

Prosjektbeskrivelse / Project description

Title: *The Other Wild: touching art as confrontation.*

Research Questions

The Other Wild interrogates internalized normative structures that harness and govern life as well as non-life, and examines ways in which these structures incorporate exclusion and demonization of states of body and mind. I choose to call these excluded things 'wildness', and to ask: What might this 'wildness' be? Posing this overarching question through artistic practice, the following subsidiary questions will be posed:

How do contemporary politics and juridical systems inhabit individual bodies, and how do normative structures manifest themselves within the body? At which point is this linked to different systems of belief and historical power relationships? How and with what justification does this extend out from the body into the land, entities and life and our notions of wilderness? I will use the term "structural magic" as a tool to look at the paranormal (beyond normal) and inter-normal activity performed in structures like state institutions, as well as the individual and collective body.

The Other Wild poses these questions through different examples and art works, located specifically within and in relation to the Scandinavian welfare state.

At its core, *The Other Wild* aims to look for potential resistance within the structures of governance and control through a research-based artistic practice. Through exploration of methods of artistic production both material and immaterial, critical and caring, the research incorporates a discussion of the potential of art during times of social, economic and political change.¹

Structure

The research is structured around two different examples, each resulting in a body of artistic work. The research follows patterns and traces of systems of belief, law and language in an *institutional body* as well as a set of *individual* and *imaginary* ones.

Inspired by for example Silvia Federici and her writing on historical processes of capitalization and demonization of bodies and land, the project takes an example of what I choose to call "structural magic", with magic as something paranormal in line of thought with both for example the black magic of the medieval witch-hunt, where transformation is crucial (the ability to fly, control nature, predict the future, take animal form, make things disappear), but also the magic of rhetorical and juridical use of language, through the use of words that have the ability to transform the status of people and land.

I am looking at two examples that of (magical) disappearance. In both examples I take a starting point in the touch, inscription, and the surface or membrane that equals skin. Material, body or skin meets another, and makes an imprint on each other.

Looking at the "regime of touch", how we structurally live in a system where we touch downwards in the axes of power, we pet the children or animals, touch materials and so on, but

¹ Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (MIT Press, November 2012).

between adults the set of norms following touch is something highly controlled, often telling the body it is alone, and in my view perhaps resists a collective experience or at least a sensibility or confrontation, and as such it is a governing structure. I am trying to locate touch as language, this writing of the body in different places.

To do this through artistic production, I will look to different types of touch or confrontation that are somehow connected to the paranormal, the unconscious, telepathy, and paranormal and intra-normal activities. But rather than looking at the economies of healing, I am interested in looking upon touch as confrontation, and as sensibility to such. The act of confrontation is important in relation to art, and how art is conceived. In following these lines, I am picking up upon Denise Ferreira Da Silva² when she is pointing to art as confrontation as a way to overcome art as representation, and the repetitive othering the representation brings.

1. The Museum

Part of the research focuses on patterns of belief (and disbelief) inherited from religion, its secular offshoots and how governance and economy are related to such.

Starting with the governance of traditional "wildness", this work takes its starting point in the ontology of the Geological Museum in Oslo, part of the Natural History Museum, and a part of the University of Oslo.

During 2015-2017 the Geological museum are packing down the whole museum, and the building will be restored. The geological museum as it stands, now closed to the public, is a meta-museum; the cabinets on view are more or less unchanged since 1917. In following the process the handling of the collection (one of the worlds most "complete", with its 40 000 minerals), all the drawers with all the stones emptied and packed, labeled, and shipped out for storage, a whole ontological narrative is packed down.

The geology of Oslo is special in Scandinavian terms, because it is very rich on fossils in daylight, which is also mirrored in the collection in the museum, a lot of the stones and minerals in storage are fossils from the same layers/periods as the oil or other fossil fuels, and are as such linked to the economy of the oil industry, and Norwegian economy.

Having Elizabeth Povinelli as a second supervisor, and following her work on what she labels "Geontologies of the Otherwise"³, has urged the eye to look at methods such as historical dating in natural sciences and what that enables in terms of ethics and ownership and how we discover the world.

2. The Prison (To accept theirs, to make it mine, to wish it for myself)

This work takes its starting point in the prison as place of structural magic, where members of society temporarily disappear. The work takes place in three prisons around Oslo; Oslo Prison, Ullersmo Prison and Eidsberg Prison. These are prisons where 60-70 different languages are spoken, and the demography mirrors the growing international working-class of northern Europe, looking more and more like what Angela Davis⁴ describes about the American prison. Looking at the prison surfaces as the extension of our collective skin, I am together with inmates and employees looking for the sometimes-aggressive confrontation between body and material ending up as marks. We are tracing the writings of the bodies that have moved through the buildings of the prison, looking at the surfaces of the architecture as an inscribed or

² Reading Art as confrontation, Denise Ferreira Da Silva, e-flux Journal #65 Supercommunity - May-August 2015

³ Povinelli, Elizabeth A. "Geontologies of the Otherwise." Theorizing the Contemporary, Cultural Anthropology website, January 13, 2014.

⁴ Globalism and the prison industrial complex: an interview with Angela Davis, Avarly F. Gordon, Race Class 1999; 40; 145

carved/drawn surface. An already written poem or the birth of a sculpture or drawing, the tracing of artworks unwanted, blind spots, but already there. Instead of removing these writings of aggression or despair, we note them and we are casting the markings in bronze and place them back in the walls. It is a collective work, tracing utterings and history that otherwise are unwanted.

Some examples of the casted markings are: The holes in the wall left behind from a torn down artwork, the mark of a chair leaned in to the wall hundreds of times. The scratches of names and words in the tabletop, in the wardrobe and walls, the marks of something being smashed into the wall, the lines of counting days.

The work also involves a workshop and film where the inmates are noting down a choreography based on the patterns of the body and movement within the prison, and also mapping within the bodies.

Framework

As the title of this project suggests, the cliché of the ‘wild other’ has been inverted. Instead of the classical narration of the wild (wo)man, the savage or animal, this insists on a narrative swap and another kind of ‘wildness’.

In connecting the two romanticized terms ‘other’ and ‘wild’ – otherness to wildness – this research focuses on the body as both individual (subjective) and collective (political). Seeing beyond the dichotomy of the existential language of ‘self’ and ‘other’, in line with an understanding of wildness as a post-normal state of being,⁵ the research explores the effect of a potential ‘wildness’ on the notion of ‘self’ and the production of subjectivity. In unharnessing the governance of the body and discovering what kind of (materialistic, spiritual, emotional and social) subjectivity unfolds, *The Other Wild* seek to investigate this potential field of creativity and life. Here, ‘wildness’ is thought to encompass states of mind and heart, timespans, the nonsense, non-life and gray zones of designated categories and narratives.

This artistic research plays with strategies inspired by twentieth-century feminist, queer and postcolonial theory, in a theoretical framework that relates the concept of biopower and post-humanism to wildness. This looks at how demonization has worked as a tool of power and politics throughout history, from the merging of different ontologies and narratives – of, for example, creation myths in eras of theological rule to the mores of democratic society – the research finds trajectories that shape the epistemological and emotional architecture of each being. As mentioned, Federici’s conception of the accumulation of labor, land and bodies as a precondition of capitalist society is taken further, in *The Other Wild*, to include the individual and juridical flesh of the human body – the home of the soul and its mythologies – as well as the bodies of communities and of the land.

Unraveling the potential wildness of these different bodies, the project looks at the ways in which normative and religiously charged dichotomies (good, evil...) operate. This maps the political, economic and personal aspects of the social contract between the body and the welfare state. It also keeps in mind the unstable foundations of the European welfare state, itself a body under great economic, political and social pressure.

The ‘confrontational’ approach of the project (alluded to in the subtitle) refers to a search for the will and power to confront, move, resist or react. Aggression, as a positive force, is a line of interest and method in my previous artistic work where confrontation is a reoccurring format, as well as a potential part of ‘wildness’.

⁵ J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Duke University Press, September 19, 2011).

Method

In the production of artistic work I make the use of a range of methods, many of them using the touch/inscription/confrontation between hand and material, life and nonlife as a lens to enter in discussion about the formulation of language and subjectivity.

In the critical reflection there are a few collectively generated texts, where we use the body as an image-producing apparatus. In relation to the academic demand of knowledge production, methods of meditation and telepathy is taken in use to circulate collective images and other bodily knowledge, again (re) acting on Silvia Federici, and her writing about the body-mind split as a precursor for neoliberal capitalism and the making of the working (class) body.

Relevance and Field

As stated at the outset, *The Other Wild* aims to question the governance and control of potential political resistance through a research-based artistic practice. With the conceptualization of method, the research also incorporates questions at the level of production. Doing this within the framework of an artistic research program questions the possibility of such a forum as a scene for transformative potential. This research shares certain interests with previous artistic research projects, such as Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato's *Assemblages: Félix Guattari and Machinic Animism* (2010–), which involves researching an animistic understanding of subjectivity and art as a field in which discussions of sanity are played out. With its aggressive inquiry, *The Other Wild* also tends towards the 'wildness' recently reflected upon by, among others, Jack Judith Halberstam as a 'post-normal' state of being, drawing lines in and from contemporary culture.⁶ Further, the research is developed under the supervision of, and in conversation with, the anthropologist, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, guided by her research into late liberalism's performativity within the subject, her knowledge of governance and the anthropology of the otherwise⁷ in relation to what is spoken of here as 'wildness'. Povinelli's study of *carnality*⁸, 'the socially built space between flesh and environment', as well as her work on the binary between individual freedom and social constraint, intimacy and governance, and her input on affect as a path to knowledge is of guidance in the process and production of artwork.

My community of artists, thinkers and writers within the community platform, FRANK, is of essential importance to this research. Since 2012, FRANK has worked as a mental and social architecture, hosting various formats, artists and co-curators with an interest in the impact and meaning of queer and feminist perspectives within the Nordic region (geographically and politically within Scandinavia with its surrounding virtues of equality and sameness).

The research opens up a potential artistic 'healing' or transformation, in line with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's agitation of poetry as a linguistic 'salvation' in understanding the current crisis as a crisis of the social imagination. This research contributes to public debate as well as to interrelations between various fields touched upon by works, introducing complexity and an alternative view of the artistic perspective.

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Liv Bugge has a research-based artistic practice, incorporating a variety of media, with an

⁶ Jack Judith Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Beacon Press, September 18, 2012).

⁷ This continues: 'This anthropology locates itself within forms of life that are at odds with dominant, and dominating, modes of being. One can often tell when or where one of these forms of life has emerged, because it typically produces an immunological response in the host mode of being. In other words, when a form of life emerges contrary to dominant modes of social being, the dominant mode experiences this form as inside and yet foreign to its body'. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Routes/Worlds* (e-flux, 2011).

⁸ Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Duke University Press, 2006).

emphasis on time-based media. Her work is engaged with moments of movement and the access to power, will and force to enact them. She is especially interested in aggression as a positive force within society. The interests within her individual artistic practice overlap with her community-building collaboration, FRANK, which she runs together with fellow artist, Sille Storihle.

Vedlegg 4 til søknad om bedømmelse i doktorgradsprogrammet ved Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo
Liv Bugge