

## Nobody special

### [About the “metaphor activation” of the human in the works of Tahiche Díaz]

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“Diaries speak about everything, except everyday life. Newspapers bore me, they don’t tell me anything; what they narrate doesn’t concern me, it doesn’t question me nor answers my own questions or those that I would like to ask”.

It is clear how ambiguous the contemporary approaches to art are, thus resulting difficult to know if they are different ways of semiotic resistance, postures of outright revolutionary decadence or cynic gestures in which dramatization has replaced any critical strategy. Radical positions eventually acknowledge their *parodic structure*; Abstract art drifts towards self satisfying embellishment and Conceptual art reveals many times a capital ideological impotency. Every religion starts off as a *worship crisis*, as the ghostly dance of a traumatized society; and maybe we are at a threshold where the *disintegration of the experiences that create a sense of community* are leading to the *museographic ritualization* of everything that once served as an “escape” (like dancing, which has been reduced by some artists to something worthy of being accepted or introduced into that canonizing and sanitizing institution that is Collecting, or, why not, the turbulence of desire, the abyss of sex turned into banners or slogans, the everyday life open to surprising obscenity); thus acquiring the silence of aesthetic contemplation (which corresponds to a “please don’t touch” sign) the rank of a *sentence*: we commune with the strictest stupefaction. Ultimately, the problem of contemporary machinations is not *amnesia*, given that there is nothing worth remembering, but rather *disconnection*. The Society of Spectacle has pushed Art and even Critics to the field of *bricolage*; the materials used to produce the “work” then being an amalgam of souvenirs that suggest a *pathetic ending*.

Tahiche Diaz establishes, no doubt, a line of resistance against the hegemonic aesthetics of *trans-banality* by displaying a whole *choreography of the body* on extreme gestures and poses. There is a manifest and obsessive component in this creator. Tahiche is, as stated by Ramiro Carillo, “a man who builds mechanisms” yet doesn’t rely as much in “technology” as he manifests the pleasure of doing things with his hands, of dominating the materials to compose allegories of humanity. As Elias Canetti said, before primitive men tried to give them shape, their hands and fingers should start by *representing* something (for example, the fingers of both hands intertwined to become a crate): “One could imagine that objects in our sense of the word, those objects to which corresponds a value because we have made them ourselves, first existed as hand signs. The hand is the *extremity of the thought*; what starts to make us “human”. Hand in hand with the works of Tahiche Díaz, we enter a domain that is mainly a unique *theatrical construction* in which the artist can use sculptural elements, drawings, videos and installations. The exhibition that Tahiche Díaz has presented in Room A of TEA, in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, is an impressive gathering of his artistic works that shows extraordinary creative energy and concern for plastic proceedings. As Ramiro Carrillo rightly points out, this exhibition’s

proposal “reflects on the creator’s role as an explorer and on the process of artistic creation as a kind of -or a model for- knowledge”.

Tahiche Díaz’s works could be understood as an extensive and relentless construction of a “self portrait”; starting from our awareness that all men live immersed in dramatic soliloquies, they can lead us to the funeral depths of the “representation of the self”, to that finiteness which, paradoxically, remains *definitive* before our eyes. “Absence is taken as an opportunity for figuration, as a reason for the portrait. The scenography that embodies its invention is a sentimental device: the image is the retention of the one who’s absent, of who’s going “abroad””. The face is what is inapprehensible in all portraits; it’s an *epiphany* that can never be encompassed. Variations and small differences refer to a *repetitive unraveling*, in which there is potential for simulation; this means, alongside the effectiveness of the displacement, the fainting of the disguise’s appearance. It could be that the face is nothing more than the backdrop of a scene only shown during intermissions, something subjected to continuous metamorphosis; but deconstructing the face is no easy task, Deleuze reminds us that it can lead to madness. It is not by chance that the schizophrenic loses, at the same time, the sense of the face, of his own and others, the sense of landscape and the sense of language and its key meanings. “Deconstructing the face –as argued on *A Thousand Plateaus*- is the same as trespassing the walls of the signifier, as going out of the black hole that is subjectivity”. We also know that fantasies rule reality and you can never wear a mask without the flesh paying for it. The other may resemble an abyss, while the symbolic order is concealed by the fascinating presence of the spectral object. “We experience this every time we look into the eyes of another person and feel the depth of his gaze”. It should be noted that, when the subject is too near the fantasy, (self) effacement takes place. What is left is art as *aphanisis*. The eye of the Gorgon connects us, definitively, to dreams and death.

Tahiche Díaz presents, in a stylized and even deformed way, the reality around him. “The reality that this man works on, that is, the grounds and purpose of his work, is a truthful –and it’s not redundant to say it- reality: his way of approaching objects and facing their representation, the construction of his works itself, seem to be processes that invoke the human condition. His work and his works are experimentation, learning, engineering, machination; they constituted not only a way of being in the world but a way to access and represent reality”. Uneasiness is, as reflected upon by Heidegger, a means of existential self-understanding but, mythically, it is also the body’s imprint, the image that, even leaping into the realm of Death, wants to stay alive. Tahiche joins *the anguish*; his obsessive Imaginary cathartically captivates the eye. “Through the scopic drive, the subject –Lacan notes- sees the world as a spectacle that possesses him. This is what seems to have fallen from him. There he is the victim of a lure, so that what comes out and faces him is not the true *a* but its complement: the mirror image *i(a)*. The spectacle captures the subject, who rejoices, exults... [...] The proof is what happens in the phenomenon of *unheimlich*. Every time that due to some accident suddenly provoked by the Other, the image of the subject itself that is reflected on the Other seems to be lacking its perspective, the weft of the chain that keeps the subject captive in the scopic drive becomes undone; and this is the return to the most banal anguish. Certainly, Tahiche uses the body to express emotional states; in his works everything seems to be “moving”, venturing into melodrama, taking advantage of the grotesque.

The works of Tahiche, characterized by originating, as he suggests, from a “neo-pagan thinking”, have a disturbing character. They fascinate and repel at the same time. This is an experience as ambivalent as the dumping of corpses in the northern wall of Athens narrated by Plato, which led the subject to violate the primitive taboo of seeing the dead, and, ultimately, to that central figure of allegories that is personification. His aesthetic does not shy away from gesticulation or fears capturing grimaces, thus unfolding with magnificent theatrical tension. The artist literally leaves his mark on everything, although later he may transform what he pulls out of the hole into a mask he would like to get rid of. “But also –writes Nietzsche in some reflections about Heraclius- men who have a sensitive heart avoid such a mask, which seems to be cast in bronze”. Maybe the only thing left to do is, instead of babbling, *muttering* what is essential, drawing and erasing what we desire. The dark enigma that may be uncovered has to do with what we would call the “masking of eroticism”. Bataille considers that the dialects of transgression and prohibition are the condition and even the essence of eroticism. What takes place in the violence field of eroticism is the dissolution or destruction of the close minded attitude, which is the natural state of whom plays the game. One of the ways of extreme violence is nudity, which is a paradoxical state of communication or, even better, the tearing of the self, the pathetic ceremony of humanity turning in bestiality. In the face of nudity, Bataille experiences a sacred feeling that mixes fascination and horror; in it emerges an equivalence of the act of killing: the sacrifice (vertiginous horror and inebriation). Passion makes us commit to suffering and is, ultimately, a search for the impossible. Passion gives name to a death halo that evidences the continuity of the beings: “The images that excite or cause the final spasm are often murky, misleading: if they show a glimpse of horror or death, they do it surreptitiously.

Ultimately, desire is fear. Even though what we would certainly want is to *live wonderfully*. What captivates us is the *real thing*, which, additionally, eludes any symbolic treatment and belongs to the order of the ineffable. The works of Tahiche resist “verbalization”; from their gestural excess we can access an inhospitable dimension. We must remember that, to Freud, the “stronger” example of the *unheimlich* experience is the (*re*) *appearance (spuk)* of the dead. Derrida notes that what he calls “body” is not a presence: “The body is, so to speak, an experience in the sense of the most fickle word (*voyageur*). It is an experience of context, disassociation and dislocations”. As Michaux said, the artist is the one who resists the instinct of leaving no trace, thus setting the materials on a territory similar to a crime scene; the trail is what makes a sign but doesn’t get erased; what is never present in a definitive way. In a time when we have assumed, maybe too quietly, what Derrida calls *destinerrance*, appears, opposing the ideology of the virtualization of the “world”, a number of veiled situations, of traces of what is different, that pushes us towards a creative path: “we leave traces everywhere –viruses, lapses, germs, catastrophes-, signs of imperfection, like a signature of mankind on the heart of the artificial world”. Art can not only be an obsession but also a viral process, like those figures//shapes?// that multiply in the works of Tahiche Díaz; this disarticulates the supposedly “normal” way of communication. The barred subject Lacan has spoken about brings us closer to the desire that can arise from uncertainty, *undecidability* or even *destinerrance*. “Therefore –writes Derrida- I think that, like Death, the *undecidability*, which I also refer to as “destinerrance”, or the possibility of a gesture never reaching its destination, is the condition of the movement of desire, which would otherwise die ahead of time. Desire is a mixture of enjoyment and dissatisfaction that cannot be resolved like it was an

“essential absence”; perhaps the abandonment of the *differential suffering* has to do with renouncing ourselves and, of course, with the difficulty of establishing an encounter with the other. Lyotard spoke about the postmodern formula, in a conflictive Imaginary, as a response left on hold, not excluding the presence of something from the other, “some need and some desire”. Tahiche Díaz enjoys his *construction of the body*, devoting himself, as he confessed, to “triggering metaphors”.

Art is thrown into a pseudo ritualism of suicide, a simulation sometimes embarrassing in which banality is magnified. The world has been broken up and each one offers, before anything else, an image of their way to *take it or leave it*. When drama fails we have fun perverting meaning; after the sublime heroic and the orthodoxy of trauma, appears the ecstasy of the gravediggers or, in other words, a third degree simulation. Contemporary Art’s duplicity emerges with its eagerness to assert nullity, insignificance, nonsense, “aspiring to be null when one is already insignificant”. Aiming for superficiality in superficial terms. However, nullity is a secret quality that cannot be claimed by everyone. Insignificance –the real one, the victorious challenge of meaning, the stripping of meaning, the art of dismissing sense- is an exceptional quality of a few rare works which never really aspire to it. In this *time of change* we endure a convulsive, zapping like pace that hypnotizes us and leads to impotence. Tahiche Díaz reflects through his works about what he calls the “Dwellings of will”, which speak about *absence*. The domestic stage is, to a large extent, *sinister*, thus producing a manifest subjective anxiety. The sinister occurs when limits between fantasy and reality fade; as defined by Freud, it is the “intimate-homely” that has been repressed and returns with all the *discomfort* (familiar yet simultaneously concealed). Every effect of an emotional impulse, whatever its nature may be, is turned into anguish by repression; “the sinister wouldn’t be anything new but something that was always familiar to the psychological life and only became strange by a process of repression”. The aesthetic of Tahiche Díaz captures a sinister and even cruel, corporality without falling into hegemonic obscenity, trying to never lose the compass of art as an experience; in his models, on one side, he minimizes reality, but what he essentially proposes is the display of a “psychic world”.

Perhaps art that make us see reality has to resort to *trompe-l’oeil*, which leads not so much to perfection as to scatology, to the wastes or, in the case of Tahiche Díaz, to the dynamic presentation of the body. According to Lacan, what the subject finds in the (specularly) altered image of its body is the paradigm of all kinds of resemblance that will give a tinge of hostility to the world of objects by projecting on it the avatar of the narcissistic image, which through the rejoicing effect of its encounter with the mirror, turns, during that encounter with its reflection, in the output of the most intimate aggressiveness. Sometimes we are captured not so much in the reflection as in a *transitional object*: “a thread from a diaper, a piece of a beloved item that doesn’t separate from the lips or the hands”. We return to the notion that detachment and castration are involved in the emerging of the subject. “Castration means that is necessary to reject joy to actually reach it in the inverted scale of the Laws of desire”. Some of Tahiche Díaz’s works take us to that dimension of the *specular castrating* and even to conceiving beauty as something that doesn’t protect us but scares us when reminds us of the image of Death. We have to understand the instinct of death as an ontological derailment or a gesture of un-investiture that refers to the dissolution of libido: what dislocates the subject (in the process of its constitution) is the traumatic encounter with enjoyment. The self, constituted specularly, believes that around him there is only a field full of debris and precisely because of this, it gets stronger; seeing

oneself as a unitary subject implies a kind of visual repression. If desire always leads to the impossibility of its satisfaction, then the instinct finds its satisfaction in the same action destined to suppress it: “While the subject of desire is based on a constitutive *lack* (it exists as long as its searching for the object-cause that is lacking), the subject of the instinct is grounded on a constitutive *excess*: in the excessive presence of something inherently “impossible” and that should not be there, in our present reality: the Thing that ultimately is, or course, the subject itself”. Tahiche composes an intense reality that represents human complexity with a unique play of specularity.

While in the Middle Ages the representation of the body only seems to be tolerated if presented undone, ““fragmented, dismembered, or either “put back together” or remounted according to unprecedented procedures, in the Baroque, corporeality is something that drips an excess, “the regulation of the soul through “corporal fluoroscopy”. There is a neo-baroque side to the works of Tahiche that is close to Michelangelo’s *terribilitá*. Christine Buci-Glucksmann points out that the baroque thinking is a theatrical interpretation of existence, an ambivalent logic that leads the other thinking, the one pertaining to modernity, to a Reason of the Otherness that is continuously overflowing. The Baroque is chaos and excess as so is the dark side of modernity that eludes totalizations. The baroque embodies the *split*: the shadow that The Enlightenment tried to lay aside. The baroque world is about distinction, dualism even; it’s a will to differentiate that becomes entangled with infinitude: “a difference that continues to unfold and refold on each side and doesn’t display one without retracting the other by a coextensivity of unveiling and veiling of the self, of the presence and withdrawal of the entity”. The bodies that appear in the works of Tahiche generate a true baroque commotion. Tahiche Díaz has expressed a strong interest in Deleuzian reflections on the Baroque and therefore has introduced many times fragments of the book *The fold. Leibniz and the baroque*: “If the baroque has established a totalizing art or the unity of the arts, it has done so firstly in extension, as each art tended to prolong itself and even to get accomplished in the art that was overflowing next to it. It has been noted that the Baroque often restricted painting and confined it to altarpieces, but painting actually got out of its frame and began to be done in polychrome marble sculpture; and sculpture exceeded itself and was done in architecture; and, at the same time, architecture found a frame in its frontage, which separated from the interior and related instead with the surroundings to accomplish architecture in urban planning. At the two ends of the chain, the painter has become an urban planner, and we witness the prodigious development of an art continuum in either amplitude or extension: a nesting of frames each of which is surmounted by a material that goes through it. This extensive unity of the arts constitutes a universal theater that carries air and soil and even fire and water. In it, the sculptures are the real characters and the city is a setting in which spectators are themselves painted images or sculptures. Art in its entirety becomes a *Socius*, a social, public space inhabited by baroque dancers”. The *tableaux vivants* of Tahiche Díaz bewitch and disturbs us: we don’t know if the living body has been paralyzed or if it’s the statute that will begin to move. Nobody knows, said Spinoza, what a body can do.

Tahiche Díaz has presented some of his works as dioramas or sculptural assemblies that accentuate the feeling of strangeness with a bluntly disturbing aesthetic. This artist is able to give an “aura” of strangeness to everyday life, like he did when stacked some “book-sculptures” before some beautiful crystal shelves during the intervention he made for the project *The Basted House* (2003) and that he titled *Nooks The*

*Enigma*. In a short passage from the *Poetics*, dedicated to the forms of artistic diction, Aristotle defines the enigma in this way: “The shape of the enigma comes, therefore, from connecting two impossible concepts by saying things that already exist”. There is a particular density of metaphors in the enigmatic but also an impossible combination or connection, the mixture of literal and figurative meanings. It may happen that the expectation of the enigma leads inevitably to disappointment but we also know that, mythically, its solution, the collapse of the Sphinx, has to do with the most obvious answer: mankind. Tahiche Díaz’s body of works is a profound meditation on human existence. Even though in the title of his impressive exhibition at TEA Tahiche Díaz introduces the term “forgetful astronaut”, we cannot identify him with this character, on the contrary, the artist wants, in an excessive manner, to preserve the memory of humanity by building a sort of prodigious and fantastic “natural history museum”, a kind of *wunderkammer*.

We are dominated by the aesthetics of pathos overdose; reality, when turned into a show, enforces banality on a global scale. “If indeed the subject has lost the ability to extend its claims and withholdings through temporal multiplicity and to organize his past and his future in a coherent experience, it is hard to imagine how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in something other than “loose pieces” and the practice of what is haphazardly heterogeneous, fragmented and random. These are, however, precisely some of the terms we have used to analyze (and even defend, like its apologist did) the postmodern cultural production. The “Victorian” idea of *saying everything* (perhaps because of a secret intention of cataloging the perverse and, at the same time, controlling the collective delusions) and the vertigo of *reality turned into a show*, don’t have to do with creative memory, on the contrary, they are symptoms of what we might call, following Heidegger, the *abject subjectivity*. Tahiche Díaz “mirrors” that deranged world by materializing to an absurd world that is marked by an almost beckettian nonsense.

Tahiche Díaz produces works obsessively so he can think about the *human condition*. “Man, like a good animal that has become aware of having a conscience -the artist writes-, has attempted to solve the problem of meaninglessness (...) constantly inventing symbol systems and philosophies that we call languages and that are based on standards as contingent as necessary to survive in the surrounding environment. Tahiche assumes the *posthumous* fate of art; its “coming after” is, in terms of Hal Foster, a *spectral* one. The absence of self, or rather the absence of myth, leads to a need to accept the *ruins*. In his works cruelty, violence and beauty intertwine, embodied in a very intense gesticulation. Despite all of this (with ample reasons to justify pessimism or to indulge in an apocalyptic tone or a nihilism without handholds), the artist continues to take a humanistic perspective: “Arts, philosophy and science –he writes vehemently and lucidly- should take command of interpretation, which is emasculated by all those images that, instead of relying on the world, urge the individual to integrate in a structure of mercantilist sects. The artist must narrate the world over any genre or classifications that alienate communication by using visual allegories and creating spaces open to the existence of the spectator. His objects (coming from hermeneutics and going only towards mayeutics) should allude time and be mediators of the individual’s experience; they (should) develop an exercise of freedom and ability to choose halfway between information and the management of the structures, while channeling energy and inviting reflection, to use the allegorical ability to represent and account for the world and to participate in life taking action in society (without actions),

just like any other worker who shouldn't drift in heights; they (should) communicate by all means and through hybrid properties, represent ideas and solve theoretical problems through a conceptual connection between the materials and the methods suitable to the shape, searching for solutions to the dominating bad taste that is crushing us and providing a product to society and a sense to the ineffable without thinking about absence and encouraging the impossible.

The essentially corporeal fantasies or oniric processes of Tahiche Díaz have something of a strict *double bind*, a quagmire in which what can be seen is disputed through “familiar” bodies. “The Longing, vertigo, anger, rejection or dreamlike weightlessness latent in the works— wrote Jorge Mora about the works Tahiche Díaz made around 2006-, are imbued in almost tangible dwellings, which belong, however, to the sphere of our dreams, of our perception and of our unconscious state”. If his installations are metaphors of a deranged world, they also are promises of something different, as if those sounds of the paradise to which he refers in the title of his intervention in TEA were forcing us to maintain a cheerful tone or, at least, to not burier hope. Life as staged in the models and sculptural compositions of Tahiche Díaz, with impressive dynamism and great gesticulation, can be disconcerting to us, but will certainly never leave us “indifferent”. His extremely passionate sculptural allegories are largely a “diary of the everyday life of the artist”, who has the ability to question us to bring out from our “forgetfulness” a revealing image. This body of works, which unfolds as an exploration and, at the same time, as a labyrinthine story, invites us to confront the many traces of the body with a titanic aesthetic effort that is implied in any construction of a self portrait. Trough an “archeological” space we begin to feel that what we see affects us, that all these dynamic forms of corporeality mirrors us but, in reality, “are nobody special”. The enigma is still standing and the doubt of what a body can do persistently resonates.