

Małgorzata Markiewicz, Medusa

Firstly, Małgorzata Markiewicz found wool in shades of green at home. Then she introduced black, white and grey sheep wool to be accompanied by yarn (linen, hemp and wool) dyed with natural plant dyes at the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, Poland. These fibres became interlocked by the artist's hand holding a crochet hook in a continuous laborious rhythm of making. Slowly, persistently, intentionally, from 15th March 2020 and over the seven months of the Covid-19 health emergency, Medusa's crocheted body emerged spreading with its fifteen metres long tentacles into the space, first Markiewicz's home in Kraków, Poland, and then into her studio. Markiewicz - similarly to Penelope waiting for her husband, Odysseus, to return, and by day, weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, which she unravelled by night - created not a cloth but her-story narrativized by the motion of her hands and released into versatile private and public spaces. She took time to interlock carefully selected yarn in a process of slow labour at a steady pace. Time was passing yet standing still as the making was sometimes disrupted by the necessity to unravel the crochet stitch and repeat the process, imbuing the emerging Medusa's body with the circumstances of its creation.

Markiewicz, together with Marta Kowalewska, Dominika Krogulska and Marcin Różycki, was invited to curate the exhibition *Open Departments / Closed Departments (2020- 2021)* celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, Poland. Envisaged to engage with the Museum's collection, the exhibition focused on woven stories interrogating the role of the institution in enabling critical dialogues concerning the hidden pasts and the democratized and inclusive presents and futures. Markiewicz imagined Medusa's crocheted body to celebrate women's creative power, her-stories and women's speech disrupting the heteropatriarchal language formations specific in Polish language, in which every noun has its own gender (feminine, masculine or neuter). The artist traced Museum's past publications discovering a lack of consistency in using the feminine suffix and intervened proposing to correct the texts by inserting feminatives to replace those nouns designating public and professional roles that held masculine forms. Her revised quotations, attentive to and acknowledging women's labour and contributions, appear in three double-warp fabrics, specific to Podlasie, a region in the northeast of Poland, made by weavers from Janów, Bernarda Rość and Lucyna Kędzierska.

In between the double-warp fabrics stands Medusa's figure. She also appears in a film, and a series of photographs created by Markiewicz. The film portrays Medusa's walk across a meadow and through a forest accompanied by the sound of a female voice. Reaching to myths' narration of the female body as a dark abyss arousing fear and disgust, Medusa's crocheted body was imagined to liberate female repressed desires and creative power. Markiewicz asked Ola Koziół to create background music for Medusa's exhibit in the Museum and the film. Koziół used the vocal technique of white voice reaching to Central and Eastern European music heritage which grew out of singing in rural surroundings. White singing is believed to have magical powers and was often applied during rites of passage such as annual rituals related to rural year. It releases physical and psychical tensions connecting the voice and the body. Vocal energy confronted with open space encourages bonding and embedding oneself within the world. Koziół's voice, delicate and yet resonating power, captures Medusa's sensorial body, vulnerable and strong at the same time. The singing draws rhythmic itinerary for Medusa's body to wander.

In Greek mythology, Medusa was the only one of the three Gorgon sisters deemed immortal. Once a beautiful goddess, she was turned into a repulsive creature by Athena as a punishment for being raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. As a monster with snakes writhing in her hair and a killing gaze,

she petrified those who looked at her, alluding to male fear of women who meet their gaze and look directly into their eyes. Sigmund Freud, in his 1922 essay 'Medusa's head', interpreted the snakes writhing in Medusa's hair as penises that, signifying lack, induced terror representing the castration fear. Donna Haraway (2016: 54) wonders what might have happened if those men politely greeted Medusa's gaze? Perhaps such manners could still be learnt? Hélène Cixous discusses the myth of Medusa in the context of heteropatriarchal discourses disciplining the female body into subordinate and passive positions inhibiting female agency. Cixous (1976: 875) calls each woman to 'write her self' and return to their bodies that had been confiscated from them. She encourages embodied self-insertion into the world by a movement. Don't be afraid, she says, go into the forest. Markiewicz's Medusa listened.

Imagined as a nomadic sculpture that can be worn by any woman to claim their agency, born in the artist's home, Medusa has been becoming since. She is not afraid of her desires and drives. Nor is she ashamed of her strength and her darkness. She embraces her becoming with. She wanders in the forest no longer confined to the domestic spheres and claims territories traversing spaces. She simultaneously is 'becoming' in several places and via multiple histories. Whoever wears her crocheted body blends their own history with the history of silenced and invisibilised women. Her skin is tactile, made from multiple writhing, twisted and interlocked threads in shades of green, red, white, grey and black. The body wearing it becomes integral and yet separate. Medusa's body caresses. Luce Irigaray (2000: 26) writes that 'the caress is a gesture-word which goes beyond the horizon or the distance of intimacy within the self'. The gesture of caressing and touching materialises the distance between and with/in the self. Catherine Dormor (2020: 100) argues that touch-caress 'offers a way of thinking about tactility and tactile (inter)relationships as offering intimate spaces of difference.' Medusa's body crocheted from different yarns touches the skin of the wearer causing different sensations: softness, or abrasiveness, soothing or itching and prickliness. The rougher texture is less pleasant to the skin while some yarns stroke the skin gently. Her skin against the skin of the wearer touches physically and affectively. Caressing is an intimate gesture founded on reciprocal exchange that connects with one another, body to body, and to the world, implicating activity and engagement of all participants, human and nonhuman.

Medusa's bodily movement invites making with and sensing with other sentient beings and becoming entangled in response-able humans and nonhumans relations. Markiewicz's welcomes Medusa to the world as an activist gesture of practising attention and care via the feminine released into a multitude of spaces, complicating gendered relationships between private domesticity and the public. Medusa's crocheted body acknowledges vulnerabilities of human and nonhuman entanglements as interconnected and interdependent. She is reminiscent of Donna Haraway's notion of Chthulucene, as explained by Hélène Frichot, more terrifying Medusa-esque, with tentacles and slippery, multiplying limbs [...] It is a counter-figure that is supported by a counter-narrative, able to collapse temporal matrices and to tell other stories. It disrupts hierarchies and plunges us into the dirt, the slithering of worms, the haptic grasping of tentacles, the mucky celebration of multi-species, non-human relations. The Chthulucene is both monstrous figure and geological epoch, both/and. (Frichot 2019: 29-30)

The Chthulucene signifies the not yet finished, the abyssal and the ongoing that is generative of liveability. Medusa's wandering in the forest embodies the Chthulucene becoming-with. Surrounded by other species – moss, grass, trees and bushes, plants and fragrant herbs - her body, being made from wool, hemp, linen and naturally dyed, is also literally physically connected to living things. It carries multiple energies and subjectivities, putting them in motion and connecting the human and nonhuman, nurturing different kinds of relations within the worlding that is one. Medusa destabilises

the story of the Capitalocene and the Anthropocene opening multiple spaces and stories, inviting sociality that characterises communities that think and live with each other.

Haraway refers to Medusa, a chthonic figure of creation and destruction with extraordinary powers that belong to the tentacular ones whose tentacles are their feelers. The snakehaired Medusa exemplifies those demonised by patriarchal forms of knowledge production. Haraway (2016: 31) writes about the eight-legged tentacular arachnid Pimotheca Cthulhu referring to 'denizens of the depths, from the abyssal and elemental entities, called chthonic.' Its tentacles tell the story of the Chthulucene. Haraway proposes that the tentacular ones, being open and entangled at the same time, weave lives along lines and not points, creating interlaced trails. She calls for another figure we need 'to erupt out of the Anthropocene' (Ibid: 52) and by suggesting snaky Medusa, draws parallels with spiders and the 'spiders of the sea', octopuses. The Gorgon's reach is lateral and tentacular teaching us practices of becoming-with in precarious times which offers us an opportunity to rethink and reknit the order of the world.

Markiewicz's fibre practice embodied in Medusa's project complicates narratives confining women to the domestic and the hidden. She explores ways in which the unknowable and unintelligible could be accounted for to foster our interconnected and inter-relational becoming-with. Co-emergence through encounters relies on ethics of care – practising attention and caring for our companion species, what Haraway calls 'making kin'. Markiewicz's Medusa enacts Haraway's 'tentacular thinking', mutually beneficial relationships and symbiotic solidarity across species and spaces, insisting on responsibility and response-ability to all living bodies. Tentacular power and forces belong to many kin entities including other-than, non-, human and human-as-humus. Medusa reimagines multispecies relations and activates collaborative entanglements to recuperate the damaged and marginalised from the frays of society. She also embodies remembrance and accountability calling for a re-configuration of hidden histories to cultivate a multitude of stories, including the silenced stories of women's creative power and women's unacknowledged labour. Her tentacles, the female body described by Cixous (1976: 885) as having a 'thousand and one thresholds of ardor', sense-with and think-with touching, caressing, reaching and knowing. As a 'body without end, without appendage, principal 'parts'' (Ibid.) Medusa becomes activated by the wearer. Her masked face allows for any woman, every woman, to become Medusa. Masks are often strategic devices in activist artistic and guerrilla groups such as Guerilla Girls or Pussy Riot. They amplify wearer's anonymity and articulate metaphorical invisible positions and silencing in society. They also enable the collective subject to emerge via a multitude in solidarity and cultivate responsibility and response-ability. Medusa becomes a plural body, limitless and moving away from centralised patriarchal narratives.

Markiewicz's Medusa embodies Haraway's 'becomings', multispecies alliance, an assemblage that dissolves categorisations and pays attention to the margins and the borderlines hosting fearsome Others. Cixous (1976: 889) writes that Medusa's 'libido is cosmic', making her 'spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation.' She is a liminal and relational creature, which once unleashed performs a multitude of un-silenced stories teaching us how to narrate alongside each other, outside of the tales told by the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, towards a common livable world.

Dr Basia Sliwinska is an art historian and art theorist and has been developing research focused on visual activism, through feminist and transnational lenses, in 20th and 21st century women's art practice.

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