

**Ewa Axelrad's
ORANZ**
Piotr Pękala

*Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war?*¹

E. Lévinas

Text accompanying
the exhibition
ORANZ (2011)

An overaeresthetised image of phenomena occurring in contemporary culture, in Ewa Axelrad's art releases its opposite *shadow* in the form of a *disease*. Like in a mental disorder of a bipolar character, one manic episode inevitably entails an outbreak of an opposite neurosis. Despite the fact that initially the latter syndrome remains dormant, it does exist parallelly to arisen dysfunction and manifests itself with the same force.

These marginal *affections* are reproduced by the artist and incased in one space. Every time the gallery gets actively involved in the development of this *disease*; it serves as a stage for releasing subsequent psychodramas. Therefore, it becomes a sort of a mental space. Its 'condition' affects both the figures and objects placed in it, as well as it evokes specific emotions in a viewer entering it. The gallery thus, despite initially appearing as a friendly place, eventually turns out to be the home hosting a *daemon*. The spirit detained in this interior, that we are shut in with on our own, has a crime on his conscience. And despite the fact that the suspect meticulously cleanses his cell, the gainsaid guilt of the elegant man* appears on one of the surrounding walls in the form of a 'projection'.

However, referring to Emmanuel Lévinas 'This separation is not simply a negation.'² Rather, the clinical nature of the exhibition is employed in order to clearly observe the *disease*. We recognize it first on the surface of the perfect object. The *disease* of the beautiful body's skin turns out to be only a symptom, revealing profound dysfunctions concealed somewhere inside of the 'body', in which we can recognize the contemporary culture. 'Being is exteriority'³ states the French philosopher, then adds: 'This time exteriority would acquire a relative meaning, as the great by relation to the small. But in the absolute the subject and the object would still be parts of the same system, would be enacted and revealed panoramically. Exteriority, or, if one prefers, alterity, would be converted into the same. And over and beyond the relation between the interior and the exterior there would be room for the perception of this relation by a lateral view that would take in and perceive (or penetrate) their play, or would provide an ultimate stage on which this relation would be enacted, on which its being would be effected *truly*.'⁴

In this exhibition the function of the *room for the perception* is held by the specially arranged gallery space. Staying in its interior we get an access to the reverse of the *exteriority* of *objects* placed there, we perceive them in *the absolute* terms. Therefore, we reached the space enabling us to get on to this *game*; what is more, thanks to us it begins to take place at all. 'The truth of being – Lévinas says – is not the *image* of being, the idea of its nature; it is the being situated in a subjective field which *deforms* vision, but precisely thus allows exteriority to state itself, entirely command and authority: entirely superiority.'⁵ Such a change of perspective creates a discomfort since it turns out that

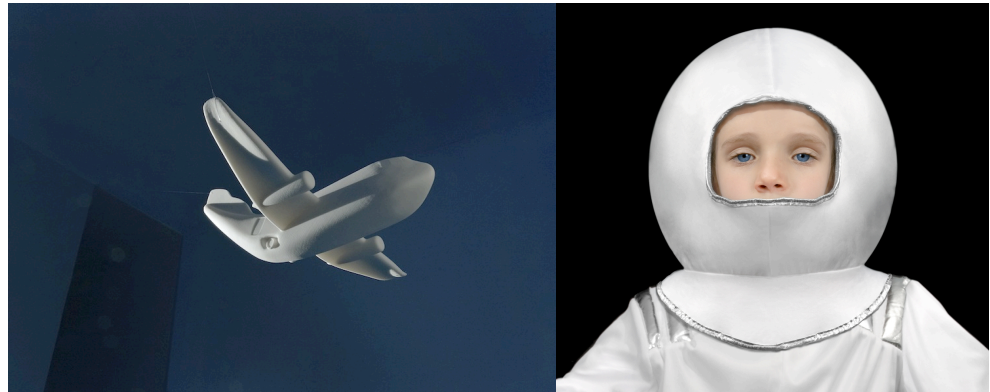
¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Infinity and Totality*, Published by Duquesne University Press, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, 15282, p. 21

* the reference to Adolf Eichmann's time in prison during his trial in Israel.

² Ibidem, p.105

³ Ibidem, p.290

this is us who intermediate between the beauty of the products of late modernity and a feeble state of its internal condition. The fact, that this *being* gets heard only once in contact with a *subjective field* of our perception, makes us feel complicit in the disease involved. One of these - still waiting to reveal itself - manias, emerges to be an everlasting striving for excellence, observed by the artist in the military aesthetics. Placing a war machine in a close proximity to a fit athlete results in the exposure of a shared characteristic permeating these *shapes*. The game (this time occurring on a horizontal plane) between the separate elements of the exhibition is, in essence, the same dialectical relationship that exists between the inside and outside of each of these *separated* 'bodies'.



What *comes to light* as a result of this multi-dimensional game is a certain truth about the psychotic nature of the modern world. In the exhibition *ORANZ* this *system* accelerates as a result of an attempt to cross physical limitations. In the process of overcoming gravity it reveals its reverse. Approaching the Sun, as if for the *true* fulfillment, this perfect 'capsule' begins to show its own disease. Therefore, we can conclude that in the face of this *absolute* cosmic body, the disease appears in its dialectical entity. The *last scene*, which, according to Levinas, would bring *fulfillment*, here causes weakness and rive, desolation and decay. 'To posit being as exteriority is to apperceive infinity as the Desire for infinity, and thus to understand that the production of infinity calls for separation, the production of the absolute arbitrariness of the I or of the origin.'⁶ In the current exhibition this *origin*, as well as the result of the *separation*, turns out to be a *space child*. However, it is not a fulfillment of our ideas about a messenger from the afterlife that could soothe the pain of earthly nonfulfillment. The transcendent *Other* does hold the idea of infinity, but not the vision of reunification. We begin to suspect him of very familiar selfish weaknesses, since instead of an antidote to our misery he brings us - the same as formed as a consequence of civilization diseases - pathology. As a result, the little boy is as *separated* as the criminal staying in solitary confinement. In this 'toxic' relationship, the Child plays the role of a complementary antithesis. It is like Kalki, the last incarnation of Vishnu, his battling Avatar who came to fight the earthly filth with his sword.

Therefore, the war is the mandatory state, with no room for peace, and all attempts to carry out the synthesis of perfect genotypes are rather a mere nightmare of a private heaven. 'But does not the experience of war - Levinas asks - refute eschatology, as it refutes morality?'⁷ In the face of such a vision the quest for the sterility of life turns out to be

a utopia, an oasis, into which the snake sneaked in. The bite by the amphibian of reality feels even more painful as it seems to be an absolute necessity. In Axelrad's art the absolute gets completed precisely through the necessity to sustain the armed conflict. The chemical reaction (running vertically) triggers another earthly mobilization. This *exteriority* is 'entirely command and authority: entirely superiority.'⁸

⁴ Ibidem, p.290

⁵ Ibidem, p.291

⁶ Ibidem, p.292

⁷ Ibidem, p.25

⁸ Ibidem, p.291