

THE VAGINA AND THE EYE OF POWER (ESSAY ON GENITALIA AND VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY)

La vagina y el ojo del poder (ensayo sobre genitalidad y soberanía visual)

A vagina e o olho do poder (ensaio sobre a genitalidade e a soberania visual)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines certain historical instances of the gynecoscopic regime that established the rules and codes of perception, knowledge, and over-codification of the female body as a visible *genital body*, knowable and reducible to the vagina and the uterus. We then go on to examine a group of contemporary works that challenge this order or, at the very least, de-structure the modern, colonial, and androcentric ways of seeing genitalia. The *gyneco-scopie regime of modernity* is founded in the synecdochal slicing up of the female body (cuts that are visual, anatomical, and aesthetic), its ultra visibility (exploration, territorialization, and optical penetration), and the paradoxical covering up of the many forms of symbolic, historical, and material violence that have made and continue to make this visual order possible in the first place. A series of works, including installations and performances, by artists such as Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Enrique Chagoya, Regina José Galindo, Vik Muniz, and Candice Lin, among others, make the violence of this gyneco-scopie regime explicit; moreover, in some cases the art blocks or fractures the gaze set upon the genital body, disrupting the relationship of subordination between the observer and the observed, thereby resisting what Michel Foucault calls the power of the eye.

KEYWORDS

Visual sovereignty, Gaze, Gynecology, *Gyneco-scopie regime*, Violence, Genital bodies, Vagina.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo examina por una parte, ciertas instancias históricas del régimen gineco-escópico que estableció las reglas y los códigos de percepción, conocimiento y sobre-codificación del cuerpo femenino como cuerpo genital visible, cognoscible y reducido a la vagina y el útero; y por otra, un grupo de obras contemporáneas que desafían ese orden o, lo que es lo mismo, desestructuran la estructura del mirar moderno, colonial y androcéntrico sobre los genitales. Dicho régimen gineco-escópico de la modernidad se funda en el troceado sinecdóquico del cuerpo femenino (cortes visuales, anatómicos y estéticos), su ultra-visibilidad (exploración, territorialización y penetración óptica), y la paradójica ocultación de las múltiples formas de violencia simbólica, histórica y material que hicieron y hacen posible ese orden del ver. Una serie de obras, instalaciones y performances de artistas plásticos como Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Enrique Chagoya, Regina José Galindo, Vik Muniz y Candice Lin, entre otros, hacen explícita la violencia de régimen gineco-escópico; pero además en algunos casos, obstaculizan o fracturan la mirada del cuerpo genital, perturbando las relaciones subordinantes entre observador y observado, y resisten en fin, la soberanía del ojo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Soberanía visual, Mirada, Ginecología, Régimen gineco-escópico, Violencia, Cuerpos genitales, Vagina.

RESUMO

Este artigo examina, por um lado, algumas instâncias históricas do regime gineco-escópico que estabeleceu regras e os códigos de percepção, conhecimento e sobre-codificação do corpo feminino como *corpo genital* visível, cognoscível e reduzido à vagina e o útero; e por outro, um grupo de obras contemporâneas que desafiam essa ordem ou, no mesmo sentido, desestruturaram a estrutura de olhar do moderno, colonial e androcentrista sobre os genitais. O dito *regime gineco-escópico da modernidade* funda-se no trociscar sinecdóquico do corpo feminino (cortes visuais, anatómico e estéticos), e a paradoxal ocultação das múltiplas formas de violência simbólica, histórica e material que fizeram e fazem possível essa ordem do ver. Uma série de obras, instalações e performances de artistas plásticos como Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, Enrique Chagoya, Regina José Galindo, Vik Muniz e Candice Lin, entre outros, explicitam a violência do regime gineco-escópico, mas também, em alguns casos, obstruem ou fraturam a visão do corpo genital, perturbam as relações subordinativas entre observador e observado, e resistem, enfim, à soberania do olho.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Soberania visual, Olhar, Ginecologia, *Régime gineco-escópico*, Violência, Corpos genitais, Vagina.

“Have there been revolts against the gaze?”
Michel Foucault “The Eye of Power”

What and how a society sees or does not see is historically, technologically, and culturally overdetermined. There is a visual engendering of the world. Every era of every culture witnesses the deployment of a series of visual technologies (lighting, optical instruments, tools of reproduction, etc.) and codes to regulate the gaze, not only making the world visible, but generating its cultural conceptualization, representation, codification and decodification. Martin Jay names these general systems “scopic regimes.”¹

This is not an essay about female genitalia, as the title may suggest; it is about power. Or rather, about the *eye of power*: a matter of visual sovereignty over certain fragmented bodies engendered through visual regimes. We first present several historical instances of what we call the *gyneco-scopic regime* that establishes the rules and codes of perception, knowledge, and over-codification of the female body as a visible *genital body* (reproductive and generative), knowable and reducible to the vagina and the uterus. We then turn to a group of contemporary works that challenge this androcentric visual regime that engenders genitalia and gender.

The gyneco-scopic regime, as we define it, is founded in: 1) A *synecdochical slice*, the product of a gaze that cuts the body into pieces, making visual, anatomical, and aesthetic cuts to produce territories or genital organs. These chunks of the body are recodified as synecdoches (that is, the part represents the whole: woman is represented by a piece of herself, genitals represent gender, etc.). 2) *Ultra-visibility*. As in the case of those who are deemed freaks, genital bodies are over exposed to the gaze and they enter into modern culture “not as agents or subjects but as ultravisible icons [...] whose cultural work is to [...] verify the prevailing sociopolitical arrangements arising from representational systems such as gender.”² This ultra-visibility is manifested in the exploration, exhibition, optical penetration, and ubiquitous representation of female genitalia in modernity. And 3) The *paradoxical covering up* of multiple forms of historical, material, and symbolic violence that have made and continue to make this visual order possible. The gyneco-scopic regime is a tautological one that is authorized through violence and justifies multiple kinds of violence; a regime that cuts and allows cutting; that is made out of blood yet appears clean before the eyes.

In this essay, we trace the historical construction of female genitalia in modern culture, examining several paradigmatic instances of the visual representation of the vagina and the genital body by anatomists and artists alike. Following this examination, as it were, we present a series of works of art, installations, and performances that resist the sovereignty of the eye; that is, works that expose the violence of the gyneco-scopic regime, obstruct or fracture such visual

1. “Scopic regimes” are, according to Jay, “general systems of visibility constructed by a cultural/technological/political apparatus mediating the apparently given world of objects in a neutral perceptual field.” The term “indicates a non-natural visual order operating on a pre-reflective level to determine the dominant protocols of seeing and being on view in a specific culture at a specific time” (Martin Jay, “Scopic Regime.” *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Vol. X. Edited by Wolfgang Donsbach. (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 4515).

2. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Beauty and the Freak.” *Disability, Art, and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), 192.

sovereignty over the genital body, and/or perturb the relationship of subordination between the observer and the observed. We are talking about certain visual insurrections that challenge “the eye of power,” as theorized by Michel Foucault.³

To better understand the tripartite structure of the gynecoscopic regime and what we deem an insurrection against the eye of power, let us compare Gustave Courbet's painting *L'Origine du monde* (1866), a famous realist nude held in the Musée d'Orsay (Img. 1), *vis-à-vis* the performance piece *Miroir de l'Origine* (2014) by Luxembourgian artist Deborah De Robertis (b. 1984) (Img. 2). Courbet's painting (which centers on the torso from the thighs to the breasts; the head, legs, and arms not visible to the viewer) is representative of the gynecoscopic regime of modernity: the vagina is an identifiable territory on a body that is sliced up and identified as female). In her performance that claims to mirror (i.e. to replicate and invert) Courbet's painting, De Robertis poses nude with her own live body in front of the painting, enacting an insurrection against the gynecoscopic regime privileged by the original. As evidenced in photographs of the performance, the artist placed herself in front of the wall of the museum where the painting hangs, legs spread, between the sublime vagina of *L'Origine* and the spectators, distracting them and making them uncomfortable, and disrupting the act of contemplation that defines the spectator. That De Robertis was arrested for this confirms that she was exposing not only her own body, but also the disparity between the museum-goers' desire to contemplate female nudes in art and their horror at being confronted with the flesh-and-blood genitalia of

3. Foucault, as he candidly states in an interview, first developed the idea of the *panopticon* as a paradigm of power while he was “studying the origins of clinical medicine” (“The eye of power” 146). The *eye of power* subjects individuals to discipline, surveillance, and knowledge; in other words, power is to a certain extent an *optic effect* that produces students, prisoners, citizens, family members, patients, and also —as we maintain here— medical specimens and genital bodies (see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. Translation by A.M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1973), and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Edgardo Castro, *El vocabulario de Michel Foucault: un recorrido alfabético por sus temas, conceptos y autores* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2006), 55-60, 254-56).



Image 1. Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du monde* (1866). Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Public Domain Mark 1.0.



Image 2. Deborah De Robertis, *Miroir de l'origine* (2014). Photographic series *Mémoire de l'origine*. Galleria Massimo Minini FIAC 2014. Courtesy of Deborah De Robertis

a live woman; genitalia that function as *resistance* to the *I* and the *eye* that *look at the object*: the “actual” vagina of the performer looks back at the spectators, unsettling their otherwise unproblematic contemplation of the female nude. The performative vagina functions then as a Lacanian “radical object”; that is, the object “which objects” and disturbs, enacting a “point from which the object itself returns the gaze.”⁴ De Robertis performs the moment when the genital object gazes back at the subject.

An additional example of this contrast between gyneco-sopic sovereignty and visual insurrection against it can be found in, on the one hand, an illustration from a treaty written by the Scottish anatomist William Smellie (1697-1763), showing one of the stages of birth with a still frame of a genital trunk (Img. 3), and, on the other, the same pose as represented in Frida Kahlo’s *Mi nacimiento* (1932), in which the bloody traces and physical pain suppressed in Smellie’s work are fully visible (Img. 4). The former, like Courbet’s painting, displays the gyneco-sopic sovereignty of the anatomist while the latter confronts the gaze of the viewer with the life and pain of childbirth. Kahlo’s painting is not explicitly in dialogue with Smellie’s work per se, in the way that De Robertis engages Courbet, but her work objects to and challenges the cleaned up and asymmetrical representation of the genital body/piece, enacting a “point from which the object itself returns the gaze.”

The gyneco-sopic regime in Courbet and Smellie segments and mutilates, presenting bodies with no face, no extremities. It renders the genitals

4. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 17. While the “the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, [...] the gaze is on the side of the object. When I look at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it” (Žižek in Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2010), 109).

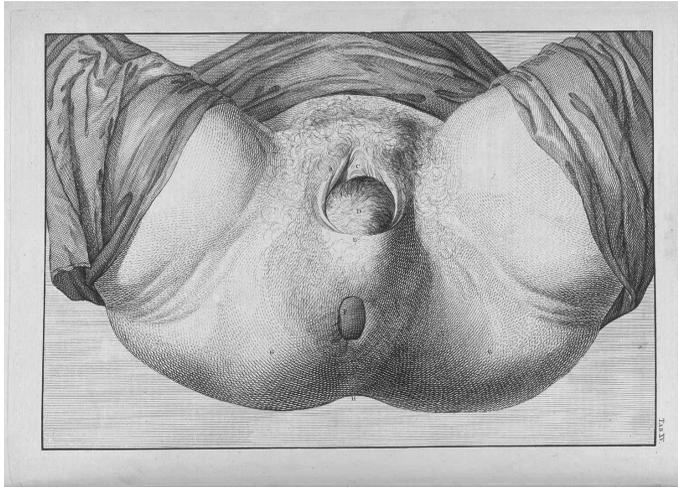


Image 3. William Smellie, Plate 15, *A Sett of Anatomical Tables, with Explanations, and an Abridgment, of the Practice of Midwifery* (1754). U.S. National Library of Medicine.

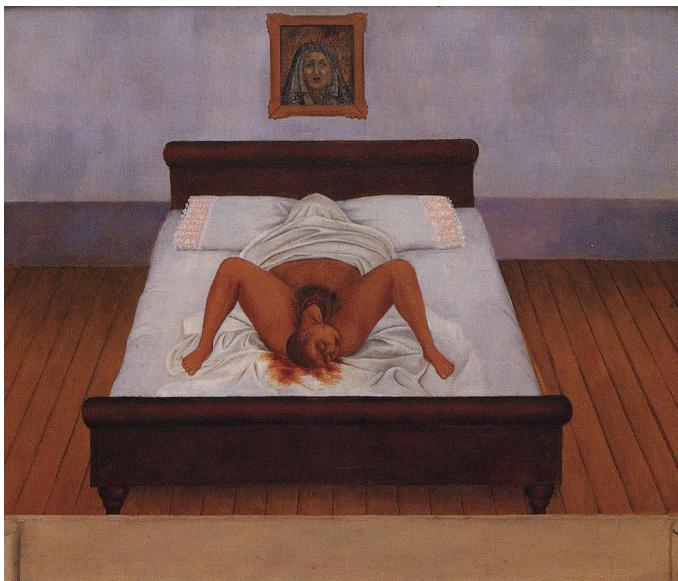


Image 4. Frida Kahlo, *Mi nacimiento* (1932). © 2018 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

5. According to Beatriz Jaguaribe, the “shock of the real” (“choque do real”) is a moment of aesthetic intensification that produces the effect of cathartic fright in the reader or viewer, and that seeks to “provoke discomfort and wants to sensitize the viewer-reader without necessarily falling back on registers of the grotesque, the spectacular or the sensationalistic. The impact of the “shock” is derived from the representation of something that is not necessarily extraordinary, but that is exacerbated and intensified. These are everyday occurrences in life [...] such as [...] erotic contacts that provoke a strong emotional response” Beatriz Jaguaribe, *O choque do real: estética, mídia e cultura* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2007), 100). All translations are our unless otherwise attributed.

ultravisible through a territorialized focalization, and it hides the violence that makes these representations possible in the first place (a topic to which we will return). De Robertis and Kahlo, however, disrupt this order. In De Robertis’s performance, artistic exhibitionism perturbs the museum exhibit, and an *excess of reality*, to borrow the words of Beatriz Jaguaribe, challenges Courbet’s pictorial realism.⁵ The vagina with eyes (a gazing organ) interrupts the voyeurism of the spectator, disorganizing the gynecoscopic regime; the vagina itself is turned into an onlooker. Kahlo, on the other hand, lays out a figure in the same pose as that of the Smellie illustration, but with three differences: the entire body is represented, the sheet is bloody, and the mother and fetus are conspicuously dead. Furthermore, the covering up of the face —typical in the gynecoscopic regime

à la Smellie— is explicit in Kahlo's piece: the sheet covers the face of the dead body, a sort of spectral appearance of the gyneco-scopic cover up.

We would like to offer two additional examples of insurrection against the eye of power to which we are referring: a 19th-century engraving by Hungarian artist Mihály von Zichy (1827-1906) (Img. 5) and the recreation of *L'Origine du monde* (2015) by US artist Candice Lin (b. 1979) (Img. 6). In Zichy's engraving, an artist buries his head between the legs of his model, who leans back against the canvas, her feet propped up on the artist's chair. This is almost a caricature of the scopic focalization that informs Courbet's nude as well as the eighteenth-century anatomical prints of genitals (the easel stands in as the doctor's table used for gynecological explorations). More than a representation of the vagina itself, Zichy's engraving represents the gaze that penetrates and examines, but that is also nearly lost as the observer and the observed, the subject and the object, are mixed up, meshed together in *cunilingus* and visually undifferentiated. The gynecologist-painter can no longer see the "thing" (and neither can we): the oral overtakes the visual. The viewer witnesses the shipwreck of the gaze in the vagina. As we will discuss, this collapse is carried to an extreme by Lin, who snatches the vaginal trunk and gives it eyes, "all the better to see you with," as the wolf said to Little Red Riding Hood before devouring her; the vagina looks back at the onlookers. These works challenge the identity of the organ and the gender identity with which it has often been associated (a genital identity), as well as the asymmetry of power in a world divided between those who look and those who are seen. Additionally, they invoke forgotten violences, the horrors and even crimes that are hidden below the achievements of science and great works of art.



Image 5. Painter and his model. Mihaly Von Zichy. PD-1923.



Image 6. Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* with eyes. Candice Lin, *Inside Out*, still (2010). Courtesy of Candice Lin and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

6. On medieval representations of the vagina and their relation to contemporary art, see Madeline Caviness, "Retomando la iconografía vaginal". *Quintana* 6 (2007): 13-37.

7. Johann Vesling, *Syntagma anatomicum* (Patavii: Typis Pauli Frambotti, 1647), f. 80 v., 96 v.

8. The term vagina (from vaina: scabbard or sheath) was used for the first time by Matteo Realdo Colombo (c. 1515-1559) in *De Re Anatomica* (1559), but until the eighteenth century, the vagina was relatively unknown and frequently defined as a deformation or inversion of the penis, a small member, or the scabbard or sheath for covering the penis; the ovaries were referred to as internal testicles. The list of "anatomists" making speculative conceptions of the vagina is notable: Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), Prospero Borgarucci (fl. 1564-1579), Gabriello Fallopio (1523-1562), and Thomas Bartholin (1616-1680), among others. Treatise writers preferred to read Aristoteles or Galen of Pergamon rather than engaging in careful observation of the female genitals (Mónica Cano "Coños. Invisibilización de los sexos otros. Anatomía política de los genitales femeninos y 'abyectos.'" *Turba. Revista de filosofía política* Sep (2014): 44-5; Catherine Blackledge, *The Story of V: A Natural History of Female Sexuality*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 60-1, 70-1, 77-9; Angus McLaren, "The

Systematic exploration of the human body was initiated during the Renaissance, but until the eighteenth century, the vagina was, generally speaking, conceived of abstractly, represented only in a speculative way, and most of the time rendered invisible. Of course there are numerous exceptions to this concealing. For instance, there are ceramic pieces from pre-Hispanic cultures that show clear anatomical understanding of the clitoris (Img. 7); medieval carnivalesque representations, such as the little pilgrim vaginas (Img. 8); or the disturbing, ornamental Sheela na gig, watching us from her perch on the cornice of a medieval Romanesque church (Img. 9).⁶ But what we wish to point out here are not the exceptions, but rather the general grammar of invisibility that prevailed until the Enlightenment shed its light on female genitalia. For until then, what predominated were speculative representations founded in readings of Aristotle or Galen of Pergamon. The vagina was considered variously as a deformity of male genitals; as an inverted penis, as in *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) by Andreas Vesalius (Img. 10); or as a receptacle for the penis, as explained by Matteo Realdo Colombo, supposed discoverer of the clitoris, in his *De Re Anatomica* (1559). When it is represented, it is shown as a slit or a hole, as in the work of Jacopo Berengario (1535) (Img. 11) and also Johann Vesling.⁷ Before it is represented, the vagina is closed off by a veil that is both optical and epistemological.⁸ This is evident in images (be they artistic or anatomical) such as Sandro Botticelli's



Image 7. *Female Figure in Birthing Position*, Moche, Perú (50-800 A.D.). Walters Art Museum. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Image 8. *Pilgrim Vagina* (Reimerswaal, 1375-1425). Courtesy of Páncéllkovács, Hungary.



Image 9. *Sheela na gig*. Kilpeck Church, Herefordshire, UK (siglo XII). Photography: Nesity-Pic. CC BY-SA 4.0.

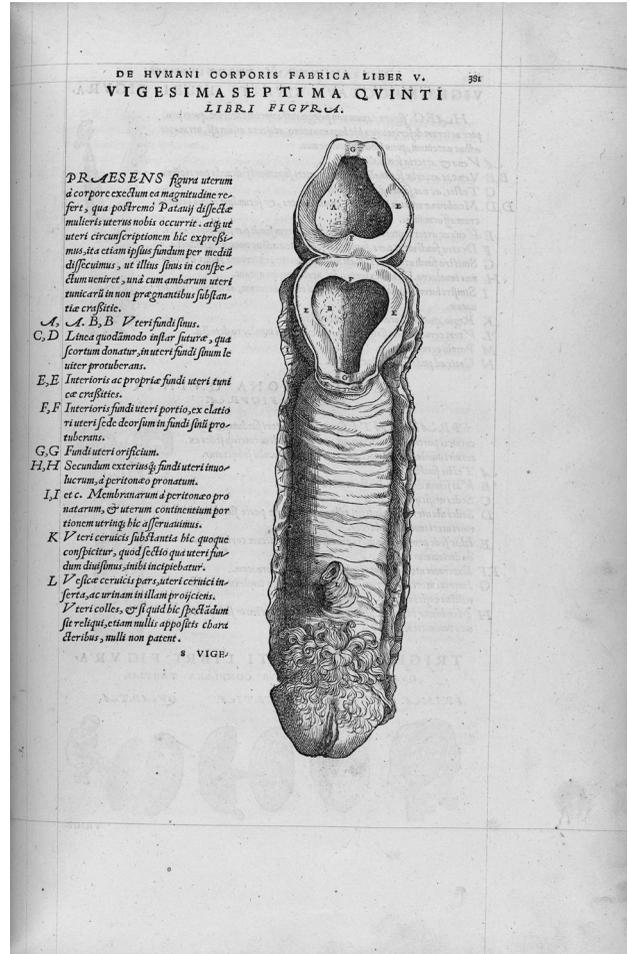


Image 10. Andreas Vesalius, "Illustration of a uterus", *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543). Wellcome Library, London. CC BY 4.0.



Image 11. Jacopo Berengario, "Dissected woman pointing to an extracted uterus", *Anatomia Carpi Isagoge breves perlucide ac uberime, in anatomiam humani corporis* (1535). Wellcome Library, London. CC BY 4.0.

The Birth of Venus (1484), the anatomical Venus (1560) drawn by the Spaniard Juan Valverde de Amusco (Img. 12), or the illustration of the flower of pregnancy (1627; published by Adriaan van Spiegel in 1631) by Giulio Casseri (Img. 13).⁹

Even Leonardo da Vinci, who made one of the first anatomical illustrations of female genitalia based on dissections (c. 1508) (Img. 14), seems a little lost when he speaks of the female body he draws as a “grand mystery.”¹⁰ The important point here is that Da Vinci represents the female body as a pelvis, with no head and no extremities, focalized on the vagina, just as Smellie and Courbet would later do. The Davincian visual display has a direct connection to the gyneco-sopic regime of anatomical illustrations inaugurated by the Scottish anatomists and “fathers of gynecology,” the aforementioned William Smellie and William Hunter (1718-1783).

Smellie and Hunter make female genitals the object of the prestigious gaze of the anatomist and their luxurious treatises on anatomy. The modern anatomization of female genitalia and the uterus are the result of a collaboration between “great men of science”—authorized by their gender, social class, and academic positions—dedicated to dissecting cadavers of pregnant women and commissioning detailed engravings of the dissections. Smellie published

Pleasures of Procreation.” *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-century Medical World*. Eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge; New York: University Press, 1985), 327).

9. It goes without saying that all of this covering up, hiding, and obfuscation of the vagina does not mean that people did not know about or were not familiar with the vagina; rather, the order of representation was speculative, not properly gyneco-sopic.

10. Leonardo Da Vinci, Jane Roberts Kenneth Keele, Windsor Castle. Royal Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Leonardo da Vinci: Anatomical Drawings from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*. Edited by Kenneth Keele and Carlo Pedretti (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 13.

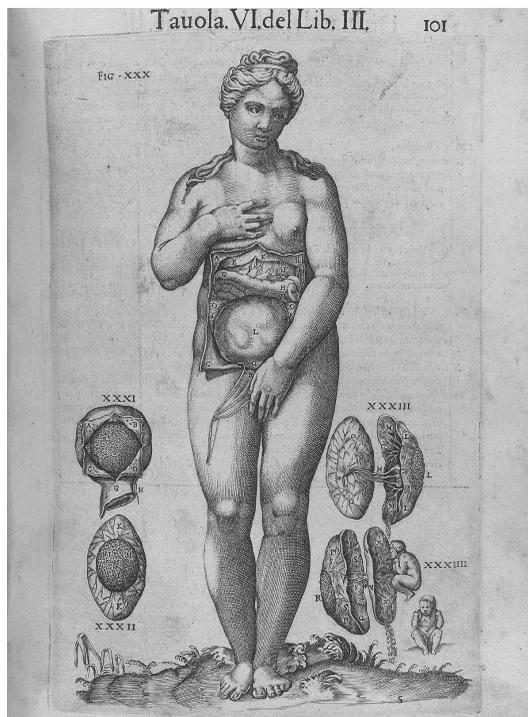


Image 12. Juan Valverde de Amusco, *Anatomia del corpo humano* (1560). U.S. National Library of Medicine. Public Domain Mark 1.0.



Image 13. Adriaan van Spiegel and Giulio Casseri, *De formato foetu liber singularis* [1626]. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

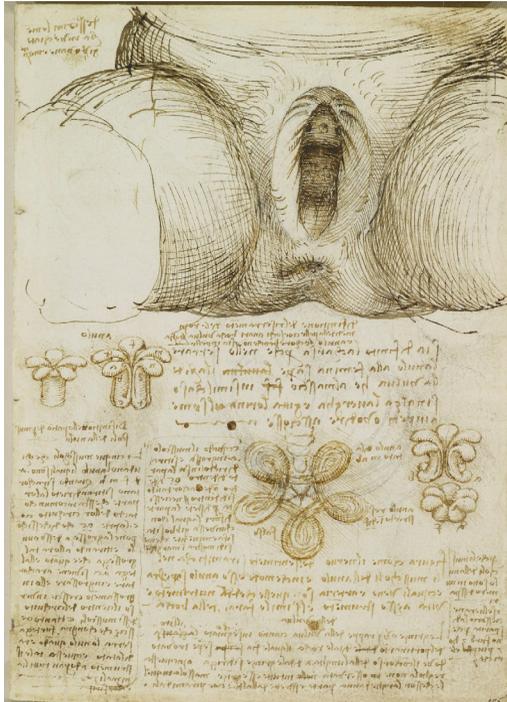


Image 14. Leonardo Da Vinci, "The vulva and anus." Drawing annotated with explanatory diagram. (ca. 1508). Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018.

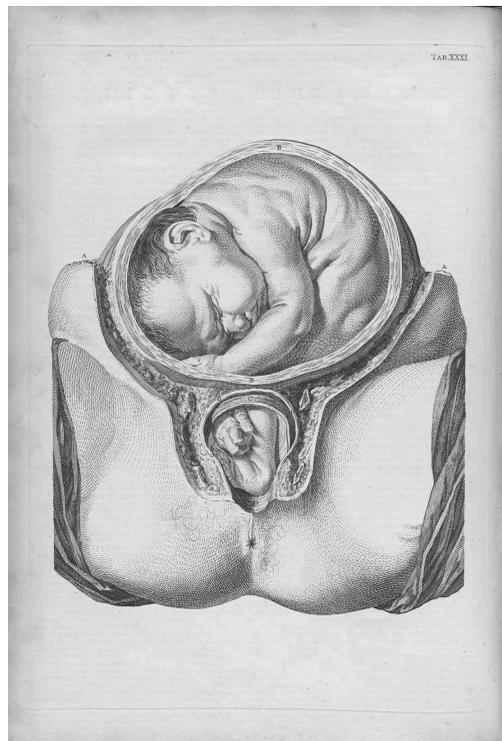


Image 15. William Smellie, Plates 7 and 31, *A Sett of Anatomical Tables, with Explanations, and an Abridgment, of the Practice of Midwifery* (1754). U.S. National Library of Medicine.

11. Smellie's treatise was illustrated by van Raymsdyk, Petrus Camper (1722-1789), and also by Smellie himself. Hunter's illustrations were drawn by van Rymsdyk (who did 31 of the 24 drawings), Edward Edwards (1738-1806; plate XVI), Alexander Cozens (1717-1786; plate XXI), and Nicholas Blackey (1739-1758; plate XXII) (see Caroline Grigson "A Universal Language': William Hunter and the Production of *The Anatomy of a Human Gravid Uterus*." *William Hunter's World. The Art and Science of Eighteenth-Century Collecting*. Eds. Geoffrey Hancock, (Nick Pearce and Mungo Campbell. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 65, 69, 71-2). According to Lyle Massey, these treatises "wrenched a semiprivate female ritual out of its homely confines and into the full light of public scrutiny and medical science" (73, see also Ludmilla Jordanova, "Gender, Generation and Science: William Hunter's Obstetrical Atlas", *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-century Medical World*. Eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 386).

12. Martin Kemp, "Dr. William Hunter on the Windsor Leonardos and his Volume of Drawings Attributed to Pietro da Cortona." *The Burlington Magazine* 118.876 (1976): 144, 147-48.

13. Smellie's and Hunter's treatises, according to Don Shelton, illustrate more than thirty pregnant bodies. The illustrations in *The Anatomy* represent sixteen bodies, twelve of which Hunter would have dissected with his brother between 1766 and 1744 (Don Shelton, "The Emperor's New Clothes" *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 103.2 (2010): 46, 49; Don

A Sett of Anatomical Tables (1754) (Img. 15) and Hunter authored the famous *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774), illustrated by the Dutch Jan van Rymsdyk (1750-1788).¹¹ With these treatises, the focalization is such that the *entire body* is reduced to a *pelvic body*, with no arms, legs, or head (and thus obviously with no eyes, which is to say, a body that can be looked upon with apparent impunity, with no risk that it will return the gaze). The relationship between this illustrated anatomization and the pelvic body represented by Da Vinci is historic. Hunter discovered and studied Da Vinci's drawings of the vagina in the Windsor Library.¹²

Between 1750 and 1754, Smellie and Hunter dissected twenty cadavers of pregnant women. Later, between 1766 and 1774, Hunter, assisted by his brother John (1728-1793), dissected approximately twelve more pregnant women.¹³ Hunter's *The Anatomy* includes thirty-four high quality illustrations. Furthermore, Hunter commissioned several three-dimensional, life-sized plaster sculptures (Img. 16). Eleven of these are housed today in the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow,¹⁴ along with several preserved uteruses, fetuses, and vaginas from his dissections (Img. 17).¹⁵

Hunter epistemologically privileges what is seen and explored *vis-à-vis* that which is abstracted, idealized, or "conceived in the imagination"¹⁶ and he alleges a scientific correspondence between that which is observed and those territories that are graphically represented. The image that "represents what is actually seen" is true and "becomes almost as infallible as the object itself," says Hunter in his preface (2 n.p.).¹⁷ One illustration even includes the reflection,



Image 16. Plaster anatomical model (Gravid Uterus, Hunter Cast 48.4). © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow 2018.



Image 17. "A sagittal section of a uterus, ovary, vagina and bladder some time after birth." The Hunterian Museum. *Photography*: Emöke Dénes.

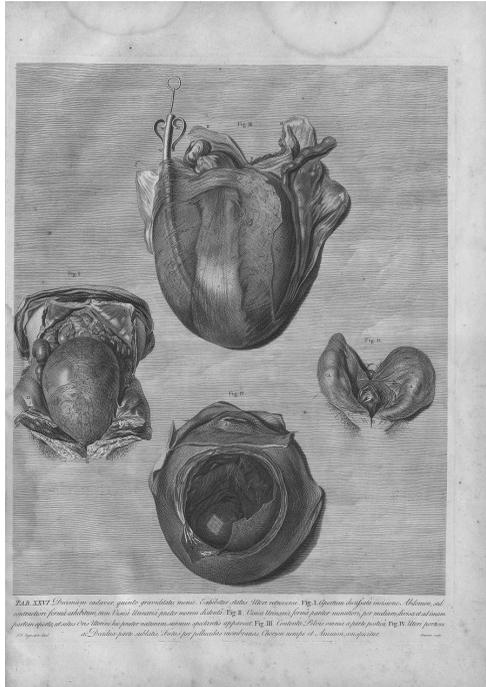


Image 18. William Hunter, Plate 26, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774). U.S. National Library of Medicine.

on the viscous head of the fetus, of a window that lets in the light (Img. 18; fig. IV). These limitations on seeing and knowing do not call into question the authority of the anatomist's visual knowledge; rather, they authorize his "visual epistemology."¹⁸ Smellie and Hunter dissect, map out, penetrate, and scrutinize the female body in order to produce scientific knowledge about it, a move that is paradoxically authorized by artistic drawings.¹⁹ This visual epistemology *organizes* the body. When we say *organize*, we mean that it literally divides the body into organs, slices it up, and produces a naturalized identity of, for example, the vagina and the uterus. The genital organs do not exist prior to their anatomization; that is to say, to the series of visual and epistemological cuts that produces the fiction of their identity and that establishes their supposed limits, their connections to other organs, their function, etc.

In Hunter's illustrations, we notice a series of successive cuts that first suppress the head, the extremities, and the upper part of the torso, leaving the pelvic body with legs spread open (Img. 19). From there, this pelvic body is cut into several deeper layers: the belly is opened by the scalpel and by the anatomist's eye, and the uterus, fetus, placenta, and even the ovaries and the vaginal tissues are extracted and illustrated (Img. 18). The anatomist is like a butcher (which we suggest with all due respect to professional butchers). Donna Haraway, noting

Shelton, "Shelton's response" *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 103.5 (2010): 167). Kaufman and Malcolm-Smith affirm that Hunter illustrated only five women, all of whom were nine months pregnant (Matthew F Kaufman and Nigel A. Malcolm-Smith. "The Emperor's New Clothes." Letter. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 103.5 (2010): 166.) and Stuart McDonald and John Faithfull state that Hunter used thirteen cadavers obtained through exhumations, in addition to supplemental material from births and several abortions (Stuart McDonald and John Faithfull, "William Hunter's Sources of Pathological and Anatomical Specimens, with Particular Reference to Obstetric Subjects." *William Hunter's World. The Art and Science of Eighteenth-Century Collecting*. Eds. Geoffrey Hancock, Nick Pearce and Mungo Campbell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 52-55).

14. The three dimensional works have been attributed to van Rymysdyk, as well as to sculptors Edward Burch (1730-1814) and Agostino Carlini (c. 1718-1790). In his manuscripts, Hunter registered the existence of twenty-one pieces, fourteen of which were connected to John Teacher in his catalog (1900). However, only eleven are found today in the Hunterian Museum (N. A. McCulloch, D. Russell, and S.W. McDonald "William Hunter's Casts of the Gravid Uterus at the University of Glasgow", *Clinical Anatomy* 14.3 (2001): 210, 213. 216; John H. Teacher, Hunterian Museum (University of Glasgow) and William Hunter. *Catalogue of the Anatomical and Pathological Preparations of Dr. William Hunter in the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. Vol. II* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1900), 659-67).

15. On the relation between the preserved specimens and those represented in *The Anatomy*, see McCulloch et al., "Hunter's Gravid", 253).

16. William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures* [1774]. [Facsimile], 2n.p.

17. "That figure which is a close representation of nature, and which is finished from a view of one subject, will often be, unavoidably, somewhat indistinct or defective in some parts; the other, being a figure of fancy, made up perhaps from a variety of studies after Nature, may exhibit in one view, what could only be seen in several objects; and it admits of a better arrangement, of abridgment, and of greater precision. The one may have the elegance and harmony of the natural object; the other has commonly the hardness of a geometrical diagram: the one shews the object, or gives perception; the other only describes, or gives an idea of it. A very essential advantage of the first is, that as it represents what was actually seen, it carries the mark of truth, and becomes almost as infallible as

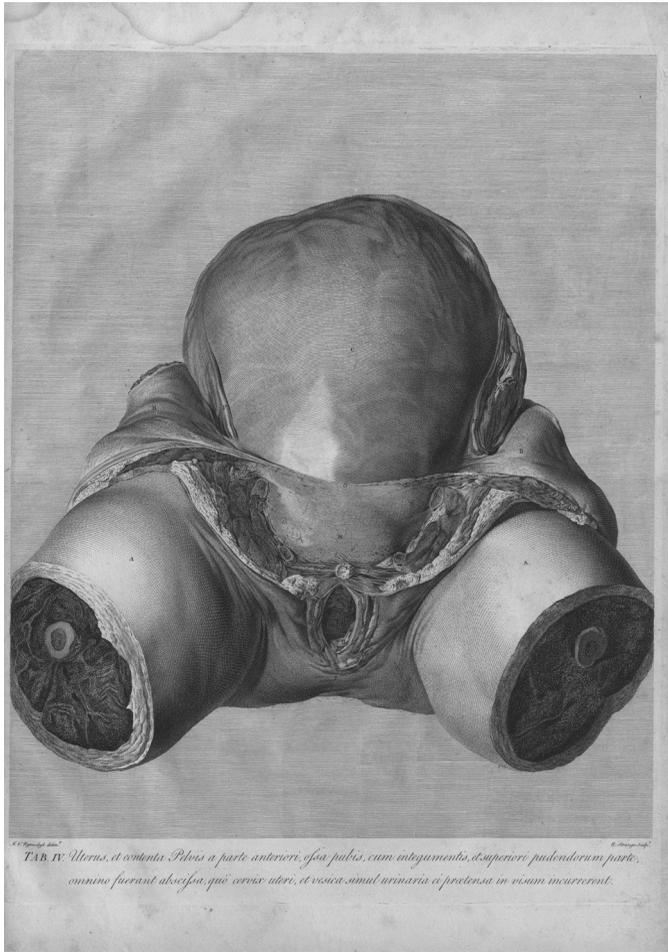


Image 19. Jan van Rymdyk, Plate IV, in William Hunter's *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774). U.S. National Library of Medicine.

the object itself" (William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*, 2 n.p.).

18. Term coined by Ludmilla Jordanova, "Gender, Generation and Science: William Hunter's Obstetrical Atlas", 395-396.

19. Hunter was a professor of anatomy at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1768 to 1783 (Ludmilla Jordanova, "Gender, Generation and Science: William Hunter's Obstetrical Atlas", 386).

20. Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *The Gender and Science Reader*: London: Routledge, 2001), 176.

21. Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Aviso de incendio. Una lectura de las tesis "Sobre el concepto de historia"*. Edited by Michael Löwy (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 81.

that "[v]ision is always a question of the power to see— and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices," poses the question: "With whose blood were my eyes crafted?"²⁰ In the images that appear so "cleanly" laid out on the pages of Hunter's book and on his anatomical models, we can glimpse the blood with which the anatomist's eyes were crafted. But we need to read them historically "against the grain" as Walter Benjamin proposed.²¹

Hunter represents not only a new type of vision cast upon the genitals, but a whole new optics that supposes and at the same time effects—both literally and figuratively— his slicing and dicing of the body into exhibition pieces. In addition to producing a detailed illustration and a three-dimensional reproduction (the plaster models) (Img. 16) as well preserving and collecting organic specimens (Img. 17), Hunter produces knowledge about the "thing" he is representing. That is to say, we are faced with a superposition, an accumulation of ultravisible bodily fragments that is saturated, redundant, and hyperbolic.

In his treatise, Hunter explains that very few doctors have had access to a sufficient number of bodies to carry out their studies, and that in fact the opportunity to dissect a woman's uterus occurs only one or two times in the life of an anatomist, if indeed it occurs at all.²² Hunter, however, manages to acquire not just one or two, but twelve cadavers of pregnant women; thirty-two if one counts the dissections he did with Smellie. This abundance is suspicious. All anatomists either hired people to ransack cemeteries, known as *resurrectionists* (Hunter himself was a famous exhumer, *Img. 20*), or they were able to attain the bodies of executed criminals.²³ Yet it is doubtful that these sources would have been able to provide fresh corpses of pregnant women in different months of gestation, much less thirty-two. Keep in mind too that pregnant women were not executed, and that when they died of natural causes this was much more typical during childbirth or miscarriage, not before. Even in the case of the death of a pregnant woman, one would have to have an effective and efficient network of communication to get to the body before it began to decay. In an article published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Don Shelton examines the relevant statistics and argues that the “father of gynecology” obtained the bodies of prostitutes by hiring murderers.²⁴ The aptly named Dr. Hunter hunted pregnant women. The abundance of fresh, untraumatized corpses that Hunter had at his disposal is difficult to explain in any other way. The gynecological gaze rests on the *corpus delicti*; i.e., the anatomical specimen is the body of a crime (*Img. 21*).

22. “Few, or none of the anatomists, had met with a sufficient number of subjects, either for investigating, or for demonstrating the principal circumstances of utero-gestation in the human species. [...] Opportunities of dissecting the human pregnant uterus at leisure very rarely occur. Indeed to most anatomists, if they have happened at all, it has been but once or twice in their whole lives” (William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*, 3 n.p.).

23. Stuart McDonald and John W. Faithfull, “William Hunter’s Sources of Pathological and Anatomical Specimens, with Particular Reference to Obstetric Subjects”, 46-53.

24. According to Shelton, “Smellie and Hunter were responsible for a series of 18th century ‘burking’ murders of pregnant women, with a death total greater than the combined murders committed by the famous 19th-century murderers, Burke and Hare, and Jack the Ripper” (Don Shelton, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, 46).



Image 20. William Austin, “The Anatomist Overtaken by the Watch... Carrying off Miss W-ts in a Hamper” (1773). U.S. National Library of Medicine. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

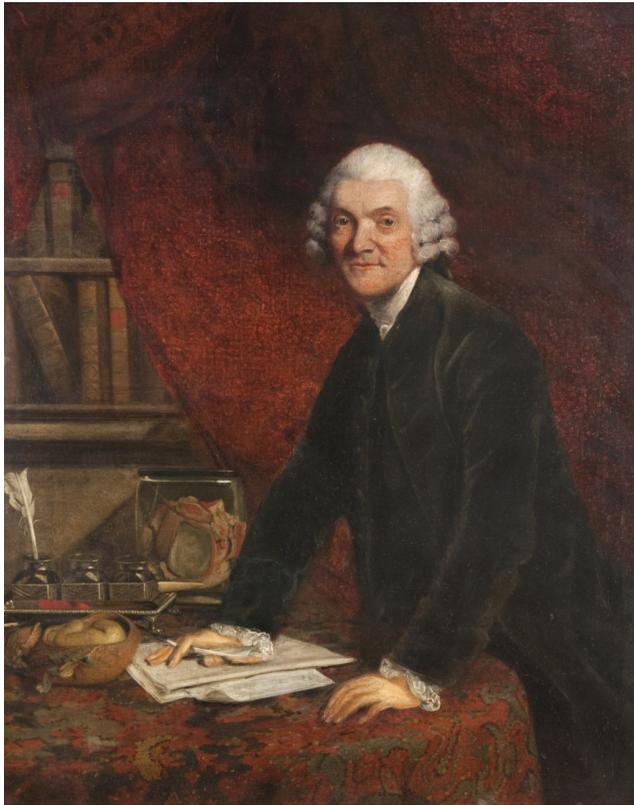


Image 21. Joshua Reynolds, *William Hunter* (c. 1787). © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow 2018.

25. “As Giorgio Agamben has signaled in his explanation of Foucault’s paradigmatic method, the notion of paradigm refers to a singular historical phenomenon through which critical analysis establishes ‘a broader problematic context.’ Paradigms ‘both constitute and make [that context] intelligible.’ In other words, the paradigm constitutes a context and makes it visible in the way that an example or a grammatical exception both makes and proves the rule. The paradigm is not exactly a part of the whole, nor is it the whole in which the part would be inscribed; it is not a metonymy or a metaphor, but rather an exemplum that, stripped of totality or generality, analogously relates to other examples to constitute a historical context (Carlos A. Jáuregui, “*Huacayñán* (1952-1953) and the Biopolitics of In(ex)clusion.” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesía* 25, 1 (2016): 54). For more on the *paradigm* in Foucault’s work (that is, the paradigm as a singularity that constitutes a principle of intelligibility for broader contexts), see Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of all Things: On Method* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2009), 9, 17, 18-24).

26. On the original commission of *L’Origine du monde*, its acquisition by Lacan and the importance

But even if we give Hunter the benefit of the doubt, the point about the violent slicing and symbolic butchering remains. Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* is to visual art what Hunter’s atlas and three-dimensional models are to anatomy: a gynecoscopic *paradigm*; that is, a visual regime that structures the androcentric invention, representation, and subordination of the female body through synecdochal slicing, the ultravisibility of the genitals, and the erasure of the historical conditions of this asymmetry. What we have are paradigms in the Foucauldian sense: orphan examples of a totality that constitute and make intelligible certain historical contexts.²⁵

Setting aside the famous and much studied history of Courbet’s painting—which was commissioned by a Turkish diplomat for a private voyeurist display of female nudes, copied by René Magritte (1940), and purchased by Jacques Lacan, who hung it in his office and covered it with a sliding mechanism behind an abstract drawing by André Masson that paid homage to Courbet’s original—let us concentrate instead on the sinister dimension of the painting, which is to say its Hunterian dimension.²⁶ For the majority of critics, the body displayed in Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* is not, at least not explicitly, a cadaver. In fact, critics often underscore the erotic vitality of the image, which, according

to British artist Tracey Emin (b. 1963) invites men —let us assume she means to say men and women— to bury their heads “right in there.”²⁷ However, early observers of the painting, such as writer and photographer Maxime du Camp (1822-1894), were scandalized by the absence of a head and extremities.²⁸ More recently, historian Jean-Jacques Fernier entertained the notion that Courbet may have originally painted the whole body, but that the painting was mutilated after the fact; that is to say, the work of art was the object and victim of a Hunterian quartering (Img. 22). This hypothesis was based on the appearance of *Tête de femme*, Courbet’s painting of a head that supposedly corresponds to the torso of *L’Origine*.²⁹ In any case, *L’Origine* does not represent a full female body but rather a slice of one, cut off by the frame at the same place as the bodies in several of Hunter’s illustrations (Img. 23). The pallidness of the skin and the mortuary gauze surrounding the body suggest death. This body, like the bodies in Hunter’s



Image 22. Cover of *Paris Match* (February 3, 2013). Photography: Paola Uparella.

of this painting to the psychoanalyst’s work, see Shuli Barzilai, *Lacan and the Matter of Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). The painting was shown to the public for the first time in 1988 in the exhibition “Courbet Reconsidered” at the Brooklyn Museum and in 1991 in the Musée Gustave Courbet in Ornans. In 1995 the painting was acquired by the permanent collections of the Musée d’Orsay (Thierry Savatier, *L’Origine du monde: histoire d’un tableau de Gustave Courbet* (Paris: Bartillat, 2006), 186; Frédérique Thomas-Maurin, Julie Delmas and Élise Boudon, *Cet obscur objet de désirs* (Paris: Lienart; Musée Gustave Courbet, 2014), 29).

27. Emin states: “it looks so real, it looks so fleshy, it looks sexy, it looks so inviting. [...] it was so radical; the fact that there is pubic hair, the fact that you can see the clitoris, the fact that it’s a woman inviting [...]. I can imagine men at the time, and men now, imagining burying their heads right in there” (Tracey Emin, “Tracey Emin on Gustave Courbet’s *The Origin of the World*, 7.9.14.” Interview with Mirjam Baitsch (video). Exhibition “Gustave Courbet” at the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel. Sept. 20, 2014, 00:14-1:02).

28. Maxime du Camp writes: “[B]y some inconceivable forgetfulness, the artist who copied his model from nature, had neglected to represent the feet, the legs, the thighs, the stomach, the hips, the chest, the hands, the arms, the shoulders, the neck and the head” (Du Camp in Shuli Barzilai, *Lacan and the Matter of Origins*, 9-10).

29. On *Tête de femme* and the supposed amputation from its body, see Anne-Cécile Beaudoin, “Le secret de la femme cachée.” *Paris Match* 3 Feb. (2013), 65-75; for a detailed analysis of the painting, see also Bruno Mortin, “L’Origine du monde: une approche technique.” *Cet obscur objet de désirs* (Paris: Lienart; Musée Gustave Courbet, 2014), 33-39.



Image 24. Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donné* (1917-1966). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969-41-1. © Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2018.

revealing a hairless vagina that appears less like a genital organ and more like a wound or a fissure in the alabaster surface of her skin.

Étant donné makes the spectator's voyeurism explicit at the same time that it produces an *ocular-vaginal mise en abyme*. The work visually materializes what María Elena Úbeda has called "the crisis of the scopic regime," in the sense that it both influences and denounces the spectator-voyeur.³¹ The rigor of the pose and the appearance of the vagina-wound could validate the perspective of those critics who suggest that Duchamp based his nude on photographs of the scene of a famous crime known as "the Black Dahlia murder". But not only does the work of art cite the crime, the crime itself seems to be the staging of several surrealist motifs of the mutilation of female bodies. Take, for example, the work of Hans Bellmer, René Magritte, Salvador Dalí, or Man Ray, where the female body is "composed" in pieces or lifeless, and is always a thing; a disarticulated mannequin or a reclining cadaver (Img. 25).

31. María Elena Úbeda, "La mirada desbordada el espesor de la experiencia del sujeto estético en el marco de la crisis del régimen escópico." Diss. Universidad de Granada, 2006. Web. 26 Feb. 2016. 240-41, 473.

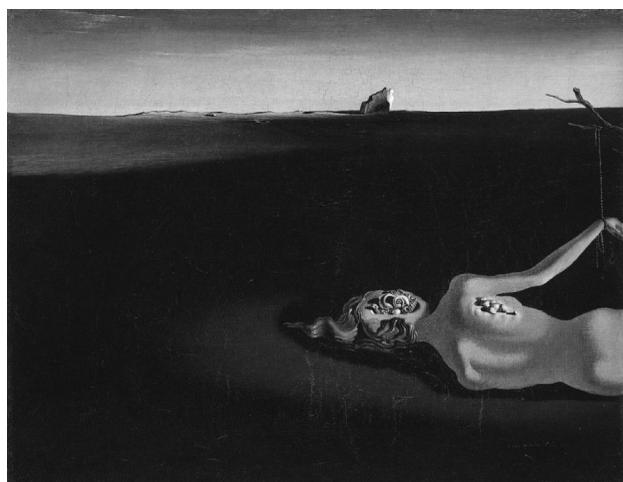
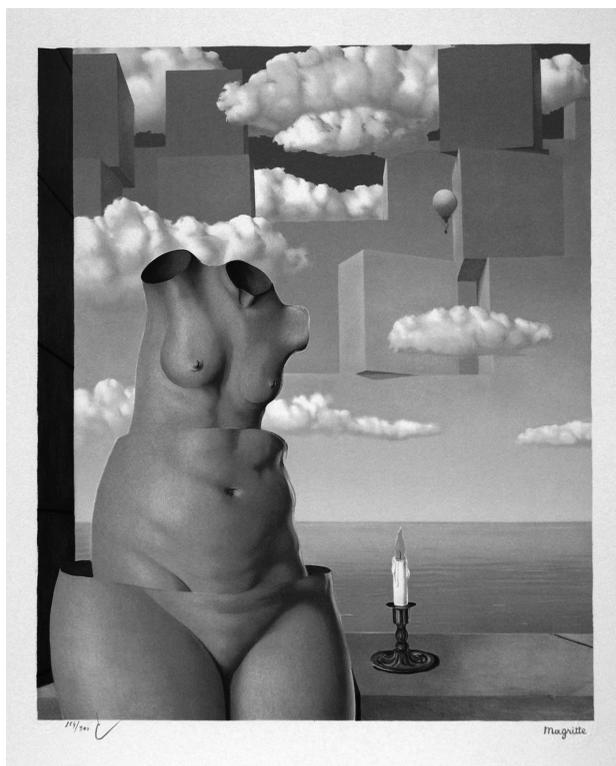


Image 25. Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée* (1936). © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
René Magritte, *Delusions of Grandeur* (1948). © 2018 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
Salvador Dalí, *Woman Sleeping In A Landscape* (1931). © 2018 Salvador Dalí, Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, Artists Rights Society.
Man Ray, *Primacy Of Matter Over Thought* (1929). © Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris 2018.

Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss suggest that the homicide, mutilation, and disposition of the body of Elizabeth Short (the victim) were part of a surrealist installation by the painter Man Ray (1890-1976), a friend of Duchamp.³² So although *Etánt donnés* can be read as critical of the gyneco-sopic regime, we must uphold our suspicions of it and perhaps even consider it a sinister voyeuristic machine, as Candice Lin does.

Lin takes on the three historical moments we have referred to here (Hunter, Courbet and Duchamp) with an audiovisual sculptural installation that brings the gyneco-sopic regime into focus. Lin's *Hunter Moon / Inside Out* (2015) (Img. 26) reproduces the three-dimensional model made by William Hunter (our "serial gynecologist") (Img. 16). *Hunter Moon / Inside Out* is not an exact replica of the anatomical model; it lacks detail, it has a silvery metallic surface, and it looks unreal, artificial. The flesh of Lin's sculpture is not flesh; it resists being consumed as an object and the sense of estrangement it produces refers back to the ominous eye of the doctor and of the voyeuristic viewer. Through *Hunter Moon / Inside Out* we do not see the anatomical body so much as we become aware of the anatomist who cut up the body and left us the inedible scraps. In other words, Lin makes visible what the Hunterian model hides: the violent scopic territorialization and the syndechocal subordination of the female body; the relation between the consumption of art and the consumption of the

32. On the possible surrealist inspirations for this crime, the "aesthetic" posing of the body, and the connections to the work of Duchamp, see Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder*. New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006.



Image 26. Candice Lin, *Hunter Moon/Inside Out* (2015), in "Canibalia" (KADIST, Paris, February 6-April 26, 2015). Courtesy of Candice Lin; Julia Morandeira; Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles; and KADIST, Paris. *Photography*: Aurélien Mole.

body; and, in the end, the multiple forms of misogynist violence, both material and symbolic, that founds androcentric modernity.

The interior of the sculpture contains a video titled *Inside Out*.³³ To see it, the spectator-voyeur must bend down, put their head between the legs of the sculpture, and peek through a small hole in order to penetrate the unknown territory of this vagina / camera obscura. Inside, other vaginas taken from Courbet and Duchamp threaten to devour the vulnerable eye, submitting it to a monstrous, indeed cannibalistic optic. We cannot fully capture in words the complexity of the video; we can merely draw attention to some of its more striking aspects. The first image is from Duchamp's *Étant donnés*. The spectator, looking through the vagina of Lin's sculpture, sees Duchamp's door with its two holes, but through those holes two eyes gaze back, preventing the viewer from seeing the *Étant donnés* nude. Furthermore, the peepholes on the Duchamp door look vaguely like eyes thanks to what looks like a natural discoloration of the wood, but in Lin's piece, the smudged wood is a fully formed witch (a naked teratological witch) whose eyes impede any replication of the voyeuristic experience found in the Duchamp installation (Img. 27). Then Lin opens Duchamp's door and there is no landscape but rather a cartoonish version of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (Img. 28) in which the vagina of the famous painting has eyes. Whereas

33. Candice Lin, *Inside Out*. 2010. Video. François Ghebaly Gallery, LA. <https://vimeo.com/15520740>

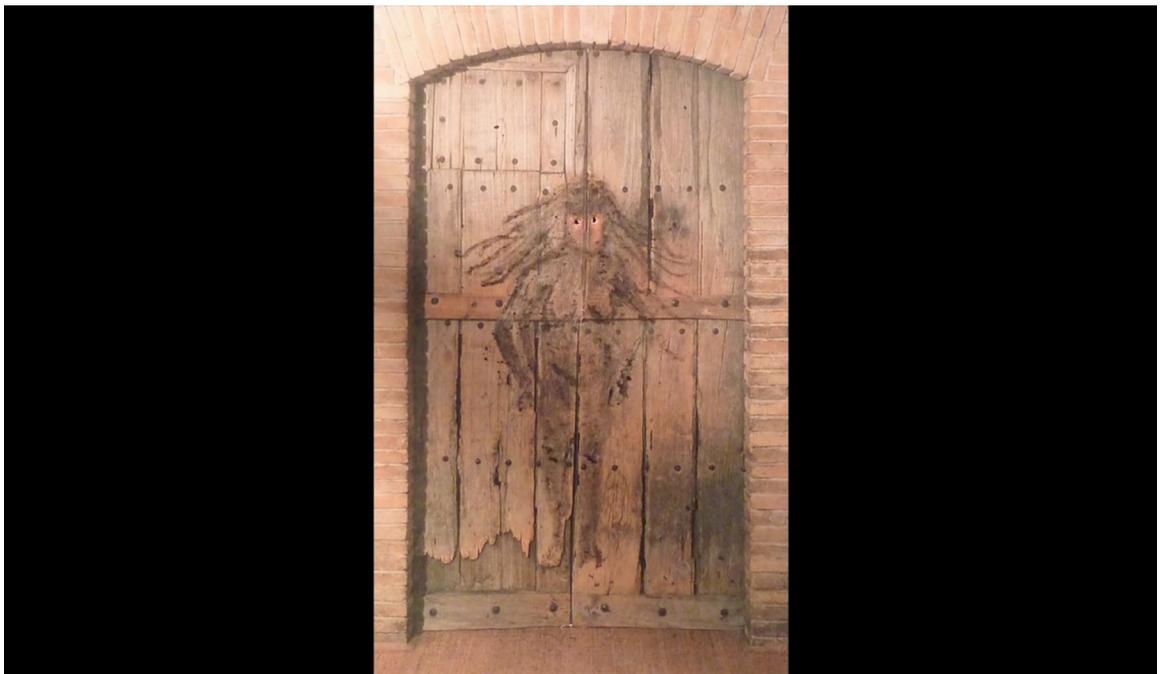


Image 27. Bacchante on the gate of Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*. Candice Lin, *Inside Out*, still (2010). Courtesy of Candice Lin and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.



Image 28. Candice Lin, *Inside Out*, still (2010). Courtesy of Candice Lin and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

Duchamp's installation obliges the viewer to recognize his/her nosy voyeurism, Lin's video-sculpture rejects the voyeuristic eye/I: the spectator peers through a small hole, but instead of the body-object on passive display, the viewer is faced with a vagina that looks back.

Lin's sculpture is not the only work of art to destructure the sovereignty of the eye over the female genitals and expose the violence of this voyeurism, disrupting the relation of subordination between the observer and the observed, and even producing a disidentification of the vagina as a sexual and reproductive organ. Allow us to explore a few additional examples.

In the performance *Esperando al príncipe azul* (Awaiting Prince Charming) (1999), by Regina José Galindo (Guatemala b. 1974), the artist lies naked under a bridal sheet with a small embroidered hole that serves as an irregular decentered framing of the vagina (Img. 29). In its social and religious context, this sheet would function as a mechanism to prevent the obscenity of intercourse, ensuring minimal contact between husband and wife and a type of intercourse defined by a generative teleology (after all, *genital*, from *gignō*, give birth or *engender*, refers to *reproduction*). In the performance, however, the sheet exposes the obscenity of the mechanism itself. Whereas Galindo's performance exhibits a body destined for reproduction, the title *Esperando al príncipe azul* suggests a body awaiting a romantic amorous encounter. The inverse occurs in Courbet's *L'origine du monde*, where the title suggests reproduction while the painting represents an eroticized body. Galindo, through a visual segmentation and genital ultravisibility critiques domestic(ated) sexuality.



Image 29. Regina José Galindo, *Esperando al príncipe azul* (1999). Edificio de Correos, Guatemala City, Guatemala. Photographs: Andrea Aragón.

Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) offers an intense visual exploration of the vagina, both as a sign of androcentric violence and as utopian and affirmative retrospection of a “primordial” femininity. An example of the former, in the performance *Body Tracks* (1974), Mendieta explores genital violence by tracing a “V” down a white wall with bloodied hands. In her series of carved limestone *Esculturas Rupestres* (Rupestrian Sculptures 1981) and *El laberinto de Venus* (Labyrinth of Venus 1982), Mendieta reinvents the symbolic power of genitals *vis-à-vis* phallic power with a series of “prehistoric” sculptures, retrospectively anterior to modern gyneco-aesthetic discourses and images (Img. 30). The artist subverts the gyneco-scopical focalization and representation of the *pelvic body* and proposes disembodied vaginas, vaginas that are the entire body: “vulvo-centric” bodies³⁴ that circumscribe the eye.

Brazilian artist Vik Muniz (b. 1961) creates two (sub)versions of the famous painting by Courbet. The first is a photograph made of dust or dirt, which plays with the common moralist association between female genitalia and filth (Img. 31). In the second piece, Muniz remakes *L'Origine* from an assemblage of journal clippings (Img. 32) that are reminiscent of the anatomic and

34. Anna C Chave, “Is this good for Vulva? Female Genitalia in Contemporary Art.” *The Visible Vagina. January 28 - March 20, 2010*. Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, and David Nolan Gallery. (New York: JohnsByrne Co, 2010), 31.



Image 30. Ana Mendieta, *Guanaroca* (*Esculturas Rupestres*), 1981. [First Woman (Rupestrian Sculptures)]. Black and white photograph. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.



Image 31. Vik Muniz, *Origin of the World, After Courbet* (1999). Art © Vik Muniz/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Image 32. Vik Muniz, *Origin of the World, After Courbet* (2013). Art © Vik Muniz/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

artistic procedure of cutting that produced the genital *organization* of the female body. Muniz's vagina-collage is both a mimetic representation and a distortion of Courbet: as the eye gets closer, the image disintegrates into tiny pieces of paper (Img. 33). As we have seen, the vagina-synecdoque only exists through a scopic focalization and a series of visual, anatomical, and aesthetic cuts. Muniz offers a cultural artefact that, by drawing near and focusing, allows for the deterritorialization of the vagina.

Two Origins of the World (2000) by Mexican artist Enrique Chagoya (b. 1953) recycles *L'Origine du monde* as a spectral backdrop behind three solid black, blue and white squares of canvas in three of the corners of the painting (Img. 34). In the foreground of the bottom right corner, an indigenous man sits at a fourth canvas, this one on an easel, apparently "interpreting" the Courbet painting. The indigenous painter does not offer a genital genesis like Courbet's, but rather a chromatic genesis that is superimposed over the Eurocentric origin of the world: the work takes the náhuatl cosmogony that privileges four fundamental colors corresponding to the four cardinal points, which are associated with the creation of the universe and the gods Tezcatlipoca (black), Huitzilopochtli (blue), Quetzalcoatl (white), and Xipe Totec (red). Over the Eurocentric backdrop of Courbet's cosmogonic pubis, Chagoya reorients the world with a counter-colonial gesture, revindicating the indigenous cultural signs erased by colonialism. Furthermore, Chagoya superposes the "sensual" and "maternal" Courbetian vagina with a canvas covered in blood red, evoking menstrual bleeding-in itself a sign of non-pregnancy.

Returning to *Hunter Moon*, Lin's sculpture, as we have said, subverts Hunter's plaster model and, upon further examination (as it were), turns out



Image 33. Vik Muniz, *Origin of the World, After Courbet* (2013; detail). Art © Vik Muniz/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Image 34. Enrique Chagoya, *Two Origins of the World* (2000). Courtesy of Enrique Chagoya and Lisa Sette Gallery, Phoenix, AZ.

to be exhibiting the violence of the anatomist himself and also the spectator (Img. 35). Hunter is of course the last name of the famous anatomist, but also the noun for one who hunts and kills. The title *Hunter Moon* also evokes agricultural reproduction and the matter of seeing, as a Hunter's Moon, also known as Harvest Moon or Blood Moon, is the full moon nearest the beginning of the fall or the autumnal equinox, which because it comes up right after sunset helps harvesters and hunters with its light. This supplemental though murky light of a "blood red" moon enables the eye of the hunter, marks the reproductive harvest, but also sheds light on the violence of Hunter's hunting, gutting, and cutting up of the female "reproductive" organs (i.e., genitals).

We can also read *Hunter Moon* as an "obscene exhibit," for *to moon* in English refers to the exhibitionist gesture of dropping one's pants and showing one's backside as a vulgar prank. In this perverse sense, the piece in effect "moons" the museum, the anatomist and his gynecological figures, and finally the inclined spectator (who is placed in a position to moon everybody else in the gallery). The second part of the title, the oxymoron *Inside Out*, means just that: what is supposed to be hidden from sight on the inside is exposed; it also means topsy turvy or the reverse of the usual. Thus the title proposes an exploration



Image 35. Spectator viewing *Hunter Moon/Inside Out*, in “Canibalia” (KADIST, Paris, February 6-April 26, 2015). Courtesy of Julia Morandeira and KADIST, Paris.

and an inversion of Hunter’s anatomical figure. The very artifact is pregnant with an amorphous creature, made from bits and pieces continuously disassembled and reassembled. The creature does not suggest the kind of generation that defines gender; rather, it is formed from the *degeneration* or teratological-genesis that questions the generation of gender and that denies the spectator any relief through its constant audiovisual flow of a body becoming: vagina with eyes, vagina-face, anthropomorphous vagina, headless woman, two-headed woman, castrating vagina, vagina dentata, vagi-penis, arm-foot, wolf-penis, the body becoming vagina; bodies in a state of destruction, regeneration, amidst discontinuous sounds, heterogeneous music, and messages devoid of syntax (Img. 36). The female body, organized and normalized by the anatomical and aestheticizing eye/I, becomes a gyneco-scopic monster, an anomalous body in the Deleuzian sense; that is, “the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization.”³⁵ We do not mean to suggest that the images represent “abnormality,” but rather a “de-normalization.” There is no border crossing; there is instead an undoing of borders, a de-organization of the genital realm.³⁶

In conclusion, we posit that Lin’s sculpture represents one of those “insurrections” against the eye (Foucault calls it “the gaze”) that the French philosopher puts forth³⁷: a radical disordering or a coup against the gyneco-scopic regime; its epistemic violences, exclusions, and asymmetries. *Hunter Moon / Inside Out* Lacanianly materializes the subjection of the subject and the resistance, the *gaze of the object*.³⁸ Or, amounting to the same thing, in this work of art, the vagina

35. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota, 1987), 244.

36. “The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. [...] It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 244, 245).

37. Foucault and Michelle Perrot. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Hate Soper. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 24.

38. “[A]t its most radical the object is that which objects, that which disturbs the smooth running of things. [...] the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its ‘blind spot,’ [...] the point from which the object itself returns the gaze” (Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 17).



Image 36. Body becoming. Candice Lin, *Inside Out*, stills (2010). Courtesy of Candice Lin and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

resists being an object and challenges the observer by looking back with the perturbing, discomfiting gaze of the Other. Lin's work not only produces what Paul Preciado calls an *inversion-investment* of the body,³⁹ but also a semiotic de-territorialization of the genital *organ* and a serious aesthetic challenge to the visual sovereignty that engenders gender as a genital thing.⁴⁰

The genitalia engendered by the sovereign eye/I defies such engendering by looking back, unsettling the naturalized visual order that organized the body. We must embrace the *degeneration* of the gineco-sopic regime; that is, the radical disorganization of the body; a body without organs that becomes the rhizome that triggers a "liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitility."⁴¹ The territorialized vagina can indeed become the line of flight where we can begin to see an insurrection against a tyrannical sovereignty that has ruled for too long over our bodies, our sexualities, and ultimately over our lives.



39. P. B. Preciado, *Manifiesto contra-sexual* (Madrid: Opera Prima, 2002), 50.

40. This challenge of the gyneco-sopic regime represents what Paul B. Preciado calls a "counter-sexual practice;" aimed "to subvert the sexual organs" by grafting "new meanings onto certain body parts," through a quotation operation called "*inversion-investment*" of the body that both inverts and recodes "the semantic axis of the hetero-centered system" (Preciado, *Manifiesto contra-sexual*, 41-42, 50).

41. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 18.

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