



Robert Smart

The Ambivalent Body:
On The Short Films of
Monika K. Adler

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Yet her short films are intimate and minimal, the majority of them limited to two figures, one male, one female; domestic melodramas of desire, estrangement, sorrow and rage. The males however continue to carry with them the threat or at least the echo of the past's marauding ravagers or act as inheritors and enforcers of oppressive and brutal orthodoxies: The women appear perpetually trapped in scenarios of betrayal, disappointment, subjugation and reduction, frequently if unknowingly complicit in their own bad outcomes.

The Ambivalent Body: On The Short Films of **Monika K. Adler**

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Love as conventionally understood is nowhere in view: only its aftermath, its failure. With the exception of *Come back to the Trees* the love attempted by the male-female pair has ended. In *The Beauty of the Shadow* and *Mutability* the failed love is viewed retrospectively, with mortified chagrin in the case of the former and with obsessive regret in the case of the latter. In *Chernobyl of Love* the pain of rejected, brutalized love escalates into violent revenge and uncontainable anguish. Only in the very short film, *Purification*, are the lovers ever shown occupying the same physical space.

In *Chernobyl of Love*, the woman is alive the man dead; in *Mutability*, the man is alive,



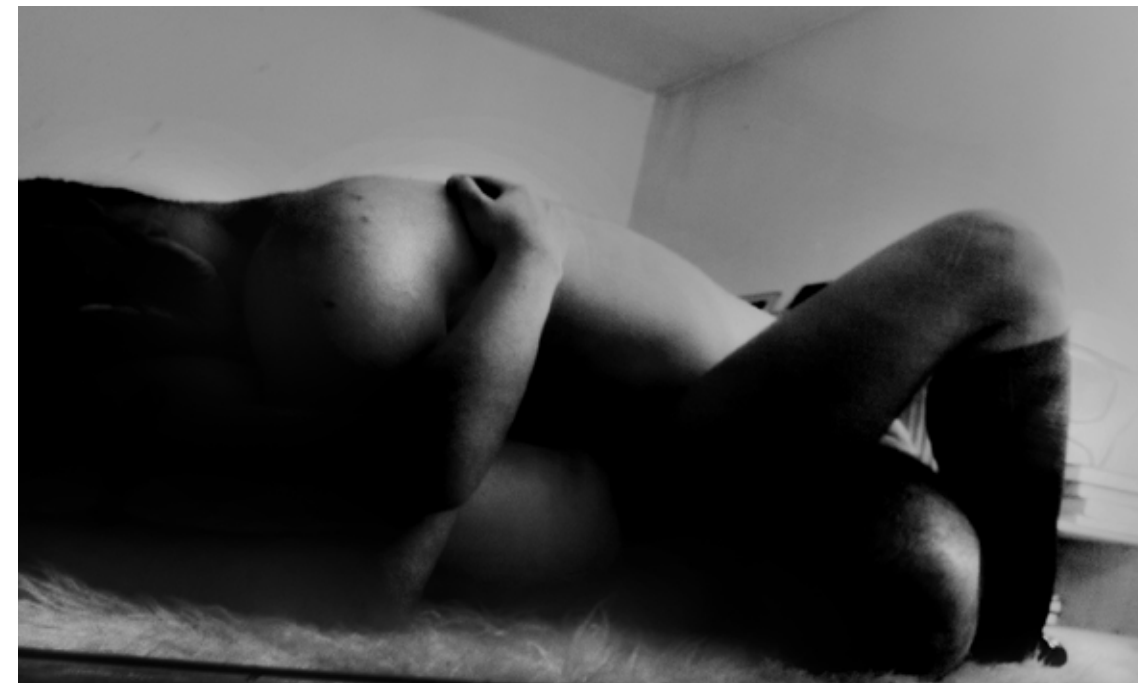
Mutability, 2013, United Kingdom

the woman dead, In *Purification*, though both alive and together on one room the couple enact a scenario of ambiguous and erotically charged subjugation. Only in is *Come back to the Trees* is there no dyad. Indeed no man is present unless he is embodied in the camera's eye as a witness to the bizarre clutch of women that has congregated in the woods and is apparently engaged in a recondite and atavistic ritual as threatening as it is incomprehensible. If male this stunned onlooker may be a modern day Pentheus watching in rapt terror the rites of thus Neo-Bacchae, who will tear him limb from limb before he can grasp the riddle of their weird conjurations.

Born in Poland in 1982, Monika K. Adler grew up in an Eastern Europe suffused with memories as well as more tangible reminders of large-scale assaults on human bodies, particularly female bodies, motivated by ideology and ethnic hatred. From the Nazis, to the Soviets invaders (who victimized her grandmother's cousin) to the rape wars of nearby Serbia, the history of the degradation of the body haunts the imagination of this brilliant young photographer and filmmaker. Yet her works are not exercises in feminist or political filmmaking, such polemics are too obvious and reductive, failing to capture the deeper reality that she seeks to evoke: a reality that eludes easy definitions and explanations and that perhaps derives from--or more likely informs--the unconscious mind of human beings.

The specter of historical trauma, the manifestation of mystery and desire in the human body, the experience of women as objects and victims of outmoded and pernicious institutions which nonetheless continue to exercise an influence on our thoughts and behaviors, are just part of what Adler's work addresses.

By far the majority of her career and reputation thus far is as a still photographer and one can trace the fraught male-female pairings back to the still photography that Adler composed from 1999 to 2010 before shooting her *The Beauty of the Shadow* in 2010. In many of these works, the majority of which are in black and white, two figures are presented in ambiguous relationship to each other: distance, position, and attitude suggestive of



Coyote, 2013, platinum print, 30 x 40 cm

menace or disconnection or estrangement. Adler's subjects more often than not have their backs to the camera and in other cases some other element, including the frame line, obscures their faces. In Adler's photographs both human beings and objects emanate a sense of abandonment or otherness, strange and liminal manifestations existing on the border between our familiar world and some mysterious and ineffable dimension not amenable to full disclosure or to rational discourse. Twilight glimpses of the troubled dreams that infuse our apprehension of this world if not a phantasm of another realm that at moments of extremity or disruption impinges on this one.

A photograph of a couple making love in the *Coyote* sequence manifests this tension. At first glance a simple representation of sexual intimacy between a man and woman on a bed what quickly becomes apparent is the possibility of assault and dominance; the male body is so aggressively on top of and virtually enveloping the female body beneath. Is this the loving communion of two people or the smothering and suppression of one by the other? Is this yet another portrait of a world where the more powerful body rules the weaker? This photograph exemplifies the unsettling equivocality of Adler's work.

Therefore, when watching one of the short films produced by Monika K. Adler, or contemplating one of her many still photographs, one is forced to struggle against the compulsion to interpret, to reach for kind of definitive theme or idea to which the images can be reduced.

The images that Adler confronts the viewer with remain not-quite-readable, subject to a multiplicity of interpretations, generated by a process that, partly unconscious on the part of the artist, elicits unconscious responses from each individual beholder: each apprehension or scenario is unique to each set of eyes that regards it. And yet the way that this troubling and pregnant indeterminacy is accomplished differs greatly from one medium to the other. If Adler's prolific output of still photography served as a prolonged apprenticeship and preparation for the short films they are nevertheless imbued with a

very particular set of attributes and a unique atmosphere of evocation, desire and dread all their own.

It was only after fully exploring and refining this visual language, this ongoing meditation on corporeality, anxiety, mystery and desire that Adler finally took the plunge into motion pictures. It is immediately obvious that Adler's films represent a dramatic departure from her photographic work yet on close analysis it is clear they are informed by the same vision and informed by the same experiences and cultural, intellectual and aesthetic influences as the work that preceded it.

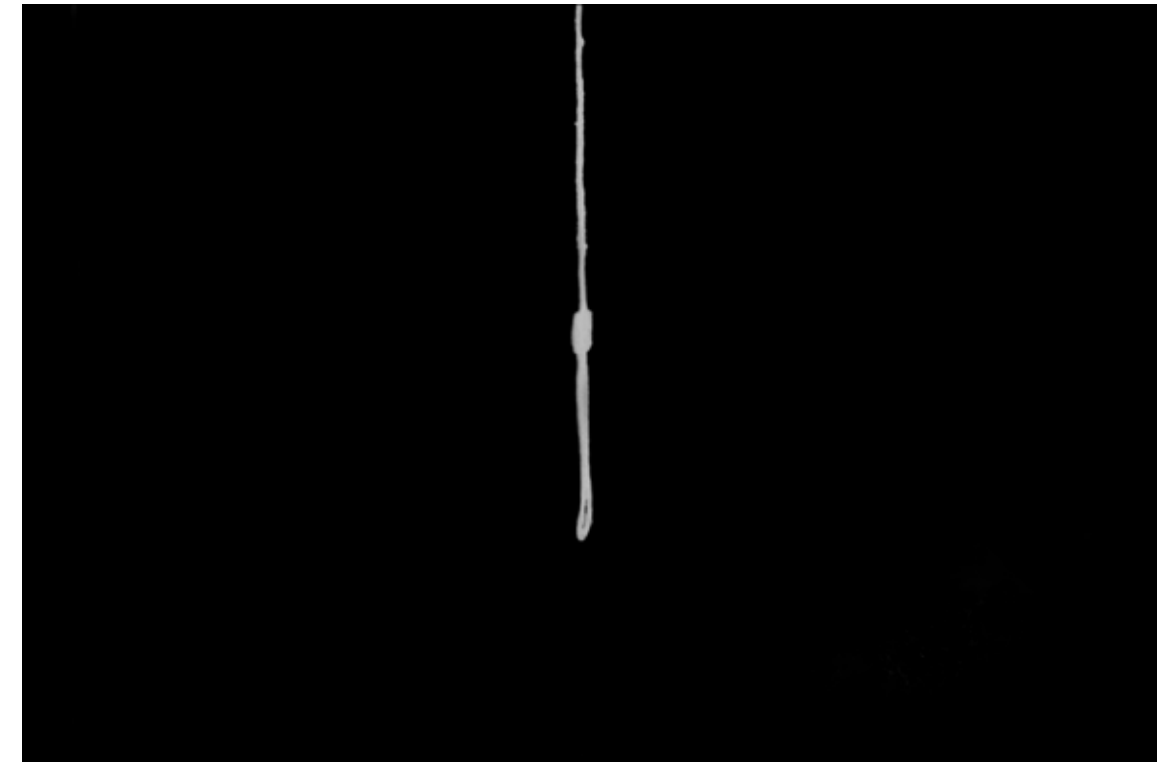
THE BEAUTY OF THE SHADOW



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland, Production Still

Among the numerous and varied artists and movements that influenced Adler's work, in all its manifestations, she cites Ingmar Bergman, Francis Bacon, Andy Warhol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, Existentialism, Zen, Andrzej Żuławski, Carravaggio, Vincent van Gogh, Camille Claudel, Francesca Woodman, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Michael Haneke, David Cronenberg, David Lynch, Nicholas Roeg, Quentin Tarantino and the Madonna of the '80's and '90's.

In Adler's first film *The Beauty of the Shadow*, produced in 2011, the influence of Warhol and Madonna are perhaps most evident. Featuring Adler herself as the protagonist (with her narration voiced by Sofia-Karla Axelsson). The twelve minute *Shadow* is ostensibly an Anias Nin-style "memoir" about the "unbearable lightness of life" of her Bohemian escapades in Paris, "a desert for the heart," that provokes in our comely heroine a desperate need to love. Adler vamps with self-conscious sexiness, her highly eroticized



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

movements as her vocal double introduces us to the "loser" man who was to become the partner of Adler's dead-end romance.

The loser man is always presented in close up, his gestures and wet-lipped facial expressions suggesting vast universes of creepiness. His first appearance features him applying lipstick, an element of sexual ambiguity that will figure significantly as the film proceeds. Adler's character apparently becomes enamored of him after he ejaculates on her expensive gold dress, immediately conveying the idea of devaluation and degradation that will characterize much of the images that follow.

We are told that once this *amour fou* is underway, the couple travels to Seville Spain to "sanctify our untrue love in front of God through B's close friend Father Antonio." Here the narration ends and we descend into a maelstrom of grainy or partially obscured images of religious processions, explicit sex, implied violence, transgression, squalor and religious mania occasionally punctuated with cynical and profane text that apparently stands in for the dialogue of the lovers and Father Antonio.

The title sequence prefigures many of the images that will appear and reappear in *Shadow's* central section as well as offering a foretaste of the droning, distressing electronic score that will amplify the sense of malaise throughout the fragmentary and ambiguously presented downward spiral of Monika's "great" romance.

The first image, a hissing snake, is never repeated, though given the films Biblical and religious references is probably a foreshadowing of a thematic concern with flesh versus spirit, temptation, compromise and fall from grace. This is followed in rapid succession by shots of a noose, a skinned animal (Most likely a dog) and large erect penis (a still photograph from Adler's *You Are my Cocaine* Photo sequence, implying an irrationally self-destructive and addictive relationship with a man. Cocaine is referred to explicitly during



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

the opening voice over and another still photograph with the word “Cocaina” appears late in the film’s central section. If there is any difference between Eve and the protagonist of *Shadow* it consists in the likelihood that the latter actively seeks out her serpents.

What is most surprising about the central maelstrom of Adler’s doomed love story is how minimalist it is. The images are almost exclusively an alternation of still photographs, text, repeated shots usually taken from a relatively fixed camera position, deliberately diffused, fragmented or obscured and repeated with variations. And yet it does manage to convey one or more relatively coherent narrative trajectories.

This second act commences with a dialogue is portrayed in text against a black screen ostensibly between Father Antonio and one of the two lovers. When asked, “What is the most important thing in life,” Antonio apparently replies: Sex and Money. His implied interlocutor then asks, “Where is the love?” “In my ASS!” is the reply. This exchange inaugurates what will be *Shadow*’s obsessive focus on anal sex.

Following this textual dialogue exchange we are presented with grainy but explicit sequence of sexual intercourse between what appears to be a man and woman. In text the woman asks, “Why do you fuck me anally?” To which the man replies, “Ha! Have you ever heard



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

of contraception?” “Too late, I’m pregnant!” The woman retorts. “I will kill you little slut!” The man exclaims. You get the strong sense that these people are not playing it straight with each other. Their relationship a kind of combat; It is deception, manic eroticism, manipulation and potentially explosive hostility.

In such a crucible violence is inevitable and here Adler deploys one of her still photographs, *Every Thought is a Prayer*, which depicts a woman lying face down in a room strewn with debris, her upper body lost in shadow, her white dress hiked up over one

hip and a religious icon of Mary beyond and above her, continuing the film’s linkage of religious imagery and rhetoric with perverse sexuality and the specter of murderous rage.

The picture fades to black and a text legend runs across the bottom of the screen: “Good Girls Are not Supposed to Like Anal Sex.” insinuating a possible additional motive (Aside from the unwanted pregnancy) for the brutality depicted in the photograph.

If the woman in the photograph was assaulted due either to “duplicious” maternity or to an unsanctioned delectation of at least one form of non-procreative sex.

After a Close Up of a man starting to speak and abruptly cut off the film’s religious motif is introduced with no small degree of irony as the viewer is confronted with yet another still photograph, this time presenting a fetid wall, its paint peeling, scrawled with graffiti bearing the less-than-reassuring (given the setting) homily, “God is alive and loves you!” A message that is undercut by a corresponding message written below, “God is dog spelled backward.” The transcendent notion of an omnipotent spiritual being caring for you individually brought to earth and incarnated in the flesh of a domestic animal. (There is an interesting connection here between this image and Adler’s short video art piece, *In the Name of the Father*, wherein a large black dog gnaws on two large, fleshy bones



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

while on the soundtrack a priest intones the *Pater Noster*. The dogma of a mythological ideology, one that informs every human institution in those regions where it predominates, that informs humanity’s idea of itself and dictates both behavior and emotions--set in opposition to the most crudely base aspect of physical existence, the predation and consumption of one animal’s flesh by another in grotesque parody of Holy Communion).

The loser lover appears again after several seconds of black screen, slowing moving his tongue around his teeth and grimacing followed by another fade to black. A male voice on



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

the soundtrack asks, “Were your parent’s religious people?” A question followed by fleeting, indistinct flashes of a person crossing herself, which is followed in turn by a voluptuous female mouth, its tongue slowly licking its bottom lip. Once again Adler cuts to one of her still photographs, *Bed of Sorrow*, a stark white bed in a dimly lit room, conveying a mood of futility and inevitable loneliness, perhaps the bed that one will die in. Indeed the specter of death haunts the film’s entire erotic meditation.

At this point the film takes a left turn. One hears a male voice exhorting Antonio to keep going, keep going over the sounds of two males breathing hard. The suggestion that they are engaged in some kind of sexual encounter is inescapable and that a love triangle is underway wherein the female protagonist is being betrayed by her lover with his friend Antonio. It is difficult to know quite what to make of the next shot of the lower half of a woman’s face, partially veiled, sticking her tongue out in insouciant mockery: Does she know? Is she amused? Is this a manifestation of a kind of cheeky resignation?

Over more heavy male breathing the male voice continues: “If I give not all I have, if I give my body to be burned but have not love, I have nothing!” There is once again the merging of religious rhetoric and sentiment with the implication of sexual congress, in this case homosexual relations between two men.

The film cuts quickly to the image of a blackboard which reads: “The Soul is the need of the Spirit.” Does the individual soul seek to reach out, to lose itself, in the ineffable, the infinite? But does it ultimately seek that communion entangled in the body of another human being?

A rapid Close Up of a grimacing male (the lover?) is followed by a shot of an erect penis being stroked and yet another Close Up of the male, his expression intense, followed by the female sticking out her tongue, this time with a hint of lascivious provocation.

As the male breathing continues Adler now utilizes dialogue that seems to have been appropriated from a Hollywood movie with a male character, quoting First Corinthians,

extolling the virtues of true love (Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful...), which continues over multiple shots of male masturbation, a photograph of a handwritten sign that reads Cocaina, perhaps implying the addictive nature of the activity portrayed (maybe someone else has become the lover’s “cocaine?”). As the recitation of true love’s attributes continues accompanied by male breathing Adler cuts to a first shot of heart outlined in gravel and then to a very graphic sequence containing two nude figures, one bent over with its backside presented to the other who masturbates his cock to orgasm and deposits semen on his partner’s ass. The heart delineated in base material, ejaculation at the culmination of possible sodomy played out under the soaring Biblical rhetoric of ideal love pushes the collision between elevated spiritual rhetoric and idealized love with crass and luridly embodied and pornographic images to its extreme.

(The imagery and tone of the film is reminiscent of the 1980’s and 90’s New York Cinema of Transgression movement (R. Kern, Lydia Lunch, Nick Zedd, Beth B et al) that produced an impressive array of mostly short films primarily shot in gritty black and white that were relentlessly focused on marginal characters, perverse sexuality, violence and death).

The ecstatic and ejaculatory climax is punctuated by another borrowed male voice proclaiming: “Enough of this farce!” This is followed by a reiteration of the hands frenetically crossing themselves, as if in hysterical defense against the carnality with which it is confronted. The male dialogue continues, informing someone that “You know when I fart it means I’m not in love. Come on! Start hating me and just leave!” (The diaphanous hands cross again, as if compulsively summoning this superstitious gesture to ward off the unacceptable).

The sounds of the two male voices on the soundtrack modulate into grunts and sounds of impact: Is it combat or more intense, more abandoned sex? After a long fade to black another text crawl crosses the bottom of the screen: “Goodbye my dolly with love from Father Antonio.” To whom is the addressed precisely? Is he dismissing his lover or his lover’s vanquished lover? The sounds of male grunting and striking returns; now more audible. After yet another black void Adler reprises the disturbing image of the skinned dog, ZOOMING IN on the face of death.

After another black fade a still photograph of a shirtless man in jeans lying face up in a bed, his face covered with a pillow appears. Murdered? Smothered? Or is he overcome with shame and desperate to conceal himself? Like so many of Adler’s photographs and films the face is concealed or obscured, the specific features, the individual identity obliterated, the expressively manipulative, dishonestly expressive face suppressed. Only the body, the universal condition we all share, is legible.

This is followed by a rapid fire alternation of crossing hands, the noose and the woman sticking her tongue out. A brief recollection of sex, a figure in a cloak or raincoat, another Close Up of the lover’s face, female lips being licked, the male body on the bed culminating in a shot of a woman’s lower legs dangling from above, alluding, it appears, to one of Adler’s earlier still photographs *Crucifixion*.

Suddenly a quotation from *The Gnostic Gospel of Saint Thomas* appears: “Whoever knows the father and the mother, will be called the child of a whore.” The exact interpretation of this quote is in dispute. Some scholars insists it means that since the soul is subject

to the body it is “raped” by what happens to the body and is thus reduced to the level of a prostitute. Other interpretations have to do with an accusation that Jesus was the illegitimate offspring of Mary and a Roman Centurion or to a Samaritan calumny against the Hebrews claiming they were the products of fornication. During the text-porn scene the protagonist informs her lover that she is already pregnant, possibly re-enacting the dubious parentage of the Messiah. One can just as easily infer that “Monika’s” spirit is martyred to the degradations visited on her body in her quest for love.

In yet another reading of Saint Thomas it is postulated that the Hebrew’s God, the father, was a sky god, whereas the rival tribes worshipped a goddess affiliated with the earth. It is possible that this divided heritage also afflicts Adler’s characters, torn between the terrestrial and the celestial, the high and low, adulterating the purity of the spirit with the squalor of the carnal--behaving like prostitutes.



The Beauty of the Shadow, 2011-2013, Poland

Following rapidly after The Saint Thomas quotation the narrator returns quoting Dorothy Parker: “The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.” It is boredom and curiosity that leads to the kind of adventures undertaken by our erstwhile heroine and exposing her to the depravities and mortifications to which her body and by extension her soul are subjected?

After the return of the narrative voice and the reappearances of Monika in the same Medium Close shot vamping, this time perhaps even more suggestively than in the opening sequence, the final stage of the film commences. This third act is essentially a recapitulation the beginning. Our Heroine has come full circle, back to where she started. It is difficult to ascertain what exactly she has gained from her experiences, her attempt at love just another example of the same pointless lightness of living. The narrator asks gravely, “Were those orgasms worth all that? Love is sometimes difficult but death even more.” Who or what exactly has died? Or is it simply the pervasive anxiety of the flesh: The body, the vehicle for pleasure and experience perpetually haunted by the proximity and inevitability of death?

At the end of the credits a title card appears in large pink letters reading: “Don’t Fuck with Losers,” thus appearing to reduce the preceding to a kind of cautionary tale for restless and amorously desperate young women.

CHERNOBYL OF LOVE



Chernobyl of Love, 2012, Poland

In *Chernobyl of Love*, we encounter yet another female victim of love gone wrong. Once again Adler herself plays the lead role as the romantic female suffering a profoundly singular “meltdown” after her male lover rejects her.

The film opens with Close Shot of Monika’s fingers digging into a hole in the side of the dead lover’s head, apparently murdered at her hands. Accompany this first shot a male voice whispers portentously on the soundtrack, “I am death.” There is cut to another angle showing her fingers plucking gray matter out of the open skull and once again the voiceover repeating “I am death.”

At this muted, melancholy music commences, accompanying the title sequence. The subtitle for the film is *Drink the Blood of your Sin*, which, again, coupled with the compulsive brain-eating, suggests a kind of black communion. But whose sin is it, his or hers--or both? Is she drinking blood and eating flesh as penance or devouring the one who committed the sin against her--or both? We are again confronted with the simultaneously opposed alternate possibilities that characterizes Adler’s work.

The consumption of the body paired with music or imagery drawn from the Catholic religious tradition reinforces the motif of communion but this time her personal God is a very personal God indeed, one whose divinity is diminished when he rejects her love and attempts to depart from her cosmos, who is diminished still when she kills him and reduces him to a corpse, a piece of meat, which she then, driven by a desperate need to



hang on to the love object (now truly reduced to an object) who repudiated their love relationship between then attempts to incorporate him into herself so that they might never be separated.

At the end of the credits a derelict building surrounded by wilderness, slowly comes into focus. Shot in the Ukraine in the vicinity of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown, the building is industrial and decayed, an incursion of ruthless and competitive instrumental reason with its will to power and hubris (Which can perhaps be apprehended as masculine) into the feminine space of the once pristine wilderness, carrying with its catastrophic miscalculations the despoilment of this natural enclave. This defiled pastoral zone, now an eerie industrial wasteland is imbued with a pervasive sense of abandonment and isolation, a limbo of the psyche or dream landscape wherein a nude doppelganger for Monika (played by Sasha) or Monika's soul, its metaphorical embodiment or proxy, enacting the protagonist's tortured descent into hell, her pilgrimage through the stages of suffering, transfiguration and ascent, she writhes and runs, and sobs out her thwarted love, clinging to the need for connection, to fragments of memory. Monika's naked psychic proxy's face is concealed throughout, primarily with a piece of orange fabric: another one of Adler's naked universal bodies.

This double is introduced holding the orange fabric before her face. Then an unseen personage digs a hole in the ground succeeded by a flailing and directionless flight to nowhere as the woman is then runs in slow motion through the abandoned setting. As if to underscore the woman's confinement the camera proceeds to investigate the moldering venue, isolated shots, inventorying the moldering accoutrements of an bereft domesticity, including a rusted spoon, knife, and containers: the quotidian becoming uncanny as it corrodes.

From the wasteland we return to the Monika, ensconced in the sitting room with beloved's corpse. *Chernobyl* consists of a fairly simple counterpoint, alternating between one world and another, the indoor world containing the numbed Monika sitting with her murdered lover lying across her lap in a kind of morbid Pieta, absently and methodically gorging herself on her ex-paramour's grey matter and the alternate outdoor universe of her exposed double's chaotic odyssey of grief and loss in her post-nuclear hell. Nor is there any reason to choose which world is "real" as both worlds are just as likely to be phantasms, nightmarish projections of the protagonist's insuperable emotional anguish, a parabola of interpenetrating metaphors for the overwhelming crisis of rejected love, both the fury and the despair of her cast off ardor manifesting in these dual allegorical projections. Both themes have their own distinct developmental arcs that reflect and amplify each other, events in one realm redounding in subtle and elusive ways in the other.

As Monika continues to devour her late lover's brain a female voiceover makes overtly sexual noises, the entire structure of Monika's cannibalistic interlude structured as one last erotic tryst, the female voice's ejaculations escalating as Monika eats, a Close Up of her face over lit in an access of transported vacancy as she licks her fingers with lascivious avidity the camera Zooming In tight on her mouth as this necrophilic consumption and consummation grotesquely parodies past ecstasies.

This orgasmic repast is interrupted by a sudden scream on the soundtrack, the shock of which appears to vault us briefly to the wasteland, where we glimpse a rosary discarded on the stair, suggesting the loss of faith, the repudiation of God, the rejection of



Chernobyl of Love, 2012, Poland

traditional religious belief and conventional morality. We return immediately to Monika, seen from overhead. A guttural male voice speaks ominously on the sound track in Aramaic in a manner reminiscent of a demon-summoning incantation from some low-budget horror film. Her spirit is now allied with dark, underground forces; her descent into hell transcending the merely personal to the embrace of a cosmic antipathy. If the exalted emotional state of the romantic idyll has now plummeted to such depths of rage and abjection that Monika has aligned her spirit with hell then her doppelganger has correspondingly been cast out into the despoiled Eden of Wormwood; that formerly idyllic wood now a desolate underworld. All the world's hells are ruined paradises.

The film now moves into another phase when it cuts to the protagonist's naked double embracing a gristly animal fetus, calling forth faint memories of the pathetic offspring



Chernobyl of Love, 2012, Poland

in David Lynch's *Eraserhead* or perhaps one of Chaim Soutine's grotesque animal carcass paintings. She rocks the fetus, clinging to it with frantic possessiveness, her ample breasts offered for succor that the lifeless carcass is incapable of accepting. The hole that was dug in the ground awaits this unformed body but the distraught woman is unable to let go, the loss too painful, she rocks the fetus from side to side, clutching with two arms ready to fight off anyone that might take this unfinished offspring from her grasp. If not a literally a lost or aborted child then certainly symbolic of their lost union and the ultimate coming-to-fruiting of their love and now never-to-be and nearly impossible to relinquish for this very reason.

Adler returns briefly to Monika lifting brain to mouth, chewing. Once again highly sexualized female vocalizations are heard on the soundtrack. Will this shocking anthropophagic copulation soon be nearing its climax?

In *Chernobyl*, her body grimy, the Nude Double squats and clutches a rosary. Religious choral music starts. She rocks, an infant cries on the soundtrack. And then she is on the

ground without the fetus, writhing in a state of absolute despair, her face concealed by the orange fabric, making agonized sounds that for the first time seem diegetic (Or at least to approximate sound produced from within the filmed space itself rather than laid over it).

A petulant female voiceover chides, "You don't know how to have fun," perhaps a recollection of her own voice in the past and a moment of recognition and regret for whatever she might possibly have contributed to the end of the relationship.

There is a rapid series of shots, the hole in the ground, the double clutching the baby again, and again contorting on the ground, anguish electrifying her flesh. And then on cold stone steps she sits shivering and crying a knife at wrist, assaying test slashes on wrists already marked by the blade as a disembodied male voice says, "go go go, the voice



Chernobyl of Love, 2012, Poland

of the dead lover or his internalized psychic ally urging to destroy herself, penance or futility, a death sentence pronounced on the self for annihilating the beloved as well as the desire to join him in death: with him gone what point is there in my existing?

On the steps she sits, arms moving convulsively before her face, doubling over as she exclaims in weird, histrionic tones: "I love you, ohhh, I love you," the repetition of this phrase a kind of working through. And as they end Adler Pans to several large fleshy bones lying on the ground near the woman's feet. It is hard to escape the uncanny suspicion that they are what remain of the cannibalized lover's body.

When we return to the doppelganger, lying in a fetal position on the ground, melancholy contemporary female vocal begins on the soundtrack. It is a more understand and grave rendition of the kind of consoling self-pity music a teenage girl might listen to repeatedly while recovering from her most recent broken heart.

We are then surprised by the arrival of a big black dog that makes off with the bone and lies down to devour them. A demon at the service of the soul, tasked to eliminate the



Chernobyl of Love, 2012, Poland

vestiges of trauma--the dog eats to forget, his predation cycling the present remnants of the dead lover into the past.

The soul's struggle to recover proceeds as we next see a long shot of the double running silently in slow motion up a wood-lined solitary dirt road finally collapsing just short of the foreground. At that precise moment music swells, again religious inflected, and the camera pans right into the trees. There is a brief cut to the orange cloth that has all along concealed the woman's face discarded on a concrete step signaling that she has succeeded in divesting herself of some aspect of the past.

Indeed the next shot in a cemetery, the image of a marble Angel headstone supports the intuition that something is dead and buried. A woman whispers: "Can you keep my secret?" This precedes a return to Monika continuing to eat brains in slow motion as ominous electronic music plays, her face illuminated in Close Up blanched white by meticulously deliberate over-lighting: It is an apotheosis. Tossing her head with a kind of erotic languor, she pauses to examine the tissue in her hand before carrying it to her mouth, hesitating, nearly surfeited, on the verge of regaining her senses.

Again, we enter the cemetery, zooming in on the marble memorial to a dead child, an echo of the inanimate fetus in the wasteland. The soft female voiceover recurs with the gentle exhortation: "Look into its eyes. It sees what we can't."

When we return to Monika she has arrived at the denouement of her cannibal tryst. Like a spent lover she pensively smokes a cigarette, voluptuous and preoccupied. The menacing male voice breaks in again disclaiming guttural Aramaic, ushering in a cacophony of demonic cries and screams: the sounds of hell. The nude double writhes on ground of in slow motion as if afflicted by the demonic choir. Monika sits smoking, clouds of smoke drifting past her, obscuring her face. The hellish sounds end.

The crisis has passed. Back in the wasteland the fetus is dropped into the hole and methodically covered over with earth, the past and its grief buried. After a subtle Jump

Cut flowers are placed atop the grave. The Focus goes in and out on the flowers, alternating blur with resolution: Could these be the eyes of the mourning woman, intermittently overwhelmed with tears?

We are transported back to the cemetery one last time approach a colorful to Angel statue, its hand raised in a traditional beatific gesture. A new Female voice, sober and resolved, proclaims, "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome free will." Church Bells Ring. Having lost control, overwhelmed with rage and despair, her consciousness fragmented, swept away by her own internal turmoil, her ability to decide in abatement, she has now after a period of tribulation achieved a resurrection of the spirit. It is possible to choose again, to move ahead.

To the sound of church bells Monika is now visible, her back to the camera, carrying an ambiguous and suggestive bag, walking up a tree-lined highway away from Chernobyl, free again and embarking on a new life.

PURIFICATION

Adler's next film, *Purification*, is short, just under five-minutes long. The description provided for the film states: *Affliction, purify, virtue-- Seville, December 2008. Cardinale Alessandro Zacchia II decided to purify a young Polish nun to free her from her sinful past.* The specifics of this back story are not delineated in the body of the film itself, no titles or dialogue or visual shorthand spell out any of this so left with only the evidence of the film itself one confronts a highly inscrutable and disquieting spectacle touching on these themes implicitly, the entire episode open to a wide range of potential interpretation and responses.

The photography in *Purification* is a stark black and white; the images startling in their simplicity, the action and settings reduced to a nearly absolute minimalism, bordering on still photography. Every scene is shot from a fixed camera position and there is no Zooming in or out, no alteration in the distance between camera and subject. The soundtrack is simple but profoundly effective, consisting of a recording of a Mass from a Croatian Cathedral. Given the situation and the religious trappings of the primary setting the use of religious music is completely congruent while at the same time given the erotic, violent and bizarre nature of the behaviors on display the use of this music is again, as it has been in other examples of Adler's work, markedly ironic and disjunctive: The relationship between image and sound is perhaps most similar in her video art piece *In the Name of the Father*.

The *Cardinal* does not resemble the vast majority of Cardinals that most of us have ever seen. He is never seen wearing any of the vestments or accessories of his vocation or rank, presented instead shirtless wearing simple black pants. The film opens with this man in an attitude of intense concentration, as if preparing for physical or spiritual trial, shoulders rounded, impressive musculature taut, resembling a brawler before a boxing match, his image reflected and repeated three times, possibly intended to suggest his role as representative of the Holy Trinity of the Patriarchal deity.

After the introduction of the *Cardinal* there is a brief return to the image of the skinned dog first seen in *The Beauty of the Shadow*, its exposed bone and gaping eyes the truth beneath



Purification, 2012, Poland

the skin's attractive surface before introducing the figure of the *nun*. The *nun* Like the *Cardinal* is never shown in any kind of vestment or habit nor is she ever engaged in any conventional religious act or attitude. When she first appears it is in tight profile close up, looking upward, her facial expression subtly conveying the moment of recollection of a memory or possibly the waking from a dream.

The next moment in the film is the *nun* seen in tight two shot lying cradled in the arms of another woman, one hand on one breast but her face turned away from the pendulous breasts offered to her by the unidentified woman.

There is a quick cut and now the *nun's* face is turned toward the breasts one hand still clutching one but now with her face closer and turned toward them, mouth hidden behind the prominent nipple, much of the detail lost in deep shadow. The *nun's* past sin was apparently a lesbian affair though the attitude and indeed the physicality of the other woman evoke a mother-daughter dynamic as well.

For the second time Adler presents us with an echo of the *Pieta*. In *Chernobyl of Love*, the murdered male lay across the lap of his lover as she devoured his brain. In *Purification* the *nun* is held in the lap of another woman. This trope presents a multiplicity of connotations, lover and beloved, parent and child, assailant and victim, sadist and masochist, corporeal and spiritual, all embodied in the flesh of two people occupying a pose that refers, however obliquely, to classical art.

The flashback to the *nun's* illicit past is followed by a tight Close Up of her rapt face, eyes wide, a tear slowly gliding down one cheek, as if realizing or admitting to her sinful nature, the misdeed that requires penance. It is the expression of someone awestruck with either remorse or terror at the punishment that awaits her—or both.

The next images Fades in from black and shows the *nun* with her face pressed into a white wash basin (It is reminiscent of a Baptismal fount?) forcibly held there by the strong arm of the *Cardinal* whose eyes are raised upward in a state of serene vacancy. They are in an ancient room of massive and decaying stone. There is a primitive wooden cross on the wall to one side of the *Cardinal*. The setting is as austere as Bresson or Dreyer.

After several seconds she is allowed to rise up in extreme slow motion, hands spread, mouth agape in terror or rapture, and once upright turning toward this man who is either torturing her or delivering her—or both; her wet white slip clings to breasts revealing her nipples.

There is a cut on a quick dissolve and then they are embracing, his arms around her, hers pressed to his chest, head raised and canted upward into his neck. The height differential between the *Cardinal* and the *nun* emphasizes their inequality and elicits associations with father and daughter, the seeds of obedience, guilt, masochism and submission planted in childhood, the house of the father giving way to the house of God.

This embrace is held for several seconds before another dissolve cut separates them, the man holding the woman's face in his hands. He caresses her face and she moves her head toward him, her expression ambiguous. His hand slowly moves up to stroke her hair then gradually moves to the back of her head, drawing up a handful of hair as his other hand positions itself at her back and she braces herself for the resumption of her purification. He drives her head back down into the basin, her hands spreading to catch the sides of it, one hand seeming to count the seconds before surrendering and lying flat on the rim



Purification, 2012, Poland

of the basin as the image fades to black. The sounds of the Mass continue throughout all of this and the closing credits.

The erotic charge of this sequence is inescapable and one is reminded of how so many BDSM scenarios involve riffs on religious figures and imagery, the structure of ritual, authority and subjugation fueling the sexual *frisson* of the participants.

The *nun's* embrace of her apparent tormenter carries distant echoes of Liliana Cavini's controversial feature film *The Night Porter*, a film that Adler admires. In that film a Jewish inmate of a concentration camp (Charlotte Rampling) during her confinement engaged in a Sado-Masochistic relationship with a Nazi guard (Dirk Bogarde). Thirteen years after the war they resume their affair at a hotel in Vienna, refusing to renounce, repudiate or attempt to pretend that the past never happened, despite the growing menace of several former Nazis who want to erase the truth of the past and their culpability in it so that they may get on with their lives and ascend the ladder in the new economy. When the perverse couple refuses to accept the historical amnesia demanded of their adversaries and refuse to relinquish their passion, they are assassinated. The maintenance of such systems requires either forgetfulness or unconsciousness. The nun in *Purification* is apparently unconscious of the oppressive nature of the system in which she willingly participates.

The idea of complicity between assailant and victim is disturbing and indeed for some people intolerable. Yet, as suggested by films like *The Night Porter* and *Purification* this complicity has roots that derive from deep in the culture itself, in the institutions of family and church and school, in the dynamics of authoritarianism, unquestioning obedience, brutal punishment and humiliation that was a large part of pedagogy during much of European history.

The psychologist Alice Miller wrote extensively about the "poisonous pedagogy," consisting of popular child rearing manuals and pervasive ideas about the need to subject the child to the harshest possible discipline, to exercise dominance and control in the service of cultivating the most compliant and uncomplaining young people possible. With such conditioning the horrifying events that wracked Europe were not inexplicable but inevitable. The church with its polarized worldview dividing reality between lightness and darkness, the damned and the saved, the righteous and the just, the profane and the sacred is a breeding ground for scapegoating, and for the assumption of roles like righteous attacker and perfidious victim. The pervasive misogyny of both the church and the wider traditional culture naturally reduce women to one of several profoundly delimiting and ultimately precarious positions within this society.

The nun's complicity in her own subjugation, her enthrallment at the hands of the *Cardinal* are the manifestation of the discredited but persistent values and psychic structures of a dying order that nevertheless still contaminates our bodies and spirits.

One imagines that after the *nun* submissively counts out the seconds of her next submersion she will rise again in a state of enthralled terror to embrace the agent of her punishing purgation.



Purification, 2012, Poland



COME BACK TO THE TREES

Come Back to the Trees may be Adler's most elusive, evocative and effective film to date. Though still relatively minimal in means it features more dynamic cutting, camera movement and a larger cast than any of her other work. To a driving tribal beat, a convocation of very nubile women dressed primarily in short white shifts perform an enigmatic and possibly lethal ritual in the solitude of a picturesque Eastern European forest. The camera Pans and tracks, veering and circling, then cutting into close ups of the women's hands bearing small mounds of brain tissue in white muslin, carried with deliberate gravity, lifted to sensuous faces to be sniffed and tasted. The images frequently loses focus, the blurred perspective suggesting an intensity of experience that threatens to overwhelm the consciousness or the presence or possibly the presence of hallucinogenic aids to exaltation warping the unseen witnesses' organs of perception.

The film begins with shot of a calla lily, a popular funeral flower in the region, on the ground next to what appears to be an outstretched male hand accompanied by the screeches of chimpanzees on the soundtrack, echoes of the primordial and atavistic.

After a brief credit sequence where the rhythmic percussive soundtrack is introduced we cut to the bleary image of a blonde woman (Milena Walczak), referred to as The Messenger in the closing credits, moving through the trees before quickly proceeding to close up of her what turns out to be her sacred offering, the handful of brains in white cloth. She advances through the forest in a state of weird transport, her offering shown several times from slightly different angles. There is a split-second glimpse of a troupe of women advancing toward her through the trees. They are identified in the credits as the Chamankas (Shamans) and are hastening to take up their positions for the uncanny ritual to follow. She stops to sniff and sample the offering. She is shown head tilted back, the residue of this appalling substance smeared about her face.

Vertiginous shots of blurred trees and a funereal obelisk alternate with the blonde continuing her rapt indulgence before shifting to the cadre of Chamankas which is headed by a brunette wearing black pants and a simple white brassiere with a mask of black cosmetics around her eyes, This "High Priestess" is identified as the She-Wolf, and is played by Adler herself.

The She Wolf advances in slow motion, rapid Close Ups of her and The Messenger punctuating the approach. The Messenger, eyes masked now in black like the priestess, approaches the She Wolf in a submissive crouch, the handful of brains proffered before her. Receiving the offering the She Wolf lowers her face to smell them as The Messenger had previously.

The brains are shared out among the Chamankas who consume their portions with the relish before proceeding to entranced and ecstatic movements in time to the pounding of drums. The women, at times arrayed in formations, are with their minimal costumes and alluring appearance, reminiscent of a cross between the better instances of 1970's erotic Euro-horror (Jean Rollin for example) and one of Vanessa Beecroft's installation pieces.

The whirling glimpse of the trees once again serves as a transition to the next section



Come Back to the Trees, 2012, Poland



Come Back to the Trees, 2012, Poland

preceding a Fade to Black that is followed rapidly by a shot of the discarded gladiola on the ground, the figures of the women barely visible in the distance. In hypnotic slow motion the women, specifically The Messenger, advance, their movement suddenly interrupted by a cut to an interior and to a raised gloved knife wielding hand plunging down, quickly cutting to the bloodied arm of the apparent victim who appears to be lying on the floor and finally to a shot of the gloved hand gripping a bloodstained knife at her side. From this condensed, oblique flashback one can only infer that this is a how the offering was obtained.

Back in the woods the She Wolf once again sniffs the brains. She then leads the cadre of women back to the flower in the foreground. The She Wolf's action of bending to pick up the flower is shown from several angles, as a howling high-pitched woodwind is erupts on the soundtrack. Accompanied by pagan flutes the Chamankas advance with the flower projected toward the camera fully in focus, women remain indistinct, a nebulous mass, animated with a mysterious purpose. The She Wolf, in Medium Shot Profile, leads them, the flower held out before her like an erect parody of a phallus.

The final shot is blurred image of the cadre of women slowly walking away from the camera. The title is repeated and the end credits role. *Come Back to the Trees* is an invitation or exhortation to return to the wilderness and join this cabal of women in taking up again the sacrificial ceremonies of some secret primeval cult practicing their faith in grave and exhilarating opposition to the dominant culture beyond the forest.

The repetition of brains and their consumption by the female cultists appears to take the desperate vengeful and incorporative despair of Monika in *Chernobyl of Love* to the level fully conscious albeit symbolic act. The appropriation of the sacrificial male's brains along with his flower held aloft like a phallus suggests the absorption of his essence—his



Come Back to the Trees, 2012, Poland

power. One imagines that when a sufficient number of sacrifices have been enacted and when enough power has been absorbed the adherents of this clandestine religion will be ready to assail the civilization beyond the trees. In every area: tone, rhythm, cutting, movement, framing, the ease with which its tantalizing suggestiveness is achieved, *Come Back to the Trees* is Adler's most impressive film to date.



Mutability, 2013, United Kingdom

MUTABILITY

In *Mutability*, her most recent film, it is possible to surmise that Dr. Karl Adler, the protagonist, like Sigmund Freud, mentor and rival to his purported ancestor Alfred, wants to know “What do women want?” and like Freud, is unable to produce a satisfactory answer. Not least of all because Monika, the singular young female patient he seeks to comprehend (and therefore control?) is dead.

The film begins with a text relating that Monika “suffered from a complex, delusional disorder which manifested itself in the forging of numerous online identities and histories,” a riddle the psychiatrist was unable to solve, a woman he was unable to possess, she has now eluded him once and for all. Her demise is signaled during the brief opening credit sequence with the sound a heart monitor pulsing, accelerating and then flat-lining.

After the opening credits and the heart monitor’s shrill death notice and the introductory text, the film takes us to Doctor Adler, walking distractedly across the antique and distinguished square of the Greenwich Observatory accompanied by the tolling of a death knell that will continue to sound throughout the film. This is followed by shots of surgical instruments and the Doctor’s gloved hands as he prepares to perform his unsanctioned autopsy. The Doctor’s gloved hand then caresses Monika’s immobile face, as it will do again and again throughout the film’s brief running time. These shots as well as microscopic scientific footage of blood cells (and later other tissue slides) cascading and careening under the camera’s gaze alternate with sequences in which Doctor Adler wanders through the scenic precincts of the ancient historical site, ruminative and haunted as his voice on the soundtrack recites his grim elegy. Thus the film’s very minimal image-array is counterpointed in a kind of minor fugue.



Mutability, 2013, United Kingdom

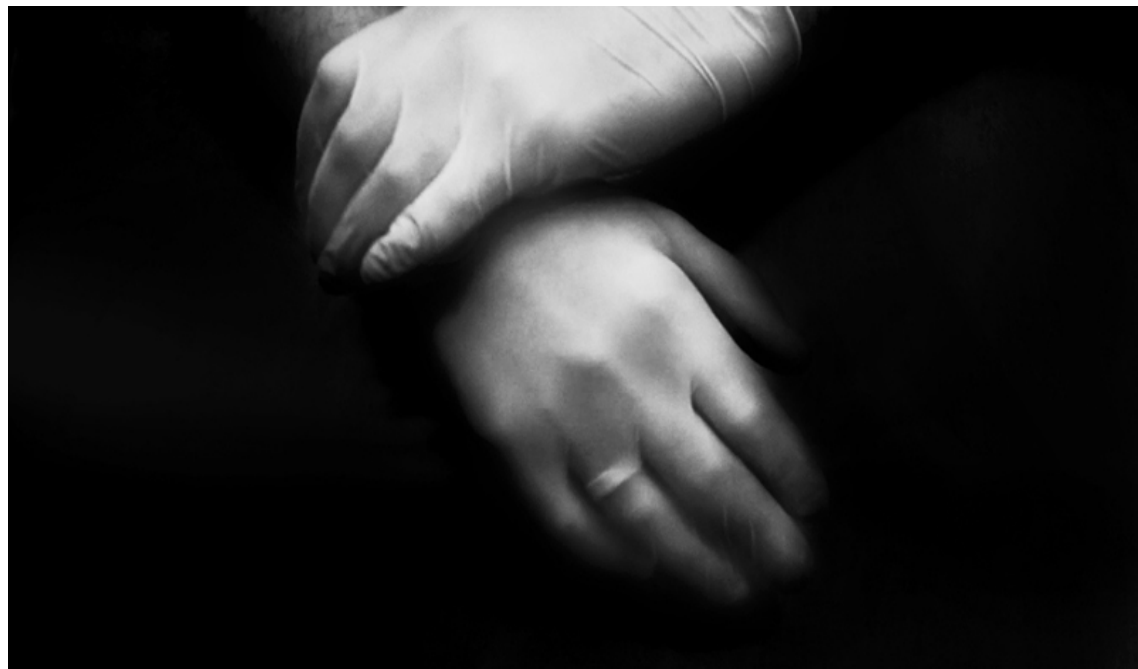
The name of the filmmaker is simultaneously the source of both lead “characters” names: Monika, the inscrutable deceased former patient and Karl Adler (K. Adler), the psychiatrist, portrayed Aeon Rose, (a longtime partner and collaborator of the director), both physically and in voiceover, performing a text that he composed for the film.

In her biography the filmmaker Monika K. Adler relates that her grandmother was a holocaust survivor and a pioneering psychiatrist of women. In *Mutability* this grandmother appears to have been transposed to the figure of the contemporary male scientist whose desire to understand outstrips any real insight he might have. He is male scientist, perhaps in Adler’s view, prototypical, whose theories, ideas and methodology are reductive and mechanistic.

Unable to possess, unable to grasp, to define or explain, he is left instead to construct a bizarre mythology of biological processes continuing after death, to concoct a purely imaginary and still purely materialistic afterlife in which the lost woman can be controlled and defined. The film presents us with the doctor recalling the autopsy he illegally performed on Monika, because as the opening text relates, her death evoked in him, “a deep existential crisis.” Which compelled him to mediate “on the boundaries between life and death, attempting to deny spirituality by glorifying biology in its animal form – in this, his own delusion, he considers his patient ‘dead but still alive’ and decides to give her something which she can take with her to the afterlife...” This biological hell that Doctor Adler declaims is rife with his own projected emotions: Angst, bitterness, loss and thwarted desire. The opening text composed by the filmmaker presents a dialectical negation of the text recited by Aeon Rose as Doctor Adler.



Mutability, 2013, United Kingdom



Mutability, 2013, United Kingdom

Therefore from the beginning the authority of the male scientist, the one still alive to perform the dissection and collect and assess the data is undermined by the opening texts characterization of him as delusional. The florid and bizarre conceptions of biological processes, the struggle of blood cells described in terms that border on personification, underscore the desperate nature of the doctor's enterprise. This is the first film wherein Adler has given both the subjective position and voice to a male character. However, by immediately setting the terms and creating the context in which that voice is understood with the text that precedes the body of the film.

In this film Monika is silent, represented with concentrated minimalism, only by a series of Close Ups of her immobile "dead" face, caressed again and again by the doctor's gloved hand. She is not the point-of-view, she is not the desiring subject and it is telling that as object of desire she presents herself as a cadaver. Is it possible that to be defined by a man or possessed by a man is tantamount to death? All of the anxiety about the vulnerability of the body, about death, and about the ever present danger of male aggression and depredation is concentrated in this image of Monika as inexpressive corpse. Does this imply that she has taken the only escape route from male systems of instrumental reason, materialism, power and control available to her? Is she a suicide?

One could speculate that in *Mutability* Adler has divided herself in two, the psychiatrist Adler, investigative, logical, materialistic and pessimistic, and the female Monika, silent, elusive, mysterious and beyond categories or definitions. It seems entirely possible that these two dueling personifications enact a conflict or ambivalence that may exist within the heart and mind of the artist.

It can also be inferred from the film's opening text (And by connecting this film with both the other films in Adler's *oeuvre* and her photographic work) that she rejects attempts to explain human existence via pure scientific rationalism, suggesting an alternative informed by an intuition of a reality beyond this one, suffusing and subtending it, irreducible to formulas or equation And yet that alternative remains almost completely

invisible, unrepresented and possibly not representable, the blank mask of Monika's corpse providing no clues as to what spiritual reality might transcend or permeate the world presented to our senses that could oppose Doctor Adler's delirious and morbid biological fantasia.

The Doctor's entire discursive exercise appears designed to define the nature of the reality that Monika inhabits and to both make it accessible to him and subject to his control.

At one point in the Doctor's voiceover he addresses the dead Monika: "You built your own reliquary from the compliments of strangers and varnished its surface with mutability," describing her possibly lethal lack of a fixed self, malleable and mercurial, shifting and altering depending on who was perceiving it, adapting to the eyes or the perceptions of others, unstable and never fixed, only achieving definition with the stasis of death. There is a suggestion of frustration at her fluidity, forever beyond his conceptual and perhaps his literal grasp, her mutability either a pathology requiring cure or the most salient marker of her unendurable freedom. For this Doctor Adler substitutes a biological mythology in place of the complex and elusive reality that eluded him. In death the nature of Monika's mutability is reduced to a purely biological process. She can be defined but not grasped: She is gone.

At the end of the film Doctor Adler states that he wants to leave her with one thing that she can take with her to the afterlife. It is his gloved caress upon her dead face. It is his consolation to believe that her afterlife will consist of only one memory, however dimly recalled, of him and only him, touching her face. In that way he remains central and significant, he is the only thing in whatever universe that remains for her, there is no other possible reality for her but the impression of his hand on her face. Anything else is intolerable to him.

Is it only in death that he can impose a stable identity upon her? Does her position on a slab, made of "coltan and wolframite" where she has been "cached, , indexed and archived to extinction" finally succeed in taming her "numerous online identities and histories," her unmanageable multiplicity of selves, and thus make it possible to reduce and distill her to one single and definable essence?

An intellectual, out of the war zone, removed from direct involvement with violence, and unlike other, more overt assailants, Doctor Adler can only impose his will in absentia, retrospectively and in a realm of pure abstraction. His lack of power in real world haunts him as much, if not more, than the loss of Monika.

Having already amassed an impressive array of images, both moving and still, Adler is currently attempting to mount her first feature film, pursuing the opportunity to further develop and amplify her explorations of trauma, history, gender, dread and mystery. Her challenge will be to maintain the ambiguity and suggestiveness, the provocation and originality, the complexity and rigor combined with the frankly erotic aura surrounding the aesthetic of her short films and photography into the realm of narrative features with its demands for exposition and comprehensibility. The success of this venture could signal the arrival of a major new talent in the world of International cinema.

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FILMOGRAPHY

2013

MUTABILITY, England 2013, 4:30 min, color/black-white

Psychiatrist Dr Karl Adler is troubled by the memory of an illegally performed autopsy he carried out on a former patient ‘Monika’ - a young woman who suffered from a complex delusional disorder which manifested itself in the falsification and acting out in real life of numerous elaborate online identities and histories. Her death evokes in him an existential crisis. He meditates on the bounds that separate life and death, and concocts a maladjusted theory which negates spirituality and glorifies corporeal biology. In this, his own delusion, he considers the subject of his dysfunctional case-study ‘dead but still alive’ and decides to give her something which she can take with her to the afterlife...

2012

CHERNOBYL OF LOVE, Poland 2012, 13 min, color

In a hotel in Kiev a young women after murdering a man, is consuming his brain. Her act of cannibalism evokes traumatic memories which take us to the Red Forest near the abandoned town of Chernobyl in the Ukraine. It relates through harsh, visceral yet at once luxuriant imagery a depiction of humanity’s deepest, darkest, and basest of instincts framed within the context of love story. It is a study of the psychopathology of young women whose traumatic past leads her to commit a crime. As with the horrific aftermath and social impact of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster the film is an account, and meditation upon emotional barbarism and the destruction of human relationship.

2012

COME BACK TO THE TREES, Poland, 2012, 5 min, color

She-wolf, a post-matriarchal trickster figure, and twelve young women, her female shamans, are waiting for the messenger with their holy communion, which comes from the body of a murdered man.

2012

PURIFICATION, Poland 2012, 5 min, black-white

Affliction purify virtue. Seville, December 2008. Cardinale Alessandro Zacchia II decided to purify a young Polish nun to free her from her sinful past.

2011

THE BEAUTY OF THE SHADOW, Poland 2011, 13 min, black-white

Short story of tragic love between a priest and young man who suffers from Borderline Personality Disorder. Scandalous sex and violence drama describes the darkest desires and instincts.

2010

I KNOW – Script/Dir. Monika K. Adler/Arthur Schmidt, Poland 2010, 4 min, color

Music Video.

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

2013

WOLFE VON LENKIEWICZ – PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST, England 2013, 10 min, color/black-white. Short documentary film about Wolfe von Lenkiewicz.

‘Wolfe von Lenkiewicz (born 1966) is a British artist known for his artistic reconfigurations of well-known imageries from art history and visual culture to create ambiguous compositions that question art historical discourses. Lenkiewicz’s latest body of works are inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, transforming ‘The Garden of Earthly Delights’(ca.1490) into a ‘post-historic, trans-cultural manuscript’.

VIDEOWORKS

2013

DEATH IN A LANDSCAPE, United Kingdom 2013, 3 min, color

2012

SHAME, Poland 2012, 5 min, color

2012

MISERY OF MY SOUL, Poland 2012, 3 min, color

2012

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, Poland, 2012, 3 min, color



The Ambivalent Body: On The Short Films of Monika K. Adler

Robert Smart

Historical violence haunts the short films of Monika K. Adler. The bodies of her female protagonists are carriers of traumatic memory. Even apparently consensual encounters carry this residue of past horrors.

The contagion of mass violence, invading waves of fanatics inspired by the pure rage of true belief to shattering acts of violation and subjugation inform every frame of Adler's films. Yet her short films are intimate and minimal, the majority of them limited to two figures, one male, one female; domestic melodramas of desire, estrangement, sorrow and rage. The males however continue to carry with them the threat or at least the echo of the past's marauding ravagers or act as inheritors and enforcers of oppressive and brutal orthodoxies: The women appear perpetually trapped in scenarios of betrayal, disappointment, subjugation and reduction, frequently if unknowingly complicit in their own bad outcomes.