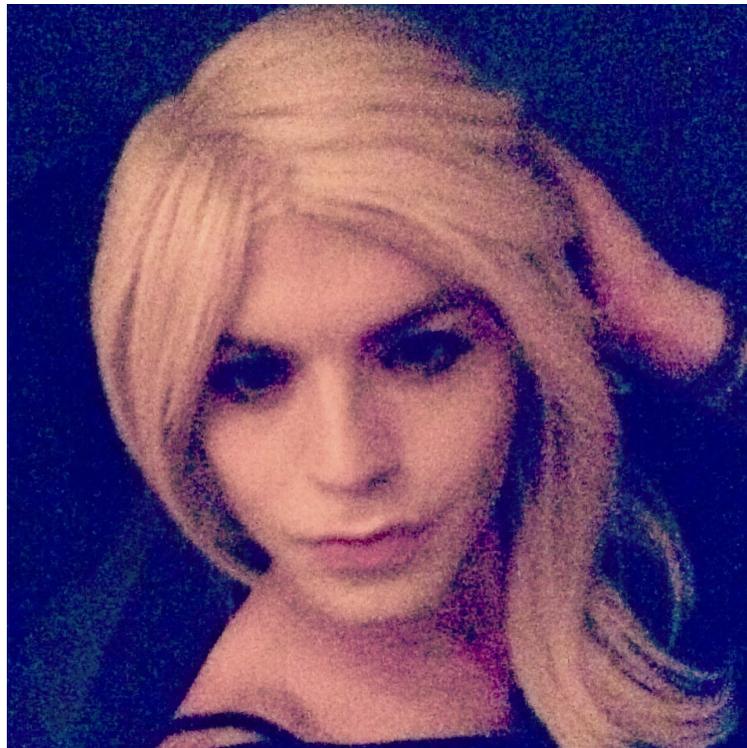




Longing to Be Occupied: Trans Desire and Other Technologies of Violence

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On the 6th day I was a woman in my bedroom I had two men over who referred to me as a she and believed in my she-ness more than I ever could. 'Because they need to,' Emily said. At first I thought that the fact that men, real men, were so easily convinced to make love to another man provided there be a few feminine props- I thought it incomprehensible. But is it not just as naïve to think a gay bottom sees manhood where there is nothing but an external version of himself?

A week of faux womanhood has gone by and my head is over-boiling with good ideas, bad theories, and an uncontrollable need to take advantage of all that's been denied before. It's difficult to sleep. What if I miss the ones who only peruse the ads during the wee hours?

A Puerto Rican boy came through my door saying, 'you're sweet' and left saying 'good night, sweetheart,' and in between arrival and departure he made me believe that what he was doing to me was making love. Brazilian-style.

He immobilized my head like it was a brick on a pavement that he really needed to step on.

He only stopped once. So that he could continue, alternating a look of murder with a tooth-gap kind of sweetness. I decided to surrender even if that meant premature death. Even if it meant awaiting and bad news and judgmental doctors that ask you how many sex partners you've had (last night?) and badly executed public health videos from 1991 inside loud free clinics where the few white people present haven't slept in five days. And ass cheeks that remain sore for days, not due to penetrations but injections, and a secret that holds no political power...

When the Puerto Rican with the deceiving sweetness, like all sweetness, caresses me and leads my hand to the back of his body, I realize I cannot bear the thought of him as a child. To think that his body was ever something else, something smaller, something lesser...His touch feels maternal, his legs spread apart and my fantasies begin to rot. Quickly. Like filmstrip burning on film projector and the audience going ahhhhh...The quick disappointment adjusted to the sympathy for the projectionist.

What a difference twenty minutes make. He wants me to fuck him and I want him to go back to being someone else. I want him to match what the dragon tattoo on his chest promises, what the prominence of his chest demands, his never having left his New York City, never having been to mine.

I can't help but resent him for knowing what I would want, knowing he could give it, and yet demanding something else altogether. I tell him 'I don't really...do this.' He smiles, and it is unclear if he is going to overlook our lack of synchrony, or concede defeat.

The answer is in the tying of his shoes and in his prompt exit, which he makes as I try to cast my spell via verbal acumen: 'I am kind of in an existential limbo,' as if intellectuality could be sexy and calculated skill could win this battle. 'I am not attracted to gay men. So if I go to a gay bar, there is nothing to do there,' I tell him. 'No, no. You need something else,' he says. 'You need something else.'

His logic is refreshingly mathematical: 'You are a girl. And you need a boy,' he continues. I smile without meaning to and it's my first knee-jerk reaction in about 20 years. He adds: 'Well, to me you are a girl.' And it's enough to take me back, physically, to my first self-inflicted orgasm. The one you get not by stroking your penis as if it were a mast. The one you get somewhat inadvertently, by pressing your entire frontal zone against a mattress and your penis isn't a dick anymore, but a squashed balloon. And the orgasm doesn't spurt out of one channel, but spreads over the entire area for an entire minute, like a wave making a thick strip of sand very moist, or a metastasis of remedy, not illness.

As I comb through journal entries from the first day I put on a dress to woo a straight man into my bedroom until today, when such practice has gained the most banal of statuses, symptoms (re-)emerge. These symptoms have so completely coded my daily life it's sometimes hard to imagine an existence where they would eventually be gone, psychoanalyzed away, without having my body feel mutilated. Mutilation, that ultimate necropolitical technique which Achille Mbembe defines as wound too immense to close, keeping before the eyes of the victim "the morbid spectacle" of a looming death that has in fact already occurred (Mbembe 2003, 12).

Among these symptoms, a prominent one: repetition. The scene re-enacts itself weekly, if not daily: a moment alone at home -- *home alone*, that childhood event teeming with such pent-up sexual excitement -- is a moment to be filled with the inviting of a stranger who is bound to save me, but who fails to, necessarily. Incidentally, as a self-exiled Brazilian subject living in the United States ever since having left "home," I am thus, symbolically speaking, always (home) alone, and must somehow profit off of that aloneness as if it were always about to end. The repetition is at once circular -- it never resolves itself -- and progressive, as each reenactment seems to call for the raising of the stakes of the previous one: a little kinkier, a little dirtier, a little later in the night, a little riskier. To the point where what began as a faint courting of death, or deathly danger (that very pre-condition of the sexual) has, by now, come so close to it -- to promises, fantasies and figures of death, or deathly violence -- that it would be difficult to refer to such courtship as something other than a type of inhabiting.

Recently, I caught myself posting online ads in which I impersonate a husband looking for a "bull" to come over and play with my transsexual wife (performed by myself) while "I," the husband, am gone. Not only that. The bull is to borrow my wife in front of a webcam so that "I" can watch the act of cuckoldry remotely and record it. Since the wife will probably ask for the bull to wear a condom, the fantasy goes, I ask him to try and discretely pull the condom off during sex, without her noticing it. The bulls originally respond to an ad that says nothing about the transsexual condition of the wife, but they usually do not mind when that detail is revealed, soon after the first email correspondence. The bull, it turns out, must be hailed away from his normative trajectory toward the female qua female object of the original online ad so he can still be reeking of it (of that first female target, of his original intention) when he comes over. Is that not what the bull brings, then, that residue of a different kind of narrative within which I myself have no part that makes the bull so attractive? The bull is only interesting because he is derailed, because his original address belonged to a body more appropriate than mine.

When the bull arrives, with the husband's blessing and thorough directions, I am lying in bed as if caught, in this game between a man I know, and who only exists in my remote impersonation of him, and a man I don't. I have spent forty-five minutes becoming hairless, and beating my face with half a bottle of NW20 MAC concealer. I lie there, stupidly, like a little lamb, and I let them carry out their plan. That is, my plan.

If the bull asks to speak to the husband, he is not there. He is in San Diego, in Las Vegas, in London, at his graveyard shift. Isn't that the privilege of the phallus, that you can summon it as much as you like, "it will always say nothing"? (Lacan 1971, 12) The sex thus unfolds as a kind of rape, authorized by an absence and carried out by a prosthetic proxy on the body of an only partially willing woman. With my head glued to the mattress, turned just so, I catch glimpses of ourselves in the mirror and the computer screen. Like I am lying face down in the snow, that "most expedient strategy of survival." [1] In order to mask my authorship of the scene, I pretend to be overcome by a rush I could not have accounted for: I am so small I cannot help but overflow. This can be an exhilarating stance, to be bent over with one's head down, hungry for vision yet conveniently obscuring one's ability to see. One can imagine all sorts of shapes by seeing shadows and fractions. Lydia Davis relates the bent over posture of a cow, with its head down as it grazes, to a compulsive position: "Just as it is hard for us, in our garden, to stop weeding, because there is always another weed there in front of us, it may be hard for her to stop grazing, because there are always a few more shoots of fresh grass just ahead of her" (Davis 2014, 131).

I try to keep my head as low as possible, bovine style, whilst gathering enough visual information to feed my fantasy of the scene that actualizes itself by looking back as if by mistake, not out of a need to know. I know nothing. In any case, I couldn't possibly know more than the bull and the husband. The camera, I hope, will catch what I will miss out of theatrical diligence. The bull's ignoring of the fact that the one being tricked is actually himself seems to enhance his size, his weight, his force, his presence. As far as he knows, my knowing of the scene is limited to what I actually see, that is, as much as a cow does while grazing in the dusk. I need to give him an opportunity to seal the deal and take the condom off without my knowing it.

Except that he is the one who doesn't know. Or does he...but still? At the moment he begins pulling off the condom I am moaning uncontrollably. Like a penetrated woman. Like a penetrated Brazilian woman. Like my mother, every single night when my father penetrated her and I listened, head down on the floor, the ear glued to the door crack: "no, honey, no..."

When he, the bull, sticks his penis back inside with no protection, I turn around and ask where the condom is. I catch him red handed. I disarm him, once he's proven himself capable of murder, or at least, rape. I'm not mad. I try to convey that I am sincerely wondering where the condom is. This is how stupid I am. We have to find it. It must be here somewhere. This is also where the fantasy ends: With the disappearance of the condom, for which no one is willing to take responsibility. The slipping of the condom is the limit of the fantasy and yet its very crux, where it begins and where it ends -- the ambiguous of the poetic *par excellence*. [2]

In this scene of fantasy, of sex, of deception, and, now, of analysis, unauthorized violence is heterosexuality's most fundamental totem. Rape appears as a shortcut to heterosexual enjoyment, to enjoyment as a fundamentally heterosexual fantasy. [3] Rape is what provides the mimicry of a heterosexual scene inside a Brazilian home, no matter where I am in the world. Rape as the guarantor of heterosexual enjoyment when the fictions of a settled biological difference that purport complementarity (of a sex and its "opposite") aren't offered up as givens or ready-mades: I must enact my vagina by obscuring its material absence and enacting its semblance. The anxieties around a difference between sex partners that isn't settled is conquered by the arrangement and movement of heterosexuality's original bones.

This is the logic of the unconscious, which slips out in moments such as a recent transphobic attack in São Paulo, Brazil, when three men tried to rape a feminine-looking 19-year-old self-identified boy while shouting, "You want to be a woman? So you're going to get beat like a woman." [4] To gain female status, my Brazilian unconscious tells me my body must be raped. They say the unconscious has no gender and no race, but does it not bare the trace, the aggravations, of one's motherland? It is in the position of the abused, of the one who derives less pleasure than the other, if any pleasure at all, that (heterosexual) difference is staged in my bed, where the mother's "no, honey, no..." must be heard, must be uttered, must be produced.

Rape appears as "a sealing act as well as a penetrating one, that both collapses and shuts identity," which is how Rodrigo Parrini describes the figure of "the horse" in the Chilean male prison system, the one who sacrifices not his life, but his masculinity, for the sake of the group. His bottoming, or his surrendering to rape, allows for the relations between men in prison to circulate as if unscathed and for their identities to feign intactness. [5]

Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* gave me the clarity of this suspicion: to feel sufficiently placed in the position of woman -- the woman of my Brazilian (Chilean?) unconscious -- I would have to lie and to lie (there). Given my position outside of the Chilean prison system and the traditional markers of female-ness, I couldn't simply surrender to rape. I would have to fabricate the conditions for such rape, which digital technology's ability to conceal and muddy my materiality, at first, helped me stage. How could I otherwise hail straight men on their way to

consummating their classic heterosexualities without putting my body on the line (for risks other than the ones I concocted) (McEwan 2008)?

In McEwan's novel, *man* (Edward) and *woman* (Florence) play out the script of their identity transactions in its absurdity and thoroughness. The edicts are clear and, despite bouts of unexplainable impulses toward ad-libbing, *man* and *woman* respect the boundaries of their matching slots. McEwan unravels its gaucheness so coldly one would think this was an algorithmic process. The bodies engage in no fusion but in a one-way transaction, which, as Luce Irigaray and others have noted, will only see the exchange of one thing: *Woman* (Irigaray 1977). Creating the conditions to become the currency of such exchange appears, then, as an appealing entryway into such an economy. Before the digital, or without it, carving such entry point seemed only possible through a clunky and unfathomable process of surgical transformations in my flesh, placed in public space for all to see (and self-control to vanish), or in dreams of reincarnation.

McEwan's *woman* dresses in a way that traps her and possesses thoughts that don't seem her own (McEwan 2008). "They were piped down to her." She is always "automatically" certain of things, mostly that everything is her fault. She makes her wanting disappear with the diligence of a self-directed *Pac-Man*. There is something of a botched Brazilian *antropofagia* here, eating the body away until there is nothing left, hoping (in)digestion brings something new. Except that here the anthropophagy is self-inflicted, carving oneself out so that it can be occupied, self-annihilation as a sacrifice to make room for and in the name of the other.

On Chesil Beach reminded me that sex, that is, heterosexual sex, that is, heterosexual Brazilian sex (the unconscious has a metastasizing provenance, let's not forget, it accumulates -- it never deletes), is always to be a sloppily disguised rape because from the phallus one is not to expect anything less: "Man's desire must wound women, make them wilt" (Despentes 2006, 83 – my translation). Here is the trap, like the bad mother whose disappearance would hurt more than her cruelty ever could, the phallus is coded as a violence that I am forced to repeat if I am to feel its north. Otherwise I am guideless.

The penis, which is "the phallus as people imagine it," is itself like a stupid beast that "knows no limit, offering one of the rare 'experiences' of infinity" (Lacan 1971, 100). [6] Freud, Irigaray, Helene Deutsch and Marie Bonaparte all claim that rape can work as the "model" for (hetero) sexual relations and as the epitome of "female" *jouissance*. It isn't without interest that central to the concept of *jouissance* is the idea of subjective division, "the paradoxical form of pleasure that may be found in suffering" (Irigaray 1977, 62 – my translation). While something may feel pleasurable for one psychic agency it may cause pain for another –the ego, for example. Curiously, Tim Dean describes the relationship between pleasure and *jouissance* as a prophylactic one, since it forms a barrier or a limit to keep the subject from being overwhelmed. Fantasy itself can be inscribed in the domain of the prophylactic in the way that it codes desire into an equation of what counts as enjoyment for the subject (Dean 2003, 248-249. Fethi Benslama explains that enjoyment is so excessive it can "drive someone to go beyond simple

pleasure in the direction of suffering, and even self-destruction" (Benslama 2016, 39 – my translation).

In McEwan's context, *man* is to do all the work that will lead up to intercourse. *Woman* is to surrender. In my condom-pulling fantasy of cuckoldry my agency is blurred by my simulated capitulation. I am playing both roles -- I am playing all roles. Until the eleventh hour intervention, when I slip out of paralysis by catching, and promptly berating, the bull in his own pseudo-agency, which is actually the outsourced execution of mine.

McEwan's intervention lies in the sudden implosion of the carefully laid-out structures of heterosexuality, which my fantasy instrumentalizes ever so perversely, and which the digital makes not only possible, but endlessly repeatable. In the novel, right before letting man (and woman) carry out their fantasy of fusion, through the invasion of woman's body, the meticulously assembled composition collapses, Jenga-like. *Man*, having spent his life cooking up coherence of character and mimetic excellence -- phallic emulation, performs his own disappearing act by producing progressively thinner squirts of semen. "You can't even control your self," she says, outing him and the system that bred his likeness -- that bred him *as* (phallic) likeness, their only coincidence. *Woman* witnesses, or (co-) produces his failure, the gap between man and a man, between phallus and penis. He is as inapt at signing the heterosexual contract as he is at unzipping her dress.

Woman, unlike *man*, was able to keep her end of the deal. *Man* made the horrific opening between reality and fantasy palpable: The phallus wasn't there: "The matter lay between them, as solid as a geographical feature, a mountain, a headland" (McEwan 2008, 170). She didn't mind so much touching it, the penis, "What she did not want, not just yet, was see it" (McEwan 2008, 125). It is the apex of an archetypical priapism -- his incessant performing of his phallic drag -- that does him in.

In my own cautiously coded fantasy, this other kind of (hetero-)sexuality is found as an attempt to mimic heterosexuality's classic model, exacerbated by Brazilian sexism where real sex is one-sided, violent and only partially consensual, the product of a kind of theft of consent: *A woman does not want, a woman yields*. The recent displaying of a "No means yes. Yes means anal" sign by an American fraternity condenses the structural pattern, the very slogan, of the Brazilian heterosexual logic of which I am an active product and which can cause an uproar in the United States that may be untranslatable, illegible, in Brazil. Within the logic of the "No means yes" sign, the fact that "anal" is all I could ever offer places my transexualized body in a default position of "yes," which I am to fight against if I am to mimic the supposed "No" position of sexual refusal of a "real girl," whom a "real man" would have to seduce, convince, and dupe into granting him sexual access. Provided he used "only" symbolic violence in order to get it. In this conjecture, my passiveness can only come about through diligent labor, that is, through a constant activeness that places me in kinship, curiously, to the very man whose phallic drag doesn't ever stop. If I am longing to be occupied, it turns out I am the one planning, producing, casting, managing and overseeing the entire occupation. By the time man comes along, he is no

phallus, not even a penis, but a sort of dildo, a kind of stand-in to finalize the job (Kingkade 2014).

Since my rape is laboriously authored, not a mere surrendering, it doesn't simply symptomatize the question of whether there can be heterosexuality without rape, or what would be left of it. Instead, it points to a literalization of such rape as a device qua device, which I can thus (re-)claim. Rape, as a (*wo*)*man*-making method, is here closer to an "initiation" that opens woman up once and for all, as Virginie Despentes puts it. A sacrificial initiation that leads Despentes, in her own biography, to sex work, which itself becomes a reparative tool. Working out a logic in which the body could be sold, used, and offered so many times, and yet more times again, means that the body wasn't so easily breakable. In fact, it is the interruption to such repetition that could denounce the brittleness of the body.

Recognizing rape, or reducing it as a device without patents can be a reparative instrument that the digital itself has enabled me to use to the bone, "many times, and yet more times again." In the logic of my own rape, a more symbolic, even ludic device, compared to Despentes' experience, sex work doesn't come about in its literal form, but the compulsive banalization of the sex act associated with it does (Despentes 2006, 49, 72 -- my translation). Instrumentalizing rape-as-device through the digital has granted me a power trip-like enjoyment in my make-believe passiveness akin to that of Isabelle, the middle-class teenage prostitute of François Ozon's *Young & Beautiful* (2013), where the ability to repeat sex (the same fancy hotels, the same old clients, the same old lies) is a comforting and exit strategy from the constraints of family life.

While the response to the cuckold ads is decidedly always large, not all of the men follow through. Some engage with the fantasy but end up not turning up for its (re-)enactment. Their refusal to finally give form to the fantasy feels decidedly different from the gay flake's inability to act it out, or his tendency to make love to its infinite postponement. The gay flake seems to foresee the dissatisfaction that the *passage à l'acte* will trigger -- the gay object is incompatible with the gay subject, whose actual object of desire is a straight one he cannot have (unless he puts a dress on, again and again), setting him to keep cruising going so as to avoid the interruption that a physical encounter would entail: a loss of fantasy, another reminder of the inaptness of the object. The straight flake who recognizes t-girls as objects of desire seems to know he will like the object *too much*, that the object lives in its very shadow. Instead of dreading the frustration of an object that is sure to be a letdown, he dreads the confirmation that the object's vicinity fulfills the function of the object qua object just the same, which may put him at odds with his own identificatory position.

One Craigslist lover once told me he loved having sex with t-girls but was afraid of doing it often because he didn't want to get addicted to it. In this manner, the digitally-mediated passiveness that speaks the language of rape is speaking back to a man who is now himself in an overwhelming and precarious position. The pseudo-excess of his phallus is re-routed into the actual device (for the t-girl's enjoyment, which he presumes to be man's/the husband's) while the too much-ness of desire leaves him at risk, dis-oriented and mesmerized. Phallic excellence,

achieved through mimetic consistence, cannot seem to withstand the digital, in which even the objects themselves are mere shadows of their material referents. As such, the difference between *woman* and t-girl is one of degree -- the latter as the excess of the first, not kind.

Every single performer in the scene of cuckoldry has been duped, even the "I," considering the bull can always disobey the instructions and *not* pull the condom off, or pull the condom off without me realizing it, both of which have happened. In Lacan's famous play with the sound of Name-of-the-Father (*nom du père*), which ascertains the Father's prohibitive function, he establishes that *les non-dupes errent*: "those who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic deception/fiction and continue to believe their eyes are the ones who err most." *Les non-dupes errent* sounds, phonetically, like *le nom du père*, it is most often translated along the lines of *the non-duped err*. It can also be translated, interestingly, as *the non-duped wander (in circles)*, or quite simply, *the non-duped cruise* (Žižek).

Maud-Yeuse Thomas notes that for a regime that exerts control through the regulation of opposites (heterosexuality-homosexuality), the figure of the transvestite occupies the domain of the lie and dupery ("une duperie pour autrui."): "(...) the transvestite is the ultimate pariah, especially when he [sic] becomes undetectable." Thomas also associates the transvestite with the figure of the *flâneur*, that is, the wandering around (in circles) of the non-duped, which Dean links to the analog gay cruising subject, and the "sex-club patron" in particular, "who readily loses himself in a stream of bodies and whose individuality thus consists in the disappearance of individuality." Dean speaks here of a general "cruising ethos" that "conduces to this impersonalizing effect." The digital grants the *man-t-girl* encounter undetectable status as the transactions and contact made between them are so easily kept away from their lives beyond the bedroom and their screens. Theirs can be an oneiric rape, without traces, evidence or repercussions. Unless disease emergences as a product of the encounter, or if the exchange of their messages or images leak, which is something networks tend to do. But even then, the sheer number of strangers performing the fantasy guarantees the inability to seize culprits or provenance. Repetition of risk, then, working as shield, or shelter, from the kind of otherness that one cannot fabricate or regulate (Thomas 2014, 55; Dean 2009, 36).

January 12, 2007

He told me to be waiting for him on the bed, wearing something that obstructed my penis from his view, and to set a glass of vodka on the rocks on the table.

I did as I was told.

He exerts his authority with the softest of all voices. Perhaps a bit ashamed of his lack of shame.

He tells me to take off his clothes the moment he realizes I am already doing it.

He tries to stick his dick inside of me without a condom. I say no, and he says, 'you know you want it,' and I say that it doesn't matter what I want, and he says isn't this what you wanted, bitch, and I kind of like it, but not as much as when I'm dreaming.

He asks me if I could, would I let him knock me up. And I think it's beautiful. Because it is impossible. And because it has never been uttered. I say yes, because that's what I'm supposed to say, and he asks if I would carry his child.

And then he cums a lot, and I pretend I don't. And he says I'd look good with tits on. And I do laugh, because it's funny. And forced. And almost possible.

He turns the light on. I ask him if he is married. He says he has a girlfriend. That will do.

We say nothing while he puts his shoes back on. Why do they always show up wearing the most difficult-to-take-off shoes? And why do they insist on throwing their belt on the floor, making the buckle hit the ground so loudly, even if it's three in the morning? They seem unaware of what is actually going on. He gathers his belongings and vanishes from the hallway, already texting her, pedestrian in his walk and wardrobe.

And I think it's funny that love in America is a fetish, not a feeling. How are they so eager to expose themselves to viruses and bacteria but emotional vulnerability is not an option? If Americans could wear a condom to protect themselves against things that are actually alive, nobody would be barebacking.

Notes

[1] Avital Ronell writes, "sometimes ducking into stupidity offers the most expedient strategy of survival" as she gives Nietzsche's example of Russian fatalism: dealing or not dealing with a crushing problem "you just lie face down in the snow" (Ronell 2002, 43).

[2] For Portuguese poet Herberto Helder, a poem is the site of simultaneous order and disorder, genesis and demise, magnificence and terror (Queirós 2015).

[3] It is important to note the performatic quality of fantasy, which is an *expression* of desire. Fantasy is, for Lacan, "this something that resists, that is not permeable to every meaning" (Braunstein 2005, 42).

[4] According to the victim, Gabe Kowalczyk, he wanted to scream, "but my body was so hurt all I could do was whimper" (Ribeiro 2014 - my translation).

[5] Cited in Javier Sáez and Sejo Carrascosa (2012, 121, 122 - my translation).

[6] I am extrapolating Avital Ronell's claims on stupidity, or "the sureness on which blissful stupidity is based" (Ronell 2002, 43).

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