

Breast Cancer Advocacy, Autopathography and Artistic Nude Representation

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Abstract

This paper analyses a work of art from an unpublished undergraduate thesis project, “In the Absence of Strength”, by the artist Rufina Boateng, a 2013 Miss Ghana finalist and Breast Cancer survivor and advocate. It attempts a review of her artistic effort for the work within feminist literature and methodologies, and as gendered people, reviews our identity formations. The project contests institutional objectification of, and demands on the female body schema within breast cancer activism and advocacy. It critically analyses methodologies of self-replication and fictional procedures in life casting employed in the project, and conclude that, the artist’s status (breast cancer victim/victor), her morphology, and artistic intents begins a pathographical exploration that seeks to undermine cultural institutions and the self she is projecting. It does so to contradict conventional female representation in art with abjection by similar format and strategy, and to emancipate the autonomous female identity, thereby initiating such discourse in Ghanaian art practices.

Keywords: Breast cancer, Autopathography, Female Identity, Artistic Nude Representation.

Introduction

In the film *Elegy*, (Coixet 2008) based on Philip Roth’s book; *Dying Animal* (2001), the beauty, pain, fear, nostalgia from loss, and the patriarchal phallocentrism associated with the breast as the focal points of the feminine body are captured through “Kapeshe’s monologues” (Hanft 2001; Scott 2001; Kakutani 2001), and the two leading characters; David Kapeshe and Consuela Castillo. *Elegy’s* excessive objectification and fetishism of the feminine body and sexuality (Mars-Jones 2001; Scott 2001; Kakutani 2001) is remarkable, but, the point of defamiliarization (Cixous 1980; Kristeva 1982) that saw the masculine gaze collapse and its concomitant mourning and acceptance of the de-sexualized feminine body are points of interest for us as authors and artists. The fear of loss and nostalgia that accompanied the imminent iconoclasm of the Kapeshe’s monument and the ensuing archival photographic documentations of Consuela and her breasts are representative of issues of identity, life and mortality, that the female body and breast cancer are subjects.

Elegy and countless others, among which *Pieces of April* (2002), *The Family Stone* (2005), *Terms of Endearment* (1983), *Five* (2011) and *My Breast* (1994) top the list Burt (2012) calls *5 Tear-Jerking Breast Cancer Movies* of all, are only few fictional moments when we get windows into the lives of the thousands of women who live in constant pain of life, fear and uncertainties that their bodies have bestowed on them. In real life situations, millions including Christiana Applegate, Sharon Osbourne, Wanda Sykes, Giuliana Rancic, Angelina Jolie, and Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke as captured in *Jo Spence’s Crisis Projects 1982-92* (Spence 2012), *Exposed Wounds: The Photographic Autopathographies of Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence* (Tembeck 2008) respectively document artistically, and or, morphologically, the contradictions that characterize the breast, identity and mortality, as well as paths of autopathography as literal and artistic practices.

As people who have lived with breast cancer victims, with traces of its bio-psychosocial scars, we find it stimulating to have witnessed another, who through her artistic practice is undergoing therapeutic catharsis from the disease’s mutilations and depressions, and reaching towards others in breast cancer politics (Foucault 1990; Cixous 1981).

With this experience, Rufina brings her body and artistic practice, and other contextual antecedence, to comment on, and contest socio-cultural expectations on the female body representation. These expectations, she believes just satisfy the masculine gaze and vilify others that do not meet cultural benchmarks yet function successfully in womanhood (Kambarami 2006). To this she concludes, that stigmatization of her kind (breast cancer victims), especially those who have undergone double mastectomies emanate from that gaze within the Foucauldian body politics and biopower (Macleod and Durrheim 2002; McLauren 2002), and the only way to contest such is to de-familiarize the body, flatten the chest through voluntary and preventive mass mastectomies in solidarity of breast cancer victims. Such actions should be geared towards de-sexualization the female body and total abjection in its representation (Rainbow and Rose 2003; Bell, 2002) within specific frames of cultural narratives.

She thus takes a stance with a feminine intervention (Godard 2003; Cullen 2000) that contradicts the gaze, and set a project between Kristeva's female fatigue and symbolic death (Kristeva 1992; Cixous 2005; Oliver 2010) and psychoanalyzes her existence in the light of the millions of breast cancer victims. Although such action usually have the "messiac" and "global feminism syndromes" (Davis 2002, p226-7), it is her artistic prerogative and right as cancer survivor (Foucault 1990) to articulate such issues (Mazurek 2015; Tembeck 2009; 2008; Al-Zubi 2007; DasGupta and Charon 2004; Bury 2001). It should also be noted that, apart from her status as artist, the duality of her experiences with victims and survivors within the circuits of the disease and gender makes her case even compelling.

In the work Boateng (2014), the artist through life casting in plaster and pigmented silicone rubber metaphorically underwent double mastectomies of her breasts and with those of her volunteers. She then exhibited the detached deformed silicone breasts stitched on canvas, contesting classical female nude representations (figs 2 and 3), in which the breast is a subject. This work revives memories in the light of Miss America Protest (1968) and other Afro-feminine protests and representations (Enwezor and Chika 2009) that border on rights of persons, resistance to cultural demands and autonomy. Authors believe that, such efforts are inspirational within local advocacy networks and artistic representations in studio practices in that, it initiate advocacy practices as well as social commentaries (Tembeck 2008; Bell 2002). The meaning of her work is subversive, in that, it seeks to undermine the basic tenets upon which Miss Ghana pageant was founded in the 1950s and which informs her participation in it. She calls for voluntary and subjective standoffs as approach against cultural stigmatization of breast cancer victims, as well as socio-cultural demands of the female body schema that feed such discriminations. She deems this required, and feels obliged to add her voice distinctly as a scheduled breast cancer advocate in her social responsibility role of the pageant (Mazurek 2015; Tembeck 2009; 2008; Al-Zubi 2007; DasGupta and Charon 2004; Bell 2002; Bury 2001). In the absence of the crown, her art then become her "Back-up plan" for her role as a cultural ambassador, interrogating the pageant's mandate and how it emanate from the same cultural construction that subjugates the female in its autonomous representations (Boateng 2014, p3).

As a breast cancer victim who has had encounters with the disease and its associated emotional confusion, and near death experiences, she looks at herself, not only in its mortality, but the value of breast in her environment, absence of which she is valued less (p6). This value associated with the breast becomes substantial in the social contexts of womanhood and experienced more with the absence of the two. Such was the feeling during the Miss Ghana 2013 beauty Pageant whence contestants showcased their vital statistics as required. So far, there has not been a contestant with a bodily deformity (which constitutes autonomous identity outside the accepted), so it can be concluded that these platforms requires flawless female bodies (Bueskens 2015; Wood 1999), excluding tons of women in the "disabled" categories, obliging all to aspire outside the female autonomy (Butler 1999; Beauvoir 1989; Kristeva 1992; Cixous 1981; Irigaray 1980; 1985). In this light, the artist through experience aligns herself with breast cancer victims who have been rendered disabled, not by the disease itself, but by the pageants' requirements and cultural body politics. With body statistics, youthfulness, costuming, contextual body interpretations and other requirements that contestants should meet (Cixous 1981; Bueskens 2015; Wood 1999), thousands are left out; thus, raising issues that need clarification. Issues of age, identity and body categorization; issues womanhood and breast; Issues of aesthetics of the female body and, of partial representations, are all implicated especially in the case of those without breasts, either from accidents, congenital disorders, or mastectomies in our aesthetic criteria of beauty and cultural narratives. In the ensuing paragraphs, we shall discuss issues raised in the artistic intent of the project *In the Absence of Strength* (2014) hoping to understand, its implications not necessarily on breast cancer advocacy, but studio practices in cultural narratives.

The entirety of issues raised above can be summed in the identity of womanhood in the absence of breast, and the value of such issue in art representation?

Identity and Representation: Between Construction and Autopathographies.

Saar (2013) believes that *of all things, it is the tragic reality of breast cancer that brings women to full ownership of their breasts*. The paths set by Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke over the years that have given birth to myriads of practices and discourses incorporating fallibility and mortality of the artists' selves are inspirational. They are included in the pioneering works upon which artistic practices incorporating the self was built. Notable works by Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, as well as Suzanne Lacy and Anna Lebowitz, and Ana Mandieta which belong to categories of performance and phototherapy may be associated with autopathography for their political connotations.

Autopathography, apart from the politics of art, has a way of documenting the diseased body of the writer/artists by the writer/artist herself as in the works by Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke as captured in *Jo Spence's Crisis Projects 1982-92* (Spence 2012), *Exposed Wounds: The Photographic Autopathographies of Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence* (Tembeck 2008) respectively. These foundational works extend the traditional medical and social implications to art practice where *self-representation offers the writer a means by which to transform their subjective experiences of illness to politics and meaning making complicating the traditional medical connotations into cultural and institutional, potentially altering viewers' typically stigmatizing perceptions of disease.... autopathographic [representation] does not project the viewer into a complacent sense of "having done good" simply by looking at the image.... continues to raise the dialectical tensions between illness and health, living and dying, subject- and object-hood in representation* (Tembeck 2008, p 88-99)

These kinds of artistic representations are different from art making and representation where certain amount of fiction is present conventionally (Mazurek 2015; Al-Zubi 2007; DasGupta and Charon 2004; Bury 2001). Here *the viewer is addressed by a dying subject, one who once truly lived...* (Tembeck 2009, p 100) The materiality of the works however is mediated either by photography, or any other means. It is important to note that, if such works were made prior to the invention of the camera, the manifestations would have been differently represented. There are many forms of autopathographic artistic representations e.g. Audre Lorde (1980) and a host of others in Al-Zubi (2007) and Tembeck (2009), where poetry, performance, dance and other forms of artistic narratives are employed. In sculptural representation, Wilke's "wearable gum sculptures in *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1974–82)" and Spence's *The Crisis Projects* (1982–92) quickly come to mind although there may be other worthy examples like Suzanne Lacy and Anna Lebowitz's 1977 *In Mourning and In Rage* for rape victims; and Ana Mandieta's corpus of work. There are also instances where pathographies are exchanged and, or transcribed depending on the illness or the language in which the representation is to be made, making the auto mediated, but legitimate.

In Buchanan (2012), the issue of breast cancer, its origins and infection rates as well as prevention was raised and discussed. The enormity of the decisions that constitute prevention also negate the socially accepted identity construct, making victims of the disease living dead socially. In the account, Margaret W. Smith, a soldier and mother at the age of 29 years had to decide due to *the hereditary BRCA2 gene mutation, which puts a woman's chance of getting breast cancer at as high as 80 percent* (p 110). Persson (2007, p277) believes that, *...cancer struck women's apprehension of their body and identity is affected by discourses about symbols of femininity, symbols....the breast is used in the construction of femininity*. Margaret in narrating her ordeal in her double mastectomies to ward off the disease on June 2, 2009 stated, *"I walked into the army's Walter Reed Medical Center with D cups that morning; by afternoon I was flat chested... The loss was tremendous"* (Buchanan 2012, p109).

Thousands of women, including Margaret W. Smith, Christiana Applegate, Sharon Osbourne, Wanda Sykes, Giuliana Rancic, Angelina Jolie and many others have between 2005 and 2014 have decided on double mastectomies as preventive actions against contracting breast cancer (Levkoff 2011; Saar 2013). These women, like many others do not after their operations have breasts, but remain feminine and function as women and maintain relationships that function between breast-lessness. On this, Saar Tsafi remarked *the most beautiful woman on earth has no breasts – the symbol of womanhood* (Saar 2013). Saar's statement is profound, challenging basic assumptions of womanhood. What does it mean to have the most beautiful woman in the world not having the basic attribute that identify her as a woman?

This brings back issues raised in most of the arguments in Butler (1999), Cixous (2005), Beauvoir (1989), Kristeva (1992), Irigaray (1985;1980) and Moi (1989) where womanhood is subjectivity and nothing biology or physical. If anything at all, the physical or the biology only supports the constructed identity to which it is obliged. Between (Saar 2013); and Butler (1999), Cixous (2005), Beauvoir (1989), Kristeva (1992), Irigaray (1985; 1980) and Moi (1989) beauty equates abjection; beauty beyond the physical and psychological, as constructed culturally. The identity of the woman would always be performative, shuttling between culturally constructed and assigned roles, and self-defined and proclaimed; between gender performance and feminine textuality. In the issues of identity, the breast, being the most recognizable attribute of the feminine body (Bueskens 2015; Persson 2007; Bartlett 2000), and supported by a host of others who argue, that, irrespective of the biology, femininity cannot be represented bodily, and that the breast is potentially pathological, instigates imminent mortality of those whose identities are bound by it.

This means that, most women whose basic identities, at least socially are bound to the breast risk of having breast cancer, throwing culturally constructed womanhood into confusion. Although popular breast cancer discussions revolve around genetic transmissions, it is also a widely held belief, that every woman stands the risk of contracting the disease. This makes the breast apart from its erotic and nurture connotations, diseased in its basic understandings also. It is only patriarchal systems that do not understand this *mortal combat*, and oblige womanhood to be bound by breasts and die from them.

In the artistic project in Boateng (2014), by marking around the breasts; hers and those of her participants, and subsequently going through the processes in life casting (Fig. 3), Boateng metaphorically insinuated double mastectomies, and started an artistic journey in autopathography. She also as a scribe aided others (participants) who did not have the artistic language and vocabulary to transcribe their own pathographies. By participating in a genre of art whose vocabulary belongs to the feminine repertoire, and writing with her body in the performance of sculpture, she writes a feminist text (Butler 1999; 1988; Tembeck 2009; 2008; Cixous 2005; 1981; Beauvoir 1989; Kristeva 1992; Irigaray 1985; 1980). In this text, as Tembeck (2009; 2008) and Al-Zubi (2007), as well as Mazurek (2015), DasGupta and Charon (2004) and Bury (2001) believe, have advocacy as an inherent property whiles at the same time contesting socially inscribed practices that discriminate against diseased bodies and suppress the female identity. She has through such actions, created an identity in Ghanaian art, autonomy in bodily representations, outside the prevailing materialist and other performative arts. The few practices that is near in form include the practice of Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, who though male, crosses into feminine domains to contest inherent culturally projected identity dichotomies and binaries. In art, Rufina's work (Fig 1) seeks reactions that are far from traditional art appreciation where artistic audiencing is mediated by fictional interfaces of artistic productions, formats and proposed forms of consumptions. Tembeck (2008) asserts *bewilderment* of artistic spectatorship in the face of the *dilemma and impotence* of the artist's re-representations, complicating *the dialogical interaction of the object and its audience* (p.99-100).



Fig 1. Untitled. Boateng Rufina (2014). Reinforced Silicon Rubber casts of breast of participants. Courtesy Artist.

Female Identity:

The issue of the identity of the woman is as ambiguous as it is in any form of identity formation (Buckingham, 2008), has been raging on for decades. Any attempt at defining womanhood now would amount to perpetuating established notions and boundaries that contemporary womanhood contest as being constructed, patriarchal and insensitive to the feminine sensibilities (Beauvoir, 1989). Numerous scholars have attempted and keep clarifying what exactly constitute womanhood. From classical philosophies, continental and emergent feminist philosophies, womanhood and its continual change and quest to free itself from socio-political constructs are an ongoing debate. The list of scholars on this subject is endless, but worthy of mentioning are the women who are defining the feminine identities outside the patriarchal definitions and expectations. Helene Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Alison Bartlett and numerous others, including Michel Foucault have had their opinions on femininity and the female identity. Issues raised in *The Second Sex: Female as The Other*, (1989) by Simone de Beauvoir; *This Sex Which Is No One* (1985) by Luce Irigaray; *Maternal Passions*, by Julia Kristeva; *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (1993) by Judith Butler; *Thinking Through Breasts: Writing Maternity*, (2000) by Alison Bartlett; *A History of The Breast* (1997) by Marilyn Yalom have helped in the discussion at hand, and feminine identity formation through the years.

Butler 2005 (as cited in Brady and Schirato 2011: 5) believes that identity politics are culturally historically informed. From religious and cultural perspectives, womanhood is bothered with numerous expectations in physiology, fertility, childbirth, nurturing and domestic management, psychology and sexuality as well as other professional demands. Generally speaking, womanhood has been cultural specific depending on the socio-cultural expectations of specific environment. It is both biological and cultural (Beauvoir 1989; Irigaray 1985; Butler 1993). As gendered people we come to womanhood with nostalgia, familiarity and expectations; relationships that spring from our very humanity; humanity that is cultural. Womanhood is referent to a set visual, material, psychological and philosophical understanding that has their spatio-temporal presences. For instance, womanhood has a gestation relative to what is available visually, materially and psychologically.

The child/adolescent/adult/elderly, girl/woman, puberty/menopause, whole/partial, birth /death, and especially, man/woman/man complexities of the 21st century possibilities are what define woman. It is generally understood that, womanhood is *comprehensible in relation to the cultural expectations on what is supposed to happen with the female body in different ages* (Persson 2007: 275), without such it does not belong to the category. There are instances when womanhood is defined by the presences of some body parts, or to some extent the degree to which these parts present themselves visibly, materially or even psychologically. For example, the presence of the hair, breasts, hips/buttocks, complexion and the manner in which the subject appear and behave culturally. When a girl child is born the very presence of certain biological traits like vagina throws her development along certain cultural perspectives and expectations. At this point, she is, and is not a woman, and these perspectives and expectations give impetus for cultural practices such as betrothing (Beauvoir 1989). It is culturally expected, that she develops both biologically and psychologically to meet the terms of the betrothal. The culture that this child is born into moulds it into their expectations hoping its *biologism* informs its conformity to culturally prescribed life of womanhood and femininity. With these, the identity of woman is not native to her, but cultivated and projected. Memberships of the culture then enforce and reinforce it whiles subjects participate and perform this identity construction to some preferential agencies that undermine autonomy (Cixous 1981).

Both Luce Irigaray and Toril Moi approach womanhood and its concomitant description *femininity* as being culturally given and set between *biologism* and *desire* (Irigaray 1985; 1980; Moi 1989). Irigaray traditionally believes that womanhood is biological, and that it is set within, without the possibility of alteration from without to avert any predicament such dispositions impose on a woman (Irigaray 1980: 74). Yet her value accrues from these dilemmas, such as *...her maternal role, and, addition, from her "femininity." But in fact that femininity is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation* (Irigaray 1985, p 84-96). She goes on to argue that, the feminine body is a "prop" for masculine fantasies, as *....the place where their encoding as speaking subjects is inscribed and where the "objects" of their desire are projected....(Ibid)* (Figs. 2 and 3). This view is shared by Moi who also believes femininity is a patriarchal construct and bothers on "*biologism*", as the belief that womanhood is *biologically given...and not historically or socially given female essence* (Moi 1989, p 123)

Womanhood have a set of attributes that through the years have accrued to the female human. Included in this set are the feminine body with its peculiar materiality and visuality; socially accepted performances of this body; and that, many disagree. Saar (2013), Levkoff (2011) and of course Boateng (2014), among the teaming lot believe that, womanhood is so much more than the sum of the parts”, and “not on the presence, absence or size of any part of her body”.



(Fig. 1.) La Bacchante by Gustave Courbet (1844-47), Rau Foundation, Cologne, Germany.
Courtesy Gustave Courbet .org <http://www.gustavecourbet.org/La-Bacchante,-c.1844-47.html>



(Fig. 3.) The Three Graces by Antonio Canova Rome, 1814-1817, carved marble. Museum no. A.4-1994, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Courtesy Victoria Albert Museum
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-three-graces/>

To Simone de Beauvoir, the nature of the female body and its associated biological timelines and subjectivities complicate identity formation for woman. Beauvoir believes that woman from birth, through puberty, childbirth and nurture, and menopause is plagued with series of crises that subject her to the cause of humanity at the expense of her autonomy. As such her sexuality, which is as a result of her morphology (the presence genitalia), is opposed to autonomy (1989). This, as opposed that of the male, has compromised her quest for independence, and where identity is projected onto her contrary to her exhibiting those traits. Woman's identity is intact and equivalent to any from fertilization when egg/sperm generate fetus, gestation and birth, childhood until puberty, then menstruation, conception, childbirth and menopause complicate such an identity. During the initial phases, identical identities based on rudiments of conception (reproductive quotas of single sets of equivalent chromosomes in equivalence sperm/egg at fertilization), basic equivalences in basic identities in childhood, and so much more equate female to male identities. To equate the above stated post-puberty phenomena to immanence/transcendence in the *male/female dichotomy is incongruous with the contribution during fertilization (reproduction) and basic identities and identical identities* (p4-7). Hence, woman is not born, but made with cultural psychologisms and performances, alongside her biological predisposition which she has no control making (Tilghman 2009).

Luce Irigaray believes female identity is compromised before she is even born. Her biology has had cultural inscriptions prior to her birth, and she is supposed to live by the dictates inscribed. Within these inscriptions are the maternal subjectivities, feminine sensibilities and sexual objectifications as roles for the girl child to perform as woman (Irigaray 1980; 1985). Her identity is further compromised in performing these roles.

For instance, in her maternal role, she becomes the ovaries that beget the fetus, the womb that carries and protects it, and the breast that nourishes the child after birth and for these her value (Irigaray 1985, p 84-96). By the same token, performing of the feminine silence her and confines her to domesticity, whiles her sexuality subjugates and objectifies her (Cixous 1981; Irigaray 1985).

Judith Butler suggests identity of woman accrues to her through repetitive performance of the subjective issues of biology, psychology and performance raised by de Beauvoir and Irigaray (Butler, 1988). She believes that identity is constructed over time couple with body schema, and must be understood as *the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self* (p519). Butler posits identity as fashioned through *social temporality and appearance of substance*, with society as audience, and performers themselves believing and performing that which they have come to believe repeatedly with social sanctions and taboos (p518-520). These result in sedimentation when these roles are performed in relation to sanctioned expectations appropriated for human females. There are body types and roles that are intrinsically feminine and continuous use of such bodies in performance of such roles or otherwise reinforce or contest established identities. These roles include basically, coital and maternal roles. She believes that, relationships of the issues between expression and performance of woman's sexuality that is confusing her identity should be revisited, and when done, the artificiality of womanhood would be unearthed (Butler 1988; 1999).

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* butler concedes that in order for gendering to succeed there should be *the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance*. Here, gender is understood as *the workings of "sex", where "sex" is an obligatory injunction for the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize itself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility* (Butler 1999, p75-177). Doing this repeatedly and sustained culturally identifies the performer. Butler believes that, since the identity of women emanate from stylized repetition of acts through time, womanhood is borne by the very acts it performs repeatedly and nothing corporeal (*physiological landscapes and landmarks*) (p, 179). These she thinks these when contested, throw the truth value of established gendered identities (including woman's) in doubt and open up possibility of other forms of identities outside the culturally inscribed ones. She asserts that, woman and all its cultural ramifications are in the state of doubt because:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; ... a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (p180) This she believes has the capacity of circumventing prevailing cultural constructs on *the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity* and open up the possibilities for *proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality* (ibid).

Gender is constructed through customary practices, that have apportioned roles, using basic physiology and biological possibilities, and practitioner been identified with respective practices, hence womanhood like any identity construction, denotes, *that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed* (p181), not an identity prior to such construction. She contends that, *physiological landscapes and landmarks* that have gained signification as being feminine attribute turned so due to the numerous performances that they were put to while fulfilling specie/cultural obligations, and are façades obliterating real identities (Butler 1999; Beauvoir 1989; Irigaray 1985). In channeling Beauvoir, Butler questions the presumed stability in gendering woman because shifting specie/cultural performative obligation as well as entities themselves shuffling physiologies and performances confront and alter existing identities (Butler 1988).

Helene Cixous (1981; 2005), in *Castration or Decapitation* and *Stigmata: Escaping Text* respectively believes that womanhood in caught in phallogentric representation and that women only dream identity outside the social and established. She believes that woman's subjectivities are trained based on their respective biology culturally and plays same to such environment without thinking about them. This she sees as constituting *muteness* (Cixous 1981, p43; 2005, p36). She argues that, the displacement of the feminine autonomy is a *backlash* of masculinity's *castration complex* in the form of *decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head* (Cixous 1981, p43). Cixous believes womanhood has been stigmatized with the masculine (2005, p13) and that man has always found woman incomprehensible, because she functions *outside the symbolic* and has sought to impose a comprehensible other (Man) on her (Cixous 1981, p46-49). This phenomenon has rendered woman mute and hysterical to the disturbance of the masculine.

She states that *women's weapon is the word, because they talk, talk endlessly, chatter, overflow with sound, mouth-sound: but they don't actually speak ... they are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body* (p49).

Cixous believes that real identity of women lies in this hysteria, and it is within this, like “love”, that prevailing cultural constructions and phallocentrism can be contested through resistance to cultural appropriations and cessation of feminine performative rituals suggested by Butler and crafted by Boateng, and start performances that invokes *man's classic fear of being expropriated* and challenge the cultural economy ... *so as to put aside all negativeness and bring out a positiveness which might be called the living other, the rescued other, the other unthreatened by destruction* (p50). It is through these that true identities could be re-inscribed on the female body through feminine textuality. On this, she claims that the masculine order or the symbolic has ordered things in such a way that they obscure the true identity of the feminine into serious predictability, drawn boundaries around and incapacitated it, and every expression is misunderstood. It is through feminine text that female identities would emerge. She defines feminine textuality as every performance that is not carved out by culture, and is antagonistic to, and destabilizes cultural constructions and anticipations of the feminine. She sees idiosyncratic feminine subjectivities “.....which can appear in primitive or elementary texts as a fantasy of blood, of menstrual flow, etc., but which I prefer to see as vomiting, as “throwing up,” “disgorging” (p,53-54); performances which traditional societies saw as taboos, hence removed to *outside the city*.

Since identity of female within Cixous' discourse lies outside the symbolic, law and culture, it is beyond sex and performances and hence beyond gender; a discourse whose activities are organized around the phallus and its subsequent castration. With this, attempts at revealing feminine identity should first seek to withdraw all social performances that support the cultural masquerades constructed for woman, and then superimpose with *feminine writing oozing* ever present memory, invoking the *decapitations associated with the feminine knowledge* and stigmatization of the body; a textuality that pour innermost feelings alien to the male social order to set sexual differentiation that *disconnect the phallogentrized body from cultural grips and configurations amidst humour and laughter* (Cixous 2005; 1981).

Within the texts of Butler, Irrigaray, Beauvoir, Kristeva, Tilghman and Toril Moi, the female identity is segmented and staggered into social acceptances and taboos. For instance, the female body cannot be treated like the male, because it is its other (Beauvoir 1989). Even within the contexts of third wave feminism in which the feminine performances that mimic, ridicule and contest established male archetypes (Cullen 2000; Butler 1999). A place male body is represented nude as in athletics; the female body is covered for indecency of similar exposure. Feminine nudity is placed between private, for male amusement; and the public, mental derailment, where it is deemed taboo. It is not possible to see bare-chested or nude females publicly without the “normal” indecency tag. The subject of female nudity is male controlled and a masculine subject (Tilghman 2009), and has been explored widely, especially in the visual arts.

The few cases when female nudity has been explored by women have been to register displeasure of extreme impoverishment of their identities as in Ana Mandieta's works, and the most recent being Arab and Iranian women in the Louvre Art Museum, Paris in March 2014. Enwezor and Chika (2009) talks about West and South African women exploring the nude feminine bodies as political tools for public protests against British colonial and apartheid policies. This makes nude protests universal for human activism, but more intense when women engage such tool. When the private within the symbolic is rendered public in this manner the order is engaged forcefully and contested. When the feminine come to its own, the masculine is seriously agitated. Carolyn Tilghman (2009) puts this well when she states that, *men find the need to turn away from the (de)naturalized, replicating, mute, mutilated body, without memory, that is determined by the male-defined mother's body, and turn toward dwelling within bodies defined by themselves for themselves.* (p49)

Bartlett (2000), Bueskens (2014) and Tilghman (2009), talk about how the female has been rendered unpopular in the public sphere, to the detriment of even assigned performances like breastfeeding and normal bodily inspections within the male economy. Besides the objectifications and discrimination, numerous authors including Bartlett (2000), Persson (2007), Bueskens (2014) and Tilghman (2009), channeling Irrigaray, Cixous, Beauvoir, Kristeva and Butler, as in Yalom (1997), conclude that the breast is the most identifiable attribute of the female body and sexuality. For instance Therese Persson believes that, *if you put a pair of breasts on a body, you make it feminine.... The breast is an aesthetic sign for womanhood possible to put on and take off, accentuate or conceal* (Persson 2007, p471-475).

Alison Bartlett thinks of breasts as performative, as sites of representation and knowledge, and thus breasts have traditionally mattered in popular and symbolic language as signifiers of either sexuality or maternity (Bartlett 2000) thereby siding with Persson (2007). Petra Bueskens acknowledges the multiplicity of meanings of breasts. They include sex, nurture, identifiers and knowledge. She believes *the lactating breast is discursively promiscuous. Both the milk and the feeding relation disrupt extant separations between sexuality and maternity, public and private, self and other on which our liberal individualist culture is founded* (Bueskens 2015, p215). She sees breast as a set of contradictions within feminine identity; between life and death and of identity of the owner. There is a tension between breast as life-giving and breast as life-threatening, which reveal the ambiguity of the breast (2015).

The knowledge of different feminine identity signifiers comes from knowing, and as humans, and as stated earlier in this paper, authors from experience concur with Alison Bartlett, Therese Persson and Petra Bueskens on the basic visual attribute of the woman. With the vagina and womb hidden even when a woman is nude, the breast remains the most conspicuous of the attributes, and any attempt at their removal, contest the status quo. From birth, through nourishment, the knowledge accrued to one from the feminine relation coming into itself during puberty and issues of sex and erogeneity, the breast is the most associated with and publicly insinuated and understood instantly (Bueskens 2015; Persson 2007; Bartlett 2000). It is based on these basic assumptions that many cultural ideologies and practices are formulated and transmitted (Beauvoir 1989), culminating in an identity tag, that everyone belonging to the female gender must wear. Of course, it is not easy identifying a woman casually as not possessing vagina or womb (Butler 1999), as it would be for another without breast, giving impetus for even transvestites and drags to opt for, in order to be identified as feminine.

This ideology and practice of tagging a group with a sign is prejudicial, and it has the tendency of discriminating against others within and without the group. It is like saying humans have eyes, ears, nose, limbs with fingers and toes, a torso and sexual organ. Anybody without any of this identified denominator ceases to be human. This leaves behind, those born with congenital disorders, accident victims and even fetus. These features do not make human, but humans, apart from being living, may have them as additional attributes. Arguments raised by Luce Irrigaray, Helene Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler and Toril Moi, contest such ideologies because they deny members of a group their basic existence and rights to function as human beings. There have been cases where female athletes have been publicly ridiculed as being males, just because their professional demands and hormonal dispensations limit the growth or development of breasts. Girls at puberty, who do not develop breasts as expected, are put under intense pressure, to perform magic and have prescribed schema of breasts. Mature women are equally under intense pressure to meet the socially accepted cups, for the right cultural associations to be extended to them. These practices are institutional, and as argued by Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irrigaray, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and many others, are to keep the female gender in conformity to institutional pleasures (Boateng 2014), and denied the accessibility to their own identities.

While keeping up with this constructed identity, womanhood also laden with the fact that the sign of this identity has the propensity of being a channel of death through breast cancer. This form of contradiction the breast possess has kept many women in a state of fright, and only few brave the culture of silence around the disease and publicly discuss the depth to which it scars its victims. Special mention can be made of Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke, who through their art initiated discussions that culminated in the artistic practice in autopathography in which artists employ their own bodies in disease situations as the subject and material for practices and discourses through their work.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this paper we suggested hysteria in *Kapesh's* reaction to *Consuela's* de-familiarized body. Butler, Irrigaray, Beauvoir, Kristeva, Tilghman and Toril Moi believe actual emancipation of the female identity would come from such situations and performances; original, because it originates within the feminine self and outside the male economy, and contests the gaze with complexities it cannot comprehend. Cixous in her texts believes that, texts like what Boateng (2014) promotes, humours the masculine contrivances in female artistic representations, and reserves the last laugh to the represented (Cixous 2005, p55). As gendered people outside the feminine text we adapt to the emerging identity constructions from our inherited and cultural projections. We come to the meaning of the breast with a cultural baggage in various relationships, and can only accept the de-familiarized or de-sexualized female body and within the acceptance modes, and negotiate ensuing reactions (Tembeck 2008).

Kristeva, Bartlett and Bueskens articulate relationship with the breast beyond sexual and nurture, although Butler, Irigaray and Cixous have reservation to that. This form of representation is the authentic female identity (feminine performance) outside the cultural performances (coital, birth, nurture etc). The work reviews the artist's self and her practice, as well as theories that drive the reproductions of the self in art representations, especially in sculpture outside photography and performance proper. It is an attempt that needs to be encouraged and refined in the three dimensional arts, where reproduction of the self is always mediated materially, same as verbal and text based autopathographies with representational bottlenecks Tembeck (2008; Bell 2002).

Boateng's work metaphorically articulates an artistic culture in the representation of the abject where the surgically removed breasts of the artist and her volunteers in their deformed states are hurled at the viewer in similar formats hitherto sexual and gloss (Figs 2 and 3). These are traditional representations that characterized western art until postmodernity. They include classical representations exemplified in body of works by Canova and their later abstractions in Picasso and Archipenko. In most of such representations the female body is reconstructed in platonic sense to articulate aesthetics that bothers on, *health of body and soul ... by the perception of beautiful forms* (Wood 1999, p67). They are abstractions, crafted from fictional patriarchal ideologies as real for sensual and corporeal masculine consumptions, as in Canova's *Three Graces* (fig3), or Courbet's *La bacchante* (fig 2). When they are abstracted (as in abstractions in visual representation), they are for stylization that seek to obscure the immediate apprehension of the inherent masculine interests. Representations in *In the Absence of Strength* (fig 1), though equally abstract, emanate from a practice that defies sensual representations of the female body with introduction of disgust (Cixous 2005; Miller 1997; Kristeva 1982) it is a confrontation with sophists modes captured in Wood (1999), and masculine comforts that are inscribed in them, as those *bodily failings indicate insufficiency* to accepted modes (Miller 1997, p205). Such representations, authors believe freeze the gaze (Tembeck 2008) which has remained discerning beneficiary in classical representations, and redirects it to the authentic issues of the female identity. The stitched decapitated breast and its non-breasted bodies effectively *upstages the voyeur on female sex* (Aydemir 2007, p179) and suspended by both the sight of the work, and the thought about the states of corporeal origins of the organs herein presented. This sort of response is what Tembeck (2008) and Bell (2002) call *the impossible in autopathographical representations*, and Butler and the host of other feminist theorists refers to as *authentic female performance*.

The question now is, to what extent does a single narrative, like the work under review count as an autopathographical work, looking at the body of work by Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke? Authors believe that, this is answerable in three ways. These are found in the thematic considerations of the work, the mass and class action of diseased people (Some of the Potential) and their auto-transcriptions, as well as, the format of the representation and references it makes.

The first is the subject matter of breast cancer which affects thousands of women, and the numerous ways of managing the disease. There are myriads of literature from these numerous sufferers to the point of limited authenticity within stories the disease engender (Mazurek 2015; Tembeck 2009; 2008; Al-Zubi 2007; DasGupta and Charon 2004; Bell 2002; Bury 2001). By having her single narrative within these thousands, the artist/victim/victor references these sources, thereby clarifying areas she could. Secondly, per the number of participants, irrespective of the pathological circumstances at the point of going through their metaphoric procedures (Buchanan 2012; Levkoff 2011; Saar 2013), undertook a preventive measure with some awareness against the disease telling individual abridged narratives in a collective manner- like short stories in a big volume. The awareness of the politics and meaning of their actions, as well as responses they sought provoke are implicit in their action individually and collectively.

Lastly, the format of representation; surgically removed breasts stitched onto a minimalist surface randomly, tuning the work into a collage (e.g. the head of John, the Baptist on a tray) references classical picturesque female representations as in figs 2 and 3 (Yalom 1997). As an autopathography, besides telling a pathological story, it contests traditional forms of audiencing in which aestheticisms and sublimations are norms (Tembeck 2009; 2008). These and many others, and in addition to the socio-political implications of the work make it a worthy candidate as an autopathographical narrative in art and within breast cancer advocacy. The female body in the traditional media comes with its cultural baggage, abuses and internal contradictions that make it complex to explore within 21st century art, compared to even half a century earlier. Discussions, such as above suggest how women themselves view attempts at objectifications that come from traditional representations of the female body, vis a vis the pageant.

Explorations such as Boateng's work reviewed here provide entry points into its contexts as idiom and medium of expression wholly or partially with the artist's corporeal states as methodology and strategy of authentication, while retaining its potency within art discourses.

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