

Ariadna Guiteras

**ATREVIDAS HERMANAS,  
QUE EN EL TREMENDO CASTIGO  
DE DESNUDAS LES DIO PARDAS MEMBRANAS**

04.9. – 19.30h Performance with Isamit Morales

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**ALL THE BODIES WITHIN A BODY**

Anna Penalva

MEMBRANES

“Every subject spins out, like the spider’s threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence”<sup>1</sup>

No human body can see itself in a complete way. Our anatomy allows us to open our eyes and see the world before us but does not make it easy for us to see our own bodies. Only by lowering the head in an uncomfortable position, bringing the chin closer to the neck, can we see ourselves: two forearms coming out of nowhere, a chest with no beginning or end and, in the distance, ten orphaned fingers. Our own body appears to us as a discontinuous, incomplete and almost monstrous formation. The mirror offers us a more complete version of these isolated parts, and forms the great bodily illusion. However, even though a mirror helps, only other bodies can see ours completely. The spaces denied by our sight can only be completed by others.

The skin is both the limit of our body and the possibility of becoming visible to others. Like the border on the map, the skin is not just the separation between one body and another body, or between body and environment, but the space from which they unfold and can encounter each other. Like any membrane, it defines and isolates, but also mediates the interaction with the external, with the difference. The membrane is alive and porous, deep and elastic, like the most fertile soil: the beginning of a conversation.

SISTERS

The first border we know of is the one inside the uterus. It is on this border that we first meet another body. Yet this is not the limit of life but what allows us to live. The internal conversation between the tissues and cells of the two bodies, the pregnant body and the embryo, is what co-constitutes us. We are not without the other. Inside the uterus, and thanks to the placenta, the immunological logic of self-preservation is broken, and it is confirmed that it is only from the relationship with the other, with that which is different, that we begin to exist.

When an embryo is formed, cells are generated that are shared between the embryo and the pregnant body. After the expulsion of the fetus at birth, these cells can remain in the pregnant body and live for decades with other genetically different cells, originally from the host body. The placenta is made up of a mediating material which, after labour, can remain in the pregnant body at a molecular level. Years later, this material can even be mixed with the cells of a new embryo in the same pregnant body: a sister. The medical phenomenon of the coexistence of cells of another individual within another is known as “microchimerism”.

Let’s have a closer look at what we call “body”. Where does it start and where does it end? We have gotten used to giving away the definition of “body” to science, and we’ve left it to doctors alone to define, know, and treat a body. The challenge before us is to fight the meaning of concepts and to think from a collective resignification, from a conceptual craftsmanship to broaden the meaning of words.

*atrevidas Hermanas, que en el tremendo castigo de desnudas les dio pardas membranas* (“Sisters, who in the tremendous punishment of nudity gave them brown membranes”), is a performance exhibition proposal by Ariadna Guiteras, in collaboration with the artist Isamit Morales. A proposal of “the art of the body”, without the presence of the artist’s body, or rather, not only with the presence of the artist’s body. An attempt to think with the body and from the body, but also to think from all those bodies which live within it, and from all the possible bodies. The body of the artist is never alone: it is inhabited by all the others which are inside it, all the other bodies which have previously been inside it, all those which it has encountered, and the ones it has invented.

The loudspeaker declares that it feels fear and pressure, and that at night it has wet dreams; the LED lights claim they feel fatigue of a body exploited by work; the elastic play dough can conduct electricity thanks to the salt component it contains; the cable announces that movement is also running through its veins, that it has drug addictions and that at some point it may have to ask us to unplug it. Bats want to learn to weave by day; ceramics want to “circlude” (to introduce new terms)<sup>12</sup>; and the potatoes want to walk. Freed from the rigid boundary between the human and the natural, open to the porosity of the membranes. A conversation between human bodies and invented bodies, between present and absent bodies that depend on each other: they are not without the other.

The mouth cavity is open and sweats from all the talking and singing. It is another porous membrane that opens and closes and occupies air without having a presence. The voices pollinate the space and infect the other bodies in the room with a silent song that announces everything a mouth can do. And the drawings on the limits of the room, on its membranes, do not represent but rather think about movement and wonder where each open line and closed circle begins and ends.

«The lichen only grows upon the granite rock by first saying to itself, “I think I can do it”»<sup>13</sup> wrote Samuel Butler in *Life and Habit*. The power that comes from inventing other bodies goes beyond a simple anthropomorphism, from assigning human attributes to other living beings or objects. To invent new bodies has an effect in the way we think of the “anthropo”. If the object is to be able to cry or to be shy, the human being is not the only one who is related with the world. To rethink the human body, we will need to pay attention to its relationship with the difference, focus on its membranes.

The possibility of making an ethics of the body displaced from the field of natural sciences suggests a new way of thinking, a new way of activating the negotiation between the other and oneself, of thinking about interdependencies between subjects and of learning to inhabit the “spaces in between”. We need these “against nature” marriages to show us a way of becoming, which answers not so much the medical question “what is a body” but rather, as Spinoza asks, “what can a body do?”

## THE ART ⊕ THE LIMITS

What a hospitable meeting this one is: *atrevidas Hermanas, que en el tremendo castigo de desnudas les dio pardas membranas* raises the issue of the impossibility of being only an individual, on a material level (only bacteria are individuals, as Lynn Margulis says) and therefore, on an ontological level. This may not be the feast of Bacchus, where the Miniad sisters from the poem by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz didn’t want to go, but rather, the announcement of a permeable and porous future which can fight the ridiculous idea of the “self-made-man”: of self-sufficiency, independence and human being.

1. Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: with A Theory of Meaning*, University of Minnesota Press, 2010

11. Peter Sloterdijk, *Ecumes. Sphères III*. Quoted in Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic*, Feminist Press, 2013

12. Bini Adamczak, online: <http://www.maskmagazine.com/the-mommy-issue/sex/circlusion>

13. Samuel Butler, *Life and Habit*, Jonathan Cape, 1910. Consulted online on Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6138/6138-h/6138-h.htm>