

Deleuzian Approaches to the Corpse: Serrano, Witkin and Eisenman

Gregory Minissale
University of Auckland

Whereas memorial culture places the corpse in an arborescent hierarchy of values, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome undermines this image of thought. The photography of Andres Serrano and Peter Witkin, and Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, are rhizomes: they form a productive network of chaotic, subterranean connections and ruptures 'dismembering' the corpse's traditional semiotics.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

—"Bitter Fruit" a poem by Abel Meeropol published in *The New York Teacher*, 1937; set to music for *Strange Fruit*, recorded by Billie Holiday, 1940.

We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes.

—Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:15.

Often, the very structure of our sorrow is organized like a tree, roots reaching down and soaring above with branches outstretched, marking moments, qualities, social differentiation, fragments we organize into narrative order. How do we resolve the contradiction of the emotional protest inherent in *Strange Fruit* and the critical distance afforded by Deleuze's critique of arborescent traditions? In this essay, I attempt to

take the vertical corpses hanging from the trees and lay them to rest in the horizontals of the rhizome. This essay does not deal with death, violence or trauma, but instead, examines dominant traditions in art and philosophy which construct the corpse as a conceptual and social category, one which aims to marginalize the threat the corpse represents in a hierarchical system of values. One such tradition associates the corpse with the tree. I examine this tree in two directions: the tree as an image of thought of a lineage and cosmology (whose emblem is the Tree of Life); this is a vertical tradition pointing up to heaven; it often depicts Christ as the risen (vertical) corpse. The antithesis of this is the downward direction, yet it is also vertical, pointing to the fall from the Tree of Knowledge. The fall is celebrated as an inversion of rational teleology by the Surrealists and others.

I go on to disassemble this verticality guided by Deleuze and Guattari, showing that there are approaches to thinking the corpse that can be characterized as rhizomic and transversal with rather more chaotic subterranean connections and ruptures, approaches that undermine the enlightenment vision of the organic continuity of the tree which we use to interpolate our hope in the transcendence of the corpse, fashioning it as the seed and fruit of the tree. With the rhizome, the tree which marks the paean to the cult of the dead is cut down and truncated, eventually to dissolve into the grasses of the earth. The rhizome is also a shared grave that augurs a different and more radical response to the corpse as an obscene plateau, as a thousand plateaus. With the rhizome all corpses are equal on a horizontal plane and share the grave of the earth with others. It cuts down the vertical cathedral of the tree and its hierarchies—the corpse individuated by beauty, fame, social rank, blood, race or branch in the family tree or the tree of history—values which attempt to make the corpse transcendent in death, and to perpetuate those very ideological categories. The arborescent corpse works with binaries of high and low, individual and group, insider and outsider, while the rhizome breaks down these distinctions. Its corpses are joined underground.

The Arborescent Corpse Points Up

One of the clearest traditions establishing the arborescent corpse consists of images depicting the subject *Noli Me Tangere* ('Don't touch me') where Christ is shown as a risen corpse revealed to Mary Magdalene. The fact that he is a corpse is emphasized by his request to her that she not

touch him. An overwhelming number of paintings by Mantegna, Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Hans Holbein the Younger, Titian, Correggio, Rembrandt, Andrea del Sarto and others show Christ emphatically vertical, standing next to a tree (in Titian's painting it appears to grow out of his head). This arborescent presence is no mere decorative flourish:

The bodies of Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ together form a grain. From this grain, or, more specifically, from the seed at their feet a plant is growing. We see in this a theological interpretation of the crucifixion of Christ is also depicted: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a single grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" John 12.24. (Baert 1970: 99).

The grain is formed by two figures on either side of a line, echoing another longstanding visual compositional schema, the upright *mandorla* or almond form which shows the Virgin Mary 'presenting' her offspring as a seed to the world. Christian iconography employs not only symbols but the diagrammatic essentials of their form to create meaningful visual compositions that are also intertextual, or inter pictorial. In Mantegna's picture of *Noli Me Tangere* a soaring yet withered fig tree is overgrown with a vine and grapes which we follow with our eyes raised up to its towering heights. The tree references Christ's miracle of bringing the dead fig tree back to life, and the wiry vine of grapes 'feeds' this arborescent frame with the blood-wine of Christ's sacrifice.

In all cases, the tree is the vertical element which raises up eyes, heart and story and delivers life into death and death into the hereafter. As a transcendent symbol of growth and fecundity, it acts as a mediating force between male and female elements, life and death, corpse and live body, past aeons of prophecy and the present. What is interesting in these pictures is the verticality of the corpse and the tree suggesting that Christ is the new Tree of Life and the corpse the seed. The legend of the True Cross holds that the wood used for Christ's crucifixion was taken from three trees which sprouted from the seeds of the originary Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. Three seeds were placed in Adam's mouth and were buried with him. From his mouth, the seeds grew into three trees: a cypress, a pine and a cedar (Freeman Johnson 2005: 85-86). The cross is thus a tree which reaches back to heaven. The cypress, the funerary tree in a large number of cultural

traditions, is the emblem of a heliotropic and anagogic structure on which is pinned a hierarchy of values thrust vertically above the raw material of the earth in a statement of transcendent faith in the air, in the rising spirit above both earth and hyle, crowned by the resurrected corpse of Christ. Christ dies on the Tree of Life, which sprouts from Adam's corpse and through the tree, he is reborn, the wood sprouts new growth.

Related to the tradition of trees sprouting from corpses is a passage from Isaiah:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding (Isaiah 11:1-3)

This passage has been represented pictorially in numerous medieval illuminated books, and carved into a large number of sculptural reliefs in churches and found in embroidery. The image portrays the corpse of Jesse out of which springs a whole family tree of kings and prophets ending in a resurrected Christ at the top. Later versions depict Adam or Abraham's corpse out of which spring his progeny, visually eulogizing the arborescent ideology of linear growth and continuity, heaven bound. Christ is the new shoot of the tree. Obviously related to these are secular versions of family trees used for various ideological purposes, there was even an official pictorial family tree made for Adolf Hitler using the tree to underline the Third Reich's belief in the perpetuity of the regime and its Aryan purity: the family tree is instrumental in fabricating illusions of immortality.

Using aspects of this arborescent tradition of placing the corpse in the Tree of Life in order to have generations of cyclical return, it is possible to read between the lines of the poem/song lyrics to *Strange Fruit* with which I began.

Southern trees bear strange fruit,

The trees are fixed in the soil of the south, a mother also bears children, and the corpses are fruit.

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,

Genocide is in the system from root upwards, an arborescent image mixed with the genealogy of blood. It traces not only the generation of white supremacists who have committed murder but the generations of African-Americans who were their victims.

Black body swinging in the southern breeze,

The verse is eerie for the corpse moves by some inhuman hand or by agency of nature; the rhythm permeates both the poem and song but also the breath of the wind. The wind is also cooling and welcoming, but not here, it is ghostly.

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees,

According to North American superstition, Christ's cross was made from the wood of the poplar tree, which always trembles because of this and adds a new meaning to the previous verse.¹ Hanging is the keyword, for the corpse hangs between strangeness and ordinariness, life suspended in vertical death, swinging from life to death, but swinging also with the poplar tree's trembling. The arborescent myth of the True Cross is re-traced. The photograph of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, August 7, 1930 that was cited by the songwriter as the inspiration for the song, does not show that the victims died hanging from a poplar tree.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,

A continuation of the rural and classical themes of idealism and decorum as one might find in official pictorial art memorializing heroism and gallantry, yet here, introducing a series of ironies that could index white sanctimoniousness screening grubby murder. Yet, in another direction, could some of this heroism be reserved for the victims of the lynching, continuing the bitterly ironic tone of the poem? In which case, the African-American victims form a tree of heroes' corpses likened to a family tree.

The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,

The line is the clearest engagement with the notion of immense physical suffering. The bulging eyes strained by strangulation, the twisted mouth is a silent, frozen picture of pain, and the victim cannot scream, the noose suspends him in the air where speech is to be found, yet the noose allows him only animal sounds. The twisted mouth is a triple articulation: the victim's gasps; the witnessing lynch mob enflamed by their own passions made animal; and the poet's witnessing, silenced, as death silences, yet speaking through this poem, which is also a twisted kind of mouth (the singer of *Strange Fruit* also has a twisted mouth). The corpse is thus amongst the living, as it is 'in' the living as memory, as silences and as twisted utterance. The poem was made into a song. The poet's voice which cries

out like a long delayed reaction to a stifled cry of pain is forced through the singer's throat, his silenced voice, the photographer's, the victim's, is carried through her voice. The tree denotes a genealogy of enunciations. The arborescent imagery conveys this twisted mouth, gnarled and distorted. Although the poet diligently avoids the word 'corpse', the poem IS a corpse, magically brought back into our presence when re-enunciated.

Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,

This is another silence which speaks, this time through olfactory sensibilities usually invoked as an idyllic scent denoting also, the idealism of a southern emblem, the magnolia tree, which is, indeed, a mighty tree, its waxy, dark green leaves flocked with heavy, creamy white flowers and with a dizzying fragrance: this is a sticky, aesthetic construct of white history which the poet wants distance us from, it has suddenly become morbid and sickly.

and the sudden smell of burning flesh!

This is one of the most serious contrasts in the poem, where redolence and even decadence descend into an animal vomit. It also indexes an ancient topos of cooked and uncooked, civilization and taboo (and cannibalism) respectively. Burning (fire) indexes the semiotic chain breath, breeze, wind, and word in Jewish lore. Burnt flesh is also an offering to God. Hence, this part of the poem is highly cosmological and religious in its imagery.

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,

The contrast here is between eye and fruit. The crows present more black/white imagery but also are a ravaging flock, and we revisit the fruit again, as helpless fruit which are to be plucked yet so are eyes (bulging eyes). 'Pluck' suggests the plucking out of the eye: "if thine eye offends thee pluck it out" and the eye for an eye of the Old Testament. Again, the witnessing eye is implicated as much as the eye of the victim plucked by the crows. There might also be a reference here to the set of racist laws the 'Jim Crow laws' enacted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to keep African-Americans subjugated and marginalized, the legislative framework for the social engineering of white supremacy which exploits the fruit of the tree. On another level, fruit from the tree references Adam and Eve's eating of the Tree of Knowledge and their fall from paradise.

For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,

Storm clouds gathering. Buffeted by the elements, the crying rain (from the eyes, from the sky) gathers our mourning, the juices of the fruit are exploited, the souls are swallowed up into the air (of the crows); the death in the air is also 'articulated' by the sucking after the last breath of life, the last exhalation through which the soul is evaporated, leaving the husk of the body. The suck is an inarticulate contrast with the poem and an onomatopoeic intervention denoting bodily processes, all are a relinquished to the air.

For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,

These are inversions, the sun is cleansing but here jaundiced and defiling, speeding the decomposition of the body, unlocking the trees to give up their fruit in an anonymous process of simply dropping and, perhaps, a suggestion of washing one's hands of blame. But the tree is a Tree of Life and the victim's grasp on it has been loosened finally to release the corpse into the horizontality of the earth.

Here is a strange and bitter crop.

The cycle is enunciated of cyclical renewal wherein there is a crop, perhaps a crop of revenge (the taste is bitter and again cannibalism is referenced). The crop is a symbol of sustenance and fecundity transforming the fruit into a legion of buried seeds, watered by blood at the roots, coming full circle. The corpse is both husk and seed playing a humble, abject yet privileged part in a system of transcendental renewal which takes as its emblem the tree, the plant, the fruit, the crop, the flower, interspersing them with truncated visions of living bodies becoming corpses, becoming dispersed. The bitter crop is cyclical; the cycle of death will be repeated as seeds, to crop, to grow trees and more corpses to drop into the earth.

The Arborescent Corpse Points Down (As Well as Up)

The contrasting imagery and poetry of *Bitter Fruit* is lodged in the tracery of the tree which is both a symbol of death and renewal, but the poet later opted to describe the tree without any irony. In a poem entitled, *The House I Live In*, Meeropol depicted the lineage of tyranny that the tree represents:

Bigot-tree
 Is a poisonous growth
 Arising out of the swamp
 Of Ignorance
 And Prejudice
 From its twisted
 Branches
 Freedom
 Is lynched.²

This is an inverse image of the tree, shown not as aiding the cycle of regeneration but as reproducing an immortal evil. Even the poet's hatred for the tree here is entangled in an arborescent discursivity which can be traced back to the original sin, where the poisonous, twisted branches of the tree reference the fall from paradise. Even the way in which the poem is written, vertically, with short lines and single words suggests a tree structure with the "Bigot tree" at the top, and the "lynched" hanging on to its bottom. But the poem also suggests that freedom is made into a corpse by being lynched by the Bigot-tree, the poet apportions ancestral and genealogical malice to the tree, and in the opposite direction, suggests that, like trees, ignorance and prejudice are generational.

The hierarchical arborescent image of thought organizes heaven, hell and purgatory. Satan has his ranks of demons, as god has his ranks of angels. Thus, the tree is both Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, the reason for Adam and Eve's downfall and the supporting structure for the crucifixion, antechamber to eternal life. Is it is both triumph and downfall. This is why in European art the Tree of Knowledge is often shown as a corpse reduced by the snake-demon to a skeleton tree which causes Adam and Eve to become mortal.³

In *Bitter Fruit*, "Blood at the leaves and blood at the root" is an expression of the genealogy of inherited bigotry and murder extending both above ground (a family tree marking both present and future growth) and underground hiding roots deep in the past. The tree, like heaven and hell, future and past, is hierarchical above and in the subterranean below, earth merely the middle registers of the cosmology. The tree is inverted, both giver of life and bringer of death, on a vertical axis intersecting the line of the earth. African-Americans were hanged by the neck from trees but this is not a meaningless expedience facilitating a lynching but a harsh reality

secreted in an arborescent tradition of thinking which stages murder in an instinctively intelligible context. This consists of banishing the victims of a conspiring mob to the anonymity of the city margins at the edge of the forest. This no-man's land is the context for an arbitrary execution which denies human rights or due process, and suggests an animal in the forest unworthy of noble reflection, hunted and made into a trophy. The tree represents the temporary suspension of the rule of law (Agamben's "the state of exception"), which institutionalizes and ritualizes murder. It gives murder the semblance of a tree: natural justice inherited from our fathers reaching back to the original sin, with the same undertones of predestination which the murderer may imagine militates against charges of premeditation. For the perpetrators of a lynching, well versed in arborescent and agricultural practices and ideologies enshrined in the Bible, the lynching is a spontaneous outburst of righteousness veiling bigotry; the makeshift arrangement underlines the absence of reflection, holding out the possibility of erasure both for the murderers and for their memories of the corpses. The corpse is a fruit that will fall to the ground in an unmarked grave and rot in a 'natural' process of decomposition effacing identity and this natural cycle will erase the deed of murder.

The tree can help to drain the trauma arising from a contemplation of guilt or premeditation in this murder or the witnessing of it by allowing such trauma to branch off into an arborescent transcendence. What could be more natural than the corpse without an identity, an 'animal' sacrifice purging the community of its sickness (in the Tree of Life model), yet allowing it to wallow in its vision that original sin is inevitable and predestined (the Tree of Knowledge model)? Here, the corpse and the tree are both one, without sense, understanding or judgement. Both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge let all murderers off the hook in a sense, either by furnishing them with the belief that the tree restores life in a cycle of regeneration, or by offering the delusion that there is no choice, that Man is born to sin and the tree has generationally always produced such thought and action, and always will. Here, the tree is the visual, diagrammatic index of murder as a hierarchically intuited and inherited practice stretching back to the dawn of time: "blood on the leaves and blood at the root", an inevitable and self-justifying cycle. The heart of the poem is rent with the tension between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge and the corpse is locked into the tyranny of this eternal war.

Extending this are some kinds of modernist traditions of art and critical theory which aim to shock and reveal the cruelty and sadism of humanity in contrast to its religious transcendence. This anti-aesthetic, downward thrust is represented by Bataille's *basseuse* and Bakhtin's carnivalesque, for example, both of which substitute the vertical, anagogical projections of the celestial for the transgressive pleasure to be derived by our demonic fall. The antithesis uses the same vertical axis of transcendence, but heads down. Here at the bottom is a celebration of animal instincts, cruelty, violence and the corpse. In art, the tradition is represented by Bosch, Breughel, Caravaggio, Lautréamont, de Sade and others. What is cast aside in Kristeva, thrown away, or what falls off, is celebrated in this downward movement:

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall) [...] is cesspool and death. Without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit-cadaver. (Kristeva 1982: 4).

Kristeva's daring exposé of the constructions, artistic, social and cultural, by which we make the corpse acceptable, reveals to us our refusal to accept our fall, the decomposition of the dead body, the death that is slowly happening in us as we speak. Instead, we choose to repress and throw aside thoughts about this physical reality.

One way in which to break the cycle of refusing to think about the reality of the corpse is to revel in forms of art and philosophy which focus on it. The corpse becomes the symbol of everything cast aside by bourgeois society, it becomes a club to beat out the clichéd sentiments and intellectual formulas we use to banish the unacceptable: another way to go back to ancient conflicts of Eros and Thanatos. Here, Bataille's inter-repulsion and Kristeva's vertigo are equivocal expressions of extreme emotions, an attraction to death as pleasure, or pleasure unto death. Inter-repulsion is attraction and repulsion together, and they are formed into a vertigo simply by putting desire next to its opposite, death, and by inverting the vertical thrust of the transcendent into the ground: the anagogic becomes the fall, and the fall a journey to ecstasy. If the corpse has fallen and its husk is thrown away, and we refuse to recognise its true import and excrete it from the city, Bataille and Kristeva show us its immanence as decomposition and

abjection by lionizing mud and faeces, blood and semen, de-idealizing any residue of transcendence in immanence. Yet, this anti-aesthetic is, however, only a dubious tactical weapon against a hierarchical and patriarchal system for it provides a foundation for this very hierarchy, adding new subterranean layers to it, rather than branching out horizontally beyond an inverse relation.

Ultimately, then, the celebrated transcendent corpse of spirit and air and the immanent corpse of rotting flesh are antithetical to each other, but cooperative in creating a hierarchy of heaven and hell. Whatever direction, elevated or *bassesse*, both are energised by paroxysms of pleasure pointing above and below through which the dead body is simply used as a poker card which can be viewed as both upside down and the right way up, simultaneously. This is another image of vertigo. Such traditions of thought, though useful antidotes to the poison of religious paradigms of power, re-instantiate these paradigms by creating a hierarchy of sensations and affects, casting aside transversal series of sensations and critical engagements that are neither disgust nor adoration, nor reaction.

Mantegna, Bosch, Breughel, Caravaggio, Bataille, Kristeva et. al, present the arborescent model of the corpse as a base *via negativa*, as a denial of a soaring, heavenly grace promised to us by the rotting seed corpse, and yet they bring the transformation of its opposite into sharper relief. Corpse as base materialism or window to the soul, the duality is locked by the love-hate axis. This dualism is clearly transposed into material form by the tradition of the Transi Tomb memorial.

The Transi Tomb is a tradition of tomb architecture that articulates a profound hypocrisy bordering on schizophrenia. It is usually built using two coffins one above the other, except, like a double decker we can see a sculpture in each chamber, one the corpse as shining apparition of the deceased in idyllic sleep, the other, usually underneath, shown as a decomposing corpse eaten by worms, bugs and other flesh eating organisms. This also led to the dual focus *momento mori* a sculpture with two faces either back to back or split down the middle, where we see a rotting corpse's head on one side, the reverse or opposite of which is a portrait of the corpse as beauty in death.

Perhaps the only way out of this duality is to cut down the Tree of Life above the ground and to dig out its roots below, the Tree of Knowledge, and chop it up, and dismember its roots and crown, and place it into a horizontal field, either to feed the grasses or to create a new forest. At least in the forest, verticality is swallowed up in a multiplicity and the cosmogony

of the vertical totem pole, which locks us into raising up our eyes and lowering them again, is levelled. This unremarkable plain is not brought into motion by desire channelled into vertiginous flights or falls but consists of recognising these forces when they come into play, not as belonging to the phenomenological "I" who experiences them but through a kind of indifference to any fetish and a partiality to them all. Here, there is a calm which finds its co-presence with the corpse.

There is an argument in Krauss (1985: 39-40) that Bataille's *informe* ('formlessness') and *bassesse*, rather than inverses of patriarchal hierarchy, present to us a horizontality of thought, an undoing of dialectical concepts and conventional definitions of knowledge, scuppering transcendence. But both *bassesse* and *informe* are structured by binary opposites: vertical up-vertical down, form-formlessness, human-animal, consciousness-subconsciousness, animate-inanimate, light-shadow, and heaven and hell. Bataille's Captain Ahab fixation on destroying hierarchies of power and idealism using the cannon fire of *bassesse* and *informe* also, necessarily, posits high meaning/low meaning (*bassesse*) and meaning/meaningless (*informe*). One side of the binary continually brings to mind the other as unsaid presence, as parergon. Although Krauss promises a horizontal alternative to the vertical axis she only manages to set up this series of binaries, reaffirming high and low, ecstasy and abjection, reinstating verticality through doubling (Callois and Lacan), or by inversions of the positive and negatives of light and dark in photography. For her, the uncanny is simply a place of doubling where these binaries are preserved. Unfortunately, the corpse is implicated in this paradigm of reversals and doublings as seed/waste.

In what follows, I begin to explore ways of going beyond this whole edifice of thesis and antithesis structured on binaries which ensnare the corpse. Instead, I will conceptualize the corpse as a semiotic system linked to many others, rather than being locked in perpetual dualisms and hierarchies. Krauss's system of binary opposites reinscribes the corpse as individual ideal with one foot in heaven, the other in hell, transcending disintegration. Also implicated in these binaries is a phenomenological counterpart or double who is also an individual witness of these series of schisms. Instead, it is possible, perhaps even necessary, for the corpse as concept to be truncated and dismembered using a disjunctive deconstructionism, and strewn across an immanent, horizontal field to be joined with many others, to create a rhizomic mass grave in the midst of the living.

Rhizomic Corpses Point Everywhere

It is important to keep in mind that while the rhizome is able to truncate and dismember the arborescent model associated with vertical, anagogic transcendence and demonic fall, and bring it into a horizontal immanence, this necessarily involves undermining the very binary between the arborescent and the horizontal. The rhizome unravels the dualism and operates more transversally, prompting the hierarchical structure of the binary to shudder.

Rhizomic corpses are a subterranean network of loosely associated, arbitrary multiplicities. Yet the rhizome here is also a range of intensity *and* co-present intensities and their ranges, where the virtual can form into opportunistic, timid beginnings breaking up blockages or flowing around them. Consciousness is a distributed system, it has no organ or area in the brain which produces it, as such, it is an assemblage of relations, affects, reflections and transformations which fashion the earth as it is fashioned by them. The corpse is distributed along these pathways and intersections; it has a site only temporarily, for it is also formed as a series of sites and perspectives. Enacting the corpse, not passively receiving it, consists of being actively involved in a series of relations, a dynamic intensity continuing before us and after us, need not be a fixed emotion or semiotic system preordained for us, inherited by us to step into.

Andres Serrano's Faciality/Defacialization

Andres Serrano took a series of photographs of dead bodies in a morgue. Although, at first, it seems banal to discuss photographic style in view of the subject matter, this does have important implications for how we as viewers construct the corpse, rather than regarding it as given, as some presence, as a thing in itself, as if it were possible to subtract any possible approach or intentionality towards it. Serrano brings two semiotic systems under scrutiny with his staging of the corpse, signifi-ance and subjectification,⁴ the former, reminiscent of the majesty of a cedar, the latter the violent crash of a machine, a car, a plane, a motor bike on its way to somewhere else. Serrano's *Morgue* is a series of interruptions of life, which cut it up as the camera aperture cuts up the visual field. This kind of photography is more like collage; the corpse is opened out into fragmentations of violence. The series sets up two visual styles, the first is

peaceful and arborescent, and the second tears this down brutally. With the first kind, Serrano presents the corpse as waxy,⁵ as a blanched fungus in medieval bandages and shrouds, draping a mimetic and parasitic aesthetic upon the corpse, a transformation from polished marble sculptured corpse into corpsed sculpture, sculpted flesh that spirits away its decomposing nature, framed by immaculate drapery and the promise of art.

This is a vertiginous beauty of form and surface in death. The colours in these photographs are muted, beige and gold, with flashes of “moon-white mime” (Deleuze 1987: 167), holy linen and swaddling clothes, the *chiaroscuro* of Caravaggio and Ribera. Against this semiotic system or strata is the subjectification instantiated by the other kind of photography, which he sets in contrast to the aforementioned focus on faciality in death. In this other system, faces are not identifiable, charred beyond identification or through lacerations, blood spattered flesh and



Andres Serrano, The Morgue, Fatal Meningitis, 1992. Courtesy the artist

bandages, there is only a map of signs of motion and disruption, cutting up visual flows. Whereas in the first system of representation, we see

the corpse through the hierarchies of art, in the second, photography is used as an invisible yet magnifying window-lens, or a concealed surgical mirror onto torn and seared flesh, yet nevertheless its cropping and focus, the signatures of the art of the photograph, tell us of the freedom of capture, choice, precision and control which are withheld from and denied to the corpse. There are a number of photographs which insert themselves between these polar semiotic systems, and which combine some of their properties.

The cropping technique makes us conscious of the cropping of the body by violent death. The dismembered integrity of the corpse is also a technique of photography which always cuts up the visual field, presenting it as already made, an illusion of the integrity of faciality. Serrano presents an analytic of the immanence of the arbitrary, the accident, the mishap, the fate of the ill fated. From the point of view of arborescent projections, there is a binary formed by this rhizomatic disintegration but from the point of view of a rhizomatic organization of presentation, the binary is absorbed and broken down into a larger, signifying field from where new combinations of meaning arise.

We become aware of conventions of power instantiated in representation and we can observe how they are able to condition our response to the corpse. Serrano's cropping and dismemberment work against the binding tropes of signifi-ance (teleological signifying systems) and subjectification (the consciousness of the transcendental knowing subject) by which we are conditioned to organize the body and its functions. Such a questioning of the visual strategies of faciality, subjectification and significance can jolt us out of our unthinking compliance with such systems. It may even allow us to focus on producing other kinds of experience, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the Body without Organs, or in this case, the 'corpse without organs'. Even though there is nothing in Serrano's work that presents us with this mode of production, there is some opening up, an *écart* where the work begins.

Serrano plays off the binary of faciality (vertical construction) versus the faceless (horizontal disintegration into other flows). While the face reveals otherness, gender, race and age, the faceless corpse suggests it could be anyone, me, you, or all of us. In this sense, the absence of the face reveals to us our will to impose faciality even upon the faceless:

It is precisely because the face depends on an abstract machine that it is not content to cover the head, but touches all other parts of the body [...] The question then becomes what circumstances trigger the machine that produces the face and facialisation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 170).

There is a faciality even in the hands. One particular photograph by Serrano in the series focuses on a pair of hands with fingers threaded into each other like underground roots. Here again, there is a resemblance to a marble finish which recalls sculpture, particularly Rodin's. I am thinking specifically of Rodin's *The Hand of God* and the *Hand of the Devil*, representing a pair of hands sculpting a figure. This is autonomy, the sculpting of 'another sculp-ture' that seems to emerge from the sculpted hands. The sculptural hand refers to Rodin's hand as the genesis of the sculpture: he is its maker. The hand produces the hand in which a body emerges. This shifting metamorphosis of autonomy seems continually to be the object of Rodin's focus, and involves a consciousness affecting and being affected by the haptic materiality of the sculpture.

It is a chiasm of touching and being touched by the sculptural form, but with Serrano's dead hands the corpse appears to hold itself, is touching and being touched by itself. The dead material of Rodin's sculpture and Serrano's dead hands seem to share an identity, for while both are inert, something in us arises which continually forces a faciality, a genealogy, a purpose upon them. Rodin's *Hand of God* refer-ences not only the mythos of man from clay but also the holding of our bodies with our hands, and the exploration of others' bodies through the blindness of touch. The chiasm created by holding one's left hand with one's right negates the subject/object dualism because we are both holding and being held, active and passive, feeling and being felt. Serrano's photograph appears as a tragic *manqué* of this reciprocity. Rodin's sculpture represents the chiasm of touching and being touched producing a sculpture, a sculpture touching itself, the chiasm as a productive ipseity and autogenesis.⁶ Serrano's photograph and Rodin's sculpture make us conscious of the productive chiasm we force upon the inanimate, the faciality we force upon such images.



*Andres Serrano, The Morgue Part II (Death By Natural Causes), 1992
Courtesy the Artist*

Within and Dismemberment

The integrity and coherence of the corpse, its sacred unity, is dismembered and mutilated in Peter Witkin's photography, as if to answer Guattari's plea:

We can no longer sit idly by as others steal our mouths, our anuses, our genitals, our nerves, our guts, our arteries [...] We want to see frigid, imprisoned, mortified bodies exploded to bits, even if capitalism continues to demand that they be kept in check at the expense of our living bodies (Guattari 1996: 32).

Guattari sees the repressive regime of signification as perpetrating frigid, imprisoned, mortified bodies, a system of recreating value systems based on the notion of unity. This desiring after dismemberment forms interesting

parallels with the Surrealist method of collage, where the body or the corpse is cut up and recombined. Precedents for this may date back to the mass dismemberment and disfiguration of war. For example, Amy Lyford examines the displays of surgical objects and body parts modelled in wax in the Musée du Val de Grâce, an army medical museum but also a military hospital which received many wounded in the First World War. The glass cases here aligning the hospital walls were hierarchical and organized along scientific taxonomies, an arborescent model on display, used to impose order over the chaos of mass slaughter all around. Interestingly, the author goes on to claim that Louis Aragon and André Breton, who were posted at that hospital, were influenced by these medical displays, and suggests that the dismemberment of the corpse or the living body, which so often features in Surrealist art, forms a continuity with the display of body parts in these kinds of collections. She claims that the dismemberment of corpses was also used by the Surrealists as a way to critique the rational order of signifying systems. Robert Desnos's *Penalites de l'Enfer ou Nouvelles Hebride* is clearly sensitized to these possibilities, the writer:

[...] urges us to see his city as a place littered with fragments of human flesh: over there, a phallus stuck through with a needle; elsewhere, ears, mouths, and feet. Body parts fill the streets of Paris, and in Desnos's city they have learned to speak (Lyford 2000: 58).

The spectacle of the distributed body parts of the corpse was used by Desnos as a way to restructure language, the imperatives of traditional grammar and the conscious mind. But raising Surrealist dismemberment to the realm of aesthetics, as Lyford does, is to underestimate and misinterpret the anti-rationalist, anti-aesthetic anarchism of the Surrealists. Aestheticization aims to create an art which is somehow a mimetic reflection of meaning, beauty and truth; attributing such humanistic, progressive values to Surrealist dismemberment smoothes over its more problematic nature, its radical extremism, bitter pessimism and its arbitrariness. Representing the dismemberment of the corpse was—and is—a way of cutting up notions of natural and aesthetic order, rationalism, truth and goodness, all fused into one unity, a unity which is, in a sense, a corpse. Dismemberment and re-assemblage open up “a rhizomatic realm of possibility effecting the potentialization of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 190).

Dismemberment, then, is a more radical project than creating a new aesthetic, something which might be compared to rearranging the furniture. It challenges the very notion of aesthetics. The dismembered corpse (as we can see in Desnos's work, and in Serrano) deconstructs our conditioning which instinctively always seeks to rejoin the parts of the corpse in the visual field, in the world, in our imaginations, and in a semantic system which makes us feel that there is a purpose to everything, a grand design, which is also, not incidentally, an aesthetic design. Seeing dismemberment as a well-meaning moralistic and humanistic critique of society and its values, a way to refresh aesthetics, reinstates rationalism, truth, beauty; it is another way to manufacture the transcendence of the corpse.

Instead, dismemberment challenges a whole series of values: the myth of the centre, the rational seat, the sacred body as temple, and questions the Tree of Life or Knowledge from which is supposed to sprout the symmetries and hierarchies of consciousness and perception, and from which the aesthetic, religious, moral and epistemological unity of bourgeois society extend. Dismemberment has the potential to make us aware of the rational traditions of organization through which the body, alive or dead, is homogenized and made known to us. Foucault theorized that it is the human body which is subordinated by architectures of control:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy,' which was also a 'mechanics of power,' [creating] subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies (138).

Although the breaking down of the human body described by Foucault resembles dismemberment, there is the rearrangement of the body into a fixed unity which coheres with cultural, scientific, political and rational principles of control societies to sustain relations of power. Even the micro-perceptions of our own body image are regulated by this control. It might be said that part of the control that is exercised efficiently over our bodies is invisible to us because we assume its transcendent unity; its composite nature disappears from sight at the moment of our looking at other bodies in the world, objectifying them and constructing their faciality. We assume it is natural or ready made for us to find in the world without our authorship. However, the dismembered

corpse in art has the power to question this instantaneous process of piecing together faciality, because it can mobilize a critical distance, and make us aware of the pieces that will not come together. Can we become aware of our cooperation with the subjugation of the human body by dismembering the conceptual unity of the corpse which we reproduce as a sign of society's power over us?

We have seen a kind of dismemberment in Serrano if we consider the whole series of Morgue works (rather than any one photograph) as fragments of a corpse and of corpses. The series thematizes dismemberment on many levels, but the relationship between these levels is not mimetic or analogous, for these qualities lead us to build up a rational and aesthetic unity which ultimately references some positivist telos. We are left without reassurances and any ideal reconciliation or resolution ('tamed death' as Ariès calls it.) Instead, we are left with questions and self-analysis, estranged from the comforts of a familiar world and our way of thinking, if we choose to recognise it and to continue along these lines of recognition.

In Peter Witkin's *Feast of Fools*, 1990, feet, hands, arms, torsos are cut apart and displayed on a dining table surrounding the blindfolded corpse of a baby, all presented in contexts of eating, grapes, shellfish, vines, a pomegranate torn open at the side (an obvious reference to the 'resurrection' of Persephone and clearly sharing a resemblance with the child whose abdomen has been stitched up.)⁷ The picture suggests both the subtraction from greater semiotic systems and the promise of the recombination of these systems into other systems. And who is to say that these dissociated limbs and body parts were ever part of one body instead of a mass of them? This suggests a radical intersubjectivity of vocabularies. In Witkin, each body part is a semiotic system interlocking with, sharing the field with, other body parts within the picture and outside of it, referencing the viewer's own body and its parts. In both the image and the viewer there is a disintegration and recombination of the body, it is no longer a simple exchange of the viewer's embodiment doubled by the figure depicted. Referring to Witkin's work, Schwenger states that within "these closed chambers the integrity of the body and the integrity of the image are simultaneously dismantled" (2000: 407). But how does this simultaneity work?

Witkin demonstrates a rupture in the symmetry which couples the material substrate of art (dead matter) with the material substrate

of the corpse (dead matter). He does this both literally and abstractly by dismembering the symbol: dead matter=dead matter, corpse=corpse, death=death, by disturbing each equivalence, creating a dissonance with the appearance of the thing and what it is supposed to stand for, which can never be known. One of art and cinema's great achievements is to show us "worlds unrealisable in the everyday, which fold us within the unperceivable, therefore allowing us to perceive" (MacCormack 2004). We do not perceive if we merely accept traditional ways of responding to the corpse as a perfect simulacrum of the viewing body. Witkin problematises this mirror and suggests that it may, indeed, not be possible. Such art ruptures faith in the mimetic telos that art shows us the truth of things as they are and as we observe them, an ideal unity that may be traced back to the Hegelian concept of classical symbolism, where the content and form of art are united in their articulation of the spirit or concept. Instead, we are free to adopt a critical distance, allowing for a multiplicity of connections and contradictions and the spontaneity of different modes of production. Mimesis is the cement that is used to reinforce traditional models of perception in order for the discursivity of the corpse to persist as a corpse, *as given*, rather than as a mode of production which can explore unpredictable emotional flows, perceptions and assemblages.

Witkin's body parts are truncated sentences, ideas, the relations between them, complex thoughts, emotions, horrors that can be recombined into any event. If his work is mimetic at all, it is because it reflects back our desire to integrate, rationalise and create identity and meaning, although there is nothing in his pictures which inherently calls for such order, and this resistance brings our call to order crashing down. There is always seepage from any packaging of meaning in his work because it is scattered with lacunae. And, of course, this is no mere mimesis because the critical distance, the self-analysis which occurs while viewing objects in the world is a psychic reordering of categories in the viewer which are not reflected in the work, only initiated by it. The work suggests that we have the power to recombine the corpse, life and thought in a Body without Organs in a delicate balance between the striations of semiotic systems but reaching out beyond them to other forms of psychic organization on a plane of consistency.

Witkin dismantles the given by questioning the codifying of the body and our desire to construct faciality in order to show us the pos-



Peter Witkin's Feast of Fools, 1990. Courtesy the artist.

sibilities of re-assemblage. His work continually attempts a rhizomic decentralisation of the signifying field so that the punctum, corpse, body, viewer are strewn across it as a distributed system working as a multiplicity, rather than a hierarchy of focal points centred on the corpse where its eyes, face, torso, fingers, hair are used to assemble taxonomies of the human being. There is a reflexive movement in Witkin's work which reveals the possibilities of the visual language we use to organize the experience of the body and the corpse and the ways in which we may conceptualize the encounter. Instead of using the logic of mimesis and resemblance, Witkin's fantastical contexts and bizarre juxtapositions encourage us to become aware of our saccades, the rapid rhythmic wandering of our eyes rebounded off a wall that does not return our gaze with its resistance. In Witkin, we disgorge our self-unity into the nexus of body parts depicted, we question reality, belief, destiny, and our encounter with the work is a powerful, productive intensity, which we can channel into other activities.

The body is only ever partially known to the self. One can not see it from all sides at the same time or think of all its different processes and aspects at once, and so there is always a mental image or dominant set of images or expositions of one's body or the body of the other at work, which is continually changing over time. Witkin's dismemberment is similar to the art of Cubism: both show us the body or body parts as a series of snap shots, moments or *Abschattungen* (profiles) of the thing, corpse, object, by which we assemble that object and subjectivity itself. This goes further than the claim that art simply doubles the corpse's decay to reflect our own, or the medium. Instead, if the corpse in Witkin or in Serrano's work reflects back anything, it is not a mirror image of the corpse or our bodies, but an understanding of how we construct that image as a series of focal points, fragmented experiences and memories, through the perception of various intersecting semiotic systems and narratives of desire. This fundamentally questions mimesis because this kind of art, as Danto writes, "gives us not merely an object but a perception of that object; a world and a way of seeing that world at once, the artist's mode of vision being as importantly in the work as what it is a vision of" (Danto 1989: 231).

Witkin cuts up the instinctive visual language we employ as a reflex or a lower-order perception that slips under consciousness to make us reach back nostalgically for the natural order and its dependence on the clichés of coherence. He foregrounds our habitual processes of perception, breaking them up. He makes me think, for example, when I remember seeing the corpse of my father in an open coffin several years ago, that I remember the parts of the corpse, not every part, and that I build up an overall picture of the corpse experience from these dismembered parts, each of which has a different significance, emotional register, sensation, and percept. Reclaiming these processes of sensation and making them objects of perception, taking them away from the shadow of the tree, allows me to move on emotionally and intellectually to reincorporate them into a new intensity and, in a sense, to move beyond the fixation that the mental image needs to be a mimetic reflection of the decaying corpse. Instead, I begin to recreate the corpse and its disparate elements in a new corpus of thoughts and ideas from different perspectives, without the compulsion of my habitual emotions and responses which tug at my sense of faciality and subjectification, my own, to authenticate an exact, ritual memorialization of the order and timbre of the experience which is another circular mimesis.

This newly discovered recombinative power is not exactly a transcendent dream of hope or a joyous metaphor of rebirth, although one is entirely free to interpret it as such. For me, this is a rhizome connecting then and now, and the whole relationship is a continuing reconfiguration. It *could* be viewed as a form of decay from the “original” father (yet another binary) to the micro-revisions of hindsight, but I would rather see it as reconfiguration of immanent intensities then and now. And this is precisely pertinent to breaking the tautological mimesis of death=death, and decay=decay in art, to form other possibilities: deconstruction=reconstruction, memorial=the reconfiguration of memory, and memory=the reorganizing of past imaginative intensities with which we can communicate with others. Against the trace of mimesis, it is the cultivation of difference in itself.

In Witkin, the corpse is organised in such a way as to make us aware of the relativity, perhaps even arbitrariness, of systems of signification and presentation that dominate our reception of the corpse and are responsible for making us subjects. The signifying chains of parts of the corpse or body are cut up to create other narratives, yet in so doing, Witkin disassembles traditional notions of aesthetic unity, harmony and peace which contain and channel trauma, and by which we expel the dead body and its materiality as waste material from the *polis*. Witkin’s dismembered bodies level top-down and bottom-up signifying and cognitive chains, transforming them into recombinative sites or nodes (leg, arm, foot, torso), reorganizing organs and limbs and the fetishes associated with them (penis, breast, feet, eyes), thus supplying the opportunity to contemplate transformation as contemplation. Witkin and Serrano take us out of the customary and its unthinking investment in hierarchical values and relations of desire. Witkin’s photographs are a network of significations and profiles, a rotating assemblage that tells us about our desire to assemble, to work up a thousand saccades into a corpse. The truncated corpse is a levelling plane of immanence, its parts recombined to deny striations and charms, formulas and clichés.

Psychogeography and the Dead
The Holocaust Memorial Berlin

I conclude with some remarks about the inter-operative, recombinant potential of these various traditions of enacting the corpse with reference to

the monument to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. This field of 2,700 concrete slabs provides the space for a discursivity between the tree and rhizome traditions of organizing experience attending the corpse. In Peter Eisenman's monument, the rhizome sprouts out from above the ground to form a petrified forest where we immerse our bodies in the landscape of the corpse, treading on the horizontal ground where memory smoothes into experience. But this is not a regressive mimesis: a dead monument to the dead. Nor is this a tree-like monument which territorializes the land around it and towers over it, casting the shadow of a despot. Rather, it is a multiplicity where new experiences are created in its spaces. One tree is vertical but a forest is horizontal. We may wish to make a multiplicity out of the tree by taking various tracings from it or peopling it with a genealogy of corpses, but the forest above and the rhizome below are polyvocal. This does not mean that a multiplicity is an amorphous and confusing melee; it does not lack precision or intelligibility, especially if we are mobile with it, as we are walking through the monument. One does not walk in some external circumambulation around a vertical pole; we walk through the monument, we are in it, it wraps over our faces. Using the principle of psychogeography so valued by architects, we create our own routes through the structure of the *polis*; we perceive as we walk, and this, in turn, affects our perceiving. It is a mutually reinforcing relationship, idealised by the Situationists, but here radically altered and disjunctive with its context. It is a special kind of walking which one adopts, that opens and closes up views as one becomes aware of one's step, the rhythm and visual flow carefully moderated by the grid-like spacing where freedom emerges within predestination. While the space of the concentration camp was the site for a massification of bodies, the monument opens up to a freedom of movement which consists in the ability to take any route within this massification and control, as a signature and experience. It inverts centeredness (it is a centre in the city but there is no centre in it) as it inverts the visitor's centeredness. It brings to mind the distributed system of the brain, the neural network that produces consciousness beyond any specific, physical centre as a series of cooperative intensities and their relations that spill over into the world. Not only do we create our own routes, we become aware of our will to create.

Adrian Parr, who has written one of the most sensitive and insightful accounts of how this monument works with the conscious walking body in its midst, writes that this grid undermines "the tyranny of a regulatory repetition of elements. The memorial derives from an intensive topography as Eisenman infuses life back into the lifeless order of the grid" (Parr 2008: 158).

Furthermore, Eisenman “critically engages the memorial typology of the vertical structure set against the horizontal ground plane that together work to produce a homogenous entity” (158). The result is that Eisenman’s monument is used self-reflexively:

[...] to release a feeling of groundlessness and vertigo. The limits of phenomenologically engaging with the 19,000-square-meter site, by relying too much on personal perception simply strips its intensive topography bare, for here there are a variety of intensities and affects comingling with each other” (158).

The monument refuses to be reduced to a stereotype of a monument. Life filters through its space. It does not create a tracing of death within the city revisiting the mythos of mimesis in art, that material inertness must stand for the inertness of the dead, the death=death redundancy. Rather, it invites a series of intensities and affects to produce a looking forward and reflexively at the same time, while breaking down binaries of subject and object, private and public, which intersect in the body of the monument.

We might glimpse another visitor through the gray concrete, a flash of red, a camera perhaps, and the frisson of the unexpected—here, there, gone—dismembering the wall of solitude and quickly restoring it. There is a hard and implacable solidity, and an irrepressible fluidity. It seems to reveal our own phenomenology of the body and space to us as we walk, intuitively questioning notions of the self and identity. And then there are broader reflections which allow this self-reflexive node to branch out. How does this analysis of architecture and moment, public space and memorial culture, address the persistently deferred corpse in this experience? Again, we can follow a thread or two left by Parr to negotiate the labyrinth of the monument:

The deeper in you go the quieter it becomes, the buoyancy of the street sounds slow to a murmur as a gray narrow silence infuses the belly of the site. Through the language of abstraction, Eisenman drags the full weight of those anonymous bodies of history up from below the depths of the earth enticing the visitors to take the place of those selfsame bodies by descending to where they were once buried (Parr 2008: 159).

In the monument in Berlin (part of it is below the level of the land), we are both in a forest and underground in rhizomic connections. All directions become canals of concrete, we are in an underworld, we are buried or we are not yet born. The ‘belly’ in this quote not only reminds one of ancient resurrection myths, Jonah in the whale and Adam with the seeds of the Tree of Life placed in his mouth, or Witkin’s body



Monument to the murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin

parts on a dining table, but also other traditions of ingestion which equate digesting with processes of mourning (Parry 1985). Yet the belly metaphor also suggests immanent life in death. Another way to experience the monument as a kind a Body without Organs, connected by physical, intellectual or emotional flows. Berlin is pushed to the periphery of consciousness as a parergon marking its way back in. It is this very wavering of the place’s identity which provides me with the suspension of my own identity. As Deleuze writes, “We speak of our ‘self’ only in virtue of those thousand little witnesses which contemplate within us; it is always a third party who says ‘me’ ” (Deleuze 1994: 75).

It begins to rain. It gathers us as we look up from our corpse of corpses, through whose drenched eyes we view the grey and territorial-

ized sky. Buffeted by the unexpected force of spontaneous emotions and sensations that intensify into something much vaster than sadness, the rise and fall is broken by the hard, gray concrete. I am alive in the dead stone, but there is something of it in me. Here, there is no rank, age, able-bodiedness, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. We do not fixate on the face but blend a multiplicity, some strains of which convey that I am one and many, a monism and a pluralism. The corpse, the one and the many, is a cultural product—song, sculpture, painting, architectural monument, image of thought—and has its origin in us. We are its author and in it we assemble our death by fashioning the earth to show the world within it. It reveals to us structures of regress, and discloses the modes of our productivity which undermine them.

Notes

¹“You will never see a poplar tree perfectly still [...] the tree is perpetually agitated or trembling because of the terrible use made of it at Golgotha” (Kidder 1900: 226).

² Undated poem in the Meeropol Collection published in Kovaleff Baker 1977: 54-55.

³ Whereas the skeleton is a form of the corpse which represents death unequivocally, the corpse in art is ambiguous because we can never be sure that it may be a sleeping figure.

⁴ Here, I insert the corpse into the theoretical approach taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s essay “Year Zero Faciality” (1985: 167-191).

⁵ This references but tries to overcome Krauss’s conceptualization of the corpse as doll, as an uncanny event prolonging the binary animate=inanimate (Krauss 1985: 62).

⁶ The chiasm references Merleau-Ponty, and autogenesis the autopoiesis of Varela and Maturana.

⁷ In some cases the artist takes photographs of corpses, or their parts, found in morgues, and reassembles these photographs with other photographed objects, either using multiple negatives, or montage, often scratching, toning or bleaching the surface for a worn effect. The technique ‘cuts up’ photographic elements and reassembles cut-up body parts into a new continuum. In contrast, Serrano cuts up the continuum of the visual field while photographing cut up body parts or parts of a whole. Both artists seem to rearrange the ‘syntax’ of the corpse, as if creative work and acts of differentiation can be used as talismans against the figure of death.

References

- Baert, Barbara. 1970. *Noli me Tangere. Mary Magdalene. One Peron, Many Images*. Leuven: Leuven UP.
- Danto, Arthur C. 1989. *Philosophizing Art. Selected Essays*. Berkeley: California UP.

- Deleuze, Gilles. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone.
- _____. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.
- Guattari, Félix. 1996. 'In Order to End the Massacre of the Body.' Trans. Jarred Becker in Guattari's *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Johnson, Richard Freeman. 2005. *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend*. Rochester, NY: Boydell.
- Kidder, H. R. 1900. 'Why the Poplar Stirs. Superstition of Miners in Michigan' in *The Journal of American Folklore*, 13(50): 226.
- Klaver, Elizabeth. 2004. *Images of the Corpse: from the Renaissance to Cyberspace*. Madison: Popular Press.
- Kovaleff-Baker, Nancy. 2002. 'Abel Meeropol (a.k.a. Lewis Allan): Political Commentator and Social Conscience' in *American Music*. 20(1): 25-79.
- Krauss, Rosalind. 1985. 'Corpus Delicti', in *October*. 33: 31-72.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP.
- Lyford, Amy. 2000. 'The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musée du Val-de-Grâce' in *Cultural Critique*, 46, *Trauma and its Cultural After Effects* 46: 45-79.
- MacCormack, Patricia, ed. 2004. *Senses of Cinema: Special Issue of Perversion*. http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/30/perversion_intro.html.
- _____. 2005/6. 'Necrosexuality', in *Rhizomes* 11/12 <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/maccormack/index.html> (Accessed 27/05/2009).
- Parr, Adrian. 2008. *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.
- Parry, Jonathan. 1985. 'Death and Digestion: The Symbolism of Food and Eating in North Indian Mortuary Rites' in *Man* 20(4): 612-630.
- Schwenger, Peter. 2000. 'Corpsing the Image' in *Critical Inquiry*, 26(3): 395-413.