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**HOCHSCHULE TRIER**  
**TRIER UNIVERSITY**  
**OF APPLIED SCIENCES**  
*Campus Idar Oberstein*

**THEORIES OF HEALING THROUGH BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS**  
*Materialization of the Erotic by a Feminine Perspective*

**Masters of Fine Arts Thesis**

May 2018

**MFA Masters' Research Paper**  
**Theories of Healing through Beautiful Objects**  
*Materialization of the Erotic by a Feminine Perspective*

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A Master's Research Paper submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

**Hochschule Trier**  
Fachbereich Gestaltung  
Fachrichtung Edelstein und Schmuck  
Idar-Oberstein, Germany  
May 2018

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*I declare that I have developed and written the enclosed Master Thesis completely by myself, and have not used sources or means without declaration in the text. Any thoughts from others or literal quotations are clearly marked. The Master Thesis was not used in the same or in a similar version to achieve an academic grading or is being published elsewhere*

*Idar-Oberstein, May 2018*



**Theories of Healing through Beautiful Objects**  
**Materialization of the Erotic by a Feminine Perspective**

## Una Lucha de Fronteras *A struggle of Borders*

*Because I, a mestiza,  
continually walk out of one culture  
and into another,  
because I am in all cultures at the same time,  
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,  
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.  
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente.*

*El choque de un alma atrapada entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la  
deja entullada.*

*A new consciousness – a mestiza consciousness – and though it is a source of intense pain,  
its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of  
each new paradigm.*

*En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on  
the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating  
new myths—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and  
the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness.*

*The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a  
prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended.  
The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and  
females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our  
languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective  
consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us  
to the end of rape, of violence, of war.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Consciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 93-94.



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## 1. Introduction

I would like to define the words theories and healing. Theory is a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained, as well as an idea used to account for a situation or justify a course of action<sup>2</sup>. And healing, as a noun, is the process of making or becoming sound or healthy again<sup>3</sup>. If theories are ideas that explain something, and healing is becoming healthy, where healthy implies being in good health (physically or mentally free from illness or injury), then this text will consider ideas on how to become healthy. However, to be more precise these theories will focus on emotional suffering. A few questions arise, such as what kind of pain is this? Which are its causes? And, do we need a cause for such suffering? For my master's research I chose the subject of Gender Violence, specifically Rape<sup>4</sup>. Since there are many women affected I want to establish a conversation that will reach them and society in order to question ourselves, and what we can do in order to help them *heal*. How to attend victims when there are countries without laws that punish gender violence? How our societies are already deaf to victims without voice? This relates to what is known in

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theory> (accessed July 24, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/healing> (accessed July 24, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Rape definitions  
: Unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception  
Merriam Webster Dictionaries, English Definitions, Merriam Webster Incorporated, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rape> (accessed July 24, 2017).  
Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats – for instance, the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought. It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent – for instance, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation.  
Sexual violence includes rape, defined as physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape.  
Sexual violence can include other forms of assault involving a sexual organ, including coerced contact between the mouth and penis, vulva or anus.  
Etienne Krug, et al. *World report on violence and health*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 149.

sociological studies as the complexity of identity and otherness<sup>5</sup>, which is readable from the social inequality gaps as not being part of the norm<sup>6</sup>, and in turn creates dominant and subordinate groups giving raise to battles of power.

According to statistics on sexual violence, most of them undertaken by the World Health Organization – WHO – and UN Women, one in three women will suffer from sexual assault<sup>7</sup>. Women represent 49.6% of the world's population (7.5 billion)<sup>8</sup>, with a number around the 3.7 billion. This translates into 1.2 billion women (33.3% of women's population and 16% of the world's population) being affected by sexual assault! These figures have major implications on public health problems and violations of women's human rights. Why is the noun **women's** allocated before human rights? Human rights pertain to men and women, why do we need to emphasize on women's rights? Clearly there is a breach, gender inequality affects in the private and public spheres. "The social and economic costs of intimate partner and sexual violence are enormous and have ripple effects throughout society. Women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children"<sup>9</sup>. As it is stated, socially and publicly there are consequences. Nonetheless, women are the most affected; physically, mentally and sexually: suffering from unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as alcohol and drug abuse. As a woman, I wonder if women are being specific targets for gender violence ("**otherness?**"<sup>10</sup>), how secure do we feel in our environments? How are girls and boys growing and under which social **rules**? What does it say about our societies? Which are the laws protecting females? Factors associated with sexual violence are based on ideologies of male entitlement and a weak legal system for sanctioning it. Could it be that gendered

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5 According to a classification that describes our identities under any given society. "People are commonly defined as other on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: racism, sexism, religious oppression/ anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged)." Beverly Daniel Tatum, "*The Complexity of Identity. Who Am I?*," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

6 The dominant group is seen as the norm for humanity. Ibid., 8.

7 One in three women will experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her life. World Health Organization, *Violence against Women. The Health Sector Responds – Infographic* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2013), 1. (WHO/NMH/VIP/PVL/13.1. © WHO, 2013. All rights reserved)

8 Countrymeters, World Population, <http://countrymeters.info/en/World> (accessed July 25, 2017).

9 World Health Organization, Media Centre: Fact Sheets; Violence against women: Intimate partner and sexual violence against women, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/> (accessed July 26, 2017). World Health Organization, *Violence against Women. The Health Sector Responds – Infographic* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2013). (WHO/NMH/VIP/PVL/13.1. © WHO, 2013. All rights reserved)

10 This concept will be used throughout the text as its definition is stated in the [footnote No. 5](#).

**1 in 3**

**1.2 BILLION**

**WOMEN**

otherness is the cause for violence? Currently, there are many organizations seeking to empower and educate women in order to reduce the gap of inequality. The fact that violence against women is prevalent in the world but varies greatly from country to country and even within each nation shows that it is preventable<sup>11</sup>. However, actual numbers confirm that many affected women need to be acknowledged and *repaired*<sup>12</sup>.

I have been educating myself into feminism and by doing so, I have learnt about the importance of language and speech in gender equality, so it is no surprise that I am giving importance to my speech more than ever. In my research (and in recognizing myself as an artist<sup>13</sup>) I was looking for the erotic as a creative power and I discovered writers such as Audre Lorde and Anaïs Nin, whose work is empowering in their exploration and narrative of the female connection with her own self. The unequal position of women relative to men and the recurring use of violence to resolve conflict are strongly associated with sexism. With the use of language we experience similarly the negation or existence of women or the female world. For example as Simone de Beauvoir mentions in *The Second Sex*: “The relation of the two sexes is not that of two electrical poles: the man represents both the positive and the neuter to such an extent that in French *hommes* designates human beings, the particular meaning of the word *vir* being assimilated into the general meaning of the word ‘homo’. Woman is the negative, to such a point that any determination is imputed to her as a limitation, without reciprocity”<sup>14</sup>. In Spanish, having the feminine and the masculine pronouns, we find mostly used the masculine words when addressing (in plural) an audience, for example, “*Todos présteme atención* (everybody listen to me)”. In this example, *todos* means all – everybody, but it is an undefined adjective with masculine connotation. And in English, even though there are *gendered-neutral* nouns and pronouns, such as boss and coach, they are coded as male<sup>15</sup>, claiming to the insignificance of female presence even in language. It seems to be insignificant since the use of language is an everyday task and we barely comprehend the power it has to magnify or erase its *real* contents; in the end language is an abstract-object. So by not using the correct words, with this I mean either integrating feminine gendered words or alternatively using *ungendered* words, we are

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11 Studies from different countries show that the percentage of women from 15 to 49 years old who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime ranges from 15% to 71%. World Health Organization, *Violence against Women. The Health Sector Responds – Infographic* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2013). (WHO/NMH/VP/PVL/13.1. © WHO, 2013. All rights reserved)

12 Repair: Restore (something damaged, faulty, or worn) to a good condition. Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/repair> (accessed July 28, 2017).

Given the definition, this word is not intended as to objectify women affected by violence or to proclaim them as damaged. But it is a term that describes the reparation processes of victims after any violent act, taken for example by governments, with regards to health, legal and monetary aspects that need to be repaired – reassessed, reconditioned, subsidized, etc.

13 Defining myself as an artist because it is my way of expression: through jewelry, through photography and sometimes illustration.

14 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Books, 2009), Kindle Book.

15 Language reflects and reinforces social norms; *ungendering* language is an important part of solving sexism. Arwa Mahdawi, “Allow me to womansplain the problem with gendered language,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/23/allow-me-to-womansplain-the-problem-with-gendered-language> (accessed July 23, 2017).

erasing any female manifestation. This, I associate with the rape cultures we are living in, making us partakers even perpetuating, legitimating and eternalizing inequality.

*We do not escape into philosophy, psychology, and art—we go there to restore our shattered selves into whole ones.*<sup>16</sup>

Although throughout history the role of women has not been perceived as significant as that of men, it is not by chance that in ancient societies it was. Storytelling and fables signified education by sharing orally and generation to generation the knowledge and wisdom about the structure of the universe, the rhythms of the land and the place of humankind within it<sup>17</sup>. “The most common archetype within many cultures was that of the universal feminine force, the ‘Great Goddess’”<sup>18</sup>, which recognized the expression of the lunar cycle within the land and within women, ascribing her with a creative nature that was capable to destroy. However, predominating-male societies have distorted the meaning of these tales, portraying woman as a destructive **object**, which relegated her to work from home without being paid, to not voice her thoughts and to accept the decisions made (for her) by men without questioning (whether it be wives or daughters). It was during and after World War the Second and due to the lack of men that women’s labor was in demand. Women engaged in doing work that was ‘only for men’, and even if this was not an improvement to their lives, it was a step forward into claiming for independence and start voicing their thoughts, in some countries. Yet, what I find curious (and contradicting) is that during both World Wars knitting was an espionage tool<sup>19</sup> for spies (male and female) despite the fact that it has been stereotyped as a female craft, up to the point it has become a cliché. But this female craft of stories and sharing has quite a heritage. In Latin America for example, in many tribes women have knitted and weaved stories of sorrow to denounce violence. Their textiles became their voices, which helped them recollect memories and heal in the process of sharing and making. These processes of articulating grief have a healing outcome. Firstly, because by sharing we are establishing links that help us erase the limits of the self: nulling otherness. And furthermore, according to psychologist and psychoanalyst Geraldine Scioville<sup>20</sup>, in order to heal from trauma, it is imperative for each patient to

16 Anaïs Nin, *In Favor of the Sensitive Man and Other Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1976), 17.

17 Miranda Gray, *Red Moon* (London: Fast-Print Publishing, 2014), Kindle Book.

18 Ibid.

19 Knitting is a grid, that is how different patterns exist and that is why you can create your own. This was used a coded language, especially in Belgium to describe the kind of trains that were going and coming to the cities. It could also be made into a sock, for example, to later be un-knitted deciphering the message that was coded into it. What I find curious is that it was used as an intelligence-espionage tool, at a time when women were discouraged to leave their houses for studies or work.

Natalie Zarrelli, “The Wartime Spies Who Used Knitting as an Espionage Tool: Grandma was just making a sweater. Or was she?,” *Atlas Obscura – Stories*, [http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/knitting-spies-wwi-wwii?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=atlas-page](http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/knitting-spies-wwi-wwii?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=atlas-page) (accessed July 23, 2017).

20 Geraldine Scioville ( [www.geraldinescioville.com](http://www.geraldinescioville.com) Bogotá) is a Psychologist from the Universidad Javeriana. Psychoanalyst from the Colombian Psychoanalysis Society, affiliated society of the International Psychoanalytical Association IPA. “My work is focused on helping people understand and transcend their suffering through psychodynamic psychology and the transforming force of the psychotherapeutic bond”.

re-build within the psyche the contents of such experience and articulate them in a narrative story. It has to become a mental process because trauma has no form, she adds. So once again, not only we find how language is an important healing device, but also sharing, as in creating support groups that can contain stories and individuals.

As I mentioned before, with my own project I have not only been building myself as a feminist but also healing myself from being a woman, I have experienced and felt **womanhood** in a male dominating society. I was given many labels that described what it was and what it meant to be a woman, and I had to fit within them. Media was telling me that I had to be looked at (by the male gaze); otherwise I would have failed at being a 'successful' woman (object of desire). However, if there were violent acts against women, people (and media) would generally say it was **her** fault because **she** had been too provocative; this was confusing. Simone de Beauvoir explains that to the male gaze women are mere objects of sex, and society turns for or against women according to the situation: "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself (...) And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called 'the sex', meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute"<sup>21</sup>. But this is a paradox. If sexuality is a taboo for all and everything that is not masculine, why have women been assigned the value of sexual object par excellence? And what is even more surprising is the fact that while she seems to be the main character in a sex-driven society, she is not allowed to explore and exploit her sexuality and her erotic power. To conclude, I will quote Audre Lorde in her approach to the erotic: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives"<sup>22</sup>. For us to reach to theories of healing within the realm of raped humanities, we must go through sex: which lies between taboo and power.

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21 De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Kindle book.

22 Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde, ed. Audre Lorde (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 53.





## 2. Women's Sexuality

Sexuality according to time and places has changed but female sexuality has been subordinated to males' and subjected to punishments and limitations. For the most part, no matter how liberal a society was, women were always controlled.

As a woman, I have felt many times confused as well as not fitting, which has consumed much of my energy and time. In words of Irene Moreno<sup>23</sup>, psychologist, feminist and blogger, she states that we (women) have been **sold** the idea that we are in a moment of freedom (and ownership) of our own sexuality but the reality is that we are experiencing a hyper-eroticization of the female body in a hyper-sexualized society and with low (to none) self-knowledge of our own desire, our own erotic body, and the worst is that we have fallen for it. It is curious enough that we are the subject-object of sexuality, but we have no idea what it means. And series like Sex and The City, which are entertaining but full of social prejudices, have made us fall rampant into this dildo-orgasm freedom-of-female-sexuality discourse. But can we even define our own orgasm<sup>24</sup>?

At some point in my making-research phase, I was confronted with the question of what erotic means to me. I was reading some chapters from the text Art and Illusion by Ernst Gombrich, which made me ask myself, how many of the things I thought I had developed as my own thoughts were entirely my own? Could it be that they were also shaped by a society that has influenced me more than I can realize? Could it be that my truth is a stereotype? How much of it is self-conceived and how much of it is imposed? Then again, what is erotic? Have I been influenced to **know** what does erotic mean? Could it be an illusion? Am I defining it through the male gaze or through my female senses? But then and back to the subject of female sexuality, is it only about the orgasm? I asked women around me to describe their orgasms, because I thought, what more than an orgasm to bare our bodies' real languages? But now I think that maybe the question was not well directed, perhaps it should have been, what makes you reach orgasm? One is about sensation; the other is about self-knowledge.

<sup>23</sup> Irene Moreno, Barcelona. Psychologist Specialized in Anxiety and Psychology Focused on Gender. Irene Moreno, "La falsa liberación sexual," Proyecto Kahlo: La revolución comienza en tu interior, <http://www.proyecto-kahlo.com/2017/04/la-falsa-liberacion-sexual/> (accessed August 13, 2017). Irene Moreno, En tu propia nube, <http://entupropianube.com/blog/la-falsa-liberacion-sexual/> (accessed August 13, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> What about our definition of pleasure? Nonetheless, pleasure, as I will be developing throughout the text, is about sensation and this is why it *desensitizes*. Thus, it is one of the reasons why I am using often the term orgasm instead. Also, I see the orgasm as our body's true language: a moment of real connection between mind, body and soul. One last reason is the fact that many women cannot achieve orgasms; this speaks of a sexuality that is controlled and manipulated to the detriment of women.



A random gallery window in Amsterdam (NE)  
Kim Kardashian (I assigned that name when taking the photo)  
March 2016

### *Feminization of labor and laborization of women*<sup>25</sup>

We are overtly exposed to advertisements flashing (almost) naked bodies for any kind of product but in the daily news we realize the world is not ready for the nakedness of the female body. In 2010 a British tabloid showed images of 20 year old, assistant teacher Sarah Lyons<sup>26</sup>, who was dancing at a festival in Cardiff with a pair of David Hasselhoff's underwear down on her ankles. The Sun, famous for its page three section, wrote an article "condemning *feminism*<sup>27</sup> for the debauchery behavior of women in our times."<sup>28</sup> Isn't it ironic? While it is perfectly okay to display

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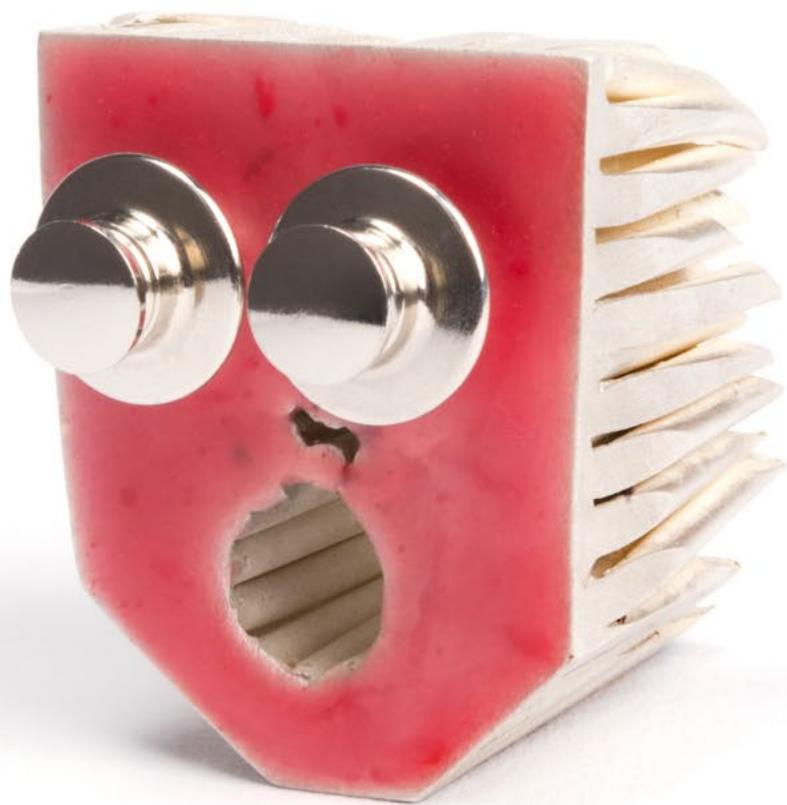
<sup>25</sup> This sentence is related to the job market and female participation on it: "on one hand the feminization of labor is associated to the increase of female participation, which among the "consequences" has lowered industry standards. On the other hand, the laborization of women is nulling any other aspect of women's identity (i.e. mother) if they are not connected to profitability."  
Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), Kindle Book.

<sup>26</sup> Article criticizing the young teacher.  
John Chapman, "Exposed, teacher's helper with pants around her ankles," *Express*, October 24, 2009, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/135876/Exposed-teacher-s-helper-with-pants-around-her-ankles> (accessed July 28, 2017)

<sup>27</sup> There are many *feminist* political and social movements as well as ideologies at the moment. Personally, I cannot agree with all of them.  
"Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. Defined in this way, it is unlikely that women would join feminist movement simply because we are biologically the same. A commitment to feminism so defined would demand that each individual participant acquire a critical political consciousness based on ideas and beliefs."  
bell hooks, "*Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression*," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 341-342.

<sup>28</sup> Laurie Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), Kindle Book.





page's three photographs as *erotic art*<sup>29</sup>, as some may claim, it is highly condemned what women do particularly if it is not portrayed to sell.

*Female sexuality, which everyday becomes increasingly synonymous with objectification, is work.*<sup>30</sup>

Evoking the idea of owning our bodies, do we really own our sexuality? We should but moreover, do we know it? This freedom of sexuality speech we have been accepting is nothing else but another ideal of womanhood imposed on us: "a woman who seeks to be desired but does not show her desire because she does not know it. The ideal of a woman who erotizes but is not erotic; it is an ideal that does not contain the notion of a woman who knows her own desire, who does not internalize desire, but who objectifies it because it does not arise from the self, it does not evolve from a self conscious and own desire, instead, she displays it to be given shape from the outside."<sup>31</sup> This freedom of sexuality speech we accepted is nothing more than another marketing strategy to sell the subject-object of sex and has become the customary version for displaying the sexuality of women. And perhaps this is connected to the fact that the work women carried out through the ages: being mothers, raising children, cleaning houses, taking care of family members, etc.; has been completely dismissed and unpaid. And while this is not our fault, we have adopted and accepted such behaviors that subjugate us, and this has been taking place from generation to generation. This external validation, women doing everything to please and attract men, is so deeply rooted into our unconscious that makes us the main characters that perpetuate the status quo. I understand this as one of the causes of beauty becoming work, beauty in the context of power and possession through external male-validation (male gaze).

### 2.1. *Female Pleasure: Desensitizing*

What is a woman? Simone de Beauvoir trying to define it, arrives at different conclusions and perspectives, after all, it was the work of her lifetime. Nonetheless, her most famous quote implies that being a woman is a social construction that most of all pertains to femininity. But then, what is femininity? I think that our perception of femininity is much easily described than defining what is a woman. And what about defining a man, is it also about masculinity? In essence, women and men could be better defined as humans. The pivoting point, I think, arises from what de Beauvoir also brings up when trying to define a woman: it is that we need to define women by identifying ourselves as women, whereas to men it would never be an issue to try to define themselves. In fact, according to David Leverenz: "ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to

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29 It is not erotic art: those images are softporn.

30 Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Kindle Book.

31 Irene Moreno, "La falsa liberación sexual," Proyecto Kahlo: La revolución comienza en tu interior, <http://www.proyecto-kahlo.com/2017/04/la-falsa-liberacion-sexual/> (accessed August 13, 2017).

the gaze of male peers and male authority”<sup>32</sup> which reinforces the subordinate perception of women in our society.



A random gallery window in Amsterdam (NE)  
March 2016

### *HYPERSEXUAL HUMAN FIGURE 101*

#### *Understanding the most curious sexual object created by man: the woman*

The fact that women have to acknowledge themselves as being part of another entity (men) is such a given, that we fail to see how much dependency this generates. This dependency is displayed everyday not only on the media but also as life goes by in men claiming ownership upon women. From Female Genital Mutilation, which is clearly a way of controlling women and is also a standard of beauty (and an aberration), to high heels, mascaras and corsets, in order to reach other beauty standards that appeal to a male audience. Also to arranged marriages and in some cases even victims marrying their rapists because “**she** is damaged-goods now”<sup>33</sup>. The reality of female sexuality being a mystery; in effect, many women and men do not know where the clitoris is located, speaks of a sexuality that is neither studied nor discussed. Which delimits it as a taboo. This also describes the extent to which dissatisfaction runs in the female sector. But as the subject-object of sex, she is **squeezed** to the maximum for the satisfaction of the male sector. Ceasing then, to be a taboo. It is quite a paradox.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, “*Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity*,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 330.

<sup>33</sup> EFE, “Matrimonio entre violador y su víctima, se propaga en Oriente Medio,” *El Espectador*, August 18, 2017, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/matrimonio-entre-violador-y-su-victima-se-propaga-en-oriente-medio-articulo-708724> (accessed August 18, 2017).

Women are not only disembodied, but are also manipulated as objects, and are made believe this is their reality. To explain this more, there is a term sociologically known as self-objectification which “is a state of double consciousness... a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”<sup>34</sup> Once again, beauty plays a part here, in the sense of those values, which are deeply ingrained, and to which we are bounded; in the perception that to be a woman, ‘*it*’ has to be beautiful. Once devoid of feelings beauty just objectifies, and thus becomes a repetitive cycle, which beyond dependency results in acceptance. In the country I come from, Colombia, women’s worth is measured on their beauty: women are trophies. It is so important to **look good**, that even though it goes bad too many times, women are still going ***under-the-scalpel***<sup>35</sup> to beautify themselves at high rates. It is such a violent act to be(come) beautiful, that we have failed to recognize it as such. Because we have internalized it so much, that we have granted it with an essential part of what being a woman implies. In the words of Laurie Penny, “if we are to properly understand women’s oppression in the West today, objectification and sexual performance must be understood as work. (...) From the working hours devoted to the purchase and strategic application of clothes and hair and beauty products, to the actual labor of dieting and exercise, to the creation and maintenance of sexual persona, self-objectification is work, first and foremost.”<sup>36</sup> So, what is a woman? A subject-object? A self, objectified? Objects do not feel, so ***it***<sup>37</sup> has to occupy womanhood by desensitizing. Then, the power of illusion takes place in its most plastic way: pornography. Suddenly it seems that a woman’s sexuality is the only resource available to define her.

*She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her. (...) an enormous round egg snatching and castrating the agile sperm.*<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2. The Male Gaze

In our societies, we can begin to understand the unequal social position women hold by the amount of acts of violence against her, mostly related to physical and sexual violence. But the worst is that it is portrayed as normal; as normal as it is to judge women according to their bodies. We value the strong ***macho***; the one who conquers all, never shows his feelings but seeks pleasure;

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<sup>34</sup> Self-objectification: viewing one’s body as a sex object to be consumed by the male gaze. Caroline Heldman, “*Out-of-Body Image*,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 347.

<sup>35</sup> Plastic surgery.

<sup>36</sup> Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Kindle Book.

<sup>37</sup> It in this case is associated with society, control, dominance—oppression, violence—beauty standards, and so on, as I have been writing about the reification of the woman through her body-sex.

<sup>38</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany, Kindle Book.



the more he has<sup>39</sup>, the more to value in him. But this is sexism, displaying its power with sex and basically leading to male entitlement. Which is also associated, mistakenly, not only with a sense of ownership over women but also with having the misconception that all women **need** them, from a submissive posture. In this line of thought, female orgasm and female consent are disregarded. And this describes the rape culture that “overvalues male sexuality and expects female sexuality to exist for male pleasure”<sup>40</sup>.

I want to emphasize that women are partaking and perpetuating these behaviors. But according to David Mamet and Michael Kimmel, “**Women have, in men’s minds, such a low place in the social ladder (...) what men need is men’s approval.**” Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale.”<sup>41</sup> And even though we are not regarded as important, we keep on fearing fathers and brothers, raising boys and dating/marrying men with the same traits that have inflicted us with pain, shame, and fear. But as I mentioned earlier, we are both to blame and we are both victims. Men can be affected by rejection, some get hurt in their egos; others choose to accept it or react aggressively; also, in establishing violent homosexual relations or acting out homophobic<sup>42</sup> behaviors, but it is a topic of further research.

### *Removing Manhood*

It is interesting, for me, to review why do women keep this submissive-subordinate role, when we are half the population of the world. Of course there are many factors, and again most likely it is a subject matter of research beyond the scope of my own, but I will mention two that may be relevant to gendered violence. Depending on the location in the world, the most important and common factors are lack of education and economic dependence, which to some extent are related. Ongoing behaviors can only change if we start from the basis of societies, reaching out individually to gain impact globally.

Why does it seem that I am suddenly talking about changing perspectives? Firstly, I am not just suddenly mentioning it; during the whole development of my research process I have been an advocate of the idea that **violence is not a means to end violence**. And secondly, because there is human need between the two sexes, and these **learned** behaviors are based on fear; what the verb **learned** implies is that it allows the possibility of change. In the words of Eve Ensler, activist

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39 Money, big muscular body, cars, women, etc.

40 Jarune Uwujaren, “How Male Sexual Entitlement Hurts Everyone,” *Everyday Feminism*, January 16, 2013, <http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/01/male-sexual-entitlement-hurts-everyone/> (accessed August 29, 2017).

41 Michael S. Kimmel, “*Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity*,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 330.

42 In the name of gender expressions and because my text is not about gender diversity but I am aware of it, I would like to acknowledge that the word homophobic only contains a bit of the big social-gender-racist gap. I am aware but made the decision to focus on a smaller part of the whole spectrum.

and writer of *The Vagina Monologues*, “Bullets are hardened tears”<sup>43</sup>. I agree with her, and very deep inside me, a seed-like idea has started to grow, about the future being feminine.

Fear, I believe, is the foundation of many negative traits found in humans. Maybe it is connected to our primitive brains and how to stay alive. But apparently, the fear of the disintegration of maleness exists and it is discussed among psychotherapeutic practices. It is also related to a fear of being consumed by women, the same as not being man enough to other men. It might be related to the paradox of power and powerless felt among females and males, but to what extent is the cause of such fear? I cannot say. “Manhood is equated with power (...) [from feminist theories, women fear men but also, are working on empowering from these theories to confront them. Also from feminist theories,]<sup>44</sup> masculinity is the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest.”<sup>45</sup> This is in the context of the public, in private, men feel powerless. This leads to unbalanced relations of power-fear-anger and instead of understanding, we divide into groups, which in turn divide into subgroups and so on, creating social gaps.

*This is the manhood of racism, of sexism, of homophobia. It is the manhood that is so chronically insecure...*<sup>46</sup>

The ideal of womanhood: modern, young, crazy, sexy, available and hypersexual that to some extent is created and empowered by the media is deceiving women into a false self-recognition as sexual and desiring beings,<sup>47</sup> as previously written. The use of the “**advertorial eroticism**”<sup>48</sup>, term to describe the commonality of market-media in displaying the disembodied female figure as part of selling campaigns everywhere and for everything, is a glimpse into our societies that value the promiscuous man and condemn the promiscuous woman. To me, **disembodiment** is a keyword, since it acts as a measurement of beauty standards and also as ripping bodies apart, both violent; and both unconsciously work into our brains. This is the irony of male pleasure and female discomfort; passive aggression and uneasiness. How is it possible that in sexuality, language falls short to define human bodily functions such as **female** ejaculation? The term

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43 The New York Public Library, “No. 173 Eve Ensler – In the Body of the World,” *The New York Public Library Podcast*, Podcast audio, May 9, 2014, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-new-york-public-library-podcast/id804982781?mt=2>

44 Adaptation by the author.

45 Michael S. Kimmel, “*Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity*,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 333.

46 Ibid., 334.

47 Irene Moreno, “*La falsa liberación sexual*,” Proyecto Kahlo: La revolución comienza en tu interior, <http://www.proyecto-kahlo.com/2017/04/la-falsa-liberacion-sexual/> (accessed August 13, 2017).

48 Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Kindle Book.

ejaculation<sup>49</sup> is defined as ejecting semen from the body. And which is its female counterpart? Female ejaculation; wrong! Again, comes 'female' before a word to **adapt** its meaning. Should not there exist a word that defines the act of ejaculating in a woman? Squirtling; objects squirt! This is the term used in pornography. Do I need to mention it is thrice as wrong? There are no correct terms and it is supposed to be part of female's sexual liberation, isn't it? Moreover, the clitoris is the only organ in the human body whose only function is to give pleasure. Female's orgasm is not necessary for reproduction, whereas male's orgasm, ejaculation, is necessary for reproduction. This implies that in terms of sexuality, we as a whole society are lacking when half of the population is a mystery without scientific studies undergoing to discover the complex female sexual body, without real freedom, without a language to build that sexuality on, and to top it, it is in itself a taboo. It may seem that I am focusing on sexuality alone, but the **lacking** also exists at the gynecologists' consulting room with those hideous and painful auscultation instruments. In general terms, there is a sense of discomfort among women; our body language reveals how awkward it is to be in our skin. What these two examples share, besides all the ones previously written, is the woman's body and especially her vulva.

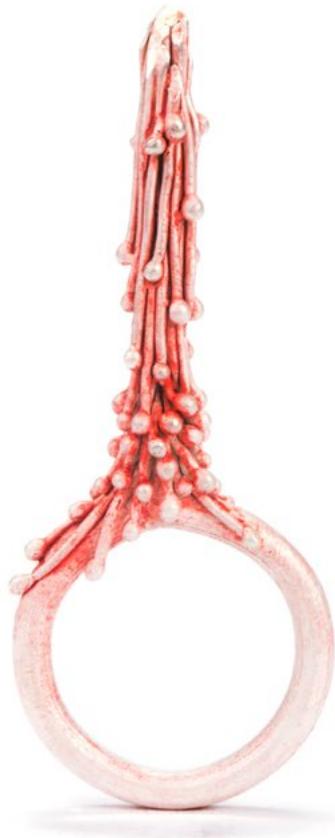
*One of the supreme ironies of the Western gender production is that whilst the sexual sell is everywhere, the sale of sex itself still takes place in a shadowy underworld of social taboo.*<sup>50</sup>

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49 Ejaculation: the action of ejecting semen from the body. Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ejaculation> (accessed August 29, 2017).

50 Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Kindle Book.





### 3. Taboo

#### 3.1. *What is Taboo?*

Taboos belong to what in sociology is coined to a (social) norm. And norms are defined as informal agreements that give a society, implicit and explicit guidance on thoughts, behaviors and social interactions. There are four main types of norms: folkways, mores, taboos, and laws. "A taboo is a very strong negative norm; it is a strict prohibition of behavior that society holds so strongly that violating it results in extreme disgust or expulsion from the group or society"<sup>51</sup>.

The definition of taboo means that it can be a noun, an adjective or a verb. It originates from the Tongan word 'tabu' and means prohibition. Elaborating on it, as a noun it implies a social or religious prohibition of a practice or association with a particular person, place or thing or (prohibition) to use or mention something because of its sacred nature; as an adjective it means to be prohibited by social custom; and as a verb, implies something is declared forbidden or restricted. Among the synonyms are: veto, ban, off limits, unmentionable, unspeakable, unutterable, unsayable, *verboden* (English and German), and associated words are sacred and rites or rituals<sup>52</sup>. Its origin is related to the Polynesian cultures of the South Pacific, but taboos have been present in all societies, past and present.

Throughout history, there have been different manifestations of sexuality as part of human behavior. This means that for the most part taboos are related to sexuality. Some examples include incest, masturbation, and homosexuality.

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<sup>51</sup> Ashley Crossman, "Understanding Folkways, Mores, Taboos, and Laws: An Overview of Some Core Sociological Concepts," ThoughtCo, <https://www.thoughtco.com/folkways-mores-taboos-and-laws-3026267> (accessed August 9, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> Definitions taken from three different online dictionaries: Vocabulary.com, Dictionary, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/taboo> (accessed August 9, 2017). Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/taboo> (accessed August 9, 2017). The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, Topic: Sociological definition, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/taboo-sociology> (accessed August 9, 2017).





Shameless Selfies  
April 2016

Nevertheless, fertility, menstruation and female genitalia<sup>54</sup> have been part of numerous cultures' myths and taboos. For example in the Maya civilization blood was viewed as a powerful source of nourishment, which meant they performed human sacrifices. However, menstruation blood was seen as the 'evil blood', meaning a woman had lost her purity. In any case for Mayas, sex was a spiritual and cosmic experience, which was practiced under the influence of hallucinogens and involved sophisticated techniques. And in Egypt, it seems they did not have much restrictions towards sexuality because they understood sex as an egalitarian and permissive act, which included prostitution, homosexuality, incest, and adultery. But female infidelity was punished. For the Romans, there are different theories aiming at their engagement towards sex: some say they had quite a liberal attitude towards sex while others express the Romans had many restrictions and taboos based on their values. But it is acknowledged that women's role in society was limited: she was the role model for making a family (she had to be virtuous – *vir* Latin word for man) and the family was the basic and starting point of society. For Babylonians sexuality was sacred and the woman was a symbol of fertility and sex. Male sexuality was unrestricted in terms of adultery, whereas women were punished for infidelity or showing sexual conduits outside of the socially acceptable for that time. Originally geishas were men, who were considered erotic professionals who included the culture and arts of Japan in their performances. With the arrival of Judeo-Christian religions many restrictions resulted and sex was regarded as a purely reproductive act, which for some parts is still visible today.<sup>55</sup>

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53 These words in Spanish are almost the same word, just change a vowel and the whole meaning is changed. This was part of my research studies about roles and power plays. I decided to integrate my body by painting with my body pads or weaving these words on pads.

sAciedad > Satiety: aiming to the objectification of women and nulling desire;

sOciudad > Society: the "rules";

sUciudad > Dirtiness: women's emotions / violence / sex (*taboo?*)

I was expressing through masks, defining beauty and portraying emotions and violence, all the unspoken.

54 Vagina, vulva and clitoris.

55 Raúl Romero, "La Sexualidad Humana a través de La Historia: Tabúes, Conceptualizaciones y Conductas," Radio BUAP – La Universidad en la Radio, <http://radiobuap.com/2016/06/la-sexualidad-humana-a-traves-de-la-historia-tabues-conceptualizaciones-y-conductas/> (accessed August 10, 2017).

It seems to be an extreme opinion, especially since I am not immersed in anthropological and sociological studies, but I dare to say that everything-everyone not male/masculine are the biggest taboos for societies.

*The menstruating woman was seen as a walking source of destructive energy, who held within her femininity a tremendous magical power which could not be contained except by shutting her off from the community and the land itself.*<sup>56</sup>

For the most part, there has been a common knowledge towards a connection between the woman and her cycles, moon and its cycles and Earth and its cycles. According to Carl Jung, this is the **archetypal** mother and was connected to the collective unconscious, which he also described throughout his work. These archetypes represent a composite of various feminine deities also known as the Mother Goddess, Gaia, Mother Earth, or the Creatress of all life<sup>57</sup>. This regains importance to the extent that it can be identified that many different cultures celebrated the creative and destructive nature of women in various aspects. Which means not all is negative. Also, it seems to be far lost in the past, but for an empowering research on female history, it is inspiring to be able to connect such cultures so far apart not only in time but in space as well and to bring it to the present.

For example, all over Europe but mainly in Ireland and Great Britain, there are “stone carvings of naked women with exposed and exaggerated vulva”<sup>58</sup>. They are mostly over doors and windows in churches and while its meaning is not a consensus, it is believed they were made and put there to protect from the death and evil to come inside. It has also been mentioned that these figures were made against lust, to cure infertility and as a tribute to the ancient Irish earth mother. These stone figures are strong and erotic, and the power that derives from them is precisely the unabashed openness of their postures. Currently, in Ireland, there are many cultural projects aiming to discover and understand the meaning behind such grotesques due to the importance of gender equality and discovering the role women had in their society a long time ago.

In March 2011 artist Jamie McCartney installed for the first time “The Great Wall of Vagina” (images in the next page). For the artist this project was meant to be as broad and inclusive as possible since “for many women their genital appearance is a source of anxiety and I was in a unique position to do something about that” McCartney claimed, “vulvas and labia are as different as

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56 Gray, *Red Moon*, Kindle Book.

57 Wikipedia contributors, “Mother goddess,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother\\_goddess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_goddess) (accessed August 10, 2017).

58 Sheela Na Gig  
The Sheela Na Gig Project, “Theories,” The Sheela Na Gig Project: Researching Sheela Na Gig Sculptures in the UK, <http://www.sheelanagig.org/wordpress/Theories/> (accessed August 10, 2017).



faces and many people, particularly women, don't seem to know that."<sup>59</sup> The wall is made out of 10 panels, with a total of 400 vulvas casted. He believes his display is art with social conscience because he wants to address what *normal*<sup>60</sup> women really look like. This is not erotic art and is not pornography since it is not about sensation; he discharged its sexual content, taking the viewer deeper, to stare without shame. Another artist, Megumi Igarashi or 'Rokudenashiko', her pseudonym, is working with her own vulva in order to display it more to Japanese culture, "I had never seen the vagina of others and I was too self-conscious of mine. I did not know what a vagina should look like at the same time, so I thought mine was abnormal. *Manko*<sup>61</sup> and vagina have been such a taboo in Japanese society. Penis, on the other hand, has been used in illustrations and has become a part of pop culture. But vagina has never been so cute. Vagina has been thought to be obscene because it's been overly hidden; although it is just a part of a woman's body."<sup>62</sup> Through a crowd funding campaign she had scanned and then 3D printed her vulva into a kayak in March 2014. Previously she sent by e-mail 3D data of her vulva to the donors. Because of this she was later arrested and fined under the charges of "obscenity display". Her logo, also a plastic doll, is the character used in a video from the organization Clitoraid<sup>63</sup>, which itself has caused grand debate despite its humanitarian struggles striving to end the practice of Female Genital Mutilation<sup>64</sup>.

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59 Jamie McCartney, The Great Wall of Vagina, <http://www.greatwallofvagina.co.uk> (accessed August 11, 2017).

60 Normal, in this case means everything on display is normal, according to the rule.

61 According to the artist Manko is the Japanese word for cunt. And Man is the "taboo word for Manko. She also created a character called Decoman, she is a manga artist.

62 (マンガ家・ろくでなし子) Megumi Igarashi – 'Rokudenashiko', <https://6d745.com/profile/> (accessed August 11, 2017).

63 Clitoraid is a private non-profit organization for reconstructing the clitoris, funded and founded under the Raelian Movement, which causes controversy. The fact that they focus on creating awareness against Female Genital Mutilation through restoring female pleasure has been harshly and frequently criticized, since survivors need psychological therapies and health treatments but these are not present in their discourse. Clitoraid Inc., "About – Why Clitoraid," <http://www.clitoraid.org> (accessed August 11, 2017).

64 Female Genital Mutilation is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death. World Health Organization, Media Centre: Fact Sheets; Female genital mutilation, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed August 12, 2017).

### 3.2. Grasping Concepts of Beauty: From Ablation to Hyper-sexuality

*More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where Female Genital Mutilation is concentrated.*<sup>65</sup>

There are many ways to be violent and inflict pain, but this procedure is not only life-threatening but also generates multiple health problems, physically and psychologically, for women. It is mainly a social practice to keep women pure, clean and faithful.

#### *Removing Womanhood*

According to the WHO “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”<sup>66</sup>. For the most part, the practice is carried out by traditional circumcisers (men or women) and under poor health conditions. Equality Now, one of the organizations working towards ending FGM and advocating for gender equality, declares, “It is mostly carried out – without anesthetic – on girls between infancy and age 15. FGM has zero health benefits and often results in lifelong health problems, increased risks during childbirth, psychological trauma, and even death.” And goes on affirming that it is “often rationalized as a rite of passage into womanhood, in reality FGM is an extreme form of violence used to control girls’ and women’s sexuality. It involves a mixture of cultural, social and religious traditions associated with preparing for adulthood and marriage, and ideals of community, modesty, and fidelity.”<sup>67</sup>

It is quite conflicting that while there are thousands of girls violated in their human rights, in the West the culture of the labioplasty and the ‘designer vaginas’ is on the rise. The invasion of female identity and its autonomy of decision as a pleasure sensing (and seeking) body, can be observed from the superficiality of “the” beauty standards: high heels, vulva makeup<sup>68</sup>, miniature waists contrasting huge boobs and asses to satiate a macho society, up to the violation of human rights such as female genital mutilation. It is through these behaviors that it becomes evident how women are turned into objects: dehumanizing the woman.

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65 World Health Organization, Media Centre: Fact Sheets; Female genital mutilation, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed August 12, 2017).  
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Global Concern, (New York: UNICEF, 2016). [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC\\_2016\\_brochure\\_final\\_UNICEF\\_SPREAD.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD.pdf)

66 World Health Organization, Media Centre: Fact Sheets; Female genital mutilation, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed August 12, 2017).

67 Equality Now: A just world for women and girls, “End FGM,” Equality Now, <https://www.equalitynow.org/issues/end-female-genital-mutilation> (accessed August 12, 2017).

68 The Perfect V product line is pure, indulgent pampering and love for your “V”.  
The Perfect V, <http://thepervectv.com/collections/the-perfect-v> (accessed July 29, 2017).

According to Roger Scruton on his analysis about *beauty*, he describes it as an expression<sup>69</sup> that needs to be rationalized. But before going any deeper into his contents on beauty, I want to connect, also through his analysis, sex and beauty. He starts by analyzing beauty from human nature, and starts asking about its relation with desire and interest. Quoting Plato and the Greeks on their view of the *erōs*<sup>70</sup>, as a cosmic force (between people), Scruton explains from the platonic cliché that “beauty, in a person, prompts desire”<sup>71</sup>. This generates a contradiction and he questions: if beauty in humans creates desire, and beauty in the arts is to be contemplated, does it mean there are two kinds of beauty? Or is it that desire is a mistake of concept and what we mean is that we are not intending to possess but to contemplate? As stated by Plato, beauty is a higher realm and somehow it is not only truth but also divine, unreachable, a language of the souls. And here I find another paradox, how is beauty viewed and valued, if we are not transcending but merely wanting to possess? On the one hand, it seems like a never-ending story in which the beauty seeker will stay forever trapped in, e.g. for this case the beauty seeker is the woman who will always be subjected to beauty treatments and will never be beautiful enough. On the other hand, another kind of beauty seeker will never transcend because it will never possess, that which 1. cannot be possessed and 2. will never reach its beauty enough level to be ready to be possessed, e.g. in this case it is the insatiable male gaze. Desensitizing humanity.

This is the trick between fantasy versus reality, into which we all have fallen prey. Once again Scruton appoints that fantasies are related to imagination, but need to be acted out. And imagination and fantasies are in fact unrealities. However, “modern society abounds in fantasy objects, since the realistic image (...), offers surrogate fulfillment”<sup>72</sup>. And this is exactly what pornography does best: objectify women and label her with infinite-unreachable beauty standards that no matter what will always let us down.

*Pornography, like slavery, is the denial of human subject.*<sup>73</sup>

The Sun’s page three “features topless glamour models every single day”<sup>74</sup>, real women on display as sexual objects. This, to some part, is what Laurie Penny ascribes as frigid mercantile eroticism: a marketing strategy using disembodied female flesh to sell the idea of more sex, but lacks on morals

69 Expression full of emotion, as stated by the author.

70 Erōs as a concept is love; it can be romantic or passionate love. Erotic derives from the concept erōs, and it has been widely studied in psychology and philosophy, meaning life force. Plato, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung are among those who used and elaborated on the term.

Wikipedia contributors, “Eros (concept),” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eros\\_\(concept\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eros_(concept)) (accessed August 10, 2017).

71 Roger Scruton, “*Human Beauty*,” in *Beauty*, ed. Roger Scruton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39.

72 *Ibid.*, 105.

73 *Ibid.*, 159.

74 Penny, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism*, Kindle Book.





(and the right to sexuality has morals based on the subject but not when the subject is objectified), and builds on illusion. An illusion that marginalizes women in their claiming of their own bodies by establishing what the ideal of womanhood is (expected). And from an early age the girl learns that she must show her goods to sell: femininity becomes work and the **gaze** is never satisfied. Thus our societies surrender into this hyper-sexuality<sup>75</sup>: devoid of emotions and never satiated. And the problem is not sexuality, but the desensitizing of the human birthright of flesh and desire: plasticizing the erotic.

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<sup>75</sup> Hypersexual disorder and sex addiction are more than an unusual sex drive. Nonetheless, the term hypersexuality used in this text is referring to the fast-paced, sex-centered consumerism of society. Hypersexual Disorders, "Hypersexual Disorders Signs," <http://www.hypersexualdisorders.com/hypersexual-disorder-signs/> (accessed July 29, 2017).

## 4. Trauma

### 4.1. What is Trauma?

According to psychotherapist Geraldine Scioville, women affected by rape suffer a psychic trauma that is silenced. Trauma is an excessive psychic disturbance. It is a state of shock, leaving a paralysis in the psychic apparatus. A paralysis in the psyche is like being frozen in time, a blockage is generated, this affects memory and it is the reason why each one reacts differently. Since survivors are left with no possibility of mental elaboration (memory loss of the traumatic event—blockage), trauma is evidenced time later, maybe years, through problems that affect the daily life of the person surfacing via very severe anxieties and psychosomatic diseases, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, inability to have romantic or sexual relationships and so on. A work of reconstruction must be done: a recollection of thoughts to *reawaken* the memories, to re-develop the speech, because traumas have no form. Therefore, a *containing-link*<sup>76</sup> must be established so that the person gets closer to what happened and can go back to the past, the traumatic experience. To heal is to become aware, consciously, of the feelings and memories that were forgotten in order to be able to elaborate the conflicts that were lived.

As humans, we have the *need* to elaborate pleasant and unpleasant experiences, and usually, we do it through the use of language. Language is a form—*a way*, by using the spoken word to identify these sensations, we have the possibility to narrate and to structure pain. Moreover, language is an object; it becomes an instrument to reify feelings such as pain. As Sherry Turkle states, the materialization of pain makes it less painful: “Toward the end of *Remembrance of Things Past*, (Proust)<sup>77</sup> says: *“Ideas come to us as the successors to griefs, and griefs, at the moment when they change into ideas, lose some part of their power to injure our*

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<sup>76</sup> From Spanish, Geraldine mentions “un vínculo contenedor”, which translated is a containing link, but it refers to the connection someone has to create to contain emotionally and mentally the person affected. Usually it is what the psychotherapist is doing, containing as in embracing the emotionality, rationality or lack of it thereof of the patient, to build a safe environment of discourse and healing without judgment.

<sup>77</sup> Author’s adaptation of the text.





**heart”** <sup>78</sup>. Trauma is so heartbreaking that all forms of representing it are broken. Geraldine, as a psychoanalyst, lends her patients the words to help them rebuild their speech, to narrate. Since, clinically traumatized patients cannot pronounce the word that caused their trauma, for example rape, she highlights how images can initiate a way to recovering memories. This is connected with our learning processes as children; images were the source, the substrate with which we learned the world, then came the words. Images have the ability and subtlety to directly touch the body of victims, while words could become too intense and thus disruptive.

*Lo importante no es acabar una obra, sino permitir que se entrevea en esta obra lo que hará posible que otros empiecen o produzcan en una fecha más o menos lejana.*<sup>79</sup>

From the psychological perspective, artistic work that deals with trauma is relevant in the sense that it is evoking sensations. **Form** works as significance of trauma because objects evoke. For Scioville, the artist makes an integration of those unpleasant sensations that could never have a symbol before and creates: materializes trauma. Therefore, art is an integrative work of human's unpleasant or traumatic experiences. However, Geraldine explains that while objects may provide a way, they do not constitute or allow healing. The actual healing of a trauma involves the elaboration of the problem to make a transformation in the psyche of the person and to have containment in the form of the other (the psychoanalyst). The artist lends her or his symbolic capacity to try to elaborate or create, to imagine external pain, to generate empathy and to accompany with elements that help victims articulate **“this happened to me”**. It is in this way that objects can **contain**<sup>80</sup>, since they are a direct expression of emotion, they translate impressions and sensory experiences, facilitating dialogue, which entails relief.

### *Trauma inherited*

*Creating can be a form of meditation or prayer; it is the act of creation and not the creation itself which reflects the divine.*<sup>81</sup>

We carry generations of trauma; whilst it is an ongoing scientific research about trauma being imprinted into our DNA and passed on from one generation to the other, studies are beginning to recognize how our experiences affect even our cells. This goes both ways, from the negative to

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<sup>78</sup> Sherry Turkle, *“What makes an object evocative?”*, in *Evocative Objects: Things we Think With*, ed. Sherry Turkle (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 319.

<sup>79</sup> Quote by Joan Miró, narrated by Geraldine Scioville during our interview on August 1, 2017. Artium: DokuArt. Biblioteca y Centro de Documentación, “Artistas – Joan Miró,” Artium, <http://catalogo.artium.org/dossieres/artistas/joan-miro/claves-de-su-obra> (accessed August 1, 2017). *The important thing is not to finish a work of art, but to allow in this work a glimpse of that which will make it possible for others to start or produce in a more or less distant date.*

<sup>80</sup> Contain, to have containment in the form of the other, to a much lesser degree because these are objects.

<sup>81</sup> Gray, *Red Moon*, Kindle Book.

the positive experiences, what this means is that meditation can indeed counteract stress effects and reshape our brains, which would in turn pass along to our kids and possibly theirs<sup>82</sup>. Moreover, I think that this assumption could open the discussion of integration and belonging, to break **otherness**. As for me, this is a notion of connection, with the self and with the outer world. From an interview with Eve Ensler<sup>83</sup>, a rape survivor herself, she describes how trauma disconnects: “I think—from my own life experience, and certainly what I’ve discovered in many women and men across the planet—is (that) when we’re traumatized, when we’re beaten, when we’re raped, we leave our bodies. We disconnect from ourselves. And if it’s true that one out of every three women on the planet have been raped or beaten, which is a U.N. statistic, that’s a billion women. Many, many of us have left our bodies—we’re not embodied creatures, we’re not living inside our own muscles and cells and sinews. And so we’re not in our power, we’re not in our energy. (...) It’s been a long journey to get fully back into my body. And, certainly, what I’ve seen everywhere in the world is that the more traumatized people are, the less connected they are to their own source of strength, their own source of inspiration, intuition, heart — everything.”<sup>84</sup> And according to Scioville, although psychotherapy not being an active technique to empower does help to build up the feminine being. Victims manage to re-signify their feminine from what it means to be a woman for each one of them and from where they want to be that woman. Understanding from that feminine that was silenced, as their identity, their force, and their voice, to hold a posture and occupy space. In this line of thought, I have my own erasures of pain and trauma: as a woman, today I am communicating on my own terms my identity; this means I am also questioning where my perceptions have been rooted to give shape to my concept of erotic, which I recognize as feminine power. As an artist, today my work is flourishing from this connection of pain by signifying traumatic experiences (my own, the inherited and the perceived) through objects created from a feminine self-questioned perspective.

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82 Information collected from talks with psychologist Geraldine Scioville and research about *Behavioral Epigenetics*: “It sounded like voodoo at first,” Szyf admits. “For a molecular biologist, anything that didn’t have a clear molecular pathway was not serious science. But the longer we talked, the more I realized that maternal care just might be capable of causing changes in DNA methylation, as crazy as that sounded. So Michael and I decided we’d have to do the experiment to find out.”  
Dan Hurley, “Grandma’s Experiences Leave a Mark on Your Genes,” *Discover*, June 25, 2015, <http://discovermagazine.com/2013/may/13-grandmas-experiences-leave-epigenetic-mark-on-your-genes> (accessed September 3, 2017).

83 Eve Ensler is the creator of The Vagina Monologues <http://www.eveensler.org>; V-Day: an activist movement to end violence against women and girls <https://www.vday.org/homepage.html>; One Billion Rising: the biggest mass action to end violence against women <http://www.onebillionrising.org>; and City of Joy: a transformational community for women survivors of violence in the Congo <http://drc.vday.org>.  
Maria Popova, “Eve Ensler on How Trauma Makes Us Leave Our Bodies and Disconnect from Ourselves,” *Brainpickings*, <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/05/19/eve-ensler-nypl/> (accessed August 25, 2017).

84 The New York Public Library, “No. 173 Eve Ensler – In the Body of the World,” *The New York Public Library Podcast*, Podcast audio, May 9, 2014, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-new-york-public-library-podcast/id804982781?mt=2>

*Women's empowerment is deeply connected to their sexuality (...) I'm obsessed with women being violated and raped, and with incest. All of these things are deeply connected to our vaginas.*<sup>85</sup>

#### **4.2. On Creating: an Alternative to Heal Trauma**

I have described female sexuality as a taboo. How can I, through my making, help break this taboo? Furthermore, how can I materialize feelings without objectifying? Is it possible? I think it is possible through the use of the erotic, by claiming and recognizing it from within each woman so as to live it broadly in all aspects of our lives, both inside and outside of our selves.

To me, the image of the Phoenix resurfacing from the ashes is the thought of empowerment and what it means to get powered up from within, which I recognize as the erotic. From the poetic definition of the erotic<sup>86</sup> is where I started linking these concepts together, but I was not sure how or why I was researching on two diametrically opposed topics. Or so it seemed. After rape, trauma can be so hard that everything inside the victim is dead. They must experience a rebirth to life, and the erotic is precisely it. The erōs is the creator, is related to desire. So, the erotic is in the image, in the imagination, it is what can be thought of, it is what can be said, it is the origin of life. Ensler bridges this connection between our bodies and our power: to own entirely our body as to feel it. So by eroticizing women, and that means giving the power and ownership over their own flesh, we are breaking women's sexuality as a taboo.

If empowerment and female sexuality go together, add up; but each one separated is the opposite of each other: empowerment is erotic and sexuality is taboo, how to eroticize? I realized, citing Ensler's quote again, that I had to focus on vulvas and vaginas. Female sexuality was the first building block to expand further my concepts and my shapes within my making.

As stated above, this research has given me awareness of my own concepts. It has worked, in a way, as a healing therapy from the *ideal* of womanhood, from sexism, from myself and from the outer world. Am I healed? I can say I am empowered, but a work in progress. Nevertheless, due to this quest for understanding why it was important for me to work with gender inequality, I am connected with being a woman more than ever, and more in my flesh, which is empowering. My aim was to create a tribute for affected women to empower them, and while at it, I realized I

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<sup>85</sup> Eve Ensler – Wikipedia contributors, "The Vagina Monologues," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Vagina\\_Monologues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues) (accessed July 2, 2016).  
No further information found.

<sup>86</sup> Esther Perel, psychologist working on the erotic as the opposite of trauma and death. Esther Perel, "About Me: My Story, Background and Inspiration," <https://www.estherperel.com/about> (accessed August 27, 2017).  
TED: Ideas worth spreading, "Esther Perel: The secret to desire in a long-term relationship," [https://www.ted.com/talks/esther\\_perel\\_the\\_secret\\_to\\_desire\\_in\\_a\\_long\\_term\\_relationship](https://www.ted.com/talks/esther_perel_the_secret_to_desire_in_a_long_term_relationship) (minute 9'29") (accessed November 2015).



was also affected<sup>87</sup>. However, this has helped me remove **otherness**, in the sense of relating with others' suffering and because of this, releasing (negative) perceptions from the pieces I am making. **Otherness**, also in recognizing its' significance for the individual as for society; since we are all victims and perpetrators.

From Ensler's words, I associate **'to connect'** with to eroticize. And according to Scioville to connect (mental into verbal) is to heal. So, is it possible that to eroticize is to heal? This leads me on to thinking that erotic is a natural female force, but it does not mean it belongs only to females. However, if we are aware of the fact that our societies pretend to deny any kind of feminine manifestation, it is not surprising that the erotic has been annulled and instead disguised.

*'In your cycle, your creative energies are not just for the forming of children, but are also for the birth of idea children.'* She touched Eve's forehead. *'You produce the spark of life, you carry it in your body, nurture it and allow it to grow until you bring it out into this world. Children enter this world from the womb, idea children enter through your body, your hands and feet, your voice.'* She kissed Eve's hands as though in homage. *'A woman without children is not an incomplete or unnatural woman, her children are the ideas she carries within herself and their birth is the form she gives them in the material world.'*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> When I speak of healing myself from womanhood, I mean the stigmas, the stereotypes; what is expected of a woman in our societies to be called a *woman*.

<sup>88</sup> Gray, *Red Moon*, Kindle Book.



## 5. Power and Sex(uality): Conclusion



A random gallery window in Amsterdam (NE)  
Beauty and sex in art  
March 2016

### 5.1. *Beauty and The Erotic*

Referring to Roger Scruton and his definition of beauty, he concludes that it is an experience that is rationally founded: we cannot assume that beauty is a subjective preference or the source of transient pleasure; it is deeply rooted in our own values and ways of reasoning. This brings to my mind the concept of the 'ideal woman'. We want to experience beauty as a central part of our lives, but what *ideal* are we aiming for? As I have already commented, Plato stated that beauty prompts desire. Nonetheless, many argue that it is "desire that summons beauty, [as a way the

mind spreads itself upon **objects**]\*.”<sup>89</sup> Desire also would be the trigger for individuals to search for beauty and for societies to define those (unreachable) beauty standards. Desire is to some extent a synonym of erotic; it arouses and sparks, it is wanting, it is aliveness. The difference is that desire, being closer to the senses, stays on the plane of possession. This could explain the plasticization of beauty; with desire becoming the hidden machine capitalism uses to impulse our hypersexual societies. Do we want to be possessed or do we want to possess? And possess what: beauty or power? This is also a lead on how pornography became the only chapter for women's sexuality but nothing else is accepted. Along with the **ideal of womanhood**<sup>90</sup>, feminism<sup>91</sup> works as a capitalistic tool: becoming our 'purchasing power', this of course, encouraged by the media. To complement this, Nina Power writes, "Feminism says that you have a right to enjoy yourself. An obligation, even." Encouraging women into masturbation and the dildo-orgasmic freedom-of-female-sexuality discourse, as stated previously, also becoming a purchasing excuse. Do we need affirmations to enjoy ourselves? I feel it is mistakenly going in the direction of possession, which screams objectification, which also depicts a feminism that disconnects from its core. So, beauty through the male gaze is desire, and desire objectifies.

Nonetheless, Scruton's view on beauty transcends humanity; and what I find interesting about that is the fact that I relate beauty with the erotic. Why? Reflecting on it, it is perhaps connected with raw power that I perceive erotic is, which is also linked with our bodies' pure language. Sexuality and orgasm are power, a source of power; beauty and desire are power, a dream of power.

*Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex.*<sup>92</sup>

### *From a Feminine Perspective: Tell the Tale*

I can see how these notions have permeated my whole existence and now it is easier for me to understand where many issues may be arising, as a woman. It has been a sort of handicap but imposed, and I am just starting to remove it by redefining from my core, from my feelings what is true for my truth. Hence, I will try to define beauty from my feminine perspective. For now, I have to admit that I am still internalizing the definitions described as processes to recognize beauty. It

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<sup>89</sup> \*Adapted by the author. Roger Scruton, "Human Beauty," in *Beauty*, ed. Roger Scruton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>90</sup> Page 32.

<sup>91</sup> For the scope of this text I am not trying to define feminism. The fact that feminism has divided into many different subgroups is related to the many different postures socially, racially, economically and politically, to name a few, from women who seek to create equality for all: women and men. Also, I feel it is in this approach of classifying and defining one posture that covers everything and everyone that we are failing to integrate. It is also the reason why I cannot ascribe to feminism generally speaking; even though I am a feminist.

<sup>92</sup> Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, 55.

is from its philosophical definition that I start to reflect on the concept by connecting it with values that to some extent make it a *truth*, which also make its definition a bit more complex. This means I cannot just mention and describe what beauty is. But, I can explain beauty as a rationally sensorial experience that always includes my brain and my heart to feel and rationalize that which I find beautiful. And it is on purpose that I write brain to feel and heart to rationalize, because between those processes is where intuition raises, the voice deep within. Thus sensing and thinking are the combination that connects me with my feminine. Also, I can mention this due to my creative process; it lies in a mixture of thinking and feeling through the hands.

Following the lines of the feminine perspective I finally come to my biggest source of inspiration (which I have mentioned before, and has served me as researching material as well as a healing device): the erotic and Audre Lorde's definition of it, "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling."<sup>93</sup> My approach to beauty is connected with her definition of the erotic. Intuitively, I knew the erotic was more transcendental, which led me to intensely research it. In turn, I arrived to connect rape – erotic – beauty as concepts to build an expression of empowerment after trauma. Adding on, from a psychological perspective, the erotic is a *contradiction* of trauma. For Esther Perel, it is the antidote to death; and Geraldine Scioville evaluated the term from its Greek root *erōs*, as the origin, the creator: bringing life back. For both psychologists, trauma is a state in which, while you are alive, you cannot feel; nothing flourishes because there is a disconnection between the mind and the emotions. This is one of the main reasons why female sexuality is so important to me, to connect from the erotic to our lives. I see it as a starting point. As Lorde says, we have been indoctrinated into turning off the erotic and only take it to our beds; although many people do not know it, they still have it and can start from there.

*I feel to think.* I need to process through my feelings and body my experiences to be able to evaluate them in an oral communicated language. So, to connect mind and feeling is to eroticize. If I quote Eve Ensler again, regarding the *disconnectedness* among rape victims and their bodies, it speaks of a disconnection with feeling and the rational mind. What she is describing is how to eroticize our lives from the power of sex, but I want to bring back the fact that female sexuality is taboo. So, how can we break a taboo? By visualizing it, making cognition of what is imposed and what is ours (our truth: deep knowledge, intuition). As stated in the previous chapter, by eroticizing women, this means giving the power and ownership over our own bodies, we start re-cognizing our truths, thus engaging in cognitive processes that would lead to breaking taboos. According to Lorde, "the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough" and furthermore, "(it) is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings."<sup>94</sup> And then, when relating to women affected, how to heal trauma? Since trauma is only overcome once the person is able to narrate what happened, I would say by eroticizing it. So, trauma and

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93 *Ibid.*, 53.

94 *Ibid.*, 54.

taboo can be lessened the more eroticized our lives are. Perhaps, the next question is how to eroticize? How to connect our thoughts and feelings? How to start from a sexuality that has been a taboo? How to own our bodies? That means we have to go through a mental process to materialize such feelings<sup>95</sup> into ideas in such a way that they start losing their power over us. Materializing through the use of language, through the use of objects, through our bodies.

Female sexuality is a bridge connecting many levels; those old stories about the cycles of women seem a little mystical and are on a spiritual plane, tending to become less important for that same reason. But a male dominating society, the same that fears the creative-destructive nature of women, has diminished those (now) fantastic stories of female cycle and power. We have been told that our menstruations are dirty. And yet, in the tampons boxes' we are disembodied: usually female legs are outlined wearing heels (what for?). In a way, we are not allowed to be complete, to be connected with our bodies, minds and cycles. So, if we analyze this sexuality-empowerment from the female affected, as Eve Ensler mentions the power among traumas and vaginas being deeply connected, there is some empowerment to do from within the self, which means healing by acknowledging our worth<sup>96</sup> as women and sexual beings; and out of the self, which would include the same acknowledging but with society. To start empowering women is to recognize us as sexual beings without objectifying us, and this is bidirectional.

## 5.2. *The Erotic as the universal Feminine Force*

*Women are different from animals; their sexuality is not simply linked to creating children, but rather its energies are freed throughout the month in their menstrual cycle. This is the wisdom of women. From this wisdom comes the ability to make life better, to make implements, to create structured relationships and communities and the ability to express the relationship between humanity and nature.*<sup>97</sup>

I will try to build a concluding thought: to eroticize is to connect to our bodies—to **heal** trauma. But if erotic is beauty, no wonder why looking for beauty out of our bodies is a mistake (beauty standards). Then, how to eroticize women? I say, by assigning the psyche<sup>98</sup> of the erotic to the body: this means discovering the soul of beauty into the body by occupying space and being

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<sup>95</sup> By feelings I mean those pertaining to each situation. For example, for trauma feelings of pain and suffering, even shame. For taboo, feelings of shame, fear, and aggression.

<sup>96</sup> Worth in the sense of those old tales from female power and wisdom, from cycles and connection with life and Earth, from our cycle and our sexuality as being a creative and destructive natural power to keep balance within our bodies and out of our bodies.

<sup>97</sup> Gray, *Red Moon*, Kindle Book.

<sup>98</sup> Psyche: The human soul, mind, or spirit. {Origin. Mid 17th century: via Latin from Greek psukhē 'breath, life, soul'.} Oxford Dictionaries, British and World English Definitions, Oxford University Press, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/psyche> (accessed September 15, 2017).



(opposite to beauty standards). Furthermore, erotic nowadays connotes sexuality. On one hand, sexuality is power; on the other hand, female sexuality is a taboo (it could also be described as chained). As humans we are sexual beings, so we have the power within ourselves to give rise to the erotic and break those chains. Sexuality is not our only erotic. However, if not silenced, it is definitely the closest to our psyche's true language. Consequently, it stems on the roots of our archaic wisdom, and holds our blooming earthly life as women. Erotic is power, is strength, it is a conscious decision about living fully. That is why it is so empowering, because it implies an act of consciousness, which is the negation to the plasticization of emotions via marketing strategies and pornography as the epitome of freedom and sex.

## *On Rape*

Basically, from the chapter of Female Sexuality, we can see that if we disconnect from the essence of the erotic, we end up lacking, bored, and satiated with plasticity. And this foretells of a society that fears the female content and which has been built on the oppressive system of Sexism<sup>99</sup>. Audre Lorde in all her wisdom (and glory) states, "There is no hierarchy of oppressions; (...) the **thread** and **threat** of violence runs through all the **isms**. There is a need to acknowledge each other's pain, even as we attend to our own".<sup>100</sup> I quote her again, because she had the words I was lacking; and I want to connect that reflection with the following, about rape being a women's issue: "It is a mistake to call **men's** violence a **women's** issue. Take the subject of rape. Many people reflexively consider rape to be a women's issue. (...) **Less than 1 percent of rape is committed by women**. Put in a different way: over 99 percent of rape is perpetrated by men. Whether the victims are female or male, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators."<sup>101</sup> With these two sentences I want to emphasize that even if I am not pointing directly my finger to men as being the only culprits, we cannot keep on dismissing it as a feminist struggle and women's only issue. At least 50% of the population is oppressed based on gender: economic inequality, violence against women and a denial of women's basic rights over their own (lives and bodies), this **normality** needs to shift and not remain unquestioned. And I have started by removing the mask from my eyes and by touching affected women through objects that seek to materialize pain, with further hopes of becoming a sort of beautiful medicine.

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99 "Oppression involves a dominant group (the group possessing societal power) exerting both ideological and structural control over a subordinate group (the group without societal power) in order to benefit the dominant group. (...) In the case of sexism, the ideological control comes through the creation and enforcement of socially constructed gender roles, while the structural control arises from the use of cultural and institutional power held by men to deny resources to and extract resources from women for the benefit of men."  
Heather W. Hackman, "Sexism: Introduction," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 317-318.

100 Beverly Daniel Tatum, "The Complexity of Identity: Who Am I?," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8-9.

101 Jackson Katz, "Violence Against Women is a Men's Issue," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Third Edition. ADAMS, Maurianne, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 343.





*Your sexuality awakens the energies which sow the seeds of inspiration. The act of sex itself can create both physical and idea children and can be the fire which drives the artist, poet, musician and seer. The art of sex is sacred, it brings the divine into the world.*<sup>102</sup>

## On Healing Through Beautiful Objects

I am doing what pornography does with feelings: I have been plasticizing pain. But pornography is downgrading women by claiming them as objects. Sexual objects. In contrast, I believe I am empowering humans by giving them agency over the objects I am creating about the same objects pornography elevates. Trying to erase subtly the limits of our stereotypes by **enflowering** penises and **rockyfyng** vulvas, altering the '**correct**' gender-role-terminology we have gotten used to.

Nature has been a research for the erotic and a source of inspiration for me. Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings and Robert Mapplethorpe photographs talk erotically to me; also through them I understood the **flower power**. There is no shame, there are no limits, it requires a lot of strength to be, and nature simply is. In contrast, beauty, erotic and power are evaluated based on labels and externally from the self, diluting their strength. If according to Plato's definition of beauty, it is a language of the souls and a truth of a higher realm; and beauty is erotic according to me, nature **is**. With this I mean, nature is unapologetically powerful in its rawness, it is; is beauty (as a truth), is erotic, is wild (powerful). Nature is. And feminine power, I believe, is completely linked with these features I pick up and grow inspired from nature. Instead of valuing things from external standards, how about we raise ourselves empowered by valuing our beings from our own sense of being?

Finally, on materiality, how am I building my concepts? The fact that stone has an eternal aura aligned to its precepts already makes it powerful, **desirable**. This is linked with the Platonist mind conceiving the object of desire as a premonition of the eternal.<sup>103</sup> At first this concept could have complemented and reinforced conceptually the problem of gender violence as a reality associated with the history of humanity within my making. However, there are other values assigned to stones and with which I began to build meaning. This desirability implies beauty; as already stated, which talks about possession. I wonder if I am trying to materialize pain, am I instead, releasing the negative connotations (for example sexual violence), to attract with the desirability of the material? Is this perhaps a way to create erotic objects as a tribute, thus becoming **beautiful medicine**? Another value I read from stones is that of history, possibly inherited from eternity: every stone is older than our lifetimes. Memory and history interwoven in a unique and unrepeatable natural object: no two stones are the same. Those marks of beauty I find in them are the true value and for which I began to use them: to speak to those affected by gender violence as beings of beauty: unique and incomparable, with a deeper history, memory and power. From my perspective, the true marks of beauty in humanity.

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102 Gray, *Red Moon*, Kindle Book.

103 Scruton, "Art and Erōs," in *Beauty*, 158.

## 6. Objectifying Rape through Beautiful Objects: Practical Conclusion

During the development of my project I discovered the equilibrium between rationality and emotionality. However, since I started making jewellery, I have been questioning whether or not I have finished pieces. To reach to finalized pieces I had to first write a text. What this constituted was theory that became so much a part of me, that it empowered the woman and came to existence, first through the text and then through objects. Could this be the materialization of empowerment? I guess, from a psychological perspective, and referring to the title of my project – *Theories of Healing Through Beautiful Objects* –, I did heal, by verbalizing thoughts (concepts and text) and then by making (pieces of jewellery that evoke, communicate, and connect), from traumatic events that might have shaped or impacted me as a woman.

The core of this project is based on a story about my family, a taboo. Nevertheless, the way I approached its development was political. During my research I was looking outside of me: seeking for concepts, definitions and ideas. But as it turns out, it took me completely inside, thus the political became personal. Or, is it that the personal is political? This is the reason why the balance between rationality and emotionality claims importance not only within my creative process but also in my life. My pieces are empowered. But personally, I am still figuring how to break my taboo and what it means to break it. It could be an act of communication, which is related to my roots.

*But, how empowerment would look like?*

The border between feeling and thinking through the hands and with the materials became a link; suddenly there were no limits. However, to switch from writing in to the workshops was quite hard and it took time for me to adjust. For a long time, I felt as if I was not including the thoughts I had developed into my making. The problem was that I was measuring them in time, not in context. And since it was the first time I created jewellery from such a deep and long process, I was reflecting with the work as I was doing, questioning about materials and materiality, shapes, colors and concepts.

Additionally, they contain taboo and visualize it, but are they necessarily breaking it? (Is this also







related to my personal quest?) At the very least, they are connecting with us: either by reifying emotions from the maker's perspective, or by creating an emotional reaction in the viewer, once they have been (made) reified emotions. I strove to make the object, object: by reifying those feelings and assigning them less value as they are to be worn. This became a recurrent thought while working, and I am still wondering what is the importance behind such statement. I wonder if this is some sort of contradiction. But what matters is that contradiction has been present throughout my whole process and is a fundamental part of my discourse and work.

I made jewellery. Wearable. It was one of the most important aspects of my statement and research about gendered violence even though I have always wanted to explore creatively in other directions instead of that of wearability. I wanted my jewelry to be worn. I want it to be worn by men and women because I want the pieces to express women are sexual beings and not a taboo. Is this then the physicality of empowerment? Fragility, transparency, brokenness, coldness, sharp edges, red, hurtful: erotic. It is not obvious but it is beautiful; it is not obvious but it is strong; we are not taught the strength of delicate. We are not taught the strength in feminine concepts; vulnerability, emotionality, intuition, raw power, erotic.

The personal is political. How did my making change me? I can identify how I grew and opened due to the content and then the interaction with my pieces, the materials, the curiosity with which I embraced each next step, the fun I had while making, choosing, thinking, deciding; also the learning I had to do in letting go and accepting mistakes, embracing more humanity within me, removing the tags I had been assigned first as a human and then as a woman. And I can see it also reflected in the pieces. It was my first approach to converse with my making – the work in progress – and I can see how much of an active role it already is, not only as a process, but also in how actively the pieces give forth and back information. How will I embrace these changes? What comes next? I am wondering if there is a possibility my pieces could affect, and perhaps change, the wearer. How could a violent person react? How can I reach out and touch deeply? Jewellery is my language; it moves me and shakes me profoundly. I have always found it says much more about me as a woman, and my femininity, than I have realized by my own life experiences. It helped me build my identity and grow confident on it. My work has changed me.

In the end it is my voice expressed erotically, with full honesty in the best way I know how to: jewellery. I have finished pieces.

## A - 1 Rape Culture

Some time ago, I was submitting a text and asked a friend to proofread it for me. In the text, I was mentioning how as a woman I felt the need to create work that communicates, questions, and challenges our societies, which have been raised as pro-rape cultures. Her reaction was harsh and she expressed with apprehension “that our culture was not perfect but it was extreme to say that we were a pro-rape culture”. This is not an isolated case; I think most of us are not aware of what it means to live in a society that **normalizes sexualized violence**<sup>104</sup>.

So, what is rape culture? Everything I have been writing about is rape culture. Objectification of women, male entitlement, advertorial eroticism, female sexuality as a taboo, valuing male promiscuity and condemning female's, the fact that one out of three women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime, female genital mutilation, stereotyping: men are strong and reliable, women are weak and soft, self-objectification, disregarding female consent, phrases such as: “boys will be boys” and “act like a girl”, sexism and sexist jokes, are just a few in this text. But somehow I feel this is not evident enough, as when we are confronted with our own fears on a day-to-day basis. The following is a description I found and impacted me, because it is not an abstract definition, it is so relatable that it touches:

*“Rape culture is encouraging male sexual aggression. Rape culture is regarding violence as sexy and sexuality as violent. Rape culture is treating rape as a compliment, as the unbridled passion stirred in a healthy man by a beautiful woman, making irresistible the urge to rip open her bodice or slam her against a wall, or a wrought-iron fence, or a car hood, or pull her by her hair, or shove her onto a bed, or any one of a million other images of fight-fucking in movies and television shows and on the covers of romance novels that convey violent urges are inextricably linked with (straight) sexuality. Rape culture is rape being used as a weapon, a tool of war and genocide and oppression. Rape culture is a militarized culture and “the natural product of all wars, everywhere, at all times, in all forms”.*

*Rape culture is [1 in 6](#)<sup>105</sup> women being sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. Rape culture is not even talking about the reality that many women are sexually assaulted multiple times in their lives. Rape culture is the way in which the constant threat of sexual assault affects women's daily movements. Rape culture is telling girls and women to be careful about what you wear, how you wear it, how you carry yourself, where you walk, when you walk there, with whom you walk, whom you trust, what you do, where you do it,*

<sup>104</sup> Emilie Buchwald, “What is Rape Culture?,” Wavaw: Rape crisis center, <http://www.wavaw.ca/what-is-rape-culture/> (accessed September 20, 2016).

<sup>105</sup> As stated in this web page, data varies from the World Health Organization – WHO – and United Nations' data.

*with whom you do it, what you drink, how much you drink, whether you make eye contact, if you're alone, if you're with a stranger, if you're in a group, if you're in a group of strangers, if it's dark, if the area is unfamiliar, if you're carrying something, how you carry it, what kind of shoes you're wearing in case you have to run, what kind of purse you carry, what jewelry you wear, what time it is, what street it is, what environment it is, how many people you sleep with, what kind of people you sleep with, who your friends are, to whom you give your number, who's around when the delivery guy comes, to get an apartment where you can see who's at the door before they can see you, to check before you open the door to the delivery guy, to own a dog or a dog-sound-making machine, to get a roommate, to take self-defense, to always be alert always pay attention always watch your back always be aware of your surroundings and never let your guard down for a moment lest you be sexually assaulted and if you are and didn't follow all the rules it's your fault.*

*Rape culture is victim-blaming.*

*Rape culture is judges banning the use of the word rape in the courtroom. Rape culture is the media using euphemisms for sexual assault.*

*Rape culture is tasking victims with the burden of rape prevention. Rape culture is encouraging women to take self-defense as though that is the only solution required to preventing rape. Rape culture is admonishing women to "learn common sense" or "be more responsible" or "be aware of barroom risks" or "avoid these places" or "don't dress this way," and failing to admonish men to not rape.*

*Rape culture is the idea that only certain people rape—and only certain people get raped. Rape culture is ignoring that the thing about rapists is that they rape people. They rape people who are strong and people who are weak, people who are smart and people who are dumb, people who fight back and people who submit just to get it over with, people who are sluts and people who are prudes, people who are rich and people who are poor, people who are tall and people who are short, people who are fat and people who are thin, people who are blind and people who are sighted, people who are deaf and people who can hear, people of every race and shape and size and ability and circumstance. Rape culture is the narrative that sex workers can't be raped. Rape culture is the assertion that wives can't be raped. Rape culture is the contention that only nice girls can be raped*

*Rape culture is people meant to protect you raping you instead—like parents, teachers, doctors, ministers, cops, soldiers, self-defense instructors.*

*Rape culture is a ruling that says women cannot withdraw consent once sex commences.*

*Rape culture is a collective understanding about classifications of rapists: The “normal” rapist (whose crime is most likely to be dismissed with a “boys will be boys” sort of jocular apologia) is the man who forces himself on attractive women, women his age in fine health and form, whose crime is disturbingly understandable to his male defenders. The “real sickos” are the men who go after children, old ladies, the disabled, accident victims languishing in comas—the sort of people who can’t fight back, whose rape is difficult to imagine as titillating, unlike the rape of “pretty girls,” so easily cast in a fight-fuck fantasy of squealing and squirming and eventual relenting to the “flattery” of being raped.*

*Rape culture is the pervasive narrative that there is a “typical” way to behave after being raped, instead of the acknowledgment that responses to rape are as varied as its victims, that, immediately following a rape, some women go into shock; some are lucid; some are angry; some are ashamed; some are stoic; some are erratic; some want to report it; some don’t; some will act out; some will crawl inside themselves; some will have healthy sex lives; some never will again.*

*Rape culture is silence around rape in the national discourse, and in rape victims’ homes. Rape culture is treating surviving rape as something of which to be ashamed. Rape culture is families torn apart because of rape allegations that are disbelieved or ignored or sunk to the bottom of a deep, dark sea in an iron vault of secrecy and silence. Rape culture is the objectification of women, which is part of a dehumanizing process that renders consent irrelevant. Rape culture is treating women’s bodies like public property.*

*Rape culture is treating 13-year-old girls like trophies for men regarded as great artists. Rape culture is when running dogfights is said to elicit more outrage than raping a woman would.*

*Rape culture is using the word “rape” to describe something that has been done to you other than a forced or coerced sex act. Rape culture is saying things like “That ATM raped me with a huge fee” or “The IRS raped me on my taxes”.*

*Rape culture is rape being used as entertainment, in movies and television shows and books and in video games.*

*Rape culture is rape jokes. Rape culture is rape jokes on t-shirts, rape jokes in college newspapers, rape jokes in soldiers’ home videos, rape jokes on the radio, rape jokes on news broadcasts, rape jokes in magazines, rape jokes in viral videos, rape jokes in promotions for children’s movies, rape jokes on Page Six (and again!), rape jokes on the funny pages, rape jokes on TV shows, rape jokes on the campaign trail, rape jokes on Halloween, rape jokes in online content by famous people, rape jokes in online content by non-famous people, rape jokes in headlines, rape jokes onstage at clubs, rape jokes*



*in politics, rape jokes in one-woman shows, rape jokes in print campaigns, rape jokes in movies, rape jokes in cartoons, rape jokes in nightclubs, rape jokes on MTV, rape jokes on late-night chat shows, rape jokes in tattoos, rape jokes in stand-up comedy, rape jokes on websites, rape jokes at awards shows, rape jokes in online contests, rape jokes in movie trailers, rape jokes on the sides of buses, rape jokes on cultural institutions... Rape culture is people objecting to the detritus of the rape culture being called oversensitive, rather than people who perpetuate the rape culture being regarded as not sensitive enough.*

*Rape culture is the myriad ways in which rape is tacitly and overtly abetted and encouraged having saturated every corner of our culture so thoroughly that people can't easily wrap their heads around what the rape culture actually is. That's hardly everything. It's merely the tip of an unfathomable iceberg."<sup>106</sup>*

Eternal.

All I have to add is that I feel enraged.

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<sup>106</sup> Melissa McEwan, "Rape Culture 101," Shakesville, <http://www.shakesville.com/2009/10/rape-culture-101.html> (accessed August 30, 2017).

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