Who can hear the monster speak?

with Keren Cytter, Shahryar Nashat, Benedicte Gyldenstierne Sehested,
Daniel Topka, Anna Uddenberg, Bri Williams

curated by Julia Hegi and Antonia Rebekka Truninger

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«Who can hear the monster speak?» finds its beginning in the body - or: the gaze on the body. This is a gaze that lays itself almost imperceptibly, but nevertheless determinedly over the skin, so as to subject the body to its constant judgment. The question of which bodies are observed by whose gaze, however, remains unanswered here. «Who can hear the monster speak?» engages its protagonists in a dialogue of looking, producing bodies that become both subject and object of observation. Bodies that look and are looked at are also bodies that desire and are desired. Actors find themselves - if only for a brief moment - in an intimate exchange that just as quickly turns into a sense of alienation. For the lack of understanding what the other person thinks or feels creates a distanced gaze. This is also a gaze that defines the other body as such - the other, the viewed, the desired. The body and the other body face each other:

«Who can hear the monster speak?» finds its beginning in the other body - or: the monstrous body. The bodies that mark one, and only one, position within a supposedly binary system are opposed by the bodies that are located outside of heteronormative conception: *'The monster is one who lives in transition. One whose face, body and behaviours cannot yet be considered true in a predetermined regime of knowledge and power*.' (*Can the Monster Speak?*, Paul B. Preciado, London 2021, p. 35)

Thus, «Who can hear the monster speak?» also finds its beginning in the monstrous body - or its voice, which is tied to its physical manifestation in the body. But possessing voice presupposes hearing voice. In this translation - a collective act of hearing or not hearing - lies the establishment of the supposedly voiceless and indeterminate body. From the point of view of a silent, monstrous body, the Spanish philosopher and theorist Paul B. Preciado speaks to all non-monstrous bodies:

> *'Why is it, my beloved binary friends, that you are convinced that only subalterns possess an identity? Why are you convinced that only Muslims, Jews, queers, lesbians, trans folk, people who live in the banlieues, migrants and Blacks have an identity? Do you therefore believe that you – the normal, the hegemonic, the bourgeois white psychoanalysts, the binary, the patriarchal-colonials have no identity?*'
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> *Can the Monster Speak?*, Paul B. Preciado, London 2021, p. 32

So, «Who can hear the monster speak?» finds its beginning in a body that catches a glimpse of its own image in the mirror – if only for a brief moment – unsure which gaze it is that is being reflected. And in the end, a body emerges that is grasped within a state of continuous transformation. This body is equally monstrous as it is non-monstrous.

Julia Hegi und Antonia Rebekka Truninger

Keren Cytter (*1977, Tel Aviv, IL) is an Israeli visual artist and writer who lives and works in New York. Cytter creates films, performances, drawings and photographs on topics of social alienation, language representation, and the function of individuals in predetermines cultural systems through experimental modes of storytelling. In Keren Cytter's video *Experimental Film* (2002), we find negotiations of identity with Cytter herself acting as the protagonist. The black and white footage incorporates a story of anxiety, adolescence, sex and violence in a non-linear manner, whilst the actors switch roles and repeat lines, disorienting what could be considered reality. The footage is interwoven with drawings that may examine detachment from prevailing structures, identities and bodies.

Selected solo exhibitions include: Ludwig Forum Aachen (2022) Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2020), Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv and Museion Bolzano (both in 2019) Künstlerhaus - Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz (2016) Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015) and the Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen State of Concept, Athens (both in 2014,) Tate Modern Oil Tanks, London (2012,) Cytter was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2021.

Shahryar Nashat (*1975, Geneva, CH) lives and works in Los Angeles, US. Nashat's work oscillates between sculpture, installation, photography and video. The human body and its representation are central to Nashat's work - whereby the artist is not primarily interested in a visual analysis, but rather in breaking down what it means to live in a body occupied by socio-cultural signifiers. While the hegemonic conception of a body privileges the homogeneous and intact body, Nashat's work is dedicated to bodies that are situated outside of traditional ideals, emphasizing their desire, fragility, mortality, but also their resilience instead. With *The Calf of Adrian Hermanides* (2008), Nashat creates an intimate space of the private, in which the artist counters the detached, judgmental gaze with a desiring gaze.

In addition to numerous other institutional solo exhibitions worldwide, Nashat has had his work shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA (2020); the Swiss Institute, New York, USA (2019); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2017); and the Schinkel Pavillion, Berlin, Germany (2014) and Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2014). In addition, his work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, such as those at the Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland (2021); Kunst Museum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2020); Sculpture Center, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA (2018); and the 3rd Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2018). Nashat's work is included in the public collections of Centre Pompidou, Paris, Kunsthaus Zürich, Art Insitute of Chicago, and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, among others.

Benedicte Gyldenstierne Sehested, (*1977, SE / DN) lives and works in Berlin. Working across photography, sculpture and inventive hybrids of these two mediums, Sehested addresses ways in which ideals of identity and body are constructed through cultural codes. Her figurative sculptures *Untitled* (2022) and *Untitled (child size figure)* (2015) are striking in their gestural presence, suggesting an inner state of being. Yet any attempt to ascribe individual identity proves futile - the fragility inherent to the material also expresses a sense of the uncanny, which arises when the figures appear both determined and indeterminate.

Solo exhibitions include: Greenspon Gallery NY; Peles Empire, Berlin; Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin. Group exhibitions include: Musee Espace Arlaud, Lausanne; Bridget Donahue, New York, Koppe Astner, Glasgow

Daniel Topka (*1992, Waldshut, DE) lives and works in Zurich and Berlin. Media-wise, Topka's work moves in photography, sculpture and installation. He examines bodies that are staged as monstrous by consumer and popular culture but are nevertheless tamed. With *o. T. (Calvin Klein_Vase_1)* (2020), *o. T. (Calvin Klein_Vase_2)* (2020) and *"I ought to be thy Adam; but I rather am the fallen angel,"_Frankenstein (Mary Shelley)* (2022) Topka shows 3 objects that - somewhere between sculpture and everyday object - receive or bid farewell to the visitor. The elastic band that identifies Calvin Klein underpants as such functions as a metonymic expression of an ideal of masculinity, which is fetishized in consumer culture. At the same time, the bands bear witness to past lives - Topka gathers relics of close friends as well as distant acquaintances, the work's fragile corporeality overlapping spheres of the intimate-private and the public.

Topka has been part of numerous solo as well as group exhibitions, including works shown at Kunstverein Heppenheim (2022), Sangt Hipolyt, Berlin (2021), Galerie Friese, Berlin (2021), The Reference, Frankfurt am Main (2019), and PS120, Berlin (2018). In 2021 Topka will be awarded the Prize for the Promotion of Culture, Schloss Bonndorf.

Anna Uddenberg (*1982, Stockholm, SE) lives and works in Berlin and Stockholm. In her sculptural, installation, and performative work, Uddenberg examines how bodies, culture, consumption, and self-dramatization are intertwined with the production of subjectivity. Using a visual language that seduces through supposed perfection, Uddenberg particularly questions gender roles, sexuality, and their representation. In *Obedient Beast #1* (2021) - part of the work series Big Baby (2021) - Uddenberg takes a satirical look at the question of how male identity can offer protection. Uddenberg's starting point here is the hyper-masculine cartoon imagery of manga artist Jiariya and Art Nouveau furniture designer Bořek Šípek, whom Uddenberg depicts as shadowy infants caught in dependence and subjugation.

Major solo exhibitions include Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin (2021), Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2019), Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles (2019), Spazio Maiocci, Milan (2019), House of Gaga, Mexico City (2017). In addition, Uddenberg has been part of numerous group exhibitions, including RMIT gallery, Melbourne (2021), Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (2021), Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw (2020), Powerlong Museum, Shanghai (2019), Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2019), Migros Museum, Zurich (2019), and Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2018). Uddenberg's work is represented in the collections of Kiasma Museum, Helsinki; Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepubllik Deutschland, Bonn; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Boros Collection, Berlin; Stahl Collection, Norrköping; and K11 Foundation, Shanghai.

Bri Williams (*1993, US) lives and works in Los Angeles. In her sculptural work, Williams uses moldable material such as soap to enwrap and conceal objects, whilst simultaneously provoking their decay. This alienation of familiar objects seems to speak to histories of subjugation and proposes a ghostly, unreal state of being. In her piece *Rejection* (2021) Williams raises questions of selfhood and representation through both a postcolonial and psychoanalytical lens. The unreadability or mystification of reality found in her sculptures interconnect trauma with individual and collective identity.

Solo exhibitions include Et al., San Francisco (2021), Queer Thoughts, New York (2020), Mumurs, Los Angeles (2020), Interface Gallery, Oakland (2018). Williams' work has been presented in numerous group exhibitions, including Kunsthaus Glarus (2021), Smart Objects, Los Angeles (2021), Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna (2021), Pina, Vienna (2020), Karma International, Los Angeles (2018), and among others.

Julia Hegi (*1996, CH) lives and works in Zurich and Winterthur and holds a bachelor's degree in Art History and English Language and Literature from the University of Zurich. Since May 2022 she has been managing the non-profit exhibition space Hamlet together with Antonia Rebekka Truninger and since 2020 she has been part of the management team of the exhibition space unanimous consent in Zurich-Oerlikon. From 2020 to 2021 she managed the exhibition project Im Grafenhag in Winterthur together with Jamira Estrada and Antonia Rebekka Truninger.

Antonia Rebekka Truninger (*1997, CH) lives and works in Zurich and Winterthur. In 2022 she completed her bachelor's degree in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Zurich. Since 2019 she has been part of the non-profit exhibition space Hamlet in Zurich-Oerlikon, which she has been managing together with Julia Hegi since May 2022. From 2020 to 2021 she managed the exhibition project Im Grafenhag in Winterthur together with Jamira Estrada and Julia Hegi.

Moving Bodies

Paul B. Preciado, in «An Apartment on Uranus», translated by Charlotte Mandell, London 2019.

There are people who use their bodies as if they were disposable plastic bags. Others carry their bodies as if they were Ming dynasty porcelain. There are people who are not treated as citizens because their legs cannot walk. There are people who live to transform their bodies into that of Pamela Anderson. Others who live to make their bodies into that of Jean-Claude Van Damme. And others who have two chihuahuas named Pamela and Jean-Claude. Some carry their bodies as if they were a common coat of skin. And others as if they were a transparent suit. There are some who get dressed in order to be naked and others who undress in order to remain hidden. There are people who earn their living by swaying their hips. Others who don't even know they have hips. There are those who use their bodies as they would a public square. And those who treat them as if they were a private parking lot. There are those who understand their bodies as a savings account. And others as if they were a river. Some people are locked up in their bodies as if they were in Alcatraz. Others understand liberty only as something the body can pull off. Some people wave their hair to the rhythm of an electric guitar. Others experience electric shocks rising directly from their central nervous system. Some people will never let themselves leave the repertoire of acquired gestures. Others get paid to throw off this repertoire, but only within the realm of art. There are bodies that are used socially as sources of pleasure, value or knowledge for others. And others absorb pleasure, value and knowledge. There are bodies who are not regarded as citizens because of the colour of their skin. There are those who walk on a mechanical rubber ribbon to keep in shape. While others walk 600 kilometers on foot to escape war. There are some who do not own their own bodies. And others who believe that the bodies of animals belong to them. That the bodies of children belong to them. That the bodies of women belong to them. That non-white bodies belong to them. Some think that they are the owners of their bodies the way they own their apartment. Among them, some spend their time doing renovations and interior design. And others take care of their apartment as if it were a nature reserve. There are people who believe they own their bodies the way the cowboy owns his horse. They mount it, force it to a gallop, stroke It or beat it, give it food and drink, let it rest so they can use it again the next day, They don't speak to their bodies, just as some people don't speak to their horses. They are surprised when they realize that when their mount dies, they are unable to continue all alone. Various bodily services can be bought with money. Others are regarded as inalienable. Some people feel that their bodies are completely empty. Others imagine their body as a cupboard full of organs. There are people who view them as advanced technology. Others as a prehistoric tool. For some, the sexual organs are organic and inseparable from their own body. For others, they are multiple, inorganic, and can change shape and size. Some people make their bodies function solely on glucose, whether it's in the form of alcohol or rapid sugar. Some people send tabacco mixed with poison directly into their lungs. There are some who make their bodies function without sugar, or salt, or alcohol, or tobacco, or gluten, or lactose, or GMO's, or cholesterol. There are people who treat their bodies as if they were their slaves. And others as if they were their sovereign. Some people are not regarded as citizens because they prefer to live in keeping with the social conventions of femininity whereas their bodily anatomy identifies them as masculine. There are bodies who do everything quickly but never have time for anything. And those who do things slowly, who are even capable of not doing anything at all. Some bodies are not regarded as citizens because their eyes can't see. There are those who take the penises of others in their hands until they ejaculate. And those who put their fingers in others' mouths to put white paste in the cavities of their teeth. The former are called illegal workers. The latter qualified professionals. There are bodies who are not regarded as citizens because they prefer to obtain sexual pleasure with bodies whose sexual organs have shapes similar to their own. There are people who calm their nervous systems by taking tranquilizers. Others meditate. Some people drag their living bodies as if they were corpses. Some bodies are hetero but masturbate only while watching gay porn. Some bodies are not regarded as citizens because they possess one chromosome more or one chromosome less. There are those who love their bodes more than anything else. And those who feel unspeakable shame about their bodies. There are those who experience their bodies as if they were a time-bomb they're unable to defuse. And those who take pleasure in their bodies as if they were a melting ice cream. Some people wear implanted mechanisms thanks to which their hearts can beat. Others bear in their chests a heart that belonged to someone else. There are others still who bear, inside themselves, for a time, another body in the process of growing. So, can one speak of a human body as if it were a single body?

Zurich, 10 November 2017