

When the personal becomes too
personal.

The Politics of the personal and the installation

“My Bed” by Tracey Emin.

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Summary

“My Bed” (1998), created by Tracey Emin, is a site specific, and a time-based, dynamic installation. It is a performed and physical narrative, a concept of a personal space translated into a sum of objects that gain their significance through concepts of personal relations. “My Bed” is a material situation in the moment of exhibition and a conceptual situation in the contemporary art world. “My Bed” comprises worn and used everyday objects, dirty bedding and clothing that are personalized through a biographic narrative and bodily fluids of the artist.

The subject matter of the artistic practice by Tracey Emin is seen as personal, and also autobiographic. The autobiographic narrative of Tracey Emin consists of personal stories that refer to very personal experiences and private spaces. The autobiographic subject matter and its personal character are both characteristics of the multimedia installation “My Bed.”

The exhibition of an unmade bed as an artwork was a controversial decision made by Tracey Emin in 1998. Even though personal and body related subject matter had been a part of the art world long before the 1990s “My Bed” was instantly tied to the persona of the female artist Tracey Emin. She was characterized as an eccentric and narcissistic personality. The general public and some critics alike considered “My Bed” to be an inappropriate exhibitionism, and her subject matter almost non-existent or invalid, because it was “too personal.”

Tracey Emin is a powerful figure in the contemporary art scene. The works of art she creates become her personal and continuous biographic narrative. The only common trait throughout her artistic practice is the notion of the “too personal” in the form of the contemporary concept of personal.

I am looking to explore the meaning and the role of the concept of the personal in relation to the installation “My Bed” and the creating subject Tracey Emin. The expression “too personal” points to an existence of rules and boundaries in the social space, which have an impact on the reality of the contemporary art world. The metatheoretic approach developed by Jacques Rancière opens for reflection on the representative power of art and the relations of its contemporary time, and the human condition. Jacques Rancière talks of art as the alternative space that shares the universal politics of existence with the social reality, but resides in its own conceptual space. The personal as subject matter belongs to the current

aesthetic regime of art, which allows exploring the meaning of the expression “too personal” as the valid characteristics of contemporary artwork and its subject matter. The discussion of the politics of the personal allow interpreting “My Bed” as a political space tied to the social reality and simultaneously belonging to the art realm. The common, unmade bed therefore is a unique and interrelated element in the art historical narrative through the personal subject matter. I will approach the installation “My Bed” as an ongoing and performed situation.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The installation “My Bed” (1998), created by Tracey Emin was considered a controversial artwork when it was first shown. Today it is an icon of the art of the 1990s. Tracey Emin belongs to the generation of young British artists who gained a strong position in the international contemporary art world of the 1990s. They embraced the benefits of the market-orientated reality of the art world, and they played by the rules of the contemporary social reality and earned a good living while also securing a stable financial power position in the contemporary art scene. They did things in a different way, or so it seemed.

“ It is a recurring project of modern youth... to seize on and interpret the basic experiences of living, particularly love and death, as if they were being experienced for the first time as if no one ever lived, loved, died before... it usually follows social changes that make its presumptions largely correct: no one ever lived, loved, died in quite this way before.”¹

An extraordinary quality with the artistic practice of Tracey Emin is the performative expression of the subjective human condition based on very personal experiences.

“My Bed” was first exhibited in Japan as a part of a larger work titled “Better to have a straight spine than a broken neck.” From Japan the bed travelled to the United States, and finally it was exhibited in Tate, Great Britain in 1999, causing a large controversy in the public space and fierce discussions in the art institution.

The installation “My Bed” brought Tracey Emin international success. It challenged the existing rules and expectations of the contemporary art institution as well as the social realm by presenting the personal as a subject matter through an installation constituted of very common, but very personal objects. Tracey Emin questioned the theoretical and practical treatment of our western reality by creating a time and site-specific art object, which resides in the spaces in-between the art world and the social realm.

The installation “My Bed” is a bed. The bed was owned and used by the artist, a bed that cradled her body in a time of a depression and lack of physical control. It is a messy and dirty bed, a space that had served its core purpose, and was then removed from its original space. Tracey Emin actively participates in the narration process of “My Bed.” The story consists of verbalized private

¹ Schjeldahl, P: Edward Munch: The Missing Master (1979);The Hydrogen Jukebox; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, P.21

experiences referring to the events for which “My Bed” stands as evidence. The narrative that “My Bed” forms, and belongs to, is autobiographic, confessional and conceptual in its character.

“My Bed” comprises worn and used personal items personally marked by bodily fluids. Among the objects constituting “My Bed” there are items of personal hygiene that are marked by blood, urine, etc. There is a fascinating equality between the narrative importance of all the components constituting the installation. “My Bed” is an ongoing appearance of a physical absence of a human being. The installation questions the concept of the personal and its relations to the time based existence of a mortal human being. “My Bed” emphasizes the spatial differences of the social realm and the art world. Tracey Emin uncovers the paradox of the contemporary individual and the struggles concerning the legitimacy and objectivity of subjective reality. The focus of my thesis is the interpretation of “My Bed” as a political negotiation of the concept of the personal in-between the social realm and the art world as a contemporary subject mater.

The public and the art institution launched repeated attacks on the artwork, its simple common form, and its personal subject matter. Tracey Emin as an artist was accused of lacking the extraordinary aesthetic qualities and well-established values of arts past and the ideals embodied in the concept of the Avant-Garde.

The installation “My Bed,” along with the international success, also granted Tracey Emin the title of “one of the most influential contemporary artists” without the usual added category, female artist. “My Bed” is a controversial artwork, extraordinary because of its common story and its common form. “My Bed” is reassembled for every new exhibition, and its form varies depending on the choices Tracey Emin makes in the process of reinstallation. The artist physically gets into the bed in order to form the bed sheets. “My Bed” is a personal print of a body; it is a personal, repetitive and subjective experience, dependent on the physical presence of Tracey Emin. The reinstallation is a performative process that changes the reality of the installation and impacts its interpretative discourse.

Tracey Emin’s work is often interpreted as biographical in reference to her multimedia autobiographical narrative. The actual experiences that the autobiographical narrative is based on are one-time and passing events. Tracey Emin is the only one who is able to tell her version relying on her memory as well as her personal choice. The unique and subjective pattern of personal choice

presents the most truthful autobiographical narrative of a contemporary individual without the requirement of truthfulness in every fact it consist of.

The personal turned into a narrative contributes to and challenges the uniqueness of the subjective contemporary individual. The repetition of the stories through the different exhibition and interviews is a procedural reenactment. These stories constitute an archive for each of the original experiences, which are lost in the past and the abstracted mazes of human memory. Tracey Emin has a performative approach to the construction of the biographic narrative that questions its own objectivity.

The formal qualities of “My Bed” often prove to be rather complicated to grasp. It is a rare occasion that an interpretation of “My Bed” holds a description of the installation. The most common approach is to choose the most shocking elements. A bed with dirty linens, used condoms and tampons with menstruation blood are the objects listed, but there are countless other objects that contribute to the experience of the “messy bed.” These other objects, if singled out, do not have the same element of shock that the mentioning of a bloody condom or tampon has, and therefore many of the personal aspects with “My Bed” remain unnoticed. The installation turns into a contemporary situation that reveals the paradox of individualism. It attempts to accept every individual as the unique and respectable existence and to acknowledge the value of every human life, while physically it is impossible for the social or individual memory to store a vast amount of archives that regard a single individual.

This paper will discuss the politics of the personal in relation to the installation “My Bed” in order to attempt an interpretation of the work as a whole. My interpretation of the installation “My Bed” will consider the performative reinstallation and the changing form as equally defining and forming aspects of the politics of the personal.

1.2 The aim of the research

The aim of the thesis is to interpret the installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin as a dynamic and performing condition of the politics of the personal.

I will use the metatheoretical approach to politics and aesthetics developed by Jacques Rancière in order to discuss the more specific concept of the personal as subject matter.

I will approach the politics of the personal as a contemporary discourse and a procedural negotiation between the private and the public space.

I will discuss the personal as subject matter in the art historic discourse belonging to the aesthetic regime to contribute to the interpretative discourse of “My Bed.”

I will address the performative nature and dynamic reality of the installation through a discussion of the personal as the subject matter dependent on the politics of the personal in the art historic discourse.

1.3 Research question

What new aspects can be incorporated in the interpretive discourse of the installation “My Bed” through a discussion of the concept of the politics of the personal as developed by Jacques Rancière?

1.4 Theory and method

In my interpretation of the installation “My Bed” through the discussion of the politics of the personal, the theory developed by Jacques Rancière regarding politics and aesthetics will be central. The aesthetic theory by J. Rancière is a metatheory. It does not apply to any specific discipline, it is universal and defines reality and its perception. J. Rancière emphasizes the universal equality between all bodies² as the universal order. Reality, as we know it, is a universal and political formation that is formed and defined by all the participating bodies.³

The aesthetic theory by Jacques Rancière denounces the differences between an amateur and master and the hierarchical education model. Jacques Rancière encourages seeing the world as a whole consisting of dynamic reforming political realities. When discussing the art world as a space J. Rancière positions the discourses of art history and the active present of art as equally contributing to the

² Rancière uses the word “body”(le corps) in the largest possible sense of the term in order to refer alternately (in a row in a succession after one another) –and sometimes simultaneously –to physical forms. Nr.13; Notes, p.104; Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2006

³ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible*; In conversation with Jacques Rancière; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p.257

narrative of contemporary reality. The discourse of art is a politically defined, fable like narrative. An interpretation of an artwork therefore is a political process that belongs to the politics of the contemporary art world. In my thesis I will approach the installation “My Bed” through a discussion of the personal subject matter as belonging to the past and presents of the aesthetic regime of art.

1.4.1 Jacques Rancière

Jacques Rancière has opened the discourses of art and art history to new perspectives through a metatheoretical approach to the reality as political and as existing in a continuous re-formation. The theoretical approach by J.Rancière to aesthetics and contemporary art inhabit a discursive space between history and philosophy, philosophy and politics, documentary and fiction.⁴ The key to understanding the universal politics as aesthetics and aesthetics as politics is to accept that the social realm and the art world are realities that are heterotopias⁵ governed, ruled and existing through processes of applied politics defining the reality of every specific field. The political is a constant presence forming either from a position or opposition in any given field. The reality of every professional field therefore is dependent on the politics that is presupposed by the universal politics and the equality of the participating bodies. Opposition is also a position. The existence of a field is an ongoing political negotiation of belonging. It is a never-ending exchange of positions.

Jacques Rancière sees the contemporary art world as a living and constantly transforming organic realm.⁶ The contemporary reality of the installation “My Bed” belongs to time of Tracey Emin and also beyond her. Jacques Rancière describes the aesthetic regime as the universal political order that has the common subject in focus. The common is the field where the definition of aesthetics of the contemporary reality is politically negotiated. Concepts like private, personal, individual and subjective are central in the perception of the contemporary reality, which is topical through the concepts of realism. The perception of time as

⁴ Réponse à Alain Badiou: Cahiers du Collège International de Philosophie 8; October 1998, p.122

⁵ Places and spaces in non-hegemonic conditions. These are spaces of otherness, which are neither here nor there, that are simultaneously physical and mental, such as the space of a phone call or the moment when you see yourself in the mirror.

⁶ Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translators preface: Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2006, p.1

continuity is crucial in order to interpret an artwork as a part of the integrating reality of modern and contemporary art. One has to accept the past, present and future as belong to the same temporality, while acknowledging the inability of a human being to experience the reality of before or after its own physical existence.⁷ I will consider the contemporary negotiation of the politics of the personal as a part of the narrative process of art history and the concept of realism as defining political aspect of the installation “My Bed.” I will build a discussion, an interpretation of the installation “My Bed” in a form of ongoing situation, a process.

1.4.2 Specifications for the discussion of the politics of the personal

1.4.2.1 Rune Gade, “performing biography”

In my approach to “My Bed” one point of departure will be the theory by Rune Gade. It is a theory that considers the importance of the presence of the artist’s subjectivity in the creative process.

The biographic narrative of Tracey Emin is supplemented through the autobiographic discourse of Tracey Emin. Rune Gade considers Tracey Emin to be an active and performing subject in the creation of her autobiographic narrative. “My Bed” is performed through the process of reinstallation and therefore becomes an active part of the autobiographic narrative. The artist’s personal participation is in an active reforming relation to the concepts of authenticity and truth through the performed biography. Tracey Emin plays with the concepts of truth and honesty. She questions the definition and the expectations tied to these concepts through a process of an active performative realism.

My thesis will explore the effect of the personal performative participation of Tracey Emin as an essential aspect with the politics of the personal with the multimedia installation “My Bed.”

1.4.2.2 “My Bed” and the artist Tracey Emin

“My Bed” is a site-specific and time-based installation. Throughout the reinstallation and exhibition process Tracey Emin emphasizes her personal relationship through physical engagement that goes beyond technical

⁷ Tanke, J.J.: Why Rancière Now? *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Volume 44, Number 2; University of Illinois Press Summer 2010, p.11

reinstallation. The active reinstallation becomes a performative part of the artwork.

“My Bed” is both, the present and past. It is a part of the biographic narrative and at the same time it is a part of the perceived moment. “My Bed” as a part of the biographic narrative of Tracey Emin is a presentative situation for the personal of a contemporary individual. It explores the concept of ownership between a subject and an object. It questions the subjective interpretation of memory and the related concept of truth. “My Bed” is a situation and an artwork that calls in question socially negotiated borders between the public and the private space.

I will actively use the personal quotes by Tracey Emin regarding the process of production of the installation “My Bed,” as well as the references to a bed from her autobiographic narrative in order to discuss the subjective subject and its relations to the space it enters through “My Bed.” Or in other words: the politics of the personal with the multimedia installation “My Bed.”

As the different variations of the installations of “My Bed” no longer exist, I will take as the point of departure the inventory list from an exhibition in Frankfurt in 2012 made by Tracey Emin herself. It is the most accurate description accessible; it lists the objects that actually are part of the stored installation and available for the next process of reinstallation. I will combine the inventory list with images from different exhibitions in order to show some quite noticeable changes of the installation. These changes have been overlooked in most of the past interpretations accentuating the more shocking elements the artwork comprises. I will look at the artwork as still in development, but with an “end of an era” in sight, dependent on the life span of Tracey Emin. I am aiming to discuss “My Bed” as a condition of its contemporary time based on a united and open interpretive discourse of the politics of the personal in the art historic narrative of the aesthetic regime of art.

1.5 Earlier research and the feminist discourse

Most interpretations of the installation “My Bed” are related to the feminist discourse. Many of these interpretations focus on the concepts of truth, authenticity and the acting subject - female artist Tracey Emin. Her subject matter is most often described as very personal, and her artistic practice is described as

aggressive exhibitionism. The relations between the private and the public as interrelated concepts negotiated in the public space is often considered to be a discussion that begun with the early feminist art. The theoretical presence of the subjective creative body is often perceived as the presence of truthfulness and honesty in the public realm and often is tied to the success stories of the early feminist struggles. At the same time the physical presence of body in its humble human form is often condemned as damaging and seen as antisocial behavior that forces individuality on the public space. It is a paradox that splits the referential individuality in an appropriate and inappropriate presence despite its existence as a physical and emotional reality belonging to same human body. I find my research subject in the politics that negotiate the places for the unique subjectivity in the public space. The personal as a space and a concept belongs to the public space as well as the private of an individual. The personal balances in-between spaces and ranges in the scale from “too personal” to “not personal enough”. This scale is a changing system that is perceived as static when moral norms are discussed in the public space. I will discuss the politics of the personal as the changes in the scale of measuring personal when it regards the installation “My Bed.”

The feminist discourse offers a strict framework and a clear beginning of a theoretical discourse that the art of Tracey Emin is ascribed to if the focus is on the female gender of the creative individual. Through the introduction of previous research I will point to important aspects with the personal and individual artistic process of the female artist Tracey Emin that will form the art historic feministic view I will refer to in the discussion of the politics of the personal.

Sarah Kent is known to be an early supporter of the work by Tracey Emin. In her text, “Tracey Emin: Flying High” Kent considers the subject matter of Tracey Emin to challenge social norms that regard the concept of “propriety.”⁸ She considers the works produced by Tracey Emin to be feminism inspired, but not always feminist. Kent refers to Tracey Emin as a contemporary practicing woman artist, as well as a woman that is a part of a generation that challenges the past definition on proper behavior in a local and cultural framework.

⁸ Kent, S.: Tracey Emin: Flying High; I Need Art Like I Need God; London 1998; Jay Jopling, p.31-37.

Clare Johnson in her book “Femininity, Time and Feminist Art,” describes femininity as a process. Femininity is played out in the social relation between a subject and its contemporary time.⁹ Johnson looks at the contemporary practice of female artists while considering the possible relation to the early feminist art of the 1970s.¹⁰ Clare Johnson stresses the necessity to see contemporary gender politics and the acting contemporary individual as belonging to the same discourse as early feminism and its depending ideals.

Stephanie Kappel in her Ph.D. dissertation titled “Gender, subjectivity and feminist art” discusses the work of Tracey Emin and the concepts of authenticity and truthfulness of her artistic practice. Among others, she quotes H. Cixous, “Write your body, your body must be heard” in relation to the active writing of the autobiographical narrative by Tracey Emin. Kappel considers the aggressive, or even violent, honesty of Tracey Emin as a conceptual strategy.¹¹ In my interpretation the subject the referent becomes the universal point of reference. Subjectivity is considered universally unique and therefore politically it is the same - different from any other.

Rosemary Betterton considers the theoretical separation of past and present as problematic. She criticizes the attempt to locate a common form and a subject matter that would allow an easier classification, recognition and interpretation of feminist art. Betterton stresses the importance of acceptance of passing time and changes in order to not focus solely on the seemingly lost- the values of the past. The contemporary woman artists belong to a different time, but it doesn’t mean that their ideas can’t relate to the past.¹² The idea of the interrelating subject matter is an essential aspect also in my interpretation of the installation “My Bed.”

Sue Tate points to the development in feminism, which naturally has reconsidered its subject, the universal woman, and turned to individual as a dynamic gender-based subjectivity.¹³ Controversy or subversion in a professional

⁹ Johnson, C.: *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art*; Palgrave Macmillan 2013, p.3

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.3

¹¹ Kappel, S.: *Gender, subjectivity and feminist art: The work of Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing*, University of Westminster 2007

<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/8614/1/Kappel.pdf>

¹² Betterton, R.: *Why is my Art not as good as me?; femininity, Feminism and “Life-Drawing” in Tracey Emin’s art; The art of Tracey Emin*, Thames & Hudson 2002

¹³ Tate, S: *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference*; ed A. Kokoli; Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2008, p.182

field like the art world is often explained through the counter movements that seemingly break or oppose the established system. In my interpretation of “My Bed” I will look at the changes in the art historical discourse in order to discuss the character of the personal as subject matter. The changes in the definition of the subject in feminism are a part of the characteristics of the politics of the personal of the installation “My Bed.”

Katy Deepwell, in her article “Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s”, addresses the concept of transgression¹⁴ in the frames of feminist discourse. The discussions of the possible transgression as the separating act between the early feminist art and the work of the contemporary female artists is a part of the concept that treats early feminism as an established, separate and closed discourse of the past.¹⁵ Deepwell similarly to Sue Tate sees the transgression rather as an illusion that can be supported through the definition tradition that is based on polarized categories identifying each other. K. Deepwell concludes that the art of Tracey Emin is based in ‘libertarian individualism’ rather than a ‘liberationist politics’.¹⁶

Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend interpret “My Bed” and the artistic practice of Tracey Emin as a politically strategic move that takes the previously perceived private into a public use.¹⁷

“...Emin uses the apparently unthought- immediacy of expression-as a strategy that occults the reality of an ethical engagement both with her own time and personal history, and the history of art.”¹⁸

“...Emin's work is inconceivable without the influence of earlier generations of women artists. That Emin's work reiterates many of the same urgent issues of identity and history suggests not that her work is mere pastiche, but that historical circumstances may have changed less than we imagine.”¹⁹

I will discuss the intentional and unintentional political exposure of the private in order to discuss the installation “My Bed” as a condition of its time. I am looking to discuss politics of the personal with “My Bed” and the concept of private belonging to the reality of Tracey Emin.

¹⁴ An act that goes against the law, rule or code of conduct.

¹⁵ Deepwell, K.: *Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s*; in J. Steyn ed., *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*; Manchester University Press, Manchester 1997

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.56

¹⁷ Merck, M. and Townsend, C.; *Eminent Domain; The cultural Locations of tracey Emin; The Art of Tracey Emin*; Edited by Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend; Thames & Hudson Ltd.; London 2002, p.7

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.12

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.12

Rudi Fuchs in “A Particular Honesty” says that Tracey Emin is locally inspired, and it adds to the discourse of the real.²⁰ Locality as an appropriated concept can become an inspiration as well as the fictional space for the simulation of relatable relations for the viewing public.

The social background of Tracey Emin is also a significant part of the interpretive discussion in my thesis. I will use her biography and the personal comments and memories constituting it in order to find a referential ground for the politics of the personal with “My Bed.”

Letho Louna (UIO) wrote a thesis entitled: *Interpreting a Bed: a glance at the reception of Tracey Emin's “My Bed”(1998) and the challenges of self-representation in connection with the branding of an artistic career.*

All of the above are active elements in the discourse of Tracey Emin and the installation “My Bed.” The feminist discourse has been the dominating approach to the artistic practice of Tracey Emin in the past and it has contributed to a wide range of interpretative strategies for the work tied to the gender of Tracey Emin. The biographic subject matter is interpreted depending on the gender of the artist, and the form of the artwork is related to the earlier examples of feminist art. This is a significant detail in my interpretative approach; it reveals the approach to Tracey Emin and her work as being limited to a specific theoretical field that has its departure in the gender of the artist.

The metatheoretic approach by Jacques Rancière opens the personal spaces of the performing subject Tracey Emin, the installation “My Bed” and the social and art realm as the politically valid and coexistent spaces of reality. The politics of the personal is a process that has its reference in all of the spaces and therefore provides a valid political reality for the situation the installation “My Bed” presents.

²⁰ Winterson, J., Friedman, C., Fuchs, R.: *Tracy Emin: A Particular Honesty*; Rudi Fuchs; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p.392

2. Theory

2.1 The politics of the personal

In “The free dictionary”, personal is defined as relating to the private of an individual and its body. Personal also can point to an intention of an activity directed to or performed by an individual. Personal as a concept connotes the prescribing and accepting of responsibility for an action performed by an individual. It refers to subject matters that are closely tied to the individual’s persona and character. Personal refers to the space that is physical and object related as well as the physical that is radiated from a human body as a part of its biology.²¹

The personal is the private in a performative state. The personal is the private in the social realm. It is a conscious and simultaneously unconscious process of space negotiation; it is a political process. The private is an experience witnessed and existing solely in a subjective universe. The personal therefore presents not only the private but also the public politics of the concept of private. Personal is a subjective interpretation of private experience and its active political participation in the politically constructed public space.

The personal as a part of the contemporary art world is an aspect in a political regime. Regime is seen as a flexible set of rules that can perform art through assumption that the art world has had past regimes based on the same universal politics of definition.

As one point of departure in the discussion of the politics of the personal I will use the theoretical approach to politics and aesthetics developed by Jacques Rancière. He builds the concept of a regime in order to construct a grid for interpretations of history, which help to visualize and discuss the politics behind discursive constructions of historical narratives. The concept of a regime allows us to reconstruct the practical and conceptual networks that account for the emergence of a given distribution of the sensible, a conceptual process explained in detail in following chapters.

The politics of the personal can be expressed through art because art and politics, both, are ways of distribution of the sensible. While art doesn’t need to be

²¹ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/personal> (28.11.13)

politically active in the social space, the existence of art always is. A work of art can be seen as a condition in the discursive construction of the integrating contemporary art world. The discourse of an artwork in the contemporary art world is built in the relationship between the politics of interpretation and the politics of art.

The personal, although not explicitly described by Jacques Rancière, is an example of political process negotiated in-between the social realm and the art world. The private of every subject is unique and the paradox is that the common or the universal quality of the unique is its uniqueness.

The contemporary politics of the personal attempts to address all bodies as equal, and therefore creates an illusion that the personal as a subject matter can be included or excluded by choice. The politics of the personal of contemporary time concern the individual subject as an acting unit in the sociopolitical realm and is the merging space for the private and the public of any body.

The interpretation of “My Bed” by Tracey Emin through the discussion of the politics of the personal is a process that interprets a performative and dynamic installation.

2.2 Jacques Rancière

2.2.1 Theoretical discourse

Jacques Rancière (born 1940) is a French poststructuralist philosopher, who has presented a theory of aesthetics that opens up new approaches to the discourse of art history and aesthetics. It is an approach that sees art and art history as well as aesthetics as belonging to a horizontal field of a distribution of the sensible²², which presupposes equality between theoretical and practical fields as well as dynamics in building of an interpretative discourse of an artwork. Alain Badiou has said that the theoretical approach to aesthetics by Jacques Rancière does not belong to one particular academic community, but inhabits a discursive space between history and philosophy, philosophy and politics, documentary and

²² Occasionally translated as the “partition of the sensible”, *le partage du sensible* refers to the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed. The distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done. Strictly speaking, “distribution” therefore refers both to forms of inclusion and forms of exclusion.

fiction.²³ The approach by Jacques Rancière, as well as his attempts to assimilate the intellectual and cultural history of Europe, is similar to the works by Michel Foucault.²⁴ It is a theory that is built closely around the changes in the definition of truth after the paradigm shifts during the mid 1900s, when postcolonial and feminist theory, among others, contributed to the development of the discourse of normality and the concept of “the other.” The aesthetic theory by Jacques Rancière is a part of the contemporary theoretical discourses that perceives and thinks of the world as one whole. The theoretical approach by Jacques Rancière looks at existence as a reality that is presupposed by a universal equality.

The works by Jacques Rancière have become influential across a very wide interdisciplinary arena, and not only theoreticians but also artists themselves are more and more interested in an approach to contemporary art, based on building a net of knowledge. Some of the academic and creative fields that have found it useful to turn to the aesthetic theory by Jacques Rancière, in addition to contemporary art, are cinema, sociology, literature, politics, aesthetics, and history. Jacques Rancière never says what to do or how to do it when it comes to the application or understanding of his theory.

“I try to redraw the map of the thinkable in order to bring out the impossibilities and prohibitions that are often lodged at the very heart of thought that imagines it self to be subversive.”²⁵

“I always try to think in terms of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems of possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum. Where one searches for the hidden beneath the apparent, a position of mastery is established. I have tried to conceive of a topography that does not presuppose this position of mastery.”²⁶

2.2.2 Introduction

The theory by Jacques Rancière presupposes the equality of all bodies in any field of existence and action. Rancière uses the word “body” *le corps* in the largest possible sense of the term in order to refer alternately to physical forms.²⁷ (see f.n.2) He discusses different phenomena as realities that are presupposed by the universal politics. Rancière denounces the hierarchical model of knowledge

²³ Réponse à Alain Badiou: Cahiers du Collège International de Philosophie 8; October 1998, p122

²⁴ Rancière, J: The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible; Translators preface; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p.1

²⁵ Canevale, F and Kelsey, J.: Art of the Possible: in conversation with Jacques Rancière; Artforum international; March 2007, p.269.

²⁶ Rancière, J.: “The Janus-Face of Politicized Art: Jacques Rancière in an Interview with Gabriel Rockhill.” ; The Politics of Aesthetics: trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; London 2004, p. 49

²⁷ Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2006

mediation. He sees knowledge as constructed by and accessible from informational, social and academic background of any given body. All bodies are political bodies and actively participate in the reality definition, also from the position of opposition. For an individual this means regaining equal opportunity and the right to think, own subjective time and occupy private and public places both physical and symbolical, which in past have been reserved for applied political discourses.

The theory by Jacques Rancière allows us to unify and see the past discussions of art realm as belonging to the contemporary art discourse. According to J.J.Tanke²⁸ the exclusive art that has been separated from the everyday experience, and the introduction of everyday as art through changes in the social and philosophical thought of the 1900s, therefore become two equally defining aspects in the politics of contemporary art.²⁹

Jacques Rancière argues against the use of category-based definitions and perception of changes in arts history in a form of historic ruptures as a simple line of transition between the anti-movements in art.³⁰ Reality is the truth as a plurality; an ongoing dynamic political process that holds it's past and present as equally defining. The now in art is a situation defined by its own history as a sum. Position and opposition are counterparts. Changes of philosophical and sociopolitical thoughts and situations therefore are politically presupposed. The reality of art is a discursive formation, defined by the change of position and opposition of it political bodies. Exclusion is an illusion, based on the polarized view on position and opposition. J.J.Tanke writes:

²⁸ Professor Joseph J. Tanke has lectured and published extensively on Continental philosophy, the history of philosophy, politics and aesthetics. He is also the author of *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction—Philosophy, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Continuum, 2011). J.J. Tanke places J.Rancière in historical contexts as belonging to the Continental philosophy, while also introducing his distinctive approach to current discussions regarding art and politics. I will use actively the interpretations by Joseph J. Tanke parallel to translations of original texts and commentary by Jacques Rancière strategically in planning my own approach, interpretation and process of theoretical application. (The Politics of Aesthetics

It is important to me that the process of interpretation and application is in harmony with me being a part of the journey that is based on exploration instead of definition of the politics of personal.

²⁹ Tanke, J.J. :Why Rancière Now? *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*; Volume 44, Number 2; University of Illinois Press; Summer 2010, p.11

³⁰ Canevale, F and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible: in conversation with Jacques Rancière*; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p.257

“Art is political and politics artistic because both are practices of contesting the historical-transcendental factors that delimit the social and ascribe to individuals a particular mode of subjectivity.”³¹

Jacques Rancière dismisses the view on art as a metalife. Art is not a prop that mimics the politics of everyday life. The contemporary art world is thought of as an integrating space that through politics can include anything as art. The main characteristics of the contemporary art world according to J. Rancière are:

“...erasure of medium specificity,... by the erasure of the visibility of art as a distinct practice.”³²

2.2.3 Politics

The politics of modern capitalistic ideals have been dominated by consensus, and thus there is a presupposed criminalization of objection or disagreement. The change to a horizontal distribution of the sensible presupposes a three-dimensional plane of coexisting equal elements that opens the possibility of otherness becoming a part of the authorized discourse through integration. Everything that seems new is already an element in and a logical consequence of the universal politics defining existence. All bodies are always present and political also through their absence. Position and opposition is an illusion that is defined in a moment of time while in reality is always changing, always a process.

Politics is a paradoxical form of action. Politics is not decided or negotiated by any bodies of power. Politics determine the contradictory relations that come to define human subjects. A human being is a body, but body is also a group of human beings, or any other physical, sensible form. A position of authority is a political situation, it is not dependent on natural or social differences between political bodies or individual subjectivities.³³ Politics is what defines violence, morality and rights.³⁴ The politics discussed by Jacques Rancière differ from the “polis” orientated applied politics, which through hierarchical systems of power distribution reserve spaces accessible only for the political powerstructures and decide if any bodies are to be excluded or included. J. Rancière says:

³¹ Tanke, J.J. :Why Rancière Now? The Journal of Aesthetic Education; Volume 44, Number 2; University of Illinois Press; Summer 2010, p.6

³² Canevale, F and Kelsey, J.: Art of the Possible: in conversation with Jacques Rancière; Artforum international; March 2007 p.257

³³ Rancière, J.:Dissensus; On Politics and Aesthetics; edited and translated b Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.35

³⁴ Rancière, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents; Translated by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.111

“Politics is not the exercise of power... it is the political relationship that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics, not the other way round.”³⁵

“The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one.”³⁶

The modern human being has a need to define and understand the reality. This need is always a part of an expectation of a possible universal definition and one true answer. There always will be a paradox of the moment when the need for an answer meets the relativity of reality. The moment of the realization is felt and identified as rupture, change or Avant-Garde. The politics of a subject exists between the contradictory polarized categories of the modern world. Politics is what establishes the flexibility of the polarized scale of reality perception.³⁷ Professor of comparative literature, Kristin Ross comments on the paradox of aesthetics and politics:

“Politics and aesthetics occupy each their particular area, but can’t ever be found there where one would expect.”³⁸

Politics does not come from the human need to gather in communities. Politics is not an applied conscious action; it is the universal and presupposes this gathering. Political conflict does not occur between two political bodies with different interests. A political conflict is the continuous reality of applied politics in the field, which acts as the power that includes and excludes while it is presupposed by the universal politics as the reality definition.³⁹

A political difference is always on the shore of its own disappearance; when the difference has surfaced it becomes a part of the common. Consensus means the end of politics. The social is not a particular sphere of existence; it is a disputed object of politics. The social space however has appropriated politics, which J. Rancière historically has discussed and identified as the norm of social evolution in a particular physical space or field of action.

“Politics is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and pertaining to a common decision, of subjects

³⁵ Rancière, J.:Dissensus;On Politics and Aesthetics; edited and translated b Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.27

³⁶ Ibid. p.37

³⁷ Ibid. p.29

³⁸ Ross, K.: on Jacques Rancière:Artforum international, March 2007, p. 254

³⁹ Rancière, J.:Dissensus;On Politics and Aesthetics; edited and translated b Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.35

recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them.”⁴⁰

“The normal evolution of society presents itself in a progression from a government of birth to a government of wealth.”⁴¹

Politics and Police⁴² are in a constant disagreement between the given distributions of sensible⁴³. The dominating discourse of truth and the reality of a space are both dependent on the existence of the defined outside, the anonymous or expelled is therefore also included.

Innovation is politically predicted reappearance of anonymous elements in an ever-changing reality. Politics is the constant process of borderline change between the physical spaces and mental spaces that a body and its subjectivity occupy. A position or opposition outside of a field is a political position as well. The anonymous bodies are politically present through their absence. The reappearance of the anonymous is presupposed because it exists. The anonymous is politically equal with the temporary power positions in the applied political space.

2.2.3.1 Democracy and Emancipation

Democracy is not a form of social life or political order; it is a political subjectification that restructures communal distribution of sensible.⁴⁴ Political Democracy is characterized by the complete absence of the entitlement to govern and is the relation determined by reciprocity between subjects and bodies. Jacques

⁴⁰ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Translated by Steven Corcoran; Polity press; 2009, p.24

⁴¹ Rancière, J.: *Dissensus; On Politics and Aesthetics*; edited and translated by Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.35

⁴² As the general law that determines the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its forms of exclusion, the police is first and foremost an organization of “bodies” based on a communal distribution of the sensible, i.e. a system of coordinates defining modes of being, doing, making, and communicating that establishes the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable. This term should not be confused with *la basse police* or the low-level police force that the word commonly refers to in both French and English.

⁴³ ‘partition of the sensible’, *le partage du sensible* refers to the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed. The distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done. ... ‘distribution’ therefore refers both to forms of inclusion and to forms of exclusion. The ‘sensible’ does not refer to what shows good sense or judgment but to what is capable of being apprehended by senses. Appearance, play, work- are the proper categories of the distribution of the sensible. (Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetic*)

⁴⁴ Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*; Translators introduction: Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 3

Rancière sees politics as universal and government presupposes equality and democracy.

“Democracy is the very institution of politics itself, of its subject and the form of its relationship”⁴⁵

As democracy form the relationship between subjects in the western civilization it form the hierarchical system of power distribution in the social reality. About the human role in the understanding of the universal politics, Jacques Rancière says:

“The people is the supplement that disjoins the population from itself, by suspending all logics of legitimate dominations.”⁴⁶

Emancipation or liberation is one of the goals of democracy in politics. Emancipation is the process for verification of the equality of intelligence between the political bodies.⁴⁷ When it comes to acquisition of knowledge, a person uses the same patterns and processes that were used to learn his or her language. There exists no gap between the manifestations of intelligence; the sense-making process is exactly the same even though the tools may be changed and varied. Reality in democracy is politically defined through and by the intelligence of all participating bodies. Emancipation is an individual and political liberation in an apolitical field, which eventually leads to a dynamic shift of the position of a political body.

“Emancipation is also understanding that one cannot place ones thinking in to other peoples heads.”⁴⁸

Emancipation as an ideal of the political process is a part of the contemporary art world. Art denounces definitions and is thereby emancipated and emancipating. J. Rancière says:

“Art is emancipated and is emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience”- in other words- when it stops trying and wanting to emancipate us.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Rancière, J.: *Dissensus; On Politics and Aesthetics*; edited and translated b Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.32

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.32

⁴⁷ Rancière, J.: *The emancipated spectator*; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p. 275.

⁴⁸ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible: in conversation with Jacques Rancière*; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p. 269

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.258

2.2.3.2 The Politics and Aesthetics

Jacques Rancière thinks of aesthetics as metapolitics. Aesthetics look at phenomena the way they are and the way they appear. Politics of art is aesthetics in its essence—the way things are and appear. Aesthetics is a system of forms that regulates what is seeable or sayable. The very existence of art is dependent on its definition, which is embedded in the universal politics of existence. Aesthetics determine the relation between being as a conscious extraordinary and being as a common and anonymous.

The question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics is the same as the question regarding the common to a community. The universal politics determine the political regime, which determines the concept of visibility of politics only as one of its aspects.⁵⁰

“The relationship between aesthetics and politics consist in the relationship between this aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics-...- the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distribute spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular.”⁵¹

The concepts of aesthetic movements and political parties can create confusion. Aesthetics as a field has often been associated with the archi-political idea of party, which represents the summation of political viewpoints of applied politics in a field of action. According to Jacques Rancière aesthetics is a metapolitical idea and does not belong to any specific field. Aesthetics is politics.⁵² Jacques Rancière says:

“Politics therefore is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these and putting forward arguments about them.”⁵³

An object or an action in a form of an artwork is political within the spaces it establishes its relations.

“There is no appearance without reality that serves to judge it, no gratuity of play compatible with the seriousness of work.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p.18

⁵¹ Rancière, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents; Translated by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.25

⁵² Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible;Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 30

⁵³ Rancière, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents;Translated by Steven Corcoran;English version; 2012, p.24

⁵⁴ Ibid. p..24

2.2.4 The Aesthetic regime

“ The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.”⁵⁵

The aesthetic regime is polemic concept; it is a regime⁵⁶ where the gaining of knowledge and space is happening in a gathering like manner.⁵⁷

Aesthetic regime of art combines the conscious production of art and the involuntary forms of sensory experience in which the art's effects are manifested. In the aesthetic regime, art has its properties from distinctions of modes of being.⁵⁸ According to J.Rancière, during the French Revolution there was a disturbance in the distribution of sensible during which the concept of the common entered and gained spaces that had been politically reserved for the monetary class.

The aesthetic regime through the presupposed universal equality of its bodies is open to a coexistence of equally valid discourses as reality definition. The equality of opinions when regarding the definition of what is and what is not art is a political debated in the academic art historical discourse, in which historically only some had politically reserved rights of classification and definition. A simplified perception of the role of the subjective opinion in the contemporary art world mistakenly leads to an arrogant conclusion that every subjectivity wants their opinion to be a part of definition. In the aesthetic regime every opinion is a part of a definition. It is not a matter of choice between what is right or wrong, but rather the relations between the participating opinions. The aesthetic regime counts opinion by everybody and anybody because its true as an existence. Any discourse therefore becomes a netlike, dynamic framework that incorporates the common. It means that the information accessible is as relative, wide and complex as the realities of the subjectivities it will be experienced and acquired by.

The aesthetic regime allows the coexistence of multiple truths that have legitimized academic relevance. J. J. Tanke concludes in his introductory essay about aesthetic regime and its character of art that:

⁵⁵ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 23

⁵⁶ ...a regime of art is a mode of articulation between three things: ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and ways of conceptualizing both the former and the latter.

⁵⁷ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/116681281/J-J-Tanke-What-is-the-Aesthetic-Regime-pdf>, (08.11.13)

⁵⁸ Rancière, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents;Translated by Steven Corcoran;English version; 2012. p.29

“The aesthetic regime is thus designed to provoke a series of counter-histories that would offer alternative explanations for the cultural transformations, new forms of experience, and the exchanges between art and life that paralleled the political upheaval of the French Revolution. As a chronological marker, Rancière’s aesthetic regime carries us from the end of the eighteenth century into the contemporary period. It attempts to demonstrate how two periods, thought to be separated by a rupture, can be united at what Foucault called the archaeological level, the network of historical *a priori* shaping what can be seen and said.”⁵⁹

The aesthetic regime of arts is thus a coexistence of heterogeneous temporalities; it integrates past and present as belonging to the same reality.

Discourses of the past become a part of the genealogy of the reality of the present through a political and repetitive practice. The very existence of art has been historically dependent on definition by means of being and doing, the universal politics of existence. Art is a political field that redefines itself in the relations of the political bodies participating in its political field of existence.

“To establish the edifice of art means to define a certain regime for the identification of art, that is to say a specific relationship between the practices, forms of visibility and modes of intelligibility that enable us to identify the products of these later as belonging to art or to an art.”⁶⁰

The attempts of the late 1800s to define art, lead to a future praxis of definitional exclusion. The definition of art was based on what did not belong. In order to identify art as anything but common, the isolation of art from the sociopolitical reality was unavoidable. Common as the excluded or the polarized value of the unique was a part of the political negotiation and a defining presence in the art definition. Common as the subject matter therefore was politically presupposed to become a value of the unique because of its polarized codependence.

“Aesthetic regime is formed of this paradox wherein art was defined and institutionalized as a sphere of common experience at the very moment that the boundaries between what is and isn’t art were being erased.”⁶¹

“The history of aesthetic regime of art could be thought similarly to the history of metamorphoses of this mutilated and perfect statue (Belvedere torso), perfect because it is mutilated, forced, by its missing head and limbs, to proliferate into a multiplicity of unknown bodies.”⁶²

⁵⁹ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/116681281/J-J-Tanke-What-is-the-Aesthetic-Regime-pdf>, (13.11.13)

⁶⁰ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Transl. Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.25

⁶¹ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible*, in conversation with Jacques Rancière; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p.257

⁶² Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Transl. Steven Corcoran; English version; 2012, p.20

Innovation in the modern sense is not the goal of an artistic practice in the aesthetic regime while it is still the political aim of the art world. The aesthetic regime is a procedural gathering of patterns for change. Aesthetic regime in its reality summons and integrates elements that do not belong to the same local political spaces that define the contemporary reality. (see p.22.) The aesthetic regime is defined by dissensus (see f.n.82) - the equality of counter-histories. Art is a professional field of action that looks to its history in order to explain and understand its present.

Change according to Jacques Rancière is an illusion that is powered by the constant resurfacing of the anonymous. Elements seen as marginal are present in the process of definition through absence. The anonymous is transformed through a political reintegration in the social reality. The Avant-Garde of art is the moment when the anonymous has been recognized as a political body. The aspect of a uniqueness of a subjectivity of the common characterizes the political body of the contemporary art world. (see p.27.) The aesthetics in the aesthetic regime of art is the politics determining the integration of the anonymous, the common to be. The politics of the arts constantly negotiates the extraordinary. In the aesthetic regime the extraordinary is the common and unique individuality. The politics of the art is based on the paradox relevance of polarized values. In order to be seen as deservingly artistic the extraordinary that is neglected as common in the political art space has to be appropriated and integrated, yet to be redefined as the extraordinary. The common is fully integrated when it seems extraordinary, when it is defined as innovative in the art realm.

2.2.5 History and realism

“The new history, the history involving “the time of history”, can only maintain what it is saying at the cost of endlessly transforming monuments into documents and documents into monuments. That is, it can only maintain what it is saying through the Romantic poetics that constantly converts the significant into the insignificant and the insignificant into the significant.”⁶³

History according to Rancière is an “anthology of great examples, worthy of being learned, represented, mediated upon, imitated.”⁶⁴ An interpretation of an

⁶³ Rancière, J: figures of history; Transl. by Julie Rose; Polity press, 2014; p.24

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.12

artwork is a part of the art historic discourse it becomes a part of the history of art. Every history of a certain era is a “story from the time of history”⁶⁵

“ A story, Une Historie, is an arrangement of actions according to which there has not simply been this and that, but a configuration that fits the facts together and allows them to be presented as a whole.”⁶⁶

In my thesis I am approaching the art historic discourse as the historic narrative that refers to the personal as one of the characteristics with the subject matter in modern and contemporary art. Modernism is often seen as the liberation of the art from the representative functions it had in the past. Postmodernism and modernism are terms that define specific art historic periods, and similarly to the concept of the common and the unique, these concepts are presupposed by the polarized definition strategy. According to Jacques Rancière the concept of postmodernism is a political consequence and logic, it is the political recovery of the concepts dismissed in definition of modernism. ⁶⁷ J.J. Tanke explains:

“...postmodernism should be understood as a reckoning with the distortion imported into the arts of the aesthetic regime by the myth of artistic modernity”⁶⁸

“If there is a political question in contemporary art, it will not be grasped in terms of a modern/postmodern opposition. It will be grasped through the analysis of the metamorphoses of the political third, the politics founded on the play of exchanges and displacements between the art world and that of non-art”⁶⁹

Any changes or innovation is the reintegrated and surfaced anonymous elements through transfiguration of meanings. To understand the presupposed equality of the elements defining the contemporary art world means to see the homogeneity of the cause and effect. ⁷⁰

According to Jacques Rancière the aesthetic regime of art is the regime of the reintegrated anonymous (see p.33). It is not a regime that opposes the previous ones, but is rather a continuous political process. Realism therefore is not the opposite of representation. The anonymous that was previously excluded from the art realm is a defined political body in the contemporary art world.

“The leap outside of *mimesis* is by no means the refusal of figurative representation. Furthermore, its inaugural moment has often been called *realism*, which does not in any

⁶⁵ Rancière, J: Figures of history, transl. by Julie Rose, Polity Press, 2014, p.10

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 8

⁶⁷ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 8

⁶⁸ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/116681281/J-J-Tanke-What-is-the-Aesthetic-Regime-pdf>, (06.11.13)

⁶⁹ Rancière, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents;Transl. by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.51

⁷⁰ Rancière, J.: The emancipated spectator; Artforum internatioal; March 2007, p. 279.

way mean the valorization of resemblance but rather the destruction of the structures within which it functioned.”⁷¹

The age of anti-representation is not the age of the unrepresentable. It is the age of high realism.”⁷²

The interpretation of the installation “My Bed” in my thesis will become a part of its interpretative discourse. I will use the art historic discourse of the aesthetic regime of art as a reference for the discussion of the personal subject matter of the installation “My Bed.” The realism associated with the subject matter and the common form of the multimedia installation according to Rancière is a process. Realism as a process is a part of the character of an artistic practice as well as is the subject matter in the aesthetic regime of art. Jacques Rancière describes realism as a combined concept defining the contemporary reality. The anonymous subject becomes an equal reference in the reality definition.

“...in the age of history and aesthetics- in the Romantic age, in short- turns every life whatever into the stuff of absolute art.”⁷³

“...The elimination of the line between dream and reality in itself merely one particular transformation among others in the set of de-figuration and re-figuration that defines realism as being always inhabited by (*sur*)realism.”⁷⁴

I will approach the installation “My Bed” as a process. It is an ongoing story that is developing at every reinstallation and exhibition. The realism of “My Bed” is the active politics of the personal.

“`realism` is not a return to the triviality of real things as opposed to the conventions of representation. It is the total system of possible variations of the indicators and values of reality, of forms of connecting and disconnecting figures and stories that their destruction makes possible.”⁷⁵

“My Bed” is a bed, and it comprises common objects, that have been personalized through bodily fluids, and personal stories, that are a part of the autobiographic narrative of Tracey Emin. An important part of the interpretation in my thesis will be the discussion of the documentary and simultaneously fictional character of “My Bed.” Rancière considers the contradicting nature of polarized concepts as a part of the realism of aesthetic regime of art. The personal as a concept is the simultaneous existence of the private and the public, as well as

⁷¹ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 24

⁷² Rancière, J: Figures of history, transl. by Julie Rose, Polity Press, 2014, p. 81

⁷³ Ibid. p.20

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.79

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.78

the true and the fictional. These concepts therefore are seen as equally authentic references for the discussion of the politics of the personal with the installation “My Bed.”

“If every object immediately has the potential to become subject, from material, this is not only, as has sometimes been suggested a bit to hastily in the age of Pop, because of its `documentary` value, which turns into a vehicle of a critical function. It is because, in the age of History, every object leads a double life, holds a potential for historicity that is at the very heart of its nature as an ordinary perceptual object.”⁷⁶

“...The times of memory-history are not the same as those of truth-history.”⁷⁷

2.2.6 Art as politics

“I believe that it is important that the birth of art occurs through the birth of art history: there is art because there is a history of art, which undermines all attempts at opposing the pure autonomy of art to its historicity.”⁷⁸

Art as a defined discourse preconditions the rules for making and doing. It is connoted with the concepts of undoing and redefining. Art is a historical political formation that constantly reexamines its own definition categories, through a political relocation of bodies. While the art realm seems to be a static and professional field, the participating bodies are constantly in a procedural revaluation of the space that art realm inhabits. Art refers to its own reality and is not an existence belonging to the sociopolitical reality. Art is a political reality, which is a sensible existence. It is physical and also theoretical in its character and change. Aesthetics is in the relations of the theoretical and physical reality of art.

“Art is given to us through these transformations of the sensible fabric, at the cost of constantly merging its own reasons with those belonging to other spheres of experience”⁷⁹

In the aesthetic regime of art the universal element is the political body and its subjectivity.⁸⁰ A work of art is political because it belongs to the art realm, not because it is an aesthetic object or idea.

⁷⁶ Rancière, J: *Figures of history*, transl. by Julie Rose, Polity Press, 2014, p. 80

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.62

⁷⁸ Wallenstein, S.O. , West, K.: *Senses of the sensible*; Interview with Jacques Rancière; *Senses*; Site magazine, 33.3013

⁷⁹ Rancière, J.: *Aisthesis*; *Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*; Translated by Zakir Paul; Verso London; New York 2013, p. 6

⁸⁰ Subjectivization (La Subjectivation) Alternately translated as “subjectification” or “subjectivation”, is the process by which a political subject extracts itself from the dominant categories of identification and classification. By treating a wrong and attempting to implement equality, political subjectivization creates a common locus of dispute over those who have no part in the established order. The logic of subjectivization is therefore based on the impossible identification of political subjects. p. 92 (TPOA)

“The works solitude carries a promise of emancipation. But the fulfillment of the promise amounts to the elimination of art as a separate reality, its transformation in to a form of life.”⁸¹

“The works political potential is associated with its radical separation from the forms of aestheticized commodities and of the administered world.”⁸²

J.Rancière says that the contemporary art discourse of aesthetic regime is based on dissensus⁸³. Dissensus instead of resistance provides the possibility to construct a non-polarized theoretical approach to the contemporary art world. Dissensus is the political coexistence of definition strategies as well as the models of narratives of the past.

“Dissensus is a way of reconstructing the relationships between places and identities, spectacles and gazes, proximities and distances.”⁸⁴

The repetitive reexamination of boundaries as part of the contemporary art discourse is based on dissensus⁸⁵ that often is connected with the subjective as a factor in a group play. The important characteristics with the reexamination is that the boundaries are explored but not beyond the existing defined field. Changes are conceptual variations. Dissensus as a disagreement is the political in motion. The politics of dissensus can be seen as teasing or disturbing the water’s surface the same way that historically held a false promise of revolution. Jacques Rancière commenting on the relationship between the concept of revolution and the function of art says:

“No, there is no subversive form of art in and of itself; there is a sort of permanent guerrilla war being waged to define the potentialities of forms of art and the political potentialities of anyone at all.”⁸⁶

Politics and art both are modified and fabricated sensible. Politics is a system of circulation and a system of borders. Art is not simply political when it engages political content but in its essence as it challenges the distribution of roles by reconfiguring our experiences of time and space. The political stakes of an artwork when regarding the distributions of space and time through the ideas of an

⁸¹ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Transl. by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p. 36

⁸² Ibid. p.40

⁸³ Dissensus (La Dissensus)- A dissensus is not a quarrel over personal interests or opinions. It is a political process that resists juridical litigation and creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the inadmissible, i.e. a political subject.

⁸⁴ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible*, in conversation with Jacques Rancière; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p.261

⁸⁵ Rancière, J.: *Dissensus; On Politics and Aesthetics*; edited and translated by Steven Corcoran; Continuum 2010, p.38

⁸⁶ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible* (in conversation with Jacques Rancière; *Artforum international*; March 2007; p.266

aesthetic regime allows us to see how the artwork as an arrangement confirms hierarchy or functions as a disidentification. Disidentification is an action and a process that redefines political categories in a given field through set systems of identification. As the term “disidentification” indicates, this action preconditions the reconfiguration of subjectivity, given that the partitioning of the sensible is also the distribution of political role.

“...politics of art consists of suspending the normal coordinates of sensory experience.”⁸⁷

The combination between the surviving ideals of the past and their reformation in the discourse of contemporary art creates a temporal paradox. Jacques Rancière explains it through the concept and expectations with the avant-garde:

“The avant-garde is endowed with the paradoxical duty of bearing witness to an immemorial dependency of human thought that makes any promise of emancipation a deception.”⁸⁸

Jacques Rancière says that the concept of the new replacing the old is misleading. The approach to here and now as passing and differentiation between then and now gives a concept of different temporalities, a false perception of time as controllable unit, and allows simplifying while creating an illusion of control felt after classification in a positive scientific manner. “What is it we are looking at? What does this present?” are questions preconditioned by the aesthetic regime.⁸⁹ The liberation, emancipation, comes with the aesthetic education, the acknowledgment of equal existence of subjectivities- surfaced and anonymous.

“Art has not taken the place of an absent or distant politics. Instead, politics and art are both engaged in providing an opening in the consensus that there is only one reality, one space, one time, the space time of market,”⁹⁰

The definition of contemporary art is the simultaneous existence of the politics of non-art, anti-art as integrated politics in the art realm. To perceive none-art as the opposite of art, means to accept an existence of a void or a gap between the spaces where the undefined becomes the disappearing. In the aesthetic regime these are the spaces that supply the anonymous elements that become a part of temporary redefinition of art.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Transl. Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.25

⁸⁸ <http://www.khio.no/filestore/RancireJacques-AestheticRevolutioninNewLeftReview2002> , p. 9 (28.04.14)

⁸⁹ De Boever, A.: *Scenes of Aesthetic Education: Rancière, Oedipus, and Notre Musique*; The Journal of Aesthetic Education; University of Illinois Press; Volume 46; Number 3, Fall 2012, p. 74

⁹⁰ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: *Art of the Possible*, in conversation with Jacques Rancière; *Artforum international*; March 2007, p. 255.

⁹¹ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Translated by Steven Corcoran; English version 2012, p.51

“The politics of art in the aesthetic regime of art or rather its metapolitics, is determined by this founding paradox: in this regime, art is art insofar as it is also nonart, or something other than art.”⁹²

2.2.6.1 The Artist and the artistic production

Artists’ access to the world is subjective. The interpretation of the information is dependent on the discursive access that the individual perception and reality definition.⁹³ J. J. Tanke in the article “Why Rancière now?” comments on the concept of regime by Jacques Rancière:

“As the term indicates, the stakes of a regime are political in that they structure, mostly generally, subjectivity.”⁹⁴

The role of an artist in the contemporary art world is to produce and circulate values. A work of art is a political body in the art realm. Its belonging is defined by applied politics and is also dependent on the regime the political body operates in.

“In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, *logos* identical with pathos, the intention of the unintentional, etc.”⁹⁵

In the horizontal distribution of sensible, a distance is not a negative. An artwork as belonging to the political art realm is in a distance from the social realm. It exists between what you already know and the things you will or can learn through the same system of gathering experiences and information. A contemporary artwork is a political body which through the process of creation is integrated in the contemporary art world. The aesthetic regime of art with the integration of the concept of the common therefore accents the aesthetics of the common and therefore the subjectivity of it. The aesthetic regime accepts the transformation of everyday objects into artworks through physical as well as conceptual manipulation according to the contemporary politics of art.

⁹² Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Translated by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p. 36

⁹³ Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*; Translators preface; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p.92

⁹⁴ Tanke, J.J.: *Why Rancière Now?* *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*; University of Illinois Press; Volume 44, Number 2, Summer 2010, p. 5

⁹⁵ Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*; Translators preface; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 23

Art world is a police⁹⁶. Art as a professional field of action can be seen as a micro universe that in scale mirrors the universal politics of existence. The law or the “Police” implicitly separates those who take part from those who are excluded in a given field of action, and the law therefore presupposes a prior aesthetic division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable.⁹⁷ In other words, the law of the police is in the relations between the political bodies and spaces that are the visible political elements of the reality definition of art. The universal politics presuppose the existence of a police and the applied politics that regulates its existence. Art as a Police is a political process, a changing and transforming reality, political in the essence as an existence, and based on the exchange of goods and concepts defining and questioning its own existence. The contemporary art world that Tracey Emin and the installation “My Bed” is a part of is the heterotopia to the reality of the western social realm.

Art and market are undividable; to make art and to survive, one has to sell the result or process of one’s labor. The idea of a selling labor or the result of it is essential in the western art world as well as the strategies for executing the process of selling. The world is divided between those who can and who can’t play with images depending on the belonging to a political field.

An artwork is a production that is in balance with the existing rules of the applied politics in the defined field of art. The power structure, hierarchy that supports the hierarchical political distribution of spaces is open to play in aesthetic regime of art. Jacques Rancière says that instead of expectations for avant-garde, one should expect a differentiated access to a phenomenon through art and play.

“... “play” is one of the possible names of this redistribution of relationships between the active and the passive which is at the heart of the aesthetic regime, but which can also be

⁹⁶ “Police” is an organizational system of coordinates that establishes a distribution of the sensible or a law that divides the community into groups, social positions, and functions. Police or Police Order as the general law determines the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its forms of exclusion, the police is first and foremost an organization of ‘bodies’ based on a communal distribution of the sensible, i.e. a system of coordinates defining modes of being, doing, making and communicating that establishes the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable. The essence of the police is a certain distribution of the sensible that precludes the emergence of politics.

⁹⁷ Rancière, J.: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*; Glossary of technical terms; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 89

translated into philosophical terms as the redistribution of relationships between the conscious and the unconscious...⁹⁸

“...the fundamental question is to explore the possibility for play. To discover how to produce forms for the presentation of objects, forms for organization of spaces that thwart expectations. The main enemy of artistic creativity as well as of political creativity is the consensus- that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities, competences.”⁹⁹

Appearance, play, work are the proper categories of the distribution of the sensible.^{100 101}

2.2.6.2 The Public

An artwork and the artist are two different subjectivities that with the subjectivity of a spectator, the public, create a new set of temporal subjectivities, a discourse constructed on the concept of a horizontal gathering of information.

Humans are the ones looking at and making sense of the political realities of art and the social realm. No spectatorship is passive. The public, the viewer, or the interactive subject of the contemporary art world can be seen as a participant in the play of art. The viewer takes an active part in any definition process.

“We don’t need to turn spectators into an actor. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story.”¹⁰²

In his essay “The emancipated spectator”, Jacques Rancière talks about the public as well as the interactive individual as its own subjectivity. Using an analogy of theater and stage, he comments on the change in the contemporary art world and its confusions of genres:

“Theater should question its privileging of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and reading of a book. It should be the institution of a new stage of equality, where different kinds of performance would be translated into one another. In all the performances, in fact, it should be a matter of linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being at the same time performers who display their competences and spectators who are looking to find what those competences might produce in a new context, among unknown people. Artists like researcher build the stage where the manifestations and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom. The effect of an idiom can’t be anticipated. It calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own story

⁹⁸ Wallenstein, S.O., West, K.: Senses of the sensible; Interview with Jacques Rancière; Senses; Site magazine, 33.3013

⁹⁹ Canevale, F. and Kelsey, J.: Art of the Possible, in conversation with Jacques Rancière; Artforum international; March 2007, p. 263

¹⁰⁰ see footnote 41

¹⁰¹ Rancière, J.: The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible; Translators preface; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 27

¹⁰² Rancière, J.: The emancipated spectator; Artforum international; March 2007, p. 279.

out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.”¹⁰³

The small subjective stories are combined with the fallen grand narratives of modernism in order to attempt to think of the world as one and not to turn the hierarchy upside down. The discursive sum in motion presents the condition of a time and so does the artwork. It is the simultaneousness of the physical and mental existence that allows the concepts of art and politics to be united, the metapolitics of existence. It allows one to distinguish between the politics of art, art as politics, and political art. The public as an active political body has defining relations to an artwork. The artist therefore performs the art through the political stage of the art realm.

There are no gaps between the intellectual and the non-intellectual audience; the likeness between these defined bodies need to be acknowledged. The illusion of the gap is created by the politics regulating the concept of knowledge and its accessibility.

The process of viewing an artwork becomes a subjective reenactment of political engagement. It is a negotiation process between the politics of the personal of the work of art and the politics of the personal of the viewer that contributes to the common subjective discourse. The artist and the viewer both are active and performing bodies in the contemporary art world.

2.2.6.3 The Anonymous phenomenon

Art and politics according to J. Rancière are not hegemonic concepts, but are both- truth and fiction. The fictional character is used as a tool in knowledge mediation. Knowledge as the real, in order to become thought, has to be made into fiction. It has to gain a materiality that is sensible, while also directed.¹⁰⁴

”The ”fiction” of art and politics are therefore heterotopias¹⁰⁵ rather than utopias.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Rancière, J: The emancipated spectator; Artforum internatioal; March 2007, p. 280.

¹⁰⁴ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 38)

¹⁰⁵ Heterotopias, literally meaning ‘other places’, is a diverse concept that describes a world misaligned with respect to normal or everyday space. Foucault (1967) theorises heterotopias as places where the technologies and disciplines of social orders are out of sequence or momentarily suspended, then re-sequenced or reconstructed to generate new spaces where microcosms of society are transformed and cosseted. Heterotopia is a space where the public-private distinction is blurred.

(<http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2010/abstracts/0048.pdf>) (12.11.13)

¹⁰⁶ Rancière, J.:The Politics of Aesthetics:The Distribution of the Sensible; Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; Continuum; New York 2006, p. 41

The anonymous despite the fact of being the unknown or the unacknowledged is a political presence through its absence. The anonymous has no distinct characteristics for recognition. The anonymous is a presence without an acknowledged source, or authorship. In order to integrate the anonymous in an existing discourse, its character has to be conceptualized, it needs to be fictionalized. J. Rancière says that the way a phenomenon and its politics are played out is depending on the character of the fictional space. The personal as the anonymous gains its own historical narrative through the integration process, and is transformed through the politics of the art realm as well as the social realm. The existence of the personal is a reality that is a true narrative based of fictional political transformation.

2.3 Rune Gade, performing biography

2.3.1.1 Performative realism

The theory concerning performativity addresses a new form of art. According to Rune Gade it is art in an open form that sets out to create continuity in relations and situations rather than attempting to be a representation in a form of an autonomous finished art object.

“Becoming a subject today is a question of doing rather than being.”¹⁰⁷

The becoming of a subject is the being of one in the public space. Performing is related to the concepts of being seen and experienced. To not be seen and to not perform in the contemporary reality means to not exist. Existence is dependent on the performance being witnessed by somebody.

“Becoming a subject is thus a relational matter; it takes two or more.”¹⁰⁸

The performative action is based on a possible existence of choice, but not freedom. Aesthetics is one of the fields where the resistance to the prevailing normative identities is located.¹⁰⁹ The performance studies similarly to other poststructuralist theories find its subject everywhere. However, there is one particular characteristic within the performance studies, and that is the focus on the concept of the real “I” and its relations in and to the social reality.

¹⁰⁷ Gade, R. and Jerslev, A.: Performative realism; interdisciplinary studies in art and media / edited by Rune Gade & Anne Jerslev; Museum Tusulanum Press; University of Copenhagen 2005, p.7

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.8

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.8

“...Preoccupation with the social field, the “real world”; its will to intervene in reality, to “test” reality or to playfully negotiate various spaces and levels of reality.”¹¹⁰

Performance and performativity are two very specific concepts, which simultaneously refer to the concepts of real action and relations shared by several subjects. Performative realism is found in the common of the performance and performativity.¹¹¹

“The performative working of “the referential illusion” seems deemed to question conventional demarcations between such binary oppositions as “reality” and “fiction”, “representation” and “presentation”, “life” and “art”, “true” and “false”, “private” and “public” etc., and thus the concept of performativity appears well-qualified to explain much of what is taking place in the contemporary art scene as well as in culture at large.”¹¹²

Discussion of the body as the performing subjectivity is essential in the performative realism. Body is the physical subject and it becomes the locus of a certain production of authenticity.¹¹³

“...The body as a potential instance of authenticity is used in combination with complex means of mediation that cooperate with the bodily signs to produce a theatre of truth, an illusion of referentiality, in which it remains impossible to decide whether we are witnessing something real or fiction.”¹¹⁴

2.3.1.2 Tracey Emin

Rune Gade looks at the artist as a performer, as the real subject of the art work, and as the phenomenon uniting the social space with the art work. The performativity discussed is general and refers to the process of active creation. It is the autobiographic narrative of Tracey Emin that is used as the raw material in a form of physical objects and experiences that are transformed into the artworks as well as the biography.¹¹⁵

Tracey Emin is a telling and constructing subjectivity.¹¹⁶ Tracey Emin builds the concept of authenticity by appropriating the physical bodies to the constructed autobiographical narratives. This process of production is in a direct relation to the social realm, and challenges the relations between the acting bodies, the artist and the public. The references to the social reality again challenge the historical

¹¹⁰ Striff, E.: Introduction: Locating performance studies, in Striff Erin (ed.); Performance studies, Palgrave MacMillan; New York 2003, p.7

¹¹¹ Gade, R. and Jerslev, A.: Performative realism interdisciplinary studies in art and media / edited by Rune Gade & Anne Jerslev; Museum Tusulanum Press; Copenhagen 2005, p.10

¹¹² Ibid. p.11

¹¹³ Ibid. p.11

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.11

¹¹⁵ Gade, R.: *Kønnet I Kroppen I Kunsten*; “I want to feel real”; - Verk, liv, biografi, og selfbiografi hos Tracey Emin; København K; Informations Forlag 2005 p.107

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p.109

relationship between the art and the artist, and question the location of the art world in relation to the social realm.¹¹⁷

”Man kan sige, at autenticiteten produceres via udkrængningen af et sandt indre, snarere end at den henviser til et sandt indre. Det er krængningen som ekspressiv gestus, det performativt skaber selvet- et selv, der så at sige ” vokser” med gestussens gentagelse, som transformerer fænomenet Tracey Emin til en slags citatcollage, en perforeret fragmenteret fortælling, hvoraf der kan udvindes og distribueres autenticitet”¹¹⁸

Rune Gane includes in his discussion the concept of “Traumatic Discourse” by Hal Foster that focuses on the expressive nature of the subjective aesthetics of trauma of the art world of 1990s. The use of the personal trauma and personal experiences as the subject matter of art contradicted the theory ”The Death of the Author” formulated by among others, Roland Barthes.¹¹⁹ The discourse of trauma can be seen as a symbolic rebirth of the creating subject as a presence in the art realm. It simultaneously evacuates and elevates the referential subject the artist whose personal is political and public, but originates from the unique individual.¹²⁰ The personal can be seen as a space where the presence and absence of an individual is simultaneous.

The question of how the life, autobiography and biography interrelate is complex. Through a transformation of the conceptual materiality of the autobiographical into an object, text or biographical narrative is a fundamental transformation of a subjective discourse that has only one true moment of existence.¹²¹

”Det reelle må indskrives i den symbolske orden for at blive kunst, dvs. et formgivet, ”artikuleret” udtryk, og allerede i denne omskrivning er det i sagens natur blevet en anelse mindre reelt.”¹²²

”...Emins fortællinger enetop er mangelfulde, ligesom også selve forteællingerne som sagt er det i deres grafiske fremtræden med overstregninger, stavfejl og spejlvendinger”¹²³

Rune Gade calls the works by Emin coded expressionism.¹²⁴ The authenticity of elements is a subject for eventual performative expression. The concept of authenticity is an important aspect with politics of the personal. Authenticity

¹¹⁷ Gade, R.: *Kønnet I Kroppen I Kunsten*; “I want to feel real”;- Verk, liv, biografi, og selfbiografi hos Tracey Emin; København K; Informations Forlag 2005p.112

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.109

¹¹⁹ <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/Gustafson/FILM%20162.W10/readings/barthes.death.pdf> (07.03.14)

¹²⁰ Gade, R.: *Kønnet I Kroppen I Kunsten*; “I want to feel real”;- Verk, liv, biografi, og selfbiografi hos Tracey Emin; København K; Informations Forlag 2005, p.115

¹²¹ Ibid. p.119

¹²² Ibid.,p.117

¹²³ Ibid. p.119

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.120

becomes a valid concept that is built through the use of the autobiographical as the personal and therefore authentic experience, told by the subject, the artist him/herself. The same relation to the human subject also creates doubt of the accuracy and authenticity of the biography, which is dependent on the human memory, as well as the choices that the social subject makes when deciding what will be included or excluded from the biographic narrative. Rune Gade discusses the influences of the early feminist art as crucial in relation to the work of Tracey Emin in a form of a direct material inspiration through the biographic artworks, as well as the immaterial experiences of social reality.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Gade, R.: *Kønnet I Kroppen I Kunsten*; "I want to feel real";- Verk, liv, biografi, og selfbiografi hos Tracey Emin; København K; Informations Forlag 2005. p.121

3. "My bed", an introduction

3.1 Tracey Emin

Tracey Emin, Ph.D. is a London-based artist who was born in Croydon, South London, England on July 3rd, 1963, to a British Romani and Turkish Cypriot family. Tracey Emin grew up in Margate in the Thanet district of East Kent, England, along with her twin brother Paul, who has been a noticeable presence in her works, and her older brother Alan who is rarely a part of her artistic narratives. Margate is a seaside town, and in the beginning of Tracey Emin's life she and her family lived in the "Hotel International," owned by her father. Due to her father's bankruptcy when Tracey Emin was seven the family was forced into an escalating poverty, and her parents split up. From then on, her mother Pam becomes the sole caretaker of all three children and every day is a constant struggle to provide for the growing needs of the family living in a little cottage at the back of the "Hotel International." Tracey Emin's mother worked as a maid, and waitressed in a local nightclub and the children were occasionally with her at work.

Tracey Emin studied fashion at the Medway College of Design in 1980. There she met her boyfriend Billy Childish, who led her to become a member of the Midway Poets, an English punk-based performance art group in Medway, North Kent.¹²⁶ She graduated from Maidstone College of Art in 1986, and was awarded an MA in painting by the Royal College of Art in 1989. Tracey Emin also studied modern philosophy at The University of London and was on the short list for the Turner Prize in 1999.

Tracey Emin has been recognized as one of the most prominent figures related to the YBA¹²⁷ (Young British Artist) in the 1990s. It was a group of young artists that became the generation who used PR strategies and media to establish a new

¹²⁶ <http://www.biography.com/people/tracey-emin-20891535> (last seen 22.01.2014)

¹²⁷ YBA (The young British artists). They were the center of attention in Great Britain during 1990s. It was a group of young artists, just finished with their formal education, the new generation belonging to the time of fundamental changes in the perception of the world around. The paradigm shift of the mid 1900s had reevaluated the philosophies and praxis of past generations, and the student riots of 1968 as well as the fast spreading punk movement in Great Britain had introduces a different behavior pattern and a promise for certain subjective freedom. It was the focus on the subjective opinion and regained space in social realm that gave a voice to the common in a space where the governing had been one sided for centuries. These young artist employed they knowledge and understanding of the capitalistic market orientated society and gained fame and wealth that is still often frowned on by the high art and social elite, as well as the common, the public.

branding trade in art that lead to a great financial success for many of them. Strategically, through art and a “feel for economics,” they managed to build a substantial wealth that also granted a voice in the institutional and the academic fields of art. Tracey Emin established herself as a household name in the contemporary art world during the 1990s with artworks like “Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995”(1995), a tent that held the names of everybody she had ever slept with, as well as the installation “My Bed”(1998), which is the subject of my master thesis.

Tracey Emin represented Britain at the 52nd Venice Biennial in 2007. She was the second female artist to have ever done so. In the same year she was awarded the Honorary Doctorate from the Royal College of Art, London, a Doctor of Philosophy from London Metropolitan University and Doctor of Letters from the University of Kent. Tracey Emin was awarded the CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire)¹²⁸ by Queen Elizabeth for her contribution to the visual arts and was also asked to carry the Olympic torch and returned to Margate in July 2012 to do so.¹²⁹

Furthermore, she was the first female professor of drawing at the Royal College of Art.

Emin’s Work is included in many of the world’s most prestigious public collections, such as the Tate Gallery, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Hara Museum, Tokyo and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.¹³⁰

The art of Tracey Emin can be seen as a negotiation between the concepts of truth and honesty. She uses her private emotional experiences as an inspiration for her multimedia art works ranging from painting, drawing, video and installation, to photography, needlework and sculpture. In her art Emin reveals her hopes, humiliations, failures and success. Her work is exciting, thought provoking, existentially sad and exhilarating at the same time. The biographical works are presented with a good sense of humor and self-reflection. Part of the artistic practice of Tracey Emin can be said to constitute an autobiographic narrative.

In her work Tracey Emin uses elements from a well-established art historical discourse such as expressionism, realism, feministic art, neo-conceptualism, and

¹²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_the_British_Empire (28.04.14)

¹²⁹ <http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/news/2013/01/tracey-emin-appointed-cbe-by-queen-elizabeth-in-new-year-honours-list/> (22.01.14)

¹³⁰ <http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/artists/tracey-emin> (28.04.14)

confessional art. As a multimedia artist she furthermore applies the techniques of appliqué and embroidery, film and video, personally connoted memorabilia and ready-mades, monoprints and works on paper, neon signs, paintings and watercolors, photographs, sculptures and place specific as well as time based installations. Throughout her 25-year career she has created and recreated emotional moments through a repetitive ritualistic artistic practice creating with it an illusion of safe and never changing subject matter.

The whole body of Emin's work can be seen as a collection of interlinked curiosities that have both aesthetic quality and high-quality craftsmanship. Her works seem to hold a secret or a hidden life, another truth.

In my thesis the Feminist discourse will form one point of departure in the discussion of the installation "My Bed." The provocative attitude of Tracey Emin, as well as the pornographic imagery in connection with her inappropriate language, is often perceived and tied to the Feminist art of 1970s. The re-appropriation of conventional handicraft techniques in order to criticize the social realm, and therefore the role and the position of a woman, resonates with the early feminist discussion of 'the personal as the political' while the return of 'the political as the personal' points to the 1990s and Gender research theories.¹³¹ Tracey Emin does not consider herself a feminist artist, but she does consider herself a feminist; as every woman today should, according to Emin.

"If you mean I don't challenge men's authority, well then no, I don't challenge it. But then I don't challenge anyone's authority. Its like with art history; I am not trying to challenge the authority of that either"¹³²

"There is nothing worse than suppression...Powerless power in one of he most dangerous things in the world."¹³³

Tracey Emin describes her art as belonging to the expressionistic tradition. As an example she mentions Edvard Munch and his ability to depict emotion and experiences like fear, jealousy, etc. in a visually recognizable form as her early inspiration. She takes the material manifestation of expressionism a step further in her installation "My Bed." The installation expresses a dynamic reality and an alternative temporality, belonging to the reality of the artwork.¹³⁴

¹³¹ <http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/biography/> (22.01.14)

¹³² Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: *The turn of the screw; A conversation with Carl Freedman; Tracey Emin*; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p. 332

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 256

¹³⁴ Wainwright, J.: *Interview with Tracey Emin; The Art of Tracey Emin*; Edited by Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend; Thames & Hudson Ltd.; London 2002, p.195

Part of the power of Tracey Emin's art lies in its ability to relate to the elements of the personal and the social reality. She re-examines the concept of art as life and life as art in her own contemporary reality. The persona of Tracey Emin becomes a part of the artistic, creative process. The social reality of Tracey Emin is in a constant interrelation to the artist Tracey Emin. When she received the CBE¹³⁵, Tracey Emin commented on the favorable recognition by saying, "I didn't have to change what I do to get here,"¹³⁶ meaning that she has had managed to achieve success despite being her destructive self. As an artist, Tracey Emin is often in a political opposition to the established institutional art world and her works have proven to be part of a persistent, decisive and strategically executed autobiographical project.

In 1992 Tracey Emin together with a friend, Sara Lucas, opened "The Shop" on the Brick Lane in London. The aim was to concentrate on her writing because she had lost the wish to be an artist. The same year Tracey Emin invited people to invest in her creative potential. For £10, one would receive four letters, three official and one personal. Through this project, Emin met her long time gallerist Jay Jopling who offered her her first exhibition. Four years later, in 1996 Emin opened "The Tracey Emin Museum," as a protest against the art institutions that would not exhibit her work. "The Tracey Emin Museum" held some of her best-known works, including "Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995" (1995), and "Why I Never Became a Dancer" (1995).¹³⁷

The paradox is that the rebellious attitude by Tracey Emin, and her inappropriate behavior, became the very reason why she eventually successfully was integrated into the political and economical reality as a contemporary artist.

3.2 "My Bed"

The story of "My Bed" has become a folktale. It has been told and retold. There are very few constant facts referring to the private background of the installation. I will tell the story and I will add elements that before have not been a part of the description, which I believe can offer new spaces to the numerous interpretations of "My Bed." The detailed description of "My Bed" is made

¹³⁵ see note 123

¹³⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/9777671/Tracey-Emin-earned-her-CBE-fair-and-square.html> (17.02.14)

¹³⁷ <http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/8614/1/Kappel.pdf>

possible by the help I received from the Tracey Emin studio. They have provided an inventory list that was made in 2012 when Tracey Emin was installing “My Bed” for the group exhibition “Privacy” in Frankfurt.¹³⁸

The installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin is the actual bed that belonged to Tracey Emin. After a period of self-neglect and deep depression, combined with a self-destructive behavior that lasted for days, the artist crawled out of the bed to get some water. Dehydration and the fear of losing herself and dying forced her out of the bed. Seeing the bed from the outside her reaction went from disgust with herself to a realization that the bed had been keeping her alive for all this time. It was an aesthetic vision where the common object was removed from its immediate surroundings. The bed in its initial messy state was moved to a clean and alternative space, a white space that granted the bed and existence outside of the social temporality. It became an alternate universe. It presented a private space through a lens of the concept of personal.

The descriptions of the work that appear as a part of interpretations often are very superficial. The objects chosen to be included in the description are appropriated for a certain theoretical approach, or establish and demonstrate the position of the interpreter. In order to achieve a description as accurate as possible, I have included pictures that were taken at different exhibitions over the years, but most of them do not refer to specific exhibition place. The description of “My Bed” in my theses is a sum of the inventory list and all the pictures presented. This combination provides the opportunity to discover the organic and dynamic nature of the installation “My Bed” that has not been addressed before.

The exhibited installation “My Bed” is often different from the authorized picture used in the media or in the exhibition catalogs.

The installation “My Bed” in a group exhibition called “Privacy” at Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt year 2012 consisted of:

“Wooden bed base (140 x 186 x 36 CM), Mattress (140 x 186 x 18), White sheet, White Pillow x 4, White Pillowcase x 3, White Double duvet, White double duvet cover, White towel with orange trim, Sheer nude-coloured tights, Light blue lace knickers; Black plastic Samsonite suitcase with green trim, Multi-coloured suitcase, Black length of chain, Silver length of chain, Rope, (Collective dimensions approx. 70 x 56 x 43 CM); Piece of blue carpet (95 CM deep/from bed frame), Small wooden table, White cotton knickers x 2, Black leather belt, Newspaper, A4 White paper with hand-written text, White

¹³⁸ It is not possible to give an overall description of this work as a static object, because the components have changed through out its existence, as have the setting for exhibition. The work consists of materials that will face deteriorate with time, so even this inventory list is temporary.

soft toy dog with red bows, Maraca – wood/metal/fabric trims, Cigarette box x 3, Large cigarette box, Box of Polaroid film Empty cardboard battery packaging, White sunglasses case;

Polaroid photograph of Tracey Emin, White candle in a light blue glass candleholder, Cork from a bottle of champagne, Small metal ashtray, Cigarette butts, Orange Rizla packet, Coins – Stirling and other currencies;

Tube of KY Jelly, Yellow & green toothbrush, Orange plastic disposable razor, Tampon, not wrapped x 2, Tampon applicator, Condom, out of condom packet x 3, Empty condom packet x 5, Condom in condom wrapper, unopened, Box of condoms, Several tissues, Paracetamol blister packet x 3, Medication packaging x 4, Pregnancy test, Lipsalve, Nail scissors, Used sticking-plasters, Hand mirror with black frame & handle, Safety pin
Apple core, Sweet wrappers, McDonalds BBQ Dip, Vodka bottle x 3, Glass bottle of Orangina.”

Tracey Emin personally executed the process of the reinstallation, in order to establish the authentic personal framework. She used her own body to form the sheets and the placement of the surrounding objects is her personal preference. The following are the pictures: on the left, from the exhibition “Privacy,” and on the right, the picture that was used in publications in connection to the exhibition and for promotion purposes:



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Bellow you will find pictures that are taken of the installation at different occasions. The exhibition place, as mentioned before is not specified:



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¹³⁹ <http://galerie-hueck.blogspot.no/2012/12/privat-ehel-langweilig.htm>

¹⁴⁰ http://www.schirn.de/en/Exhibition_15.html#../Binaries/Binary1053/21209c2aac.jpg (Tracey Emin, (My Bed, 1998, Courtesy The Saatchi Gallery © Photo Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.)



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In the pictures presented above, it is easily noticeable that the placing of the objects varies and the bed sheets are always arranged in a different manner. The mattress is not exposed every time, and some of the objects are not present at all. The most noticeable change is the placement of the suitcases.

The suitcases are a part of the exhibition room and function as the space definers, the border markers for the installation. The little white toy dog and the belt are objects that noticeably change locations, and they are in some of the pictures hidden or absent. On the nightstand there are Polaroid pictures, which are rearranged at each re-installation, and the currency next to them also varies, often depending on the place of the exhibition.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/exhibitions/2008/08/tracey-emin-20-years/>

¹⁴² <http://propagandum.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/tracey-emin-my-bed.jpg>

¹⁴³ <http://www.vincentchow.net/1781/another-reason-to-not-make-your-bed>

¹⁴⁴ <http://reganforrest.com/2011/10/review-saatchi-gallery-in-adelaide/>

¹⁴⁵ http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/Tracey_Emin.php

¹⁴⁶ http://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/tracey_emin.htm

Many of the objects that are surrounding the bed are objects that are already in the process of deterioration and they by no means fit in with the regular materials that conservators are used to deal with in the preservation of the works, but then again, it is not a new phenomenon either. Deteriorating materials, found objects and multimedia artworks that often consist of many movable parts have been a reality of the art world since the Dada movement of early 1900s. Fluxus art, conceptual art and performance art continued challenging the institutional attempts for preservation of the valuables of the arts past in the form of an object of art. In the case of “My Bed” the issue of preservation has become more of a concern with time passing and the artist getting older. Tracey Emin said:

“The bed mustn’t be in strong lights, otherwise the stains on the sheets will fade. The condoms are disintegrating. Charles Saatchi said, “Can you not make some more?” And I said: “No, of course I can’t make any more. You want me to fake it? I really don’t know what we’re going to do.”¹⁴⁷

The dissolving of the materials is visual. It can be witnessed by the naked human eye, but there is also the micro reality and disappearance, which is not noticeable without the help of technology. It is the bodily fluids and the DNA print of the artist. The biological material disappearing also points to the temporary existence of the creating subject, the artist.

The process of reinstallation and the changing form of the installation constantly questions and contradicts the concept of authenticity of the original appearance of “My Bed” in 1998. The reinstallation is ritualistic and performative, it is a part of the process generating meaning. Tracey Emin is still the dominating subject when the decisions during the reinstallation process are made, even though “My Bed” has belonged to Charles Saatchi since the year 2000.¹⁴⁸

The concept of the authenticity is built through the personal touch and the autobiographic narrative. A reinstallation executed by another person and replacement of deteriorating objects therefore could be considered as fake and misleading. The personal and the value of the personal experience similarly to the concept of authenticity contribute to the ability of understanding the common human experience as the unique with the installation “My Bed.”

¹⁴⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/magazine/tracey-emin-on-getting-older-with-her-art.html?_r=0 (22.01.14)

¹⁴⁸ “My Bed” was sold at Christie's auction the summer 2014. for £2.54m to German businessman and collector Count Christian Duerckheim.

A relation between an object and the concept of authenticity always includes the discussion of the personal relations between a subject and an object. The personal as a concept in the contemporary time of Tracey Emin is defined by the negotiation between the concepts of truthfulness and honesty. It is a process that defines the contemporary scale after which the authenticity of the personal elements constituting the narrative is going to be measured by. The art of 1990s, practiced by female artists, is still very dependent on the individual balance between the public and private sphere. It is not only the private and subjective aspects of the personal of Tracey Emin that has become a part of the personal of “My Bed”, it is also her public and social roles constituting the personal of Tracey Emin.

Tracey Emin ties her artistic authenticity to the concept of personal honesty, which thereafter legitimizes the biographic subject matter, the objects and the materials used in her art. An example is the installation “Everybody I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995”(1995), which was lost in a warehouse fire in May 2004. Tracey Emin was asked to recreate it for a 1,000,000 GBP. She refused the offer with a simple argument: the recreated work would not be authentic. It would be a fake. The original work was a one-time event that is unrecoverable and unrepeatable.

The Installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin was first exhibited at the Sagacho Exhibit Space in Tokyo in 1998 as a part of the installation, “Better to have a straight spine than a broken neck.” The exhibition space was a long and rectangular room with windows on one side. There was a suicide noose hanging over it and the bed was juxtaposed with a simple classic design wooden coffin with two bound suitcases. “My Bed” was a part of an installation that also included drawings and two blue neon signs on the far wall.¹⁴⁹ It was a rather dramatic, theatrical presentation. The artist and the work at the time were relatively unknown and the public had the opportunity to approach “My Bed” without the preexisting judgment or clear expectations.

In the 1999 “My Bed” was exhibited in the Lehman Maupin gallery in New York as a part of the exhibition “Every Part of Me Is Bleeding.” It was the first solo show by Tracey Emin in the United States. “My Bed” at this time was

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/tracey-emin/articles/tracey-emins-my-bed/> 05.11.2013

presented as a separate work that contributed to the context of the exhibition. My bed had been separated from the whole of “Better to have a straight spine than a broken neck” and the blue neon signs “Soba Sex”(1999), “My Cunt Is Wet With Fear” (1998) and “The First Time I Was Pregnant I Started to Crochet a Baby Shawl” conceptually constructed its immediate surroundings. This solo exhibition included the sculpture “The Hut” (1999), a textile work “Psycho Slut” (1999) and also a small installation “Leaving Home” (1999), which juxtaposed a metal tub partly filled with gin, two keys, a spool of thread, and the two bound suitcases that have become a part of the installation “My Bed” and are also mentioned in the inventory list.¹⁵⁰ At this exhibition, “My Bed” was placed in a maze-like setting, where the public could discover the installation by arriving at it in a sudden matter.

In 1999, “My Bed” was reassembled for the exhibition of the art that was short-listed for the Turner Prize at the Tate Gallery in London. It was installed without the noose hanging over it. The two bound suitcases were placed on the side opposite the rug, and the cluster of objects placed on the little blue rug created the entrance to the bed. One of the works nearby was the “CV” (1998) representing the contemporary autobiography of Tracey Emin, and functioning as a reference for “My Bed” as a private space in the public exhibition space.¹⁵¹ (att.2) The common form of the installation in combination with the concept of honesty tied to the persona Tracey Emin created an illusion of vulnerability of the artist in the public space. The preexisting distances between the political actors the artist and the public were blurred through the concept of the personal tied to the biographic narrative and the bed as a private space.¹⁵²

Over the years “My Bed” has been used as an example of the sad state of contemporary art. When Tracey Emin is interviewed “My Bed” often becomes an important part of the conversation. Tracey Emin then retells the story of its creation emphasizing its importance as a very personal piece of art.

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/tracey-emin/articles/tracey-emins-my-bed/05.11.2013>

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 05.11.2013

¹⁵² The installation “My Bed” has also been a part of exhibition Tracey Emin: 20 Years, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh in 2008; Tracey Emin: 20 Años, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain year 2009; Tracey Emin: 20 Years, Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland in 2009. My bed has also been a part of the exhibition for the Charles Saatchi collection in Newspeak, The Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide in 2011 and a group exhibition Privacy, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt 2012-2013.

In the year 2000, the installation "My Bed" was subjected to a physical attack. In the art project "Cai and Xi, 2000" Chinese artists Cai Yuan and Xi Jianjun removed some of their clothing and rushed to the bed and had a pillow fight while shouting and jumping on the installation/bed. This incident resulted in damages to "My Bed" and attracted a wide media attention. The performance of the Chinese artists was part of a series, which hailed spontaneous art over the institutionalized, in this case the Turner prize.¹⁵³ The name of the performance, "Two Naked Men Jump on Tracey's Bed", however proposes a more complicated situation. Deborah Cherry sees the attack, the performance by Cai Yuan and Xi Jianjun, as a temporal removal of the position that Tracey Emin has in relation to her bed. She refers to it as a form of institutional critique towards the domination of the western art discourse.¹⁵⁴

3.2.1 Tracey Emin on "My Bed"

Tracey Emin is a great storyteller. She has told and retold her own story, over time adding more and more details and events, that later became her autobiography. Depending on what Tracey Emin wants or can remember, she chooses and edits the facts of her own past and builds her story through abstracted words and experiences. The personal story of Tracey Emin is built on the collaborative imagination between the private and experienced reality and the public definition of the personal. Tracey Emin tells her stories by interrelating the concepts of pain, suffering, strength and human endurance through object based and personally coded miniature narratives that relate to the social realm in its common form. Her work is built on, refers to, and constitutes the autobiographic narrative. Through her artistic practice she creates a reality that resembles the social realm. The autobiographical narrative built by Tracey Emin is an important part of her artistic practice; it is the expected ultimate result of it- an alternative reality of Tracey Emin.

The inventory list made in 2012, marks a turning point in the history of "My Bed." It presents a change in the perception of the works physical, material form. I do not mean to imply that until then there was not a system or order of some kind, but an inventory list is a record that states what is supposed to be there and

¹⁵³ <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/tracey-emin/articles/tracey-emins-my-bed/05.11.2013>

¹⁵⁴ Cherry, D.; *On the move, My Bed, 1998-1999; The Art of Tracey Emin*; Edited by Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend; Thames & Hudson Ltd. London; 2002, p.147

will present an opportunity in the future to compare and notice a change in the elements constituting “My Bed”. The inventory list also opens for a discussion on the importance of the objects that are belonging to the biographic narrative through texts, but are physically absent from the installation “My Bed”.

The following quote concerning “My Bed” is from the interview made in connection to the same exhibition in 2012.

“Everything is in sealed containers, and it’s all labeled, like a crime scene. I did it in Frankfurt last year. I hadn’t seen it since 2008. I was thinking, with the cigarettes, that’s so weird because I don’t smoke anymore. I haven’t had sex for years, and there’s this condom. God, there’s a tampon, and I haven’t had a period for years. There’s my ex-boyfriend’s marijuana, I would never be with anyone who smokes marijuana now; there’s a whiskey bottle, and I don’t drink spirits. I get inside and pull the covers over me and then fold them back to look natural. I can actually smell the past. When I touched the condoms, I thought, Oh, I really loved that person who wore that condom. It’s a strange feeling, a good feeling. This ghost of me was still there.”¹⁵⁵

”When I was younger, it was more about the sexual action, whereas now it definitely isn’t. They’re not opening. They’re closing. This is about getting old and understanding the way of the world.”¹⁵⁶

Tracey Emin clearly contradicts the inventory list. The list does not state pot, or a whiskey bottle. The concept of biographic honesty is called in question.

Another noticeable difference is in the recollection of the period of time the depressive state of mind and self-neglect lasted. Tracey Emin is never consistent. Three days and two nights, sometimes four days is the most common period of time, mentioned by the artist, while often adding, that she is not able to remember correctly, because she spent them drinking heavily in a dizzy haze drifting in and out of consciousness. How much of this time was spent inside and outside of the apartment and the bed; was she alone or with somebody are facts that remain unclear. Elements and spaces of the installation “My Bed” become as blurry as the human memory itself, lost in the strategies of recollection.

It is the moment of realization; the beginning of editing that seems to be the clear memory for Tracey Emin, the defining moment for the installation “My Bed” to be detached from its original surroundings. The bed is transformed into a

¹⁵⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/magazine/tracey-emin-on-getting-older-with-her-art.html?_r=0
(22.01.14)

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Goldman; Tracey Emin on Getting Older With Her Art
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/magazine/tracey-emin-on-getting-older-with-her-art.html?r=0>
(28.04.14)

time capsule that attempts to freeze the moment after the bodily presence. It is a physical space that preserved a body while Tracey Emin has neglected it.¹⁵⁷

“It is quite a selfish piece of art, I made it for my self, to remove it”¹⁵⁸

“My Bed “ had to be separated from my mind” It is a process of editing. And then it could be transferred to an alternative- white space- a space that is taken care of.¹⁵⁹

The original story of the creation of “My Bed” also says that the bed became an artwork because of a desperate need of new work for an upcoming exhibition in Japan. Tracey Emin creates an aura of lightness and carelessness regarding the artistic creation process of “My Bed.” The narrative therefore is more alike a coincidental string of events, which challenges the public and leads directly to the controversial discussion of the postmodern question- can anything become art? It questions the narrative as a form of an account for an experience. The process of the construction of the narrative relates to the construction of the art work, and the authenticity of the artwork as a process leads to the realization that the truth is a truth in the form of an authentic artwork, and does not directly depend on the truth of the biographic facts that the biographic narrative is based on.

“I’d gone out drinking for a week, and hadn’t eaten for days, and I was at the point of hallucinating. Nothing would stay inside me- everything was like constant diarrhoea, washing right through me. I’d gone out, and stayed up till dawn, came home, got into bed and didn’t wake up until two days later. When I woke up, I was so dehydrated I thought, if I don’t drink some water, I’m going to die. I sort of fell over and crawled my way to the kitchen, got a drink, slowly had a few sips and made my way back to the bedroom, and I stood, and it was like Ughhh... It was disgusting. And I looked at the bed and thought “Oh my God, I could have died in there”, and that’s how I would have been found. And then from one second looking horrible it suddenly transformed itself into something removed from me, something outside of me, and something beautiful. I suddenly imagined it out of context, frozen, outside of my head, in another place.”¹⁶⁰

“I used this old black and white photograph of myself tied up for the private- view card. The whole show had a kind of feeling of bondages and being trapped. I had the idea for the bed piece month before the exhibition.”¹⁶¹

It is on a rare occasion, later in her career, that Tracey Emin refers to “My Bed” as a planned and edited intentional piece of art. Therefore I am keen to discuss the intentional aura of unintentionally with “My Bed” as part of the discussion of the contemporary politics of the personal.

¹⁵⁷ Tracey Emin in Confidence [HD] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (04:32) (28.04.14)

¹⁵⁸ http://www.ubu.com/film/emin_shorts.html (19:00) (28.04.14)

¹⁵⁹ BBC Hard talk with Tracey Emin <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5FqDxPUKg> (8:27) (28.04.14)

¹⁶⁰ Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: The turn of the screw; A conversation with Carl Freedman; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p. 252

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.251

As part of the exhibition “The 20 Years Retrospective”, Tracey Emin presents the strongest reactions of the public from the three first exhibitions of “My Bed” as part of the narrative. According to Tracey Emin the reactions to the work varied depending on the country it was exhibited in. The Japanese public had the strongest reaction to the pair of dirty slippers by the bed. Emin also mentions that one of the bloody condoms was stolen¹⁶², while in the United States the public responded with a we-have-seen-it-all-in-70s attitude. The Tracey Emin studio confirms that several other items have been stolen over the years, like the Polaroid’s that are placed on the little nightstand, but do not support the story about the condoms. (att.3) Both the most negative and the most positive of response “My Bed” received in Great Britain.

The works of Tracey Emin is linked to the biography of Tracey Emin. This has resulted in the aspect of honesty being regarded as an expression of courageous behavior of a contemporary woman while at the same time it criticizes the individualism and its absolute focus on the subjective reality interpretation.¹⁶³

“When I am dead, my work won’t be half as good”¹⁶⁴
“I am the end of my line. After me, there is no more.”¹⁶⁵

The personal in the art of Tracey Emin therefore is seen as the aim as well as means for the creation process. It is also intentionality and a choice; it is an artistic process.

“I make art that is really, really personal, so people felt like they could attack me through the art, because I was putting my self out there.”¹⁶⁶
“What my art shows is what I think looks good. What looks good is not always what one wants to see... I am probably more honest than others but is not the truth.”¹⁶⁷
“Truth and honesty- is not the same”¹⁶⁸

The illusion of the truth through the contemporary concept of honesty is constructed over time. It is a natural and social process of getting known the unknown that the artist has transformed to the realm of art. The process of gaining and keeping trust is crucial to her art.

¹⁶² Tracey Emin about My Bed, 20 Years exhibition, HD <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw-9XJtgRdA> (02:56) (28.04.14)

¹⁶³ Tracey Emin in Confidence [HD] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (42:40)

¹⁶⁴ Tracey Emin- The South Bank Show; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxaoAy9oNtY> (28:30)

¹⁶⁵ Tracey Emin in Confidence [HD] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (21:19)

¹⁶⁶ Tracey Emin talking to BBC Culture about her life. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQEQkoMiUg8> (00:28)

¹⁶⁷ Tracey Emin. In confidence; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (06:21)

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. (05:55)

“My artistic subject starts with me, but then it goes out to the world. It presents a life experience.”¹⁶⁹
“People know my name and not me.”¹⁷⁰
“100 years ago my work would be the same, contemporary art is not the aim but rather the medium.”¹⁷¹

The reinstallation process of the installation “My Bed” is another important aspect with the work. The artist describes it as the reliving of her past, a moment that is saved, frozen after the fact.¹⁷² It is a personal and a physical trail into the lost universe of the memories. It had been 14 and ½ years since Emin last slept in the bed when the installation was installed again for the group exhibition “Privacy” in 2012, but physically her body was in it during the reinstallation.

”I have to get under the blankets and snuggle... I have to install it my self, others just do it wrong.”¹⁷³
“The smell is still there, like it was all those years ago. Nobody else can do it right.”¹⁷⁴

An artist entering the art world is an integration process. It is a constant negotiation for spaces. Tracey Emin embraces this symbiotic relationship that personally is comparable to a process based code cracking, where the final combination will provide access.¹⁷⁵ The contemporary politics of the personal provided the access for Tracey Emin.

It is the creative process, the editing, the curating, the thinking and making that makes a work in to an artwork. As a paradox of the personal with “My Bed” is the necessity of the separation of the bed and its future personal use, in order to call it an art work.¹⁷⁶

”It is about alchemy of transmission of substance”¹⁷⁷
“Yeah, changing shit into gold. Or water into wine...”¹⁷⁸

Tracey Emin refers to the installation “My Bed” as one of the best things she has ever done, while also stating that she is willing to always be prepared to defend it.¹⁷⁹ With statements like this she gives a personal guarantee for the

¹⁶⁹ Tracey Emin. In confidence; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (38:00)

¹⁷⁰ Intimate with Tracey Emin- My bed, 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg5ad44knPA> (04:36)

¹⁷¹ Ibid. (03:01)

¹⁷² BBC Hard talk with Tracey Emin <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5FqDxPUKg> (06:15)

¹⁷³ Intimate with Tracey Emin- My bed, 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg5ad44knPA> (00:23)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. (02:00)

¹⁷⁵ BBC Hard talk with Tracey Emin <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5FqDxPUKg> (12:37)

¹⁷⁶ Tracey Emin in Confidence [HD] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNXVjU_Tdo (03:27)

¹⁷⁷ Tracey Emin- The South Bank Show; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxaoAy9oNtY> (08:53)

¹⁷⁸ Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: The turn of the screw; A conversation with Carl Freedman; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p.253

¹⁷⁹ Tracey Emin- The South Bank Show; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxaoAy9oNtY> (09:21)

authenticity as long as she shall live. The same personal relationship between the artist and her work also gives the expiration date for the authentic personal, which legitimizes the subject matter.

“All I’ve got is me and I have to look after that.”¹⁸⁰
“Why slag me off- what have I done to them?”¹⁸¹

The personal that receives the critique is intangible and is migrating to and from places of definition. The social reality collides with art realm, and the personal public relations are experienced as similar.

After the assault on “My Bed” in 2000, Tracey Emin felt offended, and wanted to pull out of the Turner prize, but she couldn’t because of contracts she had signed. The institution therefore determined the control on the personal that was released into and then attacked in the public space. The illusion of a punishment through condemnation of the subjective personal that questions the social order is institutionally executed and personally felt.¹⁸²

3.3.2 Strangeland, Tracey Emin and quotes on the bed

Strangeland is an autobiographic collection of stories based on the personal memories of Tracey Emin. Some of the stories, or parts of them, have been presented in the form of a separate artwork. These narratives are built as fictional metaphors of human condition constantly intertwined and questioned by the truthfulness of the facts. It is a very personal process of writing, a dreamlike drifting in memories; it is a recontextualisation of pain as experience.

I have chosen to assemble references for a bed as a space in the autobiographic narratives, in order to create a universe of “My Bed” as a space of the personal consciousness. These quotes are the phantasmagoric context for “My Bed”, the personal context.

The first quote comes from a story that retells the coping process after the sexual abuse from an adult, a boyfriend of Tracey Emin’s mother. It happened at home, at a place one is supposed to feel safe.

¹⁸⁰ Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: The turn of the screw; A conversation with Carl Freedman; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p.167

¹⁸¹ Tracey Emin- The South Bank Show; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxaoAy9oNt> (13:20)

¹⁸² Ibid. (11:14)

“I stopped eating and took to my bed. I don’t know how long this lasted but in my mind it was an eternity. I lived on a diet of orange squash and digestive biscuits. I became thin, pale, short-sighted. My teeth rotted.”¹⁸³

The following quotes describe the shame over wetting a bed while sharing a room with other girls her age and another nightmarish awakening in the middle of the night of a child whose mother is not there for her at the moment of fear.

“In the morning I said I didn’t feel too well- too afraid to leave my bed, afraid of my secret.”¹⁸⁴

“I sat up in bed, the nights silence burning my mind, the covers pulled up close around my face, lying in my own piss, too scared to breathe, my eyes darting around the semi-darkness.”¹⁸⁵

Another quote talks of the bed as the place where the day ends. Bed is referred to as a place that carries our pain, a place that keeps us while we sleep. It is a place where a human can be still for a moment to process the social spaces that exist on the outside. It refers to a night after the birthday party of a classmate that Tracey Emin has been sent home from all dressed up and bearing a gift, but lacking an invitation

“That night, I lay in bed and cried myself to sleep. And in the morning, I asked, “Mummy, what’s an invitation”¹⁸⁶

The installation “My Bed” comes from the everyday of Tracey Emin as an adult. It is a personal space, a witness for lifestyle choices of a young and rebellious youth, who once again attempts to challenge the world, the society, and the social reality with a self-destructive social behavior. The bed is the space that becomes universal for all, when the body is exhausted and the mind needs a rest. Also the rebellious needs sleep.

In the following quote there is a reference to the four pillows in the bed, which connects the personal comfort preferences of Tracey Emin and the four pillows that are part of the installation “My Bed.”

“I get into my very large bed, with its puffy duvet and four soft pillows. My head sinks into them. Its five a.m. and I wonder why I didn’t do this six hours ago. What is it that stops me going to bed? Ever since I can remember, as I was lifted and carried to my bed, I have fallen asleep with my eyes open.”¹⁸⁷

“I want to laugh with my eyes open. I want to sleep with my eyes closed.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Tracey Emin: *Strangeland*; Sceptre; Hodder & Stoughton 2005, p. 17

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 17

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 19

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 25

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 34

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 36

“Drunk and spinning, I made my way to bed. My bed. It smelt... it smelt like, like... I should have changed the sheets- but I kind of liked it.”¹⁸⁹

Suicide is a subject that is mentioned on several occasions. In Emin’s case, it often seems to be related to the concepts of peace and sleep. The physical and emotional exhaustion of the everyday makes a human body and mind long for a moment of forgetfulness, a moment of complete peace. The silence of the night and present absence of consciousness allows the physical being to escape oneself. The sea and water, the concept of drowning resonates with the feeling of drifting into a deep sleep. Tracey Emin plays with the thought of suicide as the ultimate selfish human sacrifice for a moment of peace that can be experienced as a memory only by the living. The possibility of an irreversible disappearance is so extreme, that it becomes momentarily comforting.

“I might have died, believing the sea was a warm bed”¹⁹⁰

“I sank beneath the water and, like a cork, popped back up. The sea became my bed as I floated around for a while, a tiny part of this great world more alive than ever”¹⁹¹

When visiting her father and his family in Turkey, the reality and the realization that her family never has and never will be the desired normal, a bed becomes the haven of lazy time and relaxation, the space where reality doesn’t have a reach. The bed in this case becomes a shelter and a space of hideaway for the moments when there is no more strength left to face the world.

“Tuesday: just stayed in bed all day. Sleep with no sleep. Thought with no thought. Love with no love.”¹⁹²

“Was I really all alive- no part of me had died? My soul existed, but outside me. Dear God, I thought, every part of me is bleeding.”¹⁹³

Self-abuse for Tracey Emin seems to be a comforting process. She isolates herself from the public space in order to become her own abuser, only to reach a low, where a recovery is the only available option.

“Spent the whole weekend in bed, depressed and trying to recover, with a throbbing tooth and scabs breaking out all over my chin”¹⁹⁴

Tracey Emin showed up drunk and stomped off a television set for a program on Channel 4, which was meant to discuss the topic “Is painting dead?”¹⁹⁵ Her

¹⁸⁹ Tracey Emin: *Strangeland*; Sceptre; Hodder & Stoughton 2005, p.170

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.128

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 53

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p. 89

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 98

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 183

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKNr2LOkXYE>

behavior as a public persona was eccentric and socially unacceptable, and the shame she felt was personal. The social being of Tracey Emin is a construction existing between the public and the private space. When social behavioral norms are broken the personal spaces, while still shelter like, become exposed to the outer world. The personal is in a constant communication to the public for a contemporary individual.

“All the phones are ringing, every few minutes. I can’t cope. I am embarrassed and confused. I don’t understand. Its like remembering nothing from your childhood, being shown photos, being told events and, bit by bit, assembling a possibly false memory from these fragments.”¹⁹⁶

Tracey Emin deals with her reality as a contemporary subjectivity. Her reactions and her behavior is politically determined response to the social reality, and the art world. She is operating in a subjective and confession based reality.

“Don’t be afraid to take the past head on.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Tracey Emin: Strangeland; Sceptre; Hodder & Stoughton 2005, p. 188

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 213

4. Discussion

The critical and the descriptive method used in building the interpretation of the installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin is attempted as an addition to the discourse of one of the most controversial artworks of the 1990s. With this discussion I attempt to unite and combine previous interpretations of “My Bed” by using the meta-theory and method of Jacques Rancière. I will consider the artwork, the artist and the art historical narratives as equal elements that construct a living, changing and dynamic phenomenon, which is a condition of its time in the form of an artwork.

Jacques Rancière considers art realm and the social reality heterotopias. These are two separate realities, which are presupposed by the same universal politics. The interrelation between these realities happens through the political and social subject. The reality of the heterotopias is based on a dynamic political process. The bodies defining the political reality therefore are considered equal in their universal reality. The installation, the autobiographic narrative, Tracey Emin and the public are some of the equal political bodies involved. The choice of the bodies for my discussion is not intended to present a static selection, and is open for variation in future interpretations of the installation “My Bed.”

The politics according to Jacques Rancière determine the contradictory relations that define the subject. A space that the personal inhabits in the contemporary art realm is dependent on the dissensus, an existence of the simultaneous contradictory and simultaneously complementing political realities.

The universal politics that determine the formation of the art realm is a dynamic process, while the art realm in its reality is looking for a static ultimate definition in order to control the spaces it inhabits as a politically defined field. The contemporary art world is a system of dynamic circulation of political bodies; it is a system of ever changing borders; it is a biological cell-like body. The politics of aesthetics in the aesthetic regime is negotiated between and by the political bodies. Aesthetics is a reality, a subjective reality, based on the universal politics. Politics and art are both modified and fabricated sensible. Every space that a body politically occupies is a part of its politics of the personal, and its aesthetic realm. (see p.25.)

The aesthetic regime is defined by the plurality defining the concept of the truth. An artistic process in the aesthetic regime of art is an intentional production combined with involuntary forms of sensory experience. (see p.21.)

4.1 The personal in the aesthetic regime of art

The role of the artist in the art realm is to produce and circulate the values of the aesthetic regime. The reality of the aesthetic regime is a coexistence of multiple truths in the heterogeneous temporalities. Everything and everybody has a theoretical importance, a valid existence. The subjectivity, the personal as a concept is integrated in the contemporary reality of the art world. The personal subject matter belongs to the art historic discourse of the aesthetic regime of art.

“It is the very job of art to reveal something that is invisible, through the controlled power of words and images, connected or unconnected, because art alone thereby makes the inhumane perceptible.”¹⁹⁸

“My Bed” as a contemporary artwork is a situation; a reappearing reality of its own, it is a presentative and performative piece of art. “My Bed” is a contemporary condition of the politics of the personal of 1990s. The installation is a work in a constant development dependent on the physical existence of its creator. The controversy it created signifies the politics of the personal that challenges the politics proper of the social as well as the art realm. It is a unique artwork that presents a unique aspect of the mortal and therefore unique common. I will look at the concept of the personal as the subject matter of personally selected examples from the art historic discourse in the aesthetic regime in order to trace the negotiations of the politics of the personal that the situation “My Bed” presents through its reappearance within the art realm.

Realism as a major concept in art claimed to show real people in real life situations, show the real world, the world that had been taken for granted and the reality that was too common to be included in the representative approach to the extraordinary. Realism identified the personal as the individual and presented the universal concept of normality as a discursive space. The ordinary as the common was singled out and archived in the discourse of art through the contemporary politics of the art.

¹⁹⁸ Rancière, J: figures of history; Transl. by Julie Rose; Polity press, 2014; p.50

“...‘realism’ is not a return to the triviality of the real things as opposed of representation. It is the total system of possible variations of the indicators and values of reality, of forms of connecting and disconnecting figures and stories that their destruction made possible.”¹⁹⁹

Realism as a performative concept of contemporary art connotes subjectivity as the source of an ordinary reality, and is the performance of the personal as explored and accepted reality where the sensible moment is crucial. (see p.34) The reality of “My Bed” is a performative form of realism. It combines the concept of real world staged in a performative and process based dynamic existence. Rancière calls the age of anti-representation, the aesthetic regime the age of “high realism.”²⁰⁰

4.1.1 Photography and the personal

“Fixing points of light over the ill-born, sunk into anonymity- that had already been done, technically, routinely. It was called photography, which is writing with light; and with the advent of photography, all lives entered the shared light of writing of the memorable.”²⁰¹

The photographed enter the play²⁰² of the presentation; they accept the rules of the politics that direct the light²⁰³ at them while defining their visibility. Photographs of and by Robert Mapplethorpe referring to the most private spaces, personal life and relations, presents the very contradictory integration of the ethically marginal personal. The personal subject matter is anywhere between deepest friendship and love that suddenly intervene with sadomasochistic, fetishist universes, which force the public to rethink the belonging of their emotional reactions. Mapplethorpe exposed himself as a multidimensional subjectivity. Throughout his artistic projects he took the responsibility of the presentation of his own reality.

Tracey Emin’s “My Bed” presents the reality of a moment. It is a moment of an existence that has been turned into an isolated visualization of the personal. This way I perceive “My Bed” as a photograph. It was first presented as a frozen, documented moment of a reality that does not belong to the normality ideals of the public space. Robert Mapplethorpe referred to a community of anonymous, the outcasts and the ones that were simply different. He shed a light on the social reality that was ignored and overlooked. Tracey Emin refers solely to herself, but

¹⁹⁹ Rancière, J: figures of history; Transl. by Julie Rose; Polity press, 2014; p.78

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p.81

²⁰¹ Ibid. p.15

²⁰² Wallenstein, S.O. , West, K.:Senses of the sensible;Interview with Jacques Rancière; Senses; Site magazine, 33.3013

²⁰³ Rancière, J: figures of history; Transl. by Julie Rose; Polity press, 2014; p.15

through herself she also sheds a light on the social reality of a woman, a human being, an artist and a child through stories that otherwise would remain untold.

Nan Goldin is an artist working with the documentary family style photography where the personal is a subject matter through a depiction of personal spaces. The personal as subject matter in her work is a conceptual space that refers to the private of an individual as well as the private of a group the individual belongs to. Her work “Gilles Dusein and Gotscho – 1992-1993” depicts the reality of the Aids tragedy, the epidemic that was ignored by the public realm because of the shameful connotations of the illness. Nan Goldin exposed background details in the mirror image of the society. The documentary tradition and the realism associated with the photographic medium and especially documentary style photography, forces the public to consider and actively define the boundaries of the personal. Jacques Rancière considers the reality of the art realm culturally defined. The controversial with the marginal personal in the art realm is in a direct correlation with the political position of the marginal personal in the social realm.

The politics of the personal of “My Bed” is the social reality of Tracey Emin while simultaneously it is also everything but it. “My Bed” is questioning the reality of the contemporary time, which still accepts individual tragedies as collateral damage in the social machinery. A contemporary of Tracey Emin, Richard Billingham, documented his family, an alcoholic father and the father’s girlfriend, in situations seldom shown and mostly hidden behind closed doors. He exposed the paradox of the inconsistencies between the ethical politics of the personal belonging to a social group and the theoretical ideals and expectations of a family, that both are simultaneous realities. The documentary photography by Billingham becomes a passive record of a reality of many children. He shows it from a perspective of an adult who has the voice and chance to expose the reality, but not to change his own personal experience. These photographs become conceptual art works, with no attempt to initiate a social change; the subject matter is considered provoking when the boundaries of the contemporary politics of the personal are in question. The passiveness of a documentary photography as an artwork has become political.



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The private of a social subject is defined as the personal in the public space. A personal tragedy becomes public when subjectivity has become a part of a performative political body in the social realm. An artwork is political when it is defined as such and is a part of the reality of the art world. The personal as a subject matter creates an illusion of blurred boundaries between the social and the art realm.



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4.1.2 Early Feminism

Tracey Emin is a female artist whose art practice belongs to generation after the early feminist art. As a practicing female artist belonging to the contemporary art world her individual identity as an artist is partly dependent on the struggles of the feminist discourse that negotiated the integration of female subjectivity as the common into the social and art realm. Feminism is often mistakenly referred to as a finished project of the past because of its subject that referred to a woman as a universal category for the female gender. Contemporary female artists are often reluctant to be called feminist artists, but rather present themselves as the unique and individually constructed subjects of gender research. In the contemporary art world the subject matter of a contemporary artwork can be related to the early

²⁰⁴ <http://www.darkbeautymag.com/2013/06/robert-mapplethorpe-two-men-dancing/>

²⁰⁵ http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/artpages/richard_billingham_untitled11.htm

²⁰⁶ Nan Goldin – Gilles Dusein and Gotscho – 1992-1993

<http://sexualityinart.wordpress.com/2008/01/30/nan-goldin-gilles-dusein-and-gotscho-1992-1993/>

feminist art, but this work is not necessarily a work by a female artist. Early feminist theory was formed around the understanding of the private as a public matter, which therefore is an aspect of the politics of the personal with the creating individual.

Judith Chicago was one of the first artists who created works that visually referred to the hidden, or what was defined as the private realities of the female biology with works like “Red Flag”(1971) and “Menstruation Bathroom” (1972). The personal objects like tampons were reproduced and fake blood was added and a universal but anonymous truth was exposed with the ultimate goal to be perceived as the common. The perception of a woman as a universal category is also an aspect of the politics of the personal. Tracey Emin as an artist therefore is defined by the politics proper that define the subject; woman. The definition in the social realm is based on the polarization and any change in the definition therefore is based on the politics of polarization depending on the regime and its political bodies. Tracey Emin therefore is able to continue the search for the personal and its place in the public realm through the subjective expression and professional art practice.

The rather aggressive and physically, body orientated performance by Carolee Schneeman “Interior Scroll”(1975) performed a redefinition of a public space. This space was made intimate and personal with the exposure of her naked body. She performed a symbolic simulation of the birth of a body related truth. The early feminist art was forceful and intentionally political. It created a pattern of behavior that was associated with the universal feministic woman. (see p.22) A political classification of bodies created a new concept of a woman that also influenced the behavioral patterns and public reactions of Tracey Emin.



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²⁰⁷ Judith Chicago: Red Flag 1971 <http://www.mum.org/armenjc.htm>

Tracey Emin uses objects like bloody tampons, used pregnancy tests, contraception pills and bloody condoms to create the reality illusion in the appearance of the multimedia installation “My Bed”. These objects are said to be carrying the bodily fluids of Tracey Emin. Through this the narrative “My Bed” is removed from the political space of the universal woman in to the personal space of Tracey Emin, but it still keeps its relevance also in terms of the goals of the early feministic project, considered as an ongoing political negotiation.

4.1.3 Painting

The personal as means of expression through style or subject matter is also a defining factor for the medium of painting in the aesthetic regime of art. Frida Kahlos expressive and surreal dimensions of personal suffering addressed her body as a woman and her unavoidable mortality as a human being. Her emotional world, her physical existence became the subject matter of her work. Similar to the work of Tracey Emin the paintings by Kahlo are interpreted according to her biographic narrative. The intentionality of the personal subject matter is in question as we see in “My Bed.” There is a sensible difference between the realities of the private experiences and the expression of the personal that can be seen in the medium of painting. On first glance “My Bed” is an artwork, it momentarily removes the difference between the two realities due the realism of the comprised objects. The use of common objects gives an even greater distance between the private experiences and the objects perceived as biographical evidence. The biographic narrative and the installation “My Bed” have a symbiotic relationship. The politics of the personal is negotiated between the story and the physical existence. “My Bed” as an artwork with its dependency on the physical existence of Tracey Emin challenges the ideals of the autonomous artwork as detached from the creator when released in the art realm. (see p.36.) The paintings by Frida Kahlo are a more stable and static evidence of the personal that has become timeless after her death. “My Bed” constituted of the common objects has a fragile materially, almost mortality, dependent on the performing personal link, Tracey Emin. By performing the reinstallation and reorganization of the objects constituting “My Bed” Tracey Emin functions as the authentic

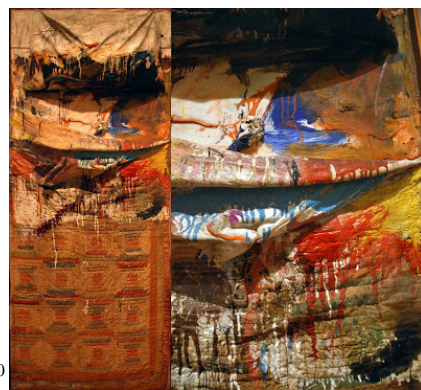
²⁰⁸ Judith Chicago: Menstruation Bathroom (1972)
<http://periodtumblr.tumblr.com/post/2546250487/menstruation-bathroom-judy-chicago-1972>

reference. Through “My Bed” Tracey Emin has managed to change the materiality conceptually. An object in its dependency of the personal contact, narrative and touch, has become mortal in line with the human being.

Another example is one of the first combines made by Robert Rauschenberg- “Bed” (1955). It consists of a worn pillow, sheets and a quilt. It is displayed as a painting by not overstepping the frame of the canvas while simultaneously it is also a three dimensional space. The bedding is said to have belonged to the artist before it was incorporated in the artwork. The personal in this case is transformed aesthetically according to the medium and the subjective professional aesthetics of Robert Rauschenberg.²⁰⁹ The personal relationship in this case exists in an accompanying narrative, but has no other physical reference than a theoretical probability. The canvas with the bed sheets assembled on it is a composition of a material collage. It is a static personal link; the art object will exist beyond the creating subject in the finished form it was first exhibited. Tracey Emin authenticates her sheets through her own body and bodily fluids. “My Bed” is a condition of the art world’s promises of the continuous existence of the extraordinary beyond the life span of the physical creating subject and the reality of the mortality of the creating subject as part of the extraordinary art work. It is a human life, the brief encounter of a subject and its social realm in relation to the eternal that Tracey Emin transforms in to the installation “My Bed.”



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²⁰⁹ Merck, M.: Bedtime; The Art of Tracey Emin; Edited by Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend; Thames & Hudson Ltd; London 2002, p.125

²¹⁰ <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/frida-kahlo/the-two-fridas-1939>

²¹¹ <http://www.mountainsoftravelphotos.com/USA%20-%20New%20York%20City/MOMA%20Top%20/slides/MOMA%2004%20Robert%20Rauschenberg%20Bed.html>

4.1.4 Pop art, Fluxus and discourse of “My Bed”

Pop art introduced the concept of genuine fakes as a sign of the western consumer reality. A new set of social and cultural symbols through new artistic mediums were integrated in the fine arts. The social reality of a subject became the reference and the focus of the creative process in art. The authentication of the artistic subject was based on subjective experiences of the social reality.

Fluxus art and artists explored the possibility to combine life and art, by transforming their private spaces and invading the public with a violent individualism that was a personal performance of its interpretations of the social realm.

Chance, accident, and unintentional intentionality are forms of expressive means that have been explored in the aesthetic regime of art. A personal interpretation has always played a role in the creative process; in the aesthetic regime the creative process has a role in the politics of the personal.

The politics of the personal with the installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin is intentional and unintentional at the same time. It explores the possibilities of ultimate truth through the concept of honesty in connection with memory. It is unique because it is ordinary and common. Its dependence on the personal physical encounters with Tracey Emin’s body is the aspect of the politics of the personal that defines the work but only while the artist is alive. After Tracey Emin is gone it will be an artwork that has lived its life and is a past as much as its creator.

The preservation of “My Bed” will be like the preservation of other conceptual art works, such as the “Capri Battery”(1985) by Joseph Beuys and the interactive works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. These works forced the public and the institution to uphold an interaction between random strangers and the art objects.

Tracey Emin challenges the social realm to consider the impossibility of the preservation of the personal as continuous reality with “My Bed” after she is gone. It is an arrogance and humility at the same time. “My Bed” as a contemporary artwork belongs to the community of the personal in the aesthetic regime of the arts, as a unique body in a living and a dynamic reality.



The contemporary reality of “My Bed” is a part of the art historic discourse of the personal as a subject matter. Contemporary art works by Gillian Wearing, Sophie Calle, and Cindy Sherman just to name a few can be considered as a part of the discourse of “My Bed.” In these artworks the politics of the personal is a constant development.

4.2 The biographic as a subject matter

Art as a political space always is defined by its contemporary time and the political bodies at play. (p.17) Art history therefore is a narrative dependent on the politics of the arts. The social realm is an apolitical body, which determines the definition of the social.

”Artist like researcher build the stage where the manifestations and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom.”²¹⁴

The personal as any other concepts existing in the public realm is subjected to the hierarchy of education and the social concept of raising an individual. The illusionary gap between the bodies knowing and the ones not knowing therefore suggest a belonging to different political spaces. This is an illusion created when a situation is isolated from the universal whole. According to Jacques Rancière the emancipation is happening when the spaces of the ones looking and the ones acting are unified. (see p.33) It is when the whole political body in the aesthetic regime of the arts is recognized as consisting of equal elements holding equal position and role in the definition of reality.

A controversy tied to the concepts of the common and the personal is possible when the anonymous has become the politically integrated common. (see p.18.) It

²¹² Gillian Wearing:2004 <http://oystermag.com/gillian-wearings-people>

²¹³ Sophie Calle: Take Care of Yourself (2007)

<http://5centsapound.tumblr.com/post/49659690076/sophie-calle-on-take-care-of-yourself>

²¹⁴ Rancière, J: The emancipated spectator; Artforum international; March 2007, p. 280

is the discussion of the validity, necessity and the reality of the unique personal experience of being common that is controversial in the installation “My Bed.”

Jacques Rancière explains the view on art as meta-life as an illusion created by the integrated common in the heterotopias of art and social realm. According to this view the art world and an art piece can be discussed in terms of inspirations that are drawn from the reality of the heterotopias, while realizing that the discussion is a political body added to the definition of the work.

The installation can be seen as the actual space of occurrence of the events described. “My Bed” is its own material context. Tracey Emin calls her expression honest, but not the truth. The distinction between these concepts is politically relevant in order to discuss the politics of the personal.

Rune Gade says that the individual existence in the contemporary time is dependent on the performance of oneself. The existence of the subjects is relational. (see p.34.) I would like to take it further, and say that this is a valid reality of the aesthetic regime as a whole.

The biographic narrative of Tracey Emin is a historic narrative built and materialized in the art realm. The intentionality applied by Tracey Emin when she supplements her biography, is the unique characteristics with the subjective role of the common in the aesthetic regime. It is defined as a choice or a voice that is a subjective presence in the building of the personal discourse. Her social roles merge with her roles in the art realm in stories that do not separate these spaces, and this fusion of realities is an aspect of politics of the personal with “My Bed.” It does not belong to any of the spaces; it is a phantasmagoric space.

The autobiographic stories constituting the biographic narrative of Tracey Emin are rather tragic, based in past and rather abstract in time and space. It accounts for events, but rarely the causes or consequences. It is set in Margate, a real place, but within the biographic narrative it becomes the subjective universe of Tracey Emin where her surroundings, including other people, materialize as a physical presence but lacking an emotional existence. Her childhood experiences are disturbing stories of sexual abuse, and later conscious sexual escapades.

There is often a lack of judgment for the social groups or the personas involved in the abusive events. It becomes an abstract notion like a sensible background, a part of the personal of Tracey Emin. The personal tragedies have become a part of the universal, it has become public and the detailed questions of

how and why the abuse happened become pointless. The forced acceptance of the passive social reality, while trying to deal with the aftermath of the childhood abuse, becomes the harshest judgment and the critique of human kind that goes beyond the time of the events. Tracey Emin is a physical and performing documentation of her own personal.

“My Bed” is a personal archive for Tracey Emin. Her biographic narrative is her performative remembering. Her work can be seen as curiosity cabinets of her own universe, archives that expand in their materiality and include experiences as concepts that are constantly revisited, and reprocessed. It is a memory trail built in tact with the contemporary politics of art.

“...there was a greater idea of creativity. Greater than anything I could make just with my mind or with my hands.”²¹⁵

When Tracey Emin tells the story of the creation of “My Bed” there is a lack of consistency. Duration or events is not specified, but an abstract and assumption based narrative, events following binge drinking is introduced instead. The details become a space for the public imagination. A clear consistency marks the moment of the parting, the moment of the artistic editing, when the bed comprises the subjects, the phantasmagoric space it will have as the artwork. “My Bed” is a material fact in the biography of Tracey Emin, an interactive fact that is authentic every time it is exhibited. The body-based performance of the reinstallation provides the personal authentication. The active performance of the personal relations to “My Bed” has continued long after the work was sold to Charles Saatchi and most likely will also be a part of the new relationship with Count Christian Duerckheim who has owned the work since July 2014. Duerckheim has agreed to loan it only to Tate for the next 10 years, which also was the wish of Tracey Emin.²¹⁶ Tracey Emin never separated from her work. The active performing individual therefore is the authentic part of the installation “My Bed.” It calls for a politically ethical discussion of the belonging of the artwork and the responsibilities of the owners to preserve the personal integrity and authenticity of the reinstalled installation “My Bed.”

²¹⁵ Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: Foreword; Jeanette Winterson; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p.67

²¹⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/10997394/Tracey-Emins-bed-to-be-displayed-at-Tate.html>

The reliability of autobiographies as narratives of truth is questionable. (see p.39.) Rune Gade compares the biographic work of Tracey Emin to a performative introduction ritual. (see p.36.) There is always a subjective interpretation and subjective intentions for presentation based on human ability to remember. The illusion of a truth is constructed through a consistent repetition of authenticated material, based on repetitive exposure of material evidence. There is no reason to believe or think that Tracey Emin is lying, and there is no need to doubt the authenticity of the objects constituting “My Bed.” On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the stories told are true either. It doesn’t really matter if the narratives are built on lies. It is the personal performance of her biography that authenticates her story and becomes the act of honesty.

We all have learned that meeting a stranger requires a certain caution in the process. The honesty of Tracey Emin in her early works therefore is considered excessive and troubling; it is perceived as an aggressive cry to be seen, accepted and noticed, which also shows an aspect of the politics of the personal in the given time.

“There was a feeling that people did want to look the other way. But maybe that was also to do with my arrogance and having a big mouth. It was a time when I talked nonstop. I must have been so excited, having a voice suddenly, and that repelled people, and they saw my work as narcissistic crap. But I am still here, and even if someone still thinks its narcissistic crap, they have to pay attention.”²¹⁷

Building the personal archives and intensively performed existence is led by the basic instinct of survival of a human being in the aesthetic regime. Subjectivity through a performative action writes itself in the public space according to the politics of the personal of the subjective space. It is the biographic narrative that accounts for an existence, and it is the ability of a subject in the aesthetic regime to fictionalize its own reality according to the politics of the personal in a given time and social situations.

“...each problem that came along I would relate back to a whole history of problems stretching back through my life like a chain reaction and I’d end up in a complete distressed stupor.”²¹⁸

A subjective becomes the unique in the public realm if it’s performed as such. Tracey Emin has been integrated in the contemporary art world; she has acquired art degrees and holds a position as professor in drawing. She earns a good living

²¹⁷ Winterson, J., Freedman, C., Fuchs, R.: Foreword; Jeanette Winterson; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009, p.165

²¹⁸ Ibid. p.254

by being an artist; she built herself according to the contemporary politics of the personal through merchandising her biography and a continuous performance of herself in the public realm that is politically recognized as a valid market for an exchange of valuables. (see p.23) The violent introduction of the biographic in her early career therefore could seem to have been part of a plan now. To say that her work is biographic and meaning that it refers to the biography means to lock down the space that the artwork can inhabit. She is a political body whose personal is as real and as controlled by the public realm as anybody else's. The aesthetics of "My Bed" are in the objects and the subjective reality belonging to the space of the common, which in aesthetic regime is also the social realm. "My Bed" does not strive to emancipate its public, it just is. "My Bed" belongs to the art realm, it has its own personal space that always will be political.

Through the autobiographic narrative Tracey Emin accepts responsibility for the stories told and the decisions she has made. "I am all that I got" is a common comment of Tracey Emin when she discusses her legacy in this world. "My Bed" shows lifestyle choices, deliberate and not, it has traces of acknowledged choice to not procreate. It is an ownership of the personal condition. "My Bed" as a space will lose the personal meanings when the subjectivity is lost. It presents a materialized fear of the subjective individual of becoming the anonymous through disappearing in the common. "My Bed" is a narrative that will matter while there is a personal dimension and a living and breathing subject that it refers to. The reality of the biographic subjects and its reality begin and end with its own physicality. It is this truthful and existential situation that "My Bed" stands as a condition for.

4.3 The bed in "My Bed"

"It looks like a scene of a crime as if someone has just died or been fucked to death."²¹⁹

This is a popular quote by Tracey Emin used when describing "My Bed."

Tracey Emin has become an observer of her own past.

"A problematic is obvious when art products are in the domain of commodities, usable objects which can cross over back to the art domain and therefore abandon the usability as

²¹⁹ <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/tracey-emin/articles/tracey-emins-my-bed/>

well as value, in order to become hieroglyphs bearing their meaning on their physical body and gains a new splendor as aesthetic objects.”²²⁰

A bed is a piece of furniture which people can lie in, relax and sleep. A bed is a place where a body rests after birth, and before death. A bed is a place in a place. A bed is a body that carries a human body in a moment of absence of physical awareness of social and subjective reality. It is an open space, which often is defined by its surroundings. A bed as an object has a discourse of its own, it has its own history, a narrative that gives us a story of birth and its evolution, built in tact with the modern ideals based on technological development seen as evolution. At the same time a bed also has its subjective reality and its own specific materiality and is defined in a constant relation with other bodies.

The early human elevates a bed from the ground to avoid draft, dirt and pests. The evidence of use of bedding as part of a bed 77.000²²¹ years ago are facts that are placed on a linear timeline and treat the past as a more primitive world, rather than different regime of social reality. The concept of a bed is universal, presupposed by the biology of a human being. Bed is cultural; it has its form, and is directly affected and determined by sociopolitical reality.

The history of the bed, as any other historical narrative, tells the story of the survived, the uncovered. It is a historical sampling that is approved by the human need to preserve its past. The examples chosen for preservation are often the extraordinary, or the different, defined as such by the classifying discourse. In its historical narrative the bed is disconnected from its common subject. It is the socially defined extraordinary characters that are used in order to give the meaning to a bed. Kings, queens and other social subjects that held power positions in the past, as well as the artist genius, are some of the socially established individuals whose beds become sacred places after their death in a staged setting in order to create a biographic space. The beds, in order to be exhibited, are tidied. They are presented to the public, absent of the physical and personal contact between the subject and its bed. As a whole the history of the bed is an analogy of any other historical narrative. It is built to mirror the social hierarchy of the societies politics proper. The bed functions as a framework

²²⁰ Ranci re, J.:Aesthetics and Its Discontents; Translated by Steven Corcoran; English version; 2012,p.50

²²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bed>

deciding normality, representative for the social reality in spite of the organic nature of it.

Tracey Emin exhibits the bed without following the expected ethical rules of the social realm that demand the social reality to be shown as a visualization of the average or the ideal.

The bed is, and has always been, a commodity while simultaneously also a universal necessity. A bed is an object that has an economical value and is associated with brands, style and social status. A rest and a good night sleep belong only to specific social realities, and the choice of having a good night's sleep is a luxury, the luxury of knowing the choice or an oblivious belief in a choice.

A bed is specified through a discourse of ownership.²²² The bed is the space where a human being spends almost a half of her/his life. Sleep is a process that is the unconscious part of the subjective universe. It is private as a physical process, and political as a social process. "My Bed" is a culturally and socially connoted object, which Tracey Emin claims ownership for. "My Bed" is a space of its contemporary time and an individual habitual past. "My Bed" is a time capsule, meant to be reopened.

4.4 The personal and the objects constituting "My Bed"

The brutal honesty in "My Bed" was not a sudden appearance. Tracey Emin had already told her biography; she had uncovered personal information through textiles as well as written and photographic work. She had also exhibited artifacts that were personal. A biographic artwork "CV" (1997) (att.2) depicted her apartment, a place that was a year later materialized in the dynamic installation "My Bed." It was a visual introduction to the personal space that the bed belonged to. "My Bed" became a material reference for a space of the personal of a contemporary artist of 1990s, which happens to be a woman.

An artwork and an artist are two coexisting realities that in contact with the subjectivity of a spectator, the public, create a new set of temporal subjectivities. (see p.29) "My Bed" is a culturally, socially and personally connoted vessel in time. "My Bed" is a phantasmagoric object. It materializes to show an aspect of

²²² Wright, L.: Warm & Snug; The History of the Bed; Printed and bound in great Britain by J.H.Haynes & Co.Ltd, Sparkford; Sutton Publishing Limited; Pxoenix Mill 2004

its reality, only to retrieve to its dynamic universe where its reality is in a different temporality, the time of the art realm. "My Bed" has since its creation formed a relationship with the public space. Short encounters, a glimpse at a picture, a story here and there mediating the impressions and opinions of others, are the bases for the public opinion. The biographic narrative that "My Bed" is a part of contributes to the illusion of knowing the artist, the persona. The controversy of the bed has left us believing that the installation belongs to the past. We do not attempt to find out more, because we have already figured it out. "My Bed" with its persistence of being what it is, challenges the social realm to admit its intolerance for the common that has attempted to be extraordinary. It requests an engagement from individuals in order to find a political position that will be the position of an informed awareness, rather than blind judgment. We forget to talk about the toy dog, the comfort it might have offered to Tracey Emin in past. We forget to ask if the dog and the checked suitcase are elements of her childhood, her past, that bear an emotional meaning. The vodka bottles overshadow the glass bottle of Orangina. So we never get to hear about that glass bottle, or the relief the orange drink might have offered. What is the medicine for, was she hurting? One of the pillows is without a case. Is that a personal preference, or were there just not enough cases? All these little details are a part of the personal that is "My Bed". Tracey Emin does not accuse the public for not caring about these stories. She might even have no wish, knowledge or memory to give us the answers if we did decide to ask. Tracey Emin is honest in offering her personal, and we are honest in trying to validate if our personal space has enough place to integrate hers, which presents the politics of the personal with "My Bed".

"My Bed" in all its materiality can seem just too much to grasp even when one considers it a static art object. Tracey Emin complicates it by changing its form through the reinstallation process. In the pictures presented in chapter three, one of the most noticeable changes is the forming of the sheets. The towel that seems to be thrown by accident on the bed suggests ongoing activity. The pictures of the installation seem to be taken in the same private space but on different occasions. (see p.47) It could be morning, a day that just began after a careless morning shower, or an evening where somebody has returned to the bed in this state. The light and the space in the exhibition is part of the narrative time of the nomadic bed.

Tracey Emin uses her body to form the sheets, her personal judgment to place the constituting objects. She introduces “My Bed” as a private space in the exhibition places, a personal oasis that reappears in its own temporality and every time is a space that is aware of the body that is absent.

“My Bed” comprises so many objects, and all of them have a personal story to tell. By singling out the liquor bottles, the bloody condoms, dirty sheets, cigarette butts, bloody condoms we choose to address only some elements in the complicated personal that “My Bed” stands for. Deborah Cherry based her analysis of “My Bed” on a certain hierarchy between the objects. It was Tracey Emin who gave a meaning to the bed that gave a personal meaning to the objects surrounding it. (p.37.) According to Jacques Rancière the information mediation is spread in a horizontal field. The hierarchy described by Deborah Cherry therefore is a valid reality, but presents just one variation of a chain of meanings with “My Bed”.

The bed and the carpet occupy a certain space, but it is the two bound suitcases that determine the space of the interaction for the installation. The space of “My Bed” is determined by its context in an interactive space distribution.

We realize the limitations of the public memory as well as our own when we have attempted to explore the installation in detail. We give up at the point when we realize that the universe to be explored is temporary, and its uniqueness is the common. We treat our own memorabilia as little gems which when gathered and a light is shared on them, can blind and disorientate. Presence and absence are equally determining in the politics of the personal. The acknowledgment and awareness for the absence is a physical space in the horizontal distribution of sensible which unites the ones knowing and the ones who don't know.

On the small wooden table beside the bed there are Polaroid pictures that depict fragments of the Tracey Emin universe. They present a time in the western reality where the self-recording ability was given to an abstract everybody. By 1990s it was a common luxury in the west. The ability to produce a likeness of oneself and see it develop in one's hand connoted power over the documentation of one's own story. The public realm was filled with images of anonymous individuals, giving faces to the ones that became an accidental part of the documented world. Images that most often held any significance only to those

taking them, rapidly created a whole new image reality that became an alternative reality consisting of anonymous common subjects in the social realm.

“My Bed” opens up for many interpretations, depending on theoretical approach as well as dependent on the variation the work is exhibited as. The interpretation in my thesis is only one of the many possible, and is also codependent on the previous interpretations. “My Bed” is a process, it is a performed situation, and in my interpretation it is whole when all of its reinstalled forms are considered.²²³

4.5 Summary

“Politics is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them.”²²⁴

The politics of the personal are analog in the art world and the social realm. According to Rancière, it is the same universal metapolitics determining the politics of art and the politics of social realm. An individual in the art world negotiates its space the same way as in the social realm. The art realm and the social realm are both defined historical processes of applied politics that define the spaces and participating bodies belonging. The politics of art has a lot of similarities to the market orientated democratic politics of social reality. It also has reserved rights to integrate and tolerate. Both the ones belonging to as well as the ones being outside of the local process of politics proper are equal universal political bodies.²²⁵

Summoning the interpretations of “My Bed” and the personal comments of the artist it became obvious that the personal as a concept is intentionally and simultaneously unintentionally tied to the biographic subject matter as the common thread within the artistic practice of Tracey Emin. The interpretations therefore focus on the shocking elements that “My Bed” comprises, and places the installation in the past and belonging to a feminist discourse. In order to discuss

²²³ I have not seen the artwork in persona, but I believe that considering the character of the interpretation presented, it is not problematic. From my point of view, adding a detailed analysis of the artwork as physical presence would considerably exceed the size of this thesis, because it would require an overview of all the exhibitions it has been a part of.

²²⁴ Rancière, J.: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; Translated by Steven Corcoran; Polity press 2009, p.24

²²⁵ footnotes 31-34.

the politics of the personal of “My Bed”, I found it necessary to consider the heterotopias the social and art realm according to the theoretical approach by Jacques Rancière. The personal is therefore approached as a politically active concept in a constant development.

The politics of the personal of “My Bed” determines the dynamic and the developing form of the installation supported by a contemporary performance of the biography by Tracey Emin. The common objects constituting “My Bed” and the personal as the common subject matter belongs to the art realm and is tied to the social realm through its dependency on the creative subject Tracey Emin. The art realm and the social reality are heterotopias determined by the universal politics, aesthetics that are found in the subjective realities of the aesthetic regime. It is the common as the paradoxical universal element of the aesthetic regime that has led to a search for a relatable unique as an element with the creative common subjectivity. The personal is played out while simultaneously socially negotiated. It is a sum of different approaches to the artist’s presence and absence in the discourse of an artwork.

Considering the politics of the personal as a continuous political process allows looking at the installation “My Bed” as a valid condition of the personal in its contemporary time.

The personal regarding “My Bed” by Tracey Emin has often been reduced to a two dimensional, simplified biographic storyline, in order to classify the installation ”My Bed” into a previously accepted art historical discourse. Considering the politics of the personal of “My Bed” in relation to the biographic narratives, it becomes apparent that the personal does not reside in the stories, the objects or in the presence or absence of the truth in the facts of the biographic narrative. It is in the performing subject and its relations. With the help of the contemporary politics of the concept of choice Tracey Emin performs her biography and is able to call on the universal patterns of the public behavior and its relations to the personal. She is able to expose the individual political claims to a space for subjectivity in the social reality that ultimately would lead to exclusion of another common subjectivity due to the capacity of the social and individual memory. She juxtaposes the individual need to matter with the contemporary ideals of equality of all subjectivities. The politics of the personal

of “My Bed” is a physical metaphor for the universal metapolitics of a physical existence described by Jacques Rancière.

“My Bed” is a phantasmagoric object; its changing form is an important part of the politics of the personal. It is the immediacy of a moment in the form of a materialized memory. We are able to perceive the continuous relationship of the personal between the object and Tracey Emin because the reappearance of the installation is a time and space simulation based on concepts of the social realm. Art realm and the social reality are heterotopias.

The personal of “My Bed” is as temporary as Tracey Emin. After she is gone there will be an empty role to be filled. The politics of the personal with “My Bed” will deal with the reality of post Tracey Emin, while negotiating its space in the art realm as an aesthetic object belonging to a different, personal reality.

“My Bed” can be seen as a condition for and an aspect with the politics of the personal in the aesthetic regime of art. The discussion of the politics of the personal opens the discourse of “My Bed” for elements that have been excluded in the past.

The literal meanings and shocking realism of “My Bed” present a peak of performative realism. It could not get more realistically fake. It does not mean that the performative realism is in decline; it is rather in a political reformation that dictates new aesthetics with the common. The politics of the personal presuppose a community within the art realm. The interpretative discourse of “My Bed” therewith is open for wide range of relations between the concepts within art historic discourse, which have been inaccessible in the past because of the politics of art history.

It can prove to be rather challenging to accept the never-ending possibilities connected to the interpretations of an artwork, but that only is the case if a one and final true interpretation is the goal. Rancière’s concept of the aesthetic regime provides a horizontal space that allows building knowledge based on our subjective ability and a position. An interpretation of an artwork is based on ongoing exploration of interrelated discourses, and is a continuous process. The social realm is a part of the art world and vice versa through references to the universal political processes that define the existence of both, rather than in separate objects or human behavior.

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Attachments

Nr1. (Courtesy of Tracey Emin Studio.)

Inventory

Black plastic Samsonite suitcase with green trim

Multi-coloured suitcase

Black length of chain

Silver length of chain

Rope

(Collective dimensions approx. 70 x 56 x 43 CM)

Wooden bed base (140 x 186 x 36 CM)

Mattress (140 x 186 x 18)

White sheet

White Pillow x 4

White Pillowcase x 3

White Double duvet

White double duvet cover

White towel with orange trim

Sheer nude-coloured tights

Light blue lace knickers

Piece of blue carpet (95 CM deep/from bed frame)

Small wooden table

White cotton knickers x 2

Black leather belt

Newspaper

A4 White paper with hand-written text

White soft toy dog with red bows

Maraca – wood/metal/fabric trims

Cigarette box x 3

Large cigarette box

Box of Polaroid film

Empty cardboard battery packaging

White sunglasses case
Polaroid photograph of Tracey Emin
White candle in a light blue glass candleholder
Cork from a bottle of champagne
Small metal ashtray
Cigarette butts
Orange Rizla packet
Coins – Stirling and other currencies

Tube of KY Jelly
Yellow & green toothbrush
Orange plastic disposable razor
Tampon, not wrapped x 2
Tampon applicator
Condom, out of condom packet x 3
Empty condom packet x 5
Condom in condom wrapper, unopened
Box of condoms
Several tissues
Paracetamol blister packet x 3
Medication packaging x 4
Pregnancy test
Lipsalve
Nail scissors
Used sticking-plasters
Hand mirror with black frame & handle
Safety pin

Apple core
Sweet wrappers
McDonalds BBQ Dip
Vodka bottle x 3
Glass bottle of Orangina

Nr.2

Jeanette Winterson , Carl Friedman, Rudi Fuchs: Quite a performace; conversation with Carl Freedman; Tracey Emin; Rizzoli; New York 2009 p. 146-149

TRACEY EMIN CV PART 1

Curriculum Vitae

November 1962 to December 1995

Conceived in Ireland 1962- same time as my twin brother. It was the last night my Mum and Dad were supposed to have spent together.

July 3rd 1963 - born 10 minutes after Paul, Croydon may Day Hospital, at 10 to seven in the morning. Spent the first six months of my life sleeping in a drawer

1965- moved to Margate. Mum and dad opened Hotel International.

1965 to 66- travel to Turkey by road. Lived on the Black Sea for six months and six months north of Ankara, in the mountains close to the natural hot springs.

Came back to Margate, 1968- went to Holy Trinity Infant School. Stopped speaking Turkish. Bit Mrs Man on the elbow and ran away. Spent the next five years becoming more and more strange.

Moved to cottage in 1972, became more and more afraid of ghosts- became thin, teeth rotted, wet the bed, and hated to be alone. A very yellow-colored child.

1973 to 74- had a birthday party. Paul and I. our friend Mario wasn't allowed to come because he was Greek and we were Turkish. This was the year me and Maria killed the dinner lady.

1974- left Holy Trinity, after a very happy final year in Mr Folkhards. Still best friends with Maria.

1975- Went to King Ethelbert's. Fell in love with Ron Hamilton. He was Irish, I heard later that had done something terrible. Hated school with all my heart, so did Paul- we left by the time we were 13.

1977- Paul lost the palm of the hand in an accident at he local bowling alley- things were never the same again.

January 1977- I was raped down an alley. Spent six months avoiding men at all cost. Breasts grew, pubic hair became thicker, period started, hair underneath my arms sprouted. Wham! I was out there. Shag, shag, shag: great sex, fantastic, wonderful free sex.

I was kicked in the face, made to go down on someone, my face held inches away from the burning flames of a coal fire. I could almost feel my skin melting and my eyes popping. One had sex with me the other one watched. Then they laughed at me. They pointed down at my brown long labia and they just kept laughing at me.

1977-he pushed my head to one side: Mind, I am watching The Muppets. Bang, bang, bang. Every Friday night in the back of his red van. Puff, you're all dead.

1979- Left Margate, moved to London. Lived in a cupboard in Clapham Junction.

1979- worked Sasha's shoe shop Oxford Street. Gilda's Boutique, Oxford Street. They threw coat hangers at me, spied on me when I went to the loo and accused me of stealing.

1980- Kensington Market. The trendy young thing: black spiky hair, balloon trousers, pointed pixie boots with no future.

1981-Medway College of Design- Fashion Diploma. Dropped out after 1981-82 rail strike. Was advised to go and see a psychiatrist, as I was condemning myself to a life on the dole.

1982- met Billy Childish. Spent five years with him on and off. Cruel relationship, destruction, resurrection of the soul, void, still friends with him today.

1982- Billy married Sheila in secret. I found out six months later, tried to commit suicide by jumping off Margate Harbour. Weight no more than six and half stone. Have to see analyst and do this til1983. Go to Sir John Cass School of Art. Do print-making two days a week.

1983-apply to art school with no qualifications. Get into Maidstone College of Art.

1983 to 86- spend three of the happiest year of my life, learning so much so quickly. Leave college in love with Edward Much and first-class honours degree.

1986 to 87- spend quite a few months dosing around Turkey, drinking cheap cognac, smoking Turkish cigarettes, doing watercolours. Maria leaves our flat in 86. She joins the merchant navy as a cook. I am devastated. My best friend since I was four years old, gone of to sea.

1987- fall for a Turkish fisherman 18 years older than me. Mad, crazy. He is married with four children, and I don't give a damn. I just drink and behave like crazy village girl. He's dead now, blown up by dynamite-TNT. Have a box full of his love letters. He was wild, like mountain man. Drunk. He tried to throw me off the cliff into the sea. He also saved me from drowning when I fell off boat drunk, in the dead dark of night, gently slipping under the blackness of the sea. He's dead now- I cried all night when I found out. And in the morning I thought I'd had a strange terrible dream.

1987 to 89- went to the Royal College of Art. Absolutely amazing- after all that I'd been through I'd say these were the worst two years of my life. Oh, to come to terms with such terrible, humble beginnings, in such a fucking, unsympathetic shit-hole. Onward, forward, never bitter. Lived in a one-room flat with someone who loved me, who I didn't love, who became so possessive about me they put bars up at the windows, and they hit me. I can and I will never forgive for that, or myself first. A victim no more. Weak, sad time of life- no self-respect, too poor.

1989- ran away. Met someone new. Left the RCA. Started to feel a bit bitter.

1990- became pregnant, had an abortion-it went wrong. Caught the fetus slipping down my thigh. Cryed and cryed.

1992- became pregnant again, had another abortion, didn't give a damn. Just did it, dealt with it, without heart.

Middle of 1992- committed emotional suicide. Emotional suicide is killing yourself without dying. Destroying each friendship and relationship. One by one, till I was alone. Destroyed all my art, left my studio, threw away my curtains, my carpet, my cushions, my comfort. Made my home into a cell and waited.

1992- asked people to invest in my creative potential.

January 1993- started The Shop with Sarah.

April 93- got off with Carl Freedman, after a year in the desert. I had loved him from afar, for a least a year. We'd spent one night together in 92. It ended with Carl believing I was crazy and trouble.

1993 November- Have my show at White Cube: "MY Major Retrospective", believing it'll be my one and only art exhibition.

July 93- Margaret Girlinger dies. Very sad time for my mother.

Go to America, New York- April 1994- wrote a book called Explorations of the Soul and do a reading tour. Journey across America. Carl drives.

November- have my own booth at the Cologne Art Fair. Feel like a princess.

December, January, February, March, April 1995- sew my tent with the names of everybody I have ever slept with.

July to September- spend most of the time down in Whitstable, where my beach hut is- a fantastic summer.

September 1995- Plan for The Tracey Emin Museum, which is due to open in December.

Christmas will be spent in London with Carl.

December 26th 95- my grandmother dies.

Tracey Emin

England, November 1997

Oh no love you're not alone.



<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin-tracey-emin-cv-cunt-vernacular-t07663>



<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin-tracey-emin-cv-cunt-vernacular-t07663/image-282459>

Nr.3

From: Tamsin Casswell <tamsin@traceyeminstudio.com>
Subject: Re: seeking information/help for master thesis_Tracey Emin_My Bed
Date: 22 Jan 2014 17:12:18 GMT+1
To: ligaolsen@gmail.com
Cc: Gregory LaRico <archivist@lehmannmaupin.com>

Dear Liga,

I am writing on behalf of Tracey Emin Studio.
Many Thanks for your email, I have attached an inventory of the items in the installation, which was made in October 2012 as Tracey was installing the work at an exhibition in Frankfurt.

Gregory will be able to send you a high-res image of the work.

Please let me know if you require further information. Good luck with the thesis - perhaps you will be able to email the final version through to me for Tracey's archives?

Best Wishes,

Tamsin

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From: Liga Olsen <ligaolsen@gmail.com>
Subject: seeking information/help for master thesis_Tracey Emin_My Bed
Date: January 22, 2014 4:52:05 AM EST
To: gregory@lehmannmaupin.com

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am a second year master student in the University of Oslo, Liga Legzdina Olsen. I am working on my master theses with the temporary title:

”The politics of personal regarding the installation “My Bed” by Tracey Emin.”

I will use the contemporary theory by Jacques Rancière. This theory gives access to contemporary art while it is happening by savoring the traditions of art history.

In my case it allows to look at the politics of personal as organic performativity. I intend to look at the installation “My Bed” as a whole. Former analysis often are based on exclusion- stressing one or another element- material or narrative, which leads to a certain dissection of the artwork as whole.

I will cut to the chase now:

I have experienced difficulties with finding a full description of the installation that is not made in order to support the analysis following. While I also think to use this list in order to support my research it is rather crucial to know if a list of objects, that construct the installation exists.

I am writing to You in hope that it is possible that You could kindly find the time to inform me about the form “My Bed” was registered, cataloged as whole in official documents, contracts before an eventual exhibition. In case of existence of description of that sort, would it be possible to receive a detailed description, which I would be able to compare with other documentations.

A picture from the actual time of exhibition at the gallery is also a greatly appreciated documentation, and I will use the received materials as attachments with references.

Thank You for Your time, Liga Legzdina Olsen.

Gregory La Rico
Archivist

[LEHMANN MAUPIN](#)

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6 Feb 2014 16:57
Dear Tamsin,

This is Liga Legzdina Olsen writing regarding my master thesis: "Politics of personal regarding the installation "My Bed" by Tracey Emin." referring to e-mail exchange in January, 2014.

I was wondering if it would be possible to receive information about the amount of times and the places where "My Bed" has been exhibited over the years.

(While the general exhibition history is easily accessible, it is not possible to find the specifications for "My Bed".)

I am also interested to find out if there have been any previous inventory lists, that list the objects constituting "My Bed".

And if you have time, could you tell me if it is true, that the Installation from the show in Japan arrived home in black plastic bags, and two of the used condoms were missing.

Thank You again for your time, Liga Legzdina Olsen.

P.S. I intend to use this information in the description chapter, in order to establish physical changes that have been a part of the installation that relate it to the politics of personal.

4 Feb 2014 14:21

Hi Liga,

we have the following notes about exhibition history for *My Bed*:

Tracey Emin: SobaseX (My Cunt is Wet With Fear), Sagacho Exhibition Space, Tokyo, October 10 - Nov 14 1998

Tracey Emin: Every Part of Me's Bleeding, Lehmann Maupin, New York, 1 May - 19 June 1999

Turner Prize, Tate Gallery, London, 1999

Tracey Emin: 20 Years, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 2nd August - 9th November 2008

Tracey Emin: 20 Años, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain, 28th November 2008 - 22nd February 2009

Tracey Emin: 20 Years, Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland, 19th March - 21st June 2009

Newspeak, The Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 29 July - 23 October 2011 (exhibition of Charles Saatchi collection)

Privacy, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 1 November 2012 - 3 February 2013

There were no previous inventories which is why we produced one in 2012.

I have not heard anything about it being returned in black bags with condoms missing - I have worked for Tracey for 5 years so I'm sure I would have heard about it if it happened. I do know that a few things have been stolen over the course of the years when it was exhibited, some polaroid photos for example that were on the little table, Tracey said they were stolen several years ago.

Best Wishes,

Tamsin

Tamsin Casswell

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