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"Bleeding Images" The Materiality of Images and the Ontology of the Gaze

Claudia Schumann's images relate a complex overlapping between destruction, hindrance and confirmation. Her photographs do not vibrate to a better, other, newer, more beautiful world, but are vibrant with the insight that the body's opulence consists in its nudity, frivolity and fragility. This opulence reveals itself just as unconditionally to the spectator as it then recedes from the spectator's gaze. This tightrope dance between her force of presentation and reticent withdrawal cannot be fully comprehended through observation or analysis, remaining a font of irritation and mystery.

And this irritation constitutes an abrupt, dissonant defect in the conceptual automatism that demands the transformation of the seen into a narrative. In Schumann's images, countenance and narrative are not synchronized. The images' materiality disturbs; they cannot be retrieved into a synchronizable story. Instead, they invite the observer to interweave this glance at asymmetry together with the observed image, thus bringing dichotomies between reality, life and death, appearance and perception, limits and rejection, cliché and schism to the limits of their capacities.

Schumann's images remain indebted to the body—the female body. The body marks a reference point reaching beyond the limits of the art work we are observing. This exhibited, depicted, rearranged and sensually distorted body compels the observer to accept it as a touchstone (criterion) for observing the objects surrounding it. The separation of image and reality is linked not only to a message but to an accusation. The observation of this female body is not a bid for or coquetterie with the voyeuristic (masculine) gaze, but instead disturbs the observer within the complacent security of his observation, even as it enchants him. In the act of observing these images, the bridges that could span sight with self-realization and enabling calibration with the Other are not crossed. This gap is what lends Claudia Schumann's images their mysterious quality—a scintillating semantics of the fragile, vulnerable countenance.

As multiple exposures, her photographs undertake to depict something—perhaps, to use a hackneyed word, depict the truth. But which truth? A truth of withdrawal, not a truth of presence. This truth wanders from an already existing viewpoint to a viewpoint of questing. Not the concrete result but the process of depiction, of inadequacy, of pure withdrawal

entices the observer's eye into longing for an ambiguity then transformed into materiality: the materiality of the image in *status nascendi*--a bleeding image.

Born in 1963 in Vienna, Claudia Schumann has not only dedicated to visual processes as an artist, but as a psychiatrist and neurologist (a profession she continues to practice) to scientific examination of the ostensibly inaccessible, to the opulence, shame and frivolous obscenity that characterise psychosis, and also to the portents and power of death.

These rubrics constitute the metaphorical base for a correlation between art and psychiatry. A new direction in Schumann's professional path began when she took the entrance examination for the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, at a time when she was already solidly established in the field of psychiatry. Her photographs of "Rosa and Claudia" constituted a kind of *Urszene* for the creative period that followed. In a sense, the "meandering" extrication between two women—one of them at the midpoint of her life, the other approaching life's end—forms a kind of ensemble out of which Schumann's later dramaturgy grew. Here, perspectives are involved that are inborn in every biological existence. The attendant aesthetic challenge consists in capturing this multi-perspectivity in an actual image, while also testing the limits of representability. This in turn results in a dramaturgy, and also an iconosophy that permeates the work of Claudia Schumann as a recurring leitmotiv.

Particularly regarding the tool of the body, Schumann reveals chasms and searchlights of the soul that language can neither encompass, demarcate or still. They lurk as a constant threat from another world, invading an ego that gasps for air. And this is not all: Schumann's dramaturgy of images is also a convoluted array, one where temporal and persepctival orders rise up against each other, "touching each other and by the same token keeping a distance from one another" (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, 34, translated BmQ) This alternation between contact and distance revolves around a floating center, where symbolic/allegorical/mythological and verbal threads of interpretation are interwoven. Contact and distance are both hell and heaven, since they conjure up worlds bristling with the delusions of projection and counter-projection. Such delusions remain a constant companion for a process we are accustomed to call life. Language, flawed and feckless, also remains a part of life.

Schumann's photographs do not reject the power of speech, but nevertheless escape it by setting upon a quest for the limits of sensual presentation. Since these limits must enter into a misalliance with the limits of verbal reasoning, there are consequences for other representative modes as well. The photographic image lays bare not only verbal and sensory

inadequacy; it is also a weapon for approaching such chasms and enjoying them in the approach.

To paraphrase Ingeborg Bachmann: "Language is the punishment. Everything is subsumed into language, everything expires in language according to its guilt and the degree of its guilt. (...)" (Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*, 97, translated BmQ), Schumann's images must expire within her dramaturgy but also transcend it. These images are neither postponements nor echoes of a romantically transcendent desire, but rather a clotting and cumulation of lives based in the moment. They thus do not reflect that midpoint dubbed all too hastily by Western civilization as "identity". According to Levinas, identity is "not a safe or innocuous relationship to oneself, but rather a chaining to oneself; it is the necessity of occupying oneself with oneself" (Levinas, *Die Zeit und der Andere*, 30, translated BmQ). Schumann's images continually subject themselves to this ordeal, in order to defy the constant threat of imprisonment within an identity that has retreated within itself.

Translated by Benjamin Mc Quade