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Here follows an automatic translation in English with some corrections.

Inc.

III

## Родово и телесно пречитување на практиките на „пумпање“ и „цицање“

Кон танцовиот перформанс „Ми треба ново тело“ на Викторија Илиоска. Текст на Душица Лазова Како дел од Изведувачката програма на jubilejното...

Зборови на  
Julijana Mladenovska

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## Gender and bodily rereading of the practices of "pumping" and "sucking"

*To the dance performance "I need a new body" by Viktorija Ilioska. Text by Dusica Lazova As part of the performance program of the jubilee...*

Words of  
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*To the dance performance "I need a new body" by Viktorija Ilioska. Text by Dusica Lazova*

As part of the performing program of the tenth jubilee edition of the Feminist Culture and Action Festival FIRST AND FEMALE and the "Choreographed Body" program of Lokomotiva, within the framework of the 47th edition of the MOT Festival, the premiere of the dance

performance "I need a new body" of the choreographer and performer Viktorija Ilioska was held.

The insightful and intuitively feminine performance, in which Viktorija performed together with her collaborator, Nastya Dzyuban, offered the audience a fresh gendered and bodily re-examination of capitalist practices of exploitation and extraction, rethinking the various forms of "pumping" and "sucking" of the body and the earth, as well as their connection in the processes of (re)production.

### **Soft or hard**

The first level on which the piece communicates with the audience is the futuristic stage environment consisting of a white ballet floor surrounded by tall white curtains (white box). Centrally placed, the scene at first glance resembles the interior of a spaceship or, alternatively, a sterile and dehumanizing womb. At the very beginning, the performers stand at the edge of the stage and after a series of short breathing and stretching exercises, in which the audience is invited to join them, they directly address the public: "Stretch your arms forward. If you want things in your life to be soft, put your right thumb on top of your left thumb. If you want things to be solid, put your left thumb on top of your right." This introduction delineates and crosses the two ambivalent bodies on stage. So, as soon as the bodies begin to move in slow, sensual movements towards the center of the stage, the space suddenly seems to lose its hard edges; it becomes soft, deep, and it sucks the bodies into the dystopian womb. This artificially created, sterile womb is countered by the warmth of the maternal womb that is meant to offer protection, care and nourishment, insinuated through the female bodies that populate the scene. Symbolically, these female bodies hold cups of milk in the shape of a breast in their hands. "The Womb" is flooded with sharp and repetitive sounds reminiscent of a construction site, of cranes and drills. At the same time, the repetitive dance movements of the bodies seem to point towards some kind of (re)creation, until the moment they contort as if expelled or spat out from inside the womb – where there is depth, there is potential for drilling. From the rotten interior of the consumption system, the excess comes out on one side, and the deficiency remains on the other.

### **Milk and oil**

The two blurred bodies, which lose their integrity as a whole upon contact with each other, slide across the floor in the form of a sticky, dirty substance that, in the context of the work, is reminiscent of oily unrefined oil. The bodies slowly begin to straighten upwards in a convulsive and rigid motion, followed by a sound that resembles bones breaking and rubbing (or, rock being crushed and drilled?). Matter begins to take shape but lacks force, with one performer sipping milk from her glass and the other pouring it over her own body. Performers enter from one body system to another, so the strengthened bones are complemented by muscles through a series of movements in the form of pumping and inflating. The main symbolism of mother's milk is more than obvious here. Milk is the basic food for newborns, and because of its completeness, nutritional value and self-sufficiency, it

is considered life-giving. The milk that moves the bodies on stage can also be read as an affective resource, "a radical, alternative form of embodied subjectivity against the idea of individual autonomy" (Hausman, 2004).

The cups in the form of breasts (otherwise breast enlargement devices; the original idea was to use milking pumps), which do not leave the hands of the performers in the first half of the performance, can open up questions for the viewer about the multi-significance of breastfeeding as a practice of care and as part of a female economy of giving, but also as invisible maternal labour that is simultaneously commodified and tabooed.

Breastfeeding as a woman's self-renewing resource and the result of the natural process of reproduction leads us in the direction of thinking about the violent and disproportionate depletion of oil reserves as the most significant natural energy resource of today. The culture of extractivism inevitably imposes criticism of the meat, dairy and pharmaceutical industries as one of the biggest polluters and consumers of resources related to production, but also to reproduction through the excessive exploitation of the reproductive capacities of female animals. Finally, the milk on stage is another reminder of the fear of carnality and the creative power of women, which is why the patriarchal world equates her with nature. The female (and queer) body recognizes its subjugation, marginalization, and exploitation in the human taming and management of nature, thus opening this dance performance to an ecofeminist readings.

### **Pump and drain**

After bones and muscles, the performers continue to immerse themselves in physicality through their movements. They morph into flesh and skin, slowly donning grotesque inflatable body builder(s) costumes as they engage in incoherent dialogue in which they continue to play with the concepts of sucking and pumping. The exposure of the excessively inflated "body" on a rotating platform and the artificial clownish smile on the faces of the performers can be read as a mockery of the ironic and self-righteous pumping of bodybuilders in the late 70s. After centuries of objectification and sexualization of the female body, this public display, admiring and evaluating the male body continues to fascinate. It remains to be asked if this "glitch" in the system is an outburst of frustration, if there is something gender subversive in it, or if it is a continuation of the male view and the ideal of the perfect body, and if a pumped-up body can be considered art? If so, then what about the public lynching of women who choose to pump and inject their lips, faces and other body parts? And what does the obsession with magnification and exaggeration say about us?

Today, the desire to cross the border of one's own capacities goes even further. The unbridled hubris of rich white men behind transhumanism creates a new, extremely dangerous category of modern-day "bodybuilders" – "the immortal posthumanist god who transcends the limitations of our biology and expands into the Universe" (Davies, 2019). Biotechnology, supported and financed by these very men, is being weaponized for their androcentric needs. As Davies notes, "their ultimate goal resembles a late-capitalist version of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian: an individualistic superman, armed with cognitive and

physical enhancements galore, raised to a state of unassailable strength and power, and gifted with the ability to reproduce without the burden of women" and to continue its exploitation in the name of progress.

In the final part of the work, we see elements of "amplification" and overemphasis in the dialogue, in which the voices are borrowed, while the performers make an effort to lip synch then; in the pop song that jumps out of the previous dark and creepy (eerie, uncanny) atmosphere and the carefree rhythmic dance of the female performers, which associates with some kind of liberation or victory (on what? on what?). The unnaturalness and bizarreness in the final moments culminate to the point of absurdity, leaving the performance with no choice but to end or start over. Drained and worn bodies return to their original flabbiness – trapped in a fictitious cycle of demand and consumption.

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