



VIDEO
NASTY
IAN HAIG

APRIL 3RD
TO
APRIL 25TH

STRANGE NEIGHBOUR

Body Dysmorphic Order

As I write this, all around me on the street poles and trains of Barcelona are ads blaring out (and in English): “Human Bodies: The Exhibition”! The image for this show is a truncated skeleton decked out with some blobs of musculature and tissue. This strange and not entirely frightening creature floats before a graphic background of what seem like stretched muscle sinews. The publicity campaign has an admirable directness and explicitness, a little like a gothic Theatre of the Macabre, but without the juiced-up horror element.

But something still bugs me: the propriety, protective affixing of *human* to all those *bodies* on display in the museum/arena.

For our bodies were never entirely ours, never entirely human. From the moment we projected them into some external image – drawing or painting them on a surface, sculpting them into a block – we idealised them, deformed them, dreamt them and explored them. These images then come back to us, intimately, affecting the ways in which we can imagine our bodies behaving, what we can do with them and what they are capable of.

The audiovisual media – cinema TV, computer – have accelerated this historic evolution, but have not fundamentally disturbed or contradicted it. It has always been a feedback loop between our real, material bodies and our extravagant, imaginary ones. This feedback loop has only become loopier, faster, crazier. This is what audiovisual artist Ian Haig is tapping into when he states that ‘the history of Hollywood is the history of the body’. In fact, it’s a question of all world cinema history, deforming and reforming our imaginary bodies in any patch of ground that these screens illuminate.

We sometimes tend to think, iconophobically, of a screen (physical screen or media screen) as something that lies, that hides, that filters out and replaces empirical facts. But the screen is living metaphor that talks back to us, interacts with us, shapes and directs our imagination. Screens multiply our sense of body and self, fragmenting and diversifying their parts and levels: inside and outside, skin and mind, blood and guts, real wounds and phantom limbs – none less real or essential than any other.

Is it all so alienating? It can get weird, I grant you. Ian Haig, like Burroughs or Ballard, Céline or Cronenberg, Rikki Ducornet or Anna Kavan, follows the line of our imaginings into wherever our screen-bodies are going today. Featureless avatar silhouettes collide with hyperreal, fleshy, inner organs; the killing and destruction of the body in video games forms an endless, superimposed, abstract loop. It's not total chaos; it has its own kind of hyper-logical, inexorable order. We could call it a Body Dismorphic Order, the most natural thing in the world.

Haig has a particular fascination for the abject: the occluded inner body, so often tastefully censored from humanist, middlebrow (and High Art) representations. The blood and guts, the veins and tissues, the 'throbbing gristle' of bodies truly breathe, move and speak in his work, like cartoon characters prodded into zany, animated motion by sparks of technological energy.

For Haig, that common meaning of the screen – as veil – comes back into circulation, especially in the cloisters of the artworld and its institutions with which he interfaces. But this is, on his part, no longer iconophobia, no hatred of images (or sounds). The artworld, undoubtedly, has decelerated what other, freer areas of culture – porn, graphic novels, trash comedy, underground culture in general – have gleefully accelerated.

Haig sees the framing of an antiseptic gallery space, and the policing of a trained curator, as social gestures of 'keeping at bay the trash' of a popular (or sub-popular) media culture. And this trash finds its most immediate and visceral expression in, precisely, images of the internal body. It is this neurotic knot that Haig needles in his living (or maybe undead) 'screen body' creations for the Video Nasty exhibition.

Clearly, it's time to remind us all of 'what lies beneath' – and what lies outside the art frame.

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Image credit: *The Screen of Flesh* (detail) 2014, silicon, fibreglass,
dimensions variable

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