
Glances, voice and blood. The insurrection of the body

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The fact of knowing and of knowing (oneself) understood as a journey, as a displacement; the uncertainty of knowing and also of recognising places in order to find a trace of our universal (as well as our personal?) humanity; the geographical, political and body space; the attention given to the way we apprehend, the way we can discern between the knowledge based on memorising different types of information and a different kind of knowledge, to which I will refer later, which leaves a mark on us and transforms what we have learnt into a part of ourselves, going as far as to change us; the attention paid to the way we see or are seen in order to establish criteria from which to start an account helping us to understand. This succession of images is the basis of a research process seeking to answer those two insatiable questions: “Who am I?” and “Who are we?”

Examining Yapci Ramos’ (Tenerife, 1977) career means getting closer to a context which was not previously defined and given for her. A tree, a shadow, a whistle, an old picture or loneliness provide a framework for approaching the way the artist creates a personal atlas which also accommodates others or “the other”, everything falling outside of herself but, in spite of that, shaping her as a person.

A wide range of inherited and sought iconographies informs her multi-layered career. And even though every project makes itself visible from a full and independent autonomy, a cohesive thread connects them all. This becomes visible as Yapci Ramos inhabits new works. Zigzagging between different kinds of time and space, the artist not only brings us closer to divergent geographies and instants, but mainly also, to different bodies.

Yapci Ramos explores a number of unknown territories such as the landscape where she was born; landscapes different from her own; body, and her own body and memory, which expands its horizon with every step she takes. The various concepts are promptly listed and slowly known. The artist consciously approaches the chimera, providing us with a hint arising from her characteristic dialectical glance. The questions “who am I?” and “who are we?” are always present

for her, as an epistemological melting pot of the evolution of human thought.

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The work *Observatory* leads us into a quasi- abstract space originated in the artist’s own geography. It presents a succession of impressions perceived after observing landscape in detail. In them, the camera captures the silhouettes of the impressive Canarian pine trees—a native species from the archipelago—in order to return the dark presence of the trees, which do not allow us to see beyond, and which are enveloped by fog. Perhaps in a premonitory way, metaphorically, the artist shows us the difficulty of knowing and writing history, either personal or collective. The silhouettes of the blackened trees engage in a dialogue with the low-angle shots of the tops of the trees while our own body gets ready to wander from image to image. Yapci Ramos is in search of a place which both she knows and lays claim to. Her work invites us to look and reflect: What can we see? Even better: Is there anything which is part of me? The artist skilfully connects biology, geography and anthropology in order to lay the foundation for the first step. These works show living objects which have been witness to the evolution of time and of Canarian peoples for centuries.

Beyond this landscape made of silences, the artist is in search of a voice or a multitude of voices, as in the project *Back&Forth* (2018), where she approaches a group of people and undresses them before they engage in a conversation about their dreams and expectations of: desire, love, sex and death.

This means reflecting on the dichotomy between Eros and Thanatos, as an unavoidable dialogue for the human drive, which is, let us not forget, always life:

“If in contrast to Freud’s idea on the human drive oscillating between two poles, the positive pole of life and the negative pole of death, we start from the premise that this drive is always a drive for life (or a will for power, as Nietzsche

named it), given that life wants to persevere, we could say that, as a matter of principle, its destiny is affirmative, going from the more active to the more reactive. (...) Different kinds of society arise from the confrontation between the forces of life, which are active and reactive to a different degree: this confrontation depends on the prevailing political practice of subjectivation in every historical context.”¹

This means considering love as an engine; love as well as death, given the irremediable fact that we die, again and again, with every forgotten and unsuccessful desire. But this also means accepting the drive of both of them. The full ability to produce new desires lies in the elimination of both poles. If we consider the silence of the tree (Observatory) and the way the artist listens to something which does not arrive, we understand why in this other work she goes straight to the word. In *Back&Forth*, the artist allows words to mature: she gathers the testimony of several people, approaches them and listens to them. Yapci Ramos let ten years pass before returning in order to bring us these images, which are accompanied by words and which recall something connected to “the animal” understood as strangeness. These bodies are not, or if they really are, they come from a different place. In this work, women and men in their (neutral?) nakedness show their privacy: a privacy which lies within the oral confession when it pierces the skin. Somehow, the artist’s gaze portrays these people on the basis of nudity, such as the nudity described by Jacques Derrida in *The Animal that Therefore I Am (Following)*, in order to go towards the voice of the animal that we all are. Yapci Ramos succeeds in placing this nudity into the spectator’s gaze. These different subjectivities do not think of themselves as naked bodies. They are not women or men, but people who get undressed in front of the camera just as they start talking, not before. They are not naked because they present themselves without clothes or because they show their bodies:

“Since time, therefore. Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us? What animal? The other. I often ask myself, just to see, who I am —and who I am at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal.”²

We get closer to other subjectivities in order to rub that of our own, in order to be able to “touch” ourselves. We know something of what we are when we know we are being looked at; nudity starts there, with unveiling. “The animal” is understood from the strangeness of everything beyond logos. In the project *I Don’t Mind II* (2018), the artist portrays the

sound of pleasure, questioning the taboos and limits between the public and the private without any concession. The faces and sounds in this work observe us with their gaze and privacy. But the territory of pleasure is not limited to humans. As with showing nudity, presenting the sound of orgasm contributes to the collapse of sexual and identity codes.

Something beats in all of her projects: the will of breaking the silence, of winning the battle against the oblivion imposed by our contemporaneity. Her political gesture denounces and suggests. In the work *Perras* (2015), her gaze demands a geographical displacement (to Aruba) and takes place under the influence of “the animal”. This work allows us to make eye contact with the animal. Who are we? These ‘bitches’ challenge us with their naked presence and as we see the urban hidden corners of a marginal society, voice-overs pierce the crash between the “bitch”-body and the anonymous word. Without doubt these dogs are the metaphor for the situation of women, but Yapci Ramos’ gesture gains a double interpretation. On one side, she denounces the sexual exploitation of thousands of women, and on the other, she gets ready to begin a relationship with the animal. Her camera faces solitary and nocturnal stray dogs, and from there, she deploys a new language in order to establish a different kind of communication. The semantic shift lies with the image of the animal. This radical replacement follows the Derridean question: What animal? The other. Always. And here they come again; the silence of gaze and the intensity of vision. The artist’s denunciation does not need to show and map the image of female prostitutes, with the subtlety which characterises her, she knows how to create a new dialectical play in order to point at the cracks of the system we belong to. Why fall into the mute repetition of an aestheticized image? No way. In order to denounce the animality and the beast within heteropatriarchy, it is better to stress the animal which still saves us:

“Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. From the point of view of pleasure in these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science.”³

In a way, Yapci Ramos pushes herself to be also the other, to establish a new equation between equals. She advocates for her own animal and, once again, she learns to create a new kind of communication subverting the imposed roles. This language must be remembered. It should be recalled that the

¹ Rolnik, S. (2019) *Esfemas de la insurrección. Apuntes para descolonizar el inconsciente*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Tinta Limón Ediciones, p. 95.

² Derrida, J. (2008) *El animal que luego estoy si(gui)endo*. Madrid, Spain: Trotta. <https://archive.org/details/ElAnimal-queLuegoEstoySiguiendo/page/n17>.

³ Haraway, D. (2018) *Manifiesto para Cyborgs. Ciencia, tecnología y feminismo socialista a finales del siglo XX*, Mar del Plata: Letra Sudaca Ediciones, p. 63.

word “animal”, etymologically, refers to something having a soul, a breath of life, a drive. This fact has been taken away from us by means of the imposed categories shaping our identity. The work *Freedom* (2019) revives forgotten knowledge and uses a new methodology whereby the artist gets involved in the development of the action, becoming a part of the work. What could be the sense of wanting to know if we are not ready to be questioned ourselves? From the solitude of a new geography, Yapci Ramos is in a position where her freedom is being taken away from her. Through the window of a room in Tegucigalpa, she observes and listens to the birdsongs, a symbol for freedom, and again, of lost animality. The artist recovers the ancestral wisdom of the Canary people and answers with a whistle, just as many other cultures had communicated for centuries: by whistling. The performativity of her gesture is resolved by means of the voice. She formulates a new code in order to interpret the new structural order we should head for. She provides cracks within the taxonomy defining us and gives way to her own whistle. Her performed voice is the private trace of personal and collective memory, and the bastion of where to start from a new place, moulting and gaining a new skin which allows her to position herself within a non-categorised self. Yapci Ramos begins to transform her learnt and imposed identity on the basis of something unifying us all: speech. If new feminisms demand language to be decolonised, by means of her action, the artist emphasises and accentuates the need for decolonising identity through language. This is only a first step: the first of a series of works leading her to be on stage. Once again, the works *Identity* (2019) and *Red-Hot* (2015-2019) create a play where she questions her own subjectivity by approaching other individualities. She does so from the inside, since she is the one adopting new identities. In *Identity*, her body mutates into the other, repeating and cloning the image she gets from old pictures. No matter if it is a man, a woman, an old or young person, fat or thin, monogamous or polygamous, heterosexual or homosexual, she inhabits the other’s skin in order to recover the vestiges of a forgotten memory while recomposing her own. She is unlimited; every image is a micro-political gesture pointing at insurrection. Her face and body are everyone and no one. She plays to be and not to be, to introduce other subjects into her own body. From the psychoanalytic perspective, this is a rupture: following Julia Kristeva, the artist stresses the fact that the glance comes before the subject. Consciously or unconsciously, this means assuming the inherited coordinates in order to tear them apart. The way we look also depends on outside objects.

It is not surprising that the work *Red-Hot* shows the artist’s nudity, her own body, although not her genitals. She does not speak from the perspective of a binary gender, but of the solitude where millions of subjectivities are. Yapci Ramos

shuts herself away to write. She recovers the need to leave a trace and she does it with her blood with the words:

GO, NOW, WHY, CALM, STOP, DO, WITH, YES, US, TRUE, PATH, COME, 39, HOME, TIME, BE, YOU. Those words are written with her menstrual blood, but she does not intend to claim her femininity by using a biological element. She writes with her blood words which can be uttered by every person who is ready to leave a trace within the anonymity of gender. The important thing here is the gesture, the will of not being a face, but language, bearing in mind collective and individual identity, which goes beyond the man-woman pairing. *Red-Hot* works as a conclusion, but is open to numerous definitions. It takes its stance in the feminist struggle, being committed to the boundless acknowledgment of the many senses and signifiers accompanying sexual identity until the disappearance of the need for knowing.

In this work, we can see the artist’s back and arm, her hand, which is writing with blood on the immaculate wall words that disappear under water. None of those concepts refers to a classified identity. The artist’s writing brings us closer to the trace of a presence that keeps asking: “Who am I?” and “Who are we?”

Yapci Ramos uses a wide range of images in order to construct, over a period of time, a possible history from an anthropological perspective, maybe from a psychoanalytic perspective or, simply, from a feminist one.