

Narcissism in Neoexpressionism by Elisabeth Haglund

Since ~~we~~ ^{about} three years ^{ago} we use to meet a few times a year a group of female ~~artists~~ artists and art critics. The discussion then turns around what is going on in the life of arts and about ~~possibilities~~ ^{to work and expose} the possibilities ~~of creativity~~ ^{for} of female artists. ~~After~~ After many years of a rather positive climate for women artists, we lately started to notice that in society, there is a return of evident masculine deprecation of women's activity and creativity. Female art students could tell about ~~contemporary~~ ^{male} disdainful attitudes from young ~~professors~~ professors speaking about women's art and more mature artists could inform about several galleries in Berlin and some in New York not willing to expose female artists. We also discussed the fact, that in the new tendencies of art, transavantgardism or neoexpressionism, only men are among the most famous ones. Last year I wanted to enter ~~deeper~~ ^{more deeply} in the subject and made an iconographical study of our contemporary art (transavantgardism, neoexpressionism) and my conclusions were published in the Swedish art review Paletten (nr 1, 1984).

In relation to the main themes of this congress I will sustain the fact, that we in Europe and partly in America still live in the tradition of what the Greek antique world gave us ^{of social} ~~useful~~ structures and ideas. The greek myths still actively live in us. New myths are created and old myths slowly change into other contexts. // The version of the myth of Narcisse as we know it today was first written down by Ovidius and then by Plotin in the ~~last~~ ^{last} centuries after "esus Christ." - In the theory of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis the old greek myths and stories got to be examples to explain the psychology of man. In the version of Ovidius Narcisse is condemned by his own words, answering Echo, who wanted his love: "I prefer to die before I will be possessed by you." When he then gets in love with his ^{own} ~~own~~ image, his terrible fate comes over him. Now he really can't be possessed. He throws his own body into the image, into the water. ~~IM~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Freud calls "primer narcissism" the ~~the~~ necessary stage in the development of the little child, when it still cannot distinguish its own body from that of its mother's. But narcissism is also the term to explain a neurosis,

an enlargement of the ego, which because of disturbances in the emotional life can't find a real relation to the Other. A contemporary ^{perspective} of the occidental cultures is that we live in a crise, where narcissism ^{is} in the secondary sense of Freud easily can developpe.

I think neoexpressionism or transavantgardism is an art in time of this crisis. I also think ~~that~~ ^{these movements of art} in some way represents the crise. For the youth and for many others there is no hope ^{to change the social life} neither ^{from} left nor ^{from} right winged ideologies; so they distrust society. They ~~don't~~ ^{just} live there, ~~but~~ ^{and} they don't take an active part to against it and to change it. Now I think people also distrust themsevles. These states of mind find expressions in ambivalence and insecurity, which forces the threatened individual to find very egocentric life-positions.

Achille Bonito Oliva writes in his book ^{International} ~~The~~ Transavantgarde, that the new art stands outside ideologies and ~~systems~~ ^{systems} of simboles. Art is born out of art. The artist is the free individual. ~~and picks up what he needs~~ The artist picks up what he needs, where the streams of the ego emerge. He collect ^{pieces} from his multi-form ~~existence~~ ^{and} amorphous existence and ^{from} certain ~~works~~ ^{artists} of this century. "to work with fragments", Bonito Oliva says, means that the artist prefer the vibrations of motions, in stead of a monolithic ideological content.

A. Bonito Oliva describes the artist as "the consuming nihilist". If one should interpret this description by Oliva, it is easy to see the artist of transavantgardism as an individual of the occidentale welfare state; he draws away in his egocentriam, at the same time ~~he~~ he takes advantage of the society without any distance and critics. This male artist seldom or never seems to consider his own ego-position in relation to the circumstances and the roles society gives him. And in the commercial world he ~~becomes~~ ^{also} a victime of his own art-production, which in itself is worked out in this nihilism.

In paintings by Rainer Fetting, Valker Tannert, Walter Fahn and Mimmo Paladino we can see the human face and the human body as redoubled or manifolded. ~~xxxxxx~~ "the double" has in art been interpreted as a reinforcement of the ego in a threatening situation. But the existence of a doubled ego becomes a threat to the ego itself. The psychoanalyst Otto Rank gives us un example of this with the novel of Oscar Wilde, where Doraian Grey makes an alliance with his own image in the

mirror to receive eternal youth. But he becomes so self-occupied that he cannot love another person. In this selfish ~~exist~~ existence is the encounter with the other exchanged to an encounter with the death. - ~~that these lonely men~~ In the art of neoexpressionism or transavantgardism ~~are not~~ alone, ^{you often see the men} and when they are not often doubled, ^{I find this as examples} ~~and~~ typical narcissistic encounter?

It is very seldom that you in this art find bodies of women depicted. When A P Penck sprayed out or painted the ~~thin~~ stick-figures, these figures seemed to move very impersonally over the white background. Most of them also seemed to be bodies of me, because between the legs of those figures there is hanging a little penis. Sometimes more femal bodies turn up, often pregnant or with vulgar and very unhappy faces. In his paintings he has transformed the ego into this stick-figur, which he calls standart. His pictorial simplification is consciously made out to be his strategy. But I only see these canvases as an empty description or an abstraction of very conventional social roles, with active men and pregnant and vulgar women.

There are ~~not~~ few ~~images~~ paintings with ~~bodies~~ women. A painting by Dieter Hacke is called The Night, 1981. ~~xxxxxxpanting~~ The night, the femal body looks like made of stones and rocks. She is a mountain landscap. She is inaccessible. She is the enigmatic dark night, but in opposite to the old femal image of romanticism a very negative image.

In this figurative painting you never see men and women meet. Naked ^{lonely} ~~men~~ move around in paintings by Rainer Fetting, Salomé and Longobardi. They seldom seem to be in an recognizable sphere. Sometimes you could have the feeling that the figures are dancing a wild unhappy dance in a dark discoteque. You can see naked male bodies who lightly touch each other or are rushing by and never ~~really~~ meet. Monumental muscular male bodies we see in paintings by Salomé and Longobardi.

A more poetical narcissism can be found in drawings and paintings by Mimmo Paladino. If I earlier expressed that the double could be related to death, in the art of Paladino we are really placed outside all frontiers. Here the lonely man (you don't meet any women) lives sometimes with a very fragmented and disintegrated body. Sometimes the bodies or the faces enter or take place in animals and in the earth; in some sort of way enter into nature.

is art give us the sensation of a world,
~~the world of Paladino is a world~~ ~~here~~ ~~the ego not only is doubled,~~
but also dissolved into fragments and where differences between life and death
don't exist like in all good art you ~~also~~ ^{here we} have the feeling ~~to~~ (in spite of the
male world) ^{lot} entering ~~the~~ ^{very} a personal world of simboles and myths are created.

As neoexpressionism ^{or} ~~and~~ transavantgardism often ^{is} ~~is~~ a figurative art, I think
there exist the possibilities to make this iconographical analysis of the content.
Here I could only give some examples of this type of analysis, which also has its
conclusions out of ^a cultural criticism - made in the perspective of sexual politics.
This criticism you must see in the perspective of the cultural tradition,
also existing since the antique greek world, where men detained women from social
life with a ferocious power. Since last century we can notice that this situation
is changing considerably and twenty years ago we passed through a "femal revolution".
Today we can still notice that something is going on, but we are surely in a period,
where this evolution is in stagnation. - I think also modern art ~~gives~~ ^{gives} reflections of more general life - situations and can tell
us ^{also} ~~about~~ ~~the~~ collectiv states of mind. And a collective neurosis in the developed
western society could be what we here met as "~~narcissism~~".

Elisabet H_aglund