

Revolutions and rejoinders

– On the works of Sophia Kalkau

Rune Gade

Everything overturned, upended, rotated. Sophia Kalkau concludes the interview in this catalogue for the exhibition *The Material and the Egg* by answer-ing the question about what she hopes the audi-ence will get out of the encounter with her works: “I hope they will go home and start a revolution,” she says.¹ Revolution means movement, more specifically this movement: overturn, overthrow. The works of Sophia Kalkau are not revolution-ary in the traditional political sense of the word, although in her statement in the interview she toys with this idea, this duality in the concept of ‘revolu-tion’. What a beautiful image it also creates in our consciousness! The idea that guests to the muse-um who, after encountering her art, overthrow the world, storm the barricades, riot, transform the state of the world. This, however, is rarely the way that art revolutionises.

However, Sophia Kalkau’s works are undoubt-edly revolutionary in the artistic sense, formally revolutionary and aesthetically revolutionary. The rotatable, the cyclical and the reflective are recur-ring elements in her universe. These are the ele-ments that imbue many of Sophia Kalkau’s universe with a sense of mobility bordering on rotation and revolution. The sphere and the ellipsoid are dom-inant shapes in her sculptural practice, as if these were a planetary system of varying bodies bound to-gether by invisible forces that set them into cyclical movements and rotations in relation to one another. In aesthetic terms, one could say that her works pro-vide a cheeky rejoinder to the world, in a language that is surprising because it insists on the ancient and eternally renewed language of art. Sophia Kalkau’s works are on the one hand in dialogue with the cultic and sacred imagery of the premodern era, when art’s affective functions were used as admoni-tions and exhortations. On the other hand, her works are also clearly oriented toward, and in dialogue with, an avant garde tradition of the modern art era in the form of a strong emphasis on the transgres-sive, the disruptive, the new and the original. Or, in the words of Sophia Kalkau, because it is from her – from the title of her first book: *ÆSTETIK... at svare verden igen med værket* (*AESTETICHS... to respond to the world with the work*) of 1997 – that I borrow the idea of the artwork as something that creates a rejoinder to the world: “Modern artworks retain an open language by encompassing conflicting ma-terial, diversity and a wealth of nuance in complex combinations. [...] They open up to the many inter-pretations and exclude the definitive – the inquiring and investigative keep the work rooted in an open, unresolved space.”²

In this quote Sophia Kalkau talks in general terms about modern art, but she could just as easily have been talking about herself, because the words could easily stand as a description of her own artis-tic practice, her own works. Sophia Kalkau’s works provide no answers, but they still give a reply, they react to the world, relate to the world. Her works provide no answers, but offer rejoinders, comment on shameless questions that nobody has asked. Her works reply in the form of riddles, clear and incom-prehensible. Her works appear as small, confined dramas, which in an almost theatrical manner, require the viewer’s undivided attention.³

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Blow an Egg! Make two small holes in the egg, at either end, and blow carefully but forcefully into one of the holes. With patience, care, will and effort, you now empty the egg of its contents while the shell remains intact. Now there is a delicate shell around a large cavity. Overthrow. A slimy affair, but also a small

revolution. The expression (the shell) is unchanged. The content (the yolk and white of the egg) disappear completely, carefully extracted, emptied. In France the leading figure of the Situationists, Guy Debord (1931-1994), who was both a film director, art theorist and Marxist, used the term *détournement* to describe an artistic practice that involved this kind of radical transformation of something existing: "Every sign can be influenced to change into something else, even its own opposite" wrote Debord.⁴ Or as the American cultural critic Greil Marcus (b. 1945) reformulated the quote in a more prescriptive formulation: "Detournement [...] meant the theft of aesthetic artifacts from the Old World and their revitalization in contexts of one's own devising."⁵ Sophia Kalkau's work, *Blow an Egg* from 2019 [p. 57] borrows its idiom from the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto's drop-shaped lamps in the entrance hall at Kunsten, transforming the shape and function completely and utterly at the same time. It is a "theft" which steals some formal elements from the male canonised architect and reuses them in a completely new context, where they take on new meaning. A micro-revolution in the midst of the art museum's inner world, where everything otherwise tends towards stasis and eternal conservation of the existing.

The dramatic shape of the lamps as a drop drawn towards Earth by gravity, on the point of falling is caught in free fall in Sophia Kalkau's version, and held around a meter from the surface of the plateau that rises underneath the drop. Sophia Kalkau's drop is elongated and with its centre of gravity clearly concentrated in the base. A drop ready to burst, barely contained, falling heavily. The drop is accompanied by an egg-shaped figure standing on the floor, not far from the drop's expected landing point. The two figures, the suspended and the standing, both with matt white surfaces, all form the circular plateau of the sand work, *Blow an Egg*. Alvar Aalto's soft organic forms are endowed in Sophia Kalkau's version with a clinical hardness and a powerful erotic latency. It is as if Aalto's lamp has been switched off and muted in the night's dark realm of dreams, transformed into a luminescent liquid projectile, shooting through the dark. An hourglass, in which time has run out, stopped. A desert mirror, whose grains of sand endlessly reflect their surroundings. A fall, which is never completed. Or a sticky egg white, sluggish and slimy, which stubbornly clings, unshakeable, perhaps? Because what could this slimy liquid actually be? Is it a sperm cell that Sophia Kalkau depicts? *Blow an egg!* The English title carries a vulgar double entendre. A 'blow job' is slang for fellatio (which is the Latin word for 'performing oral sex on a man') This is an association that can readily be activated in the encounter with *Blow an Egg*. The dripping element is associated with liquid – sperm perhaps – the egg is associated with fertility. Unsettlingly, the sterile objects in all their purist whiteness and controlled choreography appear extremely obscene, swallowed up in a perverse and gender-transgressing long distance copulation. The sculpture shows the drama of conception, at once ascetic and opulent. Suck an egg!

And then it becomes one. Or rips into your flesh. The sexual and the culinary. The raw egg. The egg surrounded by the lips. Everything upside down, upended, turned around. Sophia Kalkau's works respond to our bodies, rejoin us, like corporeal beings, they address the internal realm of the imagination, which living bodies always create as an inner refuge.

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Revolutions do not only happen in the streets with barricades and paving stones as their characteristics. They also happen inside people. As the German philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) once stated in a critique of Marxist theory, they "succumbed to the very commodification that they had revealed and combated in society as a whole."⁶ One problem for Marxist theory was, according to Herbert Marcuse, the denouncement of the subject's inner consciousness as 'bourgeois'. Herbert Marcuse, on the

contrary, emphasized the inner life as a potential space in which one could circumvent the economic exchange relationships that are enmeshed in all spheres of life in capitalist society. The revolution was, in his view, not just an endeavour to overthrow the power structures in society, but also largely a question of the overthrow of the structure of the individual's personality and existence. The retreat to the inner life was something he regarded not as an escape from reality in a negative sense, an escapism, but as a potentially liberating power: "Indeed, this escape from reality led to an experience which could (and did) become a powerful force in invalidating the actually prevailing bourgeois values, namely by skirting the locus of the individual's realisation from the domain of the performance principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience."⁷ Art's space thus offers the potential for fulfillment beyond work and consumption, art literally offers a free space.

When one stands before Sophia Kalkau's works, one witnesses what the inner exile offers by way of possibilities for liberation. *Blow an Egg* reveals a reshaping of a site-specific detail from Kunsten Museum of Modern Art Aalborg, adapted within the register of emotions and thoughts that Herbert Marcuse mentions: passion, imagination and consciousness. *Blow an Egg* offers an overwhelming contradiction that is alien to daily culture. The geometrically stringent and sanitized objects that are a part of the work exude an ob-scene latency that ruptures their purist virtue and clothes them in a surprising and exuberant sensuality. The title of the work enriches the shape of the object with an element of viscous, effusive aggression, which draws its unsettling sustenance from different kinds of games, namely our erotic experiences and our culinary experiences. Areas where we 'blow an egg', transgress boundaries, proceed tentatively, taste our way, add the right ingredients in appropriate dosages. But the mixing of the usually carefully separate and therefore architectonic and spatially delimited domains – sex, food, play – contribute to creating the unsettling incongruity of the work.

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We can attempt to isolate the large spectrum of states of consciousness that Sophia Kalkau's works address. Sophia Kalkau mentions the state between wakefulness and sleep as an important liminal phase, which is the starting point for many of her works. It is here that the ideas come to her. "At night, I toss and turn the material, all the work of the day, I wash the material, pull it through the night", she says in an interview in this catalogue.⁸ In other words, the artistic material derives from the impressions in a state of wakefulness during the day, which is processed through the altered condition of consciousness, its fluidity in the transition from a state of being awake to being asleep or vice versa. But the potential of art, the potential of Sophia Kalkau's art, is naturally not something that the artist achieves in her sleep. To understand the way that her art works requires looking at a series of gradual transitions between sleep and wakefulness, which exist and which we are all familiar with even though we do not use them in an artistic context. The dreaming consciousness is not an unambiguous or clearly delimited contrast to the wakeful consciousness. Our language reveals that this is actually familiar to us all, because we also use the concept of the 'dream' as a metaphor for all our wakeful fantasies, so-called daydreams, as well as the hopes that we have for the future, the so-called dreams for the future.

The dream state of the night enriches us with sensory impressions and images that we often have difficulty making sense of – or even remembering at all – when we awaken. We describe them as irrational and regard them as being the diametrical opposite of the rationality of our wakeful thoughts. But if we look at the findings of metaphorology – as propounded by the American philosophers George Lakoff (b. 1941) and Mark Johnson (b. 1949) – that "metaphors are [...] imaginative rationality", the primary function of which is

to provide “a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another” so we should perhaps not establish as profound a separation between the various dream states.⁹ On the contrary, we can regard them as continuous, coherent and closely related. The dream, the daydream and the dreams for the future are different, but not contradictory. They are separate, but not without connections. Rationality is always informed by the irrational as more and different to its pure antithesis, negation or oppo-site. In the same way as the aesthetic regime in the French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s (b. 1940) understanding comprises an area in which inten-tional alienation of the self is in progress and the artwork is thus “a product, which is identical with something non-produced, knowledge transformed to non-knowledge, logos identical with pathos, the non-intended’s intention etc”.¹⁰ An “impossible” heterogeneity of this kind can be found specifically in the works of Sophia Kalkau.

Blow an Egg is, like several of Sophia Kalkau’s works, a piece that appears with a ge-ometric and material clarity, while still containing amorphous aspects: it is purist and obscene, dry and juicy, clinical and dirty. The objects appear as emotional vessels, hard and impenetrable, but still labile and fluid in their content. It is a composite work, which evades the unequivocal and allows the transfer of meaning to run riot, to overrun (the meaning streams from the work). It could be a dream, a daydream and a dream of the future in one and the same figure, but the transferred mean-ing in the materialized figure, a dream sculpture, a reified metaphor, a transfer vessel. Think of this list of states of consciousness – which always con-tain elements of emotions and senses – and their relationship to the dream:

memory

longing

hope

the wish

envisioning

imagination

utopia

desire

vision

sight

delirium

hallucination

ecstasy

infatuation

daydream

apprehension

intuition

When I look at *Blow an Egg*, it seems to me that all these forms of consciousness are present in the sculpture, embedded like sediments of thinking, sensing and feeling. They are forms of consciousness which, in their respective ways, bear witness to an awareness that stretches out to the the extremities of thought, towards that which is far out, but also resides deep within a human being, in its inner, perhaps close to the innermost. They also show that *Blow an Egg* accomplishes Herbert Marcuse's provisions for the radical qualities of an artwork: "this beautiful illusion is grounded precisely in the dimensions where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given realm of discourse and behaviour while preserving its overwhelming presence".¹¹ *Blow an Egg* is a peculiar object of this kind, whose strangeness has its counterpart in its luminous presence, its gripping intimacy, its pathos. It is a *vanitas* motif, a micro-drama, which plays through the fragility and brevity of existence, allows its time to run out into the sand, allows conception and life to turn to dust, while it stands steadfast and unyielding as the everlasting image of ephemerality.

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Another feminist *détournement*: The work *Suspended Balls* from 2008 [p. 62]. These are two body-sized, drop-shaped silver balls hanging from a rope. The rope is anchored to the wall with the aid of two hooks, and affixed with gaffa tape to a bag of cement lying on the floor with its own weight holding the balls up. The silver drops could be reminiscent of boxing balls or liquid-filled balloons, perhaps vessels of some kind. But in the title of the work like an indiscreet key, Sophia Kalkau lets us know that we are not very much mistaken if we see the two balls as testicles. The word "ball" in English, like the word "kugle (ball)" in Danish, can refer to both a round object used in play and to a man's testicles. In other words, the work's play with gravity, the stretched balls, could also be seen as tense balls, a stylized anatomical study and a bizarre, sadomasochistic game involving the bondage and stretching of the genitals. *Suspended Balls* is a feminist *détournement*, inasmuch as Sophia Kalkau steals the balls from men (*castration*), reshapes them, and demonstrates an unambiguous and gruesome domestication of them, turning the suspended, dangling, balancing act of the balls into a show, a spectacle, a demonstration (of power).

In the interview in this catalogue, Sophia Kalkau invites a biographical interpretation of the sculpture, because the work was created after she had been through an extended course of treatment for cancer. In the interview, she points to the metaphorical use of the term "to have balls" as an expression possessing strength: "I wanted to and would show the world that it was me who was wearing the pants – they were my balls". The powerful formalist study in geometry and balance has implications that relate to both the living body, gender and to magical thinking. *Suspended Balls* is a *détournement* that confiscates a power symbol (the balls) from men, tames them in a delicate balancing act and allows power's symbolic elixir to dangle in the turgid, silver ball baths for the general use of all who might have need for something to bolster themselves with. The work literally suspends the testicles' gender exclusivity and distributes their symbolic power and vitality to all. Even if one, due to modesty, revulsion or blindness, chooses to overlook all the bodily references in the work, to ignore the corporeal references to the male anatomy, the sculpture, with its stringent spatial disposition, still possesses a permanent tension (they appear to be a kind of spatial carillon which allows the space to chime), which is filled with a quivering energy, as if this were a magical object, an amulet, a psychological shield emanating a violent, protective force.

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To turn things on their head and to see them with new eyes. Sophia Kalkau's works can be regarded as a dynamic typology of shapes, which mutate and fuse, allude internally to one another through reflections, repetitions (even reuse) and displacements of forms. Her oeuvre consists of an abundant, yet recurring variety of geometric shapes, which are set in relation to the human body and installed in a drama there. This could be the drama that arises within the viewer's body when it is faced with the sculptural object and it feels its own alienation, its own humanity, before the object's radical otherness. But it could also be the drama that is set in motion with the aid of the artist's body, which she allows in her many photographic series to enter into an interaction with the sculptural objects, giving rise to subtle and intricate connections between body, thing and image. Regardless of how the body is incorporated, it can be seen as party to a performance, a structured sequence of events that play out between several parties.¹²

One example is in *Entwined*, four colour photographs dating from 2011, where we cannot be certain whether the artist is present, but still sense that under the ritually arranged, salmon-coloured silk cloth on a white plinth there is a human body, perhaps the artist's own [p. 66]. Under the fabric one can discern the contours of the human figure, which sits at first with its knees bent in front of it, and then rests on its side with its knees slightly drawn in underneath it. In the installation there are also various objects, a series of bulbous eggs covered with string, some small round boards and some semicircles, all salmon-coloured and with unmistakable allusions to light-coloured skin, female breasts and nipples. Also, a thin rope, which appears to be entwined around the draped figure, and which binds and retains the human figure in position on the plinth.

The encircled or entwined, which the work's title refers to, could be about another experience of boundary, a liminality, namely the experience of reification, the experience of losing one's subjectivity and becoming a pure object, reified. The entire arrangement is reminiscent of a museal presentation, the objects organised on a raised surface. But also of a ritual, a cultic or religious situation (sacrifice, burial), which unfolds on an altar. In other words, another drama: The Sculptures as a skin, which is draped around the body to hide it, while it remains the core, the essence – or the coreless center – from which all meaning flows. The sculpture always draws a trace of the statuary with it, and the statuary draws the remnant of the human body with it. In Sophia Kalkau's works this connection to the statue is often very obvious, as in *Entwined*, where the body looks both present and hidden, an obvious foundation, but hidden under the rest of the construction's bulk. And where the work's title contains a reference to the state of entwinement, which suggests an intimate connection between the things, a web of secret contexts, that can only be guessed at, never grasped. The sculpture as a skin, smooth and salmon-coloured, sprinkled with sensitive buds, small erogenous zones, highly sensitive areas, which ask to be carefully caressed, stimulated. The sculpture as a complex exchange with a tradition of works that articulate themselves around the same thing, about the work's connection to human anatomy and the human psyche.

Sophia Kalkau has mentioned a work by the French-American artist Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), *Mamelles* (1991) as a direct source of inspiration for *Entwined* [p. 31].¹³ The works also share many formal qualities, not least in their pronounced horizontality, the shifting play between the convex and concave shapes, the many references to sexualised body parts as well as the dominant salmon-coloured hue. But the enlistment of the body into the work is direct and consistent with Sophia Kalkau, who actually uses her own body in the making of the work. The autobiographical element is toned down with Sophia Kalkau in comparison to Louise Bourgeois' insistent autopsychological interpretations of her own work. Despite the recurrent and concrete use of her own body in her oeuvre, Sophia Kalkau's works are mostly detached from her own biography, from the purely personal. Even in their most abstract versions, one could still

say that Sophia Kalkau's sculptures retain a connection to the body, because she always places them in dramatic stagings that require an almost theatrical presence of the body, whether it is the viewer's body reacting to the sculptural object or it is the artist's own body reacting actively in the staged photographs. In *Entwined*, and also in related photographic series like *Black Matter* (2012) [p. 81-85] and *White Story* (2013) [p. 87-89], it is the artist's body which, draped and veiled in strange choreographies, interacts with the sculptural objects. In other photographic series, the artist's body is more obviously present, such as the early work *Tableau/Eggs* (1999) [p. 77], in which the artist poses with an ellipsoid possessing an obvious kinship with the shape of a huge egg. In the main motif, the artist sits against the wall in the corner of a room with the egg in front of her. She is naked, but everything apart from her legs, arms and hair is completely hidden behind the egg. In the two flanking motifs in the series, we see her dressed in white clothing and white gloves, while she is seen respectively in profile, standing on all fours, bent over the large egg, with her back to us with her legs parted and arms lifted triumphantly and the egg between her legs, as if she has just laid it. *Tableau/Eggs* demonstrates how Sophia Kalkau, at an early stage – and not without humor – worked with the humanization of the object and the objectification of the human body as an artistic strategy, which complicates the simple binary division of object and subject. The egg as a distinctive metaphor of origin, an image of life's starting point and female fertility, disrupts the rigid division further, because with Sophia Kalkau, the egg is both an object and the seed of life. The *vanitas* motif emerges again: life starts as a faint tremor in a thing, the egg, and ends with the desouled body's return to things.

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The beginning of life. Head first, we arrive in the world, barely humans, small, helpless beings, powerless. Yet another drama that upends everything: creation. Perhaps the biggest revolution. Sophia Kalkau works in several areas in her oeuvre with metaphors of origin, most consistently in her ellipsoids, which with their ovoid shape, are most clearly associated with fertility. But she has also played with the origin metaphor in a series of her photographic works. In the photograph *Ursprung* (2010) we see the artist's naked body sitting on a white lambskin with her bent knees drawn up in front of her [p. 68]. The photograph is horizontal, in a panorama format, the surroundings are white. Her lower body is covered by a cloth, but her breasts are visible. The cropping of the image hides her shoulders and face. The body is delineated with a slight motion blur, which obscures the skin a bit.

Which origin does the image refer to? Perhaps several at once. Firstly, there is a long tradition in art history of connecting the female body per se, particularly the naked female body, with fertility and the origin of life. The tradition – despite all its differences and discontinuities – extends from the paleolithic era with the 24,000-year-old fertility figure, the *Venus of Willendorf* to modernity with the almost pornographic realism of the painting of a woman's uncovered pudendum in *L'Origine du monde* of 1866 by the French artist Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). Here, the woman becomes a kind of egg, a vessel containing the mystery of the origin of life. In this, Sophia Kalkau is closer to artists like American Hannah Wilkes' (1940-1933) and her unsentimental work *IntraVenus* (1992-93) – a beautiful and moving series of Venus-like self-portraits of the artist, who was afflicted with terminal cancer – than the masculine-dominated art tradition with its extolling of stereotypical female beauty ideals as synonymous with fertility. The interest is not as fixated on the beauty of the body, but on the body's latent and multifaceted meanings, its existential character.

Secondly, one can view the artistic crea-tion, creativity, as a repeated origin, which, like birth, creates new life – beyond any social de-termination, as Herbert Marcuse also described art’s potential. Each artwork is new and free, solidly bound in a tradition, but also always on its way to breaking free from tradition, creating a revolu-tion, overthrowing everything. The body in Sophia Kalkau’s works is de-individualized, impersonal, it is not anyone’s body, but merely body. The body with Sophia Kalkau is a thing, more than it is sensing, feeling, thinking. Ursprung speaks of both these traditions, allows them to run together in one shared source, one shared origin.

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This drama: the body is a thing. It is not different, it is the same as things. We are always aware of this, but we feel it mostly in the beginning and in the end, at our arrival and at our departure. In a new photographic series of black-and-white images titled *Bony Moon* from 2019, we see partly a reclin-ing ellipsoid photographed from above and lighted from the side, partly two photographs of the artist interacting with five ellipsoids resting on a plinth [p. 72-73]. The ellipsoid is not only the egg now, it is also the moon – an egg and a heavenly body at the same time. The ellipsoid is the interior, the body’s deterministic attempt at reproducing itself, but it is also the exterior, the distant planet dancing slowly around the Earth. The innermost space and the outer space. The cave and the sphere. In *Bony Moon* the isolated white object is photographed lit from the side on a white background, where only the shadow effects enable us to separate the figure from the ground. This makes the character of the ellipsoid as a heavenly body emerge in the most convincing way. But then it is brought down to Earth again by the two other photographs in the se-ries. There is not only one ellipsoid here, but five in all, and they have also been threaded onto a string by the artist. Threaded onto a string like jewelry, and placed on her back like ant eggs, white pupae, which must be transported, while she is dressed in a sailor shirt, white tights and white gloves.

The title *Bony Moon* refers to a term bor-rowed from the indigenous American people in south-eastern America, the Cherokee tribe, who used the concept of the “bony moon” of the lunar cycle in February, when the hardships of winter were particularly tough, food was scarce and they resorted to gnawing on meatless bones, sucking the marrow from the bones.¹⁴ In light of this, the object can be seen as an image of deficit, a meta-phor of hunger. However, the object still retains its character of being an egg. This aspect is actually highlighted in the two photographs where the artist interacts with the spherical objects. From being an image of deficit, it changes and becomes an image of surplus, of fertility. From the bleak hunger moon to the bulging storehouse – a ballast that one can carry around, a reserve ensuring access to the future, survival. *Bony Moon* appears to contain multiple meanings, which all relate to existential conditions to do with the body: its capacity for maintaining life, its capacity for passing on life, its risk of losing life. The body is a thing that is in contact and constant exchange with other things. The body as a thing that only exists by virtue of its contact and exchanges with others. The body as anything but autonomous, the body as an indistinct experiential horizon that we all share.

The hunger moon is repeated in the work *Outbound* from 2019, a series of photographs where, among other things, the same motif as in *Bony Moon* appear in a solarised version, which cre-ates an almost complete reversal of the tonal scale, so that the image’s white parts appear black and vice versa [p. 96]. But this is not a case of a pure negative of the positive picture but rather a dis-tortion and displacement of the tonal scale which, in the process of being distorted, is imbued with a peculiar silver-grey luminance. The dark object now appears to emit a strange light. It does not cast any shadows, it is itself a shadow from which light radiates. The inversion of the egg could charac-terize a kind of implosion, a reversal of the

fertility's surplus into a hardening. Either way, an interpretation of this kind would make sense in light of the image's connection to the poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen (b. 1970) and her poetry collection *Udgående fartøj* (Outbound Vessel) from 2015, in which an earlier version of one of the motifs in *Outbound* is included. Ursula Andkjær Olsen and Sophia Kalkau have many years of a mutually rewarding collaboration behind them, and Sophia Kalkau has illustrated, among other publications, *Udgående fartøj* (Outgoing Vessel).¹⁵ In one of the collection's main poems Ursula Andkjær Olsen speaks of the "outgoing vessel" as an emotional concentration, an emotional nodule: "I have shut myself in around my self / in a closed circuit / ball / I will send it off as the out-bound vessel / that it is / then the new person can arrive in their / inbound."¹⁶ As the critic Peter Stein Larsen wrote very characteristically of *Outbound Vessel* in the Danish newspaper *Kristelig Dagblad*, it is a text in which "Feelings of rage, self-hatred, sorrow and resignation pass through the poems and the suggestive power that the texts possess depend to a great extent on the repeated expressions and phrases that are tossed and turned again and again..."¹⁷ Sophia Kalkau's *Outbound* repeats in visual form the suggestive, rotating and repetitive power and in doing so appears share a kinship with Ursula Andkjær Olsen's *outbound vessel*, a concentration of meaning, which implodes in a black gamma-ray of (self-)condemnation, a radiation ray of (self-)loathing.

The two other motifs in *Outbound* show respectively the artist, who in a frontal self-portrait bears the planet-shaped sphere in her embrace, clearly burdened by its weight, while the object hides the lower part of her face, respectively a photograph of a crenelated cylindrical object with a kind of axis in the middle. All three photographs are solarised and therefore dominated by dark and silver elements, but despite their dramatic, nocturnal dreamlike tones they are also unexpressive and sober, as if they had itemized the downfall with a bookkeeper's factual diligence, while it was taking place. With Sophia Kalkau, it is not a matter of an emotional allegory, but rather an investigation of body-thing relations, the human body's prosthetic expansion into the world of things and the invasion of the world of things by our bodies.

This becomes particularly evident in a third work from 2019, *Preparing for a Revolution* [p. 61], which is a black-and-white photograph showing the artist lying on her back with bent and slightly parted legs in front of a plinth, while her head and torso appear to disappear inside a sharp twelve-sided object. She is dressed in white tights, a sailor shirt and white gloves. Her hands rest on her stomach, apparently relaxed, expectant. The foreshortened perspective has the effect that the twelve-sided object can be seen as many different things: a swing dress one can peek up into, an aggregate scanner on its way to carry out measurements of the reclining person, the tip of a rocket ship consisting of half human body, half things in the process of being fired off. A birthing bench, a sacrificial bench, a butcher bench – *Preparing for a Revolution* opens up equally for associations of fertility, eroticism and death. The title of the work also encourages us to view the image as a documentation of an exercise, a preparation, perhaps a manual. This is clearly not a conventional revolution with its angry mob, but more an individual and contemplative – perhaps internalized – revolution, which allows the upheavals to take place in the inner strongholds rather than the outer. As with all Sophia Kalkau's works, this one does not provide any direct instructions. It is drama without plot, history without end. But they are works that require us to reflect over origins and endings.

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The insight that these dips into over twenty years of artistic works from Sophia Kalkau's hand are about art as a rejoinder, the act of responding, which I started with citing the title of the artist's first book. To respond to the world with a work. A rejoinder that does not respond to a question. An answer that is not a

polite reply. Sophia Kalkau “rejoins” with her works. This means that the works provide us with answers we don’t think we need, answers we may not want to hear. They answer in ways that we may not care for. They provide us with answers that are not actual answers, but more calls to think, calls to see, calls to feel. This is how art reaches out to–wards the extremities, where it makes suggestions by looking backwards (towards a tradition) and for–wards (towards a new reality). They are, as Jacques Rancière has expressed the basic tenet of the avant garde, works that are filled with ruptures, because they work with the “the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come.”¹⁸ In this sense, they are present here and now, in their actualized reality, backward-looking in their con–sciousness of tradition, but also oriented towards the future. Sophia Kalkau’s works bring suggestions into play rather than creating instructions or judg–ing. Her works rejoin the world, rise up as possibil–ities and as puzzles. This is how we need to think of revolution in this particular case. As the answer to a question that nobody has asked. This is how Sophia Kalkau’s works can turn us upside down.

1 See Caroline Nymark Zachariassen: “Bearing your eggs on your back – an interview with Sophia Kalkau”, Aalborg; Kunsten Museum of Modern Art Aalborg, 2019, p. 42

2 Sophia Kalkau: ÆSTETIK... at svare verden igen med værket, Copenhagen: Basilisk Babel, 1997, p. 36

3 In an earlier article about Sophia Kalkau’s works I discussed the question of the drama more. See: Rune Gade: “Forbundethedens rum – om Black Matter og White Stuff af Sophia Kalkau,” in: Sophia Kalkau. White Stuff. Black Matter, Løgumkloster: Museet Holmen, 2013, p. 9-24

4 Guy Debord in a letter to Joseph Wolman, quoted here by Greil Marcus: “Guy Debord’s Mémoires: A Situationist Primer,” in: Elisabeth Sussman (Ed.): on the Passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Si–tuationist Internationale 1957-1972, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989, p. 127

5 Ibid.

6 Herbert Marcuse: Den æstetiske dimension. Bidrag til kritik af den marxistiske æstetik (translated by Merete Ries), Copenhagen: Gyldendals Uglebøger, 1979 [1977], p. 19-20

7 Ibid., p. 20

8 See Caroline Nymark Zachariassen, op. cit. p. 39

9 George Lakoff & Mark Johnson: Hverdagens metaforer (translated by Ulrik Hvilshøj and Hanne Salomonsen), Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Publishing House, 2002 [1980], p. 217 and p. 175

10 Jacques Rancière: The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible (overs. Gabriel Rockhill), London: Bloomsbury, 2004 [2000], p. 18

11 Marcuse, op.cit., p. 22

12 See more on this in Camilla Jalving’s article “Frit fald,” in: Sophia Kalkau. Tæt på, langt ude, Copenhagen: Kalkau’s Publishing House, 2010, p. 63-73

13 See Caroline Nymark Zachariassen, op.cit., p. 30-31

14 Jessica Prentice: Full Moon Feast: Food and the Hunger for Connection, White River Jun–ction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006, p. 1

15 Ursula Andkjær Olsen: Udgående fartøj, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2015, p. 190

16 Ibid., p. 50

17 Peter Stein Larsen: “Poetisk sortsyn med lys for enden,” Kristeligt Dagblad, 27 May 2015

18 Rancière, op.cit., p. 24156