

Marcel·lí Antúnez Roca - Texts

LA VIDA SIN AMOR NO TIENE SENTIDO CATALOG

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There is a transgressive obscenity whose urgencies come from the life-impulse, from the thirst for freedom, from the need to breach limits, from the urge to be. There is also a perverse obscenity _driven by the death-impulse_ whose object is to impose evil on the other; to dominate, to subject the other; to destroy the other's integrity.

There is a convulsive beauty that is obscene. Laughter, too, can be powerfully obscene. Courbet's *L'origine du monde* is sublimely obscene. The poetry of Artaud is painfully obscene. Obscenity is expression; emergence, clarity, consciousness, sincerity, daring, excess, an overflowing... Obscenity makes the latent explode, becoming full enunciation; at times it can be felicitously ostentatious, and then it becomes _if such a thing were possible_ even more obscene.

In social terms, the obscene is that which "makes itself seen, yet ought not to be seen"; obscenity implies the transgression of some code, and as such requires a process of communication to which the producer and the receiver bring with them their conventions, their value systems, their sense of dignity and indignity, their social and personal taboos. Because obscenity is not something objective and universal, but subjective and cultural, and the obscene message depends more on how and where the thing is said than on the statement in itself. In western culture, there are gradations of obscenity. There is strong obscenity and there are weak obscenities. The former is directly related to the fundamental human impulses: to sex, to the scatological, to death. The latter tend to have more to do with the shameless exhibition of something outside the context conventionally assigned to it. Duchamp's urinal, for example, was obscene in its day. It is undeniable that whatever is considered obscene is inescapably and profoundly bound up with human nature. The sexual act, pregnancy and birth, the agony of death, the satisfaction of our natural needs, and everything that nakedly reveals, without subterfuge or euphemism, the essence and the limits of life, is considered obscene. These things exist, of course, but they must never be shown; they should not step outside the confines of their proper place, they ought not to be made public. The tyranny of the forbidden has generated in the west a series of repressions and sublimations which have contributed to the obsessive irruption of the sexual and the commercial manipulation of all that is instinctive; a commercialisation that, far from undermining repression, has, as Foucault observed, sponsored it. For all that Baudrillard might affirm that, nowadays, in our _essentially pornographic_ society all that remains of disgust is the disgust at finding nothing disgusting, since "the promiscuity of the look is total", repressive puritanism is alive and kicking in the censorious treatment of homosexuality and the more radical prohibitions of those obscene substances par excellence, drugs, and above all in the interdiction against showing death. Nowadays, obscenity is, as Miguel Morey says, that which shows the fragility of the human being.

And yet vital energy is still a living presence: the desire to see, to be more lucid, to reinvent the body, to open up the frontiers of the mind; and man, in Bataille's words, is an animal destined to spend, to squander the excess of energy of which he is constituted, a specific energy which overflows through erotism which is at once a breaking free of the self and a consciousness of death an ascendant madness which even today continues to fan the desire to immerse ourselves in the experience of the real and indeed to go beyond our own discourses of the real. The creative proposals of Nan Goldin and Marcel·lí Antúnez are, obviously, inscribed within the realm of discourse, yet they display an exacerbated interest in reality, an extreme desire to expand the limits of consciousness, activating the creative and revolutionary potentials of desire.

This lust for knowledge, his desire for truth, together with a visceral rejection of the bourgeois idea of privacy, led Nan Goldin _over eighteen years ago now_ to introduce a camera into the scenes of her own real-life experiences. In contrast to Diane Arbus _distanced by her social background from the environments she photographed_ Nan Goldin reflects the existential anxieties of her own generation by means of situations lived through by the friends and herself. Her portraits, often shot in interiors _particularly in bedrooms or hotel rooms_ using a direct flash, display a conscious disdain for the classic syntactical parameters of framing, composition, lighting, and for the artifice and rhetorics of the *mise en scène*. Goldin goes for immediacy, opting for a naturalism that places the emphasis on the attitudes and the situations of the people photographed, living their lives in marginal sectors of cities such as New York or Berlin. This naturalism becomes an exploration and understanding of life, of its margins and its essence, bearing witness to the loneliness, the melancholy, the anxieties and frustrations implicit in our amorous liaisons and the forms in which we live our sex. Men's violence towards women, drugs, homosexuality, death, the pregnant bodies, the strangeness in the gaze of children, appear here captured by that most obscene of artistic media: photography.

Nan Goldin does not think in terms of the "decisive instant"; she does not look for the unique photo that condenses and creates its own context. Although some of her images are, in isolation, of great power, in her work it is the series that creates the signification. It is though the organization of sequences that images such as those of the audio-visual *The Ballad of sexual dependency* _supported by the music, which assumes the role of ironic counterpoint and sentimental reference for the memory_ acquire the narrative dimension which makes them a visual diary in which Goldin insistently recreates her obsessions. The changing and substituting of photographs transforms the montage into a work that constantly redefines itself on the basis of the new perspectives presented by experience. The spectator, converted into voyeur by the intensely private nature of the scenes, might classify many of these images as obscene in terms of his or her own personal taboos and experiences; but for the people represented here, who have opened up to the photographer their own personal territory, sharing with her in a way of life and a particular vision of reality, they are by no means obscene. Thus, in Nan Goldin's images there is no trace of violence nor any intention to be obscene, but rather a radical honesty that does not reject the pathos of life or the aesthetic of ugliness, searching them out as part of the descent into the infernos of reality, a reality in which the lust for life is as strong as the existence of death.

In Marcel·lí Antúnez, the obscene is ironically conjugated with the monstrous, and generates an expressive intensity whose tremors travel beyond mere artistic experimentation to touch an existential phantasmagoria. He thus establishes disturbing connections between the solar thought of a philosopher such as Bataille

and the darkest terrors of human life.

At the source of the pieces he presents her under the tittle "Cabezas arrncadas, máquinas de placer, poemas de amor" ("Torn-off Heads, Pleasure Machines, Love Poems") is an experiential and artistic trajectory in which erotism is understood as a defiance of death, in which the excess of vital energy seeks to pass beyond the anxieties of being, to suspend them for a time, to set them outside oneself. In his desire to name that darkness, to translate his questions into a plastic script in which flesh becomes a new material of language, Marcel·lí Antúnez takes intuition as his point of departure and converts representation into wounding presentation, allowing us to see what we would normally only apprehend in the case of death, sickness or accident.

In his work, the body is fragmented, but the fragment becomes sign and symbolic condensation. In the torn-off heads he looks inside the flesh in order to go beyond the flesh; he strives to reach that point where the being shrugs off its limits, condensing the moment in which the sublimity of sexual ecstasy is confounded with the spasms of death. In this way he sets forth on a journey to the furthest extremes of the possible, condensing the two fundamental vectors of the destruction of the subject: the moment of the loss of selfhood that takes place during orgasm and the definitive loss of consciousness that is death. In these pieces, the spectacular and the truculent are sought out consciously and deliberately . The redundancy of the figures communicates atrocity, presenting pain and evil not as isolated but as frequent and persistent. Parody acts as an exorcism of evil.

In the pleasure machines and the love poems, the new sculptural material articulates with other signs and elements, creating objects in which ironic suggestion and metaphor play an important part in the configuration of new visual poetries. A new syntax places in relation the referents which transmit the idea of the materiality of the emotions, of the necessary union of the physical and the spiritual in love, of the flesh and the symbol, of the "body" and the 2 not-body", in Octavio Paz's words.

The work of both Goldin and Antúnez asks to be contextualized in an historical and artistic moment in which the individual is searching for reconciliation with the primordial forces incarnate in the body in order to reinvent it, calling into question established conventions _not only in art but in life_ and affirming the implacable need to see everything, to say the unsayable, to question the hierarchizations of taste, to roll away the stones that seal up the real, to escape the ethical and aesthetic dictatorships that imprison it. It is in these terms that they frame their commitment to living in a time that establishes itself in the present; a carnal and mortal present whose vital experience of passion is as the conjunction of all the forces that inhabit it; a time in which poetic reasons can coexist with the flesh, and in which love is the fundamental force of life, because _and here Marcel·lí, Nan and I are in complete agreement _life without love has no meaning.