

Perfume, Violence, and Symbolic Sacrifice

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Abstract: *This article firstly analyzes a practical exercise of re-staging iconic violent images through actors and discusses the bodily reactions to being exposed to violent images. The article then presents a theoretical framework to understand the notion of the body as symbolic sacrifice. The text brings together these two notions (effects of violent images and symbolic sacrifice) and discusses the violence inherent in advertising images. Lastly, it claim that the clothing and perfume advertising industry, through the display of violence, attempts to commodify the sacrificed body.*

Keywords: *violence, visual culture, theater*

I remember in 2010 when Jean-Luc Nancy gave a lecture at the contemporary art museum of Helsinki, Kiasma, at a conference entitled “Body as Theatre” (Elo & Luoto, 2018). He started the lecture by examining the moment of waking up, especially the instant when he became conscious of seeing. And then he wondered where this seen image finds its location in the body: “Where do I perceive this image in me?” “Strangely enough,” he reported, “the image finds its placement not in front of me, not in my eyes or in the center of my head, but somewhere at the back of my skull, almost behind me. The encounter with the world happens behind me.” And later during the lecture, referring to his own book, *Corpus*, he stated: “the body always forces us to think further” (Nancy, 2008). I could add, not only further, but even outside the body. When you think about what your own body has experienced, you have to place yourself inside and at the same time outside yourself. This idea, or better to say, this image appearing at the back of the skull, finding its location in the body, almost outside the body, has haunted me ever since I attended Jean-Luc Nancy’s lecture. And probably this is also one of the reasons that initiated an exercise which consisted in re-staging pictures that I discuss in this article. For I was interested not only to find where an image (the image of the world) finds its location in the body, but also how images affect the body. How they can “modify” it.

When I started this investigation, it was 2015. Paris was struck by several terrorist attacks. After these attacks in Paris, I was affected by several videos posted on the internet by Isis. The intensity, the determination, and the violence present in these videos captivated me. Something repulsed me yet at the same time intrigued me. I founded this ambivalence in me problematic. And then I thought that probably this problematic ambivalence is an important problem that needs to be examined. Therefore, this investigation led me to focus on images that represent an

experience on the limit: images that are considered violent. Michel Foucault wrote extensively on how violence, and by extension a power system, expresses itself mainly on the body. The structural repression of a power system imposes its violence on the bodies of its citizens and displays this violence on their bodies as theatrical images (i.e. public executions, decapitations, or hanging), which contribute to a precise staging of fear (Foucault, 1977). In this sense, violent images could be examined as a theatrical communication of a power system. But here I am more interested in examining violence as a manifestation per se (which creates phenomena of closeness and trauma or distance and consciousness) rather than its use as instrument by a power structure (for terror and control).

This article is divided into two parts. The first part discusses a practical exercise that aimed to re-stage violent images. This exercise led to an examination of the violence hidden in the advertising industry. The second part presents a theoretical framework discussing the notion of the body as symbolic sacrifice. Lastly, the article examines if the advertising industry and especially perfume advertising, through the display of violence, attempt to commodify a kind of “longing” for the body.

The “symbolic sacrifice” defined by the Italian psychologist Massimo Recalcati, is a psychological and anthropological understanding of the paradoxical relationship that humans have towards their own bodies (Recalcati, 2017). During the 20th century, Western thinking has seen an attempt to overcome the so-called mind–body division that is often epitomized by the Christian concept of the soul as “pure” and of the body as “corruptible.” In this sense, the phenomenological school, which focuses on the body experience in order to develop rational thinking, is a clear example of this attempt. This school proved that the body is an important area of philosophical investigation. By referring to the notion of symbolic sacrifice, I would like instead to suggest another approach to this “division” between the body and mind, which proposes that human beings have to “sacrifice” their body in order to become “human.” Humans, unlike animals, can reflect on their own death. Language contributes to this process of “consciousness,” but this “consciousness” demands a “symbolic” sacrifice. Humans sacrifice their being part of nature in order to access humanity (animals-conscious-of-death). And this element of “nature” that is “sacrificed” is inscribed in the body. However, the sacrificed body is not simply something removed or denied, it is a constant negotiation that humans have to make between “language” and “nature” (the body, the beast, or the dark side). This constant negotiation is not easy and can be explosive. It also constitutes a great source of desire that the advertising industry tries to exploit. In fact, the violence present in the images of the advertising industry is not supposed to repulse the observer but on the contrary to arouse desire. In this sense, “buying” a perfume represents the promise to restore the body that has been sacrificed. The advertisement therefore tries to commodify the beast, the nature, and the dark side that symbolically humans have killed (or removed) within themselves.

My initial question was why some images are considered violent? And especially what kind of knowledge we can acquire by watching violent images? In addition, as a theater director, I was curious to examine an aspect of human behavior that we could consider “extreme”: I was wondering how to represent violence. I was wondering how actors can understand a violent situation and how they can “embody” such a situation. The immediate and usual way to perform “violent behavior” on stage would be to ask one actor to embody an aggressive character that performs violent acts towards other characters. However, I was wondering if it would be possible to examine alternative ways to explore performing violence and especially, to explore a situation that is far from their everyday life experience, a situation that could be considered an

experience on the limit, something that is unfamiliar. With the photographer Keme Pellicer, we were researching many violent images that can be seen in the media. With Keme, we decided to propose ten different violent images and let the students¹ choose according to their spontaneous gut-feelings. Four images were selected. These images were iconic violent images, very far from our reality, and at the same time, because we have seen them over and over, almost familiar. They were so extreme: the moment when a Vietcong insurgent is shot in the street by a general, a woman held as a trophy by a group of male French Resistance fighters, an American soldier pulling a naked Iraqi prisoner with a dog lash, a woman being buried alive. These images are common for their ubiquitous replication in the media, and at the same time they are remarkable. The most problematic aspect is that these images are so haunting because we don't know what to do with the emotions that such repellent images create. We are familiar with them and the vision of them is unsustainable, we want to stop the images, for them to not exist. The difficulty is what to do with the emotion generated by these images. Some people simply deny them. Some prefer to release the tension either through jokes or through actions. Some individuals decide to view these images as a test, to prove a personal resistance to these frightful pictures. I believe that most of us, however, need to create a "distance" from these images. The notion of distance developed by Kant and re-proposed by Max Ryyänen considers "distance" geographically. The observer is in a safe place, far from the terrible event, allowing the observer to appreciate the view (Ryyänen 2019). But I would like to decline this notion of "distance," of being safe, to something more intangible, something related to ethics, or to the emotion of the observer: something like a theoretical framework placing the observer in a "safe" position, allowing him or her to cope with the violence present in the world. For these images do not produce knowledge, but as Susan Sontag wrote, they simply haunt us (Sontag, 2003, 126). This "distance" could then be understood as a theoretical frame that rationalizes these emotions. I will come back to this notion.

The idea of the exercise was to re-stage these iconic violent images with the help of the student actors and re-photograph them. After having re-staged and re-photographed them, the students made several theater improvisations based on the re-staging. These improvisations pushed the students to explore these images from different angles; from the position of the perpetrators, from the position of the victims, from the point of view of the photographer. During these improvisations, the students developed monologues of what the characters they embodied could have said, thought, or felt in that particular situation. Our aim was not to be "documentary" in the sense of being as realistic as possible. The work was purely fictional. The actors were encouraged to invent what they felt. Naturally, it is logical to wonder if fiction can provide knowledge starting from a historical image. I do believe that this exercise is fruitful but it is important to clearly define what exactly is examined. Two main points were under scrutiny during these improvisations: 1) Could the students make such an effort of imagination to be able to portray themselves in such an extreme situation? 2) Can we understand something more that the picture does not say? And if yes, what? Regarding the first question, some students were able to explore the violence of these images, others were struggling. And for the second question, all the improvisations indicated that the image presented a reduced vision of what was probably happening. When we look at an image, it seems that as the viewer, we understand what is happening: we see an armed person shooting at a defenseless person. We immediately label who is the perpetrator and who is the victim. But the "reality" is far more complex. The

¹ This research was done in collaboration with the BA students of the Swedish acting department of the Theater Academy of Helsinki, Finland.

improvisation opened up the complexity that the image could not do. To go back to Susan Sontag, the improvisation managed to introduce a narrative that helped to “understand” the situation instead of “haunting” us. After this experience, with Keme and with the students, we were exploring how it would be possible to shoot these images that we re-staged again, but with a “twist” so that these images can relieve us instead of haunting us. Something about distance is at stake in these images: they disturb us, they come too close on an emotional level. We need to create a “mental” or “emotional” screen to put them a bit further away so that we are not disturbed, so that we can look at them. At the same time, in order to achieve something productive, something that can trigger knowledge (and not only haunting), they need to come even closer to us; in the sense, not closer to our skin, but closer to our reality, of being familiar to us, so that as viewers, we can decipher what is not in the frame. The whole idea was to find ways to introduce everyday life objects or elements from our everyday life that could bring these violent situations closer to our reality. And especially, to find ways to make them “less” haunting (less dangerous or traumatizing) and still retain the importance (the brutality, the violence) of the image. This “twist” is a bizarre turn that we aimed to apply onto the images.

At this point, before I continue with the description of the process, I would like to share a peculiar, and at the same time revealing, experience which brings us back to Susan Sontag’s statement. I was invited to the Aalto University, to an MA seminar about visual culture and contemporary art to share this research process conducted with the acting students of the Theater Academy of Helsinki. When I presented the images, which were only one step among a larger process, some students from the MA program reacted aggressively towards what I was presenting. These students, without knowing about the whole process conducted with the acting students, stated that the method was wrong, that ethically speaking the process was questionable, and anyway why on Earth would we want to produce more violent images, there are already enough of them. I was surprised because the criticisms that the students were making about the work were exactly the same reasons that led me to initiate this work. I wanted to offer an alternative discourse to the presence of violent images in our everyday life. I tried to develop a process of thinking through practice. And I was sharing the practical research that was carried out, so I could develop a discussion on violence. But this reaction was unexpected, and somehow it confirmed the statement of Susan Sontag: the images triggered an explosive reaction among the students, and the debate was closed. Students were entrenched in their opinions and their judgments were fixed. No discussion. It was surprising that even in an academic environment, the images worked in the same way: they simply haunted the viewer. The discussion eventually became polarized: on the one hand some students argued that violent images create more violence and on the other hand other students argued that violent images help to understand violence. What appeared to me was that the polarization of arguments simplified the complexity of the violence: it is good or it is bad. Violence is a multi-layered and indistinct experience that it is difficult to accept. It seemed that the students needed an answer for what they were seeing and, especially, feeling. Probably this incident exemplifies the problem related to the representation of violence. The key to resolving this problem would be to understand what has happened, to try to deconstruct the progression of the reaction, in that precise moment when the view of the images hits their bodies and their bodies needed to sublimate this “hit,” this tension, into a discourse. Then, the discourse polarized the position of the students and nullified any attempt to contextualize or to integrate a broader dialogue about these images. This situation reminded me of the intense debate about the video *My Way, a Work in Progress* by the Finnish artist Teemu Mäki made in 1995. In this video we can see Teemu Mäki killing a cat. The video lasts 30 minutes and the scene

where the cat is killed lasts 6 seconds. The video contains video footage of wars, sadomasochistic sex, battery chickens, famine in Africa, views from slaughterhouses, ecological catastrophes, and garbage dumps. The video tried to examine forms of structural and mental violence. With this video, the artist wanted to instigate empathy towards people suffering from wars, to give voice to those who are economically exploited, and to make the Western audience more conscious of their implication in global war. However, the scene of the cat provoked a vehement reaction among the viewers. Teemu Mäki received many threatening emails explaining that he deserved to die like the cat in the video and the video has been censored in Finland (Mäki, 2005, 74-76). All the other 29 minutes and 54 seconds of the video were obliterated by the cat scene. This art piece, which was supposed to develop a debate about the Western attitude towards violence in the world, generated only violent reactions. I don't want here to defend the work of Teemu Mäki. I am more interested in the reactions that the video created. I will come back to these "reactions." There is already a long tradition that goes back to the Renaissance, where artists, like for instance Michelangelo, considered their artwork as a form of creation and destruction. Michelangelo considered sculpting as a form of violence where the artist hammers, removes, and eliminates the stone. For him, this act of destruction is the very act that supports the art. And the art historian Scott Nethersole points out that a medieval exegetical tradition compares the violence suffered by the martyrs with the art of sculpting, especially sculpting ivory (Nethersole, 2018, 209). But here, rather than examining how artists considered their work (whether destructive or cathartic), I am more interested in the reactions and how the concept of violence creates new consciousness or knowledge. And, as in the case of Teemu Mäki or in the Aalto University incident, the debate remained conflictual. Of course, we could say that violence, because it is about violence, can lead only to conflict. But this position leads to a dead end. I would like to suggest that maybe in these discussions, the wrong questions about violence were asked. I will come back to this issue later in the article.

But let us return to the process of "twisting" the images and to the results of this second step. The image of the woman held by the French Resistance was "reversed" in the sense of having a group of women (dressed in clothes of the same time period) holding a man. The gender reversal did not produce any effect. Probably the reason was that the group of women remained unclear. When it was the men, it was not only men, but also the "heroes" who liberated France. In this sense, in the reverse picture, the group of women could not be connected with any existing group. Maybe we would have needed to go a step further and, for instance, have a group of "MeToo" women holding a man who had harassed them and on whose forehead was written the word "pervert." The persons in the image of the buried woman were replaced by Moomin characters²: Moomin was buried by Little My, Snufkin, and Too-Ticky. In this situation, the clash between familiar, childhood imagery and this brutal action managed to disrupt the initial image. The image of the American soldier holding the Iraqi prisoner was replaced by a woman wearing a niqab holding a naked European man with a leash. By reversing nationalities, the so-often condescending attitude of the West towards other cultures was opened up. And finally in the image of the shooting, the gun was replaced by a very harmless object: a perfume bottle. A perfume was sprayed and the woman, the "victim," with her hands fastened behind her back, received the "shot" of perfume as if it were a bullet. At first in this image, the "twist" seemed a failure. The image looked like a typical perfume advertisement. But then at a second thought, this process revealed how the perfume advertising industry relies on violence to sell its products.

² The Moomins are the central characters of a comic strip for children created by the Finnish artist Tove Jansson. This comic strip is extremely famous and almost all the Finns know their adventures. They are a family of white, round fairy tale characters with large snouts that make them resemble cute and inoffensive hippopotamuses.

When this reflection became clear, the initial reaction was to blame this type of advertisement. How is it possible that images portraying male domination, sexual domination, rape, even gang rape are used to sell perfume or clothes? For instance, the Dolce & Gabbana 2007 advertisement displayed a woman held to the floor by a man. Three other men are standing by and looking at the woman. By the contortions of the woman's body, she seems to be fighting and trying to get out from the grip of the men. Later Calvin Klein made a similar advertisement, which also portrayed a woman assaulted by a man while two others are complacently watching the scene. It is very hard not to think of these images as a glamorization of gang rape. Or for instance, a Gucci 2015 advertisement portrayed an adult woman lying over the lap of a man and the man slapping the ass of the woman as if she was a child. Or the Sisley 2016 advertisement where a woman is sitting on the floor in the middle of a bull fighting arena, her legs spread out with a red dress and a bull looking at the woman. As spectators, we suppose that the bull will soon charge directly on the sex of the woman. And again, a Relish 2009 advertisement displayed two young women arrested by two police officers in Rio de Janeiro. The two police officers are not only arresting the women, but they are abusing their authority and the image suggests that they assault them sexually. One of them is holding one of the women on the car while grabbing her ass, the other one is gripping her hands behind her back and pulling her. The woman's facial expression could be read either as discomfort from being pulled or as pleasure from being "dominated." Or again, Alexander Wang's 2016 advertisement, displaying two young girls (who look like minors) with cadaverous faces (as if they are sick or drug users) in the trunk of a car. And so on. Women's organizations opposing the objectification of women are constantly attacking this industry (The Guardian, 2016); the brands regularly apologize, but nevertheless new images with the same violence are produced. These images are obviously shameful. Should we consider that the key to attracting the attention of potential buyers is a strategy of relying on shock value (the violent images)? Or do these violent images reveal something else?

The Italian psychologist Massimo Recalcati, following Freud and Lacan's analysis, points out that humans are the only "animals" able to think and discuss their own death (Recalcati, 2017). This "consciousness" is made possible through the acquisition of language. But this acquisition of language also brings a loss: it banishes humans from the sphere of Nature. A series of symbolic barriers, of cultural limitations, of prohibition imposed by civilization's program, demands the removal of the animality in the human (27). Becoming "human" requires a separation, a cut from a form of excess. According to Recalcati, an animal cannot experience nakedness, being naked, because the animal is never really naked, in the sense that the animal does not wear clothes. To be naked or to dress up are actions that are possible for an existence that relies on the filter of language (28). What differentiates the existence of the human from that of the animal is that the life of the animal and its death can only be present, immediate, it cannot become an object of interrogation, of examination. In the animal, everything is fully "present," regulated by the rule of instinct. In other words, the human being, in order to become human, needs to sacrifice the animal part of her, to detach herself from nature, and submit herself to the filter of language. I am well aware that the terminology employed by Recalcati stands on a slippery slope. It is easy to accuse Recalcati of an anthropocentric, condescending attitude towards animals. Post-human thinking has already pierced this animal-human dichotomy. However, even if it seems antiquated, I consider his notion of language regulating body interesting. The sacrifice that language operates, is a symbolic sacrifice of the "excess" allowing to access the realm of humanity. And whoever does not accept the symbolic sacrifice imposed by language, becomes a creature that embodies the monstrous excess of life, of life that scares life, of life

that is not controlled. It is the terrifying, unknown, dangerous beast that scares children: the black wolf, the venomous snake, the shark, the crocodile (31). These figures which populate the folktale imagery are the symbolic transposition of the danger of falling back into “animality.” What threatens humans is the possibility of losing their “humanity,” forgetting their symbolic sacrifice, and letting the “beast” rule, in other words to fall into barbarianism. The notion of symbolic sacrifice replaces here the body–mind division and proposes a dialectic mediation between “human” and “Nature.” The excess embodied by the body needs to be “regulated,” to be “cut” away, and language operates this regulation. It is possible to infer then that in order to access the status of humans, people have to “cut” away what connects them to the realm of the animals, to Nature. The excess that is “sacrificed,” the animal inside, Nature, is what resides in the body. The body represents then the memory of the animal, of Nature, that language has to control. To some extent, a similar idea can be found in Dante. In the *Divine Comedy*, Canto XI depicts the sinners punished for using violence. These sinners are divided into three categories: those who used force against others (homicide, tyrants, and thieves), those who used violence against themselves (suicide and spendthrifts), and those who used force against God. The Canto also explains that there are three types of violent nature: those that cannot contain themselves (cannot stop their impulses), those that use malice (use intellect wrongly), and those that are mad beasts (not following virtue). Dante’s division is taken directly from Aristotle’s *Ethics*, he also considered “bestiality” the worse condition for a human being (Aristotle, 1934).

Scott Nethersole, studying violent imagery in early Renaissance Florence, pointed to a distinction between sacred violent images and secular violent images (Nethersole, 2018). Sacred art, as for instance the flagellation of Christ, is meant to evoke empathy in the viewer, while secular art portraying violence perpetrated by a brute or beasts were meant to “repel” the viewer (92). What is interesting in this observation is that violent images have two specific statuses: one is supposed to emotionally touch the spectator, the other to stimulate consciousness in the spectator’s eye. Nethersole lengthily described the tradition in Florence to paint the flagellation of Christ, where the perpetrators are in full action but the skin of Christ remains intact. Such a clash between the “text” of the story (Christ being flagellated) and the “image” (Christ not being wounded) pushes Nethersole to suggest that the “flagellation,” or the violence, was imagined by the watchers. By doing so, the spectators participated actively in the Passion of Christ (91), the viewers become flagellators wounding Christ. The intention is to bring the viewer closer to the suffering of the scene. The viewer is summoned to feel, and to respond emotionally to the implicit violence in the image. Secular images of violence instead did not have the intention to make the spectators feel the violence. Nethersole, among the various terrible secular images he analyzes, discusses widely the particular extensive stucco decoration (48 meters long) that surrounds the entrance of Palazzo Scala from Borgo Pinti in Florence. The stucco presents numerous violent scenes between humans and beasts, and beasts against beasts, Centaurus being drunk, and various killings. What struck the author is why someone would place scenes of violence in his house? These are not sacred images supposed to arouse empathy, they are a long listing of brutalities. The author suggests that, in order to understand these images, we should not forget Dante’s text. When the humans progressed away from animality, they progressed away from violence (123). These violent images were not there to impress or to create an emotional response to violence, but they were a fable instigating the spectator’s perception. The observers took pleasure in watching these violent scenes because the viewers considered themselves civilized and thus far from being “animal” (or brutal). They considered themselves to be distant and could “enjoy” these violent depictions. These images, according to Nethersole,

were placed in such a central place of the house because they were a social definition of the owner of the house (141). The sacred images, in which the violence was invisible, invited the viewer to meditate on Christ's pain and on their own sinfulness. While in secular violent images, in which violence was visible, viewers rejected this violence as alien to them (237). Even though Nethersole's research dwells on Renaissance paintings (another time period and another medium than the pictures discussed in the exercise), I consider his arguments convincing and applicable to today's context. However his final conclusion is disputable and I will discuss it here because it reconnects with the "incident" at the university. Nethersole discusses the jubilatory description that Giorgio Vasari³ gives of *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1485-1490), painted by the Italian painter Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448-1494). The description outlines the beauty of the lines and the skillful composition of this massacre: "*con giudizio, con ingegno et arte grande*" – made with judgment, intelligence, and great skill (238). The extensive praise by Vasari and especially the pleasure that this art piece provokes in Vasari is challenging. This strong connection of violence with pleasure seems to compromise the discourse about the sacred or secular that Nethersole developed. In his interpretation, there was a moral learning from these violent images (either empathy or consciousness), but never an aspect of joy or pleasure. This leads Nethersole to wonder what could be the reason for violent images to be displayed in homes. Nethersole seems to find the answer to this question in Aristotle's *Poetic*, when he discusses mimesis and especially the definition of the catharsis effect, which claims that the viewing of horrific images creates the sense of wonder and pity that helps to purge the observer from committing similar actions. This statement is a direct response to Plato's criticism of mimesis which, according to Plato, prompted emotions in the spectators that were problematic and ethically dubious. We can perceive in the opposition of the two Greek philosophers a similar opposition in arguments in the university incident. However, in both cases, and here is my reservation regarding Nethersole's conclusion, the arguments are based on a theory for theater, meaning for something that develops a narrative. The problem with images, as we have seen, is that they do not create any narrative. This leads me to wonder, as I mentioned earlier, if the wrong questions about violence are being asked. It seems that the debate about violence is concerned with moral issues: good or bad. But as I examine below, this moralistic approach to violence might impede the perception of a broader implication connected to violence.

To return to the perfume advertisements using violence, in which category would they fall? What is the purpose of the violence in these images? Is it to summon empathy, like in sacred art described by Nethersole? Or is it to stimulate consciousness among the buyers, like in the secular art? I doubt the first option and also the second one seems unlikely. What is it then?

The symbolic "sacrifice" implies a constant negotiation between "humanity" and "beast," which is dealt with in the subject: the outburst of vitality or the desire to let the "animal" emerge are continuous temptations that humans face. This desire to "connect" with the animal inside is probably, as Recalcati suggests, a frustration from the fact of living a "lesser" life: a life that is regulated by the filter of language. According to him, a life that is constantly under scrutiny (by language) cannot be an existence fully lived (Recalcati, 2017, 27-29). The animal, unlike the human, can instead live "fully." It is thus possible to understand this ambivalent attitude of the human wanting to become human and at the same time longing for the primeval state that has been sacrificed: the body, the animal, the life fully lived. This is why, there are situations in which "civilization" is suspended, and humans are allowed to let the beast, the Nature, the "body"

3 Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) was an Italian painter, architect, writer, and historian, most famous for his "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects," considered the ideological foundation of Western art history.

speak; like in the act of making love. In this moment of intimacy, language is dispossessed and humans can regain the primeval status of being fully present. Or in its opposite, during a conflict either ritualized, like a sports game, or lethal, like war. The ritualized conflict is limited in time: when the game is over, the players regain their “humanity.” And similarly, when the war is over, the soldiers should regain their civil life and return to their “humanity.”⁴ Games and wars, where civilization is suspended, are exceptional moments; they are not supposed to be the norm.⁵ The subject who has agreed to the symbolic sacrifice is nevertheless in tension within herself: for the body is present and reclaims her attention. It is possible to understand here the longing of the body, of the fully lived life. The body makes itself present, palpable, in various ways. The subject is thus in constant tension and needs to negotiate the “emergence” of the body while remaining “civilized,” remaining in the symbolic sacrifice. The sublimation of such tension, of such desire, is therefore captured by the advertising industry which seems to offer a release for it. The excess of the body, the desire to live fully, is packaged in a bottle or in clothes that are accepted by the civilization program. The subject can purchase this accepted part of herself. What the advertisement offers is the promise to reconnect with the lost body, with the beast, with Nature. It is a perfume, a sense that does not create knowledge, but stimulate memories and arousals. In this view, the longing of the body is commodified. In such case, the violence depicted in the advertisement, is not necessarily an incitement to implement violence, but is a way to touch the “soft” spot of humans: what they had to give away to become humans. In this situation, violence is instrumentalized, and used to sell products. The potential buyer hopes by buying clothes to reconnect with her “lost” body. I would suggest that these ads should not be condemned for objectivizing women or for portraying violence, but for instrumentalizing violence itself. Violence, the mystery of violence, is denatured and trivialized. The danger of such operation is that we might then fail to address the right questions about violence. As in the case described at the university or with Teemu Mäki. The anthropologist Anton Blok argues that violence in the West has been monopolized by the state. This created a sense of pacified humans and society. However, such condition makes us consider violence (and its so-called unauthorized form) as something anomalous, disruptive, irrational, senseless; the reverse of social order. Violence is considered the antithesis of civilization, something that needs to be brought under control. The danger in this, concludes Blok, is that we might fail to ask what violence signifies and how (Blok, 2000, 23-24). We are inclined to look only at the expression of it and judge it from a moralistic standpoint. Bringing the discussion of violence into a moralistic point of view is again an attempt to come to terms with a complicated phenomenon, to provide a simplified answer to an ambiguous phenomenon. By either considering it as good or bad is to reduce the mystery of violence and to consider it through the lens of utilitarianism.

In this article, two arguments were examined: the tension between the body and language and the effects of violent images. The body is the depository of the excess that humans have to sacrifice in order to reach the status of humanity. This symbolic sacrifice is operated and consolidated by language that “prevents” the body from falling back into animality, into barbarianism, into Nature. As I mentioned, this tension between the body and language is a constant negotiation, a tension that is sublimated into a morbid desire or longing for the lost ability to fully live life. The body is thus the container of the excess and the temptation of this excess. The clothing and perfume advertising industry instrumentalizes this desire by offering a commodified version of

4 An example of the ritualistic bath for the soldier coming back from war can be found in the Greek tragedy *Oresteia* by Euripides, when Clytemnestra prepares the bath for her husband, Agamemnon coming back from the Trojan war.

5 Of course, this claim is debatable and Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer*, examined the ambiguity of Western societies proclaiming democratic values and at the same time promoting continuous states of emergency diminishing the state of law.

it. The violence that is so often blatantly displayed in such advertisements becomes a promise to the potential consumer to re-connect with the sacrificed “animality,” with Nature, with the excess. As discussed above, violence is a complex phenomenon and exposure to violent images affects the viewer’s body. In order to release the tension generated by the vision of violence, the viewer needs to create some kind of “distance.” A theoretical framework, a moral judgment, a polarized position (is it good or bad) are ways to establish a safe distance and thus to “protect” the body. But as examined above, violence is not only an external phenomenon that humans want to get rid of. It is a part of the “animality,” of the “Nature” that is sacrificed, and which is longed for. The use of violence in an advertisement in order to sell products is a way to arouse such an emotional response and at the same time to offer a channel to sublimate this tension. The problem is that “violence” is put into a sellable package (either accepted or banned), but the important questions about violence and about our relationship towards violence are avoided.

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