

Lizzie Calligas; Bodies.

(Metamorphoses: My body/your body: Triptych framed)

Ever since the women have liberated themselves from us, they cannot be blamed if they want to be bodies for their own sake, and not for our pleasure. However we need not accept what results from this (such as it appears on the above mentioned triptych) without being critical about it. Whether Lizzie Calligas likes it or not: it concerns us.

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People are beginning to realize that the thing once called "soul" or "spirit" or "mind" must somehow show itself, before it may become a matter of consideration. If it stays intimate and implicit, we may suspect that he who considers it does not come to the point. Now the way that thing usually shows itself is through air waves provoked by ^{tongues} ~~images~~, lips and teeth, or through letters on paper put there by typing fingers. In such cases we say that "spirit" shows itself through words. But it may show through other bodily motions as well, for instance through the photographic gesture. In such cases the body of another person may be the object of the photo, and that body may itself execute motions to show its spirit. Such a spiritual (spiritistic) dialogue may be called "my body/your body", and not just "somebody photographing anybody". It is not as if in such a process the two bodies (the one that photographs and the other shown in the picture) had somehow become spiritual. On the contrary: both those spirits have become a picture. And it is the picture that show the body, and it thus permits the spirit to become a matter for consideration. This is Lizzie Calligas' matter.

With vertebrates like humans bodies are (unfortunately) either female or male. With Calligas those bodies (both the one that photographs and the one being photographed) are female. We hold the mistaken opinion that spirit is neither female nor male, but that it blows beyond the bodies wherever and how it wants to. Calligas shows that this is not so; with her it is a female spirit that blows, and it does not blow like we want it to, but like it must, i.e. coming from female bodies and toward other bodies (including male ones). If we are males (if, as is the case of this reflexion, it is a male body which moves to show that thing), then the spirit which blows coming from the triptych will have us shudder. It forces us to admit that when we speak of "pure spirit", we mean to say "male spirit". Calligas forces us to admit that there is a female spirit, and this is an awful admission. For two reasons:

We shudder, because we realize the crime we have committed by repressing women (by submitting their bodies to our own ones). By having done so, we have lost the dialogue between the two forms of the spirit. We have criminally established a monologue by the male spirit. And the second reason why we shudder is that the female spirit (if it finally does show itself), shows itself so alien to us. Not as if it would tell us: look, this is how women see their bodies if there is no man present. It tells us: this is how males have to look at female bodies, if they want to recognize women and be recognized by them. The

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female spirit is alien to us, because it makes^{us} strangers, and permits us to become one with it only after having overcome that strangeness (if indeed we can ever become one with the female spirit).

Thus the triptych challenges its male observers to reconsider what it is they do when they love a woman. To love a woman I must first admit that the spirit that shows through her body is something alien to me. And he who says "alien" is saying (before anything else) hateful and ugly. It is only after having overcome the strangeness that ugliness turns into beauty. Thus those uncounted artists who have depicted beautiful female bodies in the past are a priori incapable of loving those women. Because they did not experience that shudder of strangeness which must precede love. They have violated the spirit which might have shown through these bodies, by forcing it to show itself as a male one. This is what the triptych tells us.

But this we cannot admit such as it stands there. Because if we start to reconsider love, love is done for. Not because it is blind, but because it spontaneously changes into beauty everything it touches. The spirit which blows from Calligas' triptych is unloving. The women's liberation movement which shows its spirit in the triptych is no doubt totally justified. We need no reconsideration to see what crime we have committed (and continue to commit) by not admitting that the female spirit is alien to us, and that such a crime is harmful for ourselves, not only for women. But this is precisely the paradox here involved; it is because that movement is fully justified that it is so unloving. We have to chew on Lizzie Calligas' Metamorphoses for a long time, before we can digest it (and thus be metamorphosed by it).