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Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past

Edit Andras

This paper, which examines attitudes to feminism amongst art communities in former Eastern Europe, was given at the opening symposium for the exhibition *After The Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 16 October-16 January 2000. The exhibition of 140 artists (40% of whom are women artists) from 22 countries was curated by Bojana Pejic. (see interview with Bojana Pejic in *n.paradoxa's* print edition *About Time* Vol. 5, Jan 2000).

The historical and artistic course taken by Eastern Europe (the region understood in the broadest sense) has not simply been rougher than its Western counterpart; a graph of its development would look different altogether. While the Western model is a succession of phases logically and regularly superseding one another, the eastern model is one of long periods of rigid stagnation followed by dramatic breaches and intense, abrupt movements. Moments of coincidence or concord between the two can create a mirage, a false sense of synchronicity potentially deluding both sides.

Once the Wall fell, one could easily think the region's separate course of development was over too. Yet, the landscape is far from serene; instead, it looks like a 'landscape after the battle', scattered with unexploded mines left behind by previous periods on both sides of the Wall. Granted, our side has more mines: there was neither a chance, nor a method to clear them. And who was going to bother with mine clearance while the battle was raging anyway. And there was a battle, and its fronts were many. Real battle first gave way to an imitation performed according to a set choreography. After the political transition, there came the fronts of an imaginary battle in people's minds. For conditioning has a way of working long after circumstances have changed.

As is obvious by now, the political opposition and the counterculture mirrored

the way official power worked; they were equally militant, arrogant and intolerant. Their soldiers stood in close formation on this side of the trench and soldiers were obliged to surrender gender, racial and ethnic identity. Deviation and difference were tolerated neither by the opposition, nor by the state ideology. In the spirit of internationalism, socialism promised a homogeneous and neutral society, where differences in gender, race, ethnicity, class and culture are all eliminated. Socialism and its welfare policies did cut back gender-based economic discrimination, but this happened at the cost of the state appropriating the so called "women's question" and degrading it to an economic one. In the fight of the opposition too, any kind of division was subordinated to the shared struggle. If solidarity and loyalty were the unwritten law of the opposition, adherence to the party line was the explicit order on the other. While official art held out the bait of a share in institutional power, underground art offered the glory of ethical superiority. There was a choice in this dual culture, but only between these two sides; no other positions existed, at least not publicly. Even a passing neutrality was the transient luxury of later times, the increasingly long periods of cease-fire.

When the cold war began, modernism was the dominant art paradigm on both sides of the wall and it was counterculture that became its heir behind the wall. The art officially promoted was socially committed, accessible, realist and narrative; so not only radical avant-garde works with their tacit political criticism but indeed any kind of abstract art became forbidden. Modernism posited art as universal and undivided, above nations, society and even life. This only left good and bad art and the mythified concept of quality was supposed to tell the difference. Whatever passed beyond the narrow modernist system of values and concept of art ran the risk of being sentenced without appeal, of being labelled weak or not even worth judgement.

Thus, the social-political context and the paradigm of art were a double shell that excluded any kind of difference. During the long period of isolation, survival strategies and the local sign language were refined into an ever-growing sophisticated system that permeated all the space within the shell. Information could only pass through if it coincided with the local state of affairs or could at least be given a reading that made sense within this structure. This mechanism was all right by the West too; in fact, for a long time, the charm of the East was exactly this similarity with a touch of refined opposition. Though more and more small cracks appeared on the shell, the basic structure remained the same for decades and shaped the artistic approach of several generations.

Meanwhile, the modernist paradigm began its slow collapse in the West, a process to which feminism made a significant and early contribution by questioning the elitist attitude and monolithically, formalist concept of art characterising modernism. The movement of the first generation of feminist artists was something Eastern-European counterculture could easily recognise as its twin except in a more "particular" version, and this unwanted pretender to the throne was majestically

rejected. The rejection was uniform; not even women found the tenets of feminism relevant, partly because they enjoyed certain state policies, partly because they were equal members of the opposition. In addition, an internal feud is the last thing one wants in a state of war. Besides, within the framework of modernism, the perspective offered by women joining forces, the feminist art movement, seemed equally alarming to women behind the wall: instead of admittance to a universal culture, it was the nightmare of slipping back into an underrated subculture. The second and third generations of western women artists opposed modernism in the spirit of postmodernism. Yet, their language of art informed by poststructuralist philosophy was so alien to the East that it could not effectively cross the line. So the arguments of the intense generational debate anatomising the questions of gender on the other side of the wall were bounced right back by the dual system of rejection. Virtually nothing came through, the discourse remained unknown and countries behind the wall tend to lack even a word for its central term, gender.

When the Wall fell, a tremendous flood of information poured in, burying the earlier system of values. And everything came, the valuable and the worthless, the historic and the cutting edge all mixed up, and even those who had the most solid footing were overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of this flood. Society, intellectual life and individuals were all frantically searching for bearings and the shock gave way either to a self-therapeutic escape to the past (see the election of various socialist governments) or the explosive resurgence of what had been repressed (see the increasing prominence of moderate and extreme nationalist ideology).

As for art itself, the fall of the wall did not bring a paradigm shift, nor a real dialogue with the West on equal terms. First it was the alternation in power and internal rivalry of the polarised opposition that cast a shadow over artistic life. As it turned out, the opposition was far from homogeneous and the rifts appeared along the old liberal-nationalist (or *zapadnik-slavophile*) faultlines. 'Artistic restitution' was in full swing; positions and retrospective exhibitions were conferred like state decorations. This too silenced all voices questioning apologetics or its proportions and timing. And the view of art adopted by the people newly in office was naturally nothing but the good old view forced underground, which therefore accrued quite a bit of ethical capital, one which could also be easily adapted to the new front lines. So mental walls were erected, not between but within regions this time, for who needed a cacophony of voices when the battle was raging on so many little fronts now! While the former opposition retreated to Potemkin villages, refusing to acknowledge that the world and art had totally changed, a new generation appeared on the scene. This more tolerant generation was socialised in and after the political transition, a period without walls; the global art scene was a natural connection for them, for they worked in a similar spirit. So the conflict between modernism/avant-garde and postmodernism appeared as a generational conflict. Even this younger generation is not quite free of the ghosts of the past: they move freely, but it's a

minefield they move on, because there was no time for mine clearance. And for lack of intellectual continuity, this generation lacks the command of theory they could have attained in a world of successive dominant discourses.

When the Wall fell, women outside the confines of the Potemkin villages were free to focus on their creative work without the pressure of the fight for power. If their male contemporaries had a better chance of getting the spoils of redistributed power as long as they kept their old weapons, women could turn to up-to-date issues in art much more openly. The appearance of numerous women artists was a novelty in a region where art used to be dominated by men and these women did not even encounter institutional resistance, which could lull them into a false sense of having to face none of the mental resistance western women artists had to confront. There were two reasons for this half-hearted "leniency". Firstly, for the historical reasons explained earlier, there was no tradition of open gender-based discrimination. Secondly, the gender aspects of these works were informed by the fluid gender categories of the 1990s and appeared in such a sophisticated and delicate way that the environment, being utterly unreceptive to problems of identity, simply did not "get them." The result is incongruity: gender aspects appear in the works at times virtually concealed by various camouflage techniques, at other times openly to the point of brutality; yet, in self-reflection and statements of intention, gender is glaringly absent. "Feminine art" with its 19th century origins is considered as inferior and amateur is awkwardly avoided or obsessively and loudly rejected; so is oppositional women's art with its essentialist overtones, and the categories of feminism, still seen in the east as a purely political movement, fare no better. Add to this the total absence of any complex analysis of local gender relations; no wonder, since there is neither a philosophical-psychological background, nor a sophisticated language, so what is left is the crudest, historically discredited categories. Therefore, while the local works keep in touch with global art, even if this is not always obvious at first glance, interpretation and thinking about art are tied to an earlier paradigm and discursive phase, that of modernism. As for the youngest generation, they have reasons of their own to avoid discourse of gender. As it is clear from their works too, they no longer identify with the oppositional, essentialist attitude of the 1970s, with which their works would still be identified if gender aspects were emphasised in interpretation. Moreover, as mainstream artists, they fear their "success" would be compromised by identifying with a marginal group with multiple bad connotations in this region. This fear is not unjustified, given the popular old backlash argument that their success is the result of the passing fad of women's art rather than the quality of their works. Since this magic word has not been deconstructed here, it is still the most powerful weapon these artists have to face. No, there is one yet more powerful. A more conscious gender-related message, a critical attitude, an analytical approach, deviations from the formalist creed, the deconstruction or demolishing of the gender status quo and--God forbid!--narrative, committed works can even earn

them the dreaded label of "soc-real". And there is more where this comes from: the pollution and poisonous gases like Eastern-European sexism whose heavy smell permeates every layer and sphere of society, a scathing and often quite vulgar misogyny often used from positions of authority, and the instant ostracising and professional discrediting of anyone said to be associated with gender or feminism-related issues - methods and devices that have long become unacceptable in the west. At the same time, it is still often heard that this is an internal affair of the west which has nothing to do with us.

The West, traumatised at first by losing its image of the East and without bearings itself, first supported phenomena in which the earlier clichés lived on, for the suddenly chaotic scene was impossible to grasp. Feminists, however, and first and second generation feminists in particular, could easily have a *deja vu* experience of the original fronts and the battlefield left behind a good twenty years before. The "barbarian wilderness" inspired their missionary zeal, and being marginalised locally, they were more than happy to export their ideas, as if time could be stopped. If the historical background, context and language were different, if the rallying cry of "sisterhood" could no longer move masses even in the East, these seemed minor obstacles in the euphoria of the day. The generation dominating the western scene at the time was hardly that enthusiastic: they were annoyed and confounded by the chaotic and bizarre mix of problems they thought were long obsolete. The advice that easterners had better take a few crash courses in current feminism and "catch up" to be potential partners in conversation once again ignored the differences in context. Eastern Europe was gradually slipping into the category of "Other" and the familiar machinery began its work: authoritarian patronising combined with stereotyping as a substitute for getting to know the other. Meanwhile, the voices claiming discursive incompatibility and failure of communication were just getting louder and more impatient in their exclusion of the region from the global scene and its debates. In this light, of course, the embrace of modernism with its promise of equality or the eager connection to the global scene without trying to untangle unsolved local problems suddenly seem to make more sense. But these choices only increase the distance between the regions. Granted, you could even take a risk, start walking, and you might not even step on a mine; actually, if you look from far enough, you could even think these mines don't exist at all. Another charming alternative is to talk about the gender aspects of Eastern Europe and immediately find yourself in a cross fire in no-man's land.

The Eastern-European model with its long periods of rigid stagnation, followed by dramatic breaches and intense abrupt movements has a vicious flaw. There is the price of deformity and inconsistency to be paid for phases skipped and for paths never taken step by step. The Region is, of course, far from homogenous, its borders too have a way of shifting now to the west, now to the east, then they occasionally shut a little tighter, say, to the south, and the moment of slowing down varies.

Accordingly, the phenomena outlined here are not equally and uniformly present everywhere; metaphorically speaking, mine frequency and timing vanes significantly within the region. But one thing is sure: no mine-free zones yet, and that includes the gender front.

for further work by Edit Andras who works in Budapest and in New York see:
Edit Andreas & Gabor Andrasi *Vizproba : Water Ordeal* (Exhibition catalogue, Obuda Club Gallery, Budapest, publisher: Obudi Tarsaskor, Budapest,1996)

And Edit Andras 'Representation of the Body in Contemporary Hungarian Art'
Andrasi Gabor (ed) *Erotika es Szesuaitas a Magyar Kepzomuveszetben / Erotics and Sexuality in Hungarian Art* (Budapest: League of Non-Profit Art Spaces,1999).

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Editorial Policy

Katy Deepwell

n.paradoxa is the only international feminist art journal in the world dedicated to exploring feminist theory and the work of women artists.

It's a paradox of the internet that the widespread global communication it fosters has not proved to be a strong site for the publication and exchange of feminist knowledge about the visual arts.

n.paradoxa remains after 3 years the only site of its kind on the internet.

n = noun, para = beyond, doxa = taught or accepted opinion.

The name, *n.paradoxa*, is a play on Donna Haraway's discussion of a parasite which lives in the gut of a termite in South Australia called *mixotricha paradoxa*. This parasite has paradoxical and unexpected habits of survival and reproduction - like every good feminist !

As a paradigm for feminist research it seemed apt for three reasons: 1) it survives by attracting others to live on it; 2) it reproduces by division and 3) its discovery reveals the value in seemingly obscure forms of research and the time and effort needed for interesting discoveries.

n.paradoxa seeks to publish a truly international cross-section of women writers on contemporary women artists which offer a local, or trans-national perspectives.

Contributions are welcome from any woman writer or woman artist who would like to contribute their research to this local/global dialogue amongst women artists, curators, critics and art historians. The subject can be on any aspect of contemporary women's art practice in the visual arts and its relation to understandings of feminist theory. Anyone conducting research who is interested in publication in *n.paradoxa* should contact the editor directly by email. Please send an outline of the argument proposed and the subject covered.

n.paradoxa online offers a flexible platform for the publication and circulation of artists' manifestos, polemical statements, women artists' projects, conference and research papers, and PhD or MA research work on contemporary women artists' work.

To contact the Editor email k.deepwell@ukonline.co.uk

Feminist Art in Poland Today

Izabela Kowlaczyk

Feminist art functions today in a specific political context in Poland. There remains a big discrepancy between feminism in the West and East. After 1945 the Polish government propagated a notion of woman that was created by the dominant communist ideology. Women became an objects of social and political manipulation. The tendency of women to take an active role in the job market in the years 1947-54 and later in the 1960s was initially the government's response to a deficit of workers, especially in the services and trade areas of the job market. But when deficit didn't exist, after 1955 and in the 1970s, the government invoked the so-called primary role of woman, that of being a mother and wife as women's role in social life. Women's situation in the employment market has never been good in Poland. Women have consistently been discriminated by a lack of access to some areas of employment and to high earnings. They have frequently been employed in areas that were not privileged in the economic politics of Poland (for example, as teachers now).

In spite of a strong rhetoric about "women's equality of rights" propagated by the communist Polish government, the real situation of women was bad. Slogans like "women's equality of rights" created the communist fiction under which Polish society operated. When we talk about an aversion to feminism in countries which had communist regimes, we must also reflect on special place of the Catholic Church in the history of Poland. The Church symbolised many people's aspirations to political freedom. The church itself stood in opposition to the communist system. The Church circles consolidated the opposition. These circles carried on a memory of insurrection in Polish history which attributed a special position to women. Women according to this tradition was represented as a "pathetic" Mother-Pole, who nevertheless looked

after the Polish home and was a guardian of national values. So in this way the Polish Church strengthened the model of a traditionally passive woman, who can realise herself only in her home and family.

In the 1970s and even 1980s the Polish socio-political background was not favourable to feminism. The feminist art that appeared was influenced by Western feminist tendencies, which unfortunately often resulted in simplified imitations that did not refer to issues rooted in Polish reality. Moreover Polish artists have not come up with feminist programmes and theory related to their own unique position. Some of the most prominent women artists have denied having any connection with feminism. This trend however was connected with lack of a public art discourse in Poland, and a lack of critical tendencies. The situation started changing after the collapse of communism in 1989, when feminism started developing a more fully self-conscious programme of artistic actions. Defining own identity, question of body and lately analysing ways of disciplining body through consumer's culture are the main questions of feminist and critical art in the 1990s. I should add that I prefer the notion of "critical art" as it seems to me more precisely.

Contemporary women artists often avoid qualifying their art or labelling themselves as "feminist", since they are afraid of the pejorative connotations of the term. Some of them, for example, Zofia Kulik and Katarzyna Kozyra are not afraid to confirm that they have connections with feminism, but there are only a few, as Alicja Zebrowska says, who wish like herself to be feminist artists. The situation is more complicated, because also some male artists deal with problem of woman's social position in today's society. I mean here Zbigniew Libera, first of all. His video untitled *How to train little girls* (1987) and his work *Universal Penis Expander* (1994) which is ironic critique of phallogentric culture, one can define exactly as example of an emerging 'critical' feminist art. The term "critical art." is more useful, because this art. is connected with new threats for human freedom created by a culture based on consumption (that is relatively new in Poland and has only developed after 1989).

1989 was the year of great changes towards capitalism and the date of an emerging consumer culture. This date is taken as the date in which the former East opened itself to the West, and started to be free after forty years of communist power. However new threats have been appearing and they are now the main subject of critical artists working in the 1990s, which include some strong feminist artists among others. The power of the conservative political forces in Poland and authority of the Catholic Church are examples of these new threats. Both claim, in different ways, to return to traditional values, traditional families and to foster the model of a passive woman for whom the most important values must be: family, home and children. Political parties often now appear to create a situation in which the very real problems of women don't exist or are mentioned only to be dismissed as marginal problems. The result of this kind of rhetoric are amongst others: the current ban on abortion, the lack of public education on sexuality or contraceptives, the limited

money for actions against the maltreatment (violence against or rape) of women, the lack of hostels for women who are homeless or have escaped their families and discrimination in the employment. Nevertheless, because of these conservative tendencies, a new critical and feminist art has started developing.

Discussions about the morality of art are more and more popular in today's art criticism in Poland. There is a hidden tendency to restrict artistic freedom, to limit actions that the more conservative forces in our society regard as not in conformity with dominant or general political tendency. The censorship of radical artistic actions started to be way of calming down all controversial problems. Before 1989 there were kind of political censorship in the field of art, this included attempts to not finance or give opportunities to artists who engaged in any substantial critique of the system. The effect of this kind of censorship was the silencing or erasure of critical art. After 1989 more of today's contemporary art functions in the marketplace. Art institutions face new problems today with regard to spending taxpayer's money. Krzysztof Wodiczko said already in 1986 (October) that the biggest threat for art in today's consumer culture is that of the big corporations and private sponsors who because of their ties with political interests do not want to sponsor controversial art, as this image contradicts their political interests. The consequence of this is a limitation of artistic freedom of expression.

Given this background, I want to offer some feminist and critical tendencies in the Polish art and give examples of how this art has been censored or silenced.

One of the most controversial artists is Alicja Zebrowska. Her video installation untitled *Original Sin* recalls a bible story from the *Book of Genesis*, where the first woman, Eve, stands accused of humanity's fall and exile from the paradise. Her punishment is that she was subordinated to man, and she was condemned to give birth in pain, and her sexuality identified as threatening or as something shameful and attributed as sinful. Alicja Zebrowska in her work broke down with this stereotyping vision of woman's sexuality. She showed how a woman's vagina experienced pleasure without the participation of man. The film shows a vagina provoked by fingers and an artificial penis. Zebrowska recalls first erotic experiences, playing with a female friend. The important point of the film is a conflict between the sexual pleasure on the one hand and feeling the shame at the nakedness and the sex on the other hand. These scenes were preparation to the most important sequence of the video: simulation of childbirth, but instead of a child in the opening of vagina it appears the head of Barbie doll. As one Polish critic suggested the vagina for Alicja Zebrowska becomes a place for the creation of her identity. 'The vagina does not want to be treated like an internal penis, like the reproduction of male sexual organ, does not want to accept its non-autonomous position, which is expressed in the passive acceptance of active sperm and the breeding function.'

To analyse this work we should take into account the Polish context in which the film was made and first shown: the ban on abortion introduced in 1993 (*Original*

Sin is 1994). This was followed by the closure of any possibilities for sexual education and a renewed treatment of woman's sexuality as something shameful, a social taboo or something restricted to the private sphere. Zebrowska showed that the "private is political", that woman's sexuality is the object of manipulations and law's regulations, treated in Catholic morality as correct only in the context of a heterosexual family, where the aim is giving a birth to children. This system creates as different all kinds of other forms of human sexuality relegating them to the margins and stereotyping them as not proper or naming them - "sinful". As Foucault claimed sexuality is always controlled by the dominant system of power. However revealing this truth maybe, it is not comfortable for our society. *Original Sin* by Zebrowska was shown during the *Anti-bodies* exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw. It was the object of several attacks by those who considered it to be breaking down morality and as pure pornography. For me, there is an interesting play with pornography in Zebrowska's work, but she breaks with the modes of pornography, because her work doesn't give sexual pleasure to viewer, instead it often gives a form of visual pain. (It would be interesting to interpret this in terms of the Kristeva's notion of "abject"). There were also legal trials to block the *Antibodies* exhibition and postpone its travel abroad and the exhibition was also refused financial support by a famous foundation.

Another important figure in Polish art is Zofia Kulik, who represented Poland at the Biennial in Venice in 1997. In her large photo-tabloids, she presents various structures of domination and subordination connected with patriarchal system. The basic motif of her art is the male nude and he is situated between different signs and symbols directly connected with different systems of power. The man in her works is represented in the role of both oppressor and victim (he is a ruler, master, leader and in the same time: a slave, warrior, subject). He is passive and anti-individualised, he is represented as only one small cog in the big machine of power. In this way Zofia Kulik shows the form of internalised power described by Foucault. Showing this man in conventionalised poses, he is unmasked by his nakedness and covered in ridicule. Kulik reveals an artificial and vulnerable character in a social order based on constructed hierarchies which use only physical force and ideal types for self-legitimation. Hence, she ridicules the patriarchal culture, mocking the system of subordination that it created. The artist shows the invisible power that can rule our attitudes and activity. She reveals something of which we often are not conscious, it means: our place in different forms of system and power, our entanglement in power mechanisms. In the world defined by this way we are attached to different systems since the moment of our birth, we are taught to be obedient to such sorts of power as State, church, parental and patriarchal powers. Zofia kulik presents to the eyes internal structures of power and their functioning in our consciousness. In May this year, a major exhibition of Zofia Kulik's art took place in the National Museum in Posnan. However the work made especially for this exhibition and for the Museum was censored and the effect of this was that the

main space of the Museum big hall stayed partly empty. The work designed for the main entrance hall was titled *Both Home and a Museum*. In the central place of the hall stood the obelisk and on the walls, Kulik had placed photos of a close-up of male genitals from classical sculptures in The Hermitage in St Petersburg. These photos proved to be extremely controversial for the Museum's director so much so that he ordered the guards to remove them without the artist's knowledge or consent. The director said that this work could be shocking for visitors. He didn't even agree for cover pictures of genitals with fig's leaf ! Consequently Zofia Kulik dismantled the rest of the work - a central sculpture which included an obelisk. I suppose that there could be also different reason for this act of censorship. This work was very critical of the institution of the museum in so far as it showed it as an institution of power - an institution as described by Douglas Crimp in his book *On the Museum Ruins*. But the work *Both Home and Museum* also showed the phallogentric power of the museum, where the private is excluded in its notion of public. The museum excludes Others and denies or discounts gender, class, culture differences in its own vision of history. Douglas Crimp argues that 'art was made to appear autonomous, alienated, something apart, referring only to its own internal history and dynamics.' Finally in leaving an empty entrance hall in the Museum during Zofia Kulik's exhibition, the Museum confirmed itself as a significant sign of the power of the museum to chose its sacred objects.

At the same time as the censoring of Zofia Kulik's exhibition in Posnan, work by Katarzyna Kozyra was being shown in a public place, and attempts were also made to censor Kozyra's work at the Bathhouse in Gdansk. Katarzyna Kozyra was the chosen representative of Poland at the Venice Biennale where she showed her new work *Men's Bath House*. She is always treated by the media as a very controversial and even scandalous artist. Her art displays old, ill, "natural" bodies. Her controversial actions (like *Women's Bath House*) force viewers to examine their attitude to their own body. She also reveals that the "beauty" is a social construction and the fact that the ideal of a woman's body is constructed according to the social relations. *Women's Bath House* (1997) - Kozyra in Budapest filmed women with using hidden camera. It showed contradiction between poses knowing from European culture (she quoted *Women's Bath* by Ingres), that would be seductive, erotic and poses of women who are unconsciousness of an observer, they are completely different in the way in which they dried themselves off, move about, combed their hair. All discussion about *Bath House* centred on the issue of Kozyra's having transgressed people's personal rights. However this work rises also question of media ethic, which regularly uses everyday people's private experiences and where human rights are violated all the time. In her new work for Venice, she also filmed in Budapest, but in a *Men's Bath House*, where she came into characterised as a man. Her early piece *Olympia* (1996) was produced about her own illness with cancer and her long-lasting therapy. This fragment of her biography and her direct reference to the Manet painting - because

of the scandal that it too gave rise to when it appeared - form the thematic background for this work she then made namely, the problem of identity with an illness and the breakdown which takes place during illness of not just a bodily existence but a human one.

Kozyra's *The Bonds of Blood* work was made in 1995 but shown first in May this year on the billboards in the Programme of the Open Gallery, a project of a commercial firm from Posnan. This work was first created under the influence of events in former Yugoslavia and its images are a symbolic metaphor of deadly rivalry and combat over ethic and religious ideologies. The two sisters' naked, unprotected bodies are depicted against the background of the great symbols of Christianity and Islam. Naked and devoid of all attributes these figures of women are powerless and defenceless. The models are the artist herself who was ill at the time and her crippled sister. Kozyra portrays the symbols of the great ideologies and exposes the way they conceal their potential aggression against humanity. As critic Malgorzata Lisiewicz wrote: 'By highlighting the link between the sisters, the artist voices her protest against men's domination and patriarchal power expanding its rule through the church and religion. Thus the bonds of blood, with the woman subjects in their centre, become an antithesis of the fraternal struggle carried out by man.' The moment of placing *The Bonds of Blood* on the billboards was not without wider significance - it was moment at which there was a revival in the ongoing conflict between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. The work by Katarzyna Kozyra had already earlier evoked protests by amongst others: representatives of Polish Red Cross and Catholic Action. Representatives of them said that it was irresponsible/ blasphemous to put naked figures of women between symbols of Red Cross and of other religious systems. The firm which led The Open Gallery and which chose *The Bonds of Blood* came to a compromise and covered the portraits of women with big stripes of paper. The work thus stayed completely illegible.

These are only few examples in last few years from Poland. I could also mention the *Aids and Me* exhibition where eleven artists attempted to represent what they think and feel about Aids: including their fears of being infected, or the acceptance of people with aids and an understanding of their dramatic situation. One of the works was also by Katarzyna Kozyra. She showed a man as a victim in a special Polish and Catholic context - his pose was in relation to an iconography of Christ. The image showed the hypocrisy of current Polish society which declare itself to be Catholic, but is reluctant to help people with Aids and does not condemn people's protests against shelters for homeless with Aids in their neighbourhood. The exhibition was closed after three days. Another example would be that one of Serrano's work *Piss Christ* was not shown in the Contemporary Art Centre recently or that the curator of the Polish Pavillion resigned from Zbigniew Libera's work *Lego - Concentration Camp* at the Venice Biennale in 1997 (This work is closely related to the problem of commercialisation every aspect of history in our culture in a Shindler's

List manner, following Spielberg).

This blocking of radical artistic actions is supplemented by the endless discussion of morality in art. Some critics, connected with traditional or Catholic periodicals accuse many of the new phenomena in art of being evil and transgressing all moral norms. They are also nostalgic for the traditional art, like painting and avoid most of the contemporary critical art even denying that it should have the status of art. Their discourse evokes instead a "universal order of things" and an "unchangeable ethical code". In fact, the responses to the art of the 90's reveals the hypocrisy of a society that doesn't want to talk about the body, human sexuality, Aids or moments of trauma in our history. It reveals many double standards in our society today and deconstructs the privileged place of some groups while highlighting the marginalisation of others.

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The Geometry of Power in the Zofia Kulik's Art

Izabela Kowalczyk

'Whenever I recall how they tried to "bring me up" - at home, at school, in institutions - for a positive, polite and joyful citizen, I feel deeply distressed. I was never hungry, never cold, I did not suffer any physical discomforts. So when I feel distressed it occurs to me that it is my own mental weakness, my own fault in a way.

Why am I not a joyful citizen?

I have been hammered, we all have been hammered. Hammering implies a repetitive driving of a nail into something. And now it seems that I am struggling with some invisible blade which I try hard to turn away from me and point it outwards - at others? It is not gentleness that fills me in but suppressed desire to attack. The only problem is the one of direction: to myself or from myself.

I wrote once: "Order and self-subordinations account for a powerful inner urge that makes me behave and act in a given way: both in so-called life and so-called art". By visualizing the "subordinations" do I appreciate and praise it, or do I mock it and abolish it? Accepting the "subordination" as my problem and theme, full of fear and hatred toward the situation in which "the urge of subordination" occurs I take an artist revenge with every weapon (symbolic and formal) that has been against me. (...) (Zofia Kulik. Artist's Statement from *Darc Decor* Independent Curators Incorporated (ICI), USA)

From the end of 1980s the Zofia Kulik's art has been organised by such problems as power and subordination. Since this date her art has turned outwards in a wider sense. 1989 was the year of change in the geopolitical life in Poland, and even in the whole of Eastern Europe. It was the date of the communist systems' collapse and we

should add that this system had persisted in so-called Eastern Block for over 40 years. The date mentioned above was also an important moment for the appearance of a new political system. In Zofia Kulik's private life many changes also took place in this period. In her art the private is always connected with the public, so these changes also became very important. In 1987 she broke her connection with her partner of life and art, Przemyslaw Kwiek. From 1970 to 1987 she had managed with him the Private Studio of Art Activities, Documentation and Wide-Spreading. In place of the ephemeral events and actions that were created together with Kwiek, she started to create concrete, material works of art. The fundamental artistic form of these material artworks became photography and it is only in this period and manner that Zofia Kulik appeared at the woman's and feminist art exhibitions. Zofia Kulik's art has many threads (layers) but its unique combination of these threads is unrepeatable and one can not fully interpret the political, private and artistic threads separately. Such a situation creates one problem for the writer on Kulik's work: how to bind together the very different questions and issues that appear in her art and how to avoid emphasising some of them while omitting others. The key to interpretation ultimately are such notions as power and subordination.

Zofia Kulik's works during this time, such as *Medals* (1987-89), *The Inter-National Gothic* (1990), *Square of Palace* (1990), *March, March, March* (1990), *Guards of the Spire* (1990), *Favourite Balance* (1991), *All Things Converge in Time and Space; to Disperse, to Converge, to Disperse, and so on* (1992), *Columns* (1992), *Petals* (1995) are big hieratic tabloids composed like mosaics, with Gothic windows and altars, columns, Persian carpets and mandals. These forms present a world defined like a system and organised around some form of representation always with a centre, an order given from above. Kulik's work is described by Alicja Kepinska as including: such co-ordinates as "static" symmetry, role of centring point, precision of place, formal rigour of shapes. With the help of these visual matrixes the artist pays attention to understanding the world as ordered structure, system of power and subordination, domination and dependence. Geometric forms are the framework of composition, they are filled with photographs of different motifs and themes. The main decorative motif is a body, most often it is the male nude situated between different signs and symbols which are connected with different systems of power. So there are: flags, banners, arrow - heads, cambrels, ropes and monuments from different periods of totalitarianism. In this representation the naked man is treated as the "transmitter" of meanings of all domination systems and orders. His role is dual, on the one hand: he is a ruler, master, leader, from the other hand: on the other he is a slave, subject, when he is showed with loop on the neck in *The Inter-National Gothic*. The majority of Kulik's works are placed in context of communism. We can find the references with communistic celebrations and the 1st of May marches (for example, in the work *March, March, March*). In Kulik's works the body is represented as that which was at authorities' service. We can talk about something like collective body.

The body here serves the government as a representation of its power and splendour, I mean here the actions of the collective body during celebrations, marches, national holidays, festivals and so on. In her works Zofia Kulik shows not only the body's obedience to and constraint by the communist system but we can also find signs and elements connected with other powers that are important in Polish political and social life. She shows the power of catholic church so one notices forms such as crucifixions, altars and the human body that is shaped as Christ's body. She also shows the main opposition to communism in Poland, emphasising its by presenting typical symbols of the Solidarity opposition: for example, its Victoria/Victory sign. Kulik analyses contemporary Polish culture and shows how the communist system and its opposition, mainly catholic church, influenced our minds. Her analysis is not limited only to the Polish context. She also reveals the impact of power and subordination in other political and social systems. In the work entitled *Idioms of the Soc-Ages*, for example, one of the representations of the male body is photographed as if it were a swastika and this image is additionally repeated in ornamental forms. In *Inter-National Gothic* there is also shown a fascist salutation. In other representations there are different emblems of international communism, for example, the red banner, medals, sickle and hammer, typical soc-ages (socialist realist) architecture, Warsaw's famous socialist-built The Palace of Culture and Science (for example in *Guards of Spire*). A man and his body is participant of both the construction of power and its constraint. He is depicted as one of the official order's elements, Communist, Catholic or Fascist.

Let's return for a while to the work *The Inter-National Gothic*. It depicts the male body with loop on the neck, as I said earlier. The ambiguity of these works moves away from references to only communism or totalitarianism. The photography of her male nudes reminds us of numerous academic catalogues of poses and gestures, some of them intentionally invoke academic stylization of the perfect body. After thinking through what this art is about one might conclude that the impression left is not optimistic. The artist reveals that human being (man or woman) assumes a required pose according to situation. He or she adapts himself, herself to the particular situation and falls into next set of subordinations. Mechanisms of power and subordination direct him, her and control his or her behaviour and activity.

It is worth noticing here the effect of the museum glass-cases which appear during Zofia Kulik's exhibitions. Into these kind of cases she puts different souvenirs, gadgets, photos, postcards that refer to the totalitarian systems. By this method, she creates a sort of depressing museum dedicated to various power types. Enclosed in the museum's glass-cases these emblems, which refer to totalitarian systems as communism and fascism, seem to be harmless but to every viewer, they bring back immanent need for freedom in the face of human being's

submission. Using this method, the artist appears to warn against systems in which there is no privacy (private sphere) given to citizens and constraints placed upon their consciousness as well as their body.

In every society, power operates through sexuality and attempts to master or make obedient the bodies which it controls, as Foucault claims. The most extreme examples of total human body appropriation are totalitarian systems. In these systems the male body is treated with affirmation, it becomes a symbol of power and domination. This often occurs through the hero-worship of the body of a concrete man - usually the nation leader, usurper or the only ruler. But very often it is also the anonymous body, for instance: a warrior or a sportsman. Occurring as male nude shown in action, it becomes a timeless example of power, strength and perfection. Such a male nude serves as the support to the social hierarchy of the power and as the factor which strengthens patriarchal models within a society. This role is never played by female nude which, if it appears in totalitarian art, generally refers to notions connected with everlasting femininity, powers of nature and woman's role as a mother. The art of totalitarianism is based on strong and binary oppositions and it precisely this which characterises the different roles of woman and man; soldier and mother. One can treat Zofia Kulik's art as an accusation against a world that functions on the base of hierarchy and domination. One can also interpret her art as an attack against the universality of culture. In such structured world, the artist sees and analyses the danger of constraint and domination over the groups and individuals that are situated at the lower grades of social hierarchy or are beyond its precisely marked cultural frames. These problems we can also find analysed on a feminist level. Feminism has analysed the relations between genders in the patriarchal system which exists under the influence of all hierarchies and drawn attention to the men in power in this kind of system. In Zofia Kulik's works her analysis of patriarchy seems to be the clue that can join such systems as nazism, communism, and such institutions as army or other systems. The artist aims her "symbolic weapon" exactly against patriarchal system. The title of one Zofia Kulik's work: *All bullets are like one Bullet* is the paraphrase of T. S. Eliot's expression: 'All women are like one woman'. The phallic shape of a bullet that appears in her works may relate to a male genital organ and it can be treated as the symbol of his power. Translocating and reversing the meanings in this way the artist manipulates, as she says: the weapon that is usually used against her. It is worth paying attention to this in how she chooses to depict men as she breaks with the tradition of individualised portraits and instead depicts the precise character of the male model. In Kulik's works the men is objectified as 'man', he is shown by the same means the women have become "Woman in Art" through the last six centuries. The passive and anti-individualised female nudes that turned images of women into men's objects of visual consumption indirectly expressed the power and rule of men, their control of the language about and images of women. In spite of the power attributes that go

together with typical representations of men, Kulik often shows a man, as defenceless, powerless and passive. Her use of conventionalised poses unmasks his nakedness and the man is covered with ridicule. The fact of stripping a man of his clothes disarms him, and at the same time renders him harmless, takes the possibility of activity and enforces the possibility of obeying orders away from him. Zofia Kulik reveals the activity of power that was presented by the act of representing men herself.

Let's try to interpret the representation of naked model in which he assumes a pose similar to monument to Lenin. Undoubtedly creators of this monument wanted the body of socialist leader to represent Lenin's authority and power. Showing the man in the same pose but stripped of clothes changes the connotation and he becomes a seemingly empty sign that means nothing. In this way, the artist shows the illusory character of symbols and signs connected with power. She notices the insecure and weak principles of all systems, among which the patriarchal system is obviously included. Since the artist strips a man of the power granted him by patriarchy, it is worth thinking over how she also depicts women. Kulik also breaks with passive representations of woman in the art. Showing herself in her own works she predominantly appears with attributes of power and domination. Passing censure on patriarchal system, she creates her own system and order in which we can find references to the matriarchal one. But the artist does not think about reversal of systems but about showing the mechanisms through which they operate. She wants to analyse the relationships between the power which remains at the centre and how it dominates and produces its subjects. It is worth to notice that in Poland only Zofia Kulik has made work in which the sphere of relations between a woman and a man has been addressed and tried to describe the total subordination and influence of power in the patriarchal system. Although it is difficult to univocally qualify her works as feminist, one can state that she took up the problems of feminism most comprehensively in Polish art and she has achieved very interesting results.

The artist shows that power in an invisible way can rule our attitudes and activity. She reveals something of which we are not often conscious, the means of power itself and our place in different forms of system and power, literally, our entanglement in power mechanisms. Defining the world in this way, we become attached to different systems since the moment of our birth, we are taught to be obedient to such sorts of power as State, church, parental and patriarchal powers. The thing in which Zofia Kulik is interested in great measure is the problem of how this power influences our consciousness and how conflicts arise that are rooted in very deep layers of the human consciousness. She presents both the internal structures of power and how they function in our consciousness. Both oppressor (here: woman) and victim (man) tend to be viewed as two aspects of the same game. The name of the game is power and subordination. The artist shows the geometry of this game. The power is situated in the centre (although the centre is often empty)

while other parts of the system are subordinated and situated in relation to it. The artist presents the ambiguity of the situation in terms of the mutual dependence of victim and oppressor. The first person in "the drama" is the victim who adores the power that remains in the centre and is happy to play the role imposed upon him (her) from above. The place that is occupied by 'victim' is very comfortable for him (her) because it gives a kind of satisfaction to him. The victim's satisfaction is the result of allocating him (her) a fixed place in the game / world and of giving him (her) the possibility of defining himself (herself) with reference to something: the power in the centre. The power plays a protective role in relation to individual, it protects him (her) from that which is situated outside the whole system. It protects him/her also from being thrown out of the well-ordered structure but the price that the individual must pay is a loss of freedom and individuality. One can think through the problem in this question: does real freedom exist at all? The truth is that the individual who resists one system falls into other and frees himself (herself) from one pose by assuming only other poses. So perhaps the individual is doomed to function and be in a constant state of mutual dependency and maybe there are always some powers in reference to which the individual has to define himself (herself). This improbability of tearing himself (or herself) free from the particular system, Kulik shows through her intensively repeating these representations in different combinations revealing the operation of power itself.

The question about the limits of our subordination is the most important point of Zofia Kulik's art. Can the individual be free in the world shown in this way? The artist draws our attention to the most important and serious danger which exists in totalitarian systems, namely the total human being's incapacity to act autonomously. Totalitarian systems seek to possess the whole human - his (her) body and consciousness in a manner subordinate to the system. The method of taking such possession is very intelligent because a man (woman) does not notice his (her) own subjection. But this form of power is not only exercised in a dangerous manner by totalitarian systems. The danger is also carried by patriarchy and each form of power that seeks to treat the world hierarchically. In her most recent work *From Siberia to Cyberia*, the artist points out the power of media culture and power which we internalise from this culture. Zofia Kulik, in the words mentioned at the beginning of this article, expresses her passive acceptance with reference to this kind of power and how she falls under its control. She also expresses this most clearly when she refers to "hammering" of her consciousness. I suppose that the presentation of this situation, the disclosure of its power mechanisms and the excavation of power from its invisibility are the best solutions of the problem. This deconstruction of power can reduce and weaken its control and allow the individual to free himself (herself) from its influence. Zofia Kulik makes such a presentation in her art and in this way her art becomes one of the possibilities of regaining freedom for the constrained mind.

For more information about the artist Zofia Kulik, see Sarah Wilson's essay 'Discovering the Psyche: Zofia Kulik' in *n.paradoxa* Volume 4, July 1999 and her catalogue of Zofia Kulik's one person show in Posnan Piotr Piotrowski (ed) *Od Syberia/Do Cyberii; From Siberia to Cyberia* Museum Narodwe w Poznaniu. Poland, May-June 1999. ISBN 83-85296-82-4. Her work *Siberia to Cyberia* is included in the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 16 Oct-16 Jan 1999.

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Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

May Long week end

R.came down again for a conference on Sensation - not the Saatchi kind - at the Warburg Institute. It was quite interesting - the lectures that I managed to attend. I should have attended more but little things kept getting in the way like Em coming over for lunch and not wanting to cancel. I know hearing an esoteric lecture on the introduction of the Rosary as a revolutionary act in the Medieval church is probably not as important as being there for an old friend who has tried to top herself just six months ago but.... there are times one would really like to listen to very interesting and obscure information just for the sheer beauty of the knowledge.

However I was rewarded with some juicy gossip about my friend Bet who is usually extremely clam-like about her affairs. Well it turns out that she is still seeing in an on /off sort of way an ex-husband !!!! And she is also v.v. serious about a short squat and rather rotund town planner that she has met in her new line of work. He in turn is also married but the said family lives in the North.

At the opening of the last show at the Whitechapel Ron and A. were there trying to tell me that Bet had this new lover and he was standing just behind them. I threw a dead casual glance around the room looking for the usual Bet-type appendage man but didn't see any when N. from the Tate walked by and winked at me. It completely through me off my stride and I completely forgot about the new Bet appendage. Thinking back on it I must have seen her new man but he wasn't what I was looking for as her is apparently completely against her usual type. Not only is he not English and very middle class and in addition not an ex-Public school type but most strange of all not taller than her, not more successful than her, and not more outgoing and gregarious than her. In other words he seems exactly what she needs. The other news is that she

is doing some rather secretive freelance work that even Em with all her inside contacts says is difficult to get to the bottom of.

Anyway, the weekend turned out to be a hell of a lot of fun. R. was originally supposed to come to visit the Thursday night before. But after waiting up past the last tube I figured he was probably wasted in some Soho drinking den. How right I was. All the provincial curators do this when they hit London. I got a meek telephone call late the next afternoon. My problem is I usually get quite annoyed at men when they fuck up. But at the stage I'm at now, their stupidity just does not bother me. It's sad to say but if R. was wasted in a gutter and landed up at some old mate's house - well it's his life! He's old enough to know what he wants to do with it. The trouble is I can't seem to apply the same logic to near and dearest. I really get all wound up about him and his total lack of concern or interest in me and my wonderful career. He say all artists are totally self-obsessed. How dare he !!!

We went to a great party on the Sunday night. Mark Wallenger's birthday party; you know one of the yBa's, a Turner-prize-short-listed-kid-type person. Well, it was in or shall I say on the 29th floor of Guy's hospital. Getting there was a like something out of a science fiction movie. First off London is deserted on a long weekend, especially on a Sunday night at a hospital. The hallways and atrium were all ablaze with light but no one was about, and there were no signs to point us to the 29th floor. In fact the elevator only went to the 27th. Then we noticed another elevator in the corner that didn't say where it went. Like Alice in Wonderland we had a go and lo and behold we landed on the 29th floor. Following our noses we found ourselves in the hospitality suite - a huge room with a bar on the very top of a tower block that overlooked the West, North West and North East London. The view was magnificent!

The sun was setting, some silly French hip hop music was playing in the background - going "C'est ou, c'est la blah, blah, blah" - and R. and I were drinking Molson's beer. Not quite heaven but near enough for me these days. During the evening we met various young artists who were so obviously struggling to keep body and soul together that I wondered how many of them would still be practising by the time they reached 50. I saw myself in them at that age and it was sad. Before we left, because the music stopped and we were told to go, I bumped into an old friend who said how great it was that I could come to her wedding reception. I just looked at her then at her husband or the man next to her who I presumed was her husband and she blathered on. I congratulated them. Then R. grabbed me and hissed in my ear that it was also several other people's parties in case I had thought it all a bit strange.

'Like the granny dancing with the ten year old and the fact that the D.J. looked somebody's 15 year old brother and the arguing curators from Italy who sat in the corner all night?', I said 'Yeah, something like that.'

'Actually not till the very end when I picked up the art critic Sussie C. from the floor in the ladies. She was very upset and drunk over somebody getting married and not to her.'

'Fancy a night cap?'

'Sure your place or mine? Or shall I say your bottle or mine?'

'I brought down a really good whiskey that I bought on my last trip to Scotland.

A lovely old malt.'

'That's exactly what I am. A lovely old malt. I'm sticking with my own kind.'

'I like coming to visit you. You're so understanding and not bothered by much.'

'That's because I'm not married to you.'

'Does N & D notice if you get angry at him.'

'I have to check if he is alive first.'

'Great view wasn't it!'

'Yeah, makes you almost wish you were a council tennent on the 18th floor of a tower block.'

'Your Japanese tenant is weird. She never says anything.'

'Yes, even Nearest and dearest has noticed that she avoids him. We hear her come home at night, but sometimes a week or two goes by and I don't see her. I know she's there because she goes through all the toilet paper and leaves her saucepan of rice in the sink.'

'I'm glad I saved the bottle for this visit.'

I just looked at him sideways and put the key into the front door without another word.

June 30th

I have been to so many private views for graduating degree students, foundation students, general Art & Design students, GNVQ, BTEC and any other art type design student end of year course that finishes at this time of year that one could possibly invent. I can now safely say - I hate it all. Well, just the crappy stuff.

My students in Brighton graduated with four Firsts which was four more than the painting department. S. was extremely happy and I made her more so with a bottle of cheap champagne. This year with all the extra paper work and other tedious tasks associated with lecturing in art I have managed to have two massive headaches. Both of which landed me in bed dopped up with headache pills. The last one wasn't too bad. I was lying in bed when G. telephoned all excited but trying to act drop dead casual. She is so obvious. First she enquired after my health then ignored anything I had to say by butting just as I began my lament. 'Look this is really important. Christies is having their Contemporary Art auction in Clerkenwell next Tuesday. We are going! Try to dress decent. Meet me at the Whitechapel at 1 ,as Bet is also going.' - and hung up. Try to dress decent!!! Try to dress decent!!! Bloody cheek!!!

Eight days later

I went in an all grey *tres* Betty Jackson and *tres* smart but casual dress. That is I thought it was until I hit the ladies loo and I began to notice that the place was awash with Prada bags, outfits and shoes. Most women looked like walking adverts

for Prada or Channel. Neck-craning was also de rigour. In fact most people spent the auction rubber-necking to see who was not bidding or who was.

Money flowed fast and furious. It all seemed so abstract except I had to keep telling myself that it was 55,000 pounds(translate into 90,000 dollars) for this little photo of Cindy Sherman and that bargain painting of ...and so forth and so on unrelentingly so for four hours. One could ever so quickly loose track of reality. No chance of that for me though as I with great clarity remember the outstanding electricity bill for the studio!

G. and I gasped at one point as these two obviously plastic surgery altered American women swanned in, decked out in Prada and with pasmina scarves swathed several layers deep around their necks. It was VERY hot in there. We wondered at one point if the obvious plastic noses, (No.s 2 & 5 respectively from the catalogue of American plastic surgeon's catalogue of nose types) would melt down their flawless and surgically stretched skins. One of them was a black woman whose nose was definitely that of the wrong racial group - she looked like a Michael Jackson clone.

As soon as both of us left we HAD to find a cappucino, quick-like and dashed down the Clerkenwell Road into the nearest coffee bar. Shaking from the culture shock, G. spoke first.

'Seems a bit far removed from the reality of suburban arts councils and publicly funded galleries, doesn't it!'

'Just a bit. Did you clock the plastic noses on those two at the back?'

'The ones out of last year's catalogue of noses. Guaranteed to make you look like Barbie'

'If it got any hotter their faces would have melted.'

'Did you ever consider surgery?'

'All the time '

'How's the diet going?'

'You mean the exercise program, don't you'

'That as well'

'Want another cappucino?'

'Thought so.'

We sat there watching the rain lightly drench everyone walking by; both lost in our own thoughts of how strange and distant the mega-world of art can be when the serious money starts flowing.

'What are you doing this summer?'

'For a holiday or in the studio.'

'Well, you never go on holiday with that fish you're married to so how's the commission going.'

'Fish can be very interesting '

'Only if you're a bored cat!'

'I'm still working on that commission. It's all the bureaucracy of the church and

over-worked vicars with parish councils that have no imagination'

'Sounds like the rest of humanity to me!'

'So I will just get on with the drawings. That's a job and a half in itself. I just can't imagine my work ever being in an auction like that.'

G. looked at me and opened her mouth but not before before I quickly said 'Don't even think about saying it. Just shut up and lets go, I have to pick up something for supper.'

July 4th

It's Canada Day and I was going to have a few fellow country men and women or more truthfully North Americans, as Cal Pearl is not Canadian, over for some traditional cocktails. But I have no enthusiasm for it at the moment. Things between n. & d. have gotten so frosty that you don't need air conditioning. Also I am so knackered from all the extra teaching I've taken on as well as the stupid artist organization I sit on the board for with their endless extra meetings. The only people I really dislike worse than art administrators are artists. Ironically most of my friends are either one or the other. There is only a bit more admin work to do for the various courses that I have taught on this year and then I shall close the studio door and forget about it all. This month looks to be amusingly boring and quiet. How wonderful!!!!

July 28th

Boredom was something I am really looking forward to for once in my life .No such luck!!! Now, as you know old N & D has been some what of a pain the butt as of late. But not as much as Bet with the new man in her life. Where does she find them!! Why can't she be like EM. and take up serial monogomy. Or even like G. who bless her socks goes through men like a blizzard on the prairies.

I am not even going to begin with all the complications arising. They look so strange together, with him being a foot shorter than her and that when she is around him she is so gobsmacked that she can't speak but looks longingly all the time into his eyes. I just shan't begin.

Meanwhile, back at the house Nearest takes it into his head to strip the bedroom floors of carpets and put down some wood substitute flooring. Fine and dandy but after two weeks of living in a building site and no further progress I decide to take things into my own hands and lay the plywood myself. Ha! ha! ha! My hands become full of splinters. They get so infected that when I wake up on the Sunday morning I can't bend them and start screaming:-

'Take me to the A & E ! I've got blood poisoning !'

Guilt is an amazing motivator. The silent one leaps out of bed and speeds us down to the Royal London.

Sure enough I landed up with my right arm in a sling, told to put ice packs on it

periodically and given a prescription for some medicine which I think are antibiotics but look like horse tranquilizers. The sympathy card is going to be played very strongly.

One nice little adventure did happen in July. I took myself off to Leeds to see my friend R. who has been trying to get me up there for ages. I am not adverse to his pleas especially since he is looking so divine these days (having lost all that weight and his new hair cut, not to mention how he looks in his new leather jacket). It was also a great chance to catch up gossip with my friend D. who is a designer. Yes, I bought a tres tres gorgeous little strapless number from her which I shall make good use of with all the glorious weather we have been having.

Well, life is strange. D. and I had a little chat and a few drinks before meeting R. at the City Art Gallery where he works, for a private view. As a matter of fact, there were several private views for various shows. One of which was the gallery's collection of Rembrandt etchings. There lies another little story about the Rembrandt show in London which was so beautiful it made me weak at the knees. If I could have a 'one to one' with anybody in history it would be Rembrandt. Definitely!!!

The person I went with was a collector who I am despartely trying to get to buy some of my work. It was hard work. In the end after several hours of show and a brilliant tour by moi, I gather from the conversation that he thinks my work is not quite to his taste. So as an act of revenge I got him to take me to Chez Bertol for tea and ordered the largest and most expensive piece of gateau on the menu soon followed by a second one.

Well, to get back to the evening, as it wore on and things were coming to a close I suddenly had a terrible shock as I recognised an old passion of mine from ten years ago. I hadn't seen him since then and in the meantime he had lived the drug and drink life in Manchester but recently has consequently given it up. I was so shocked at his changed appearance that I grabbed R. and hissed at him

'Did you know that B. is here'

'Oh yeah! He comes to all the openings. He's okay now and we go out a lot to the pub. He's been trying to catch your attention all evening.'

It was obvious he was still very interested. All I could think was 'What a lucky escape I had.'

So we all went out with artists to the pub and then on to Harvey Nicks (They have a divine new shop in Leeds) for a drinks party on the roof garden and then out to a Japanese meal which B paid for to impress me. He had to leave early to get back to the cottage, he rents with his current girlfriend in a small town outside Leeds. When he left the young artist and D.both looked at R. and myself and said in one accord

'What was all that about?'

'What do you mean?'

I said dead casual and trying to act like it's normal and not squabble over the bill for a huge meal because an ex was trying to impress you so much that he paid for it

all. So R. filled them in on the subplot. 'And that calls for some cocktails,' he added. Such a sweet man! So off we went to a new little bar and drank. Then very tipsy-like we caught the last train back to R.'s place where we all crashed into our separate beds like the three bears in Goldilocks. Mine was R's little daughter's which was so small my feet stuck out the end but the stars on the ceiling were great glowing in the dark as was the Rupert the Bear night light. Kids have it so easy these days.

September 1st

Another birthday looms and I am on the wrong side of 50. I still feel like twelve. In fact I feel great. I remember someone saying, just after my 30th, that I was on the wrong side of thirty and they turned out to be the best years of my life. I had hoped it would carry through into the forties. But they rather got a bit murky and therapy ridden. One still lives in hope!!! I have also decided to drop my teaching at the local comprehensive. I know it's less money but I can not stand any year of seventeen year old boys with all their immature and sex-orientated humour. It's too much like the men I know who are fifty. That was really one of the most shocking insights I ever had when I realized so many men never got past 17 years of age emotionally.

Thus I stand at the cross roads of poverty and more poverty, if sales don't start coming in soon. I plan to spend my birthday at a conference in Bristol with artists from all over the world. Is this really a good decision? More private views than I can handle!!! I can't even remember what I see these days. In fact I don't see much because they are always so crowded with people.

September 29th

What A month!!! Camden had a P.V. that was so crowded. I kept bumping into Anish Kapoor who kept trying not to remember that we once shared a studio together many years ago. You know when people who try to blank you give it away by then checking to see if you are noticing that they are not noticing and it is really pathetic. The SLAG opening was also great for sheer party value. I'll go back this week and see the art. Next week Bet and I are doing some serious art-slutting on Friday. She has a new contract at the National so a different but equally poisonous set of gossip will soon be forthcoming.

The conference was great as was Bristol. One unfortunate incident involved my old mate the collector (remember the Rembrandt show) who was in town at the same time to put his daughter in university before he flew off for another holiday. He very sweetly took me out for a meal and we started to chin-wag about this that and everything else. He is renovating a house in the city for his student children to live in while they are at university. Not for them the perils of rented digs!!! In describing the state of affairs going on with the building works he ever so casually describes it as such a state that my house was not as bad as it was but almost! One could get the picture. I just looked at him gobsmacked. This from a man whose wife earns over £

150,000 a year and has a private income on top of a regular job, a full time house keeper and a cleaner. How dare he criticise the state of my house! Me, who has four part-time jobs and sits as a volunteer on the boards of many artist-run organisations and has a studio practice to run and operate - all at the same time. I do my own housework sometimes at 11 at night or 6:30 in the morning before I start my other jobs. The thing is, he thought he was being witty!

Come the revolution, he will be top of my list for those going "against the wall" - To quote a very appropriate phrase from the sixties. He thinks that by taking me out for meals he is supporting the arts by feeding a starving artist - the sad thing is that he really is.

One rather surreal conversation at the conference involved an old mate who complained that:-

‘I am being dismissed as a wrinkly anti-computer Ludite.’

‘Well,’ I said ‘You will just have to use anti-Ludite wrinkle cream then.’

And thus began a rather bizarre conversation around moisture cream and anti-intellectualism; two of my favorite topics. I am always amazed at the high levels of discussion at conferences.

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