

David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) is probably one of the most iconic pieces of lo-fi cyberpunk of the early 1980's. We could even argue that it is the famous line uttered at the end by the protagonist, Max Renn, that best summarises how the logic of video had already entered the domestic space leaving behind the prescient minds of artists like Paik. Our current image-culture, the birth of virtual reality and also the exponential rise of visual studies, all are somehow indebted to this "long live the new flesh!" that Renn calls out, just before shooting himself and embracing this new transcendence of the visual.

Since then, we've been trying to come to terms with this unleashed death-drive of electronic images, beating with a digital eroticism, ever more powerful than their mechanical counterpart. Perhaps because of this, today we might attach to images in a more hygienic way than Cronenberg's gory prostheses predicted, but this in no way diminishes their orgasmic spell. Quite the contrary, in the making of this new flesh of the gaze we've developed a perverse taste for further ghost limbs, for immaterial organs and obsidian presences, deforming and haunting the obvious piece of meat effaced by Renn's symbolic sacrifice: the body. Yet, the more we step into this utopia of impure visual lust the more we feel that the flesh of our profound today is also unsurprisingly old; written with the magical tradition of the "word of command"; woven with code and mingled with alphanumeric typos.

The fact is, that in the era of the social network and of hyper-visual sharing we are increasingly becoming more text and more word than ever: not just embodying text, but becoming engulfed by its space: not just as in a written document, unfolding the past in the present, but as in "real time". Textual studies have always kept an eye on the fluctuations of the linguistic signifier. Their interest today is not necessarily semiotic or hermeneutic but material: they attend to the physical variations of the letter, the page, the book, the social and performative implications that surround editions, publishing and corrections. In recent years, and with the advent of digital text, this materiality, this flesh of the text, has of course been expanded to comprise something else than mere physicality - or as Ronald Scheifer puts it, an "intangible materialism"¹. In this sense, email may be no different than a good old letter but, together with instant messaging and social media, it is redefining our notion of textual presence. To the point of substituting gestures so bodily and oral like the handshake or the hug.

After all, we might not be attached to a gun like Renn was but we are certainly woven to our ubiquitous keyboards; en fleshed too by our textual prosthetics.

Variations, editions and textual marginalia have always been an old concern of artist Joseph Grigely

(1956). A textual scholar himself, deaf since the age of ten, Grigely's work has primarily dealt with the textual manifestations that are transparent to the eye: from the petty notes of his conversations with the hearing to the mute lyricism of opera singers, his oeuvre consistently points out this archaic textual score - or as he prefers to call it, to a "textuality" (Grigely 1996). However, this score is no longer the score of precise meaning, orderly syntax, authorial intention or Austin's performative, but the textual score of mutation, of biological whim and of damp genetics. For Grigely, as for Rancière, the text still works as the link between actions, but now the phrase links as much as it gives flesh. And "this flesh or substance is, paradoxically, that of the great passivity of things without any rationale" (Rancière 2007:46). That very substance is the one that would seem to condense and collapse in the work of Juliana Góngora (1989) whose video piece, "Palabra dura", gives way to the rest of the exhibition. In it, Góngora struggles to recite an anonymous poem with a stone in her mouth, drooling, gaping and gasping all along. Her performance makes it difficult to follow the text and yet it is the poem that extrudes an abject language of feelings that are left unresolved. Halfway through the mimetic ritual and a pornographic topos, her mouth describes the way cranes manage to escape their predators by filling their mouths with stones to fall silent, "to avoid being hunted, to avoid death". Right after it, the two sculptures of Ivana Basic (1986) seem as props directly out of Cronenberg's wild imagination, making us wonder if it flesh that follows syntax or if it is the structure who surrenders and bows in the face of deformity.

On a different corner of the script, the works by Teresa Solar Abboud (1985), Nicoline van Harskamp (1975) and Fernando Baños (1970) combine in a phrase of gesture, panting and tracing. "Chicken", by Solar Abboud is presented as the result of pressing – or printing – sign language onto turning clay. The work not only turns the concept of volume of speech inside out, enabling mute signs into form, but provides a silent alternative to the body topicality that floods contemporary art today. A silence that contrasts with the noisy background of van Harskamp's "Her production" where we are confronted with a choral story about fricatives and affricates, written using the phonetic system found in dictionaries. A mimesis between sign and gesture, the onomatopoeias literally being the score of the movements for the mouth, that leads us to think of text as the result too of 'pressing' – of printing – sound onto ink. Only to feel in the musical arrhythmia of Baños' "Discursos", that, as it happens with physical matter, text is more often than not comprised of ineffable gaps and spaces than of clear representations.

This negative syntax still rebounds to Grigely's collection of half finished sentences, "Mumblebook", and concludes in the "untitled conversation" that reminds us, textually, that "speech is shaped breath". Grigely's works project from the walls this very same rhythm of discontinuity: his notes on show, produced in the late nineties, long before textual conversations were mainstream and

part of everyone's life, act here as the conjunction between works that share a textual something. Or as Blur could put it back then, the nexus between "works who are words, who like words to be works, who do words like they're works, who do works like they're words, [...]" (1994).

At the far end of our song, a big marble slab by Andrea Gómez (1977) with the word EMAIL inscribed on it, reminds us of how presently this immaterial flesh shapes our own; our everyday becomes this "endless middle of words and marks and lines"; a compacted mass of signs and blurbs that resembles the geological signature of the stone. Then, to the right, ranging from small pebbles to a big chunk of debris, Gomez's embodied hypertextual objects allow us to imagine how it would be to share the digital with the hand: muting them in our pockets or perhaps making it sound; throwing it against the panes of glass. Her youtube links are there for us to type, not to click. And as with glass, they resonate with Grigely's "Music", where a group of anonymous voices try to silently give account of the tune we cannot hear.

"Long live the old flesh" has gathered a selection of works that explore the "thingness" of text or that think the "tongue" not only as a culture or idiom but as a muscle of the body: a fifth limb that gestures in the darkness of the mouth, shaping air, watering words, tasting perhaps the meanings of stones. Through ineffable oral performances, buccal materialities and deaf volumes, the artists shown pose how elusive yet meaningful the old flesh of the text may be. Text becomes reunited with its etymology of tissue; a flexible dark solid that asks what gives us flesh today.

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1 Schleifer, Ronald (2009) *Intangible Materialism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.

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