

# The Supremacy of Ambivalent Feelings and Coquetry with Things

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With the emergence of processuality, contemporisation and networking, namely the tendency towards the mobile, the immaterial and transitory in the new media, the image of the body in post-auratical contemporary art has been entirely transformed. A new “aesthetics of the vanishing” was presaged. “From now on”, everything was “played out in the mode of vanishing, not only of the image (cinematism), but also of the body, of the object.” (Paul Virilio) The media-technological processing of the body effectuated the latter’s disembodiment and denaturalisation, a powerful new artificiality in digital seeing and communication, which, at the same time, for our sense perception brings with it such immense deficits and hindrances almost verging on a loss of a sense of reality, almost to the point of psychosis. The modern disappearance of the body in thought and perception already began, in principal, with the renunciation of mimetic, pictorial representation as had already existed in several art historical variants, such as Dadaism, Cubism, abstract Expressionism, in geometric abstraction, in Informel and Tachism, and with the fragmenting and mechanical alienation of the body as in Picabia or Warhol through to the abstract manifestations of space and time in Minimal and Conceptual Art, in partly computer-aided linguistic art, a one-sided verbalisation and semiological rendering of the visual, as further pursued in the technological-electronically inspired simulative aesthetics of a Gary Hill or Bill Viola.

Marcel Duchamp can be considered precursor and initiator of a representational strategy that put paid to the twin notion of the original work and of authorship and who identified the self evaporation or vanishing of the body prior to the emergence and widespread dissemination of electronic media. Duchamp’s Readymades spring to mind, in so as these are only presented “Negatively, as the body’s denial”, as covering or prop, which, as is the case in the “Westen” series from 1956-59, “steers the attention towards that which is absent in them” and that which they cover over (Herbert Molderings). The same may be said of the plaster body casts and tactile objects “Not a shoe”, “Feuille de vigne femelle” (Female Fig Leaf), “Objet dard” (Javelin), “Coin de chasteté” (Chastity Wedge) as representatives of the “absent body” and objects, as prints in the depressions and protuberances of the moulded original. In his “negative” body sculptures from the eighties, Bruce Nauman cites the human body in diminished form, withdrawing or making itself absent from material. In sculptures such as “Seven Wax Temples of the Left Half of my Body” (1987) and “Neontemples of the Left Half of my Body” (1966) wax transparencies and neon light simulate the half eliminated real body by means of its life-sized covering. The disembodiment manifests itself by a minimalist construction. In the installation “Perfect Balance”, from 1989, a bust showing a protruding tongue as wax impression is combined with a monitor screen on which an obscene hand movement is depicted. The mobile monitor image joins the model of a natural object in an anachronistic, quasi archaic procedure. This media balance is dismissed by many artists who equip the low-achieving, antiquated human body electronically, and a completely new constitution of a dream body is hence introduced into the computer. With the aid of plastic surgery and implantations Orlan goes as far as to transfer the computer-generated montage of an art-historical ideal notion of beauty on to her own face. Stelarc prophesies, that in the future, the archaic mimetic body will be replaced by new technologies, such of modern

prosthesis technology (Paul Virilio, *Die Eroberung des Körpers. Vom Übermenschen zum überreizten Menschen*, Munich/Vienna, 1994). With the distancing of post-human artists from the aesthetics of outmoded mimetic representation, the newly conceived, technologically re-constructible, and anticipated body as potential form now reveals itself as a laboratory of electronic manipulation. In the computer-generated or aided, cloned art of the eighties and nineties, the body's technological development shows itself as being threatened in an unforeseen way by the abstraction from the corporeal, namely, through the phenomenon of the vanishing body.

Zenita Komad's most recent production in Los Angeles bears testimony to a confrontation with the trend towards the "post-human" aesthetics of the vanishing body and of the transcendence of the body. Quite unexpectedly, she discloses to us a series of tailored items of clothing, which, much like Duchamp, can be interpreted essentially as evocative coverings and negative forms of the diminished, absent body. Like trophies, the colourfully painted, larger-than-life shirts, trousers, jackets, dresses, aprons and kimonos are pulled taught across wedged stretchers, decorated with signs or labels and, today, are mostly hung on inscribed plates. Thus designed, these totalities, which point to the disclosure of new meanings for an aesthetics one is rather unlikely to encounter in the networks of global communication and in the lifestyle of urban culture, not only possess a quality conveying something irritating, but also remove themselves from those systems of value and order commonly subject to public art in market society. In the case of the outsider Zenita Komad, considered from the perspective of the increasing dominance of technological media, the question is now raised as to whether or not those forms of bricolage now considered antiquated, the handcrafted constructions and their allied forms of painting, sculpture, collage, photograph and text are able to release the technologised creativity for the purposes of subjectivity.

Zenita Komad does not thematise her works as readymades, but instead presents them as bricolages influenced both by a personal (self-referential), as well as by a world-oriented blueprint for life. She resists the ubiquitous devaluation of the individual signature and craftsmanship of the artist by the electronic Zeitgeist. Through the attention she pays to the textile coverings and negative forms of the banished, media-sociologically downgraded body and through her very unusual artistic regeneration, she remains faithful to the technocratically disenchanted human being. Charged with the magical, the bricolage represents the culturally disciplined, or neurotically inhibited energies and skills of subjectivity. With Komad, the aesthetics of clothing in imitation of the body, especially in its expressive representative function of the "diminished", instrumentally outmoded body, favours and reanimates the "mimetic power" of the human being as inherited from archaic periods, the "formally violent compulsion to be similar and to comport oneself" (Walter Benjamin). So crafted, the clothes emerge as both the stage and projection surface of an anthropomorphic view of life, a way of thinking analogous to the inner and outer reality of thought, which, in Komad's work "navel of the world" (2007) is initially demonstrated as a performative self-representation, then as installation: the rope symbolises the umbilical cord connecting the nature of man to the nature of the world whole. The individual human being as a world in small (microcosmos), in certain ways reflects the elements and energies of the macro-cosmos. In some senses, that which is at work in the constitution of reality appears to man as similar, which is why each is able to communicate with the other. Should the world-orientation of art not be a phrase and awaken a human interest, then the artist must contribute to a knowledge of the similar. If, alongside the natural scientist, he wishes to explore the external world, he must first realise "that he is himself an integral part of that world we are supposed to explore... and, similarly, that without accounting for our perceptive mental apparatus, the problem of world constitution is an empty abstraction without practical interest." (Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*)

The interdependence of man and world, which invokes the beautiful symbol of its “deep organic bonding”, places artistic productivity in the hot and cold bath of introjection and projection. One part of the *external world* is transferred to the ego and becomes the object of conscious and unconscious fantasies. A part of the *interior world* is transferred outwards from within the ego. The artist’s thoughts, feelings, desires and anxieties, his fantasies reach his production of picture and work production, which then appear as independently existing objects superseding the representing subject. Which analogies and correspondences between the ego and the environment, between the introjected and projected qualities of experience are to be found in Komad’s work? What characteristic fantasised scenarios does it possess? Through the two main components of the image carriers, it would appear at first glance that the conceptual and the real, the intelligible and the sensible parts diverge in order to oppose their mutual analogisation. And yet, while Komad, with her pictures of letters, approaches the abstraction of Concept Art, which excludes the corporeal and material, most of the image carriers are materialisations of the pictorial and sculptural metier. They strive away from the written surfaces by the real growth of the canvass and reliefs in three-dimensional space, later consummated in the “Card Houses” (2006). If one compares these to Richard Serra’s “House of Cards” (1968 to 1981), everything minimalistic appears to be cancelled out. In the case of Serra, steel sheets in elementary geometrical forms are layered one on top of the other and balanced in such a way that in, in the style of architecture, they form a “sculpture as space” into which the viewer can enter. On the outside Komad’s card houses are partly painted, partly inscribed and sculpted canvass walls, stacked up into a stable pyramid made of three gabled roofs, the open interior space of which is accessible via the ground floor and which can at the same time be brought into play performatively (as the artist’s self-presentations show). Komad goes way beyond Serra’s sculptural new order operationalisation and architectonic space, in the case of Serra, to a certain degree “decorated” by the wall-sheets, which have remained – like a card game – with different picture faces. The one-sided illustrated gables of her “card houses” appeal to the subjectivity of the observer and the dwellers, and confront them with their sensibilities, an emotional no less than cognitive dimension of their being. It is in this way that the objective spatial construction of the house is extended to a place for the specific encounter and examination of the ego with the image of that which it resembles. Initially, it is not the new textiles, sculptural, real-three-dimensional Bricolages, but rather the totality of the previous pictorial language displays which challenge the user to an imaginary, mirror-image identification and/or distancing (“I is another”, Rimbaud), to visualised representational contents and scenarios.

When taking a closer look at the ensemble of the “card houses”, the design of many opposite compartments and pairs of opposites, – at odds with the constraints with our biased, affirmative culture – asks us to consider the discrepancy between the ordinary viewer’s existing knowledge of art and that which he is yet to discover, between what he sees and does not see. Thus, many text and word constructions are articulated either ambiguously or as a contradiction. They are shot through with irreconcilable meanings. In “Heaven’s gift”, the divine offering is negatively characterised with a wooden wedge that comes crashing down from some or the other unspecified place. That a more deeply positioned “floor” represents an example for the “conspirative” relation of correspondence of most word-image-montages: the aphorism inscribed in red, “manus manum lavat” is visualised by an elevated anchor and black arrow directed upwards towards a dazzling yellow field. The mutual endorsement of text and form, in the viewer, rather evokes a defensive response than one of applause. It is in the “perhaps”, the indefinite content and openness of her constructs, that one can clearly see komad’s uniqueness.

The transitory, provisional, mobile of the “card houses” and picture gallery, today referred to as installations, along with the exchange and regrouping of its “elements”, is standard practice.

The constructs which draw on sentences, and aperçus, inscriptions and artificial Latin coinages, artists names (Beckett, Louise Bourgeois, Maria Callas, Galileo Galilei) and art historical quotations (such as Ingres' female portraits and Rubens' "Leda and the Swan" after Michelangelo) are at their most convincing when uniting antithetic and irreconcilable units of meaning. The questions pertaining to the "right" way of reading leaves much scope for ongoing debate and speculation. The tension inherent in a no less strongly contrasting and graphically compressed word-image conglomerate, such as "ego – kill your self" (2005) is indebted to a familiar ethical conflict of interests. In contrast to the ambiguously sketched, grotesque grimace with cockscomb and crown, whose eyes, glasses, nose, mouth, may be likewise read as verbal "ego", in short, a caricature of egoism, its categorical opposite number, the altruistic imperative now expresses itself: kill your egotism, make the welfare of another the principle of your action and legislation in general, as Kant said.

Zenita Komad devoted an additional, three-dimensional word-image to the ambiguity inherent in the word "to love". A lettered canvass on which is inscribed the exclamatory sentence "I love YOU" (2006) is penetrated by an oversized finger object, the red finger nail repeating itself in the word "love" written in red, whereby the two reds do not signify one and the same thing. Doubtless, the act of piercing by this monstrous finger member, most typically used to signify the genitals, accounts for the narcissistic "object-less" condition, that is to say "in the other, we always love ourselves. We simply cannot do otherwise." (Wilhelm Stekel). As a child, we enter the world as "absolute egoists" and, thus criminally endowed, we must spend our lives learning how to love. Imagining that we have not overcome self-love in people, we rather ensnare ourselves in conflicting assessments. Even Zenita Komad, who so often writes that relativising word "love" on her negations and phobias, thinks similarly.

Freud and Stekel thoroughly analysed the principle dichotomy, the "bipolarity of all psychic phenomena". For each feeling and thought the opposite can also be felt and thought. If "well-founded love and no less well-justified hate are both directed to the same person" there then emerges a "conflict of ambivalence" (Freud, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety). Even commonsense perceives "two souls dwelling within its breast", jostling for supremacy. Opposing feelings and ideas unite together as if in a dream, which also takes the liberty of, "representing an arbitrary element through its conflicting desires". (Freud, Interpretation of Dreams). It is here that Komad (without intentional recourse to Freud) refers to a concrete example. In "I DREAMT I WAS DEAR GOD" (2004-2008), by virtue of the typographical accent on the letter O, the word "GOD" is attributed a double meaning. The O, in so far as it is written in bold, 0 (= nil) is defamiliarized, thus splitting the sentence into two contrasting ways of reading. Graphically even more pregnant, in the lettered picture "GOD IS not NOTHING" (2005, textile/textually extended 2007) position and negation are brought into relation with one another. Through their picture puzzle reproduction in two different typefaces and colours, white and red on a blue grounding, statement and counter-statement result in an ambivalent and contradictory judgement. Whether the saying "God is Nothing or the contradiction "God is not Nothing" is true is purposely left open to doubt, since both are logically plausible. The concepts god and religion are "problematic". With these, only something possible can be thought. Far too little known is Freud's pertinent argument: religious teachings are complete illusions. "One is unable to adjudge as to the reality value of most of them. Not subject to proof they remain irrefutable." (The Future of an Illusion, Freud, Coll. Works, (Germ. ed.) vol. XIV, p. 354). Komad uses "problematic judgements" and statements whereby opposing claims, the contradictory opposite, is also conceivable. Any anticipated of an 'either' 'or' will be disappointed. Conceptual opposites from the religious culture of dissent, pecked up like so many crumbs, are taken up into the conceptual word-image-constructions for their question-ability, namely, as unsolved problems. The viewer should not be overwhelmed and indoctrinated by answers to questions from which reason is no longer present. A veritably "problematic nature", such as

Zenita Komad's, is incapable of being partisan in the struggle between love and knowledge, faith and intellect. An offensive negation of an opinion commonly held as true runs: "KNOWLEDGE IS A HIGHLY COMPLICATED THING, love too" (2002-2004). "I have no desire to convert to any particular faith. I wish to convey a vision. Here we observe the reappearance of that auspicious word which had preoccupied the minds of those cultural sceptics, the "raw materialists" of the *ars povera*. Here, Komad's key work "The Navel of the World" comes to mind. Could it be that what stands behind the analogisation of microcosm and macrocosm, the knowledge of the ego and the knowledge of the world, is the mystical utopia that, in reality taken as a totality, all opposites were once merged and formed one whole? At least representation and language close ranks anomalously. As disclosed in "grow!" (2006), belonging to their synergetic desire for contact is that, entirely intent on the questions and the unlocking of Komad's conceptual pictures, they employ their words and word associations as powerful magical means of expression. With the sentence written and crossed-over in red letters "RELIGION IS DANGEROUS" (2006), Komad managed to signal a warning in evocative imperative form, about the reason-inhibiting doctrinal principles of religion, which one otherwise rather tends to encounter in the "suggestive" pictography of psychoanalytic bricolages.

Now, one knows from Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis, Lawrence Weiner et al who have made language their material, that through the renunciation of rhetoric and reflection, the abbreviation and simplification of sentence formation, the reduction to single words, discursive reflection can switch to intuitive, direct viewing. Influenced by Conceptual Art, Komad's letter pictures also profit from this when she prepares letters and characters, syllables and sentences by means of typographical interventions, and an almost Lettrist layout, for her object presences. Word and image are magically reconciled. Not stopping here, in a number of new textile bricolages the words and sentences of the picture characters, of clothes and crinkly drapes, are shrouded a little as if by covers and curtains and as if to elude the viewer's gaze. ("Ode to Art – TE QUIERO", "(DICTUM) Sapienti SAT (est)", "SIC", "ME", "GODD IS not NOTHING", "HOW CAN WE DANCE WHEN the world IS BURNING/BORING", "are eyes only for crying?").

The transition from word-linguistic representation to the presentation of the visual, object-bound material in space opens new, trans-border expressive potential. Due to their semi illegible textual elements, the mystification of the textile bricolages is only a partial aspect of the total work, which splits its constructs into the visible and the concealed, in seduction and defence, attraction and repulsion, and is arranged in the juxtaposition of candid and occlusive affection, as Komad's self-portrait "present", from 2004, lashed to possession shows. Here, the strong need to communicate and to protect, the offensive opening and defensive inaccessibility of her own feeling in this ambiguous "present", are expressions of an "affective ambivalence" (Eugen Bleuler), found to a greater or lesser extent in every psyche and which, in cultural comparison, appears as a universal phenomenon. Komad releases the threatening conflict of ambivalence at the outer limits of depersonalisation, as a chess game of contrasting powers and forces, which compensates for the deficient harmony in opposing feelings. Occasionally, Komad has declared her artistic self-understanding as a role-playing game of thoughts and feelings, behind which stands her own ego (a parallel to Cindy Sherman's fictive self-staging). Hence, while her games with ambivalence cannot pass as self-portraits they do include the performative self-portrait as an accompanying medium of role-playing games and continues the tradition of Performance-Art. Examples of this would be "the Navel of the World" and "californication" (2007), the title of an album by the rock-band "Red Hot Chili Peppers", which, through the compression of "fornication", "carnation" (flesh colour), "incarnation" (becoming flesh) and "California", grant access to the unconscious thought of the joke, of the promise, of the forgetting of words.

In a Freudian sense, most word-image-object montages would be explained as bridges "over

which lead the paths to the unconscious". Abstract and discursive viewing remain the expressive forms for overcoming anxiety and psychic defensive mechanisms (introjection, projection), which dominate in Komad's work – though unnoticed, since they would otherwise be prematurely sexualised as obscenities. Who would have touched on the idea of recognising in that anthropomorphic little house entitled "self-portrait" (2008), whose door is deformed into the shape of a gigantic mouth with outstretched tongue, a magically staged protective and defensive charm? Mouth agape and fully extended tongue, which one might easily misconstrue as a sexual provocation, appears in all cultures as a mask of shock and defence. (Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt/Christa Sütterlin, *Im Banne der Angst, Zur Natur- und Kunstgeschichte menschlicher Abwehrsymbolik*, Munich, 1992). Impressive and aggressive postures belong to the innate faculties of the human expressive repertoire and were thus similarly attained by Komad not, first or at all, by the study of the historical figures of the custodian and the protector. Psychologically, they may well be read as a "signal of anxiety", used by the ego in situations of danger. As a powerful expressive and defensive technique in the conflict between ego and instinct, this construct also is manifest in "god's speed your tongue" (2005). "Gruß Gott (god's speed)", that familiar pious greeting is linked to the terrifyingly monumental sculpture of a bloody tongue. In this construct the antipodal desires of magical greeting and magical curse come into their own and flank one another without mutual interference. The split and ambivalence of this magical character, which seeks to affect both good and evil is also to be conceived as a power struggle, should the black magic be perceived as the negation of the magical greeting. Thus, a dynamic is set in motion which refers those antipodal approaches, the monomaniac characters of religious and erotic forces, to one another.

In this scenario of conflict between equally strong powers and forces a strategy of self-assertion prevails in Komad, which is compelled to protect itself against inner and outer danger in the interests of body and of life. The appropriate apotropaic forms of expression are the deterrence, threat and ridicule of an assailant and, generally, a damaging demand placed by instinct on the ego. One of the simplest means of defence is the crossing out of the mouth performed on the body of a Parisian Actionist from the Otto Muehl circle ("clear your mind", 2004). A smaller defence magic is the red NoSex crosses over the trouser fly of a textile bricolage from 2007 ("n.t."). Knife, javelin ("urgent", 2005, "promethean", 2005-2007), disarming and even more insular, staring eyes ("hit the bull's eye", 2005) or pairs of eyes with sculpturally protruding pupils ("painting against bad looks", 2007, "painting against bad thoughts", 2006) and the homogeneously masked faced isolated from blackened surroundings ("use your brain (Maria Callas)", 2006), which tends rather to prompt associations of a severed trophy head than of a portrait, make their repeated appearance in the sinister repertoire of the ban and of protective magic. No less forbidding and sinister, another head raises itself in phallic rigidity out of the greened soil. Covered by a fly agaric, namely, poisonous hat, the gaze now inclined away and up towards the sky, the elongated, exposed neck intersected by a white latticed window, this Madonna, as if under protective custody apparently seeks to repel an unidentified menace. A negative aura of anxiety casts a dark shadow over her medallion ("e piu si muove" (as per Galileo Galilei), 2003).

In a remarkable paraphrase of the painted mythology "Leda and the Swan" by Rubens, as inspired by Michelangelo, and produced in Antwerp around 1600, Komad imagined a Leda, part horrent, part devoted. The inclined head of Leda in the Swan's beak is modified by a strange, shocking mask, whose steer-like look, pointed aggressive horn on the forehead, and the fiercely fluttering shock of hair, are drawn in opposition to the inviting, passive gestures of hand and figure – to loosely cite Rubens. The Michelangelo-Rubinesque model shows a happy, momentous divine love affair between Leda and Jupiter masked as the swan, whereas Zenita Komad depicts the encounter as the interaction of assault and defence, the latter, however, moderately interpreted as an ambivalent gesture of prohibition and approval ("Leda and the

Swan", 2004).

The threatening, evil-repelling masked face with piercing eyes and phallic horns has come down to us from classical mythology in various guises, such as Baubo, Ishtar, Sheela and Gorgo Medusa. One finds some features of this early symbolism of shock and protection in Komad, in the figures and articles of common daily use in modern life. Among these remarkable, contemporary amulets is the handbag. Not unlike the Card Houses and the symbolic self-portrait of the artist in the form of the facade of a house, the windows (the eyes) and door (the mouth with the tongue) which stand for the "gateways of love" (Freud), the huge, semi life-size bag made of fleece material and ornamental diamonds ("girl in bag", 2007) which initially represent a protective, intra-uterine space, is not an erogenous zone as is the case for the man, albeit that the fantasised return to the womb dominates equally in both sexes. As gleaned from the interpretation of dreams in psychoanalysis, the trapezium-shape of the diamond represents an archaic symbol of the vulva. In a smaller adaptation, the performative initial version of the sculpture with woman holding the bag before her is abandoned in favour of the bricolage of the bag with a robe showing the prominent label of Coco Chanel's, the initials of her name in brackets. These are not readymades or remakes, but handmade, unique, auratic objects, which, at least with respects to the bag, amount to an increased effect in the protective and defensive magic of the woman and the symbolism of the womb. At the same time, by virtue of their hypertrophied, idolized presentation the bag, robe du soir and other Chanel articles cited, such as the lipstick and perfume flacon No. 5, are an incidental aid to black magic when contrasted with the common aesthetic embellishment of these and other promoted products. Claes Oldenburg aimed at a similarly demoralising influence on the affirmative consumerism of his time by means of his monumentalised, soft, everyday objects.

Only recently has the artist transferred the motif of the defence magic to a textile object of over three-metres in height, which, in an important sense is reminiscent of the "Sheelas", those repulsive female figures native of medieval Ireland – with spread-eagled legs displaying their crudely stylised vulva. They are seen as the pendants to the figure of male "genital presentation", their frontal genital-fixed demonstration is accounted for in ethnology by the term "bearing of the genitals". (Eibl-Eibesfeldt/Sütterlin, 1992). The "frontal bearing of the genitals" would be similarly misunderstood as a Christian reference to human sinfulness, as well as a sexually stimulating exhibition. Its chief function has far more to do with the ridiculing and deterrence of malevolent demons. The protection against demons by the "bearing of the genitals" survives as a mode of expression, today in secularised form as a defence mechanism of the threatened psyche.

The phobias in life and in art, the anxiety to be touched and the sense of revulsion towards particular objects and occurrences, articulate the experience of threat as well as the need for protection. The artist and the anxious neurotic are both engaged in the overcoming of images of anxiety. Through his creativity, the artist discovers himself at an advantage in the invention of forms, symbols and images. His anxiety is less resistant and irrational and tends to be warded off by aesthetic sublimation.

It is against this background that Zenita Komad's apotropaics, to be discussed further in the conclusion, assert their artistic calibre. In the textile material picture of 2008, "monster" already mentioned and meanwhile presented in two versions, the Irish Sheelas' repulsive "bearing of genitals" is shifted away from the religious, secularized and sounded for its capacity to withstand the pornographically sated, hardened eye. Komad combines her three-dimensional pictorial work with altogether heterogeneous elements. Right at the bottom is the frontal bearing of the genitals in a fragmented form of the womb area of a spread-eagled, life-size puppet with gaping vulva; above this there hovers a strange, extended lidless eye, which, through its

sculpturally obtruding over-dimensional size and visual omnipresence assumes the form of an organ of ubiquitous control; above this a long phallic pole imposes itself, the rungs of which also suggest and symbolise omnipresence. Taken together, the various elements produce a protective totem bristling with weapons. And yet, the deterrent, aggressive turn against an external assailant appears to have shifted towards a self-destructive feeling of anxiety and inhibition, which, to us seems doubly strange and, consequently, artistically more modern.

Ethnological research has established in the seldom heeded gesture of “breast-baring” an equivalent to the deterrent magic of “genital bearing”. Archaeology has handed down to us female figures fashioned in wood, stone or ceramic, “which embrace their breasts, or in exposing them, supportively clasp them with their hands” (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Weltsprache Kunst. Zur Natur- und Kunstgeschichte bildlicher Kommunikation*, Vienna 2007). Whereas the offering, holding and squirting of breast milk is commonly interpreted as symbolic of female fertility, in prehistoric times, and later in the Greece and Rome of classical antiquity, one also discovered breast baring figures, idols, votive gifts and amulets with deterrent and protective sign language. In this case, there is neither a thematic connection to breastfeeding, nor with presenting of the breasts is there an erotic, exhibitionist intention.

This finding encourages one to position the alleged breast-fetishism, the female-motherly and erotic appearances in equivalent presentations by Zenita Komad, within an apotropaic context. Does not the “breast-baring” in “californication”, “tainted love”, in oversized bikini with rubber bosom (“n. t.”, alle 2007) speak rather more for a soothing deterrence magic when contrasted with undesirable, salacious communication? The pink breast-ensemble in “californication”, though reminiscent of the fertility of Diana of Ephesus, is painted over in black with derisive grimace. While the performer nestles comfortably in the soft cushion of her sculpture, her arms are not in any way desirous of being touched. It is here that the typical ambivalence of affection and aversion, typical of Komad, comes into play. And hence, the installation as a whole also disposes over a duality: the seductive *and* deterrent dactylological and sign language, still effective in the taboo word “fornication” as borrowed from the album “californication” in the above mentioned title of the work. The apotropaic magic only partially comes into its own.

Furthermore, the relief work “tainted love” (2007) can only be claimed for apotropaic symbolism to a limited degree. “The bearing of the breast” is reproduced in a codified, complex sign and material language. In the crooked relief background, two red heart shapes are depicted below which are painted a sort of string or necklace of small, milk-white punnets, prompting the observer to make the association of lactating women. The positive, life-confirming force of this sign, struggles, in a manner of speaking, against the uncanny, depressive “black magic” of the relief background. Joy and sorrow, expansive and oppressive feelings, love and the death-wish co-exist in this ambivalent construction, from which an apotropaic magic emanates only conditionally. By contrast, the material picture of the red bikini replete with rubber bosom, and immediately recognisable as an item of jest, suggests a derisive prototype of grotesque humour, the custodian and defence function is conceived, and partly taken up by Pop Art, partly by the “apotropaic signalism of tourist art” in playful, belittling, vestigial form (Eibl-Eibesfeldt/Sütterlin).

Generally speaking, what counts in psychology is that the psychic defensive processes are poised against anything likely to induce anxiety. What interests us are solely those artistic forms of expression, which the ego construes as defences against outward and inner threats and incidents, the question of phobias and their sublimated, aesthetic composition. Among the plurality of things and events, which can become the object of phobia and which, more especially, Zenita Komad has subjected to artistic treatment, belong the revulsion to be touched by something filthy or contagious. This *Délire du toucher*, this state of “mysophobia”, is indebted to one of one of the most scurrile of her ideas: the door handle packed in shiny



cellophane “melancholic door buckle” (2008).

In a larger work cycle of so-called “root sculptures” Komad brought to expression her anxiety-ridden fascination with the spectacle of nauseating things of root-like, slithery, moist and slippery, and in one way or another, uncanny consistency. The non-object, sculptural forms grouped under the title “roots” (2006) grow from of the surrounding membrane of taught, stretched canvass and clutch out over the borders of the square picture-format into emptiness. This malformed organic twiner, or growth of unknown origin, is reproduced in green, blue, red, white and/or black, which is what facilitates the sense of disgust with various associations, whether more in the direction of an anxiety of an animal or of plants. Whatever occurs in the mind of an anxious person, whether it be a polyp clutching out towards him, a mangrove jungle, a poisonous root, any conceivable twiner or growth (concealed beneath the latter is a possible anxiety of cancer, carcinophobia), is impressive by virtue of its revulsion and anxiety-inducing aspect. This is why a backward-looking title such as “back to the roots” (2006) prompts confusion. The theme is not the return to a romantic experience of nature but a return of the ego to itself, which, with respect to the anxiety about the auto-suggestively induced abominable animal or growth, which it itself imagines, also epitomises the anxiety of the self, which it then artistically masters. The ego’s defensive reaction articulates itself in the paradigm of Komad’s “root sculptures”, by being both repelled and aesthetically fascinated with the intrusiveness of the organic and the curious, the generally distanced and cold-bloodedness of “this restless, nervous, coiling, convulsive vitality, as if this was all an abstract, somehow demonstrative dance of life, without corresponding warmth of life, without the inner ‘content of life’”. (Aurel Kolnai, *Der Ekel*, 1929, in “*Ekel Hochmut Haß*”, Frankfurt M., 2007). Here, the revulsion of life and anxiety of life are “quasi only the invitation, which the deterrence then actualises”. This would not occur, as Kolnai observes in his phenomenology of hostile feelings, were the phobic subject not attracted by that which induces nausea. Hence, that which nauseates releases an ambivalent reaction. “It is at once invitation and deterrence, enticement and threat”, “a coquetry residing in the abhorrent”.

Coquetry, assisted by the ambivalence of feelings is also the universal key to an artistic strategy, which, in the simultaneity of seduction and defence, attraction and repulsion, manages to retain the necessary problematisation and question-able dignity of her work and, nolens volens, both allures Zenita Komad’s admirers and holds them in check.