
duVa body

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One of duVa's earliest works—as he likes his name to be spelled—was the four-minute-long experimental video *Grotesque*, from 1987. Among his most recent works is the video performance *Grotesco Sublime MIX (GSMIX)*, first presented in 2005. From the 1980s onwards, two decades have passed as he develops his poetic project. The issues raised herein are: why discuss duVa today, and under which circumstances?

There are many different ways of perceiving the presence of a gesture, an aesthetic action, and its creative contexts, just as there are many different ways of discussing the symbolic dimension of an artwork. Nevertheless, at the core of each interpretation lies a subjective experience. Therefore, it would be better for us to approach multiple character types, with regard to the notion of grotesqueness, and thus choose to analyze what we consider to be a hybrid, shapeless feature in the work of Luiz Duva, born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1965.

Why duVa?

First off, duVa's artistic existence is not about interpreting the world, but rather experiencing the world. It is about the issue of thought as a strategy, or as a process of subjectivation, as Deleuze put it. Therefore, this essay is not about introducing duVa as a subject, but rather introducing him in his dimension as a thought-artist.

He started on his path in the 1980s making fiction. This is a relatively difficult task in a country like Brazil, whose foundation lies in the daily soap operas on TV. How can one implement, within this genre, a language displacement?

Deus come-se is a video made by duVa in 1990. The figure of a man is thoroughly fragmented through electronic editing. The action, like a puzzle or a construction over an abyss (an edit within an edit), is raised to the deconstructive dimension characteristic of art discourses. In the video, image processing turns concepts into images. This is a key feature of creation using types of electronic media in which, more than the humanism of the sight that is led by the cameras, as Dubois put it, it is the *hand that touches, fondles, gropes, infiltrates, edits*, and consequently provides meaning.

Like a geometrician, by means of multiple cuts that he makes upon the screen, in *Deus come-se* duVa accomplishes a type of mathematically constructed edit. In it, he exerts semantic and syntactic control through the decomposition of a body in a fictional action. The body has an ambiguous character, something that is only possible in electronic media, since it appears to be fixed and, at the same time, moving in a series of successive cuts. Moreover, as the human body is cut to pieces, it bumps into an insect in a Kafka-like situation. Anguishingly and, at the same time, ironically, a bull has its throat cut, is dismembered, bleeds, and is killed. Meanwhile, the insect and the man try to devour or dominate each other. Their bodies dialogue with each other, and they recognize themselves based on each other. Nevertheless, it is the video's image and sound—metaphorically speaking—that eats them away, devours them, and subverts them through a tragic purging effect, or a sight that is too close. Better yet, the image has the power to transform them into a body that is different, grotesque, part man part animal, a denial of divine creation.

If *Deus come-se* was generated at the core of a creative process that began two decades ago, to speak of Luiz Duva today means, more than anything else, to speak of a consistent poetic proposition which not only stands the test

of time, but also has the power to give off a worldview. Along that line of thought, one can also realize the timeless dimension in which that worldview is expressed. For example, just as Peter Bruegel from the Netherlands conveyed his grotesque perception during the Renaissance, one can notice similar aesthetic gestures nowadays, be it in the work of artists such as Matthew Barney, in the international context, or in the work of artists such as Luiz Duva, in the Brazilian context.

Why the aesthetics of the grotesque?

Pointing out to grotesque aesthetic experiences in the work of duVa means linking him to a repertoire aimed at discussing human contradictions, represented during 19th-century romanticism by Victor Hugo, through contaminated operations that prompt scorn and laughter, ranging from tragedy to comedy, from the sublime to the grotesque. In that moment, opposing himself to classical norms, Hugo¹ presented, with his modern drama, the principles of mixing genres, of rejecting rules, of refusing to imitate models, and of freedom in art.

For Guinsburg, it is through the paradox, the unlikely, and the abyssal vortex, that the art of the grotesque destabilizes and sets everything it touches into motion, *unbalancing harmonic relationships, juxtaposing in the same axiological horizon the high and the low, the refined and the rude, the fair and the beastly, the tragic and the comic*². That is the direction in which language displacement takes place in Luiz Duva's propositions. It is not only a semantic displacement, it is also a syntactic one. The displacement occurs both in singular procedures (as is the case with the disruption of fiction in *Deus come-se*) and in the limit situations he submits electronic media to in his work.

Such statement stems from the act of observing duVa's perceptive gestures as stemming from a type of intelligence that is oriented towards unconformity, hybridism, and the disorganization of forms. In *Deus come-se*, the grotesque takes place through disarticulation, or the disaggregation of the *whole for the fragment*, with the intent of exploring, in video, multiple views and their most complex procedures. Here, the displacement happens through the deconstruction of motion and the way in which he undoes symmetrical arrangements, within the context of editing the work. That is, through the insertion of motion as a fictional element in the very plane of image-video.

Deus come-se, though, is not the only case in which grotesque gestures and language displacements occur in duVa's work. Such phenomena also take place in *Jardim Rizzo* (1992), in *Momentos antes...* (1995), and later on, in *The bodymen lost in heaven* (1996), among others. All of these are fictional videos, and they all build upon the problematic of the grotesque.

Thus, the grotesque appears in duVa's artistic practice under the logic of reversion. For this and other reasons, the aesthetic action of the grotesque in his work stems from the way in which he promotes a language that is incompatible with preestablished norms, thus disclosing the expansion of expressive forms.

The reading of the language used by an artist who crosses through media pathways, or deterritorialized landscapes, can be considered, as Plaza would put it, as the reading of *parallel, simultaneous universes that tend to lose their contours and fixed boundaries*. Thus, like a multiple sensoriality, duVa's trajectory in Brazilian art can be presently seen as a moving, shapeless drawing in the field of electronic media image and sound.

¹ Hugo exposes this view in his *Preface to Cromwell*.

² Guinsburg exposes this view in the introduction to the Brazilian edition of Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*.

Sometimes we feel as if image in the contemporary world were no longer able to express itself. The problem is no longer how to make image express itself, but rather to provide it with another instance of power.

Image is a symbolic construction; its production requires a series of operations which, in this case, consist of working with the expansion of current electronic media. It is up to the artist, then, to draw from this reality in order to bring new circumstances to the sensory-motor scheme of image.

Luiz Duva brings new circumstances to contemporary image by means of the disorder in his syntactic system. The hard determinism with which duVa edited his early works gave way, towards the end of the 1990s, to a process of introducing chance and randomness in the field of image production. He began articulating images by using the logic of imprecision, incorporating the unforeseeable and the mobility of information into them.

duVa, who used to make videos for the TV screen, now moved toward other sensory spaces. Thus, he expanded the motion of image, taking it to the architectural environment of video installations, as well as to the synesthetic, immersive improvisations of his VJing presentations.

In 2001, duVa made *Corpomóvel 1 e 2*, a combination of installation and performance. The work is like a mobile production, editing, and image manipulation unit in which duVa recorded, edited, and presented the work to the audience, all at once. The motion of image, which had already been fictionalized and turned into installation, now became a performance as well.

In keeping with this more hybrid nature, still in 2001, another *expressive body* came up in his images: the *collective body* produced during his *live image* presentations, also known as *live video* presentations. During this period, by means of partnerships such as the one involving Videobrasil, duVa created work of the likes of *PVC* (2001) and *A mulher e seu marido bife* (2001).

In *Vermelho sangue* (2002), a video performance presented along with musician Wilson Sukorski, twelve projection screens were specially designed for the 1st Brazilian Festival of VJs – Red Bull Live Images. On these screens, duVa showcased the undetermined, ever-changing language of scratching, the electronic cutting of image, as he immersed himself in the environment of the electronic scene.

Departing from formal control, the expressiveness of duVa's images gained new dimensions. His work was no longer about decomposing images in a calculated fashion, or aimed at obtaining a finished audiovisual product, as in *Deus come-se*; little by little, his creative process became more open to informality, to the lack of control and finishing. His works began coexisting in space with more plural and collaborative dialogues, thus embracing the creative body of the *other*, who is also under displacement in the acts of visiting, entering, living, and sharing his video installations and video performances.

Following those experiments, in 2003 duVa presented the video performance *Desconstruindo Leticia Parente: Marca registrada*, a minimalist exercise in appropriating and deconstructing another video performance. In this case, he dismantled *Marca registrada* (1974) by Leticia Parente. This work, which pioneered video art in Brazil, has nothing to do with live image. Rather, it is a tribute to the artist Leticia Parente, expanding her image into three simultaneous screens, and setting her ideas into the realm of *live video* manipulation.

More recently, duVa has broadened the dimension of image even further in the fields of improvisation, and of presenting his work to audiences. In order to do so, he began working with interfaces and interactivity. This is

how he made the installation *Demolição* (2004). In this work, duVa proposes a sort of virtual demolition of the image. The demolishing effect is accomplished by pushing the buttons on an interface, as the audience before a projection conducts the events like in a videogame and, aesthetically speaking, demolishes the image.

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In a very particular way, duVa currently incorporates a musical dimension into his work through image sampling. It is by means of this cross-procedure of image and audio samples, or by playing synesthetic games in the technological realm, that image becomes capable of producing sound. If electronic image, like music, exists only in time, that is, in duration, rhythm, frequency—as Machado put it—, then we can assume that, in a direction opposite to that of video art pioneers (the great majority of whom, such as Paik, came from the musical realm), duVa reactivates these abstract dialogues, inverting them, and taking images back to the field of audio experiments.

A fruit of this wide array of experiences, Luiz Duvá's artistic maturation occurs in a moment in which his audiovisual writing presents itself most radically as cinematic expression, plasticity, and sensoriality: it is pregnant with inner motion. It is in the quest for these new aesthetic substances that his trajectory takes on the dimension of a *poetic body*, or a *duVa body*. Such a distinct, impure, undetermined, nonstandardized, and shapeless body of language expands the very dimension of media, and returns to its origins: it becomes shadow, brightness, drawing, painting, photogram, frame, sampler, it becomes itself contemporary imagery and thinking.

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