

Identification and Resistance. Strategies of Subjectivation in the Early Works of VALIE EXPORT

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Abstract: In the following article, I would like to discuss three works of VALIE EXPORT, namely *Ping Pong* (1968), *I Am Beaten* (1973), and *Movement Imaginations* (1974-75), as portraying different strategies of constituting subjects and as entering into dialogue with different theories of subjectification. Thus, I will argue that the relation between viewer and screen that is presented in *Ping Pong* lays bare an understanding of cinema as an ideological apparatus at the core of which we find an intricate connection between the constitution of subjectivity and ideological interpellation. Furthermore, the same process is underscored in *I Am Beaten*, which portrays a process of identification where we can read an understanding of subjectivity as subjection. Lastly, I will argue that, in contrast, in *Movement Imaginations*, we can distinguish a focus on resistance and on the body's capacity for endurance, starting from which we can begin to trace a different understanding of subjectivation, neither as ideological interpellation nor as subjection, but as an assertion of a radical equality. However, while *Movement Imaginations* depicts this search for resistance in active terms, the search for possible paths of emancipation and resistance is present in the other two as well, at first in *Ping Pong* as the denunciation of a closed path and, secondly, in *I Am Beaten* as a refusal. In this way, the question that runs through the text is the search for possible modalities of resistance in the artistic practice around 1968, which will also take into account the role of media technologies and the constitution of a regime of visibility.

Keywords: VALIE EXPORT, cinema, subjectivity, ideology, apparatus, Rancière, Butler, Althusser.

In the second edition of the *Maraisiade*, a short film festival taking place in Vienna, an Expanded Cinema film entitled *Ping Pong* received the award for the most political film of the year 1968.¹ VALIE EXPORT's expanded film consisted of a projection of black dots

1] Briefly put, Expanded Cinema represents an artistic movement and a particular way of engaging with the filmic medium which surfaced in the 1960s and whose sources should also be traced back to the investigation of this medium within structural film. However, it must be stated from the beginning that the forms of Expanded Cinema that were present in the American context will not be of interest to us here. Instead, the focus will fall solely on the Austrian context which was present in the second generation of filmmakers of the Austrian post-war experimental film context. Expanded Cinema is here defined as "the expansion of the commonplace form of film on the open stage or within a space, through which the commercial-conventional sequence of filmmaking – shooting, editing (montage), and projection – is broken up [...]" (EXPORT 2003)

In addition to the breakdown of the cinematic apparatus, Expanded Cinema works also replaced and modified the constitutive elements of this system – the aim of the artistic practice was the modification of the relation between the apparatus and reality, such that "state-reality is not reproduced, but rather the subject and its experience predominate. The 'world' is no longer simulated; rather the possibility of producing 'world' is demonstrated." Peter Weibel quoted in (EXPORT 2003). In its larger context, the engagement of Expanded Cinema signified a point in the development of visual technology that clearly understood that this technology was constitutive to the experience of reality as such. Neither *subject*, nor *collective*, nor *reality* could be understood apart from a theory of media. Additionally, it is also a response to the different modalities of subjection that were implied in the development of visual media and new modes

appearing in different places on a solid screen, a small tennis racket and a ball. The viewer is invited to become a player and engage physically with the film by using the racket and ball to match the points appearing on the screen. It enforces a relation between viewer and screen in which presumably the spectator is invited to make the passage from passive recipient to active participant or to operate a switch from the assumed static position implied by the projection of films in the dark theatre of cinema to one based on action. Thus, at first glance, *Ping Pong* plays with the categories of consumption and production, pushing the spectator towards an area resembling active production. However, what *Ping Pong* manages to bring out instead is that this switch cannot happen along the lines thus portrayed, making it clear that the only realm open to the player is that of reaction. In other words, emancipation cannot take place because the rules of the game have been set in advance. There is nothing for the viewer/player here except the established channels of communication and action, which have been pre-determined in advance by the real producer – the director. The timing of the work is not to be disregarded – it speaks of an interrogation of the viability of some forms of democratic participation. Therefore, we can perceive a number of layers present in the work, which extend from a critique of the cinematic apparatus to an interrogation of the relation between state and individual (in which case, the figure of the director parodies into that of a dictator, as amusingly postulated by Peter Weibel in the description for his *Action Lecture*).²

of communication. In his text on Expanded Cinema strategies that were developing around the year 1968, Matthias Michalka connects this point to a crisis of the viability of certain forms of democratic participation. (2004, 99)

2] *Action Lecture*, a performance by Peter Weibel in 1968, in Cologne, at the opening of the *XScreen*, a festival for independent film, takes audience participation to absurd dimensions. In the performance, Weibel stood in a front of a screen, while a number of films were projected on his body, as well as on the screen behind him; meanwhile a tape recorder attached to his body reproduced one of his speeches, while he was speaking the same content live via a microphone. The main component of the performance/action was the inclusion of the audience with the help of a mechanism which created a correlation between the amount of noise made by the audience and a switch which connected a spotlight, the projector, the tape recorder and a cassette player. Thus, “if the audience is loud enough, the spotlight lights up and the tape recorder and projectors are automatically started via a light-dependent resistor. However, the spotlight dims the light of the screen, and the noise made by the audience drowns the sound of the tape recorder. A wave of interaction is thus produced between stage and audience.” (Weibel n.d.) The “wave of interaction” revolves around the possibility of understanding the replayed speech and seeing the films – the louder the audience, the stronger the light of the spotlight and the more difficult it is to perceive and understand the projection. In much the same way, lack of audience participation means no light is reflected and the projection and the playback don’t occur. Therefore, in the interaction between audience and stage, between the two spheres, a breakdown in communication occurs. In the German description of the work, quoted by M. Michalka, Weibel points out the ‘privileged’ function of the artist as the only stable element: “with clamour: a lot of light, louder audio, with silence: no light, no audio, except for my live spoken voice. likewise, I can – as some sort of dictator – hold my hand between the lamp and the light dependent resistor and stop the loop.” (original: “bei geschrei: viel licht, lauter ton, bei stille: kein licht, kein ton, außer meinem live gesprochenen ton. desgleichen kann ich – als eine art diktator – meine hand zwischen lampe und ldr halten und den kreislauf stoppen.“ The translation is my own.) (Michalka 2004, 99)

The fiction of the artist as dictator parodies both the role of the producers within an increasingly

In a video-action from 1973, titled *I Am Beaten*, the artist is lying on the floor, under a mirror, looking at her own image. Near her is a tape recorder playing the words 'I am beaten' on a continuous loop – the performer repeats the same words, at first in the interval, in the in-between of the loop, but progressively coinciding with it, such that the two become indistinguishable by the end. The process of identification, however, is not shown as simple repetition and interiorization via language or via a doubling through the mirrored image but is rather emphasized as reproduced through the media as well. Namely, the aforementioned arrangement of the action is supplemented by the presence of two video cameras and two monitors – one camera which captures, at first, the entire mirrored image and transfers it on monitor 1 and a second camera which is oriented towards monitor 1, initially capturing a close-up of the head and transferring it on monitor 2. Together with the diminishing discrepancy between recorded speech and its live reproduction, each of the cameras slowly change their images until these coincide as well. At the end of the action, the process of identification is complete (EXPORT n.d.c.). The same image is reproduced, multiplied and re-affirmed through mediatic channels.

By contrast, the video performance *Movement Imaginations* (1974-1975) brings to light a different aspect of subjectivity and resistance while at the same time portraying another possible interaction between body and video medium. A series of actions performed in the first half of the 70s, *Movement Imaginations* focus more on issues of endurance and resistance of the body (Mueller 1994, 59). Thus, in the discussion on *Movement Imaginations*, a few themes will be concentrated, which can be also be traced in her other performances from the first half of the 70s, such as *Eros/ion* (1971) and *Hyperbulie* (1973).³ Additionally, what especially marks the artist's passage from the medium of film to video, is a preoccupation with the latter's ability to interact with the dimensions of time and space. In following this final aspect, we will attempt to engage

mediatized society, the one-sided relation usually implied within media communication, as well as a questioning of the viability of usual channels of participation. Perhaps it would be helpful to note that Michalka connects Weibel's take on communication to the conservative media and repressive state institutions prevalent within Austrian society at that time. For their performances and films, artists were arrested, fined and faced persecution in sanctioned media channels. I believe however that, from our contemporary perspective, the issue at stake appears stronger, especially if we extend the question towards the problem of consensus and the fabrication of the public sphere through media. For what was at the heart of this artistic commentary around 1968, the relation between media, representation and reality, has never left us at all. The very viability of this question has not decreased and is perhaps nowhere better reflected than in a society permeated by a discourse of *fake news* and particularly during a pandemic where the function of mediatic communication and representation has been drawn ever more clearly. (I concede however that this is a much more complex point to make than indicated here, for although it may appear that the battleground between truth and false has reached absurd dimensions, the conditions for it are historical and identifiable).

3] While I will address neither *Eros/ion* nor *Hyperbulie* in the present essay, the themes to which I refer are resistance and its connection to the body as a site of struggle. In these performances the body appears as the site of resistance precisely because of its dual position as a medium of communication – it is both a sign, a surface on which civilisation leaves its marks, while nonetheless being endowed with a capacity to signify and to resist its imposed signification. Stated differently, the body appears at both the medium of subjection, as well as the site where the pathologies of this subjection emerge.

her work in a dialogue that seeks to understand her artistic practice as part of a strategy contesting a certain regime of visibility – in other words, what is at the centre of these works is a certain relation with the image along the lines of assigning subject positions which involve distributions of different conditions of experience. If we are now to return to *Ping Pong*, we can also see an interrogation of the relation with the apparatus similar to the production of subjectivity, concordant with the Althusserian basis of Apparatus Theory. However, the later reference to works stemming from the first half of the 1970s will serve as a means of searching for strategies of resistance and emancipation, which are based on a different understanding of the process of subjectivation. In this sense, the intellectual trajectory of Jacques Rancière will prove to be useful – a former student of Louis Althusser, for whom Althusser's reaction to the events of May '68 proves the intellectual bankruptcy of the latter's theory of ideology. Then, what will start as a confrontation with Althusserian ideology will become in Rancière's later thought a certain manner of conceptualizing political subjectivity through acts of dis-identification and disagreement.⁴

I. PING PONG. EIN FILM ZUM SPIELEN – EIN SPIELFILM⁵

According to the artist:

Ping Pong explains the relation of domination between producer/director and consumer/spectator. What the eye tells here to the brain is the occasion for motor reflexes and reactions, not intelligible or emotional reflexes. Audience and screen are partners in a game whose rules are dictated by the director. Nothing shows the

4] In this regard, it is necessary to make a few additional remarks. Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" was first published in 1970, while an earlier essay of Rancière, in which he criticizes the former's response to the student movement of '68 has 1969 as a publishing date. In addition, VALIE EXPORT's *Ping Pong* was also presented in 1968. Despite this break in temporal continuity, I still believe it is possible to place these works in a dialogue, as they can still function as tools of response and interpretation to the same context. The fact that the events and artistic productions around 1968s both react to the developments of previous years and have reverberations in the theory that is to come should not come as a surprise. From the same logic, neither is reading parts of *Ping Pong* with Althusser a theoretical imposition of the work, but rather an interesting point of departure. Having this in mind, the present paper will refer only to the works cited above, for the purpose of clarity leaving aside the complexity of Apparatus Theory, its psychoanalytic basis, as well as the explicitly feminist writing within Apparatus Theory. The reason for this is not indifference – for VALIE EXPORT's work has a strong feminist emphasis – but rather taking issue with the presuppositions of the Apparatus Theory, in particular the way it conceives of the relation between the viewer and the screen. In this sense, I interpret *Ping Pong* as making explicit this basic presupposition as well as issuing a verdict: *the emancipation of the spectator cannot take place*. I will search for a response and a way out of the predicament within Rancière's notion of disagreement and the resulting political subjectivity (which can also be appropriated for a feminist discourse that rejects essentialism and the stability of the identity 'woman').

5] *Spielfilm* is the German term for feature film. The title has been left in the original German version because it functions around a wordplay that is untranslatable. Namely, *Spiel* stands in for game and the verb *spielen* means play. Hence, a *Spielfilm* is a film literally meant to be played (*ein Film zum Spielen*). This already shows however a very important method in EXPORT's work, that of creating wordplays and literalization.

domination character of the screen as medium of manipulation more clearly than this: [regardless] how much the spectator comes in and plays with the screen, this changes little in his status as consumer. He is the one reacting, not the screen. The emancipation of the screen, which emancipates the spectator into a producer hasn't occurred. [...]. (EXPORT n.d.b.)⁶

Additionally, the audience at the second *Maraisiade* was informed that 'the game' was also available for purchase at a toy store and it was indeed displayed in a toy shop during the Christmas season, with two other editions planned: one in a 'luxury' format and the other in a 'popular' version, in Styrofoam (EXPORT n.d.e.). It thereby offered a rather amusing commentary not only on commodity production but on the status of the artwork as (luxury) merchandise as well. Moreover, the relation between the viewer and the screen assumes the form of training, implied even in the artist's statement on the film, under the guise of playful advertising – "if you think that mental and bodily training is fun, then PP [Ping Pong] is the right thing for you, pick up a ball and racket and try to use them to meet the points which appear on the screen."⁷

In order to properly situate this description and to inquire whether it suggests a capacity to structure a relation, may this be even that between the screen and the spectator, we have to go back to the practice of Expanded Cinema to which *Ping Pong* belongs. Namely, at the core of this practice, as we find it within the Austrian experimental film context, is a concern with the materiality of film and of image production. Furthermore, the materiality of film is not restricted solely to the celluloid here, but rather concerns the entire apparatus as productive of meaning. Hence, by shifting the line of questioning towards the system which is the apparatus – the unity constitutive of cinema: projector, celluloid, camera, audience, screen etc. – the concern with materiality is no longer confined to a particular element (thereby resulting in the static dual opposition between cinematic illusion and reality, itself duplicating and overlapping a rigid distinction between false and true), but also concerns the relation between the elements themselves (EXPORT 2003). It is rather in the in-between where the stakes are played and where

6] "Ping Pong expliziert das herrschaftsverhältnis zwischen produzent/regisseur und konsument/zuschauer. was hier das auge dem hirn erzählt, ist anlaß zu motorischen reflexen und reaktionen, nicht zu intelligibilen oder emotionalen reflexe gleichwohl. zuschauer und leinwand sind partner eines spiels, dessen regeln der regisseur diktiert. nichts zeigt deutlicher den herrschaftscharakter der leinwand als manipulatives medium als dies: wie sehr der zuschauer auch ins spiel kommt und mit der leinwand spielt, an seinem konsumenten-status ändert dies wenig. wer reagiert ist er, nicht die leinwand. die emanzipation der leinwand, die den zuschauer zum produzenten emazierte, ist noch nicht eingetreten. ein spiefilm – das heißt ein film zum spielen." (EXPORT n.d.b.) The English translation is my own but is also based on the existent English description of the artwork. I have however opted for translating the German text because the English version is not as comprehensive and leaves out some terms which are essential for my interpretation, such as 'emancipation'. I therefore felt the German description to be both closer to the artist's understanding of the work and more comprehensive. For the English description, please see (EXPORT n.d.f.).

7] The text is originally in German and is as follows: "wenn sie glauben, daß körper und geistetraining spaß machen dann ist PP das richtige für sie, nehmen sie ball und schläger, versuchen sie mit ball und schläger die punkte die auf der leinwand erscheinen zu treffen." The translation is my own. (EXPORT n.d.e.)

materiality is no longer confined to a status of inert matter upon which form is imposed but is itself productive. Compared to this larger consideration of materiality in Expanded Cinema, it is questionable, however, whether *Ping Pong* goes this far and doesn't restrict itself instead to make evident a particular ideological relation to the screen. However, another glance at the description complicates this interpretation – since it is clearly stated that the emancipation of the viewer does not take place, does not *Ping Pong* only exemplify in order to better make a certain theoretical point clearer?

The issue of image production and its connection to reality already puts the category of the imaginary into play, as constitutive and mediating between image and reality. We will therefore call the relation between the two as well as the one between the viewer and the screen, an *imaginary relation*. The status of the imaginary is here seen from a psychoanalytical point of view and is therefore analogous to Louis Althusser's definition of ideology in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". Namely, ideology is defined as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." (Althusser 1971, 162) Thus, because of the shift presented in the Althusserian notion of ideology, the function of ideology can no longer be resolved by opposing a false representation to a real one, but concerns the very status this representation has, alongside its modes/forms of manifestation, for the constitution of the social sphere (the reproduction of the relations of production) and of the subject. Additionally, whereas ideology had been understood as a system of ideas, it now becomes manifest as an *apparatus* that regulates the relationship between what can be imaginable and what cannot, what can be thought and what cannot, as well as the line between the visible and non-visible (Žižek 1994, 1).

We can therefore draw an affinity between an understanding of ideology as apparatus and cinema as a machine producing and reproducing different modalities of the visible, which address subjects as spectators. *Ping Pong* lays bare this functioning of both ideology and cinema as an apparatus. And by returning to an interpretation of the relation between spectator/player and screen as one of training or of practice, the connection with Althusser will point us in the direction of the materiality of ideology and an understanding of subject formation as subjection. Thus, our current premise is that in *Ping Pong*, the spectator appears as an interpellated subject. It can appear so because the relation with the screen – the game – is already coded and lays bare a structural relation with power. Furthermore, within our current theoretical framework, the mechanism of ideology cannot be understood apart from its relation to the subject it forms – that is, neither subject nor ideology can be conceived outside of the relation itself, such that:

[...] *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning.* (Althusser 1971, 171)

Moreover, this constitutive connection between ideology and subjectivity is not dependent on an original foundation but is to be found in the repetitions and practices that continually address the subject. Put differently, we are once again dealing with a double relation – it is not the case of an idea that results or engenders a particular ritual, but the sustained relation between the two. If ideology is no longer solely a system of ideas, it then resides in the *coherence* of the social sphere as a whole, as that which ensures coherence between practices, rituals and beliefs, between subjects and the way they perceive themselves – it emerges as a structuring relation, which requires repetition (or practice, if we will) in order to maintain its coherence.

Furthermore, the relation with the screen in *Ping Pong*, as a reaction to stimuli, parodies the one between the worker and the machine – in the ideological space opened up, it becomes a modality of learning. Althusser describes the reproduction of labour power as occurring through the process of mastering a practice, which happens alongside its submission to the ruling ideology: “for it is clear that *it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power.*” (Althusser 1971, 133) In other words, the reproduction of labour power as learning revolves around the reproduction of modalities of thinking and ways of being, which Althusser further indicates by stating that the agents of production are taught to “perform their tasks ‘conscientiously.’” (Althusser 1971, 133) If we are to take the affinity between the two apparatuses all the way, then it is possible to see that the spectator’s interaction with the screen, dictated by the director, can also structure social identifications and ways of being, cinematic interpellation being able to reproduce the mechanism at the core of the formation of subjectivity. However, while *Ping Pong* does render this bare ideological functioning explicit, it is also quick to point out that the subject itself is reduced to the status of mere matter informed by an ideological machine, having no realm open other than that of simple reaction and no real agency. By contrast, in *I Am Beaten*, the constitution of the subject becomes more complex, and the artwork attempts to render an ambivalence plausible, a space that opens up within the mechanism of identification.

II. I AM BEATEN

In the description of *interpellation* or hailing as the mechanism through which ideology addresses the subject, this mechanism hinges on misrecognition. Thus, and according to Althusser’s example, an individual will react to a hailing (by a police officer, in his example) by turning around, an act which implies that the individual has recognized her- or himself as possibly addressed. Additionally, the other aspect which Althusser’s example brings out is the function of language or, rather, the apparent transparency of language, for “the ‘obviousness’ that you and I are subjects [...] is [...] the elementary ideological effect” (Althusser 1971, 172). As it can already be observed, both instances are clearly mapped in EXPORT’s *I Am Beaten* (1973). What’s more, I would

argue that the effectivity of language is doubly underlined both through the fact that the acoustic acts as the medium through which identification is affirmed, as well as the fact that the affirmation takes a passive form. Another aspect of subject formation through ideology is clearly outlined in the case of religious interpellation, where the function of the image is made explicit. We can summarize religious interpellation by underlining two aspects of its functioning. First, one is a subject insofar as one recognizes him – or herself as a subject of God (and, hence, as subjected) and, second, the relation between subject and instance of power is mediated by specular misrecognition (to be a subject is at the same time to recognize yourself as having been made in *the image* of the Other).⁸

Keeping this in mind, in Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*, the effect of interpellation "is not the creation of a subject fixed in place, but becomes the occasion for a further making" (1997, 99). The relation between ideology and subjectivity is then better expressed in the regulation of reproduction, for the process of subjection takes the form of "a certain kind of restriction in production, a restriction through which that production takes place" (Butler 1997, 84). What seems once again implicit here is the metaphor of 'turning around' (as a reaction to the hailing) for reflexivity or for the institution of consciousness. Thus, through interpellation, "the subject emerges as one for whom power has become voice and voice the regulatory instrument of the psyche." (Butler 1997, 197) Starting from this quote, I would like to offer a reading of *I Am Beaten*. The title is passive; the subject only appears through its status as an object of discourse and of the process of identification at play. Additionally, the relation between the performer, lying down, looking up, and her image is itself mediated by the repeated discourse and through the voice. Its regulatory function has a performative dimension insofar as the specular identification is supplemented and enforced through the repetition of the sentence "I am beaten". Perhaps, even more poignantly, identification also appears as a processual alignment – in this case, the way the two video cameras interact with the image of the performer, up until the point they are aligned with each other. There is, however, an aspect that has so far remained outside the discussion, namely the corporeal dimension. In this sense, the situation of passivity is part of an alignment or a distribution of roles itself part of the process of identification – the passive identity belongs to a feminine subject (also reinforced by the performer's position). Furthermore, the multiplication of the images of the body also speaks to a function of the role of woman as image, as regulated by an image of the body that responds to masculine desire and whose position in the sphere of labour has been mainly relegated to the private sphere of the household and of reproduction.

8] At this point, we would have the perfect opportunity to speak about the function of the mirror stage in Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, in order to avoid simplifying the mirror stage and considering its rather broad use in discourses on image and identification (particularly in the writings on cinema part of Apparatus Theory), I would like to simply stress the psychoanalytic premises of Althusser's famous essay on ideology and assume a basic familiarity of the reader with the mirror stage.

Nevertheless, there is room for ambivalence in the process of identification, which emerges precisely through the fragmentary multiplication of the image, as well as through the fact that the image reproduced through the video cameras is not the performer herself, but her mirrored image. Thus, the reproduced image is from the start that of an abstracted ideal Ego – perhaps the initial incongruence between the uttered speech “I am beaten”, which follows the playback of the same words speaks to this existent division while making visible the repressive violence constitutive of the process itself. However, in the process of misrecognition that is presented in *I Am Beaten*, this ambivalence can be interpreted as the occasion for the exercise of a *weak power of refusal* (see Gush 2018, 42-43). In such an interpretation, the passive position is not so much the result of this process but a refusal of the terms in which subjectivation plays out. But isn't then this 'weak power of refusal' itself only possible if the process of subjectivation remains incomplete, if there is something which withdraws itself from it and remains outside of its power?

If, as stated above, the relation between power and subjectivity manifests itself as a restriction in production, then this restriction is itself productive, creating symptoms and effects which exceed the purpose of production (Butler 1997, 18). And if we are to refer to this relation in terms of an institution of consciousness, the metaphor of turning around is applied to power as well, determining the subject as “the effect of power in recoil” and consciousness as the effect of this repression, emerging alongside the unconscious (Butler 1997, 6). Between the power that institutes the subject and the subject's own actions, a discontinuity therefore appears – and this is the space where the possibility of resistance can be sought. Resistance emerges as a necessary correlate of regulatory power, as its own excess of production. The space of reflection opened up in *I Am Beaten* can therefore manifest itself as ambiguous because the process of misrecognition portrayed becomes the site of a divided self, as well as a site of excesses and irregularities that prevent a complete identification.

III. MOVEMENT IMAGINATIONS

My thesis is that we can find in *Movement Imaginations* the search from *passive refusal* to *active resistance* and the potential to turn the possibility of this refusal into a chance for self-emancipation. Within this line of interpretation, both *Ping Pong* and *I Am Beaten* make explicit an understanding of subjectivation as subjection, alongside a search for possible sites of struggle and without fully conceding to the terms of discussion.

Movement Imaginations (1974-75) is a video performance consisting of two parts. Within the first part, we are presented with a number of scenarios where the willpower of the subject is shown in opposition to external material forces. The role of the video medium is that of a tool aiding the investigation – all the actions are also shown in close-up on monitors placed in the foreground, giving the audience the possibility to see the

action as a whole, but at a distance, as well as up close (Mueller 1994, 61-64). The actions, in the description of the artist, are as follows:

I am standing on tiptoe inside a circle woven of barbed wire. When my strength fails me the soles of my feet are hurt by the barbed wire. With my extended arm I hold a heavy weight high above my head, slowly the arm sinks down, through the video image./ I press a spiral spring with my hands until they reach the position of praying./ With my lips I hold a burning match./ With wide-open eyes I stare into the light of a lamp./ I am on the floor in front-support position, between my arms, below my face is a small pedestal covered with broken glass. I suck at a nail that is driven in wood until I have sucked it out. (EXPORT n.d.d.)

A number of the actions were performed by the artist while wearing a nightgown, further suggesting an emphasis on the modalities of resistance available to a feminine subject. Furthermore, Mueller describes the actions as an investigation of “the phenomenon of inertia [...] for its potential to endure and also to overcome, given hostile forces.” (1994, 61) Beginning with this description, it is then possible to suggest a continuity between *I Am Beaten* and *Movement Imaginations* as the passive refusal present in the former becomes metamorphosized into the capacity for endurance in the latter. Thus, both performances show a scenario whose final goal would be an overcoming of externally imposed limitations through different strategies. Additionally, what *Movement Imaginations* makes concrete is the body as a site of struggle or of resistance precisely through the point of view of its understanding as capacity. In the words of the artist, the actions are:

[...] bodily demonstrations of the passion of man to resist all extreme conditions as long as possible. [Movement Imaginations] are therefore concrete forms of the human imagination which turn against any kind of limitation. The test of the body has here no auto-destructive tendency but has to be understood as a demonstration of the human intention [...]. (EXPORT n.d.e.)

The second part, also titled *Movement Imagination No.5*, concerns more directly the possibilities of the video medium, especially in its relation to the body. A video camera captures the upper part of a room and transmits the image to a monitor situated in the lower part – a split is thereby created. The performer jumps into the view of the video camera and appears on the monitor in the lower part of the room, thus being able to ‘heal the split’ (Mueller 1994, 61). The capacity of the body is here supplemented by that available through technology. In this case, the medium of video accompanies the passage from passive to active subject. And in contrast to *Ping Pong*, we are dealing with a different interaction between body and technology, no longer contained by the realm of training. By allowing the split to manifest itself spatially in the room, the subject emerges in the gap and occupies the space opened up. She furthermore arrives there through her own capacity or willpower. Consequently, if *Ping Pong* is the depiction of a case where emancipation cannot occur and if in *I Am Beaten*, the only power available is that of a *weak refusal*, then *Movement Imaginations* makes a case for endurance and willpower as

tools towards self-determination. In this scenario, self-determination is the only path open to emancipation. It is therefore also possible, I believe, to make the passage to another understanding of subjectification, which parallels this shift.

IV. THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY

In his *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Jacques Rancière makes the distinction between politics and what he terms as the police. Namely, he defines the latter as:

[...] an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. [...] Policing is not so much the «disciplining» of bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of *occupations* and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed. (Rancière 1999, 29)

In other words, we are not operating with an opposition between state apparatuses and individual subjects, but rather with a configuration that assumes a certain distribution of the visible and the way this visible becomes intelligible. It manifests itself in the configuration of the *who, what, where* and *how*. By contrast,

[p]olitics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification. By *subjectification* I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. (Rancière 1999, 35)

The manifestation of subjectification, therefore, takes the form of a dispute, the contestation of a certain regime of the perceptible and its recognition cannot take place outside of its reconfiguration. What this also entails is that politics as politics only occurs as a disagreement or a dispute with a certain distribution of roles, identities and corresponding fields of experience, and it does so by affirming the existence of a part that has no place. It, therefore, emerges as the affirmation of a gap, as a part that has been left uncounted and the manifestation of a wrong that needs to be addressed.

The notion of *disagreement* already hints at the important role played by language. The form through which a miscount or a wrong is addressed is such that language itself – the determination of who is seen as capable of speech – is the ground of contestation. Or, in other words, it is a matter of who is recognized as a speaking subject. Furthermore, the way subjectification takes place is not a simple assumption of a common identity but rather means making this identity into a stage for a dispute or a confrontation. It, therefore, entails a necessary moment of *disidentification*, a “removal from the naturalness of a place” and the assumption of an impossible and paradoxical identity because it affirms as existent something which is non-existent (Rancière 1999, 36). Finally, this mode of subjectification has as its basis the premise of equality which is to be verified

and exercised in practice. It cannot be something granted to the subject, but that which is the premise of her/his capacity for action and for speech, which is itself enacted in the act of disagreement. We are therefore dealing with a notion of equality that is radical because it presupposes a universal capacity. Staging identity as the locus of contestation means blocking the process of identification outlined above too. It's at the same time transforming the locus of identity into a place of anarchic availability since it can be occupied by anyone. The space of politics is thus the space of this radical opening where identity paradoxically becomes an affirmation of an impossible identification.

In VALIE EXPORT's "The Real and Its Double: The Body", the problem of identifying the experience of the subject 'woman' entails a problem of representation. By looking at the way this experience has been expressed in literary and artistic works, the place of the feminine subject reveals itself in a double bind of a sort. Traditionally, in her role as an object of desire, the image of the female body has been the place of painful contestation and refusal because it was at the same time the locus where a repressive identity was formed (as the identity woman has long been defined through recourse to corporeality or naturalness). On the other hand, the place towards culture or abstract theory was itself more often than not blocked, resulting in the impossibility of an actual path from identity towards subjectivity. Moreover, the strategies of insurrection that appear in the text, such as anorexia, the fragmentary and anagrammatic representation of the body or its transformation into a site of disease, locate feminine experience in the gap that emerges between the body as an expression of an external constraint and the self. This results in the elaboration of two strategies – either a complete refusal of this identity which results in an annihilation of the body, or the diffusion of the boundary between body and outside, which is at the same time a staging of the body's disappearance. However, in either case, the traditional representation of the body is the place where an impasse takes place, the place where the path to subjectivity as self-determination is blocked. Then is it not the case that an identification of feminine experience entails a contestation of a regime of the visible, or the intelligibility of a mode of representation? Are these not strategies of disidentification? Furthermore, is not Expanded Cinema's insistence on the productive capacity of materiality to displace meaning and thereby create new sensibilities, new modes of perceiving itself not part of a contestation of a perceptible configuration?

V. CONCLUSION

The end of the 1960s also saw the emergence of the video medium on the market, an accessible medium situated outside traditional forms of artistic production. Thus, "video enabled women to create their own representational spaces where they could transcend the dichotomy between private and public – regardless of whether they were addressing issues related to the body, domesticity or women's place within the social and/or political sphere." (Sichel 2010, 209) Within *Movement Imagination No. 5*, the use of video hints

at the possibilities offered by this medium to investigate the spatial and temporal coordinates of experience. The split created with the help of the video camera addresses the modalities through which information is communicated in a certain representation, acting as a tool for investigating a partitioning of the visible. By the same means, it can stage the very issue of partitioning, of configuring: the split is not only visible but permits the emergence of a subject.

Moreover, in the video performance *Silent Language*, developed between 1972 and 1976, video is used as a tool for investigating the intelligibility underlying traditional representations of women in painting (Mueller 1994, 59). With the use of the medium, a retracing of female postures is staged: a female performer dressed in contemporary clothes and at times holding kitchen utensils copies the exact posture of a traditional female figure. At the beginning of the video, the image of the performer and of the painting are superimposed, but as the painting slowly fades away, it reveals the contemporary performer enacting the same posture and gesture in a contemporary setting. Both representation and body are here treated as mediums capable of transmitting information, and their investigation reveals the partitioning of a social structure corresponding to the intelligibility of representation. Video stood out as a medium because of its ability to reveal and distort traditional forms of representation, its real-time ability to intervene in space and time and to manipulate images (something which was already perceptible in *I Am Beaten*).

VALIE EXPORT's use of technology, her emphasis on its capacity to produce distortions of existent meaning and thus create new modes of perception and understanding has at its core an interrogation of subjectivity that takes its cue from determining the coordinates of feminine experience. Determining the path open for this subject and her modes of existence suggests then an analysis of the social structure as a whole and a testing or trying out for possible areas open to contestation. At the beginning of this paper, *Ping Pong* was also understood as an interrogation of some forms of democratic participation, which needed to take into account the determining role of new media. It is then possible to see in the availability of the video medium the chance to invent new forms of democratic participation and to redefine the configuration between public and private, to investigate and re-invent modes of appearance. And in Rancière's conceptualization in terms of the distinction between the police and politics, a way to think of the constitution of subjectivity, not as subjection but as an assertion of radical equality. The path then open has to imply thinking emancipation as self-emancipation, alongside a reconfiguration of the space of experience and an understanding of resistance as refusal of a given order and as disidentification.

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