Self-Representation as a Marginal Subject: Identity, Displacement and Identification between Cinema and Visual Arts

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Abstract

In the field of cinema and visual arts, contemporary installations and digital projects, there is a growing interest in the aesthetic transformation of control images, traditionally used in crime prevention, for military use, or as recognition techniques in the context of police and legal services. Borrowing some symbolic aspects of such procedures, numerous artists have recently reworked some of the same tropes to redefine the representation of the migrant, the refugee, the illegal citizen, the subject at the margins, or the outcast, critically reading the related stereotypes and formulas. They range from the ironic staging of processes of identification (*Self Portrait*, Mekas 1980), to the denial of the somatic coherence of the individual (*The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*, Orlan 1990-93), to the use of passports in self-portraits (*Daniel Isaac Spoerri-Feinstein*, Spoerri, 1977), to the commercialization of one's own body in order to gain civil rights and citizenship (*Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport*, Ostojić 2000-05). Against this backdrop, this contribution focuses on the aesthetic use of identification and control techniques within a contemporary visual context, crucial not only for understanding the more recent forms of life-writing but also for rethinking identity in a historical and cultural perspective.

Keywords: Self-representation; Life writing; Displacement; Visual art; Body.

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In the context of cinema and visual arts, and contemporary installations and digital projects, there is a growing interest in the aesthetic transformation of images of identification and control, traditionally used in crime prevention, for military use, or as recognition techniques[1] in the context of police and legal services. Some of the most renowned examples are artworks such as *Wanted: $2,000 Reward* by Marcel Duchamp (1963), and Andy Warhol's *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* (1964). Borrowing some symbolic aspects of such procedures and technologies of identification,[2] such as the double image taken from the front and in profile, the identikit, the fingerprint, and so on, numerous artists have recently reworked some of the same tropes to redefine the representation of the migrant, the refugee, the illegal citizen, the subject at the margins, or the outcast, not only critically reading the related stereotypes and formulas but also showing the violence that such technologies of identification inflict on the subject. From this perspective, it is interesting to analyse specific aesthetic procedures for representing the marginal subject, which are used when topology replaces autobiographical chronology. They range from the ironic staging of processes of identification (*Self Portrait*, Jonas Mekas, 1980), to the accumulation of identity cards and passports in self-portraits to show how physical displacement is connected with emotional changes (*Daniel Isaac Spoerri-Feinstein*, Daniel Spoerri 1977), to the theme of the commercialization of one's own body in order to gain civil rights and citizenship or the issue of crossing physical boundaries (as in Tanja Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport*, 2000–05, and *Illegal Border Crossing*, 2000). Against this backdrop, this contribution will focus on the aesthetic use of identification and control techniques within a contemporary visual context: this is crucial not only for understanding the more recent forms of life-writing in the dialectic between Western and non-Western societies, but also for rethinking the notion of identity in a historical and cultural context that calls us to read self-representation in terms of notions such as body, gender, ethnicity, and displacement.

1 Autobiography, Autogynography, Life Writing: Who is the Subject Who is Speaking?

Reflecting on the pervasiveness of self-representation in contemporary audio-visual forms has brought attention to the theoretical debate on personal writing, primarily autobiography. At the same time, what characterizes the new wave of studies that reflect upon confessional forms in the broad sense is the need to rethink the concepts that emerged from the famous formulations of Philippe Lejeune and the studies that have codified the genre of autobiography. The definition proposed by the French theorist outlines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (Lejeune 1989: 4). This description sees autobiography as differing profoundly from all other narrative forms and places the figure of the literary protagonist at the centre of the text, basing its relevance on the pact made with the reader. In the last decades of the 1900s this definition was questioned by feminist theory on the one hand, and by post-colonial studies on the other. If autobiography, in fact, traditionally stands as a genre strongly linked to culture, its theory forms "an all-male genealogy of eminent founding fathers of the autobiographical genre" that "establishes a geographically circumscribed and culturally specific canon based on aspects of European culture that have contributed to giving centrality and uniqueness to Western man" (Gamberi 2017: 109; Gusdorf 1956, my trans.). The history of autobiography in Western culture has thus become a story of "exclusions and inclusions" (McLennan 2013: 20):

> [i]n its valorisation of the white male subject and his history, autobiography has often excluded members of various identity groups (such as women, African-Americans) from consideration and value. But, paradoxically, the history of autobiography is also marked by the efforts of practitio-

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1. While we live in a state of fully visual control (which includes for example the use of drones, CCTV, and tracking systems), and in a social surveillance environment (with the spread of social networks, live video recordings, Google earth), many artist have questioned the "disciplinary gaze" at control over human beings and the political landscape of contemporary technological surveillance, and the role and power of the image in our society (as for example Harun Farocki, or Van Houtryve, among others, see Malavasi and Costantini 2016).

2. They are in fact inscribable within all of those techniques of power and domination which their coercive function have an impact on the individual, according to the Foucaldian notion of the "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988).

ners who belong to those excluded groups and who use autobiography to make various claims (McLennan 2013: 20).

In this sense, the history of autobiography is also a story of the crossing of a limit, and the creation of marginal and autonomous writing spaces. This reinvention that pertains to the subjectivity of the writer also impacts the form itself, which often borders on the hybrid and liminal forms of self-representation. For this reason, the notion of autobiography has been progressively flanked, if not superimposed, by that of life writing, which also includes life-narrative forms such as autobiography (McLennan 2013: 7–8). Re-reading the tradition of autobiography in order to escape the Western canon, Moore-Gilbert extends the characteristics of post-colonial writing, considering life-writing as a transversal territory in which heterogeneous forms occur (including testimonies, reminiscences, private narratives) and as a label suitable for extension to the field of visual arts, photography, cinema, oral history and so on (Jolly 2001: ix). The critique of the term is therefore related to the difficulty of applying it to women, minorities, and non-Western writers, where there is a focus on the relationality of the self, rather than on the writer's individuality as in canonical autobiographies: "as studies of post-colonial life writing, including narratives by diasporic and migrant writers, have shown, there are certain differences between conventional autobiographical forms and their post-colonial equivalents, especially concerning the way in which the self-reflective subject and its story is presented" (Goodson et al. 2013: 192). Autobiography is, in fact, a genre historically structured around a male subjectivity, as Domna Stanton states in *Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?* (Stanton 1984). In theorizing the characteristics of the autobiographical literary genre, Philippe Lejeune addresses only literary examples written by men, excluding from his own interpretative paradigm on the one hand the feminine authorial subject, and, on the other, the relevance of the specificity – primarily, gender – of the subject. Parallel to the masculine autobiography, however, whose tradition has its roots in St. Augustine's *Confessions* and then finds a codification as a genre from the eighteenth century onwards, there is a tradition of female autobiographical writings, that originate in *The Book of My Life* (1562) by St Teresa of Avila. The debate around forms of subjective writing and female representation arose following the feminist movement, coming to prominence in the 1980s and aiming for an autobiographical feminine writing, or an autogynography. Its specificities, compared to autobiography as theorized by Lejeune, were the lack of linearity and the adoption of discontinuous forms. The solipsistic vocation of the male autobiographical narrative would leave space in this type of text for a fluid subjectivity, for the construction of a relational and plural subject (Smith and Watson 1998).

These considerations have paved the way for reflection on the writing of minorities, women, marginality, non-Western subjects, to the point of gradually moving away from the autobiographical label in favour of different formulations, all of which emphasizing:

> the generic, cultural, and historical variation between the western texts on the one hand and non-western life narrative on the other hand, as well as within each group. Yet the thematic of dislocation and subjectivity appears to be particularly important to postcolonial authors of life writing: while responses to various experiences of 'home', 'exile', and dislocation may range from alienation to finding solace in homelessness, in the context of postcoloniality 'auto/biographical Selfhood can scarcely be conceived separately from socio-spatial concerns' (Goodson et al. 2016: 195).

Situating the subject in historical, social and gender terms becomes fundamental when one looks at subjective writing, and is even more relevant when dealing with forms of personal writing related to a migrant or displaced subject, where the geographical, spatial, and cultural context becomes the real centre of the text. If the body of the subject is often central to forms of self-representation, it is also because this locates the subject in a specific socio-cultural context; hence, the text calls for a reading at once in biographical and ethnographic terms:

> it is in this sense especially that self-representation is a significant auto-ethnographic gesture, in which the personal investigation of one's life, memories, views and experiences becomes the analysis of the self in a given socio-cultural context – as well as of the context itself. The human being has never been as deeply, extensively and unceasingly *homo socialis* (Rascaroli 2012: 402).

It is through procedures and technologies such as the ones that will be discussed here that the subject is socio-culturally positioned first and foremost as a migrant, a subject who articulates a distance, a citizen, calling first of all for reflection on intercultural diversity and ethnic dialogue, as Naficy states. In *accented* practices, every story is as much a private narrative of a life as a social history of exile, a collective narrative of a diaspora (Naficy 2001: 31). Michel Beaujour, among other examples of his fundamental contribution to the theory of the self-portrait, has investigated the multifaceted relationships between place and self-writing, analysing self-portraits that are mainly structured around place and images of memory. There are cases in which topology replaces autobiographical history, as the history of the subjects is dispersed among the traces of their journeys. We can read those experiments, in the light of topological self-portraiture, as theorized by Michel Beaujour: a kind of self-writing in which the autobiographical history of the subject is replaced by the places and images of a memorial journey. However, we must take into consideration that we can only think of them as particular ways of taking the floor and speaking out as a person who is above all a subject, culturally situated at the fulcrum of any self-narration.

2   The Civic Self-Portrait, the Mugshot and the Aesthetic of Identification

Representing subjectivity in terms of identification means to conceive subjects not for what they are but for their similarity/difference with respect to a context. It is therefore a question of systematizing a political conception that recognizes the subject as belonging to a group that has linguistic, cultural and historical elements in common (Mindus 2014: 120). Some artists have focused on the bureaucratic representation of the subject as a citizen rather than – first and foremost – an individual. Such treatment becomes particularly relevant at a time when ethnic characteristics, national identity, and linguistic belonging have become the elements that are superimposed on the singularity of the individual.

The origins of this viewpoint can be traced back to renowned works from the early twentieth century that exploit the practices of police photography, which includes among its methods for identifying and documenting individuals the mugshot, a double shot combining a front and a side view. The representation of the individual is considered more accurate if taken from a dual aspect, because face and profile together seem to be able to present an accurate impression of the face. The practice of "photographing criminals (or suspects) from angles set 90 degrees apart [...] can be attributed to the notion that only the double mug-shot guarantees *identity*" (Stoichita 1997: 226, emphasis in original). The mugshot is therefore conceived as the emblem of the forensic and surveillance image. The use of mugshots has been widely explored in the visual arts, with the self-portrait at times assuming the role of the expression of personal identity in its most literal meaning: as an ID. Far from guaranteeing identity, however, the mugshot has been used to challenge the standardized, official, and always imposed image of a subject. When used in artistic contexts, indeed, the mugshot suggests that the artist identifies with the criminal, mocking authority and detective procedures, and is a transgressor capable of breaking the rules and deriding social customs, cultural habits, and artistic traditions, a practice especially common in the historical avant-gardes. The combination of the artist's portrait with the police mugshot can be seen for instance in *Wanted/$2,000 Reward* (1923) by Marcel Duchamp, or in some works by Andy Warhol such as the already mentioned *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, which, presented at the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair, portrays the fugitives from the FBI's notorious list. In these works, the marginality of the subjects is well expressed by their criminal status; they are, whether accidentally or intentionally, outside the law, contravening social or legal norms. The intention here is to disturb the two poles of justice, the ethical-moral one of social behaviour on the one hand and the exercise of legality regulated by law on the other.

Alluding to this artistic tradition, Jonas Mekas presents himself in a similar way in *Self Portrait*, a twenty-minute video experiment made in 1980, which takes the form of a monologue delivered by the filmmaker while standing in front of the camera. The numerous references to issues of time and place invite us to read this work within the tradition of the self-portrait as a journey of the self, often linked with issues of travel in Mekas's filmography, where an explicit autobiographical tendency consciously emerged, as is the case in renowned films such as *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976), and as is also fundamental in other more recent works, such as the web-based *365 Day Project* (2007). Essentially structured as a sequence shot, the brief self-portrait of the filmmaker at sixty is organized around the exhibition of Jonas Mekas's body, while its thematic and narrative substance is expressed by the monologue, delivered in the first person. The filmmaker seems uncomfortable being filmed; he often

hesitates and interrupts his speech by looking for words or making digressions. At the same time, it is clear that he is always performing for the camera, such as when he stops suddenly, shows his right and left profiles, and then turns his back to the camera, clearly linking his gestures both to the use of bureaucratic/law-enforcement portraiture and to the tradition of visual art as discussed above (fig. 1).

Figure 1. *Self Portrait* (Jonas Mekas, 1980)

Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp both used the mugshot as a provocative way of reflecting on the status of the artist; we can therefore read their artworks in the context of an avant-garde's anti-bourgeois critique, claiming an anti-establishment, lawless, anarchic status for the artist (Muzzarelli 2003). In his *Self Portrait*, Mekas may be said to recall and, at the same time, go beyond this artistic tradition: rather than reflecting solely on the status of the artist, here Mekas shifts the focus of his artwork to the status of illegality and the lack of identity associated with migration. Through his performance in front of the camera eye, Mekas sarcastically calls into question the conventional identification procedures that turn the migrant into an illegal person, where the body becomes the surface onto which the mechanism of power and the procedures of control are applied. The control of bodies, which is also the control of life, is brought into question here, where clearly politics slips into biopolitics, understood as governing people's lives by controlling their bodies, their movements, and generally all demographic, social, economic and cultural dynamics.

Mekas presents himself at once as an artist, as a displaced subject, and as a transgressor. The fixity of the pose is promptly contradicted by his voice, which refers to a multiple personality and the impossibility to fix one's many selves in a unique image: "[t]hat's one me", Mekas affirms, going on to ask, "[w]hich of many mes is making films and which one is drinking this beer?" He therefore completely refuses to provide an official image of himself and rejects the idea that one has a unique identity. "I was dropped to New York by the circumstances", says Mekas, "from the great and brilliant western civilization, I was uprooted from my home and so I had put my roots in New York".[3] Mekas also remembers all the ways his name has been pronounced erroneously during all the years he has spent away from his homeland (Busetta 2019, 79). If a name is what makes an individual identifiable, migrants are divided between preserving their language and using their adoptive language, thus oscillating between two cultural, spatial and memorial dimensions (Moore 2006). In this sense, the writing of the exile thus becomes a new language. The ache of nostalgia assumes that the current place of residence of the person is not familiar enough anyway, that home and language have disappeared (Steinwand 1997, 9). Mekas continuously articulates a distance between the space in which he is located and the space of memory, that of his Lithuanian origins, using the self-portrait to represent a divided and marginal subject, who impresses at a linguistic and physical level the need to tell one's story from a distance. The monologue seems at times to lack a real logic, representing the subject as a wandering individual, who, improvising, brings together loose associations of thought. Mekas's visual style reinforces the impression, with the camera erring between the body of the subject and his surrounding environment. The themes of place, exile, and physical but also psychological displacement and loss recur in *Self Portrait*, a work that, along with many other films by Mekas, "not only depict exile, displacement, and longing but also are exilically accented in their visual style, narrative structure, character location, structures of feeling, mode of production, and Mekas's own exilic

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3. In the opening of *Lost, Lost, Lost* Jonas Mekas describes his emigration as an odyssey, comparing himself with Ulysses, and talking in the third person as a divided subject, forced away from his homeland. In *Self Portrait* we find again the figure of nostalgic pain, experienced by a person living in a place that will never be spatially, linguistically or culturally sufficiently familiar (Steinwand 1997).

status as inscribed in the films".[4] The elements that appear in the text, such as his hat, found in New York, or the flowers planted in the flowerbed, take on the role of traces of the subject's mobility or settledness: the hat serves to reactivate his place of adoption, the flowers evoke the desire of uprooting onself. Thus, Mekas, as Catherine Russell writes, "plays out the fundamentally allegorical structure of autoethnography, transforming all images into memory, traces of experience, signs of the past to be salvaged in cinematic forms" (1999: 312). In this way, autoethnography claims its testimonial specificity, always making of the subject a cultural anchor point. The self-portrait turns into an affirmation of the artist's creative choices and transgressive artistic role, emerged in the context of an innovative, alternative, and avant-garde way of filming such it is the American avant-garde he helped to create. The exile itself is like a journey without an end: "if you go away from a place, a home, you need to put down your roots in another place. So all I do is plant my roots wherever I go", says the filmmaker in *Self Portrait*. This suggests, as it has been observed, that if the home is lost, it is the home-movies, as well as the associative character of American underground cinema, and the foundation of the Anthology Film Archive in 1969 that allow the filmmaker to build a new home and a network (Ruoff 1991, 6-28).

3   Crossing the Boundaries of Subjectivity: Body, Name, Genre

The self-designation of a moving subject, close to crossing a border, lost in the meshes of linguistic translation or caught in a cultural clash is one of the prominent forms of the contemporary art scene. We need to consider how the body takes a crucial role in the political control of individuals. The body of the migrant is a body showing the clashes between identity and power, not only because "the materiality of the body expresses a tangible evidence of the biological control to which migrant bodies are subjected, [but also because] the choice of the body responds to the attempt to include all migrants and migrants within the discourse on subjectivity, understood as bodies bearing specific historical, political and economic needs" (Adami 2018, 112, my translation). The standardized procedures of identification, together with the use of the mugshot, require that the body, and above all the face, are clearly visible so as to allow clear recognition; or they even track the body with procedures such as the detection of fingerprints, and eye tracking. This is why the passport and identity card as material traces are often used by artists in self-portraits.[5] In *Daniel Isaac Spoerri-Feinstein* by Daniel Spoerri (1977), for instance, the omission of the image of the artist's body contributes to reduce the individual to his legal identifiers, such as name and surname, underlining how, in our society, subjects are assessed more for their nationality and ethnicity than for their individuality. The title of the work, indeed, refers to the full name of the artist, who normally simply signs himself as Daniel Spoerri, omitting the second name and the original surname Feinstein, which was later changed to the maternal surname Spoerri (fig. 2). The misalignment between a given name and the name used in everyday life already symbolically opens up the gap between the objectivity of personal data and lived subjectivity, between the symbolic programme that foresees the path of the subject and its real implementation.[6]

The proper name (imposed on the subject in the family context even before his birth) becomes so crucial to clearly trace the terms of a first form of detachment from the so called *ius sanguinis*, which in addition to its meaning pertaining to geographical place also evokes that indissoluble bond of blood that one has with one's family. In the work exhibited at the Tate Gallery, Spoerri shows copies of his various passports, in which the prints, both official and non-official, real or invented, are clearly visible, as well as his travel destinations and his photographic image taken in a photo booth. It is thus a self-portrait in the form of an "identity card" (Calabrese

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4.   Naficy uses the expression accented cinema to refer to the work of some filmmakers. An "accented" cinema, which is diverse from the dominant cinema considered to be universal and without accent, in which the concept of exile is particularly relevant, and whose accent is produced from the condition of dislocation of the filmmaker, and emerges from its mode of artisanal production (Naficy 2001, 141).

5.   Even in the Jonas Mekas retrospective held at the Serpentine Gallery, London on 5 December 2012-27 January 2013, the filmmaker's passport stood out on display in the exhibit with writings, images, audio-visual fragments and a copy of his poetry collection *There Is No Ithaca*, all serving to present a portrait of the father of the American avant-garde. Here the passport is linked to the sense of nostalgia that pervasively runs through the work of Mekas and takes the form of a failed return to home, which has become impossible following the forced exile experienced by the filmmaker and a void related to the memory of the exile, of the migrant.

6.   "If one has to define the moment at which man becomes human, we can say that it is the moment when, however little it be, he enters into the symbolic relation" (Lacan 1988: 155).
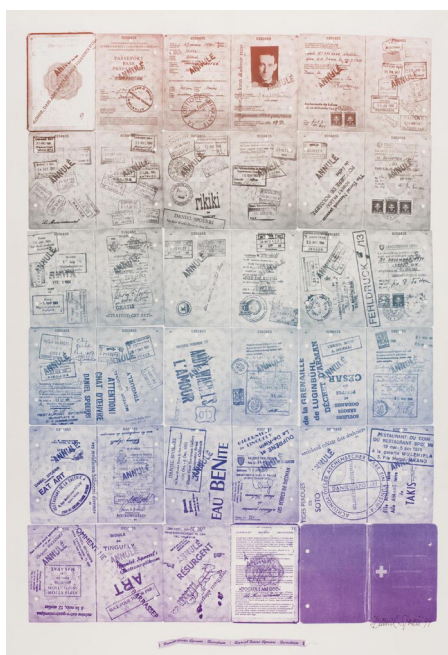
Figure 2. *Daniel Isaac Spoerri-Feinstein* (Daniel Spoerri, 1977). Courtesy: Daniel Spoerri

2010, 372),[7] and a reflection on the themes of physical, cultural, and emotional displacement and civic identity that has a particular value in the case of the artist of Romanian origin, who then became naturalized French, and who had to take refuge in Switzerland with his family following the murder of his father by the Nazis during the Second World War. The exhibition of the identity card is therefore a way of recalling the subject's identity, his nationality, which has a great many implications at a geopolitical level and in the construction of racial stereotypes.

If the body and the face take on a crucial role in self-portraiture, as thresholds to entry into the depths of subjectivity, the materiality of the body is here understood in the negative sense, as a burden that imprisons the subjects within their geographical identity. The theme of given name and identity registration also arises in the works of Orlan (Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte), an artist famous for using her body as a performance site, reconstructing it through cosmetic surgery as a plastic surface to be modelled. In *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* (1990-1993), Orlan applies to her forehead the prostheses that are usually used in the enhancement of female cheekbones, contravening the canons of beauty adopted by more recent cosmetic surgery practices. This serves as a way of questioning the assumption that cosmetic surgery constitutes the branch of surgical medicine aimed at improving physical appearance or making people look younger, while also questioning identity as *idem* (according to the sense of identity as sameness discussed by Paul Ricœur),[8] which claims that the individual remains in conformity with her image as reproduced in identity documents, or that one's personal identity is unaltered despite the fact that a living organism is constantly changing. Again, it is a way of demonstrating what is acceptable in terms of body transformation procedures (on the one hand, common processes ranging from cosmetics to dyes, from breast augmentation to rhinoplasty, and facelift, and, on the other, less socially acceptable transformations such as gender reassignment, or body modification involving the insertion of under-skin prostheses, etc.). These reflections also lead us to relate the theme of marginalised corporeality with that of gender. In the articulation of the self-portrait as marginality we cannot in fact set aside the reference to the subjects' sexuality. Personal writing, in this case, becomes not only a way to talk

7. Not coincidentally, examples of such artworks range from *Self-Portrait with Jewish Identity Card* by Felix Nussbaum (1943) to the more recent *Passport Control* (1988) by Mark Wallinger.

8. I refer to Ricœur, who in describing the meaning of "identity" makes a distinction between *idem* and *ipse*: the first term ("sameness") has to do with similarity over time, its opposite being difference and changeability. The second term (literally "selfhood") refers to singularity, its opposite being stranger or other (Ricœur 1990).

about a subject, but also a way of representing the self as a group that shares certain characteristics and needs "a perspective shaped by the idea of representativity, which highlights the ability of people to speak on behalf of the social group they belong to" (Cati, Piredda 2017: 628).

The story of oneself inevitably extends to the story of a community that is involved for socio-political, ethnic, gender and cultural reasons. The theme of travel, of overcoming geographical challenges, crossing borders, or of the gap between legislative impositions, biopolitical measures and human rights has a key role in many contemporary self-portraits, as in the examples explored in the previous pages. The journey in these cases takes on a very particular role, since it implies more than a physical shift, for the crossing of borders, the subordination to control practices or their illegal evasion generate new experiences of dis/locationality and belonging (Goodson et al. 2016).

4   Stating "a migrant woman's identity"

A self-representation of a social nature can also influence the subjective configuration, if it is true that "the social representation of gender influences its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender – or self-representation – affects its social construction" (De Lauretis 1987, 9). The connections between migrant subjectivity, gender, and sexuality is at the core of the works and performance by the feminist artist Tanja Ostojić, who is of Yugoslav origin but is reluctant to associate a national identity with herself. *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–2005) is the title of one performance in which, showing herself naked, with her head and pubic area shaved, Ostojić sells her body in order to obtain citizenship. By questioning the community of European citizens, Ostojić constructs through the body and the title of the work the south-eastern Europe perspective, particularly the female one, denouncing "marriages of convenience" as actually nothing else but a form of imposed prostitution. The pose Ostojić adopts in the photograph, in conjunction with her shaved head, is reminiscent of the visual imagery of prisoners rather than a woman who is about to get married (fig. 3), or even to images of deportees of concentration camps. The representation of the artist as naked and vulnerable, together with the shaved head, lead us to think of the practices imposed to punish and humiliate women, such as the case of the women who "slept with the enemy" during the Second World War, and were treated with contempt for having had relations with German soldiers. At the same time, the image shows the recurrent objectification of the female body in the West by paradoxically adhering to sexualized advertising conventions (Hopkins 2018: 255). In this sense, the sexualization of the female body gains added meaning when we analyse the migrant subject, suggesting a reflection on gender and further emphasizing the state of weakness in which the subject finds herself. The female body of the migrant is here represented at the crossroads of various forms of violence: the need to "sell" the body in order to gain civil rights and citizenship; the suffering resulting from being at the mercy of people in a position of power (it suffices to think of the rapes and sexual violence to which individuals who must cross a physical border are subject[9]); and the humiliation of the display of the female naked body, which reduces subjectivity to pure carnality, exhibited in harsh lighting with the genitals clearly visible as a way to prove her gender, and, simultaneously, as a sales strategy. Hence, the visual strategy seems to be oriented towards bringing together different genres, such as the pornographic and the bureaucratic, as Surkis writes (Surkis 2009, 197), to which I would add a third one, the visual language of advertising. Nevertheless, by mixing these aforementioned codes, the work is able to overcome them all, not submitting entirely to any of these. In fact, as Rune Gade argues, "instead of erotic nudity, the image confronts us with an exposing exhibition of a fragile nakedness" (Gade 2009, 206-207):

> The shaved sex connotes porn aesthetics, but mixed with the concentration camp connotations of the shaved head, it produces unalloyed doubt and uncertainty about the message of the image. [...] Tanja is clearly not "hot", although the conventions of the personal ad would have us expect some sort of sexually charged representation (Gade 2009, 206).

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9. The theme of the sexual harassment at the frontiers would deserve a further reflection that goes beyond the space of this essay, and which should also include many other categories of people potentially finding themselves at a disadvantage (such as minors, disables, and sexual minorities, considering the gender in a broader sense than only the feminine one), see for example Romero Ruiz (2012).

10. I would like to thank Tanja Ostojić for providing permission for the publication of this image.

Figure 3. Tanja Ostojić: *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport*, 2000–05.Participatory web project/combined media installation. Installation view, *Integration Impossible?: The Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić*, Kunstpavillon Innsbruck, Austria. Photo: Rupert Larl - Copyright/courtesy of: T. Ostojić[10]

Ostojić's performance, which took place between 2000 and 2005, focused on the publication of an advertisement in which the search for marriage was openly declared. The artist then engaged in an exchange of correspondence with over 500 applicants around the world, which was then followed by a real wedding with one of the suitors, giving rise to a media scandal but not ultimately to the actual acquisition of a permanent residency permit (Gržinić and Ostojić 1999), which was eventually refused by the government authorities (Gržinić and Ostojć 2009, 42). The artist engages in what she defines as the act of "assuming a migrant woman's identity" (Ostojć 2009, 163), and undertakes a systematic strategy of "tricking the law to gain the right to move freely, and live and work in diverse locations" (Gržinić and Ostojć 2009, 163). Furthermore, her work tends to emphasize the personal and unique aspect of everyone's story, as it is true that "migrants are constantly abstracted by the media and discriminatory laws, and often treated as a single alienated group. The aspect of personal and direct speech, as opposed to abstract speech, is an important element throughout my work" (Gržinić and Ostojć 2009, 163-164). The "marriage of convenience" is here seen as a consequence of the controversial relationship between being "European" (as a person born in Europe) and being part of the "European Union" (thus having the right to work and travel inside the Union; Allara 2009, 176). As Allara writes, we can also view the project as Ostojć's way of "performing the border" (an expression she quotes from the video essay *Performing the Border* (1999) by Ursula Biemann), where a parallel is established between national boundaries and the boundaries of women's bodies (Allara 2009, 171). By questioning marriage and the issue of true love, Ostojić also subverts that particular cultural assumption, still in vogue, in which every woman's ideal of realization is to find her "other half" and romantic love, while she defines instead a different ambition, that of obtaining denied rights through the acquisition of citizenship. The work demonstrates how the body of the migrant here assumes a particular meaning, as it is first and foremost a sexualized female body, and consequently highly vulnerable.

The same issues are also investigated by Ostojić in other experiments in artistic solidarity, aimed at documenting the illegal methods used to cross borders and geographical barriers. The theme of migration policy, especially within the European Union, is present also in another work by Ostojić entitled *After Courbet, L'Origine du monde (2005) – EU Panties*, which ideally continues the same reflection fielded with *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport.* We see the image of a woman's body with underwear bearing a European flag, making specific reference to Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866). By explicitly quoting the title and the visual impact of Courbet's work (while also calling into question the same quest for an emancipatory role of art in society and the political engagement of artists), Ostojić wraps the European flag directly around the genitals of the groin portrayed, making European politics and the issue of sexuality inextricably connected. As Surkis states, the scandal of the work does not lie in its sexual explicitness, but "in how it located sex at the

centre of European politics. [...] It points to how sex organises the terms of inclusion and exclusion in Europe, from laws regarding marriage and filiation to the economics and surveillance of prostitution. At its most literal level, her poster signals what non-European women 'have to do' in order to get access to Europe" (Surkis 2009, 197).

The female body becomes at once a political body and a cultural text, a place of negotiation for sexual discourses, revealing the relations between genders, national and international trajectories, and political and ideological implications in a given historical moment.

5   Conclusion

Looking at the examples analyzed in the previous pages, we can see how the self-representation of the displaced subject is constitutively and intrinsically a gesture of political resistance. In the self-representation of the migrant subject, or in general of the person who is experiencing a situation of geopolitical suffering, subjectivity is always read in biopolitical terms. In the works by Mekas, and in particular in *Self Portrait*, the filmmaker shows his body as crossed by loss and absence, fragmented in different places, lost in linguistic exchange, perpetually in search of roots and shaped by control and identification practices. Spoerri's work stands up against the identity/identification binomial through the refusal to exhibit his own body, and the proper name, in favour of those surfaces through which control is exercised (passport control, identification documents, etc.). Finally, the works of Tania Ostojić explain the link between migration and gender, when the female body becomes a surface on which the exercise of biopolitics shows its value of control and sexual abuse. The case studies analyzed show the strong connection between the self-representation and the cataloguing of the subject, revealing how the technologies of the self are practices of forced biological control over the body and the exercise of violence on individuals. The body becomes the privileged surface for investigating the subjectivity of the migrant, as a tool to subordinate and control, being both the fulcrum of hyper-attention in terms of control and often completely neglected in terms of rights. The body is, at the same time, an instrument of effective resistance to biopolitical practices, becoming the major political tool available, a device through which the artist gives form to an effective strategy of dissent and opposition to reclaim his or her rights within the historical context in which the body is located. By telling about oneself, by staging one's own subjectivity, and by relating to a social and cultural context, the marginalized subject takes charge of a political debate. Thus, reflection on self-representation cannot be separated from issues of border, space, language, sexuality and so on. The aesthetic choices implemented in the works analyzed in this contribution are therefore also ethical strategies and means of resistance deployed to reveal how the personal is always political.

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