

FOOLS, PROPHETS AND WEAPONS.

MFA-essay by Linnéa Carlsson 2008.

- Are you planning on building a big cannon?
- Well yes, pretty big.
- That works?
- Yes of course!
- You are not allowed to you know. You can't build big cannons that work for private use.
- Yes, but perhaps I can get around that since it is art.
- That would not be interesting for us because then we would be in a grey zone, and grey zones are exactly what we don't want to be in.
- All right...
- A small cannon might be possible though.
- I see. But if I can't have a big cannon I am more interested in a catapult.
- And catapults are too far away from our field of interest. We can't do that.

(Telephone conversation with Christer Henebäck, Information Director at Bofors Bae Systems November 2007 concerning possible sponsorship for my Mfa project.)

I decided to build a catapult for my MFA graduation show. In this text I will describe some projects and thoughts that led to this piece, and some that it evoked. Among other things I have discovered that my work is partly about making art! This disappointed me at first. But it turns out that the making and exposition of art can be used as a metaphor for the individual and the possibility or impossibility of having free expression, to be an individual at all inside a power structure. The text itself will present three of my works and the unresolved questions they involve, explored through particular people's writings that have influenced my process or whose ideas I find interesting in relation to the content of my work. It will be in the manner of a shrubbery rather than a systematic investigation.

The white cube and what cannot be said there

In 2007 I made an animation and the installation *Welcome Home, Prophet!* It deals with the problem of the gallery space and who is allowed to say what in there, with the relation between peripheral positions and the ideal room; the gallery in this case. There are two characters in this piece; the Prophet and the one who is waiting for the Prophet.

The installation consists of a *Welcome Home Party for a prophet*, with banners, a red carpet, music, garlands in the ceiling, twinkling electric lights along the floor. The red carpet leads to a stage with silver curtains, and on the back wall of the stage hangs the bigger of the two banners: *Welcome Home Prophet!* The rest of the room consists of two parts: three sculptures (*Furniture for the Prophet*), and a film screening of an animation.

Parasol for the Prophet is a big parasol in black painted wood and black fabric stuck into a foot of black colored plaster. The table, the chair and the camera and tripod are also made out of wood and painted with black varnish.

The animation (*The Prophet in his Lonely Pondering Seeks Reality in the Desert and Thinks about Playing Boules with Rasputin, Albrecht Dürer and Loretta Lynn*) shows the prophet in the desert with a book, reading and thinking. There is the sound of the wind and crows flying above him, and also the sound of someone breathing near to a microphone. We get to peep into his mind where a game of boules is taking place, with Rasputin, Albrecht Dürer and Loretta Lynn (the American country singer) as participants. After the ball is thrown the film ends with the reactions of the three characters.

I understood after a while that the Prophet is psychotic. How did I know that? I think it is the dichotomy of the “show-room” (the gallery) and the “desert” that resembles the neurotic versus the psychotic. The neurotic covers up and the psychotic reveals what the neurotic does not want to know. Also the neurotic is directed towards someone or something while the psychotic is not.

I am interested in the position of the prophet generally, not in any particular prophet. The religious content of the acts and statements of prophets are not in focus here either. It is their symbolic actions and their position in society that I find interesting. It is a peripheral position, also sometimes held by artists and persons whose mental health is questioned by society. I recall an essay I read a few years ago about the Sami way of dealing with persons who in most Western societies would have been called psychotic. When someone fell out and stopped functioning in society and seemed to take part in another world it meant that she or he had been “called” to become a shaman. It also meant that something needed to be changed in the society. The calling period is a painful state of mind where time and space dissolve and reality is altered. The called one would have hallucinations and sometimes be aggressive. To let the called one come through the calling independently, she/he would be placed in the wilderness and would be checked on by the rest of the group occasionally while they tried to understand what needed to change in their way of living. The called one would not come out of her/his calling until the society was ready for him/her as their new shaman. To change in the right way they had to listen and try to interpret the called one.

If we compare the called person in Sámi society with the psychotic in ours, we can note that one difference is that in Sámi society it is more common that the psychotic symptoms stop and that there is an actual recovery. This might be because her/his surroundings assume a listening position. Seen from that perspective one might say that the psychotics of Western societies never emerge from their isolation in the calling period because they are not listened to.

This thought is not far away from those of R.D Laing who treated schizophrenic patients in the '60s and '70s, through listening to them, taking away their medication, and above all not intervening in their process. Some patients regressed so much that they were like newborn babies that couldn't eat or talk. Even though one of them seemed to be dying Laing refused to intervene medically and after some time this patient improved and gradually came back to a relatively independent life.

When I say that the artist may have a peripheral position I am aware that is not exactly a general fact, and something that most artists are trying to get away from. Still, the place and status of the artist in society is very uncertain. Sociologically, the role of the artist in society is special. It is unclear what need the artist fulfils and with what capital or service they fulfil it. The demands on art/artists range from economical to philosophical/academic but still the artist defines herself in collaboration or struggle with curators, gallery owners and critics. The artist may or may not be paid for her job. Her work may or may not be seen as a job at all. Is it knowledge that the artist has and gives through her work? Is it some kind of insight, a different perspective? Is it the ability to make visible the human experience? Is it something that anyone can do if they wanted? This insecurity is connected to the searching quality of art. We are looking for something, but we can't say exactly what. If we could we would search for something else. There are few jobs in our culture like that.

Secondly the (perceived) perspective of the artist is significant. Just like the philosopher she imagines she can put her eyes in another place to see something else, sometimes inside someone else's head but often in a peripheral position far to the side or above. All in all, why do we want to work with art? The fact that we choose this, in spite of the negative aspects socially and economically, in itself reflects a wish to "see from without", that cannot (and shouldn't) be hidden in any post-structuralist awareness however outspoken. Some romantic notions of the artist and art and its position in society are inevitably tied to that choice.

The prophet's role as mediator of messages is interesting. "A prophet can be said to be someone who is chosen to mediate a message which is given to him or her, and who also talks with an authority that belongs to the one who is sending." Gaining authority and escaping personal responsibility through pointing at an external, peripheral or transcendental source is common, not only in religious domains but also in politics and art. (Politicians blame the European Union or some global development that is impossible to criticize. Many artists have claimed more or less transcendental sources of divine or subconscious nature to give the work more authority.) Historically the symbolic actions of prophets have been surprisingly similar to performances of our times. I have read about prophets who perform actions that today we would call performance art, or lunacy. For example tearing a cloak in 12 pieces and then interpreting the result symbolically. Or lying down on one's side, pretending to be the Babylonian army attacking Jerusalem. How did people at that time know how to interpret such a performance? Or did they?

A prophet can be proclaimed to be false and then we don't have to interpret, then the language is not a language anymore. (It is the same for artists.) But all this is really about norms and how the power-play between the norm and the non-normative works.

The Fool in Christ

When thinking about those things in relation to my miserable prophet I started reading about the *Fool in Christ* which was a common phenomenon in Russia between 1400 and 1650. Being a Fool in Christ was an alternative to entering a monastery and becoming a monk. In fact, a lot of the fools had previously been monks and were often well educated but turned to becoming Fools in Christ to further extend their sacrifice and get closer to God. It was also a reaction against a monastic society that had become too worldly and a society that was unequal and hypocritical. As fools they would never open a book or even talk intelligibly, they would utter sounds and sometimes use echo speech (repeating everything said to them). They caused scenes and got people's attention through their disgusting and sinful behavior, their ugliness, their stench, their manner of eating and drinking alcohol. Only in solitude would the Fool in Christ read the Bible and pray.

The Fool in Christ could be a woman or a man, and up to a certain time was held sacred by the people and accepted by the powerful. When the Tsar and the Patriarch started seeing their open criticism as a threat, the "fools" were prohibited and then secretly arrested. At the beginning of the 20th century they were still in existence but were then deported by the Soviet regime.

A few examples:

Holy Simeon (600 C.E. in Byzantium) dragged a dead dog after himself on a rope for several days. This should be interpreted as a gesture of utmost humility; he wanted to show that he was no better than an animal.

Vasilij the Blessed, one of Russia's most loved fools, who gave his name to the cathedral in Red Square, poured away a cup of wine that Ivan the Terrible had given him. It was a gesture that pointed to "the toast of fury" in the book of Revelation, and stood for God's punishment on the unrighteous Tsar.

Their function was to protest and shake the audience, stir emotions and provide a new perspective on existential questions. They were legally immune. While it is said that the righteous could understand the actions of the fool, and the sinful would scorn him/her, there was still need for a professional interpreter: the hagiographer.

Artists also tend to use a way of communicating that to many people seems cryptic. We have interpreters, art theorists and curators, and sometimes we can avoid the law, or at least ethical judgment. We try to point to the unrighteousness and flaws of society; we just call it something else: critique.

There must be a need for this character in the periphery who dares to go where most people don't and who tries to see society from the outside. Probably because we are curious to know what we look like from there and need to be mirrored and hope to be confirmed. That could explain why the person in that position often becomes an authority, albeit obscure, and also why the mad have such a strange position in art history. The interest and market value of art works are much greater if the artist was mentally ill or at least unstable. This I would call a parasitic tendency on behalf of people that we judge and at the same time seem to need. There is an ambition in art to allow also for our own dark side, but not completely, and therefore we have made a social and physical room where those stories are impossible to tell. Or hear. The lonely lunatic can be taken up by the art world and transformed into a genius in no time, as long as he/she is exotic but not dangerous. Strange in exactly the right way to inspire and fascinate.

Apart from that, the details of the positions described above fascinate me in themselves and in relation to artists and the art scene; this comparison can also be useful as a way of criticizing our own position. How come we choose a language that, like the unintelligible babble of the Fools in Christ, needs an interpreter? And why are we taking this position at all, what is the value of standing here?

The so-called desert that the prophet is in reflects his mental state of "psychosis", but also points to the very big claim that he makes. Jesus walked out into the desert and he came back as *the* Jesus. Other people have been known to go out there, and it has become a movement out of normal human community. When the desert-er returns he or she is expected to have knowledge that cannot be found within the boundaries of the norm, and is separated from others by a special purpose.

You might say that the prophet adopts the role because he thinks he is special, which is usually negative. Like the Napoleon or Jesus syndromes associated with schizophrenia. But I don't look at my Prophet that way. I see him as suffering from too large a sense of responsibility. Because while we accuse the schizophrenic of taking on the importance of Jesus, we might ask the rest why they don't. The "why should I" appears more sane, but I have a sympathy for the "why not me?".

In my installation the one who is waiting, on the other hand, is already in a furnished room. That is, she is "sane", or neurotic. She wants to pull him in under cover, as if he was someone near to her or another part of herself. But apparently she doesn't know him at all, because she has made a room

where he could not explain what he has found in the desert. The prophet is to choose between psychosis and home decoration. And he has to say what he has found in the periphery, in a room for the spectacular. The white cube devours everything that is said in there and rearranges it in its own symbolic order of artistic goods. That is why the prophet is absent, and will not arrive at the party.

The idea of something real in art

I will use some concepts originally derived from Jacques Lacan, but that I arrived at through Slavoj Žižek, so they cannot be seen as an attempt to explain the ideas of Lacan. I only take the parts of both of their writings that I find applicable to my work.

Lacan divides our experience of living into the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. The symbolic order is all our understanding, our language and reason. We try to create an organization of our experiences that will render them meaningful. Where this organization fails the Real might leak through. The Real is frightening since it is not understandable, cannot be categorized or even formulated. “The Real constantly resists symbolization, even though through a number of strategies we try to neutralize it and incorporate it in the symbolic order”. In films, according to Žižek, the Real can be depicted as the mysterious danger that threatens the crew in the spaceship from within or from without. It can be a lurking danger that we never get to see, a virus or a phenomenon that is inexplicable and uncontrollable. Most of art is on the symbolic level since it is language; it means something other than what it is. Artists, curators, ideas and art itself are categorized, economized, explained and forcefully made understandable as part of an order (for example: art history).

When we manage to formulate/symbolize the Real it is no longer real. (Žižek/Lacan are not alone with the feeling that there is something elusive that we can't ever grasp. It exists in most religions and, as I said before, in art. And maybe in ideology; the goal of the struggle is the struggle, not the goal, because the goal is impossible.)

Art can carry something uncontrolled, something traumatic that has not been formulated. But just like language, art cannot describe the Real. Still, it can *be* there, underneath the surface of the work, the surface that we can grasp and talk about. The Real is impossible because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order. “This character of impossibility and resistance to symbolization lends the Real its traumatic quality”. In “Welcome Home, Prophet!” I base the story on the notion that what he has found in the desert is something that cannot be said in the room that awaits his return to civilization; that there are things that need to be said but get distorted in the translation process that starts when the object or word enters the circumstance where it is prohibited, the symbolic realm – in this case the exhibition room. I don't know what it is he has found. I thought of it for a while as being anything that is not allowed to be said here, an embarrassment. In that case the room could be any institution or group, a family or a religion, whatever. Then I thought it could be emptiness, which we don't want to hear about. If we bring up emptiness, of meaning or of action, we turn it into a subject content anyway when we talk about it. It has to be something! And it is, even emptiness is something. But the emptiness of the emptiness disappears when you talk about it. Although if you talk for long enough it may come back. Or maybe what he found was not even emptiness but nothing, and this nothing could be the Real, the unspeakable: that there is something that language can't cover.

“The real object” :“A cause that does not exist in itself, but is only present as a series of effects, always in a warped, distorted form.”

A “Thing” in Lacan's understanding: “the materialization of a terrible impossible enjoyment.”

Chris Burden and the Real

At first I didn't like Chris Burden's work, thought it was too spectacular. And there are very spectacular parts of it that you have to see in the context of that time and what it was reacting against. But he is after a directness, an awareness; something urgent that is not for show.

One piece by him is a device which pushes the walls of the gallery apart, so that eventually it might destroy it. Visitors have to pass through a turnstile, and every time someone does a gearbox and a jack push the massive timbers further into the bearing walls of the museum. The work is called *Samson* and was made in 1985. In the MAK exhibition catalogue about Burden it says: "like a glacier, its powerful motion is imperceptible to the naked eye. This sculptural installation subverts the notion of the sanctity of the Museum (the shed that houses the art)." As with the catapult, the power is real. In this case it is let out as well, not held back and forbidden to fire, but released very slowly. It works the walls slowly but surely. It is a big, powerful machine. Most visitors probably don't *choose* to contribute to the destruction, since they do so simply by entering. I think that more than actualizing the responsibility of the individual visitor it makes us think about the responsibility of the museum as an official building and institution. We are pretty sure that they would close the show before it got really dangerous. It can become a little desperate; we want to find a real danger but there will never be one, not in an artificial context that is controlled by an institution. And the strange thing about art is that it is in both positions, the personal/peripheral and that of the institution/norm.

The threat of Burden's machine comes close to the Real. The metaphor of the glacier surely suggests *Samson* is Real.

The Sculpture (that is a Weapon)

The Sculpture is a catapult that builds on the technique of the Roman torsion catapults, which means that the power of the weapon comes from a twisted rope. This model was abandoned pretty fast because of its tendency to destroy itself when fired. The catapult has a new construction made by me with modern materials. My aim was not to be true to any historical weapon, but to make as powerful a weapon as my resources would allow. The sculpture/catapult was loaded but not allowed to fire in the gallery.

The Sculpture (that is a Weapon) continues where "*Welcome Home, Prophet!*" ended. It is an attempt to go around the "as if" that happens in the white cube, to strike a hole in the controlling translating authority, here represented by the gallery room and the situation we have constructed there, including the viewers. I am aware that it is probably impossible. It *will* be interpreted, metaphorized. But maybe the power itself will still be what it is; what it can destroy. The power is a ready-made. A threat of violence, does it *mean* something? If we are afraid that the weapon will go off, can you interpret that fear? If it does go off, does the hole in the wall mean something, or is it just broken? Will that be interpreted or will it simply evoke fear and anger?

Of course it means something that the sculpture threatens the room that the Prophet refused to enter.

Power strategies

There are in Foucault's power analysis two power strategies. Magnus Hörnquist has named them and discusses them in *Foucaults maktanalys*: the juridical-negative and the technical-positive. The former controls through regulation and laws, and prevents unwanted behavior through old-school discipline, like in the military. Or like the juridical boundaries put up by our society. The latter is more modern and is the strategy used in our time. It is not destructive but productive, since it uses the opposing behavior and directs it to enforce the constitutive structures of society, through what Foucault calls the "normalizing sanction". It coordinates groups and movements and handles conflicts that arise, with the purpose of generating and then exploiting initiatives and energy. A sort of "go-with-the-flow" maneuvering of people, as opposed to the juridical-negative strategy, which regulates and represses initiative. The juridical-negative strategy is easier to spot and fight, it is open in its brutality. It gives you the option of whether to obey or not. With the technical-positive strategy that option does not exist since it works through an interplay between the forceful and the voluntary, so that people get the idea that they are choosing themselves. And we do get to choose, but we don't get to not choose, or to choose outside of given options. In the end we have taken an active part in the control of ourselves, which is the purpose of this strategy, and we can't blame anyone but ourselves.

The "normalizing sanction" is where individuality and difference are no longer a way towards rebellion or liberation for Foucault, but play into the hands of the constitutional structure. Any refusal to fit into the norm is challenged and will cost you, but in the end you get to choose yourself. If the opposing behavior does not end, it can be instrumentalized. This happens through classification and attention; like when a subculture is given space in a gallery or anywhere at all (as happened to graffiti and hip-hop). That is when it gets eaten up, the dominant culture takes the energy of the subculture, it needs it, but disarms it. They show that they are open to new and opposing groups and expressions and at the same time they disarm them as a threat to their domination.

The sanction of choice is also interesting. Hanna Arendt writes (in *Origins of Totalitarianism*) about impossible choices and their dehumanizing purpose with examples from concentration camps. A mother could choose which child to have killed and which to let live. This, says Arendt, is not a choice.

I think the choice that is not a choice is exemplified in modern everyday life as well. Our lifestyles and habits are so mapped out and controlled, and technical-positive power strategies operate by giving us formal responsibility; but in reality we have neither choice nor responsibility.

Aesthetics

I will have to say something specifically about aesthetics, since I've never had a clue about it but have been trying to deal with it all the time. To demonstrate that it is not easy even to understand what it is I quote an "explanation" from an Internet dictionary (answers.com):

- 1 *(used with a sing. verb)*
 - a The branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty, as in the fine arts.
 - b In Kantian philosophy, the branch of metaphysics concerned with the laws of perception.
- 2 *(used with a sing. verb)* The study of the psychological responses to beauty and artistic experiences.
- 3 *(used with a sing. or pl. verb)* A conception of what is artistically valid or beautiful: *minimalist aesthetics*.
- 4 *(used with a sing. or pl. verb)* An artistically beautiful or pleasing appearance: "*They're looking for quality construction, not aesthetics.*" (Ron Schram)

Definitions range from perception psychology to the philosophical appreciation of beauty. When I deal with aesthetics it is mainly a matter of communication, and that part of it is not in this definition.

My own thoughts about the term are that it is either something that you follow, i.e. you conform to a consensus about how to express certain emotions, attitudes or social positions (A). Or else that it is something that you develop yourself, you absorb it from your surroundings but you change it, add to it (B).

At the same time it is either something you use to be understood, which makes it a language (1), or something that *is* what you are saying. In this case the language is the content (2).

Thirdly, it can be consciously planned (x). It can also be the result of an action (y). Even shit looks like something even though it is only the result of the digestion process. When someone looks at the shit it may be judged aesthetically.

This gives eight possible combinations, of which I find the following worth mentioning:

B1x. A fortunate relationship to aesthetics for an artist. If this is your combination you are able to control the looks and language of your art, use aesthetics as a language and you develop it. You may sometimes be too conscious of the surface and forget the content. You understand contemporary visual signs and are able to use them in the correct way.

B2y. This is unfortunate because it leaves you fairly unaware of what people will perceive. You are too involved in making the work to look at it. The fact that you are developing your own visual language (you probably have one although you are unaware of it) is good, and could have been the result of feeling that what you have to say needs a new language, but in this exact combination it is probably just because the look is a result of an action. And this is my relation to aesthetics, most of the time. It is an almost non-existent relationship, though in effect that is not possible since everything that is materialized is a language and has a look. I start from the action, not the look. If I make a table I am more interested in the fact that I am making a table and what it means in some sort of context/story than the visual aspects of the table and what they might say.

The Ugly and *The sculpture (that is a weapon)*

I have compared *The Sculpture (that is a weapon)* to the concept of “the ugly” as treated in Tom Sandqvist’s book *Det fula. Från antiken till Paul Mc Carthy. (The Ugly. From the Antique to Paul Mc Carthy.)*. With the help of some of those definitions, you might say that the weapon is “ugly”. Its focus on function leaves aesthetics behind. It also disrupts the room. Its content is the aggressive ability to destroy the room, which makes the traits of the ugly very concrete.

“The ugly” can be defined as something that is in the wrong place. Like shoes on the pillow. Or like something broken, a broken glass or a wound. It can be equal to bad, as the opposite of good. It has been seen as simply the absence of beauty, but has been found to be something in itself.

It disrupts and occupies the room with the object’s own existence. It threatens to devour the clean and ideal room (the ideal room is neutral and demands control over the objects, easy to compare with the white cube). The ugly and the broken trespass on the integrity of the physical room, but also on the integrity of the subject who is looking at it. The subject doesn’t feel safe anymore. The ugly is aggressive and active, when it should be passive and benign, useful. It behaves like a subject, with a will of its own.

I have been asked where this project stands when it comes to feminism. I don’t have a straight answer but the question is interesting. It could be useful to formulate in a very concrete way what I am doing.

I (as a more or less young woman) am engaging in typically male activities like construction, welding and carpenting. I am also using the knowledge and good will of a handful of middle-aged men, including my father, to build a phallic weapon.

I am building a huge penis whose erection I can control and which I can use as a weapon. Coming from the countryside with a working class background, I go back to where I came from and with the knowledge and good will of the sawmill workers there and other neighbors and interested people, construct a weapon. I bring it back to the institution and the gallery and call it art.

For Mark Cousins quoted in Sandqvist’s book, the conclusion seems to be that the ugly is masculine. It is phallic, it is like the power of the father, it is a punishing power that flows against us and restrains our desire. Its resistance to being an object, and ability to take the position of a subject, can also seem masculine.

There are two possible ways for the subject to deal with the threat of the ugly.

To destroy the object, or clean it, in some way render it harmless.

To pretend it doesn’t exist, which would mean to abandon the subject position.

Both of the solutions are parallel to what happens in the normative process according to Foucault, and what happens in the gallery as an ideal room in the translation process, which renders the voice from the periphery harmless. But for Žižek the weapon (or more specifically its power) might be “Real” and as such feminine. The woman is real and returns as the man’s symptom, like a ghost he has once killed.

The ugly and the real have many similarities. They both also have interesting connections to the sublime. The sublime is – rather than beautiful – horrible and immense, it is always something strange, beyond the self or the identity, something that can’t really be portrayed or formulated. It exceeds all regulation, “even space and time”. This, says Sandqvist, can be the link between the ugly and the sublime.

The Dictator, the power and the play

Together with Hanna Sjöstrand I made a game/experiment about power, which was shown at Tjörnedala Gallery on Österlen. A wall separates the Dictator and the Painter, and all communication is one-way: the Dictator can enforce the Painter's behavior through ringing a bell, or punish her by beeping a horn. There is extra reinforcement in the form of food-balls prepared with everything that a human needs, a complete human food. But the Painter can't see or communicate with the Dictator. The Dictator can see the Painter and the painting only through a television screen connected to a video camera.

Following Pavlov's experiments with dogs, where he gained control over their salivary glands, the Dictator tries to teach the Painter aesthetics: that is, the aesthetic preferences of the Dictator. For me the interest was how I would react emotionally. I took on the role of the Painter and I felt the presence of someone I couldn't see watching me to be very disturbing and worrying when I was painting. I knew she saw what I did, but I couldn't see her face. Sometimes she would pace around on the other side of the wall, in her leather boots. I interpreted that as total disinterest in my work. When she rang the bell or gave me a food-ball it was a great relief.

The Dictator tries to change the way that the Painter paints, her artistic expression. But controlling behavior is enough to make the mind lose its independence. You don't have to bypass the mind at all. Like the watching and control of the interneer that Foucault writes about, I (as the Painter) lose my power and my experience of painting when being watched by someone I can't see. To gain power over a subject the important thing is not to execute it openly but to make sure the subject knows that he/she can always be watched, but does not know when he/she is being watched. Another important thing is to provide options. What defines castration, says Lacan, is the forced choice. The painter has to *choose* to paint what the Dictator likes.

We created rules and a situation that gave one person power over the other. It made it clear to me how weak we are, how even obviously made-up rules of reinforcement and punishment affect how we feel about ourselves, and prevent our (feeling of) independence. But they also create uproar. After the Dictator had beeped the horn many times in a row, even though I had tried to find new ways of attacking the canvas, I felt revolutionary spirits steaming up in all of my body and mind. I let go of the palette and the brush and sat down, my head sunk down in my lap. I wasn't going to work for this bitch. Then she beeped again. I got up and took the biggest brush and painted a big crashing airplane across the whole canvas. I was actually afraid; my hand was stretched out as if the canvas could bite.

It is highly dramatized, the scene where I am afraid of the consequences of stretching my hand out to sabotage the painting, and it is as if she owns and protects the picture from inside it and can harm me only if I touch it. The picture itself has become my enemy and since they are in collusion the painting becomes my enemy. Or the battlefield of our struggle.

And what are the possibilities of the painter breaking free in this situation? The disciplinary technique of positive reinforcement combined with punishment builds on a strategy of interplay between force and acquiescence, which forces the subject to take an active part in the process that confirms her subordination. The rebellious act lets out our frustration but is also exploited and used in the process and confirms the hierarchy. My rebellious airplane across the painting was perceived by the Dictator as something artistically interesting, she actually enforced the initiative with a ring on the bell.

Sources:

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