

Manifesto on mOtherness

by
Maja Smrekar

As my artistic processes are guided by intuition and associations, my observation of our zeitgeist has been building in me a certain gut instinct for many years. It was generating upon a thanatopolitical observation of global reality and many challenges the society has been struggling with: disappearance of natural resources and the increasing demand for them, never-ending wars, the global migration flows, refugee crisis, increasingly growing populisms, overpopulation and consequently threats to biodiversity that brought forth other-than-human entities to their accelerated mutations. This whole grim spectacle of neoliberal capitalism that levels human and non human animals in their interchangeable place within the global market economy, provoked me to pose questions, such as: *What are the arts of living on such a damaged planet? How to achieve any possibility of empathy in these capitalist ruins? And most importantly: How to particularise the possibility of my own motherness within this context?*

An attempt to answer these questions brought me to the point where I felt I needed to take a risk in extending my views beyond the anthropocentric ones. By reaching for possibilities and potentials that go beyond the laws of gender, race, genus and species, it became clear to me that I had to come up with an artistic statement that needs to happen on a micropolitical level and therefore on a molecular one. I accordingly adopted a microperformative method to employ empathy towards the non-human other, as a strategy that would possibly help me achieve (more) empathy for a human other. As a gesture of the most profound connection between the two beings, I therefore decided to feed humanity's by far longest nonhuman companion - the dog, with my own milk.

I composed a methodology that followed a process of preparation in 112 days of seclusion. It started in October 2015 and lasted until February 2016. The process included psycho-endocrinological training: a diet of iron - and B vitamin—rich food and hydration by galactagogue liquids that promote lactation. Alongside, I prepared physiologically by using mechanical breast pumping: 8 x per day – every 3 hours for 20 minutes. The breast pumping act carried the impulses to neuroendocrine cells of my hypothalamus, through the nerve receptors in my breasts. Consequently hormone oxytocin, that as a side effect causes empathy, was released to be transported by blood to mammary glands further releasing the hormone prolactin which stimulated milk production. I thereby executed the same strategy as some mothers-to-be, who are about to adopt a still nursing baby. But most importantly, the prolactin acceleration does not need to include ovaries or uterus, so this process can be executed no matter regarding gender or one's reproductive ability, as it is not only connected to pregnancy.

Colostrum started to occur after 8 weeks; right when I adopted a puppy whom I called Ada. The public presentation titled *Hybrid Family* took place in the form of small group visits in my studio where visitors could witness the feeding of a puppy with colostrum, while drinking galactagogue herbs tea and discussing subjects such as the reproductive freedom in a heteronormative society and the anthropocentrism as one of its consequences.

By these conversations and throughout my whole experience I was drawn to think within the discourse of Donna Haraway who poses the question: "What is feminist reproductive

freedom in a dangerously troubled multi species world?" My answer was as follows: just because I don't have children, that doesn't mean I do not own maternal instincts. Furthermore, the microperformativity of the two hormones produced by breast pumping and later by breastfeeding that were increasingly expressing as a feeling of empathy became the ultimate point of departure for Hybrid Family, whereas *by being pregnant with a concept of abundance, I became the Other as a mOther.*

Hybrid Family's molecular discourse concludes with the following thought: rather than being reduced only to parenthood, motherhood should become abundant to interpersonal relationships on a large scale. It should transform into mOtherness as a concept of solidarity in co-creating our responsible futures among humans and other than humans.

After it has been well recognised that hormone prolactin ensures not only survival of the species through its reproductive role but also survival of the individuals of many species in its homeostatic roles, I therefore call and welcome (women of) all genders to start and/or (continue) breastfeed(ing)!