
A body / WHAT BODY IS THAT?

Mariana Marcassa [1]

PREPARATION:

I prepare my naked body with two orthotics: a dental mouth opener and a posture corrector especially built for the performance.

The body is tied to the posture corrector, which is T-shaped, with horizontal strings.

It is positioned alongside the spinal cord, forcing the body to be erect and immobilizing the arms.

The forearms are free. The mouth is gaping. The spine is tied, straight.

PERFORMANCE:

Standing up, I open my Master of Arts thesis and read "Part 1" of such writing. As I read, the body cries. The body shakes. The body sweats. The body drools. The performance ends when the text ends.

January 28th 2011. Opening of the thesis defense "QUE CORPO É ESSE? Grupo EmpreZa, sensações de uma experiência-terreiro" [WHAT BODY IS THAT? Grupo EmpreZa, sensations of a terreiro-experience]

When in crisis, goes out to walk at night and, in coming back to consciousness, already is in another city, kilometres from home. Gathers the carcasses of animals devoured in the pasture, in between the cities. Pig, ox, dog. Gives the bones a special treatment. The house stinks of bone, lime, formaldehyde. Already in São Paulo, becomes a beggar, works cleaning plates in a restaurant

in Santa Cecília. Starts sleeping in the restaurant. Time passes, and then comes the surprise of a love letter that calls for a return to the *cerrado*. [2] In Goiania, invests, in infinite instalments, in the motorbike that allows for the delivery boy to work. But the body in crisis continues its life between wandering at night, booze and pills. Boozes a lot, drives the motorbike drunk in the city streets. Falls. The bridge is fifteen meters high. The accident puts the body in a coma, and then there is the effort of returning to life. Help is needed. Food needs to be put into the mouth, the body washed, ass cleaned. And then, the hard work of locomotion, of moving unaided, eating unaided, speaking well. With the effort of re-education, has the chance of working as a farm peon. Takes care of cows and masturbates in the midst of the pasture. An exhaustive masturbation to satiate the world which tears the body. A full world, a packed world which throws it away from its petty reality of a life in the interior, between the *roça* [3] and the city. Slips with a cloth diaper in between the legs and lets the anxiety come. A horniness which wets everything, soaks the thighs. Sweats. An entire day until the exhaustion of the body. Where the hand can't any longer, fingers hurt, a cunt hurts, a dick hurts, a body hurts. Enough, the entire pasture already smells like masturbation, the anxiety has gone. As a farm peon loses an arm and makes a living. Broken, without the arm dilacerated in the mowing machine, buys a car with the indemnity and drives with only one arm. Shits squatting over the latrine, it comes from the habit of life in the wilderness. Stutters while reading in public, has a lot of difficulty in thinking well, a collapsed body. A repressing gaze, mute, without words, torments dreams. Screams in such a way that causes deafness. Drinks every day, as much as necessary in order to forget the cancer of someone close and his fucked up miserable life. There is the embarrassment of waking up all came beside her. Only talks of sex and shouts the premature ejaculation to the seven winds. Drinks a lot, falls in the gutter. In the morning of the following day, beaten, robbed, sprawled on the street. Goes out to walk the night and carries the carcasses which stink in the pastures. But, on a random day, finds the animal alive. Starts talking with it, they become friends. Takes it home as if it were a carcass. Puts it in the kitchen. Pushes that enormous horse, all of it, inside the house which stinks of bone, lime and formaldehyde. Takes prescribed pills and drinks. It is then that the body is stricken by a rare disease, has to protect itself from the sun. But that hardened aristocratic blood causes paralysis: latifundiary

aristocracy, of the rearing of cattle, of the possession of lands, of the massacre of peoples, of redemptive Catholicism. The body hurts with it, tries to escape from itself, wants to run. Goes from the schizo to the paranoiac. A paralyzed body, stuttering, decompensated. Cuts itself entirely: from top to bottom, the sharp knife opens a tear of blood in the marked body. Inside the skin, the tears tattoo the whole body and make evident its own pain. Takes pills to behave. At times, slips into tight, exotic, exaggerated clothes. Doesn't know how to act his homosexuality in a city of machos. So many tight clothes, so many garments. Goes from the revolutionary to the reactionary. Standoffish body, difficult to come close to. Buckles because of it. Stutters full of twitches. Between the truck driver and the housewife fucks the *roças* dog. The dog cries. But to whom? Melancholy everywhere. The heat is intense and in the air ashes of fire squander the dry woods of the winter without rain. And like an old *camarada* [4] of the Goianian steppes, searches for shelter under the shadow of a contorted tree: with water wets the dried up lips at the same time that he eats the cassava flour sweetened by sugar cane syrup. Knows that from this fuck nothing will come out, no fucked up being will be born and continue his race. Thinking is rare. During break, remembers an experience which isn't his own and smells the damp leather of the troops that in a distant time passed through there. That smell of sweat on the mule's coat mixed with his own, with the smell of the penis he had just stuck into the dog. All these sensations, together with the intense heat, make him melt. In agony, looks up at the sky without clouds and thinks nothing. Croons like a singer and looks for an inexistent calm, a firm land of any kind, a ground, a home. The solitude is almost absolute. Around, mounds, lizards and sun. The burning of the surrounding woods insists and invites him again, in the burnt smoke mixed with sweat, to remember a time which isn't his but is his. Images take hold of his sight as if the body could make them come out of its pores, announcing them as marks which belong to the depths: roasted buttocks from the long journey on the animal's loin, the arid days inside the woods, the rummaging of lands. Stinking men hungry for gold. Bedevilled Indians, dispossessed slaves. The mute sound of suffering in erecting villages on the banks of the river. Vila Boa latifundia. The chapel, the priest, mass. And once again the sweat, the stinking smell of pain: black slaves, labour of the body, manual, hard, strict. Of the Goyáses remains the name and something deep in the skin of that body. Here, the little dog is a woman, a slave,

an Indian. The dog cries, but to whom? The fire stops and the red dust rises, it irritates the eyes and makes the body suffer. Runs towards the stream. Finds limpid water, fresh, smooth. The minnows of the little river whisper the popular saying: eat live minnows and learn how to swim. Doesn't hesitate, opens the mouth and throws live minnows inside the throat which goes to the stomach. Jumps into the water and swims like a wild animal. It is already night. After some time, comes the pig which longs to gain weight for any work whatsoever. Buys the pig, takes it to the *roça*. The pig becomes a pet. Takes care of the animal as if it were a Madam's Lulu, strokes it, caresses it, gives it food, takes it for walks. Has love for the pig, fattens it and soon will make of it a good meal. A banquet where the pig is the guest of honour which knows how to come and comes a fucking lot. Writes on its behalf, thinks on its behalf. Screams on its behalf: the pig isn't a metaphor! In a religious night, resolves to follow the procession on foot, from Goiania to Trindade. Finds an enormous staff on the road as if it were a bone of a dead animal in the pasture, and gazes at all those people which carry the Cross to redeem their sins. But the eyes laugh at all that frenzied religiosity. Arrives at Trindade, drinks a few and goes back. Exhausted, tired. In Goiás Velho throws himself against the church walls, again and again, seeming to free the sounds of the dead in that land. And the body shrieks as it bangs into the wall. Brutal brunts with which the body exhales the stinking smell of its ancestors pain: *Goyases, Acroá, Kayapó, Karajá, Xambioá, Yavaé, Avá-Canoeiro, Kalungas*. The scandalous voice of dead Maria Grampinho that buried all the filth from the streets in her hairs. Obsessed with the hair clips that she finds in the fissures of pavements, is burrowed, mistreated, dumped in the humid basement of Cora Coralina. [5] Mad black woman spends her life looking for *ramonas* [6] to stick in her hair. Dirty hair full of clips. From Cora Coralina, the dark, humid basement and her culinary witchcraft. When happy, the body drinks some more and, stuttering, can no longer speak. Speech comes to expel sound. The head trembles and the smirk takes over the face. Only Jesus! He sings. Only Jesus! In the streets, shouts out that his body is a hotel of the lowest category. Screams in sleepless nights, in the desire that someone may hear him and take him far, very far, from there. Drinks because of it. Dances because of it. Spins because of it. A tiredness is needed. Decides to pierce his own feet in a *Serão Performático*. [7] And that thick blood spread on the floor

which smells like life and death causes wonder and uneasiness. But why, they ask. Why?

He stopped.

It is that the old body sees the ocean for the first time. With the mellow wave which calms the nerves, the body begins to dress only in white. Shaves the head and sows the stretch marks which scar the womb, now the open fissure of an animal gusted with stripes. Learns to control losing control itself: vomits at the right time, chews with orthodontic mouth openers, controls the movements of a twisted body, the lashings which flog the slave's body. Swallows dense batches of the hair of the head just in front, till it is all in the throat, spits it out again with the certainty that there wasn't more to swallow. Sticks needles in between the nail and the flesh – subtle, delicate gesture – no longer is it known where lies the beauty and the horror. Throws itself naked against the walls. Reckons forces with the other: slap in the face, exhaustive scream, stone in the hair. A reckoning of forces which has nothing to do with the affirmation of oneself, nothing can be said under the sign of a dialectic, if man or woman, if white or black, if rich or poor. The reckoning of forces comes from the body's effort to make itself expressed. It is more than a reckoning, the body enters entirely in an effort, a tension which it lives, expressing itself there with all the marks, the collapses, the pains, the stuttering disgraces of *a body*. And creates with them. The stuttering body, rumpled, anxious, grabs the *roça*, the cow shit. Death, the bones, the surgical instruments, the suffering and the blood, the aristocratic blood and the hardened religion, sex, nakedness and the skin, premature ejaculation and masturbation, the pain, the stone, the tension. And a life which insists, art.

Notes

[1] Mariana Marcassa is developing a post-doc at the SenseLab, Concordia University, Montreal. She holds a PhD in Clinical Psychology, tutored by Suely Rolnik at PUC-SP, and a MA in Clinical Psychology from the same institution as well as a Major in Visual Arts at the Federal University of Goiás. She is one of the founders of the Brazilian collective from the state of Goiás, Grupo

Empreza, with whom she has worked for a decade (2001-2011):
<http://www.grupoempreza.com/>

[2] The *cerrado* is a vast tropical savanna ecoregion in Brazil, particularly in the states of Goiás and Minas Gerais.

[3] *Roça* can be used both as a noun and as a verb. As a verb, of which the infinitive is *roçar*, it means to rub. However, in Brazil, the word, used as a verb, and especially in rural contexts, adds to its meaning the act of chopping down vegetation. The verb, under both its senses, has been substantialized to also designate the place where this action takes place.

[4] *Camarada* can have multiple meanings, from friend to companion to even, in a political context, militant. Its use in the text, however, refers to a specific context of Brazilian history, already after the end of slavery, where the peon, although receiving compensation for his work, lived in conditions that differed only minimally from slavery.

[5] Cora Coralina (1889-1985) was a Goianian writer and poet. She lived her entire life in the same house, one of the first constructions (in the 18th century) of Goiás Velho, the old capital of the state of Goiás. A mad woman called Maria Grampino, that Cora Coralina is said to take care of, lived in the basement of her house.

[6] *Ramonas* are hair clips. A word used by the Goianians.

[7] *Serão Performático* is an expression used by Grupo Empreza to name a performatic event which includes a series of performances.