



RITA GT

THE BODY THAT FORGETS ITSELF

GALERIA BELO-GALSTERER

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Rua Castilho, 71 RC Esq. Lisboa

Rita GT's performance – and the accompanying artist's book – entitled *The Body that Forgets Itself* (2019), commissioned and produced in the frame of *Portions of Share*, reflects upon the notions of conviviality, power and hospitality.

Rita GT explores the concept of knowledge by analysing the sense of privilege inherent within it. Throughout history, knowledge has been associated with freedom, and access to it was a major tool for control and domination. Literacy, with the book as its signifier, has been regarded as a token of power; it guaranteed recognition and social privilege. The perpetuation of certain political and social power apparatuses has relied heavily on the exclusion of certain populations or regions from gaining literacy, from acquiring knowledge and thus, from enabling the “melting of the solids” (Bauman 2000, 3). It is through the power of language, and therefore through the ability of deconstructing historical narratives, that con(solid)ated

political structures are challenged by those who have been left out of the normalized and hegemonized political discourse, which in its perpetuity reinforces exclusion and preconceived prejudice. Colonialism's imposition of new beliefs, languages and rituals contributed to the construction of an oppressive and unequal reality and resulted in the dissolution of the colonized populations' history and culture.

Rita's powerful act of eating the book which she has created challenges the traditional conception of history. Knowledge concealed in the book loses its impregnability, no longer a privilege hailed by few, rupturing the preconceived ideas of encounters and conviviality. A history marked by the exclusion of women, minorities, and disadvantaged social groups precluded by proper education, becomes, through the artist's act, able to be rewritten and retold.

The stand taken by the artist in her white virginal gown is a provocative pose for a white woman to strike. Eating the object that primarily represents knowledge makes the performance a statement of redemption. Furthermore, the feminine presence uncovers another layer of the untold – female histories and their absence in the “book of history”, written, mostly, by men. Women were, and are still often, regarded as secondary to men, and have historically been consistently and systematically erased, their stories hidden, their opinions despised, their wishes and wills belittled and their contributions undervalued. Knowledge itself, historically distributed and shaped in the majority by men, is here physically embodied by the artist in an act of domination and empowerment of women. As she reads the book out loud the poem becomes her own, defying preconceived power structures, through the appropriation of what those words signify. There is no one to grant her the right to this power: she takes it herself, devours it, page by page, and *o corpo responde*.

We witness a substantial act of rupture with history and traditional positions of power. The act of the embodiment of knowledge through a woman-performance is subversive and breaks ancient – and yet contemporary – norms. In this way, the action of embodiment itself becomes the symbol of survival of culture. It is the artist who transforms herself into the physical proof of its continuity and existence. At the same time, a strong ambivalence is evident when the pages disappear. Along with the visual act of the book and the body becoming one entity, it is possible to perceive the strong presence of the absent or the silenced. The pages are gone and – this action seems to imply – so are the erased voices of so many populations. Nonetheless, just as centuries of oppression and cultural violence, the artist's act renders it impossible to obliterate the traces of the silenced and forgotten, and we are faced with what's left: the scenario, the table where the book lays, the chair where she sits – which are left empty,

void of body and purpose. On top of the table, we see the remains of the book, the light-brown leather cover – almost a continuation of the artist's skin, demonstrating nature's endurance in the face of humanity's struggles, and the ripped pages, which cannot be replaced and must exist as a memoir of what was.

The role that the artist gives to the visual takes shape in her performance and reaffirms the power in the transmission of the previously hidden content. The vehicle of communication put in place by the artist is, in this sense, a way to give voice rather than of swallowing or silencing voices. It conceives art as a learning process that produces reflections on ambivalent aspects of the production and distribution of knowledge, its survival and its censorship. Here, the artist sees her mission in the exploration of the dichotomy of the privileged vs. non-privileged condition. She re-plays the encounter of the coloniser and the colonised and precludes it to unfold in a way exercised by (man)kind for centuries. Re-created silence and crumbs of the vanished pages give room for the voices of the past. Will we be able to decode them and make a new history?

José Maria Cortez
Marta Saccani

Bibliography:

Bauman, Zygmund. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

About RITA GT

Born in Oporto, 1980. Lives and works between Viana do Castelo and Angola. Graduated with a Degree of Design and Communication from Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto (2003) and post-graduated from Escola Maumaus in Lisbon (2004/2005). Read a Master's Degree - MFA at Malmö Art Academy - Lund University in Sweden. Rita GT is a socially-conscious political artist, approaching themes such as memory, identity or the importance of human rights. Having lived in many different countries enables her to have a broader vision, valuing the historical points of view of many cultures. The colonial symbolism that is recurrent in her work defines her own identity and artistic language. She uses imagery, words and performance revealing a constant interrogation and experimentalism in both material and conceptual aspects.

About PORTIONS OF SHARE

Portions of Share is a curatorial project by the students of the international MA and PhD programme in Cultural Studies, The Lisbon Consortium, Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. This project, developed during the seminar on Curatorship led by Luísa Santos is conceived within the conceptual framework of *4Cs: from Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture*, a European Cooperation Project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The curatorial project consists of three artists' books reflecting on notions of conviviality, power and hospitality. Besides the three artists' books, *Portions of Share* presents a publication with essays on these notions through the lenses of the artistic proposals of invited participating artists. The invited participating artists of *Portions of Share* are Rita GT, Nuno Nunes-Ferreira, Kristina Müntzing and Kalle Brolin (*Sunshine Socialist Cinema*).

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