

URSULA'S GARDEN

On the most fundamental level there are transitions from continuous to discontinuous or from discontinuous to continuous. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we learn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is.¹

¹ George Bataille, *Erotism | Death & Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood [San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986], 15.

i | Discontinuity)(Continuity

Ursula's Garden is composed of a series of numbered and catalogued casts - polyps, masses of tissue and cells - that together form an artificial garden of growths expanding and contracting against one another along the gallery walls. The work is rooted in the experience, both the trauma and joy, of having and living within a body. Both the medium of the casts and process of their making are analogous to numerous fluids, secretions and expulsions of the body (e.g. sebum, grease, puss, ear wax, follicles, cum, feces, sweat, blood, urine, sexual fluids, hair follicles, boils, phlegm, urethral discharge, mucus, black heads, ingrown hairs, vomit, polyps, warts, zits) and its biological processes that allows them to regenerate endlessly, as long as the body continues to survive. By the repetition of multiple cast works, one is tempted to trace a connection and comparison to familiar artists such as Rachel Whiteread, or perhaps more tellingly, Eva Hesse. Rosalind Krauss furthers this connection through her use of Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the body as "a series of part-objects" to describe the 'desiring machines' of Hesse's practice, stating:

...the body understood as a series of part-objects — breast, mouth, stomach, intestines, anus — each of which is a machine. But unlike the world of mechanical production, where a machine is one thing and its product another, removed from it, discrete, separate, the desiring production of the part-objects is a process in which there is no distinction between production and product. For the flows produced by one machine, the breast, say, provide the continuum into which the next machine, the mouth, can cut, thereby setting up the precondition of the mechanical, which is to articulate matter. As each machine cuts into the continuity of the flows produced by its neighbour only to produce a new flow for the next machine to cut into in its turn, all are organized in relation to three principles. The first is repetition, for as Deleuze and Guattari say, 'although the desiring machines make us into an organism, at the very heart of this production the body suffers in being organized in no way at all'; the second is continuity, for which the operative term is *process*; the third is desire, or the connective 'labour' that drives libido toward producing/product.²

The genealogical rhythm that emerges through the repetitive nature of their sequencing alludes to the multiple components and or, 'interior machines' of the body and their assemblies at various scales including: teeth, bones, vertebrae, cells, flesh, tissue, mouths, phalluses, testicles, anuses, intestinal tracks, breasts, nipples etc. depending on which individual element one chooses to focus on. The ebb and flow of the waves created by the entwined plaster casts implies that they are simultaneously suspended in a liquid of some kind - whether embryonic fluid, cytoplasm, or simply underwater - while bound to the earth and each other. These are also bodies that produce their own energy (heat) through the chemical process of transforming from a liquid to a solid. The assembling of the individual parts to make a collective whole results in a series of interlocking organic forms set against the transitional fold where the wall becomes the floor. When inspected closely, condensation forms in the gap between the outer latex membrane and the plaster bound within. When taken as a whole, the autonomous bodies are combined into an integrated composition that form a new type of architectural space through their organization around the perimeter of the room - deforming edges that would otherwise define the dimensions of the space. In this site specific work, the architecture - that which is typically characterized (at least in modernist terms) as the masculine, hard lined, measured and structured form ruled by Apollonian rationale - finds an

² Rosalind Krauss, "Hesse's Desiring Machines," *October Files 3: Eva Hesse*; [2002]: 52.

obverse relationship with the organic, chthonic, ambiguous, and metamorphic capsules, evoking what architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter terms 'Dionysian tectonics'. The rigid, planar solidity of the gallery walls is undermined and subverted by these pooling modules at their base by reconstituting its material qualities in the form of numerous and varied, combination of bodies.

ii | Work, Endurance & Labour

In classical mechanics or physics, work is defined as the product of force x distance or displacement. A force is said to do work if, when acting, there is a movement of the point of application in the direction of the force and is defined as:

$$W = \vec{F} \cdot \vec{dx} \quad W = \int_{\vec{x}_0}^{\vec{x}_1} \vec{F} \cdot \vec{dx}.$$

Here, through action and form, the seeming dichotomy of the processes of chemistry and Newtonian physics are expressed. Chemistry is concerned with processes, probabilities, interactions and transformation, physics with unambiguous dispositions and states. In the 'Garden' matter is transformed and its process recorded through the forming of a common building material. The main component of Gypsum Wall Board (GWB), or drywall, is calcium sulfate dihydrate (gypsum), and through chemistry and labour (force) it can transform the raw surface of the exposed GWB into varying levels of refinement - in some cases, to a pristine, smooth surface of a collector's or gallery wall. The process by which these deformed casts are made incorporates the physical concept of displacement described above - the artist's hand is required to displace the plaster within the latex membrane and held over time in order for the plaster to set. Multiplying like a virus, it is through variations in time, pressure and means of manipulation that the forms begin to take shape and relate to one another as an organic, biomorphic continuum. The physicality of their production can be broken down as follows:

Process:

- 1/ Mix Plaster w/ water
- 2/ Open condom wrapper
- 3/ Fill condom w/ mixed plaster
- 4/ Spank the sheathed plaster to settle and release air bubbles
- 5/ Tie off condom.
- 6/ Wash the cast.
- 7/ Hold & form the cast in place against the wall and adjacent forms with the requisite pressure to achieve the desired volume and relationship between the parts in relationship to the whole.
- 8/ Wait for gypsum cement to set.
- 9/ Remove condom & discard responsibly.

To say that much of queer art, before and after AIDS is based primarily on an obsession or preoccupation with the body is, at the very least, well established and documented in various modes of analysis, research, and the work itself. The body in queer culture is commonly a subject to be gazed at and objectified, but is also as an anatomical being subjected to the physical processes of sex, medical practices and experiments, pharmaceuticals - recreational & prescribed, excretion & ingestion, pleasure & pain. Similarly, there are currents in architectural history and theory that are also concerned with the body and its experience of various phenomena both within and outside of architectural work. Whether in physical terms such as material qualities, light, acoustics, smell, or other elements that we are able to sense, perceive and experience. These concepts range from the Classical treatises of Vitruvius on proportion in architecture and the human body, the philosophical underpinnings of Phenomenology as they relate to architecture, to the queer theory and city writing that emerged in the late twentieth century.

Over the course of the last 30 years the spectre of death has become intimately connected with gay sex, permeating many aspects of queer cultural, sexual and political life. Consequently, the history of both AIDS as a subject matter as well as AIDS activism in art is deep, long and loaded with many heroes of the queer avant-garde, both living and dead, as well as wider fields of art, architecture and design. In the current era of PrEP, when the practicability of the condom has been called into question as a hinderance to sexual pleasure - both physically and visually, the cast works negotiate a current taboo in queer culture - namely the moral overtones of adhering to safer sex practices as well as our reliance on and the utility of condoms as a ubiquitous, disposable, external means of preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections - most importantly namely HIV. The amount of 'freedom' and feelings of release that this new drug allows is not unrelated to desire to be unbounded and unrestrained by the anxiety, fear of death and inhibitions inherent in both concepts of the Dionysian and the death instinct, architect and theorist Neil Leach explains:

The theme of death is fundamental to Freud, especially to the later Freud, the metapsychological Freud. Freud's later theory is centered around the conflict between eros and thanatos, between love and death, between life instincts and death instincts. Eros, as the life instinct, serves to counter the tendency toward thanatos, the death instinct, and acts as a force to complicate life. It continuously counteracts and delays the death instinct. Eros is therefore set in opposition to thanatos, that which seeks resolution and quiet. Thus, the death drive becomes for Freud one of the fundamental impulses within human behavior. The death drive can be seen to emanate from the moment of birth itself, a violent trauma that upsets the pleasure of the time in the womb. For Freud the time in the womb relates to the development of the id, the faculty that absorbs and enjoys pleasurable sensations. The id is the domain of the unconscious. Herbert Marcuse defines the id as follows: "The 'id' is free from the forms and principles which constitute the conscious, social individual. It is neither affected by time nor troubled by contradictions: it knows 'no values, no good and evil, no morality.' It does not aim at self-preservation: all it strives for is satisfaction of its instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle." The womb provides the id with a refuge, a state of placid protection and constant gratification. With birth this freedom from disturbance is lost forever. Yet the memory of this period in the womb remains, and subsequent life is governed by a desire to regain this lost quietude, this lost paradise. Life is dominated by a regressive compulsion, a desire to return to the womb. This striving for integral gratification dominates all subsequent life. Thus, for Freud, the drive toward equilibrium that results is none other than a "continuous descent toward death," where death finally provides that longed-for

resolution and quiet. According to Marcuse, “The death instinct is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension. The descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is an eternal struggle against suffering and repression.”³

The comparison which can be drawn here is between sex and artistic production as life instincts (eros) and the desire for resolution, equilibrium and gratification (thanatos) as intimately and infinitely bound. In the casting of these autonomous yet integral objects we are somehow informed of this truth. This striving for ‘integral gratification’ is succinctly described by artist, actress, writer, mother and muse Cookie Mueller:

Fortunately I am not the first person to tell you that you will never die. You simply lose your body. You will be the same except you won’t have to worry about rent or mortgages or fashionable clothes.

You will be released from sexual obsessions.

You will not have drug addictions.

You will not need alcohol.

You will not have to worry about cellulite or cigarettes
or cancer or AIDS or venereal disease.

You will be free.”⁴

³ Neil Leach, “Vitruvius Crucifixus,” in *Body & Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture*, George Dodds & Robert Tavernor, eds. [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002], page 215

⁴ Cookie Mueller, “Ask Dr. Mueller: The Writings of Cookie Mueller”, Amy Scholder, ed. [New York :Serpent’s Tail High Risk Books, 1997]