no guarantee of forever. Tom ends up being okay that their relationship doesn't have a label, but he wants "consistency, I need to know that you won't wake up tomorrow and feel a different way."[41] Summer responds, consistent with postmodern love, "I can't promise you that. Nobody can."[42] The persistent

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[38] Ibidem, p. 1.

[39] Ibidem, pp. 1–2 (emphasis original).

[40] Ibidem, p. 2.

[41] S. Neustadter, M. Weber, op. cit., p. 61.

[42] Ibidem.

existential threat to the relationship is a new recognition about the real-ity of romantic love. The prevalence of divorce means that love may well not last. In place of everlasting love, love's postmodern value is to further one's authenticity and provide a learning environment for one's actualiza-tion, which can still be postmodern, even if neither self-actualization nor authenticity are peculiarly postmodern pursuits since it is the ambient conditions under which the terms are negotiated that give rise to the label "postmodern" in terms of love and marriage. In sum, one of the features of a postmodern romantic comedy is that the definition of love is subject to negotiation within the film itself. Moreover, language seems inadequate to address this sort of love, which is why we need both the images and the story.

After the kiss in the copy room on Day 29, we jump to Day 282, where Tom and Summer are shopping in IKEA. Tom, in a mocking attempt to play house after endeavoring to turn on the taps of display sinks, reports, "Honey, our sink is broken [...] seems like all of our sinks are broken."[43] Summer rejects this playful pose. However, we see why Summer's re-jecting Tom's playfulness is so puzzling as the scene quickly changes to IKEA on Day 34. That structurally the same sorts of moments can have completely different emotional valences becomes clear when Tom's play-fulness suggests that the couple is playing house, a postmodern gesture to Jameson's postmodern as 1950s ironic nostalgia. "Home Sweet Home," Tom proclaims.[44] We should note that this gesture is not furthered simply by means of the plot, but also by the characters' dress or costumes. In the DVD commentary, director Marc Webb explains that they dressed Zooey Deschanel in clothes that appear both classic and timeless. When they are playing house, during the Day 34 IKEA scene, they joke about the sink being broken and how that is why Tom bought a house with two kitchens. Summer follows, "doing her best Donna Reed impression."[45] After they pretend to dine on bald eagle, Summer pulls Tom into the next room by saying, "I'll race you to the bedroom."[46] They playfully chase each other through the store into the bedroom displays and cuddle on a bed. Tom reveals, "Darling, I don't know how to tell you this, but there's a Chinese

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[43] Ibidem, p. 36.
[44] Ibidem.
[45] Ibidem, p. 37.
[46] Ibidem, p. 38.

family in our bathroom."[47] The playful awkwardness is sealed with a kiss, as well as an explanation that Summer is not looking for anything serious.

The negotiation of love is furthered in the next scene in Tom's bedroom, where the couple is becoming intimate. Tom excuses himself for a moment in order to give himself a pep talk in his bathroom's mirror. "Settle. She's just a girl [...] wants to keep it casual. Which is why she's in my bed right now but that's casual. That's what [...] casual people do."[48] The next shot is from behind Summer in bed, where we see Tom emerging from his bathroom pep talk, and as part of a postmodern pastiche, it replicates an iconic shot from the poster for the film *The Graduate*. As a nod to a sex comedy trope, the screen fades to black with the sound of Hall and Oates's "You Make My Dreams Come True." It recalls the 1980s music videos as well as the great romantic comedy musicals such as *Singin' in the Rain*. The postmodern pastiche continues as the next scene has the feel of a music video. The screenplay suggests that "it's the greatest morning of all time!"[49] We see Tom dancing down the street, checking his reflection in a store window only to find *Star Wars*' Han Solo staring back. The visual metaphors pile on as we see random passersby give Tom high fives and a group of businessmen and others break into a "Busby Berkeley-style choreographed dance."[50] Tom mocks hitting a home run as a phallic-shaped water fountain suddenly bursts full with water. The UCLA marching band soon joins the parade, with Tom as the parade marshal, and a cartoon bluebird lands on Tom's hand as an homage to *Mary Poppins*. He is still dancing even as he reaches his office building. This is love's apotheosis. However, we know already that this is not the sort of everlasting love that is alluded to in other romantic comedies' happily ever after. From the best day to the worst day, matching on the image, the elevator doors open to Day 303, where a clearly heartbroken Tom enters the office, passes a new secretary, and checks his email. Summer's voice-over states, "So great to hear from you. I can't this week, but maybe next? I hope this means you are ready to be friends."[51] The special effects elongate the sound of "friends" and continue the aesthetic break from the naturalism so common in mainstream Hollywood cinema.

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[47] Ibidem.

[48] Ibidem, p. 39.

[49] Ibidem, p. 40.

[50] Ibidem.

[51] Ibidem, p. 41.

What happens between Days 45 and 303 is the rise and fall of the romance. The idea of love itself is expanded as at different times in the succeeding scenes, Summer proclaims her love for Ringo Starr, pancakes, and her coworker, Millie. An emotional intimacy ensues as Tom and Summer share their stories, hopes, fears, and dreams. The comedy becomes physical as their love has a carnal aspect. While shopping in a record store, Summer pulls Tom into the adults-only section. We see them at Tom's apartment watching their selection. Summer suggests that shower sex doesn't look too difficult. The sex comedy genre's discretion is repeated again when we see a bathtub's curtain rip and they fall out laughing: "Shower sex is hard." Tom and Summer's courting involves trips to art museums, where the avant-garde is mocked by calling it "complex" and a statue that could only be poop motivates a change in plans. In a postmodern move, so-called high art gives way to so-called low art, as Tom and Summer hatch a plan to go to the movies – the art-cinema façade with its French films invites us to regard the movies as art. The expansion of the idea of love continues as Tom takes Summer to Angelus Plaza, the site of the film's opening, a place that he loves and where he shares his love of Los Angeles by showing how the skyline visible from the park could be different, even more beautiful. We see how the intertitles are architectural sketches of Tom's vision, the same vision Tom draws on Summer's arm as if it were a tattoo. He explains the history of the buildings – the Continental 1904, another building with orange hue 1911 – and how he would change things if he were an architect. Tom clearly loves Los Angeles.

The fall of the romance is signaled by Tom's unease about the relationship with no name. He seeks his sister's advice about the situation, and she suggests that he should just ask Summer, but understands that the reason Tom doesn't is because he is afraid of the answer. While seeing Tom and Summer doing many of the things that led to the rise of the romance, such as going to movies and record stores, we see the same footage, but the music has changed. When Tom presses Summer about their relationship status, he responds, "This is not how you treat your friend. Kissing in the copy room, holding hands in IKEA, Shower Sex? Friends, my balls."[52] We see Tom on a rebound date with Allison. This is a disaster of a date where Tom cannot stop talking about Summer. Allison inquires, "She never cheated on you? Did she ever take advantage of you in any way? And she told you

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[52] Ibidem, p. 59.

up front she didn't want a boyfriend?"[53] That an individual has respon-
sibility for one's role in an emotional entanglement signals a change in
the notion of love undergirding many other romantic comedies, where
love has its own agency and the lovers fall under Cupid's spell. That is, in
those other romantic comedies, love is something that, once discovered,
can only temporarily be rendered asunder. A postmodern love is love as
education, involving a thrill of discovery. Once the lesson is learned, the
attraction may lessen as the lovers seek ever greater self-realization. The
rebound date ends in the karaoke bar with Allison leaving a drunken Tom
singing on the stage. In another type of romantic comedy, we might simply
chalk this up to the "boy loses girl" part of the plot.

The office party celebrating Millie's engagement is one bookend of the
romance; Millie's marriage ceremony is the other. Tom unexpectedly en-
counters Summer on the train en route to the wedding. When we see Tom
and Summer traveling together, we sense some hints that the film might
abide by the romantic comedy formula where boy and girl are reunited at
the end. In a beautiful sequence, we see Tom and Summer travel along the
Pacific Coast with the bright summer sunlight painting an orange nostal-
gic hue to their conversation. Tom has the book *Architecture of Happiness*
by Alain De Botton as a nod to one of his loves, architecture. We learn
Summer is working elsewhere – a sign that she has moved on. Yet, this
is their opportunity to reconnect. The wedding is beautiful as Tom and
Summer sit together at the outdoor venue. We see them rehashing their
relationship at the reception while they sit at the kids' table playing duck-
-duck-goose with their tablemates. They dance, and on the train ride
home, Summer rests her head on Tom's shoulder. We think at last that
Summer and Tom will live happily ever after. Summer ends the evening by
inviting Tom to a party at her house the following week.

As Tom makes his way to the party, the narrator informs us, "Tom
walked to her apartment intoxicated by the promise of the evening; he
believed that this time his expectations would align with reality."[54] We see
Tom's reality versus expectations on a split screen. The expectations race
ahead of the reality, yet the images have much in common until Summer
opens her apartment door. Tom expects Summer to greet him with a hug
and a kiss, to open the gift he gave her immediately and fawn over the
fact that it is the same book he was reading on the train. Instead, Summer

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[53] Ibidem, p. 79.
[54] Ibidem, p. 88.

welcomes him tacitly and introduces him to other friends at the party. The hopes that the party invitation may be an invitation to rekindle the relationship are dashed. Even his attempt to entertain other partygoers with an ironic quip fails. Tom soon realizes that this is Summer's engagement party. The haunting sounds of Regina Spektor's refrain "I'm the hero of this story – I don't need to be saved"[55] further echo Tom's despair. As he flees from the party, the image moves from color to charcoal, the image erases the background, and Tom is left as a silhouette against a blank background. This break from Hollywood realism is aesthetically interesting and philosophically important, as it conveys the hollowness of his experience. He is reduced to a mere shadow of himself.

However, Tom has much further to fall. We see him spend three days in bed, leaving only to buy more hard alcohol and junk food, missing three days of work. When he returns to work, he lashes out at the superficial and sentimental nature of the greeting card industry. He quits. We see him consult his little sister again when she is briefly taken out of her soccer game. She suggests that maybe Tom is only remembering the good parts of the relationship, and that he should look again, when he remembers, to see what else is there. We see a flashback to scenes that we previously had witnessed only in glowing, warm lights, but this time they show Summer's ambivalence as a common thread through all of the scenes. We see Tom watching *The Graduate* again, and this time seeming to get it. The screenwriters explain, "We wanted to follow a guy sifting through the memories of a relationship, moving backwards and forwards through time as he starts to see things he might not have seen while he was going through it."[56] We see Tom move forward by developing a portfolio and interviewing for architectural firms. The film circles back to its opening scene with Summer wearing her wedding ring, sitting with Tom on the park bench at Angelus Park. Tom expresses confusion that Summer could not commit to him, but then less than a year later is married. Summer learns from Tom that the idea of love is not simply a fairy tale, continuing the idea of love's relationship to knowledge and personal growth, as one might expect with the circular narrative structure. The film ends with Tom interviewing for a new job, and while waiting to be called, he discovers another attractive job applicant. They converse and discover that they both love Angelus Park. Tom invites her for a coffee. Her name is Autumn. The numbers return to

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[55] Ibidem.
[56] Ibidem, p. 114.

Day 1. The ending is ambivalent, as there is a reluctance on Autumn's part to agree to the date. We are left with only potential love, and this potential represents the promise and the fragility of postmodern love.

Conclusion

When describing postmodern film, Catherine Constable suggests that "at stake here is a repositioning of postmodern aesthetics as the aesthetic strategies of mass culture, which recognizes that the products of mass culture are capable of offering a variety of forms of complicitous critique."[57] While there is no doubt that the innovative filmic aesthetic properties, such as the charcoal intertitles or the repetition of nonlinear juxtapositions, function to ease the uptake of the film's meanings, these techniques can still be called postmodern. The foreign film parodies, the dance sequence, and the brilliant reality-versus-expectations split screen when Tom attends Summer's engagement party are all designed to make Tom's state of mind clearer. However, it is clear that Tom's specific perspective is being privileged over the objective realism of classical Hollywood films, and this change signals the influence of postmodernism on the artistry of film. Moreover, it does so premised on radical changes in the institution of marriage, as well as an underlying conception of love. No social institution is unchanging, and this is true with marriage. The advent of no-fault divorce has created a generation whose idea about the permanence of love has been shaken, and this change is foregrounded in the film as it explicitly mentions that both Tom's and Summer's parents are divorced, and features greeting card mock-ups dedicated to "Other Mother's Day." Not only has the institution of marriage changed, but how we identify its key component, love, has likewise changed. This film offers a vehicle to represent these ongoing changes, and we might think of this as postmodern filmic aesthetics meets millennial meanings. A postmodern romantic comedy may be a subgenre in the ongoing development of film – a change made necessary due to the changes in the institution of marriage and the social demographics of cinema's audience and to the changes in film's artistic conventions. An analysis of *(500) Days of Summer* has shown how specific filmic elements give rise to cues that help us track the changes

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[57] C. Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics*, New York 2015, p. 89.

of the social currency of love, marriage, and their changing meanings. At this point, one might wonder about the question mark in the title of this article. I suggest that if there is anything certain in postmodernism, it is the irony of its uncertainty. It is by working through the paradoxes that we can gesture toward the meaning of the film.[58]

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Blood, Death and Fear – Philosophy and Art in Relation to the Myth of Womanhood

Abstract

Mythologies from different parts of the world have always used female characters. Most of these are not positive ones, quite the reverse.

Nowadays, our generally accepted attitude towards womanhood and women has barely anything to do with the emotions which were triggered by such mythical creatures as lamias, mermaids or vampires. Furthermore, equal rights are perceived, today, as integral to a healthy society. Yet, there are some aspects of womanhood that are not only absent in public discourse, but also trigger such extreme emotions as fear and disgust. One such trigger is menstrual blood.

The aim of this article is to present negative images of the woman in mythology, with all their consequences, as well as to show how feminist reflections and artistic activity negate this understanding of womanhood and sexuality, frequently employing controversial and inconvenient themes in the furtherance of that goal.

Key words

womanhood, sexuality, blood, menstruation, mythology, nature, culture, feminism

The end of the twentieth century brought crucial changes to the perception of – *and the ways in which we talk about* – women and womanhood. She is no longer seen as a feeble creature, which, as Anna Małyszko points out: "should be subordinate to man, should be obedient to him, as a dependent creature, less rational than him and with weakness of mind – imbecillitas."[1]

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[1] A. Małyszko, *Bestie i ofiary. Przemoc wobec kobiet w filmie współczesnym* [Beasts and victims. Violence against women in contemporary film], Gdańsk 2013, p. 67 (translation mine).

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This belief in the inferiority of the woman was refuted long ago. Theories which have been developed and which have multiplied over the years, are no longer in contention with present day notions of equality between the sexes. Instead, contemporary feminists are trying to portray women as having always been changeable and contextual throughout history. Still, that part of the subject matter which deals with the idea of a woman – and especially with her corporeality – arouses anxiety, or even stirs controversy. One of the less acceptable aspects of womanhood is menstrual blood.

Blood, in general, is very colourful in its symbolism. In one context, blood has positive associations because it evokes the beginning of new life. In another context, however, it is solely associated with death and pain, and is its constant companion.

However, no blood ever aroused such extreme emotions as the blood which flows naturally arouses. Menstrual blood, virtually absent in public discourse, is still a skillfully avoided taboo. Mass culture disfigures the image of womanhood and manhood, rejecting and losing those aspects of sexuality that are inconvenient for postmodern culture; but neither do they fit the perfect image of a woman.

The aim of this article is, firstly, a brief investigation of the history of the cultural status of the female especially in ways which highlight her dissimilarities. This historical, cultural status is rooted in philosophy as well as in mythology and is the result of a specific, dualistic vision of the world. The second aim of this article recalls and takes account of those feminist theories which jettison the functioning of binary opposition: man/woman, culture/nature, which would have women inferior to men. Those ideas seek to form theories based on an embodied, changeable, fluent subject, involved in a cultural context.

Thirdly, the goal of this article is the presentation of several pieces of feminist art, both American and Polish, which complement those theories to some degree, by negating an anachronistic mindset and using the theme of transgression as a tool for disenchanting the *menstrual blood* discourse.

The opinion which proposes that woman is nature orientated and that man is culture orientated is an old, widely developed idea, which has been variously criticised since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the history of philosophy, as well as in sociological and cultural reflections, a tendency towards that association can be seen. Nature has been understood as ambivalent – life-giving on one side, but wild and dangerous, on the other. Thus, the image of a woman has been ambivalent too.

Woman, as the embodiment of natural forces, was simultaneously worshipped and cursed; she was perceived as a vehicle of unbridled passion which had, at all times, to be held in check by man. Some ancient philosophies such as Aristotle's reflections on human nature, linked manhood with rationality, reasonability and objectivity. Womanhood was associated, in some measure, with such attributes as irrationality, chaos and subjectivity.[2] Therefore, it was man's paradigm that prevailed and rendered as irrelevant, woman's perception of the world.

The best way to cope with fear and anxiety, caused by the negativity associated with womanhood, was to create a collective memory with images of female figures which had specific, negative connotations. It is worth mentioning that the majority of female monsters and ghosts are attractive in appearance which seduces and deludes potential male victims.

One example of an ancient female monster is the vampire – *Empusa* – one of the phantoms that had her place in Hecate's entourage. The etymology indicates gluttony and impetuousness, because *Empusa* means "she who invades by force." This character, strongly associated with eroticism, was believed to have abused men and to have rendered them impotent, thereby causing their deaths. *Empusa* in Latin is *Lamia*, which is derived from another word – *lamyros* which is translated as "voracious." This word is also connected with eroticism as it conjures up the possibility of ascribing such attributes as promiscuity.[3] Another *femme fatale* from Greek mythology is the mermaid. This was a woman with a human head and trunk but with a bird's legs and claws, all of which fitted the Greek idea of the soul as a winged demon, craving for blood and love.

In eastern mythology – or to be more terminologically exact – in Slavic mythology, there are also legends in which such a female character is also to be found. One of these is *Strzyga*, whose name is derived from the Latin *strix.* She was a demon with a bird's claws who fed on human blood. "According to folk etymology, 'Strzyga' is a demon who damages clothes."[4]

The origin of the word is Greek – στρĺξ, and hence the Latin – *strix*, *strigis*, which means an owl- or eagle-owl, ultimately translating as *striga* – or

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[2] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, trans. A. I. Peck, Cambridge 1943, I 728a 18–21, p. 103.

[3] E. Petoia, *Wampiry i wilkołaki* [Vampires and werewolves], tłum. A. Pers et al., Kraków 2003, p. 34.

[4] R. Dźwigoł, *Polskie ludowe słownictwo mitologiczne* [Lexicon of polish folk mythology], Kraków 2004, p. 67 (translation mine).

"witch."[5] Those dark, parasitic demons were the forerunners of the vampire, who, in western culture, were deemed to have been possessed of a wild sexuality and have become a symbol of female eroticism hidden by patriarchy.

Although the myth of vampires is universal in terms of sex, there are, as can be seen in Maria Janion's book, divisions derived from a gender background. This distinction is closely related to the human reaction to death. Janion talks about two different discourses, typical of a given sex. There is the neurotic, male discourse, which is characterised by fear and lack of acceptance of death, as well as the tendency to control everything that is vague and unclear. Whereas the female discourse equates with the lack of a strong identity and acceptance of death.[6] Those attributes make womankind more susceptible to the influence of a vampire by becoming the object of a vampire's attack, thereby becoming, herself, a vampire. Another argument in favour of speaking about women, as creatures more susceptible to vampirism, is a woman's physiology and her connection to nature. As Janion indicates, the reason why women very often became protagonists, or at least main characters in vampire literature, is the fact that everything connected with the nature of womankind is fatalistic. Thus, the literature dealing with vampirism and menstrual blood creates women as strange, alien and dangerous creatures.[7] Any explanation of that image is closely related to the issue of blood – a taboo and very complex symbol.

"Closely connected with images of death, and more often with life, which eventually always wins, blood was considered both dangerous and healing, bringing both bad luck and good luck, at once unclean yet pure."[8] Blood is a paradox among symbols. The most intriguing is the "unbearable concurrence of contrasts."[9] The whole web of paradoxes is caused by the fact that blood is connected both with death and life. The ambivalence of blood puts the human being in a difficult situation, which makes it impossible to overcome the fundamental vagueness caused by the symbolism. Blood accumulates opposing values and contradictions.

In spite of the fact that, in various cultures, blood is understood differently, it was always treated as a substance with special attributes and

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[5] Ibidem.

[6] M. Janion, *Wampir. Biografia symboliczna* [Vampire. Symbolic biography], Gdańsk 2008, p. 35.

[7] Ibidem, p. 227.

[8] J. P. Roux, *Krew. Mity, symbole, rzeczywistość* [Blood. Myths, symbols, reality], tłum. M. Perek, Kraków 1994, p. 8 (translation mine).

[9] Ibidem.

is both revered and cursed at the same time. Blood is both fascinating and an object of worship but it is also feared; contact with it is avoided. Blood, when connected with death and suffering, is repulsive. Besides its connotation with the process of dying, the sight of blood is terrifying in its unpredictability. Its loss always indicates the weakness of the organism. It does not matter if this loss is a real danger for the human being. People always feel unsafe at the sight of running blood. It evokes very strong emotions. One particular feeling accompanying the sight of blood is disgust. Coming *face-to-face*, so to speak, with this bodily fluid invariably evokes the most unpleasant of feelings and instigates that most basic of human reactions *viz.* the *fight-or-flight* syndrome.

It is known that blood, generally, is a taboo subject, but if one were to start talking about menstrual blood, then that would quite over-step the boundaries of decency, as can be seen, in that the very mention of it is completely absent in public discourse. Although the loss of menstrual blood is a natural – and even a desired – process as an indicator of a woman's health, any mention of such, immediately stirs up discomfort and disgust.

In western cultures, female physicality has always evoked anxiety and ambivalent feelings towards it. The female body has always been an object of desire and love but it also nauseates and repels a man because of the malodorous secretions which accompany the processes of giving birth and the puerperium. Due to the fact that the female menstrual cycle is governed by the moon's phases, womankind is placed closer to the darker side of nature and, because the night is thought to be a very dangerous and mysterious period of time, this has automatically influenced the perception of women. All negative attributes of blood are transferred to the woman, because she is the one who comes into contact with blood more often than does the man. What is the reason for this menstrual blood to be commonly perceived as being so unclean and so desecrated? Girard, in the book *Sacrum and Violence*, explains this attitude towards menstrual blood as being a primitive taboo linked to violence and sexuality. Blood is sullied when it is shed otherwise than ritualistically. Where menstrual blood is connected with sexuality, both sexuality and menstrual blood are perceived as lascivious.[10]

Until recently, almost every reflection about women began with the recollection of opposition, namely, the nature/culture debate, which, with

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[10] R. Girard, *Sacrum i przemoc* [Sacrum and violence], tłum. M. i J. Plecińscy, Poznań 1993, p. 44.

other, similar pairs, such as form/matter, active/passive, mind/feelings, was the foundation of dualistic thinking on the subject. Now, although still present, it has become old-fashioned and is criticised as outdated. The aforementioned criticism of this view has come about through different paths. This article will focus on ideas which rely on the assumption of a non-dualistic definition of the body, which claims that answers to questions about the body, and the relation between corporeality and subjectivity, cannot be based on a binary pattern. This kind of understanding of corporeality is based on reflections of such structuralists and post-modernists as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deluze.

Judith Butler, the American, feminist philosopher, inspired by Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's philosophy, as well as by the philosophies of Lacan, Nietzsche and Althusser – and who is also the author of a dissertation entitled *Gender Trouble* – analysed the concept of womanhood. She theorises – as did Nietzsche, Foucault, and Althusser before her – about subjects being the effects of repressive power regimes. Butler suggests incorporating the so-called feminist genealogy of a woman into feminist theory, as well as rejecting binary opposition, so prevalent in western tradition.

Butler's theory assumes that sex and gender are culturally designed and manipulated. According to her, sex is part of a regulative practice which creates bodies. For the purposes of this article, the most significant part of Butler's theory is its reference to Aristotle's theory of matter and form. According to this philosopher, women are imperfect and less valuable creatures, whose sole *raison d'être* is to reproduce, whereas men are the *prime-mover* – or initiator – and as such, are possessed of much higher status in the process of reproduction.[11] Because women are perceived as not being fully formed human beings, when compared to men, they are regarded as passive matter, requiring the active factor of male sperm; this *lack* gives rise to the perception that woman is deficient in some way. Such a point of view implies a negative attitude towards the body in general. The discourse views the body as being of less value than the mind or spirit and also distinct from it. Judith Butler confronts this theory by explaining the term *matter*. She says that in the Latin and Greek languages "matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested of the more modern empirical deployments

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[11] Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie* [The Complete Works of Aristotle], t. 5, tłum. T. Siwek, Warszawa 1993, k. II, 732a.

of the term."[12] This definition negates the perception of matter as non – intelligible and incapable of creating new life or a new entity and puts a different light on the ancient understanding of matter by emphasising its dynamism and power. This could be helpful in creating a better perception of the body, especially the female body which, historically, has been perceived as changeable.

The abandonment of the concept of universal woman or man is visible in the works of another researcher – Julia Kristeva. In her opinion, language is a crucial tool for creating both woman and man. Every subjectivity is created through language, according to the proponent of the *Speaking Subject* theory. Femininity is not the possession of any single subject but a language and that renders it unstable. Therefore, the subject is, for Kristeva, something unclear and fluid.[13] Kristeva is also the author of the term the *abject* which is closely connected with corporeality. In Kristeva's theory, *abjection* is defined as a feeling of disgust and rejection. Her definition of the *abject* contains everything that does not have social acceptance and is connected with organic substances which cause feelings of discomfort and disgust. Among those substances there is, undoubtedly, blood, especially the kind of blood which excites controversy, *menstrual blood*. This leads to the conclusion that if menstrual blood is perceived as an *abject,* then womanhood must somehow be marked with *abjection*.

Susan Bordo, an anthropologist and feminist, criticises, masculinised, phallocentric, contemporary culture. According to Bordo, this culture, which followed the idea of cognitive perfection as being abstract, pure and detached from the body, has separated itself from the "female universe." Symptoms of this situation can be seen in, for example, the discrediting of inter-subjectivity and intuition as credible sources of knowledge. To illustrate this detachment from matters regarding the female body, Bordo, in the *Unbearable Weight* cites a poem by Delmore Shwartz "The heavy bear who goes with me."[14] The animal is nothing but a metaphor for the woman's body and is depicted as brutal, violent, irrational and involuntary.

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[12] J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the discursive limits of "sex"*, London and New York 1993, pp. 31–32.

[13] J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller, New York 1984, pp. 25–26, [in:] E. Hyży, *Kobieta, ciało, tożsamość. Teorie podmiotu w filozofii feministycznej końca XX wieku* [Woman, body, identity. Theories of the subject in feminist philosophy at the end of the twentieth century], Kraków 2003, p. 55.

[14] S. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Berkeley 1993, pp. 1–2.

> The body is a bear – a brute capable of random, chaotic violence and aggression [...] but not of calculated evil. For that would require intelligence and forethought and the bear is, above all else, a creature of instinct, of primitive need. Ruled by orality, by hunger, blindly "mouthing" experience, seeking honey and sugar. [...] The bear – which is also the body – is clumsy, gross, disgusting.[15]

Butler criticises the view of the woman's body as expressed in the quote above, by opting for abandoning the idea of an abstract subject. That which should perish, is the imperialistic, monolithic self. The self which doesn't accept embodiment and social location, that is – Perspectivism.[16] She resists, as Freud, Marx and Nietzsche did before her, the perception of a subject that is divided, torn between body and mind in which the mind is superior to the body. One possible implication of such a perception is the image of woman as the subject of *abjection*. The *abject* in this case would be all the liquid substances of the female body with menstrual blood being one of the most stigmatised and taboo of *abjects.*

The advocate of the theory of corporal feminism, Elizabeth Grosz, has several aims, one of which is the demonstration of the futility of using binary oppositions such as female/male, body/mind, nature/culture. Those oppositions foster misunderstanding and in consequence, create a dualistic way of thinking about reality. In this dualism, elements are isolated and do not influence each other. Grosz's aim is to radically reshape the theory of the subject and reassign the position of the body; in her opinion, this would result in a different and improved understanding of themes such as corporeality and human sexuality. Grosz, as a feminist of sexual difference emphasises the embodiment of subjects and the fact that the body is a place of various influences. She notices that:

> The philosophical devaluation of the body has its consequences in politics, because women, although theoretically equal to men, are thought to be more corporal, which leads to the conclusion that they are less able in intellectual and social aspects and all but handicapped according to male standards.[17]

Corporal feminism is the answer to such perceptions about women and human physicality. In this type of feminism, the body is treated as a factor which creates the biological and cultural existence of a given human being. Grosz also says that the body is generally understood as

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[15] Ibidem.

[16] E. Hyży, op. cit., p. 198.

[17] Ibidem, p. 22 (translation mine).

a synthesis of culture and nature. This understanding of corporeality is closer to Spinoza's monism and the philosophy of Nietzsche and Foucault. In those philosophies, the body has countless attributes which describe it. The body, understood in this way, is not seen in opposition to the soul or psyche but has the status of being the foundation of human experience.

In her reflections on womanhood, there is also a place for the topic of the *abject*, which has its roots in the concept of the human being as a controllable and stable entity; this view is false according to Grosz. A woman's body is supposed to be a negation of this concept because of physical excretions. Due to the fact that these are never fully controllable, the female body can thus never be compared with the male body. Additionally, because some of those excretions in western tradition are perceived as pollution or as unclean, this aspect of the female body which is entwined with both sexuality and procreation, becomes an *abject.*

Womankind, encased in her liminal body on account of the liquids, which emanate therefrom, appears to be a creature which slips out of the frames of patriarchal society. The female body, which changes in harmony with the cycle of nature is, in male-dominated society, something that must be controlled, tamed and, in a way, purified. Despite the fact that we live in an era of equal rights, the tendency still persists to marginalise women through the perception of her as being less rational and thus less intelligent, as a person. Because of this, feminism, as a social and political movement and feminist researchers, as well as feminist artists have a hostile attitude towards social norms. Nowadays, art no longer struggles with problems of women in the artistic world, but it still touches upon sexuality and the social perception of the woman. Art explores themes which are still uncomfortable and controversial. For this reason, in this article, it is worth showing several pieces of feminist art, which are, in a way, artistic representations of the ideas included in those feminist theories earlier in this paper.

The term *abject* – originally described by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* – refers to those objects and substances that cross the body's boundaries, for example tears, faeces, urine or menstrual blood.[18] *Abject art*, however, refers to that art which explores themes of transgression and taboo in using those substances. In the limelight of this art is the human body with all its imperfections. Although there is nothing closer or more familiar to the human being than his own body, it can

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[18] T. Patin, J. McLerran, *Artwords: A Glossary of Contemporary Art Theory*, Greenwood 1997, p. 1.

become an object of disgust and repulsion. It can even gain some kind of autonomy and exist on its own, as if detached from the self. It can become estranged and unfamiliar. *Abject art* uses this kind of feeling and those aspects of humanity which are denied as *abject*, thus forcing spectators to confront them.

This area of feminist art, which currently fits in with assumptions of *abject art*, undertakes a discussion about menstrual blood. The reason for the use of the theme of menstrual blood in this kind of art is the fact that this special blood is something of an *inexpressible* and one of the aims of feminist art is to delve deep into women's existence, which is unclear, somewhat blurred and even inexpressive. Absent in public discourse and in art, it was introduced by feminist artists as a medium of feminine subjectivity. Feminist artists use menstrual blood as a way of understanding specific reactions to this object, namely, *discomfort* and, in some cases, *disgust*. The revulsion aroused by art is seen here as an element of understanding and acceptance.

In 1972, The Women House was founded – a female artistic society, organised by, among others, Judy Chicago in Los Angeles. They exhibited their works in a house-cum-art gallery. The very exposition had its place in rooms which imitated the kitchen and the bathroom. Artists creating this space lived there at the same time, in order to make the distinction between everyday life and art less visible. Simultaneously, their aim was to show the experience of women, thought to be unworthy of being displayed, as being a topic worthy of deeper reflection. The exhibition consisted of daily necessities – cosmetics, tampons, and underwear.

One part of the exhibition was Judie Chicago's installation entitled *Menstruation Bath*. This was a room painted in red, with a bin, filled with used sanitary pads, placed inside. The pungent smell of blood pervaded the room. Menstrual blood, shown in this way, shocked the spectators. That which should remain covered at all times and that which should never be expressed verbally or in any artistic language, became exposed. This artist dared to show something considered to be one of the most disgusting and embarrassing aspects of being female. Through this piece of art, she also criticised contemporary society and culture, which exclude menstrual blood from all social discourse. Chicago wanted to protest against those artists who deny this experience, unique to women – and who use only the male perspective in their works.

Menstrual blood was also used in a performance staged by the Australian artist Casey Jenkins in the work *Casting off my Womb*, in 2013. The

performance took place in one of the art galleries in Darwin. The woman spent twenty-eight days knitting. What was unusual in the performance was the fact that the wool was placed in the artist's vagina and the timing of the performance was set at the time of the women's period, so she did not stop knitting, even when she was bleeding. The decision to portray this scene was a fully conscious one because Jenkins wanted to tame the most intimate part of the female body and show it in a more neutral way. This piece of art engendered neither the sympathy nor the approval of the spectators on account of all the blood and yet it was the blood itself which was the most important part of the performance! Furthermore – and as if to add insult to injury – the artist was wearing only a white T-shirt, which was viewed as obscene and audacious.

As the artist explained, her performance was about intimate, close contact with her own body, about feeling the body, as well as confronting spectators with what is considered taboo and ultimately removing those taboos about woman's sexual organs. Carolyn Korsmeyer writes about the activity of feminist artists in the following way:

> Female artists can turn away from the pleasant and smooth outside to the warm, dark, glutinous inside where there are substances no one ever talks about. This conscious cultivation of that which is not beautiful – but which is crudely physical – shows an image of emancipation which is different from the ordinary, everyday, powerful oppression of the social norms of appearance.[19]

The work of Jenkins touches upon a subject that is one of the most powerful taboos in the majority of cultures which is all the stronger because of cultural norms. The theme of blood, where used, is only a method of shocking people in order to evoke a response, even compassion. No images of blood, however, are ever presented in an unprejudiced manner and its depiction always engenders some degree of disgust. Menstrual blood is still something unpleasant, unclean and necessary to eliminate. Any contact with menstrual blood is unwelcome.

Another work worth discussing is a video made by the Polish artist – Hanna Nowicka, entitled *Initiation* (2002). This piece of art raises the issue of the process of female puberty and becoming an adult, as well as the horror which accompanies that first sighting of menstrual blood. The girl appearing in the video is Nowicka's daughter. She is wearing a white dress, standing barefoot on a white square, holding passion-flower fruit

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[19] C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, New York 2004, p. 146.

in her hands. It is worth mentioning that the Latin term for this fruit is derived from the words *passio*, which means suffering and *flos*, which means flower. The term was developed at the beginning of XVIII century by missionaries in South Africa. In the video, the girl tramples on the fruit. She then brings some more and again, tramples on it. Since the title of the film refers to menstrual blood, the juice from the passion-fruit evokes unambiguous associations with the aforementioned. At the end of the film, both the white square and the girl are daubed in red. In this work, the symbolism of the red is interspersed with the symbolism of the white. White is associated with innocence, purity, and childhood, whereas red symbolises suffering, creation and, of course, blood. The artist was trying to show the emotions accompanying the girl's first period and that the time of becoming an adult is also time of pain and intense feelings. Although her video is not a controversial one, nor one that evokes strong emotions such as disgust or fear, it is one of those pieces of art that is aimed at de-mystifying the phenomenon of menstrual blood. As Jolanta Brach-Czaina in her book *Błony umysłu* writes:

> For thousands of years, human imagination has been drinking the blood which has ever accompanied death and has raised slaughter to the level of the highest values. Only this naturally emerging blood was proscribed, hidden and forgotten.[20]

Getting back to the title of the article, it should be said that whilst discussing theoretical reflections, there is some visible progress concerning the perception of woman; contemporary culture has, as yet, still not become familiar with all elements of womanhood. Although menstrual blood is a natural fluid and its presence is a sign of good health, as well as a necessary condition for new life to be born, it still arouses only negative emotions. The theme of female physicality is, unfortunately, left in limbo. The hope for changing this perspective is the acceptance of a new definition of the subject as fluent, unstable, amenable to change and resistant to oppressive discourse. There is a need for a subject which is flexible in construction rather than rigid, one which changes of itself and evolves. Railing against fallacious discourse is, also, a contemporary feminist art form, which is working to change how women are perceived by society. Using menstrual blood as a topic is a right and proper action, as it perfectly reflects the idea of the fluency of its female subject.

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[20] J. Brach-Czaina, *Błony umysłu* [Membranes of the mind], Warszawa 2003, p. 127 (translation mine).

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Natalia Yakubova[*]

Phantasies of Restored Innocence: Traces of the Actress Irena Solska (1875–1958) in the Dramas of Jerzy Żuławski (1874–1915)

Abstract

Psyche in *Eros and Psyche* (1904) by Jerzy Żuławski was one of the most important roles of Irena Solska (1875–1958), which she played for twenty years. The playwright confessed that he also had written *The Myrtle Wreath* (1903) and *Ijola* (1905) specifically for this actress. In spite of the fact that reviewers often criticized the texts and tried to "protect" Solska from being associated with the author's intentions, she probably identified herself with them to a great extent. Given the lack of detailed accounts of Solska's performance in the criticism, these texts become the most important source, although also a controversial one. They reveal some important impulses of Solska's creativity. Her desire "to restore innocence" in her onstage creation was a way to overcome the repressive reality of her past and the burden accumulated through "the matrilineal heritage."

Key words

Irena Solska, Jerzy Żuławski, female creativity, matrilineal heritage, constructions of innocence, women's autobiographical writing

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In 1975 the famous writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz wrote about his visit to Fribourg, Switzerland.[1] The Cathedral of St. Nicholas in this town is decorated with the stained glass of the great Polish artist Józef Mehoffer (1869–1946). In his essay, Iwaszkiewicz writes that in the windows of the Swiss cathedral he recognized many well-known characters of the Cracow artistic community of the early 20th century, including Jerzy Żuławski, a famous writer, and Irena Solska, a theatre star of that time. "Jerzy Żuławski as Herod is sitting at the feast table [...] and, who is dancing before him as Salome? Solska herself, in a short tunic."[2]

In fact, however, the Salome scene cannot be found on the windows of the Fribourg cathedral. Irena Solska is present as Helvetia on the stained-glass *Our Lady of Victory.* In this scene, Helvetia is thanking the Virgin Mary for victory in the battle of Morat (1476). The Virgin Mary is the central figure of the composition, while Helvetia is standing showing her back, her face turned right just enough to recognize Solska's profile. Helvetia's whole body is covered by an enormous decorative cloak.

Yet, Iwaszkiewicz had reason to write about Solska as Salome. In 1905, Jerzy Żuławski, who was not only a writer but also a theatre critic, wrote a lengthy essay on how Solska *could* play this role. Solska never did. What interests me, however, is a detailed account of how Żuławski interpreted Solska's creative individuality, which will help me to understand what her impact on the creation of his plays could have been. I consider this task part of the work of reconstructing the complex dynamics of how the impulses of original female creativity are read, reinterpreted, and appropriated in the works of male authors and then re-appropriated by the actress in her performance.

Żuławski dedicated his essay to Irena Solska and refers to her throughout the whole text. He explains that she asked him to inform her should he encounter something interesting abroad. The impulse to write this essay was a performance of *Salome* seen in Munich. The title part was played by Lotte Sarrow, and while everybody was fascinated by her

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[1] J. Iwaszkiewicz, "Kraków", [in:] idem, *Podróże do Polski* [Travels to Poland], Warszawa 1977, pp. 49–64.

[2] In this text, I am citing from the Polish sources using my own translations. Iwaszkiewicz refers to the most powerful images of Solska that from the 1970s began to dominate how the actress was remembered: graphic *Sylwety* by St. Eliasz-Radzikowski (Silhouettes 1908–1909) and the novel *622 upadki Bunga* by Witkacy (622 Downfalls of Bungo, 1910–1911, first published in 1972).

acting, the author of the essay was thinking that she was wrong in her interpretation, and that only Solska would be able to play Salome adequately.

Żuławski writes that Lotte Sarrow and almost all other performers see Salome as "an overindulged, capricious, hysterical and [...] spoiled child of the court."[3] The correct reading of Salome – which, as he believed, only Solska could convey – would be based on the understanding that the foremost feature of Wilde's heroine is her chastity.[4] Żuławski points out that her virginity is preserved despite the mores of Herod's court. He also explains that "the most zealous guardians of their own chasteness are the most sensual people,"[5] and that it is especially true of women. However, he admits that a trace of Wildean perversity is also known to this character and it is the reason why she falls in love with Jokanaan. He concludes that there is something mystical in the nature of Salome's desire.[6]

"I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire."[7] Żuławski claims that these words are usually ommited in the theatre productions, but they represent a key to the character. According to the Polish author, the famous dance makes sense only when it is clear that Salome is sacrificing her chaste body. By demanding Jokanaan's death she reclaims the price of this sacrifice.[8]

In his own plays, written for Solska, Żuławski created a specific tension between the heroine's state of innocence and a quite radical manifestation of her desire. In *Wianek mirtowy* (The Myrtle Wreath, 1903), the plot is driven by the heroine's anxiety around chastity. She is about to marry an older man who saved her family from financial ruin. Janka takes part in the marriage deal quite consciously. To manage her chastity as a market good means for her to enter the world of adults. In a sense, the situation is probably sexually arousing for her. Soon, however, chastity takes on a rather metaphysical value. Janka realizes that the "state of innocence" played an important role in her teenage love of Władek, a childhood friend. Once she is married, the unique chance to bring this

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[3] J. Żuławski, "Z Monachium" [From Munich], [in:] idem, *Eseje* [Essays], Warszawa 1960, p. 244 (translation mine).

[4] Ibidem, p. 243.

[5] Ibidem, p. 250.

[6] Ibidem, p. 250–251.

[7] O. Wilde, *Salomé*, Boston 1996, p. 35.

[8] J. Żuławski, "Z Monachium", op. cit., p. 255–259.

kind of relationship to its full gratification will be lost. So she decides to give her virginity to Władek right before her marriage to another man. In *Wianek mirtowy*, she visits him before going to the church. Her plan, however, fails, because it is completely unacceptable to Władek; thus, he prefers a suicide.

Wianek mirtowy was criticized for the incredibility of the female character. A critic in *Gazeta Lwowska* wondered if it was possible for a maiden to call for Władek's love as Janka did, and claimed that if read as "a character from life," the heroine was probably "a strumpet who boasted of the treasures lost long ago."[9] However, he concluded by suggesting that Żuławski surely didn't want the audience to understand the character as "a life type" but rather had created "the symbol of the power of demonic woman."[10] Other critics, who didn't go so far and preferred to think that Janka was designed as a realistic character, could not explain her behaviour except as a pathology or "demonic instincts."[11] In his response published in *Gazeta Lwowska*, Żuławski insisted on the credibility of the character and even claimed the plot was based on a true story.[12] He praised the critic of *Gazeta Lwowska* for coming closest to his concept, but at the same time confessed that he "had no intention to present the destroying power of the woman-demon": "Janka by no means is a demon – to my mind, she had to be a maiden truly innocent, truly confident about the fairness of her behaviour and unconscious of the fact that she, the weak one, destroys two male creatures that are actually strong."[13]

In his next play, *Eros i Psyche* (Eros and Psyche, 1904), this tension between "innocence" and "corruption" was explained by the plot of metempsychosis. Psyche, an Arcadian princess, is doomed by the god Eros to leave her idyllic homeland and to wander through radically different ages and different reincarnations. In pagan Alexandria she longs for Christ as the God of universal love. In a medieval convent she misses sun, joy and life. In her next reincarnation, that of a princess in the Italian Renaissance, she has had enough of the joy of life, too. In the time of the French

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[9] A. Krechowiecki, "Z teatru" [From the Theatre], *Gazeta Lwowska*, 1903, nr 202, p. 4 (translation mine).

[10] Ibidem, p. 5.

[11] [N.N.] "Z teatru" [From the Theatre], *Kurjer Lwowski*, 1903, nr 245, p. 6 (translation mine).

[12] J. Żuławski, "Głosy publiczne" [Public Voices], *Gazeta Lwowska*, 1903, nr 204, p. 4 (translation mine).

[13] Ibidem, p. 5.

Revolution, Psyche feels that love for the people could finally replace the outdated love for a man. Then, in contemporary society – which is profiting from the benefits of the bourgeois revolution – she awakens to the fact that her role has been reduced to that of the mistress of a cynical rich man. In every epoch, Psyche always looks for the eternal god Eros but her partner is always Blaks, who personifies inert matter and is doomed to go through reincarnations as well. Whoever she happens to be, at a certain point the heroine reminds herself about the existence of a different definition for "love," which somehow she has forgotten and wants now to reanimate. From this perspective, "Eros" and "Arcadia" in the first scene can be understood as something like paradise before the fall, where "love" didn't (or, wouldn't) contaminate "innocence." Since Psyche has rejected, one after another, every "contaminated," partial version of love, in the finale of the play she is given the chance to restore Arcadia – and by doing so, to save the world.

The next play Żuławski wrote for Solska didn't rely on a myth, but easily could fit the format of one of the scenes from *Eros i Psyche*. In *Ijola* (1905) the tension between the "innocent" and "corrupted" versions of the same woman is the result of the fact that the heroine is a lunatic, and doesn't even know that every night she visits an artist who believes her to be a vision of ultimate purity. So he makes a statue of the Virgin Mary to look precisely like his night guest Ijola. Unfortunately, the woman happens to be the wife of an old knight (the whole plot takes place in medieval ages), and this knight was careless enough to leave his wife alone in the castle for a long time. His return makes Maruna (for this is Ijola's true name) face the rumours about her strange night behaviour. She insists that she was faithful (besides the fact that she doesn't love her spouse and, when with her nurse, admits to dreams of love and passion completely different from her experience with her husband). Some other strange things happen. A traveller, who used to know Maruna as a young girl called Jagna, comes to her to claim the passion she allegedly had for him some time ago, but she proudly denies that anything like this existed between them at all. Denounced by her husband (and his tribunal) as a witch, Maruna-Ijola declares that she is fully happy that she was loved by the artist and offers herself to him as a loving woman, not as an image of the Virgin Mary. She is already imprisoned, so she hardly can hope for a gratification of her feelings. But the fact that the artist rejects her as a witch can but deeply disenchant her, of course. When the artist changes his mind and comes to liberate her, she, in turn, rejects his offer, claiming that true love exists only in a dream.

Eros i Psyche was a success throughout 20 years, but *Ijola* only had several performances. In spite of this difference, not only Ijola, but Psyche as well, were hardly described in detail in contemporary criticism. In both plays Solska was praised for the stylish performance, her appearance referencing abundant associations with the visual arts (Pre-Raphaelite artists generally, or specifically Burn-Jones, or Rops). This praise of the visual side of the performance, however, either silently or overtly admitted the lack of dramatic force.

To get the idea of both performances, however, it is important to understand that most probably the audience wouldn't agree with the critics' judgments. As for *Ijola*, Solska herself wrote about this fact in a letter to Zofia Hanicka. After Ludwik Solski became the head of the Cracow municipal theatre some critics constantly attacked the new team in general, and *Ijola* (re-staged in Cracow after the Lvov premier) became their prey as well. Solska writes about the fact that in Cracow the audience's appreciation was even higher than in Lvov, but the bad reviews could have influenced the public.[14]

As for *Eros i Psyche*, the unusually long run of the play can attest to the appreciation of the theatre-goers. But we can read about the split between the audience's opinion and that of the critics in many reviews that accompanied renewals or guest performances of the play. Just a year after the opening night, when the Lvov production was transferred to Cracow, critics expressed their surprise with its persistent success. This surprise only grew through the years, culminating in 1921 when the famous critic Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński proclaimed that the success of the play was in

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[14] *Listy Ireny Solskiej* [Letters of Irena Solska], red. L. Kuchtówna, Warszawa 1984, p. 63. She also wrote about the issue to Zofia Hanicka in her letter 7.XII.1905. Zofia Hanicka was her only friend whom Solska made her confidant in the love affair with Żuławski. So, Solska often asked her to contact Żuławski in the issues which she somehow had failed to explain to him herself. From this letter is clear that Żuławski was irritated that *Ijola* announced for the Tuesday performance 5.XII had been cancelled and was suspicious that this decision had been influenced by the bad reviews. Solska explained to Hanicka that the reason was her illness, and wrote extensively about how sick she and her child were. Then she writes: "probably you have [his] address, please, write [to him] that it was not because of the reviews that the play was cancelled – but because of my illness[.] – On Sunday, if I am better, I will play, because the reviewers and the public are two camps – at this moment opposite ones[;] – on Tuesday the theatre would have been full as well – so, if I am able to move and if my cough ceases, I will play." (Jerzy Żuławski Papers in Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warszawa, inv. nr 1892, v. 4, p. 71, translation mine).

"giving the audience an opportunity just to stare through four hours while giving them an illusion of thinking and even that of thinking philosophically."[15] At the same time, the same critics who expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of Żuławski's writing wanted to underline that Solska's creation should be judged – and praised – regardless of it.

Somewhat more varied press opinions can be found about the first play Żuławski wrote for Solska, *Wianek mirtowy*. In this case, the critics tried to situate themselves vis-a-vis controversial moral questions raised by the text and this determined their attitude towards Solska's acting as well. Even then, however, the critics judged Solska's acting *against* the whole content of the play. Their evaluations were so different, that it is impossible to reconstruct from their comments *how* Solska played Janka. Some critics escaped from the discussion of Janka's conscious managing of her sexuality into the claim of unrealistic monstrosity of this character. These reviewers made the statement that Solska, by her intelligent acting, her personal charm and harmony in her means of expression elevated this character, made it nobler and acceptable at least to a certain extent. At the same time other critics explicitly denied this harmony and even personal charm, for example in such words: "First of all she lacked essential feminine charm, that powerful weapon in the hands of this kind of maiden-demon. Mrs. Solska was a hysteric only, who sometimes was abject, never charming; she was a sick woman, and not a symbol of the maiden perversity."[16]

Although critics tried to "protect" Solska from being associated with the author's intentions, most probably she herself identified with them to a great extent. In 1904–1906 the actress and the playwright were in a secret romantic relationship, evidenced by their extensive correspondence.[17] In her letters Solska constantly addressed Żuławski's writing as their common concern.

In 1912, some six years after their definite romantic split, in the preface to the 3rd edition of *Ijola*, Żuławski acknowledged Solska's impact on his plays, referring to such roles as Janka, Psyche and Ijola: "[Y]ou passed before my eyes as a girl with the myrtle wreath, monstrous in her innocence and perverse in her simplicity – you followed my thoughts

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[15] Boy, "Z teatru" [From the Theatre], *Czas*, 1921, nr 140, p. 2 (translation mine).

[16] A. Krechowiecki, op. cit., p. 5.

[17] About 150 letters in Jerzy Żuławski Papers in Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, inv. nr 1892, v. 1–4. 29 letters are published in: *Listy Ireny Solskiej...*, op. cit.

as a Soul that longed after the ultimate love [...] at last, you embodied my dream about Jagna – Ijola – Maruna which is now written down in awkward words in this book."[18] This phrase is by no means a gallant exaggeration.

So, in the situation where, in regards to Solska's three very important roles, I cannot rely on any evidence available in theatre criticism, what I can try to find the traces of the actress in those "awkward words" that are written down.

Solska's letters and her autobiography written after the Second World War will help me to understand such characters as Janka, Psyche and Ijola. They will also help me to question the line of interpretation that is prompted by the influential book *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* by Gail Marshall, although some of my examples – *Eros i Psyche* and *Ijola* – seem to fit Marshall's concept almost ideally.

Gail Marshall argues that "much of the professional and personal history of the Victorian actress is defined by her negotiation with the imposition upon her of the contractual dimensions inherent in the sculpture metaphor; and that this metaphor is essentially authorised, and its dimensions determined, by the popular Ovid myth of Pygmalion and Galatea."[19] In what Marshall labels as "the Galatea-aesthetic," the bodily presence of the women onstage tends to be converted into "eternal beauty," by "giving 'chaste permission' to desire."[20] Thus, by surrendering to the "sculptural metaphor," an actress of the Victorian stage gained social respectability but constrained her creativity to a great extent. She is much praised when she preserves the integrity of a statue (who displays minimal movement, let alone dramatic passion); her heroines should patiently wait for the animating gesture of a male creative power. Marshall gives numerous examples of how the Victorian critics highlighted the "personal charm" of the English actresses, which, as she argues, suggests that their performances rather lacked dramatic tension. Although Marshall contrasts these opinions to those written about French actresses who seemed to engage much more with the dramatic material rather than being comparable to antique statues, in fact, I think, the "sculpture

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[18] J. Żuławski, *Ijola*, 3rd edition, Lwów 1912, pp. V–VI (translation mine).

[19] G. Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*, Cambridge 1998, p. 4.

[20] As she writes in connection with Helen Faucit, ibidem, pp. 51–55.

metaphor" and "Galatea-aesthetic" was present in all European theatre of that time, although probably it was not necessarily always connected with the sculptural ideal of classical Greece.

As for Żuławski, it seems that at least in *Eros i Psyche* and *Ijola*, he created for Solska precisely such roles in which she could display her decorativeness, to show off her "charm" in a maximum of "live pictures." These dramas don't lack "sculptural metaphors." Psyche is an innocent female creature – additionally an "ancient" one – so moulding her after the patterns of Greek sculpture seems to be inevitable. In a sense, she is animated by the male god Eros when he awakens in her the joys of love. Subsequently, it is Eros who somehow "prescribes" her new forms in which she is reincarnated in the different historic epochs. It is also he who finally liberates her from all these historical costumes and allows her to return to the eternal beauty of the original Psyche. As for Ijola, this hero-ine appears before the religious medieval artist already as a live sculpture. During her trial he tells about the love he felt toward the night apparition, and these are the words that animate Maruna with love which she never knew before. In both texts the central character is understood as a vessel for the timeless feminine ideal which needs a creative male power to be unlocked and, in a way, to awaken from the state of unconscious dreaming of the "untrue" versions of mundane women.

It seems that Żuławski superimposes what Marshall calls "the sculptural metaphor" upon Solska and constrains her within the patriarchal story of a "Galatean myth." And in fact, the reviews of the plays concentrate precisely on the "charm" or visual values of Solska's performance and by and large ignore dramatic episodes in which the heroine appears assertive. Was Solska's cooperation with Żuławski just a story of surrender to a "Galatean myth?"

What follows is an attempt to read what hypothetically Solska could load "the charm" with. What could her Psyche fascinate with, even in the 1920s?

I would like to argue, that if the critics and audience were not always (if at all) able to explain in words what was especially intriguing about Solska's performance and fell back on such formulaic reasoning as "her personal charm," this doesn't mean that her stage presence could not offer more than pleasing good looks. After all, who said that it was *conforming* charm and not *disturbing* charm?

Writing her autobiography was a major concern for Solska in the 1920s–1930s (this version of the text was unfortunately lost during WWII), and then in the after-war period of her life. As I argue elsewhere,

she felt an urgent need to reaffirm the type of creativity which she con-
sidered muted under the dominance of the director-centred theatre par-
adigm.[21]

Solska refused to conform to the aesthetic norms of the period, which
insisted on the dissociation of women's creativity from their body and
sexuality. In her writing, however, she never addresses these issues di-
rectly in connection to her stage creations, but rather reaffirms these val-
ues with what can be called "embodied writing."

For example, in order to transmit the impulsiveness which one used
to create a role in her time (i.e., at the turn of the century), she writes in
terse, energetic phrases. But also when she refers to the offstage events,
the ability to get emotionally involved with everything that happens
around her becomes one of the main characteristics of her personality.
This, in turn, is connected to understanding acting as a means to channel
sensibility into creativity. "Unbelievably lively, impulsive, I had to have an
illusion of life – which would be far from the bitter reality."[22] This phrase
refers to the suicide of her fiancé, which took place when she was sixteen.
The desired "illusion of life" is, of course, theatre, which begins to draw
the heroine after this tragic event in her life. In fact, the autobiography re-
fers to numerous aspects of "the bitter reality" and the author's extra-sen-
sitivity reveals its dark side.

Particularly, Solska writes about a fear of madness that accompanied
her from her childhood. She was afraid of inheriting a psychological dis-
ease from her grandmother, and even attempted suicide to escape a sim-
ilar fate.[23] This fear most probably resulted for Solska in the constant at-
tempt to constrain her expression of emotions, by hiding passions under
a mask of aesthetics, or behind a pose which could express a resigned
sacrifice. In her autobiography Solska often recalls events in which she
was extremely involved but was able to hide her engagement from others,
sometimes at the cost of a subsequent emotional breakdown.

Probably this anxiety of psychological unreliability was a reason for
her dependence on a paternalistic figure, as her first husband Ludwik
Solski (1855–1954) was in her life for quite a long time. He was twenty

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[21] N. Yakubova, "Reclaiming the Actress's Authority over Theatre Creation. Auto-
biography of Polish Actress Irena Solska", *Aspasia*, The International Yearbook of Cen-
tral, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History, 2008, No. 2,
pp. 120–138.

[22] I. Solska, *Pamiętnik* [Memoirs], Warszawa 1987, p. 50 (translation mine).

[23] Ibidem, pp. 25–26.

years her elder, and at the time of their marriage she was a beginner while he was an acknowledged theatre star. While there are many accounts of how Solski could be rude and unjust to his wife, whom he treated as an apprentice, it is also true that with him Irena could remain a child and live her role of the quiet victim, even when in fact her life with her husband was full of minor and major rebellions.

In her letters to Żuławski written during their love affair, Solska often addresses the issue of her victimhood. It is important for her to under-line that true love had remained unknown to her before her meeting with Żuławski, but the tough conditions of her life could not prevent her from keeping her soul chaste for this real love. At the same time these letters are full of overtly expressed sexual desire, put in words with ease and poetry.

The notion of another, secret self is very strong in Solska's writings. Onstage, she often made her heroines appear to be lunatics or day-dream-ers. The critics mention them as spirits, phantoms, or fairy-tale creations, even when the texts of the plays don't presuppose this fantastic or mysti-cal interpretation. Absent-minded, abandoned day-dreamers or lunatics waiting to be awakened – this became one of the most popular types of roles for her at the turn of the century.

At the same time her heroines were able – just like Salome – to de-mand quite cruel sacrifices from those whom they found guilty in their inner torments and irresolvable dilemmas, or, to put it the other way, who dared to reveal the heroine's "other self," or make them conscious of this secret self.

No review of Solska's acting prior to her encounter with Żuławski can attest that it is in this vein that she played Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, or Olga in Stanislaw Przybyszewski's *Dla szczęścia* (For Happiness), but why not? Nothing attests that it could not be the case, for detailed accounts of most of her roles simply don't exist. After all, it is absolutely unknown in what roles beside his own plays Żuławski could actually see Solska, but surely he could deduct the above mentioned psychological complex from her offstage persona.

As for Żuławski's plays, Solska's impact can be observed most clearly in the text of *Ijola*, since the actress' letters from the period when it was created and performed are also available.

To begin with, the title heroine has multiple names and one of them, the title Ijola, corresponds to Solska's family pet name Lola, which was turned into Jola by her niece. This niece notably was named Marunia

– and Żuławski's heroine is similarly named Maruna. This playful usage of childish nicknames reveals the game which intertwined the life and art of the artist-lovers. In Solska's letter of September 1904 (still some three months before the text of *Ijola* was finished) she writes about the drama, as it is already known to her, and asks about next roles in such words: "I am asking you about it as a child asks for a fairy-tale, and you are giving me these 'fairy-tales' and will give me them, and I will be telling them to people, to the entire world."[24] She often signs her letters of this period as Lola or Jola.

However, what is surely more important is Solska's impact on how the heroine's sexuality is self-articulated – which probably was without a precedent in the Polish dramaturgy. This issue was, not surprisingly, ignored by critics of the text. In the dialog with her nurse the heroine confesses the repulsion and disgust she feels towards the sexual desire of her husband, for whom she nevertheless maintains respect and loyalty during his absence. However, her idea of the true love which, she admits, she never knew, and for which she has been longing since her childhood, undoubtedly includes sexuality. As an obstacle to the fulfilment of this dream she mentions that "everybody pulled some dirty hands to me"[25] – similar phrases could be easily found in Solska's correspondence to Żuławski.

Paradoxically, Maruna uses her marriage to restore her innocence in the belief in ideal love, since her husband left her alone for a long time. Her other self, Ijola, in whose image she appears to the artist, is precisely the culmination of such restoration, since precisely this "apparition" inspires the sculptor to make the statue of the Virgin Mary.

We can assume that Ijola's dream corresponds to what art meant for the actress: a "fairy-tale" through which she herself restored her childish innocence and went back to that point in her life from which she could claim her new love to be actually the first true love of hers, as it was in the case of her love to Żuławski. Before the Cracow premier, she wrote to the author: "In two weeks we are to play *Ijola*, on November 4. I don't like this day, I want to forget it and that's why I have chosen *Ijola* for that day."[26] It was on that day that her marriage to Ludwik Solski took place in 1899. Thus, the actress expects a therapeutic effect from playing *Ijola*: it can cancel the day of her unhappy marriage and help her restore her

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[24] Jerzy Żuławski Papers, inv. nr 1892, v. 1, p. 94.

[25] J. Żuławski, *Ijola*, op. cit., p. 75.

[26] *Listy Ireny Solskiej...*, op. cit., p. 60.

other, secret self. Before the Christmas of 1905, summing up the year, she writes about her "dream-like happiness," putting these words in quotation marks.[27] Though this is not a precise quotation from *Ijola*, it paraphrases the words of the heroine who pervasively uses similar phraseology.

In the play, however, Maruna is deeply deceived by the object of her ideal love, since even he is inclined to believe her to be a witch. In the final act of the play her beloved appears before Maruna in her prison with the decision to pay with his soul for her love. The heroine rejects such love, together with the rescue plan. Once again, the phraseology of the longing for love (Maruna describes to her beloved what he lost by denying her at the court) is very close to what Solska wrote to Żuławski, especially at the moments of their ruptures.

Żuławski's text is a peculiar document, and analysis of the presence of Solska's personality it contains can be but a risky experiment. Anyway, it concerns not only the written text, but also a visual level, as well as a more profound psychological – or even psychoanalytical – one. Żuławski processed Solska's psychological complexes through dichotomies that she rather rejected. *Ijola* reaffirms the dichotomy of spiritual and corporeal. The poetic and the mundane are neatly separated in Żuławski's writing. In what Solska ever wrote – and especially what she wrote to Żuławski – she quite stubbornly mixed the matters of spiritual closeness, artistic collaboration and, let's say, preoccupation with materiality and corporeality. It is highly characteristic that after Ijola she expects Żuławski to write the role of Phryne for her.[28] Phryne was a hetaira, a lover of Praxiteles, who was the model for Aphrodite of Knidos; in the context of *Ijola* the task sounds rather challenging.

What is even more important is that, like in *Wianek mirtowy*, *Eros i Psyche*, and in the later novel *Powrót* (The Return, 1914), for whose heroine Solska was also the prototype, in *Ijola* the female character is defined as a woman completely absorbed with her emotional life, without any other occupation. It is suggested that creative activity can belong only to the man, while the woman can be but inspiration.

In her autobiography, Solska writes in detail about neither *Wianek mirtowy* or *Ijola*, and assigns only one passage to her famous Psyche. Although she often mentions Żuławski among the playwrights who supported the theatre she is dedicated to, when she writes about her private

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[27] Jerzy Żuławski Papers, inv. nr 1892, v. 2, pp. 116–117.
[28] Jerzy Żuławski Papers, inv. nr 1892, v. 1, p. 94.

life, in an innate response to the gossips about her promiscuity, she uses precisely his example to draw attention to the double moral standard for men and women:

> Here is an example: J.Ż., who is a playwright and a married man, falls in love with the performer of a role, that is truly beautiful. [Here Solska refers to Żuławski's romance with Jadwiga Mrozowska who played Psyche in Cracow in 1904] From Cracow he arrives to Lvov where he begins to disturb another performer [...] Next he gets divorced, marries for the second time and has three sons [in 1907 Żuławski married Kazimiera Hanicka, their sons were born 1908, 1910 and 1916]. Does such an attitude to life and adventures deserve the name of 'love'?[29]

However, in a sense, the shadow of Ijola-Maruna returns to the pages of Solska's autobiography, when she writes about a role which became her major success in the 1920s. In 1923 Solska played the main character in *Anne Pedersdotter* by Wiers-Jenssen, retitled in Polish *Czarownica* (The Witch). The story is based on events which took place in 1590 in Bergen where the widow of Lutheran priest was accused of witchcraft and burnt alive. In the play, Anne Pedersdotter is a young wife of an old pastor. She falls in love with her son-in-law when he suddenly returns to the town. At the same time, she gets to know the sad story of her mother, who was thought to be a witch but escaped punishment. Trying to understand what this supposed witchcraft could be, Anne discovers that she probably inherited a kind of power from her mother, because her son-in-law, in spite of all her apparent indifference, confesses his love to her, thus answering her deepest desire.

The description of the role in Solska's autobiography is quite exceptional. Through the whole text she hardly acknowledged such a degree of identification with any other character:

> One wandered through the foreign countries, one lived in a town called Bergen, being the daughter of a possessed woman and inheriting the burden of extraordinariness which at a certain moment of life echoed in the most innocent way and predetermined my existence. Yes, my existence, as Anne Peters [actually Pedersdotter].[30]

Solska describes the performance in Lvov as a unique case when her emotional involvement was so strong that she attests it as "an attack of hysteria" which expanded over the whole female audience.[31] In an inter-

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[29] I. Solska, *Pamiętnik*, op. cit., p. 112.
[30] Ibidem, p. 144.
[31] Ibidem.

view, Solska said that this role had the effect of "calling onto the stage one of my former incarnations, a memory from the past."[32] It is interesting, that of all possible ways to describe the role, in her autobiography she chooses to narrate it from the point of view of matrilineal heritage which the heroine discovers in herself (while in the play the character of mother is actually absent).

The presence of mother figure, however, is very strong in the Solska's text, and it is also strong in her correspondence to Żuławski, although Solska's mother had died a couple of years before their relationship began. This makes me think that Żuławski was aware of Solska's specific complex of the "burden of extraordinariness" as her matrilineal heritage[33] and he reflected it in the construction of his Ijola-Maruna. When Maruna confesses to her former nurse that she has dreams about love and happiness, the nurse decides to tell her about the curse that was cast on her by the abandoned lover of her mother: Maruna is doomed to inflict love in many men but she will never receive gratification but in a dream; her love will always be destructive. It is this inherited "curse" that makes this heroine confess to witchcraft as well as it is the case with the "witchcraft" of Anne Pedersdotter. In both cases it is clear that "the curse" begins to be fulfilled once the heroines get to know about its existence. As Maruna puts it: "[t]he names, which are given to people, / create in them what they mean."[34]

What a difference, however, in the interpretation of the "burden of extraordinariness" between Żuławski's *Ijola* and Solska's autobiography! Quite early in her text Solska describes the suicide attempt she undertook out of fear that she was doomed to become mad as her grandmother. Then, after having saved her, her mother tells her only one thing: 'Work and don't think about it.'[35] Given the fact that Solska always describes her mother as an artist of inexhaustible energy and efficiency, this advice seems to echo the authentic experience of escaping madness by converting it (or its threat) into art. Solska highly identifies with this concept.

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[32] Cited in: L. Kuchtówna, *Irena Solska*, Warszawa 1980, p. 195.

[33] Surely, such phrases in her letters as "I am from the family of melancholics and awful neurasthenics" (Jerzy Żuławski Papers, inv. nr 1892, v. 1, k. 10) also refer to the same complex. As it can be judged from what she wrote on the same issue in the autobiography, "the family" means here rather her mother and grandmother, than any other relative.

[34] J. Żuławski, *Ijola*, op. cit., p. 221.

[35] I. Solska, *Pamiętnik*, op. cit., p. 30.

To sum up, in his plays written for Solska Żuławski got insight into what can be defined as the deepest impulse of her creativity, but actually at the same time he denied the female creative power that can result from "the burden of extraordinariness." Żuławski came very close to Solska's psychological and even psychosomatic experience, but in the relevant female characters tended to highlight what could be potentially destructive in such experiences. He totally overlooked that women could have their own ways in the world besides being related to men whom they either inspire or ruin.

All this, however, doesn't mean that Solska, in her performance, could not restore the complex plethora of meaning that initially served Żuławski as inspiration, but of which he could convey only a part. It is doubtful, however, that we will ever find any plausible documentation of how she could have done it. All we have are textual shadows, "awkward words." These shadows, however, are still important as the inspiration for further research.

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Mary Edwards[*]

Aesthetics and the Feminine
Conference Report

The first Society for Women In Philosophy Ireland (SWIPI) Summer Conference was held at University College Cork, Ireland, from the 17th – 18th July 2015. The aim of this conference was to provide a supportive, engaging environment for researchers working on the topic of the feminine in aesthetics or the thought/work of female aestheticians/artists as well as for artists concerned with gender issues, to present their work. Openness and cross-disciplinarity were the major ambitions of the conference organizers, Áine Mahon and I, and this was reflected by a generalist call for papers.

The keynote presenters were Stacie Friend (Birkbeck College and Vice President of the British Society of Aesthetics), Áine Mahon (University College Dublin & Marino Institute of Education), and EL Putnam (Dublin Institute of Technology & Mobius Alternative Artists Group). Stacie Friend's paper, 'Reality In Fiction,' defended the view that readers approach texts (both fiction and non-fiction) with the assumption that they are about the real world. This fed into lively discussions about the implications of this 'reality assumption' for feminist literary theory and the potential for 'resistant reading.' Áine Mahon's paper, 'Moral Education and Literature: On Cora Diamond and Eimear McBride,' built upon the work of the American Philosopher, Cora Diamond, and argued that the rich and subtle connections between moral philosophy and literature have

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important implications for broader educational debates and, specific-
ally, debates regarding the value of the arts and humanities in a context of
global economic collapse. EL Putnam presented 'Art at the Threshold of
Life and Theory' and shared many original images from her latest project
on motherhood. As both an artist and a theorist, she sought to dispel re-
ceived myths about the distinction between 'art' and 'theory' by illumin-
ating areas of intersection, mutual-influence, and co-dependence in her
own work.

The rest of the conference was arranged in parallel sessions, grouped
together under loose themes. In the first of these, on Friday afternoon,
'Feminine Myths' ran in parallel to '(Not-)Playing the Gender-Game.' The
former was opened by Claire Katz (Texas A&M University), with a paper
on 'Gender, Justice, and the Limits of Forgiveness: Figuring Rizpah within
the Cycle of Revenge,' which brought together Christian and Jewish read-
ings of Rizpah as a foundation for exploring the role of gender within
philosophical accounts of justice and forgiveness. The next presentation,
'The Modern Pandora: Idealism and Sexual Difference in Ridley Scott's
Prometheus,' by Daniel Conway (Texas A&M University), argued that while
Scott's (2012) film takes its name from the Titan Prometheus, it is more
concerned with revisiting the story of Pandora, who (according to Hes-
iod), was given to humankind in retaliation for the trickery of Prometheus.
Then, Ruud Thomas Burke (University College Cork) spoke on 'Knowing
to Maintain the Female – Locating the Feminine in the *Daodejing* and the
Will to Power' and exposed important, but often overlooked, similarities
between the ontologies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Daoism. Though both
ontologies subordinate the feminine, Burke offered suggestions for recon-
ceiving them in ways that do not.

Meanwhile, across the hallway, '(Not-)Playing the Gender-Game'
began with Sophia Pavlos's (Michigan State University) paper on 'The
Femme Fatale Meets Wittgenstein: Subversive Sexuality or Heteropatri-
archal Ideology?,' which employed Wittgenstein's theory of language to
show how multiple, contradictory conceptualizations of the *femme fatale*
can co-exist and argued that women can choose to play more liberatory
language games that need not be completely distinct from the sexist ones
they already participate in. After this, Wendy Mariel Bustamante (Texas
A&M University) presented: 'Fantastical Female Forte: Approaches to the
Construction of Female Utopia in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction,' which ana-
lyzed different approaches to constructing a female utopia in young adult
fiction novels and highlighted the potential for young adult fiction to be

pedagogically valuable through promoting critical awareness of gendered experience. Elspeth Mitchell (University of Leeds) closed the session with a paper on 'Video art and feminine subjectivity: reviewing critical feminist art practices through Luce Irigaray's philosophies of *touch* in the visual field,' which brought together Luce Irigaray's notion of sexual difference and the video tapes of artist Sadie Benning as resources for thinking about the (im)possibilities of representing and speaking feminine desire and subjectivity.

After a coffee break, Hollie MacKenzie (University of Kent) opened the session on 'Art, Morality, Reality', by presenting 'Labial Art-Politics: A Feminist Artistic Theory-Practice of Resistance' and defending the view that art is a potential site for experiencing the world differently and suggesting some ways in which a 'labial' art-politics might be able to both avoid and challenge traditional dogmatic ideas about 'woman.' Next, Jason Dockstader (University College Cork) presented 'Anti-realist Aesthetic Judgment of Moral Judgment' and argued that moral anti-realists are justified in committing to aesthetic anti-realism and can still make aesthetic judgments, in much the same way they can make moral judgments. However, he concluded that a moral and aesthetic anti-realist, if motivated by an aesthetic displeasure caused by uttering or observing moral/aesthetic judgments, ought to refrain from making them. This was followed by Diana Tietjens Meyers's (University of Connecticut) paper, 'Political Dissent in the 21st Century: Annette Messager's Installation Art,' which analyzed Annette Messager's recent shows and maintained that Amy Mullin's view – that artworks gain aesthetic value by fostering moral imagination – can account for the synthesis of aesthetic 'enchantment' and political seriousness discoverable in Messager's work.

In 'Society's Mirror: reflections of the Feminine in Social Consciousness,' Carla Milani Damião (Federal University of Goiás & University of Amsterdam) explored Benjamin's complex description of women and his idea of constellation in his early writings on eroticism and in undelivered letter to Annemarie Blaupot ten Cate, in 'Women as constellation in Walter Benjamin's Aesthetics.' This was followed with a joint presentation by Dominika Czakon and Natalia Anna Michna (Jagiellonian University, both), 'From muse to *femme fatale*: an analysis of changes in the depiction of femininity in art based on the example of the works of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz,' which built upon Carolyn Korsmeyer's analysis of the influence of the muse/object dyad within European culture upon artistic representations of femininity. Czakon and Michna argued that the Polish

artist Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), whose heroines are usually 'demonic women,' broke from traditional ways of depicting women and questioned whether this change, observable in Witkacy's work, and that of other male artists in the early 20th century, reflected and contributed to evolving attitudes toward women. This parallel session was followed by EL Putnam's keynote presentation.

On Saturday morning, 'Girls on Film' ran in parallel with 'Feminine Possibilities'. Jyoti Atwal (Jawaharlal Nehru University) opened the former with a paper on 'Representing Motherhood in Indian Cinema', which responded to the question of how Hindi cinema sought to imagine a new independent India after 1947, by focusing on Mehboob Khan's (1957) film, *Mother India*, which, personifies the nation as a strong widow, immune to corruption. Next, John Thompson (University College Cork) asked what Debord's use of images of women in *Society of the Spectacle* (1973) tells us about the situationist understanding of gender and representation, in his talk on 'The Image of Woman in the Work of Guy Debord.' Thompson argued that the very image of the female may derail the situationist project of *détournemount* and that, perhaps, some images are better left unused. Meanwhile, in 'Feminine Possibilities', Charmaine Carvalho (Hong Kong Baptist University) questioned the 'low' status of the chick lit genre; considered the main arguments surrounding the aesthetic possibilities of the Western chick lit novel, in relation to distinctive creative expression in Indian chick lit novels; and argued that the answer to the question of chick lit's aesthetic value may be found in some of its global transformations, in 'Feminine Aesthetics in Indian chick lit: Possibilities and Challenges.'

After lunch and Áine Mahon's keynote presentation, Daisy Dixon (University of Cambridge) and James Kirkpatrick (University of Oxford), opened the first of two sessions on 'Overexposure' with their joint presentation, 'Make-Up Sex?: the Fictional character of Pornography.' Dixon and Kirkpatrick argued that the fictional character of much pornography does not insulate it from having pernicious effects on the societies that consume it. This was followed by Laura O'Connor's (Ulster University) examination of self-produced images of femininity displayed on social network sites and feminist art practices that respond to this, in 'Methods of Subverting Femininities Online through Feminist Art Practices.' O'Connor concluded by considering the implications of using the 'pornified' internet as a platform for subversion and for new 'becomings' of female subjectivity.

Running parallel to 'Overexposure I' was 'Symbolism and the Feminine', opened by Barbara Jenkins (Wilfrid Laurier University) with 'Channeling the Feminine,' a presentation that drew upon numerous references to a transpersonal, collective force consistently referred to as 'feminine' to explore the possibilities for understanding this force as a libidinal energy, layered by sexual difference. Next up was Jane Connell (University of Melbourne), who spoke on 'Representations of the Theban Sphinx: From the monstrous, *feminine* uncanny to advocate for equity, justice and the verbal resolution of conflict' and illustrated how the Theban Sphinx retains considerable influence as a representative woman in philosophical, psychoanalytical and aesthetic thought and within popular culture. Objectified, renowned as malevolently maternal, erotically dangerous, and a puzzle in herself, she is marginalised as a speaking subject and thus presents a site for investigating resistances to an open-minded and comprehensive representation of the 'feminine' subject.

Sarah Manya (Concordia University) opened the 'Overexposure II,' with: 'Owning the image: Overexposure in the Performance work of Ann Liv Young', which discussed the work of Ann Liv Young, who takes methods of performance art to a new levels of exposure and overexposure. Manya elucidated how Young's unique tactics affect her audience and might even move them towards a kind of cathartic experience. Next, Katherine Nolan (MART Visual Arts Organization) presented: 'The Camera and the Selfie: Narcissism, Self-regulation and Feminist Performance Art practice' and discussed a prevalent Western concept of femininity as narcissistic and exhibitionist and considered how this affects the perception of feminist performance art practices. Nolan proposed that, though such practices may be compromised by the preponderance of self-imaging, they might offer strategies of critique and resistance to the normalizing function of an endless stream of 'selfies.'

'Feminine Embodiment' ran in parallel to the above session. First up was Laura Jiménez Izquierdo's (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía), who questioned some normative practices in aesthetics and suggested new possibilities in relation to the non-normative and disabled body, in her paper, 'The Disabled Venus: Reinterpretations of the *Venus de Milo.*' Then Fumina Hamasaki (Lancaster University) followed with 'Milking Blood: The Feminine *Subject* in Menstrual Art / Philosophical Discourse,' which explored how the interchangeable imagery of menstrual blood and breast milk can be deployed in both philosophical texts and visual texts and how such texts can establish the feminine 'menstruating' subjectivity in opposition to 'phallogocentric' ontological being.

This final parallel session was followed by Stacie Friend's keynote presentation, after which delegates were invited to a wine reception at 20:20 Fine Art Gallery in Cork City Centre, where the main exhibition displayed art inspired by the landscape of Cork City and County and featured the work of: Nora Buttimer, Donagh Carey, Laura Cull, Sharon Dipity, Joe Healy, Eadaoin Harding Kemp, Anne Marie McInerney, Jenny Monks, Lily Reilly, and Maura Whelan. This beautiful venue, along with the high proportion of female artists on display, provided the ideal setting for drawing 'Aesthetics and the Feminine' to a close. Both speakers and audiences came from a diverse range of disciplines (including philosophy, art theory, politics, gender studies, performance art, and history). Time was assigned for questions and discussion after each presentation, which allowed audiences to provide comments, feedback, and pursue more detailed discussions with speakers. The overall atmosphere was inclusive, informal and lively, as there were good numbers in attendance, approximately between 50–60, for keynote (plenary) presentations and 10–30, for the presentations in the parallel sessions. The organizers are most grateful to SWIPI, The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, University College Cork Philosophy and Politics Departments, and 20:20 Fine Art Gallery for supporting this event.

About the Contributors

Charmaine Carvalho – PhD candidate at the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interests are gender studies, feminism, popular culture and the construction of selfhood. She is working towards a dissertation on the fashioning of the "single Indian woman" in Indian chick lit novels.

Noelle Leslie de la Cruz – associate professor of philosophy at De La Salle University (Manila), where she is also working on her poetry thesis – about the sonnet form and the poetics/physics of light – for her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing degree. She has co-edited the 2011 book *Feminista: Race, Class, and Gender in the Philippines*. Her most recent research is an unpublished manuscript entitled *The Dream King, the Indian Prince, and Jewish Mice: Toward an Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Sequential Art (or Comics)* in which she applies Paul Ricoeur's interpretive method as a way of bringing out existentialist issues in popular graphic narratives. In 2009, she received the First Prize for poetry in the prestigious Philippines Free Press Literary Awards, for her ekphrastic poem entitled *Discourse*. She specializes in existential phenomenology, feminist philosophy, and philosophy of literature.

Mary Edwards – PhD Candidate at University College Cork, SWIPI Student Representative. She was a conference organizer for Aesthetics and the Feminine. Her main interests are in 20th century continental philosophy, phenomenology, feminist philosophy, and aesthetics. She is in the final stages of completing her thesis on the later philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, which focuses on his unfinished work, *L'Idiot de la famille* (The Family Idiot).

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Carolyn Korsmeyer – Professor of Philosophy at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. A specialist in aesthetics, she has published numerous articles, edited seven books, and authored four. Among the latter are *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* (2004) and *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (2011). Her current research concerns the concept of the genuine. She is a past president of the American Society for Aesthetics.

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Carla Milani Damião – PhD in Philosophy and lectures in Aesthetics and Philosophy at the Faculty for Philosophy at the Federal University of Goias (UFG), Brazil. She has published many articles on Aesthetics and Walter

Benjamin's narrative theory, as well as being the author of a book titled *On the Decline of Sincerity, Philosophy and Autobiography from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Walter Benjamin.* She is also interested in Film-Philosophy and Gender Studies. She completed part of her doctorate in Germany (Freie Universität, Berlin) and post-doctorate in The Netherlands (Universiteit van Amsterdam).

Adrian Mróz – BA graduate student of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He completed his undergraduate studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and defended his thesis there on the Axiology of Music. He also is a classically trained musician and works as a music instructor.

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Marta Tużnik – PhD student of the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She is a Vice-president of the Scientific Club of Aestheticians at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She has organised many scientific conferences. Her Master's thesis discusses the philosophical and aesthetic analysis of the vampire in art. She is interested in negative values in aesthetics, gender issues as well as disgust in art and aesthetics.

Natalia Yakubova (Natalia Jakubowa) – candidate of sciences degree in theatre studies and PhD in literary studies. She is a research fellow at the Institute of Art Studies, Moscow. Books: *O Witkacym* [About Witkacy] (Warszawa 2010), *Teatr epohi peremen v Polshe, Vengrii i Rossii. 1990-e– 2010-e* [The Theatre in the Transformation Era. 1990–2010] (Moscow 2014). In 2013–2015, thanks to Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellowship Programme, she conducted a biographical research on the actress Irena Solska at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She publishes extensively in such theatre journals as Russian *Teatr.* and *Peterburgsky teatralny zhurnal* and Polish *Didaskalia.*