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THE QUESTIONING BODY

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A few words about process

In late autumn of 2017, Sanna Kekäläinen asked me to write something for her upcoming piece, *Vieras-Främling-Stranger*. We met at Kappeli restaurant on a wintry day, talked about one thing and another, and also discussed slightly deeper matters. We got to know each other very gradually, though I had actually been following and thinking about Sanna's work actively ever since 2011. I was at that time collaborating with philosopher and dance researcher Victor Molina on an article about three European choreographers, and Sanna Kekäläinen was one of them. The writing process was scary and enlightening for me; I realized that I had a research topic on my hands, that the deep themes welling up from it would demand a wider treatment, and I didn't yet know how to define what it was about the material that fascinated me.

So I continued the project on my own, formulating and writing the feminist research article *La mujer en la danza: Cuerpos insurrectos y subversivos*.¹ Soon after that article appeared, Sanna's piece *Whorescope* (2017) had its premiere, and I met her in a chilly hallway at the Cable Factory arts complex right after the performance. Later, Kekäläinen & Company invited me to write a piece for a collection of essays celebrating her 20 years of work, later titled *Body, Meat & Spirit—Perspectives on the Work of Sanna Kekäläinen*. At the time, the remaining questions and confusion I had and the scale and fascination of her work were still swirling over me. Nevertheless, I decided to take the leap and write about what was most important: complex physicality, the body-permeating poetics of flesh, the meanings formed in the moment of movement.

This essay is, in a way, a new perspective on that opening of physicality, and at the same time an entirely separate project. The writing was preceded by a long, shared process, in close conjunction with the construction of the piece. Since March of 2018, Sanna and I have talked for hours and hours, sitting or lying on the floor, in white chairs, in a corner, along a wall of the Ruumiillisen taiteen (Physical Art) Theater. The flood of talk has been

¹ "La mujer en la danza: Cuerpos insurrectos y subversivos". In the publication *La investigación en Danza*, Volumen 2. Valencia: Mahali ediciones, 2016. 203-210.

enormous, an almost endless stream of thoughts, themes, and ideas that bubbled up from both of us. Looking back, I can attest that the need to speak was constant. Every time we met. We were both surprised, perhaps especially me. Suddenly talking was easy, effortless, free of embarrassment or awkwardness.

We met about once a month before physical rehearsals began and then four times during the rehearsal period, at which point I also had an opportunity to observe the rehearsals. We talked about the upcoming piece, its themes and its possible form, talked about dance and art in general, about Finland and my home city of Barcelona, about our own experiences and realities. Our conversations roamed freely—we had no desire to steer it in any predetermined direction, toward any theme or point of view. The "shape" it took, its free association around a theme, was itself interesting. I recorded most of our discussions in order to examine them and return to their streams of thought later. In October 2018, we also did a longer and more detailed interview and, in addition to continuing the method of conversation we had found, I also proffered more detailed and more general questions about her work. Some of the material from that interview is loosely included in this text.

In writing about *Vieras-Främling-Stranger*, I feel as if I'm in a privileged position. I can look at it from the inside, through process discussions I participated in as a creator, as well as through the time I spent as an outside observer of the developing piece. We've shared our thoughts, given voice to them, brought them into a common space. Sharing this has been new to both of us, accustomed as we are to solitary work. At the same time it's been a crucial way of approaching both process and theme—all the opening up, the dialogue, the non-introversion is an essential part of the shape and content of the piece.

As I've been writing this, I have also considered the conveyance of dance and movement into words. I experienced extreme frustration with written theme assignments in primary school and high school, and as I've become a thinker in academic dance research, a certain kind of freer and more personal, private vocabulary of dance has been a challenge for me. I've bounced between academic language and my own voice, listening to one and then the other. Also, this essay was written in Finnish, a language I have rarely written after living for a long time abroad. Sometimes the words I need, the expressions that help ideas blossom

in my mind, don't exist in Finnish, but they do in Spanish, which is now my everyday language. So how describe my ideas? How to speak words that don't exist? What kind of a writer's voice do I have in the peculiar but beloved code of this Northern corner of the world? There are certain words that have awakened this love; my body remembers the language and how it lives. I feel as if my reflections are connected to the same sort of searching that a choreographer does when working on a dance piece. What form will best suit the subject or its themes? How can a theme be best elucidated, and what form will best support the shaping of its meaning?

This essay is a new direction in writing for me, opening up to that confusing and fascinating chaos that swells inside me when I witness Sanna's work.

The text can be read in two ways. In the traditional way, from beginning to end, following a linear arrangement, or by theme, choosing topics from the table of contents that arouse your interest. So there's no need to read through the entire text in chronological order, but it's various parts do communicate with one another, each chapter deepening the one that came before it.

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Introduction

The body is our general medium for having a world.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

We exist in the world through our bodies, participating bodily in the events of the world. The body is a medium not just for our existence but also for communication, memory, experience, and emotion. All of our experience is the body's experience, its internal events: experiences of the world and of ourselves, the realities that surround the body and intermingle with it. It is the place where our existence in the world happens. The body is in the world, and the world is in the body.

In western countries, a woman's social existence is firmly connected to the body as seen through outside eyes, it's outer appearance. A woman is the image of her body.

Youthfulness, thinness, firm flesh and a beautiful face define a women's social *value*, because a desirable woman is pleasant to look at. Physicality is defined from the outside.

Popular culture's image of womanliness maintains and reinforces these beauty ideals,² which flood our consciousness through our media environment—on television, in films and advertising, on the internet, our eyes are taught what is beautiful and what isn't.

² Beauty ideals focused on a woman's outward appearance closely parallel the beauty ideals in many kinds of dance. Styles of dance based on technique and models of study, such as ballet or modern dance, where to go is a perfect performance of the movement (form), dancers grow up in front of a mirror from early childhood. The image of their own bodies is in the mirror, their feel for their bodies based on the experience the mirror offers—and experience of an image of the body. According to the traditional mindset of classical western dance, the natural body is not suitable for dance, it must be altered, corrected, made into the ideal body for the technique and style of the dance. This mirror of dance—first in the rehearsal room and later in the dancers head—demands that the body be molded into a certain shape, often one of ethereal thinness or sinewy energy and discipline. When a woman, or a dancer, sees her image in the mirror she becomes the viewer, melding with the audience viewing her body. She observes herself as spectacle. (More about mirrors in Berger, p.49-51) Popular culture it equates womanliness with sexuality, because women's bodies are not only pleasing but also exaggeratedly hyper-sexual, always ready to satisfy the (male) viewer's desire and vision. The man did the thinking and choreographing, and woman danced the movements that he gave her. The woman loaned her body to the male choreographer as a tool for his work, to realize his vision.

The history of Western visual art has reinforced this traditional vision of women in compositions that depict the woman as the passive, seated model and the man as the active painter, the working artist. A woman is presented not as she is but as the male artist sees, experiences, and immortalizes her. In the history of dance the female body has likewise long been a tool to express the genius of a male artist's ideas.³ A man thought and choreographed, a woman danced the movements that were given to her. The female dancer loaned her body out as the male choreographer's tool, as a means of realizing his vision.

But what if a woman wants to speak by herself, about herself?

To think, speak, paint, or dance about who she is and how she experiences the world, her world.

Self-portraits by European artists became common in the 14th century with the spread of the use and affordability of polished mirrors. To paint herself, to tell her story in a self-portrait, an artist must be able to look at herself, to see herself. In a self-portrait, an artist looks at herself as the Other, her body becomes an art object, a sort of duplicate of herself.⁴

When a woman artist looks at herself, what does she see? How does she view herself?

Sanna Kekäläinen sees her body as a question, a what or why. Physicality is an artist's subject of study, material to be listened to, to delve into, to try to give a shape. The creator (the artist), the one who is observed (the model), and the materials (color, shape) reside simultaneously within the same body. It is the artist, the thing depicted, and the work itself —thought, observation, and realization.

³ The strict division of gender roles is particularly seen in ballet. Modern dance pioneers from Isadora Duncan to Martha Graham rejected not only the traditional roles of dance but also the reproduction of the movement created by male choreographers: These women choreographed their own dances. For more on dance history from a feminist point of view, see Christy Adair: *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens*. New York University Press, 1992.

⁴ Material on portraits and self-portraits from Shearer West: *Portraiture*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

In the visual art tradition, self portraits, in which an artist depicts him or herself, can be considered a kind of diary that can aid in revealing something about the artist. Private experiential history, a diary written into the body, has been a subject of many of Kekäläinen's solo works dating back to 1990. In these works, an outspoken and independent female persona seeks a variety of alternative modes of existence, the beauty that dwells deep within the body, outside of certain societal mirrors. In addition to the image of the body, the self portrait reflects the reality of the artist.

A mirror turns inward, away from the image of the body and toward what is under the skin.

Images of nakedness

Sanna Kekäläinen's female personas often appear in her pieces naked, making their skin visible.

Throughout the tradition of European painting, the manner of seeing a woman's body as an image has been built on the nude. John Berger considers two different ways of being unclothed. One is the nude, in which the female figure is presented as a beautiful object of art in an aesthetically pleasing pose. The woman offers her nudity to the viewer to please him, she poses and is aware of the viewer's gaze. The other, much rarer form is nakedness, which is "to be oneself", unclothed. It is the naked body, not directed toward an external observer but sentient and alive, allowing the person's individuality to flow into their physicality.⁵

⁵ John Berger: *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books, 1972. The third chapter of the book discusses women in western art.

As examples of sentient individual women in art, Berger mentions the Rembrandt painting *Danae* (1636), in which a woman lies naked on a bed in a state of anxious excitement. Her body does not lie passive. Her hand reaches out toward something outside the frame of the painting. Her body moves, it is dynamic and quivering. The intensity of this body and the way that Rembrandt brings out the individuality of a particular woman⁶ makes it impossible to think of her as exhibiting herself to the viewer of the painting. Her body is alive not only through the intimate moment created by the movement but also through the force of gravity, the flesh of her breasts compressed by the movement of her arm, her stomach sagging earthward. Her skin, too, exudes extraordinary life in Rembrandt's choice of colors and brushstrokes.⁷

The female personas that Kekäläinen materializes are situated in the same aesthetic of the living body. Bodily experience is drawn through movement and quivering flesh as life and vivacity, the private person materialized in the skin. For Kekäläinen, dance is not a fettering of a body's movement, but rather a channeling of a state of being and movement initiated by the body. Movement is not stifled beneath postures. So the dancer does not strive toward a certain established language of movement, but rather reaches outside of aestheticized forms toward the honest, the private, the vulnerable, the absence of affectation—or toward a churning, exaggerated over-exuberance, whichever makes the questioning body visible. The skin is a breathing, porous layer throbbing with movement.

The body of the *Danae* in Rembrandt's life-sized composition invites the viewer to encounter the woman as a person, through her private self. Before us is a naked, living woman, not an exhibition of a body stripped of its identity, a rigid image of woman presented for our pleasure. To fossilize the body is to halt its life, to close it off, imprison it within a shell. To allow life to be revealed, on the other hand, is to awaken and accept feeling, to aspire to touch something living.

⁶ The models for the painting were Rembrandt's wife Saskia van Uylenburgh and his lover Geertje Dirckx

⁷ "Seldom has seemingly 'breathing' skin been suggested with paint in such a convincing way." p. 240, Eric Jan Sluijter: *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*. Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

The original source of the body's dynamism is perhaps outside of physical space, just as the impetus for the movement of Rembrandt's *Danae* is outside the viewer's visibility, but the motivation for the movement nevertheless immerses the body that is presented in a particular state of being. In Kekäläinen's works, the body reaches toward something hidden, some significant event or past moment imprinted in it and causing it to move. At same time, this reaching out reveals something about the body itself, about its internal experience. Kekäläinen's body is the theater of events. Everything that happens is simultaneously here and in the past, in constant movement between the inside and the outside.

The flesh and sexuality

In certain pieces, the use of the naked woman's body makes its bareness noticeable, it emphatically captures the viewer's gaze and comments on nakedness. The nakedness is read intentionally or experienced as something that excites our attention. The body is considered, appraised, and the woman is easily seen as a sexualized being. Sexuality is felt to form a significant component of nakedness, even if that is not the work's main theme.

Does nakedness automatically signify sexuality?

Is the unclothed body inevitably lewd, controlled by lust?

How can the accentuation of women's sexuality be resisted?

The realistic visual depiction of the body is often associated with the kinds of images that make the vulva a titillating spectacle: a presentation of the female body as pornographic. By the same token, the wrong kind of representation of the body as spectacle is rejected as an ugly experience, because imperfection, ambiguity, unkemptness are seen as inappropriate modes of (female) human corporeality.

In the media, a woman's partially or entirely uncovered body is often 'clothed' by hiding its fleshly physicality. The flesh is 'erased' by presenting the body as aloofly exotic or as a luxuriously veiled and adorned consumer good. Flesh is covered in an armor of opulence, its smoothness the unmistakable attribute of perfection, lifting an object into a new category high above the weight of earthliness. That is why Christ has no seams in his clothing. It is why the spaceships of science fiction are of gleaming, seamless metal.⁸ When a woman's body is presented as flawless, free of wrinkles, entirely smooth, it is equated with this supernatural quality, an object magically, admirably above the mere human. A woman's genitals, too, are fossilized, depicted as a hermetic diamond:

This ultimate triangle, by its pure and geometrical shape, by its hard and shiny material, bars the way to the sexual parts like a sword of purity, and definitively drives the woman back into a mineral world, the (precious) stone being here the irrefutable symbol of the absolute object, that which serves no purpose.⁹

By concealing the vulva under this idealized protective hood, the woman's entire body is solidified, made into an admirable whole. The woman's experience of her sexuality is extirpated through the petrification of the parts of the body associated with it. Every corner of the body is separated from all life, any physical sensation that could destroy the viewer's illusion of perfection.

The invisibility of the vulva and the taboo on speaking about women's genitals is crystallized in Western attitudes toward women's bodies. In the history of visual arts, women's own sexual desire is removed by leaving the vulva out of the painting—and especially the pubic hair, which is associated with sexual desire because the hair pushes its way out from under the smooth surface, thus making the internal life of the body visible. By restraining too evident signs of the life of the body, the woman is relegated to feeding the sexual desires of others without herself experiencing desire.¹⁰ A body which is too alive draws attention to a woman's individuality, and the presence of the vulva might lead her to

⁸ Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*. The Noonday Press, 1972. p. 88, from the chapter 'The New Citroën'.

⁹ Barthes, from the chapter 'Striptease', p. 85.

¹⁰ Berger, p. 31.

her own experience of sexuality. By removing both, she is smoothed and flattened into a desirable and beautiful object whose body and sexuality is controlled by the (male) viewer.

In examining the physicality of the body, one of Kekäläinen's central themes is the examination of the state of being bare. Or put another way: if physicality is explored only through flesh that is hidden beneath clothing, something of its physicality will necessarily remain hidden. Unexamined. In making the flesh visible, the meaning of physicality is also revealed; the feelings it awakens, the possibilities, the taboos, its charged quality, tell us something about corporeality itself—female corporeality.

This is why the revelation of the tension of naked corporeality is avoided when a woman's body is presented as a consumer product. Roland Barthes says of the striptease:

The end of the striptease is then no longer to drag into the light a hidden depth, but to signify, through the shedding of an incongruous and artificial clothing, nakedness as a natural vesture of woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of the flesh.¹¹

From the first moments of *performing* an undressing, the woman's body is wrapped in illusion, in the end it is chaste, and thus both unreal and unthreatening. It exudes no depth or individuality, nothing dangerous that would demand a reaction from the viewer or challenge him to participate. Even naked, her body is clothed, covered in a cloak of chastity that transforms her skin into a covering for the world within her. The closed body doesn't evoke any troubling questions, doesn't comment or challenge.

For Kekäläinen, nakedness is a kind of tool, a state in which the body's protective shell—of poses, attitudes, elevation or illusion—drops away. The body is on display in its entirety, not smoothed out or partially effaced. Its skin is porous, with no protective armor and no defense mechanisms. The condition of bared corporeality reminds us of a child's innocence,

¹¹ Barthes, 'Striptease', p. 84-85.

open and vulnerable, unaware of the external gaze of others, and this makes it possible to rewrite the body, to transform the body into a question.

Nakedness in Western art history is primarily 'sans vulva'. Even Rembrandt's *Danae* hides it with a perfectly placed shadow cast on the place between her legs. There is something there so forbidden that it cannot withstand the light of day.

Hélène Cixous speaks of women being taught that their bodies are a 'black territory', a mystery, a region unexplored. The body is a blind spot, its existence denied, a thing impossible to look at. It is a dark continent shrouded in obscurity, and darkness is dangerous. Because of fear of this darkness, women's bodies are conquered and pacified, they are colonized Africa, dispossessed and exploited.¹² So a woman is taught to be both a victim and her own enemy, her relationship to her body becomes suspect and thus unreliable, her self difficult to accept, let alone love. Cixous also speaks of 'the infamous logic of antilove',¹³ the default mode of encounter with one's own body.

The vulva, and with it a woman's entire body, is socially stigmatized in a constant effort to destroy its darkness and mystery. The vulva is a portal to a woman's inner space, a door that must be closed and walled shut. In her book *The Fruit of Knowledge*, Liv Strömquist comments ironically on how the NASA space capsule Pioneer blasted off in 1972, sending information about Earth into outer space. On its aluminum hull was engraved an image of a man with realistic reproductive organs, but the vulva between the woman's legs, represented by a short line, was removed from the final version, apparently thought inappropriate.¹⁴ Between her legs there was, concretely, 'nothing'. Her flesh continued uninterrupted from her naval to her feet.

¹² I refer often in this essay to Hélène Cixous's article *The Laugh of the Medusa*. *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4. (Summer, 1976), p. 875-89

¹³ Cixous, p. 878

¹⁴ Liv Strömquist: *The Fruit of Knowledge*, Fantagraphics, 2018 p. 34-35. English translation by Melissa Bowers. Strömquist cites the work *The Depths of Space*, by Mark Wolverton, Joseph Henry Press, 2004. p. 79.

It is difficult for a woman to see or consider her sexual organs in public space, not only through images but also at a symbolic level. Little boys' phallic objects such as various guns and swords make symbolic processing of their bodies and sexuality possible, but there is no symbolic societal counterpart in the world of girls.¹⁵ How can the vulnerability and power of a woman's body be socially processed? How can her physical and internal world be approached? Traditionally feminine ways of behaving like sitting with one's legs together, taking neat little steps when walking, and using softened, subdued gestures all lead in the same direction: prohibition, concealment, silencing. Or pleasingness, docility, and obedience.

According to traditional gender role divisions, a woman is taught to be constantly examining herself—how she looks and what impression her behavior makes from the point of view of others. Men act and women are on display—and a woman is trained to look at her display from the outside.

Unmarked **nakedness**

In dance, as in any live artistic performance or event, the body is its own prison. Movement reaches outside of physical boundaries to become the immaterial body, but is only able to transform itself as far as the boundaries set by the flesh will allow. The body can never rid itself of its corporeality. Its outer form as the body of a man, woman, or other gender, is the living body's biological frame, the prison of its inner world. The culturally read signals of the flesh remain, and the vulva is ultimately a vulva.

¹⁵ Feminist art has taken up a forceful strategy of accentuating women's bodies and making them visible. Hannah Wilke's ceramic vulvas, performance artist Valie Export's crotchless pants, or Carolee Schneemann's text that emerge from the vulva are examples from the 60's and 70's.

Can a woman's body be stripped away — can she be 'merely human'? What part of the display can be removed to reveal her universal humanity? Is it possible to move outside of the socially written confines of the body?

Kekäläinen's body strives for communication that intensively reaches far outside of womanhood. The naked body is a kind of laboratory for approaching the subject of a piece, but it is also a subject of broader examination: the physical body as a place of existence. In Kekäläinen's works, nakedness is above all the primary space of existence, a natural and unconcealed way of being in the world. The naked body reaches for a moment when innocence is not yet lost, for a time before we learn the experience of shame. Experiences that arise from this freedom of infancy approach something human and universal, ask existential questions that lie outside of the boundaries of gender.

Consciousness of being the object of the gaze, and through it the experience of being naked, originates in a way of seeing. In his discussion of the creation story, John Berger talks about this change in the gaze:

They became aware of being naked because, as a result of eating the apple, each saw the other differently. Nakedness was created in the mind of the beholder.¹⁶

After eating the apple, the gaze changes to one of shame about one's own and the other's bodies because the bodies are seen as different and therefore strange. Nakedness is thus the experience of nakedness in the viewer. It is the viewer's way of seeing a body without clothing.

Two individuals, one clothed and one unclothed, share an unequal status. One is in a position of power, because clothed, and the other is unprotected and naked. Can we who approach art also uncliothe ourselves, find some space of nakedness and frolic naked in the meadows of physicality, in that intuitively sensed state where the world is not viewed from a distance, but felt with the skin?

¹⁶ Berger, p. 48

Provocation

Sanna Kekäläinen's realistic way of making the body visible is outside of the elevating gaze and apart from the feminine emphasis on pleasing and on images of consumption. She rejects the body's consciousness of being watched, of being a beautiful object to indulge the viewer, peeped at by a voyeur from a comfortable distance. Her body speaks of itself and of its own reality, and its quivering flesh, its nakedness, cannot be shut safely away in the shell and form of the beautiful object we call the nude. This body is not there to indulge the viewer; its purpose is not to serve; it can't be controlled or consumed, is not an object of desire or of the male gaze and the male point of view.

When this position of power for the viewer is lost, a woman's body is often rejected and demonized. Improper behavior, appearance, or states of display are punished.

In America in the 20th century, women who questioned Victorian standards of beauty in exuberant and carnal burlesque shows were depicted in the papers with demeaning language. Elisa Holt was, in the words of reporters, a strapping animal, and Lydia Thompson was called a monstrous spectacle. The removal of these women's bodies from the public space was vehemently demanded, due to the impropriety of their lively fleshliness.¹⁷ Their physicality was too strident and challenging.

Rembrandt's *Danae*, too, was unusual in a painting tradition that strove for the idealized image, and critics called it ugly and scandalous, while wondering why he didn't use a 'more beautiful woman' as a model. In 1985, the painting was vandalized when the figure's crotch was slashed and acid was thrown at it. The reason for the attack was never discovered, but Rembrandt scholar Eric Jan Sluijter speculated that the reaction was due to the way the painting revealed a too-living woman with a body that was movingly alive.¹⁸

¹⁷ Much on burlesque comes from Robert G. Allen's *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

¹⁸ Sluijter, p. 243

The loss of power for the viewer is manifested as disappointment, as a loss of pleasingness, an experience of ugliness. A woman the viewer cannot control is interpreted as unpleasant, or as obscene, as if something too private has been revealed.

Another interesting perspective on women's physicality is the censorship of Dries Verhoeven's piece *Ceci n'est pas mon corps* (This is not my body) in Helsinki in 2014. In the final scene of the street performance, an 83-year-old woman sat naked in a glass case wearing a mask of a young woman over her face. The piece was allowed to go forward on the condition that the woman put on underwear—covering her breasts and vulva. The aged, naked female body touched some sort of taboo when it took over the glass booth, a pedestal that belonged solely to young and beautiful bodies. Was nakedness equated with sexuality, making the viewer a voyeur, peeping at an old woman? Or was the provocation in the piece's corporeal relationship to beauty, or life... or death?

Visibility in a public space, the privileged place of being seen by others, is a constant object of selection and of surveillance. What will be raised up as good and beautiful, and what rejected and kept hidden? The concealment of otherness and difference is systematic at the same time that 'we', our own identities, are linked to the existence of otherness. 'We' can only exist in contrast to 'they' who are shut out. And yet the things that are socially marginalized, the hidden taboos, are symbolically central; they stir up questions that society prefers to avoid, questions to be struggled against, a change to be resisted. By censoring a question, society rejects questioning and avoids change.

Is the naked body of an aged woman so politically charged that its presence in a public place must be prevented? A woman's physicality represented a question society is not prepared to answer.

In addition to damage and destruction, another way of using power is making a thing invisible by removing or ignoring it. Censoring a certain kind of bodily presence, also removes its social influence, its ability to breathe and speak.¹⁹ By turning the gaze away from its presence, attention is diverted away from its significance, its meaning and its ability

¹⁹ Cixous, p. 880.

to exert an influence. The display of certain (female) bodies sends a strong message about the body as an independent whole. Bodily representation is a means of political questioning.

The difficulty and necessity of speaking

Hélène Cixous emphasizes the importance of a woman's own voice to fill in the gaps in patriarchal societal imagery. A woman representing herself in writing and presenting her own reality is a step toward visibility, and thus toward a change for the better.²⁰ Writing the body from within appropriates the speech of the body as a tool for interpreting one's own experience.

It is challenging to consciously express the living, honest experiences of the body or contain them within an existing vocabulary. Experience is a progressive, variable process in the memory of the body, where the past is alive amidst continuous change. Following Nietzsche, words are our horizons, always too mundane or too general for describing our experiences, which are all-encompassing and unique. Words exaggerate or dilute what we want to share, they become superlatives or are inadequate for revealing the reality of our experience.²¹ In her work, Kekäläinen doesn't present the past as a straightforward narrative, doesn't make events into 'museum pieces' by giving them a certain form or 'word'. She doesn't attach them to rigid frameworks where the dynamism of experience is destroyed, where it is reduced to inadequacy or inflated beyond recognition.

The documentary *Lyubov: Love in Russian*, follows author Svetlana Alexievich as she interviews people for a book. She wants to use private experiences to examine what love is, how the moment of love can be captured, or how love can be preserved.²²

²⁰ Cixous, p. 880.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Gateway Editions, 1996. p. 88

²² *Lyubov: Love in Russian* (2017) Taskovski Films, London. Directed by Staffan Julén.

Alexievich's books are made up of strong, personal voices that make shared experience visible. In addition to the speech in her books, the documentary *Lyubov: Love in Russian* gives faces to her interviewees. Many of them don't have words to describe love and are silent for a long time, their speech faltering, searching for what to say, looking away. Their movements, gestures and posture convey how the emotions that the experience of love awakens wrap a person in an all-encompassing embrace. Their whole bodies radiate the experience of love and speak of what they've experienced, publicly shout that which is impossible to describe. Speaking about love makes their bodies tremble; memories bring tears to their eyes or draws shy smiles on their faces. Something comes alive when love returns to their bodies. Love is preserved, packed tight, overflowing, stored up and ready to burst from inside the body. The experience of love and its loss is connected to a powerful, bodily emotional charge. It is only after this that they are able to begin to find the words to talk about love.

How can one talk about the all-encompassing experience of love without making it banal or pulling it to pieces?

Alain Badiou sees love as an existential possibility, a suggestion of a different place of being. Love presents a possible world where we're not merely wrapped up in our individual realities or our striving for advantage, a world born between two different people—a world outside of the individual. It is a reality built and shared between two different and separate individuals, where we 'see together', while still remaining separate and strange to one another. Love honors another person's strangeness, it doesn't rule or conquer difference by subduing it for one's own use or making the other person a part of oneself, but builds a new reality—a new world—that happens in the ongoing encounter between two people. Love is a process of slowly building, a desire to continue a shared and thus fragile world, to be in a new and unknown reality.²³ It is love's conflicting feelings of closeness and at the same time strangeness that make it difficult if not impossible to put it into words.²⁴

²³ Alain Badiou: *Elogio del Amor*. Café Voltaire, 2009.

²⁴ Poets are often thought of as a voice between humans and reality because they have the capacity to arrange words in such a way that they bring experience to life.

Love is a slowly occurring event that impresses itself so deeply upon our bodies that no word is broad enough, precise enough, all-encompassing enough to fully express the entire experience. Every expression is too much—or too little.

The *living time* of an experience, the moment and the event, are revealed in the thinking of Kekäläinen's body—in the constant reaching for the elusive and unattainable world of experience. Within the theme of the piece, the body lingers, trudges, wanders, and drifts. But not aimlessly. Every Kekäläinen piece is based on a thoroughly worked-out plan, a kind of schema or blueprint for the course of the entire event. It is a fully organized construction, a map, a path. An open script or unenclosed organism that the dancer makes her way through, either alone or with observers, whether in a rehearsal or a 'performance', in its entirety, from beginning to end through its full content. Her works aren't just a collection of scenes, of constructed pieces of a whole; they are a succession of events, of moments, that build upon each other, moments that exist and occur only in relation to each other.²⁵ This carefully thought-out, long series of events is experienced again and again through bodily reality, always different but always following the map, unique yet tethered to the established landmarks. The dance is an experiential mycelium, a wide-reaching web that lives within the structure, surrounding and accompanying the conditions of the corporeal event.

Kekäläinen brings the world of experience to life in her body by 'speaking' the theme to the recipient. Heinrich von Kleist sees speech as the pursuit of thought, a process of clarifying knowledge. Instead of merely pondering a thing, he encourages speaking about it with someone at the first opportunity, speaking without stopping, stumbling and searching for words, navigating the endless jungle of language. At some point the brain, activated to the extreme, will find the right direction and the correct choice of words to express what we know. To Kleist, speech is a reaching for our train of thought, and thought is created in our mouths—in our bodies.²⁶

Thus the process of thought launches itself from an intuition, from forming the right kind of question. It is by finding the beginning of a certain insight that the motor of thought starts up

²⁵ Interview with Sanna Kekäläinen, Oct. 18, 2018.

²⁶ From Heinrich von Kleist's essay, "On the Gradual Formulation of Thoughts while Speaking", 1805.

and our quest for thought is born. The embryo of thought is a question for which the impossibility of simple answers makes room for the birth of a hitherto unknown world, just like the conception of the paradox of the relationship of love and strangeness that Badiou describes as the 'diferencia idéntica', 'identical difference'.²⁷

Kekäläinen's corporeal speech thus forms a kind of series of oxymorons (from the Greek *oxys*, 'sharp' and *moros*, 'stupid'), a bodily thicket of seemingly contradictory words that reaches toward bodily thought. In her works, the body is a public secret, a condensation of bodily thinking that materializes at the intersection of opposing forces. The body is penetrated by bodily thought and a silent cry. Word hybrids state one thing then drift the next moment toward something else. The tension of the accessible and the inaccessible shapes the dancing body. It is in a state of timelessness, a moment where the private past touches on a shared insight.

Kekäläinen's every (bodily) reality is another sort of speech of the body, a voice, a sound, welling up from within. The distinct quality of the sound emerges from her different ways of moving or being—silence or a shout, a twitch, a lilting song, a smile. The dancer's skills arise from recognizing this sound, from listening to it and channeling it outward. It is a shaping of the sound's tone into flesh, muscle, skin.

Svetlana Alexievich's books, too, are made up of private voices—shouts, snarls, gasps. Each interviewee's unique stories and events combine to tell their own polyphonic history, together forming a choir. They consist of potent details they've committed to memory, because the very significance of the event made them remember. This alternative collective history of experience delineates the mood of a particular time in a society. By telling its own version of events and social phenomena, it is a counter-echo to the hegemonic Truth, a questioning of official history.²⁸

²⁷ Badiou, p. 10.

²⁸ One of Svetlana Alexievich's works, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, gives voice to more than two hundred women who participated in the Second World War, sharing their experience of the wartime environment. Her book *Voices from Chernobyl*, which won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015, describes the effects of the nuclear accident on the city and its inhabitants, the people who felt it on their skin.

Alexievich listens to her interviewees, collects their voices of experience, and uses these voices to write their experience of society. Kekäläinen listens to the experiences of the body and through them speaks bodily suggestions or questions to society. Both bodies of work are from a source deeply private, where loneliness becomes shared, experiential speech.

Love and the Breach

Relationships between people are like dense forests. Or maybe it's the people themselves who are forests, trail after trail opening up within them, trails that are kept hidden from others, opening only by chance to those who happen upon them.

True, by Riikka Pulkkinen

People are aware of their own imperfection, smallness, insignificance in the universe, in the world, in nature or in a society where we are just one person among many. We in our market economy try to fill that crack in human omnipotence with success and wealth, charm and attractiveness. We attempt to make ourselves lovable in the eyes of others. 'Look at me!' we shout in the virtual communication of social media, or in the physical presence of others. This eventually becomes the faint plea: (Do you) Love me (?).

There is a crack within us that only another person or persons can fill.

The experience of deep loneliness, of a 'separate, disunited existence' can be an unbearable prison where a person 'would become insane could he not liberate himself from this prison and reach out, unite himself in some form or other with men, with the world outside.'²⁹ We try to prove to our ego that we are desirable, admired, intelligent, attractive, fun, successful

²⁹ Fromm, p. 23.

—and therefore lovable. In an attempt to feel loved, and also to love ourselves, we show only our best side.

We turn inward and curl up inside the sense of omniscience and superiority we feel in front of this narcissistic mirror. We build a protective wall around us, its inner surface covered in a layer of mirrors. All of these mirrors are aimed toward us, reflecting and duplicating the perfection we see in them. At the same time, we deny our shortcomings and human imperfections. We cover the cracks with reassurances.

But these fissures are our potential for contact with others, for connection with another person.

One of Svetlana Alexievich's interviewees named Julia describes in great detail the first time a boy took hold of her hand, when she was 18:

We had cats at home, and I had cat scratches on my hand. As we walked holding hands, his hand sweated and the sweat got into the scratches. It stung terribly. But all I wanted was for him to not let go.³⁰

In Julia's story, another person was physically absorbed into her body through wounds in her broken skin. For love to happen, it requires a crack, a breach in the outer shell that protects us. This one intense bodily experience crystalizes all the emotions—the passions and pains that Julia experiences as love, as what love is to her.

That breach, our human shortcomings, is a thing we try desperately to hide and patch over. We understand love as a transaction in which the other person must have 'qualities which are popular and sought after on the personality market'.³¹ We seek out a top-notch individual, a lover with optimal capabilities and multiple areas of expertise, a real go-getter. We want to have the jump on love productivity. Now. We see others as merchandise, because love in the age of neoliberal materialism is a hedonistic, pleasure-based contract in what Alain Badiou calls the 'libidinal economy'—a system in which a risk-free and thus superficial form of love

³⁰ From *Lyubov: Love in Russian*.

³¹ Fromm, p. 17.

is consumed for pleasure.³² Love is perverted and subsumed into the world order of consumer capitalism, made into a bargaining chip.³³

The private and vulnerable reality that opens up in the crack, in the breach, is the breeding ground for love. And an ability to share our imperfections just as they are.

In her piece *Puna-Red-Rouge* (2007), Sanna Kekäläinen shares her experience of strangeness when meeting a Masai woman. Their physical differences were extreme. The woman had a bald, oiled head and wore a red blanket and large beads. More than that, there was the experience of being unable to communicate: "... I felt horror, emptiness, and fear. I couldn't make contact with her presence or her soul. (...) But this African woman didn't seem to understand anything from my gaze, either, couldn't read my emotions or expressions. Perhaps she, too experienced the encounter as alienation and rejection."³⁴ How could two people be so far apart that they were unable to recognize the humanity in another person's eyes or reach any shared understanding as human beings?

The experience caused confusion, but also an insight about difference, a realization about the diversity of humanity and her own uniqueness, but also her limitation and inadequacy. And a hopeful question that Kekäläinen poses: "Where, then, can we meet? Where can we be exactly the same, twin beings?"³⁵ Although the two of them were looking at each other quite close up, close enough to touch, there was a wall of alienation between them, some kind of cultural code that exuded more difference than sameness. Does the experience of extreme difference prevent people from touching each other's souls, from basic human communication?

³² Badiou, p. 6.

³³ Philosophers and sociologists are concerned about the transformation of love into a component in our consumer-based lifestyle. This text is strongly influenced by Alain Badiou's desire to reinvent love. In *The Agony of Eros* (2017), Byung-Chul Han is concerned about the destruction of the Other and of otherness, through which love becomes impossible. The third thought-provoking source is Erich Fromm's reflection on love as an activity in his classic work *The Art of Loving* (1956).

³⁴ Program from *Puna-Red-Rouge*.

³⁵ Idem

According to genetic research, all humans are descended from one African woman, known as the mitochondrial Eve, our common ancestor. The basic material of our bodies is one. In our genes we are all part of the same original mother. We share the same physical origins even though we have grown into our culture's image, differentiated by our habitat and customs. If we are in the end nevertheless both human, how can we get over the wall of alienation?

The etymology of the Finnish word 'ihminen'—person, human—is not unambiguous. It may have been borrowed from Proto-Indo-European, since there is preserved in Sanskrit the word *jā-ḥ*—'offspring', 'being'. One possible Baltic origin, the Lithuanian 'įžymì'—'known'—refers to another person through similarity or recognizability, but the roots of the word are believed to come from the Mordvinic *inze*—"stranger"—which emphasizes difference. Another person is an unknown, removed and distant.³⁶ Is that other person someone we know, someone close, or are they a stranger? Are they related to us or alien to us? And when we approach otherness and difference, do we encounter it with curiosity or aversion? Can we allow a person to be different and yet still a whole person?

The difficulty in encountering difference is reflected in the way we perceive people who speak differently. Throughout history, the speech of another nation or a neighboring village has been experienced as incomprehensible babbling or an onomatopoeic jumble, judged as an inability to speak. Instead of talking, foreigners emit strange noises that end up becoming the names of entire peoples. Bar-barians referred to uncouth, uncivilized people. The term Ber-bers came from the ancient Greek word *barbaros*, meaning 'stranger' or 'outsider'. Ta-tar is a synonym for 'barbarian', used by the Chinese to name the peoples of Central Asia, whose languages were to them indistinguishable. To those who used these names, foreign, unknown peoples were not real people; they were a deficient, lower caste, of lesser value,

³⁶ Information on word origin comes from the the Institute for the Languages of Finland, author Klaas Ruppel, https://www.kotus.fi/nyt/kysymyksia_ja_vastauksia/sanojen_alkuperasta/ihminen, and from the Finnish libraries' Ask a Librarian service https://www.kirjastot.fi/kysy/haluaisintietaa-mika-on-sanan-1?language_content_entity=fi Source: Kaisa Häkkinen: *Nykysuomen etymologinen sanakirja*, (Modern Finnish Etymological Dictionary) WSOY, 2004. Electronic data accessed Dec. 19, 2018.

less civilized. This justified their destruction or enslavement, destroying or exploiting the threat of difference for their own uses.³⁷

Encounters with strangers would have jeopardized the superior truth of one's own community, called into question one's way of looking at the world. Strangers were seen as a threat to the community. Difference was not a pathway to opening up experience or an opportunity for self-reflection, for getting outside of a closed reality or the logic of sameness.

Sameness has a wall built around it that keeps out anything unfamiliar, anything that could question or damage the community.

An encounter entails risk, opening the borders and defensive walls that protect the fortifications we've built. It's an experience of difference that can force an entry and compel us to question the world we have built, our truth, the private space we're protecting. With love, we allow this to happen, make room for another among us, inside us. Love invites us to look at the world outside of our identity. That is why, when love happens, it requires that we abandon being wrapped up in our own reality, our narcissistic introversion.

Love is the question, who am I and who is the other? And it's the ability to withstand this suspense of constant questioning and uncertainty.

Humans are basically social animals, herd animals who need to be surrounded by others' presence, movement, sharing— and love. Made visible in all its imperfection. Constructing commonality, validating uncertainty, trusting in difference and sincere acceptance.

Love is the capacity to be unprotected. Love is the opening of the body to another, to otherness.

³⁷ José María Valverde: *Pensar y hablar*. Universidad de Barcelona, 1994. p. 8. From collection of published conference papers.

Immersion in the Body

Kekäläinen often mentions that examining the body requires a certain way of being, a kind of 'stripping away of shells'. The body must be open to internal experience, bare and vulnerable for the dancer, open to her environment. It requires a certain kind of unprotectedness.

Twelve years ago, in the process of creating *Puna-Red-Rouge*, her work began to take a definite turn in a particular direction. In creating the piece she wrote a lot about private memories, roughing out a vocabulary for them and writing them down. But most of all she opened up the material of these memories, searched them for 'a transformation of the unique language of the body spoken through movement into contemporary dance.'³⁸ The body in the piece is revealed as if dropped there. It isn't performing or trying to impress the audience with its skill. It bathes in private being. Corporeality seems at times to control the dancer—it moves her around like a wet rag, wiping the floor with her skin. Kekäläinen is like a life-sized marionette, a puppet whose flesh the body modifies as it pleases. Or an extremely agile yet endearingly clumsy, intuitive child exploring her own physicality.

She seems surprised by every movement, every new emerging impulse, as if she herself is not dictating or directing it. Through the persona of the piece, she asks who the stranger is living inside us, what unknown thing moves within us, and moves us.

Powerful emotional experiences, moments of bodily realization and other meaningful events have made our bodies, made us, what we are. In dance, the bareness of the body opens up realities about the themes of a piece that cannot be concealed. Or we are able to grasp realities through our bodies that we do not know we carry in our bodies—only the body itself knows. The movement reveals small, preliminary answers to questions of who we are and how we are. The flesh speaks when we take the time to listen to it.

³⁸ Description of the piece at: <http://www.kekalainencompany.net/wp/en/works/puna-red-rouge/>

In *Puna-Red-Rouge*, the vulnerability of this dropped body is combined with recognizable movement material such as gestures borrowed from Nijinsky's faun, some small animal trying to learn to use the wings growing from its back, stroking another furry creature's ears, looking through binoculars, blowing little kisses. At the same time, Kekäläinen seems to be reflecting on her relationship to a learned movement language of dance that appears in spurts over the course of the piece. The familiar pirouettes and demi-pointe movement language of ballet, the leg positions and movements (attitude, grand battement), references to the Graham technique of modern dance with its positions on the floor or leg swings reflect the vocabulary that is taught to the body in dance training. She unpacks the language and forms that come from years of practice, become ingrained in the very body, a vocabulary that the body has internalized.³⁹

While filtering this dance vocabulary, Kekäläinen also reflects on the relationship of the body to this learned language. She reaches melodramatically toward the kingdom of heaven, a broad toss of the leg hits her in the head, causing her to stumble, she diligently prepares to pirouette, but the pirouette itself lasts only a brief second. Getting up from the floor, she flexes her muscles, celebrating her own abilities, pretending her obvious flop to the floor was an artistic decision. She mimics pleasure and exaggerates her attempt to pivot from hero of the dance world to anti-hero. Her body strains toward familiar patterns of motion while enriching them with new meanings as she enjoys galloping around the stage like a prima ballerina executing a series of leaps—or like an innocent, enthusiastic child. The movement constantly comments on itself. In her rich physicality, she is ironic but affectionate, funny but critical.

The physicality is unforced, but also supported by something external, lapping like waves between deep waters and ingrained movements and trajectories. *Puna-Red-Rouge* seems to lay out the foundation for Kekäläinen's method.

³⁹ Sanna Kekäläinen began her dance training in children's ballet, then studied at the School of Contemporary Dance in London in the early 1980's, where the emphasis was also on ballet dance technique as well as modern dance, including the Graham technique. She also attended courses and did post-graduate studies at SNDO in Amsterdam.

Four years later, in *The Beast – A Book in an Orange Tent* (2011), her way of moving changes and sharpens. The ornamentation seem pruned away, leaving only the substance arising from ever deeper in the core of her body. The movement phases become longer episodes within which her personas examine the materiality of their bodies. The same movement motif lives for a long time as Kekäläinen's typical current of motion switches from lightning fast transformation to slow contemplation. The movement is propelled on its own rapids, then slows in the backwaters, peacefully depositing its sediment. The dancer sometimes stops moving, to breathe, but always with the internal current awake, ready to be propelled into another flood of motion. The flow intensifies together with the music, but it doesn't illustrate or subordinate itself to the melody, it just settles freely along the path suggested by the sound world of the piece. The lightness of *Puna-Red-Rouge* is gone, replaced by a certain blackness and heaviness, the quality of the movement darker.

The personas in the piece radiate a bared humanity. A disoriented wanderer in the desert, an outraged citizen, or a frustrated human figure wallowing in despair and anger are pellucidly honest. In other phases of the movement the naked body is like a protozoa, an organic mass, or a fearless experimenter. Because there are no shameful secrets, the dancer doesn't have to cover or hide herself. Her relationship with the world is a mixture of the spontaneous curiosity of a small child and the calm of a person who accepts herself as she is.

Compared to *Puna-Red-Rouge*, the form of the movement is dispersed, the tone of the various personas intermixing and forming hybrid entities. The gestures are clear and directed, but no longer familiar and recognizable. The body can no longer be read unambiguously – we don't know what its signs refer to or what they mean, though they are clearly meaningful. They come from somewhere and form a sort of innate logic, a prelinguistic way of communicating and speaking. They convey a strong need to speak.

Flesh has replaced form, been given the leading role. The changes in Kekäläinen's state of being are holistic and multifaceted. The cycle of movements takes more time to develop, able to transform more broadly and extensively than before, to sink deeper into the flesh and then well up to the surface of the skin.

Kekäläinen's works are based on certain dogmas that have become more precise and distilled to their essentials over time. Eliminating representation and the vocabulary of movement associated with it—things such as recognizable movements, forms and techniques—allows a different kind of movement and presentational mode to flower. At the same time, she seems to have completely finished dealing with her relationship to the learned vocabulary and tradition of dance. Recognizable movements are an organic part of the flow, but no longer a clear object of study—only a few learned words have been chosen to be a part of it, and they merge into a deeper corporeality. A strong basis in dance training is nevertheless reflected in the rich use of the body, the building and breaking down of the rhythm of the movement, the muscular performance, and the use of space. What has been learned is the foundation the artistic elements are built on, and their liberation is explored.

The quest for an honest unbaring and exploration of the depths of the body proceeds in phases. From one work to the next, Kekäläinen's corporeality becomes clearer while her mode of presentation becomes stripped down and calm; we now see the dancer in a world of slowness and focused concentration, with a logic that is less and less rooted in representation. The relationship with theatrical elements has also changed. There are fewer props and no video. Costume changes are made in front of the audience, and there are no longer side curtains. The visual look and lighting is more minimal, but more precise. Kekäläinen's stage logic has also become clearer, barer and more vulnerable. Only the bare essentials are presented, because the body itself is the most important stage.

The themes in Kekäläinen's art draw directly from bodily experiences—shame or shamelessness, happiness, fragility, suffering and passion. Or alienation, the experience of distance and the difficulty of achieving contact, nearness with another, love.⁴⁰ In tandem with her way of creating—her method—Kekäläinen is working on a long-term study of the human body through various themes. Her works always open up a new perspective on this corporeality, teasing open experiences of a particular theme, and through them the experience of being in the world. The body is a whole, changing and reforming over time,

⁴⁰ Works such as *Onni* (Happiness, 2009), *Häpeä* (Shame, 2010), *Häpeämättömät* (Shameless, 2010), *Passion* (2016), and *Hafed—Collage of Differences and Fragility* (2016).

always different and always, at bottom, the same, a known unknown. Each work is a small reflection on and opening up of the boundless theme of humanity.

The piece *Diva vulva* (2015), which focuses on power, gender, and through them the female body, seems to be the culmination of many simultaneous processes in Kekäläinen's work. The way of moving in the work touches on a sort of fine-tuned aesthetic of vibration. Its phases of movement are largely earnest in mood, with corporeal events assembled on small surface areas such as a table top or a space on the floor bordered with fur coats. Or corporeality is associated with the difficulty of hugging while wearing two furs, of moving while holding a raised ax, or trying to stand up from a supine position. In *Diva vulva*, existence and the state of being become dance, become more important than large movements or the production of many kinds of movement. Her immersion in the body has progressed to a point where it allows a choreography of the skin to happen. It is a condensation on skin of her examination of being.

In this piece, Kekäläinen spends a lot of time with her back to the audience, and different areas and parts of her body thus become expressive material. They transform, tremble, and draw ways of being in silhouette. They serve as mediators, as pulsating living sculptures or canvasses. The dancer is dropped so deeply into the chasms of the body that the need for movement is diminished and even drops away at certain moments. Kekäläinen's language of movement is tangled, writhing, searching, repetitive and filled with subtle variations.

She also adjusts some of the lights and music in the piece herself, thus stepping further and further from the conventions of performance and stage illusion. The work takes place in a space that is constructed right before the audience's eyes. In *Diva vulva* the representation and problematization of performing that interests Kekäläinen is present in many parts of the piece simultaneously—in motion and movement, in her way of being on display, in the angles at which the body is seen, in the construction of the place where it occurs. She also seems to be exploring how the theme of the work can allow and guide the questioning and modification of performance conventions and new ways to share a piece.

She moves forward very slowly, extremely systematically, and from many directions toward something whose existence we have a hint of but which cannot be defined, deduced, or planned without ambiguity. Each of her pieces is a step through which something new takes shape.

Recognizing Beauty

The visual artist Berlinde de Bruyckere approaches humanity and woundedness in *Inside Me*,⁴¹ a piece constructed of gnarled branches treated with layers of wax and assembled on wadded sheets laid atop an old tobacco drying rack. The branches are simultaneously extremely brittle and sinuously carnal, like knotted veins extracted from a body. Resting across thin ropes, they evoke a feeling of defying gravity, the brittle wood and worn cords are the materials of uncertainty.

Bruyckere builds each of her pieces using dozens of different shades of wax poured layer by layer into moulds designed by the artist. The very thin layers of wax melt together as the work thickens and seeks out its shape, but the artist can't see the results until the wax hardens and is removed from the mould. She works in a sort of intuitive maker's space, following an idea and listening to a material familiar to her—the wax. The layers merge into each other and each layer shows faintly through the next, forming a whole that could not be achieved by a more systematic approach. The artist recognizes the end result, but is unable to plan any exact or direct route to reach it.⁴²

⁴¹ Berlinde de Bruyckere, Sara Hildén Art Museum, Feb. 10-May 20, 2018.

⁴² “In the studio of Berlinde De Bruyckere” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZotDGJONHJM> Viewed Nov. 23, 2018

Inside Me is an endless mosaic of colors and shapes with subtle differences in shades that you only notice when you linger over the piece. The top layer of wax creates the impression of a uniform surface—a skin—through which you can see dozens of overlapping layers of hues and indefinable depths. The surface vibrates as the viewers eyes caress it, sometimes seeming to move, to change its shape. At the same time, the piece as a whole exudes a tangible fragility, even a sad weakness and transience that is difficult to connect to anything in existence.

Kekäläinen's exploratory corporeality reveals a similar layered beauty, a certain way of letting the material gleam through the skin. Movement deep within the body wells up from the depths and becomes visible, the skin seems to turn inside out to reveal all the movement material accumulated there in a way that is unexpected and surprising even to the dancer herself. Disorienting. Fascinating. Even the slightest change in the hue of the movement leads back to the thought, the particular experience or insight that shaped the space within the body in the desired direction.

A certain way of being is thus distilled from the mycelium of experience and moves within the themes that it finds, asking questions and exploring them, making claims and challenging them. Although the physical structure of the work is carefully planned and modified in advance like the mould that Bruyckere builds for her branches, the discovery of the material of the work itself, its concreteness, is a fascinating transformation of thought into action. It is the work repeating and remaking itself again and again, and recognizing the beauty of the result. The witnessing of that moment when a possible answer to the question posed begins to glimmer through the surface of the body.

The body isn't just revealed, it reveals itself. The creation of the work is not wrapped up in conscious representation or exhibition, not in narrating or describing, but in thorough preparation of the situation, arranging the pieces in just the right way so that something can be seen over and over as the piece transpires. Working is placed partly outside of ego and decision-making, beyond the reach of consciousness.

Michelangelo's well-known sonnet talks about the relationship between maker and materials:

Nothing the greatest can conceive
That every marble block doth not confine
Within itself; and only its design
The hand that follows intellect can achieve.⁴³

So intellect, skill, and consciousness guide action, but only to a certain point. The sculpture is already in the marble, the movement already in the body. To gain access to the body's truths and to make them visible, something that is fettered by consciousness must be removed. She must abandon the everyday logic of the body, forget the rules of the formal language of dance, discard the weight of the need to perform. The body under the control of consciousness must be directed to listen to the material, and not the ego.⁴⁴ A certain way of creating must be silenced so that a different kind of beauty can emerge.

The ability to recognize beauty, to perceive the paradox contained in a theme, to see where its reflection in private content lies, is the core of Kekäläinen's art. She searches unstintingly, repeats endlessly, works tirelessly, and sensitively recognizes the hidden elements in the truth of the body. The work is not created but encouraged to emerge; it is allowed to happen through the careful construction of the right kinds of frameworks.

⁴³ Michelangelo's sonnet number 151 "Non ha l'ottimo artista". Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

⁴⁴ Choreographer Merce Cunningham is known for using chance to reveal different movement realities. He avoided decision-making and conscious choices when he constructed his works, instead using such things as dice or coin tosses to create his choreographic structures. He combined the extreme technical skill of his dancers with a random organization outside of consciousness. Only in this way could something free of human logic and outside the reach of the ego emerge.

Shadows of darkness

How is a (woman's) body affected by the fact that the experience of one's own corporeality —its vital power, its mutability, its inner stirrings, even its voluntary actions and will— does not match the image presented in a consumerist society? Capitalism's bodies are efficient, clean, and quiet. Humans, on the other hand, are a chaos of imperfection and insecurity.

Experiencing the body as inappropriate and rejecting its noisiness is directly related to the material substance that makes us present in the world—the body and our own selves.

There is something forbidden within our very bodies, a strangeness that cannot be dealt with openly, but nevertheless exists. Part of our bodily existence is censored, some body parts mutilated and deemed unseemly. The woman's body outside of the ideals of beauty is particularly conspicuously expropriated, confiscated from her. It is made into something unfamiliar, something weak, a mortally dangerous figure. The body is a place of inhibition and restraint and thus a hostile companion,⁴⁵ and at the same time it can't be gotten rid of because it is the inescapable location of our existence.

Writing the body in an internally generated way awakens private reality to life, allowing us to recognize and reconquer the body. For Kekäläinen, experiences are a kind of 'physical diary', writings about what a (woman's) body has experienced at various periods of time. What kinds of experiences have left their sediment through the stages of childhood? What about adolescence, when the inner workings of the body come powerfully to life? How can we touch memories of the very earliest stages of infancy? Can they be touched? The body's memory transports the dancer to some very early time, a moment when the body does not yet have words, when it stumbles as it tries to stand up or take its first shaky steps. Within the body a state of being something like what happens when we examine memories in psychoanalysis reveals itself, but this kind of time travel happens not within the mind but in physical reality.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Cixous, p. 880.

⁴⁶ Interview with Sanna Kekäläinen, Oct. 18 2018.

This memory of a non-verbal time, its traces on the body⁴⁷, are an archive of our personal history. Accumulated layers of eras are imprinted in the body, because when we touch the traces of those memories, experiences that are unconscious come alive and the quickening layered within them is released. Experience is dynamic bodily memory whose unconscious existence is materialized in movement as a Kekäläinen piece transpires. The sediment of embodied experiences brings the inner world of the body alive.

The very private gestures that reflect the inner state of the body, such as an ordinary raising of an eyebrow or twitch of a hand, are what Rudolf Laban called shadow movements.⁴⁸ Shadow movements are the opposite of actions⁴⁹ but they inseparably follow all voluntary, conscious movements and actions 'like a shadow'. They are the shadow reflecting from the inner experience of the sentient individual. There is thus at the core of Kekäläinen's works an abandonment of production, a discarding of action-centered body movement in favor of surrendering to a certain kind of internal flow that grants authority to shadow movements. The shadows of the inner world emerge in the dance unmediated, as communicative corporeality.⁵⁰ The movement of the unconscious allows the humanity of the body to flow out into the world.

The innermost part of the body is squeezed out through the skin by force as the shadows become visible movement, vibration, vocalizations, personas. Seeking out the unconscious and staying with it, staying outside of conscious memory, is staying in the body's deepest internal currents. As the inner world becomes visible, bodily thinking happens, which Laban

⁴⁷ Mnemic trace: 'trace of a memory'. All references to traces of memory are from *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. Thomson Gale, 2005. p. 1062-1065, Alain de Mijolla (ed.)

⁴⁸ From the article Article "Shadow Moves," by Marion North in *The Laban Sourcebook*. Routledge, 2011. p. 257-263, Dick McCaw (ed.)

⁴⁹ The conscious and performative movements Laban refers to are things like sitting down or picking up an object.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Laban saw shadow movements as the material of dance, because it is by intensifying such movements that 'dance was born'. North, p. 259.

considered central to understanding the language of shadow movements. For him, movement was thinking.⁵¹

But shadow movements, or the shadows of movement, don't think in logical paths. They instead reflect a person's inner thought bubbling up from the unconscious. They are the private physical self thinking, an unorganized and chaotic experience of who I am. Or constricted and spasmodic movement impulses that come from how I became me. There is no one truth in existence. The 'who' emerges in the imperfection of shadow movements, in their internally generated order and quality of motion. A shadow is pure meaning: the internal tension, the color of the movement, and the personal tone made visible.⁵² As Kekäläinen dances, her body asks questions and speaks out their possible answers—she stays within the questioning chaos of her body's archive of unconscious shadow movements.

The question and questioning of the body arises from bringing bodily memory to the present moment and making it flesh.

By means of these shadow movements, Kekäläinen writes her body into visibility. The wounds, experiences of warmth or estrangement, the encounters, wrenching experiences, seams, cuts and scratches, the imprint of touches, of caresses gathered into bodily memory are released. Her pieces are collages of these feelings and emotions, the speech of the body, its formation through experience; the stretching, contracting, expanding, and opening of the flesh. Humanity pushes its way out in all its shades of color, as a living being and not merely a creature to be admired or loved.

The persona that emerges in her works is delineated and made visible; it begins to act—to move, to live—through the material of the inner world. The personas in Kekäläinen's work

⁵¹ “If one understands that thinking is moving... one comes nearer to the understanding of the language of shadow moves”. Unpublished screenplay *The Psychology of Action*, by Rudolf Laban. From *Effort and Personality According to Rudolf Laban: An Artistic Inquiry of Mobile State*, by Sara R. Van Koningsveld. Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago, 8/2011. p. 34.

⁵² It is also interesting how Laban's skills were used in the industrialization of society in the early 20th century. Improving how movements are performed, and eliminating shadow movements in particular, made it possible to improve the productivity of the human body in places like factories. Efficiency in a market economy thus required the abandonment of personal bodily communication and the destruction of emotion and the inner world.

are comparable to Francis Bacon's portraits of his closest friends, with their distorted faces, swollen noses, twisted necks, and monstrous mouths that convey the person's experiences of unhappiness, suffering, or violence. The form of their bodies becomes secondary, their intimate experiences falling like shadows over the image of the whole person, effacing and covering over their likeness.

Like Bacon's work, Kekäläinen's examinations of the personal experience of the body are not linked to the tradition of self-portraits that examine the artist's identity or describe the creator's persona or mould their social standing. The creator disappears from the event, because the experience is not made into an autobiographical narrative, story, representation, or individual display. The reality of experience is the untidy material of her works. The self in this portrait—the artist's body—is just an archive of experiences, a non-continuous and illogical maze of events from which that material is extracted. We are no longer gazing at an object—the person, ego, form from which the shadow is reflected—but instead seeing only the shadow that it casts.

The (self) portrait that Kekäläinen makes visible is the chaotic humanity sketched for use by those shadows.

The body is thus a kind of metaphor, a vehicle for transferring emotion, as in the original Greek word *metaphora*, to carry over. The state of the body carries across alienation, difference, love or vulnerability, rootlessness or longing. It is a vehicle for the transfer of experience from one body to another, from the artist's body on display to the body of the participant present to see it. And it is human, ambiguous and contradictory, an extremely simplified surface and a hidden core. Its truth is the truth of the recipient, a truth that resonates in those who read and experience it. The body carries the intellect and emotion, understanding and passion, from one person to another. It is a simplified alternate route we can use to speak of the unspoken.

Touching and Being Touched

Some of the shifting shadows in Kekäläinen's work are made of the darkness that society constructs upon women. On a more general level they are also made of the relationship to one's own strange body, an experience of another, a stranger, inside ourselves. The alienation that culture produces is formed from the imprints of society's conceptions of beauty, rules of conformity, strict gender norms, and ways of using and showing the body. Its power structures injure bodies that are marked as being of lesser value and limit their living space.

Hélène Cixous reminds us that the 'dark continent'—and for her, the female body particularly—is not at all dark or unexplored, and even if it is less explored it is due to the belief that it is too dark to explore.⁵³

A woman steps out of that darkness by the very act of taking control of her body. Creating visibility is not just the occupation of space for corporeality but also a liberation from darkness. By exploring the body, the imprints of power are made visible and dealt with while new kinds of alternative corporealities are revealed in a shared common space.

In her contemplation of a different way of seeing (the female gaze, a woman's point of view), filmmaker Jill Soloway⁵⁴ talks about the camera's attempt to get inside the body, to film an individual's feeling and emotions.⁵⁵ She conceives it as 'a feeling seeing', where the film camera, instead of looking at the characters, shares and evokes being in an emotion.

⁵³ Cixous, p. 884-885.

⁵⁴ "Jill Soloway on The Female Gaze". Master Class, TIFF 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnBvppooD9I> Accessed October 5, 2018.

⁵⁵ Soloway emphasizes the importance of describing emotions when it comes to those who are not cis males (males who experience their gender identity as corresponding to their biological sex).

Feeling transcends action, and Soloway wants the viewing experience to also transcend mere watching: "I'm not just showing you this thing, I want you to feel it with me".⁵⁶

At a live performance event, especially of works based on corporeality, the physicality of the audience allows a sharing of emotion. Kekäläinen prefers to use the word 'event' when talking about a 'performance', precisely because of this different way of being present. The conventions of performance separate the dancer and the audience into different realities. The dancer is under the lights, there to be seen, while the audience is hidden in the dark. Or they're seated passively on benches, looking on with admiration while the dancer is active and moving. Can dispelling these boundaries help the viewer to become a 'participant', a part of what the 'creators' on display—the dancers—are sharing? How does the movement of the event make the seated participant move, or be moved? How can the experience sneak its way in through the viewers' eyes and skin and inhabit their entire body?

Not long after *Puna-Red-Rouge*, as the movement phases of her works transpired, Kekäläinen's gaze permanently changed direction. Her gaze no longer gravitates to the 'front', toward the audience or the auditorium. It stays close to the dancer, is directed at the body or the body's environment and sometimes into farther space. As the forward facing gaze has broken down, the relationship to being the object of the gaze also seems to have changed. The body sinks deeper into some kind of ecstasy of speaking that makes its physical communication clearer: as the dancer's gaze turns inward, the body turns ever more intensely outward. It draws from within and liberates inner space in skin, muscle and movement. The mental landscape is more bared, more honest, more openly displayed. The reality of the body becomes tangible.

As Kekäläinen's corporeality spreads out into space, it can also touch what it feels like for a woman to be the object of the gaze every day of her life. Soloway talks about exposing the effect of the gaze as another element of the way of looking when the one on display expresses how it feels to be looked at. How does it feel to be on display, evaluated, to

⁵⁶ Soloway talks about her methods for achieving knowledge of this body, e.g. working with the camera as a bodily activity at the moment of shooting, or taking the body and its sensations into account when it comes to film techniques (lights, technologies), but also external factors (schedules, budget).

become the object of desire? What does the weight of that gaze feel like? As it tries to go more than skin deep, the gaze also cuts through the surface of the body, wounding the protective layer of humanity with its carelessness. The gaze can elicit uncertainty, create tension, stuttering, trembling, speechlessness, fear, shame—or it can share acceptance and pleasure. The ability to withstand the gaze is a precondition of being on display.

Kekäläinen's works reveal the body stigmatized—in two senses of the word. Femininity is a brand burned into the skin from the outside, a mark of shame that subjugates the body to a particular kind of social treatment. The body is different, other. Its flesh is of lesser value, discriminated against and despised—or its image is separated from experience and this image is praised, admired, worshipped. Stigma is simultaneously a trace of the psyche on the skin, an innate but outwardly visible sign, a wound. In Kekäläinen's works this wound opens up into space and is made visible to those present. It is revealed to them; they are allowed to touch it.

Only one who is able to touch the wound really knows what is happening inside it. The touch goes through the skin, reaches under the surface. When we touch, we sink into the other person's body, deeper than a gaze combing over its surface. The flesh of our bodies merges into one another at this touch.

A caress, a particularly sensitive form of touch, does not use force, does not compel, or take, or control. A caress doesn't try to manipulate what it touches. It tries to carefully feel what's inside. It wants to go deeper, farther in. According to Didi-Huberman, seeing is not thinking; it is an experience of touch, of palpating with the eyes.⁵⁷ Seeing is a strong contact with what is seen, a connection formed by touch. Caressing of this kind does not stop or collide with the surface of an object, it feels around, senses the porousness of the surface so that it can partake of the secret it hides. Touch wants to coax out the good, the vulnerable, the private, the soulful inside the other. Kekäläinen's art also shows a clear desire to make contact with the alienated body, to get back into her own body and get to know it again—to listen to it, accept it, cherish it. To caress a body is to take care of it.

⁵⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman: *Lo que vemos, lo que nos mira*. Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2010. p. 14.

The intimate poetics of Kekäläinen's feminist stage also offer the comfort of accepting the body. The peace radiating from this way of being is an opportunity to touch a (woman's) experience of getting to know one's own body, how a body feels outside of the wounding gaze, from the inside, familiar and recognized, an innate home and safe resting place.

The fleshly body strives toward holistic communication through touch, outside of looking at an image. The sight is a magical sense that lets us maintain a kind of illusion of distance, but touch demystifies everything. The living body invites personal contact, invites touch. In the experience of looking, the sense of touch returns the body to the surface of the earth, to being a part of physical reality, a shared world.

Moving and Being Moved

According to some anthropological theories, shared movement plays a central role in the development of human communication. The first, crucial moment in human development is thought to be when humans stood up on two feet, freeing their hands for a variety of other activities. The second major change was the development of language, which made it possible to think symbolically and talk about imagined, abstract things and past and future events. The third thing, which is important from an anthropological perspective on dance, happened between these two changes—moving together, sharing a communal, rhythmic bodily experience in such things as physical labor or moving from place to place at a shared pace. Shared movement combined social activity, a certain kind of template for aesthetic thinking, and powerful bodily communication, and this fusion was a necessary step in the development of language.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Andrée Grau: “Anthropology and dance”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXbGg3TTNKY>

To share movement is to share feeling, communal bodily communication that can be experienced while doing such things as marching in a demonstration or dancing in a nightclub. The human body is created to communicate with other bodies, to mirror the feelings and states of others so closely that we live them in our own bodies. When we see a car accident we feel pain, our faces echo another person's grimace when they taste a sour lemon, we laugh easily when we hear someone else laughing. This kinetic empathy⁵⁹ is direct communication from one body to another, one experience to another. It is physical speech that moves reflexively through corporeality, intuitive and independent of our reason or control.

Through the depths of our bodies, our own private differences, we approach other bodies and share a sort of deep common experience. The deeper we go into our own internal world, the closer we get to ourselves and thus to others. A shared experience is an intimate connection between bodies. This deep communication is an invitation to share the private events of one body, which are also universal human events. It is a proposal to move together, to be moved by the touch of the personal and private, both physically and intellectually. It invites us to a sudden awareness of another's experience that resonates within the events of our own bodies.

Is art still a place where we can gather not only for enjoyment but also for sharing the private and the social? Do we dare to share and deal with the experiences that have accumulated in our bodies or the bodies of others? Are we capable of asking questions of our bodies?

Kekäläinen's dance strives for those hidden feelings and experiences that have deposited their sediments into all of our bodies, whose meanings resonate from one body to another. They pour out in movement, presence, vocalization, song, howls, personas, struggle, astonishment. The noise inside the body is transformed into audible speech or sound. Can we approach dance by listening to this sound, listening with our eyes and skin? Not by understanding it but by perceiving its color, its unique quality, hue, vibration, or rhythm.

⁵⁹ For more about kinetic empathy in dance, see Susan Leigh Foster: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Through the senses, the world floods into us, because it is through our senses that we become open, vulnerable, often unable to resist the things we hear or touch. Sensory perceptions come into us. Can we still experience corporeality even outside of language, without forcing it to be read, interpreted as an unambiguous message, but rather listening to it as speech about something, as sound that communicates something, resonates somewhere? Do we dare to consider our corporeal existence, question it, claim it as our own?

Kekäläinen's works invite us to share the questioning reality of holistic touch. She designates the body as the place where the work happens and proposes an unmediated bodily connection, physical presence, and an experience of intimacy in which two strangers "suddenly allow an emotional wall that separates them to collapse" and experience a "moment of unity".⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Fromm, p. 19.