

# Rubbing Up Against Desire

Jordan Holms

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## INTRODUCTION

This constellation of poems, vignettes and short essays focuses on a series of paintings titled *Facings* in an attempt to unpack contemporary feminist concerns in relation to desire, sexual difference and the female body as it is negotiated in the urban landscape. In composing this roaming figuration of femininity, I asked: How do I carve out a space for myself? How do I make a home? How do I locate my own feminism as an extension of myself in the urban social climate? In trying to reconcile these competing ideas I venture to take up writers and theorists such as Rosi Braidotti, Audre Lorde, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Hito Steyerl and enter into a conversation about the instances in-between daughters, mothers, seduction, saints, nomadism, armour, urbanity, flesh, rot, decadence and absence.

These small, wayward texts are in no finite order. They are, perhaps, an accumulation of similar concerns bracketed into an album of songs. Or rather, different parts of a book as opposed to different words in a sentence. So begin wherever you may.

## ON THE CARAPACE AS BODY ARMOUR

In biology, a carapace comprises part of the exoskeleton in certain animal groups, such as crustaceans and arthropods. It is a chitinous shell that functions as both a protective cover and as camouflage. This calcified shield is, essentially, body armour. My paintings, too, are body armour. In the series titled *Facings*, each painting is six feet in height and six and a half feet in width. They loom over my relatively small frame like stony castle towers — they form a threshold to a nomadic, unessentialized body of femininity.

In one painting, shades of vulgar pinks, like bits of stale chewing gum, cover two thirds of the canvas. This space has been cordoned off into squares of various sizes. All slanting slightly to the left. It looks like a garage door. A broken garage door. The far right third is treated with a birch hue, almost the colour of clouded coffee or caramel candies in your grandmother's pocket. This space is organized into horizontal panels of similar size, like a fence or cheap, interlocking floor panels. Bisecting these two competing spaces is a turquoise stripe, about four inches in width, the colour of oxidized copper. Stacked on top of this stripe is another, of the same width, but of a deep mahogany colour. Dense and flat.

Another painting, equally garish in its violent palette and slanted composition, champions rows of vertical and horizontal lines stacked on top of each other like a decaying bookcase crammed full of neglected books. The painting is split into three

sections; the top quarter features a repetition of closely-knit vertical stripes of rainy blues and mossy greens that simulate a curtain-like rendering of the paint. The quarter below this boasts an obtuse, thick stripe of nostalgic mustard yellow. The latter half of the work reorganizes the repetitions of the top quarter into horizontal stacks of lines, varying in width. Like the previous painting, this work is flat and unapologetically abstract, but there is an aesthetic hint of a decaying trailer façade. Abandoned and silent.

The origins of these paintings are culled from a series of portrait photographs I took several years ago for a project concerning the band t-shirt as sexual currency in local metal culture. I endeavored to begin this series of paintings as representational of their photographic mothers, but as I began to paint it became clear that it was not the women in the photographs I was seduced by at all, but the urban sites that formed a narrative around them. As the feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti states in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, “[...] showing that what is erased in the process of erection of the transcendental subject are the maternal grounds of origin” (28). In attempting to reinterpret the bodily roots of subjectivity, mine is an anti-Oedipal project of sorts – not a negation of history, but a critical recognition of and engagement with a patriarchal genealogy. I understand the colours, the textures, and the linear, geometric composition of the selected photographs as a codified language, like the pattern on a tortoise shell or the serrated edges of a crab carapace. The *Facings* series, as figurations of this body armour, engage in an abrasive, vulgar relationship with the viewer. They

champion their own gaudy as the shells, the shedded skins and the dilapidated shelters of a nomadic subject. Sometimes a t-shirt is just that: a physical network of fabric. Sometimes a t-shirt is an apparatus of performativity that is maybe even more fickle than a material accumulation. Sometimes a t-shirt, as the sexualization of a material object is an apparatus of desire. In consideration of the multifaceted functions of the band t-shirt, my paintings inhabit similar, multiple roles. This series of paintings, like the t-shirts, figure into an articulation of how communicative objects, such as shirts and paintings, construct certain relationships with the female body as they forge spaces of currency, shelter and armour.

Historically, the female body has always demanded centre stage in painting. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde states: “The master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house” (iii). In beginning this series of paintings, I asked, how am I meant to contribute to a feminist discourse concerning desire, sexual difference and the body while continuing to exploit the naked female form, as it only serves to satiate a horde of Western colonial tropes of femininity and essentialism? By erasing the figure and integrating it into the architectural space of the painting, I am able to let go of some of my frustration with the exhibitionism and sensationalism that adheres to the female nude. In place of this, I focus my attention on the actual physical territory of the painting as an opportunity to conjure a moment that teeters between representative field and a formal, flat, abstract painting.

In these paintings I intend to conjure enigma in flatness. In its capacity to

compose and recompose the quotidian, this series endeavours to deconstruct the fallacy of resemblance. I seek to embrace the overlooked and the underestimated in a suturing of debased culture and high art. The tilt of the plane and the recession and procession of mark making connotes something between rot and decadence, something both attractive and repulsive, as it pertains to urban arenas and architecture akin to both the aesthetics and politics I engaged with while enacting the band t-shirt project. These monumental paintings share a literal, aesthetic likeness with the urban sites they depict, but bare their own countenance as occasions of body armour. These works pertain to a mercurial tracing of memory, as a repository, an asylum, for a cosmos of intimate histories. In these paintings, femininity does not begin and end with a sprawling nude because I do not need a naked woman in my painting to talk about being a woman. The *Facings* series performs figurations of body armour because they manifest themselves as spaces where a woman can forge a different kind of face than the one that is expected of her.

In *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes speaks about the binary of *pothos* and *himéros*, as they respectively define a desire for the present, sexual being, and a desire for the absent being. With Barthes in mind, this series of paintings attempts to inhabit the affective zone that is conjured through absence and silence, in place of where a sexualized female body once existed. Braidotti claims: "Sexual difference is the situated corporeal location that one starts from – it is a negotiable, transversal, affective space" (29). This is to say that sexuality is always in relation to something; it forms planes and

axes, it is pre-verbal, sensed, context dependant and always performative. This in-between-ness, this limbo, is articulated in terms of a designation of what appears to be on the canvas, what is said, what is omitted, what is veiled, what is behind, to the side and what is at the foreground of a discourse pertaining to common tropes of femininity. It is about the demarcation of the movement of desire as a state of in-between-ness.

The body forms the epicentre of this conversation concerning desire and sexual difference, and to armour its viscosity with a physical site is to remove the seductive tendencies of desire and rub up against the essentialism imbued in female identity. If a woman's body is at the centre of this dialogue, the representation of the sites in question can be understood as the intersection where the faceless titans of socio-political systems of patriarchy converge with the intimate terrain of personal desire.



## VIGNETTE I

You look at the same river I look at. Or is it really the same, I somehow doubt it. One foot falls in and then the other and then the other again, down. Down to the ankle. Up to the hem of his briefs. Up to the brim of my beliefs in how I can keep it together, for the time being, I am succinctly incredulous and wary that I cannot. Deeper than we thought. He sunk deeper than we assumed it would be. Morals are in the basement; debase this baseness, if you can. Baste me in run-off, in sewage, in grease, in grief. And I'll put your mind right in the gutter like it's my job. And he was so very angry, so, so very embarrassed. We chuckled not so silently, but tried half-heartedly to mask our bemusement. Like the comic relief we sought, we took it as entertainment at face value. And I slipped on the moss and tumbled backward into a ribbed bed of branches and I dropped my beer in the sand at some moment between then and now and I tried not to cry in my beer. Stunned, we did not react for at least a minute or two and then laughed, hysterically so, as he struggled to dry land. We did not try to help him, but how could we when we cannot even help ourselves in the slightest, but for to down another beer will do just fine tonight. As far as home remedies go, self-medication is nothing to chirp at. He struggled to salvage what remained of his dryness, like your precarious temperament. And I always feel like I must butter it up or cushion the blow in some way or be a buffer in some way between you and what you say. You're light on your feet because you have a talent for balance, have an equilibrium that escapes me. And you, at times. Listen, I'm a sentimental character beneath the alcohol and ratchetry. And I do not mean to describe the fickleness of it, but I guess we could just assume that it is so, that it is all. Brave men don't run from their homes and this is your home, I know it. Like the time I showed you that one film that is so close to my heart because the colours are so close to something I want and want to need, to put into paint. But that wasn't originally made for you and I concede, it wasn't originally made for me either, however it was brought to my attention in a most timely fashion. And I can see that

I'm Narcissus, not the Hercules imagined. But I explain, dear, I must be to do what I do and sometimes it pours over, floods maybe, but not instantaneously, not like a bursting dam, not like an orgasm, more of a consistent ebb and flow, or a slow burn, over into those more nomadic, more hermitted and horded corners of my idiosyncratic mannerisms. To hour to hour. I tell her, it's uncanny how for the majority of the year we shove, forward march, always precisely, keenly, acutely aware of what time it is, at all times. But on muggy, listless days as such have come to pass recently, we fuzzily hypothesize that it probably, might be, quite possibly could be somewhere, something, reminiscent of or characteristic of May or June. Maybe. Like the tides, we sink into it. And they aren't dirty, they're just silty. We fret that Atlantis may come crushing us. Atrophy. A trophy, you're a trophy doll; you're a fucking hood ornament. Perplexing our lungs that bubble and froth, but that's just hyperbole because it only licks at our ankles, dear, and there's nothing to worry about here, for we are fine. And if we are not, at least we are finite and we will be brilliant because we will try out darnedest to make it so. And, tides may rise, and drown us, but the mammoth volume is an unnecessary precaution on God's part, because you, dear, you could simply drown in three inches of water if you really, so terribly wanted to do so. And it may be the ruin of us, but so could so many other things. And in this nihilistic ideal, in this fecund landscape, I find not a trope; but a tangible, malleable comfort. Like the mud underfoot that sags and whines: do not despair, for we are here.

## EXTREME SEDUCTIVENESS IS PROBABLY AT THE BOUNDARY OF HORROR

Comorbidity is like getting  
 Two for the price of one.  
 Or maybe  
 Two for the price of none.

Since I do not recall asking  
 For such plagues to cloud my ever-narrowing,  
 ever-diminishing field of fucktopic vision. His greatest fear is that  
 He will come to eventually lean

Solely on shock value, like a decaying crutch. Instead of  
 Feeding what should have been some degree of talent  
 As if it hasn't already been so swiftly stifled, gagged  
 By an excessive cocktail of exhibitionism  
 And self-indulgence  
 And a liberal dose of histrionics

No, not true  
 My greatest fear is losing my hands  
 But that is just too fickle, too sedentary  
 to immortalize in print

A cocktease. Like I want to offer you something  
 That I don't have and I want to  
 Shove it down your throat  
 And I want you to choke

Murder has its sexual side (claims Holzer)  
 As most often all things do  
 He says  
 I wouldn't complain if it  
 happened to be  
 autoerotic  
 asphyxiation

Is there any other way to go? I ask  
 He says  
 Choke on it. But don't forget to swallow.

Mummy says  
 It's impolite not to swallow,  
 Dearest.  
 You and I, we are  
 Comorbid (Swallow that)

As in this doomed  
 Union only offers a hellstorm of hand-in-hand  
 Hideous afflictions and  
 Complications, side effects include, but are not limited to

Pestilence pushed under the bed skirts  
 And terrible bedside manner on my part.

Do not forsake me at my least presentable hour  
 When my English is no longer proficient  
 to mask naked, dearly known  
 Sins, skin ripped raw  
 Exposed, a minor sacrifice in exchange  
 for chronic dates with the devil.

He's attracted to the open sores in art, a common interest  
 And a lust so savage  
 That I'll do dinner with the anti-christ, but in all seriousness you know I'll do  
 More than dinner

And in other seriousness, I don't even want to hate fuck you  
 In that sacred and profane kind of place.  
 Kind of space  
 Of mind, no I don't mind

Where the Rococo repulsive grotesque co-mingles, co-habitates  
 Comes to die, to copulate, to co-masturbate, comorbidly and consciously, so keenly  
 Aware that the chaos does reign here  
 And the hysterical sublime seeps out  
 And trickles down the plushy, blushing insides of her dirty thighs,  
 floor-bound, hell bent, intent on bloodying up the hardwood,

Mother will be so very displeased, I find it trite  
 That I'll ruin more bedsheets this year because I am a she  
 And I think its tedious  
 That it rains for so many days and months in a row here

That the sacred and profane reigns

And falls from grace

Into grain

And reap the fields while you still can

Because adultery is in this season

You lucky bastard, you.

## VIGNETTE II

Someone's shitty kid screams in pain. Or in pleasure? Or in pain? It's pleasure. I'll take pleasure, in ringing that kid's neck or in breaking your back. But you've already broke it because you're old and I've been told to hold my tongue. And nod along. And just agree that Daddy knows best. For Daddy does right by me. And daddy does know best, dear. Or at least he tries, and he cries. And the ceiling is low today. And planes fly even lower today. To escape the overbearing gaudity. They dip and dissipate in between the clouds and the cover. I drive over the bridge. Think about diving off the bridge. Think about. No, don't. It's fleeting. The same pace as the wipers that screech to and fro and do a meagre job of pushing the rainstorm a side. Are the people in the cars to my left and to my right judging me based on how fast my wipers are wiping, I think they are. They're going way too fast. Way too fucking fast. These appendages need a setting between useless and manic. I wonder how long the Camry could float for. I can't exactly say. The river is relatively stagnant today. You say, the muddy waters look like concrete. And I accordingly use the word stagnant in reply. And you repeat: stagnant. And I say yes, stagnant. Like that other time when I used refracting correctly in a sentence and you spent fifteen minutes looking up the definition and proper context. Even though I was sitting directly opposite of you. All you had to do was ask. And I asked: should I leave you two alone? And I really. Really. Meant it. And maybe if you lock the door, they'll think he's still here with you. And maybe if you lie on the floor a little bit more, he'll stay near you. Because you're close to the ground that way. And you wanna be in the ground this day. Monogamy does not become her they say. She was too much to handle for a man like him, they say. Much too much to handle. To handle? Why do I need to be handled? Like a sow or a cow or some other filthy farm animal. Handle me? If anything, just manhandle me and I will smile manically and I will be happy and I will say more please, sir. More please, Daddy. Darling. Dollface. Honey.

## THE NOMADIC SUBJECT AND DIFFERENCE

Nomadism is a particular life-style in which one, sometimes belonging to a people or a tribe, has no permanent home, and instead travels from place to place. The nomad habitually follows a specific route in accordance with the seasons and the availability of food. Nomadism is not synonymous to an aimless wandering; it is an organized movement that follows a predicted trajectory. Rosi Braidotti takes up the term nomadism from ethnographic studies and appropriates it as an underpinning of subjectivity as a state of becoming.

In “A Conversation: What is it? What is it for?”, Claire Parnet states: “Nomads have no history, they only have geography. Nietzsche: ‘They come like destiny, without cause, without reason, without consideration, without pretext’ (31). This idealization of nomadic living is romanticized and perhaps in direct conflict with Braidotti’s appropriation of the term. For Braidotti, nomadism is not concerned with a hapless wandering, but a purposeful roaming which functions to maintain sustainability and survival. In “Writing as a Nomadic Subject”, Braidotti claims: “My work as a thinker has no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, displacements and adaptations to changing conditions. Nomadism for me equals multi-lingualism” (167). In order to unpack this multi-lingualism, it is necessary to first establish the territory of subjectivity that concerns Braidotti. Subjectivity does not imply an explicit relationship to individualism. For Braidotti, subjectivity is “a socially mediated process of entitlements

to and negotiations with power relations” (168). Although we are constituted by power, our actions are able to constitute certain power as productions of truths, as archetypes universally linked to the commodification of subjectivity as a cosmetic option.

If one is to embrace this retelling of constructed knowledge, language is positioned as an enforcement of order or code. The insidious history of the word ‘code’ implies that there are those who abide by the code and those who choose to defy it. If one is party to the latter option, there is an implied consequence of othering, of banishment or ostracization from society. These kinds of relationships between knowledge production, power and subjectivity designate a certain fetishization of language, as though it is a vehicle through which lessons are taught. This idea of the code implies a unifying manifesto of terms and conditions under which one should ‘properly’ perform their gender. As Braidotti articulates:

The subject is a process, made of constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, that is to say, entrapment and empowerment. Whatever semblance of unity there may be is no God-given essence, but rather the fictional choreography of many levels of a relational self into one socially operational self [...]” (169).

The subject does not exist; we are always undergoing a process of subjectification – a becoming. With this claim in mind, Braidotti implicitly asserts that difference does not have to be a state of disenfranchisement, but one of resurrection. The reformation of the nomadic subject, as a process of becoming in constant motion, postulates a tracing



of a certain patriarchal genealogy. The entanglement of nomadism, subjectivity and difference is “a skein, a multilinear whole. Composed of lines of different natures [...] follows directions, traces processes that are always out of balance” (Deleuze 338). These lines are subject to fracture, fragmentation — tracing the bifurcations of their genealogy. The lines in this ideological apparatus do not encompass systems that exist in a vacuum. The relationships amongst these ideas are always evolving, relational and performative. Through the nomadic subject, Braidotti spacializes power as a diffusive practice. She opens up a space of agency, not in terms of a vertical hierarchical system but horizontally, as she postulates, by way of Foucault, that power is a productive force that incorporates people into its structure, as we are all active participants in the reproduction of power.

Braidotti’s nomadism is a championing of difference and an acknowledgement of our position in relation to the past. She states, “Nomadic becomings are rather the process of affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, unhinged from the binary system that traditionally opposed it to Sameness” (Braidotti 171). Difference is a situated corporeal location, a space of movement that demonstrates the visceral ways in which sexuality is discursively produced by gender. Why should this difference be a fault, a weakness of femininity, of feminism? How do you invoke the feminine without associating it with essence? In “Approaching Literature’s Space”, Maurice Blanchot states, “This unique means, this unique act, is death. Voluntary death. Through it we abolish ourselves, but through it we also found ourselves” (44). The past manifests itself

in the present, every time that it is hailed through memory. Perhaps an acknowledgement of the past (the father's) material existence is necessary in order to recover from it, insofar as this declaration asserts a form of apostasy; an abandonment of a previous loyalty, rather than a denouncing of its existence. Instead of deny the reality of this genealogy by perverting it; to render the father inessential, it must be made visible to reconfigurations as opposed to being denied its historical reality.

Braidotti asks how can we take down structures that we are already implicated in? In *After Cosmopolitanism*, she states, "A nomadic form of reflexive cosmopolitanism needs to start from a more sober account of the world-historical events that show how the concept of 'difference' functioned as a term to index discrimination and exclusion" (12). The western narrative of time is based on a fundamental colonial understanding of othering. Braidotti attempts to acknowledge that we are not autonomous in this model, but always in relation to other beings, to a tracing of various, enmeshed genealogies within an apparatus of time. This current model understands the present as a hinge between the past and the future, but who has the right to be in this present? In an attempt to counter-act this privileging of speech, Braidotti attends to a tracing of intimate histories that is largely constituted by a gleaning of absence, of what is not there, as well as what is present. Ultimately, with Braidotti's project in mind, I understand my own painting practice as also being unfaithful to its tradition, to the lineage from whence it came, but not divorced from its inheritance.

## IF NOTHING ELSE

If nothing else give me  
 Leisure  
 A break  
 A time to break bread with friends  
 And forge past foe  
 And faults  
 And fault lines  
 And sink holes  
 And when I was young I thought that quick sand would be a more frequently  
 reoccurring problem  
 Than it really turned out to be  
 And I'm not so certain whether I'm disappointed  
 Or relieved  
 That cracks in the pavement  
 Are more prevalent  
 And the brake pad falling out the bottom of my car  
 Was an actual occurrence this year  
 If nothing else give me  
 Space  
 My good friend says that  
 lovers are like mutual messes  
 And my good friend says sometimes  
 you just have to find your right mess  
 Can I ask  
 What is your policy on bow ties and belligerence?  
 If he's offering to eat you out in a suit  
 I'd wager that chivalry is well and alive  
 But, if you'd like I'll show you some belligerence  
 I'll get in your face  
 All fucked  
 And wired  
 And carry me home  
 You must  
 Throw me over your shoulder  
 And heave  
 Until it hurts me, make me physically ill to extract  
 toxins  
 with a swift elbow digging, gouging into  
 a feeble diaphragm

and other cumbersome, malignant internal organs  
Shoved aside to make room for an excessive,  
possessive heart  
You've had your fair share of run-ins with your own mortality  
I'm sure  
Benighted savage  
And ladies in their lairs  
So segregated  
So separate  
So divided it burns  
It hurts  
Its brands  
And maims  
And we'll just amputate some limbs  
To loose some weight  
If only that  
We are all peculiarly swung  
And that's just how the stolen tire swings  
So you cannot argue with us on that one  
If you feel overshadowed  
We advise killing off the father  
With a degree of respect  
That is  
She's drunk.  
And that's a good thing, mind you, believe me  
because mother so devotedly smoked throughout her pregnancy  
And I just can not help it  
But I'll sleep in your shirt  
To keep you around  
These are my hunting grounds  
I follow  
And scour  
For a semblance  
of I know not what  
It's painful  
But only in the way it's supposed to be  
I'll spin you a tale  
But I won't joke about that Papi

## VIGNETTE III

Shook. Silent. Heaving. Washed myself out with running water. Sunk back into bed. Salt seeps down my cheek and curls around your arm. But you don't feel my sudden, alarming wetness. Because you're out and you've lost the feeling in your extremities. Bad circulation. No blood flow here. You have a pretty big cock, I told them. But it doesn't fit quite right. I didn't tell them. It's not right. You fuck like you're running away from something. Something most unholy. But I still think you're saintly. Christ-like. And you think you're a martyr, but you're not and you're not here, like Jesus and like Daddy. And I'm constantly worried. You don't like to look at my face. And it seers my flesh like a cattle brander. Fertility hurts. And maims. It's a bright pain. To look anyone in the eyes today would not do. And I'm insecure, like the stars and the seasons. Especially here, where summer is only a veneer for rain. Like trickster hermeneutics; enacting one thing to suggest another. Being with you makes me want to fuck other people. Makes me want to fuck 'em. Fuck them. Because their histrionics are child's play in comparison to your disinterest. To your distance. Move, move from me. Want to want another orgasm so, so bad. Want to want the company. Like an attempted murder. And that's why this is condemned. Crazy. Because we don't really. Don't really like each other at all. Him and her and you and me. And I and you and we're just too tired to be alone, relentless introversion does not suite us, darling. And you are cold. Cold. Cold to the fucking bone. Bone. Fuck me. You ask. Do you want me to fuck you? I nod, grin wide. Famished. And you do. But its just friction of skin on skin on skin. And it gets lodged. Like our hearts in our throats. And cock and balls in mouth. And cheek in tongue. And our hearts are like bark. And they're stuck and rough and barbed. Jammed. And dry. Butter it up. Like my humour. And like your temperament. That's like a whistling kettle. Just fuckin' goin' off in the kitchen. On the stove. Press your soiled hand hard into the coils. Linger there for just a minute. I will if you will. Just put some butter on your burns. Butter me up, bad boy. Banging pots and pans like we're ringing

in the New Year. Throwing glassware on the hardwood. At the wall. At your face. A near miss. Missed your damned, jewelled crown. My hat's off to you, oh knighted sir. Slap me in the jaw and you better hope you make contact. Because I can't touch you. Because I want to hurt you. Want to poison the orange juice that you never drink because you're too preoccupied with extricating yourself from my bed, too much of a task in letting yourself out the front door. Because your jeans just seem to love my floor. Crashing into the kitchen sink. Colliding, hurling into pelvic thrusts. Collapsing. Collateral. Breaking collarbones. Fuck it, I'll do the dishes tomorrow. Tomorrow, I'll do them. I say. I don't do the dishes anymore. Wash it. Rinse it. Scrape it, hard. Harder. Harder. You're not here.

## ATTRACTION AND REPULSION AS THE CO-MORBID SYMPTOMS OF DESIRE

In medicine, co-morbidity refers to the existence of one or more subsequent disorders in relation to a primary or dominant disease. Desire, as an ideological apparatus, is infested with co-morbidity; the afflictions, both aesthetic and political, that hinder this slippery territory conjure secondary and tertiary burdens; tangential diseases. Currently, in psychiatric medicine, co-morbidity is a problematic term because its inherent concomitance is not fixed and therefore the use of such enigmatic language often results in misdiagnosis. Due to the arcane nature of this term, co-morbidity is scorned as archaic psychiatric jargon. In an effort to unpack the ways in which desire, sexual difference and the body constitute the process of subjectification, in what ways do attraction and repulsion operate as co-morbid symptoms of desire?

Instances of historical truth exists even if all evidence of it is erased, however, in order to tell the truth, it can only be manifested, and therefore mediated, through the lens of certain media which is always imbued in and filtered by some iteration of a socio-politic context. What must be explicitly acknowledged in regards to my painting practice is that I do not intend to violently remove the female figure from the portrait as a disavowal of femininity or a repression of desire, but as a means of facilitating a discourse concerning desire without defaulting to an fetishization of the female body as a warped, hyper-sexualized object of fascination. In “A Conversation: What is it, What is it for?” Gilles Deleuze states that one must “[...] deterritorialize terms, that is, terms

which are torn from their area, in order to reterritorialize another notion [...]” (18). In this way, I am attempting to recover the female body from its historical position in painting and relocate it in a discourse concerning attraction and repulsion, the co-morbid symptoms of desire, within the context of the local, urban landscape in which I find myself situated. As Rosi Braidotti articulates in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, “The body or the embodiment is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (33). It is in these instances of intersection that I pursue a project that renounces the body from normatized gender performativity. If there is no explicit figuration of the female body rendered in the painting, there is no opportunity to trace a lineage of bodily hypersexualization, of grotesque fascination, and therefore conversations pertaining to desire can be manifested in the spaces between the physical, symbolic and sociological, without falling victim to exhibitionism.

Although fascination is habitually thought of as a direct, physical appeal to a thing or a body, it also pertains to a phenomenon of constructed desire that harbours sentiments of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. My painting practice is concerned with the unearthing of this more insidious desire, as it is ingrained in the routinely overlooked. In my painting practice, desire is mapped out by way of the feminine body as it appears and is erased in urban sites of interaction. Braidotti claims that “[...] “the body” in U.S. feminism cannot be positively associated with sexuality in either the critical or the public discourse” (26). This ultimately suggests that in order to establish



a positive relationship between the female body and sexuality a new order, founded on the championing of difference rather than essence, must stake its claims. Sexuality is discursively produced by gender norms – we are all in the midst of performing a pre-ordained script – we become naturalized figurations, dramatized by desire and the ways in which desire dictates how we perform our genders. As Barthes states, “Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire” (73). Desire is the verbal condition of the subject. One needs desire to be in relation with another. And one speaks, (or paints, if you will) in order to change the category of woman.

Sexual difference is not an essentialist position because one must acknowledge sexual difference in order to think about relations of power. Braidotti also states that, “[b]etween the “no longer” and the “not yet”, desire traces the possible patterns of becoming. These intersect with and mobilize sexuality, but only to deterritorialize the parameters of a gender system [...]” (32). With this act of mobilization in mind, the explicit erasure of the female body in the *Facings* series is not meant as an act of diversion or equation of the female body to spaces of urbanity, but as a reterritorialization of attraction and repulsion to a place of in-between-ness that does not substantiate itself through a myopic essencing of the female gender. In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler states that hyper-sexualized representations of the human body do not assert a point of view, but “[...] constitute a certain kind of conduct [...] the conduct “silences” those who are depicted in a subordinate fashion [...]” (18). My

intention with the *Facings* series is to reinstate the speakability of discourses concerning desire and sexual difference by claiming a disaffiliation from the fetishized and sensationalized representation of the female body in the tradition of painting. By reinterpreting the universalized woman, located in the landscape of desire, I am moving towards a disentangling of the body from tropes of femininity. I aim to deterritorialize the female body as an essentialized artefact and reassert its presence as a physical site of urban construction, as a literal performative gesture by way of the picture plane. In “Writing as a Nomadic Subject”, Braidotti states, “Creativity is a ‘matter-realist’ nomadic process in that it entails the active displacement of dominant formations of identity, memory and identification so as to open them up to that roar that lies on the other side of silence” (170). The conditions of speakability are located in this series in terms of an extractive performance that does not equate itself with a silencing. This uprooting occasions an opportunity to not completely sever, but fracture or complicate the relationship between the female body and the painted medium. In this fissure, I endeavour to make space for a conversation concerning desire and sexual difference without instrumentalizing the body as a scapegoat of desire. If desire is not about sex at all, but relations of power, then why must I make an example of the female body? Can I not consider desire, by way of my paintings, in terms of memory, nostalgia, commodification, degradation and my corporeal location in the world?

Attraction and repulsion compose the co-morbid symptoms of desire in which one symptom does not exist without the others, mutually inclusive, like a disease. These

motifs are traditionally profane themes that are often idolized in popular culture and have consequently become sacred, desired. If painting is the ailing patient, how does one begin to evaluate the state of a patient who suffers from co-morbid diseases? Barthes asks: “How can you evaluate viability? Why is the viable a Good Thing? Why is it better to last than to burn?” (23). The many deaths of painting have come and gone; burnt out like a cosmic fireball. Now there is a desire for a resurrection – an exhumation. Painting, cloaked in its macabre costume, seeks to negotiate its own mortality through the stigmatization of the medium. Contemporary painting is, then, a reconciliation between the medium and its mortality. And if contemporary Western society has instigated the glorification of profanity, what better way to offer a return to the reverence for the sacred sickliness of painting than through an unpacking and disassembling of its co-morbid cohort.

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