

AN OVERDOSE OF “ME”

and the metropolis is and was, passing through Weiss's work, where the urban body-landscape seems to be just one of its constant changes. In a certain way Weiss's body is a composite entity, perhaps a hybrid: a camera-body, a self-sufficient body that if it so desired could take the place of the man, as she shows in a short video entitled *David 1*, in which she places her camera over the genitals of Michelangelo's David, and with simple editing, supplants him. At first Weiss plays with making shapes like she were composing a kaleidoscope; shortly thereafter she develops an anti-technological strategy, as I have mentioned, in which her projects are made by taking advantage of the shortcomings and accidents of early television. She intervenes not just in the images, but also in the audio track, into which she splices scratches of sound. Hers is a position of resistance, producing anxieties that vibrate between her voice, her visual discourse and her urgency.

Since the return of the Greeks, curiously, the body has been linked to forms of global discussion in which other bodies question what constitutes the new difference, and whether this is necessary in the skein of an already departing normativity before the rules of kinship and of the assignment of sexual roles.

I have wanted to mark the difference in the global atmosphere between those who can enunciate and advance their visions of the future, and the factors that introduce the delay in the discussion of which body is valid and which to be protected. In this vein, video in Mexico —more stable now, and digital— has given rise to a new book and two long videos with 5000 interviews, called *Las muertas chiquitas* [*Les petites morts*], a project by Mireia Sallarés. Mexican women of distinct ages, professions and social classes discuss, showing a wide range of emotions, such feminine subjects as the orgasm with its accompanying pleasure, fear and hesitations, interfered with by histories of pain and of the disappearance of women's bodies, which had been identified in the morgue, disfigured and with their teeth missing. In other, more brutal words, the body returns in a reverberation of images that is at once document, testimony, knowledge and expression of forms of feeling that bring us (me) to ask ourselves about other ways of recording simpler and simultaneously more sophisticated images, while the problematic of the body keeps augmenting its signification as a complex political knot. ●

SILVIA GRUNER

Program erratum: in the program, my presentation is entitled *Una sobredosis de mí* in Spanish. Being faithful to the title would imply talking about what's mine or belongs to me, which is the self invested in objects, and thus talk about my possessions, my work, my friends, my house, my dog, my practice, my boy-friends, my trips, my photographs, my experiences, my exhibitions. In the digital age all of this has become information that makes us feel like it enriches our lives and our communication. What is mine is all displayed on the Web, on my blog, on my Facebook page, my e-mail and my iPhone.

We think that external wealth is inner wealth and we all do yoga and breathe deeply to balance out the twelve hours we spend at the computer keyboard.

My presentation's title is *Una sobredosis de 'yo'*, and with *yo*—"I," "ego" or "self"—I am referring to the self electrocuted by so many visual stimuli, a self filled with panic unleashed when stimuli overload the body's and the mind's capacity to decipher them. This self refers to the psychosis caused by excess energy or information that leads to systemic paralysis. Symptoms of discomfort in our environment are related to the imperative of "enjoying oneself" (the new superego); this imperative of being happy is associated with the imperative of being productive and consuming. When the self panics and becomes paralyzed or enters a state of euphoric hyperactivity. When all the fuses blow at once, the only thing that's left dangling like a severed cable is guilt: the guilt of not being happy, of not enjoying oneself, of not being productive, of not consuming and of not being part of the world that surrounds us. This overdose of self is indeed lethal.

1. A Story

I press the button to the elevator in the small hall outside my grandmother's apartment. While I'm waiting for it to arrive I look at myself in the mirror hanging on the wall. My grandmother comes up to me, hugs me lovingly, looks at her reflection in the mirror and says to me, "What you see is what you will see." Alarmed, I ask her, "What do you mean?" while I silently pray for the elevator to come quick and for the door to the fifth floor to open. When it does, I run in and watch the door close between us.

2. An Overdose of “Me”

We are everywhere and other people see us. Mirrors reflect and multiply us *ad infinitum* at gyms, malls, airports, on escalator railings or doors. All those surfaces reflect us and other people aren't outside the mirrors' frame but rather

filling out the image. The others know this because we are all there in transit, we all rush around, exchanging sideways glances and quick smiles. When we stop, we look around like a lighthouse spinning 360 degrees, breathing haltingly, we realize where we are and rummage around in our pocket for the cell phone. We are preparing to meet someone. We call before getting there, we call when we get there, and while we're waiting, we look at the department store's window displays. We bide our time looking, with the unsought company of others; feeling awkward, we pretend these others weren't in the same reflection.

3. The Mirror

The mirror was my constant companion in adolescence, without no other meditation but my loneliness; I had all the time in the world to examine myself in a private act of contemplation, looking for answers. I saw myself blurrier, taller, skinnier, prettier, more concerned, more in love. I repeated this ritual several times a day, attempting to accept myself. I only cried in front of the mirror and my image seemed different in my parents' or my brothers' bathroom. In my mirror I was totally alone but not in the others. I liked feeling that I had company without the others knowing I had locked myself in their bathroom.

4. Legacy

I am an artist who has been able to enjoy the consequences of the freedoms gained through the social and political struggles of the 1960s and 70s. I've never questioned whether art is personal and therefore political: a life project devoid of exploitation, with equal rights, sexual freedom, based on principles of solidarity and love for other living beings. A life of freedom fighting against all forms of injustice equally. What has happened in the world over the last thirty years? The radical, creative and intellectual life project that was ours was co-opted by capitalism, leading language, social relations, the couple, physical and mental health, psychoanalysis, art, spirituality and nature to enter a state of crisis. Capitalism replaced humanistic and personal needs for a consumable simulacrum. A "light" representation of our lives has appeared, and it would seem that what we used to call our preferences are now merely some options on a menu filled with better ideas to live out our meager lives. Everything is possible! The digital era recreates reality: *the real thing which is more real than reality. Avatar is here to stay.*

The impotence in the face of consumerism, violence, the brutality of war—which is decentralized and taken for granted— natural disasters, economic

pressures and crises have imbued our collective unconscious, causing fear and paranoia to pop up at the slightest provocation.

5. Jerusalem, 1978–82

We were free, *bien sûr*, but it was hard to tell what freedom was good for. Freedom was an imperative that had become a series of eccentric and not always friendly attitudes: haircuts, sexual preferences, our way of speaking; we were all social misfits. Art and friends were on the thin edge of legality (legality understood as the official consensus) and more than a few were given appointments at the psychiatric ward. Most of the students had already paid their debt to the army: for three years their body and soul had been confiscated by the State. They finally had the chance to reinvent themselves. Not all of this was entertaining to me, and it made me dizzy: we were artists. Outside the industrial building in Romema life was different; the violent reality of political life in Jerusalem made me even dizzier. I sought refuge with Ibrahim, my Arab dad, in his store in the old city.

6. Ur

I watched him hypnotized as he mended a sock as perfectly as my grandmother would have. He studied philosophy and history at university. He worked as a translator for the Palestinian newspaper *Al Fajar* in East Jerusalem. He was a left-wing militant; he was able to dodge military service by saying he had converted to Islam. He was from a prestigious intellectual Jewish family and on his personality test, the army psychologist had given him a score of zero: dementia. He lived in Jerusalem's most orthodox neighborhood because he didn't want to live among Zionists. Was that another example of eccentricity or of sanity? I had discovered the Other and fallen in love. I learned that political responsibilities had to do with education and solidarity, and that direct political action meant fighting against the repressive state. For the first time I felt I was part of something bigger. A second battle—defending my subjectivity, my sexual identity and my freedom—had gone beyond art, though it didn't resolve things in my private life. I still felt dizzy.

7. USA

Living in the paradise of exacerbated communication, I shut myself in, making experimental films at the Massachusetts College of Art, which has one of the most important independent film archives in the world. I had found the perfect

sanctuary: the most obscure means of displaying my neuroses and existential issues. At that time the camera replaced the mirror and I obsessively depicted my own body. The intimacy of the projection room, the projector's noise, the beam of light in the dark allowed us to project, imagine and experiment all possible forms of pleasure and perversity. Freedom had become introjected and a few of us shared a handful (or a treasure trove) of extreme forms of behavior, unimaginable in front of the camera. It was a veritable Pandora's box. As filmmakers, sculptors, painters, we met in the darkroom to see and listen to Stan Brackage, Jean Genet, Maya Deren, Man Ray, Jack Smith, Michael Snow, Carolee Schneeman, Joe Gibbons, Anne Robertson, Saul Levine, Marc Lapore, Nan Goldin, Mike Kelly, Linda Montano... They were all people, none of them was famous, they were all underground artists. It was the late 1980s and the personal had never been more personal, transgressive and desperate.

8. The Mousehole on Licenciado Verdad, Mexico City

The 1990s: when all of us were artists, neighbors, friends, lovers, art critics, foreigners and poor. We showed our work unconcerned by the market's critiques or demands. Our practice and lives were intertwined, we enjoyed collaborating, we liked other artists. We didn't have much to lose besides time, which we let drag on irresponsibly. It was a charmed life and I think we all have good memories of those times. The historic center of town was a cabinet of curiosities and we weren't far behind. Our egos had not yet possessed us, we shared coffee, beer, sugar, art books and *Seño Bertha*, the building's superintendent. She was our informant and protector. A piece that Francis (Aljys) threw away, painted on sheet metal, still hangs above the door to her apartment.

In Mexico City working in Super 8 started getting prohibitively expensive while video allowed me immediate feedback.

Among other things, videotaping my surroundings helped me resituate myself in the city where I grew up, rediscover it, since I had trouble recognizing it after spending ten years abroad.

9. The New Millenium

Surviving biennales and art fairs, divorces, the disappearance of loved ones, AIDS, cancer and Lacanian psychoanalysis hasn't been easy. In the face of such trials and tribulations, we were about to lose what was left of our sense of humor.

Now we're all connected through the Internet, we can be present in any place at any time and visible to everyone. But with the disembodiment and

¹ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009), p. 157.

² *Ibid*, p. 158.

³ *Ibid*, p. 138.

de-sensualization of everyday life in the virtual world, the Other has become terrifying and threatening.

Lived experience is thus invaded by the pervasive proliferation of simulacra. Here we can see the origin of a pathology of desire, a sort of cancer reaching the very heart of the libidinal experience. Libidinal energy is attacked by a replicant of a parasitic type, as shown by the phenomenon of synthetic media pornography.¹

The limited character of libidinal energy brings us back to the theme of depression as collective phenomenon. The semiotic acceleration and the proliferation of simulacra within the mediatized experience of society produce an effect of exhaustion in the collective libidinal energy, opening the way to a panic-depressive cycle.²

10. Return to Vanitas

We are in the twenty-first century, no longer facing the mirror with my grandmother while waiting for the elevator, but instead with the reconstructed digital image of my body that moves like a ghost to the beat of elevator music.

And in spite of all this, we must not doubt the power of art. As Franco Berardi (Bifo) says:

The passive estrangement named alienation, the painful estrangement from the self, must then be overturned to become a delirious, creative, re-focusing estrangement.³ ●