

RETHINKING THE BODY IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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Exploring the role the artist's body in contemporary art is the main aim of this study. The body has always been a topic in academic disciplines as well as everyday culture, however since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a remarkable growth in interest. Bodies that once belonged primarily to biology have emerged as key factors in other sciences, such as social and cultural analysis, linguistics, politics and economics. They have been reestablished as sites for reason, knowledge, learning and perception.

From the broad theme of body in art, the subject of this thesis is narrowed to the display of masculinity and femininity in concept based art and compared against the present understanding of Body art. Concurrently the idea of the body is broadened to include its corporeal as well as psychological side. The hypothesis is, that the subject of a body can be demonstrated in different ways, depending on the concrete artist, and such demonstration is often not in its explicit, material state.

This study is divided into four chapters:

Chapter 1: Introducing the Body

Chapter 2: Object vs. Agent – the Body in Contemporary Art

Chapter 3: Different Identities in Praxis

Chapter 4: Towards a New Body Art

In chapter one, the specific meaning of the word body and its history is developed chronologically, against a few philosophical theories – dualism, monism, phenomenology, the embodied mind theory and psychoanalysis. In a similar fashion, the issue of gender, and its possible reading, is outlined. The origin of its current meaning formed in the 1960s and the main perspectives – social or biological determination – that gender is researched from. And finally, the methodological framework for this study is prepared by selecting the main standpoints:

- The philosophy of embodied mind, where the body-mind is an undivided entity and site of engagement with the world.
- Gender, as a binary system of abstract concepts.
- Comparative mythology and psychology of art, as a source of topics.

The method of research was set to focus on the qualitative approach to information, more precisely, on the analysis of documents and physical data and a subjective description of the creative process.

Chapter two begins with discussion about the role of the body in contemporary art and by specifying the art of interest in this study. It starts by focusing on the genre Body art, the period of time and circumstances in which it developed, and its connection to and simultaneous influences by feminist art criticism.

Since the rise of happenings and performance in the 1960s, body in art became a place of engagement, changing the way we perceive subjectivity and meaning, activating inter-subjectivity. In Body art, the body of the artist is projected into the work as a specific subject. Because of the particular socio-historical circumstances, the subject, especially the female body, was largely claimed by feminism and acquired a political reading.

The reason for choosing masculinity and femininity as relevant factors in relation to Body art are discussed and the current notion of gender in art is addressed. The chapter ends with a brief overview and critique of examples of exhibitions that relate to the topics of “masculinity” and “femininity” as they appear in contemporary art today.

Chapter three contains examples of concrete artworks, outlined within a proposed broader field of Body art. Considering that the art of interest is not just formal, but fundamentally concept based, it is reasonable to focus on the body in a wider sense, that is to say in its corporal, but also absolute, state, reflecting its inner psychology.

The focus was placed on gender in order to reflex and balance the current notions of Body art. As a result, several thematic units were outlined, representative of masculinity and femininity

in art creation. These categories are not exhaustive, but an exemplification. Similarly, the concepts of masculinity and femininity are abstract, rather than directly connected to human gender.

The selected topics are roughly complementary, each of them illustrated through examples of concrete artworks.

“Art and Nature” and “Art and Body” are mostly referring to the exploration of Self. “Political Art” and “Personal Art” are categories concerned with the society, or the Self as part of society. Finally, the last pair, “Art and Technology” and “Art and Handiwork”, indicate the choice of method and material. Each section contains illustrative examples of artwork by an established artist and part of the data used in these sections came from a structured questionnaire filled out mainly by emerging young artists. The concrete data is related to the theoretical framework.

In the second part of the chapter, I address the use of motifs, materials, and recurring themes of the body in my art praxis. As an artist, whose work is sometimes connected to the category Body art, my exploring is not limited to the physical side of the body, but is also focused on its psychological factors. I felt the need to critically evaluate my work, which is done again by dividing it into a few thematic units and comparing them to abstract philosophical concepts as well as other artists’ work.

The aim of Chapter four is to summarize and compare the information obtained from the previous chapters and present a new perspective on “the body” in contemporary art. The inquiry led towards a unifying perspective. In this vision, Body art, might be thought of, from a conceptual point of view, as a reflection of humanity into the artwork. It would be defined by the existential quality of the initiating questions that lead to the creative process. As seen in the results of the questionnaire that was carried out, these impulses are independent of the medium and technique, but united by their ontological qualities.

After comparing the findings and putting them into the context of present curatorial and artistic praxis, the groundwork shows, that on a bigger schema, the polar categories of masculinity and femininity could be found in transcendence and immanence respectively. This can be loosely compared to the initial division of the body on reason and order versus/and matter and chaos, effectively both united in the human condition of bodiliness. These complementary principles are present from the microcosm of our bodies, to the way the world is viewed. Instead of isolating them, they are described in relation to its whole. Such rethinking was not done to re-label the category of Body art, but rather to raise awareness of its partiality and to present other issues that the body consists of and stands for.

What was understood and proved in this thesis is that the concept of body, used in the way that embodied philosophy proposes, would surely take its place as a key topic of contemporary art. While one of the initial points of departure was to research and counterbalance the connection of the feminine to the body, the conclusion was found to be not in symmetrical opposites, but very interdependent and continuous qualities of masculinity and femininity. While a point of conclusion was reached, many new questions in relation to the body have opened up. The body will continue to be at the centre of cultural studies and feminist debate, so the vision for the future is a better understanding of it’s ambiguous, even contradictory expressions in the creative field and further possibility of an integrated vision.

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本研究の目的は、アートにおける身体の客観的/主観的ポジションについての自身の考えを現代美術のプラクシス（実践）と美術批評の広範な領域と関連づけながら分析することである。自身の制作手段の探求は、アートにおいて身体が現在置かれている状況の考察に基づいており、とくにセクシュアリティとジェンダーに焦点があてられている。このパーソナルな追求が、同時代のほかのアーティストや批評家と対立あるいは同調しながらどのように映し出されるのかを探求する。

第1章では、身体という言葉の持つ意味やその歴史を解説しながら、人間が持つ身体と精神、または魂という問題を哲学的な問題を検討し、さらに最近の「身体化した精神」、もしくは「身体化した哲学」について論じた。また、本論文は、身体化した精神 (Embodied Mind)の哲学において身体と精神が分離されずに共存でき世界に参加・関与 (engage)する場となること、抽象性が高い二元論的概念としてのジェンダー、比較神話学と芸術心理学の応用の3点を基軸として構成されている。

第2章では、ボディ・アートの起源、ジェンダーとの密接な繋がりに焦点をあてた。コンセプチュアル・アートの到来は、美術の基礎と存在意義、そしてその機能を劇的に変化させた。作品における知的概念を重要視し、鑑賞者による介入を必要とした手法は1960年代から70年代にかけての美術界にも大きな影響を与え、標準的な制作手法となってゆく。コンセプチュアリズムやミニマリズムのような高度な思考実践を伴う制作は、その後続くボディ・アートやパフォーマンス、プロセス・アート、サイト＝スペシフィック・アート、そしてランドアート等、それ以降の美術へと広がった。なかでも、ボディ・アートにおいて男性性と女性性が重要な要素となる。「美術におけるジェンダー」という主題は、その多くが女性アーティストに限定され、男性というジェンダーが完全に欠落していることを見出した。

第3章は、具体的なアーティストの作品や自身の作品について、男性と女性に分類される世界に関していくつかの議題を提案し、「女性の」美術と「スタンダードな」美術の乖離について論じた。しかし、主要な問題は、ジェンダーのような要素からは独立した、人間性 (humanity) や人間の条件に基づくものである。近年の美術における男性性については「美術と自然」、「ポリティカル・アート」、「アートとテクノロジー」、近年の美術における女性性については「美術と身体」「パーソナル・アート」「美術と手芸」

といったそれぞれ3つの視点から考察を試みた。

そして、これまでにあげた議題を参照しながら自作を提示し、制作プロセスにおける論拠を提示した。議題（自己省察・関係性・環境・文化・フィクション対、現実・家庭・幸せな家庭・自然）は、究極的には存在論的な問題でもある。生きることの意味を探ること、そして自己を探ることが、共通の特徴として作品には存在している。多くの場合、主題を直接的に語る訳ではなく、不完全な問いの答えを探す試みである。制作はその答えを見つけるプロセスでもあり、最終的な作品は二次的な要素にすぎないと言える。

第4章では、これまでの章で得た情報を総合し比較しながら、現代美術における「身体」についての新しい観点を提示した。ボディ・アートは、コンセプチュアルな観点から見れば、人間性を美術に反映させたものでもある。それは、創造プロセスへと導く問いかけの存在論的価値によって決定づけられる。その衝動はメディアやテクニックからは独立したもののだが、その存在論的価値と密接につながっている。

精神分析的な解説でアーティストの制作を語ることは作品の魅力を半減させてしまう。作品のコントロールを、その分析によって狂わされてしまう可能性があるからだ。作品の豊かさや繊細さには、ある種の記号的な神話があり、それらは単純な言葉で語ることなどできない。賢明に用いられる精神分析的な美術批評は、美術史家たちだけでなく、アーティストたちの護身術としても使われているのだ。

このような再考は、ボディ・アートというカテゴリーに再びレッテルをはるためではなく、それが部分的なものであると自覚し、また身体がもたらす他の諸問題を提示する為であった。本研究で導きだされたことは、身体化の哲学が言うような意味での「身体」の概念は、現代アートにとってキー・トピックになりうる。出発点としては、女性的なものや身体の繋がりを調べることから始めたが、結論では、男性性と対立するのではなく、むしろ相補的（コンプリメンタリー）なものとして論じることとなった。

身体は、今後もカルチュラル・スタディーズやフェミニズムの中心的モチーフであり続けるだろう。未来へのヴィジョンは、創造の領域での身体のアンビギュアスで矛盾してさえいる表現をよりよく理解することであり、統合された身体観のさらなる可能性である。