

**ACCORDING  
TO THE  
FLESH**

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**Essays by  
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## OF CUPID AND CUPIDITY: a Valentine in ACCORD with the FLESH

EROTICA does not appear in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary. Instead, EROS: Greek God of Love = CUPID, Roman God of Love, son of Mercury and Venus, from the Latin *cupere* to desire, hence CUPIDITY; an inordinate longing or lust, also covetousness. Eroticism is named a pathology. Nor does EROTICA merit an entry in Roget's Thesaurus, all you have is EROS filed under two headings LOVE, a sympathetic affection and IMPURITY, a moral affection. No wonder Western Art has had such trouble representing, defining and describing EROTICA.

But in the name of love plunge in we must. To write about Erotica is inevitably to respond to its intention/claim/wish/desire to incite a sexual response in the viewer. So to write or speak of it is to position oneself as the *voyeur*, even the masturbator . . . Speaking or writing of the unmentionable - is it oral or manual pleasure?

To utter the erotic is to tumble into the unmade bed of the DOUBLE-ENTENDRE: from the mistrans. of the Fr. *double-entente* lit. double intention/meaning/hearing; and to emerge dishabille, dishevelled, distracted, discoloured, disturbed, discomfited, discandied, disappointed, distressed, disconsolate, diseased and disclaiming that was not what was meant . . . But being double, the *entendre* may disentangle, disenthroned, disenfranchise, disenvelop, disfrack, disgorge and discharge meaning from mystery and mystification. The EROTIC suggests because it is suggestive and we are suggestible per se. Prone to it.

vide: Kitson/Fahey skit on the impossibility for women of talking about anything at all -eg: eating biscuits especially *Dolce Amaretti* - without using phallogocentric language.

Get the thrust; the words themselves enact their being - EROTICA is an onomatopoeic sigh, SEX is an (ex)plosive ejaculation, FLESH is visceral, LUST curls the tongue and parts the lips with the outward breath and FUCK is the glottal stop that begs for repetition. Language feels you up, but the imperative is to GET ACROSS IT: Aust. espec. NT Vernac. to understand cf: get on top of it, bouncey bounce some ideas around in a frenzy of linguistic foreplay.

Perhaps because language is veiled in the lace and fishnet of metaphor and simile it can't help but refer to what is concealed beneath - the body, gender and so sex. The NAKED MEANING is always simultaneously TRANSPARENT partly clothed in something else . . . Is this why it's seemed harder to write Erotica than to make erotic art? Does the visual stimulus slip beneath the sheets, with barely a ripple of disturbance and before we're aware of what's happened there's the bulge? Does it go to the head and the groin immediately like a smell? Does the visual pierce the pleasure centres of the brain before we can censor it? Words are more

discrete and so discreet. Words come slowly one at a time, and like Slow Love if the pressure of each one and the sequence in which they come is right then the satisfaction is high but there's many a slip between the fuck and the lip . . . it only takes a word out of place, a phrase in excess and it's not pleasure but pornography, harassment, a complete turn off. The visual, if it comes at all, comes quick whole and lodges deep inside before you can remember to resist.

Is this true? What works for you - words or images? Or is the separation of words and images arbitrary, aberrant and duplicitous as the excuses of a tired lover? From pictures we make narratives, to tell ourselves stories and from words we dream images and picture what we read - we can't help ourselves doing this. The desire to complete the circuit from eye to mouth, from head to heart, from brain to groin is unstoppable. When we are asleep, in galleries and libraries, unseen and unread are books and pictures lying on shelves, spreadeagled on walls waiting for us to go open them, look at them, dying to flirt and seduce us.

Erica Jong, Henry Miller's biographer says, Erotica refers to - "*that sensuous terrain which Henry Miller called the 'Land of Fucking' which is seductive because of its radical innocence, not because of its repetitive frictions. Rubbing after all is just rubbing.*"

And as we all know, the rubbing has to be just so, with Erotica it is all too easy to be rubbed the wrong way and not merely, unstimulated, but positively turned off.

The visual artist in making erotic art must position him/herself on the spectrum of erotic possibility and the viewer of such work similarly positions themselves and when the stimulus and the stimulated meet a conjugation of desire/memory/fantasy is consummated. The erotic spectrum offers an endless variety, a polymorphous perversity of couplings of form and content, and like all human phenomena its trajectory follows a normal curve from the hard/porno/perverted; overt as the nose on your face at one end, to the other end of the spectrum, where it's all in the mind's roving eye, the soft/ambiguous/abstract now you see it, now you don't . . . This normal curve will tend to correlate with the extremes of difference between the socially defined 'masculine' and 'feminine' with a hump in the middle where most congregate which is the androgynous, the stimulus that appeals to men and women, hetero and homo sexual.

But/ Barthes (*apres* Roland) Hold on! I'm coming! Do not all creative acts conjoin reproduction and the production of pleasure? So then is all art erotic? If any image or representation, or any text (and their attendant possible symbolic transferences and transformations) has erotic potential then is everything that artists make erotic in someone's eyes or ears (*entendre*)? To create art is to engage passionately with the material of the world. In the 60s making art was equated with fucking experience. At other times different strokes have demanded different words.

In the Christian schema, an Epiphany is a manifestation or appearance of the divinity, as when Christ appeared to the Magi on the 12th day after

Christmas. James Joyce defined certain human emotional experiences between people, and certain aesthetic experiences as EPIPHANIES. At such times one beholds and apprehends transcendence. They are moments and passages of time which exist out of time and are experiences of intense and total pleasure, which are immediately recognised as themselves when they appear. But Joyce says the experience must be UNTAINTED BY THE DESIRE TO POSSESS. If the experience incites the desire to possess, it is in his view PORNOGRAPHY. Does this make all art collectors Pornographers, and if so what of Art Dealers - Traders in Flesh, Peddlars of fetishes, Used Flesh Salesmen, (sic)? Whereas for Susan Sontag the erotic is shot through with religious metaphors and she goes on to argue that what Pornography is really about isn't sex, but DEATH. cf. *PETITS MORTS* : Fr. colloq. little deaths = ORGASM.

ACCORDING TO THE FLESH invokes the earthly and the divine and lies languorously astride them. As a viewer, I am aroused: I covet, I want, I desire-

**Geoff Sharple's** Museum Objects, all of them, but esp. No 1., the frightening and beautiful clam, the vulva as the shell of Venus, a gummy *Vagina Dentata*, a brocade evening purse cf. Freud on the meaning of women's handbags. The silvery lure, the tickler that insinuates itself between the paradigmatic male and female thing(s). And all three so exquisitely and neatly boxed in, special presence, gifts for us all from the knowledge of the flesh ;

**Penny Campton's** Lipstick paintings, a red gash laughs, leers lasciviously, she has the bit between her teeth. Look out! She'll have you for breakfast and make a meal of it.

**Colin Holt's** J-Yellows, Mon. The man/*mon* = mine (*Mons Venus*) is yellow, frightened and jealous of the woman and the men that look at the woman and you too, the viewer. She throbs and pulses red blood and like a baboon's bum, everyone can see it. He cringes yellow streaked and cowardly, scratched out but still hiding under the layers of paint, watching and suffering. Such is jealousy, he is enthralled.

**Robin Hooper's** Hot Pink Tango Sequence II, a Peep Show under the stairs, a booth behind the curtains, fragments of layers of perspectives on parts of bodies in cool watery blues and warm enticing pinks. Come inside, it's a bit tight, but won't hurt much.

**Tomislav Martin's** three chairs esp. In Memory of Battleship Potempkin, so big my feet don't touch the ground, Alice's chair, I feel small again and it's a Dentist's chair, The Barber's chair - what will happen to me if I sit in it? Speculation is exciting and like Goldilocks, I want to try them all. Connect flesh with the seat of desire, to find the one just right for me.

They are all artfully made things, erotic and witty. The pleasure of the joke? cf. Freud on the orgasmic release of laughter. They tickle the fancy and are a little bit of what I fancy, and they speak to me directly of things I know, of things I desire and of things I remember. As the way of the world is FRUSTRATION OF EROTIC DESIRE, my lust to possess will go unrequited. But that only multiplies the pleasure and adds a delicious *frisson* of the unattainable.

Ya can't always get what ya want, but sometimes ya just might find, ya get what ya need: SATISFACTION.

Suzanne Spinner : She writes and lingers over a line, pores over a paragraph, sashays around and stinks by her sentences, wrestling with words unwilling to be ravaged and mark the pure white page. Words want to have their way with her. She will make them lie down with her intentions and violate the pristine integrity of the naked page. The pen presses hard, second thoughts are rubbed out, meaning is penetrated....