



DELEUZE CONNECTIONS

Deleuze and Sex

Edited by Frida Beckman

Tongue and Trigger: Deleuze's Erotics of the Uncanny
Cara Judea Alhadeff
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In his book, *Sexuality: The New Critical Idiom*, Joseph Bristow challenges scholars to form a political project rooted in Deleuze's rhizomatic and schizoanalytic lines. My pedagogical and art-based research explores the possibilities of radical citizenship by actively cultivating vulnerability through corporeal inquiries. A commitment to heterogeneous embodied thinking has the potential to rupture cultural assumptions. It explores the cross-fertilization of Deleuze's enfoldments as disarticulated membranes. An awareness of disarticulated membranes awakens the possibility of fully inhabiting our bodies—bodies that pulse with the multiplicity of the 'I'. Revitalization of both individual and social bodies produces enfoldments of psyche-somatic consciousness. No hierarchies survive these monstrous, heterogeneous, multiple entwinements of body intelligence and body wisdom. The body in relation to the mind and other mind-

bodies/body-minds *becomes* a condition for participatory democracy—a lived erotic politics.



As a color photographer, my exhibitions have been repeatedly censored as a result of ambiguous representations and interpretations. Intended as strategies for social action, my work explores Deleuzian corporeal topologies. Creative and critical focus is on corporeal politics—in particular, vulnerability and the seemingly unfamiliar. Images and writings illuminate a call and response between anxiety and beauty: anxiety in the moment of recognizing the uncanny, the familiar within the unfamiliar. Identifying a connection with the other, yet clinging to a separate identification, beauty inhabits the uncanny in the moment of response to our undeniable connectedness. The characters in my photographs and videos represent a Deleuzian simultaneity of inside and outside, of private and public, and play with the illusory distinctions between us and them, the familiar and the unfamiliar. My models simultaneously splay their bodies into the distance, like a smear or echo of memory, and compress themselves into the foreground, the tension of the

present-moment. I create my large-format color photography and video work by finding natural and architectural sites that I relate to human gestures and psychological states. I then choreograph scenarios within these environments. Although the images are consciously constructed, the relationships are born out of an improvised collaboration in which the physics of touch, gravity, and balance establish an unfolding performance. My models simultaneously splay their bodies like a smear or echo of memory, and compress themselves into the confines of the photographic field. Nothing is manipulated during the analog developing/printing process which I do myself—now rare among contemporary color photographers.



My intention is to play with relationships amongst liminal forms. The relationships among the “objects” within my photographs play out a process of continual de-centering and excess. I hope this language of critical imagination becomes an erogenous life-affirming power, breaking up predetermined taxonomies of knowledge, suspending what we think we know. How can we challenge, personally and collectively, our socialized fear and distrust of self-doubt, what comes out of our bodies, and what goes on inside of them? For the past twenty years, these questions have compelled me to collaborate on cross-disciplinary projects with choreographers, composers, architects, philosophers, anthropologists, and geographers. I experience my work as a 2-dimensional manifestation of dance, sculpture, poetry, sociological investigation, and philosophical engagement rather than as only “photography”—I shoot my still images with an analog large-format SLR Hasselblad camera and although I am a photographer, I experience my work as sculptural, cinematic, and performative. This is one reason why collaborating with artists from other disciplines is so important to my working process.



I arrange public and private spaces, objects, and bodies (including my own) in such a way that blurs the lines that separate them. This luminescent excess inhabits both the domestic and the animalistic. The characters become hybrids of machine and animal that populate dream-like worlds. The quotidian in relation to the sensual spectacle sets up a ritualistic narrative—a strewn collision of bodies and space is simultaneously purposeful and haphazard. Through a carnal visual language, these polymorphic bodies are engaged in ambiguous ceremonies. My photographs explore the body as a membrane between sensuality and restraint, surrender and resistance—disentangling the body's porous boundaries; hyperbole and austerity, reactivity and compliance. They display a consciousness of organized excess. My intention is to disrupt the distinction between the interior and exterior of both psychological and physical experiences.



Uncertainties help me explore my ambiguous desires and fears about my body—its internal and external designated "disorder"—my experience of my own monstrosity. The word monster shares its root with the verb to demonstrate. Through carnal visual language, polymorphic bodies engage in ambiguous ceremonies. Although my photographs are consciously constructed, the relationships are equally born out of an improvised collaboration in which the physics of touch, gravity, and balance establish an unfolding performance. I am again reminded that there is no solid ground—no clear-cut or absolute answer—only tension, suspension, anticipation, interpretation. Tension animates connective tissue, the web that binds us together, while distinguishing us as autonomous. My photographs are rooted in an acute awareness of these contingent encounters—psychic, imagined, palpable, and projected. Instead of being attached, thus limited, to our own perceptions, I would like to create environments in which there are nomadic margins that shape and construct as they overlap. This continuous folding edge, in which several equilibriums co-exist, recalls Deleuze's architectural folding of form, of

time and space and Leibniz's concept of the curvature of the universe: "...the fluidity of matter, the elasticity of bodies, and the motivating spirit as a mechanism" (Papadakis 18).



Both content and structure of my project are intricately rooted in the potential of the uncanny—the simultaneous exchange of the familiar within and throughout the unfamiliar. The uncanny is my political strategy—an erotic ethic and commitment to aesthetics within the permanent flux of the corporeal. For example, it is culturally assumed that it is men, and not women, who are capable of ejaculation. The fact that millions of women do indeed ejaculate is not at the core of my research. Nor is my project an attempt to replicate or usurp male tendencies or to render my body within a systematic functionality, thereby reifying hierarchical/dichotomous power relationships in which sexuality is reduced to a generic hydraulic model (a la Elizabeth Grosz's critique of recent discourses on the female body). As a woman who ejaculates *without specific physical stimulation*, the socio-political implications of what my body represents are vast: a rhizomatic, molecular sexuality, without an end-point, no arrival, no derivation. My body/sexuality inhabits and produces haecceities and affects in a chiasmic dissolution of binary codes' and social expectations: "infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; [they have] no top nor bottom nor center; [they do] not assign fixed and mobile elements

but rather distribute a continuous variation” (*Mille Plateaux* 476). Whether I am viewing my process of ejaculation, my *becoming*, through the uncanny Deleuzian masochist or a Taoist field of immanence,² I am positioning myself within an intuitive re-configuring of socialized sexuality. The nature of this collaborative emancipatory project transgresses internalized, invisible, taken-for-granted capitalist Oedipal structures. Creativity and subjectivity become pedagogical strategies for social change.

Because we are so entrenched in normative/normalizing behavior, the public is unaware of our constitutional rights and the vast extent to which we are oppressed. We don’t know what we are missing. In contrast, like E.T.A. Hoffman, physicist Stephen Hawking exclaims, “Everything we need is already within us just waiting to be realized” (87). There is magic in witnessing what already exists; paying attention to the constantly shifting unknown that is right in front of us. Instead of being attached, thus limited, by our own perceptions, I would like to support environments in which there are traveling margins that shape and construct as they overlap—a continuous folded edge in which several equilibriums co-exist, recalling Deleuze’s architectural folding of form, of time and space and Leibniz’s concept of the curvature of the universe: “...the fluidity of matter, the elasticity of bodies, and the motivating spirit as a mechanism.”

A Deleuzian commitment to heterogeneous investigations and decision-making (that is, embodied thinking) has the potential to rupture cultural corporeal assumptions, thus addressing the incalculable peregrinations of sexuality as corporeal cognition in relation to citizenship. This is an opportunity to investigate and share psycho-somatic subtleties in order for viewers to re-inhabit their bodies’ potential for presence and pleasure; to remember what already exists within themselves and in relation to one another. Departing from Deleuze’s philosophy of space and his particular way of connecting art, science and philosophy, I reflect on the ways in which spaces can be defined, quantified and measured, or alternatively, the way in which they resist our tendency to make them comprehensible. Deleuze describes our environment as a world in which two different kinds of spaces are present in continuous flux and mixture: a ‘smooth space’ and a ‘striated space’. Striated space is a measurable space, a space that is quantifiable and understandable – a space of over-coding, centralization, hierarchization, binarization and segmentation. Smooth space, on the other hand, is one of continuous development and variation, a space hardly measurable, difficult to grasp: “Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is *haptic* rather than optical perception” (*Mille Plateaux* 479). Thinking about our surroundings as ‘Smooth and Striated’, my images explore Deleuze’s corporeal philosophy to examine the simultaneous love of both organization and disorder. I play with the processes of (de-)quantifying, (de-)stabilizing and (de-)composing the world—*affecting* the illusion of order convenience consumption breeds. Affect is not an extensive sensory motor act, but an intensive vibration. Within this context, I realize one reason why my images have been repeatedly censored in multiple cultural contexts is because striated space tends to dominate our cultural norms; people confuse optics with politics. In contrast to these reductive binary approaches, rhizomatic smooth space, as the height of collaborative trans-disciplinarity, offers us a model for integrating art with life, politics, and unapologetic complex thought.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body as a discontinuous, non-totalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensifies, and durations may be of great relevance to those feminists attempting to reconceive bodies, especially women's bodies, outside of the binary polarizations imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, and interior/exterior oppositions (Grosz 135 cited in Bristow).

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In cultural production, as in reception, vulnerability³ becomes a vital intervention in public-private discourse. Since the private is construed and constructed as vulnerable and ambiguous, it requires unquestioned taxonomies of regulation and normalization. The sanctity of normalcy constitutes a hegemony of representation that colonizes our relationships with our bodies. In contrast to this dominant cultural perception, in my photographs, self-portrait videos, and theoretical practice, I am exploring the fluidity of sex as a key to encouraging social agency: the creative potential of erotic politics.⁴ Erotic politics reorients our cultural concepts of pleasure and vulnerability and ultimately who has imaginative power and control over our bodies. For me, eroticism offers any intensely satisfying sensation of connectedness to oneself, to others, and to one's environment in which creativity and *work* enhance our own and others' sense of vitality. Eroticism can be a key to examine the unconscious mind by interweaving the very interactions that are often prohibited or suppressed under social norms. This conscious practice embodies various responsibilities to ourselves and to others. My images reflect this fecund dynamic translation process between erotic politics and Deleuze's philosophical discourses. The lived concept that all is in flux, every "thing" (not as things in themselves, but the a-substantive), moves in a double orbit by helping us understand the relational tension embedded in each interaction. This rhizome of contingent encounters embodies erotic politics.



An elliptical continuum is central to my photographic work. Just as Deleuze and Guattari borrow and proliferate BwOs, I arrange the space, objects, and bodies (including my own) in such a way that blurs the lines that separate them. Luminescent excess inhabits both the domestic and the animalistic. Like Deleuze's masochist, my photographs explore the body as a membrane between sensuality and restraint, surrender and resistance—disrupting the distinction between interior and exterior psychological and physical experiences”

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⁶ “How does one introduce desire into thought, into discourse, into action? How and must desire deploy its forces within the political domain and grow more intense in the process of our overturning the established order? *Ars erotica, ars theoretica, ars politica*” (Foucault’s introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, xii).

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⁴ Deleuze's realization of *puissance* expresses an erotic politic: It is the “capacity for existence”; “a capacity to affect or be affected”; “a capacity to multiply connections that may be realized by a given ‘body’ to varying degrees in different situations” (xvii Massumi’s forward in *Mille Plateaux*).

⁵ My photographs unravel vulnerability into/within a Riemann field of conscious subjectivity: “When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom” (*Mille Plateaux* 377).

⁶ “How does one introduce desire into thought, into discourse, into action? How and must desire deploy its forces within the political domain and grow more intense in the process of our overturning the established order? *Ars erotica, ars theoretica, ars politica*” (Foucault’s introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, xii).

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