



HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

FROM GYM TO GUILDS

On sister-friend tactics, weak resistance, young girls and body politics in contemporary art

Author:	Kinga Molińska
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1. Introduction

My grandmother once told me that the whole lineage of women in my family is cursed. It was a little unexpected to me that someone who is a religious Polish Catholic shared this type of superstition. My mother and her sisters couldn't find a proper partner, and each had at least one daughter. In single mothering, my grandmother saw the doom.¹ This curse was manifested in small rural areas in Poland, where I come from. Soon I found out that the vast majority of my female friends, and colleagues from a Polish university were raised by single mothers. This encouraged me to move beyond personal context to reflections on the marginalisation of the lived bodies of young girls and women. I became fascinated with how, in this form of being together among other women in an enclosed environment, we can think about forms of challenging broader political issues, how subjectivity and relationships with body/bodies can be developed, and what tactics we can observe in everyday situations.

Experiencing it with two younger sisters who just turned eighteen makes me deeply interested in observing how, during the process of shaping identities, young girls can resist and challenge institutionalised forms of marginalisation (state, school, church, family) and conservative thinking, such as heteropatriarchal stereotypes imposing harmful expectations on young women's bodies. At the beginning of my MFA, while I was trying to work closer with the Polish context, big feelings of weakness accompanied me, especially following the change in the Polish government to more liberal and the lack of actions they expressed that they would pursue - for example, the legalisation of abortion.² I was trying so much to think about my role as an artist while feeling very politically unimportant.

Over time, a slowly maturing anger that comes directly from my heart to my mind has caused me to rethink the relationship between weakness and resistance, passivity and agency, or maybe the crack between these dichotomies, where everyday acts of resistance and relational solidarity emerge. This personal context, blended with the observation of communal experience and broad

¹ This essay will not focus on single motherhood or its stigmatization. I mention the story about the curse to highlight the significance of my experience being raised by a single mother in this context and how it shaped my understanding of sister-friend relationships.

² More information about this particular political context, change in the government and grassroots reproductive rights work is available here - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/a-year-after-tusk-came-to-power-why-is-access-to-safe-and-legal-abortion-still-a-distant-dream-in-poland/>, accessed January 27, 2025.

analysis, made me interested in sister-friend tactics. I have started to think about how we can resist and navigate these complex power structures daily, which behaviours we can categorise under sister-friend tactics, and how they relate to art. Sister-friend tactics can be defined as modes of being together among sisters and friends. These tactics emerge from everyday situations and personal experiences. However, they can be expanded into broader analysis and function as forms of weak resistance, as I demonstrate in this essay. I will unpack this definition and illustrate it with specific examples throughout the text.

It is very hard to separate the names of power agents under the umbrella of patriarchy, conservatism, capitalism, or the Catholic Church. Women's reproductive health, sexuality, and bodily autonomy, alongside influences of the Catholic Church, play a significant role in positioning and controlling women's bodies. However, the Polish context can be reflected in a more generalized understanding. According to gender studies professor - Sara Lee Bartky: "The disciplining power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular".³ Resistance can be seen as an act of questioning and challenging oppressive systems of control, which is also embodied and carrying affective dimensions. "To resist" means to develop everyday tactics that can help operate, counter and navigate the strategies imposed by oppressive systems on the bodies. I will focus on resistance in the realm of body politics.

1.1. Research question and the central argument

In this essay, I seek to answer the following research question: How can contemporary artistic practices explore the interplay between weakness and resistance and foster alternative, relational forms of resistance, such as sister-friend tactics?

³ Sara Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism & Foucault: reflections on resistance*, ed. Irene Diamond, Lee Quinby, (Northeastern University Press: 1988), 142.

I will focus on young girls and women (or those coded as women) because, so far, this experience is closest to me and my lived body.⁴ Departing from relational practices of care, mutual support and solidarity, I would like to identify and investigate the relationship between sister-friend tactics and contemporary artistic practices. Sister-friend tactics function as a voluntarily chosen political solidarity. I want to argue that contemporary artistic practices, through their critical engagement, can 1) redefine the relationship between "weakness" and "resistance", 2) challenge traditional dichotomies, 3) investigate sister-friend tactics, 4) and, by doing this, A) function as forms of weak resistance and B) create space for alternative to dominant, discriminatory narratives and representations, allowing marginalised identities to be seen.⁵ It can happen by engaging with feminist theories of body politics and weak resistance. I will examine how rethinking weakness in relation to resistance in contemporary artistic practices can create new forms of political imagination, especially while we shift the criteria evaluating what a "successful" form of resistance can be.

I will concentrate on three artistic practices: 1) Mari Koski-Kersu - working with matter (permafrost) in collective actions, 2) Julia Wornowicz - visual representations based on images and stories alternative to big Polish historical narratives in painting, 3) Olga Micińska - bringing craftsmen together (from a particular type of practice to collectivity). Some parts of this essay have been translated into Polish and activated by radio sessions at Radio Kapital.⁶

⁴ At the same time, this decision is motivated by reductionism, the length of this essay requires, not exclusion. I hope this essay will provide a perspective from which different identities can draw, no matter to what extent we identify or relate to the young girls.

⁵ Weak resistance is a reversal of heroic model of subjectivity and brotherhood. It is the turn towards every day and ordinary. This type of resistance is not weak by itself, it can be phrased as weak in comparison to the dominant power structure and authority, which perceive these acts as politically unimportant. This understanding is drawn on Ewa Majewska's analysis of weak resistance. I will elaborate on it further in the text.

⁶ Here is the link to all episodes of my radio show I have broadcasted until now:

<https://radiokapital.pl/shows/carewaves/> I decided to reach the Polish public and share my investigation and research, thereby blending parts of my essay with field recordings and track lists. The first episode is an introduction to the contextualization of care, the second one introduces auto arachnology, and the third one is a conversation with my friend about our relationship and the associations we share with the sea, which is a physical border separating us. Currently, I am in the process of creating an audio description in English and figuring out with the radio how to add it.

In the writing of the essay, a few roles accompanied me - the role of feminist observer, listener, and autoarachnologist.^{7 8 9} Through this essay and my enquiry, I'm interested in building interdisciplinary networks full of interconnected entanglements and knowledges, where material processes and crafting blend with visual, tactile and somatic properties and weak strategies of everyday resistance. Writing and my artistic enquiry affected each other in a tectonic way. The essay consists of identifying and describing sister tactics, artistic examples, and a body of theory. It focuses on exploring each tactic concerning theory and its application.

1.2. Main concepts – definitions

I will provide a brief glossary, unpacking the words I use throughout the essay.

Body politics - power structures controlling and regulating types of bodies connected with gender and operating on the broader level – sociopolitical context describing the power and micro-scale – our individual bodies and smaller groups.

Materiality is a very dense term in the history of Philosophy, but I refer to artistic material processes. Influenced by posthumanism and new materialism, I see materials not only as passive entities but also as active and complex. It allows artists to rethink their material choices and decision-making process within the creation process and the types of engagement.

Tactics – According to Michael de Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategies, tactics are responses to more structured, more extensive power systems methods of actions called strategies.¹⁰ Tactics operate on a smaller scale; they are temporary and are used by individuals

⁷ "Auto" refers to the self, entangled in and shaped by its experiences, practices, and concerns. It also connects to auto-theory, blending research with personal narratives. "Arachno" refers to the myth of the spider-woman, whose weaving was a commentary on the sexual harassment of mortals by gods. The "-logy" suffix means "the study of". Auto-arachnology as a concept proposed by Julia Wilhelm in her text *Autoarachnology* is the study of the self as a spider—one who weaves webs, stories, and connections, telling alternative narratives, focusing on gathering, connecting, and allowing things to coexist without hierarchy.

⁸ English is not my first language and, to correct grammatical and syntax errors, I used Generative AI - Chat-GPT, typing a command related to the organisation of the language, of some paragraphs of this essay.

⁹ Episode *Sieci i Pajaki* (Webs and Spiders) in Radio Kapital on auto arachnology and spider webs, <https://radiokapital.pl/shows/carewaves/2-sieci-i-pajaki/>, accessed January 26, 2025.

¹⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), XVII – XX, 29-43.

to navigate spaces of strategies. Their goal is to subvert the dominant strategies subtly, which I will argue later, can be seen as weak resistance. In my case, I am particularly interested in how tactics can emerge from personal relationships such as sisterhood or friendship and how they can be extended and applied to material processes and seen as forms of resistance.

2. Main text

2.1. Understanding sister-friends' tactics and weak resistance theoretically

My main theoretical framework through which I will analyse artistic practices and reply to research questions is a hybrid of feminist theories. To enforce my argument and show why weak resistance is socially and politically significant, I will use theories by Ewa Majewska and Agata Lisiak. Elisabeth Grosz, Agata Lisiak and Sara Ahmed to navigate us through corporeal feminism and young girls. I will also introduce concepts of constellations and contextualisation of care by Monika Rogowska-Stangret, Anonymous Collective of Friendship and Tian Zhang.

2.1.1. Sister-friends' tactics

I want to speculate on sister-friend tactics, which can be seen as tactics of resistance towards body politics and hegemonic structures and as a way of refuge and being together. The relationship between sisters is always forced. Blood connection is not a choice. Family can also function as an oppressive mode of organisation, so I perceive the moment when sisters become friends as another form of challenging this. That's why I linked the tactics with sister-friend relationships. Every relationship between sisters looks different. Being an older sister is a constant fight between strong feelings of responsibility, letting go, and catching myself in the moment of patronisation of my younger sister. An interesting shift happened when my sisters challenged our bond while growing up.

Departing from my personal experience, observation and analysis of everyday situations through feminist lenses, I identified three sister tactics for addressing family dynamics and cultural and institutional modes of oppression. I want to speculate on sister-friend tactics as a form of weak resistance that has the potential to open new political imaginations and critical

reflections. I want to create constellations that are both social and physical. To do this, I will apply theories and artistic examples that function as extensions of sister-friend tactics.

The micro level influences the macro and the other way around. The tactics depart from the macrocosm and my relationships. Still, by contextualising them and showing similar mechanisms of interpretation, reading, and speculation, we can rethink human relationships and bring them to a broader context. As interdisciplinary scholars Maree Martinussen, Margaret Wetherell and Virginia Braun prove, friendship can be a refuge from perfecting the neoliberal individualised self and self-surveillance. It is a space "for being" and "for being bad" for female friends.¹¹ What I identify as characteristics of sister-friends tactics are relational solidarity, interdependence as a source of strength, subtle/weak resistance, non-binary thinking (rejection of strength/weakness, individual/collective oppositions), the intersection of the personal and political, emotional and political subversion, feminist materiality, the potential for transformation. I will focus on the interplay between these possible components in the examples I will give here.

2.1.2. Weak resistance

Ewa Majewska, a Polish philosopher and feminist, highlights the importance of the actions of the weak in everyday life. Her preface to the open-access Polish journal *Praktyka Teoretyczna* aims to categorise weakness in different forms than conformism.¹² It shows how to build critical, emancipatory theories that can contribute to alternative and anti-heroic story-making. She puts her analysis in the context of capitalism's triumph after 1989, neoliberal productivity and precarity of work, making us think that we no longer need resistance.¹³ She proves that we need to develop alternative lenses – where resisting is not only a historical necessity of other than hegemonic male subjects but also a responsibility of seeking freedom, reclaiming agency,

¹¹ Virginia Braun, Maree, Martinussen and Margaret Wetherell, "Just being and being bad: Female friendship as a refuge in neoliberal time," *Feminism&Psychology* 30, no. 5 (2019): 14, accessed January 3, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333772407_Just_being_and_being_bad_Female_friendship_as_a_refuge.

¹² The title can be translated to *Theoretical Practice*.

¹³ Ewa Majewska, "Słaby opór. Obraz, wspólnota i utopia poza paradygmatem heroistycznym," *Weak Resistance: Image, Community and Utopia Beyond the Heroic Paradigm*, trans. Kinga Molińska, *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 32, no. 2 (2019): 10, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.14746/prt.2019.2.0>.

and self-determination of oppressed groups. The distinction between heroic and passive is a traditional and hegemonic alternative that weak resistance tries to challenge. According to Majewska: "The perspective on weakness with its refusal of heroism, of culturally white, hegemonic masculinity, and with its tendency to inhabit periphery and margins, not the centre, resonates as the announcement of emancipation, not its failure".¹⁴

In the analysis of resistance and its visibility provided by interdisciplinary researchers in Gender Studies, Selin Çağatay, Mia Liinason, and Olga Sasunkevich at least three different ways of resisting are identified. Firstly, visible forms from social movements like protests; secondly, less visible actions rooted in everyday life might not provide a change but influence resisting subjects in different ways; and thirdly, there is a "grey zone" between the two types mentioned before. According to their definition, "resistance is defined as a response to relations of domination that undermines, negotiates, and challenges power".¹⁵ We can also speak about embodied resistance, which has affective dimensions.

2.1.3. Weakness

The "weak" agency can generate and build unexpected alliances and implications. Referring to Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, Majewska shows that even the most oppressive biopolitical sovereign power, equipped with all the tools of control, is never absolute.¹⁶ It never deprives the subordinates of all agency. The agency might be limited due to sociopolitical context, and structural constraints like social norms and power in decision-making but marginalized groups find a way to challenge and subvert the realm of strategies. This is what Michael de Certeau labelled as tactics development.¹⁷ In feminism and queer theories, it can happen through the valorisation of affective and reproductive labour, critique of individualism and heroism, which characterise classical, liberal subjectivity built upon the violent, colonial, patriarchal

¹⁴ Majewska, "Słaby opór", 11-12.

¹⁵ Selin Çağatay, Mia Liinason and Olga Sasunkevich, *Feminist and LGBTI+ Activism across Russia, Scandinavia and Turkey Transnationalizing Spaces of Resistance*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84451-6>.

¹⁶ Majewska, "Słaby opór", 9.

¹⁷ Here I refer to the definition of "Tactics" presented in the Introduction - page 5.

construction of hegemonic subjectivity of the West.¹⁸ The amount of invisible, hardworking subjects keeps capitalism and Western subjects alive.

Working with weak resistance might seem too ordinary, meaningless, or tame to have a political influence, and I know this is just a tiny contribution to systematic change. However, I see it as a seed or potential that helps to imagine how marginalised, underprivileged groups can resist in everyday life. Questioning the notions of causality and agency can support the development of a new political imagination.

As Agata Lisiak, Professor of Migration Studies, points out, forms of girl resistance going beyond individualised femininity patterns created by *girl power* can be one of the spaces for developing new political imagination.¹⁹ Depending on the criteria and scale, forms of resistance can be accessed differently. If success is measured by immediate, radical changes, weak resistance fails, but if we choose another way of assessing societal changes (beyond reform and revolution), we can perceive dimensions and multifaceted aspects of transforming the political.²⁰

2.2. Tactic 1: Going to the gym together

The first tactic involves investigating the body as an active site of resistance in social struggle and its encounters with materialities. It is also connected to communal workouts. When I visited my sister in Poland, she took me to a regular gym gathering with her teenage friends. The gym was located 3 kilometres outside the city centre, disconnected from public transport. They walked there every time, motivated by being together and avoiding the city-centre gym occupied by their male peers. Breaking cultural, gendered, racial and class codes, resisting narratives over young girls' bodies and reclaiming the right to the city, according to Agata Lisiak, can happen in the moment of taking over man-dominated spaces by young girls (spaces

¹⁸ Majewska, "Słaby opór", 11.

¹⁹ Agata Lisiak, "Poza girl power: dziewczynski opór, kontrapubliczności i prawo do miasta," *Beyond girl power: girl resistance, counterpublics, and the right to the city*, trans. Kinga Molińska. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 32, no. 2 (2019): 60, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.14746/prt.2019.2.3>.

²⁰ Lisiak, "Poza girl power", 60.

from which they are excluded).²¹ A similar reflection accompanied me during my enquiry into gatherings of young female friends exercising in the gym.²² Even if their active presence could be seen as a subtle act of decoding traditionally male-dominated space, thereby a form of weak resistance, it is also problematic because of gym culture and the need to shape a perfect body fitting into beauty standards and normative images. At some point, my sister and her friends stopped going to the gym, and it was when I and my friends decided to exercise together.

This experience was far from the isolation and alienation associated with neoliberal self-care. It fostered relationships and solidarity through collective embodiment. In this example of the sister tactic, I see a lot in common with corporeal feminism.

2.2.1. Corporeal feminism and Elizabeth Grosz

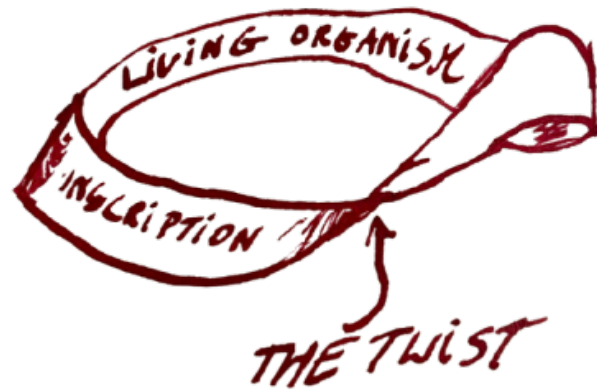
The trembling layers of skin cells connected to so many sensory receptors, the number of microbes living inside our guts, the way senses blend to create crossmodal perspectives on perception, the memory it holds—not only ours but also our ancestors, the embodied knowledge, the somatic, the tactile, and the sonic. Reclaiming the body is a political practice. The body holds living experience; we can expose the biopolitical structure by turning towards it. It is an extensive area of investigation, particularly for some feminists. Developing the concept of corporeal feminism, Grosz claims that the body is not a pre-cultural, fixed substance; it operates within the tension between universal and specific nature and culture, which situates it beyond essentialism.²³ It brings the body and our corporeal experiences into another space for feminist analysis. However, the body is insufficient; the discussion must be supplemented by theoretical, critical investigation including feminist research positions. By contextualising the body and rethinking biology (especially regarding women's bodies), the body can be seen as something beyond binaries. We can touch the body "from the inside to outside" by exploring the body as a living organism, which builds a form of subjectivity through, for instance, its different senses, and "from the outside to inside", where the body can be seen as a surface for inscription, the effect of a socio-historical context. To illustrate the coexistence of the two

²¹ Lisiak, "Poza girl power", 52.

²² The gym was located 3 kilometers outside the city center, disconnected from public transport. They walked there every time, motivated by being together and avoiding city-centre gym occupied by their male peers.

²³ Elisabeth Grosz, "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism," *Australian feminist studies* 2, no.5 (1987): 2, accessed January 18, 2024, DOI: 10.1080/08164649.1987.9961562.

perspectives, Grosz uses the Möbius strip, a figure that makes it possible to see both aspects simultaneously and how they are intertwined. I see the gym as a fascinating site for analysing this body of theory and collective exercising as an example of an embodied Möbius strip.



Monika Rogowska-Stangret identifies the main characteristics of corporeal feminism. Firstly, it departs from complex entanglements, avoiding the dualisms that dominate philosophical thought. Secondly, it stipulates that one gender or one social group cannot be identified with the category of corporeality, as this results in actual oppression (one main dominant body as a reference to the rest). Thirdly, it rejects models based on presenting some specific body as a norm; we must consider pluralism and the spectrum of norms. Ultimately, the body is not only biological but also cultural, social, political, and geographical.²⁴

Grosz addresses the question of the body's susceptibility to social meaning, which goes beyond biology. She also turns towards ontology and nature-culture relations. The bodies we know and have - are affected by social inscriptions, such as our movement, gestures, meaning, relations, possibilities, and forms. For Grosz, the concept of gender autonomy is essential, and she points out that the culture still has not recognised the complete and autonomic existence of at least two genders. Corporeal feminism is not only about embodiment or corporeal incarnation.²⁵ Grosz is open to the pluralism of the bodies and shapes and has moved away from the normalisation

²⁴ Monika Rogowska – Stangret, *Ciało – poza Innością i Tożsamością*, trans. Kinga Molińska, (Gdańsk: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, 2016), 233.

²⁵ Monika Rogowska – Stangret, *Ciało – poza Innością i Tożsamością*, 231.

of the body.²⁶ However, this pluralism of bodies and shapes is still marginalised in different visual representations, especially the ones associated with national and historical figures.

2.2.2. Mari Keski-Korsu

Corporeal feminism provides a lens through which we can analyse *Permafrost Bathing*, an artistic project by Finnish artist Mari Keski-Korsu. Her project transcends binarities like nature and culture, and through the corporeal experience of communal bathing with permafrost, it embodies relationality and Grosz's Möbius strip theory.

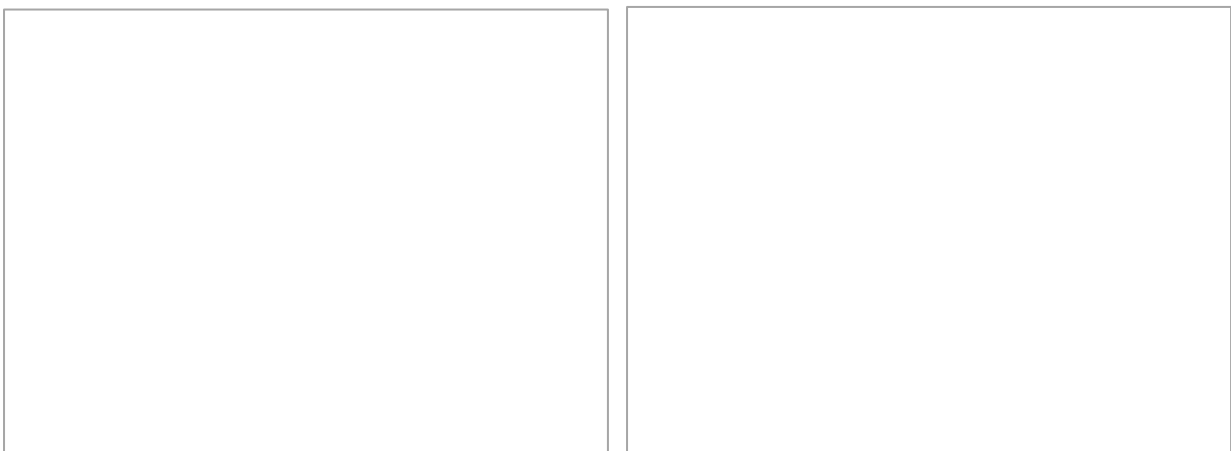


Fig 1,2. Mari Keski-Korsu, artist. "Permafrost Bathing." (2023), photographed by Bon Along <https://www.artsufartsu.net/permafrost-bathing/> (Accessed January 19, 2025). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Mari Keski-Korsu breaks the distinction between the inside and outside of the body but also engages with the body at the corporeal level through examples of communal bathing. In *Permafrost Bathing*, she uses permafrost as an old, traditional healing method.²⁷ Moor mixed with viruses and microbes from thawing permafrost directly touches the human body. The permafrost which melts is a prominent sight of climate catastrophe, so through this hydrobodily encounter, she demonstrates the interconnection between humans and more than humans. Keski-Korsu shows how artists can work with commoning through communal bathing in

²⁶ Monika Rogowska – Stangret, *Ciało – poza Innością i Tożsamością*, 231.

²⁷ More information about this project: <https://www.artsufartsu.net/permafrost-bathing/> accessed January 2, 2025.

natural areas as a support mechanism. When participants put permafrost on their bodies, this matter hits the surface - human skin. The old folk healing method is revised by microbial entities from thawing permafrost. Melted permafrost, or its presence on other surface lands of the Abisko area, is an effect of human activities contributing to climate change and ice melting.

Even if Koski Kersu's practice is deeply bound with environmental and ecological issues, communal healing can be linked to exercising with friends. The bodily and different contexts differ in both practices, but we can still see a common thread. The imagery of communal bathing – also associated with post-workout routines – and using something possibly dangerous to strengthen the body (a mix of viruses and bacteria vs heavy weights) brings them together. They also enhance bodily resilience. Weak resistance in both examples is embedded in subtle routines of everyday life. The resistance is happening on the body surface – the number of viruses and microbes present in permafrost, but it is also a collective healing gathering. Through collective actions and engagement with this material, the artwork can be read as weak resistance towards human activities that caused climate change and extractive capitalism. In the gym and during bathing, resistance takes place "under the skin". It translates into strengthening the body and developing physical immunity, making the resisting subjects stronger.

2.3. Tactic 2: Sharing family secrets

While tactic 1 focuses on weak resistance related to bodily engagement, sister-friend tactics move beyond the material bodies. Delving into hidden family history—a very intimate gesture—is a powerful way of reclaiming narratives not present in dominant discourse, thereby challenging patriarchal silencing.

Sometimes, hidden information about family members slips out of our relatives' mouths. My sister and I gathered to collect this data and to find out why it was so important to keep it a secret from the youngest part of the family. Access to family truths was giving older generations silencing power. My younger female cousins visited us. It was the gossiping gathering to determine what our mothers and grandparents hid from us. We also wondered how much of the everyday situation of our family lives would be concealed and that we would never have access

to it. Similar things happened during the history classes in school, where access to main national agendas was presented, concealing female and queer figures. This investigation had to take place in smaller groups of friends with the support of the internet.

2.3.1. Willful children and young

girls

The crucial part of weak resistance is Sara of the figure of a *willful child*.



Majewska's analysis of Ahmed's investigation Ahmed uses the willful

child as a base for the further development of queer identity, which goes beyond heroism and, in small gestures of childish resistance, finds a way of development or failure. Ahmed explains: "If authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given".²⁸ The willful child relates to the refusal to listen to orders, authorities, and subordinates.²⁹

I see a link between the figure of a willful child and stubborn teenage girls, maybe even a chain: from a willful child through rebellious young girls to feminist killjoys.³⁰ This tactic shows the importance of age and the connotations it generates within power dynamics. You are "too young" to know the truth. The patronising care excludes you from access to knowledge and decision-making. That's why the concept of a young girl has an essential influence in approaching tactics of weak resistance.

A young girl possesses a particular body going through gender training since childhood. Due to their age, they are culturally associated with immaturity and naivety. *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young Girl* by author and activist collective Tiquun from 1999 provides a critical analysis of commodity fetishism connected to young girl figures, such as hyper-

²⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subject*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

²⁹ Sara Ahmed, "A Feminist Army", *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), October 19, 2016, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/10/19/a-feminist-army/>.

³⁰ The Feminist Killjoy is a concept developed by Sara Ahmed, describing someone disrupting patriarchal norms, and speaking out during everyday social interactions. Ahmed describes this concept more broadly providing killjoy truths, responsibilities and maxims in her book *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*.

consumption, commodification of emotions, and conformity to the *perfect girl image*.³¹ Majewska points out that Tiqqun's hard-hitting narration of contemporary culture is intertwined with consumption, presented as a fake form of emancipation of contemporary women.³² This manifesto can also be seen as revealing secrets to a young girl about consumption mechanisms their bodies and images are tied to.

Another example of fake emancipation of young girls/women might be a return to traditional gender roles. Ewa Majewska argues that even if the distinction between "women" and "men" categories seems to be anachronic, the precariousness of contemporary societies – identified with limited access to work, increasing economic stratification, and employers not providing social and health needs - forces women and girls to come back to traditional gender roles and responsibilities.³³ Regression is motivated by the sense of stability and safety that women seem to find in these roles, in contradiction to institutions that should be providing such support. This destabilises the economy and feeds an unsatisfied need for stability, leading women towards intimate relations, paradoxically aligning with traditional gender roles.³⁴ As Lisiak highlights, the slogan *girl power* also becomes depoliticised, whitewashed and detached from its anti-consumerist beginnings.³⁵ Popular culture extracted and co-opted it by producing neoliberal girl subjectivity: assertive, fearless, self-sufficient, emancipated, and happy. As long as she follows consumerist values of optimisation and productivity.

Majewska argues for increasing the visibility of the causal power of marginalised groups labelled as weak or powerless—women, people outside big metropolises, and the class or culturally excluded. Understanding our historical and sociocultural context is essential for the development of consciousness. In Tactic 2, I want to highlight the importance of revisiting and recontextualising the past to deepen our understanding of our situatedness. Our critical awareness and personal agency are limited without access to this knowledge.

³¹ Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young Girl*, trans. Ariana Reines, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 46-83.

³² Ewa Majewska, "Prekariat i dziewczyna. Fetyszyzm towarowy i emancypacja dziś", *Precariat and the girl. Commodity fetishism and emancipation today*, trans. Kinga Molińska. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 15, no. 1 (2015): 220, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.14746/prt.2015.1.6.>,

³³ Majewska, "Prekariat i dziewczyna", 222.

³⁴ Majewska, "Prekariat i dziewczyna", 234.

³⁵ Lisiak, "Poza girl power", 52.

2.3.2. Julia Woronowicz

Julia Woronowicz's artistic practice, particularly in the *Girlhood* and *New Mythology* series, features willful children and young girls.^{36 37} She presents a strong, naïve visual language and aesthetics that resist processes of historical erasing. Through visual representation, she reclaims space for marginalised identities that did not fit "big Polish" history. The origins of the Polish State are traced back to its baptism in the 10th century when Poland officially became a Christian country. Julia Woronowicz, who describes herself as a chronicler of alternative Polish history, makes a series of paintings, sculptures, and tapestries drawing on Slavic mythology, feminist archaeology and ethnography. Her works challenge the lack of representation for subaltern groups in "big Polish" historical narratives, stories, and beliefs.³⁸ Woronowicz also collaborates with various archaeologists, such as Beata Sobko, to ground her painting practice in research.³⁹ *Tkania Wildecka / Tapestry of Wilda* shows twelve months of the everyday life of the peasants, women, and animals. It is divided into three horizontal levels: underground, human and big forest.

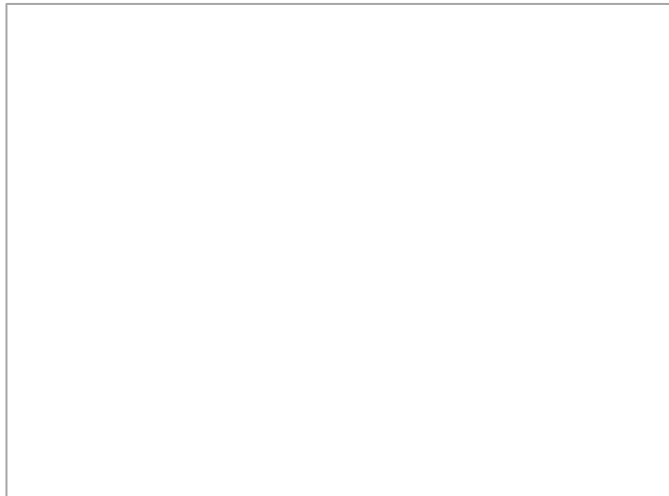


Fig 3. Julia Woronowicz, artist. "Tkanina Wildecka." (2023),
<https://www.facebook.com/liulje/posts/582207277465075> (Accessed January 25, 2025)
Image removed due to copyright reasons.

³⁶ More information: <https://www.juliaworonowicz.com/> → series → *Girlhood*, accessed January 20, 2025.

³⁷ More information: <https://www.juliaworonowicz.com/> → series → *New Mythologies*, accessed January 20, 2025.

³⁸ It is discussed in the video work related to the painting series called - *Tapestry of Wilda Series*. Available here: <https://www.juliaworonowicz.com/>, accessed January 20, 2025.

³⁹ Information about this collaboration is included in the piece mentioned in footnote 28.

Woronowicz employs the naive style of painting to portray gender-based violence and focus on feminist and queer aspects of Polish history, which are largely unknown to the public. I interpret Woronowicz's use of the naïve painting style to enforce the visibility of marginalised bodies in historical national agendas. By appropriation of negatively connotated associations of naivety with young girls and willful child figures, she subverts them. I perceive her practice as deeply political. The vast history of Polish painting is significant in upholding national hegemonic agendas and a collective sense of nationality. Within this context, I perceive Woronowicz's naivety as a form of deliberating play with conventional, "well-mastered" monumental canvases, often perceived as acts of genius who received their talents from God, historically reserved for certain bodies. The exclusivity and dominance are being challenged through the subversion of visual codes. Her paintings' detailed anatomical features are simplified, making it harder to assign them to a particular gender identity.

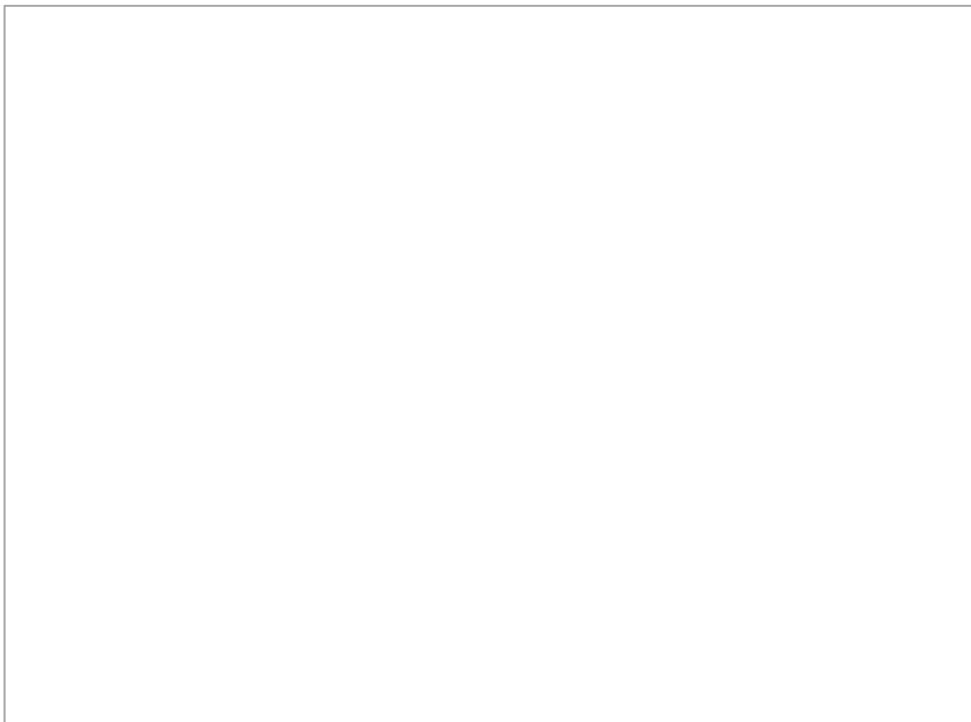


Fig 4. Julia Woronowicz, artist. "Tkanina Wildecka." (2023), <https://www.facebook.com/liulje/posts/613610257658110> (Accessed January 25, 2025)
Image removed due to copyright reasons.

By weaving the visual representation of underrepresented historical, marginalised, and hybridised figures into very historically heavy mediums such as oil painting, Woronowicz resists oppressive systems of history-making. These systems often enforce nationalist movements and erasure women's presence and contribution and their invisible unpaid labour that sustains processes of social reproduction. Her practice challenges national patriarchal agendas by providing space for female and queer creatures to thrive and feast together on the canvas as a form of liberation. This aligns with what Majewska and Lisiak describe as forms of reclaiming the space and the right to be seen and listened to. In her painting *Podwieczorek / Afternoon Tea and Noble Maidens*, we see a shameless feast of priestesses. Women can eat and drink freely, breaking the conventions of how a "young good girl" should act.

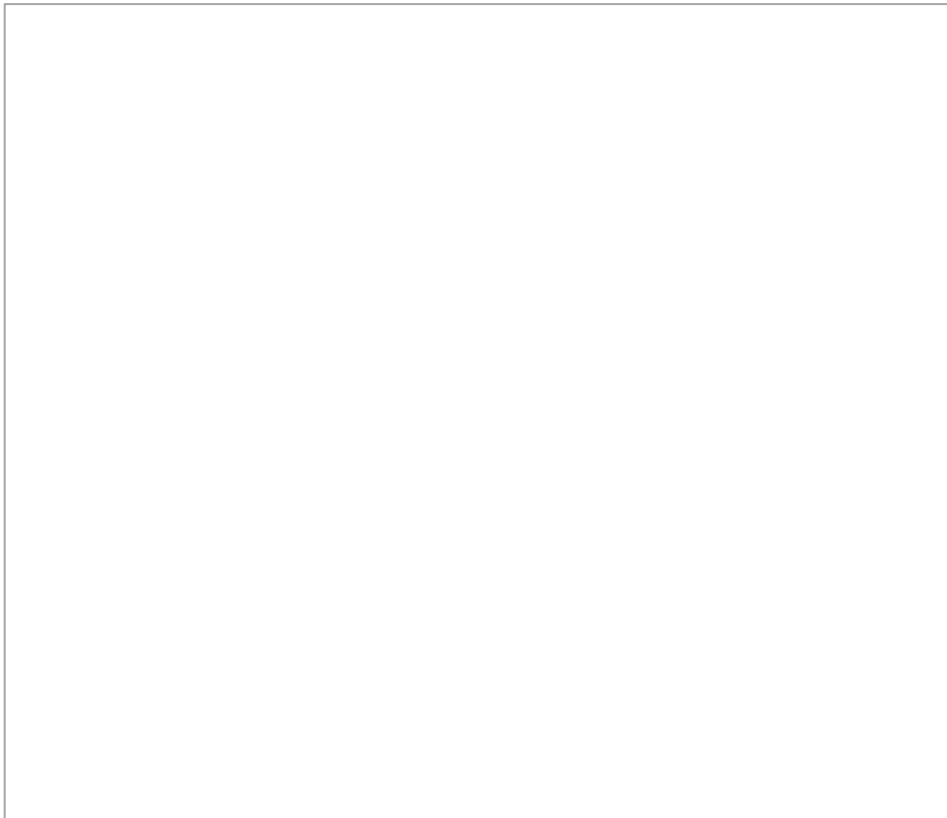


Fig 5. Woronowicz, Julia, artist. "Afternoon Tea and Noble Maidens." (2024), photographed by Jan Rusek, <https://www.facebook.com/liulje/posts/596138152738654> (Accessed January 20, 2025). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

In my essay, I have decided to situate her practice alongside the critical reading of the young girl's category, willful child, and sister-friend tactics connected with unearthing hidden family history. This shows how important it is for feminist liberation to reclaim histories marginalised

by dominant narratives and representations. I would also risk and name Woronowicz, not only a chronicler of alternative Polish history but also a chronicler of weak resistance.

2.4. Tactic 3: Borrowing clothes

After focusing on reclaiming personal and historical narratives in tactic 2, I would like to move to the last tactic - borrowing clothes. This tactic reflects relational resistance through materiality and is rooted in care and generosity. I observe changes in my closet whenever I return to my family home. My sister is constantly "stealing" my clothes. Even if it seems politically insignificant, I perceive borrowing and sharing clothes as bringing people together through materiality, passing textiles from body to body. The clothes I used to wear were intimate companions of my skin. Yet, after being borrowed indefinitely, they embody a sense of co-ownership and a counter-consumerist approach. Clothes also hold histories, and their material component allows us to store someone's presence.

2.4.1. Constellations and care – from material processes to friendships

Even if I'm departing from an individual perspective (or individual view on my relationship with my sister), I was never in this experience alone. Inspired by an anonymous theoreticians' group - Friendship as a Form of Life, we can see our relationships as constellations. According to them: "We form constellations. Our bodies are never isolated and are always enmeshed in shifting patterns of relations. Scattered across space selves, form patterns, trace connections ethical but unseen. They give us consistency and form outside of our solitude. When we make our connections material, our constellations take shape, become tactile, make worlds." ^{40 41}

Constellations are both social/ human and physical/ material. Individuals can be supported and feel strength from being a part of the group. We need to reimagine modes of being together. By acknowledging our interdependence, we materialise them. Constellations can be modes of being together.

⁴⁰ Friendship as a Form of Life, "Strange Constellations", theanarchistlibrary.org, August, 2016
<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/friendship-as-a-form-of-life-strange-constellations>.

⁴¹ Episode *Intro* in Radio Kapital is connected with this quote, and in this episode I expand on the contextualisation of care – <https://radiokapital.pl/shows/carewaves/1-intro/>, accessed January 26, 2025.

The relationality is grounded in the contextualisation of the care I would like to bring here. Care is necessary because it is emotionally loaded, and its presence means we are engaged in our actions. As Monika Rogowska-Stangret points out: "Engagement and care are a sine qua non of the cognitive process and knowledge, and therefore forms of relation-building with the world".⁴² This importance of the relational aspect in care is also present in Tian Zang's manifesto, which highlights how care became a buzzword after the pandemic and that we need to acknowledge who are caregivers and care receivers, who are expected to provide it, who to receive it.⁴³ Care can be seen as a network of giving and receiving. Tian Zang, in providing characteristics of radical care, sees setting and respecting boundaries, investing in the personal change happening in the microcosm, and sharing as caring and growing interdependently.⁴⁴

2.4.2. Olga Micińska

Borrowing clothes creates a material and relational bond, which, through Olga Micińska's practice, can extend this tactic into a collective and process-driven context. Instead of borrowed clothes, we have craftsmanship, carrying the knowledge and material processes associated with 'hands-on' work and direct contact with the body. Guild-making can be one possible macrocosm that brings together threads provided by Zang. The histories and experiences of individual women collected in one context can have incredible political power. In Olga Micińska's artistic practice, the experience linked with material knowledge and craft and their marginalisation in the construction fields unite members of the guild. The project named *The Guild* is a photo series bringing together different female craftsmen. The imaginative office of this guild - *The Headquarters*, functions as a group exhibition. It brings another initiative in which Micińska is involved in the informal platform - *The Building Institute*.^{45 46 47} Both projects aim to emancipate practical knowledge and influence diversity and development within

⁴² Monika Rogowska – Stangret, *Być ze świata. Cztery eseje o etyce posthumanistycznej*, (Gdańsk: wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2021), 140-141.

⁴³ Tian Zhang, "A manifesto for radical care or how to be a human in the arts", Sydney Review of Books, July 17, 2022, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essays/a-manifesto-for-radical-care-or-how-to-be-a-human-in-the-arts>.

⁴⁴ Zhang, "A manifesto for radical care or how to be a human in the arts".

⁴⁵ More information: <https://olgamicinska.com/index.php/sculpture/the-guild/>, accessed January 3, 2025.

⁴⁶ More information: <https://olgamicinska.com/index.php/sculpture/the-headquarters/>, accessed January 3, 2025.

⁴⁷ Instagram profile with the initiation of Building Institute: <https://www.instagram.com/thebuildinginstitute/>, accessed January 1, 2025.

construction work. Their action takes different forms - exhibitions, educational events, publications, etc. Through various processes acknowledging the processuality of the sculpture-making, engaging with workshops as infrastructures, and highlighting solution-finding aspects of crafting, Olga provides a space for the care and relationship building between different craftsmen. Micińska also presents fascinating insights on the material processes she engages with as a maker-artist, focusing on processes including constant response to problems occurring during the process and not treating artworks or sculptures only as finalised objects. Micińska presents an idea of the hybrid artist who combines a "continuous method of solution-finding occurring in the making" and an "inventive impulse of artist's expression".⁴⁸



Fig 6,7,8. Olga Micińska, artist. "The Guild." (2022), <https://olgamicinska.com/index.php/sculpture/the-guild/> (Accessed January 20, 2025). Images removed due to copyright reasons.

What Micińska proposes can be reflected in Dorota Golańska's text about the relationship between new materialism, art and science. She shifts from artworks to work-of-art, in which we should consider the processes and relationships accompanying the processes of making. Thus, she questions the ethics of representation associated with oculo- and anthropocentric

⁴⁸ Olga Micińska, "Craft as a verb. The artist as a maker, the workshop as infrastructure, and the prototype as a form of actuality", (Dutch Art Institute, 2018), 24.

Western ways of thinking organised by a hierarchical system of binary oppositions.⁴⁹ Ethics of care, including within new materialist approaches to care, can contribute to challenging the idea of artistic genius, detached from reality and society.

As Zang claims, rethinking and engaging with the personal is very important in building radical care.⁵⁰ In creating *The Guild*, profession and craft were bringing women together. The material processes combined with feminism function as a binder. Sharing clothes with sisters can also be seen as giving up singular ownership and sharing something as intimate as a hands-on relationship between the craftsman and the work of art. Care is interconnected with the dynamics between sisters—sometimes, one is a giver, and sometimes, one is a receiver. The craftsmanship is transmitted with all its materiality from hand to hand. Similarly, intimacies and stories of clothes travel from skin to skin.

2.5. Overall discussion

Sister-friend tactics, such as going to the gym together, sharing secrets, and borrowing clothes, create and illustrate the intersection of relational practices, body politics, and materiality. Aligning these tactics with artistic examples highlights the broader implications of weak resistance, which is present every day. Using theories and artistic examples allows me to zoom out from personal situations into the broader context, creating a form of interplay between them and tactics.

What makes all the artistic examples I brought here, such as sister-friend tactics? All of them can be seen as subtle and relational resistance rather than direct political confrontation. It happens through different methods and mediums. These include communal bathing with particular matter – permafrost (Keski-Korsu), alternative storytelling and building visual representation (Woronowicz), creating *Guild* departing from crafting and gender

⁴⁹ Dorota Golańska, „O praktykach i procesie. Badania artystyczne a mechanizmy wytwarzania wiedzy w ujęciu nowomaterialistycznym”, in *Feministyczne nowe materializmy: usytuowane kartografie*, ed. Monika Rogowska-Stangret, Olga Cielemeńska, (Lublin, E-naukowiec, 2018), 214. English title: *On Practices and Processes: Artistic Research and the Production of Knowledge in a New Materialist Perspective*.

⁵⁰ Zhang, “A manifesto for radical care or how to be a human in the arts”.

marginalisation (Micińska). The artists case-studied here all engage, but differently, with material processes. A common characteristic is fostering care and solidarity.

Their works can also operate in the threshold between the personal and political, between margins and centre. Together, they create a web–face perspective on sister tactics in arts, but they also present an embodiment of weak resistance in craft and art. We can also identify many differences between these practitioners, like the point of focus and scope of their works, as well as different approaches to materiality. They are approaching themes of relationality, materiality and resistance from various angles.

3. Conclusion

In this essay, I wanted to show how personal stories and experiences can draw a parallel with artistic practices and feminist theories to prove that sister-friend tactics contribute to the investigation of weak resistance, reimagining agency and providing a potential of transformation for microcosms I describe three tactics coming from sisters and friends' experiences. The connection between them and artistic examples and theoretical references allowed me to shift from personal to political, showing how small actions can be seen as weak resistance. In my investigation of artistic roles in society, I wondered how someone like me, who feels very politically and societally unimportant, can reconsider their position and contribute to change. The shift of criteria of what we access as successful forms of resisting and tactics opened my eyes to new political imagination.

Firstly, I tried to show the interconnectedness of different methods, topics, and practices by providing a web of diverse practices and theories. Secondly, potentiality, application, and speculations are the words that closely accompany me in investigating and naming sister-friend tactics. Thirdly, I am very interested in different mapping strategies and how I navigate this text, such as mapping the tactics and presenting relationships between weak resistance, art practices and material processes. This "map" has the potential to be developed as care-tography. Ultimately, I hope that the sister-friend's tactic has the potential for transformation and emancipation, which can go beyond personal relationships. Through this writing, I also wanted to investigate how different artistic practices embedded in materiality can go beyond purely visual values. It helped me to situate my enquiry better and understand the importance of

aesthetic choices and artistic tactics in creating visual languages and collaborations. I want to address this essay to my past, present, future sisters and friends.

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