

Kerry Downey with Natasha Marie Llorens

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Q:

At timestamp 9:20ish. "The place where your teeth meets the word." This image feels very connected to the way the abstract and the body meet in a moment of injury. A viscous red moving slowly across the image. Bloody, filling the visual field. Can you speak to the relationship between the images and the text in this passage?

A:

This is the first scene where I represent my body. Until now, the viewer is suspended in abstraction. I introduce the body through touch. By punching and slapping and nuzzling my own hands, I elicit various kinds of intimacy, with the hopes of producing different kinds of sensation and attention in the viewer. It's radical that you're able to track these quick shifts between aggression, play, and tenderness. Sex is such a locus of power play, but I think these slippery feelings exist in all relationships, with greater or lesser degrees of awareness and intensity.

Repetition plays an important role in movement between emotional tones, and in the video overall. By repeating the action, we experience it changing. It's like how we recreate traumatic events with the hopes of transforming our feelings about them. We replay incidents to understand them, trying to get closer or further away. Repetition can rupture and new meanings can emerge through the fissures. New skins or boundaries create possibility for healing, which I think is a creative process. The playfulness helps make visible our latent desires. I want to uncover and create fantasies located in haptics. Hands are so hot, so queer.

Q:

At timestamp 9:20ish. "The place where your teeth meets the word." This image feels very connected to Rankine's work, to the way the abstract and the body meet in a moment of injury. A viscous red moving slowly across the image. Bloody, filling the visual field. Can you speak to the relationship between the images and the text in this passage?

A:

Dear angling of care, I cannot see your teeth, I have never seen your teeth. I want to feel the place where your teeth meets the word, where the sense suffers the word, the mark, the shape, the sound.

The imagery and text work together to communicate the sensorial experience of the violence of language. The mouth, as a site of production and consumption, is creative, vulnerable, and aggressive. You're seeing this red interior, spotted with dark teeth-like shapes, or maybe they're holes. This space is flooded, bleeding, without boundaries. Language cannot contain me.

Earlier in the video I say that "it is hard to listen while looking." I'm thinking about times I go silent when experiencing a pressure to verbally perform, or how I lose track of what is being said when a situation

feels threatening. This moment of red is attempting to communicate the psychic and bodily states of dissociation, shame, and rage. This is where the abstract and the body meet.

In my various teaching practices and in my own life, I am exploring the privilege of language – one's access to speech, one's ability to speak or understand. While I have a great deal of language power, I am highly sensitive to the many forms of violent language. I have experienced this most directly as a queer and gender non-conforming person, and as someone socialized towards a feminine accommodation of others. Throughout my life people have asked me whether I'm a girl or boy, male or female. This is not an innocuous question; people eye me up and down. It is invasive, either/or, and it renders me hypervisible. While one part of me is being read, others aspects of my being are rendered invisible forced into hiding. This is the violence of the gender binary.

I have felt that my very being can produce concern or panic in others; maybe their own genders are not so stable. When people cannot identify my gender, this can also destabilize their sexuality. In this scenario, homophobia and transphobia are mutually constructing each other. I would argue that misogyny is also in the mix and that these three things cannot be disentangled. These gender and sexual categories, as well as race, class, and ability, are heavily reliant on that which we can see and decode on the surface of a person-- in their color, in their shapes, in their sounds, in their movements.

I'm interested in the relationship between being "read" and becoming red or seeing red. This red imagery could be interpreted as blood spilling from overt violence, but I'm speaking to the subtler ways reading a person can be violated by linguistically. As a sensitive, pinkish white person prone to anxiety and shame, I turn red easily. This turning red is then read. My sensorial experience of blushing feels like heat, which is also about rage and repression. This makes me think about drowning in my own blood or emotionally bleeding out. In the intersectional reading of my reddening, my white privilege cannot be erased and my occasional redness may do very little to undermine my whiteness. (fuck: Trump is orange, but he's still white). This also makes me think about the construction of whiteness as a fixed category and I wonder about my Irish, Syrian, and Polish immigrant ancestry being erased through this category. Parts of myself are cut off from me. Again, I recognize my anguish in this cannot be extricated from my privilege.

In thinking further about this blood red imagery, it would be a missed opportunity to not talk about bloody vaginas: menstruation and the violence against female bodies, so often the result of disgust or fear of the feminine. I think about how misogyny is internalized in a lot of different genders. Again, the gender binary produces these falsely stable categories that are reinscribed through everyday speech. This linguistic cut (male/female) has real material consequences on bodies, particularly female-identifying, trans, and non-binary bodies.

Q:

In the final sequence to this video you speak directly about death, dying, and yet the images are so awkward. Not playful like the first sequences I ask about above, or abstract/abject like the second. They are just weird, embarrassing almost, like watching someone talk to themselves when they think no one is watching. Again, I am struck by the disjuncture between stated violence to the body and the representation of the body.

A:

Maybe dying is awkward and transformation isn't sexy. I'm trying to figure out what I am, some queer creature whose referent or gender or Self is in the belly of a fish at the bottom of a giant ocean. Pretty

humbling. I've projected a spotted shape onto my body and there is a floppy skin-like material full of holes that masks or reveals parts of my body. I am playing with the idea of skin being a material thing, a metaphor, a projection. It's me and not me. The bright pinks and dark holes are shifting and I am searching for new frames of recognition, new shapes. You see me wrestling with the ways my experience of my body and myself feel abstract, hard to pin down. There is a playful tug of war between visibility and invisibility, between the desire to be seen and the shame of being seen. I want to be understood, but I don't want you to think you know me. I'm asking the viewer to hold complexity, and I want this ask to be generous. "You are not to know me at all" is addressed to anyone who thinks a self is a distinct thing with any inherent truth.

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