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7 ORLAN's Hybridizations: From Virtual to Literal Cyborg // From Mortal to Immortal Being

"Remember the future."
(ORLAN, 1998, p. 317)

To think about our future as carnal and transient human beings in a biopolitical and technohumanized age driven by medical, digital, technoscientific and transcendental probabilities of life-enhancement, means at the same time to think about who we are and for how long. For the French-born multi-media and performance artist ORLAN remembering the future means zigzagging along a non-chronological timeline within her lifespan, putting into practice these promising and visionary biopolitical and technoscientific prospects for us to be remembered in the future while the artist herself has already been through the various possibilities of *Giving Birth to Her Loved Self*, of breeding and cloning, of de-constructing and re-constructing, of virtualizing and immortalizing her body as well as her multiple selves.

One of her first photographic works with the punning title *ORLAN accouche d'elle m'aime*¹³⁵ from 1965 bears witness of the embryonic poetics of the birth-giving artist as metaphor for the artist's clone as a continuous subject in ORLAN's oeuvre.¹³⁶ The photo shows the artist from a bird's eye perspective with a mannequin emerging from between her naked thighs, thus hinting at her soon to follow doubles, her self-generating powers and the subsequent possibility of splitting—at least—into two, confirmed by ORLAN's words: "Life is an aesthetic experience to be recycled. I have recycled bodies as the fundamental materials of life. I have made my body the tool for new and multiple embodiment." (ORLAN, 2010a, p. 118).

ORLAN's multiple embodiments eventually demand their own names. Born on May 30, 1947, as Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte in Saint-Étienne, France, she changed her name to ORLAN in 1962, fusing for the first time the juridical persona legally entering into society via birth certificate with her artist's self.¹³⁷ After her groundbreaking surgical performances (1990–1993) the artist reincarnated herself in 1993 as Sainte ORLAN by soliciting an agency to create a new name and logo for her and by commissioning a lawyer to petition her new identity and look with the

¹³⁵ ORLAN *Gives Birth to Her Loved Self*; the French *elle m'aime* (she loves me) in its homophonous reflection can be read as *elle même* (herself).

¹³⁶ ORLAN's oeuvre can be accessed over her web page (<https://www.orlan.eu/>).

¹³⁷ A birth certificate only gives evidence of the legal data of the child's parentage, never of the biological-medical facts.

Republic of France (ORLAN, 1998, p.326). When asked about the current state of her legally protected name the artist denies an answer: "So, I will not answer. My name is ORLAN, inter alia, and as possible, my name is written in uppercases." (ORLAN, personal communication, July 27, 2016).

The change of names is accompanied by the change of her appearance(s). After her third operation in 1990 ORLAN's *Official portrait in Bride of Frankenstein wig* refers to the myth of a cyborg-being that in our age of post-mechanical—i.e. in-vivo, in-vitro as well as machinic, electronic and programmed—reproduction has become an actual option. ORLAN as *Frankenstein's Bride*, followed by digitally produced *Self-Hybridizations*, video- and telematic games with ORLAN as the protagonist vary the prospects of her imagined and multiplied selves. Consequentially, these photographic pretenses are only the prelude to further hybridizations that reach beyond the metaphorical level of virtual transformations and eventually result in the artist's surgical, transgenic and robotic mutations and multiplications. With the surgical interventions in 1990 ORLAN has started to manipulate her looks in a literal manner which she calls *Carnal Art*:

One can consider my work as classical self-portraiture even if initially it is conceived with the aid of computers. But what can one say when it comes to permanently inscribing this work into the flesh? I will speak of a "Carnal Art," in part to differentiate myself from Body Art, to which nevertheless it belongs. ... Carnal Art is a work of autoportraiture in the classical sense, but with the technological means of its time. It oscillates between disfiguration and refiguration. It inscribes itself in the flesh because our era begins to lend itself to this possibility. (ORLAN, 1998, pp. 318–319)

Besides reaching into her body, ORLAN thereafter applies biotechnological means to mingle her flesh with other non-human organisms in a chimerical way. Her digital images, her bodily changes, her mixed genomes and lately her robotic counter-image, the *ORLANoid* (2018), manifest the cyborg-body including its binaries of uniqueness and multiplicity, miscellany and diversity, the *I* and the *Other(s)*, the virtual and the literal and, last not least, the mortal and the immortal body. Insisting on the thought that we are not only one *I* but plural "we"s, her oeuvre sounds like the declaration of war against the *Self* in an age of the mass-individual; and it most certainly is: "My work is a struggle against the innate, the inexorable, the programmed, Nature, DNA (which is our direct rival as artists of representation), and God!" (ORLAN, 1998, p. 325).

The sculpting and breeding and redoubling metamorphoses of her body unmistakably address the subject of the *Self*. By suggesting flexible identities of herself and by confronting us with quite arresting images of these very processes of hybridization, ORLAN not only questions the status of her own body and *Self* but also re-directs our attention effectively towards the *Other*, namely our own bodies and identities. The digital/surgical/genetic/machinic de- and reconstruction of ORLAN and its resulting consequences may lead to an equal identity-transformation in the onlooker, who is

invited onto a quest for the location, the origin, and the interdependencies of the human identity, by de- and redressing her inner *Self*.

With the help of ORLAN's literal embodiments we are only just beginning to guess the destabilizing, disconcertingly unreal, seemingly unnatural, at times dangerous, confidingly technophile, dissuasive and repulsive consequences of the human hybrids our bodies and identities have become:

My work and its ideas, incarnated in my flesh, interrogate the status of the body in our society and its evolution in future generations via new technologies and upcoming genetic manipulations. My body has become a site of public debate that poses crucial questions for our time. (ORLAN, 1998, p. 319)

This debate also internalizes how and why we have long ago started to drift off into a transcultural, transnatural, and technoscientific posthuman condition. Plus, this debate stars two players and their relationship: the *representational Other* that we are confronted with (ORLAN) and the *real Self* that we cling to (us). Though for a start the real work needs to be accomplished by the artist: "As my friend the French artist Ben Vautier would say, 'Art is a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it'" (ORLAN, 1998, p. 326). This is how she does it.

7.1 Redressing the Body: The Reincarnation of Sainte ORLAN

From the years 1990 to 1993 ORLAN worked out a way to radicalize Body Art with her long-term-performance *The Re-Incarnation of St. ORLAN*. Over the period of four years ORLAN underwent nine—what she called—"surgical manipulations" (Bouchard, 2010, p. 63). For the performance of her re-incarnation ORLAN had transferred her artist's studio into the operating theatres of several hospitals in various countries. In addition, she outfitted the operating room with a new decor, replacing—wherever possible—its interior and equipment. ORLAN is producer and director all-in-one for when and how she makes arrangements for the transplantation of her skin, a liposuction, the surgeries on her facial features or the reshaping of her flesh and bones. The same changes were initiated on a psychological level: between 1990 and 1993 ORLAN went through psychoanalysis in order to develop her new personality.

To grasp the meaning of the physical changes ORLAN initiated on herself, one has to skip back in time to find art historical role models. For instance, to the Greek artist Zeuxis of Heraclea who once created the ideal portrait of a woman by inviting the most beautiful ladies of his time into his studio. From each one of them he selected the most perfect feature and/or flawless body parts in order to re-combine these in his portrayal. ORLAN was following similar strategies. To arrange her facial features in a novel way, she picked from the following archetypes of art history: chosen was the chin of Botticelli's *Venus*, the nose of Gérôme's *Psyche*, the lips Francois Boucher has

given to his *Europe*, the eyes of *Diana* from the painting of the School of Fontainebleau and the high forehead from Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.

But the artist was not only aiming at a new visual version of her face. By assimilating the physiognomies selected from the mythological protagonists, ORLAN also meant to incorporate the character traits of these women into her persona on a symbolical level: this is why she picked *Venus*, the goddess of erotic love, fertility, and creativity; *Psyche* represents the soul; and *Diana's* readiness to combat was chosen as a male component to be added to the artist, just to name a few of the expected characteristics (ORLAN, 1998, pp. 319–320). Thus, the physical incisions reach far deeper into her flesh than the cuts of the surgical knife that can only mark the body's surface.

Of course, such a surgical intervention holds risks. Especially as ORLAN was merely having a local anesthesia that enabled her to talk and act as freely as possible while being operated on, in contrast to a full anesthesia that in its coma-like consequences not only helps to prevent pain but also to protect the patient from the psychological trauma of seeing her own flesh cut and flayed. During her epidural anesthesia, instead, ORLAN was able to recite from a selection of texts, which picked up on the theme of the particular operation (e.g., Michel Serres (1991/2015), Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni (1984), or Julia Kristeva (1982) among others). The medical staff was garnished with outfits of famous fashion designers that were commissioned by ORLAN for this happening, such as Paco Rabanne or Issey Miyake. Furthermore, still lives with fruit arrangement decorated the room and music and a dance-performance under the direction of ORLAN supported the action dramatically. The whole performance was transmitted live via satellites into public museums and galleries in Tokyo, New York, Paris, Toronto, Hamburg, and other cities. The video was reinforced by sign language. Throughout the procedure the audience had the opportunity to get in contact with the artist and ask questions, send faxes and communicate over video-conference with ORLAN as long as she was not prevented from speaking by surgical necessities. All these interactions contribute enormously to the fact that an invasive procedure of—for example—a transplant is being reduced to a mundane occurrence.

ORLAN's surgical interventions recordings, videotapes and even relics of her bodily fluids and flesh, as well as other remains from the operations, were placed on the art market in order to raise money for follow-up performances. The vials and reliquaries on offer contain blood, fat as well as the removed tissue of the artist (each relic holds 10g of her flesh); furthermore, there were dressing materials and gauze bandages that had been used during the surgery and hence were soaked with the artist's blood. All these products were framed for sale like fan-merchandise, certified by ORLAN's signature and the following inscription: "This is my body, this is my software".

There remains the question of why the artist is treading such a radical path and provoking attention in assuming a new identity this way. In the age of plastic surgery, of medical omnipresence, in this age of mechanical reproduction fostered by means of stem cell research—to which I will turn to later in this text—ORLAN is problematizing

legal and at the same time ethical issues: Firstly, after the last medical intervention, the artist wanted to obtain a court order, that would allow her on a juridical level to take on a new identity (ORLAN, 1998, p. 326). Plastic surgery allows us a complete revision of our optical persona, so it seems to be justified to ask how far we are willing to go and what legal consequences are to be expected. The artist touches on this problem by passing down her own DNA that—in the age of humanistic science and the clone—could offer her a life even after her death. Secondly, and even more importantly, ORLAN's hyperreal new looks raise the worrisome ethical question to what extent life sciences or oneself should be allowed to muddle with the identity issue of a person and to have a say in *who* we are and *for how long*? And, thirdly, ORLAN of course touches on a feminist issue, i.e. to free women from the dictates of beauty standards. Also, Amelia Jones (1998) associates with this thought:

ORLAN's work points to the fact that plastic surgery, rather than allowing us to gain control over our bodies, exacerbates our subordination to their vulnerabilities and morality—a subordination all the more dangerous for women, due to its long precedent in Western representation and thought. The more we attempt to reverse the signs of aging or supposedly misbegotten facial and bodily features, the more obviously we are obsessively driven by our corporeality (specifically, its visual appearance as psychically incorporated into our senses of self). (Jones, 1998, pp. 227–228)

ORLAN's effort gains credibility whilst she is using her own body in a self-mutilating act, being her own object and material of study all at once, thus, demonstrating the unattainability of false promises on perfection and eternal life. Her message is intensified by the unnatural clash of medicine and the *fine* arts. What art lovers and connoisseurs think of as being *fine*—the idealistic beauty of the female nude that is not downgraded to a merely naked, thus realistic body, the decorative but exclusive decency of art—collides with ORLAN's representation of the open body. The stigmata that were thought to make her more beautiful, inflict physical pain on us. In a visual and a mental way. The artist is well aware of that. And she apologizes as follows:

I am sorry to make you suffer, but remember, I am not suffering, except like you, when I look at the images. Only a few kinds of images force you to shut your eyes: death, suffering, the opening of the body, some aspects of pornography for some people, and for others, giving birth. In this case, eyes become black holes in which the image is absorbed willingly or unwillingly, these images are swallowed up and hit just where it hurts, without passing through the usual filters, as if the eyes no longer had any connection to the head. (ORLAN, 1996, p. 2, para. 4–5)

When we are watching the surgical interventions on ORLAN's body and especially in her face, our own facial muscles twitch. We feel the urge to look away. Still, while covering our eyes, we are trying to catch a glimpse. And ORLAN *wants* us to look. She needs us as witnesses when medical science as a form-giving instrument reaches well beyond its limits. She is convinced that her doings can only be justified by the urgent poignancy of her message. This is what she claims for her art:

For me, art which is interesting is related to and belongs to resistance. It must upset our assumption, overwhelm our thoughts, be outside norms and outside of the law. It should be against bourgeois art; it is not there to comfort, nor to give us what we already know. It must take risks, at the risk of not being accepted, at least initially. It should be deviant and involve a project for society. And even if this declaration seems very romantic, I say: art can, art must, change the world, for that is its only justification. (ORLAN, 1996, p. 5, para. 19)

What in the aftermath of her performance is in fact able to make a change for future worlds is related to the production of the reliquaries that contain her body samples. They consist of the drained fat and blood from various liposuctions that were bottled in vials and bandaging material left over from the surgical interventions onto which ORLAN added blood-paintings, as well as blood-soaked gauzes that bear her imprint in combination with photographic transfers of her face. These *Holy Shrouds* are carried to an extreme in the form of apparently holy reliquaries. For a secure preservation of its content the biopsies are sustained in liquid media and the collectability of the relics is guaranteed by the welded and bullet-proof receptacles. Each reliquary is labeled and—apart from the logo “This is my body, this is my software”—inscribed with the same excerpt of Michel Serres’ text on *Lacisme*, each time in a different language; it reads:

The current tattooed monster, ambidextrous, hermaphroditic and cross-bred, what can it make us see, now, under its skin? Yes, blood and flesh. Science speaks of organs, functions, of cells and molecules, only to admit at last that it’s high time we stopped speaking of life in laboratories; but science never mentions the flesh, which, quite rightly, signifies the conflation, here and now, in a specific site of the body, of muscles and blood, skin and hair, bones, nerves and diverse functions, that inextricably binds that which pertinent knowledge analyzes. (as cited in ORLAN, 1998, p. 327)

Knowing that stem cell research provides the possibility of a clone, with her relics ORLAN is taking measurements for the physical conveyability of her post-mortal persona. Moreover, ORLAN plans to exhibit her whole body after her death as an ultimate relic (ORLAN, 1998, p. 326). I will come back to the importance of these anticipatory steps in the chapter *Redressing Identity*.

For now we have to state that with her surgical performance ORLAN was re-incarnated with a new look and a new personality, the consequences of which are not only inscribed in her face and into her psyche but have also been testified by the law, resulting in a change of her identity which is inscribed into the fabric of society. Her at first sight mere cosmetic interventions are meant to scrutinize the highly appreciated concept of our individual freedom.

7.2 Redressing the Image: Virtual Crossovers

Before literally changing into a new look and persona ORLAN enabled us to imagine the expected outcome of her bodily and facial changes before the surgical interventions by offering a computer animated 3-D-scan of her soon-to-be re-incarnated *Self*. After the operations the artist created virtual portraits of the healing process of her temporary looks that lasted 40 days. This work in progress titled *Self-Hybridizations, In-Between* (1993) follows the seventh of the nine operations, called *Omniprésence*, added one photograph of the artist's battered face every day, forming a long row of diptychs. The series contains ORLAN's healing portrait on the upper half and an image of her face that was digitally morphed with classical beauties of the art canon on the lower half of each diptych. The lower portraits fuse into endlessly thinkable avatars for the future to come. The discrepancy, however, lies in the futuristically synthesized computer images of the two beautiful women in the lower half and the recklessly candid proofs of ORLAN's shattered and bruised face on top. Both images are representing the grotesque in-between status of becoming-other, the one "made by the computing-machine", the other "made by the body-machine" (ORLAN, 1998, p. 322). In both cases the transformation process is referred to as divine, symbolically hinted at by the process of healing lasting 40 days which—in a biblical sense—is also the number of days spent for penitence. It is a demonstration of the carnivalesque excesses the artist has initiated with her surgical performances, in need to be followed by the obligatory 40 days of abstinence. This is why ORLAN adds one more picture of her perfectly healed face, showing off the two bumpy implants on her forehead, when she had passed the obligatory 40 day quarantine imposed on a patient that underwent beautification: on the 41st day this photograph shows her reincarnation as Sainte ORLAN. "The current tattooed monster, ambidextrous, hermaphroditic and cross-bred" (as cited in ORLAN, 1998, p. 327) that ORLAN was quoting from Michel Serres' laical text, all the while referring to the Harlequin's variously colored and patched coats and skin, was only a temporary condition as the next surgical alterations lay ahead of her.

When finished with her literal mutations, ORLAN, beginning in the year 1998, launched a photographic cycle, once again titled *Self-Hybridizations*, that aims at another virtual identity-shift. This time featuring a transcultural motif, the artist merges her own portrait with African, Pre-Columbian, and Native American iconologies and lost civilizations. After having surgically incorporated the western feminine ideal into her own body, ORLAN turned to the standards of beauty originating from ancient and/or non-western civilizations. Thus, opposing criteria of beauty, age, facial features, face paintings and plastic deformation merge into one another in digitally manipulated photographs. Our own era meets long gone times of native cultures or non-canonical ideals of far-away nations. Often mistaken as the real outcome of her surgical interventions (ORLAN, 2002, p. 227), these hybridizations so obviously intertwine the varied cultural appearances that—for a vast public

influenced by Eurocentristic ideals—have started to become a much dreaded idea of a universal intermingling of races and multiculturalism. As a result of this ever-growing fear, the *Time*-magazine in its special issue of fall 1993 had pictured “The New Face of America” on its front page, depicting a symbiotic, digital-blend of a beautiful woman, backed up by her pseudo-relatives imagined as cybergenetic little heads in the background. The idea of generating an “ideal racial synthesis, whose only possible existence is in the matrices of cyberspace” (Haraway, 2004b, pp. 279–280) has been surpassed by ORLAN's exotic icons: firstly, she had at this point already undergone the literal procedures in order to become a cyborg-being herself and, secondly, her *Self-Hybridizations* do not obey the idealized image of a western idea of beauty. Both of them—ORLAN and the *Time*-magazine—are assuming the *Other* as another within a global culture; but while the media-version seems to be hoping for a handsome hybrid that fits into the western canon of norms, the artistic version stresses a new norm that follows the will and design of the individual mind. Stéphane Malysse (2010) is therefore suggesting:

[T]hose games of identity acted out by various cultures show that the body is only a costume, a cultural costume. Since it varies from culture to culture, why not leave the individual the decision as to cultural orientations? Why not allow individuals to hybridize themselves? (p. 134)

For ORLAN (2002), the wishful thinking and fearful aversions of the masses has nothing to do with her artistic doings nor with reality as such:

[I]t would be wrong to separate the “surgical operations performances” from my *Self-Hybridizations*, because the former do not belong only to reality and the latter do not purely take place in virtuality. I have always sought to erase the limits, to transform reality into virtuality, and vice versa. (p. 227)

A new series of *Self-Hybridizations* (2014) morphs the artist's image with the elaborate masks of the Peking Opera. The bright colours of the masks for one thing show the artist's features, then again, merge ever so subtly into the equally patterned and brightly coloured backgrounds of each portrait. In comparison to her earlier virtual hybridizations ORLAN has added a 3-D-effect to these photographs,¹³⁸ taking her mutable *Self* towards a last missing step in her oeuvre which is the augmented reality of the video-game. Whereas she had already previously experimented with interactive sculpture (*Bumpload*, 2009) and 3-D video (*La Liberté en écorchée / Flayed Liberty*, 2013), the interactive game *Expérimentale mise en jeu* (2015) is a full body experience for the

138 Digital reproductions of the *Peking Opera Hybridizations* can be purchased for digital tools such as smartphones or tablets: the surface does not only hold the actual photo-series but shows acrobats moving and dancing in front of her *Hybridizations* that act as ORLAN's avatars and copy the Peking-look of her hybridized portraits, thereby adding yet another augmented reality.

player who slips into ORLAN's body as the game's protagonist. Unlike so many other videogames the goal is *not* to destroy or at least win over an opponent, but to rebuild artworks such as ORLAN's *Flayed Liberty*, her skinless self-portrait, over the course of 4'33", which is also the time frame given by John Cage's composition on silence with the same name. Listening to the sound of the blood rushing through the body and the nervous system working to the limit, the character in the game becomes more and more human the more successful she operates in her reconstruction tasks (ORLAN, personal communication, July 27, 2016).

In redressing her image time and time again ORLAN's doubles act both on a literal and a virtual (game-)level.

7.3 Redressing Identity: Harlequinesque Crossovers

In order to literally cross over on a transcultural, transgendered as well as transgenetic level and—eventually—to become immortal the way the fictional character Harlequin once was, ORLAN is retelling his story with *The Harlequin's Coat* (2009). The shrewd but ironic, gaudily dressed character taken from the *Commedia dell'Arte* can not only be described as a world citizen but also as a traveller of the underworld and of extraterrestrial territory. When coming back from his trip to lunar landscapes—that is how the story goes as Michel Serres (1991/2015) tells us—the Harlequin is invited to a press conference to report about his journey (pp. 7–11). The audience marvels over his extravagantly colourful but battered cloths that must have its cause in the Harlequin's wonderous and exciting adventures. But Harlequin refuses, at first, to either reflect about anything extraordinary he had witnessed or even to take off his coat. Reluctantly and under pressure from his audience, he starts to take off the thick layer of coats, one after the other, each of which is a motley patchwork of different quilts, coarsely sewn together, in different sizes and matches of diamond-shapes and colours. When it comes to the last coat, the Harlequin showing his stark naked bareness, the audience is horrified as there it shows, "[t]he current tattooed monster, ambidextrous, hermaphroditic and cross-bred" (Serres, 1991/2015, p. 10) in the process of becoming. The mythical character had obtained bruises and patches from his escapades to hell and travels to the moon that had not only resulted in his colourful and now worn and cobbled dress, but that had left marks even underneath his many layers of clothing—on his very skin. During a lifetime, the Harlequin has become a hybrid, a multicultural, cross-skinned, an impure cell-bastard.

The metaphor of Harlequin's personal history serves ORLAN as a background for *The Harlequin's Coat*, her first project involving biotechnology and living biological matter of herself and of others, resulting in the co-culturing and fusion of human and non-human cells and tissue culture. The idea was to hybridize skin tissue of various ethnicities (white & black) and other species (marsupial & bovine) with her own skin cells (ORLAN, 2010a, pp. 116–117) as a literal and metaphorical adoption of

these multi-ethnic as well as multi-specied backgrounds, identities, and emotions. The skin and muscle cells collected during biopsy were supposed to intermingle their different pigmentation, different specification and different genderfication to grow together as transhuman hybrids, therewith transgressing cultural coordinates and species barriers. The unnatural blend of seeded cell cultures was shown intermingling *in-vitro* in constantly moving petri-dishes that were attached to the pied backdrop of a Harlequin's gown. The work of art was presented with a custom-made bioreactor marking the head of the larger-than-life model of the Harlequin that was indicated by colorful diamond-shapes on the dress, growing ORLAN's tissue-cultures that seemed to morph infinitely.

The idea of hybridizing a *Harlequin's Coat* is not far-fetched or an outrageous excess as it might seem at first glance. In our medicalized world the comingling of different species for the purpose of life-enhancement is a well-established practice. While the engineering of plant and animal genomes has resulted in transgenic organisms for more than a hundred years, in the meantime also for the human species a biotechnical cut-and-paste-technique is being applied in order to provide our bodies with organic replacements, for example the cardiac valve can nowadays be grown from pigs. And while ORLAN had a piece of ox bone implanted into her jaw to create an artistic link between the human and the non-human, I myself had bovine bone material transplanted underneath my molar owing to the medical necessity of regenerative dentistry. We have all become cyborgs a long time ago. The patchwork of the Harlequin's coat and his skin underneath corresponds with our own body and identity. And like him we are just hiding our mended body and over the years so many times patched up *Self* underneath a coverage. All the marks give testimony to our being in contact with the external world. Harlequin has become the norm. As to the remains of ORLAN's cell cultures, these were not able to form into a full-grown hybrid skin. The initial mistrust of Harlequin's—and later ORLAN's—nauseated and shocked audience was unwarranted: "Of course, all the cells or bacteria are dead" (ORLAN, personal communication, July 27, 2016). One more reason for ORLAN to sponsor a *Petition Against Death*¹³⁹ via her website requesting people to act up and sign. But *cui bono*?:

Similarly, the petition against death that I have circulated many times in my life: it is sometimes not signed, as if the petition would reciprocate, as if it had a power, an effect, as if it had a power that I haven't given to it. It's a playful and poetic petition like flash mobs, a strike that doesn't have a concrete demand, that is not aimed at succeeding. (ORLAN, 2010b, p. 40)

ORLAN and those signing up know the outcome already: The current state of science does not allow for negating a loss of the mortal body. But forthcoming knowledge and

139 The petition can be signed at: <http://www.orlan.eu/petition/>.

insights will continue to negotiate the healed, modified, transformed, hybridized, exchangeable, and maybe the soon-to-come obsolete body. In this case ORLAN will be prepared to compensate for her present state of being-in-the-world with a possible continuous substitute via the reliquaries containing her own harvested body cells. “Her body is a factory, her flesh is product”, as Kate Ince (2000) has put it (p. 48). This is the reason why and how ORLAN might be successful: Ever since the discovery of DNA in 1953, modern biotechnology has worked on the production and recombination of DNA which became possible in 1973. The latest pioneering discovery in medicine and biotechnology was the successful re-programming of human cell material that earned the Japanese cell researcher Shinya Jamanaka and the British biologist John B. Gurdon the *Nobel Prize* in 2012. Being able to re-program human cells means that specialized stem cells can be retransformed into *pluripotent* stem cells. Reducing a cell to its original status of pluripotency is a desired means in a medical context as only a pluripotent cell has the ability to develop into almost all kinds of other cell types of an organism. A pluripotent cell is not yet programmed and therefore not yet specified for a certain tissue type. Once again and in order to clarify matters: A completely developed adult human being is living in a body that merely consists of innumerable different, but always unipotent cells. Unipotent cells are normal cells, however, *unable to divide*; in mathematics, *uni* coming from the Latin word *uno* which is “1”, a unipotent element is a nilpotent element, in other words its power is *zero*. For the human body this means that unipotent cells are only able to develop more of the same cell type: skin cells cultivate more skin, blood cells more blood, and hair cells grow hair, etc.

In contrast to a unipotent cell the most precious cell for scientific research and the body’s potential to restore itself is an *omnipotent* or *totipotent* cell. The Latin *omni* meaning all-powerful, almighty. From an omnipotent cell any other stem cell of an organism can be generated. Hence, an omnipotent cell can develop into a complete, viable, and self-dependent organism. A fertilized egg cell is such an omnipotent stem cell. These embryonic stem cells are not legally available or used for scientific research in every country. In Europe, for example, scientific research using human embryonic cells is not allowed.

Now to the polypotent cells: Polypotent or pluripotent cells are—in accordance with their Latin origin—not *almighty*, but they are able to do a lot. It is not possible to create a whole organism from them. For the time being, it is increasingly common to isolate pluripotent stem cells from various human tissue or to reprogram extracted cells into a state of pluripotency. In doing so scientists are working on the promising prospect to be able to heal numerous diseases. Using the human body as a self-sustaining storage, generating and duplicating its own material is, however, highly questionable and much discussed on an ethical level.

At present the specialization of cell types is reversible. For non-scientists this information comes as a relatively unspectacular one. But for those having children the almost reflexively advertised offer to have the umbilical cord of a newborn safely

stored away by professionals appears in a new light and is all of a sudden making—still arguable—sense when being aware of these new medical standards.

Manipulating the processes of living organisms has become state of the art—this not only for the natural and life sciences: BioArtists are working at the interface between medicine, biology, and informatics. The knowledge and techniques that had become available for the biotechnological sciences were subsequently picked up and made useful for the fine arts as well. The flux of the development of these newly adapted methods has led to a broad field of forms of artistic expression today. The overarching term *BioArt* is in itself a mutant one, serving as a placeholder for divergent practices such as digital and virtual simulations, robotic devices, the decoding and computer-based imaging of DNA-sequences as well as dry and wet laboratory operations *in-vivo* and *in-vitro* such as the cultivation of animal and human cells and tissues, biotechnical, neurophysiological, genetic mutations, and transgenic hybridizations. Therewith, BioArt is breaking down the once indispensable wall between *bio* and *técne*, initiating a “process of hybridization between the human being, the animal world and the machine world” (Gilardi, 2007, p. 230) in the art world.

What the two disciplines—science and art—disagree on is not their bioscientific methodologies but their motivation in applying them: While the natural sciences have restricted themselves to the question of *how* to succeed, the fine arts are on the lookout for answers on *why* we should do so and *what consequences* are to be expected in the face of a constantly shifting and modifiable *conditio humana* that has been downgraded to a mere information-pool on growth, health, biological functions, age, and disease. Walter Benjamin's (1936/2006) much discussed manuscript on the questionable aura of an artwork that is being reproduced goes into its next round with artists such as ORLAN that hint at the potential to hybridize and clone the human body with the (un)predictable prospect of releasing their personae into the next future, into the age of mechanical reproduction of the artist's body.

With the reliquaries containing her flesh ORLAN ventures towards her eventual immortality. The above named biotechnological achievements let the loss of the body be negotiable. Not only on a metaphorical level like Christian saints and martyrs whose reliquaries—however fragmented these might be—stand in for the integrity of their persona that was meant to be resurrected as a whole body, ORLAN is reincarnating herself into many bodies and multiple forms of being. Thanks to scientific data-harvesting and -verification, ORLAN can even for the future be assured that her relics are able to manifest the always same genetical basics—her very own cell-material—identifying her as the always same gateway for coming individuals.

This is why ORLAN has not stopped co-working with scientists from various biology laboratories such as *SymbioticA* (University of Perth, Australia) and lately *Sup'Biotech*, as well as with Institutes such as the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* or the *Institut Pasteur*, all of them situated in Paris, to store her stem cells from her latest performance, the *Tangible Strip-tease en Nanoséquence* (2016), at the temperature of -80° Celsius (ORLAN, personal communication, July 27, 2016). That this

performance was not only about the storage of her cells for further experimentation is already given away by its title: samples of her microbiotic flora were sent through the audience via vials and tubes passing them from one audience member to the other (Kyrou, 2018, p. 134) in order to not only have a share in her body fluids, but—as in the case of Harlequin presenting himself to the public—for the sake of realizing that we are all made up of the same material—only varying in tiny little bits and pieces of our DNA from one individual to the *Other*.

7.4 Redressing a Second Self: The ORLANoid

By circulating her *Self* through the rows of an audience during the performance *Tangible Strip-tease en Nanoséquence*, seeing her innermost parts floating through the fingers of the *Other*, ORLAN had managed to “place oneself outside of oneself to become oneself” (ORLAN, 2010b, p. 42). However, this is quite different from the insights acquired during the mirror stage as it was described by Jacques Lacan (2006) in the year 1949: ORLAN’s performance is way beyond recognizing herself as an “I” as she is explicitly differentiating between her *Self* and the one of the *Other* and between her *Self* and her *I*. To do this, she needs to be aware of the fact that, innately, we are provided with a “starter-kit” to develop into the *Subject* we will eventually identify with. Psychoanalysis distinguishes three entities along this process: developing an *I*, developing the *Self*, and becoming a *Subject*. The development of the *I* happens—according to Lacan (2006)—during infancy, as soon as we are able to recognize ourselves reflected in a mirror. As a next step we are cultivating our *Self* by listening to our emotions and by gathering experiences along the way that we try to match with the reactions and from the perspectives of the *Other*. Once a—continuously mutable—relationship towards the external world has been established, we have become the *Subject* how it is seen by others. There are moments when we are able to objectify ourselves from this *Subject*: in our dreams and at the sight of ORLAN’s oeuvre celebrating her prospering *Selves*, resulting in her saying “Je sommes” instead of the familiar “Je suis”. It is what Lacan describes as being aware of the fragmented body (Lacan, 2006, p. 75); it is—how Erika Fischer-Lichte put it so strikingly—the “Abständigkeit des Menschen von sich selbst” (Fischer-Lichte, 2004, p. 129; “Man’s detachment from himself”; the translation in English is mine). The *I* owes its existence to the dualisms of seeing/feeling, seeing/being seen, touching/being touched, the two-dimensional/three-dimensional, the *I* and the *Other* as well as the Subject and the Object. Thus, we are only able to identify our *Self*, by thinking these different perspectives as co-existing. However, to think these dualisms as one is a difficult task, remarked on by Peggy Phelan (1993) as follows: “In that declaration and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being” (p. 13).

This is why ORLAN also states that “Je est une autre”, adapting Rimbaud’s famous *bon mot* by changing it into its feminine *Other*, (ORLAN & Virilio, 2010, p. 193) to claim her multiple, female identities to which most recently she added one more version: her robot-hybrid *ORLANoid* (2018). The once again decidedly unorthodox perspective she has on her *Self*, disagrees in more than one fundamental way with the *I* that is supposed to reflect in Lacan’s mirrored stage: ORLAN’s robotic vis-à-vis is not flat, not untouchable, not back-to-front, and—most of all—it can be communicated with.

The *ORLANoid* is not a robot in the sense of the novelist Karel Čapek who coined the word from the Czech *robota*, meaning “forced labor”, i.e. somebody meant to work or be useful in some way. It is more of a “technohumanist figure”, as Donna Haraway (2004c) would describe it, an “enhanced command-control-communication-intelligence system (C3I)” (Haraway, 2004c, p. 299) that is capable of deep learning, able to react and interact unexpectedly, thus extending ORLAN’s body by means of electronically and digitally encoded information, such as an artificial, collective and social intelligence as well as language skills. On approaching the sensors of her double, the *ORLANoid* comes to life, moving about, expressing itself in ORLAN’s voice and directing questions towards the artist projected on two video screens. Regarding its intellectual capacities, the robot before being put into existence was fed with texts and poems by ORLAN and answers given by internet users to the Proust Questionnaire. She had invited her friends to think up additional questions for the *ORLANoid* to ask her and vice versa (ORLAN, 2018a, p. 116).

Of course, the *ORLANoid* is a lookalike of ORLAN in the year 2018, however, only the head down to the bust, her arms and hands have been re-modelled after the artist. The rest of it gives away its mechanical and electronic origins as the transhuman hybrid it was meant to be. The *ORLANoid* contradicts the notion of the—as Donna Haraway has traced down its history (Haraway, 2004d, pp. 321–322)—ever so popular fem-bot as a sex-toy, or the smugly creator-ess’ creature. It is neither technophile nor technophobe such as all of ORLAN’s reincarnations—be it the computer-generated hybridizations, the surgical re-modelling of her persona or the clones of her biological *Self*. This cyborg is a virtual and at the same time real being: “Cyborgs are also places where the ambiguity between the literal and the figurative is always working. You are never sure whether to take something literally or figuratively. It is always both/and.” (Haraway, 2004c, p. 323). That is the reason why ORLAN is addressing her double as follows: “You’re a sculpture—a moving, talking self-portrait that pretends to feel emotions, though you never really will. ... because you’re an object, you’re one of my ‘among other things,’ one of my theoretical and aesthetic representations” (ORLAN, 2018b, p. 117). So it doesn’t matter to ORLAN that the flaws of the mechanical creature show. On the contrary: the artist wants to stress the promising as well as the threatening prospects of a technoscientific future that might—at its current status—be overrated: “[I]t soon becomes apparent that artificial intelligence essentially creates artificial stupidity—a certain type of intelligence that is greatly inferior to our own” (ORLAN, 2018a, p. 116). The highly efficient algorithm of the *ORLANoid*’s artificial

intelligence is still lacking human capacities such as feeling pain, having intuition or visions, developing emotions or a gut feeling—it doesn't have guts or a heart! Although it might be able to develop a humanoid *I*, it will fail to develop a humanoid *Self* and will hence never succeed in becoming a human *Subject*. All the same, ORLAN's robot-hybrid will over the years develop its own identity. And it will differ from anybody else's.

There are no similar individuals. Individuality is one of the most valuable commodities to human (wo)mankind. In a posthuman world, however, the characteristics and forms of expression of our individualities seem to become more and more compatible and replaceable. To go look for our individual *Self* in- and outside of our bodies might seem obsolete concerning the technoscientific, transcultural, and transnatural possibilities of our times. To remember the future, as ORLAN wants us to do, means to become aware of the many ways our identity manifests itself, that it is interchangeable and reproduceable, multiplying and hybridizing over and over again, thus being able to develop into new constructions of our *Self*. As Donna Haraway (2004a) has put it superbly: "The point is to learn to remember that we might have been otherwise, and might yet be, as a matter of embodied fact" (Haraway, 2004a, p. 240). As we have seen, it is hard to know what and how many ones we are at the very moment and also who all the *Other* ones are. To find an agreement with and an acceptance of these facts—that we cannot even take for granted—ORLAN helps to open a door to. A door that we need to trespass in a world of growing in-acceptance of the *Other* and an anthropocentric focus we need to overcome. For the sake of every single identity.

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