

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Ayerza, Josefina, "Rosemarie Trockel," lacanian ink 18, Spring 2000

Rosemarie Trockel

Josefina Ayerza

The wicked witch appeared and warned the princess dear, 'beware the rose, for when it pricks, you'll sleep a hundred year.' 'The evil spell,' a fairy cried, 'just might not have to be! A handsome prince – if brave and true – can kiss and set you free.'

Rosemarie Trockel's *Sleeping Beauty* right away raises the case as to esthetical parities concerning the famous fairy tale's belated images. Again, what other referent is there than the signifier provided you take on its meaning? Now you look quietly into the image, the questions crowding, but a head... swollen, asleep, dead... dying? And is it at all the head of a woman? Chances are your reflection upon the image won't fit the formal truth. And what this attests to is that *Sleeping Beauty* is not a signifier, but a name, indeed a spectre. The meaning it brings forth sets up the real. Legacy, or the surplus subtracted from the legend, lurks in the spectre. When it verges on delusion it is because the name's place is void, kept void, celebrated as void. A rigid designator, it ascribes to the unmovable, it is not displaceable. Say you proclaim the *Sleeping Beauty* is a Mafioso, a passed out bum, a dead corpse, he will still be *Sleeping Beauty* however you describe him. Again, the singular topic, forever split between a story and a void, is not designated to reach its object. Its deeds lining up with melodrama, you recognize reality in fictional texts because that's

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where you come from.

There was one oddball, yet the many look-alikes. A pale fellow crested with a profusion of dark, wavy hair – you surmise his complexion is almost white by virtue of rice powder; that his lips, not necessarily colored, are nevertheless painted; that his eyes and eyebrows, emphasized with kohl and mascara, hide things... that the nose, too perfect, is fictitious, and also the ears – and he could be suffering though he's also smiling, vacillatingly, as if it all were a joke. A distraught audience has fingered him as multiple, claimed that he may not have been him – the One – whatever it takes to make him an Other getting only worse. Again you surmise, joyful music, glittering candelabra, luxurious costumes, charisma, diamonds and dazzle... the Persian Room in New York's Plaza Hotel, the honky-tonk pianist in the movie *South Sea Sinner* with Shelley Winters, the Madison Square Garden, the Radio City Music Hall... and since Mr. Showmanship has no particular history, the figure in the portrait, thus the argument goes, must be Wladziu (Polish for Walter) Valentino Liberace. And it also is the many Liberaces – his famous chauffeurs – following Liberace's will to reproduce himself, outside himself, in other people's flesh, identical. The nature and dynamics of the operation are the domain of the character's myth, which also tells you how Liberace, a maverick of cloning, used human beings to extract himself from others, to be in the Other flesh. Trockel's drawing retains the label *Untitled* on behalf of profusive metonymy, or the many speculations... not so much from

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the One over to an Other, but from the Other over to the One.

An asleep, inert baby, a target mark over his chest... *The Misfortune*. A 1991 interview with Meyer Vaisman comes to mind; on the occasion Vaisman told of the popular festivals in his native country. Thus, in Venezuela, when a baby dies they proceed to boil him, and then they dress him in white and paint him as an angel. In addition the baby gets paper wings and is then set on a table. With people dancing and feasting, around the table the infant represents a newcomer in heaven. When the party concludes they hang the baby on a hook over the front door, so everybody can see that there is a new name in heaven. Angels, said Vaisman, are always children... Thus ensued the different sort of angels in my mind, specially the ones consisting of a head and a pair of wings, those that have certainly being equated to signifiers, and yes, they fly. With Trockel the names in heaven mark the body of the baby by cutting around the heart. And the invisible stigmata is resolved only when the desperate search for meaning yields to the agency of the signifier – whose misfortune is it?

An inert *Young Man Dozing*, it was past twelve o'clock when he awoke. The sun flowing in through the curtains of the room, rays of light bathed his face, arms, and torso. In the dream he was a butterfly. Now he says to himself – it's only a dream. Again, still pondering over the fancy, he comes to ask himself whether it is the butterfly who dreams he – the butterfly – is Choang-tsu...

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He is not mad, first because Choang-tsu doesn't regard himself as absolutely identical with Choang-tsu, and secondly because he does not fully understand how right he is. Why is he so right? According to Jacques Lacan when he was the butterfly that he apprehended one of the roots of his identity – that he was and is, in his essence that butterfly who paints himself with his own colors – and it is because of this that, in the last resort, he is Choang-tsu. Because of the nature of dreams it's not likely that while he is the butterfly he would start wondering whether, when he is Choang-tsu awake, he is not the butterfly he is dreaming of being. Now he dreams of being the butterfly, now he wakes up and wants to tell the story. Not that he represented himself as a butterfly, he was a butterfly. This does not mean he is bewitched by the butterfly – he is a witch butterfly, yet spelled by no one, for in the dream he is a butterfly for nobody. It is when he is awake that he is Choang-tsu for others – entrapped in their butterfly net.

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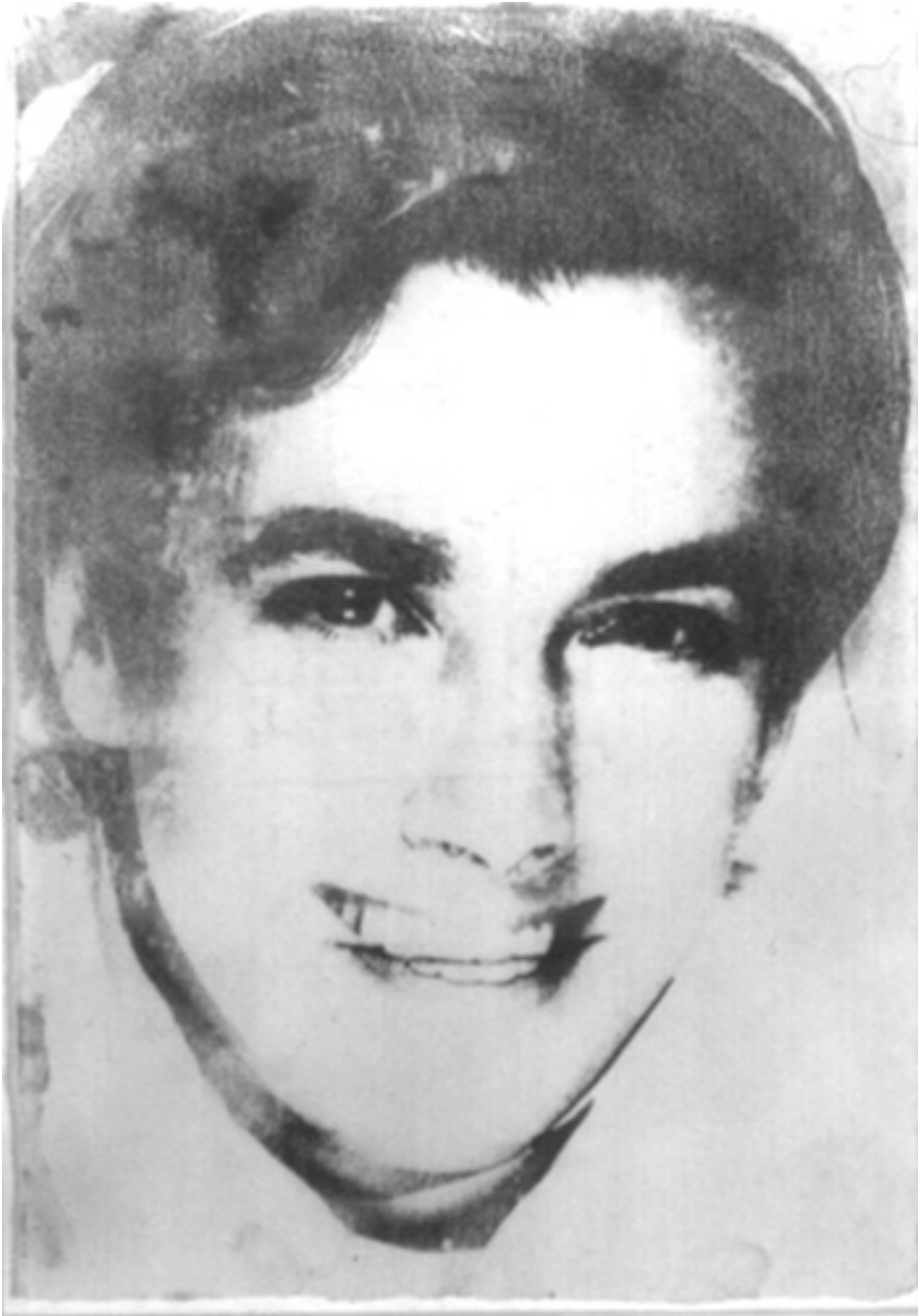
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Sleeping Beauty, colored pencil on paper, 2000

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Untitled, photocopy on paper, 1993

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Le malheur (The Misfortune), colored pencil on board, 2000

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Young Man Dozing, pencil on paper, 2000