

THEORETICAL REFLECTION



A few years ago I was lost... I found myself in Greece where I accepted a lot of violence to be done to me by a man in a search for love. A lot of self-doubt entered into me and old patterns of self-hatred started to reappear. It took me some time to understand that nothing was wrong with me, but that the situation in which I had fallen was part of larger dynamics oppressing me as part of a group identified female. In the rest of this reflection I will refer to this particular power dynamic as patriarchy in order to frame relations with a political world that interconnects us all.

I remember sitting in front of his computer looking through an usb-key that I had with me for unclear reasons. Between images of art-projects I found a book called 'Woman Hating' by Andrea Dworkin. It was this kind of moment where you realize, this is not a coincidence. Through her writing I realized I had found myself in a situation of male dominance instead of love. It allowed me to recognize and name these reappearing interactions in my personal life, but also to theorize on a larger scale.

*As she writes; 'We think that we are free and refuse to see that we are functions of our particular culture. That culture no longer organically reflects us, it is not our sum total, it is not the collective phenomenology of our creative possibilities – it posses and rules us, reduces us, obstructs the flow of sexual and creative energy and activity, penetrates even into what Freud called the id, gives nightmare shape to natural desire.'*¹

These words resonated very strongly with me. It allowed to connect personal experiences to a larger political framework. In that moment I said yes to her words, because I knew that when I would say yes I could find more similar writing. That was when bell hooks crossed my path with her reflections on love.

When bell hooks entered into my life I had just said goodbye to a way of living that was more survival than living. I had entered into a big depression and wanted to be saved. No prince came to save me as I had read in fairytales from when I was younger. Luckily I had bell hooks reflections to hold on to. She woke me up about the way I had been loved and had been loving. For the first time someone allowed me to say that the family in which I had grown up was lacking love. She even allowed me to question if my family had ever

¹ Dworkin, Andrea (1974). *Woman Hating*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

been loving, maybe it was only care. It felt that I finally had found the words and courage to open my thinking.

My depression came to me in a process where I was trying to conform to normative norms like, find a stable job, be in a heterosexual couple relationship, buy a house, have children, be a nurturing woman, don't be too smart no one will find you attractive... In my meeting with bell hooks I found support to let go of these norms. She made me feel less alone in my search and motivated me onto the path of self-actualization; that's how I came to apply for this master for example.

As she writes: 'Self-love is the foundation of our loving practice. Without it our other efforts to love fail. Giving ourselves love we provide our inner being with the opportunity to have the unconditional love we may have always longed to receive from someone else. Whenever we interact with others, the love we give and receive is always necessarily conditional. Although it is not impossible, it is very difficult and rare for us to be able to extend unconditional love to others, largely because we cannot exercise control over the behavior of someone else and we cannot predict or utterly control our responses to their actions. We can, however, exercise control over our own actions. We can give ourselves the unconditional love that is the grounding for sustained acceptance and affirmation. When we give this precious gift to ourselves, we are able to reach out to others from a place of fulfillment and not from a place of lack'.²



I realized that in my loving relationships and artistic projects I had most often been reaching out from a place of lack instead of fulfillment. In my artistic work I was for example always stretching 'the not'. What was not there, the wrong, but never developing a practice of wholeness. In the process of this master, I came closer to working from a place of fullness, instead of accentuating an intense void. It is in

the building of parallel universes, that can slowly overgrow these ruling empty structures, I find fulfillment.

When I entered into the master program I had arrived theoretically at a point where I understood that social forms such as the family, heterosexuality, the nation, even civilization itself are effects of repetition. Here I see a breaking away from the first quote of Dworkin, where she suggests there to be some sort of ideal natural human state. In my opinion 'the natural' is as much a constructed form as any other.

² hooks, bell (2001). *All about love - new visions*. New York : Harper Perennial.

Judith Butler then suggests something interesting about repetition: 'it is through the repetition of norms that worlds materialize and that boundary, fixity and surface are produced. Such forms appear as forms of life only through the concealment of the work of this repetition.'³

This notion of repetition made me start to look for theory that relates itself to praxis, because its by doing I can unlearn. I was looking for practical ideas that are build within a strong feminist framework. To form a foundation from where deconditioning through repetition can take shape. Its in that moment I found the article 'Against the Couple Form' by Clémence x. Clémentine and Associates from the Infinite Venom Girl Gang, that would have an enormous impact on my life and how I form relationships.



Their manifesto directs itself against the couple as a social form of organizing (amorous) relationships. They define the logic of the couple as reducing relationships and desire to the needs of patriarchy within the capitalist mode of production.

As they write: '*the couple promises that, upon entering its grasp, one will no longer suffer from alienation, from isolation, from boredom, from rootlessness. The couple grants a woman personhood and social visibility. She obtains a*

title, a temporality, a space through the couple. Marriage enshrines this logic and its perpetuation of the specific form assumed by patriarchy under capitalism.'⁴

They go on by concluding: '*patriarchy and capitalism thwart any possibility to love in a way that liberates oneself from the logic of the couple or from one's own oppression. To liberate love necessarily involves the abolition of patriarchy and capitalism. One cannot opt in or out of these structural relations, and the struggle against them will be a collective, historical project.*

In this pathetic, stillborn world, we do have feelings. Sometimes we look at someone and think we are in love with them. We must crush the illusion that romance is or will be an avenue for liberation. We must divest from romantic relationships as means through which we might access a better world than this one. In realizing that their economies and conventions are part and parcel of the continuing soft disaster of our lives, we will leave behind all hitherto existing couples. New and perhaps unknown forms of feminist organizing present the only possible frontier for love.'⁵

³ Ahmed, Sara (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press.

⁴ CLÉMENCE X. CLEMENTINE AND ASSOCIATES FROM THE INFINITE VENOM GIRL GANG (2012). *AGAINST THE COUPLE FORM*. NEW YORK: LIES JOURNAL VOLUME I.

⁵ CLÉMENCE X. CLEMENTINE AND ASSOCIATES FROM THE INFINITE VENOM GIRL GANG (2012). *AGAINST THE COUPLE FORM*. NEW YORK: LIES JOURNAL VOLUME I.

For me the theoretical framework they set out in their article is a big inspiration for my personal life. At the same time I take it as a challenge to find and to create these forms of feminist organizing. I see the scores and the text I developed during this master period as an extension of this quest for other forms of relating through praxis. There is so much amazing theory to explain, but I do believe its in the repetition of other ideas that new universes get born. That's what the 'guerilla death scores' are all about for me. They are suggestions, challenges, concepts, to go out with, try, fail, redo, confront, interrupt and rewrite. Its only through the combination of theory and praxis, that in my eyes, alternative worlds can be weaved and that is where lies my dedication.

This year of master research and all the fresh ideas and theories it brought me is concluding. There were many inspiring articles suggested during the course. The ones that stood out the most to me was the article from BAVO on 'The Art of Over-Identification' and the chapter 'Toppling dance' from the book 'Exhausting Dance' by André Lepecki. In my opinion they examined performance from a revolutionary standpoint, dared to be critical and have a deeply connected socio-political analyzation. It made me understand the importance of performance theory. The artist who creates the artwork, the performance, but can never oversee the total impact it might have. The theorist who deeply analyzes the artwork and can connect it to larger socio-political issues. For this theoretical reflection it could have been amazing to receive an interpretation by a performance theorist of my own project. To hear their reading and maybe respond. I write it down as an idea, a possibility, even if it didn't happen the thought is present.

It was a year in which I have the impression I read a lot of theory. The articles offered to us in the program and then on top of that the ones I needed to read for my project research. In the 'official' theory I was often missing a red thread that connected the articles together. We would read an article on this and then it would never be countered or continued. To find the other side of a particular perspective I felt left alone to figure things out. The moments where I managed to connect theory from the official program with theory for my project were beautiful. There I felt I was making theoretical relations, that strengthened my analytical skills. Like in BoK 18 for example were I connected Bruno Latour with Donna Haraway or connecting BAVO with 'nomadic theory' from Rosi Braidotti.

Even though it has been a year full of theory and little practice, I'm hungry for more. To expand my brain and fulfill it with challenging ideas that will unfold themselves into my artistic practice. As you maybe noticed while reading this theoretical reflection I try to not just integrate theory into my artistic practice. I'm looking for ways to embody theory in every aspect of my life; in the personal, the intellectual, the artistic, the emotional, the physical, ... In the embodiment lies for me the relation between theory and praxis. Words

on paper are lovely, but having them take shape in space is for me the only way to understand and lay layers on top of what has been constructed.

This summer will be filled with practice informed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen 'Sensing, Feeling and Action' and Sara Ahmed 'The Cultural Politics of Emotion'. These will be the two books accompanying me on my travel to Poland, Moldova and Ukraine and I can't wait to discover what are beautiful thoughts will come from that.

I would like to end this theoretical reflection with a quote from Donna Haraway, which form me stresses the importance of choosing wisely who's thoughts you use to think yours.

'It matters which thoughts think thoughts. We must think!'⁶

So lets be wise about our choses!

That said I do want to make a note about the choices of theory and lectures made. I have already posted this on projectcampus, but I want it to be included in an official document.

All the male lecturers.

All the lectures by man.

All the examples of male artists.

Where is the gender balance?

What does this communicate to a group of students who for more then 80% identify as female?

All the lecturers were white.

All the artists presented come from the Occident.

How does that relate to white supremacy and the academia?

I feel exhausted from this dynamic and upset, because I don't feel this communicates to me -identifying as female- an encouragement that my work and words will matter or have value.



⁶ Haraway, Donna (2016). Staying with the Trouble. Durham and London: Duke University Press.