An Oeuvre Positioned between the Modern Demiurge and Postmodern Referentiality

Lóránd Hegyi

For three decades, ORLAN's oeuvre has been placed in provokingly diverse contexts and surprisingly different discourses. However, it is marked by a consistently compelling, intellectual, ethically and emotionally based intrinsic coherence legitimized by the radicalism of personal commitment. Latent heroism seems to be inextricably linked to her oeuvre, even though she employs subversive humor and challenges social, cultural, aesthetic, ideological, and religious values in a critical and analytical manner. It may be this very heroism—today it appears to be somewhat old-fashioned and anachronistic—that distinguishes her work from the aesthetic strategies devised by a young generation of artists who frequently take up ORLAN's suggestions and questions.

There is no doubt that in her oeuvre we find heroic and optimistic avant-garde strategies, utopian and ethical concepts espousing an artistic synthesis as well as maximalist and voluntarist claims to totality if we focus on technical, methodological, evolutionist, and quasi-scientific aspects or the regularity and consistency of her oeuvre. In this sense, it may be argued that she has always taken a true-blue avant-garde position; the latter attempts to change prevailing conditions radically and incessantly. It tends to negate the vast realm of reality, ranging from mental conventions to physical, material, measurable, and controllable properties, and it even encompasses and enlists the full array of capabilities of the human body, the total boundlessness of creativity in the name of an ideal project. This involves a necessary and systematic modification or destruction of the realities concerned as well as an ongoing and forceful approximation to a projected, planned, and anticipated new reality. The more the prevailing status quo is eliminated, the more space and power are allocated to a designed new reality derived from an ideal project. This reality tends to replace earlier realities, doing away with their values and taking over their functions.

All of this is entirely in line with the avant-garde demiurge that substitutes the desirable, ideal, forward-looking, and absolute for current realities that are flatly rejected. This replacement of specific realities by utopian, radically imaginative, and fictitious projects emanating from an intelligible plan engenders a required propensity to intellectual violence. The latter aims at annihilating existing realities—just like Marinetti with his futuristic credo, and subsequently the German dadaists, Russian productivists as well as almost all radical avant-garde thinkers and artists. In the case of ORLAN, this concept of surgically altering existing physiognomic realities of her body corresponds to a strategy of objectifying the utopian, or of visualizing intelligible ideal concepts.

The strategies of postmodern deconstructivism, the practice of dissolving homogeneous language, and the discourse about the other and about multiple identities with regards to ORLAN's oeuvre lend themselves just as logically, adequately, and seamlessly as avant-garde interpretations. The simulacrum formed by different cultural references takes on an appealingly provocative and intensely experienced appearance in a climate of seductive fictitiousness created by the media. This simulacrum is one of the main facets of ORLAN's

oeuvre. In various shapes and forms, the artist deals with the question of what is real and what is simulated. She accomplishes this by means of an artificially transformed, systematically generated, fictitious, and imaginary body embedded in an artificially designed, imitated media world, or by means of simulated, merely cultural production mechanisms that are perceived through communication and do not, in fact, exist in real life, such as her films. Whatever the case may be, ORLAN focuses on the cultural and ethical credibility of creative work, i.e. on a value-generating activity. The artist is turned into a medium, and the same happens to his/her production, socio-cultural context, presence, social status, contextuality, and postmodern existence.

Ethnological, mythological, cultural, and historical paradigms have been included in reflections on multi-identity and nomadism—these two phenomena being regarded metaphorically, didactically, and with an avant-garde mindset. Consequently, the aesthetic competence of allegorical thinking acquires a new dimension that may be specified not just in an avant-garde context, but first and foremost in connection with allegories of myths. However, these allegories of myths do not feature as prominently in discourses on ORLAN's art as, for example, socio-cultural critique or explorations of her methodological decisions.

This latent demand that the interpretation of her art also extend to allegories of myths seems to be an integral part of ORLAN's thinking. And yet there is no single, clearly defined methodological line, and no system of signs associated therewith. In her practice, we make out elements of the grand mythical narratives of our past that refer to current socio-cultural and ideological discourses.

In this context, Philip Auslander alludes to ORLAN's typically postmodern stance: ". . . her work exemplifies resistant postmodernist political art . . . demonstrating what Craig Owens calls 'the impossible complicity' of postmodernist political art, 'the necessity of participating in the very activity that is being denounced in order to denounce it.'"[1] It is striking how in ORLAN's oeuvre her activist, participatory, evolutionist, didactic, and hence optimistic and moralistic avant-garde attitude and her subversive, deconstructivist, skeptical, ironic, and postmodern proposals for activities coexist and interact with each other.

Apart from this seemingly affirmative, but actually radically subversive, strategy of utilizing and questioning the given system of values, referentiality—associated with the crisis facing Lyotard's mythical "grand narratives"—appears as a core element in ORLAN's work. Her artistic activities feed on grand utopias as well as on grand emancipatory narratives. These become manifest in a never-ending human revolt against external, divine, unfathomable, immeasurable, overwhelming powers and decisions that restrict the freedom accorded humanity. The goal of this revolt is to radically enhance the power, creativity, imagination, and capacities of humanity so that the territory of human immanence can be enlarged and that of divine, extrinsic, and elusive transcendence be diminished in size.

This exercise includes exemplary narratives about the creation of living, viable, autonomously acting, quasi-human beings by special people, such as the story of Golem or of Frankenstein. The latter is a modern apocalyptic version revolving around the notion of grave and even unbearable responsibility. It also articulates the ambivalence of reactions displayed and functions fulfilled by the masses, the tragic predisposition of anonymous groups of people towards manipulation, and the psychological ramifications when majorities turn from victims into culprits. Golem's creation involves divine powers and God-given secrets—or secrets stolen from God; it is a process—the creation of a new being—that emulates the powers normally vested in God. In contrast, Frankenstein is an example where science, the enlightening and emancipatory power of knowledge, human intelligence, diligence, and a quest for inventions, i.e. powers intrinsic in humans, serve to create an intelligent, quasi-human being. Both heroic attempts touch upon a taboo—the absolute and inalienable right to create new life. Both stories describe the revolt and resistance put up against the exclusivity of external, transcendental, and divine capacities in the name of human immanence.

Another variant of such emancipatory narratives is the creation of intelligent machines and robots. While they are evidently artificial, mechanic contraptions, sophisticated and complex constructions, they do have some capacities that even match natural human abilities. A seductive appeal radiates from automatic machines since they are able to do something more effectively than real humans and thus have a superhuman dimension, i.e. something divine or, to be more precise, something diabolic. The reason for this intriguingly seductive appeal is that these are artificial creatures which, for all their obvious artificiality, for all their mechanical design, harbor something frightening and troubling: the tantalizing ambivalence of their character that precludes neither potential life nor autonomous intelligence. This confusing ambivalence fires our imagination, and it challenges the unequivocal identity of such creatures.

Stories about chess-playing computers or music machines, about dolls that imitate human emotions, and about robots that perform certain tasks are metaphors of the expansion of human immanence towards external determinations, however these are legitimized. The power wielded by artificial creatures over real people, the dangers emanating from, and the bewilderment caused by, their irresistible appeal are all expressed in the story of Pygmalion. The artist's admiration for his own creation, for the artificially produced body turns into genuine love and desire, confounding the relations habitually existing between humans and sculptures, between living beings and artificial creatures. This narration includes a complex interaction between the creator and his product. It is not a static situation, but a changeable process in which dependence undergoes a shift, with the creator becoming increasingly dependent on his own creation. Here, power is all about emotional dependence. The artificial—and artistically designed—creature has an aesthetic and erotic effect on its creator. It is then liberated by him and loses its dependence as the creator himself becomes emotionally attached to it. Overcoming this addiction requires introspection on the part of the creator: he must realize that the object of his admiration is but his own artistic creation. And this necessitates that his creature's autonomy is destroyed.

A somewhat altered and more modern version of this narrative is found in Federico Fellini's *Casanova*. Here the irresistible appeal of the mechanical doll stems, on the one hand, from artificiality, alienation, boundless imagination, and, on the other hand, from restricted options and absolute passivity. In this case, love is no interaction, but unilateral projection. It needs no response, but a totally empty space that the active part requires for its projections. That is how dependence emerges; it grows stronger as one part behaves more passively and the other one more actively, i.e. the more one-sided the relationship becomes. Paradoxically, it is this artificiality that engenders real emotions; it is this emptiness, this absence of emotions on one side which stimulates the presence of genuine emotions and thus dependence on the other side. It is precisely this radical, uncompromising artificiality, this utter absence of all human emotions in the man-made creature which results in perverted perfection. A superhuman quality is acquired not thanks to the soul that is bestowed upon it, as in the Golem example, but on account of the void that it fills. In ORLAN's work, this radical artificiality is both significant and complex, just like in the story described above. She tries to remodel her body entirely so that it is turned into an empty projection screen. Projections of the other—placed in the context of religiousness and contemporary notions of beauty—are directed towards her depersonalized, empty, object-like body. By means of gradual changes her body inches towards an ideal project. In this process, ORLAN champions utopian and evolutionist avant-garde concepts of redesigning the world and of recreating humanity as well as postmodern questions of identity, otherness, artificiality, and simulacrum. She uses her body as an instrument, an object of public discourse, and an empty projection screen.

This fondness for perfection and this tendency towards correcting certain realities and qualities in the name of the ideal project is one of the salient features of the "grand narratives" of modernism, as is evidenced in particular by the efforts made by the radical avant-garde to create an entirely new world populated by entirely new humans.

One of the most significant elements of avant-garde strategies was the utopia of radically redesigning the world, which had several political, moral, aesthetic, cultural, and sociological consequences; most importantly, it called into question the intrinsic value of the artwork and its aesthetic perception. Hence, the futur-

ists propagated a form of anarchic, destructive, heroic, pragmatic, subversive, universalistic, lofty, and utopian total art. Not only did they attempt to blur the borders between art categories and between various representational, object-focused, and activist, non-objectified types of expression, they also subjected art to the general process of global change. The futurists regarded non-artistic activities, such as anarchic demonstrations, violent clashes with the concert audience, or—*horribile dictu*—warfare as futurist actions, i.e. as a new form of art. This art no longer wanted to remain "just" art; rather, it was to be used as a weapon against petrified and traditional societies, as a vehicle in the process of laying waste to what is old and building up what is new.

A few years later, dadaists with their internationalist and pacifistic mindset touted radical irony as a subversive tool to erase outdated, feudalistic, and bourgeois values, discovering the potential of a radically new language and novel forms of communication in the process. They declared war on bourgeois logic and on rationality; they "wiped the slate clean," and turned values upside down. Their purpose was to disclose the alleged logic of bourgeois society and thereby demonstrate the actual absurdity of our world. Dadaist irony was just as unfettered as futurist actions. With their radical, merciless, and frequently morbid irony they lashed out against the pseudo-values cherished by imperialistic societies thriving on nationalism, militarism, destructiveness, and recklessness. Dadaists, especially those holding sway in Berlin, explicitly pointed out that dadaist activities were, by no means, a new form of art, just another "-ism," or an attempt to give rise to a new style; rather, they were to be viewed as "anti-art," as "non-art" that does not convey the emotions shared by individuals, but that proffers a new form of communication. Ultimately, the Berlin dadaists wanted to use their "anti-art" activities as a means to radically redesign social structures.

When it came to encouraging pragmatic processes of change, Russian productivists and constructivists went a lot further—not least because they had one more or less successfully completed revolution and an ensuing upheaval of values under their belts. From its inception, Russian avant-garde comprised several strands: a spiritual, mystical, and transcendental variant as well as a pragmatic, materialistic, and utilitarian line. Even so, it always assumed that new art, or rather productivistic "anti-art," constituted the universal and objective patterns of the world that emerged quite clearly in new materialistic methods of construction, allowing for collective interpretation. Its goal was to teach people how to understand these formerly concealed patterns so that they could internalize them. This new art, which no longer wanted to be just art, but a useful tool, was to fulfill a dual function: to reflect the objective connections and universal state of the world and to educate the "new man" who builds up society and shapes new values in conformity with these patterns. The radical relaunch of the world involved the creation of a new constructive man liberated from the shackles of outdated class differences such as religion, class, education, but also from old power structures like the nation or the state.

This dual function of productivistic art manifested itself in the "Letatlin" project propagated by Vladimir Tatlin. It concerned a utopian aircraft moved by the physical power exerted by the human body, and thus epitomized an ancient dream of humanity, i.e. to overcome the limits of our real physical bodies and to be able to fly. Tatlin, a pragmatic, utilitarian man, was also a utopian dreamer who believed in the infinite possibilities of technical progress. When launching the "Letatlin" model, he also wanted to present a practical device, a vehicle for practical usage that could move without expending costly energy. At the same time, his was a utopian idea—to provide physical proof of the victory over the limits imposed by our bodies. In this sense, "Letatlin" was a tool, an artificial prolongation of our bodies, a prosthesis to optimize the physical configuration of our muscles with a view to enabling them to fly. Hence, it embodied the grand old utopia of the flying man.

The utopia of a radical and universal transformation of society and its values always remained an integral part of avant-garde art, including historical epochs in which social, political, and ideological change was not feasible. Umberto Eco distinguishes between avant-garde and experimental art. The former tries to apply methodological artistic explorations and radical linguistic modifications to social and political practice, while the latter carries out its research and innovations in an artistic context, devoid of utopian, expansionist ambitions.

Viewed from this angle, ORLAN's art is a highly specific phenomenon. On the one hand, her intention is to preserve unalloyed avant-garde ideas—utopian thinking, Expansionism, and the evolutionary principle—radicalizing them such that she transfers developments immediately, in all their physical evidence and dramatic irreversibility, to her own body. On the other hand, she limits the capacity of utopian and universalistic Expansionism to the personal realm, the last refuge where the artist is still in a position to work efficiently. To put it differently, ORLAN's processual physical redesign is an Expansionist action targeted at her own body. It perceives and uses the artist's body as a medium, a feature shared by the dadaists as well as performance artists of the past thirty years who have devised various strategies and methodologies to pursue this goal. Furthermore, her art centers on the question of the artist's status in today's society and in global media communication. ORLAN's series of performances stretch over years and receive global media coverage. The

face-altering surgeries are broadcast and made accessible to everyone, i.e. everyone seems to be able to participate in these processes.

This is an allusion to the strategies aiming at a democratization of art. Since the late fifties, this phenomenon has been associated with, and adapted to the given social context of, contemporary art. At the same time, ORLAN also raises the problem of the universal competence of art. ORLAN approximates her face to an "ideal," a "design," drawing on various "prefabricated" art-historical models. When choosing her models, cultural, sociological, historical, and anthropological aspects come into play, as she looks for certain cultural archetypes, traditional clichés, and specific collective and conventional objectifying processes as references. Her face, which has gradually changed in appearance following a string of surgical interventions conducted over the years, is the result of a very complex process. Absolute "privacy" interacts, via a set of complicated mechanisms, with a distinctly global and utterly open and collective system of communication. The utopian avant-garde idea of radically redesigning the world is reduced to ORLAN's own body, a highly personal field of competence. The latter, however, is "deprivatized," "collectivized," and "globalized" in this process of all-encompassing media communication. ORLAN thus complies with the criteria of radical directness, of immediacy, and of specifically and concretely changing given realities. At the same time, she meets the requirement of defetishizing art, of collectivizing artistic creativity by means of participation, and of debunking the artwork by involving the viewer in the process of media-facilitated creation.

At another level we encounter an additional dialectic question—the relation between immediacy with alienation. The "artwork," i.e. the human body, ORLAN's face, is irreversibly changed in its physical and empirical appearance. ORLAN destroys her body in order to create a new one that is organic, alive, and functioning. Her earlier face exists only in memories and in computer-based documentation formats. This act of annihilation is an analogy to the destructive, subversive ambitions of classical avant-garde that was bent on eradicating a petrified society, traditional systems of communication, and conventional values with a view to inventing a new language relating directly to new values and a universal structure of signs expressing a redesigned world. Hence, ORLAN's permanently changing countenance that gradually approaches an ideal design is a metaphor of utopia. It is also the medium of an action whose heroism is derived from its physical, pragmatic, expansionist, and practical specificity; an action that links subject and object, activity and passivity, project and result, privacy and publicity in a dramatic, sensual, physical, and shocking interaction. ORLAN herself comments on this as follows: "My body has become a site of public debate that poses crucial questions of our time."

The experiment is conducted with the artist's own body, and the competence of art is reduced to a small territory. Responsibility is assumed solely by the artist. Or maybe not just by her, since the viewer—being a consumer, a voyeur, no longer an "innocent" observer—also becomes part of a chain of communication and is confronted head-on with questions relating to the applicability of utopias and the responsibility to be shouldered by the public. ORLAN raises very topical issues that, on account of their art-historical references, are embedded in a global anthropological process of introspection and self-cognition.

1. Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance. Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1997.

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He has curated many exhibitions including *Aspects / Positions: Cinquante ans d'art en Europe Centrale* (Vienna, Barcelona, Southampton, 1999), *La Casa, il Corpo, il Cuore: Construction des identités* (Vienna, Prague, 1999), *L'Autre moitié de l'Europe* (Paris, 2000), *Passage d'Europe – Un certain regard sur l'Europe Centrale et Orientale* (Saint-Étienne, 2004), *Domicile Privé/Public* (Saint-Étienne, 2005), *The Giving Person* (Naples, 2005), *Heimatlos/Domicile* (Paris, 2006), *Giardino – Luoghi della piccola realtà* (Naples, 2006). He has co-curated the Venice Biennale, the Toyama Biennale (1993), the Bienal de Valencia (2003), and was Artistic Director of the Sculpture Biennale in Stuttgart (1995).

He is the author of *Avant-gardes et Transavangardes: Périodes de l'art moderne* (1996), *Roman Opalka* (2000), *I Love You* (2003), *Diversities* (2004), and *The Courage to be Alone – Re-inventing of Narratives in Contemporary Art* (2004).

The narrative

Eugenio Viola

Not to write about the body, but to write the body itself.
Not corporeality, but the body.
Not signs, images, or tokens of the body,
but the body.
J.L. Nancy[1]

The narrative is an essential act. It is a celebration, a great recital, at a time that seemed to have decreed the end of all the narrative possibilities that flow from ORLAN's life and oeuvre. An exceptional oeuvre that occupies a place apart from all the "posts-" and "-isms," but with the unique stylistic signature that has always identified this complex, irreverent, ironic, blasphemous, iconoclastic artist, in whom provoking the flesh and turning the body inside out, art and life, playing with identity, and a constant fluctuation between the virtual and the real rise to the level of poetry.

Revisiting ORLAN's history, from the early sixties to the present day, means, above all, rediscovering the history of the poetics of the body, in which body art and carnal art are the fundamental stages.

Real body and imaginary body, lived body and emotional body, mystic body and social body, diffuse body and hybrid body, all merge together in the ceaseless flow of references in ORLAN's work. The present ceaselessly alters the view of the past, constantly reinstated in her work by an endless interplay of quotations, appropriations, and hybridizations of different mediums, as elements that can be endlessly modulated and declined. *Le récit* offers us a general survey of the artist's life and work and builds a bridge between a past revivified by the present search and a future that promises to be long and fruitful.

The narrative is also the latest poster that has been produced in *Le Plan du film* (The Film Plot) (2001–2007), an ongoing project based on Jean-Luc Godard's invitation to make a film conceived in reverse, like all of ORLAN's works, a kind of destabilizing synthesis made up of autobiographical events and invented elements. A situation suspended between fiction and reality, in which ART once again becomes a spectacle, a comedy, life's ironic double.

The narrative is, above all, a great retrospective exhibition organized by the Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne Métropole, in the town where ORLAN was born and in the year in which she celebrates her sixtieth birthday. She was born on May 30, 1947, and set out on her career under the banner of eclecticism, alternating poetry, theater, sculpture, photography, video, performance, and painting (*Abstractions géométriques*, Geometric Abstractions, 1964–1969), but later gave up painting definitively. From then on her body became her privileged instrument, the central space in which the relationship between the Self and the Other was played out, the support on which ORLAN wrote her story and from which she spun all her subsequent work. "Exhibiting paintings seems to me to be an act of dissimulation, a step backwards," she said later. "Painting is tantamount to refusing to accept one's own exhibitionism fully, insisting on wearing a mask."[2] Her first performance, *Les marches au ralenti* (The Slow-Motion Walks), took place in the streets of Saint-Étienne in 1964, offering a symbolic representation of her fellow citizens' everyday life. Her first work of living sculpture, *ORLAN accouche d'elle-m'aime* (ORLAN Gives Birth to Her Loved Self), was presented the same year. With a punning title—elle m'aime (she loves me)/elle-même (herself)—she portrayed herself in the act of self-generation, attached to a mannequin that almost seemed to be emerging from her vagina. This work was an early expression of an embryonic poetics, containing a series of motifs that became recurrent in her later work: otherness, the clone, the double, and self-generation. This last theme reaches a very special level of consciousness in the surgical operation-performances, the *Self-hybridations* (Self-Hybridizations), and in *Le manteau d'Arlequin* (Harlequin's Coat), which is still "on the stocks."

The Political Body: *Les draps du trousseau*

Art challenges the prevailing principle of reason:
in representing the order of sensuousness,
it invokes a tabooed logic,
the logic of gratification as against that of repression.
H. Marcuse[3]

The events of May 1968 found fertile soil in the strongly politicized, intellectualized French society and marked "the introduction of an aesthetic factor in social events, with the proposal of alternative models of ART and an increasingly assertive demand for a political practice that took the new need for subjectivity into account."[4] The various artist, student, intellectual, and political minorities became engaged in protest and the difficult formulation of alternative proposals. Slogans such as *imagination au pouvoir* (all power to the imagination) gave

new value to dada directives by combining them with radical political activism. The poetics of the body, happenings, and Fluxus overturned the codes of art. In the context of the feminist struggle, the language of women artists became radicalized, and in a society in which a false egalitarianism between genders prevailed, they questioned the contradictions, pressures, and acts of violence that were part and parcel of the position of being women in a society of men.

ORLAN took part in feminist demonstrations with a series of subversive actions, brandishing signs that bore the words *Je suis un femme et une homme* (I am a woman and a man, but with the genders of the words "woman" and "man" reversed), embarking on a process of playing with identity that has remained a constant feature in all her work. Most women artists engaged in this kind of discourse set out from an existential substratum that presents the situation of subjection to which women have always been relegated. In those years, similar works using the metaphor of the real or invented wound, either bandaged (Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*) or bleeding (Gina Pane's *Action sentimentale*), were an indication of psychophysical suffering. ORLAN reflected on the social body and on the cultural representation of the body on which the community exercises its modeling effect, imposing forms and limits on how it is generally perceived. By adopting a strategy based on the "pleasure body," the artist defined a modus operandi far removed from the approach of her colleagues in body art, implementing a form of protest that I would agree with Pierre Restany in describing as more "technical," one that pursued the "objectification of the body." This perspective takes in all the work she did on the theme of the trousseau that her mother had lovingly prepared with a feeling of respect for tradition, and that the artist provocatively transformed into raw material for the work she produced over many years. I am thinking of the *tableaux vivants* (1968–1974) in which ORLAN introduced an ironic distancing effect into her reinterpretation of various masterpieces of the past, such as Botticelli's *Nascita di Venere* , which became *La naissance d'ORLAN sans coquille* (The Birth of ORLAN without a Shell), or Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*. In other cases, as in Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, she applied a reversal of perspective that inverted the meaning of the work. I have in mind the furious *repéRAGES des taches de sperme sur les draps du trousseau* (Marking of Sperm Stains on Sheets from the Trousseau) (1967–1968), in which the unfortunate sheets became the setting for "close" encounters between ORLAN and her lovers . . . soiling the sheets with sperm, marking the stains with a wash, and then symbolically embroidering over them blindfolded.

Later the "ORLAN body" became a unit of measurement, a standard, a parameter of physical self-determination that could be used to determine relationships with space. A body that became the "archi-tectonics of meaning"[5] and that reactivated the ancient system of Vitruvius, which entered modernity via Leonardo da Vinci and Le Corbusier's "modulor." The *MesuRages d'institutions et de rues* (MeasuRages of Institutions and Steets) (1974–1983)[6] marked an even clearer inversion: it was not the perfect body of an ideal man, but the body of a woman of small stature that confronted those spaces and became the measure of everything. In addition to a growing need to impart a sense of sacredness, each of those actions also introduced a violently physical and symbolic gesture of reappropriation. Thereafter, "ORLAN carries out the transfer of this notion of measurement to her own body. The measurement of the body becomes the measurement of life."[7] Measuring became a rite.

The artist came to the selected space with an easel on which she noted down the space-time coordinates of the place. She put on a dress made from the sheets of her trousseau, and she measured the site by laying her body on the ground all along the defined course. In the presence of two witnesses, she recited the number of "ORLAN bodies" contained in the space and wrote the result on the easel. She went to get water, removed the dress/shroud, which by that time was steeped in the experience of the place and gave a public quality to the metaphor of washing dirty clothes, normally restricted to the private sphere. Finally she took some samples of the dirty water, and they were labeled, numbered, and sealed with wax.

This aesthetic strategy led to the creation of "hybrid" works that were connected with the action, but had an autonomy of their own. She went beyond the merely documentary aspect, perpetuating the event and initiating a procedure that she "vitalized" with the series of surgical operation-performances.

The metaphorical illustration of the rejection reappeared amplified and in a very vivid form in *Étude documentaire: la tête de Méduse* (Documentary Study: Medusa's Head).[8] The members of the public entered a large room one after another, following a compulsory route: two perpendicular blocks led to a huge frame on which a sheet from the artist's trousseau was stretched. On the cloth were the words "Étude documentaire: la tête de Méduse," amid yellow, blue, and red marks. The red was, in fact, blood. An embroidery frame like the ones used for women's handicrafts was set in the middle of the sheet, which was pierced by a hole. ORLAN was immediately behind it, with her vagina exposed and fully dilated by spring clips. At the time of the action, ORLAN was having her period. Her pubic hair was painted blue and yellow. A magnifying glass gave her vagina enormous dimensions. A screen showed the head of the person who was about to look. Another screen showed a picture of the head that was looking. An extract from Freud's essay "Medusa's Head" was distributed on the way out from the room. The beginning of the text recalled how "the Devil took to flight when the woman showed him her vulva."[9] The sight of the genital organs arouses alarm in the adolescent. But the almond-shaped vulva, with its fuzzy fringe of hair and lips like overdeveloped eyelids, is also like an eye.

"It is this detail of the body [the eye]," Jean Clair writes, "with its external resemblance to woman's nature

Corps-sculpture n° 3 dit Shiva ou tentacules de bras multiples (Body-sculpture No. 3 Called "Shiva, or Many-Armed Tentacles"), 1964
photographie en noir et blanc/black and white photograph
81 x 76 cm (avec cadre/including frame)
Pièce unique/Unique piece
Courtesy the artist

. . . the *coincidentia oppositorum* that unites what is noblest in the body, vultus, with what is basest, vulva, it is this terrifying mimicry that operates ceaselessly between the gaze and what attracts it . . . for [the gaze] has become a totalitarian enterprise uniting opposites."[10] And we are reminded of Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, a voyeuristic reminiscence, an inverted view, a peep through the keyhole at what "seems, twenty-seven centuries later, to be the oldest known portrayal of Medusa."[11]

Hesiod's *Theogony* tells the myth of the petrifying gaze of Medusa, an androgynous monster that was the embodiment of horror. The human eye could not stand the sight of it. To accomplish this difficult task, Theseus used a series of stratagems that ORLAN transformed into a "bachelor machine" to confront Medusa, the unviewable, metaphorically represented by the exposed vagina and the menstrual blood, considered in all ancient societies since the dawn of time as dirty and impure. "The metaphysical eroticism of Medusation is clear evidence of a denial of the body," Nancy warns. "Medusa checks the stroke, and paralyzes the outstretched arm: what remains is a masturbation of the eye."[12] More ironic is the reference to Courbet's *L'origine du monde*, a work to which ORLAN returned some years later with *Origine de la guerre* (Origin of War) (1989), reactivating the principle of inversion established at the time of the *tableaux vivants*; in other words, the introduction of a male "counterpart" that inverted the sense of the original work. Courbet had daringly painted a woman's crotch, a vagina voluptuously offered to the eye in close-up. ORLAN, on the other hand, with the aid of digital technology, chose to show the lower abdomen of a man portrayed provocatively with an erection.

The Mystic Body: The Ecstasy of Saint ORLAN

The baroque is the regulation of the soul
by the radioscopy of the body.
Jacques Lacan[13]

Partly bound up with the theme of the trousseau, but in other respects forming a self-contained corpus of work, ORLAN's reinterpretation of Judeo-Christian iconography was developed over a period of twenty years, using the metaphor of the baroque and the figure of Saint ORLAN. It was yet another act of female transvestism, an act of transformation, but also one of cultural nomadism, experienced by means of the ironical use of the mask and the Dionysiac face of art.

Catholicism abounds in tales of saints and martyrs. Its hagiographies teem with countless stories of mystic experiences imbued with a physical dimension. A marriage of mysticism and desire pervades the Christianity of the Western world, from St. Francis of Assisi to Catherine of Siena, St. John of the Cross to St. Teresa of Avila; stories of bodies taken to the limit, a relationship with religion lived in absolute terms, in which a spiritual thirst and physical urge blend indissolubly. There are also innumerable, almost excessively physical sacred representations in the history of art. Georges Didi-Huberman maintains that the religious iconography of all Western art is based on the double incarnation of Christ in the flesh and in images.[14] Flayed figures, crucifixions, tortures, demonstrative ecstasies, and licentious martyrs are favorite themes of much of Italian painting from mannerism onwards, leading Lacan to declare: "It is in Christianity more than anywhere else that the work of art most obviously shows itself as what it always is everywhere—obscenity."[15]

Yet Bataille points out that one of the Christianity's peculiarities is precisely its association of eroticism with sin, the only result of which is to attach a forbidden quality to it that was practically non-existent in the ancient world.[16]

Yet it is no accident that some of the criticism that has analyzed the phenomenon of body art has highlighted the relationship between the practices of the saints and those of body artists. Lea Vergine, hagiographer extraordinary, declares: "It is the mystic that is most attached to the body, as the history of the saints shows . . . Some practices have been transferred from the field of religion to that of art."[17] The practitioners of body art are, in a way, the direct descendants of those saintly figures.

ORLAN was not the only artist touched by an air of sanctity in that period: think of Lisa Montano, Lea Lublin, or Luigi Ontani. Nevertheless, her case goes beyond the traditional themes of deconstruction of identity and

Strip-tease occasionnel à l'aide des draps du trousseau (Incidental Strip-tease Using Sheets from the Trousseau), 1974
Détail/Detail: *Naissance d'ORLAN sans coquille* (Birth of ORLAN without Shell)
60 x 44 cm

desacralization characteristic of body art, entering the terrain of the relationship between ART and life and the total identification of the person with the figure. Her *Études documentaires* (Documentary Studies) define a radically different course, distinct from that of other artists at the time.

In a way, ORLAN offered what I would be tempted to call a "hagiographic" version of body art—a hagiography lived naturally as the pretext for a theatricalization that was deeply felt and sincere. A moral art in which "the body is affirmed and understood as choice; it becomes the place of the narrative, the privileged place of the existential narrative."[18]

Hence the inevitable encounter/confrontation between ORLAN and one of the great emblematic themes of modernity—the baroque—reinterpreted in a highly original way by associating the forced pathos of the Counter-Reformation with contemporary art practice. The new saint received her "enlightenment" at the sight of Bernini's *Santa Teresa*, a work already considered perverse by Bataille because of the way in which the great seventeenth-century sculptor interpreted ecstasy: a disturbance that overwhelms the mind as well as the flesh; a mixture of spiritual tension, emotional impact, and sensuality, in keeping with the religiosity of that century and the account that the saint gave of her ecstatic experience in her "autobiography." "In everything that has come from the effects of Christianity, especially in art . . . it is all exhibition of the body evoking pleasure."[19] And, in my opinion, it is precisely in this exhibition of a sensual body, in this "di-mention of obscenity"[20] that the essence of ORLAN's sacred travesties lies. *Le Drapé le Baroque* (The Draped the Baroque) (1971–1990) was the name given to that corpus of works, which form part of ORLAN's corpus/body. The performances were adapted for each location in which they took place; they were carried out entirely in slow motion, lasted between three and five hours, and were "celebrated" in accordance with a very precise ritual—ORLAN appeared draped in a dress made from sheets taken from her inexhaustible, eclectic trousseau.

At the end of the action she generally let down her hair, which was held by a band of cloth, bared one of her breasts, and struck an ecstatic pose. The performance was thus divided into two distinct parts: the first was essentially aesthetic and referential. The artist made slow, rhythmic, but extremely sensual movements. In the second part, everything became more instinctive, almost animal: the saint gave way to the whore, in accordance with the duality that underlies all these actions. It is no accident that Jean Fouquet's *Vierge à l'Enfant* is an image very dear to ORLAN: this sensual Virgin, depicted with geometrical volumes profoundly inspired by Piero della Francesca, portrayed in the act of offering her generous breast to the divine child, is none other than Agnès Sorel, Charles VII's mistress. The Madonna and the courtesan. Once again we are faced with an image of *coincidentia oppositorum*, a transcendence of opposites.

On some occasions ORLAN was carried in procession in a palanquin, giving her blessing. Sometimes she was shut up in an acrylic glass box pierced by a hole from which her accusing finger protruded; or else she brazenly exhibited the figure of an infant made of bread, which she dismembered during the action and then ate.

Apart from the photographs that documented those actions, the artist also produced photographic works in the studio, such as *Sainte ORLAN avec fleurs sur fond de nuages* (Saint ORLAN with Flowers against Clouds) (1983) or *Sainte ORLAN couronnée et travestie à l'aide des draps de son trousseau, avec fleurs et nuages* (Saint ORLAN Crowned and Costumed in Sheets from Her Trousseau with Flowers and Clouds) (1983). They offer a sublime portrayal of ORLAN in the guise of a distinctly sculptural ecstatic saint.

In the series *Skaï and sky et vidéo* (Leather in the Sky with Video) (1983), ORLAN was dressed as a white virgin, or else, in a dark counterpart, in black imitation leather. She posed on a pedestal improvised from a video stand that, removed from its normal context, took on a new semantic value.

From this basic model, declined in several variants, ORLAN constructed her personal hagiography.

The first actions were inspired by Saint Teresa: the posture, the arrangement of the drapery, and the immutable ascending movement that ORLAN imprinted on all the portrayals of saints and Madonnas were taken directly from Bernini. In a later phase, the folds became increasingly diffuse and "Deleuzian," with a growing theatricality that also appeared in the videos, reaching its peak in the mid-eighties. For the exhibition *Made in France*,[21] the artist attained the height of baroque exuberance by fitting out an entire chapel dedicated to Saint ORLAN: a complex, diffuse, sophisticated installation that played on dualism, receding perspectives, and

trompe l'oeil. ORLAN took iconographic and architectural motifs from the past (columns, a statue, a clearly determined vanishing point), and hybridized them with modern technologies: laser rays, video projections, holograms, and photographs.

In this work, baroque artifice merged with an antinomy of true and false: the contrast between marble floor and stucco columns, the presence of thirty live doves and a profusion of white plastic flowers.[22] This major work foreshadowed a whole series of aesthetic strategies that were reworked and expanded in a new phase of work called "operation theater."

In her analysis of ORLAN's art, Christine Buci-Glucksmann speaks of the "triumph of the baroque," understood as an art of effects that in turn generate affects and make it possible to "transgress the established norms . . . the models of femininity."[23]

ORLAN's work sets out from an extremely critical position, going against the Christian tradition that "rejects the body and especially the body-pleasure principle . . . It suggests a guilty body, a suffering body, a body that needs to suffer."[24] That is why all the saints and Madonnas that the artist presents are always ecstatic and exultant. A baroque declined in the feminine, as it were, and seeking to seduce. Did not Eugenio d'Ors declare that the baroque is a woman?[25]

However, not content with situating her poetics in a baroque context, ORLAN produced a singularly personal reinterpretation of the subtle subversive element that underlies the baroque. A subversive element that the artist transformed into a poetics of excess, irreverence, and sarcasm, generating an effect of disorientation and fragmentation and entering the particular field of postmodernism, that of the "end of the grand narratives."[26] This disorientation was further accentuated by a profusion of multimedia supports—video, photography, film, hologram—with a polysemous aim that refused to single-out a specific viewpoint, a unique focus: "After the Counter-Reformation, at the time of Kepler, it was seen that the world was not built on the basis of the primitive figure of the circle, but around two centers and formed an ellipse."[27] ORLAN contrasted the motif of the double center that characterizes baroque cosmology with the question of the breast, reducing its anatomical duality to a symbolic unity: "The second breast is hardly ever shown. This single, therefore phallic, showing intrigued me a great deal. I concluded that there must be something of a man beneath these Madonnas—that they were male stories, told by men for men."[28] In the final analysis, showing a single breast became a reaction to the castrating view of woman that the Catholic religion offers. From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, therefore, the phallic exposure of a single breast refers to the metaphor of a femininity crushed and stunted by Catholicism.[29]

Étude documentaire : Le Drapé le Baroque n° 28 (Documentary Study: The Draped the Baroque No. 20), 1979
photographie noir et blanc collée sur aluminium/ aluminum-backed black and white cibachrome
100 x 100 cm
Édition de/Edition of 7
Photo Luc Wauman
Courtesy the artist

ORLAN's iconographic investigation was meticulous and did not stop at merely taking samples from the works of others. It involved a series of quotations and references that were the conclusion of profound theoretical meditation and cultural mediations. ORLAN occupied a position at a crossroads between iconographic reflection, art history, and psychoanalysis, as Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni declared in *La robe*.[30] This Lacanian psychoanalyst associates the theme of ORLAN's sacred travesties with the problem of self-generation—a fundamental motif in the artist's poetics. "Most audible in the silence deepened by the mother's absence is ORLAN's mute plea to a young woman who might remake her. For her all too real mother is for ORLAN like she had never been where she was wanted. For want of finding that mother, she remakes herself."[31]

Thus the "transfiguration" into Saint ORLAN was intended to alter our way of looking at certain representations in those archaisms that have to do with woman, and it denounced the hypocrisy of a society that traditionally divided the image of woman into two antithetical stereotypes: the saint and the whore. ORLAN set one against the other as she played with

Carte postale d'ORLAN derrière le distributeur automatique ou presque voilà la vérité sur l'affaire (Postcard of ORLAN behind the Vending Machine), 1978
Édition de/Edition of 500

this age-old dichotomy. The two faces of the bipolar portrayals (white virgin/black virgin, virgin/whore) were sometimes shown simultaneously, as in the action entitled *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* (Kiss the Artist). ORLAN presented herself, uninvited, at the FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain) in Paris. On a platform there was a chair supporting a cuirass-like molding representing her naked torso. In the middle of the molding there was a transparent slot in which to insert a five-franc coin that fell into a container placed level with the pubis. Beside the artist there was a photo of Saint ORLAN in an ecstatic pose, gazing up towards the sky, offering her breasts beneath the open folds of her immaculate tunic. She sold kisses, real kisses, artist's kisses, to an astounded public: "Come along, come along, come to my pedestal, the pedestal of myths: the mother, the whore, and the artist."[32] The coin entitled one to a *baiser* (a deliberately ambiguous term, because it also refers to the sexual act). The more bashful customers could also put their coin in a box and light a candle for the saint instead of receiving a kiss. Saint and whore. Two antithetical but complementary roles in the macho imagination that relegates the canonical role of woman to a range that lies between those two extremes. Two texts written in collaboration with Hubert Besacier, *Face à une société de mères et de marchands* (Facing a Society of Mothers and Merchants) and *Art et prostitution* (Art and Prostitution) explained the action. When questioned by *Le matin de Paris*, ORLAN explained her intentions unequivocally: "By using my body as material I am questioning the art market and claiming the right of women to own and control their own body."[33]

Pictures of ORLAN's action were shown in Philippe Bouvard's television program "Le dessus du panier" and created a scandal: the artist was immediately dismissed without notice by the school in Lyon where she trained cultural activity organizers. Despite public protests and strikes by students demanding the withdrawal of the dismissal, ORLAN was not taken back onto the staff. Fourteen years later, however, *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* was purchased by a public collection, the Fonds régional d'Art Contemporain des Pays de la Loire.

The Aesthetic Body: *La réincarnation de Sainte ORLAN*

The question of the unpresentable . . . is, in my view, the only one to which it is worth devoting one's life and thought in the coming century.
J.F. Lyotard[34]

The series of surgery-performances is a project that originated with a double name: *Image(s)-nouvelle(s) image(s)* (Image[s] - New Image[s]) and *La réincarnation de Sainte ORLAN* (Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN) (1990–1993). The first name sanctioned and gave official recognition to the transition to a new phase of work; the second was an ironic reference to the artist's faithful alter ego, who at this point was reincarnated to present the climax of a long cognitive process.

This was the extremely personal, provocative "other way" proposed by the artist, in an attempt to go beyond the crisis that was besetting performance art. She imagined an operation that would be an "action work," in which the residual trace was not confined to a support separate from the work or a pale simulacrum. The annexing of cosmetic surgery as an artistic medium, the subject/object of the performance, led ORLAN to a double detachment from her previous work: going beyond the traditionally fleeting and ephemeral event in itself, which henceforth was crystallized, perpetuated, and directly embodied in the artist's body; and a definitive detachment from the theme of the body in its traditional connotation.

Conscious of the novelty of her message, the artist followed avant-garde tradition and drew up and pub-

lished a manifesto that gave official sanction to this new form of expression. Even in its name, carnal art deliberately differentiated itself from the paradigm of body art.

Étude documentaire: Urgence G.E.U. (Documentary Study: **Ectopic Emergency) certainly represents an important antecedent in ORLAN's artistic and existential course. This work had been presented in the second symposium of performance art in Lyons[35] (1979). It was not a planned operation; it was surgery that the artist had to undergo urgently, and she immediately decided to photograph and film it, in accordance with the principle that assimilates life to a "recoverable aesthetic phenomenon." The operation was performed with local anesthetic. ORLAN watched it as a conscious spectator; she reacted to a dramatic event that was part of her private life and, in an impulse of aestheticism, she made a performance of it. Once again ART blended and became confused with life, once more the private became public under the effect of a hypernarcissistic urge that exorcised time and reestablished the need for an artistic viewpoint.

"During the operation I was very moved by the pyramidal structure with the surgeon at the summit and the assistants who handed the instruments, the light that fell from the ceiling as well as the concentration, and I thought that one day I would work again with surgery."[36] The operation theater that emerged in the nineties was completely different. ORLAN imposed her presence as an artist even in the operating room, traditionally an anonymous, aseptic place, and transformed it into a kind of entertainment theater. The reinterpretation of the baroque aesthetic, a veritable leitmotiv in the artist's protean activities, was enacted in operation after operation by means of parody and the grotesque. A host of allegories, and carnivalesque or Bacchic symbols, invaded the scene. Practically all the operations bore the "signature" of a designer who created the costumes for the artist, the medical team, and the film crew. ORLAN was only given an epidural for the operation, as she had to remain fully conscious throughout the time that she was in the operating room. The important thing was that she should be the leading performer and the director throughout the drama that was being performed.

A kind of rite was enacted, with ORLAN as the vestal virgin. It was a *hic est enim corpus meum* ("this is my body") without any Eucharistic value, in which the artist became the priestess of a pagan rite that presented the unpresentable and revealed the *hic et nunc* of what, by definition, should not be shown. It was a paradigm of impossible appropriation, an updating of the poetics of the open body beloved by Bataille, "eviscerating" the absolute of eroticism beyond the skin, amid internal organs, driving the consequences of the act of denudation to the extreme.[37]

ORLAN achieved her aim: the operating room was transformed into an artist's studio. All the operations were accompanied by the reading of a text, carefully chosen and selected by the artist, who recited it in the operating room as long as she was able. The text translated what the body sought to express, inverting "the Christian principle of the word that is made flesh into the flesh that is made word."[38] The action began with the reading of an extract from *La robe*: a robe (dress) is a mere external appearance, but it is also a wrapping that envelops the body and conceals the skin, a metaphor for the divergence between being and appearing, a divergence that ORLAN reduced by means of surgery, at the same time eliminating the distance between art and life. An extract from this book was read as an overture to all the subsequent operations: "The skin is disappointing . . . I have an angel's skin, but I am a jackal . . . a woman's skin, but I am a man. I never have the skin of what I am."[39] The first operations were very cautious. ORLAN gradually explored this new medium and personally sounded out its risks and limits. The first operation, with the symbolic title *Art charnel* (Carnal Art), took place in Paris on July 20, 1990. The artist had hundreds of white plastic flowers placed in the operating room. Charlotte Calberg made the costumes. An enlargement of *La naissance d'ORLAN sans coquille* dominated the room. The residual trace of the operation, fat removed from the artist's legs and face, was used to fill airtight reliquaries of transparent resin, modeled on ORLAN's limbs.

The second operation, *Opération dite de la licorne* (Unicorn Operation), took place barely five days later, on July 25, in the presence of just one photographer. The artist's technical crew had been reduced to the essential in response to the surgeon's protests. In addition to the text by Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, ORLAN read an extract from Julia Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* while the surgeon placed an implant in her chin. In September 1990, there was a third operation: a liposuction of legs and ankles, performed with local anesthetic. A video of the first operation was projected on the operating table. ORLAN had arranged for transcriptions of conversations with surgeons that had refused to operate on her to be copied on the walls. The mighty machinery of the media went into action. A scientific journal relaunched the debate about the moral aspect of operations of this kind that seem to go beyond purely aesthetic interests and touch on the domain of madness, with a pathological connotation.[40] The fourth operation, *Opération réussie* (Successful Operation), was performed on December 8, 1991. Paco Rabanne made sumptuous costumes for the occasion, with silver plates that harmonized perfectly with the scenic design that ORLAN had organized in the operating room. There were fake marble vases, with real vegetables and fruit and a lobster in the vases on one side, and in another vase the same products, but made of plastic. During the operation, true and false, living and artificial mingled. Quotations inspired by surrealism blended with allusions to the baroque, for example in the form of two crosses that ORLAN handled during the operation—one black and the other white—manichean images of Good and Evil, Life and Death. The operation concluded with a liposuction, and the lips were refashioned

with the scalpel. Pictures of the operation were used to make fourteen triptychs of photographs and a series of *Grands reliquaires* (Large Reliquaries) for the exhibition *My Flesh, the Text and the Languages* organized at the Penine Hart Gallery in New York in April 1993. The fifth surgery-performance, in July 1991, was *Opération-opéra* (Operation-Opera). The costumes were by Frank Sorbier, who arrayed the artist in a black dress with large colored motifs, with small red gloves, and parodic accessories that deliberately contrasted with a flamboyant Harlequin's hat. The reading from *La robe* was followed by an extract from Michel Serres's *Le tiers-instruit*, the text of which was subsequently engraved in twenty languages on glass reliquaries and framed in metal. Exhibited in the central part, in a kind of updated *fenestella confessionis*, a few grams of the artist's flesh were immersed in a special liquid, Bouin's fixative, that ensured preservation. The sixth operation, *Sacrifice*, took place in the context of a performance festival in Liege, in February 1993. The accompanying reading was an extract from Antonin Artaud's text about the *Corps sans organes*. Three skulls placed in the operating room enriched and completed the setting. The operation was a liposuction of the face and abdomen. On November 21, 1993, there was a seventh operation, *Omniprésence* (Omnipresence), of a decidedly more radical nature, marking a break in relation to the previous operations. In the pale green room, there were various clocks corresponding to different time zones, evoking the dislocation of time and space. There was a man wearing a black mask and a woman in an enormous green hat translated each item into sign language. ORLAN was dressed in a long black pleated dress by Issey Miyake, exhibiting a skull symbolizing vanity. Attached to it were the silicon implants that she was going to have inserted, similar to the ones that are usually inserted in cheekbones, but the artist had decided to have them placed in her temples, just above the arch of the eyebrows. The video of the operation, undoubtedly the most unbearable of them all to watch, showed the surgeon's firm, calm hand drawing lines on the face of ORLAN, seated on the operating table, to mark where she was going to operate. After ORLAN had lain down and received an anesthetizing injection, the surgeon made a deep incision in the artist's face. Blood flowed freely. The skin that had been peeled back revealed her inner face. ORLAN smiled calmly and replied to questions live. The photographs of the operation served as a visual manifesto of carnal art, showing that ORLAN did not suffer despite having her body opened up. The people that suffered were those that saw the raw images. The operation, recorded on video for CBS, was broadcast simultaneously in various parts of the world: in the Sandra Gering Gallery in New York, the McLuhan Center in Toronto, the Multimedia Center in Banff, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, where there was a round-table discussion with Norbert Hillaire, Gladys Fabre, Christian Vanderborght, Serge François, Jean-Paul Fargier, and Pierre Restany. A video camera recorded the (easily imaginable) spontaneous impressions of the invited critics. The outcome of the operation was an installation, *Omniprésence*, at the Sandra Gering Gallery in New York. It consisted of an impressive photographic fresco in the form of diptychs that became more numerous every day, and it clearly showed the intermediate state, the puffy, swollen, convalescent, postoperative face of ORLAN produced by the "body machine," juxtaposed with a digital image in the lower part of the work: a portrait of the artist made by the "computer machine" with the aid of "morphing," hybridizing her face with emblematic images of beauty selected from masterpieces of Western painting. They were shown in succession during the forty days of the exhibition. The installation also contained the final portrait, some resin

reliquaries of human flesh, and the gown of the surgeon, Dr. Cramer. *Omniprésence* marked a twofold transcending of limits in the artist's progress: in the process of transformation of physiognomy and identity—which now shifted to the terrain of what was radically "other" and thus inaugurated the mutationist paradigm of carnal art—and in terms of media impact.

The artist constantly made use of the media system, in an ascending progression from her early appropriation of Minitel[41] to *Omniprésence*, in which ORLAN's body dematerialized into the "acorporality of the virtual" (P. Virilio) to be broadcast on the television network. Suspended between defiguration and refiguration, the mechanism of transfiguration of the saint of olden times reached its highest point in a kind of ubiquitous hypertechnological epiphany, introducing a reflection on the relationship between art, new technologies, and the possibilities of expression bound up with the new communication media. The artist had already begun to use these technologies in the eighties, for multimedia performances. Thus the baroque virgin, already a "high-tech" hybrid, broadened the field of the visible to the immaterial scene. A supplementary operation was performed in New York a week later, accompanied by the reading of Sanskrit texts, leading to the production of *Saints Suaires* (Holy Shrouds), pieces of gauze soaked in the artist's blood and bodily fluids. When they dried, the fluids gave innumerable nuances to the gauze. A portrait of ORLAN done at the time of the surgical operation was then printed on this unusual support by photographic transfer. The historical reference was certainly to the Holy Shroud. ORLAN offered an updated version of the veil that the pious Veronica placed on Christ's bloodless face, a veil that runs through all the iconography of Western painting, from early Christianity to ORLAN. A ninth operation, the last to date, took place in New York, a liposuction to collect the fat required to make some neon and Plexiglas reliquaries. These reliquaries played on the combination of two traditionally opposed elements—flesh and light—represented by neon as a halo. ORLAN subsequently reused the photographs from this last operation in *Pièce lumineuse* (Luminous Room) (2004),[42] a sensual, deformable, sentient operating room, displaced to another time and another space. A way of returning to the reflection on the poetics of operations with the necessary critical distance.

With carnal art, ORLAN "put into operation" what I would call an aestheticized defunctionalization of the act of surgery, in which aesthetic surgery was used outside any medical legitimacy as a means of transformation of oneself and of the Self, but also in order to produce works of art.

This latter aspect is the most important part of the operation act, which ORLAN herself defined as "a moment of passage between two images, between two states,"[43] for "the operating theater is above all a place for the production of artworks."[44]

The incisions, ablations, sutures, and removal of flesh and fat in the operation became the direct material for the construction of artworks that included *Reliquaires* (Reliquaries), containing parts of the artist's body, drawings, and self-portraits made with her blood during the operation, pieces of gauze and *Suaires* (Shrouds), not forgetting the residual trace of the event: photographs of the operating room and the film of the operation directed by herself.

The work that ORLAN arranged to be done on herself was presented as the exploding of an aesthetic canon, a wild demiurgic determination, a visionary work in progress, an inverted narcissism. The artist chose her transformations pragmatically, referring once again to the theme of self-generation in the most radical way possible. The exploration of the theme was taken to its furthest consequences: a "constructed repersonalization" that rejected the burden of genetic heredity "in accordance with the artistic project of a new beauty that belongs only to her and that is offered to us in the sacred sacrificial enclosure of art,"[45] within a perspective of "radical demystification of the act of surgery,"[46] by which "this great demystificator of identity attains the summit of her art, the most aesthetic of moral acts."[47]

Michel Onfray acutely remarked: "For the first time, too, a transvaluation of values was put into operation, permitting a shift from aesthetic surgery to the aesthetics of surgery."[48]

I am reminded of Paul Valéry, when he imagined the astonishment of the body violated by the surgeon, that explorer of the abysses and labyrinths of the life of a stranger's body that he reads and interprets like an exegete. Valéry explained that the art of surgery embodies in itself the very meaning of making manually[49] (and the Greek word χειρ, one of the etymological roots of "surgery," means hand). The act of surgery ceases to be private and secret and becomes public, in accordance with the principle of reversal of the norms commonly admitted by our anesthetized society. It was this very principle that had led ORLAN, some years earlier, to wash her soiled linen "in public" and to display her rejection of purity with stains of sperm.

ORLAN's work touches on anthropology, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and science. It delves into all these disciplines, constantly supported by the mass media system. In it there is a simultaneous questioning of identity, the taboos connected with opening the body, the shattered myths of a vanished femininity, the sphere of public and private, and the limits of art, language, and life.

The criticism effected by ORLAN is scathing. She makes use of knowledge whose limits she takes pleasure in exploring. Her work has to do with disagreeable situations, a kind of alarm signal reflecting the profound existential malaise that torments our age.

Again and again there have been reactions of rejection and disgust. If the artistic use of surgery is a mat-

ter of scandal for the media, in the "art world" it is a constant cause for irritation. Many people have dwelt on this woman's presumed madness, and accusations have rained down. ORLAN makes a radical engagement, with the greatest naturalness living out the "artistic monomania" that some psychiatrists say she is affected by. This is just as well: "Sickness and the pathological are always very interesting in art."[50] Beyond the subtle demarcation line that separates madness from eccentricity, ORLAN is an artist fully conscious of her acts, moved by a remarkable theoretical lucidity. Her brutality and her work show no indulgence towards herself or towards the public. They go straight to the heart of highly topical, hotly debated issues.

The fact that ORLAN's work disconcerts those that approach it is understandable. To apprehend it correctly one must adopt a system of values that frees itself from humanism and moves outside it, opening up to a new, different, inorganic sensibility that comes from the encounter between the senses and objects, based "on philosophy, on a readiness or accustomedness to think in terms of extremes."[51] The artist's work seeks to go beyond classical aesthetics and attain a neutral aesthetics in which the experience of horror introduces an indeterminate dimension of the grotesque, without distinguishing between human beings and things, between the organic and inorganic worlds, between the living and the non-living. ORLAN's aesthetics develops separately and obscurely in relation to classical aesthetics, by the production of "works in which what counts most is effect, excitation, and excess."[52]

With the backing of Aristotle's *De anima*, Lacan declared that if anything constitutes the basis of existence, it is the body.[53] Nothing is more intimate or more secret than the body. In this regard, ORLAN's use of plastic surgery takes on the appearance of an ontological rethink. "The ontology of the body is ontology itself," Nancy adds. "Being is not something that precedes or underlies the phenomenon. The body is the being of existence."[54] At this point ORLAN called the body into question in radical fashion, as if questioning all her previous work and making a *tabula rasa* of the past. A deliberate act.

The Obsolete Body: The Mutationist Paradigm

Our current post-modern era can be characterized
as a transitional period of the disintegration of self.
Perhaps the coming 'post-human' period will be characterized
by the reconstruction of self.
J. Deitch[55]

ORLAN's operations fit perfectly into the mutationist paradigm that characterizes the return to body themes in the nineties. At that point the debate about postmodernism gradually gave way to the idea of posthumanism and mutation spread by nomadism and fruitful exchanges between different cultures and systems of thought. Science and genetics issued a great challenge to artists that championed the postulate of the obsolescence of the body, establishing the definitive transcending of the body themes of the sixties.

"The role of the demiurge has shifted: it now belongs not to the artist, but to the scientist,"[56] ORLAN declared; or, even more provocatively: "The place of the avant-garde is no longer in art, it is in genetics."[57] Artists became receptive to biotechnology. The art of the nineties abounded in prosthetic devices, hybrids, clones, monsters, and transplants—offshoots of an unrestrained genetics that filled art magazines and exhibitions. The new technologies were on the way to overwhelming human beings and their world. Artists went along with this inexorable movement. Science and ART turned towards the future.

ORLAN became involved in this debate early on, in 1990. She was the first artist to speak of the mutating body. "When the body comes back into the foreground in an obvious manner and technology moves forward in leaps and bounds, we ask ourselves about the future of human beings. What will their place be? What pressure will the human body be subject to and what will its status be?"[58]

It was a question of rethinking the body as an imperious necessity, a body that became both subject and object of endless combinations. Primarily, this imperative acquired the connotation of an anthropological mutation that led to deconstruction of the biological model and modification of the concept of otherness. In his study of the relationship between anthropology and modernity,[59] David Le Breton made a fundamental observation: if Freud could state that anatomy is destiny, anthropology theorizes that it has been definitively superseded. "In our societies, the malleability of the self and the plasticity of the body have become commonplaces. Anatomy is no longer a destiny, but an accessory of presence, raw material to be fashioned and redefined, subjected to the design of the moment."[60] There was a transition that Anders discerned at a very early point, from the model of *homo faber* to the new figure of *homo creator*.[61] Differences multiplied. Identity was transformed into an entity in which "the body becomes a blank page, a degree zero of expressivity, starting from which all assemblages, all operations, and all presentations are possible, and one can say that an activity such as ORLAN's is a rather good example of this multidimensional, multimedia evolution of bodily self-expressivity."[62] ORLAN's body was open to all alterations—radical, modulatable proof of her personal existence, a manifesto of a constantly developing identity.

The theme of the mutant body also became a research field for fashion, movies, and music. In just a few

years, the French artist became an emblematic figure for a whole generation of creative minds; a significant example of dialogue between the art world and the world of fashion, a prolific encounter between two universes.

In 1996, Jeremy Scott called his first fashion show *Body Modification* in homage to ORLAN. In 1998, Walter Van Beirendonck (W & LT) made his models parade with false swellings on their temples, inspired by ORLAN's protuberances. For his exhibition *Believe!* at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam he asked the artist to participate in the production of a catalogue by posing among mannequins displaying false swellings similar to hers. For the occasion the artist wore an enormous false nose emerging from the middle of her forehead, based on a picture of King Pacal, a Mayan divinity. In this way, ORLAN set out to destabilize the conventional aesthetics of fashion by playing on the antimony between true and false, protuberances and false nose, one of the key motifs of her poetics.

In a period characterized by the need to rethink the body, to multiply and contaminate it, a network of convergences of change emerged. The movies, music, literature, and ART rallied under the banner of mutation and agreed on the need to study the body. In this connection, I would speak of sister mutations, in the same way that painting and poetry were considered sister arts in the Renaissance, as in the saying *Ut pictura poesis*. In this open field of sister mutations, the subsequent collaboration between ORLAN, mutant artist par excellence, and David Cronenberg takes on a very special significance. The film director submitted a film scenario to the artist based on the idea of a generation—a future civilization—that would not know pain. As if in a reality show, the scenario included the opening and closing of ORLAN's body in a context similar to her "operation theater." This is the meaning of *Painkillers*, the crowning achievement of a series of common reflections on the theme of the body.

Cronenberg considers the body as malleable, visceral material. Mutation and the mechanism of self-generation from the biological body to the hybridized body are the common theme linking all his work, from *Shivers* and *Videodrome* to *The Fly* and, more recently, *eXistenZ*.

The correspondence between the work of the filmmaker and the artist is particularly apparent in the film *Dead Ringers*. Cronenberg presents a ritualization, a sacred metamorphosis of the act of surgery, to the extent that I think that here, too, it is legitimate to speak of "operation theater." Before operating, Beverly Mantle submits to a process of being garbed that takes on the sense of a solemn rite of preparation for sacrifice. The operating gown, a kind of bright red chasuble, matches the assistants' uniforms and the walls of the room, the color of which is heightened by the aseptic lighting of a shadowless operating lamp. The scene, already imbued with a somewhat hieratic quality, is bathed in a very pictorial surreal light. The film shows a progressive radicalization of the act of surgery: Beverly no longer operates for a specific purpose, but for the pleasure of operating, of performing the rite. The act of surgery becomes pure, invested with the same aestheticized defunctionalization that characterized ORLAN's "surgical aesthetics," with which it establishes an interesting parallel.

ORLAN's latest project, *Le manteau d'Arlequin*, which I would describe as "videodromic" and which is still "on the stocks," also has to do with new skin.

Using the most advanced features of biotechnology, the artist returns to the theme of self-generation from a new and unexpected angle. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Australian collective Symbiotica, which for a long time has been engaged in research on cell tissues. In a special laboratory, they are currently trying to grow cultures of cells from the artist's skin, hybridized with cells from people and animals of

various origins. The long-term aim is to obtain scraps of skin of assorted appearances, a "Harlequin's coat" that might be a metaphor for contemporary crossbreeding as described by Michel Serres in "Laïcité," the preface to *Le tiers-instruit*. This text was also used to accompany the fifth operation performance, *Opération-opéra*. The body now exists in terms of display, entirely in terms of the surface of what is ex-posed, as in a painting;[63] in its *ex-peau-sition* to itself and others it reveals a double framework. Exposing and covering up, nudity declined in accordance with the intimacy of the interior and exposed to the intrusion of others. Mario Perniola aptly inverts the basic dualism of soul and body in Western thinking, too similar to constitute a genuine opposition, and declares himself in favor of a new opposition between life and clothing that finally makes it possible to "take the body in its vestimentary exteriority, in its essence as an object,"[64] in which "the experience of clothing as body is prolonged, extended, and radicalized to the experience of the body as clothing."[65]

The Diffuse Body: *Self-hybridations*

Virtuality is not a simulation,
an imitation, a mimicry of reality,
but an entry into another dimension,
ontologically different, as it were.
M. Perniola[66]

"The sphere of the archaic and the expressive sovereignty of the image accompany the path of the disintegration of the self and the loss of subjective identity."[67] This is the perspective that corresponds to the postoperation works that make up the series *Self-hybridations* (Self-Hybridizations) (1998–2007), a supplementary stage in ORLAN's protean activity. "Contrary to what I set out to do in the surgical operations, the *Self-hybridations* series do not belong to the transformations of my flesh—my 'phenomenological body'—but to pixels of virtual flesh, mixed with non-organic material and my own image, itself actually reworked by surgery."[68]

Each day the artist continues to stretch and push back the limits of her "journey through an infinity of possible physical identities,"[69] in an evanescent confusion of material and immaterial, confronting the canons of ideal beauty in Western and non-Western cultures. It is an exciting journey that short-circuits archaism and cyberculture, different civilizations and aesthetics, and unimaginable gulfs of space and time. ORLAN is in perpetual motion, creating non-organic new identities, hybridizing pre-Columbian, African, and American Indian icons with her own image, itself transformed by surgery, thus producing a complex narrative that mingles real and unreal, self and other. The humanist vision of identity, self-centered and withdrawn into the myth of its anthropic purity, not disposed to welcome otherness, is contrasted by Donna Haraway, not without a touch of provocativeness, with the "utopian" image of the cyborg, a hybrid creature composed of organic and inorganic that refers symbolically to a mixed, impure identity, contaminated by the non-human and in constant metamorphosis.[70] The new models of subjectivity that emerge in this context are characterized by their "ontological promiscuity"[71] and by a receptiveness to hybridization that once again places this new phase of ORLAN's work in an avant-garde perspective.

Refiguration Self-hybridation, série indienne-américaine n° 6 : portrait peint de Ru-Ton-Ye-Wee-Ma, Strutting Pigeon, Wife Of White Cloud, avec un portrait photographique d'ORLAN (Refiguration Self-Hybridization, American Indian Series, No. 6: Painting Portrait of Ru-Ton-Ye-Wee-Ma, Strutting Pigeon, Wife of White Cloud, with ORLAN's Photographic Portrait), 2005
image numérique/digital photograph
124,4 x 152,4 cm
Édition de/Edition of 5 + 1
Courtesy of Galerie Michel Rein, Paris

In *Self-hybridations précolombiennes* (Pre-Columbian Self-Hybridizations) (1998–2000), the artist used "morphing" software to hybridize her new face with masks and votive statuettes of the Olmecs, Mayas, Incas, and Aztecs, which are the expression of aesthetic canons from the past, extremely different and distant from those of today.

The *Self-hybridations africaines* (African Self-Hybridizations) (2000–2003) were obtained by mixing a portrait of the artist with ethnographic photographs of African tribes. This series of pictures, mostly in black and white, recalls the first "exotic" photographs that began to circulate in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. As in the first series, the updat-

ed fetish masks reveal distant canons of beauty from another civilization.

In the *Self-hybridations amérindiennes* (American-Indian Self-Hybridizations) (2005–2007), ORLAN hybridized her own image with portraits painted by George Catlin between 1830 and 1835, representing people belonging to various American tribes. The aim was to make the works as "live" as possible, almost tangible in their virtuality and fascinating in their sometimes disturbing appearance. The *Self-hybridations* are totemic figures with an artificial otherness that is seductive. This new phase of the artist's work, presenting a confrontation between new technologies and references to pre-Columbian archeology or African and American Indian ethnic groups, is a way of reinterpreting the "collision of time"[72] that Pierre Restany describes by means of the paradoxical status of a now dead civilization, an aesthetic canon revealed by archeology or simply very remote from us, that ORLAN's virtual intervention brings back to life. "With my [pre-Columbian or African] *Self-Hybridizations* we are faced with a virtual time in which there is a close conjunction of the past of those cultures, the recent past of my own photograph, and the future of this image, its future as an artwork seen by viewers, and the fantasized future that it suggests."[73]

The works in this series evoke the motif of the mask, which alludes to an identity and becomes its complementary instrument and accomplice. As Marcel Mauss remarks, a masquerade brings a multiplicity of roles, names, and functions into play, and also their potential annulment.[74] The process of the masquerade takes up an even more radical position at the heart of a vast symbology of the body that becomes a dynamic, serial, multiple stratification—a linguistic assemblage of a physio-psycho-sociological nature.[75] In its permanent process of construction, ORLAN's body presents a fleeting disguise suitable for describing the fluidity of an embodied physical subject that reaches the level of the artistic production of signs or an unlimited process. ORLAN: ∞.

1. "Soit à écrire, non pas du corps, mais le corps même. Non pas la corporéité, mais le corps. Non pas les signes, les images, les chiffres du corps, mais encore le corps." J.L. Nancy, *Corpus*. Paris: Métailié, 1992, p. 12.
2. "Exposer des œuvres peintes me semble être un acte de dissimulation, un retour en arrière, déclarera plus tard l'artiste, peindre revient à refuser d'assumer pleinement son propre exhibitionnisme, à porter un masque." G. Fabre, "Femme sur les barricades: ORLAN brandit le laser," *Skaï and sky et vidéo*, Galerie J. & J. Donguy, Tierce, Paris, 1984.
3. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955, p. 204.
4. F. Menna, *Il progetto moderno dell'arte*. Milan: G. Politi, 1988, p. 43.
5. "l'archi-tectonique du sens," J.L. Nancy, *Corpus*, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.
6. Among the more noteworthy actions in this series were: *Projet de mesuRage - ceci n'est pas un vœu* (MeasuRage Project - This Is Not A Vow) (St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, 1974); *Le mesuRage* (MeasuRage) of the Benedictine convent of Saint-Pierre in Lyons (1979); *Dans une certaine mesure, la mesure est comble* (To a Certain Measure, the Measure Is Complete) (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1977); *Le mesuRage* of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, 1983).
7. P. Restany, "ORLAN, il più estetico degli atti morali," *D'Ars*, no. 137, fall 1992, p. 130.
8. Action performed in the Neue Galerie of the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst in Aachen in 1978.
9. S. Freud, "Das Medusenhaupt" [1922], *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Imago*, XXV, 1940, pp. 105–106.
10. "C'est ce détail du corps [l'œil] qui, par la ressemblance extérieure qu'il entretient avec la nature de la femme [...], la *coincidentia oppositorum* qui réunit ce qu'il y a de plus noble dans le corps, vultus, et ce qu'il y a de plus bas, vulva, c'est cette mimique terrifiante qui se joue sans cesse entre le regard et cela qui l'attire [...] parce que [le regard] est devenu cette entreprise totalitaire qui réunit les contrastes." J. Clair, *Le nu et la norme. Klimt et Picasso en 1907*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 73.
11. "représenterait, à vingt-sept siècles de distance, la plus ancienne figuration connue de Méduse." J. Clair, *Méduse: contribution à une anthropologie des arts du visuel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 23.
12. "L'érotisme métaphysique de la médusation est un sûr témoin du déni des corps, avertit Nancy. Méduse en arrête le trait, en paralyse l'extension: il reste une masturbation de l'œil." J.L. Nancy, *Corpus*, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.
13. "Le baroque, c'est la régulation de l'âme par la scopie corporelle." J. Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XX, Encore*. Paris: Seuil, 1975, p. 105.
14. G. Didi-Huberman, *La peinture incarnée*. Paris: Minuit, 1985.
15. "Nulle part comme dans le christianisme, l'œuvre d'art comme telle ne s'avère de façon plus patente pour ce qu'elle est de toujours et partout – obscénité." J. Lacan, *Le séminaire*, *Op. cit.*, p. 103.
16. G. Bataille, *Les larmes d'Éros*. Paris: Pauvert, 1961, pp. 77–78.
17. Lea Vergine, "La Body Art. Conversazione con Angelo Trimarco," in *Figure dell'Arte 1950-2000*, Stefania Zuliani, ed. Milan: Modo, 2005, pp. 68–69.
18. "Le corps est affirmé et conçu comme un choix, il devient le lieu du récit, le lieu privilégié du récit existentiel." E. Viola, "Conversation with Pierre Restany," in this catalogue, pp. 99.
19. "Dans tout ce qui a déferlé des effets du christianisme, dans l'art notamment [...], tout est exhibition de corps évoquant la jouissance." J. Lacan, *Le séminaire, Op. cit.*, p. 102.
20. "dit-mension de l'obscénité." Ibid.
21. At the E.L.A.C. in Lyons in 1980.
22. This work was documented in the 16-mm film *Mise en scène pour une Sainte* (1981), the climax of which is the presentation of a genuine ecstasy, achieved by means of dissolves.
23. "transgresser les normes établies, [...] les modèles du féminin." C. Buci-Glucksmann, *ORLAN, triomphe du baroque*. Marseilles: Images en Manœuvres, 2000, p. 12.
24. "a rejeté le corps, et particulièrement le corps-plaisir. [...] Elle propose un corps-coupable, un corps-souffrance, un corps qui doit souffrir." E. Viola, "Conversation with ORLAN," in this catalogue, p. 83.
25. E. d'Ors, *Lo barroco* [1935]. Madrid: Tecnos, 2002.
26. "fin des grands récits," J.F. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit, 1979.
27. "Après la contre-réforme, à l'époque de Kepler, on s'aperçoit que le monde n'a pas été construit sur la base de la figure primitive du cercle mais sur deux centres, formant l'ellipse." E. Viola, "Conversation with ORLAN," in this catalogue, p. 83.
28. "Le deuxième sein n'est presque jamais montré. Cette monstration unique, donc phallique m'a beaucoup intriguée. Je me disais qu'il y avait de l'homme sous ces madones, que c'était une histoire d'hommes faite par les hommes et pour les hommes." Ibid.
29. One must remember that this reflection was influenced by theories of the "universal phallus," very fashionable in France in the eighties, in the ambience of a type of psychoanalysis that hoped for the return of Freud under the aegis of Lacan.
30. E. Lemoine-Luccioni, *La robe. Essai psychanalytique sur le vêtement*. Paris: Seuil, 1983.

31. "S'entend surtout, dans le silence que l'absence de la mère creuse, l'appel muet d'ORLAN à une femme qui la refabriquerait. Car sa mère trop réelle est pour ORLAN comme si elle n'avait jamais été là où elle était demandée. Faute de trouver cette mère, elle se refabrique elle-même." E. Lemoine-Luccioni, Ibid., p. 141.
32. "Approchez-vous, approchez-vous, venez sur mon piédestal, celui des mythes: la mère, la putain et l'artiste." G. Fabre, "Femme sur les barricades . . .," *Op. cit.*, n.p.
33. "En utilisant mon corps comme matériau, je remets en cause le marché de l'art et je revendique le droit des femmes à disposer librement de leur corps." H. Besacier, *De l'Art charnel au Baiser de l'Artiste*. Paris: Jean Michel Place et fils, 1997, p. 52.
34. "La question de l'imprésentable [...] est à mes yeux la seule qui soit digne des enjeux de la vie et de la pensée dans le siècle qui vient." J.F. Lyotard, *L'inhumain, causeries sur le temps*. Paris: Galilée, 1988, p. 139.
35. ORLAN and Hubert Besacier organized an international symposium of performance art in Lyons between 1978 and 1983. This is a very interesting aspect of the work carried out by ORLAN, engaged then not only as an artist, but also to coordinate and publicize multidisciplinary artistic and cultural activities.
36. "Lors de cette opération, j'ai été très touchée par la structure pyramidale avec le chirurgien au sommet et les assistants qui passent les instruments, la lumière qui tombe du plafond, la concentration, et j'ai pensé qu'un jour ou l'autre, je retravaillerais avec la chirurgie." E. Viola, "Conversation with ORLAN," in this catalogue, p. 83.
37. G. Bataille, *Les larmes d'Éros*, *Op. cit.*
38. "le principe chrétien du verbe qui se fait chair au profit de la chair faite verbe." ORLAN, "Manifeste de l'art charnel," in *ORLAN, monographie multimédia*, CD-ROM, Jériko, Paris, 2000.
39. "La peau est décevante [...]. J'ai une peau d'ange mais je suis un chacal; [...] une peau de femme mais je suis un homme. Je n'ai jamais la peau de ce que je suis." E. Lemoine-Luccioni, *La robe*, *Op. cit.*, p. 95.
40. Dr. Cherif-Zahar, "Document, texte pour l'opération d'ORLAN," *Vie sociale et traitements*, nos. 23–24, September–December 1991, pp. 13–43.
41. In 1982, ORLAN created the first electronic magazine of contemporary art on Minitel, called *Art-Accès Revue*.
42. A large installation created in collaboration with the architect P. Chiambaretta.
43. "moment de passage entre deux images, entre deux états," E. Viola, "Conversation with ORLAN," in this catalogue, p. 83.
44. "le bloc opératoire est avant tout un lieu de production d'œuvres." Ibid., p. 83.
45. A. Bonito Oliva, "Il corpo glorioso," in *ORLAN, 1964–1996*. Rome: Diagonale, 1996, p. 6.
46. P. Restany, "ORLAN, il più estetico degli atti morali," *Op. cit.*, p. 131.
47. Ibid.
48. "Pour la première fois, aussi, on opère une transvaluation des valeurs qui permet le passage de la chirurgie esthétique à l'esthétique de la chirurgie." M. Onfray, "Esthétique de la chirurgie/Surgical Aesthetics," in *ORLAN: Ceci est mon corps... Ceci est mon logiciel/This Is My Body ... This Is My Software*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996, p. 21.
49. P. Valéry, *Discours aux chirurgiens*. Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
50. L. Vergine, "La Body Art. Conversazione con Angelo Trimarco," *Op. cit.*, p. 63.
51. M. Perniola, *Il sex appeal dell'inorganico*. Turin: Einaudi, 1994, p. 61.
52. Ibid., p. 99.
53. J. Lacan, *Le séminaire*, *Op. cit.*
54. "L'ontologie du corps est l'ontologie même: l'être n'y est rien de préalable ou de sous-jacent au phénomène. Le corps est l'être de l'existence." J.L. Nancy, *Corpus*, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.
55. J. Deitch, "Untitled," in *Post-Human*, Castello di Rivoli (Turin), October 1–November 22, 1992, n.p.
56. "Le rôle du démiurge s'est déplacé: il n'appartient plus à l'artiste, mais au scientifique." P. Dagen, "ORLAN, artiste, pionnière de la métamorphose corporelle," *Le Monde*, March 22, 2001.
57. "L'avant-garde n'est plus dans l'art, elle est dans la génétique." Ibid.
58. "Quand le corps revient sur le devant de la scène de manière évidente et que la technologie avance à grands pas, on s'interroge sur le devenir de l'être humain. Quelle sera sa place? À quelles pressions sera-t-il soumis et quel sera le nouveau statut du corps?" E. Viola, "Conversation with ORLAN," in this catalogue, p. 83.
59. D. Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*. Paris: P.U.F., 1990.
60. "Dans nos sociétés, la malléabilité de soi, la plasticité du corps deviennent des lieux communs. L'anatomie n'est plus un destin, mais un accessoire de la présence, une matière première à façonner, à redéfinir, à soumettre au design du moment." D. Le Breton, "Obsolescence du corps," in *Le corps mutant*, Galerie Enrico Navarra, 2001, p. 11.
61. G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992.
62. P. Restany, "Il Corpo in Mutazione," *D'Ars*, no. 165, 2001, p. 21.
63. J.L. Nancy, *Le regard du portrait*. Paris: Galilée, 2000.
64. M. Perniola, *Il sex appeal dell'inorganico*, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 38.
67. M. Fimiani, *Antropologia Filosofica*:Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2005, p. 77.
68. "Contrairement à ce que j'ai entrepris avec les opérations chirurgicales, les séries Self-hybridations n'inscrivent pas les transformations dans ma chair – mon 'corps phénoménologique' – mais dans les pixels de la chair virtuelle, mêlée à des matières non organiques et à ma propre représentation, elle-même réellement retravaillée par la chirurgie." ORLAN, "Virtuel et réel: dialectique et complexité," in *ORLAN Self-hybridations/Série précolombienne*. Paris: Al Dante, 2001, n.p.
69. E. Viola, "Conversation with Pierre Restany," in this catalogue, p. 99.
70. D. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 149–181.
71. R. Marchesini, *Post-human. Verso nuovi modelli di esistenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, p. 12.
72. E. Viola, "Conversation with Pierre Restany," in this catalogue, p. 99.
73. "Devant mes Self-hybridations [précolombiennes ou africaines], nous sommes devant un temps virtuel où se conjuguent étroitement le passé [de ces] cultures, le passé récent de ma propre photographie, et l'avenir de cette image, son futur en tant qu'œuvre vue par des spectateurs, et le futur fantasmé qu'elle suggère." ORLAN, *Op. cit.*, n.p.
74. M. Mauss, "Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de 'moi'," in *Sociologie et anthropologie*: Paris: P.U.F., 1950.
75. M. Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," in Ibid.

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The Process of Mediation as the Work's End Purpose with ORLAN

Joerg Bader

The apparatus of the media with their global presence and miniaturization has come closer to and even penetrated our bodies, and we have mutated to become media. We have become ganglions of information machines, of which as messenger and message we are the smallest part.
Gerhard Johann Lischka[1]

For the Dwarf

Part of the relevance of ORLAN's work lies in its ability to reach an audience well beyond confined contemporary art circles. The post-avant-garde movements have seen numerous artists turning their bodies into an image by making a work of their fleshly frame. But there are no more than a handful whose image has been conveyed massively by the mass media—people like Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Gilbert and George, or just recently Pipilotti Rist. ORLAN counts as one such artist. These artists are seeing one of the historic avant-gardes' dreams come true, achieved only by the Russian and Italian, Communist and Fascist, futurists in becoming involved in society's debates through the mass media.

With websites reproducing her image, the covers of magazines, reviews, and books hoping to catch the reader's attention with ORLAN's portrait (rarely with her body), and with TV shows in which she appears—there are dozens of them—the artist gets involved in local affairs through her proposals and provocations. By dint of imposing her images through *Marie-Claire* and TF 1 (France's leading TV channel), always depicting her in different roles and postures, the artist ends up having her say. She embodies and formulates the nebula known as "contemporary art." It is, to paraphrase the artist, "the flesh become word."

That her entire work falls along the lines traced by the historic avant-garde movements is something Bernard Blistène notes in his conversation with Christine Buci-Glucksmann in the monograph published in 2004. "Reaching the conclusion that the historic avant-garde movements have failed and that it is impossible to revive their project *as it stands*, he holds onto the idea that the artist has to step across the borders of ART with the aim of changing our lives." This sentence written by Peter Bürger in his essay "Das Altern der Moderne," published in German in 2001, applies equally well to ORLAN. Already, back in 1974, in "Die Theorie der Avant-Garde," Peter Bürger was stating the reason why no neo-avant-garde worthy of the name was possible unless it took the need for its failure as the locus of its project.

Any future detailed analysis of the reception of ORLAN's work by the mass media can only pass on this pertinent analysis. It is exemplary in the sense that the reception of ORLAN's work by the mass media is the failure she needs in order for it to come about. The artist has found an echo way beyond art circles thanks to, or precisely because of, the mass media. For, far from being satisfied with this echo, ORLAN keeps repeating that the mass media produces a reception, an interpretation of her surgical performances that is completely wrong. "There was no question of physically taking on the features of these characters [Venuses and other female bodies idealized as absolute beauty]," she stated firmly on November 3, 2002, on the French-speaking Swiss TV program "Faxculture" as she made gestures fending off the program's editor and presenter, Florence Heiniger. For the artist, the misunderstanding lies in the fact that the mass media wants to pin her down to an oppressive model they themselves convey day in day out in free association with fashion and advertising—one that she flatly refuses. To sum up: she is successful because the people who multiply and broadcast broadband images of her have got it wrong. It is to this extent that ORLAN's work can be compared to Peter Bürger's theory of the need for failure as a neo-avant-garde project.

"Can a work take on the derealization effects of the media system while itself avoiding them?" asks Jordi Vidal on the subject of the performer Yan Duyvendak in the DVD *Yan Duyvendak*, brought out by the Fonds cantonale of Geneva in 2005. He goes on: ". . . any work that rebels against its own time, and its forms of representation, runs the risk of collusion with the systems it is attempting to accuse and fight against. It is much more a matter of a *shared language* than merely being coopted . . . by exposing oneself to the laws of economics and market recognition, [the work] reformulates and renews the terms of reality with the attendant risk of losing itself." ORLAN is fully aware of this. Did she not herself set out her media future and its consequences in 1997 in her manifesto *Art charnel* (Carnal Art): ". . . this is why it [carnal art] is inscribed in the social sphere, in the media (where it is a scandal because it takes issue with the received wisdom) . . ."

In that sense, one can view the fake TV program she set up in 2001 as a critical, not entirely well-meaning, comment on the mass media by the artist. The discussion of that highbrow talk show was on a rehash of theoretical thinking on contemporary art over the last

few years: the relationship between ART and cinema. But the real opposition ORLAN brought to bear in this fake television studio set up at the Cartier Foundation in Paris was the confrontation between a representative of television and a representative of film. The artist had invited a genuine television presenter (Alain Maneval) and a real-life film director (Richard Dembo). In so doing, she was also pinpointing where the major social, economic, and aesthetic issues lie today, i.e. between cinema and television. (As an aside, the opposition between contemporary art and cinema seems to be no more than an appetizer for a floor that claims to be critical, but which comes running at the first sound of a billionaire in the luxury goods industry opening up his treasure like an unlicensed hawker selling replica fashion items on the Academia Bridge in Venice. To put it another way: are the contemporary critical forces really in favor of a whole sea change in human organization or just a change in their own lives? This is a question ORLAN asks insistently.)

But to come back to the artist's sweet revenge on the mass media. To make things clearer still, the artist had her "guests" ("well-known film critics, plastic artists, and finally, actors," the artist stated) perform, exclusively before a studio audience, i.e. the artist made possible an aura situation, as Walter Benjamin describes the theater and not cinema, as having. So ORLAN turned this TV show into theater while depriving the masses in her TV audience. The studio audience, unlike the people watching their plasma screens in the privacy of own living rooms, was receiving something live, this something that produces aura. ORLAN is as a television producer doing "on the spot" work close to Walter Benjamin writing about Baudelaire, the one describing ART after the failure of the avant-gardist project. ART is disenchanted, but cannot at the same time unguess itself. These are thoughts that Peter Bürger chases after in *The Aging of Modernity*: ". . . it is we who produce the enchantment of art through the spirit we create around it. Art is nothing without the institution."

Portrait d'ORLAN de profil
(Profile Portrait of ORLAN),
1998
photographie couleur/color photograph
50 x 60 cm
Photo Fabrice Lévêque

But when ORLAN does a satellite broadcast of her surgical performances, or when she exhibits photographs, she is close to the Walter Benjamin of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, that is to the philosopher noting the emancipation of the aesthetic experience from a schema still marked by the religious, thus causing the loss of aura. The same thing happens with ORLAN in a television studio. She is both an image and a living body. "The transformation of the body, the image metaphors and turning the body into an image and these images into a body are all woven into her works to represent and provoke changes." The sentence by Marion Scharmann-Frank on the work of performance and video artist Ulrike Rosenbach, who also does photography and other media as well, holds for ORLAN as well. Let us continue with the thoughts of the writer of the essay "The Interaction of the Body and Image" in *Beiträge zu Kunst und Medientheorie* (Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe, 2000), which again could be attributed to ORLAN: "It is the 'intermediacy' that makes the artist's contents such as feminism and death visible." These few lines are intended as an encouragement for a broader study that would imply a great work on the mediatic archives.

1. *The Media of Art, the Art of the Media*. Bern: Benteli, 2004.

Joerg Bader was born in 1955 in Zurich; he lives and works in Geneva. Critic and artist, he has curated *Decoraz(i)òn* (Tecla Sala, Barcelona, 1999), *Representation du travail/Travail de la représentation* (Geneva, 2003), and *PHOTO-TRAFIC* (Geneva, 2006). He has contributed to books and catalogues on Georg Aerni, Luc Andrié, Balthasar Burkhard, Yan Duyvendak, Michel François, Anton Henning, Jules Spinatsch, Bruno Serralongue (forthcoming), Jeff Wall. Since 2001 he has been Director of the Centre de la Photographie, Geneva, and in 2002 he began teaching at the art school of Perpignan. Since 2004 he has also been invited to teach at the Haute école d'art et de design in Geneva.

Identity Crisis or Identity Creation? Personal Narrative or Social Narrative? ORLAN's Search for Self through the Artistic History of the Self

Donald Kuspit

What is for me most impressive about ORLAN's art, and most engaging, is the way she identifies with female figures in works of art to establish, or at least suggest, a sense of self. Even though she knows that she is only living a fiction, and thus has not really achieved what psychoanalysts call a core or "foundational" sense of self—a stable, consistent, dependable identity, both personal and social—she becomes, by consistently identifying with works of art to announce herself and her convictions, a very special kind of self: a self through art, a self that feels alive, and full of mind, only when it feels itself to be art. It is a way of tempting death, for works of art are dead—old works of art are very dead, however alive they may be to their lovers, and perhaps to the art historians who dissect them as though they were still alive—even as it is a way of extracting the life blood they once had in them, and giving it fresh life by using it, in a kind of aesthetic and cultural transfusion, to give ORLAN life, more particularly, a strong, if temporary, sense of vital, even exuberant selfhood.

Thus there is ORLAN as Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* (1977). There is Saint ORLAN in *Le Drapé le Baroque* (The Draped the Baroque) (1979–1981), with its debt to Bernini's *St. Teresa*—the virginal yet knowing bride of God, a sort of perverse Madonna-nun. One tempting breast is visible, but no infant nurses at it, and she has a smirk on her face, as though she's already tried the forbidden fruit of God's sex and not liked its taste. Then there is ORLAN as a variety of classical beauties in *Omniprésence* (Omnipresence) (1994). Morphing her face with such art historical and cultural mirages of seductive beauty as Botticelli's *Venus*, ORLAN identifies with these mythical figures while mocking them with her contemporaneity. They "fill" her out, as it were, even as she empties them by putting herself into them. Something similar occurs in ORLAN's hybridization of her face with pre-Columbian heads (1999) and African masks (2002). These so-called primitive or tribal works, much used as an exotic resource and perverse stimulant by modern artists—a catalyst to originality by reason of their originality, at least to European eyes in search of visual intoxication and novelty—seem to convey what the psychoanalyst Michael Eigen calls the "original face" behind the social mask, even though ORLAN's use of them confirms that they are no longer original, either aesthetically or emotionally. There is also *Fiancée Numérique de Frankenstein* (The Digital Bride of Frankenstein) (1990), involving identification with an artistic fiction in a modern horror film—there are other allusions to film art—and, above all, the plastic surgery works, with their facial transformations, affording new expressive and aesthetic possibilities.

This *La réincarnation de Sainte ORLAN* (Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN) is in effect an audacious reconfiguration of self. Indeed, a sort of reckless mythologizing of identity as well as an important station on ORLAN's way to what the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott calls a "true self," which for her seems to be a cross to grudgingly bear. Struggling to achieve it by compliance to traditional models of self, and thus false selves—ironically struggling to be true to herself by falsifying herself, suggesting that she doesn't know what a true self is or could be—each of her surgical performances is in ironic principle what Winnicott calls a spontaneous gesture and personal idea, the basic signs of the true self. It is always rooted in the body—as ORLAN's art is—and always brings with it a sense of fullness of being, as ORLAN's body and face performances do. Paradoxically, by failing to be satisfied with any one self (a self that "fits" her, a socio-artistic mask that is simultaneously authentically herself) she truly becomes herself. Her authenticity resides in her unconscious recognition of the inauthenticity of all artistic masks. She tries them all on, the way one tries on different hats or dresses to see

whether they are "fitting," whether they "express" oneself as well as physically fit, and discards them all, realizing that her authenticity consists in this perpetual process of trying on, this search for the securely and convincingly "fitting," the psychosocially and cosmetically correct self-representation. It is all part of a masquerade—a sort of theater of the absurd—and the masquerade is the absurd "truth."

In short, never satisfied with any of her art-fictional selves, ORLAN restlessly moves on to the next narcissistic adventure. It is a perpetual Sisyphean search for a self that only exists through the search. It has a certain ironical feminist point—woman's self has been said to be role-dependent, and as such hollow at the core (thus woman's proverbial fickleness, masking her "selflessness," that is, her dependence of her sense of self on fictions created by patriarchal society). But, I think, it also has a masculinist point. The artworks ORLAN inhabits, the way a crab with no shell moves into discarded shells, where it makes itself at home, which is what so-called "appropriation" at its most significant is, were made by male artists, suggesting that she identifies with their maleness, perhaps to convey the masculine component of herself and every self, perhaps to unite it with her female body.

ORLAN's art involves an internal dialogue of form with itself, as the overflowing baroque drapery suggests—ORLAN's presentation of it as a *Sculpture de plis* (Fold Sculpture) (1983 and 2002), that is, an abstract "gestural" sculpture in its own right, makes the point clearly—as well as a profound narrative of the body ego. This is arguably the first theme that emerges in art history, as such works as the Venus of Willendorf suggest, and psychologically the primary theme of life as well as art: experience of the body (and the recognition that it cannot be taken for granted) is fundamental to the sense of being human. At the same time, however obliquely, ORLAN pays homage to cultural history, to certain authoritative works of art, and thus to a certain view of art-historical dominance.

But ORLAN is not only concerned with herself and art history. She is also a kind of cultural and social critic—a contrarian punching ironical holes in hardened preconceptions. All her concerns converge in *Origine de la guerre* (Origin of War) (1989), in my opinion her single most telling work. It is an ironical take—a reversal and negation in one—on Courbet's shameless *L'Origine du monde* (Origin of the World) (1886). The vagina is front and center, replacing the traditional whole figure, and presented as a perversely voluptuous end in itself, perhaps an invitation to cunnilingus. Here is the female mystery in its raw state, stripped of the traditional veil or hand of modesty, protecting the vulnerable site while announcing its sacredness. No longer in hiding, it is no longer an inner sanctum, but a profane and perhaps ugly fact of life. In its stead, ORLAN presents the shamelessly erect penis, perhaps an invitation to fellatio, but also an instrument of war—metaphorically a spear or scimitar (as its curve suggests)—waiting to do destructive damage: not simply to penetrate the female body, but to dominate it and destroy its spirit.

The penis is no doubt "at the origin of the war between the sexes [and] a progenitor of a more generalized violence," as one interpreter of ORLAN's picture writes (does the picture imply penis envy, as can be argued?), but her picture of it also exposes the phallocentric character of art and instrumental reason, or rather of instrumental reason become socially irrational, as the Frankfurt School thinkers have sustained.

For the penis is not only the instrument par excellence but a symbol of the irrepressible male will to power. It represents male desire, which satisfies itself by dominating woman—and society and art. ORLAN's work suggests that this is inevitable (the penis will always assert itself) and that woman can survive by accepting its presence, whether by marrying it, as her trousseau works suggest (although ORLAN is implicitly married to herself and her art), or by mocking its "metaphysical" status by presenting her body in a way that mocks male voyeuristic curiosity about the

Entre-deux n° 15 (In-Between No. 15), 1994
photographique couleur dans caisson lumineux/color photograph in lightbox
120 x 160 cm
Édition de/Edition of 5 + 1
Courtesy the artist

female body, with its missing penis. (As Freud suggests, woman's "difference"—the fact that she is castrated by nature, as it were—arouses man sexually even as it terrorizes and threatens him. Why else does Ingres's odalisque turn her back to us, as though in shame, but to hide her lack of penis, which is the ironical secret of woman's so-called mystery?)

ORLAN's work deals with the modernist will to power—self-empowerment—through art. It also represents the protean self—the typical postmodern self, as such social psychologists as Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Gergen have argued.[1] More crucially and subtly, her art confirms what Lifton calls the loss of belief in symbolic immortality,[2] in her case the symbolic immortality that art once conferred. It is this that makes her art ironically immortal, and deeply relevant—even emblematic—of the postmodern worldview, with its skepticism about anything having meaning beyond its times, let alone forever. I have argued that ORLAN identifies with figures—goddesses, no less—in works of art, achieving a certain sense of significant self by doing so. Such identification is not only a way of sustaining a sense of self, but of claiming immortality—today the mock symbolic postmodern form of immortality. For in postmodernity, immortality has become a hollow idea, and symbols have become hollow artifices, social theater rather than existential truths in intuitable form, and thus directly accessible by emotion. There is only the existentially empty and emotionally barren immortality of fifteen minutes of fame—the ironic or pseudo-immortality of meaningless existence. Thus the modernist subversion of traditional meta-narrative symbolism is carried to a nihilistic extreme by postmodernism. Reduced to the expression of ideology, symbols lose cognitive purpose and expressive power. They become dispensable signifiers of social authority. Losing every trace of authenticity—no longer emotionally convincing and memorable, beacons to guide existence—they end up as irrational symptoms to be eliminated by rational discourse. Stripped of aesthetic poignancy, they become banal.

Now ORLAN identifies not only with the immortality of the goddess (pagan, Christian, or populist), but the immortality of the works of art that represent them, that is, works of art that have become so famous, by reason of their symbolic and aesthetic potency, that they (and their creators) seem immortal. Indeed, they seem to epitomize immortality: art immortalizes because it is immortal. It is an ancient idea: life is immortal only as art. But art has lost its power to immortalize in postmodernity, and with that the idea of its own immortality becomes meaningless. Art becomes another relativistic socio-historical construction, a contingent representative of its times without the transcendence that aesthetics affords.

The meta-narrative of art is unable to resist debunking and devaluation—indeed, self-debunking and self-devaluation, not to say self-hatred, as in dadaism—in contrast to the meta-narrative of religion. It continues, at least for the supposedly unenlightened many, to convey eternal truth, offering transcendence, the saving grace of life, despite ruthless attempts to discredit it, whether by showing it to be an infantile illusion, to refer to Freud's idea of it, or opium for the unhappy masses, as Marx thinks. Both regard it as a crutch on which consciousness heavily leans when it cannot bear reality.

But ORLAN refuses to be disillusioned, to give up the consolation of religion. She grasps the mystical ambition that gives it existential value: it is the sanctioned path to ecstatic glory, and with that everlasting aesthetic glory. Ecstasy and aesthetics are entangled for ORLAN, tied in the Gordian knot of religious art, which is what she makes, as such works as *Le Drapé le Baroque* indicate. Whatever its spirit of irony, it is an endorsement of sacredness, and above all of the ecstasy through which the sacred is experienced and realized. Aesthetics mediates ecstasy, but ecstasy inevitably takes aesthetic form: for ORLAN, aesthetic experience is implicitly ecstatic, and ecstatic experience implicitly aesthetic. Thus she turns to baroque

art and Bernini, where their simultaneity and inseparability become self-evident.

ORLAN's art is a sacred art, and restores the idea of the sacredness of art, with the feeling of sacredness, now a matter of ecstatic-aesthetic experience rather than the result of blind faith. ORLAN's self-transformations are religious conversions in principle, as her mortification of her flesh and face in her surgical performances suggests. Religion promises and delivers the sacred in symbols that because of their ecstatic-aesthetic character are able to withstand debunking and devaluation. The ongoing use of religious symbols in secular contexts, and even their profanation, as in de Sade, confirms their meaning and value. Saintliness remains a powerful idea, and ORLAN is struggling towards saintliness by way of martyrdom to art. But the idea of the genius artist—genius as a guarantee and symbolic proof of immortality and sacredness—is debunked in postmodernity, forcing ORLAN to create herself and her own sacredness by using the genius of the sacred art of the past to establish and announce her own genius.

The idea of art's mysterious profundity and transcendence has lost credibility in postmodernity. Today, art is only interesting, as Hegel said a century and a half ago. In part this is because, like everything else today, it is subject to so-called permanent revolution; progress has replaced eternity. But ORLAN is able to transform herself into a sacred work of art by identifying with works of art despite the fact that the work of art no longer has a transcendental identity. This is no mean feat—indeed, a paradoxical triumph—especially because the work of art has become an anxious object, uncertain of its identity, as Harold Rosenberg said.[3] As he suggests, the boundary between art and non-art has been blurred at the expense of art, a nihilistic process that began with Duchamp. He stripped art of aesthetic meaning, purpose, and value, and with that undermined its transcendental identity. By the seventies the blurring had become irreversible, as Stefan Morawski observed.[4] (The idea of the aesthetic, developed by Baumgarten and Kant, and implicit in Joshua Reynolds's idea of fine art—also developed in the eighteenth century—seems to be short-lived. It was openly attacked by dadaist anti-art early in the twentieth century—and there is a dadaist streak in ORLAN, as *Origine de la guerre* makes clear—and by mid-century was trivialized and displaced by the theoretical celebration of the anti-aesthetic. Today, fine art—the conception of the work of art as a transcendental object—seems anachronistic and quaint, although many artists refuse to stop making it, that is, they continue to assert the ultimate reality of the aesthetic. Even such ironical artists as ORLAN continue to depend on it, as her use of the fine art of Ingres and Bernini indicates.)

Underlying its anxious identity is the postmodern work of art's protean identity, modeled on the protean self. It wears different identities by way of different interpretations, arriving at ultimate success—the enduring recognition called immortality—when it becomes saturated with interpretations, giving it the ironical plenitude of Gergen's saturated self. ORLAN confirms this: she saturates her art with many interpretations of identity, all over-determined and dialectically implicated in one another. The final identity may be incoherent and inconsistent, despite the linchpin that is ORLAN's body, but each identity has its internal coherence, and with that a certain self-sufficiency. The sum of ORLAN's identities may not add up to a whole self, but each enacts a mythically convincing self. One might say that ORLAN's art is about herself as a problem of art. She performs art as much as she performs herself, suggesting that unless they are performed they are problematic. She raises the question of whether a representation can be completely convincing—mistaken for reality rather than admired as theater. (ORLAN the public persona, the grand actress with her extraordinary stage presence and photogenic features, rather than the private person, the suffering individual in search of salvation through the religion of art. Is there any

Photo de la performance multimédia au Palazzo Grassi, ORLAN débout sur la châsse (Photograph of the Multimedia Performance at Palazzo Grassi, ORLAN Standing up on a Plexiglas Reliquary), 1980
photographie en noir et blanc/black and white photograph
50 x 60 cm
Édition de/Edition of 5 + 1
Courtesy the artist

difference?) She answers "no": every self-representation suggests that the reality of the self is unrepresentable. Representation is a deceptive act—the artist's self-deception as well as deception of her audience?—that is nonetheless relished for its artfulness, that is, its power of deception.

If representation is about establishing presence, implying that self-representation is about establishing the presence of the self, thus making it fully present to itself as well as to the world, so that it seems to have no past and needs no future to be itself (a truly ecstatic presence), then in postmodernity artistic representation has become an inadequate way of establishing presence. Postmodern art lacks the presence of traditional and modern art, indicating that it is unable to accomplish the transformative task of imaginative art—turning ephemeral, dubiously given, dispensable reality into timeless, indubitable, indispensable presence. ORLAN overcomes this postmodern hurdle by regressing to the timeless art of the past in the service of her ego as well as of art, even though the presence the past gives is quixotic. Art history is a Potemkin's village of art, but ORLAN props up the façades of the past with her insistent presence. This doesn't end her anxiety about her identity and art, as her repetitive performances indicate. ORLAN gets in her own way: her protean restlessness, with its relentless self-mirroring and self-idealizing, never affords more than a temporary sense of original presence, confirming that she continues to be anxious about her identity. Nonetheless, the ideal mirror, telling her she is an original self—giving her magical presence—remains the masterpiece she appropriates. She invests herself in it completely, using it as what the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut calls a self-object. By becoming part of masterpieces, and thus a masterpiece herself, she works through conventional ideas of female selfhood, arriving at the unconventional truth about herself by transcending them all. Her body gives them presence, even as they give her a certain larger-than-life presence.

Thus ORLAN's dazzling re-envisionings of herself, and her conceptual re-materialization of Old Master art, as well as her own material body and face, is not nihilistically ironical, as conceptual art's so-called dematerialization of art is. Instead, since ORLAN seems to have more than one body ego and artistic identity, she makes herself, and art, enigmatic.

1. "By protean style," Jay Lifton writes, "I mean a series of explorations of the self in which one tries out various involvements and commitments towards people, ideas, and actions; and shifts from them, leaves them for new ones at relatively minimal psychological cost. Another dimension of the protean style is the simultaneous multiplicity of images so that one can hold in one's head, and does frequently and in a great variety of ways, images that are contradictory and seem to take one in opposite directions simultaneously." In *The Future of Immortality*. New York: Basic Books, 1987, p. 17. More pointedly, Richard Gergen writes: "The relatively coherent and unified sense of self inherent in a traditional culture gives way to manifold and competing potentials. A multiphrenic condition emerges in which one swims in ever-shifting, concatenating, and contentious currents of being. One bears the burden of an increasing array of oughts, self-doubts and irrationalities. The possibility for committed romanticism or strong and single-minded modernism recedes, and the way is opened for the postmodern being." In *The Saturated Self*. New York: Basic Books, 1991, p. 80.

2. Jay Lifton, *Op. cit.*, p. 12, thinks that the "quest for a sense of immortality," and with it the idea of immortality, and the possibility of its convincing "symbolization," became meaningless with Hiroshima. Immortality involves "trust or faith in the flow of generations in the expressions of the human spirit," and with that "trust or faith in human existence." The Hiroshima survivors lost it. If "much of history can be understood as the struggle to achieve, maintain, and reaffirm a collective sense of immortality under constantly changing psychic and material conditions" (p. 16), then psychic and material conditions have become such that there can be no collective sense of immortality, let alone an individual sense.

3. Harold Rosenberg writes that "the anxiety of art embodies the freedom of art to make itself at will," which "can only mean that the art object persists without a secure identity, as what I have called an Oanxious object." In *The Anxious Object*. New York: Horizon Press, 1966, p. 17. The same thing can be said of the artist; she persists without a secure identity, indicating her anxiety about herself as well as art. The historical fact that art has been "liquidate[d] as a classification of objects and . . . redefine[d] in terms of the intellectual acts of artists" (p. 17) adds to the artist's anxiety and insecurity. She must be an intellectual, and her art must have intellectual rigor and significance. It must hold its own with other "intellectual acts," which means it is measured by intellectual standards rather than artistic standards, if they still exist. Her ideas must have a place in the history of ideas as well as of art, if art continues to have a history, that is, if it is not subsumed by philosophy, as Hegel predicted it would be. To ORLAN's credit, her appropriation of Old Master art invokes traditional artistic standards, suggesting that she continues to regard art as an aesthetic enterprise as well as an intellectual (conceptual) activity.

4. Writing in 1972, Stefan Morawski declared that "the boundaries between the artistic and the non-artistic have been blurred," implying that this is the reason for art's decadence. "What Is a Work of Art?," in Lee Baxandall, ed., *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*. Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 329.

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Cinematic Skin

Peggy Phelan

Like many feminist artists who came of age in the seventies, ORLAN's art is deeply political. However, the mode of political thinking that her work both advances and reflects is not a simple logic. Indeed, it flirts with illogic, and for some, it hovers on the very edge of sanity itself. As social historians from Thomas Szasz to Michel Foucault have argued, the definition of sanity is more than a strictly medical diagnosis; its interpretation is steeped in social and cultural beliefs about the borders of the appropriate.[1] Artists associated with the avant-garde have been interested in challenging such borders for a long time, and ORLAN is hardly the only artist to be denounced as "mad," "crazy," or "disturbed" by mainstream commentators. But questions about ORLAN's sanity are especially persistent and fierce because the borders of the appropriate she questions most deeply are those designed to curtail the agency and freedom of the female body.[2] And since, for better or for worse, the body serves as the stage for the drama of subjectivity, ORLAN's work also raises provocative and difficult questions about the lives of women more broadly and these questions, in turn, provoke questions about the lives of men and children and the "sanity" or (il)logic of cultural arrangements tout court.

From 1990 to 1993 ORLAN orchestrated nine performances using plastic surgery as her artistic media, the first of which was called *La réincarnation de Sainte ORLAN* (Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN).[3] As she explains to Eugenio Viola in the interview in this volume, technically ORLAN's first use of surgery as a media for art occurred in 1978,[4] when she was rushed to the hospital during a performance and video festival she was co-curating in Lyon. Suffering with an extra uterine pregnancy, ORLAN decided to have her emergency operation filmed and the videotape rushed to the conference site via ambulance so that it could be screened during the time allotted for her presentation.[5] A central thread in the development of performance and video art in the seventies unraveled the borders between art and "real life," and ORLAN's decision to frame her emergency surgery as art was part of that same unstitching. Consequently, *Urgence G.E.U.* (**Ectopic Emergency) enlarged the category of performance art by framing medicine within its purview.[6] Moreover, within the context of the festival, the surgical sutures and the cinematic cut came together, suggesting the possibility that plastic surgery was akin to a kind of cinematic editing.

From our current post-everything orientation, it is sometimes difficult to grasp the passionate revision of what art might be that took place in the seventies. Feminist art, minimalism, land art, pop, happenings, Fluxus art, environmental theater, music, dance, and poetry all launched rigorous critiques of past practice and created stunning new explorations of material, media, color, scale, sound, movement, language, politics, and the human body, generally. Feminist artists of the seventies often critiqued the sexist assumptions of art history and art making—especially the notion that women's primary relation to art was as image to be (re)made by male artists—an assumption that thereby elided the possibility that women could be artists themselves and not merely objects of the male artist's gaze. Many feminist artists employed their own bodies as their medium, and this led to the genre of body art and its subsets—endurance, hardship, and what ORLAN calls "carnal art," among them. (ORLAN admits there are many overlaps among these terms, but wants to preserve "carnal art" because unlike endurance or hardship art, carnal art is not immediately associated with pain).

By becoming both art maker and image made, feminist artists in the United States such as Carolee Schneemann, Eleanor Antin, Adrian Piper, and Hannah Wilke, paved the way for some of the "art stars" of the eighties and nineties, Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, and Barbara Kruger. Significantly, these latter artists worked primarily in photography and graphic art—media that fit more comfortably into the market economy of the art world than live performance. One of the great unwritten chapters of art history is the slow but steady intermingling of photography and video into the domain of live art.[7] The fluidity of mixed media has had some of the most far-reaching influences on contemporary art and the ongoing commingling of live art and the photomechanical has been especially compelling in relation to ORLAN's art. Characteristically, rather than hiding the market forces at work in the difference between the ephemeral nature of live art and the commodity-based logic of the art world, ORLAN exposed it by using the sale of photographic documentation of her past plastic surgeries to finance her future ones.

Before looking more closely at ORLAN's surgeries, it is useful to consider an important precedent for her project. Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) makes use of one of art history's favorite tropes: the sculptor chiseling away at ill-shaped marble until beautiful form emerges. The artist put herself on a strict diet for thirty-six days and photographed herself with a Polaroid camera, naked, in four different poses, carefully noting the time of day each photograph was taken. Composed of 144 of these photographs arranged in chronological sequence, *Carving* presents Antin's body in the same four poses every day of the performance. As the photographs accumulate and give body to the photo-sculpture arrangement called *Carving*, the artist's own form diminishes. A comment on the ideology of dieting, the combined force of aesthetic and social conventions about attractive white women, *Carving* also has been interpreted as a response to the

specific violence of the message "you must be thin," to Jewish women.[8] Perhaps most crucially, *Carving* stages the crossing of the trajectories of photography and performance that has been decisive for the development of both feminist and postmodern art. Her diet became body art, a mode of performance, which in turn became a photographic sculpture.

Twenty-one years later, ORLAN's 1993 performance, *Omniprésence* (Omnipresence), at the Sandra Gering Gallery in New York followed a similar design. ORLAN's seventh plastic surgery, conducted on November 21, was a six-hour procedure that added implants to the artist's cheeks, chin, and temples. It was broadcast live in the gallery and in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the McLuhan Centre in Toronto. The live performance traveled, via satellite, to these far-flung sites even as the specificity of ORLAN's skin became subject to intensely focused looking and surgical manipulation. In the Gering gallery, ORLAN installed two horizontal rows of photographs covering about five feet of gallery space. On the bottom row, forty-one digitally morphed photographic portraits of ORLAN's face and the five visual sources that would provide the map for her surgical transformation. Selecting fragments from the archive of canonical Western art and myth, ORLAN turned her face into the stage for a new image composed from bits and pieces of images of other women central to Western art history. ORLAN selected Leonardo's version of Mona Lisa's eyebrows, Botticelli's version of Venus's chin, Gerard's version of Psyche's nose, Moreau's version of Europa's lips, and the eyes of Diana, created by an anonymous sculptor of the school of Fontainebleau. (These selections give us an extremely witty reading of Western art history's relationship to women-as-parts. The joke emerges because the selections of fragments are all off-the-mark. Mona Lisa is famous for her smile, not her brows, and Venus is famous for many things, but her chin is not high on the list and so on.) By morphing her own visage with this source material ORLAN created a photographic hybrid, a half-"natural" and half-constructed image of her face, thus exposing the ways in which the natural is inflected by the constructed and vice versa. But that was only the first of many reversals in ORLAN's performance. Extending the force of the live into the genre of portraiture, ORLAN arranged the forty-one morphed photographs as the base of a diptych that would support the addition of forty-one new photographs, each taken on successive days of her healing from the surgery. A banner reading "Entre Deux" (Between the Two) braided the two rows together. As with Antin's *Carving*, each added photograph was marked with the date and time. The first photographs show a bruised and bloody face that does not conform at all to the map made by the digital morphs "*Omniprésence* measures out in space and time two sets of facial mutations—one produced by the 'machine-body' and the other by 'the machine-computer."[9]

More radically still, ORLAN's installation exposed the notion that the technology of the body creates its own imaging apparatus: no matter how well the computer can combine and morph images, in the end, the mortal body heals unevenly, turns scars into poems, bruises into bumps, time into gravity's wrinkles and folds. The join between the virtual plan, the map of remaking, and the body's own "too, too solid flesh," is vividly imperfect and the gap between the plan and the action is what we might call the intractable force of the live in all performance.

ORLAN's photographic sculpture, unlike Antin's, focused on her face, and thus must be seen in the context of portraiture. The eighty-two portraits in the Gering gallery have much in common with Warhol's silkscreens. His *Ethel Skull 36 Times* gives us multiple portraits of the same face in different poses, different colors, and we might even say in different performative moments. But these variations do not interfere with our ability to recognize Ethel in each portrait. ORLAN's portraits are more unsettling because they create a wedge, a scar if you will, in the assumption that identity is rooted in the face, an idea whose roots reach back to the dawn of modernity. The radical malleability of ORLAN's recovering face undoes that notion. ORLAN's surgical performances suggest a new understanding of identity—one that the new sciences of cloning, transplanting, and genetic manipulation also underscore. We are on the brink of a new conception of the mortal body, and since the body is so closely tied to subjectivity and identity, these lived experiences will also be fundamentally altered.

In the twenty-one years between Antin's *Carving* and ORLAN's *Omniprésence*, the technologies of self-fashioning shifted considerably. Moreover, the difference in performance method each artist employed to change her appearance—dieting for Antin and surgery for ORLAN—also reflects a larger cultural transformation in our relationship to passivity and activity. For Freud, female identity or femininity (whether taken up by a man or a woman) emerged from a performance of passivity, while male identity or masculinity entailed a performance of action. (The performance of passivity requires enormous rigor and discipline, but I will leave that to the side for now.) The typical dieter "takes control" of her body and energetically applies her will in the service of reducing the size and shape of her body. There is nothing passive about dieting, and yet it has been a habit taken up more by women than by men, although that is now changing. Plastic surgery, on the other hand, requires the passivity (often induced with chemicals) of the body-to-be-transformed and the energetic mapping and carving of the surgeon. (One might think of dieting as "do-it-yourself" plastic surgery.) ORLAN's surgical performances staged the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of these ideologies of transformation. On the one hand, femininity is thought to be passive, eternal, and static, even while culture arrangements demand an ever more coercive adherence to restaging and revising one's appearance.

ORLAN's surgical operations are interventions in the thicket of patriarchal ideology that assigns value to women—value often based on looks. Reversing the paradigm of the passive patient, ORLAN herself mapped and staged her surgeries. Drawing from the history of art and myth, ORLAN assembled a composite new image from bits and pieces of celebrated iconography, gossip, and historical force which all conspire to create the ideology of "the beautiful woman" in Western culture. ORLAN explained: "I constructed my self-portrait by mixing representations of goddesses from Greek mythology: chosen not for the canons of beauty they are supposed to represent, but for their histories . . . These representations of feminine personages have served as an inspiration to me and are there deep beneath my work in a symbolic manner. In this way, their images can resurface in works that I produce, with regard to their histories."

However, while ORLAN was thinking about symbolic icons, the ideology around plastic surgery as an apparatus for the production of beauty overwrote her intention. ORLAN "chose Diana because the goddess was an aggressive adventuress and did not submit to men; Psyche because of her need for love and spiritual beauty; Europa because she looked to another continent, permitting herself to be carried away into an unknown future. Venus is part of the ORLAN myth because of her connection to fertility and creativity, and the Mona Lisa because of her androgyny—the legend being that the painting actually represents a man, perhaps Leonardo himself."[10] But ORLAN's symbolic system was often ignored, especially in the United States, and her post-surgical appearance, especially after the implants were inserted into her temples in 1993, as a failed attempt to become as beautiful as the icons of Western painting. Philip Auslander, for example, claims that ORLAN's "unconventional physiognomy is the result . . . of a desire to conform to canonical models of beauty."[11] But that claim misreads not only ORLAN's intentions, but also the overall force of the surgical series itself.

The number of canonical sources ORLAN referenced wryly mocks the ease of Marcel Duchamp's readymade (oh would that we were all readymades!) and also underlines the enormous gap between "the plan" and "the result" when virtual imaging encounters what Hamlet called our "too, too solid flesh," by which he also might have meant our "too, too sullied flesh" or indeed our 'too, too sallied flesh." The textual quandary so besetting to Shakespeareans nicely reflects the quandary of the flesh itself. Sometimes too porous, sometimes too closed, the flesh beckons and oozes, scars and heals. It is the fundamental malleability of flesh that makes it our most cinematic body part.

The eighty-two photographs that comprise ORLAN's diptych *Entre Deux* (Between the Two) function as a kind of film reel that could stretch out

Omniprésence
(Omnipresence), détail/detail
Version pour une performance à la Sandra Gering Gallery, New York/
Version for a performance at the Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, novembre/November 1993 - décembre/December 1994
quarante-et-un diptyques en métal et quatre-vingt-deux photographies en couleurs/
forty-one diptychs of metal and eighty-two color photographs
Photo Raphäel Cuir (Visage d' ORLAN/ORLAN's face); Alfons Alf (sur écran/screens)
Courtesy the artist

Self-hybridation africaine
(African Self-Hybridization), 2003
photographie numérique sur papier couleur/digital photograph on color photographic paper
125 x 156 cm
Édition de/Edition of 7
Courtesy Galerie Michel Rein, Paris

indefinitely. The paradox of cinema, in both its digital and analogic form, is that it is essentially still photographs subjected to the force and pulse of time. Like us, these images flow, stick, and mutate. Psychoanalysis and cinema came of age at the same time and each apparatus helped us see more clearly how fundamentally mutative we are. The invention of cinema launched the arts of imitation, copying, modeling, and screen acting technologies that exposed the malleability of the visual image while psychoanalysis provided clues to transforming and altering the invisible features of our unconscious realms. Hence for ORLAN, the surgical performances included both the recitation of psychoanalytic texts and the parade of new designer fashion for the operating room. But as plastic surgery lost its radical edge in the nineties and became an almost banal method of self-transformation and a frequent theme of television scripts in the early 2000s, ORLAN moved onto new projects.

One of the critiques of ORLAN's surgical series was that it was "too Western," that her sources and her critique were confined to the West. Her newer work, especially the *Self-hybridations* (Self-Hybridizations) photographic series, is based on non-Western sources, primarily African, pre-Columbian, and Mexican. Again, ORLAN is interested in combining the image of her face (a face that is itself explicitly a hybrid) with celebrated images from non-Western sources. While this work is vulnerable to accusations of racism and neo-colonialism, it might also be understood as a kind of utopian vision—a digital manipulation of the old and the new, the East and the West, the female and the male, the human and the animal, the real and the virtual, that both illuminates the political and ethical tension in the enterprise of globalization and benefits from it.

ORLAN's *Self-hybridations* can also be seen as harbingers of a newer world, one in which the human body and identity politics as they are currently understood are passé. Freed from the borders of skin and history, ORLAN's photographs document events that have not (yet) happened. ORLAN's *Self-hybridations* series remind us that, for better or for worse, we live in a world elsewhere and inhabit bodies that are about to be. For some, ORLAN's photographs exploit and appropriate the politically disenfranchised—one would be hard-pressed to imagine a contemporary African artist digitally morphing her image onto medieval portraits of European saints and then wanting to call them *Self-hybridations*. And for some, ORLAN's portraits herald a kind of spectacular release from the confines of time and space, culture, race, gender, and while for others wonders of human identity. In moving away from the blood sport of the surgical operations to the digital operations of computer pixels, ORLAN has perhaps moved from a preoccupation with live presence to a preoccupation with virtual presence. As we spend more of our lives embedded in and on screens, we run the risk of embracing "a brave new world" that will only reproduce and proliferate the violent toxicities of this area. ORLAN's photographs show us a future in which our past is all we can remember, and therefore, all we want to forget. If one wants to speak idealistically, one can suggest that ORLAN's decision to activate the archive of non-western images brings much needed attention to their original force and value. In this vein, one can suggest that ORLAN's exposure of the mutability of the human image, especially the face, across time and across culture highlights the radical instability of the proprietary relation that we often assume adheres between the body and the self. No one of us 'owns' or 'is' a body: we are all bits and pieces, both beyond and under our physical forms. We're all spit and pixel attempting to cohere. However, the ways in which this illusionary logic of the proprietary expresses itself comes with a vicious politics. Ronald Reagan insisted he did not have cancer but rather some part of his body had it and it was cut out. His identity in other words did not express itself through his body: he was more image than flesh. But others of us, especially women, the desperately ill, the obese, the starving simply lack the capacity to make such a sharp differentiation between the skin we're in and the dreams we have.

Art is not and should not be a version of sociology or demographic juggling, but neither should it be willfully blind to its own politics. ORLAN's move from

operating on her own skin to operating on the digital archive is also a move from the literal stage of one body to the stage of the body of the other as imaged in the historical archive. ORLAN's work resembles the journey of artists such as Antonin Artaud who, convinced that we were sore afflicted, rejected individual psychoanalysis in favor of theatre as the collective cure for "plague." Artaud was institutionalized and given electrical shock treatment. ORLAN is sixty, free and alive, and as sane as any of us.

1. Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*. New York: Harper & Row: 1961; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.
2. Barbara Rose's 1993 essay, "Is it Art? ORLAN and the Transgressive Act," *Art in America*, 81:2, February 1993, pp. 82 ff., raised "the crucial question . . . whether we are dealing here not with art, but with illustrated psychopathology." While Rose herself concluded that ORLAN was indeed sane, her essay nonetheless served to authorize and dignify the question itself. I admire Rose's work, but I am also troubled by her assumption that it is her duty to become a diagnostician or referee of the socially and mentally appropriate. Some of her early work on Warhol also suffers from this same error about the job of the critic. Given that Rose's essay appeared in conjunction with ORLAN's first major work in the US, *Omniprésence*, it has had an outsized role in American commentary on ORLAN's work.
3. The dates, locations, and other details of the nine operations are as follows: first operation: "La Ré-incarnation de Sainte-ORLAN ou Images nouvelles Images," July 21, 1990, Paris; Second: "Opération dite de la licorne," July 25, 1990, text by Julia Kristeva, Paris; Third: September 6 (or possibly September 11), 1990, Paris; Fourth: "Opération réussie," December 8, 1990, text by Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni, Paris; Fifth: "Opération-Opéra," July 6, 1991, text by Michel Serres, Paris; Sixth: February 1992, text by Antonin Artaud, Liege; Seventh: "Omniprésence," November 21, 1993, New York (with live satellite broadcast to the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and the McLuhan Centre, Toronto, the Multimedia Institute, Banff, Canada); Eighth: December 8, 1993, New York; Ninth: December 14, 1993, New York. Most of the surgeries were well documented photographically and most also employed music, dance, lighting, and large-size posters of the artworks quoted. The surgical robes were often designed by well-known innovative designers. ORLAN only used local anesthesia and she performed readings from the selected texts before succumbing to the chemicals. For more information see Jill O'Bryan, *Carnal Art: ORLAN's Refacing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
4. There are many errors in the critical literature on ORLAN. This performance is sometimes dated 1979 and sometimes 1978.
5. For an excellent discussion of ORLAN's career until the mid-nineties, see Tanya Augsburg, "ORLAN's Performative Transformations of Subjectivity," in *The Ends of Performance*, Jill Lane and Peggy Phelan, eds. New York: New York University Press, 1998, pp. 285–314. I have drawn on details from her essay throughout my own.
6. It is worth noting that this is an important difference from Chris Burden, with whom ORLAN is often compared in US-based commentary. Burden's famous 1971 performance *Shoot*, in which he was shot in the upper arm by a marksman who missed his mark, "ends" with the fired shot. In fact, however, the performance continued at the hospital and with the police, since all gunshot wounds that come to medical attention trigger police attention, and also with his recovery from the wound. Until Frazer Ward's essay, "Gray Zone: Watching Shoot" (*October*, no. 95, winter 2001), little attention was given to any of these aspects of the performance. Ward himself is not interested in these details especially. He is concerned with the perhaps unethical passivity of those who witnessed the performance without intervening.
7. While many have noted the ways in which photography and video have served to document live art, the larger story of how the media of the photomechanical and the live came to advance a new art has not yet been told, although its effects fueled the ubiquity of installation art and advertising in the eighties and nineties. See my essay, "Performance Art and Experimental Video: Highlights from the Video Data Bank Collection" and Vanalyne Green, "Vertical Hold: A History of Women's Video Art," both in *Feedback: The Video Data Bank Catalog of Video Art and Artist Interviews*, Kate Horsfield and Lucas Hilderbrand, eds. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006, for preliminary sketches of this story.
8. Lisa Bloom suggests that the dwindling, vanishing body at the heart of *Carving* might be seen as a response to the history of the catastrophic disappearance of Jewish bodies during the war. She suggests that feminist art historians have consistently overlooked Antin's Jewishness in discussions of her work. See "Contests for Meaning in Body Politics and Feminist Conceptual Art: Revisioning the 1970s through the Work of Eleanor Antin," in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds. *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 153–169.
9. Caroline Cros, Laurent Le Bon, and Vivian Rehberg, *ORLAN – Carnal Art* (translated from the French by Deke Dusinberre). Paris: Flammarion, 2004, p. 147.
10. Barbara Rose, *Op. cit.*, p. 84.
11. Philip Auslander, "ORLAN's Theater of Operations," *Theater Forum* 7, summer–fall 1995, pp. 25–31.

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Conversation with ORLAN

Eugenio Viola

Eugenio Viola: We have all been intrigued by your name, ORLAN—a pseudonym that you've always gone by and that now is one with your persona. When was ORLAN born?

ORLAN: Yes, this name was born a long time ago. I had just started psychoanalysis. At the end of the third session, when I was paying, the analyst told me that the next time I couldn't use a check, and that I ought to pay in cash. Immediately after I signed the check, he said I could pay with a check the next time. I didn't understand the message, which was absolutely contradictory. I was continually thinking about his words, but I just couldn't figure out why he had behaved in such a way.
Before the next session I did precisely what a lot of people who are in analysis do: I bought something for myself, to compensate.
In French, we have an expression: 'être bien dans ses pompes' (literally, to be well in one's shoes), meaning to be completely at ease. I went to go buy some new shoes and while I was signing the check, I suddenly saw what the analyst had seen, and understood what he had meant to tell me.
When our adolescence is coming to an end, we all search for the perfect signature. We write out our signatures on kilometers of paper, trying to find the most interesting one, the one that seems to sum us up and that we will keep for our whole lives, the one we like the most.
I had chosen one and, for years, unmistakably, I had taken to writing not my name, but the word 'morte' ('dead' in French). These letters stood out very clearly while some of the letters of my family name disappeared, so I was signing with this word 'MORTE,' that name that wasn't mine, and no one had noticed, neither my parents, my friends, nor myself.
From that moment I decided that I didn't want to be 'morte/dead' anymore. I extracted the only positive syllable of this word, 'Or' (Gold) alongside which I put 'lan.' I could also have put 'Or-actif' (active gold), or 'Or-vif' (lively gold), but I used 'lan,' which sounds like the French word for slow: 'lent.' This is the real story of the ORLAN pseudonym, and when I introduce myself, I usually say 'I am ORLAN,' among other things and as far as possible. To rename oneself is part of inventing oneself.

EV: Your artistic path has been long and varied: from performance to body art, along with videos, installations, sculptures, photographs, up to carnal art and to your recent virtual and biotechnological works. What was your training?

ORLAN: I started out studying painting and sculpture. I attended the Beaux-Arts school in Saint-Étienne, my hometown, for a year; but as this was before the educational reforms that took place in France after '68, I fled very soon because it was really too traditional. So really I was self-taught. After having started to paint in a figurative manner, I quickly moved on to lyric, then material, gestural, and finally geometric abstraction. At the same time I was beginning to use photography and performances, or more precisely actions called *ORLAN-Corps* (ORLAN-Body). At this time, I was also writing poetry called *Prosésies écrites*, which became my first book published in 1967 with texts from '63–'64–'65 . . .

EV: Quite early on you focused your attention on topics connected to the language of the body. You once stated to Gladys Fabre that 'to exhibit pictorial works seems to me like an act of dissimulation, a withdrawing of oneself. Painting is a refusal to fully assume one's own exhibitionism, it is to wear a mask.' When did this transformation take place?

ORLAN: Yes, I've written about this. Along with painting and sculpture in 1964, I started to use the language of the body.
ORLAN shows me the photograph *ORLAN accouche d'elle-m'aime* (ORLAN Gives Birth to Her Loved Self), and answers: This is a very important image for me; it marked the beginning of my work, and many of these photographs have been lost, about thirty unique works from this period are all that are left to me. In this photograph, a mannequin without arms seems to be emerging from my vagina. It belongs to a vintage series which are my first works using photography. Between 1964 and 1966 there were several series entitled *ORLAN-Corps* and *ORLAN-Sculpture*. These were the departure point and key to all of my future work. In this photo, everything is already expressed: identity and otherness, giving birth to oneself, splitting in two, cloning. In the Corps-Sculpture series, the body is shown without an identity, the face is hidden either behind hair, or by the pose, or by a mask. These photos were created at a

time when women were claiming the right to be heard, demanding equality, reclaiming their sexuality, asserting their right to contraception and abortion, so naturally, at the heart of this work, is a political and feminist agenda. At this time, too, I appeared several times with a placard which read 'I am both man and woman.' As a citizen of this world I have never thought that my work as an artist freed me from militancy in my private life and I am against all forms of discrimination.

EV: You were very young when you came into contact with Fluxus. Was this the foundation of your social vision of art?

ORLAN: I wasn't too young when I met Ben Vautier, Robert Filliou, SERGE III, and Jean Dupuy, and later Nam June Paik, John Cage, Ben Patterson, Carolee Schneeman, and later still Hermann Nitsch, Eric Andersen, Charlotte Moorman, Philip Corner, Geoffrey Hendricks, Emmet Williams, Ken Friedman, and Alison Knowles. Art is life and life is art; for me life was, and is, a recoverable aesthetic phenomenon. 'Art is what makes life more interesting than art,' said Robert Filliou, 'because then it becomes Art.' Nietzsche also talked of life as an aesthetic experience.

EV: In the field of corporeal art, you have followed your own very particular path, marked by strong cultural mediation. I'm referring here to your extensive rereading of iconography using the figure of Saint ORLAN as a metaphor for the baroque. What is the role of the baroque in your work?

ORLAN: Christine Buci-Glucksmann talks about the baroque in her work *La folie du voir*. I intentionally chose the baroque because as a style it has been rejected in France. The example of Bernini makes this clear—his wing of the Louvre was never built; France thought the baroque was in bad taste.
I examined images of women that, in terms of Christian values, were socially integrated and respected and also looked at the image of the prostitute and of Mary Magdalene. I studied images of Virgins, Madonnas, and saints and I created a series called *Étude documentaire: Le Drapé le Baroque* (Documentary Study: The Draped the Baroque).
These works were not tableau vivant like those that I had created previously because they were not reconstitutions or precise references to works of art, but free creations derived from the chosen references.
I reused some of these creations in other series, for example a Burgundian Madonna was used in the work entitled *Striptease occasionnel avec les draps de mon trousseau* (Incidental Strip-tease Using Sheets from the Trousseau) and she is also present on the pedestal of *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* (Kiss the Artist), as well as appearing in the operating theater and in the Bollywood-style cinema posters *ORLAN before Saint ORLAN*.
I have drawn up a personal vocabulary. I construct works like words in order to be able to use them later and give them a role in other stories, other structures, and other mental constructs. I draw up new sentences by creating new meanings, but always using the same terms that are part of my plastic vocabulary. For example, in the last surgical-performances, I manipulated crosses—a white cross and a black cross that derived from my work on the baroque and can also be found in painted posters entitled *Saint ORLAN with Cult Symbols*. One of the aspects of the baroque that has most intrigued me is the fact that, at one and the same time, it portrays both good and evil. The baroque shows Saint Teresa, taking ecstatic and erotic pleasure in the arrow of an angel (Lacan has spoken at length on this), even ugh Christianity asks us to choose between good and evil.

EV: You have talked of a critical distance. What is your relationship to religious imagery?

ORLAN: Christianity rejects the body and especially the body-pleasure principle. When it does think about the body it is to torture, cut, and make it bleed. It suggests a guilty body, a suffering body, a body that needs to suffer; my work is in the area of pleasure and sensuality. I do not believe in pain as a form of redemption or purification. You should read my manifesto on carnal art. Today, religion is still extremely present, in art and in our daily lives, even if we are non-believers and it seems more and more difficult to say we are atheists—though those who are should declare themselves while the impious still can without being hung, drawn and quartered, or imprisoned. We can all be tolerant. Religion is an ally of power and, in particular, phallocratic power. Religion has always degraded women and this is a principle that I have long fought against. I did not receive a religious education. For me, a religious image is not a transgression, but I did feel the need to understand the culture we live in. Religion is everywhere; art for millennia has been a propaganda tool. It was important to examine these images of Virgins, Madonnas, and Saints by using them at a critical distance. By playing with them, by putting them on like you would put on a puppet's glove, by making them freely say something else or by enlarging what they said.

EV: A surprising connection—the fanatical pathos of the Counter-Reformation and contemporary artistic research.

ORLAN: After the Counter-Reformation, at the time of Kepler, it was seen that the world was not built on the basis of the primitive figure of the circle, but around two centers and formed an ellipse. However, during the baroque period we do not see this second center—you cannot see the second breast.

The second breast is hardly ever shown. This single, therefore phallic, showing intrigued me a great deal. I concluded that there must be something of a man beneath these Madonnas—that they were male stories, told by men for men.

EV: Among those artists that have worked on the theme of the body, which have you felt closest to? To those who worked on feminism—I am thinking here of the work of Ulrike Rosenbach and Katharina Sierveding, or other French artists? Though obviously there are many differences, some critics have compared your work to that of Gina Pane who in 1977 declared that 'art is no longer representation, but transformation.' Do you agree?

ORLAN: I knew Ulrike Rosenbach, Marina Abramović, Valie Export, and Carolee Schneeman, but on the other hand I did not know Katharina Sierveding, but obviously I knew Gina Pane. I do not say the same things about Art; for me, Art is not a question of support, but about context and position within a social, geopolitical, and cultural context. Gina Pane, like the protagonists of body art in France, like Michel Journiac for example, showed the psychological and physical limits of the body. They dealt with suffering and endurance like many other performers. All my work runs counter to pain, it revolves round pleasure, the joy of living—this is the fundamental difference.
Le Baiser de l'Artiste concerns sex (it was a real French kiss), the joy of life, and communication with the other; it was designed to create a link and a question. This is the vital difference. I feel that I am a long way from those artists that are working on extreme body art. The new primitives for example and those who practice body modifications, their performances are always imbued with a large amount of masochism. For me, pain is anachronistic and uninteresting. Our bodies suffered for millennia without aspirin to relieve toothaches or headaches. Our age has almost conquered of pain, even the pain of childbirth to which Christianity is so attached. Even though it is not my own scene, I do respect those artists that are deeply and intelligently involved in this area, like the work of Marina Abramović, which I like a great deal.

EV: You have just referred to your famous performance, *Le Baiser de l'Artiste*. This was a stage of vital importance in your artistic development, almost a turning point.

ORLAN: My life can be divided into before and after *Le Baiser de l'Artiste*. After, there was my dismissal, the break with my family, people insulted me, I lost my job and my studio. It was a tragic-comic period of my life.
Le Baiser de l'Artiste, first of all, was created by me as a sculpture, an installation with photographic objects; the sculpture illustrated a text written in collaboration with Hubert Besacier. The title was *Face à une société de mères et de marchands* and began with the words 'at the foot of the cross were two women, Mary and Mary Magdalene . . .,' two stereotypes of the images of women that I had examined. On the same wooden pedestal that I had painted black, I installed a life-size photo of Saint ORLAN that had had the background cut out and glued to the wood and on the other side *ORLAN-Corps*, a photo of my torso, my torso with the background cut out and glued onto the wood. It became a sort of ATM of kisses when I installed myself behind it for the opening, especially when the officials arrived. I forced myself onto their attention in the Grand Palais at the 1977 FIAC contemporary art exhibition. The performance caused such a scandal that the press releases were no longer issued by the FIAC, but in *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* in the Argus Press. Following the scandal in the media, the private school where I trained future cultural coordinators immediately dismissed me with a telegram which read: 'Your attitude is incompatible with your role as a teacher. All classes have been halted. We'll let you know about your wages.' This sort of dismissal by telegram is illegal in France. My students went on strike, organized demonstrations, wrote songs that told my story, but nothing came of it and I was dismissed.
I was not able to pay the rent on my studio; it was sealed before I could remove all the things I had inside. I lost a lot of my works and some negatives from this time and I didn't find work for another ten years. I had nowhere to keep this work. Jean-François Taddei saved it for me by putting it into deposit in the Eric Fabre Gallery where he worked. Twenty years later he was able to sell it to a publicly funded collection—the regional fund for contemporary art of the Loire, where he was the Director. For the thirtieth anniversary of the FIAC the work was requested in order to place it in the entrance as the work that had most marked the International Fair of Contemporary Art. I savored the moment. It has also just crossed the Atlantic to be shown at the MOCA in Los Angeles in Connie Butler's historic exhibition on feminism.
Before this, I sold my work in Portugal, Caldas da Rainha, at markets next to the fruit and vegetables. My body was for sale, cut in pieces. For a few escudos you could buy my eye, my breast, my face, my vulva in photos with the background cut off and then stuck on wood, and also my kisses, but not mounted in the same way.

EV: During the eighties, your performances became more and more theatrical and the video performances that went with them more and more technically competent. What is your relationship to video?

ORLAN: The baroque and theater are linked. I undertook some large and long performances that could be called theatrical even though I was not an actor, but an actant. I also designed works that could be called theatrical and baroque, such as the chapel dedicated to Saint ORLAN.
Ephemeral actions and performances were linked into the archive and so to photography and video. These traces are sometimes traces and at other times reworkings; they could be used in works or could be complete works.
However, I also created videos outside of my performance work. My most recent example is the Epicurean *memento mori* 'although . . . Yes but . . . and one final blow' and more topically Ommmmm, a film about our current security rituals.

EV: Your surgery-performances have had a powerful media impact—artistically, aesthetically, communicatively. An interest that was born at the time of your Minitel experiment.

ORLAN: Using the Minitel I created a review entitled *Art Access Revue*, which was the first telematic contemporary art review. Right from the start of the Minitel, the French ancestor of the Internet, I wanted to intervene artistically on this network, which was a conduit for horoscopes, recipes, this 'pink' minitel. However I did not want a review that dealt with current arts news. I wanted to give artists the ability to work with the minitel, a machine whose large pixels gave such poor gray-scale definition. This lack of definition was interesting because on the other side of the equation were the video, photographic, and graphic artists who no longer just swore by the quality of their technique, but by the definition of the image. A number of plastic artists and also musicians and writers created works especially for this technically poor telematic space—they included, among others, Vera Molnar, Daniel Buren, Jochen Gerz, Joël Hubaut, Ben Vautier, and Nam June Paik.

EV: Is there a link between *Urgence G.E.U.* (**Ectopic Emergency), the first 1979 operation, and the other surgery-performances?

ORLAN: My first operation was during the performance and video symposium that I organized with Hubert Besacier for four years in Lyon. We were the first to stage a major international performance festival in France; we brought over Paul McCarthy (first of all), Tom Marioni, Klaus Rinke, Hermann Nitsch, Walperkowski, Nathalie LL, Valie Export, Gina Pane, Joëlle Léandre, Robert Filliou, Carolee Schneeman, Barbara Heinish, Connie Beckley, Wolf Vostell, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux, Mike Hentz, Christina Kubisch, and many others.
We were right in the middle of the festival when I had to be operated on urgently; it was a sick body that needed urgent surgery. I had an idea, and as soon as a camera was in position in the operating theater and the cassette was full it was shown at the festival as if it were a programmed performance during the symposium. I was talking a moment ago of life as an aesthetically recoverable phenomenon. During the operation I was very moved by the pyramidal structure with the surgeon at the summit and the assistants who handed the instruments, the light that fell from the ceiling as well as the concentration, and I thought that one day I would work again with surgery.
One of my performances at the Pompidou Centre was visited by trustees of the Edge festival in Newcastle and they asked me to suggest a work for their festival, Art and Life in the 1990s, and it was when I was reading *La Robe* by Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni that I had the idea for a series of surgical performances.

EV: Carnal art differs from corporeal art, to which it is however linked. This is what you state in your manifesto. With carnal art you go beyond the body themes as we understand them. For instance, you are the first artist to use plastic surgery as a medium. The operation concentrates on the 'rite of passage' that is a characteristic of the seventies. Where do you stand?

ORLAN: Yes, it is a moment of passage between two images, between two states, a staging with 'cult objects,' the tools of this passage: books, lancet, expander, operating light, camera, costume, operating field, video, photo, décor, painted cinema posters, etc. But the operating theater is above all a place for the production of artworks. It is an artist's studio and also a film studio in which I am consciously producing reliquaries, drawings made with my fingers and my blood, videos, photos, etc. It is more than just a performance space that is retransmitted via the satellite to several locations in the world like the Pompidou Centre and the McLuhan Centre in Toronto.
This series was designed by me to build a new image of me and to produce new images; the idea was to put features on my face. This is what I am working on at present with the digital photographs in the *Self-hybridations* (Self-Hybridizations) series.
Each of my pre-Columbian self-hybridizations is made up of a photo of the pre-Columbian statue and a photo of my new face to obtain a hybrid digital photo. This series uses sculpture as a reference, and in these portraits of mutants I have kept the stone and earth materials. The African series was made in the same way, but in black and white. This is because it has as a reference an ethnographic photo, the first photographs in black and white in which we sought to photograph the OTHER. The final series refer-

ences paintings and uses the paintings of Indian chiefs by the nineteenth-century painter George Catlin This series looks like paintings, though in fact it is made up of digital images. All my life I have tried to break down those barriers that are mostly in people's heads, between the generations, sexes, skin color, and also between artistic practices. In this series, there is one series that is hybridization between painting and sculpture, another that is between traditional photography and digital photography, and the final one between digital photography and painting.

EV: *Art charnel* (Carnal Art) is a self-portraiture in the classic mold, but undertaken with the techniques of its time.' Is it true to say that your work has a classical aspect?

ORLAN: In art history, the traditions of self-portraiture go back a long way. This is why I have spoken of classical work, but this portrait is inscribed in my flesh before being visually inscribed on the photo. I am not just reproducing my self-portrait. I am producing it at the same time; you could say that the presentation and representation of the self is like sfumato.

EV: As an artist, how do you interpret the reconstruction of the subject that is born of the interaction between the body and new technology? Will art melt into science?

ORLAN: I don't think that science will melt into art or art into science, but I do think that to renew itself art can mime science, whether scientific discoveries, biotechnology, or other ideas and integrate with them. Jean-Pierre Changeux says 'artists and scientists, from time immemorial, have sought to produce representations that will renew our understanding of the world and humanity.' Naturally, there will always be other scenarios possible and artists who follow other paths. What I say is not necessarily a password to the future—I have no crystal ball.

EV: From metamorphosis to mutation: what has changed in the themes concerning the body?

ORLAN: When the body comes back into the foreground in an obvious manner and technology moves forward in leaps and bounds, we ask ourselves about the future of human beings. What will their place be? What pressure will the human body be subject to and what will its status be? You spoke of metamorphosis, but metamorphosis is a great myth—all civilizations have tried to transform the body. This is what I am showing in the digital photographs of the self-hybridization series. Up till now we have only been able to change our appearance, but with genetic manipulation we will be capable of deeper changes. David Cronenberg said in an interview that 'technology does not menace us any more than we do ourselves, since it comes from within us. The problem is not the technology, it is rather the human .'

EV: Where did the idea for protuberances come from?

ORLAN: The idea was to add and not take away, not to mutilate, but to do something that had never been done before and that was not recognized as increasing beauty. As Michel Onfray said, 'from the idea of an augmented body' or 'sculpting oneself or inventing oneself' to quote Michel Foucault 'the dissection of self as an invention of self. Modernity is not just our relationship with the present, but our relationship with ourselves, in the sense that being modern is to refuse to accept oneself as we are in the flow of each passing moment; it is to take oneself as an object for working out complex and difficult ideas.' These protuberances are implants that are usually used to heighten the cheekbones, and with the agreement of my surgeon, we decided to place them on either side of my forehead. For my surgeon, who was reliable and prudent and who understood that I had no desire to stay pretty, the task was to work with me to find a suitable place for the implants without taking unnecessary risks, but still keeping to the spirit of what I wanted to do. It was a surgical procedure she was doing for the first time.

EV: How do you feel now about your new image?

ORLAN: Very good. I used the literalness of the performance to speak of the violence and pressure that is inflicted on women's bodies.
I wanted to make a radical change and display the difference. I felt this difference inside of me, naturally without it being visible on my calling card, my face. I had a face that was pleasant and conformed to society's expectations, which is no longer the case now. My new face is an integral part of my life and my art—it shows that we can develop a link with seduction by taking on an appearance that is not usually considered beautiful. These protuberances are, in fact, new organs of seduction. We are no longer in the age of the large faces and frontal images such as those of Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell and others. Jochen Gerz has left of his hat knitted in gray wool that was his trademark. Artists no longer look like artists and are more and more being infiltrated into the system just as when intellectuals were used like a production line to bring political discussion into the workplace.
Eva and Adèle, however, manufacture strong and efficient but sweet images that are in opposition to our warlike times and make appearances that question this hard and cruel world at the heart of Art. ORLAN shows difference, otherness in a world that makes great efforts to conform, is super-normal, and plays the game; it's like plastic ready to be molded, formatted, alienated by religion, politics, the family, sports, television, etc.

EV: Your work has often been misunderstood. How do you reply to critics who think your work is not art and those who think that your surgery-performances are a sort of depersonalization?

ORLAN: My work has never tried to please; it tries to be pioneering and to pass on messages. When you have no criterion by which to judge a work because it breaks with everything that has been done up till now and with everything that is being done, it is easier to say that it is not art or that the artist is mad. It was the same with the impressionists and many others. It was said that their eyes were sick, that it was the greatest fraud of all time. There is often a moment of rejection when one is faced with something innovative and different.

It is true that people have been very aggressive towards me. I was so often physically attacked that several times my galleries hired bodyguards to protect me—in Atlanta and the B&D Studio in Milan, for example.

The media impact was incredibly potent. There were a number of television programs that went out almost all over the whole world. CBS News was in the operating theater with Connie Chung. My operations inspired the 'Extreme Makeover' program that was launched some time later.

I am still often asked to appear on TV to talk about my surgery-performances even though I have not done any since 1993. A number of articles have appeared in the press most of the time with information that is completely untrue and which is presented in the articles as citations of my own views. It was written of me that I had had 164 operations (there were only a modest nine, which I did not have to undergo, but I organized), that I was a super-masochist, though my first experience with a surgeon was without pain either during or after and it was the same for all my operations (they only took place between 1990 and 1993), and that I wanted to be an ideal of beauty, but in fact my work is against all models and standards of beauty, etc.

This series is often taken out of context as though I had never created works either before or after.

It was the press that manufactured the scandal at the same time as they complained that I was trying to make myself be noticed—as if artists such as Ingres, Pollock, Jenny Holzer, Rauschenberg, Malevitch, Duchamp, Ann Darboven, Daniel Buren, Niel Toroni, Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Raymond Hains, John Cage, to name but a few, had created their works just to cause a scandal. But naturally, great and small, all artists hope that they will be noticed, appreciated, and sold.

Regarding *Self-hybridation*, it was written that the photos were taken after each operation, which if we look at them, even at a glance, seems incredible. It was written that I want to look like Botticelli's *Nascita di Venere*, even though my work runs contrary to models. It is important to differentiate between hybridization and imitation.

The mass media seems to be the ideal way to pass a message on to the greatest number of people; but on television the message is so short and so limited and in the press it's sensationalized to the point where the message is often wrong.

In my case, sometimes what was said was so different from what I wanted to say that the impression was given that we were talking about two very different works—one orchestrated by the media and the other that I managed to show and explain in my many lectures. I consider these numerous contributions, in very different spheres, as part of my work.

Two stories that collide, with mine it's difficult to hear, mainly because I am a woman. There is a great deal of resistance when a woman tries to liberate herself from social and religious pressure and it is unacceptable for women to escape from the standards that men have established for their pleasure and to ensure their domination.

EV: But how did the art world react?

ORLAN: In the art world, the journalists, the critics, the art historians, the gallery owners, the collectors expect the artist to push back the usual boundaries of art, but when an artist does, they don't take to it much. As far as I was concerned, I took the risk of not being accepted right from the start. I touched a raw nerve, reactions to me were very violent for ten or so years, but in the end this was not very long. In any case, they induced and developed stories, rumors, generated impassioned debates, much university work written by young artists or art historians, like you, for example, and have influenced quite a few young artists. In the first place through designers like Jeremy Scott and WLT Walter van Beirendonck, who paid homage to me by putting mannequins on the catwalk with lumps in their make-up. He wrote a book *Believe* with input from me and put on an exhibition where for the opening I appeared with my real protuberances and a very large false nose that grew out of my forehead like the Maya and the public had real noses but were invited to decorate themselves with false protuberances in make-up. Several artists have restaged *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* or the measuring of roads and institutions.

My work has inspired several novels. In the theater, Jan Fabre has also paid me homage. In the streets, in New York, in Macao, or in a supermarket in Ecully, a suburb of Lyon, or elsewhere—the young and the not-so-young want to speak to me, be photographed with me, want me to sign autographs. This is proof that the fuss has died down.

On the other hand I do take pleasure in having at one and the same time an article about me in *Le Monde*, a university thesis examining my life, and an article in a sex magazine or in *Paris Match* for example.

EV: And what do you say about those critics who regard you as an incarnate-living work of art?

ORLAN: *laughing* Many critics have said that I was a moving-living sculpture and that I was looking for death. Bernard Ceysson was the first to write about my operations. He wrote a very beautiful piece that he entitled 'ORLAN the Ultimate Masterpiece,' in the catalogue *Saint ORLAN's 20 Years of Publicity and Cinema*. For me, the plastic result was not the objective—any result would have served my purpose. I am interested in mutant, changing, nomadic identities. My body's destiny, like the bodies of others, is death, but like many other artists I have a body of work and works that can be seen in museums, galleries, at biennials, fairs, and in private collections—work that is independent of the life of my body.
An operation is not a moment of depersonalization. It is, on the contrary, internal construction, a question of decision and choice, that takes both oneself and society into account and which might go as far as erasing all features so as to construct one's own image. It is 'constructed repersonalization.' My work oscillates between refiguration and defiguration. Deleuze and Guattari spoke of facing and defacing.
I am not the result; the works that flow from it are the result. What really matters is the process, what happens in the operating theater, and the fact that my body has become an arena for public debate. That's what interests me—being a conduit for debate. I give a great many lectures and I consider these contributions as works. I often manage to scotch-tape the pictures, rumors, and all the preconceived ideas that go before me and am able to tell the public what I am about and why I do what I do.

EV: Talking about Aristotle's *De Anima*, Lacan said that 'it is indubitably the body that is the basis of the being.' Continuing this idea then, can your surgery be seen as a sort of ontological recasting, Lacan-like, playing with words, and I like to think that in your case, he would have spoken of oper-a(c)tion?

ORLAN: Yes, I think we can, since these surgery-performances were also a part of ORLAN-Corps actions. Have you seen any of Lacan's recorded lectures?

EV: No.

ORLAN: During these lectures, the audience was almost in a state of hypnosis, as they are with some of the great orators. Silence was very important to him. He could remain for thirty seconds in absolute silence. He had an enormous hold on his public.
Turning back to the idea of oper-a(c)tion, Lacan was extremely physical, corporeal in his relationship with the public. Sometimes this relationship only took on meaning when he was with his students. In a certain sort of way, it also regarded actions.

EV: *La réincarnation de Sainte ORLAN* (Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN)—do you believe in metempsychosis?

ORLAN: I say, 'This is my body . . . This is my software' (I am not really sure what the soul is). I don't want to believe. I want to know and to understand. Believing is like children 'believing in Father Christmas.' Will we ever become adults? Then we won't have to believe, tell stories. Faith is handed down, as something that you have to believe in, that is self-evident, which is the only possible truth. This is so important to people who are ready to believe in anything—in incredible, absurd, and childish stories, in stones, in mountains, or in figures, in cards, or in horoscopes. All this seems very anachronistic and strange to me, but useful if it serves to comfort an inconsolable humanity facing mortality, like me, and having to die without having learned anything. No, I don't believe in metempsychosis. The reincarnation of Saint ORLAN was sarcastic as regards the reincarnation and person of Saint ORLAN who was created little by little.

EV: What did the passage from real to virtual mean for ORLAN?

ORLAN: The contrasting of real and virtual is always unsound. However, before *Self-hybridation* I worked with video, telematics, a range of graphic techniques, etc. It's not very new for me and I will be returning to the real with my 'in vivo' cell cultures. I move from one to the other. I try to find the best materials for an idea, the best way of saying what I want to say. I don't set against each other painting, new technologies, video, drawing, frontal assaults, or infiltration techniques. I am for 'and.'

EV: ORLAN and Cronenberg: the 'twinned mutations.' Tell me about the *Painkillers* project.

ORLAN: Everything started with a book by Linda Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys*, in which the author included my manifesto on carnal art. David Cronenberg read it and saw a connection with his own work, *Painkillers*, which will be the story of a generation, of a future civilization, where there is no more pain. But I won't say any more than that. I will play a role that is close to me, but written by David Cronenberg.

EV: What are you expecting from cinema?

ORLAN: The meeting with Cronenberg was very precious; we respect each other a great deal, which, I hope, will be demonstrated by something visible and legible. I think it will be something very exciting in my life. But we should not mix everything up in the film. I am not the protagonist. I will just play a small role that is based on my work. What is wonderful is that the film takes its inspiration from carnal art and that I am taking part. I myself have several cinematic projects.

EV: Besides the project with Cronenberg, do you think you'll work again with surgery?

ORLAN: I don't think so. I was the first artist to use surgery to make it think afresh about itself, but surgery is not my job. It's not because I do it that I want to go on doing it all my life. I had the idea for an operation where the body would be opened up, with no other aim but to open up the body and show it while I read and while I smiled. I would say that this is a poetico-demonstrative action, to show that it is possible to have one's body cut open and not suffer. I prefer to work with other cutting-edge technologies that are not linked to surgery: robotics, artificial intelligence, biogenetics, and biotechnologies. I am working, at the moment, on a collaborative project (I like collaborations a lot, I have collaborated with an architect, musicians, a choreographer, a designer, a scriptwriter, and others) with a group of Australian artists, Symbiotica and Jens Hauser. These are artists that have a laboratory that specializes in skin cultures at the University of Perth, and Jens Hauser is a biotech art theorist. They have got a laboratory organized to culture skin and muscle cells. I will be creating an installation with my harlequin coat made up of rectangular Petri dishes in which there will be different colors. Some of these will be garnished with skin cultures obtained from my cells mixed with different cells. This harlequin coat alludes to "Laïcité," and the preface to the *Tiers instruit*, a philosophical work by Michel Serres that I used for my fifth surgery-performance, *Opération-opéra* (Operation-Opera). The harlequin is a metaphor for multiculturalism and hybridization, for each piece of his costume is made from different materials with different provenances.

EV: Another recent project is closely linked to the cinema: *Le Plan du film* (The Film Plot).

ORLAN: There are a number of artists that are interested in cinema and whose point of departure concerns cinema images. I try to do the opposite; instead of using cinema as a departure point, I use my iconography that I then use in the cinema to realize the complete construction of a film in reverse.
I am making a film in reverse from a sentence of Jean-Luc Godard's: 'a magisterial film because since it has been made in reverse it is a sort of reverse view of cinema.' I started with the painted cinema posters, painted by various Indian poster artists in a Bollywood style, then posters using digital photos in luminous boxes were placed near cinemas near Les Halles in Paris, and everyone was looking to see where these films were being shown. Then we made a fake DVD published by Al Dante with a soundtrack that did not exist and was created by the group Tanger. I went on to TV at the Cartier Foundation, which simulated a real television program with real cinema critics, real actors, real television presenters where we showed my posters. The critics interviewed, reviewed a film that didn't exist by saying that they had just left a preview. The actors talked about the filming and why it was such a turning point in their career, and each invented the story, the pitch for each poster. We showed the whole at the Cannes festival in the Hotel Martinez and shortly after a producer said to me: 'I would like to produce your first full-length film, but I want an ambitious project.' I worked with a professional scriptwriter and we wrote a scenario for an actor—one of America's great film stars. The lawyers on the production side and the actor have not yet managed to agree and they probably won't—the project is probably too ambitious. I am going to write a new scenario for someone else.

EV: After your death, will you donate your body to a museum? Art and life would totally overlapping.
You would be on the threshold of a total work of art.

ORLAN: It would be logical not to be able to get rid of my body when I am dead. This body has served as material for my art all my life and I would like it to be the central object in a video-interactive installation. Many ethical problems are posed, which is strange, very strange, since there are a large number of museums that display mummies. Is it possible that I might not find a museum in time to produce the installation?

Conversation with Pierre Restany

Eugenio Viola

Eugenio Viola: In order to understand the figure of ORLAN correctly, I think we have to see her in the context of the French artists who were working in the field of feminist themes in the sixties and seventies.

Pierre Restany: Of course. But it is important to realize that French artistic feminism is not militant by nature, but existential. The artists of that time, working in the sixties and seventies, engaged with their position as women in the face of all the difficulties inherent in the male chauvinist context of the time, a condition experienced as part of their artistic vocation, part of their destiny. So they lived their condition as women in a world of men, and I must say that they adapted to the situation very well.

EV: In what sense?

PR: They succeeded in playing the game, in being victims when it was the right moment to be victims and giving themselves up to a kind of legend of the active woman, the successful woman, the female star.

EV: So there was a convenient situation of protest?

PR: That is true in a rather general way. The women on the French female art scene all had a great sense of timing. In the context of Nouveau Réalisme, for example, Niki de Saint-Phalle's work with shooting was something very specific, even if her relationship with Tinguely created a rather special situation. The same is true of Annette Messager, who in the seventies asserted a line of conduct of her own that apparently found its fundamental motivation in the art of her husband, Christian Boltanski.

EV: In the more specific context of body art, however, I think that the inevitable reference is to Gina Pane and Michel Journiac.

PR: Precisely. The contribution of Gina Pane and Michel Journiac was very important to body art in France and more specifically in Paris. It was a context in which the social and sociological component was of great importance. Significantly, the activities of the Collective of Sociological Art, with Fred Forest and Fischer, were contemporary with the beginnings of body art in France.
It is very interesting to investigate the structural profile of Gina Pane and Michel Journiac. They were artists of culture, of course, concerned about the justification of their existential otherness. Their homosexuality was lived with the greatest decorum. The assumption of the integrity of their situation was an act of human dignity for which they fought. The existential normalization of their homosexuality was the central motivation of their work in both cases. In this sense, art very often became a comedy, a travesty of reality. In their case, the dimension of organic truth was very powerful. One cannot analyze their work without taking that dimension of authenticity into account. Their art became a projection of their problems, in a sense, at a time when the position of the homosexual was questioned and was difficult. There were many reservations that have now been overcome. Their case has also given an example to the gay community by the assumption of a language of uprooting, of protest and affirmation, using the language of art with great dignity and often very gracefully.

EV: In that scenario, I think the part played by ORLAN acquired a certain importance. She pursued a different, 'other' discourse, aside from the artists that might be ascribed to the feminist movement or the confrontations of her colleagues in body art that engaged with the existential facet, for which, in a sense, ORLAN's work represented the antithesis, based on the concept of the 'pleasure body.'

PR: ORLAN also had a hard task to perform: substantiating the concept of the objectification of the body for the general public. But her prime motivation, and the most important one, was not directly socio-political. Her discourse was much more 'technical,' as it were. *Le Baiser de l'Artiste* (Kiss the Artist) was an operation in which she wanted to demonstrate the objectified availability of the body. It was not a pornographic transaction. It was not a comedy or merely a performance. It was an affirmation of the truthfulness of the discourse itself. I think that ORLAN had set out from that affirmation of the body as object and made the moral transfer from it quite naturally.

EV: 'ORLAN: the most aesthetic of moral actions,' according to your celebrated definition. What do you understand by 'Moral Art'?

PR: Moral Art is really the organization of a language that corresponds to the evolution of the poetic, affective, organic dimension of the body.
The body is affirmed and understood as choice; it becomes the place of the narrative, the privileged place of the existential narrative. By that use of the body, ORLAN programmed a real rebirth, in stages.

EV: Are you referring to the surgery performances?

PR: The idea of altering one's own body in a very conscious way, by cosmetic surgery operations understood as performance, had a very precise and very interesting significance. It was the time when the debate about biotechnology was getting underway, the moment when we had experienced the first symptoms of a new conception of time.

EV: How did the conception of time change?

PR: Until those years, the years when ORLAN was working, we only had a linear concept of time. With the advent of biotechnology we witnessed a veritable explosion of time. When a doctor operates on our biological or genetic memory there is a collision between the present time of the operation and the past of our genetic memory. We experienced that collision of time totally in ORLAN's operations, where that conception of time was utterly true, as was the concept of artificial life. That concept of the collision of time is also matched by our dual concept of life: real life on the one hand, and artificial life on the other. Millions of intelligent machines are now capable of reproducing situations or behavior that only recently were the exclusive prerogative of living human beings. That is an important point if one wants to outline the context of ORLAN's work and its progressive perspectives.
ORLAN succeeded in entering that genetic and spiritual problematic in a specific, topical way. The interesting thing is that she was totally aware of that scientific evolution and above all of that detachment from the body.

EV: With regards to the surgery performances, you have spoken in the past of a 'radical demystification of the act of surgery.' What was ORLAN's objective?

PR: From the outset, the programming of ORLAN's actions followed strictly aesthetic postulates and referents. ORLAN's objective was always to play with identity, a fundamental manipulation of identity—in all the work on the baroque, for example. The experimentation with identity expanded in the series of operations, becoming a unique work of metamorphosis focused on the subject-object of identity. The very first in the history of body art.
ORLAN now bears the visible traces of a journey through an infinity of possible physical identities, testimony of which is offered by her syncretic-synthetic face. This relationship of the body with the concept of an existential scenario is really a fundamental, basic element in her work, which in that sense has taken on an extreme awareness of that new dimension of the body. I think this is something very important and we are feeling the effects of it now; it already forms part of a new civilization, the civilization of global culture, in which the coupling of all communication systems, connecting electronic machines with our brains, is creating new perceptive structures for human beings. Those perceptive structures give us the possibility of creating an autonomous culture. The old pattern of the family, in which the parents transmit their knowledge to the children, has become an utterly superseded concept. The children of future generations will get their culture by surfing the Internet, and the dialogue that they have with their parents will break down completely, because they will not be able to understand their parents' language.

EV: So ORLAN's work falls within a premonitory perspective?

PR: All ORLAN's work, going beyond experimentation with operations, is a sign of anticipation of a future that will really be very different from ours. I think she is anticipating a phenomenon that will be of primary importance for the future, one that I would define as a 'transfer of energy.'
We who form part of the other civilization, the one that is dying, still feel obliged now to memorize a series of basic data on which we establish our personality, our identity. Future generations will no longer feel that need; they will get the basic data from Internet, which will be our collective planetary memory. So what will we do with all the mental energy that is released?
As an optimist, I would like to think that there will be a phenomenon of transfer of that mental energy into sensory energy, and that tomorrow, thanks to the mighty electronic machine, we will be able to make direct, positive use of all the senses that we had totally narcotized—smell, touch, taste—so that our view of the world will directly and naturally become more sensory and sensual. In this regard, I must say that ORLAN's experiments were pioneering experiments. We can say now that ORLAN was anticipating and facing the consequences of that new physical, mental, and sensory dimension of the

human being. The important thing is that she understood that the body was not only an object, but also the privileged place of all those possible existential scenarios. And that is truly a great revolution in self-expression.

EV: So have we come to an epochal turning point?

PR: We are really on the brink of a total change in civilization. Our evolutionary consciousness is normally sustained by the memorable model of Apocalypse. We actually experience the evolutionary rhythm of mutation in accordance with an apocalyptic perspective. The concept of Apocalypse is twofold: on the one hand, the Beast, or Horror. And on the other, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the great hope of happiness and serenity. The evolution of our concept of the body, and of the existential scenarios on which the body is based, corresponds to the scenarios of Horror and the Beast. The things that interest us nowadays are serial killers, clones, and transsexuals. Those are the things affecting the body that give us the measure of our evolution. This entire discourse forms part of ORLAN's work. We are in the age of natural life and artificial life, the age of the organic collision with time. We are capable of accepting that distanced, objectified dimension of the body, and in this sense, ORLAN's work takes on an increasingly topical meaning, one that is increasingly general and wide-ranging.

EV: Do you think that art will merge with science? The art of science or the science of art?

PR: I do not know if one will be able to talk of merging, because I do not like identifying art with a whole series of highly professional practices. But the real thing is that the boundary between science and art will no longer exist, and so perhaps we must expect people of learning to become capable of freeing themselves from a certain kind of rationalism. That will happen when biotechnology has reached such a point that human beings are capable of engaging in dialogue with all the models of artificial life that they have created. At that point, where will art stand? On the side of human life, or of artificial life? Basically, it remains to be seen. I think there will be a kind of dialogue that will draw art very close to science. I only hope it will not be total, because art needs a certain freedom, and rational control is excluded from it. We will certainly be increasingly caught up in the process of cultural globalization that involves going beyond the old generic distinctions.

EV: You said in a famous article that 'ORLAN thinks of her life as a work of art.' Certainly, a very close relationship between art and life has always characterized her artistic and existential evolution. One has only to think of the process of review of Judeo-Christian iconography and of Saint ORLAN, the artist's faithful alter ego for over twenty years. In ORLAN's case, can one speak of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art?

PR: We might call it total, but in the globalizing perspective of our culture art has to be total. It is like a phenomenon of pure logic understood in the context of our expanding culture.

EV: Do you consider ORLAN to be more like Narcissus or Pygmalion?

PR: I would be tempted to say that she is Narcissus.

EV: But an inverted Narcissus.

PR: Yes, certainly, a Narcissus that no longer needs an Echo because she has gone to the limits of self-sufficiency. On that level, such a monumental Narcissus is a virtue.