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## Images of women in the *Trilogy of Virtues* by Ulrich Seidl

### *Trilogy of Virtues* — the body as a (non-)virtue

The *Trilogy of Virtues*, apart from revealing specific microworlds, spins a tale about a family. And it is a peculiar portrait. Its individual parts (*Love*, 2012; *Faith*, 2012; *Hope*, 2013) consist of independent stories, separate portraits, but with each Ulrich Seidl makes a kind of return to the same sad life. The heroes, though related, do not maintain mutual relations. They live separately, which the director emphasises through storytelling. It seems that neither the sisters nor the daughter of one of them give themselves a chance to build a deeper bond, and the director himself does not allow them to meet for long; “What would they talk about with each other,” he seems to be convincing from behind the frame. They are too different, but equally lost and in a desperate, sometimes irrational way, wanting to drown out the despair that fills them. It seems that while for the youngest of them — the heroine of *Paradise: Hope* — the chance for impulse has not yet been missed, her mother and aunt have been deprived of it. To change something, they would have to question their long-standing choices and deny their own fate. Meanwhile, their every movement lacks hope and expectation, no matter how desperately they try. It is easy to see a void in the shadow of unintentional ridicule. Perhaps that is why in the world of Seidl this void is the most readable and vexatious. Seidl portrays people who try to satisfy their suppressed desires, and — to make it harder for them — he often “dresses them” in imperfect bodies, which maybe more than once — in fear of rejection — they would

like to “strangle in themselves.” Seidl, defining his protagonists, refers primarily to their bodies and physicality. As Georges Vigarello maintains:

the body becomes the essence of identity — this change is appropriate for individualist societies, in which the subject seems to depend only on himself, he identifies himself absolutely with what is expressed by his physical appearance, his limitations and characteristic features: the foundation of himself based on the foundation of expression, sensitivity and the desire to have a constant and strong identity.<sup>1</sup>

## Women portrayed through their physicality

The body and the problems that physicality creates seem to be what defines the narration of the *Trilogy of Virtues*. Physicality is for the three related women not so much something important to them, but rather something that unites them in the sense of the aforementioned identity, but as if outside of their choices, whereas the viewer realises that the body remains the most durable binder, and perhaps the most eminent exponent of what goes on beyond the reality of words.

For the heroines of the *Trilogy*, so different and emotionally distant from each other, the body becomes a kind of unique communion. The question to ask at this point is why Seidl concentrates on the problems of corporality. As the body has already been mentioned, with all its separateness, mannerisms and special features, it is what remains common, what is revealed and, finally, what dominates in contemporary culture. The otherness that Seidl’s protagonists represent is also signified mainly through the body: obese, mature, marked by cellulite, subjected to self-injury and self-destruction and so far from perfect (or as in the case of the heroine of *Paradise: Faith* being an obstacle to achieving full spiritual purity) that they could disappear. Instead, they are subjected to sabotage, which takes various forms. This is particularly evident in the opening scene of *Paradise: Faith*, whose main character — Anna Maria — celebrates a specific ritual — whipping — as a form of reparation and atonement for sins — both her own and others’, who, in her opinion, do not live according to the commandment of God.

## Ritual as an attempt to tame corporality

As Mary Douglas notes:

ritual recognises the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. Vigarello, *Historia otyłości. Od średniowiecza do XX wieku*, Warszawa 2012, p. 393. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Polish are the author’s.

<sup>2</sup> M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, New York 2001, p. 95.

but also

ritual focuses attention by framing; it enlivens the memory and links the present with the relevant past. In all this it aids perception. Or rather, it changes perception because it changes the selective principles.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the ceremonial repetition of some activities allows us to tame what remains uncertain or incomprehensible to us. In this context, the ritual becomes a kind of a stencil through which it is possible to read reality, as it is a precise point of reference, and through its fixed rhythm allows us to concentrate on something that is already known and in this sense certain. Further on, Douglas clarifies that

order [related to the ritual — H.K.] implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of the dual nature of order and disorder shows, on the one hand, that it is an obstacle to the establishment of norms, but on the other, it draws attention to the possibility of creation and transformations in the sphere of culture. It leaves room for change. This change, in the case of Seidl's films, does not always take place to some degree within the physical and body. In the case of the *Trilogy of Virtues*, it is above all the female body.

Through the ritual (from a broader perspective), the body of Seidl's protagonists becomes an element of penance or an attempt to find, as it seems, the lost meaning of the surrounding reality. It is worth noting that in each part of the *Trilogy* a specific rite is celebrated with relation to the body. As already mentioned, the heroine of *Paradise: Faith* carries out self-flagellation. For her sister, the heroine of *Paradise: Love*, this ritual is sex, which the woman practises with random men during holidays in Kenya. For her, sex becomes a form of escape from loneliness and an attempt to gain appreciation of men, whom she treats like objects, which does not, however, diminish her own sense of imperfection.

For the 13-year-old Melanie, the heroine of *Paradise: Hope*, on the other hand, the ritual is physical activity, exercises that the girl has to perform as part of a slimming camp. Running, squatting, jumping are supposed to help her lose weight, and make her a joyful teenager. Seidl portrays Melanie as a person for whom the body is a source of uncertainty and rejection, although, as the director points out, the sources of her problems go far beyond the dogmas of physicality. This perspective can be noticed, for example, in a scene where Melanie confesses to her camp colleague that she has fallen in love with her caregiver, a much older doctor.

“Have you kissed him?”

“Are you nuts?”

[...]

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

“No.”  
 “Why not?”  
 “He doesn’t even know.”  
 “He’s not dumb.”  
 “You think that, just because I often go to his office...”  
 “Often? Like every day?”<sup>5</sup>

The conversation continues later, after the man rejects the girl, not wanting to hug her in the projection room.

“What happened?”  
 “Nothing!”  
 “You sure?”  
 [...]
   
 “Is it the doctor? What happened?”  
 “It’s just dead.”  
 “From his side or yours?”  
 “His.”  
 [...]
   
 “Why do you think that?”  
 “Well... He’s always so distant with me. We don’t do anything, you know.”  
 “What would you like to do?”  
 “I dunno. I wanted to hug him, but I wussed out.”  
 “Why do you think he doesn’t like you?”  
 “I dunno, maybe he doesn’t find me pretty.”  
 “I’m sure he finds me too fat.”  
 “You’re totally pretty.”  
 “I’m definitely too fat for him.”  
 “You’re crazy.”  
 “I’m telling you.”  
 [...]
   
 “It’s just, I think you should pay more attention to your looks.”  
 [...]
   
 “Think so?”<sup>6</sup>

This excerpt outlines a much broader perspective than just the first attempts at recognising one’s sexuality. Particularly important is the fact that the 13-year-old trivialises the fear of rejection, or more accurately, she is not able to recognise it because she does not have the tools available to adult people. Melanie identifies her failure with obesity, not with the fact that the man she is infatuated with is an adult.

Of course, this way of thinking has its source in immaturity, which pushes the heroine into the arms of naive fantasy. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to notice another problem as well. In these short, almost reflex words, the way the teenager perceives herself is materialised — very fragmentary, but at the same time extremely accurate. Melanie is not able to recognise her own feelings or needs, but she is able to pinpoint

<sup>5</sup> U. Seidl, *Paradise: Hope*, Austria-France-Germany 2013, 0:35:01–0:35:46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 0:40:56–0:42:39.

the origin of her problems — which is the body — unattractive, thick, in need of repair. In obesity, as Vigarello notes, two themes overlap: loneliness and abnegation.

The rift deepens, especially when compared with another change [...] with the metamorphosis of the body image, it is not, of course, about its meaning or the way it is treated, but about the change of its status.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, as the historian emphasises, the body remains the source of our identity.<sup>8</sup> It makes the individual “become his or her appearance.”<sup>9</sup> But also, as Mike Featherstone notes:

the body has permanent quality, such as height or bone structure, but in consumer culture there is a tendency to perceive the qualities attributed to the body as plastic — it is clear that thanks to effort and “working on the body” they can achieve the desired appearance.<sup>10</sup>

“Becoming a body” is very important because it shapes our way of thinking about ourselves: if “I am through the body” and it is inappropriate in some of its elements, I am a body that is not accepted by culture and by the same culture designated for change, thus I have been depreciated and culturally and socially stigmatised. This thought emerges from the self-criticism of teenage Melanie. The ritual approach to the body is inscribed in the mechanisms constituted in culture, which treat the body as a tool of self-expression.

In consumer culture, the body appears as a vehicle of pleasure: it is desirable and desirous, and the closer it approaches idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the greater its interchangeable value. Consumption allows shameless exposure of the human body to a show.<sup>11</sup>

Expressing oneself through carnality is much simpler (at least in a reflex, socially established image) than verbal expression, especially in the case of women. Seidl portrays his heroines primarily through physicality, but perversely it is physicality that culture would prefer not to expose. The body of Seidl’s protagonists manifests what is inexpressible to them — pain, suffering and harm. Seidl’s perception of the body departs from the idea of Cartesian dualism and is definitely closer to Jean Paul Sartre’s deliberations, who perceived the body as “a point of view of the world, directly, inseparably connected with consciousness.”<sup>12</sup> According to Sartre, the body has the dimension of three ontological values of “the body — for oneself,” “the body — for the other” and “the body — as an object — for me.”<sup>13</sup> As Marek Drwięga writes,

<sup>7</sup> G. Vigarello, op. cit., p. 393.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> M. Featherstone, “Ciało w kulturze konsumpcyjnej,” [in:] M. Szpakowska, *Antropologia ciała. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, Warszawa 2008, p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> M. Drwięga, “Trzy wymiary cielesności w filozofii Jeana Paula Sartre’a,” [in:] M. Drwięga, *Ciało człowieka. Studium z antropologii filozoficznej*, Kraków 2005, p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

for Sartre, the body is a point of reference, a point of orientation in the world.<sup>14</sup> This thesis should be applied to the first of the separated categories, that is “the body — for yourself.” The body, which contains a specific perspective — “as an accidental form that takes on the necessity of my randomness”<sup>15</sup> — because the body is necessary for existence, and thus for having subjectivity, and — as Sartre emphasises — for functioning in a specific situation.<sup>16</sup> The body allows you to be. For the heroines of Seidl it is a key value. They exist through the body.

## Carnality as a language of communication

The body [...] functions as a kind of language through which hidden meanings and reflections are communicated and [...] that is why the body becomes important in reflections on subjectivity and its definition<sup>17</sup>

and thus also a portrait of femininity, but also, as Roland Barthes stresses, the body is not an “eternal” object inscribed forever in nature; in fact, the body was controlled and formed by history, societies, systems, ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

The body turns out to be a natural source of knowledge about ourselves, and although it sounds like a truism, it is worth emphasising the fact that physicality complements reflections on the subject, our changeability and individuality. It externalises identity and to some extent shapes it.

As Małgorzata Szpakowska emphasises in her reflections, recalling Kant and Yi-Fu Tuan,

the body is a peculiar centre from which all paradigms of culture depart. The basic categories of culture, its most important concepts and symbols have their origin in the human body. Man is the measure of all things in the most elementary sense.<sup>19</sup>

Further on,

Kant wrote that for our orientation in space, the starting point is always our own body, and Yi-Fu Tuan, who also refers to this statement, derived from the properties of the human body not only a simple sense of directions (up — down, right — left, front — back), but also their valourisation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> I. Kowalczyk, “Obrazy ciał w przestrzeni publicznej,” *Kultura Popularna* 2012, no. 4 (34), *Tabu w przestrzeni publicznej*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> R. Barthes, “Encore le corps,” *Critique* 1982, no. 424, p. 647, as cited in: G. Pac, “Kobiety, asceza i władza nad ciałem w późniejszym średniowieczu,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 100, 2009, no. 3, p. 525.

<sup>19</sup> M. Szpakowska, “Wstęp: ciało w kulturze,” [in:] M. Szpakowska, *Antropologia ciała...*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

This kind of a fracture in leading a narrative about his own physicality, which is characterized by a “proper” and “imagined” image of the body, is close to Seidl’s perception and sensitivity. It also remains something that fascinates the Austrian artist at the storytelling level. This is because it allows us to recreate a world that is in a sense inconsistent. This tactic is very clearly visible also, and perhaps above all, in the way in which the director guides his characters. For example, Teresa, the heroine of *Paradise: Love* is a woman who went to Kenya on an exotic holiday, primarily to experience sexual adventure with men, whom she uses for her own pleasure, because in her opinion she represents the better, more valuable part of the world — white, therefore by rule privileged. The paradox of this perspective is that, with her impertinence, the woman tries to obscure her own accompanying sense of rejection, loneliness and unattractiveness, which catalyses above all in the way she perceives her body, also in relation to the “Other.” This is in relation to a body, which differs not only in colour, but also in its posture or shape. As Simone de Beauvoir points out,

the concept of the Other is as eternal as consciousness itself. Even in the most primitive societies, the oldest mythologies, we find the notion of duality, the Identity and the Other: this division was originally not created under the influence of gender difference [...] the inclination towards an alternative is an essential feature of human thought. No community is ever defined as such, without immediately opposing the other.<sup>21</sup>

On one hand, the protagonist perceives herself as superior, her white (still culturally privileged) skin gives her an advantage and protects her from embarrassment, on the other, the slender, young body of a black man, with whom she sleeps, forces her to look at her own imperfections and complexes. This can be seen in a scene in which Teresa asks one of her lovers to look into her eyes — which symbolically refers to looking into the soul, inside and thus outside the body — earlier a woman shows the man her sagging breasts and tries to turn the situation into a joke, while pointing out that when she is wearing a bra, her breasts look more attractive. The scene clearly shows that Teresa is aware of the deficiencies of her physicality, and therefore asks the man to look into her eyes to see her, not her imperfections that need some form of retouching. “[T]he eyes, like pallor, emphasise the call to the soul, an allusion to the unexplored spheres.”<sup>22</sup>

In the first part of the trilogy, *Paradise: Love*, the contrast at the level of the characters’ skin colour is also important. The white heroine uses a black man, reducing him not only to the role of a sexual attraction, but also a cultural sensation. For her, the man is fascinating not only because through sex and company he allows her to drown out her own overwhelming loneliness, but also because he is an element of something strange — the distant orient, about which one reads every day only in books. The

<sup>21</sup> S. de Beauvoir, “Druga płec,” [in:] M. Szpakowska, *Antropologia ciała...*, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> G. Vigarello, *Historia urody. Ciało i sztuka upiększania, od renesansu do dziś*, Warszawa 2012, p. 133.

body of the man is a “different” body, in this sense safely distant, but at the same time it remains one that becomes an obvious cause for cultural confrontation. It is worth recalling the words of Frantz Fanon:

as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of “being for others,” of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. It would seem that this fact has not been given sufficient attention by those who have discussed the question. In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology — once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside does not permit us to understand the being of the black man: he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.<sup>23</sup>

In the above reflection, Fanon points out the lack of subjectivity of the “other,” or its constitution only in relation to the White — as the ultimate model. The very necessity of comparison is unjust here and reveals the developed structure of domination. Perhaps this is why the heroines of *Paradise...* do not notice the inappropriateness of the situation in which they are entangled. If they are such towards the “Other,” their sense of morality can also be redefined, becoming the “Other.” The body, as Judith Butler rightly observes, becomes a tool for Fanon, which can serve both enslavement and freedom, because, on one hand, it turns out to be a quite an obvious point of reference, whilst on the other, it remains something individual, thus giving a sense of uniqueness.

Fanon refers to the body as an instrument of freedom, and here freedom is cartesian fashion equated with a consciousness capable of doubt “Oh my body, always make me a man who asks.”<sup>24</sup>

Seidl, by delineating such a boundary between the horizon of the body and culture, ponders on the mechanisms that are characteristic of this culture. For Seidl, the body becomes a kind of a symbolic mirror in which fears and complexes are reflected.

The disintegration of the bodily image threatens the subject to return to the sphere from before the imaginary order, that is the archaic body in parts, uncoordinated and not identical with each other.<sup>25</sup>

Also Butler points out that the body can be the building block of freedom, and biological sex can become a plane and a motivator of gender.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, London 1986, pp. 82–83.

<sup>24</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 1990, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> M. Bakke, *Ciało otwarte. Filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności*, Poznań 2000, pp. 23–24.

<sup>26</sup> J. Butler, op. cit., p. 153.



At first this appears to be a synthesis of body and consciousness, where consciousness is understood as the condition of freedom. The question that remains, however, is whether this synthesis requires and maintains the ontological distinction between body and mind of which it is composed and, by association, the hierarchy of mind over body and of masculine over feminine.<sup>27</sup>

The heroine of *Paradise: Love* uses much younger men for something she would probably not do “at home” — firstly, because she is far from home, her daughter, family and everyday life filled with routine (as suggested in the initial scenes of the film, when the woman meets her sister — the protagonist of the second part of the *Trilogy* — *Paradise: Faith*), and secondly, because all her experiences are shared by her and someone she objectifies and treats thoughtlessly. However, the woman does not realise that she is exploited, she falls victim to manipulation by those who are also exploited, but not as the weaker ones, those who “do not remain indebted in the cynical monetisation of the sense of low value and loneliness.”<sup>28</sup> Exploitation is linked to the sense of loneliness and rejection felt by both sides of the deal.

The financial pragmatism of the beach boys stands in flagrant contrast to Teresa’s desire “to look into each other’s eyes for a long time... I mean looking into the eyes without seeing what’s on the outside... that no one sees how ugly I am.”<sup>29</sup>

While for the heroines of *Paradise: Love* and *Paradise: Hope* the body is, on one hand, a plane of rejection, on the other, communication and shaping of one’s femininity, for the heroine of *Paradise: Faith* it seems to be a burden and something that should be subordinated to higher, spiritual values. It is a very interesting imbalance, and one which supplements the portrait of female carnality with a spiritual and ideological element. Despite the fact that the heroine of *Paradise: Faith* reduces her life to one aspect, she is not able to get rid of her own physicality and instincts. Anna Maria searches for emotions and feelings in something, to some extent, unreal and half non-physical. The perversity of Seidl’s narration resounds most strongly in this — to some extent superficial — contrast. Although Anna Maria seems to draw strength from her faith, in the end she turns out to be weak and lonely, just like her husband, Nabil. The woman torments her body, denying herself the right to an intimate relationship with another human being. Asceticism is supposed to help her come closer to Christ. It is worth noting that

in the later Middle Ages, the deity of Christ was identified with masculinity, and carnality with femininity. This was not so much connected with [...] the tradition of linking femininity with carnality in

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> L. Mastalerz, “Raj: Miłość,” rež. Ulrich Seidl, *Dwutygodnik.com*, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/3925-raj-milosc-rez-ulrich-seidl.html> (accessed: 7.10.2018).

<sup>29</sup> C. Philipp, A. Wolfig, U. Seidl, *Paradies/Paradise: Liebe/Glaube/Hoffnung. Love/Faith/Hope*, Ostfildren 2013, p. 13.

general, but with the fact that the body of Christ, who did not have a human father, was to come entirely from the Virgin Mary.<sup>30</sup>

Further,

there was, therefore, a strong relationship between the body of Christ and the feminine body. The essence of feminine ascetic practices in the later Middle Ages was, therefore, not the destruction of the latter (although, in dualistic terms, they were inclined to see the mortifications of holy women described by some male commentators of the epoch), but the use of it as a controlled and subordinate soul tool to imitate the torments of Jesus, which was to lead to sanctification. The tormented body was, therefore, basically honoured.<sup>31</sup>

Anna Maria's attitude towards her own body is very close to Plotinus's perspective. The philosopher described the body as not only a source of sins, but also a punishment for them.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps in order to complete this punishment, the heroine of *Paradise: Faith* chooses a lack of closeness with another human being.

Her husband's disabled body is also doomed to loneliness, with the difference that it is beside the choice and will of the man. The emotional handicap of the woman is somehow complemented by the physical incapacity of her husband. Disability and imperfection of the body complement the hidden emotional disorder.

In this melting pot of absurd rules, the body becomes a costume for habits and human nature. Also by exposing bodies, those belonging to white European women are imperfect and imperfectly ordinary — and those belonging to black Africans are young, resilient and functioning in terms of symbolic prey. The clumsy physicality exposes here all that is hidden at the level of the psyche, and at the same time remains a kind of a trophy that can or should be won, although, as Seidl tries to make us aware, the body could be a cohesion that unites foreign cultures and families (and in a sense manages to do so) as it is something common to everyone. Through physicality the director searches for unity lost on the ground of culture, at the same time making it clear that within the corporeality there are also barriers that support the sense of alienation. The body becomes an enemy. The "body-enemy" is one of the topoi of culture which is analysed by Małgorzata Krzysztofik in her research. The author notes the paradigm of the body as an enemy has many variations — carnality can be a prison for the soul, a prosecutor, a habitat of lust or a master. Variants of the topoi have an ideological plane in common — they lead to the conclusion that the body has weaknesses, thus pushing them into the sphere of profanum.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> G. Pac, op. cit., p. 530.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 531.

<sup>32</sup> G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, vol. 4, Lublin 1999.

<sup>33</sup> M. Krzysztofik, "Ciało ludzkie — między sacrum a profanum. Literatura XVII wieku wobec ontologii cielesności," p. 5, <http://www.ujk.edu.pl/strony/Malgorzata.Krzysztofik/artykuly/cialo-sacrum-profanum.pdf> (accessed: 14.10.2018).

Further on,

the “body-home” is also an apartment which, according to apostolic teaching, is the temple of God himself, but under the influence of sin becomes the “ugly basement,” the place of residence of the devil.<sup>34</sup>

## The body as a source of female sexuality

Ulrich Seidl talks about the body through the prism of sexuality. Each of the protagonists tries to define it somehow. They do it through their sexuality. The director deliberately portrays women of different ages to point out that generational differences or differences in beliefs and experiences do not rule out the possibility of certain common experiences and needs. As has already been mentioned, the body becomes an element of a unique communion. Seidl does not portray his heroines as independent and strong women; on the contrary, their strength is only apparent. The director sees their weaknesses in the fact that they do not fit into the rigour of contemporary culture — oriented, admittedly, towards the body and physicality, but with different characteristics. Slim, shapely and young. Seidl’s women fight desperately to create bonds. However, they try to build relationships outside, not among themselves — perhaps because distance minimises the risk of real rejection.

They all negate themselves, but each one on a different plane. Physicality, though unattractive, remains the most obvious expression of their sexuality and femininity, because it fits into the social and cultural paradigm. As Butler emphasises in recalling de Beauvoir’s deliberations, the female body should be a footing and an instrument of women’s freedom, and not their essence, which defines and limits them.<sup>35</sup> Seidl’s women seem strong, stronger than the men they often manipulate. And although Seidl reverses the patriarchal mechanisms, allowing women to be initiators, their independence ultimately turns out to be very fragile. The protagonists of the *Trilogy* are greedily looking for a relationship that allows them to appreciate themselves, while at the same time the choices they make do not bring any relief.

From Seidl’s perspective, the body and physicality ultimately turn out to be a heavy burden for the heroines, much more than an element of liberation and self-fulfilment.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> J. Butler, op. cit., p. 12.

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## Images of women in the *Trilogy of Virtues* by Ulrich Seidl

### Summary

The aim of the article is to systematise the reflections on the way of portraying women in the work of Ulrich Seidl — with particular emphasis on the *Trilogy of Virtues* — which consists of films: *Paradise: Love*, *Paradise: Faith* and *Paradise: Hope*. The author will show that the director focuses on the issue of the body and perceives his protagonists through this prism. Thus, for Seidl, body and physicality become an element of narration that connects women of different ages and experiences, much more than the fact that they are related to each other. The body serves the Austrian as a medium for reflection on the problem of social exclusion, one of the causes of which is precisely physicality, which differs from the image of the body approved by contemporary culture. The author demonstrates that the director immortalises the body in the context of what remains isolated in culture in the taboo sphere, and thus remains an element of social and cultural exclusion.

Keywords: body, women, ritual, Ulrich Seidl