

Jaime del Val's Performance in Mytilini, Lesbos, on September 25th, 2010
At the Audio-Visual Posthumanism Conference
Review by Yunus Tuncel, Sep-Oct, 2010, New York City

Jaime del Val's projected live body performance¹ that I saw in Mytilini, Lesbos, in September 2010, is unusual, unique, thought-provoking, and full of perils both for the performer and the spectators. It was a first of a kind for me and here I will share my impressions of this spectacle with my readers. Before I present a close review of this performance, it is necessary to describe the nature of this type of performance,² especially for readers who are not familiar with it.

The performer attaches several video cameras, usually between two and four, to the different parts of his naked body. These cameras are small surveillance cameras that point to the skin and may be placed in different places of the body for different performances, although sometimes he uses the same place for a number of performances. There are also lights attached to the cameras that are controlled by a switch connected to a digital projector and a microphone connected to speakers. As the performer does his performance, images of body parts are projected onto the screen via the digital projector accompanied by sounds made by the performer and amplified through a sound scrambler.³ In indoor performances—this is what I experienced—his movements and interactions with spectators are limited, although he does not have to carry the projector on his back. Whereas, when he performs outdoors, he walks freely among his audience and projects, from his or the participating spectators' body parts, on the walls of churches, government buildings, and other “iconic” and public places as long as he can get away without being harassed by the police. With all the gadgets on his body, he looks like a cyborg, a name he also uses for himself in some of his performances; an uncanny figure that looks neither like a human or an animal, but beyond both, beyond human. His gaze does not recognize

¹ Jaime del Val's performance followed, at the end of third day of conference, a reading of “A Metahumanist Manifesto” co-authored with Stefan Lorenz Sorgner. They read it out loud as they took turns in reading different parts of the Manifesto. A copy of the Manifesto appears in this issue of *The Agonist* with the permission of the authors.

² Jaime del Val and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner refer to these types of performances as METAFORMANCES, understood as a process of becoming in which the body redefines its sensory organs in a permanent Amorphogenesis (see the post-anatomical body of the Manifesto), redesigning its limits as relationality of affect and movement and thus allowing to establish new planes of immanence as opposed to the exteriorities of the spectator-performer divide.

³ The voice is electronically processed live by a specially designed software via the computer to which the microphone is connected.

anything familiar, and his spectators are in an unknown territory since they struggle in vain to place him in recognizable categories. Jaime del Val, however, evades all such attempts and jolts his spectators from their seats: “Beware!” his performance summons; any body part or image of floating body parts may appear next to or above him/her on the screen at any time. And it is on this different plane of immanence, beyond ordinarily recognizable identities, that the performer aims to establish a connection with his audience.

There are several planes of immanence in Jaime del Val’s spectacle, which crisscross one another in ways that exceed ordinary understanding; these planes are body-body parts, sound, and digital projection. The performer, who appears, with all the gadgets attached to his body, as though he just landed on earth from another planet—in his outdoor performances he looks like a naked astronaut—walks around or in and out of his audience in slow motions, as he coordinates his movements and projections with what is projected on the screen. Body parts, removed from their home, are now amplified, deformed, and transfigured. They are no longer recognizable as body parts on the screen; they create a different landscape and as such are transfigurations in a digital medium.

Sounds are produced by the performer and amplified through a technological medium. They are primordial and sound as though they are coming from an abyss, an unfathomable part of human existence. While permeating all media present in the performance and playing a unifying role across media, they remind spectators of the omnipresence of sounds in an utterly lonely and empty universe. Are these the sounds of a fusion, a collision, or a friction, either at the sub-atomic level or at the level of astral objects? We will never know. One thing is clear though; we will always be pulled away by these abysmal sounds towards an unknown future.

The third plane of immanence is the screen of projected images. Here the body parts that are projected are sometimes recognizable as body parts, but more often than not, they form an uncanny landscape in which one is content to be lost. These re-constructed digital images evade an easy categorization; they are neither beautiful nor horrifying nor ugly nor grotesque. They do not represent what we already know, but rather present a play on images, a different production of new simulacra, in a digital medium.

What is also striking about Jaime del Val's performance is the double-nature of his spectacle. We are ordinarily accustomed to watch only one spectacle at a given moment, especially in indoor spaces of spectacle, although this has been changing in recent times with the use of multiple screens in one room. Some spectators may be fixated on one of the two, while some others may oscillate between the two as in a calligrammatic operation. Here we have a live performance and an immediate projection of that performance onto a screen: two simulacra, two media, the medium of the bodily performance is integrated with the medium of digital projection. Neither is the origin of the other; they do not resemble one another, theirs is at most a relationship of similitude. The series, or rather the matrix, that is established here via the sound, since the sound permeates all media and belongs to both, opens itself up to the audience. This is why it is better to refer to this spectacle as a matrix where there are many open ends, instead of two ends as in a series, to which a spectator can insert himself as yet another simulacrum. In this way, the artist plays with the active-passive roles of the spectator, as he projects and receives an active participation from his audience and as spectators become spectacle.

It is necessary to drop a note on nudity in Jaime del Val's performance. Nudity is a common feature of contemporary spectacles and is present mostly in specific contexts and places. However, Jaime del Val's outdoor performance constitutes a special type of public nudity⁴ in which nudity plays a role in breaking down typical boundaries, that is, rigid constructs of identity, and opening up new spaces in which new alliances can be formed. In other words, it de-structs and re-constructs spectacular relations within the field of performative forces and their affects. That the destruction in question is a form of transgression (aimed at transgressing certain social norms) cannot be thought away, and any such performer is playing in the dangerous social zone created by taboo-transgression tension.

What are the affects of such a performance within the context of contemporary questions, specifically those raised by Jaime del Val and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner in their co-authored

⁴ Public nudity among adults in modern society is a special type of nudity that occurs outside the context of sexual encounter. Simply defined, it is to appear naked to others in public to whom one would not appear naked in one's everyday life. Nude beaches, nude colonies are places where public nudity is allowed, but, with the exception of these, most societies forbid public nudity. Spain, the home country of Jaime del Val, is an exception to this general rule. Archaic societies have dealt with nudity differently; as a general rule, covering of the genitalia seems to be prevalent in most societies. Athletic nudity in ancient Greece, a special form of public nudity, was an exception even to this rule.

Metahumanist Manifesto? We can say at the outset that it operates in a space that sets forces in motion and projects them towards a re-generation of new forms, as it breaks down stereotypes based on identity-formations, mind-body and subject-object dualisms, and rigid constructs of sexuality. Through technologies of becoming and the fluidity of media, such a performance presents movement against identity and metabody against our ordinary conceptions of the isolated, unitarian body. Out of this spectacular process, new affects are formed, as the performance echoes in and becomes one with its audience, as in Dionysian rituals.

To conclude, while the performance cannot be lauded enough for its radical departure from our ordinary conceptions and for its critical stance on many problems we are faced with under the hegemony of mass media in contemporary society, it must be kept in mind that a metahuman performance demands a metahuman audience that can and must live up to the task. Or else, spectators will end up looking at this performance in religious awe.