

Ilustracje pochodzą z katalogu:

Effluvia. Helen Chadwick, Katalog Wystawy, CTD Printers Ltd. England, 1994; Museum Folkwang, Essen 6 March – 17 April 1994; Serpentine Gallery, London, 19 July – 29 August 1994; Fundacio „la Caixa” Sala Catalunya, Barcelona, 28 April – 12 June 1994.

Il. 5 z: R. Betterton, *An Intimate distance. Women, Artists and the Body*, Routledge, London & New York 1996.

LIBIDINAL ALLEGORIES

Summary

This text is an example of using psychoanalysis to interpret “abstract” photo-pieces of the contemporary British artist, Helen Chadwick (1953-1996) presented in the catalogue of her 1994 exhibition titled “Effluvia”. The psycho-somatic and visual potential of these photographs has been expanded by using in the analysis Sigmund Freud’s theory of libido, Rosalind Krauss’ concept of the visual unconscious, Melanie Klein’s theory of part objects, and Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, which provides the general framework. Focusing on Chadwick, the interpretation presents the most recent tendency in psychoanalytically oriented art criticism, which abandons the structural model of Jacques Lacan, turning instead to the conceptions of Klein and Kristeva. This tendency represents the return to a more literal, i.e., physical, primitive, and pre-linguistic corporeality as opposed to the “textual body” in artistic and theoretical practice of the 1970s and 1980s.

Chadwick’s photographs, which I call “libidinal allegories”, are read as allegories of a polymorphic and hermaphroditic sexuality circulating beyond the hierarchy of sexual difference. The analysis emphasises the somatic dissolution of visibility, its opening to the fluidity of the symbolic background. The focus of my attention is the question of sensualising and corporealising the image and the gaze, embedded in unconscious processes. Libidinal allegories effect the introspection of the image, examining its origins in the period when sight was not yet the dominant sense but was enveloped in the haptic, optic, and olfactory sensations associated with the space of the mother’s body.

For two decades, the main concern of psychoanalytic art criticism and the related art is the problem of representation/picture/image. Exploring Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, which explains how the ego is constituted in mirror reflection through the gaze, artists and critics have focused on how the subject and its sexuality based on sexual difference are constructed or destroyed through image and seeing. A return to the drives and sensations conveying corporeality and sexuality on the pre-symbolic level leads to the emergence of an alternative model, signalling art which in the psychoanalytic, Lacanian sense precedes the image. The effect of being sucked in is produced in the picture, restoring the remains of pre-linguistic and pre-Oedipal sexuality.

As far as the relation between visibility and the abject is concerned, I would like to point out that the *symbolic* order is related to the logic of picture-gaze, while the image it produces is based on the traditional code of visual representation. It is a coherent and complete image, produced in accordance with the principles of phallic and vertical visibility, where the subject or object represented are depicted in the state of unity and fetishis-