

Clinic 1

Corporality and catastrophe

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Sede: Casa del Lago

Explicit body: anatomies of abjection

Analysing some of Annie Sprinkle, Bob Flanagan and Orlan's performances, the first session sets the emergence of what may be called explicit bodies into abject art. Abjection as a program, as a connection of desires, a conjunction of flows and *continuum* of intensities, leads us to a debate on corporality as an issue beyond the organism, significance or subjectivity. Going over these anatomies of abjection and picking up some of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ideas, we were able to address certain artistic practices, by connecting them to the clear construction of an organ-less body. In this aspect, Orlan's carnal art gives us a chirurgic body; Flanagan's medical art produces a masochist body and Sprinkle's post-pornographic performances confront us with a gynaecological body.

Focusing on etymology, the explicit body is a spread, unfolded, unwound, open and secret-less body. "*Open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces,*"¹ that's how *Libidinal Economy*, the book by Jean-François Lyotard, *programmatically begins. A spread out, open body is turned into a simple surface without an interior, an anti-baroque procedure, instead of pleat over pleat we now have a deployment of the body like a Möbius strip, "the libidinal body's strip open and spread out on its only face with no other side, face that nothing hides."*² *Explicitus*, past participle of *explicare*, makes you think of this moebian body transparency, this extreme visibility of the body, a perfectly lit surface, with no shadows or concealment.

Explicit, third person plural, in medieval texts used to mean, "here it ends." We may be going through the final period of corporality's analysis and representations, as we know them. The explicit body, in this way, is a paroxysmal body. Explicit could be a new euphemism for the traumatic paroxysm of corporality in modern writing. *Explicitus*

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Economía libidinal*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990, p. 9.

² Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Clinical eroticism and mechanic abjection

On the second session we looked at Romain Slocombe's art, a photographic manifesto of "fragmented body images", the ones found in Lacan's psychoanalysis when putting together a series of violent body transgressions related to castration, mutilation, dismemberment or wound. This medical art shows accident signs in women bodies that are marked by many kinds of prosthesis, collars, cast or bandages. Broken dolls that abandon fetishist perversion to enter a more radical space: castration³ (something that can be found in traditional, Victorian, nineteenth-century fetishism and is still cast, like a ghost, in our times) is not on the spotlight anymore, but its disappearance, a crisis of fetishism as a representational strategy, as an exorcism of castration from its representation and its change into sign. Castration at this point is not a sign, but presented in its literality, we face a threat that doesn't stop on the image's sifting screen, and hasn't yet been exorcised by aesthetical representation.

The eroticism in Slocombe's images shows fetishism as an opposite sign, he turns his models into dummies, dolls, broken dolls. Baroque fetishism: the bandages have now an operating function on the bodies' surfaces, still producing pleats, pleat over pleat. The mark (fetishistic bar) is now an inflection, a pleating-point that is not inside neither outside. The wound works, structurally, as a need on the body that now and then is underlined by these framing bandages. *Bandage/bondage*, where corporality spreads out as an erotic surface and as a writing space; a multiple erotic writing space (irreducible, in my opinion, to the sadistic/masochistic universe). Inscription writing (wounds, bruises, lumps) and description writing (bandages, bondages), sketching in the inside and caressing the surface, two moments that are intercepted in Slocombe's pornograms, in the fusion of body and writing that goes through *City of broken dolls* porno-grammatic rhetoric. The wound becomes the sign for what may be called an erotic clinic—not only a medical art—of the traumatic inflection of the body. A transgression eroticism, where body becomes a space penetrated by intensities, Benjamin's shock, Lacan's trauma, Barthes's *punctum*. The most interesting is that these three famous notions have a resemblance; they have a disturbing acquaintance with the image of an open wound, maybe the last metaphor in a metaphor-less universe.

Hanging bodies in a grace state, not subjects neither objects, but *abjects*. To Kristeva, the corpse is the "height of abjection".⁴ It's not by accident that Baudrillard

³ Véase, Baudrillard, Jean, "El cuerpo o el osario de signos", en *El intercambio simbólico y la muerte*, Caracas, Monte Avila, 1993.

⁴ Kristeva, Julia, *Poderes de la perversión*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989, p. 11.

considers the corpse as the “body’s ideal limit in its relation to the medicine system”.⁵ Abjection, linked to Slocombe’s medical art, becomes a flirting between the erotic body and death, connection between clinical and pornographic views. The same happens to the images by Phoebe Gloeckner in the new revised edition of *The Atrocity exhibition* by Ballard, or in the lithography series *Crash Babies*, by Trevor Brown; erotic and clinical metalepsis, hipertelic pornography that makes the pornographic view more radical, leading it into the inside of the bodies, beyond the skin limits, in a sort of pornography of the wound, aphanisis of the erotic body. An aesthetic of the shapeless, a secret-less body’s eroticism. A new atrocious exhibition stage where we briefly watch corporality moments before its disappearance. The bleeding signs are simply that: tracks of something that has already vanished.⁶

Technology, spectrality and post-pornography

In third session we looked at Belgian artist Win Delvoye’s work, specially his Sex-Ray series, from 2001. From flesh to bones, going through skin limits, his x-ray images turn the body into a transparent ghost, deepening the vision in a sort of post-pornographic x-ray. It’s almost as if the Sex-Ray images answered, on their own way, a question asked by Jean Baudrillard more than two decades ago. “But why stop with nudity, or the genitalia? If the obscene is a matter of representation and not of sex, it must explore the very interior of the body and the viscera. Who knows what profound pleasure is to be found in the visual dismemberment of mucous membranes and smooth muscles?”

The post-pornographic bodies are penetrated not only sexually but also escopically, the voyeur is thrown into the interior of the body sucked by an extreme visibility instinct. Corporality’s ostentation that overshadows the sexual representation itself, passage from porno’s explicit sex to post-pornographic explicit body. Sex is not photographed anymore, but x-rayed. It is put through a radioactively penetrating glance, boring through sex to get to porno’s sublime limit, an obscene look that doesn’t only go through the folds and pleats of corporality, but sinks vertiginously in its interiority, in its most enigmatic intimacy. Much before Delvoye, French photographer Hervé Guibert considered an x-ray from the left side of his torso the most intimate image of himself, way more intimate than any nude.⁷ White, x-rayed, spectral obscenity; mapping of a corporality that goes beyond the tangible.

⁵ Baudrillard, Jean, *El intercambio simbólico y la muerte*, Caracas, Monte Avila, 1993, p. 133.

⁶ Baudrillard, Jean, *De la seducción*, Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1993, p. 36.

⁷ Guibert, Hervé, *Ghost Image*, Los Angeles, Green Integer, 1998, p. 74.

Body, sex and desire’s shallowness, our sight faces signs of something that doesn’t exist anymore. These images recall the frustrating absence of corporality in the photographer, for the same reason we get this spectral, ghostlike aspect. About the “ghostlike effect,” Derrida says what Barthes once related to photography “the spectrum is in first place what is seen. But what is seen is invisible, a body’s visibility that is not present in flesh and bone. It denies intuition in which surrenders, it is not tangible.”⁸ Spectral pornography gets us to face bodies that are impossible to caress with sight, turned into ghosts in front of our eyes. Passage from little death to a straight death, sensuality disappears in this kind of erotic necromancy, body’s exhumation, desire’s autopsy. If we think of Barthe’s significance, that is, sensually breaking loose from the erotic image, spectral pornography will get the erotic sense of the image to collapse; a crisis in sensuality of sense, phantasmagoria of a secret-less body, destined to disappear. In Delvoye’s images, visibility desire doesn’t stop at the skin limits, his x-ray images turn lover’s hugs into a funeral dance, transparent bodies, skeletons that are penetrated by sight, ghosts. The same happens in medical art, visibility is taken to paroxysm, bodies are cut open before our eyes, and we spy through an open wound, as a voyeur would do through a keyhole. Different from the Victorian voyeur, we prefer to put corporality under a microscope, put x-rays through it or capture its heat with infrareds.

Participants

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⁸ Derrida, Jaques, *Ecografías de la televisión*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1998, p. 145.