

THE REBEL BODY

Johanna Breiding

**With collaborations by Shoghig Halajian, taisha paggett,
Dorian Wood, Katrin Ebersohn and Cary Cronenwett**

Curated by Martabel Wasserman

THE REBEL BODY is an exhibition of works by Los Angeles based artist Johanna Breiding. THE REBEL BODY brings together multimedia works and various collaborations to explore historicized accounts of political persecution. The central work, *THE REBEL BODY*, is a video installation that takes the story of Anna Göldi, the last European witch to be executed (1782), as a point of departure in order to consider the ramifications of hearsay and storytelling. On September 20, 2007, the Swiss parliament acknowledged Anna Göldi's case as a miscarriage of justice. Göldi was exonerated for her crimes 226 years after her death on August 27, 2008 on the grounds that she had been subjected to an illegal trial. Highlighting the role of the witness, *THE REBEL BODY* documents the landscapes that contain – and subtly recount – buried histories of injustices. The video is made in collaboration with Shoghig Halajian, and partially narrated by Silvia Federici (author of *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*), with music by Dorian Wood and editing and sound design by Katrin Ebersohn.

The exhibition includes *Demonstrative Score*, a two-channel video installation that uses an archival compilation of acts of protest that aim to dismantle public monuments of European historical leaders and Confederate soldiers. Archival footage offers a visual score for choreography, performed by taisha paggett. The work responds to recent iconoclastic events that demand revisions to national narratives, and define history as a living document that warrants active engagement by marginalized subjects. This two-channel video installation is edited by Cary Cronenwett. Additionally, *Slippage/Spillage* presents a constellation of diaristic photographic imagery that serves as propositions for personal encounters and collective actions. The observational gaze recalls photographic histories of social realism and enacts an urgency to witness and record, while underscoring the poetics and fragmentation of the archive.

Text contributors include: Jess Arndt, Silvia Federici, Litia Perta, Dean Spade and Martabel Wasserman.

Catalogue design by Shauna Steinbach and printed by Jaye Fishel with Bullhorn Press.

LIST OF WORKS

Johanna Breiding

Documentation of plaque outside of courthouse, 2016
Digital C-print, 5 x 7 in.

“UP THERE SHINES A LIGHT

In memory of Anna Göldi who was sentenced in a witch trial on June 13, 1782 in Glarus and beheaded through the sword.

In 2008 the Canton of Glarus rehabilitated Anna Göldi.

For all victims

of despotism
of political targeting
of religious persecution
world-wide.

Hurter-Urech, Anna Göldi Foundation, 2014”

Johanna Breiding

Evidence, 2017
Ink on paper, 11 3/4 x 14 in.

Johanna Breiding and Shoghig Halajian

THE REBEL BODY, 2018
HD Video, 18:37 min.
Editing and Sound Design:
Katrin Ebersohn
Music: Dorian Wood

Johanna Breiding

Haute Route: Somewhere between Chamonix and Zermatt, 2016
Digital C-print, 20 x 30 in.

Johanna Breiding

Landscape Documentation in 3 minutes over 3 years, 2017
Digital C-print, 20 x 30 in.

Johanna Breiding

Liberty Enlightening the World (July 4, 1776), 2017
Gelatin Silver Print, 20 x 13 1/2 in.

Johanna Breiding and taisha paggett

Demonstrative Score, 2017
Two channel video, duration variable
Edited by Cary Cronenwett

Johanna Breiding

Slippage/Spillage, 2015-2018
44 Digital C-print, dimensions variable

MY LEFT SIMIAN

Jess Arndt

If left is witch? My left side is simmering. First, in the left foot: five extra bones still present plus the one I had removed, the navicular bone—“*a boat shaped bone in the ankle or wrist.*” Navicularis is the number one cause of lameness in horses. In his already-packed up office, the surgeon diagnosed me and tried (I was his final patient before he skied to retirement) to operate the next day.

When I ask for the bone, which is “fake” but also sail-like, my handlers proclaim it a biohazard and dispose of it in their own method.

Most people stop at L5, but I have an extra vertebrae, L6 (666666), just above my sacrum. Sure my spine's in the middle but the resulting kink twangs left.

Moving physically upwards, my first surgical removal, age 11: a supernumerary nipple along the left milk line. The nipple skin puffing slickly in puberty, poking out just beneath what I already desperately wanted gone. Milk lines start at the armpit and run to the groin but can also drift as far as the foot; are an “evolutionary holdover” marking out the human path.

I don't remember asking for the surgery or how it came about. I think of this when I touch my dog's belly. Hidden, pink, and gently pouching, with nipples all the way along.

More spare bones in the upper back, three this time. Dr. Mike, my chiropractor, shakes his head. I guess they're just floating.

On my left hand, a witch's paw. My parents' friend—a suburban belly dancer, the owner of a Macaw parrot aptly named “Mac,”—identifies me. I look down, already drowning in difference. Across my left palm, the head + heart lines merge into a single bisecting band. Monkey's paw, she may have also called it, crackling.

According to Google, it isn't a witch's paw but a Simian Line:

“People with Simian Lines generally live their life differently than most other people. Not necessarily living better or worse. Just living more intensely with an undercurrent of uneasiness.”

“The presence of a single transverse palmar crease can be, but is not always, a symptom associated with abnormal medical conditions, such as fetal alcohol

syndrome, or with genetic chromosomal abnormalities, including Down Syndrome, Cri du Chat syndrome [named for the sounds that its infants make, catlike, mewling], and Klinefelter syndrome [men whose chromosomes show more than one x]... .”

As a kid I was proud of my mixed palm and displayed it without invitation. *Let me see yours*, I'd say to anyone, hoping they'd bite. (I'd already learned it was easier, as an outsider, to attack.) But no one ever had *one* hand where head + heart were distinct, and the other where head + heart mashed together, the same, solid as a tunnel running underneath a mountain or a muddy, pounded track.

Recently, my girlfriend and I have been fighting with a new level of disorder. “You get so thick,” she says. “I can't tell what you're saying vs. what you're meaning. You don't make any sense.”

Primates have deep-creased Simian Lines, which is where the name, and its now-seen-as pejorative undertow, began. I flip through Google image. Perversely, on monkey hands the crease seems profoundly human. Gentle even.

I am not sure what to do about the fighting, which only means, about the feeling that rushes from my head, mostly tubular. I know I open my mouth. Language=secondary confetti trying to paint over whatever comes out.

During the witch trials, any mark or nevus i.e. “*moles, scars birthmarks, skin tags, supernumerary nipples, natural blemishes and insensitive patches of skin*” could be portent with occult illness.

I *feel* what I *think* and I think what I feel. Is it ever supposed to be any different?

But things do get mixed up. For instance: I don't remember if I made the single teenage pierce to my right ear to hide being gay, or because, proudly proclaiming it, I thought right was left.

“Authorities in the witch trials routinely stripped an accused witch of clothing and shaved all body hair so that no potential mark could be hidden. Pins were driven into scars, calluses and thickened areas of skin: the practice of ‘pricking a witch.’”

If mark-less, you were guilty of harboring secret pocks: punished for blankness or probed internally for phantom twinges.

My friend and I are standing in the dining room sipping huge cans of beer. Something steams off of us, rolling out into the cramped space. The possibility

of nighttime, which we might suddenly join? My friend's head nearly scuffs the ceiling. "You both have witches' bodies," my girlfriend says.

"Sometimes, the mark was believed to have been left by the Devil licking the individual!"

In 2014 I scraped off my left and right breasts. The surgeon drew the "cut line" through what remained of my extra nipple, snipping the old scar neatly away. But I can still feel an uncomfortable, nervy soreness when our son steps barefoot on my chest. Below the skin, the nipple hasn't been removed at all.

I stare at my left hand. It's windy, turbulent out. Our cat is spooked. Against the scars, my birth lines swim deviously, hard to distinguish. What about *there*, where five years old, on Valentine's Day, I plunged my thumb pad through a china bowl? Or there, on the island, where I put my eleven year old hand through a divided glass door? Or there? Twenty-three, yelling with misshapen tears, my palm already shattering my truck's front windshield?

I feel/think what I think/feel.

Nonetheless, the presence of all this extra bio material has led people to intone: *maybe you had a twin?* But I'm sure I didn't cannibalize anyone in the womb. There was no one ever that close. More likely my body arrived already knowing I wouldn't fit, and during its last vital minutes in utero, did its best to start concocting someplace else.



Slippage/Spillage, 2015-2018

THE GREAT CALIBAN: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE REBEL BODY

(Excerpt from *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*)

Silvia Federici

The Great Caliban The Struggle Against the Rebel Body

Life is but a motion of limbs.... For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body.

(Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1650)

Yet I will be a more noble creature, and at the very time when my natural necessities debase me into the condition of the Beast, my Spirit shall rise and soar and fly up towards the employment of the angels.

(Cotton Mather, *Diary*, 1680–1708)

...take some Pity on me... for my Friends is very Poor, and my Mother is very sick, and I am to die next Wednesday Morning, so I hope you will be so good as to give my Friends a small Triffl of Money to pay for a Coffin and a Sroud, for to take my body a way from the Tree in that I am to die on... and dont be faint Hearted... so I hope you will take it into Consideration of my poor Body, consedar if it was your own Cace, you would be willing to have your Body saved from the Surgeons.

(Letter of Richard Tobin, condemned to death in London in 1739)

One of the preconditions for capitalist development was the process that Michel Foucault defined as the “disciplining of the body,” which in my view consisted of an attempt by state and church to transform the individual’s powers into labor-power. This chapter examines how this process was conceived and mediated in the philosophical debates of the time, and the strategic interventions which it generated.

It was in the 16th century, in the areas of Western Europe most affected by the Protestant Reformation and the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie, that we see emerging in every field — the stage, the pulpit, the political and philosophical imagination — a new concept of the person. Its most ideal embodiment is the Shakespearean Prospero of

The Great Caliban



15th century woodcut. “The devil’s assault on the dying man is a theme that pervades all the [medieval] popular tradition.” (From Alfonso M. di Nola, 1987.)

the *The Tempest* (1612), who combines the celestial spirituality of Ariel and the brutish materiality of Caliban. Yet he betrays an anxiety over the equilibrium achieved that rules out any pride for “Man’s” unique position in the Great Chain of Being.¹ In defeating Caliban, Prospero must admit that “this thing of darkness is mine,” thus reminding his audience that our human partaking of the angel and the beast is problematic indeed.

In the 17th century, what in Prospero remains a subliminal foreboding is formalized as the conflict between Reason and the Passions of the Body, which reconceptualizes classic Judeo-Christian themes to produce a new anthropological paradigm. The outcome is reminiscent of the medieval skirmishes between angels and devils for the possession of the departing soul. But the conflict is now staged within the person who is reconstructed as a battlefield, where opposite elements clash for domination. On the one side, there are the “forces of Reason”: parsimony, prudence, sense of responsibility, self-control. On the other, the “low instincts of the Body”: lewdness, idleness, systematic dissipation of one’s vital energies. The battle is fought on many fronts because Reason must be vigilant against the attacks of the carnal self, and prevent “the wisdom of the flesh” (in Luther’s words) from corrupting the powers of the mind. In the extreme case, the person becomes a terrain for a war of all against all:

Let me be nothing, if within the compass of my self I do not find
the battail of Lepanto: Passions against Reason, Reason against
Faith, Faith against the Devil, and my Conscience against all.

(Thomas Browne 1928: 76)

In the course of this process a change occurs in the metaphorical field, as the philosophical representation of individual psychology borrows images from the body-politics of the state, disclosing a landscape inhabited by "rulers" and "rebellious subjects," "multitudes" and "seditions," "chains" and "imperious commands" and (with Thomas Browne) even the executioner (*ibid.*: 72).² As we shall see, this conflict between Reason and the Body, described by the philosophers as a riotous confrontation between the "better" and the "lower sorts," cannot be ascribed only to the baroque taste for the figurative, later to be purged in favor of a "more masculine" language.³ The battle which the 17th-century discourse on the person imagines unfolding in the microcosm of the individual has arguably a foundation in the reality of the time. It is an aspect of that broader process of social reformation, whereby, in the "Age of Reason," the rising bourgeoisie attempted to remold the subordinate classes in conformity with the needs of the developing capitalist economy.

It was in the attempt to form a new type of individual that the bourgeoisie engaged in that battle against the body that has become its historic mark. According to Max Weber, the reform of the body is at the core of the bourgeois ethic because capitalism makes acquisition "the ultimate purpose of life," instead of treating it as a means for the satisfaction of our needs; thus, it requires that we forfeit all spontaneous enjoyment of life (Weber 1958: 53). Capitalism also attempts to overcome our "natural state," by breaking the barriers of nature and by lengthening the working day beyond the limits set by the sun, the seasonal cycles, and the body itself, as constituted in pre-industrial society.

Marx, too, sees the alienation from the body as a distinguishing trait of the capitalist work-relation. By transforming labor into a commodity, capitalism causes workers to submit their activity to an external order over which they have no control and with which they cannot identify. Thus, the labor process becomes a ground of self-estrangement: the worker "only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working is not at home" (Marx 1961: 72). Furthermore, with the development of a capitalist economy, the worker becomes (though only formally) the "free owner" of "his" labor-power, which (unlike the slave) he can place at the disposal of the buyer for a limited period of time. This implies that "[h]e must constantly look upon his labour-power" (his energies, his faculties) "as his own property, his own commodity" (Marx 1906, Vol. I: 186).⁴ This too leads to a sense of dissociation from the body, which becomes reified, reduced to an object with which the person ceases to be immediately identified.

The image of a worker freely alienating his labor, or confronting his body as capital to be delivered to the highest bidder, refers to a working class already molded by the capitalist work-discipline. But only in the second half of the 19th century can we glimpse that type of worker — temperate, prudent, responsible, proud to possess a watch (Thompson 1964), and capable of looking upon the imposed conditions of the capitalist mode of production as "self-evident laws of nature" (Marx 1909, Vol. I: 809) — that personifies the capitalist utopia and is the point of reference for Marx.

The situation was radically different in the period of primitive accumulation when the emerging bourgeoisie discovered that the "liberation of labor-power" — that is, the expropriation of the peasantry from the common lands — was not sufficient to force the dispossessed proletarians to accept wage-labor. Unlike Milton's Adam, who, upon being



Woman selling rags and vagabond. The expropriated peasants and artisans did not peacefully agree to work for a wage. More often they became beggars, vagabonds or criminals. Design by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845).

expelled from the Garden of Eden, set forth cheerfully for a life dedicated to work,⁵ the expropriated peasants and artisans did not peacefully agree to work for a wage. More often they became beggars, vagabonds or criminals. A long process would be required to produce a disciplined work-force. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the hatred for wage-labor was so intense that many proletarians preferred to risk the gallows, rather than submit to the new conditions of work (Hill 1975: 219-39).⁶

This was the first capitalist crisis, one far more serious than all the commercial crises that threatened the foundations of the capitalist system in the first phase of its development.⁷ As is well-known, the response of the bourgeoisie was the institution of a true regime of terror, implemented through the intensification of penalties (particularly those punishing the crimes against property), the introduction of "bloody laws" against vagabonds, intended to bind workers to the jobs imposed on them, as once the serfs had been bound to the land, and the multiplication of executions. In England alone, 72,000 people were hung by Henry th15e VIII during the thirty-eight years of his reign; and the massacre continued into the late 16th century. In the 1570s, 300 to 400 "rogues" were "devoured by the gallows in one place or another every year" (Hoskins 1977: 9; Holinshed, 1577). In Devon alone, seventy-four people were hanged just in 1598 (*ibid.*).

But the violence of the ruling class was not confined to the repression of transgressors. It also aimed at a radical transformation of the person, intended to eradicate in the proletariat any form of behavior not conducive to the imposition of a stricter work-discipline. The dimensions of this attack are apparent in the social legislation that, by the middle of the 16th century, was introduced in England and France. Games were forbidden, particularly games of chance that, besides being useless, undermined the individual's sense of responsibility and "work ethic." Taverns were closed, along with public baths.

Nakedness was penalized, as were many other “unproductive” forms of sexuality and sociality. It was forbidden to drink, swear, curse.⁸

It was in the course of this vast process of social engineering that a new concept of the body and a new policy toward it began to be shaped. The novelty was that the body was attacked as the source of all evils, and yet it was studied with the same passion that, in the same years, animated the investigation of celestial motion.

Why was the body so central to state politics and intellectual discourse? One is tempted to answer that this obsession with the body reflects the fear that the proletariat inspired in the ruling class.⁹ It was the fear felt by the bourgeois or the nobleman alike who, wherever they went, in the streets or on their travels, were besieged by a threatening crowd, begging them or preparing to rob them. It was also the fear felt by those who presided over the administration of the state, whose consolidation was continuously undermined — but also determined — by the threat of riots and social disorders.

Yet, there was more. We must not forget that the beggarly and riotous proletariat — who forced the rich to travel by carriage to escape its assaults, or to go to bed with two pistols under the pillow — was the same social subject who increasingly appeared as the source of all wealth. It was the same of whom the mercantilists, the first economists of capitalist society, never tired of repeating (though not without second thoughts) that “the more the better,” often deploring that so many bodies were wasted on the gallows.¹⁰

Many decades were to pass before the concept of the value of labor entered the pantheon of economic thought. But that work (“industry”), more than land or any other “natural wealth,” is the primary source of accumulation was a truth well understood at a time when the low level of technological development made human beings the most important productive resource. As Thomas Mun (the son of a London merchant and spokesman for the mercantilist position) put it:

...we know that our own natural wares do not yield us so much profit as our industry.... For Iron in the Mines is of no great worth, when it is compared with the employment and advantage it yields being digged, tried, transported, bought, sold, cast into Ordnance, Muskets... wrought into Anchors, bolts, spikes, nails and the like, for the use of Ships, Houses, Carts, Coaches, Ploughs, and other instruments for Tillage.
(Abbott 1946: 2)

Even Shakespeare’s Prospero insists on this crucial economic fact in a little speech on the value of labor, which he delivers to Miranda after she manifests her utter disgust with Caliban:

But, as ‘tis
We cannot miss him. He does make our fire
Fetch in our wood, and serves in office
That profit us.
(*The Tempest*, Act I, Scene 2)

The body, then, came to the foreground of social policies because it appeared not only as a beast inert to the stimuli of work, but also as the container of labor-power, a



Slippage/Spillage, 2015-2018

DRAWING #1

Litia Perta

plunk of deep strings
(Alice Coltrane plays)
while the child crinkles the crinkle paper
inside the owl's wing

How strange it was that he was a he –

he came and the possibilities narrowed.
and widened.

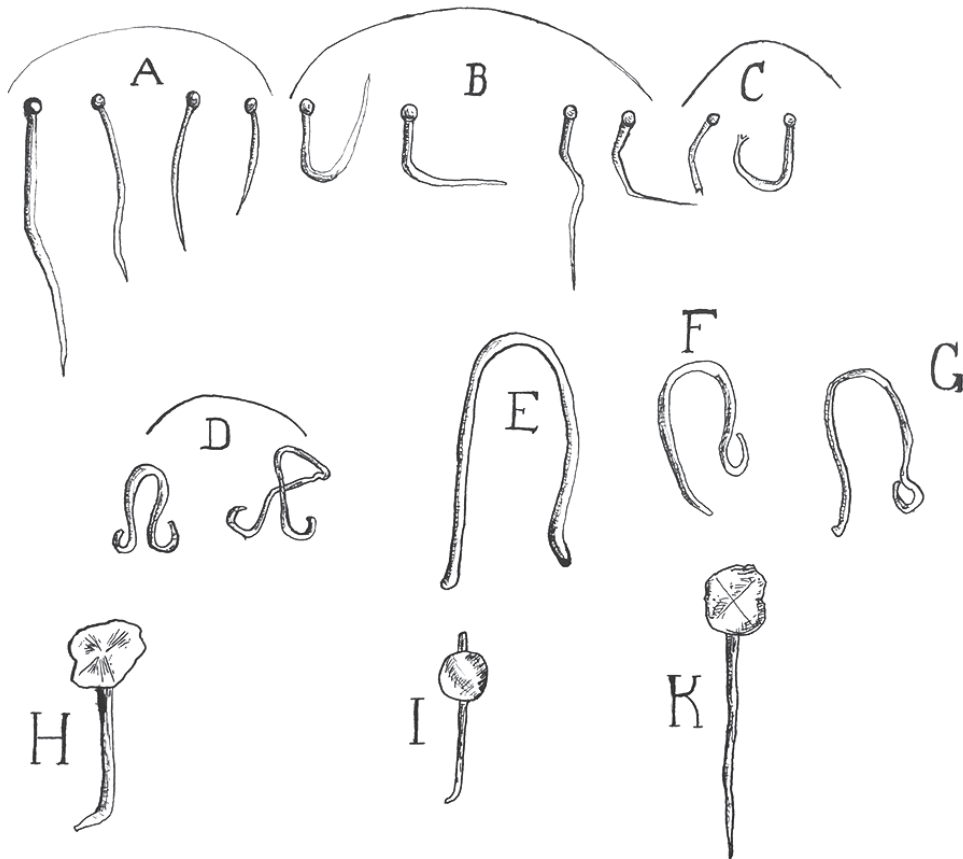
Now he leaves trails of teething spit and vomit on the layered quilts made for him
specially by aunties both chosen and blood.
family is this.

I have looked long at the marks and
wished for the paper in my hands.
ink or pen or quill or what – or pencil?
i cannot tell.
(and baby smacks palm to rented floor.)

black marks on a slightly warmer than white ground:
sperm, protozoa, the beginnings of mottled life, labeled with letters in order of the
alphabet, all the way to K – just missing L
(mine – unnamed, unsigned, unsung).
Worms, nail heads, dart pins, sensing stitches, morphological anomalies, earrings
fashioned by a beginner – beginnings.
And back to the sperm I saw first...

J. is not a mom, she is a J. – a line curved, an
unexpected bend in the river,
the swerve,
the one not predicted or accounted for. and sometimes this means she goes uncoun-
ted. and sometimes this means she doesn't count.

And He is her soul sister: admires her, learns the sexiest most kindred "masculinity"
from her. will, does.



Evidence, 2017

All this I wanted badly. and when my head was prostrate on any floor or stared into the vast expanse of sky or trained its open forms on the horizon line of the sea, I would wonder: when? how? but also, inside, past worry, I could feel the being coming. *How strange it was that he was He—*

...Felt him nestling in and the word that rattled all weekend long was *Friend*.
now, no longer *my* smile, *my* light. now—always and forever—it is ours: We two.

I knew when the tall one entered the house that candlelit night —
something in the pleat of his pants,
something in
his gait,
his breath,
teeth,
eyes,
glimmer,
the laughter,
curl of his dark hair.
Yes.
This.
Yes.

the turns the fissures the swerves—like morphology. human.

the spermatozoa must be a particular shape to enter the egg,
or so they say.
And now they measure for the perfection of the shape.
...how many look like A_{1-4} ,
how many like B_3 —
 B_1 , B_2 , B_4 will not do...
neither any of C, D, E, F or G—
(although on the page one finds these swell with being)
Possibility.

K might do. But not H or I—
truncated, too small, a scowl.

...from the plush, dark blood of my own inside-belly come his dimpled hands,
his pudgy thumb, the meat of his big toes, the shocking light of his face when it
opens...hair that grows in secret, like the two bright white teeth that came last
week just like that, in the night, unknown to us...the morph, the song, the splurge,
the swerve, the are.

BELONGING TOGETHER

Dean Spade

You are at a bus stop with strangers when you learn that 49 people have been shot dead and 58 injured a gay club.

You are at a job, pretending to work on something, as news of the hurricane comes in.

I am alone, about to go to class, when I hear of the fire at a party.

I am alone, frying an egg, when I hear that 58 people are dead, 851 injured from someone shooting up a country music show.

You are in line, waiting for your food, when you read about Charlene Lyles.

You are on the train when you see the video. Diamond Reynolds and her four year old witnessing the police kill Philando Castile.

I am alone, cleaning my desk, when I hear that 1200 people have died, and 41 million have been affected by flooding in India and Bangladesh.

I am alone, brushing my teeth, when I hear that Erica Garner has died of a heart attack. She was 27.

I am alone, filling out a form, when I learn that 2016 and 2017 are the hottest years on record.

You are in a waiting room, reading more reasons to fear impending nuclear war.

The Rebel Body invites us to feel how resistance might move our bodies, to sense the landscapes that hold us while we persist.

Silvia Federicci's description of the persecution of women as witches ends with a provocation, describing a contemporary "process of transformation of the all of the elements of everyday life—peoples' relationship to death, to love, to nature—that allows for the more intense exploitation of people's vital energies." Building racial capitalism requires hunting witches, establishing male authority, reordering how land is held to eliminate commons and enforce free hold estate, eradicating forms of spiritual practice and healing based in connection to land that is not ownership, creating channels for extraction in the colonies and in Europe. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federicci describes processes of "social enclosure," showing how contracting the space for group social connection, sharing of resources, and spiritual practice, and enforcing marriage and the private home was essential to the development of capitalist social relations after the English Civil War. These shifts have continued, toward the smaller nuclear family and, increasingly, the individual. Federicci argues that neoliberal/neocolonial economic arrangements, articulated by advocates as "free trade," are a new wave of enclosure and extraction. Capitalism always requires new

markets, invents new needs, changes the conditions that shape us to channel more of our lives through profit-generating relations, finds ways to extract more. These changes are narrated as producing new freedom, a freedom defined by disconnection and lies about efficiency. A freedom that makes some people quietly disposable, others spectacular targets of murder and massacre.

Staring at a screen, I think about the recent creeping captures, the current wave of social enclosure, the new ways we mediate our last shreds of connection. I operate/ am operated by the new technologies that make desire, appeal, belonging, and contact into quantities, sites of competition, compare and despair. I heed the latest commands for the free: Be alone, urgently writing the content for corporations that collaborate with the police and the Israeli government. Make yourself look right, smart, cool, connected, delighted. Say the right thing. Shame those who don't. Weaponize your feelings and beliefs. Take a picture of your breakfast. Demobilize.

taisha paggett slows and shows us how bodies move, together, in passionate dismantling. She plucks those movements out of their fevered, jubilant, angry moment and invites consideration of what it feels like to move together like that, what our bodies might do. Can we feel a different embodied experience than the isolation, feeling-stuffing, and alienation that comes with standing alone in the unending stream of bad news? Can I feel myself, not alone, others around me, outside, tearing something down? What happens when I invoke that feeling in my brain and body? How do I get outside? What is freedom beyond the newest device, the one that takes a better photo?

If I were an artist I would make a beautiful instructional poster/video/song/dance/spell/cake offering movements to do when the bad news comes: shaken fist, beat the earth, wracked with sobs, vigorous stomp, tear your hair, run around the block, imagine allies and ancestors surrounding. Could it matter to fill our bodies with the anger/anguish rather than suppressing, accommodating, habituating, hardening to the increasing misery? Could feeling *more* mobilize compassion, accompaniment, claim, demand, and connection? I am what I practice, and I am always practicing something. What does repeating that hear-the-devastation-and-stuff-it do to me? What does saying/liking things in proscribed profit-generating online forums and feeling like I did something do to me? If contemporary structures are designed to demobilize rebellion, contain disruption, and declare freedom, what practices mobilize embodied rebellion to the point of threat?

The Rebel Body provokes intimate questions about what my body has to do with the conditions in which it moves and with the other bodies moving around it, close by and far away. It invites a desire to connect to stone, forest, field, and friend, to inquire in our bodies as much as in our social movements about how freedom might feel, and what we need to feel to get free.



Demonstrative Score, 2017

THE REBEL SELF

Martabel Wasserman

We could not be made of stars and muscle for capitalism to take root and spread across the globe like a deadly virus. There was an epistemological crisis of self and philosophy responded.

“Descartes’ doctrines had double aims, to deny that human behavior can be influenced by external factors (such as the stars, or celestial intelligences), and to free the soul from any bodily conditioning thus making it capable of exercising an unlimited sovereignty over the body,” writes Federici in her generative Marxist and magical classic *Caliban and The Witch*. The soul could not be sensual, it had to be made practical. The rebel body had to be contained. To summarize (oh so briefly): for the transition from feudalism to capitalism to occur, magic had to die.

Magic is anti-capitalist: it sees the earth as an animate collaborator. Wage labor alienates: the body from itself, the soul from the sensual, the self from the other, humans from plants, animals and the earth herself. “The revival of magical beliefs is possible today because it no longer represents a social threat.” Magic has been commodified so deeply, as any avid crystal consumer can attest. In its commodification, magic has been made unthreatening. Yet we must make it a threat. Whereas agrarian and industrial capitalism rendered the body as the machine, we now live in a time where our personality is our brand. As artists, we dance a dangerous neoliberal tango between self and commodity. Where does one end and the other begin? Similarly, the artist/healer must promote themselves as special to carve out a living in a shit economy. Gigs and jigs. The self as brand, as documented by wordsmith magician Naomi Klein, is what got us into this mess with Donald Trump. How can magic help? How can we render the body rebellious and free the personality from its cult?

Johanna Breiding constructs a narrative around an absence and the unknowable. What is unknown cannot be contained. *THE REBEL BODY* (taking its name from the Federici’s chapter “The Great Caliban, The Struggle Against The Rebel Body”) is made in collaboration with Shoghig Halajian and begins with a search for Anna Göldi, the last European witch to be executed (1782) in Switzerland. Their film is about looking and longing, but through its nonlinear assemblage we feel what we cannot know. The figurative absence of Göldi structures the exhibition. The absence is felt as a full void, a gendered feminine operation indeed. Here, we are able to commune with a deep well, with all of its mixed up connotations of violence, life, and longing that the queer body of the witch points us to. The works orbit around this, forming various constellations. Can the social body be remade of matter and stardust? *Slippage/Spillage* is both a title and a methodology.

While the exhibition as a whole orbits around Göldi, *Slippage/Spillage* orbits around the artist. It as if she is looking for herself in multiple directions, simultaneously. She looks to the past at Göldi as a queer ancestor. She looks at the sky, following her traces, her relationships and encounters. The story of the witch hunt throws darts at a shifting target: “otherness.” But what we see in Breiding’s work, and what we must insist upon, is telling the story of identity in a more nuanced way than the oppressors. Difference spills *and* slips. It is not fixed in time or space. It can be persecuted: but it cannot be destroyed. In her work, the presence of landscape reminds us (again and again), memory is transmitted through human and nonhuman contact. It is imprinted through the queer magic of touch. It is dormant in the land and it transmutes through translation and time. We open back up to the stars when we let it run unruly and free.

How, if at all, is erasure a useful narrative device in the genealogy of the witch hunt? Breiding addresses this question within and between the works *Demonstrative Score* and *Slippage/Spillage*. In *Slippage/Spillage*, she presents an erasure of Descartes’ face in a textbook reproduction of his portrait by Frans Hals. The photograph shows the pink and grey debris of the eraser around his face and in the margins of the book. In the two-channel video *Demonstrative Score*, we see a collection of found footage. On one side, we are shown monuments to violence being pulled down; on the other, taisha paggett creates a choreography based on this footage with the absence of a figure. In these works, Breiding gives us erasure anchored in the materiality. We see the eraser dust, and we see the faces of the men finally being kicked off their pedestals. The gestures become about the bodies performing them. The absence of our queer ancestors—whose stories we cannot know—structures new narratives. The erasure of dominant stories is not about forgetting, but rather a performative act that pries open a space to contemplate what it is not there.

How can we expand the self to avoid the claws of capitalism without erasing it?

In another of Breiding’s photos, the heads of two donkeys blur together to create a single entity. It is an ephemeral trace, a formal choice, and the magic of photography that gives us a glimpse at the alchemy of contact. For magic to pose a threat to capitalism today it cannot be contained in the performance of self. The show itself models this expansion through its deeply collaborative nature. The work is about history and the present, but importantly, not the future. It is an exploration of the multifaceted nature of the capitalist present, an increasingly challenging endeavor as our attentions are exponentially divided by screen-mediated chaos. Presence can be nonlinear and transtemporal, but it is also grounded. We are stars and muscle. We must work with what’s in front of us and transmute it with all our might.



Slippage/Spillage, 2015-2018