

The Representation of the Female Body in Self-Portraits in Contemporary Photography

Astronette

Introduction

Works of art always have been influential concerning the ruling beauty ideal in Western culture, thus they have become imprints of people's attitude towards human body. As Jo Anna Isaak claimed, "art history is the activating field for the production of art, which in turn produces a social image, which then becomes constitutive of a certain kind of knowledge and awareness – particularly with regard to woman" (48). The image of woman has been traced out basically by men and women became the "silent Other" (Isaak 68), those who contribute with their existence to the forming of men's identity and who are also able to be a surface of projection. The representations of woman gained numerous connotations coded in culture, from the allegorical depictions of freedom, melancholia, or knowledge in oil paintings to the profitable commodity of a woman with implausible perfect body in mass media. Since art got into the world of commerce the image of woman body turned into an effective tool of advertisement and the dumping of pictures gradually took over the control of body image. Mainstream media does not only sell with the image of women body, but also sells it. Consumer culture with its obsession with body developed its own form to be imitated and "people follow the ideals of Beauty as suggested by the world of commercial consumption" (Eco 418). Body transformed into an instrument for getting into accordance with culture, but also a form of self-expression. An acceptable and amiable body signs a "well-managed self" (Bordo 297) controlled with discipline and which abstains from extremities. But only a tight group of privileged is able to fit into the canon of beauty and those who are excluded face difficulties in finding a way to the identification with their own body. One of the possible ways can be obtained if we turn back to art. Hans Belting raises the question whether it is possible to reduce body into an image (34). Since our comprehension is heavily loaded with cultural codes, pictures can not be deprived from their connotation that is projected on them immediately when we look at them. Thus an image of a body transmits all the arbitrary meanings that lay latently behind. As Belting points out, artists use their body as the medium of art and in this way with their body they are able to communicate meaning that points below their body. On the other hand, art, especially photography, is a way to observe the presence and materiality of the given body. For those who can not match into the canon of beauty photographs can serve as a possible way for examining their body and their boundaries in order to create an identity. Contemporary photographers Hannah Wilke and Ana Casas Broda used this method to find the answers. In a case of an ill or overweighed body it is not an easy task to position them in the scale of bodies provided by consumer culture. Photography

provides an outer image of their body, serves with different points of view, and advances self-observation. For a body that is claimed to be distorted and imperfect, self-discovery serves as a mode of finding its way out of the deluges of pictures with perfect bodies. How far can a photographer get in her self-discovery? In a culture which is overwhelmed with pictures of beautiful bodies it is shocking to face an overweighed, ill, fragmented body, people rather tend to turn away. In this way it is not easy to set these bodies into the image of woman dictated by our culture, if it is possible at all. Wilke and Broda led their investigation in order to find the possibilities of perceiving a body that can not be considered as an object of desire, but rather an essential but fragile link to life and reality.

Intra Venus

For a woman finding the connections to her ill feminine body and forming the ways to identify with it have different obstacles rooted in culture. Similarly to our ideal of beauty, “death is always culturally constructed” (Bronfen 54). In nineteenth century art women were often connected to death and these two bear the characteristics of lack or castration and they both “present ‘allegorically’ in western representations” (Bronfen 205). Besides herself a depicted female dead body could stand for much more: female bodies were often the symbols of melancholia or knowledge (Bronfen 6, 7) and they are always the passive objects of the gaze and observation. As opposed to this, in our capitalist consumer culture we do not have accepted images of the ill and the dead. The capitalist system overwhelms us with photographs of models with perfect body shape which stand for the beauty ideal of our era. Thanks to this, women are inclined to compare themselves to this model and this phenomenon dislocates the identification since the subject loses confidence but can not find herself in the image of perfect bodies offered by our consumer culture. In this case a woman with ill body has only one chance: self-observation through which she can have a view of her body and determine her boundaries.

Hannah Wilke was an innovative conceptual feminist artist. In her series she steadily used her own body and intended to turn it into a work of art. She considered herself “as the artist and the subject of her work” (hannahwilke.com). Wilke introduced the term “Performatist Self-Portrait” by which she meant “her photographic work she created and directed others to photograph” (hannahwilke.com). Her last series was the posthumous published *Intra Venus* in which she depicted how lymphoma and certain medical treatments transformed her body. The presence of her ill and dying body got in the centre of the

photographs and she sought to find an extroverted way of self-discovery that can not fit into the traditions of representations.

In connection with medical treatments and procedures Wilke felt that these tend to hide the ill person (Karen Black) suggesting that the process of decaying is shameful. In this recurs what Lennard J. Davis pointed out: people tend to divide bodies into “immutable categories” (129). Division is a way how human mind perceives and comprehends the world and in the case of bodies this splitting can reach the two extremities: “whole and incomplete, abled and disabled, normal and abnormal, functional and dysfunctional” (Davis 129). Since a sick body falls out of the category of normal and complete it becomes undesirable and loses its values (Davis 131) so there is no point in showing it. In our consumer culture it is a general custom to turn the attention away from the weak and disabled and being blind for those we do not want to see. Illness is a very personal state of the body; people tend to hide it from the public eye and since it goes with the transformation of the body, the losing of health, completeness, or even certain abilities, it is considered to be shameful. With a defective body one can easily define his or her body against the current ideal of beauty which may help to determine what he or she is not but do not help to decide what he or she is. According to Davis, a self with damaged body can not see his or her body as the object of desire but “sees the true self of fragmented body” (139). This fragmented body has no place in the canon of beauty of the modern culture so the subject faces difficulties of categorizing him or herself and finding a proper place in the scale of bodies. She may feel excluded because of the state of the body, the medical treatments, the pain, the illness, and the losing of completeness can go together with the feeling of shame and humiliation. Because of these, someone with an ill and distorted body may consider herself as a pariah, as an untouchable and as such she can not find the proper images to identify with so she has to find and establish these body images through observing her own body. On the other hand, the splitting recalls what Belting points out: the division between body and mind (Belting 47)¹. The mind appears independent of the body that is a kind of container of it made of blood and flesh. This body can be easily put under examination that is a clear and proven method in modern medical science, but in most of the cases one aspect is often left out: the mind, the emotions, the relation of the patient to the state of his or her body and illness. Not to mention that body parts affected by illness are often treated separately from the body and the human being is not considered as a complete whole. As the malfunctions of the mind can easily generate physical symptoms, body also

¹ As Belting claims, owing to scientific representations a division between body, which can be considered as biological machinery, and mind, which is disembodied, can be drawn.

manipulates the mind. In this case the illness is one of the body's but since the artist identifies with her body the illness becomes the state of the mind also. It is problematic how to separate the two since they are in continuous interaction. Wilke's body can be a kind of passive sufferer of her disease. Her body is certainly exhausted and tormented. On the other hand, she becomes the active observer of her body, seeks for the boundaries, and revives her body memory. With these conscious actions she can manifest strength, confidence, and a kind of power over the state of the mind.

In most of the photographs Wilke appears naked. The nude was always a perfect form for the depiction of completeness and perfection, as Davis claims, the nude forms as "a set of idealized conventions" about the proper body image (132). For Wilke it was common to operate with her naked body since in her previous series she often posed in this way. By recreating those poses she marks that the distorted body is also able to fit into this form of presentation. (Fig.1.) This self-reflexivity can help her find certain reference points to which she is able to link herself. The sick and weakened body can be easily noticeable since it differs from normality but, as it was above mentioned, we tend to avoid noticing and facing them otherwise we have to deal with our preconceptions and reevaluate our attitude or even self-esteem. It is always safer to stay within the borders. However, with nudity the artist exposes the ill body with its defectiveness and makes this reality visible. In these photographs Wilke provided restricted numbers of signs. In one of the



Fig.1.

portraits (Fig.2.) she is looking into the camera with an enigmatic expression. She is obviously exhausted but her look partly reflects her determined personality. With her body language the artist exquisitely expresses her vulnerability. Two striking elements make the interpretation clear: the hairless head and the stuck needle. This reduction of signs does not imply reduction of meaning; however these obvious signs transmit the information immediately and initiate the context of the photographs. With her sincere and straight mode of representation Wilke achieves that the pictures confront the spectator. They show what is

usually not shown, what we do not see, what we does not want to face at all. She uses her very personal, intimate, and vulnerable state to depict her body that is not purified from the unacceptable imperfections. Her presented body image can not fit in the Western representations of feminine bodies: it is neither a beautiful smooth passive body of a passed lady, nor a modern and unreal woman with perfect body forms. The body which Wilke stands for represents an in between state: it fell out of perfectness, completeness, and the culturally constructed image of femininity, but it is still alive, the body and mind are connected and are struggling with the illness. Giving a body image like this creates an authentic connection to reality; Wilke explores a completely different kind of femininity with which she manages to fill a gap between the overloaded images of perfect bodies. On the other hand, nudity also has a part in the process of making her body into the medium of her art since even with her sick



Fig.2.

into an idealization since her sick body is unable to stand for any ideal forms. The representation of her body in the level of images can help her face up to her transformed body image. The depiction of the sick body contributes to that the subject has to take the imperfections and decay into consideration and these are all parts of the human body as well as beauty, and the identification with it has to be solved in a way since the body is the medium that allows the person to operate in the world.

body she is able to play. So the artist's ill and fragmented body can not fit in the ideal image of beauty any more but it is still presented in the form of the nude with her evoked poses, so the form may stay the same but the content is transformed, distorted. The photographs of her nude body do not support our conventional notion of beauty but adapting this form contributes to the creation of a new tradition. In this new tradition the artist makes an attempt of using the old form in order to create a new identity in her changing circumstances. Nude is a good way for observing her body and in her case this depiction can not turn



Fig.3.

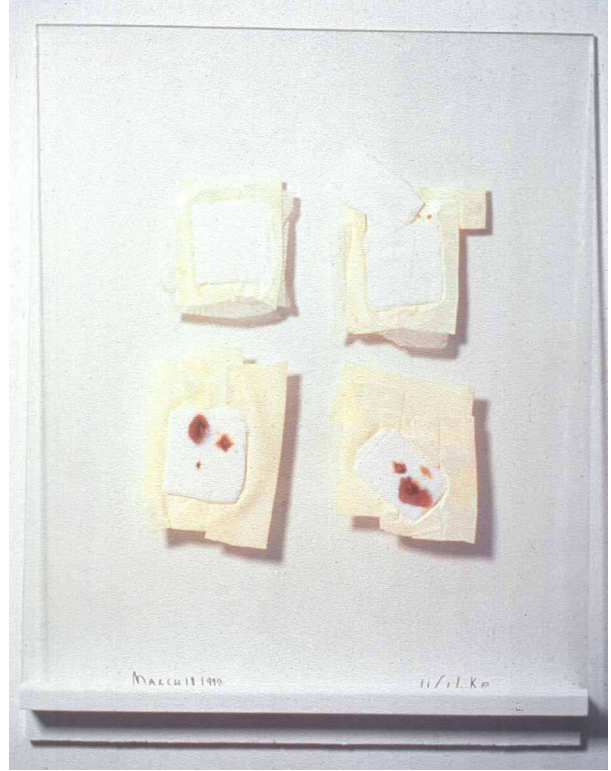


Fig.4.

The afore-mentioned division is not only present among bodies but also within the body that is clearly visible in the case of Wilke. The series includes photographs of brushstrokes made with locks of hair (Fig.3.) that fell out because of chemotherapy and bandages put under glass (Fig.4.) like tissues under the microscope. These kinds of pictures can have double function. On the one hand, they contribute to the process of self-observation in which the artist take her body and body parts into account. The artist took herself into pieces and presented these in more different pictures. She creates artificially arranged compositions from the lost, distorted parts. Inspecting her fallen locks of hair and the bandages touched by blood and fluids can serve as a way of understanding her body and illness. Hair is an integral part of human body but the losing of it, the sight of it becoming separated from its natural state makes the person redefine her body. The body loses its former stage, its “own and clean self” (Kristeva 53) with which the subject might have identified herself and the process of falling into parts blurs the boundaries of the body and thus reaches the state of incompleteness and fragmentation. This also touches the borders of abjection. As Julia Kristeva stated, an object like these “from its place of banishment, does not cease challenging its master” (Kristeva 2). These materials become the obvious signs of fragmentation, they challenges the self, and marks the fragility and defencelessness of the body. Despite of their frightening and repulsive quality, with their familiarity and strangeness

they prompt the artist for further observation. On the other hand, their materiality and the observation provide a possibility for the artist for a certain kind of abstraction and turning herself into the medium of art. Converting and composing the lost substances of the body into pictures besides observation can serve also as estrangement. Looking at these pieces from a certain distance helps realize the changes and the loss and also makes possible to perceive the material quality of these objects. In this case these materials become the only constituents which provide information for the spectator. Their simplicity does not deprive them from their meaning; they remain small but visible traces of the illness but they can not be interpreted without their context. For an artist like Wilke it is not unusual to turn her body into a piece of art or more precisely to transform her body into the medium of her art and these detached pieces of her body creates a possibility for further attempts and elaboration of the artistic process which accompany the experience of illness.

Concerning these, the question emerges: for what extent these images mean the artist and for what extent can they represent an overall image of ill woman body? Wilke discovered her own way of self-representation which can be considered even as documentation of her illness, but also an experiment to face and cope with her trouble. She examined her body with openness and dared to turn against silent and helpless representations. Through these portraits Wilke was able to examine her boundaries and looking over them helped her to create an image of herself that made identification easier. Thanks to the simple form she uses, a certain generalization can be drawn from them. With moving out from the silence and photographing her fragmented and decaying body she made an attempt to turn against the general (and in most of the cases male-controlled) depictions of women bodies and opened a way for a new representation that contains more sincerity and more connection to reality. She called the attention to the fact that decaying and illnesses form an integral part of human body and we do not have to be shameful because of them. In the case of *Intra Venus* the woman stops being the object of desire but rather her human and fallible side becomes stressed. An incomplete human body, moreover an incomplete body of a woman can not fit into the image of beauty and normality dictated by our culture. She was able to show the public what was formerly hidden and proved that it is not impossible to cope with a distorted body image.

When the twentieth century set in, the age of the rapidly changing beauty ideals began. The ruling ideal gradually became thinner and thinner to the extent that this model has a considerable influence on the confused self-image of many girls and women. Previously the corpulent body was the sign of wealth, prosperity, and high social status but later, as Susan Bordo claims in her essay “Reading the Slender Body,” social power became less expressed through body shape and at the same time obesity turned into the sign of “moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will” (Bordo 294). Personality started to become expressed through body and the acceptable body became the sign of a “well-managed self” (Bordo 297) which is demanded by consumer culture. If someone manages to hold in check his or her hunger than this person is considered to be a disciplined and accommodating individual who fits in the normal. Thus obesity is regarded as an unacceptable and undesirable form and in many cases the effort to overcome it reaches extremities taking shape in eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia. Both obesity and extreme thinness fall out of the normal and none of them “is accepted by the culture as an appropriate response” (Bordo 298) since they stand for extreme behaviour and abnormality. The hunger for food and the urge for self-discipline and thinness oppose each other and “the self is torn in two mutually incompatible directions” (Bordo 297). It is problematic to dissolve this contradiction under the circumstances of consumer culture since it puts the pressure on its members who are encouraged to consume but in the same time overwhelmed by the pictures of perfectly shaped models. Specific beauty ideals have always influenced the opinions about body shape and femininity, and women continue to be “more tyrannized by the contemporary slenderness ideal than men” (Bordo 299). Culture has the fixed idea that the image of woman should stand for a kind of passive beauty and a woman continually has many expectations to meet dictated partly by consumer culture, men, and herself. On the other hand, the power of self-discipline is “decisively coded as male” (Bordo 300) and the woman, regarded as someone who needs to be controlled, has to adapt this ruling ambition over herself in order to achieve a body with which she becomes acceptable and attractive. Women are urged to supervise their body shape and make efforts to achieve the ideal form but this process continue to generate the consumer beauty ideal further.

Influenced by the ideal of consumer culture Ana Casas Broda, the contemporary Spanish photographer, led her *Diet Journal* from 1986, from the age of 21, to 1994. She wrote down everything she ate and continuously photographed herself. The photographs and the journal entries embody the strong discipline over the self and the series is a perfect example

of the constant need of self-discovery, self-identification, and a search for possible ways of observing the body. She did not intend to publish this series, her aim was to document the process of dieting and “verify the minimal changes [she] had achieved” (Broda). As she claimed, she wanted to “explore [her] naked body from angles no mirror would provide” and photography is a perfect tool for this kind of examination since it is able to expand the image of the body and let the photographer to look at herself from a different point of view and “construct an image of [herself]” (Broda). It is not about pure and sheer self-observation which is impossible of course since the body image she identified herself with did not develop in a sterile world but it was strongly affected by the ideal of beauty dictated by our consumer culture and as Bordo pointed it out, the body images we create for us are “always interact with culture” (16). If it was not true than Broda might had accepted the form of her body and had not started a diet in order to change it. So in this case her diet provides the context of these photographs, it is the frame in which she tried to determine and change her body image. According to Bordo, the images of the universally accepted bodies in our culture “normalize” that is, they serve “as models against which the self continually measures, judges, »disciplines«, and »corrects« itself” (25). This statement is clearly obvious in the case of Broda since she found the “other,” the images of women with slender, smooth, and perfect body, against which she identified herself. However, this other is not subordinated to her but she is the one with her culturally not accepted and unattractive body who falls out of the category of normal and who can be considered as an outcast. The classical image of slim body became her desired state and we can distinguish between two bodies: the one she had when she started her diet which was imperfect and distorted as opposed to the culturally given perfect body image; and the one with which she could attain her aim, or which was actually the aim itself, the slender one. With this, recalling Lennar J. Davis’ binary division, Broda also established her own splitting: the slim body that is desirable and her body that is imperfect and overweighed thus unacceptable. This proves that thanks to the culturally given ideal we do not need an ill and decaying body in order to develop problems and dissatisfaction. It is profusely enough to measure ourselves to the others and reach the conclusion that we are the ones who are the abnormal, who become the other as opposed to the normal ones because we would heartily identify ourselves with the perfect body we do not have, rather the body we own.

Broda kept *Diet Journal* with discipline and these note-books serve as documents, as folders of her diet. Photography is thought to be the easiest way of depicting and documenting reality and in this case it is an ideal choice because the artist can make an advantage of the

process: photographs can give pictures of her body as it is, without harsh manipulation. Thanks to the camera this method provides different angles and points of view for the artist (as opposed to simply looking into the mirror) with which she can place her attention outside her body, she can turn her attention back indirectly to her shape, and the observing subject becomes the object of the examination in one person. It is similar to the case of Wilke. On the other hand Wilke aimed the public too, while Broda intended to keep the photographs private. In a group of the photographs the artist is simply standing beside the wall or curtain or just in the garden facing or with her back to the camera, wearing different types and amount of clothes but she often appears naked. In these documentary-like pictures the need for self-observation appears, the artist's intention for creating an image of herself, of her body with which she can identify herself. A group of black and white pictures from 1986 depicts her standing naked in front of the camera showing the front, the back, and the two sides of her body. (Fig.5.) In Broda's case nudity does not serve as a tool of representing any ideal image either, and since it has no connection with idealization it rather has a role in documentation

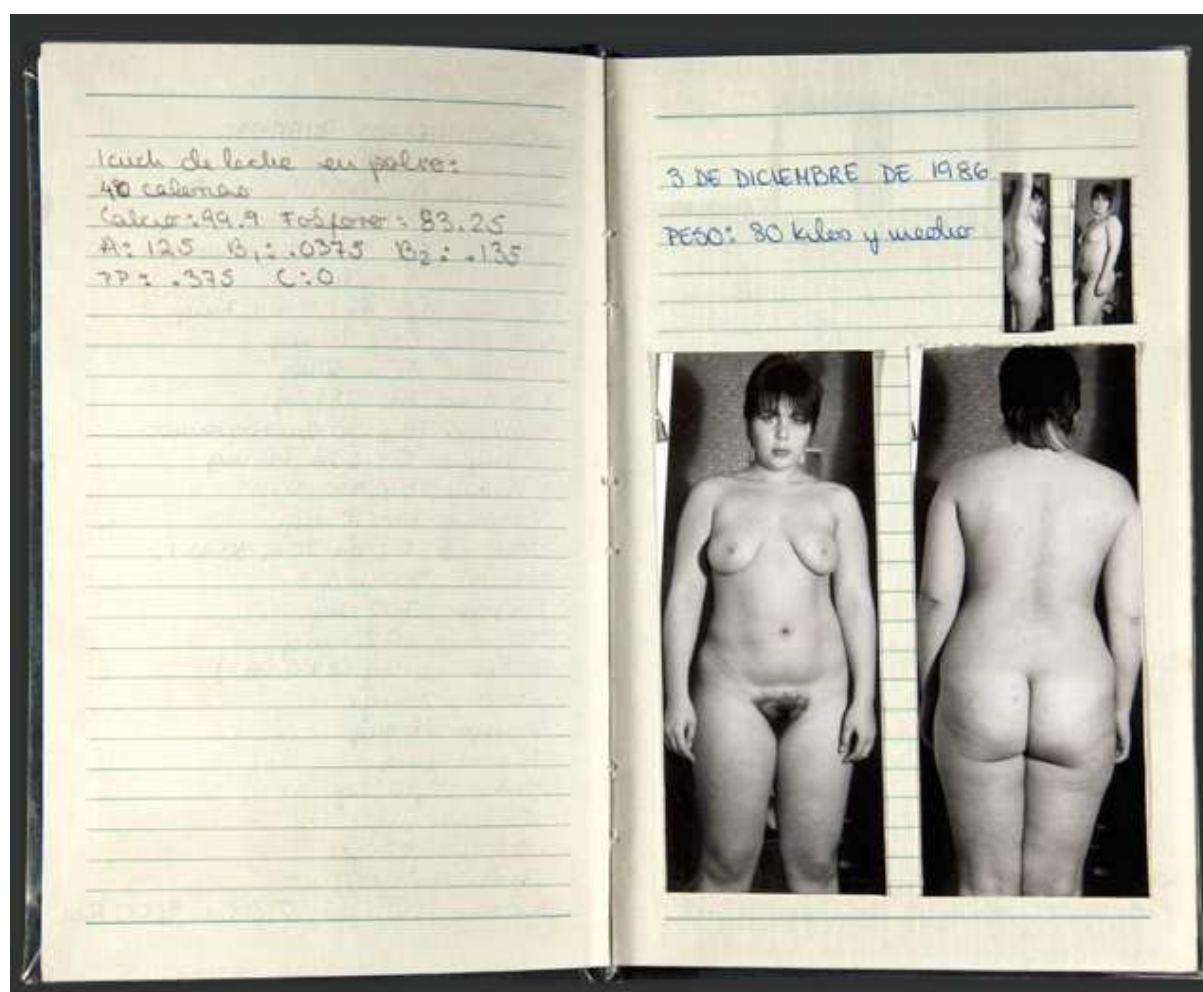


Fig.5.

and recording the current state of her body. It even recalls the photographs which appeared in anthropometry during the early 1900's. The model is physically the centre of the photograph, provides an image of her naked body and this image is pure, straight and without any photographic manipulation or transformation. Keeping the cultural context of the images in mind the spectator does not need a measuring rod to categorize the depicted body. We are aware of the current form of ideal body and since culture codes this into our mind without our conscious decision we can determine after a single glimpse whether this body fits into the ruling normal or not. Concerning the photographs Broda also went through this process of categorization. She got to the conclusion that her body is plump which is an untenable situation and decided to change it. She faced the problem and focused on it which is also reflected in the photographs. Since it was intended to be a personal series not to be shown she was the only one she had to look in the eye directly. However, her desire to be slimmer is deeply rooted in culture so all the culturally given and forced images are behind her in a latent way. It is obvious from the pictures that the person to be photographed was completely aware of the fact that photographs record her body. The pictures have very narrow composition so they are very focused to the object, only the body and a little part of the background are visible, they do not provide broader spatial references. So similarly to Wilke, Broda also operates with few but unambiguous signs. Because there are no other reference points than her body and curves this means that her attention (thus the spectator's attention) is focused in her undressed body so this is the only sign that directly provides meaning for us. Despite of the simplicity of this form we are aware of the carried information since, as it was above emphasised, it is culturally coded and the form can not be purified of it. The prejudices and stereotypes are always hiding in the background and a specific visual sign, a photograph of an overweighed woman, can induce them without our conscious contribution. Following from this, our cultural background provide a stable connotation for the images which become a report of our era. This report is twofold: it is present in the photographer's attitude towards her body that she wanted to change in order to fit herself into the notion of beauty, but it is also hided in our preconceptions that are awakened in the moment when we look at the pictures. They stand in close connection and both generate the other. Thus the personal microcosm is strongly influenced by the ruling ideals that are built into the attitude of the



Fig.6.

individual who also projects them to the others and this never ending chain serves as a rich breeding ground for the system of our consumer culture.

Besides these document-type photographs there are others which depict the artist in various poses and in different scenes, with different clothes and accessories. She put on bathing suit, underwear, dresses, stockings, sometimes even ballet flats and make-up. The locations vary from the beach to the garden and home. In a group of portraits the artist is standing beside the wall wearing underwear, stockings, and garters, in some pictures she is half naked. (Fig.6.) It is striking that she depicted herself in a variety of poses. On the one hand, these poses represent her intention: they confirm and verify the results of her diet. With the modifying of the poses, with arranging her body into different positions she is able to explore her curves and the way her flesh and body shape behave. This makes the changes visible and observable. Photography makes a good service for this kind of exploration since it provides an outer image of her body that allows her further investigation. On the other hand, self-control, as it was above mentioned, is considered to be a male aspect and the attitude of the series reflects severe self-discipline. Keeping the *Journal* through eight years, recording every consumed food, monitoring and weighing the body, and keeping it under control, while in the main time maintain, express, or maybe even rediscover femininity is not an easy task.

With the usage of these feminine and provocative poses the artist challenges the patriarchal culture. With the supposedly masculine power of control that she forced on herself she was able to achieve weight loss but in the long run the aim of this was to get closer to an ideal and more feminine body shape and in the same time she found the opportunity to expose her femininity. However, she does not only challenge but also tempts this patriarchal model. The provocative and seductive poses root in this culture, they are a standard mode of representing and objectifying women (spread legs, exposed breasts). These poses make a woman's body tempting for the men and since the artist's final aim was to become more attractive, so partly to be considered to be more attractive by the others, it is obvious to adapt these kinds of extrovert postures. With these constructed images and feminine poses the photographer created a possibility for herself to examine her body in different situations, to observe how her changing shape, her curves behave, and contradictorily go against but also merge with the patriarchal culture.

Broda's clothes, the underwear, stockings, and garters, also contribute to the photographs' message. On the one hand, the garments, which are very feminine ones, form a link not only to the desired body shape, but especially to femininity which can be lived and



Fig.7.

experienced through the “new” body. Thus the clothes can stand as representatives of exposed femininity. On the other hand, the garments influence the physical outside of the self but the motivation of choosing them comes from the self. As Susan Bordo states, the appearance of a person has “come to operate as a market of personal, internal order (or disorder)” (295). In this way they become the expression of the personality and also form little signs of the identity. These are all connected to her desired body shape, their aim is to make the woman’s body more attractive and sensual but of course they are also able to manipulate the appearance thus creating a misleading image. These details make the series personal and indicate that as the body image can not be abstracted from culture and society, the personality itself also can not be detached. As a consequence the process of self-observation can never be objective since emotions are attached to it which can mislead and manipulate the creation of identity.

Another two pages of the *Diet Journal* contain numerous photographs from 1988. (Fig.7.) In these pictures Broda appears on a beach, next to a pool, and to the sea. The photographs with their apparent incidental character recall the images of private and family photographs. For an extent they are really part of a private album but actually they are consciously constructed images. The artist plays with the different poses and angles again, shows her back and different sides of her body. There is a whole sequence of these small movements. Broda did not intend to create art with these pictures; the apparent decomposition does not ruin the series’ coherence. In fact this snapshot quality supports her aim to observe her body in different situations, to catch moments of her physical existence. With these photographs she sets herself into a certain space, provides the scene for her body deepening the layers of her examination. The artist in this way broadens the context in which her body operates and which provides the ground of her self-discovery.

The linearity of the photographs is provided by two features: the written material and the connection of the pictures into a series. A peculiarity of the series is that the photographs are accompanied by written materials. It might be questionable whether the texts have role in the interpretation of the photographs or not, but they are an integral part of the *Journal* and contribute to its context and linearity. Broda wrote her entries in journal format, indicated the date and the most important pieces of information of the day. She added what and how much she ate, the calories, nutrients, and from time to time her weight. (Fig. 5., Fig. 6.) Her self-discipline and the control over her body are reflected in this method which thoroughly represent consumer culture’s obsession with body and appearance. Even the journal structure, in which individuals used to express their thoughts and emotions, had been taken over by the mania of dieting. The dated journal entries contribute to the temporal quality of the work, it

helps to join the images into a series. The photographs record the current state of her body and joining them into a series makes possible to indicate the time scale and the changes. Thanks to this temporality became perceptible. The photographs from the different days, months, and years provide a huge scale in which the photographer can look back herself. This scale, which grew out from her microcosm, is embedded into the contemporary consumer culture.

Broda led *Diet Journal* driven by the desire to form her body into a more attractive one. But this urge came clearly from our culture and pursued her to regulate her body to meet the outside world's expectations. These influences turned into her internal driving force. Through making this personal series she aimed to observe herself and construct an image of her body which helps her dealing with the situation. With photographing her body she attained to create a form, an image of herself that she can easily discover. This method provided an opportunity for her to practice control over her body in order to reinvent her feminine part. Broda's series embraces a time scale which expresses the changing in her body and provides a report about consumer culture: discontentment can occur easily and under the pressure of the beauty ideal it is not difficult to develop a problem in the self-esteem.

Conclusion

In this consumer culture that is obsessed with bodies and the modes of manipulating bodies both contemporary photographers, whose body falls out of the ideal of beauty, turned into the mode of self-observation. Their own body became the centre of their investigation in order to help themselves construct a body image with which they can identify themselves. It also means the discovery of their imperfect, fragile, but real femininity. The ideal of beauty excludes their bodies and in this way it became difficult to determine themselves, but through observation and with the help of the medium of photography the artists were able to produce an outer image of themselves and in this way find reference points.

Through the representations of melancholic deceased ladies and the modern perfectly shaped bodies Hannah Wilke had to find her own way to face her ill and fragmented body. She discovered and represented this in between state that was not usually depicted. She confronted the spectator and showed what was previously hidden and thought to be shameful. With this transgression she expanded the boundaries. On the contrary, the aim of Ana Casas Broda was to get closer to normality, to achieve a state of her body that lets her to fit into it, to become similar to it. Under the pressure of this context and guided by it she started her own self-discovery. She sought for the perfect with self-discipline. Imperfect bodies like these are

very much visible in reality but consumer culture is selectively blind for them and refuses to accept them. When these bodies differ from the normal they are not taken into account, but when they are getting closer to the normal they became visually more acceptable. But in the case of Broda it leads to a contradiction since as her body became thinner, so visually she became smaller and less visible, she became more acceptable.

Through constructing images the artists attempted to construct their identity. Wilke consciously operated with her body as a medium of art and this strengthens the connotation detached to her images. On the contrary, Broda's series was a private one; it became a series of art afterwards. But it also managed to create a report from this era. Through photographing themselves they discovered their body. They needed this because our culture does not offer an image which may provide help for them to find the answers. As a consequence, they are the ones who had to create these images to help out themselves. Wilke stepped forward as a representative of women with ill body and with her straight mode opened the way for new possible representations. Broda with her determined self-control went through a mode of self-discovery with which she created a report of the mental state of our consumer culture. These representations opened different kinds of femininities which are fragile, vulnerable, but perceivable and real at the same time.

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