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NUDITY AS A FEMINIST GESTURE: IN DEFENSE OF A SUPPOSEDLY LOST CAUSE

Griselda Pollock rightly argues in her book *Vision and Difference* that simply 'adding women' to art history will not necessarily make it more feminist. She claims: "Women's studies are not just about women – but about the social systems and ideological schemata which sustain the domination of men over women within the other mutually inflecting regimes of power in the world, namely those of class and those of race."¹ This structuralist positioning of the gender question within a wider spectrum of class inequalities and racialization, which we should enlarge today to embrace also the LGBTIQ+ struggles, allows for an intersectional approach to the question of art history, hopefully without stabilizing the category of womanhood, but rather presenting it as a historically adequate description of some art historical struggles for equality, today deconstructed in the process of queering, de-binarisation and embracing transgender identity. I need to add this general statement, as I intend to use the words 'women' and 'men,' in a non-essentializing, non-normative

way, as they depict historical struggles for equality central for any discussions of nudity, artistic representation and equality within those histories and struggles.

It is much more popular to associate nudity with innocence, transparency and immediacy, than with strategy, opacity and distance. Art history and theory however complicates this popular belief by adding the dimension of performativity to the supposedly stable human body's image. Images can therefore do things, like words in John Austin's *How to do things with words?* Such suggestion however is far more difficult to explain than performativity of certain words. However, while the judge's 'guilty!' or the priest's 'I now pronounce you husband and wife' clearly do something to the materialized, historical reality, images might be more complicated that way. The image of God in a Catholic church might make people do things, just as well as the white and red stripes on the border territory signalize the end of the territory of

the Republic of Poland, therefore making anyone going beyond these stripes a border crosser, and possibly a criminal, if they carry no documents with them. Road signs also have the magic power of allowing the police or city guard to demand a sum of money, or even our driving licence, after we behave in certain ways behind the wheel. But is the image of a nude woman also that powerful? Or is it only sexual agency, which has this power? But then – what is sexual agency? Or sexual organs in action? Was professor Marian Filar right, when he argued that it is the intention to show sexual agency that makes an image pornographic?² Was Robin Morgan right saying that "pornography is theory, and rape is practice" (of violence against women in patriarchal society)?³

Feminist artistic interventions have been central to proving that the perception of nudity has been to a large extent profiled to please the male gaze. One of the central distinctions, organizing our perception of the artistic nude, opposes nudity to pornography, and in some countries found its legal formula too, where the latter is forbidden by law. This distinction has been discussed in Poland as well, and while we currently do not have a law prohibiting pornography as such, we have various legal norms foreclosing the possibility of abuse of someone's image, good name, privacy, integrity etc.⁴ Performativity in the context of nudity could lead directly to its condemnation as pornography, according to those who argue that what makes them special is 'the ability to cause action,' in this case: sexual arousal. But – isn't any nude body possibly a sort of excitement? How would a distinction be made between a body, which explicitly seeks such result of its appearance from that which is not meant to cause such effect? For some – it is the context that changes everything, and in many cases this is right – we might experience nudity very differently depending on whether it appears on a wall of a church, in an art gallery, museum, porn magazine or a shabby VHS tape from the early nineties. Due to the historicity of artistic representations as well as the cultural and generational changes in taste, we might now see as pornographic the representations of bodies, which

– in the intention of the authors at least – were not meant to incite sexual response.

Feminist perspectives on the female nude, as well as on pornography, have been as diverse, as feminists can be. Robin Morgan's claim "pornography is theory, rape is the practice" united those authors and activists, who proclaimed the necessity of a legal ban on pornography. Angela Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon participated in campaigns aimed at introducing such a ban in the state of Minneapolis (1983) and Indianapolis (1984), both attempts were finally unsuccessful, as the legislation was voted against. In 1976, the young feminist photographer, Jacqueline Livingston, working as an assistant professor at Cornell University, probably paid the biggest price for the anti-porn campaigns, as she was accused of spreading child pornography, enforcing the sexualization of a child as well as violating her duties as parent. Each of these accusations led to a court trial, which she eventually won in the early eighties, however as in the meantime no gallery would exhibit her work, she was fired from the university, which led to her change of profession and moving to Hawaii. In 2009, two Polish curators, Mariola Balińska and Małgorzata Zwolicka, invited Livingston to make a solo show of photography in the National Museum in Gdańsk (in Pałac Opatów). Some journalists discovered the scandalous past of the artist, and published articles inciting protests, regardless of the fact that the exhibition was not one on pornography, and the pictures presented in it were a tender collection of everyday family images. I met Jacqueline on this occasion, and we maintained very friendly contacts until she died in 2013. She offered me a beautiful photograph for my first book's cover.

Many feminists disagree with the anti-porn perspective, rightly claiming that there is no scientific proof of Morgan's statement, and therefore it cannot be legitimately argued that pornography leads to violence. The plethora of these perspectives was collected by the much missed feminist theorist and organizer, Ann Snitow, who made the amazing effort to collect opinions from all sides.⁵ Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter on the

other hand have been documenting the 'sex wars' since the early nineties in their groundbreaking anthology, composed of theoretical essays, but also a calendar of events concerning sexual politics as well as that of its visual representation.⁶ They have also been one of the central voices for the feminism opposing censorship, in visual arts and more widely – in all cultural production. Duggan sees censorship as part of the neoliberal pact – where the state and capital withdraws from its obligations of care and safety, a conservative narrative offering a dummy of actual protection is installed, giving an appearance of genuine concern of the state about the population.⁷ The same can be said about the anti-child porn EU regulations, which seem to replace the care for the protection of children from sexualization and abuse by the means providing safety to the gaze of the adults. The fact that a mature person will not see a fictitious image of child porn will not save children from sexual violence, logically the opposite can be expected, as with the preoccupation with what the adult may see, the state forces get distracted from following the actual criminals abusing children.⁸ My own experience of being accused of defending child pornography by the editors of an art magazine in 2009, when I was merely defending Adorno's claim that while we focus on what adults can see, children are still suffering domestic violence, proves that such reasoning can be true. I was told by some of the magazine's editors, that even though I actually train teachers and educators in the prevention of sexual harassment of minors and children in schools, I have no clue about what children need, because I do not have any. Luckily Grzegorz Borkowski, another editor of said magazine, found a way for my article about Jacqueline Livingston to be published anyway and did not submit to the accusations.

Some authors, such as Linda Williams, argue that pornography might actually succeed in preventing violence, as the play with images can allow a phantasmatic realization of forbidden passions, thus saving their potential victims.⁹ Such claims are further complicated by such legal norms as the EU directive from 2006, which demands punishment for child pornography created without

using any actual models (in this case: children and minors), and thus making completely fictional images almost as dangerous as those, which were produced with actual presence of real children and their sexualization by adults.¹⁰ This directive leads to creating appropriate legal norms in European countries, which are quite similar one to another, and to legal practice, which can differ between EU countries. In my book on politics of art from 2013 I discuss two cases of artists put on trial because of their work being accused of promoting child pornography.¹¹ The feminist artist from Finland, Ulla Karttonen, presented an artwork aimed at criticizing the omnipresence of child pornography on the internet. She used printed images of young women published online, trying to pick those, who did seem to be minor. However, as we well know, such distinction is particularly volatile, and so therefore the artist was tried and sentenced by courts in Finland, and sentenced for promoting child pornography, although the court decided not to act upon the verdict in recognition of the feminist good intentions of the artist. She decided to make an appeal to the European Tribunal of Human Rights in Strasburg, where, after a long discussion, which still can be found online, the verdict of the courts in Finland was supported.

The Polish artist Krzysztof Kuszej on the other hand wanted to critically address the very painful topic of sexual molestation of children by Catholic priests, of which he was one of the victims as a child. In his artwork from 2007, he used found footage press images of sexually harassed children, which he inserted in large scale paintings, thus also in his case we cannot speak of any use of children to produce sexualized images. After an exhibition of his work in Łódź in 2008, he was arrested, and his artworks, as well as computer and other equipment, were taken as evidence of possible guilt. He spent seven months in jail, which is a very long period of time. The judge of the local court invited several experts and eventually cleared the accused artist of all charges. In the verdict's explanation, the judge claimed, that it was an act of enormous courage and responsibility for the future generation to produce such artworks and therefore also to re-



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1. FEMEN activist, 2010.
Wikipedia
2. Alexis Hunter,
Model's Revenge, 1978.
Compliments of the artist
3. Ewa Partum homage
a solidarnosc 1982
compliments of the artist
4. Ewa Partum,
Samoidentyfikacja, 1980

open the artist's own trauma. Kuszej worked in the context of critical art, which the judge claimed to have learned for the purpose of better preparing to the trial. The artist was declared innocent and apologized for the long arrest. No appeal was made, therefore the verdict seems to be final.

As we can see, Polish and Finnish courts interpret the agency of artists as well as their use of found footage very differently. One thing remains true: the Baudrillardian argument about the things being replaced by simulacra, or better – Debordian claim about social relations being replaced by images in the society of the spectacle, is becoming true also by means of the (almost complete) equation of the production of child pornography with and without the presence (and therefore also abuse) of actual children. We need to discuss this troublesome equation without fear of being accused of promoting violence, and yet with the growing culture of cancelling and readiness of the social media to provide immediate acceptance or rejection for any controversy, we might be willing just to resign from such discussions. My own example of facing severe accusations mentioned above shows why most lawmakers, lawyers, artists and journalists, not to mention scholars, prefer silence. Yet, cases such as that of Kuszej, and the unbiased, bold defense provided by the judge in his case, show that the neoliberal productivity mode, smoothing all controversies for the better acquisition of profits, does not always win.

The controversies concerning pornography have shaped our perception of the nude body. While a naked child's picture in the seventies would just be seen as a nice memory shot from someone's childhood, today any posting of nude babies on social media cause outcries about protection of children from abuse. The protection of children and their privacy is a legitimate concern, but what matters here, in a discussion concerning nudity and its visual representations, is above all the immediate change of standards, which has taken place just in the last two decades. The protection discourse has intensified to such extent, that it is surprising that naked images abound on the one hand, and on the other – even more cases

of child abuse are reported to the police and media. How can this be explained? As you might already guess, my response is that the protection of the gaze of the adult is by no means an effective substitute of legal, social and cultural protection measures helping the actual, living children of flesh and bones to be safe from violence and sexual abuse. The fake protection measures are today replacing the actual ones. This claim cannot be substituted by even the most elaborate criticisms of the abuse, stereotypes and inequality of genders, racialization and exclusions performed in pornography as it is produced today, at least in its mainstream versions.

Entire groups, companies, collectives and art projects have been devoted to creating pornography free of abuse, exploitation, stereotypes and non-consensual violence. Festivals such as the *Post-Porn Fest* in Warsaw, *Porn Fest* in Berlin, their sister projects in Vienna, Brussels and other cities are collective entities dedicated to building a sexually active, diverse community without exploitation, abuse and discrimination. They gather porn producers offering alternative visual representations, as well as business and art production models, in which the abuse rightly criticized by the anti-porn feminists, Marxists and others are not accepted. It is in such circumstances, that what is now called 'sex-positive feminism' abounds, just as expressions of LGBTQI+ erotica and representations. Agnieszka Szreder, the co-curator of the Warsaw *Post-Porn Fest* speaks of postpornography as if it was a "whole new language, expressing the world and experience of it in new categories." It is important to notice that – as many active and former sex workers claim – such contexts really bring alternatives not just to bodies and their representations, but also of work conditions and atmosphere in porn production. Some of these sex workers are feminists, as Annie Sprinkle, as well as the authors of the amazing anthology of texts, *Whores and other Feminists*.¹²

With such feminist and LGBTQI+ sexual productions, as well as authors such as Brian McNair, we enter a whole new era of what he called 'porn chic' – a new sex-positive fashion for pornography, mostly understood either as class-

emancipatory transgression to what was taken to be 'low aesthetics,' or as a newly established feminist sex-positive canon.¹³ The porn-chic is therefore a strong claim to aesthetic as well as political emancipation, by means of pornographic imagery, usually produced (or: claimed to be produced) in an ethical, abuse-free way. Such new fashion works against the marginalization of what Lynda Nead labelled 'obscene,' excluded from the stage, and therefore becomes a way of granting visibility to the persons, bodies, sexual practices and orientations, which were not particularly visible before. Emancipated, self-conscious, and also sexually explicit femininity, various versions of gay sexuality and desire, lesbian S/M and other marginalized visual representations of sexual life, are entering the stage with and by means of porn-chic, making of them the most attractive images adding surplus value to any product. This popularity of the marginalized is obviously contaminated by the risk of immediate commodification, and yet for many it also becomes a way to disturb, subvert and reverse or even transform the canon of visual representations, thus making it possible for the fat singers, gay porn stars, trans lap dancers or lesbian dommes to become pop icons, movie or social media stars etc.

Such abundance of atypical naked bodies in the public visual sphere most certainly has emancipatory and empowering effects. It is common to see children becoming fascinated with queer pop culture icons, non-binary movie characters or trans singers. Such fashions create what Jack Halberstam called the safe-spaces of 'Gaga feminism,' in which the countercultural does not necessarily mean 'opposed to the market economy,' but it most definitely means "resisting neoliberalism AND the heteromatrix."¹⁴ This emancipatory and empowering impact that the changes of visual representations of bodies have on the population, cannot be perceived as proof that everything is fine in the sector of visual representation. Social media provide drastic examples of opposite tendencies, particularly when it comes to their influence on teenagers, especially girls. While we observe the growing popularity of

atypical bodies represented publicly, websites and social media profiles advising unhealthy, or even deadly eating and behavioral patterns abound. In a recent scandal, a whistle blower, Frances Haugen revealed, that Facebook (now: Meta) knew about several Instagram profiles promoting diets and lifestyle leading to severe eating disorders, such as anorexia, and did not close these accounts until the scandal was revealed.¹⁵ It should however be noted that teenagers are just a part, albeit extremely important, of social media users. It is therefore interesting to see, how with the growing preoccupation of what the adult eye should or should not see, the border between pornography and sensuality is blurred, at least this is one of Brian McNair's conclusions.

A very interesting example of a project allowing to situate the otherwise hardly ever present border between the pornographic and the nude or – as it might also be called – between the sexual and the sensual – is a recent series of photographs of the Warsaw based artist, Mariola Przyjemska (*Victoria's Secret*, 2019-20). In her psychogeographic walks around the city, she often visited Christian churches, and photographed the body of Christ, represented in paintings and sculptures. These images, meticulously framed and only rarely showing the face of Jesus, could very easily be confused with any Catholic saint's representations (of St Sebastian for example), but also with a contemporary or historical dead body in a morgue, possibly a victim of sexual crime; a woman's or intersexual body (as the gender of legs or arms is not clearly defined). With such a plethora of connections and interpretative possibilities, the body of Christ became a common denominator not just for all identities and genders, but also – for all those interested in rethinking the meaning of the body and sacrum. By offering this, Przyjemska made a great post-secular use of what stands as the most central and most important mystery of the Christian religion – the embodiment of God in human flesh. This religious secret becomes in her work once again an interesting and engaging problem, as her pictures inspired by it, open discussions of gender, embodiment, but also topics



5. Judy Chicago, *Red Flag*, 1971

6. Mariola Przyjemaska, *Victoria's Secret*, 2019–2020. Compliments of the artist

7. Mariola Przyjemaska, *Victoria's Secret*, 2019–2020. Compliments of the artist

such as sanctity and violence happening to various bodies, including those most holy. In today's discussions and conflicts surrounding gender and sexuality, and the trans- and non-binary persons and bodies in particular, the *Victoria's Secret* photographic series performs a fascinating role of respectfully opening a debate, which otherwise could easily become painful. For the Christian religion on the other hand, Przyjemska opens a new trajectory of becoming something, which it rarely is today – a peaceful common denominator for a contemporary debate, usually occupied with dogmatism or exclusions. Instead of this, Przyjemska's work becomes an opportunity for a Paulinian 'coming community' - for which – like Giorgio Agamben rightly claims – it does not matter whether one is a Christian or a Jew, a man or a woman, a Greek or a Roman...¹⁶

It always strikes me, how easily and how fast the naked woman becomes a naked body in male-dominated, patriarchal society. This happens in the musings on seduction, offered by Jean Baudrillard, it takes place in Agamben's *Nudity*, it is very central in George Bataille's *Erotics*, however in this last case, it is a part of a very meticulous, and I would argue also a very pertinent, adequate discussion of, the sexual act, in which the (male) subject emerges, while the (female) subject disappears, after being stripped – like in the case of Carl Schmitt's *enemy*, also in Bataille's analysis – of all its human characteristics. While in Bataille's work the dehumanization correctly depicts the patriarchal sexual act based on the violently unequal gender social contract, in Agamben it is a Freudian slip, revealing the extent to which the otherwise perfectly emancipated and egalitarian thinker is still thinking along the cruel, patriarchal lines.¹⁷ Agamben's depiction of Vanessa Beecraft's 2005 performance in Berlin focuses on the vulnerability of the fully dressed spectators walking between 100 almost naked women (wearing only transparent pantyhose). From my own, feminist perspective, it can be understood, that a man who grew up in Italy, surrounded by the canonic representations of the art historical, mainly female nudes represented solely to please

the audience, must be terrified seeing one hundred living women naked, but in a pose of full physical capacity, staring at him with a gaze suggesting possible action, not necessarily aimed at his pleasure, must be terrified. However the transition of his narrative, the move between 'women' and 'naked bodies' is to me even scarier, as it reveals the lively tendency mimicked by Bataille in his depiction of the sexual act and the disappearance of the woman in it in *Eroticisme*.

In the process of shaping gendered representations of human bodies in art history, adding 'more women' might actually end up with further perpetuation of gender inequality. This argument is today often being used against pornography, sex work and its various media representations of bodies and genders, as well, as against including trans-, queer-, non-binary, lesbian, gay and other non-normative nudity into the public visibility, as I would like to call the generalized areas of artistic representations, but also – media visibility, internet images and other elements of today's visual culture, in which they also function as elements of the public sphere. The public sphere should not be merely treated as 'what is outside of home,' neither should it be reduced to 'what is outside the buildings,' it should rather be seen as what Jurgen Habermas calls a debate of the common issues, accessible to all, or – as Kluge, Negt, Fraser, Warner and other authors describe as a debate of common issues, hegemonized by the male, white, privileged, straight minority.¹⁸ As we can already see, what I try to emphasize, following Rosalyn Deutsche and her wonderful analysis of public art from the nineties, is the discursive, conflicted, and active nature of the visual cultures, often presented a *de facto* impossible *universum* of some petrified images, which neither interact nor cause trouble (Deutsche, 1992). Just as in Deutsche's analysis, public art is one which questions the existing divisions between the private and the public, also the body representations subsume the role of activating or petrifying processes of representation, stabilization, consent making or conflict among different practices and visions of body politics. Therefore, they are also

susceptible to colonial processes of epistemic violence, which always complicate not just the discursive, but also the visual dimension of the representations of the subaltern, as Gayatri Spivak argues in *Can the Subaltern speak?*¹⁹ As she writes, “For the (gender-unspecified) »true« subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there’s no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. (...) The woman of whom I will speak in this section was not a »true« subaltern, but a metropolitan middle class girl. (...) She was made to unspeak herself posthumously, by other women. In an earlier version of this chapter, I had summarized this historical indifference and its results as: the subaltern cannot speak.”²⁰

Spivak does not, and in fact never did, condemn the efforts of representation and/or its analysis. On the contrary, she argues – following Althusser in that matter – that a meticulous ideological work is always already present in such acts of constructing representation, as well as discussing it. Thus, as Karl Marx wrote in *The Capital* the commodity is just like the Shakespearean character, Quickly (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*), we can never be certain, which part of her exactly we grab.²¹ Spivak emphasizes, that “a postrepresentationist vocabulary hides an essentialist agenda,”²² thus proving, that ‘difference,’ just as the *homo sacer*, the proletarian or the refugee, is not ungendered, and undergoes a painful procedure of ideological differentiation. By installing *catachresis*, synecdoche or scripting ‘of the reproductive body’ Spivak also opens the possibility of escaping the binary narrative of men/women, however – as this binary itself contains elements of violence, its dismantlement cannot avoid certain amount of repeating.

An interesting connection between the body and representation, was made by Rene Magritte. In the painting *Representation*, from 1937, he offers a realistic image of the woman’s body, from just below the breast down to the middle of the thighs. As we might remember, Magritte only painted his wife, so what we see seems to be the belly, vagina and tights of *Georgette Berger*, in a

golden, simple frame, which in shape follows the body’s contour. As we know, the other painting of Magritte, The Treachery of Images from 1929 became the object of the painter’s discussion with Michel Foucault, who in his book Ceci n’est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe) beautifully deconstructed Magritte’s intention. Magritte’s reasoning is one far more similar to the critical deconstruction of ideology performed by Spivak and the other members of the Subaltern Studies Group – he does not say that representation does not exist, which is Foucault’s conclusion; he says something opposite – that within the operation of representation, several processes are present, including the word/image/object triad, which cannot be solved merely by the correspondence theory of truth, in which the accuracy between the words and the things is unproblematically taken as prima facie criterium of the quality of a statement. This unproblematic realism is undermined in any theory of suspicion, be it that of Marx or Freud, or any their followers. It also is central in feminist analysis, therefore also art history, however due to its preoccupation with gender, sometimes class, ethnicity and sexuality are less present or openly marginalized, and thus the white straight middle class women become THE subject of feminism.

The decolonial perspective, as useful and necessary as it is to preserve the somewhat denied autonomy of the oppressed subject, will not save us from the violent political epistemology of the hegemonic European Subject. It will allow us, however, to express, preserve and value the epistemology of the oppressed, as one shaped in the dialectic process of sublation of the plethora of oppressions. The decolonial perspective focuses on the subaltern by means of intended neglect of the oppressor. In my view, however, by claiming that the hegemonic subject does not exist, we might allow its strength to reemerge.

The art strategies organizing political uses of (female) nudity are obviously tacit hostages of the above mentioned conflicts at the core of representation debates. In the art historical field perhaps the most interesting theory allowing the location of these tensions,

was offered by Lynda Nead, who used the ancient term 'obscenity' to discuss the process of exclusion and resistance of certain bodily representations in the field of Western art history. The notion of obscene, meaning 'ex-cluded' or 'out-of scene,' as the word's etymology suggests, opens a common denominator for all those bodies, subjectivities and genders, which do not fit in the representation regimes of the West. Nead argues that this means for the contour of the woman's body in the painting, sculpture and later also other media to always be 'closed' (the exclusion of body liquids and vagina), and positioned in ways convenient for the male heteronormative viewer. Before feminism the women's bodies could not be presented as active or professional, with some minor exceptions for professions traditionally reserved for women. The similar exclusion is experienced by any non-normative bodies, and the exceptions in the art history only prove the general norm.

We can divide the acts of resistance to these norms of representation into those expressing vulnerability, as in Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* from 1964, where the viewers are cutting pieces of the artist's clothes, while she patiently sits and allows her almost complete undressing. Another strategy focuses on the expression of disagreement, resistance and/or scandalization of the unequal norms of representation, as in Judy Chicago's *Red Flag* or the performative actions of the Ukrainian and international group Femen.

Femen's strategic nudity has been discussed by feminists, who are divided between those who think that these Ukrainian and international artists are following the patriarchal script of aesthetic canon, exposing mainly young, female bodies in their happenings, and those authors, who – like Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza – see their actions as a successful feminist takeover of nudity, effectively employed to challenge structures of domination.²³ She explains that nudity has been strategically employed in protests as an act of resistance for many decades, and in various parts of the

world: "in the Philippines, 'undress' was a form of protest first used by Cordillera women against the Spanish colonizers in the sixteenth century. During a protest action against the building of the Chico Dam in the seventies, the Cordillera women bared themselves as a symbolic act with the intent of shaming the dam engineers into leaving the dam project behind."²⁴ Similar protests have been held in Cameroon, India and Nigeria. In Ukraine, Femen was first created to contest the sex tourism (albeit not sex work as such). The young women perform with bare breast also in other countries, like Belarus, where they protested against Lukashenko's dictatorship, in Poland (during the Euro 2012 Football Cup, held simultaneously in Poland and in Ukraine), France (after rapes of women by policemen in Tunisia in 2012) and Germany, where Femen's activists presented themselves around the surprised Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, to demand his support of Ukraine in the time of Russia's invasion in 2022. The group's members claim to be the new Amazon's, employing their bodies for the women's cause, sextremism for the women's rights. They fill in the 'Barbie woman' standard, depicted by Oksana Kis as one dominating Ukraine's politics since at least the former Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko.²⁵ The Guardian journalist, Chitra Nagarajan, criticized Femen for cultural imposition of European values onto women of the Islamic countries. Their bare breasts offend some of the members of the Muslim communities, thus making it impossible to discuss the problem of violence against women and thus also building solidarity networks with women in these communities, not solely supporting them from the outside. While this argument is relevant, its author mistakes part of the group's activities for the whole thing and criticizes all Femen's actions based on a specific case, thus committing a *pars pro toto* mistake. The legitimacy and even effectivity of Femen's actions in Ukraine, Belarus and Poland, as well as those performed in other countries, but without any connection to religion, seem to be effectively supportive for the oppressed groups. The criticism of the group should therefore be more nuanced to better construct its arguments in the debates.

The female nude can be a threat to patriarchal norms and exclusions, but it can also become a problematic tool of incels and other agents of the misogynist *old regime*, targeting women in their supposedly emancipated lives, especially in the domain of sexuality. As many authors have argued, the internet has become a zone of stalking, harassment and abuse, regardless of the cyberfeminist optimism surrounding it in the nineties. Women's naked images and deep fakes, used predominantly against famous women, but also employed by the men harassing more ordinary colleagues, former lovers or complete strangers, become a difficult weapon, sometimes causing more damage to women's psychic lives than earlier forms of gender-based aggression. In the times of social media and online dating platforms, as well as expansive backups of any private information, sometimes regardless of the individual decision of the device's owners, leaks of personal information, including passwords, but also photographs and videos stored on machines and online repositories, such as iCloud, become women's worse nightmare. Kaley Cuoco, Scarlett Johansson, Alexandra Daddario, Miley Cyrus and so many other actresses have their nude images still floating in the internet. Many other women are threatened that such a leak might occur, if they do not surrender to threats. As I argued in *Feminist Antifascism*, these tendencies and problematic behaviors should not be seen as undermining the generally emancipatory developments in the field of women's nudity, sexuality and gender politics. They are symptoms of the inability of some men to adjust to recent changes in gender role social division, similar to those analyzed by Anthony Giddens in *The Transformations of Intimacy* from 1992. Just as in 1990, it was still difficult for some men to understand that their female partners have had other husbands or boyfriends before them, now it is absolutely impossible for some men to accept rejection.²⁶

Without a deeper reconstruction of the evolution of the feminist perspectives on nudity and pornography, it is hard to establish a feminist sex-positive view on nudity today. As this article

shows, there are multiple controversies concerning the uses and abuses of women's bodies in the visual public sphere, however it is clear that most of them if produced by feminist artists, activists and protestors, serve to dismantle the patriarchal power structures rather than to strengthen them. The subversive uses of nudity in activism have their laboratories in the form of emancipated pornography, as well as in feminist and queer art today. With some exceptions, they can be politically potent in deconstructing, subverting or overcoming the male dominance in visual culture, and furthermore – politics and society.

Notes

- ¹ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.
- ² Jacek Sobczak, "Sztuka a pornografia," *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 1(4) (2018): 21-44.
- ³ Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977).
- ⁴ See: Sobczak, "Sztuka a pornografia"; Ewa Majewska, *Sztuka jako pozór. Cenzura i inne formy upolitycznienia kultury* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha! Art, 2013).
- ⁵ Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
- ⁶ Lisa Duggan, and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- ⁷ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).
- ⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- ⁹ See: Linda Williams, *Hard Core. Power, Pleasure and the „Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (London: Duke University Press, 2008).
- ¹⁰ Ewa Majewska, "Censored bodies, censored selves. Towards a feminist critique of neoliberal anti-porn legislations," *Transverse* 10 (2010): 51-57.
- ¹¹ Majewska, *Sztuka jako pozór. Cenzura i inne formy upolitycznienia kultury*.
- ¹² Jill Nagle, *Whores and other Feminists* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- ¹³ Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture. Sex, Media and the democratization of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002).
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- ²¹ Karl Marx, *The Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992).
- ²² Spivak, *A Critique of the Postcolonial Reason*, 271.
- ²³ Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza, "Women's naked body protests and the performance of resistance: *Femen* and *Meira Paibi* protests against rape," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 35:2 (2014): 251-268.
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