

Mette Björnberg: “Power Play”
Galleri Magnus Karlsson

And you may tell yourself
This is not my beautiful house!
And you may tell yourself
This is not my beautiful wife!
—“Once in a Lifetime,” Talking Heads

You may be in the midst of some absurd drama—to fulfill the role of student, worker, parent or lover. A specific shade of rouge, heel length, pants vs. skirts breed affirmation of an imposed or sought-after position. It is argued that gender is inherently performative; so, let us relieve ourselves of that which demands unmasking. The conflict between transparency and obscurity further accentuates the threat and its respective meaning. Gender remains policed and tyrannized; with every policy change, a new sect of humans are targeted due to how their body is shaped, seen and represented. From conversion therapy to bathroom laws to LGBTQIA+ discrimination, torture and even death are consequences of this conformist-driven matrix.

There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object [...] an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.¹

For the sake of self-invention, this *conjuring* and its link to any predicted outcome must be denied. Rejection leads to rebellion against the patriarchy via art—e.g., Ana Mendieta's *Rape Scene* (1973) or Vanessa Place's Twitter account.

Historically key artists haunt those who now dare to implement their own trajectories. Let's play a game where influence becomes muddled, time shuffled, faces blurry—where newly formed stars are mere particles, or in contrast, supermassive blackholes. Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979) may now include a place setting for Mette Björnberg (and other women) whose work exists *after* Chicago's triangular porcelain installation. In light of that which miraculously and tragically unfolds, Björnberg provides opportunity to consider her ruptured dish. Each pastel slit and penetrable gash suggests entry into a more lucid state, where no one persecutes and nothing goes punished. Contemporary artists such as Betty Tompkins and Jonas Dahlberg are aware of the rupture's dangerous allure; their work² stands either at risk of censorship or has been unrealized because of it—slash erased from the collective gaze in one bureaucratic sweep. Yet, the provocation of this vulnerable gesture slides along a dubious spectrum. Italian artist Lucio Fontana created torn, ripped and punctured canvases which amply flirt with destruction; yet, these works withstand scrutiny.

Lynchian by design, Björnberg displays a plethora of pie-shaped foci—lush sirens dodging lies and duplicity. As if: *there is nowhere to hide*. Yet, FBI Agent Dale Cooper would neither escape nor unpack the complexity of Björnberg's mystique. The artist's work could be the embedded backdrop of a John Waters film; we see “Divine” entering a kitschy shack after roaming back streets in bedazzled drag with tramps. One acquired taste leads to another eccentricity. Gay porn director Bruce LaBruce might choose Björnberg's frilled carnivalesque accoutrements or oversized glass beads to accentuate some domestic scenario before or after a violent homoerotic climax. Each accompanying interpretation careens between quaint and freakish—a speculum of her slippery aesthetic.

What the psyche wants and needs can be counterproductive to what power desires; these two realms are in flux. With each instance of power, someone suffers macabre consequences, recognizes limits yet attempts to transform energy. Someone slow dances with transgression or adopts subversive tendencies to disrobe real vs. imagined oppressions aspiring to lock down the gullible. Someone categorizes behavior as either pure or taboo—only to follow in accordance or shun the attitude just stereotyped. Someone seeks to transcend imposed boundaries, choosing the margin over status quo.

Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between [wo]men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. Because of this peculiarity, which power shares with all potentialities that can only be actualized but never fully materialized, power is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either of numbers or means.³

No theory or movement comes remotely close to justifying this shrewd narrative; power thrives beyond codes and structures and does not easily afford comprehension. Power does what it wants; those interested in its essence must confront the painful task of taming both anarchy and themselves. Good luck with that.

—Jacquelyn Davis

1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, UK : Routledge, 1999), xiv.

2 Refer to Tompkins's *Fuck & Cunt* paintings in parallel to Dahlberg's Utøya Island memorial-as-wound.

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL : The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 200.