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Framing of the Dangerous: The Artwork between New Materialism and William S. Burroughs

Rámování nebezpečného: Umělecké dílo mezi novým materialismem a Williamem S. Burroughsem

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to think through the problematics of art and artwork by comparing two authors – the New Materialism scholar Elizabeth Grosz and the artist William S. Burroughs. The result of this comparison is a philosophy of artwork that dehumanizes art and places the creative process in the relations forming between the living body and the dynamic forces of the earth. The most important step of the thesis is to analyze those relations that result from sexual difference. These announce the arising of art practices in nature, for they establish attractiveness and desire as mechanisms through which life produces excessive variations of itself. Another step is the elaboration of such conceptualization that frames sexual difference as a potentially life-threatening and dangerous principle through which the theory of art can be connected with the process of creation of an artwork as described in Burroughs's texts. Special attention is given to his shotgun art that focuses on capturing the so-called random factor of creation, which Burroughs interprets as something essential for the possible independence of the artwork from both the author and perceiver.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je pojednat o problematice umění a o uměleckém díle skrze srovnání dvou autorů – myslitelky nového materialismu Elizabeth Grosz a umělce Williama S. Burroughse. Výsledkem tohoto srovnání je filosofie uměleckého díla, která dehumanizuje umění a staví kreativní proces do vztahů, skrze které živé tělo interaguje s dynamickými silami země. Nejdůležitějším krokem práce je analýza těch vztahů, které jsou důsledkem sexuální difference. Ty oznamují počátek uměleckých praktik v přírodě, jelikož zavádí atraktivitu a touhu jakožto mechanismy, skrze které život produkuje své excesivní variace. Další krok je vypracování takového pojetí sexuální difference, jež ji formuluje jako život ohrožující a nebezpečný princip, díky čemuž je možné teorii umění propojit se samotným procesem tvorby uměleckého díla, který je popsán v Burroughsových textech. Zvláštní důraz je kladen na jeho brokovnicové umění, které je zaměřeno na zachycení takzvaného náhodného faktoru kreativity, což Burroughs interpretuje jako esenciální pro možné osamostatnění uměleckého díla od autora či pozorovatele.

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Introduction

The chills creeping around our spine as the right note is hit. The slight opening of our mouth in awe when we look up the cathedral wall. The splash of bright red color that screams at us from the canvas. These are physical responses that tell us something about both art and a living body. Our body is shown to sustain a fragile balance – it is an enclosed, yet not hermetic system. On one hand, we feel our body's integrity being disrupted as alien agencies travel through us. On the other hand, these can be internalized by a body, for they make up the movements that allow a body to interact with matter around it, which is essentially what allows a body to act as a *living* body. What needs to be addressed are, therefore, the openings, for they allow the various agencies at work within us to form what we are. We need to allow the living body to step outside of the empty void we've put it in. When faced with a work of art, a body is part of an interaction – and a very radical one at that, for an artwork actively plays with our body's openness and fragility. To say that we are *moved* by art is a quite fitting way of addressing the change it can cause us to undergo. We feel trapped and moved from one state to another by an alien, a strange compound that acts freely and rushes towards us.

The argument I will be making in the thesis is that Elizabeth Grosz's materialist theory of art allows for the conceptualization of such movements mentioned above. The argument is split in two. At first, matter, and consequently nature, has to be shown as dynamic, as a totality of forces that in itself contains possibilities for creative encounters. Only after demonstrating the productive potentials of this encounter can art be restaged from its ostensible and taken for granted heights down to nature, to the lower echelons: a transition that allows it to be tied to the inhuman animal context through which it is not restrained, but that, on the contrary, enables works of art to play an active part in the evolutionary process. It only makes sense to invite both an artist and a philosopher to not only conceptualize the above-mentioned processes that allow for an artwork to be made and to affect living bodies, but also to understand it deeply through the process of creation itself. This text, therefore, aspires to offer concepts of both a philosopher and an artist that exemplify said movements. The result of this should be a theory of art that conjoins two different lines of approach that nevertheless, as I believe, have the potential to form a coherent pattern. Here, the philosophical line will be represented primarily by the work of Elizabeth Grosz, whose theory of art as understood through the concept of sexualized nature links the living body and artwork so closely they become

almost inseparable. One cannot understand one without the other. Her commentary on art is elaborated mainly in her book *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (2008) but it is continued upon in her later books like *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (2011) and *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism* (2017). In these texts, Grosz pursues a tracing of the origins of art in the natural world. However, according to Stephen Zepke's (2010) review of Grosz's *Chaos, Territory, Art*, this task requires exhaustive insight into biology, preventing Grosz from focusing more on actual artists and artworks.¹ In the reviewed book, it is only the second to last chapter where we finally get a more detailed analysis of an actual artwork, namely of Aboriginal Western Desert paintings.² With this thesis, I hope to prove that Grosz's theory is compatible with works of other artists, by which I hope to direct her theory to places where she herself does not go.

The artist whose work I intend to use as an example of a possible combination of philosophy with art is William S. Burroughs. Here, I won't focus on his creative work as a writer, but rather as a painter of his so-called shotgun paintings – paintings that are created by shooting (the canvas, the wood board, etc.) with a bullet, which is sometimes used to create an explosion of color by hitting a can of spray paint attached to the surface. Another source I draw upon is Burroughs's remarks on the topics of art and creativity. There are numerous points in Burroughs's *Paintings & Guns* (1992) – a text composed of two essays, one of which (“Creative Observer”) directly focuses on the problematics of art – that are notably similar to the points made in the writings of Grosz. Given this proximity, Grosz's theory and Burroughs's works are more easily to be brought together when building the structure combining the two elements of art and philosophy. Together with the approach Grosz is taking, I aspire to allow for a theory where art and philosophy work together with each other, by building on their mutual constructions.

Given that Grosz's major inspiration is the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I will sometimes drift away from her work to the works of those authors when it seems necessary.

¹ Stephen Zepke, review of *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, by Elizabeth Grosz, *Comparative Literature Studies* 47, no. 4 (2010): 549.

² Elizabeth Grosz, “Painting Today” in *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 87–101.

Some of the other authors she draws upon will also be discussed, as Deleuze and Guattari also devote themselves to them, and adopt and transform their concepts. I will focus mostly on the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jakob von Uexküll, whose remarks on the so-called *Umwelt* are central for Grosz; for without them I believe it would be much more difficult for her to develop a philosophical system that connects biology with the theory of art. However, Grosz also works extensively with other scholars, specifically Luce Irigaray and Charles Darwin, whose thought is very difficult to connect with Deleuzian tenets. Due to this inconvenience, I will also devote separate chapters to the influence of these authors on Grosz's theory, which will hopefully help to shed light on the overall system in which Grosz's ideas are embedded. It is both the strange combination of different influences and the overall context of Grosz's philosophy that makes her into an author with an original thesis capable of departing from its Deleuzian origins. Grosz's work is, therefore, not to be understood as "just" an interpretation of Deleuze, although they do share a large selection of concepts and methods.

It should be noted that Grosz's texts do not revolve exclusively around art theory. Grosz is probably best known as a feminist theorist, whose work heavily affected an important strand of current theoretical feminism. Therefore, I believe it is important to at least mention the overall arc of her feminist project, through which she addresses the problem of what it means to be a woman and what a woman can become through the elaboration of ontology, ethics, and theory of art. In this thesis, I will mention the basic points of her so-called *ontoethics*, a project developed in one of Grosz's more recent books, *The Incorporeal*, in order to connect her theory of art with the rest of her extensive project. Overall, I would like to advise for an experimental reading of Grosz's writing, one that understands her feminism as a driving force behind most of her works. Her goal, as she has repeatedly mentioned, is not to define what feminism is or what women are, but what they might be.³ In order to address what feminism and woman could become, she must, however, describe the processes that are behind *change* in general. She needs to describe the principle of *becoming*, of *self-overcoming* to come up with a feminist theory that is built upon the foundations of the past, but that nevertheless is addressed to point out towards possible futures. Given this

³ Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams of New Knowledges," in *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 74–87.

overall goal of her philosophy, I believe it is possible to read her texts through this simple optic: If you wish to change something, this is how you do it.

The name of this thesis suggests that Grosz's philosophy can be understood as a philosophy of "new materialism". Although her own position towards this philosophical movement is complicated, as I attempt to clarify in the first chapter, there are some reasons we could call Grosz's approach, towards art specifically, "materialist". Throughout her work, it is not by way of theories concerning human mind or cultural context through which she addresses the problematics of art. What has to be clarified first is what the origins of art in the *natural* world are, which leads directly to another issue concerning the relationship between art and body, namely how artwork can generate sensations affecting the body.⁴ The idea that art creates a direct impact on the observer's body which is fundamental to Grosz's theory, and it also gains significance when she moves from her art theory to ethical claims. What, therefore, needs to precede the cultural analysis of art is a development of concepts that could address the becomings the body undergoes when it is faced with a work of art and what these becomings can entail. That is to say, there are three chapters in this thesis that are formulated around three main questions I've found to be significant with respect to Grosz's theory of art.

The first chapter, *A General Introduction to Grosz's Project of Dynamic Ontology*, focuses on the status of Grosz's ontology and its connection to ethics and art. Through Grosz's concept of *ontoethics*, life will be expressed as dynamic, as something that has to be brought down to the world of material forces in order for it not only ensure survival but also to discover various ways of life that maximize its actions and create artistic excess. These discoveries are made possible precisely because of ethics and art that, although operating in different ways, both enable life forms to overcome themselves by tying them to not only to "other forms of life" but also to "a nonliving nature".⁵

The second chapter, *Origins of Art*, deals with the question of what the origins of art in the natural world are. This question inquires into the connection between the evolutionary process and art – how do we (and by we, I do not mean we as a human race, but we as animals) even become

⁴ "Sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, not through representations, signs, images, or fantasies, but directly, on the body's own internal forces, on cells, organs, the nervous system." Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 73.

⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 14.

artistic? And how do our suddenly artistic bodies form our overall position in the world? These problems in Grosz's texts are approached mainly through the conceptualization of sexual difference as a way through which bodies become artistic through their attractive attunement.

The third chapter *Grosz's Theory of Art* and the fourth chapter *Burroughs Paintings: Dangerous Creatures* are focused around those questions that arise once we get to artwork as such. They address the dynamic processes happening between an artwork and a living body – either that of artist or observer. This part of the thesis allows for a more profound integration of Burroughs's thoughts while remaining within Grosz's theoretical project. Neither Grosz's nor Burroughs's writings would be helpful if we looked for some sort of aesthetic theory searching for the criticism or meaning of works of art.⁶ What they, however, have in common is the linking of art to one of the most profound issues in philosophy – namely, the creation of life. For both of them, life is full of creative encounters that are conditioned by our corporeality, by a body that is always extended to what is “outside” itself and that is affected by other forms of life which allows it to be opened towards future becomings.

⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2.

1 A General Introduction to Grosz's Project of Dynamic Ontology

Although Grosz is sometimes listed as one of the prime philosophers of New Materialism and refers to herself as a materialist, her own perspective towards ontology is a bit more complicated and cannot be simply referred to as materialist without clarifying exactly what *kind* of materialism she develops.⁷ Throughout her work, Grosz comes up with various terms describing her approach and whether it is *extramaterialism*, *new materialism* or *new new materialism*; and it would be a mistake, to assume that in all of her writings Grosz was committing some kind of materialist reductionism by bringing all reality down to a mathematical one.⁸ On the contrary, what is real and what isn't is a far more complex topic, for in Grosz's ontology, "what there *is*" always has to be addressed through "what *might be*".⁹ Her philosophy describes matter as unstable, dynamic, always opened for change and conditioned by *force*. This assertion becomes the primary concept in her philosophy.¹⁰

If we could name a grounding concept in Grosz's ontology, it would certainly be the concept of *becoming* – a movement that makes a thing what it is and allows for it to become something else in the future.¹¹ Throughout her work Grosz focuses on these movements – these *becomings* – that do not happen to already established things, but "preexist" them.¹² Therefore, instead of questions concerning the stable, she is asking for the possibility of (significant) *change*. One of the possible ways to address change is through art and the process of creation.

⁷ Katve-Kasia Kontturi and Milla Tiainen, "Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin: An interview with Elizabeth Grosz," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender research* 15, no. 4 (November 2007): 246–256, 247.

⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 5; Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 5, 13–14.

⁹ "It is only rarely that ontology is addressed not only in terms of what *is* but also in terms of how what is may enable what *might be*. Ontology has been increasingly directed toward explaining scientific and mathematical models, for which ethical considerations seem conceptually extrinsic. Yet an ontology entails a consideration of the future, not only of what we can guarantee or be certain but above all what virtualities in the present may enable in the future." Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 2.

¹⁰ Kontturi, Tiainen, "Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin," 248; Tuija Pulkkinen, "The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory: Sexual Difference, Ontology, and Intervention," *Hypatia* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 279–295, 280.

¹¹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 1.

¹² Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 1.

1.1 Forces of the Real

Before we get to artwork as such, creativity and artworks need to be approached as things resulting from evolutionary processes, as emerging from “provocations posed by the forces of the earth [...] with the forces of living bodies”.¹³ In her texts, terms like “forces of the earth”, “forces of the real”, “cosmological forces”, “chaos”, and “matter” are often used interchangeably, and it is necessary to first explain what Grosz means by those terms before we move towards art itself, for even her book on art as such mentions “chaos” as “the beginning”.¹⁴ This kind of chaos is to be understood not as an opposite of order, but rather as a multiplicity of many different orders and forces, that combine, conflict, unite or destroy.¹⁵ Chaos is what constitutes a reality which is, therefore, not to be taken as a multiplicity of *things*, because as already indicated – in Grosz’s ontology, everything there is, is in a continuous process of becoming (something else).¹⁶ Real is, therefore, unstable. It is a totality of forces that make and unmake things. It is this ontological assumption that, according to Tuija Pulkkinen (2017), characterizes Grosz as a Deleuzian thinker, for in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s texts “reality does not consist of individual things, but is rather a chaos, matter, totality.”¹⁷ Chaos is a surface that allows for change to happen.¹⁸ It is Deleuze’s concept of pure difference in which Grosz grounds her concept of becoming and that helps her to think of presence as something open-ended, as something always bound to change. In time everything changes as matter differentiates through effects of various forces only to produce more differentiations in the process.¹⁹ If we, therefore, want to explore art as something that directly affects a body, what needs to be clarified at first is not only the concept of body as a material thing or matter in general, for there is another

¹³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2–3.

¹⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 5.

¹⁵ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 5.

¹⁶ Pulkkinen, “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 281–2.

¹⁷ Pulkkinen, “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 281.

¹⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 5.

¹⁹ Pulkkinen, “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 286–7; Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

– namely *force* – that captures all the changes it undergoes and that clarifies how matter/chaos become differentiated into a living body.²⁰

It has already been mentioned that calling Grosz simply a materialist is, to say the least, a complicated matter, although it does not have to be considered a mistake. What can however be said with certainty is that Grosz is an ontologist, and that it is Deleuze who put her in that position.²¹ The overall concept of Grosz’s project is to develop an ontology that would allow matter to be understood as something that is creating an excess of itself by which it escapes any reductionism. As she herself states, epistemology is not an interest of hers.²² She is an ontologist and all the other authors she draws on and who will be mentioned in this text at least briefly are turned into ontologists as well (despite their possible affinity for epistemology) and they, therefore, serve this purpose of her philosophy to develop a dynamic ontology of matter and life by providing her with various concepts.²³

To conclude, Grosz’s materialist ontology is unique exactly for its focus on *force*.²⁴ Matter is in its fundamental ground nothing but a multiplicity of different speeding forces that preexist every contemporary stability. Anything that is created from this chaotic mixture, whether it is an artwork, scientific theory, or a living body, are just points of temporal coherence. They are effects of various becomings and should be understood as resultant forces that take part in a long and branched chain of forces whose effects are constantly piling up and whose final result can never be fully calculated as the matter further differentiates. This is why Grosz’s materialism is nonreductive for more than just one reason. Not only does it dynamize what could be understood as dead and stable, but it also cannot claim that it is in its power to allow for something that is of human provenance to arrogate a final explanation of all there is. It is constructed and its effects are

²⁰ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 5; Pulkkinen, “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 286.

²¹ Pulkkinen, “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 279.

²² Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 248.

²³ This approach of Grosz towards the philosophers she is inspired by, namely towards Darwin and Irigaray, is uncovered in Pulkkinen’s text “The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz’s Deleuzian Feminist Theory,” 279–95.

²⁴ “...I would prefer to understand life and matter in terms of their temporal and durational entwinements. Matter and life become, and become undone. They transform and are transformed. This is less a new kind of materialism than it is a new understanding of the forces, both material and immaterial, that direct us to the future.” Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 5.

unknowable. If anything, it is just another ordered ontology claiming its position among others. It is, however, one that acknowledges its force and desire to cause change.

1.2 Materialism and Art

In an interview with Katve-Kaisa Kontturi and Milla Tiainen, given in 2007 (right before publishing her first book devoted exclusively to her theory of art) Grosz advises for a specific conceptualization of artworks that would allow for them to be understood as a result of “experimentations with the real”.²⁵ I take such experimentations to be couplings of a living body – of an artist or an observer – and of material forces of a real. Therefore, when referring to art in Grosz’s perspective, the status of a living body and matter is a major one. There is a need for concepts that frame the overall conditions of life, conditions that allow bodies and other material objects to affect each other – for creation of artwork can be understood as an accumulation of forces which results in a production of some sort of excessive compound of qualities that is capable of escaping the movements of an artist to form a force on its own. The creation of art is, therefore, a way through which the world and all the bodies in it can be affected.²⁶ Chaos – a totality of various forces – is what enables these qualities to emerge; at the same time, it positions them on its surface, which results in various unexpected effects. According to Grosz, products of culture like concepts, artworks or theories are not to be understood as something that stands in opposition to material nature, a nature that is static and pre-given and that is put into motion only by a culture that represents it in a creative way.²⁷ It is exactly the other way around. Culture – and consequently also

²⁵ Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 247; At the beginning of this interview, Grosz responds to a then popular positive approach towards “representation” in feminist theory that, according to her understanding, positions representation in an opposition to the world as some sort of a domain that allows for an active participation of subjects on those tactics that frame them, construct them and so on. Grosz defends her distancing from this popular conceptualization of representation by pointing out to some kind of dualism this approach entails. Rather than thinking the world or nature as some sort of stable or imperceptible thing in itself and opposing it to representation of it, she links those two and at the same time subverts the dynamic of this relationship. It is not that representation forces some sort of a movement on motionless nature, for nature has never been motionless in the first place. “What we need,” she states, “are the representations to slow down the world [...]” Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 248.

²⁶ Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 247.

²⁷ Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 248

art – is, according to Grosz, “the fruition, the culmination of nature”.²⁸ Her notion of nature as chaotic and dynamic allows her to conceptualize culture as something that is creative and can come up with anything new only to an extent that it is drawn from a nature that is bound to produce new forms of life.

In the following chapters, I will define the concepts that grasp not only art but also a living body as a specific convergence or redirection of forces that make up nature. It is the bringing down of a human together with their “cultural” inventions to corporeality that allows Grosz to form theory of art that draws on the concept of nature that is creative, that allows for bodies to accumulate and channel these creative forces, and that further positions body on the same plane with art which results in their mutual interaction. Regarding the problematics of art, it is the events in which those interactions take place that need to be addressed in order to understand both how we can become creative and how artworks can have any effect on our bodies. This might still seem too reductive for some. Isn’t “art” more than just a result of our body interacting with the matter around it? Maybe it is, however, it would be another kind of reductive approach to obviate the process itself through which it is created in the first place. There is something inherently interesting and philosophically relevant in the process in which a body couples with, say, a brush and paints. Grosz states that she is “interested in the processes that make and unmake objects” but isn’t art precisely a result of these processes – and a result that is totally unpredictable, for what exactly is its purpose?²⁹ The experiment operationalized in this thesis takes a look at the ontology that would argue for the importance of these processes, that could take art (but also ethics) as something that came to be, rather than something that is just “there” and that can inherently be linked to ethics as well as politics.

1.3 Living body

How did a living body come to be? Grosz’s *Chaos, Territory, Art* provides quite a simple answer to such a question. Its emergence is purely random, and it wasn’t in any way planned. It came to be as an effect of various forces that at the same keep it in motion.³⁰ What is more complicated is,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 1.

³⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 5–6.

however, the relation between life and those forces. In *The Nick of Time* Grosz refers to Nietzsche and his understanding of the *will to power* – a concept that could easily be linked to Grosz’s concept of *force* – to explain in detail such relation.³¹ The important element that she takes from his text is the concept of will, which is not proper to life as such – because it permeates everything that is outside of it.³² Once again, we have stumbled upon a concept of dynamic nature. Force, therefore, cannot be a concept that would differentiate life from matter. Thus, instead of partaking in some sort of dualism that would oppose a living body to inanimate matter, Grosz, being influenced by Nietzsche, understands the living body (life) as “that which *accumulates force*, attracts other wills, augments itself.”³³ What is, therefore, unique about life, is that it has “the will to accumulate force”.³⁴

The living body should be understood as an effect of various forces, either social, natural, or material, that are channeled through it. Whether it is the force of attraction brought forward by sexual selection (which is a force of great importance in Grosz’s ontology, as we will see later) or a force like gravity, these are all forces playing their part in the current state of things, and they imply an opening for future states as well. Grosz’s search for the concept of life that would incorporate such multiplicity of forces leads her directly to Charles Darwin’s texts. Unlike many of his successors, Grosz refuses to reduce the organism to mere genetics.³⁵ Grosz Argues that Darwin’s concept of life offers a multilayered scheme in which the living body is presented as a multiplicity, as an interplay or struggle not only of many external forces but also of internal ones, coming from genes and organs, from every cell, from every living organism that has its part in making a body.³⁶ In Grosz’s understanding of Darwin, “life has no privileged moments” – there is

³¹ Grosz regards the relationship between concept of force and concept of *will to power* through Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche. *Will to power*, in his understanding, is not exactly a force as such, but rather a “*synthesis of forces*”, as a precondition of forces to cohere or oppose each other. *Will to power* is, therefore, something that allows forces to be directed as well as a result of these forces. Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 129.

³² Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 133.

³³ Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 133.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), #689; Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 134.

³⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 119.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

no moment when life reaches its ideal form.³⁷ This notion links her and Darwin's conceptualization to that of Nietzsche, who breaks down the body into parts – organs and cells – which in themselves emit the *will to power* whose status is no lesser that of those of any larger forms.³⁸ A living body, an organism, therefore, is a milieu composed of other milieus, it is a section of the totality of forces that has no clear lines determining where it ends and where it begins.³⁹ What her ontology of chaotic forces allows is to think the forces as mutually affecting each other, as they are happening in one dimension that is without any depth.⁴⁰ Artwork, which is commonly understood as a consequence of the cultural domain that only has a cultural impact, is also one of the many centers of a forcefield that has an impact on material bodies.

Drawing on inspiration from Nietzsche, as well as on Bergson and Deleuze, we see that Grosz extends materialism by the concepts of *life* and *force*.⁴¹ These concepts, meanwhile, should not be understood as concepts opposing matter, but as something that complicates our understanding of it.⁴² In her texts, a living body is not exempted from a material field of forces. On the contrary, it is a force itself, it operates on the same flat surface any other forces do, which is what enables them to interact. We can see, therefore, that in Grosz's interpretation, a body is not alive because it is animated from the outside by some sort of insertion (of a soul, a mind or a form).⁴³ It is alive because it is a specific self-organizing system that forms a force capable of redirecting and utilizing other forces.⁴⁴ Life is, therefore, one of the ways through which matter differentiates to create excess of itself. It enriches the matter by coalescing a "self-organizing system" that utilizes the material through various tactics.⁴⁵ Because of these creative tactics, that paradoxically could be seen as struggles of living body to ensure its survival, life evades any

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 41.

⁴⁰ Grosz, by referencing Deleuze, names Stoics as one of the first "philosophers of the surface". Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 21–22; Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 130.

⁴¹ Pulkkinen, "The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory," 284.

⁴² Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 34.

⁴³ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 156.

⁴⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 3, 34; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 5–6.

⁴⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 31–34.

stability. There is a constant tension between a past and a future, between an inside and an outside, arising the moment there is an organism and it is, therefore, not an accident that Grosz, in several places, defines the theories of life she addresses, whether it is through Darwin's, Bergson's or Deleuze's concepts, as a sort of *dynamism*.⁴⁶ It is life understood as a dynamic redirection of various physical forces that we need to address in order to move forward to art itself, because this understanding of life enables us to describe the processes through which a body is becoming sensible towards various stimuli, including aesthetic pleasure.⁴⁷ Knowing this, it is no wonder that Grosz herself begins her book devoted directly to art (as in *Chaos, Territory, Art*) with a reference to Bergson's conception of life and matter:

“[...] life, even the simplest organic cell, carries the past with its present as no material object does. This incipient memory endows life with creativity, the capacity to elaborate an innovative and unpredictable response to stimuli, to react or, rather, simply to act, to enfold matter into itself, to transform matter and life in unpredictable ways.”⁴⁸

We can see that through Bergson's concept of life, Grosz constitutes a living body as an accumulation of forces of a specific kind; it allows for organizing itself according to the past as well as for addressing the future states it might enter.⁴⁹ Both its past and its future are a result of a conflicts that call for a system that is capable of inventing various tactics that keep it in function. The task of those tactics is to solve problems, to ensure survival, but also, as we will see later in Grosz's concept of sexual difference, to come outside of itself, to allure other bodies, and to become not only a self-sustaining compound, but also an inventive and intensive one. Because life strives to accumulate, it is never stable, never in harmony with its surrounding, as Grosz states: “[...]life is not a balance and equilibrium but accumulation or expenditure to excess, the production of the unnecessary, invention and art as well as brutality and cruelty, for its own sake.”⁵⁰ We can see that

⁴⁶ Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 17; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6; Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 27.; Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 216, 246.

⁴⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6.

⁴⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6.

⁴⁹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 27–8.

⁵⁰ Grosz, *Nick of Time*, 133.

there is something about a living body that allows for creativity, for if life accumulates forces that themselves enabled it to emerge in the first place, the most it can do is to redirect them towards matter in order to “insert” life back to matter, to create an organized material compound that would be as intensive as a living body and that can produce an excess in the similar way living body can. That, in both Grosz’s and Burroughs’s texts, is a creation of an artwork.

1.4 Grosz’s project of Ontoethics

So far, we have shed light on at least the basics of Grosz’s ontology. However, an ontology that provides us with knowledge of what there is holds its value only to the extent it enables us to understand what caused us and what we can cause, to understand our possibilities of becoming other.⁵¹ Grosz understands the present as open-ended and takes no relations or things as such to be definite and eternally given. This, however, results in an ontology that leaves specific freedom and chance to those processes through which relations of various values can be formed. Because we are part of life, we can connect to the chaotic forces that generated our bodies and establish new relations to other bodies and objects, we can come up with various ways of life that are possible only to an extent that our bodies and their relations are never definitive. What’s more, relations might not only be formed between things that are already there, but that could result in entirely new entities. The claim behind Grosz’s connection between ontology and ethics is that how we relate to other forms of life and objects has a direct impact on the world, and therefore, results in the various becomings through which things come to be.⁵² By acknowledging this, an *ontoethics* can be developed, ethics that emerges directly from ontology.⁵³

Ethics is a concept that does not describe what life is like or what it should be like, but *how* it is and how it can be. Because the living body is present in a world where it needs to ensure constant exchange with the matter that surrounds it, each life form has to address the possible relations that can be developed because of its dynamic nature. It is because life has to interact that it has developed ethics suitable to its conditions as well as for production. The living body needs

⁵¹ This notion comes from Grosz’s interpretation of Nietzsche: “[...] in his understanding, a study of the way the world is, is a condition for a moral life, a life of self-overcoming and self-expansion.” Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 103.

⁵² Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 1, 7.

⁵³ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 1.

to keep itself in action and it is through ethics that it can distinguish which practices are appropriate and which aren't to ensure not only its future survival and continuation but also the possible ways through which it can be connected to other bodies, through which it can transform itself and be part of a nature that is creative. If there is, therefore, an universal ethical principle all life forms are subjected to, it would be the principle of "maximizing action".⁵⁴ Otherwise, Grosz argues that we always have to look at the specific situation of a given life form – for example, a specific species and its material conditions – to deduce what tactics are the best in order for a given life form to find the optimal way to "actualize the virtual" – to form new objects and relations through connections it can make to what there is.⁵⁵ The basic mode of life and therefore a continuous attunement of any living body is to explore the possibilities of what can be sensed and what can be created. This is the imperative immanent to all life forms – the imperative to constantly reinvent, to make the most out of the laws which life is subjected to in order not only to preserve the past but also address the future. This principle is what, according to Grosz, forms the *unity of life*.⁵⁶

Although life forms a unity through its creative connection to the material, it is exactly this principle that results in a multiplicity of life, in varieties of life forms. Due to changing material conditions, what differs is not only the possibilities of development but also the strategies through which the virtual can be actualized.⁵⁷ Different organs allow for different qualities to be sensed; different bodies allow for different social relationships, and, therefore, for diverse versions of ethics and aesthetics.⁵⁸ At the same time, when there is a living body, a series of tactics emerges as the body deals with conflicting forces to ensure its survival and production. At this point, we can see the first of Grosz's attempts to dehumanize ethics and art; for the most effective way through which life form comes up with new ethics is not through passive contemplation but through the direct effects on the body. Human development does not hold a patent on efficiency in any way.⁵⁹ Creativity is not a result of human capacities. It is an effect of forces that put *any* living body in a problem-solving setting resulting in original solutions. Grosz's *ontoethics* is therefore applicable

⁵⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 22.

⁵⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 19–21.

⁵⁶ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 33.

⁵⁷ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 20.

⁵⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

to any beings and any life form. It can be shown not only how we are like animals, which is what many scientific theories have been doing for a long time already, but also how animals are like us – how they too are creative and artistic.

Because with the addition of life matter is constantly reinvented, it calls for invention on our part too. Arts and ethics are a creative response of life to life itself and to the problems it entails, and therefore needs to be understood as part of the processes that are natural. This approach toward philosophy and art is present in Grosz's as well as in Deleuze's work. As Ronald Bogue summarizes in his book *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*: "As molecules bond, embryos divide, or birds grow and sing, so painters paint, philosophers conceptualize, and scientists postulate, experiment, and theorize."⁶⁰ Both philosophy and art are parts of natural processes and so they are subjected to the same forces as our bodies are. They are results of principles immanent in life itself and it is therefore through the concept of life we can connect art and philosophy to the material.

1.5 What is Dangerous to Life?

In order to advance in connecting *ontoethics* with art, we need to move forward to another great influence on Grosz's work, namely Nietzsche. In *The Incorporeal*, the chapter on Nietzsche is one of the first points where the connection between ethics and art is made, and it couldn't be done without Nietzsche's core concepts like the *will to power* and *overcoming*. Once these are added, ontology, ethics, and art are no longer to be separated. Ethics that deals with the problematics of how "the world could be" is found inside the theory about "how the world is" and concordantly, ontology is described as something naturally pouring out of the way we develop ethical relations with the past, the present, and the future, for we play our part on the way life unfolds itself.⁶¹ The significance of art in this context lies in its capability to affect living bodies through the sensations it produces. Art is pushing life forms forward in their evolutionary process of *overcoming* and is, therefore, one of the most intense processes through which a body can become other.⁶² Grosz cites

⁶⁰ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

⁶¹ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 1, 96.

⁶² Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 157.

The Gay Science, one section of which could be especially useful in the effort to concisely describe the relationship between knowledge, creativity and overcoming:

“We [who want to live outside of the great majority] however, want to become who we are,— the new, unique, incomparable ones, who give themselves their own laws, who create themselves! And to that ends we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists in order to be able to be creators [...].”⁶³

According to Grosz, the discovery “of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world” does not equal the abstract knowledge we attain through our minds, for it also presupposes the experiences of our bodies that link us to the world.⁶⁴ To understand does not mean to contemplate, but to experience, sense, and create. Our knowledge is useless, or maybe it is not even knowledge if it “stays inside”. It needs to get out to gain any meaning whatsoever. But even if it does, what science that produces knowledge lacks, is the understanding of its own origin and status – the fact that it is constructed, and that its theories only maintain their value according to the degree of influence they have on our “way of life”, as Grosz puts it.⁶⁵ In the discovery of this shortcoming, Grosz together with Nietzsche positions art as a piece that completes the ontology she wishes to elaborate, inasmuch as it is art that uncovers a function of human constructions (that sciences are part of), which is “to enhance our ways of living”, linking ontology directly to ethics.⁶⁶

To enhance ways of living, however, does not mean to strengthen what is already there, but to push our bodies towards new experiences, new becomings. Similar points about the concept of *self-overcoming* are made in *Becoming Undone*, only here, the concept is approached from a Darwinian perspective. In Grosz’s understanding, Darwin is “the first theorist of becoming,” for his theory of evolution allowed life to be taken out of its motionless form and direct itself towards

⁶³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), #335; Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 103.

⁶⁴ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 103.

⁶⁵ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 104.

⁶⁶ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 104; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #344.

unpredictable futures.⁶⁷ It follows that the biological context of any life form is not determining but rather open-ended and unpredictable and that life is bound to change on some fundamental, bodily level; this also applies to the human situation. “Darwin has affected a new kind of humanity,” Grosz writes, “whose destiny is *self-overcoming*, a humanity that no longer knows or masters itself, a humanity doomed to undo itself...”⁶⁸ Grosz in *The Incorporeal* seeks a kind of Darwinian reading of Nietzsche, a reading that would make it possible to combine Nietzsche’s ethics of *self-overcoming* with evolutionary theory. This would result in an ethics that is not prescribed to life but is immanent to it, it is entailed in its dynamic aspect. This is an ethics that is as a result not that different from what Nietzsche tries to accomplish with his concept of *gay science*.

For Grosz, to create a new kind of science – *The Gay Science* – means to refocus our perspective. While not abandoning the past that made possible what there is, we need to add a new horizon – the future – to our philosophy.⁶⁹ With this addition, it is possible to link ontology, ethics, and art, for if we understand what there is (ontology), we are able to partner with the agencies that make us towards the new goal of *overcoming* (ethics), which is essentially an aim that reaches for the *creation* (art) of an overman – a living body that is not a closed entity entrapped inside an impermeable void, but that is “the most opened to being affected”.⁷⁰

Grosz states that the human is no longer one above many but “one among many”, making such a life form in principle no different in kind from any other and that it is our animal nature, the nature of our bodies, by which we have to understand not only the ways through which we can be inventive but also what these inventions could be and what gives them their value.⁷¹ Humanity has always tried to rupture itself from the relations that are responsible for its current state in a struggle to free itself from nature.⁷² Nevertheless, Darwin’s contribution to philosophy makes these efforts futile. The human effort to free itself from nature, to control it, can never be achieved, for humanity itself is an effect of the processes of nature, and only if it understands itself as an effect resulting

⁶⁷ Kontturi, Tiainen, “Feminism, Art, Deleuze, and Darwin,” 248.

⁶⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 24.

⁶⁹ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 107.

⁷⁰ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 107, 275; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #301.

⁷¹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 24.

⁷² Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 24.

from many causes, can it finally free itself *from* itself and from its useless efforts. According to Grosz, we need new humanities (new ethics), nonetheless, “a new humanities become possible once the human is placed in its properly inhuman context.”⁷³ In the following pages we will discover that art is one of the most important parts of the inhuman context. It links the human to the animal within it and to the material forces, which is how in Grosz’s philosophy, it gains its evolutionary importance by addressing the unpredictable futures.⁷⁴

If the goal of science is to enhance our way of life and art subsist within this link between science and life, it is the arts that “enable life to overcome itself” – for arts harness the present state of things in order to produce another.⁷⁵ It enhances the best, the most ethical way of life there is as it produces sensations ensuring a body of its openness which result in a necessary *overcoming*. That is, according to Grosz, the fate we ought to love, the state of *amor fati* Nietzsche writes about.⁷⁶ Fate does not lie in untouchable perfection, but in the passionate, to follow Nietzsche, *imperfectum*.

With the addition of another object, and it doesn’t matter if it is a work of art or a power plant, it cannot be expected that nature necessarily becomes more controlled. On the contrary, with every addition, we harness forces and create a new one that sometimes can turn towards us in unexpected ways. Through creating art, through transforming nature, we create an agency that transforms us back.⁷⁷ Only through this can we transform ourselves into “living works of art”, which is the only way through which, according to Grosz, we can become a being that is fully devoted to loving its fate of “becoming who one is.”⁷⁸

Because of the direct effect artwork can have on body, the process of *overcoming* is not best achieved through morality, or knowledge, but through art. Therefore, the *overcoming* of life is what links ethics to art and what consequently links those two to ontology. In this thesis, I would like to link *overcoming* with creativity and then focus on how the creative process is a process full

⁷³ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 21.

⁷⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 60.

⁷⁵ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 95.

⁷⁶ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 95, 100.

⁷⁷ “[...] a gay science, is the result not of an overcoming an annihilation of nature but of its stylization, its transformation, and our own.” Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 123.

⁷⁸ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 122.

of dangerous encounters, that is elaborated with the help of Burroughs's creations. If artwork uncovers the constructed nature of those aspects of life that push it to overcome itself, Burroughs's paintings make obvious the dangerous aspect these *overcomings* inherently contain. Together with Nietzsche, Grosz argues that what is "dangerous to life" is actually the avoidance of the dangerous aspects it yields.⁷⁹ In the ethics she develops, passions are no longer to be suppressed and controlled, but they are to be accepted and allowed to pass into action. Following Darwin, we can overcome our human nature by acknowledging the animal in us, and consequently, by allowing our body to change end position ourselves towards new futures. And if it is art that can have the most direct effect on our body, it is art through which an ethical life can be achieved. Ethical life, the one that loves its fate, the one that is opened to every possible experience, even the dangerous one, demands the kind of art Burroughs produces. It needs an artwork that stands alone like a body with a frame instead of skin in front of those who observe it, an artwork that provokes life to such a degree that it produces sensations capable, in theory, of destroying an individual. It is a model representing a limit of what most art can accomplish – to be a threat to its creator.

1.6 Overcoming of Nietzsche: A Feminist Critique

Grosz's *ontoethics* is not fully Nietzschean (although it couldn't be done without him) for there is something Nietzsche forgets. For a human to thrive, it has to acknowledge those forces that allowed him to enter a state of life, when he can, finally, love his fate and open himself enough to overcome himself. Those forces, however, are also other living bodies, animals and women too, that have been forgotten in the process of *self-overcoming* of man. According to Grosz, the process of *self-overcoming* in Nietzsche lacks ethics that would allow for anti-oppressive relations to others. As she specifies in a footnote:

"It is clear, that for Nietzsche the primary conditions for *self-overcoming* are not collective, social, interpersonal, but primarily solitary, a matter of the rare individual actively confronting his (or her) own limits, with no concern for others, for those understood as weak, unhealthy, downtrodden, or part of the herd."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 108–9.

⁸⁰ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 276.

Although Nietzsche defined under which circumstances human “thrives” and opens self towards new becomings, forgot that an individual cannot do this on its own. The preconditions he prescribed might also be used to address how we could collectively become more ethical beings, no longer humans whose effort to control and repress nature has only pushed it away from its creative potential. And no other can make this process possible than a female to whom man, Nietzsche included, owes a “maternal debt of life”.⁸¹ Grosz continues this critique by advocating for the reading of Nietzsche by Luce Irigaray (whose influence on Grosz’s thinking will be further unfolded in the following chapters). According to Irigaray, Nietzsche’s idea of *eternal return* is an idea that kills life in its attempts to affirm it and save it from weakness. It is a life that refuses to be reborn, for it has ruptured itself from the world, from others, once again clinging to another realm – life after death with no chance of being born again, for there is no mother that could complete this task.⁸²

A similar critique can also be found in Grosz’s *Chaos, Territory, Art*, where Nietzsche’s accent on the *will to power* is commented on with respect to art.⁸³ In contrast to Nietzsche, Grosz argues that for a body to enter creative encounters, it has to acknowledge that there are forces that do not belong to him, although they can affect him.⁸⁴ Art, therefore, cannot be understood as an attempt of a body to direct its own forces outside of itself. Only by acknowledging the relations a body has with its surrounding, only when it refuses to control it, can art be grasped as something generating sensations that are not from us (as Nietzsche would argue) but towards us. Art is not resemblance or representation to the organic, but itself partly ordered self-organizing system that frames the chaotic forces and becomes another center of a force-field.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 120.

⁸² In Grosz’s text this claim is supported by Irigaray’s incrimination of Nietzsche: “And your whole will, your eternal recurrence, are these anything more than the dream of one who neither wants to have been born, nor to continue being born, at very instant, of a female other?” Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover: Of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press: 1991), 26.

⁸³ “Thus the first gesture of art is not, as Nietzsche believed, the exteriorization of one’s own bodily forces and energies, the transformation of flesh and blood into canvas and oil but a more primary gesture that requires a body’s prior separation from the earth, from nature, from its world.” Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

This feminist method whose glimpse can be spotted in Grosz's treatment of Nietzsche is something characteristic of her work overall. With the exception of Irigaray, she focuses little on female philosophers, which is not due to her lack of interest in feminism, but rather due to her lack of interest in separating (once again as we have seen with Nietzsche) one type of body from others. Although, as we will see in the upcoming chapter, Grosz's concept of sexual difference through which nature is separated in two holds a special ontological status, it is not so much about the separation of one body from another, but about a new kind of relationship between bodies. The goal of her feminist philosophy is not primarily to focus on oppression but on those means through which oppression can be overturned. And if this can only be done through those that focus their energy on achieving such goals, so be it, even if they are men. If you wish to free yourself from those who oppress you, do not shy away from men, but claim their inventive practices as your own.

2 Origins of Art

So far, Grosz's philosophy has been described as an ontology that can be understood as some sort of *dynamism* by which it produces both an ontology *as well as* ethics. However, only now have we stepped on the ground of Grosz's ontology which is also a feminist ontology, and because those concepts through which she thinks the origins of art are indeed concepts brought forward in her work on feminism, we need to dive deeper into it. It could be said that Grosz feminizes those scholars she chooses to work with mainly through the writings of Luce Irigaray. Whether it is Nietzsche, Darwin, or Deleuze, it is through Irigaray's concept of sexual difference and her understanding of nature as "always at least two" through which she manages to pull the body out of its solitude – as we have seen with her critique of Nietzsche's *self-overcoming*.⁸⁶ Because of sexual selection, whose importance in the natural world has been established in Darwin's work already, the body radically changes – for there is another body it has to take into consideration. This results in a whole new relation of body towards matter, a relation that is indeed artistic.

Whether Grosz writes on the topic of art or feminism, there is a tension that arises in the combination of thinkers she chooses to work with. Once we move to the theory of art and creativity specifically, the thinkers appearing are namely Charles Darwin, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, and Jakob von Uexküll. Although these thinkers form an unusual combination, their concepts establish a stable structure in Grosz's work. When Erin Hortle and Hannah Stark (2019) write about this thing specific to Grosz's work – namely about the choice of authors that are almost seemingly incompatible (Darwin, Deleuze, and Irigaray) they pointedly note that these thinkers "sit in Grosz's work like the sides of a triangle, each positioned so they hold the others in place."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Hortle's and Stark's text does not focus on the role of art and creativity in Grosz's work, which may sometimes be seen as a project secondary to her work on feminism. However, as we have partly proven in the previous chapter, it is almost impossible to read her work on (feminist) ethics

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference, Irigaray and Darwin," *Angelaki* 17, no. 2 (2012): 69–93, 74; Luce Irigaray, "Human Nature is Two" in *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, transl. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 35–42, 35.

⁸⁷ Erin Hortle and Hannah Stark, "Framing Sexual Selection: Elizabeth Grosz's Work on Deleuze, Darwin and Feminism" in Michael James Bennet and Tano S. Posteraro, *Deleuze and Evolutionary Theory*, Deleuze Connections, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 59–74), 59.

and ontology without also providing insight into the role of creativity in life. Switching the focus to art by adding another important source of hers, namely Jakob von Uexküll, might help with the understanding of the relationship between an animal and its lived world, as well as the overlap between art and the natural world.

2.1 Grosz's Irigarayan Darwinism

Luce Irigaray's concept of sexual difference plays a specific ontological role in Grosz's work.⁸⁸ Although Irigaray refers to her main concept of sexual difference mainly through the problematics of cultural life, in Grosz's texts it is put in the context of biology, which is done through a Darwinian perspective on the matter. In Grosz's *The Nature of Sexual Difference: Irigaray and Darwin* (2012), she pursues the following: to "produce a kind of cross-mutation" between Darwin and Irigaray. Grosz "radicalizes" both Irigaray and Darwin.⁸⁹ This is a bold move, for Grosz demonstrates that Darwin's texts are relevant for feminist theory from a whole new perspective.⁹⁰ By combining the concept of sexual difference with Darwin's sexual selection, Grosz pursues to prove the irreducibility of sexual selection to natural selection and simultaneously continue on Irigaray's concept of sexual difference through placing it in the natural world. What follows is the establishment of sexual difference as a difference with a special ontological status, for it becomes a "motor" through which life is pushed towards producing its excessive variations in both biological and cultural domain.⁹¹ What is important here, is that sexual difference as a grounding concept leads Grosz towards announcing the beginning of the *artistic* in life which is brought forth as nature is sexed. This is because it is indeed sexual difference that "alters the course of life as we know it, deflecting all other forms of evaluation and selection through the inexplicable, unpredictable, incalculable vagaries of taste, desire, appeal."⁹² Taste and appeal – concepts that are associated so strongly with art – have to first be addressed in terms of their origin, which is sexual difference.

⁸⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2.

⁸⁹ Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 78.

⁹⁰ Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 69–70.

⁹¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2.; Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 147; Pulkkinen, "The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory," 287–8.

⁹² Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 88.

Many thinkers have already proceeded to work with certain concepts of Darwin, however, according to Grosz, their work often drawn incorrect conclusions that consider sexual selection and natural selection as inseparable, as two sides of the same coin – namely the principle of survival.⁹³ In Grosz’s thorough reading, there is already a conceptualization of sexual selection in Darwin’s texts that is incompatible with natural selection. While natural selection “is primarily directed to survival”, sexual selection is in operation for another reason – namely for “the attainment of possible sexual partners.”⁹⁴ Sexual selection demands the attractiveness of a body. It is what “enhances and intensifies the differences between the sexes,”⁹⁵ for there is now a production of excess on both sides of the relation. An excess that takes on the form of various qualities and bodily characteristics that are “often superficial and generally nonfunctional”⁹⁶ for its meaning cannot be explained with respect to just one body, the one that carries this excess as some sort of a quality (e.g. odors, colorful feathers, etc.) – there has to be another body too, the one that is attracted to these qualities. It is, therefore, attraction that allows for a body to become expressive as well as excessive because in the process of attraction a body has been pushed outside of itself towards other bodies by utilizing techniques through which it struggles to overcome itself. The characteristics of a body that are to attract partners, therefore, do not follow the same purpose as those bodily parts that have developed to ensure survival. “[...] these forms of sexual selection, sexual attraction,” Grosz writes, “affirm the excessiveness of the body and the natural order, their capacity to bring out in each other what surprises, what is of no use but attracts and appeals.”⁹⁷ What follows is that Grosz does not construe sexual selection as simply leading to reproduction (which would link it to natural selection) but as something that allows for a body to be part of courtship without the attention to the result of those connections.⁹⁸ Sexual selection is there because of the other, and its purpose is no other than an intensification of qualities, which links attraction to “art practices”.⁹⁹

⁹³ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 119.

⁹⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 120.

⁹⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 121.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 7.

⁹⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 121, 122.

⁹⁹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 7.

Grosz argues that what links Irigaray to Darwin is their mutual effort to return the body to this dynamized nature. Previously I've mentioned that in Grosz's interpretation, Darwin's conception of a human being as a member of the animal kingdom prevents humans from positioning themselves above nature. Irigaray's effort to think (human) nature not as "one" but always "at least two" – as male and female – allows for a more dynamic concept of natural processes.¹⁰⁰ This allows Grosz to understand nature as never complete, always as a tension between at least two forces, as a place of creativity.¹⁰¹ It is Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference as a grounding universal, as "the engine or force involved in the production of all other differences" on which Grosz feminizes her philosophy and through which sexual difference becomes one of the most important concepts for her. Grosz combines Irigaray and Darwin by understanding Darwin's concept of sexual selection as "a form of sexual difference" or as "the consequence of sexual difference or morphological bifurcation".¹⁰² Once sexual difference is established in nature, bodies are ever further differentiated as sexual characteristics designed to attract partners allow for the acceleration of production of variations.¹⁰³ This is the base for understanding sexual difference as a difference whose importance is truly *ontological*. Because two bodies are providing their genes, the result is not the repetition of an individual, but something other than the original. This is why for Grosz, sexual difference is "the very machinery for guaranteeing the endless generation of morphological and genetic variation, the very mechanism of biological difference itself."¹⁰⁴

If we look for the origins of art, we have to start with the animal and examine the force of sexual selection, for according to Grosz it is the sexual selection that allows art to emerge.¹⁰⁵ In *Chaos, Territory, Art* she poses the relationship between art and sexuality in more detail:

¹⁰⁰ Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 73–74; Irigaray, "Human Nature is Two," 35.

¹⁰¹ Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 75.

¹⁰² Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 78; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6.

¹⁰³ Grosz, "The Nature of Sexual Difference," 81–82.; This aspect of Grosz's philosophy is well summarized in Pulkkinen's text: "The idea here is that when there are two individuals who give their genes to a new individual, this multiplies the chances of variation in comparison to a continuation of life through non-sexed systems of reproduction." Pulkkinen, "The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory," 187.

¹⁰⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 170; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6; Pulkkinen, "The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory," 287.

¹⁰⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 7.

“[...] it is not exactly true that art is the consequence of the excess that sexuality or sexual drive poses, for it may be that sexuality itself needs to function artistically to be adequately sexual, adequately creative, that sexuality [...] needs to harness excessiveness and invention to function at all.”¹⁰⁶

What ensues from this argument is the correction that art does not resemble tactics of sexual selection, but that those tactics are in fact artistic. Sexed bodies do intensify sensation which is, according to Grosz, a goal in itself, and it is this absence of an external goal that makes sexuality artistic, always in the search for other ways of producing excessive intensities.¹⁰⁷ Sexual selection, however, is not only of the body’s concern; it has to be broadened to the totality of nature as well. As the body is attuned to sense attractiveness, the whole world is shifted, allowing for the emergence of artistic excess.¹⁰⁸ What links the sexed body to a work of art is the production of intensified sensations, for what defines art as separate from other forms of production – the production of commodities – is its unexpectedness and illusive uselessness.¹⁰⁹ Whereas commodities serve a specific goal, they are designed to produce what is predictable.¹¹⁰ Art or a sexed body, on the other hand, has a specific “freedom” to it. It is intensive because it exceeds what is expected.

The reason why Grosz engages sexual and natural selection as principles that are to be kept separate is because when we reduce sexual selection as something subordinated to the “higher principle” of natural selection, we overlook the new that is brought forward through attraction – which is the intensification of matter.¹¹¹ Sexual difference, therefore, introduces art into life – the attention-grabbing combination of colors, the melodies of birdsong, the tempting scents.¹¹² When Grosz writes that “art is the sexualization of survival”, she means that art “hijacks the tactics of

¹⁰⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 64–5.

¹⁰⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 33, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 33.

¹¹² Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 7.

survival”, which has been given the potential to produce infinite variations through sexual difference.¹¹³ Sexualization entails the *creation* of “more”. It adds a new order to life, however, it is not just one order among many, for it radically changes life by generating endless production of new varieties, new forms of life.¹¹⁴

The introduction of pleasure from sensory qualities is established to keep “the machinery” that produces excessive differentiations and opens up life onto ever more possibilities in operation.¹¹⁵ It would be a great loss, as Hortle and Stark argue, to overlook the production of “excess” in the natural world for the sake of focusing on reproduction (which is essentially a result of “hetero-patriarchy” trying to naturalize the reproductive aspect of heterosexuality as the only function of sexual selection).¹¹⁶ Grosz’s Irigarayan reading of Darwin’s texts provides an alternative to the authors who refuse to relinquish this focus.¹¹⁷ There is no hierarchy to be drawn here. What Grosz accomplishes is the flattering of the evolutionary process in order to strip it of its goal-oriented narrative, the “higher principle” of reproduction (which is, in fact, reductive), leaving us “just” with the processes of endless differentiation.

2.2 Dangerous Attraction

With sexually differentiated bodies, life and survival are faced with a new challenge. For Grosz, it is important to understand the relationship between sexual and natural selection as a relationship of a fragile balance. While natural selection sorts through mutations that adapt to given environmental circumstances, sexual selection “complicates” the process of survival, because of the new necessity of a body to attract the other body.¹¹⁸ Natural selection precedes sexual selection in time; but while attracting other bodies can definitely also be seen as a tactic for survival (because if it fails, the result is a decline in offspring), sexual selection creates an unnecessary abundance of sensory stimuli that no longer serve survival of one body but the attraction of the other body. When life gives rise to the two kinds of bodies, whose task is to, at some point, couple and merge, there

¹¹³ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 172; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 11, 26.

¹¹⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Hortle, Stark, “Framing Sexual Selection,” 65; Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Hortle, Stark, “Framing Sexual Selection,” 67–68.

¹¹⁷ Hortle, Stark, “Framing Sexual Selection,” 67; Grosz, “The Nature of Sexual Difference,” 79.

¹¹⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 171.

is a new kind of *force* emerging as well. The sexually bifurcated body is pushed towards another direction and its struggle is now not only to survive but to “allure and acquire sexual partners”.¹¹⁹ With the addition of another force, survival is becoming more complex, and not only that, for there are times when struggle for survival and struggle to attract are to be seen as forces conflicting each other. This argument adds to Grosz’s theory of the irreducibility of sexual selection. It reverses tactics that turned out to be productive up until this point in time, for as the body is becoming *expressive*, it becomes vulnerable and the preservation of the individual is left behind as one can even be put into danger by exposing oneself (Grosz is referencing Amotz Zahavi’s *handicap principle*: “the more beautiful the peacock’s plumage, the more visible it is for all.”).¹²⁰ According to Grosz, sexual selection entails the delight in the beauty that develops despite the possible danger it could bring upon an individual.¹²¹

The exposing of oneself entails the emergence of vulnerability and, therefore, an increase in peril. However, I would like to argue that the danger does not have to be caused by the presence of a predator, rival (body of another species), but by a body that is threatening and alluring at the same time – which is, as I argue later in this text, crucial for understanding the tension emerging between a body and a work of art. To explore this proximity further, I attempt to prove that the danger caused by sexual selection is dual, one of which has been already described by Grosz and the other, I believe, can serve as a gateway to Burroughs’s notion of paintings as “dangerous creatures”, that are created to imperil one’s safety.

- (1) In Grosz’s ontology, because there is no external order to impose limits, different forces are left as if potentially unbounded, which applies to the force of sexual selection as well. With the complexity developing in the tactics ensuring the attraction of a partner, alluring bodies unintentionally attract bodies of predators as well. There is, therefore, no outer principle, no greater force of natural selection, that would stop the tactics from developing, for sexual selection is irreducible.

¹¹⁹ Hortle, Stark, “Framing Sexual Selection,” 66; Elizabeth Grosz, “The Nature of Sexual Difference: Irigaray and Darwin,” *Angelaki* 17, no. 2 (2012): 69–93, 81.

¹²⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 29–30; Amotz Zahavi, Avishag Zahavi, Na’ama Ely, and Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Handicap Principle: A Missing Piece of Darwin’s Puzzle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹²¹ Grosz, “The Nature of Sexual Difference,” 84.

(2) There is another type of danger that is not specifically addressed in Grosz's text, one that does not necessarily come from a predator, but the one that is always present in the process of attracting the other. Every sexual encounter implies the necessity of a body to be vulnerable, to form openings welcoming the other in order to increase pleasure. However, there is no affirmation of safety in these encounters and with the introduction of this type of encounter with another body, there is a tension between self-preservation and opening oneself for the other. The one body that attracts us can at the same time cause great harm, for in no other encounter are we intentionally and consciously participating in getting our body this close to another being.

This type of danger can perhaps be associated with one of the concepts introduced earlier in Grosz's work, namely desire, which is (in her Deleuzian interpretation) introduced as a "positive and productive" force drawing singular bodies towards something that is outside of themselves.¹²² This conceptualizes desire as positive, rather than as "a lack or a hole in being" (which would be a way of addressing desire through psychoanalytic interpretations).¹²³ However, Grosz interpretation is positive only to the extent that it builds on excess rather than on "lack". For in another section of Grosz's commentary on the topic, there is a hint of destruction in her own concept of desire, that "assembles things out of singularities; and it breaks down things, assemblages, into their singularities [...]."¹²⁴

I want to argue that the ethics Grosz develops together with the ontology – based on irreducible sexual difference – is not as joyous as it might seem. The argument of danger, which is of secondary importance in Grosz's text, is a point that I want to underline in this thesis. This is because the notion of danger that is hidden in sexual selection (and, consequently, in art) is one of the possible and perhaps the most suitable principles through which Grosz can be connected with Burroughs in order to produce a new perspective on art.

¹²² Elizabeth Grosz, "A thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," *Topoi* 12, no. 2 (1993): 167–179, 171.

¹²³ Deboleena Roy, "Microphysiologies of Desire," in *Molecular Feminism: Biology, Becomings, and Life in the Lab*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018, 57–89, 59; Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes," 172.

¹²⁴ Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes," 172.

2.3 Uexküll's Umwelt

Art that is not limited to the human is just the first few dots to connect in the new pattern Grosz outlines. There is another question arising from her texts. In the material world where there are animals, milieus they occupy, and territories they form, how can we describe the relationship between an animal and matter? It is these sorts of questions Grosz believes are indicated yet not fully developed in Darwin's work.¹²⁵ To answer the questions, Grosz turns to the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll, whose work not only provides concepts addressing the relationships forming an animal world, but also directly links those relationships with art.

In the work of Uexküll, art (more precisely music) is given a special status, which Grosz draws upon in order to understand art as something omnipresent throughout nature. Nature should be thought "through music."¹²⁶ Music is here presented as a form (not mere metaphor, as Grosz notes) that according to Uexküll clings to the "dynamics of life" and allows it to be grasped through the polyphonic relations emerging from it.¹²⁷ The gap between different species, males and females, organisms, and the world they occupy is not unbridgeable. As I've stated in the previous chapter, an organism is a result of various forces. These various forces are now interpreted as different compounds that *play* each other as instruments and form music as an outcome.¹²⁸ Uexküll's *Umwelt* (the *island of the senses*) is a concept that embraces such musical encounters.¹²⁹ His "musical laws of nature" explain not only how two bodies can interact (e.g. attract each other) but also in general how the body can interact with anything.¹³⁰ *Umwelt* is not a given milieu any animal can enter, but rather a world that is there already with respect to the animal; it is strained so it can be experienced as an *island of a senses*.¹³¹ It is the result of what sense-organs are attuned to, a given portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, range of frequencies and so on. The musical laws of nature explain

¹²⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 7.

¹²⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 40; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 314.

¹²⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 41; Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 174.

¹²⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 174, 176, 178.

¹²⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 41.

¹³⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 40.

¹³¹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 174.

how forces are taken out of the chaos and given to the action occurring between them and the organism.¹³² It is because of mutual attunement and interactions these forces provoke the living body to evolve, to expand beyond its limits, and by this, they enable the production of art.¹³³ In a milieu, which an animal occupies and which form its body, organs and Umwelt catch each other's *rhythms* and produce song as an outcome.¹³⁴ Once again, art is taken from the hands of the human and is taken elsewhere.¹³⁵ In Grosz's interpretation of Uexküll, the materialism is unmistakable. It is the *body's* interaction with what surrounds it that assigns meaning to the objects, the role of mind is moved aside.¹³⁶ As we have already seen in Grosz's interpretation of Darwin's texts, what is and what is not aesthetic depends on the body, and so there can be many different forms of aesthetics due to different body-milieu encounters made possible by given sense organs this or that life form is endowed with.¹³⁷ This notion is something Grosz elaborates through Darwin, as we have already seen in the introductory chapter. Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt*, however, allows for a more detailed interpretation of this body-dependent aesthetics.

In a similar way in which objects and organism equipped with organs are attuned to each other, an artwork also enters our *Umwelt* as a specific rhythmic compound. Thanks to Uexküll, Grosz can not only explain where the attraction we feel when encountering art comes from but also how this encounter with matter is even possible. If an artwork attracts us in similar ways any other body, living or not, can, following the bio-semiotician, it *plays* us as it produces affects through which we are *becoming-other*.¹³⁸

¹³² Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 176.

¹³³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 2–3, 99–100.

¹³⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 178.

¹³⁵ “For Uexküll, the music of nature is not composed by living organisms, a kind of anthropomorphic projection onto animals of a uniquely human form of creativity; rather, it is the Umwelten, highly specifically divided up milieu fragments that play the organism. The Organism is equipped by its organs to play precisely the tune its milieu has composed for it, like an instrument playing in a larger orchestra.” Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 43.

¹³⁶ Grosz cites Uexküll directly: “Everything that falls under the spell of an Umwelt is altered and reshaped until it has become a useful meaning-carrier; otherwise it is totally neglected.” Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 175; Jakob von Uexküll, “The Theory of Meaning,” *Semiotica* 42, no. 1 (1982): 25–82.

¹³⁷ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 23.

¹³⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 77.

2.4 Grotesque Body, Grotesque Art

Art and sexual selection foment the same – they announce the openings of a body to the possibilities of the new. The exchange between an artwork and a body (which is attacked by the sensations artwork generates) is a direct parallel to the process of attraction when two bodies intrude on each other’s milieu in order to open current structures for new becomings.¹³⁹ These two encounters with matter are based on the same principle which allows the qualities of matter to be intensified. These art encounters, however, require a radical rethinking of a body. In the spirit of Grosz’s philosophy, it is necessary to think of a new type of body. A body that is not perfectly enclosed, but is full of openings, through which it can be stimulated. Because we cannot conceptualize the impacts one body (or a work of art) has on another without addressing those “opened” zones through which body is stretched towards what is outside of itself, it is necessary to define their importance for Grosz’s theory of art and come up with concepts that could elucidate such an “opened” body.

One of those concepts could be the so-called *grotesque body* through which Dennis McDaniel (2004) refers to Burroughs’s paintings.¹⁴⁰ In the previous chapter, I’ve stated that when faced with another sexed body, the great structure between the parts of our body is potentially disrupted, which is what makes the encounter a dangerous one. Now, I’d like to argue for the association of those body parts that allow such disruption with those parts that make a body grotesque. When defining the *grotesque body*, McDaniel turns to Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition:

“Bakhtin states that the grotesque stresses ‘those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world’. The nose, lips, tongue, fingers, breasts and nipples, penis, feet and toes, and the body’s solid, liquid and gaseous issues are the raw materials of the artist of the grotesque”.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 7, 23.

¹⁴⁰ Dennis McDaniel “New World Ordue: Burroughs, Globalization and the Grotesque,” in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh, (London; Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2004), 135–141.

¹⁴¹ McDaniel “New World Ordue,” 136; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 26.

Every sexed body is in a sense grotesque, for it is full of weird openings and parts that are poking everywhere waiting to be stimulated; it is not a coincidence that Bakhtin refers exactly to those parts of the body that are most often associated with sexual pleasure. If Grosz defines a sexed body as that of excess, there is another factor of it – namely its grotesqueness – which is also defined by “superfluosness” – by something that is excessive.¹⁴² It is because of this superfluosness that the grotesque, sexed body, although it allows for intensification of pleasure, also “alienates, disturbs and unsettles” and is, therefore, a source of another type of danger.¹⁴³ To make a connection to Grosz’s writings, this type of danger puts one at risk for the sake of intensifying sensation. Although Grosz does not use the concept of *grotesque body*, her comments on art make the connection between intensification, innovation, and risk.

“Art is the consequence of that excess, that energy or force, that puts life at risk for the sake of intensification, for the sake of sensation itself – not simply for pleasure or for sexuality, as psychoanalysis suggests – but for what can be magnified, intensified, for what is more, through which creation, risk, innovation are undertaken for their own sake, for how and what they may intensify.”¹⁴⁴

We have seen in the previous chapter that Grosz gives great importance to the sexual characteristics of a body. Those however allow not only for sexual pleasure but also for sensing intensity of any kind. What is “sexualized” – meaning attuned towards sensing the intensity – is the whole body (not just sex organs) towards which the nature has become exposed. There is great opportunity given to a body that has been attuned this way – the creation of art. And this creation is made possible because of the attunement of those parts through which a body and world are connected, those parts that are, as Bakhtin or McDaniel state, grotesque. There is a great proximity between their definition of *grotesque body* and Grosz’s description of a body that has been sexually

¹⁴² McDaniel “New World Ordue,” 136.

¹⁴³ McDaniel “New World Ordue,” 133.

¹⁴⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 63.

differentiated and whose sexualization is not to be looked upon only through the development of sex organs, for it endows a body with a whole new outline.

“Sexual selection magnifies and highlights these morphological differences and transformations – those differences that attract or appeal are more likely to be selected and incorporated into successive generations, which are more likely to differ further from each other – that enhance the body’s sexual appeal. This calling to attention, this making of one’s own body into a spectacle, this highly elaborate display of attractors, involves intensification. *Not only are organs on display engorged, intensified, puffed up, but the organs that perceive them – ears, eyes, nose – are also filled with intensity, resonating with colors, sounds, smells, shapes, rhythms.*”¹⁴⁵

If artwork organizes matter in a similar way a living body does, if it is a desire of an artist to create creatures that are indeed alive, the depiction of *grotesque body* brings one closer to such a goal. The most alive creatures thus become the most grotesque and dangerous of all. A living body is never perfectly designed, and this is also why it cannot be depicted as perfect either. How could it be, when its outlines constantly shrink and expand again? The more openings a body develops, the further it moves from the perfect enclosed genteel ideal towards that of grotesque faultiness. This grotesqueness, however, should not be understood only in negative or positive terms. It is a condition for the intensification of pleasure as well as a source of shame and panic. As will be elaborated further, the depiction of what could be called a *grotesque body* in Burroughs's paintings and novels evokes a feeling of danger in an observer precisely because it is grotesque. Grotesqueness is a tactic Burroughs uses in his attempt to give life to the creatures in his paintings, to make them intriguing as well as dangerous. The random splash of color resembles such grotesqueness. Its tentacular limbs are frozen in an attempt to grab something, in an effort to connect with the observer. *Grotesque body*, metaphorically speaking, is that which resembles an octopus, whose tentacles are always on their move to squeeze the body into any gap, and it is not an accident that some parts of the shotgun blast of color are reminiscent of tentacles. Burroughs’s paintings play with those parts of a body through which it communicates with its surroundings and

¹⁴⁵ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 66. (*emphasis added*).

through which it can receive various commands – pushing it to transform itself and to enter the dangerous.

3 Grosz's Theory of Art

“Art is of the animal. It comes, not from reason, recognition, intelligence, not from a uniquely human sensibility, or from any of man's higher accomplishments, but from something excessive, unpredictable, lowly. What is most artistic in us is that which is the most bestial.”¹⁴⁶

In Grosz's *Chaos, Territory, Art*, there is a moment of inverting the way we commonly grasp art. Western common sense tells us to think about artistic creation as something inherent to humans and their condition, even as something we as a species are thought to have exclusively evolved into – something made possible only when other, “lower needs” are met. Grosz, however, unexpectedly places the origins of art in these supposedly lower echelons, those deemed “primitive.”¹⁴⁷ We are artistic (just) as long as we are animal, meaning that we bring art as a part of our animal nature, as a “heritage”.¹⁴⁸

Grosz states that art is of the animal for its attractiveness. It is brought to life because of sexual selection, which in no way means that its meaning is sexual, only that it is the consequence of force that allows bodies to be opened towards intensified qualities.¹⁴⁹ Through the sexualization of nature, there is a need to extract qualities of matter and give them a stage, so they can affect another body. Art – an offspring of sexual selection – is driven by the same force sexed bodies are driven by – a force that is meant to attract, to form a process in which the nervous system of another body is impacted.¹⁵⁰ With the emergence of sexual selection, we as animals gain a new relationship with our surroundings. The attraction, therefore, doesn't need to come from another body, it is a unique attunement towards matter leading to a concept of matter that is endowed with intensified, attracting qualities. Those can now grab our attention in a similar way other bodies do and it is no longer experienced just through the ways it can be “used” for a specific end as some sort of a

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 63.

¹⁴⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10, 35, 63.

¹⁴⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 63.

¹⁵⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 3.

tool.¹⁵¹ As I've already indicated in the previous chapter, sexual selection has to be separated from the reproduction narrative, for it is not about any specific moment of successful reproduction that results from sexual selection, but about specific attunement of the body's organs that reshapes the way body relates to what surrounds it.¹⁵² By acknowledging this, we can once again return to Grosz's understanding of desire as a positive and creative force to demonstrate that once a body is sexually differentiated, its concern is not only the other body but anything that is other. There is a tension emerging, a force as body desires to connect to what is other in general, and by following this force, conjunctions are made as well as destroyed. Through desire that has its origins in sexual selection, the whole world is exposed to erotic encounters. This rethinking of desire in Grosz's philosophy can be found nicely summed up in Margrit Shildrick's text *Prosthetic Performativity* (2009):

“[...] desire itself takes on wider meaning that liberates it not simply from the bounds of genital sexuality per se, but more generally from the restricted parameters of what is usually defined as sexual relationality [...]. *Skin on skin in the bedroom is no more privileged than the sensation of fine sand running through my toes, or the sweet taste of juicy peach on my tongue.*”¹⁵³

With sexual selection, with desire, the whole world is opened to taste and intensity. As something which is already inherent in sexed bodies and their interaction with what surrounds them, artistic creations are products of the process in which an animal is coming up with new ways of generating intensity.¹⁵⁴ In Grosz's view, “the very impulses behind all art” are forces of “taste, appeal, the bodily, pleasure, desire.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 171.

¹⁵² Hortle, “Framing Sexual Selection,” 69. (*emphasis added*).

¹⁵³ Margrit Shildrick, “Prosthetic Performativity,” in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, eds. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009), 115–133, 124. (*emphasis added*).

¹⁵⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 3, 65.

¹⁵⁵ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 39.

3.1 Composed Art

Sexed nature is what announces the emergence of anything that hints at the artistic in the world and what indeed makes the creation of art in general possible.¹⁵⁶ There is no longer mere matter, but matter that is intensified, that involves strange tensions emerging between its qualities and a body. However, when concerning artwork as such, there is a process of liberation as the non-organic structure of artwork stands face-to-face with the organic one. What, therefore, needs to be described is what makes art “composed” art.¹⁵⁷

Here it is necessary to recall that sexual selection which renders nature artistic does not culminate in the coupling of the two. On the other hand, even if there are two bodies or a body and an object, there is always something in-between them, namely *sensations*, that are “visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory”, *sensations* that mark a *zone of indeterminacy* through which two bodies or a body and a work of art are attracted to each other.¹⁵⁸ Artwork, however, is not itself made of sensations.¹⁵⁹ Following Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz states that the necessary condition for an object to be called art is the *production* of *sensations* – percepts and affects – that compound an independent being that is situated outside of the perceiver or any somatic states, yet it marks an event into which other bodies can enter.¹⁶⁰ Art’s goal is, therefore, to *produce* sensation that intensifies to such an extent that they are separated from this origin so it can stand alone, away from a body, as intensity itself.¹⁶¹

Grosz avoids the phenomenological interpretation according to which a work of art would create an impact on a subject that would *experience* art; she approaches sensation as something that is not “in us”.¹⁶² Rather, we are “in it”, for sensation cannot be understood as a state of a body, nor simply as an object.¹⁶³ It is an *event* through which the body enters and through which it becomes

¹⁵⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 70.

¹⁵⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 59.

¹⁵⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 7, 73.

¹⁵⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 59.

¹⁶⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 59, 71; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, transl. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 164.

¹⁶¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 7.

¹⁶² Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 73.

¹⁶³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 73.

something else. At the same time, because it cannot be understood as something belonging to a body – but rather as something that creates an effect on the body as it travels through its nervous system – we have to return to Grosz’s fundamental ontological unit: *force*.¹⁶⁴ We are once again in the field of forces. Both body and artwork are laid on a flat surface where their forces mingle and create another one. The result is that bodies, which are themselves a result of many acting forces, can through their grotesque parts enter becomings, as they change through the “zones of indeterminacy”.¹⁶⁵

In Burroughs’s *Painting and Guns*, we can spot a similar understanding of art as opening zones between subject and object. The text advocates for such a conceptualization that would consider artwork to be a very potent object, so potent that it moves and transforms bodies that approach it. What Burroughs as an artist aspires to do is to “evoke the Stendhal syndrome”¹⁶⁶ – a feeling of being spoken to by a work of art. There is no longer mere material and a subject observing it. The material passes into movements, it vibrates and creates an opening on the observer’s body through which it can enter various becomings.

3.2 Territory and Deterritorialization: Framing of Chaos

If sexual selection announces the arrival of art, what *initiates* art as a compound of sensations that can be transferred out of the body is an “animal that carves out a territory and constructs a house”.¹⁶⁷ The emergence of a territory partly answers the question “how can art be built”, and it goes hand in hand with the question “why do we enjoy it”. Territory is a redirection of forces, a result of an artistic excess that forms a mark of a given territory. The building up of a territory – of a place where the qualities of matter can be extracted and given a home – allows the forces of the earth and the forces of the living body to cohere, to create a *resonance* of rhythms.¹⁶⁸ A territory, therefore, allows for our body to be in relation to forces of the earth, to be stimulated by it by

¹⁶⁴ “Sensation is that which is transmitted from the force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the actions of this being back onto events.” Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 72–73; Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), 34.

¹⁶⁵ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 73.

¹⁶⁶ William S. Burroughs, *Painting and Guns* (New York: Hanuman Books, 1992), 35–6.

¹⁶⁷ Deleuze, *What is Philosophy*, 183.

¹⁶⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 11.

creating a specific organization of qualities – the *refrain* – “that resonates with and intensifies the body”.¹⁶⁹ It has already been said that sexual selection is not just about the body, but about the whole position of a body towards matter or the world in general. Matter is endowed with qualities that provoke a body, which is embodied in the position of an artist that wishes to entrap those qualities in the territory, to show them to the rest of the world. Sensations are now finally given a stage, they are “abstracted” from the body and can in turn “intensify, effect, and transform bodies.”¹⁷⁰ The pleasure felt when nerves are stimulated results from our body’s resonance with the forces of the earth. These pleasurable encounters with intensified matter are one of the ways in which we can render the chaos and respond to it. It is art’s way. The need to channel and organize the chaotic allows for the emergence of an ordered principle.¹⁷¹ This is why, according to Grosz, architecture holds the primacy in art; by building up the first wall, based on which the chaotic forces can be partly deflected, accumulated, “tamed” and which allows for qualities to form a block of sensation.¹⁷² These qualities are no longer something tied to the body, rather there is another body forming, a body producing sensations that can affect other bodies.¹⁷³

Grosz connects territory with her notion of sexual difference. For her, territory is artistic because it is the consequence of an effort to attract partners. And, yes, there is a dangerous aspect to animal territories, as she shows on an example of a birdsongs, which “mark out a territory that is both desirable (for potential suitors) and dangerous (for potential rivals),”¹⁷⁴ however, we can spot that she uses overall very positive, even joyful terms when describing the territory that is sexual. “Territory is artistic, the consequence of love not war, of seduction not defense, of sexual selection not natural selection.”¹⁷⁵ Once again, Grosz doesn’t seem to direct her aim primarily toward the possibility of one body (or artwork) being dangerous for *another* body, precisely *because* of sexual selection and not as something that would be the result of (sometimes opposite of) natural selection. For Grosz, if there is something dangerous about sexual selection, it is the

¹⁶⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 11; Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 171.

¹⁷¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10.

¹⁷² Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 171.

¹⁷³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10–12.

¹⁷⁴ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 37.

¹⁷⁵ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 69.

excessive “visibility”. However, there is something *inherently* dangerous in sexuality and it is not because of the relationship of one body to its potential rivals or predators, but because of the effort to connect with another body. This dangerous aspect permeates through Grosz’s text when she turns to another aspect of an artwork – namely to the process of *detrterritorialization* that allows for liberation of artwork.

Composed Artwork has to detach itself from the body and from a given place on earth as well. Although forming a territory is a first step in making composed art as such, we are still dealing with art that is tied to one place and its movement is, therefore, limited to what comes to it. In Grosz’s *Becoming Undone*, *detrterritorialization* is mainly described as a process that is enabled by the *framing* of the territorialized qualities so they can, as a tightly bound compound, be “transferred elsewhere” across other milieus than those that have originated them towards moving living bodies.¹⁷⁶ There is something inherently destructive in the art-making process. *Detrterritorialization* is a concept that captures this destructivity, for it is a process that takes qualities out of their origins to be part of an artwork, which results in territories that are destroyed as the new territory is forming.¹⁷⁷

The emancipation of art from its own origins necessitates the construction of a frame, one that would separate the artwork from its surroundings, allowing for the possibility of the work emitting something *toward* the body, not *from* the body. Coming back to Uexküll, the living body is a rhythmic structure, one that is, nevertheless, always a composition of milieus itself, in a position towards various milieus, with relations to other bodies and so on. And it is because it channels the surrounding forces *through* the body that the rhythm can form; so the body is never rhythmic by itself, it is a continuous response to its milieu. The process of rhythmization is, therefore, necessary for any transition happening between two milieus. Living bodies – also milieus – move through space and time with a rhythm allowing them to resonate with objects their bodies are attuned to.

For Grosz, qualities of matter are synonymous with extracted rhythm, and together with a given place – a milieu – they form a territory.¹⁷⁸ Construction of a territory is thus a condition necessary for the rhythm to be extracted. What *detrterritorialization* enables is to make a rhythm

¹⁷⁶ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 172, 187.

¹⁷⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 19.

repeatable through time by creating a *refrain* – a regular rhythm – that is transferable.¹⁷⁹ The liberation of artwork is enabled by both the processes of *territorialization* and of *deterritorialization*. Objects like a canvas, screen, concert hall are tools that transfer and entrap the qualities and consequently make them repeatable through time, as refrain catches the rhythm and establishes, through differential repetition, its frame.

To return to the beginning, it is chaos, the untamed forces of the earth that render both processes of *territorialization* (taming these forces) and *deterritorialization* (transferring these forces) possible, and there is, therefore, something inherently chaotic in art. An artwork creates a point of contemporary cohesion, that slows down the ever-changing flux – whereby it is similar to a living body that also channels the forces of the earth through its bodily rhythm.¹⁸⁰ Artwork is, however, at the same time made possible by the process of *deterritorialization* that connects the territory to its (ontological) origin of flat surface on which forces can travel at various speeds. It is the differentiating chaos from which it has been drawn that allows for the separation of qualities. Although art is framed, composed and ordered, there is another order of art that is “chaotic”.¹⁸¹ As it moves through space, composed art has a power to invade, transform and reorganize bodies. *Deterritorialization* is, therefore, linked to the second type of danger I’ve already touched upon. If the building up of the frame allows a work of art to affect other bodies, simultaneously any territories it cuts through are now things of the past. Artwork is, therefore, also made of a movement that is necessarily destructive and even dangerous, although Grosz herself does not use that word specifically.

“If framing creates the very condition for the plane of composition and thus of any particular works of art, art itself is equally a project that disjars, distends, and transforms frames, that focuses on the intervals and conjunctions between frames. In this sense the history of painting, and of art after painting, can be seen as the action of leaving the frame, of moving beyond, and pressing against the frame, the frame exploding through the movement it can no longer contain.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 52.

¹⁸⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 8.

¹⁸¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 9.

¹⁸² Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 18.

This understanding of art and creation is not far away from one of Burroughs's. One could say that his paintings represent the limit of painting in general, for his intent to construct his paintings as moving creatures is something we can directly link to Grosz's description of what art aspires to do "after painting" through its attempt to leave the constraining frame.¹⁸³ He and Grosz both conceptualize artwork as an object that makes the becomings the most visible, for no other object so radically catches our attention by combining materials and elements of other things and conjoins them into the monstrous never seen before formations. At one point in his essay, Burroughs writes that he wishes for his paintings to gain some sort of agency. They are to be understood as creatures that ought to "walk away off the goddamned canvas".¹⁸⁴ This "walking away" of creatures off canvases could be read as a process of *detritorialization* that is essential for the liberation of an artwork. It is at the same time an aspect that is essential for Burroughs's art, for his paintings are as close to falling into chaos as possible. While their chaotic patterns are what threatens us, nevertheless, it is also what makes them intensive and unpredictable. And the more intensive art gets, the more radically it can transform. Just as a sexual encounter can be an act of love *and* of violence, so can an artwork be shoved into somebody's face – as disturbing as it is. Whenever there is an intensity, there is also a risk, and Burroughs's paintings, as we will see later, glorify this connection between life and jeopardy.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 34.

4 Burroughs's Paintings: Attempting the Miraculous

“I want my painting to literally walk off the goddamned canvas, to become creature and a very dangerous creature. I see painting as evocative magic. And there always must be a random factor in magic, one which must be constantly changed and renewed.”¹⁸⁵

Although he is known mainly as a novelist, Burroughs spent his career experimenting with many forms of artistic expression, and the visual arts were not an exception to this. Although this thesis focuses mainly on his shotgun art, visual arts like collages, calligraphic drawings and other experiments (sometimes involving various efforts to merge written language with pictures) were a great interest of his.¹⁸⁶ Although Barry Miles dates the “genesis” of his visual work to the fifties, and Burroughs himself writes that he had “gotten involved a little bit with painting” in the early sixties, it is not until the eighties that his painting career as such started, Burroughs showed some serious intention behind his paintings and at this time his visual works gained a recognition independently from his literary work.¹⁸⁷ In this chapter, I would like to approach in even more detail Burroughs's shotgun paintings specifically through the concepts given by Grosz, and through his essay *Creative Observer* that I take to be a commentary to his own works. When it comes to details of Burroughs's life and painting career, I draw mostly on Miles's *William Burroughs: El hombre invisible* (1993), specifically on the chapter titled “Shotgun Art”.¹⁸⁸

In the following chapters, the focus will shift to Burroughs's notion about an artist attempting the miraculous, which would be the creation of life working from his insistence on conveying the random factor to creation. Burroughs conceptualizes life as something that is essentially dangerous, and if his paintings are to become alive, they necessarily have to be dangerous. With the help of Grosz's concepts, I hope to prove why artistic creations, in their struggle to act as living bodies, are created as attractive as well as dangerous – and what, in light of this, is the overall purpose of an artist that aspires to such a goal.

¹⁸⁵ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 35.

¹⁸⁶ Barry Miles, “Shotgun Art,” in *William Burroughs: El hombre invisible* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 229–241.

¹⁸⁷ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 9.

¹⁸⁸ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 229–241.

4.1 Paintings on the Edge: Touch of Chaos

Although Burroughs himself did not understand his works as fitting into any specific art movement, “Abstract Expressionism” as a category provided by Deleuze and Guattari’s texts (and consequently in Grosz’s texts as well) situates, quite comfortably, most of Burroughs’s works.¹⁸⁹ It is one of the lines of modern painting that according to Grosz can be distinguished from the others based on the level on which a sensation and chaos are regulated in a work of art.¹⁹⁰ According to Grosz, this type of painting “comes as close as it possibly can to falling into chaos [...] the pattern is no longer discernible, all standard frames of reference (top/bottom, figure/ground) are subverted.”¹⁹¹ This description can be closely linked to Burroughs’s art, as he himself writes that his paintings do not at all indicate any order and that they can be part of virtually any context, for their “chaotic order”, their intent to deterritorialize to the extreme, as Grosz would say, dominates. Burroughs paintings are intentionally made through means of destruction, by a bullet that deterritorializes in the most destructive way possible. The can of spray paint is shot – the color is transferred on the canvas or piece of wood by an explosion – the qualities have been extracted – artwork is made. Burroughs feels very strongly about the possibility of his paintings to convey chaos, the randomness that forms them, and the destructive force through which they’ve been created, and develop the kind of agency they themselves radiate.

On multiple occasions, Burroughs links “unpredictability” or “random factor” to the creation of something that is alive. Life is dynamic. It is when the colors “run around”, when an explosion “approaches basic randomness”. Burroughs concludes a section of *Painting and Guns* by referring to the artist as someone who not only needs to be a creative observer actively seeking creative encounters but also as someone who wishes to evoke those forces that make his body alive and pass them further on. The artist strives for one single thing: “All serious and dedicated artists,” he writes, “attempt the miraculous: the creation of life.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 240; Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 104.

¹⁹⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 87.

¹⁹¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 88.

¹⁹² Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 18.

4.2 Sexed Bodies as Dangerous Creatures

“You see, that would be the clearest proof that the work of art was separate from him – if it could endanger him. That is all art should be about: the heresy of creating life.”¹⁹³

Both Burroughs and Grosz deviate from the common understanding of art, as neither of them associates art with a kind of human superstructure or excess of human genius. Art, as has already been said, is a natural process, and the artist, more than anything else, wants to participate in the evolutionary forces that make up living beings. The path to this goal is Burroughs’s so-called random factor, which is not only a means of “moving images” – to enliven them – but in the broader context of art theory also marks a certain end to art as representation, which I will address in the next chapter.

Now, however, it is necessary to return to Grosz and her understanding of how sexual selection alters life, and how this theme can be linked to Burroughs’s images, which are not only to be living beings – but also beings that are “dangerous”.¹⁹⁴ The aspect of danger hidden in the sexual selection is one of the many points in Grosz’s text through which I would like to link her theory to Burroughs’s notes on art and paintings. According to Grosz, art has its origins in attraction that can threaten life. However, it seems that her argument mainly serves to clear up how sexual selection cannot be reduced to natural selection privileging an individual. Nevertheless, this text approves of a much closer connection between attraction and risk. Not only that a body that has become attractive is disadvantaged by its attention-grabbing colors or sonorous melodies for overexposing itself, but it is also this body that attracts, and lures closer, which produces the sensation that is akin to those of a predator. I would like to introduce the proximity of risk and attraction as a possible further development of Grosz’s theory not only of sexual selection but of art as well. Although Grosz doesn’t call this “danger”, the process of *deterritorialization* necessarily entails danger even though it can be viewed as a positive force. Since art has the power to return us to our inhuman context and transform our bodies, it only makes sense that the most transformative of arts would come off as dangerous.

¹⁹³ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 34.

¹⁹⁴ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 35.

Once a link between attraction and danger is established, I would like to move further to another thesis of this text, which is based strongly on Burroughs understanding of art, namely of the random factor in his paintings. Burroughs's paintings are the work of an artist who has discovered not only that there is a possibility to allure observers through attention-grabbing danger, but also (to make a connection crucial for this text) that dangerous factors can be accentuated in artworks through methods that somehow embrace randomness and that it is this randomness, this dangerous intensity that follows an artist's call to create life.

4.3 Artist: Creative Observer

It seems as if those artists that have decided to embrace the chaotic have returned the body to the visual arts. It is a return of the body that is never fixed on one unchanging state but that moves through life as an opened body constantly disrupted with unexpected perceptions. In Burroughs's essay, it is a *bodily* life, a life of perception that is dependent on a corporeal nature, that allows for creative observation leading to creation of an artwork. For both Grosz and Burroughs, an ethical life, or in Burroughs's context the way of life of a "creative observer", is a life that reinvents itself, that is aware of its corporeality linking it to its material surrounding, that allows it to create via observation.¹⁹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari have also mentioned this aspect of Burroughs's works specifically, only with respect to his writing: "In literature, it is William Burroughs who has best evoked this effort of the body to escape through a point or through a hole that forms a part of itself or its surroundings."¹⁹⁶

Deleuze and Guattari write about an "effort of the body to escape".¹⁹⁷ However, we should avoid imagining a body that wants to escape to something "above" itself. Its movement is rather horizontal, there are no mountains to be climbed, only a flat surface. We are once again caught hanging on the skin of a grotesque body. A body escapes through its grotesqueness, through its holes and tips to what is next to it. Deleuze and Guattari once again cite Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* to address the opened, grotesque body:

¹⁹⁵ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 29, 39.

¹⁹⁶ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 17.

“No organ is constant as regards either function or position... sex organs sprout anywhere... rectums open, defecate and close... the entire organism changes color and consistency in split-second adjustments.”¹⁹⁸

In Grosz’s and Deleuze’s texts, a sensation is possible only when a body of an organism is stretched towards becoming something else. We do not observe what is there without participating in that which is there, nor do we project the reality as a result of some sort of creation that occurs only on our part. The sensation is a result of an event through which a body loses its inner structure as it is stretched to become another body, a *body without organs*.¹⁹⁹ This is true for Deleuze, Guattari, Grosz as well as Burroughs and they all provide their concepts that would capture such events through which the body overcomes its current state.²⁰⁰

For Burroughs, there is little stability and structure observable in life and its creation; therefore, it cannot be designed in advance, it cannot be done safely, and it cannot be commanded.²⁰¹ As we’ve seen with Grosz’s reading of Nietzsche, what is dangerous for life is to *avoid* the dangerous, to cut ourselves from what surrounds us. And Burroughs seems to be aware of that:

“This stereotype of the artist or writer sitting in a timeless vacuum with nothing coming in from outside – this is not viable. If you cut yourself from the input you’re going to have sterile replication.”²⁰²

As Grosz has accurately pointed out, Nietzsche’s understanding of art as an “exteriorization of one’s own bodily forces” is neglectful of the process of framing of art which allows for art to be

¹⁹⁸ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 47; William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 9.

¹⁹⁹ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 47.

²⁰⁰ “A wave with a variable amplitude flows through the body without organs; it traces zones and levels on this body according to the variations of its amplitude. When the wave encounters external forces at a particular level, a sensation appears.” Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 47; “To view these pictures puts the viewer in the position of the creative observer, who creates by observing. There is a distinct sensation when this creation occurs.” Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 29.

²⁰¹ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 43.

²⁰² Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 19.

separated from a body.²⁰³ While it is true that her theory of art returns art to animal and to material forces which allows art to recover the inhuman context of a human condition, art is still a coupling of two orders – *territorialization* and *detrterritorialization* – and in order for the artwork to liberate itself, it has to be separated from the body, it has to be framed and detrterritorialized – brought elsewhere.²⁰⁴ Creation, therefore, can never occur in a body’s attempt to order and control matter, rather, the only way one can successfully create art is through acknowledging the detrterritorializing forces of chaos constantly attempting to reframe life into another life form. Not even Burroughs can understand his creations as a result of him suddenly becoming creative on his own. Artist is rather “a medium” that “tunes into certain cosmic currents”, and has to get out to let forces of the chaos be channeled through his body, which allows his body to be “possessed” (not “to possess”!) by a genius.²⁰⁵ Those tactics that attempt to make a body creative on its own, like meditation – “New Age stuff” as Burroughs calls it – he turns disdains as non-productive.²⁰⁶ An artist is the one that gets out there and sees too much, the one that makes visible even those things others cannot observe.²⁰⁷ The meaning of these observations is elusive, for every manifestation gains a new meaning once it is part of a new *body without organs*. Life is kept in motion by the constant process of reframing itself as a result of which it produces new entities, new life forms. In Burroughs’s texts, an artist finds himself to be part of this evolutionary process.

“A meaning-sensitive observer creator who observes what a manifestation means ... means to whom, or what? To the observer. He may find himself beset by larval beings, desperate to be observed and to exist by being observed.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 10

²⁰⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 187.

²⁰⁵ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 43.

²⁰⁶ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 44–45.

²⁰⁷ William S. Burroughs, *My Education: Book of Dreams* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 212–213.

²⁰⁸ Burroughs, *My Education*, 213.

4.4 Burroughs's Nagual Art

In paintings like Burroughs's, ones which are created by a method involving uncontrollable process of applying paint to surface, chaos is "deployed to the maximum", creating some sort of "catastrophe-painting".²⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari describe this as a kind of relationship reversal, where the hand (its movement), instead of being *led* by the eye, takes the lead and "subordinates" the eye.²¹⁰ When Burroughs attempts to describe his creative process, he describes the event in similar words. "There might be something on my mind, I try to just let the hand do it, see with my hand. And then look at it, see what has happened."²¹¹ In *Painting and Guns*, Burroughs uses a similar statement to address the difference between painting and writing: "[...] for one thing, when I come to writing, I cannot help but know exactly what I'm putting on the paper. When I paint, I do not know. In painting I see with my hands, and I do not know what my hands have done until I look at it afterwards."²¹²

Commonly, a painting would be understood as a representation: there is a form present in the artist's mind that the material should acquire through controlled work – through careful observation of an eye that determines every move of a hand-brush. However, in Burroughs's work, the roles are reversed. First, the hand is in action, and only then can the eye follow the appearing pattern. This is true mainly for his earlier works, nevertheless, his shotgun paintings are another step in this game of eye domination. The only task left for the hand is to aim and press the trigger, the bullet will take care of everything else. An artwork's meanings can no longer be determined by the artist's conscious intention because if the result of an action painting method is unpredictable, there is no way the resulting pattern could represent anything an artist was already aware of. It is no longer even her who dances around the canvas, it is the bullet, she is literally pushed away from the painting. If there is something on Burroughs's mind that then is performed by a bullet, it is there only virtually and not as an actual conscious idea. As he himself admits:

²⁰⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 88; Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 104.

²¹⁰ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 107.

²¹¹ Miles, "Shotgun Art," 236.

²¹² Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 10.

“I may see quite clearly in there something that I’ve seen recently in a magazine or a newspaper, whatever, emerging. That is emerged that I, see I can’t consciously draw anything.”²¹³

As Barry Miles points out: “Burroughs has no preconceived idea when he begins a painting.”²¹⁴ By giving up on the representation, Burroughs’s great search for the randomness in art begins for there is a direct link between the abandonment of a representation in art and randomness.²¹⁵ The shotgun method is introduced as a simple extension of a random technique resulting in unpredictable patterns.²¹⁶ “The next stage of his (Burroughs’s) work,” Miles writes, “was the introduction of cans of spray paint as a medium, not sprayed directly on the surface but exploded by a shotgun blast in front of the plywood panel.”²¹⁷ Shotgun paintings are one of the ways through which painting is not representational by intent. It is meant to produce random-looking creatures that change their appearance every time they are observed, and it is meant to escape any clear meaning and viewpoint. Burroughs himself stresses this when comparing writing and painting:

“Because it is read sequentially, there is no way to effectively portray simultaneous events in writing. But that’s the whole point of painting: multiple points of view can be simultaneously presented. One expands the area of awareness, and one seeks the new frontiers in randomness. A shotgun blast produces explosions of color that approach this basic randomness.”²¹⁸

It could be said that what Burroughs hopes for in shotgun paintings is the formation of an artwork that would be *grotesque* – made of many holes and limbs, that would incorporate as many forces and milieus as possible, which would prevent only one perspective. The question is how one

²¹³ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 236–7.

²¹⁴ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 236.

²¹⁵ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 235.

²¹⁶ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 235–6.

²¹⁷ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 235.

²¹⁸ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 11.

creates such artwork. The actual making of artwork is not much written upon in Grosz's texts. However, we can connect Burroughs's comments on the matter with Grosz's understanding of a living body. At one point in *Becoming Undone*, Grosz defines life as "the continuous reframing of every internal perspective with another equally valid internal perspective".²¹⁹ There are no privileged points through which living body can be accessed, for it is always a "multiplicity of perspectives", and "nothing but a vast series of cells, organs, and (micro-) organisms, a network of aligned and competing forces or perspectives[...]"²²⁰

Just as there is no single force responsible for creating a body and there are multiple perspectives that need to be taken into consideration, so does the creation of a work of art, at least in Burroughs's notion, need to assume various positions in the process. As he himself writes: "The idea a painting has to be painted from one point of view is ridiculous. Move it around, hold it up there, stick it down there [...]"²²¹ A creation of a painting that would come off as a moving and living creature requires that the emerging body of color is as grotesque and vastly particular as possible. With shotgun paintings, much more grotesque bodies are created, those that position an artist with his restraining perspective further away from the canvas and allowing the bullet to tear them apart and create their imperfect endings. By that, they avoid any given order or point through which they could be observed. What shotgun paintings allow is the exploration of the "basic randomness", even more than the action paintings that still rely on hand or hand-brush to do most of the work. To update the status of an eye, it is here subordinated to the bullet-formed explosion. It is an exploding can of paint that explores the virtual:

"The shotgun blast releases the little spirits compacted in the layers of wood, causing the colors of the paints to splash out in unforeseeable, unpredictable images and patterns."²²²

Life, as we have seen in Grosz's texts, calls for a non-stop reinvention and production and, therefore, no life form (not even the one of an artist) is complete at any point. No reproduction of the same is ever satisfactory. All the dedications of an artist to create life fall flat or are at least

²¹⁹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 119.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 28–9.

²²² Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 15.

given a task that is so difficult it is almost impossible. The completion of the task seems to elude us every time we have the solution right at our fingertips. “There is no way you can say, ‘Now I’ve got it, all I have to do is repeat.’ As soon as you get to that point – where you say ‘I’ve got it’ – you haven’t got it.”²²³ It is because Burroughs understands art as an attempt to create life, and because his (and Grosz’s) conception of life does not do without the random factor, that there is in no way any mechanical, repeated technique which could serve as a tool to complete such a task. In the official statement of his art written in January 1989, Burroughs emphasizes the importance of a random factor in his artwork when referring to the so-called “nagual universe” – a universe that unlike the “tonal universe” is not ruled by predictable causal relations.²²⁴ Burroughs, according to his own words, attempts to create “Nagual Art” – an art through which we gain access to the nagual universe of chance that only opens through a “door of chance”.²²⁵ This door, however, opens only through the random factor, and it is exactly a shotgun blast that is “perhaps the most basic random factor”.²²⁶ It is up for discussion whether an artist who creates “tonal art” could even be called an artist, for he or she would not create anything new – there would be no excess, no unpredictable combination. Art of a tonal artist would only be a repetition of what has already been done before. Through Grosz’s theory, this “tonal art” could be linked to life that may reproduce, but not yet through the coupling of sexually differentiated bodies. There is no attraction to the world of colors and sounds in tonal universe, which is why there is no desire of a body to connect with what is outside of itself. As a result, there is no excess, nothing exciting nor dangerous. Without sexual difference, there is “only sameness, monosexuality, hermaphroditism, the endless structured (bacterial or microbial) reproduction of the same.”²²⁷ This is why tonal art is, according to Burroughs, is “as predictable as the universe he copies...”²²⁸

In *Painting and Guns*, Burroughs states that he sees “painting as evocative magic. And there must always be a random factor in magic, one which must be constantly changed and renewed.”²²⁹

²²³ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 17.

²²⁴ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 240.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 101.

²²⁸ Miles, “Shotgun Art,” 240.

²²⁹ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 35.

His fascination with the conception of artist that attempts to create life is what results in him creating art that, like magic, is unpredictable. If an artist's goal is to create life, and if "the whole matter of life," as Burroughs writes, "is chance",²³⁰ then she has to abandon anything that is mechanical and predictable and open herself up to something indeed magical – unexpected. The claim is that one cannot predict life, that life is partly always formed by ordered as well as chaotic principle, which is why its creation is necessarily risky.

The imminent randomness of explosion Burroughs writes about, the unordered pattern leading to infinite openings of the flesh is how the dangerous being of sensations is created. This being provokes other beings to become other, it entails the disconnection of parts to the edge of annihilation, and it poses threat to anything that comes its way. This type of painting, however, is not some sort of resemblance of destruction. Even though it is created by destruction, it forms a positive force that directs itself towards new becomings, it radically deterritorializes by demanding to be observed from multiple points, always generating new creatures in the process. There are creatures emerging as the limbs made of color take unexpected routes, form new frames within the frame. It doesn't matter if the painting is turned upside down or if it's put in an assemblage with other things – the tentacles of the explosion frozen in motion find their way to other connections. These are the ways of art that is pursuing to escape out of the place of its origin to become the most independent out of all the creatures.

²³⁰ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 18.

Conclusion: Inhuman Becomings

“I don’t have to go to outer space for aliens. They are all around me.”²³¹

It is 1988, in London, at the October Gallery, Kathy Acker, a famous punk novelist, in her interview with Burroughs, discusses the pessimistic state of the political situation when referring to Burroughs’s books. In the interview, Acker asks him about the possibility of us (humans) saving ourselves somehow – meaning, possibly, saving ourselves through art. Instead of answering the question, Burroughs alludes to the silent preconditions echoing in the question which he can’t agree upon: “An impossible question to answer,” he replies. “Who do you mean by ‘us’ and who do you mean by ‘ourselves’. I don’t subscribe to the idea of such a thing as human nature, humankind. And I feel very little even empathy with most people...”²³²

Both in Grosz’s and Burroughs’s universe, meaning prescribed by humans and the position they hold is continuously undermined. They both wish to create the new inhuman context, to explore the randomness of the chaos and to draw upon it; to explore politics that would be creative in a sense that it wouldn’t define itself through reactionary negativity, but that would create something from the extraction of the forces that form hegemonic systems and redirect them. According to McDaniel, there is a certain power in grotesque art, for it undermines “the cultural hegemony of the West” by posing itself as a threat as well as some sort of a humorous byproduct of the dominant forces the West has released into the world.²³³ What is interesting is that Burroughs’s paintings are almost intentionally left “free” from the humans to such an extent that they are given a capacity to pose a threat to us, which is how art proves its independence. Burroughs knows that a work of art cannot have prescribed meaning, because we do not own it (in Grosz’s terms, the sensation is not “in us”). His paintings, therefore, fully expand the capacity of a sensation to put us in them, to redirect those forces that made us who we are into horrifying creatures.

In Grosz’s text, we have discovered the inhuman context of art; that art is not a sign of human intellect, but that it is something much older and lies deep in the flesh of a sexually

²³¹ Burroughs, *Painting and Guns*, 12.

²³² William S. Burroughs, interview with Kathy Acker taken on the occasion of the opening of Burroughs’s exhibition (London: October Gallery, 1988).

²³³ McDaniel, “New World Ordue,” 132–133.

differentiated body. The practices of art allow us to channel those forces that make up our bodies and celebrate the intensities of forces of the earth through processes of *territorialization* and *detrterritorialization*. Composed art is there to connect us back to our dynamic, animal nature, to remind us of the sexed nature that is unordered, unpredictable, and that allows the abandonment of the human through the process of *overcoming*. Similarly, the role of Burroughs's works is not to serve any human nature, but to destroy it and by doing so go beyond it, to place the human in the inhuman context by fully deploying the chaotic order every artwork contains. Through his notes on art, we can see Burroughs repetitively giving autonomy to his works and simultaneously undermining his position as an author. It can be sensed that in the interview done by Acker, he is refusing to choose any sense for his own work and letting it speak by the acts it provokes.

A: "Are your books in any way methods for altering perception?"

B: "As far as they can be."

A: "How far do you think literature can work in that area?"

B: "Well that's it, as far as it can go, and the same way with paintings ... they are both attempting the same thing."²³⁴

The animal heritage of art is not binding us to devolve, but on the contrary, it reminds us that we are sentenced to overcome what we are, to become, in Burroughs's terms "creative observers" that would develop new ways of life through which humanity could be returned to its animal context.²³⁵ Art is, therefore, dangerous for a human because it ties it to the evolutionary forces of his animal heritage, to the production of an excess.²³⁶ Some texts interpret Grosz as a utopian thinker of feminist futures.²³⁷ However, I've shown that when the process of *detrterritorialization* is taken into account, Grosz's theory necessarily leads to dangerous encounters in life even though it is built on the overall positive notion of sexual difference. She and Burroughs

²³⁴ William S. Burroughs, interview with Kathy Acker taken on the occasion of the opening of Burroughs's exhibition (London: October Gallery, 1988).

²³⁵ "The animal is that from which the all-too-human comes and that through which the human moves beyond itself." Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 185–6.

²³⁶ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 7.

²³⁷ Hortle, Stark, "Framing Sexual Selection," 72.

both understand their creative position as a philosopher and as an artist similarly, for they both share the same imperative behind their production. They wish to place the human in the dangerously close proximity to inhuman context, which would allow for the emergence of new, alien ways of living. This, however, is best achieved through intensive affects produced by art through which the body can move beyond itself towards other life forms.

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