

# Sausage Opera

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In preparation for everything that follows, I went to the supermarket in the seaside town I am spending some days in and purchased a package of chouriço, a vinegary Portuguese sausage. The sausage was literally out of its casing. I remembered liking this sausage so much on a trip to Portugal some years ago and, since the town I am in historically is a Portuguese fishing town (as well as the place where "the pilgrims" planted their first foot on American soil), this spicy sausage, even out of its casing, seemed to pull so many things together as an idea, and more importantly, I could put so many of them all at once in my mouth.

While I was cooking the sausage, I was trying to have a video chat with my girlfriend in New York who I had been up late with a few nights before looking at Nathalie Djurberg's sacred and eerie animations. During our chat I kept explaining to Leopoldine that I was starving since she didn't understand why I was trying to cook and chat at the same time and freaking out because I kept burning all the sausage in the pan. I felt certain that if I was cooking a familiar dish I could do it all but now the deep orange pig meat was quickly

turning to a dark red, almost black cindery concoction. I was making hell food. Ugh. I had to stop our talk, pay attention and then it worked out. And I've been eating sausage now for days. And growing increasingly disturbed as my exploration continued, and I've learned that sausage is essentially (though sadly it is now mostly an imitation of this) intestines stuffed with ground meat. The intestines often being from the very same creature whose meat is being ground up. It's the worst homecoming you can imagine. It's torture, really. Sausage, hot dogs. This extremely popular food. Imagine that you died, your entrails are yanked out and drained and bathed. Then you are ground up and stuffed into those same intestines. This is unbelievable horror. I am not a vegetarian but it's useful to think this way to understand what the atmosphere of Baroque truly is. All the hanging pigs and accosted women mean something. It's one of the orders of horror. And fittingly, the same night we were looking at Nathalie Djurberg's work, we also came upon a video of large brown turds, giant inflatable ones by Paul McCarthy swaying in a public park in Utrecht (fig. 1). Those turds are not to my knowledge in the show. Instead, we have Paul McCarthy's more Bernini-like sculpture (in wood) of a girl and a bird and *Dopey* (p. 116). I think turds are not really Baroque. I mean you see the gesture in certain paintings. You see the person squatting over someone else's head but you don't see the shit exactly. But those spectacular turds are now part of the apparatus of my head. There was a blond boy in the park who seemed a little elated to discover that poop can be art. If you think of it, a sausage is sort of a pre-poop. And post. It's a melancholy simulacra of the body - any body - its offshoots, byways and canals, a derangement of the body's works in fact. And here an animal body, perhaps the gentle pig, is about to defecate itself but before the act of defecation occurs the intestine will be consumed by another creature. One of us. Defig indeed.

The gaze of the cow in the market place in a painting called *The Meatstall* (p. 50) is so incommensurately sad, especially as its one prominent head, positioned among all the sausages and other heads hanging above it, exudes indeed a melancholy stare and I wonder if melancholy is like this shit that never leaves the body but enters the mouth of another kind. Is melancholy just a look on your face like you are already dead in life? Or is it a moment of transport. Shit changing rooms. Finding itself in another one and then another again on its long voyage into the persecutor (or victim's) mouth. And then like a nightmare it starts happening again. It feels as if you, the confabulation of all these ground-up thoughts are standing there in the wrong room for eternity. When did it begin? Modernism or shit's journey. Is the Baroque relay an apprehension of this never endingness. And our various light and heavy acts in response to it. I think of the drag queen at the doorway in Ryan Trecartin's work thoughtfully enquiring, "Am I over existing?" Or just proclaiming, "I love being in places that mean nothing to me" (fig. 2). Both delivered with such total meatiness, the ditzzy shit that these girls say. The Beckett-y-shit. But that cow on the shelf shows just what it means. Does it mean the same? Which same?

I look at Oscar Tuazon's sculpture like a box of broken crackers, stepped on (fig. 3). I always like his sage and emphatic defeat. His sculpture reminds me of a day I was standing in Target. Realizing that I'd forgotten to take my allergy pill, I leaned up against the popcorn counter and bumbling opened my tin and the pill hopped out and landed on the floor and I watched a very large beefy man stomp on it as he trudged by, aimlessly shopping, a buzzed melancholy filling the man's eyes. Oscar's stepped on candy bar touts the spirituality of interruption. The trampled quality of daily improvement, of "health". Or just to be standing in a department store, in a mall, on a freeway opening onto other ones, to be riding around in a world full of ever brighter and stranger copies. We applaud breakage because it stops anything else, the pill, the pearl wobbles then falls and is smashed. When I look at the painting of Louis the 14th with his beefy calves in white stockings and chunky heels that any woman or queen would be thrilled to slip on today I think, The Sun King, I think yes he is "there" (fig. 4). Yet, is he? The painter has depicted his wrinkly aging face like a butt. The human softness is counter to the shining splendor of his trussed and ornamented body. His casing. There's a lot of wrinkling flesh in this show. And to trumpet it is riotous, baroque. The father bends over his son's ass and is wiping (p. 62). It's a wrinkled little butt. The lithe dancer in Nathalie Djurberg's video is both made of puckered flesh and is fiendishly tearing the flesh off her female partner - is it frenzy or a sadistic demonstration of female power over their audience who are all men and even religious men, and who themselves are a giant observing and devouring mouth consuming the spectacle of the women's dance. Alone in another video Nathalie Djurberg's avid protagonist is assaulted and tangled in a seething mesh of penises that she heroically slashes through creating a red-denied stump again and again till she is surrounded by the confetti of each prick's bloodied tears (fig. 5). Her artifice is our mad triumph, the broken pause. But the ocean eats the ships. That's a painting. A massive riot of dead fowl are collapsed onto one another. That's another. These are old ones. On a shelf right below all the dead birds, a couple of live hens are breathing their secrets to one another. How did we manage this, says the first one. It's like a New Yorker cartoon. I mean the contemporary artists do really seem less global, historic. Like the only history is art history. Yet, there is the torture place and there is the market place and there is the royal place. And through all history women are fodder. In the painting called *The Rape of the Negress* the black woman is waving desperately but the way we see it there is no one coming at all (p. 106). She is alone in their fun. The painting of her is one of a profusion of such moments. She will die like the cow but that moment is still far off. The meeting of the two extreme sets of feelings, the boys' joy and the woman's alarm is the still bright horror of the painting. In *Crazy Lovers* the man diddles the woman's one breast or is it simply cascading out that way (p. 49). Is she an oddity or is the single breast a portent of further riches from the unexposed lands of her body. Yet their sausagey faces do not telegraph value. In this private room, what these "crazy lovers" are rich in is *abandon*. Which is not the button ever pushed in the

new work. Except maybe in Nathalie Djurberg's which snarls and bites and plays with frogs (fig. 6).

Juergen Teller's photos of skinny blondes are just a fashion shoot without clothes. The women stand in endless corridors and arches, and the (female) human is utterly disenfranchised in the wrong clothes (none) so these creepy works of his feel like pitying family photos rather than art or even porn. The architectural banquets that the blondes are posed within render them like awkward adolescents on a family vacation in history and so they find themselves stuck in that wrong picture looking eternally betrayed. His richest picture is the most animal one. The whitened close up begins at her shoulders and each tiny plane of her hips and crotch are contrapostally displayed as her lifted boobs stand over a sepulchral ass in the Louvre to make her fleshiness an ugly fact (p. 44). Now for a fleeting moment she is richly abject and it is entirely a relief.

Marilyn Minter's *Cheshire* (p. 151) is the in your face companion piece to Jacob Isaacs van Swanenburgh's *Jaws of Leviathan* (p. 80). Something huge and catlike is eating humans. Who I assume have sinned. Her mouth is all gilded, slick and bloodied and hungry for *you*. This *Cheshire's* the difference between a long shot and a close up. His is the morality film, hers is the horror, the nightmare that haunts you all day, hours away from the bed. It's the humanized mouth of a pig. What if you woke up and it was eating you now, what if it wanted you for any and all purposes? (Scream!)

In poverty there is always someone succumbing to the need to entertain themselves and their neighbors because to be hungry and poor and homeless too is to be bored and exposed, and utterly desperate. Balancing bottles and lying in trash is genre photography at its heart wrenching purest. Again and again the button is pushed. I think the photographs of Boris Mikhailov (p. 70 to 71) supply an unadulterated link to the widening pool of human suffering that grows in relation to the corpulence, fat or thin of the pigs on the top, unslaughtered, over-fed, dead.

Cindy Sherman's series of portraits of what looks like a variety of wealthy women, successful women seem to be precisely about the act of self-portraiture by the subject herself - each woman is full of her own gleeful candor about the deft pleasure of arriving at the realization of oneself, whether we find her monstrous or not, whether she makes us hot or queasy as she gazes out from her caftan, cowboy hat and winking smile, with her bronzed face-work or no (p. 133 to 135). These pictures remind me of the assertion of a Native American chief who was painted by George Caitlin in the 19th century that he, in fact, the Native American, had painted his *own* portrait, not Caitlin, because of the bravery it took for him to be able to look straight into the eyes of a white man. Cindy's women virtually gleam with pride of self against a millennium of riotous misogyny. I pick up these cards with pleasure at their smug joy at journey's end, the triumphal moment, the empty room.

Interestingly, Maurizio Cattelan performs a female castration by making safe the agony of Francesca Woodman, protecting her fall, institutionalizing her on a bed/cross (p.41). Do we call it love? The quiet torture of his installation is familiar to us all. She "lives." And the dogs are stuffed too.

The final little sausage is the tongue. I love this. This is Urs Fischer's master work (cover and p. 97). Here it wags, an actual genital exhibiting itself through a hole in a wall. The horrendous close up, the tender enemy you can touch that's to be blamed for everything and rewarded only with it.