

Long Live the New Flesh!

BY GIGIOTTO DEL VECCHIO

Maximilian Zentz Zlomovitz is hooked on subway tunnels. That's where he first came into contact with a fantastic, uncanny world, peopled by homeless graffiti artists and post-atomic scraps of technology that sink their cables into the viscera of the body. Gigiotto Del Vecchio shares a bit of the artist's childhood and tries to delve into his otherworldly rooms.

***Gigiotto Del Vecchio** I remember that one of the first times we met, at a certain point during the evening, we talked about Grandmaster Flash, New York, tags, the birth of break dancing and other things from that period. Now, as we start our conversation, we have the responsibility to inform our readers about why we are so interested in that particular historical moment. What do the Eighties have to do with it? Why do we like to recall those atmospheres?*

***Maximilian Zentz Zlomovitz** Atmospheres! I think we have kind of similar memories from our childhoods in relation to that, for you in Naples and for me in Berlin. When I think of the places where I use to play when I was about 10 years old, like under the elevated train tracks close to where my mother still lives, I have mystical, fantastic, uncanny memories. It started with collecting Coke cans, the ones with pictures printed on them. They were often rusty, with the color of the print fading away. I would build huge cities out of the cans in my room at my mother's place. It was always exciting under the tracks. I found everything from heroin needles to suitcases with dead rats to rotten porn magazines. It was kind of my paradise, my secret place. Then I met these guys, graffiti writers from that period. It was 1993, and the homeless who were sleeping under the tracks told me the story of a policeman's ghost living in the tunnel of Anhalter-Bahnhof train station. They told me that in 1991 a graffiti writer nearly got busted and shot that policeman. They took me around and I got more and more interested in that underground parallel reality. These wasted places were reflected back at me in movies like *Wild Style*, beat street videos of Grandmaster Flash and Stephen King's *IT*. These tunnels and empty "ghoststations" had me addicted. They fed me something that I couldn't find in a shopping mall. That whole style and look was fascinating to me, it was total freedom. I remember we had a look that was something between a transvestite and Grandmaster Flash. We loved DONDI, the famous sprayer from the Bronx who died of HIV in '98. He didn't give a shit about anybody and lived as a homeless person in trains, risking everything to paint his trains. I think these memories influence my work. But not the style, more the metaphysical part of it.*

***gdv** There is a strange dimension of reference to a technological world, but not in a contemporary, timely sense, more to the natural evolution of the analog process toward the first digital experiences. A reminder of those cyberpunk dimensions in which the machine was seen as a natural extension of the human body and the computer evolved from an electronic calculator to a personal computer. Can I find such references looking at your work?*

***mzz** Yes, it's the idea of technology that comes from a *déjà-vu* of a hidden, unconscious place in the deep, inner body. It's like a dream where someone cuts your arm off and you don't know what to do with it anymore, so you put it in the trash but then you realize that a cable is coming out of the wound so you go back to get the arm and repair the cable and it works. I wish we wouldn't differentiate between a human body and a simple technology anymore. What interests me is the*

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coldness of a reality that isn't real, of course! As an artist you can play around however you want and create your own game like the persons who are designing computer games. Maybe they would be the best living artists today if they would make more abstract, personal things without being so commercial.

gdv What fascinates me about your work is the layering of reflections and evocations you manage to make central to its development. The origin of rational thought, the project phase of the work naturally encounters poetry, form, but also conceptual rigor and analytical depth. How do these processes and intersections combine?

mzz It often starts with the space that I have to make a show in. I am kind of a control freak with spaces and they often bore me. I might not like the floor and have to change the room to adjust to my way of thinking. Sometimes I feel like a weird *feng shui* interior designer. For example, I don't like wool or beige colors for my work. I'm more of a metal guy, fascinated with materials that are not comfortable in relation to a human body. The kind of fetish aesthetic that began in interior design and architecture of the '80s and the absolute tasteless aesthetic of the early '90s interest me. It was the first torture that split the human soul into two parts, one of a deep romantic and the other of a slave to materialism. The relationship between an object or the environment and myself has to come alive as a relationship of uncanny or sexual sensitivity, and things are finished when they are alive, even if they are in a deep sleep.

gdv Your latest exhibition, at Micky Schubert, impressed me. The force of the filmic dimension you activated was totally engaging, you created a three-dimensional situation in which the viewer was completely enveloped. How was that project conceived?

mzz I had that kind of an installation in my head for a long time. A desire to build a room that is a forgotten place, a place where something may have happened or which was left over from a strange project or a psychic experiment or a strange fetish laboratory in another dimension. The burnt brackets in relation to the cable and that modern glass shower stall created a JG Ballard moment for me, in relation to the fleshy, red, latex wall piece. Of course I had that scene in the red room in mind where the snuff videotapes were filmed in *Videodrome* as well as the atmosphere from *Total Recall* by Paul Verhoeven. I was also thinking about this scene in *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* by Rachel Talalay, where a woman takes a shower and gets killed by living tiles. I think normal things like showers, kitchens, toilets or couches that you don't think about can be the most frightening. That's a typical *cliché* for '90s horror movies. I often think like a director of my own 3D movie, but without any scenes or people playing some role, it has to come up individually for anyone who is in it.

gdv What is the position of cinema in your life? Are there directors you see as points of reference?

mzz I am very interested in sets of films from the '80s and '90s. That typical apocalyptic atmosphere of the future after a big flu, which kills the government along with millions of people, like in *12 Monkeys*. Big cities that are wasted away after an atomic world war, like in some of the Carpenter movies. All that artificial aesthetic of other realities is important to me. The style of total anarchy and freedom. But I'm not interested in copying sets one to one, I'm just influenced by the idea that all the new shiny stuff we have today has a very short life span or that maybe, in the near future, that stuff will come alive and control us. David Cronenberg is a huge influence on me, my favorites are *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*. It's hard to find a director like him, his movies are neither horror nor sci-fi, they have a second level of psychological reality, a dream logic of a person who

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has dementia. The props in his films are like unconscious objects of a very personal history. I think that's what I try to find in my way of working and in the things I do.

gdv Observing your work, one often has the sensation of being faced with a bodily quality that seems ill, fragile, all too precarious. In "Flesh to Flesh", the exhibition at Micky Schubert, I was particularly struck by one work: two orthopedic crutches resting on a pane of glass. One was immersed in a situation of precarious balance, and very strong alienation...

mzz I think it's a new idea of a fetish. One that doesn't appear through a sexual feeling, but rather from a possibility of connecting to the inner pain that everybody has hidden away somewhere. It is related to weird instruments that could help you to feel the pain from the outside. Like getting an electric shock from a wire to keep yourself away from that boring, creepy, outside world which lets you know that we are nothing more than the product we want to consume. It's like a new type of addiction. A secret drug to help you feel your inner self again. It's the next step after leaving corporeal sexuality behind. The work we're talking about was maybe an example of how it could look like when somebody leaves his tools behind, the tools of a futuristic junkie who is living in an architecture made out of glass and steel, without any windows. I think we have to accept that we are approaching a very cold, humanless next period, where everything seems to be so very connected.

gdv How do you imagine the future?

mzz It will be a wonderful microchip dreamworld, were some of us will have to be careful not to talk about things that someone else doesn't want to hear. But the rest of our society will be happy to receive whatever they wish to obtain, and I'm not just talking about the super rich, I mean 93% of the normal population. They will be slaves of the latest technologies that will satisfy 100% of their dreams. It will be DARK! DARK! DARK! And sexy.