



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga

an autopsy

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Summary

This text should be seen as an experimental supplement to my Master Thesis Art Installation “*In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga*” and aims to provide detailed and in-depth contextualization of any possible symbolism present in the piece.

To provide such an extremely detailed written explanation of my work is an unprecedented occurrence in my art practice. It has always been my conviction that such an explanation is not only unnecessary but even counter productive for the experience of my artwork. The installation, being created within an Academic Masters program where the current discourse regarding the requirement of accompanying academic writing in artistic practice-based research, provided me with the opportunity to create such an explanatory text and test the validity of my theory.

Ideally this text should be read after having experienced the installation piece in person.

Keywords

Sculpture, Figure, Installation art , Symbols, Beauty, Voyeurism, Alchemy, Love, Magic, Crisis, Contextualizing

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"I had nothing to offer anybody except my own confusion."

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...I do not pretend to aught worth knowing,
I do not pretend I could be a teacher
To help or convert a fellow-creature.
Then, too, I've neither lands nor gold,
Nor the world's least pomp or honor hold –
No dog would endure such a curst existence!
Wherefore, from Magic I seek assistance,
That many a secret perchance I reach
Through spirit-power and spirit-speech,
And thus the bitter task forego
Of saying the things I do not know, –
That I may detect the inmost force
Which binds the world, and guides its course;
Its germs, productive powers explore,
And rummage in empty words no more!

Goethe, Faust[2]

Originally it was my intention to write the master thesis as a series of daily diary entries, reflections upon my own creative process. Almost immediately it became clear that this was not a natural way for me to relate myself to my own practice and I abandoned the writing. The exercise did make me realize how I actually go about creating an art piece from an initial notion to the finished exhibited piece. The main discovery with the diary entries was an awareness of my inability to speak about my work (but for in descriptive terms about the formal aspects) until long after the piece is finished. It is as if by me explaining the piece while in the midst of creating it interrupts the thought pattern, removes me from of the creative bliss or trans that I find myself in while working intensively on a piece and thus kill the “spirit” of the project. Once the work is finished and exhibited I find myself back in this mortal world and contrary to what one might suspect, not in a state of euphoria but overwhelmed with a feeling of sadness and loss. It is not until after a mourning process has taken place that I might be able to gather my thoughts and verbalize what it is I have indeed created and even then I find myself averse to the thought of having to explain it.

As an artist that has been practicing and exhibiting for several years in several countries I did make a conscious choice by seeking myself back to the academic world. Partly aspiring to acquire new skills in the new media art field such as micro controllers, sensors and computer programming but even more the presumption that there I would find the space where my boundaries as an artist

would be challenged in a safe non-competitive setting without the pressure of the end result having to be a product ready for public critique, exhibition 'to be sold' because of the finances invested by the supporters I had in the commercial art world. What further drew me back to the University world was my interest in developing formal practice-based research skills preparing me for the possibility of in the future undertaking PhD studies through my art practice.

With that background came my decision to challenge myself with this Master thesis text and not only attempt to literary explain my master thesis art installation but to go even further and attempt to dissect every aspect of it as if I was conducting an autopsy. In this 'act of seeing with my own eyes' [3] I am hoping to gain more insight into my own art work and my creative thinking as well as exploring the possibilities that might or might not lay in contextualizing one of my art pieces.



FIG.1
Josefina Posch, "In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga" 2010

Upon encountering the installation one is first faced with a large pentagon shaped enclosure with exposed studs, raw particleboard with white silk-screen prints that is obviously a reproduction of an old etching of a man and a woman. There are oval holes on two sides of the pentagon about one meter up from the floor. The holes are lavishly decorated with white fur, feathers and pearls. There is a violet light shining through the holes. In front of the holes there are benches to kneel down on in order to be able to see through the holes. Looking inside the pentagon one is confronted with a clinical white space illuminated in ultraviolet light coming from a fluorescent tube in one of the corners. There are two life size figures hanging almost hovering in the space. One is a man and one is a woman. They look like idealized mannequins but at a closer look one sees the realistic and aged hands and feet.



FIG.2
Josefina Posch, "In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga" 2010

The sculptures are partly covered in a white pearl coloured silicone that seems to be dripping of the figures. On the lower spines of the figures there are nipples with goat-milker-liners attached to them. From the liners there is PVC tubing going from one figure to the other and from the figures back to the walls of the pentagon where the viewer peeks through. Following the tubing that connects the two figures one finds a small animal like creature on the floor gnawing at the tubing. The creature is seventy-five cm long, covered in white fur and has a sack shaped tail in silicone with nipples on it. Outside the pentagon on the wall there is a screen playing a video loop of close-ups from the two figures. They are hanging and moving slowly and they are laying close to and on top of each other. It is obvious that the action in the video has taken place at an earlier moment before the sculptures where hung up in the pentagon.

3.1 In My Secret Life

The first part of the title “In My Secret Life” is also the title of my whole series of three art works or acts as I chosen to call them. Beginning with act 1 “*In My Secret Life – Hibernation*” that was shown in Bergrummet at Konstepidemin Art Center in Gothenburg, Sweden in December of 2009. The title is a reference to the Leonard Cohen song with the same name [4] and to the mysticism in Zen Buddhism and the teachings of the Kabbalah which Jewish philosopher Gershom Scholem, referred to as “the secret life of Judaism” in a letter to Zalman Schocken in 1937. [5] It was not only the lyrics in Cohen’s song that lead me to use him as a reference but the admiration of someone who presumably spend eight years working on one song to perfect it and his matter of fact relation to spirituality and mysticism [6] What intrigues me with mysticism is it’s offering of separating intellectual scientific thinking with a trust in our notions and intuitions. This paradox between the scientific, rational, intellectual methodology that is unavoidable for the engineering, construction and fund-raising of my art projects and when the physical action of creating becomes almost liturgical transferring me into a hypnotic state.

“Mysticism is a phenomenon found in all the ‘great’ religions. Given our present knowledge concerning world religions we can say that the goal of mysticism is the liberation of humankind, specifically of our soul’s innermost core, which is overwhelmingly earth-bound and therefore in mortal danger. Mysticism projects us into absolute, pure original being, with our essence, thought, feelings and will safe and sound.”

Heiko A. Oberman[7]

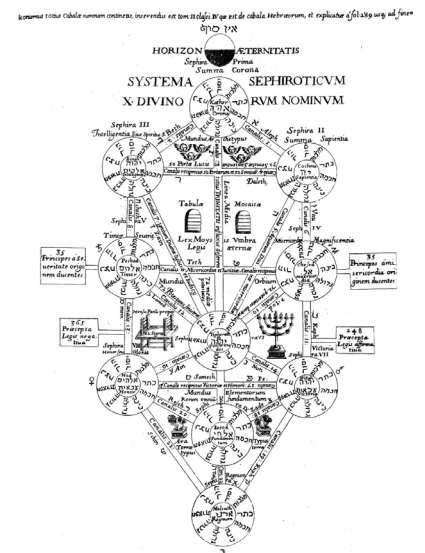


FIG.3
Unknown artist, “The Tree of Life”

Det Stora Vidunderliga is a Swedish ambiguous phrase without a suitable English translation. **Det Stora** means the great and **Vidunderlig** refers both to the sublime, something miraculous, fantastic, enormous, and unprecedented as well as something grotesque, gruesome, unnatural or monstrous. The whole phrase appears as the last words in Henrik Ibsen's play "*A Doll's House*" [8]

HELMER: Nora – can't I ever be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA [picking up her bag]: Oh, Thorvald – there would have to be the greatest miracle of all...

HELMER: What would that be – the greatest miracle of all?

NORA: Both of us would have to be so changed*[sic] that – Oh, Thorvald, I don't believe in miracles any longer.

HELMER: But I'll believe. Tell me: 'so changed that...'?

NORA: That our life together could be a real marriage. Good-bye. [She goes out through the hall.]

HELMER [sinking down on a chair by the door and burying his face in his hands]: Nora! Nora! [He rises and looks round.] Empty! She is not here any more! [With a glimmer of hope] "The greatest miracle of all..."

Henrik Ibsen [8]

In the English translation there is an unfortunate lack of the tension and intrigue that the word **Vidunderliga** creates by as noted above translating it to 'greatest miracle of all' that contains only positive connotations. Further in line five marked with a * the word changed is in the Swedish version *förvandla* which is different from the translation of changed, 'förändra' in the sense that it carries a magical reference. Maybe more linked to the English word transform which signalizes a change that is permanent.[9] I bring this up because my attraction to the word **Vidunderlig** and this last scene is precisely because the complex duality in Nora suggesting that something that could be miraculous or monstrous must happen for them to transform themselves and maybe be able to be more than strangers in a future time. This idea of the necessity of facing a crisis to not only become aware of one's situation and the things (material) surrounding us but also as a initiative to transform ourselves and come closer to our true desires is something that I will come back to when I dissect the scene I set forth inside the pentagon. Reading the Ibsen play I identified with both the Helmer and the Nora character, it was never a black or white case and what intrigued me with the play is not how it points out women's 'inferior' role in a marriage but the complexity and 'game' a relation (marriage) can be. In my own work I have at times intentionally used the male as oppose to a female form as a symbol, even though the piece might be partially self biographical, in order to create a paradox an

enigma as well as to remove any obvious references to female (see feminist) art that audiences often resort to in lack of other immediate references available to them.

4.0 The Enclosure

4.1 The Pentagon

The reason for choosing the geometric even-sided pentagon shape was mainly an aesthetic decision. The space lends itself to a perfect corner for the two figures to hang facing each other, the vertically mounted violet fluorescent tube separates them down the middle. Two of the sides have peepholes limiting the visual field to a side view of the diorama and leaving the last wall, which is facing the scene, empty. There is a plenitude of symbolic meaning and references to the pentagon from associations to the Goddess Venus, in alchemy with five being the number of fire, water, air, earth and spirit. In my case being a figurative sculptor I think of the famous Leonardo Da Vinci man in a circle illustration where the four limbs and head creates a five pointed star or if connected by straight lines forms a pentagon. It is also an old architecture shape used in fortresses something that the American military headquarters have famously utilized in their modern construction of the Pentagon complex.[10] The pentagon in my installation is both a sculpture in itself as well as providing an important border between the audience and the installation. A doll house stage set with the eroticism of a peepshow. I the artist let you in but at the same time I am preventing you to get too close or to participate, immerse, become part of the scene inside.

"The Travel poster [referring to an idealized advert of happy beautiful couple walking on sandy beach] is the ubiquitous cultural metonymy for 'the place' of success, which entails becoming beautiful in a beautiful place. When success looks like a place and place is just an appearance – the place where you are perfectly beautiful – then most of us can simply try to be "closer approximations of the beautiful," never truly "inside" the pictured paradise."

Virginia Blum [11]

As starting point for this installation was my intention to depict a similar idea to what Virginia Blum speaks about in regards to the travel poster: the notion that we are never able to fully know another person(s). Relationships or other people's lives are seldom what they might seem from an outsiders view. Something that is true both for 'regular' people and celebrities who's idolized lives can be enviously followed via web sites and tabloid media. Some celebrities occasionally, not so much invite as grant 'fans' i.e. mortals the possibility to

enter their world by putting them through a series of trials. The purpose of these trials is to exhibit the dominating powers that the celebrity holds and are therefore almost always humiliating for the fan. The tests also includes the element of competing with other fans in order to become the idols best friend, assistant, new backup singer or just a member of their ‘possy’. In my installation you, the viewer, are in the disadvantage position: on your knees peeking through holes, their fur lining touching your cheek activating an almost unnoticed sensory response by the soft caress. But I am teasing you, because I want you to succumb to my command, confess your curiosity, embrace your perversities, your voyeurism and as soon as you believe you are safe as an anonymous observer I force you face-to-face with another viewer appearing in the opposite peephole and suddenly you are not alone, there is another competitor for my space and your secret that you thought was safe is exposed.

“I, a shy exhibitionist.”

Josefina Posch [12]

Or maybe I am a voyeuristic exhibitionist since according to Andrea Sabbadini [13] there are two contrasting and complimentary kinds of voyeurism. The first one called penetrative voyeurism ; a narcissistic form of aggression involving gratification through the furtive watching of objects unaware of being watched. The second one, reflective voyeurism involves the experience of pleasure through the watching of objects who are aware that they are being watched; she argues that this is a more advanced form of perversion because it implies some recognition that others are not just extensions of one’s own self, but real persons responding to the voyeuristic activities of the subject and possibly getting themselves exhibitionistic satisfaction from being looked at. This might place my artistic practice in the second category. Nevertheless the voyeuristic element in my work is a recurring theme and I elaborate on this further in the section about the peepholes.



FIG.4
Josefina Posch, “Intrude - Big Brother” 2008

The print outside the pentagon was originally meant to be purely ornamental wallpaper-like medallions. When designing the pattern I came across the old print “*The Fall of Man*” by Albrecht Dürer from 1504 and thought it would be a perfect fit for the piece. While researching for this paper I have on several occasions come across Dürer in relation to other components of the installation such as alchemy, colour and especially the search for the perfect figure. The symbolism that the image carries depicting Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, is unavoidable even though not of importance to me as I mentioned it was purely an aesthetic decision but as Walter L. Strauss points out referring to S.R. Koehlers remark from 1888:

“...it is equally certain that the biblical story served the artist only as a pretext for representing the nude, both male and female, according to the best lights he then had, based on Apollo Belvedere and on Venus. Nowhere else has Dürer treated the flesh with such caressing care...”

S.R.Koehler [14]

This implies that the artist had similar intentions as I did using the image. But there might be another reason for Dürer’s choice of subject matter when he chose to transform of these classical and mythological sources (Apollo Belvedere and Venus) into the biblical forms of Adam and Eve that could indicate Dürer’s belief in the divine origin of the classical canon of human proportions. The religious, as opposed to secular presentation, moreover, rendered the nude figures more acceptable to the public at the time.[15] Walter L. Strauss points out that Dürer’s Adam and Eve are unconscious of their own nakedness thus proclaiming to the northern Europeans an ‘emancipation of the flesh’ and the curse that has rested upon it for fifteen hundred years.[16]] He explains some of the elaborate symbolism in the piece and for me the cat and mouse in the foreground are the most interesting ones since I include one of my ‘Trepidator’ inspired sculptures in the installation that in turn carries connotations to the rodent- mouse. The cat and the mouse in the print symbolizes the predator and the innocent prey, as a summary of the relationship between the two human protagonists. Wieseman explains:

“The elk, bull, rabbit, and cat embody the four temperaments: the melancholic, the phlegmatic, the sanguine, and the choleric. According to medieval doctrine formulated in the twelfth century, the perfect equilibrium of these humors in the human body was upset after the Fall, causing one or the other to predominate and make man both mortal and subject to vice.”

M. E. Wieseman [17]

- The Peepholes

"Holes are access from one space to another—outside to inside—inside to outside—inside to inside. Round and square holes, body holes and architecture holes, mouth, ears, eye sockets, rectum, vagina, penis hole, front door, back door, windows. Holes are also openings to sleeves, deposit chambers and pockets. Donuts and rods, as sexual mechanisms, rub devices. Drilling holes, making a hole with a drill bit. It's about sex and confusion."

Paul McCarthy [18]

When I was about six years old my grandmother started taking me to the Museum of Natural History 'Naturhistoriska museet' here in Gothenburg and I remember walking through the large halls with the glass incased stuffed animals, the dioramas sceneries with their perfect stillness of a frozen moment and desperately trying not to look at the Siamese twins in the glass jar, but failing every time. But the deepest impact, that touched something fundamental in me was to be found at the very end of the exhibitions; a display case identical to the other ones but with darkened glass with only a peephole and the descriptive text 'The most dangerous animal on earth'. Looking inside you found yourself face-to-face with a pair of wide open, slightly confused fear filled eyes only to realize you were looking at yourself in a mirror. This simple 'trick' shocked me to my core, not because I was being fooled but because it was my first memory of being aware of my own self and that this self was something immensely dangerous.

Fast forward to me living in San Francisco in 1998 where the second part of MTV's Real Life took place and the Y2K fear already started to infiltrate our daily life, I began to be aware of the vast amount of surveillance cameras that surrounded me on a daily basis.



FIG.5
Josefina Posch, "Exposure" 1999 & 2003

I became excessively uncomfortable in the presence of surveillance cameras sensing that this someone who was watching me obviously knew something more about myself than I did, since this someone felt I needed to be watched. After all, I was the most dangerous animal on earth, and I started to experiment with surveillance, watching and being watched in my art, a theme that still can be found in a lot of my work including *“In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga”*

The portholes in the pentagon of the installation *“In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga”* are both voyeuristic peepholes into this diorama of my secret life as well as referring to the ‘glory-holes’ found in sex clubs where a separating wall hinders all physical contact but for at the body part exposed in the hole, which with it’s lower placement suggests the genitals. In my installation the audience, by being on their knees would in such a setting by being the provider of e.g. oral sex be the pleasing one and whoever is inside the pentagon [see I the artist] would be the receiving part. The kneeling scene further carries connotations to a confessional where the audience is the sinner and again the insider, I the artist, would be the priest with the power of offering ways of forgiveness of sin.

While writing this paper I became interested in how my work might relate to Marcel Duchamp and his piece *“The Large Glass”* in connection to Raymond Roussel’s novel *“Locus Solus”* [19] something that I bring forth under the headline: 5.4 The Silicone, The Milkers and The Tubing. But during that research I came across another of Duchamp’s pieces the *“Etant Donnes”* (1946-66) who’s existence by being such a well known work I somehow must have had in the back of my subconscious and was happy to rediscover it as a reference to my own peepholes.



FIG.6
Marcel Duchamp *“Etant Donnes”* 1946-66

"Anais, rise to the surface. Dress up. Go and take a look at the surface world. Meet the world which glitters."

Anais Nin [20]

Fashion, design and other bodily adornments have always been a natural part of my life growing up with parents working in that field. Quite early on I became comfortable in letting my own personality show through by embracing a personal fashion style as opposed to follow present trends and has always appreciated other individuals doing the same. What I like about Anaïs Nin's way of self-medicating out of an depression by prompting herself to dress up and meet the world that glitters, is that it gives a psychological value to fashion. Frequenting the clubs while living in Miami Beach I got a first row view of the hip-hop culture and the fashion that goes hand in hand with it. What fascinated me with hip-hop fashion was that the men's fashion was more elaborate than the women's with a abundance of jewelry, fur and accessories.

To me it was tribal: it reminded me of the Native American Indians where the men wore the large feather head pieces and painted their faces. The lavish display of wearing your wealth becomes in a society where money is power a sign for superiority aiming to induce respect, which in the 'Gangsta' hip-hop culture is closely connected to fear thus the fashion becomes a sort of war paint to intimidate any possible enemy. This African American desire to adorn might be what Zora Neale Hurston spoke about as 'Will to adorn' in relation to language which she claims is

"the second most noticeable characteristics in Negro expression. . .It arises out of the same impulse as the wearing of jewelry and the making of sculpture – the urge to adorn. . .what ever the Negro does of his own volition he embellishes."

Zora Neale Hurston [21]



FIG.6
Unknown artist "P.Diddy and Cristal"

Hurston continues that there is a notion in the African American culture where there can never be enough of beauty, let alone too much. On the other end but still related is the baroque element where abundance is aimed to express awe, triumphant power and control which in my opinion permeates today's society from the U.S. to the World Fair in Shanghai. The word Baroque is from the Portuguese word 'barroco', meaning imperfect pearl. A pearl that is uneven textured and does not have a symmetric center axis. Imperfections that are not immediately discoverable and might not effect the initial beauty of the pearl but still rates them as second grade might relate to my fascination with the body, bodily perfection vs. imperfection and plastic surgery. There is also the other element that I described in an artist statement from 2008 [22] and how it relates to my artwork then as well as my master thesis piece.

"...Wölfflin coined the word Baroque in *Renaissance und Barock*, 1888 and identified it as 'movement imported into mass' which might be a suitable connotation for me since after years of global movement I am now back in my physical 'mass' : my birth city Göteborg and artistically with the sculptural mass of the figure caught in the no-mans land between having moved and about to move."

Josefina Posch [22]

5.0 The Scene Inside

5.1 The Lighting

Colour has for me always been difficult since colour carry such strong connotations and references both on a cultural and individual plane. As a sculptor I always felt that colour took away from the forms and the core of my pieces, therefore I quite early started limitation myself to making them all white, which might be argued are in fact all colours.

While participating in workshops with artist Olafur Eliasson while he developed his "*Your Black Horizon*" for the Venice Biennale 2005. I became fascinated with his obsession with light and colours. Especially his theorizing around Colour Memory and how we, if entering a room saturated in blue light will in about 10-15 seconds cause our eyes to produce such high amounts of orange that if the light was suddenly switched to white the space would appear orange but if the blue light was constant the room would after some time will appear white. Our perception of the colour of the room thus depends on how long time we spend in it and will be different from the person next to us that might have entered at a different time but also depending on that persons cultural memory of the colour in question.[23] In "*In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga*" I saw an opportunity to

experiment with our perception of colour and since the original piece was designed to be broadcast in real time over the internet and aimed to raise questions regarding the experience of art works first hand versus via a screen through the net, I chose violet for the light being a spectral colour with a wave length of approximately 380-420 nm and thus cannot be exactly reproduced in RGB Colour spaces such as computer screens.[24]

Violet as oppose to purple was present on the original colour wheel of Newton who it is worth noting was a practicing alchemist. Violet also has it's own symbolism attached to it. Psychics who claim to be able to observe the aura with their third eye report that those who are practicing occultists often have a violet aura and further that people with violet auras are forward looking visionaries who may be in occupations such as performance artist, photographer, venture capitalist, astronaut, futurist, or quantum physicist.[25] In J.G. Herder's aesthetic treatise *Kalligone*, [26] the anthropologist argued that because of the colours, blue and red had supreme beauty (after white), several nations called blue and red the beautiful colours, attributing them to a man and a woman: 'firm blue to the man, soft red to the woman' and the opposite in German Romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge's circle of Ideal and Real colours, c.1809 with the warm, orange-red side of the circle is given to the male and the cool, blue violet side to the female. Point is that in the borderline between the blues and the reds one finds violet which symbolic annotations of the sublime, spiritual has also been seen as the ultimate merger between male and female that in China commonly is referred to as Ying and Yang - the ultimately harmony of the universe and symbolized in the arts by the colour violet.



FIG.8
Olafur Eliasson, "Your Black Horizon", 2005

In my artist statement included in the C: Art: Media Masters exhibition brochure [27] I urged the viewer to ponder upon V.I.T.R.I.O.L which is a reference to alchemy and the *materia pura*. Today vitriol is used as another name for sulphuric acid but to the alchemist vitriol is a contraction of the initial letters of the following Latin sentence: *Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Inveniens Occultum Lapidem* with one possible translation 'See in the interior of the purified earth, and you will find the secret stone.' [28] On the outside alchemy seems to be about making gold and creating worldly riches. But Peter Cornell points out that for the true followers alchemy has a much deeper hidden purpose: the refinement and the successive change of base metals is a sort of liturgical process parallel to the alchemists own spiritual change. The process demands infinite patience, trials, depression, failures, new trials, passion and prayers. There are carefully regulated patterns that the alchemist must follow towards the final goal, which is the 'philosophers stone' that in turn has the ability to turn lead into gold as well as being the elixir of longevity. But to reach there the alchemist must descend into his or hers deepest inner core and it may be that this self discovery process is in fact the gold (goal) with alchemy.

Alchemy describes a world of contradictions and the fundamental opposites is represented by the relation between the male and the female and they speak about the chemical marriage, sun and moon, the king and the queen with the ultimate, complete divine creature symbolized as an androgenist and Cornell gives here an example of Duchamps *Mona Lisa with a moustache*. [29] It is precisely this liturgy within alchemy that Cornell describes that intrigues me and that I as an artist can relate to when it comes to my own creative process. There is that moment when art making goes from being purely mechanical labor and instead, as if by magic, one enters a state of *trans* or *flow* where time and place seems to disappear and one just might feel a connection to something much larger than what reality normally presents. It is as if at that moment you are completely and without contradictions fully in touch with your own conscious and subconscious at the same time and Anaïs Nin describes it beautifully:

"When the artist is forced to enter the immediate present, he loses his own peculiar perspective which enables him to connect and relate past, present and the future... and to dream he has to transcend reality and he cannot be drafted into action. He has to make his own detours or he becomes a reporter. If the artist cannot practice this transmutation, then no other can, and we become animals again. People forget that the artist deals in symbols, that is, reality illuminated by the soul. ."

As Anaïs writes this direct connection is normally associated with the remembrance of dreams but both Louise Bourgeois and Luis Buñel through his protagonist Severine in his film *“Belle du jour”* [31] claim they never dream but instead has this constant connection to their own subconscious. Bourgeois believes that this ability to directly communicate with ones unconscious is a mystery but “...a beneficial mystery, a very rare, evanescent one. It's a gift from above...very close to love.” [32] This sensation of euphoria when something mysterious and magic, *Vidunderligt* is taking place in the creative process is for me like a highly addictive drug, for when that euphoric moment has passed I am even more aware of reality with all its faults. What follows is a sense of loss, knowing what *could* be, this feeling slowly winds out to be replaced by a normality which off course in turn act as the breeding ground for the desire to be in that moment of creative transcendence and the cycle is being repeated. Another artist that knows addiction is Damien Hirst and he also speaks about magic being an integral part of the creative process.

“...But the bottom line is that there's magic to it which exists. I really believe that. I mean, I pretend all the time that I know what I am doing and some of the time I don't know up from fucking down. But you've got to be convincing. And the only reason I'd waste the fucking time to be convincing is if I know the magic's there. There's a magic to things which are fantastic that exists. It really fucking exists. It's a real, absolute, total, solid fucking magic. There's no illusion about that. There just isn't.”

Damien Hirst [33]

5.3 The Figures and The Relation

“Thus the first model from which the first image of man arose was a clod of earth, and not without reason, for the Divine Architect of time and of nature, being all perfection, wished to demonstrate, in the imperfection of His materials, what could be done to improve them, just as good sculptors and painters are in the habit of doing, when, by adding additional touches and removing blemishes, they bring their imperfect sketches to such a state of completion and of perfection as they desire.”

Giorgio Vasari [34]

As Vasari points out, after creating the universe but before resting on the 7th day God made art and this first sculptor chose as his subject matter the figure and the self-portrait. My return to figurative sculpting did not come after any creation of a universe (if anything as a result of a collapsed personal universe) but as a direct result of my need to go back to the beginning of my artistic core - to my own creation. Going back to what was my artistic ‘self’ I came to the realization that for me the self was closely connected to the figure. Sculptor Anthony Gormley

who has spend a whole career exploring the figure from a personal perspective literary from the inside out by utilizing his body for his hollow body-forms explains in regards to the self and figurative sculpture

"...What I am making comes from myself but it is not myself it separates self from not self and in some ways it's like looking in the way that meditation looks or the way that psychoanalysis looks, taking a moment out of life so that it can be reflected upon."

Michelangelo Pistoletto [35]

When speaking about the self, weather artistically or psychologically one cannot avoid Kierkegaard's well known concept regarding what the self is, famously set forth in his book *"The Sickness Unto Death"* from 1849.[36] But a greater influence on my new quest for my artistic self came, after I had already started my exploration with the figure, through my interactions with artist Michelangelo Pistoletto while spending four months as an artist-in-residence at his Cittadellarte in Italy in 2008. Pistoletto describes a similar thought pattern as me in his first artistic question on canvas in the 1960s. He investigated the figurative experience and the idea of the self by double reproducing of his own image by painting his self-portrait on a reflective surface such as a mirror or polished metal. The figurative object born out of this action allowed him to pursue his inquiry both within the picture as within life. In the essay *"Plexiglas"* from 1964 he explains:

"I believe that man's first real figurative experience is the recognition of his own image in the mirror: the fiction which comes closest to reality. But it is not long before the reflection begins to send back the same unknowns, the same questions, the same problems, as reality itself: unknowns and questions which man is driven to re-propose in the form of pictures."

Michelangelo Pistoletto [37]



FIG.9
Michelangelo Pistoletto, "Self-Portrait", 1962

What came as a natural investigation for Pistoletto was in my case spurred by what might be called an artistic crisis. At the same time as I was sure and quite secure of my own personal identity I questioned my identity or better my role as an artist. At the same time as my crisis encouraged a re-evaluation of my artistic practice it also brought forth a peculiar heightened awareness of the things around me, including my and others' artistic objects (works of art) to the extent it became almost unbearable for me to be around works of art. The idea that a crisis can or might even be crucial in becoming aware of the things around you can be found in the ideas of phenomenology and in the extension thereof by existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre novel "*Nausea*" from 1959 where the awareness and the following nausea results from the crises that is triggered in Antoine by the adventurous protagonist's trial at settling down in a small town. Not unlike my own situation and Sartre speaks about this awareness and repulsion with objects through his character Antoine

"Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them. They are useful nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts"

Jean-Paul Sartre [38]

This heightened awareness of the objects triggered by a crisis is also discussed by Peter Cornell in "*Saker Om tingens Synlighet*" where he touches on similar questions.

"Tingen blir synliga i ett avbrott eller kris. Det är i Krisis som Husserl bryter upp från den abstrakta vetenskapens skenbart autonoma värld och vänder sig till livsvärlden och dess vardagliga föremål. Krisen kan också vara av mer existentiell nature och i den stämningen tränger sig tingen på berättaren i Malte Laurids Brigge. Han störs vid upprepade tillfälle av att vad han uppfattar som locket till en bleckburk av någon outgrundlig anledning skramlande ramlar i golvet i grannens rum. Det väcker hans irritation men också en hallucinatoriskt tydlig inre bild av bleckburken i rummet intill. . .

Peter Cornell [39]

This initial awareness and aversion I had to things and art objects culminated in the ironic realization that the nausea I felt might be more connected to the precise opposite: the lack of objects and textures and the puritan, relational, social practice elements that my work at the time encompassed, urging me to throw everything aside, start re-inventing and it is here my newfound interest in the figure really manifested itself. To me it seemed natural to explore this objectification of the figure by placing it in a three-dimensional still-life setting and with that a possibility to prospect conscious or subconscious symbolic meanings in my work. By alluding to the awareness of objects, the awareness of death, of time passing and the volatile nature of life itself in "*In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga*" could be seen as a Vanitas, encouraging happiness by

through the symbolism of objects acting as a reminder of life's fragility. Nin connects these thoughts of illness and death with a heightened awareness in her diary entry:

" I think of what the doctors say, that tuberculosis develops genius because the apprehension of death inspires a burning awareness of life's beauty, significance, transience. The bacillus breeds restlessness and hypersensitiveness."

Anais Nin [40]



FIG.10
Paul Cézanne, "Still Life with Skull" (Nature morte au crane), 1895-1900

Earlier I have spoken about my artistic crisis and how it might have been amplified by finding myself stationary in one place for a longer amount of time but this decision to become immobile was in fact a result of more private events in my personal life: the falling out of love and a loss of physical health. That my crisis spurred phenomenological existential enquiries did not come as a surprise to me, but what bewildered me was that in the wake of these events I discovered being something of a closet romantic. Desperate not to take responsibility for this notion I blame the Italians or more precisely the Venetians since living there for a year ruined my minimalist, puritan, conceptual sense of aesthetics and seduced me with notions of beauty and desires. Living in Venice with its abundance of works oozing of explorations in colour and light, is at the same time inspiring and despondent since the constant awareness of the impossibilities as an artist of today to ever live up to such a past, is frankly quite depressing. Venice is a beautiful city, there is no doubt about it, but so is San Francisco and what makes Venice extraordinary might be precisely this pervasive nostalgia for it's grandeur past that makes it

romantic, stirring our desires and persuasion of beauty. From Othello and Casanova to Von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's beauty obsessed novel "*Death in Venice*" from 1913. In the novel the ageing German author Von Aschenbach, becomes mesmerized by the beauty of a young Polish boy who he obsessively falls in love with. Von Aschenbach's fascination with the (beauty of the) boy ultimately leads him not only to become a figure of ridicule but also to even risk his health exposing himself to the cholera epidemic that ultimately becomes his death. Mann also expresses the duality between the artists on one hand desire for perfection as he refer to as a nothingness, a place to stay, a place to rest and the realization that it somehow goes against something.

"...the artist's desire to rest, his longing to get away from the demanding diversity of phenomena and take shelter in the bosom of simplicity and immensity; a forbidden penchant that was entirely antithetical to his mission and, for that reason, seductive – a proclivity for the unorganized, the immeasurable, the eternal: for nothingness. To rest in perfection: that is what the striver for excellence yearns for; and is not nothingness a form of perfection?"

Thomas Mann [41]

A similar antithesis was very much present in my new found romanticism. After all what right did I have to obsess with beauty and desires living in turbulent times with wars, terrorism, global economic crises and a forsaken nature in decay? I was convinced this desire had to be suppressed by all means. But as Oscar Wilde so wisely put it, the only way of resisting temptation is to give in to it [42] and if now a driving force for my creativity can be found in dealing with the fears associated with what a direct connection to my subconscious could imply as well as a confrontation of desires found therein, what point is there then in my search for an expression of this if I consciously begin censoring my subconscious? In her texts Louise Bourgeois often comes back to the importance of complete honesty with oneself in order to create successfully.

"Honesty is a strategy for survival. If you are trying to self-express, to deceive is beside the point. If you don't achieve self-expression, you become depressed. It's related to fulfillment. However, if your art is about exorcising fears and self-expression, if you are convinced yourself you will be convincing to others. I do not have to convince anybody of how I feel – the proof is in the work. Be convinced by the work."

Louise Bourgeois [43]

And what makes Bourgeois work so successful is the omnipresent paradox between her on one hand convincingly self-assurance and trust in her instincts and on the other hand her deep-rooted insecurity, low self-esteem and loneliness. This tension resulting from facing ones fear is something I admire and strive to achieve in my own work.

In this spirit and for the sake of this papers aim to dissect the symbolism in my work even hidden to myself I will mention another possible layer to my new-found interest in surface beauty possibly linking it to my falling out of love and the mourning of the separation that, even though I initiated it, still found myself unprepared for the full reality of the de-attachment. As mentioned earlier Alexander Nehamas [44] claims that beautiful things see love requires attention and to abandon them or be abandoned by them is always a source of pain. At times I saw the separation as a de-colonization of my self thus leaving me in this post-colonial state and there might be a psychological connection between inner experiences such as loss of love and beauty if the body is seen as a territory where the outer body image intersects with the 'self'. As an artist I find it far more satisfying to embrace and explore my newfound multitudes through my work than through some psychoanalysis so it might be that exploring beauty is a way of trying to regain love. Speculating on the culture of plastic surgery Virginia Blum on the other hand relates the loss of your own beauty as it is connected to the sense of your self, with the loss of love.

"Beauty itself can be seen as the ultimate vehicle of attachment: losing it will lose you the love you had; regaining it will find you love again. Just as the child is held together provisionally in the mother's eyes and embrace, the operating table is the place where the surgeon-as-mother will repair the discarded and fragmented body. Just as you mourn the loss of the object, you mourn, most important, the loss of the self loved by that object, the self that was attached. Paradoxically, the table where your body is split apart, your face torn asunder, is the table where you will once again be made whole. You attempt to make present on your body your missing beauty/love."

Virginia L. Blum [45]

Even though I have a fascination with surgery and have used silicone implants in my artwork I must say that the previous assumptions of where there is beauty there will be love might be prevalent in today's mass consumer society but I am far more interested in a more romantic notion of where there is love there will be beauty. Romanticism might initially seem outdated, labeled as sentimental and irrelevant even inappropriate to the contemporary art discourse but I am vouching for it's return as an alternative or even better as a supplement to the present aesthetics of relationalism and social practices. Thinkers such as Kaja Silverman and Leo Bersani are already using aesthetics to explore in the deepest ways what human 'relationality' might be. Silverman has even moved further from desire toward the conditions of love and joy with her newest book "*Flesh of My Flesh*". George Baker⁴ writes in account for this

"...these [love and joy] are two affects that our times – of infinite war and indiscriminate destruction; of massive ethnic, national, and religious polarization- must consider anew. The times, in other words have produced a call. There have been summons."

George Baker[46]

“Jag tror att jag redan skrivit i mina anteckningar, att kärleken mycket liknar en tortyr eller ett kirurgiskt ingrepp. Men man kan utveckla denna tankegång i hela dess beskhet. Två älskande må vara aldrig så betagna i varandra, aldrig så uppfyllda av åtrå, den ena av de två kommer alltid att vara svalare och mindre besatt än den andra. Den ena är då operatören eller bödeln, den andra operationsföremålet eller offret. Hör ni inte dessa suckar, detta stönande, skriken, rosslingarna? Är det förspelet till en förnedrande tragedi?”

Charles Baudelaire [47]

Baudelaire’s notebook entry appeals to me by encompassing several of the issues I address in my art practice: the surgical interest, love, masochism and viewing a relation (here symbolized as a sexual act) from the outside and not having full insight to what might really be taking place. It was during my Bachelor studies in San Francisco in the late 1990’s that I first started using medical paraphernalia in my work, starting with a fascination with prescription medication as a legal form of drug use. To me it was amazing that there was opposition to illegal drug use and at the same time ‘Benzos’ such as Valium or opiates were prescribed like candy and socially acceptable to pop even during a business presentation. But my engrossment with the medical field was most importantly rooted in the tactile fixing of the body. It was not about illness or bodily injury but the medical possibilities to repair the body and the devices used for this. There is no real personal experience of ever being hospitalized, I have had some cuts that required sutures but never any serious surgery and I have never been prescribed any form of sedative medication in any larger amounts that might lay behind this. I have even previously reflected upon why I was so fascinated with this medical world but have not been able to pin point it. I do remember when I was quite young seeing the Austrian artist Gottfried Hellnwein’s self-portrait and thinking – that’s it, he’s got it, he understands! It was honest and it was my first encounter where a contemporary artist had appropriated a much older piece (Edvard Munch’s “*The Scream*”) and succeeded in making it highly valid as his own work.



FIG.11
Gottfried Hellnwein, 'Self-portrait' 1973/1991

There is something engrossing about the idea of the body needing to be mechanically forced into submission by the surgeons to be healed or even as simple as having dental braces. Then there is the latex in my work, in gloves and on sculptures: that constant membrane always present to divide strangers from complete flesh on flesh bodily contact. There is also a sado-masochistic element present, the notion of your body being a machine that needs to be taken in to service as one would with a car and it is also here where my preoccupation with the PVC tubing, the Goat milkers and this constant filling and milking of fluids – effluvia, that might be a symbol of trepidation, the Id or the Self and another artist that frequently uses bodily fluids in his work is Paul McCarthy. His performance video piece with Mike Kelley “*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone*” from 1994 acts as a constant inspiration for me reminding me not to fear or hold anything back in my work.

“Maybe it is a conditioned response: we’re taught to be disgusted by our fluids. Maybe it’s related to a fear of death. Body fluids are base material. Disneyland is so clean; hygiene is the religion of fascism. The body sack, the sack you don’t enter, it’s taboo to enter the sack. Fear of sex and the loss of control; visceral goo, waddle, waddle.”

Paul McCarthy[48]



FIG.12
Paul McCarty, “*Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone*”, 1992

The body and the machine or the body as machine has also been a recurring theme in my work. I have previously mixed soft flesh-like materials such as the silicones and latex forms with elements resembling technology and/or machinery. Some of my pieces actually work. That is they do something e.g. the large lung-like forms actually move breaths, the silicone breasts have microphones inside them that replays with a short delay what is being said at the moment just to mention a few. The original installation piece “*The False Promise of Convenience II*” [see image next page] was site-specific, placed in an abandoned office space where I created a sort of assembly line of latex gloves and sacs. The lineup was



FIG.13
Josefina Posch, "The False Promise of Convenience II", 2003-04

The lineup was important, as was the filling element and as the creatures came round to the 'milking' station they became drained or stripped of content. The assembly line machinery did not work but was installed as if it would be working and during the course of the exhibition I often got the question what it was that was being filled into the sacs. This was a great moment for me as an artist because my artwork succeed in triggering the imagination of the audience and my standard answer was always "What do you think it, is?" and by the answer I learned about my audience and their subconscious of what could be in the sacs: there was a dialog. What did convenience promise us and not live up to? What did that promise fill us up with only to later strip us bare of? Luis Buñel used to reply " Whatever you want there to be" to the standard question he used to get about what it really was in the little box with it's buzzing-bee noises with which the Asian owner provokes the curiosity, fear, excitement of the girls in the brothel in his film "*Belle de jour*" [49]



FIG.14
Luis Buñel , "Belle de jour", 1967

The question relating to my assembly line installation also made me realize that contrary to what new media artists maybe would like to admit, the strength of such work might not lay in the actual seduction of the machinery working but that it convinces the viewer that it does. This theory was confirmed to me when I last year read Raymond Roussel "*Locust Solus*" from 1914 [50] and his detailed descriptions of 'art works' that so obviously could not work but as a reader you do

not care because he makes you believe they do. There are of course many more layers into “*Locus Solus*” that are worth considering in relation to my work but for the specific art piece “*In my Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga*” that this essay is essentially focused on, the main impact was the connection the book provided to the surrealist and especially Marcel Duchamp’s inspiration from it that is maybe most obvious in his piece known as “*The Large Glass*” or “*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*”, (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*) 1915-1923 Many interpretations of the piece has been made. To me the piece always seemed to investigate the complexity of male and female sexual desires. It is suggested that the subject is male idealization and voyeurism, an investigation to achieve ‘knowledge’ of the female. David Hopkins suggests that this knowledge of the female is acquired in stages, just as striptease involves the removal of clothing one after the other. But he points out that in “*The Bride...*” Duchamp is parodying the male objectification of women rather than unself-consciously colluding in it. Hopkins continues in another chapter that if the Duchamps piece

“...pictures Virgin Birth, its ‘hidden’ inner life – the sense in which liquids and gases circulate through its tubes and viscera – creates a peculiar sense of awe, an awe perhaps equivalent, in machine-age terms, to which was once widely experienced in front of statues of the Virgin.”

David Hopkins [51]

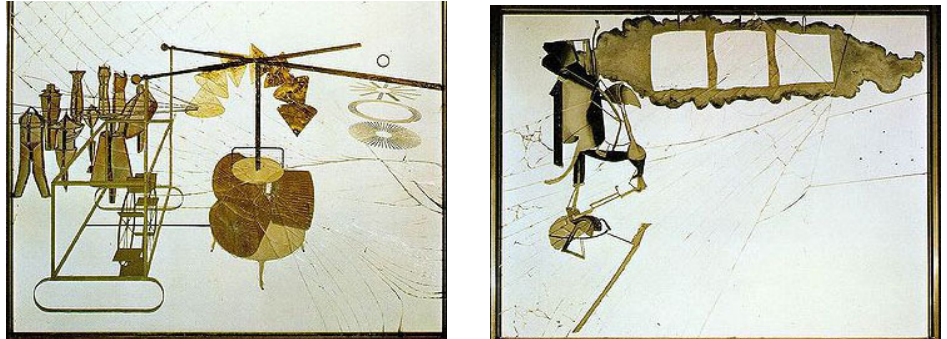


FIG.14
Marcel Duchamp, “*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*”, 1915-23

There is again the connection to my work with the presence of the fluids, the machinery and the (sexual) relation but Hopkins also adds the element of awe, which I briefly explored in the passage about the will to adorn. The idea of awe in my work came about during my exploration of the baroque and later when sculptor Thomas Broome in a studio visit with me suggested my work had Science-Fiction elements in it[52] Initially I strongly rejected this, but at a later time I came to terms with the fact that my work was indeed about a fictional science and that the ‘sense of wonder’ experience unique to the genre being an emotional reaction to the reader suddenly confronting, understanding, or seeing a concept anew in the context of new information.[53] The idea of the sublime - infinity, immensity, ‘delightful horror’ has been suggested as a key to understanding the concept of ‘sense of wonder’ in science fiction with parallels to the ideas of ‘awe’. It is not

only in science fiction or the baroque that the sense of awe is aspired by artists. Damien Hirst describes something similar when he speaks about what great art is.

" Great art is when you just walk round a corner and go, 'Fucking hell! What's that!' Great art is when you come across an object and you have fundamental, personal, one-on-one relationship with it, and you understand something you didn't already understand about what it is to be alive."

Damien Hirst[54]

5.5 The Idealized Body vs. The Realistic Cast Hands and Feet

It was a conscious decision from my side to use cast parts from mannequins as oppose to making life size sculptures from scratch. The main concern being a time vs. importance to the final piece. As often happens with art works, time or I should say the lack of time was here the stronger contestant. My reluctance to using mannequins was rooted in my fear of hanging figures becoming marionettes or too obviously connected to the surrealist movement, which would add a whole new set of associations to the work that I was not aiming for. In my opinion I succeeded in avoiding both associations to overpower my final piece. It was always clear to me that I would use cast hands from real persons and as realistic as possible glass eyes. As for the hands and feet I wanted them to be utterly human: aging and mortal. It is the fascination with cosmetic surgery that comes back in my work and the strange human forms being created by these doctors where seemingly youthful bodies and faces are attached to aged hands and feet. The absurdity is obvious and for a split moment one cannot help but contemplating that maybe it is the limbs that have aged prematurely as a result of some horrific emotional disaster.

" At a plastic surgery convention, he [the plastic surgeon] showed before and after pictures of his surgical correction of one woman's pubic area, isolated from the rest of her body. The audience was properly enthusiastic over the result. He then went on to report that this particular pubic area belonged to a ninety-four-year-old body. The other surgeons where both amazed and amused. 'What does the rest look like?' queried one surgeon, presumably joking. 'Oh, the rest of her looks ninety-four, but this bit looks nineteen'."

Virginia L. Blum [55]

There is perfection in the imperfect maybe imperfections in one sense are necessary for perfection that paradox. The idealized bodies of the sculptures are off course my sense of aesthetics to depict of strength, youth, health, sexuality and in extension happiness. But there is also my fascination with how this surface beauty is achieved in society today where plastic or cosmetic surgery remakes

body parts in hope to create a perfect whole. Without referring to any specific source texts Mark Rothko elaborates on such ideas of beauty and perfection by referring to Leonardo Da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, Rothko's writes about both artists' writings in which they according to Rothko express the existence of an unresolved duality towards perfection. Rothko mean that they both speak of painting being simply a mirror, but it mirrors the most profound aspects of appearances. Thus the artists need to study the organic construction of the objects that they are portraying on order to mirror them properly. This implies that the artist can also **portray internal truths by** "noting and depicting the profound subtleties of those external appearances". **But as Rothko continues Leonardo and Dürer do not consider it their function to portray appearance.**

"They must paint those appearances which imply a sense of perfection. Therefore both Leonardo and Dürer write that to compose a proper figure they must examine numerous figures and select those limbs and organs from each which seem to be the most perfect and then combine them into a synthetic figure which would be a symbol of perfection. Therefore they make the definite statement that in nature itself, perfection does not exist in separate appearances, but that the artist must select and synthesize various attributes to create an appearance of perfection."

Mark Rothko [55]

As a sculptor that has been fascinated with the medical field and paraphernalia I find an odd kinship with the plastic surgeon. The surgeon is essentially a sculptor with flesh as his media. I do not wish to moralize when it comes to individuals' decisions to have plastic surgery, it is ultimately a private choice. My pre-occupation with plastic surgery is more a fascination with the look/feeling of the prosthetics before they are implanted into the bodies e.g. silicone breast and the whole process of the surgery that is normally a result of a tragic accident or disease but in plastic surgery harm is being done to a healthy body. Therefore it is common for plastic surgeons to justify their practice by claiming it being a psychological necessity. As with artists there are certain individual recognizable 'styles' among plastic surgeons who either praise the style of a colleague but more often eagerly open criticizes each other for mere reproducing a certain look on every patient.

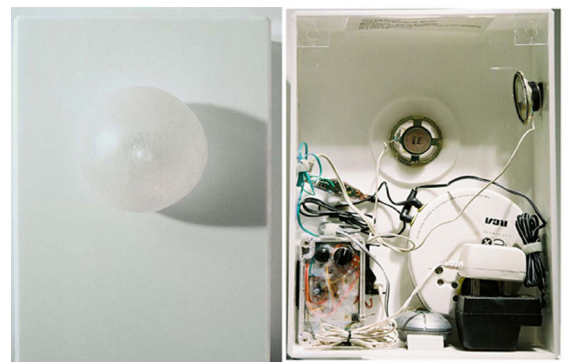


FIG.15
Josefina Posch, "The Cultural Sounds of Miami", 2005



FIG.16
Josefina Posch, "The Overrating of High Self-esteem II", 2005

Maybe worth noting is that in my work encompassing devices or implants that are normally used to improve a body part, new media and seemingly unrelated audio components it was always when the male body was incorporated that strong emotions of disapproval were voiced. Anyhow, I am more intrigued by the notions of male beauty than that of the female. It is probably because I am a woman and already know the female body inside out or maybe simply because I like being around beautiful men. What makes a man beautiful is different from that of female beauty and Baudelaire might just have pinpointed the core of the difference when he writes:

"Ett vackert ansikte hos en man behöver inte, utom möjligen i en kvinnas ögon, ha de drag av vällust, som hos en kvinnas ansikte är en så mycket mer lockande eggelse som det i allmänhet är vemodigare. Men denna manliga Skönhet skall också uttrycka något glödande och sorgbundet – andliga behov, dunkelt undanträngda drifter – och ge en föreställning om oanvänd brutal kraft - någon gång om en hämdgirig känslökyla (...) – någon gång också, och detta är något av det mest intressanta hos Skönheten, om det gåtfulla och slutligen (för att erkänna hur modern jag känner mig i estetiska frågor) om olycka."

Charles Baudelaire [57]

But then again maybe there is not such a difference after all. Going back to the Thomas Mann novel "*Death in Venice*" where male beauty is explored with such brilliance that when reading the book one soon forgets that the love interests are in fact two men, (well actually a boy and a man) and our fascination with beauty instead touches us on a universal level. One of my favorite film directors Wong Kar-wai from Hong Kong also succeeded with this in his film "*Happy together*"

from 1997 that awarded him best director in Cannes. The movie depicts a romance between two men played by Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung Chiu-Wai. Before watching the film I was unsure how I would be able to relate to two homosexual Asian men on a road-trip in Argentina but through Wong's talent for exploring complex relationships this was never an issue I even reflected upon while and after seeing the movie. In Mann's novel beauty and misfortune – ultimately death is inseparable and Alexander Nehamas regards beautiful things as something that requires our attention and an attachment both deep and intense and to abandon them or being abandoned by them, is always a source of pain. Nehamas means that our experience of beauty is inseparable from interpretation but as beauty always promises more than it has given so far so is our effort to understand what it promises forever a work in progress.

"It [our effort to understand beauty] is completed only when beauty has nothing more to offer: understanding comes into full blossom as attraction withers, as it always does – unless death comes first."

Alexander Nehamas[58]

5.6 The Creature

On the floor inside the pentagon there is a creature gnawing on the PVC tubing that might contain effluvia going from the male to the female figure in a symbiotic exchange or maybe as a symbol for one draining the other. In any case the creature is interrupting and feeding of this flow, the creature is a variation on my "*Trepidator*" sculptures that I started using in 1998. The name coming from trepidation (tremor, apprehension or fear). Originally I wanted to sculpt a shape that would define my trepidation that I felt at the time, that feeling of something gnawing away at you in the night when you cannot sleep. I added the latex glove to the head since my apprehension during that time was connected to my search for a national identity and it became a symbol for the latex gloved search I always seemed to be subjected to by the immigration officers upon entering the USA. I first used the gloves in the piece "*In Search of National and Cultural Identity*" that was shown at the Berkley Art Center in California, 1999.



FIG.17
Josefina Posch, "In Search of Cultural and National Identity", 1999/2006

Since then I have come back to this figure in various forms most recently in my piece *“Trepidator and Stardust”* 2009 that was shown at the Drawing Museum in Halland part of the Valand student exhibition *“Drawing so Far”* 2009. The idea of something eating away at you or the existence of a destructive force within was also used in my video piece *“Nidhög”* from 2004. One possible meaning of Nidhög is ‘The Tearer of Corpses’ and in Norse mythology it was the dragon-snake that constantly gnawed at the root of the world (symbolized as a tree). The day Nidhög finally succeeds in eating away the root, would be the beginning of the end of the world-cosmos ‘Ragnarök’ after which the war of the Gods would leave two humans alive who would then re-populate the earth. The creature in *“In My Secret Life – det Stora Vidunderliga”* has a tail-like sac with nipples seemingly growing out of which is another component I have previously used reoccurring in my work. This notion of fear being something we pass on from generation to generation and carry with us in sacs: maybe the sacs can stretch indefinitely or do they have a breaking point and if so where is the limit?



FIG.18
Josefina Posch, *“In My Secret Life –Det Stora Vidunderliga”*, 2010

6.0 The Video

The video that is part of the installation consists of close-up shots of the sculptures hanging and moving as well as being put in new poses with each other, edited to the Leonard Cohen song *“In My Secret Life”* (but without recording the audio to the final piece), into loop that is shown next to the pentagon. This video element of the piece came about as a solution for the lack of resources to fully develop the original surveillance part of the installation. My initial idea, that I still plan to realize since it was in fact a core component of the piece, was to have a set of three or four web based surveillance cameras pointed at different angles of the figures. One camera wide shot, one over the shoulder of the female figure to a close up of male face and vice versa and one medium shot in changed angle of the two figures facing each other. The cameras would be hooked up to a computer and a program would randomly switch between the camera angles to a pattern set forth by me i.e. to the Cohen song *“In My Secret Life”*. The idea being

that this would create a film with a new story line depending on which of the camera angle would follow the other. Since the sculptures would be far away from the audience this surveillance would be the only way of getting a more intimate relation to the figures. Further by putting the footage on-line, streaming live but not available to the greater public instead limit the access to one or two at the time pre-selected exhibition spaces in other parts of the world. These venues would then show the footage live in their exhibition spaces as large-scale projections or on big screens, as they normally would show video work and by this creating a completely new piece.

The surveillance video aims to explore our relation to an artwork in real life versus via the Internet. Cornell's quote of Duchamp's idea that the viewer actually together with the artist is part of the creative process and an necessary for the completion of the piece.

"...enligt Duchamps tes att konstverkets fullbordan kräver två medverkande, konstnär och betraktare, som tillsammans utför den skapande akten. Det är konstverkets existensmodus att visa sig och betraktarens att betrakta, obehärskat, glupskt och med begär."

Peter Cornell[59]

How would this manifest in the piece I imagine? What is lost and what is added? What is there with live broadcasting that makes it more interesting to hear live radio or hear and watch live broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera in New York, that can be experienced by purchasing a ticket and watching it at a movie theatre here in Gothenburg. Sabbadini describes this communal viewing in relation to viewing a film about viewing (*Belle du jour*) as follows:

"...we are no longer just indulging in the scopophilic activity of watching a film...What we are watching now is other voyeurs like ourselves. In other words, our identifications on the one hand, and our visual excitement on the other, have as their objects not only the film itself, but also the subjects and objects of the voyeuristic activities projected on the screen – a silver surface which thus turns into the disturbing, distorting mirror of our own suppressed desires."

Andrea Sabbadini [60]

Voyeurism has in recent years, possibly beginning with the birth of reality TV gone from being something hidden and shameful to a natural way of being entertained. The Internet has created what might be the ultimate set-up for satisfying our voyeurism, where individuals can easily conceal their identity and their intentions from each other, watch and being watched by strangers and all this in the privacy of our homes. The Internet forum further facilitates the possibility to lurk i.e. look without having to participate, an Internet term for a person that read blogs but never post. The Internet also provides a space for communication that might be perceived as threatening or difficult in a face-to-face interaction.

Such as delivering bad news, personal disclosures involving taboos or testing out new personalities, similar to what the move to a new city would offer a possibility to 'start over'. Internet communication is mostly considered secondary to real life interactions but one should not underestimate the power of it and online relations. When it comes to love and relationships most people in romantic relations view online behavior involving emotional involvement, sexual talk, the revelation of deeply personal things equivalent to real life infidelity causing the same hurt, loss of trust and possible the ending of the relationship.[61] But then again when it comes to the ability to reproduce the experience of an artwork the Internet seems to at least for now still have its limitations. Hans Ulrich Obrist and Harold Szeemann discusses this in an interview from 2009.

"HUO: Despite the current increase in information about art via the Internet and other media, knowledge still depends a lot on meeting people. I see exhibitions as a result of dialogues, where the curator functions in the ideal case as a catalyst.

HS: The problem is that information can be retrieved via the Internet, but you have to go to the site in question in order to see if there is something behind it, whether the material has enough presence to survive. The best work is always the least reproducible.(...)"

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Harold Szeemann [62]

Another recurring subject when discussing new media and the use of Internet is the cyber-world's possibility to completely engulf an individual. Never mind that the book ones upon a time was accused of doing the same thing, we all know how completely oblivious someone can be of their surroundings while surfing the net or playing an interactive game. It is as if this person actually is in another world and the Internet or interactive media provides a first-class space 'place' to loose one self from daily surroundings. From being an instrument for participation when compared to passive TV or movie viewing, the Internet expanded to a search for a way of fully immerse an individual. An evolution close to the developments in art that has gone from a purely pictorial plane to the modernists' exploration of depicting the 3-D world on a flat surface, the audience participatory work of the 1960's that in turn made way for the today popular 'social practice' way of working with art. [63] Currently sculptors such as Olafur Eliasson and Anthony Gormley are artists in the forefront of a new field exploring ways beyond objects, with the immersion of the audience as goal. For Eliasson it is mostly this ability to fully immerse his audience in a physical environment that is being brought forth when discussing his work and I feel this is unfortunately since his ideas of immersing the audience has far more interesting aspects. One is his constant

consideration of the museum visitor as an integral element in his work, ideas of creating experiences (art) that make it possible for the audience to think of the very production of the experience. [64] This idea of encouraging an evaluation of the nature of the experience while you are engaging in it goes against the notion of success in most commercial experience aimed projects. An example of this is how Eliasson went about the creation of *“The Weather project”* at the Tate in London utilizing a method maybe more associated with social practices, where he questioned members of the staff from the janitors to the director about what they imagined he would do for his upcoming exhibition and realized that what they had in common was that they all kept on talking about the weather.

Anthony Gormley might at first seem an unlikely allied to Eliasson being a figurative sculptor but they share the idea of participation being something internalized and focused on the inner life of the spectator. Gormley explored something similar with his *“Event Horizon”* where 31 of his ‘body forms’ i.e. sculptures were dispersed though out the public spaces of London, creating human-shaped holes in reality, aiming to reverse the figure-ground relationship that has been so fundamental to the development of Western art and moving away from this Newtonian model of object placed in space to a more quantum idea of energizing space at large without a boundary. [65]

Eliasson’s take on the relation ‘Live Art’ vs. Internet is admitting the future possibilities that the unique time-/space situation have and it’s huge impact on our understanding of our surroundings but he continues,

“In it’s current form, the Internet, the way I see it, has signed a contract with a Modernist, two-dimensional conception of space. The relation between it and its users is one of subject and object: I can see it as if it were an image, but I cannot feel it, I’m not present in it, the interaction between the medium and I is too weak.”

Olafur Eliasson [66]

Gormley on the other hand, decided in 2009 to utilize the Internet and it’s voyeuristic milieu as an integral part of his artwork. In *“One & Other”* during one hundred days 2,400 participants each spend one hour each alone on the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square in London, the performance could be followed in real time via web cameras. [67]

The main goal with this text was the opportunity to write an explanatory and academic lengthy text about one of my art pieces, exploring what value such contextualizing might have. On a personal level, the act of putting my thought pattern and detailed explanations of the symbolism in my work, in writing did not turn out to be the discovery process that I had imagined. Instead it was more a laborious job of putting words in a certain order to explain the results from my discoveries in creating the installation that I had in fact already visualized with my finished piece. It is not an easy task to write about art and it is even harder to write about your own work. For a visual artist words always seems to be a constriction of notions expressible visually and ironically, for the audience the pure act of looking without words, in hope to comprehend is an equally challenging a task that James Elkins describes:

"My central objective has been to show that pictures are much harder to write about than they appear to be when interpretations focus on nameable symbols and stories. It is hard to pay attention to no semiotic aspects of pictures, and harder still to remain alert to the temptation to separate meaning from apparent meaninglessness. In simplest terms, it is hard just to look: it is much easier to read, or to tell stories, than to stare at the peculiarities of a stubbornly silent and wordless object."

James Elkins [68]

The writing of this text, by taking place within an academic framework and not as a reflective catalogue text to an exhibition, provided me with a new set of challenges in regard to the style of writing. Academic study is a practice in itself and academic writing having such a distinct style, could be seen as an art form and therefore I am not sure that it is the ideal vessel for providing the comprehension that aims to facilitate the possibility for the judgment necessary for practice-based research to be considered academic.



FIG.19
Damien Hirst, "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" ,1991

Damien Hirst, part of the Young British Artists of the 1990's, famous for his sculpture of an immersed four meter shark in a tank of formaldehyde, is one example of an artist that knows the value of being aware of the language present in the arts, may it be visual, music or linguistic, in order to convincingly break out of their respective forms and create something that is more. He speaks about this realization that he had while a student.

"...I just opened a book which was an encyclopedia and flickered through it to find a page I liked. Then I nailed the book down with "Romance" written on it across the top of the page. And then I had an old vanity mirror, so I nailed that into the book. And I had a tutorial where John Thompson [head of the Fine Art department at Goldsmiths] said to me, 'Oh, you are aware that in Hamlet, the Shakespeare play, the vanity mirror and 'romance' means duh-duh-duh...' And I went, 'No.' And he said, 'Well, you can't get away with this. You can't get away with this sort of behavior.' ...He was dead right...You can't be unaware of the dead obvious. There's a visual language that exists; it's tried and tested; it's worked for thousands of years. It's like if you are a musician there are rules; there are notes. And I think art it's the same thing."

Damien Hirst[69]

There are no simple answers, instead it has to be decided by each individual artist based upon the goals of his or her process. Having practiced art creation both in the commercial art world and within an academic setting has not provided me with any key insights, assisting me to make a more specific judgment in the question. When re-entering the academic world I had hoped to find a space where I would be able to push my boundaries as an artist in a non-competitive, encouraging and supportive environment.

The academic world is not a utopia and essentially I did not find what I had hoped for but I still believe that this world has the promise of becoming an ideal setting for the exploration of art today since the components, the preconditions are all there and I am looking forward to follow this evolution and possibly be part of it in the future. While I might question the agenda of artists wishing to obtain academic titles when practice-based research very well could be done in a studio setting, at a non-university affiliated art academy or as a non-degree seeking guest researcher I also believe it is up to the academic world to realize the possibilities laying in the exploration of untried unorthodox solutions for judging the results of such research.

"An artists words are always to be taken cautiously. The finished work is often a stranger to, and sometimes very much at odds with what the artist felt or wished to express when he began. At the best artist does what he can, rather than what he wants to do. After the battle is over and the damage faced up to, the result might be surprisingly dull – but sometimes it is surprisingly interesting. . . Asked to enlighten us on their creative process, both would be embarrassed, and probably uninterested. The artist who discusses the so-called meaning of his work is usually describing a literary side issue. The core of his original impulse is to be found, if at all, in the work itself."

Louise Bourgeois [70]

Louise Bourgeois points out that artists' words should be taken cautiously and this is also true of mine. As I tried to show in this thesis text, her statement rings true on several levels for as I have described, the finished installation "*In My Secret Life – Det Stora Vidunderliga*" is for various reasons a compromise from my original intentions. When artists elaborate on these compromises that are inevitable in creating complex pieces it always end up sounding like excuses and I believe thus the reluctance of artists to speak about them.

Finally I will finish where I started, for I still have nothing to offer but my own confusion. There is no doubt that there is a value for an artist to reflect upon his or her own practice and the placement of it historically and present, as well as the dialog it has with other already existing works and practices. But this is unavoidable practicing the creation of art. It happens by default. The question still is, if and if so how to best transmit these reflections to an audience in excess to the artwork stemming from the process. Would one of modernisms and surrealisms most noted symbols "*Le Dejeuner en fourrure*" (*Breakfast in Fur*) 1936 that has inspired a sea of meanings and interpretations to be retroactively attached to it, if the artist Meret Oppenheim already had provided intellectual or symbolic explanation for it? In my opinion, artists very well can and should speak about their philosophy surrounding their art creation but I still doubt there is anything crucial to gain for the artist explaining specific works of art. Such explanations only exists to benefit an audience or critic who cannot or do not wish to make the effort conducting their own research in the work viewed, in order for them to comprehend and judge it.

But *when* the research is being done: the end result of this symbiosis between curator, audience, critic, writer and visual artist might just be *the greatest miracle of all*, 'det stora vidunderliga'.

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