

ANDREA CRESPO

by Kari Rittenbach

“Life’... is an acquired taste, an addiction like any other, an open-ended project.”
Rosi Braidotti

“What we do on the net others can do without all that equipment.”
Kathy Acker

The phallo(go)centrism of Freud’s twentieth-century psychoanalytic project relies on both its corresponding negatively formed lack, and the physiological facts of anatomy then classified as more or less binary, if not binding. His metaphorical theories were extrapolated from the literal, in other words, from observations of the normal statistical distributions of the biological. Donna Haraway has characterized the human organism naturalized by early life sciences as an “unambiguous locus of identity, agency, labor, and hierarchicalized function,” thereby questioning the determinism of the sexology it so solidly constructed.¹

While artists, writers and activists of the 1970s appropriated psychoanalytic tropes to push back against patriarchal power, or rescue marginal figures and fetishes in their crusade for equality and sexual liberation, the body, as evidence, was re-inscribed. Its processes and pleasures still rouse terror in their operations on the psychic cohesion of human organisms — sparking essentialist turf wars in several quarters.

Haraway’s generative theories on the triangulation of (wo)man, nature and machine, articulated in sympathy with diverse social movements, allow for the radical undoing of phallogocentrism and its corporal subject in the Western philosophical tradition;

even as Freudian myth is perpetuated by hegemonic forms of social reproduction. In particular, Haraway’s writing on the semantics of bodily defense in the discourse of immunology speaks to the psychosomatically constituted self and dominant, often regressive, modes of “imaging” within therapeutic culture: “What is at stake is the kind of collective and personal selves that will be constructed in this organic-technical-mythic-textual semiosis. [...] How can ‘we’ [...] image our vulnerability as a window on to life?”²

Her question pertains to the project of artist Andrea Crespo (b. 1993, Miami), whose layered drawings, slender composite objects, and video works ‘image’ transformative fantasies and imaginaries expressed in affective online communities at the tail ends of the spectrum. Crespo also proposes sensible language for the nonconformist conditions and potentialities of their own neurodivergent, transsexed tendencies by playing on the vocabularies of pharmacology, psychiatry, cybernetics, and cultures of fandom. Key terms like ‘source person,’ ‘core personality,’ ‘#cycling,’ ‘#machinekin,’ ‘#actuallyautistic,’ ‘possession,’ ‘polymorphism,’ etc., accrue in their work in an overwhelming series of technically specific tags, clever titles, and contingent self-diagnoses mostly alien to art jargon.

Crespo has described the installation as a mode of meaningful therapy; a method to materialize, even temporarily, dissociated and disembodied perspectives in the present. In recent exhibitions held at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler in Berlin (*sis : somatic systems*), at Hester (*polymorphoses*) and at the Swiss Institute (*virocypsis*) in New York





attracting... 2015 (opposite page) plurisim (incubator), 2015 (p. 185) All images Courtesy: the artist, Hester, New York, Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin

throughout 2015, interlocking puzzle pieces, digital scanners, stretched or compressed cloth, flat screens, plexiglas, standard analytical charts, framed activity graphs, and simply rendered *kawaii* characters populated the exhibitions in multiple layers and configurations, in neatly contained aesthetic registers. Executed primarily in a cool, muted two-tone palette arranged under bright white gallery lights, the temperature of Crespo's imaginary is distinctly clinical, bathed in the anemic pallor of omnipresent screen-glow. By contrast, the inky midnight blue backgrounds of their video works dissolve the spectator along with the space of projection into the darkness of the non-locable site of the long tail, where sympathetic users gather virtually around shared morphological interests and investments. Beams of light scanning the interior of the flat screen, caressing the wide surface of the digital projection, or twinkling in EMDR patterns on a wand affixed to a hybrid sculpture gently soothe viewers and cause them to feel, in a psychosomatic sense, "read."

In *sis : somatic systems* Crespo first introduced the multi-system organism of the mirrored, coextensive and irreducible sisters Cynthia-Celine as a conceptual avatar for the artist. Their Manga inspired bicephalism is outlined in the composite digital prints *phase I-III* and *discharge*. And it flickers through the video *sis : parabiosis*, which speculates on the psychosocial circumstances of their becoming. The particular teratological configuration of the partly doubled woman is an intensification of gender fluidity, in which Crespo finds "escape from some, not all, of the body's ontological entrapments."³ For *polymorphoses*, sueded microfiber shaded the windows of the gallery to block out external light, with onomatopoeical titles encouraging quietude. Turning spatial emphasis inward, the *trompe-l'œil* creases on these panels performed the haptic — visualizing the "crush" and reinforcing the shallowness

of the image space beyond the sheath of glass and the chirruping mechanical action of the scanner. Several sculptures composed from data security boxes UV printed on their acrylic faces carried inscrutable fragments and liquid traces of entities seemingly caught in, marked on, or trapped by the architecture of the screen that also colluded against the viewer. Despite this seeming apprehension of embodiment, *virocrypsis* finally enabled the complex incarnation of Cynthia-Celine. The eponymous film sets their tittering, non-identical dialogue in chatroom-like exchange — the soliloquy in plural — against the sparkling fissures of an apparently cracked glass plate (final release from the flat-bed scanner); while the soft surfaces *patient(s) history* and *attracting...* showed them fully emerged in pale pastel color, shiny-eyed, delicately adhering to digitally printed swatches of sateen.

Because Crespo's films, objects and installations reverberate with the futuristic residue of posthuman body formations and conditional notions of gender, their project of transformation — the struggle between community, multiplicity and autonomy — maintains an erotic charge and a radical potency. Crespo's latent critique concerns the biological self's hyperstition through technology and para-fictional online interaction — a condition which offers more ontological possibility than any prosthetic relation of dependency. Yet Haraway's call for a window onto the outside of twenty-first century "technical-mythic-textual semiosis" remains. If the multiple can be figured here so consistently, and so cutely, where might images of life in all its heterogeneity, degradation, and demonic vitality be found — both within and without the boundaries of the body?

1. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 211.

2. Donna Haraway, *ibid.*, p. 225.

3. Hannah Black, "Artist Profile: Andrea Crespo," *Rhizome*, 10 Sept. 2014, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/sep/10/andrea-crespo>.