Chapter 11
# The Body in Photography:
## A Psychological "Real"–istic Reading

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter attempts to speak about the body as a creative agent of the manifestation of images led by the unconscious. The body is represented by its image. The issues of "limits" and "gender" are related to photography. An Image is the limits of a being in the world. Limits stand for the death of the "real thing." Representations of bodies in the works of five photographers are discussed. They try to define gender by manifesting forms that challenge the limits of corporeal appearances. These bodies become corridors that lead to meetings with the horror of the "real thing." Gender is lost in the forest of meanings: gender does not exist; it is meant, it is rendered as a word, it acts as meaning while suppressing the biological body's loss and its disguise within a signifier. The photographic image that promises reality's capture is rather a visual bandage for what cannot be said, what is compromised in order to be rendered as image.*

## INTRODUCTION

*"Je ne sais quoi": I know not what [art is]. (keyword in discussions in early Modern Europe, R. Scholar, 2002)*

Wittgenstein is categorical: to venture into speaking of art -that is to say, about that which eludes logos, which lies outside the signifier- is an absurdity. Since how can you speak of that which exists, especially given its existence outside logos? The question is even more pressing, when you engage not with the artistic expression itself, that is, the image or the sound, the movement or the word, but with that which engenders the emergence of the image, particularly the invisible, the "thing", the hereafter, the unconscious, the handling of which is art.

## Background

One way of confronting art is not to speak at all. Wittgenstein (1921/1922, p.90) is again categorical: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." However, things about art have been said and are being said, especially on the philosophy of art or, in other words, aesthetics. At this juncture I am referring to the foundational works on art that have left their mark on the modern era which Descartes inaugurated: Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Hegel's *Aesthetics* (1835), *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950) by Heidegger, *Aesthetic theory* (1970) by Adorno, by extension Gadamer's view regarding the artwork as an experience of transformation in *Truth and Method* (1960) and certainly the views of Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935).

In parallel with the philosophy of art, the psychoanalysis of art evolved with Freud as its main proponent. Certain of his writings came to be points of reference in the psychological approach to the study of works of art: *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910a), "Delusions and Dreams" in Jensen's *Gradiva* (1907) and *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914). Lacan's writings in the same vein were similarly influential. All other philosophies, contemporary perspectives included, such as those of Arnheim, Gombrich, Danto, Berger or Bourriault, for instance, are no more than a series of footnotes to the foregoing works. I would suggest that one is not able to be Kantian without being Freudian too.

Possibly, therefore, we may say something about art, even though art does not belong to the order of logos, that is, in the order of the signifier. If art belongs anywhere, it belongs to the order of the invisible, the void. Art belongs to the void not in a metaphysical or parapsychological sense but as an action of the psyche on reality, being outside our immediate perception, our consciousness.

As Freud said, the artist, compelled by a novel experience, is transported to an unconscious wish of the past, to a repressed area of gratification, and through the work of art he attempts to reconstruct this area. The work of art ensures an ideal form of handling of the repressed desire, by reconstructing it symbolically in reality's terms. Art is a sublimated recollection of what is repressed. Sublimation is the representation of what is lost; however, loss itself stays outside of the representation.

The sublimation of the "thing", Lacan comes to say, consists of the reconstruction of what is lost. That which cannot be represented on the plane of lack, finds its representation in art. Art is the handling of the void inherent in the "thing". Thus, art is an attempt at reconstructing the void, an act of appropriation of the ineffable. Art, I would say, is a remainder of meaning which nevertheless remains outside meaning. By way of the vessel example, Lacan (1960/1992) claims that it has been made to represent the void which lies in the center of the 'thing'; the vessel is complete to the degree that it is empty.

Indeed, the idea of the void had already been proposed—e.g. Heidegger (1927/1962) in an aside says "being denotes a representation which remains void"—mainly by apophatic theology, the German mystics, de Bovelles etc. However, the contribution of the psychoanalytic theory remains vital.

By now, despite my theoretical position, I have begun speaking, and I shall endeavor to fashion the invisible into words. And what is more appropriate than to talk about the immediately lived experience, the body: the body through the concept of gender construction and therefrom as a means of apprehending art—in the present case the art of photography.

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