

Subversions of the Body

Sex, Sex Work, and Gender in Surrealism

Ruth Oppenheim-Rothschild

2002

Miserabilist society wants our bodies. It wants docile bodies, controlled by fear, by class, and by silence. As surrealists, we desire absolute control of what we do with our bodies, what we want from our bodies, and how we see and present our bodies.

The institution of marriage must be destroyed. Surrealism has no room for man and wife, missionary-position monogamy, and likewise, no place for mainstream gay culture that wants to be as straight as it can possibly be. We demand the right to fuck who we want to fuck, however we want to fuck them. This means total access to protection against STDs, birth control, and abortion—class should not control sexual possibilities. It means an end to abstinence-only, heterosexist sexual education in schools. It means the destruction of rape culture. It means following our desires. It means being able to verbalize and act on what we want.

It also means being able to use sex however we want to, including sex as work. Miserabilist society despises sex workers because they are not wage slaves. Sex workers do not have to answer to a boss, work a dull 9-to-5 job, compromise their principles, or in the words of Angela Carter, “rely on fraud to make a living.” We demand the legalization of prostitution, without zoning, and unions for all forms of sex workers.

Miserabilism is also intent on controlling our genders. At birth, we are assigned Male or Female according to our genitalia. It wants so badly to enforce this dichotomy that intersexed babies, born without distinctly “male” or “female” genitalia, undergo cosmetic surgery at birth that frequently leaves them void of sexual feeling and the ability to have orgasms.

Just as surrealism refuses to see the world as white and black, good and evil, appropriate and inappropriate, we have to stop seeing gender as a binary system, and stop seeing biology as destiny. We are male, female, or both, or neither, and we will be these things without fear, without shame, without limitations, and without apologies.

What is surrealism about if not the refusal to apologize for our desires, our imaginations, and our lives? Surrealism is not a movement in political and social theory. It is constantly growing and changing, in our eternally active, always subversive, bodies.

fifth Estate

Ruth Oppenheim-Rothschild
Subversions of the Body
Sex, Sex Work, and Gender in Surrealism
2002

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/358-fall-2002/subversions-of-the-body>
Fifth Estate #358, Fall, 2002

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)