

BEUYS' OWN, or ANOTHER KIND OF WOUND

IMPOSSIBLE: The Otto Muehl Story

by William Levy

Barany Artists (NY) 2001, 126 pp, \$25

Reviewed by EDDIE WOODS

"I am a vegetarian, as Christ was not and Buddha should have been. Being sufficiently greedy of life, I make a compromise and kill only things that don't run away from me, like cabbages and coconuts, onions and eggs." - R.H. Blyth, *Zen and Zen Classics*

Many years ago, I wrote a short story entitled "The Commune." In it a 16-year old boy describes, with simply-phrased sensuality, the joys of living in a 'polyfidelitous' community where bisexual incest, as well as occasional bestiality (mainly with an enormous Schnauzer named Togo who "adores the smell of freshly-fucked cunt"), are as common as drinking herb tea, learning without benefit of formal classrooms and milking cows. Initially intended for London's *Libertine*, an alternative-minded sexzine which nonetheless plagiarized its juiciest photographs from a continually desecrated—scissorly raped, you might could say—copy of *Wet Dreams* [William Levy, editor], this loving tale of Utopian possibilities was rejected, albeit with regrets, *because* the ultimately doomed publication had just won a major obscenity trial. "It's got everything that we want, Eddie," the editor, Dr. Arabella Melville, wrote me, "but we're not about to risk going through that again." In truth, their legal victory was doubly Pyrrhic: first they were given a cake they couldn't eat, and then shortly afterwards put out of business by the real porn barons, those who ultimately controlled distribution and favored nothing stronger than soft-core, apolitical, safe-bucks periodical titillation. As for "The Commune," it was eventually published, as a literary contact ad, in a bastard step-offspring of *Libertine's* called *Free Classifieds*.

Along with writing about sexual adventurism (the aforementioned story being among the mildest), I have also lived communally, indulged voraciously and experimented wildly—with girlfriends, boyfriends, and countless prostitutes of more than merely two gender persuasions. Nor am I a stranger to the fascinating relationship between death and sexuality. A former wife once insisted that, whilst fucking, I keep both hands clasped around her throat and progressively tighten my grip the closer we drew to the grand mutual orgasm she guaranteed me would occur, further making me promise to strangle her to death during our moments of climaxing. (As Sonja was nothing if not a zealous nympho, we indeed came together, she signaling the onset of her ecstasy by loudly gasping "Now, now! Yes, do it now!") It was a thrilling experience; but upon shooting my own load, I immediately unhandled her. Outraged by my deceit, she damn near—and quite literally so—killed me. The damage she subsequently did to the hotel room we were occupying at the time cost me a small fortune.

Beyond this and other dangerous dalliances, I am well aware of the potent role blood sacrifices have played in religious and other significant rituals, including sexually-oriented ones, from time immemorial. Still, as a Kali devotee who'd prefer to see them stop slaughtering goats at dawn at the Hindu goddess' mother temple in Calcutta and a conditional Crowley admirer who believes the ejaculating goat he slew should have lived to enjoy the memory of copulating with a human female, so, too, do I draw my own line at Otto Muehl famously murdering geese in order to plunge their bloody, pulsating necks into willingly expectant cunts-in-waiting. All the more so because Muehl was wont to enact this rite of libidinous passage as a performance piece.

William Levy—himself no stranger to matters deep, dark and marvelously outré—initially beheld just such an Otto happening in 1970 at a small Frankfurt-am-Main atelier, after having recently smuggled a thousand copies of *Suck* (the first European sexpaper, of which he was chief editor) into Germany from the Netherlands. Describing how Muehl first slashed a goose's throat (with a knife he'd been waving in "prayerful debauchery") before swinging the bird about by its feet, cutting off its head, then thoughtfully slipping a condom over the freshly decapitated neck in order to safely screw a crouching woman now "quivering in sexual rapture," Levy muses: "Did we witness a murder? But on briefest reflection, one hot second, everyone knew...it was not a *homicide* [but] an *ansericide*. Nonetheless, here was something repulsive and splendid with a primal excess of radicality and density in Eros and Magic not found elsewhere."

True. And anyone who feels seriously uneasy reading about this should ask themselves whether their discomfort springs from genuine compassion for all sentient beings or, instead, a deep-seated sexual arousal which their conscious minds are scared shitless to acknowledge. It was, after all, precisely this perverse self-censoring mechanism among many of his readers that ultimately did in the Marquis de Sade. Most people don't want to know who and what they really are, and would sooner imprison (or even kill) the bearers of such awesome revelations rather than wisely welcome their potentially enlightening tidings.

The author's next encounter with Muehl's anserous antics came in November of the same year, at the *Suck*-sponsored Wet Dreams Festival in Amsterdam, to which Levy had invited Otto. Only this time the performance didn't come off as planned; ergo, there was also no chance of feasting on the fated fowl later on (a follow-up to the Frankfurt event which left Levy concluding that the sacrifice was "not senseless termination [but] a ritual where they transubstantiate the spirit by eating what they kill"). In Amsterdam, you see, the goose got stolen midstream by the English poet-playwright (etc.) Heathcote Williams, at the hysterical urging of fellow *Suck* contributing editor Germaine Greer—an unforeseen truncation that ostensibly presented Otto with no alternative but to shit on the stage ("More than one stool," we are assured).

To make up your own minds as to whether the theft was justified, you'll need to thoroughly peruse, and then meditate carefully on, at least three of this intellectually incendiary book's decade of chapters (including a trio of

utterly erudite appendices), particularly the fifth, "A Full Toss," wherein an array of pros & cons are set before you like an intelligently discursive table d'hôte. Only missing from this tasty squabble is any reference to the attack penned by American writer/former Living Theater member Mel Clay, demanding that before interrupting another's performance Heathcote must be prepared to better it. Alas, knowing Mel, his idea of 'bettering' might have easily allowed for offing Otto. Art rules OK? Levy did, however, publish both Clay's brief diatribe and Williams' poem "Why I Stole the Goose" (generously excerpted in *Impossible*), along with 15 pages of text and illustrations by and about Muehl, in the large-format *Wet Dreams Book*—now an expensive collector's item well worth forgoing a few meals to get hold of.

For sure, Levy's probing appraisal of a most difficult and dedicated life offers readers much more than an in-depth gander at just one of Otto and his followers' multi-faceted *Selbstdarstellungen* ("the practical psycho-methodology of self-representations designed to induce a dramatic transformation of consciousness") and the now-septuagenarian guru's other audacious experiments aimed at confronting society's ubiquitous *wichtel*, the villainous goblin spirit that disturbs all natural flow. Thus *Impossible* surveys Muehl's activities, writings and various artistic pursuits (the Louvre gave him a three-month exhibition that opened in October 2001) from the Sixties heyday of the Vienna Actionists through the development of the AA (Action/Analysis) communes, then to and beyond Otto's seven-year imprisonment for having sexual relations with children. According to Muehl, the latter event would never have occurred had one of his main protectors-cum-admirers still been alive, namely the long-serving Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky. Another famous Muehl supporter was the revolutionary artist and political activist (and a co-founder of Germany's Green Party) Joseph Beuys—hardly surprising for someone who, in his idiosyncratic résumé, portrayed his own birth as an "exhibition of a wound drawn together with an adhesive bandage."

Levy, who has now published three books on Otto Muehl, once stated that his purpose in writing was "to get what's heavy off the ground." In choosing Otto as a subject (see also his *Ottoismus in Holland* and *The Night Before Charisma: The Rise and Fall of Otto Muehl*), he has certainly opted for one of the heaviest to hoist. In so doing, especially with this daringly ambitious tome, the originator of "writing as terrorism" has again proved himself a literary weightlifter of the first water. For even if Levy's book did not get me to suddenly rank Muehl among my favorite personages, I definitely came away from *Impossible* viewing Otto in a greatly enhanced light: say as someone who with every honest intent has successfully embraced Martin Luther's dictum *pecca fortiter*, sin boldly.

Handsomely printed on antique laid paper and sturdily spiral bound, *Impossible: The Otto Muehl Story* was specially designed by another well-known creative maverick, Willem de Ridder (also the designer of *Wet Dreams* and Levy's spectacularly infamous *Natural Jewboy*). What's more, it contains several reproductions of Otto's outlandish drawings (including one on the cover, in color) and presents, for the first time in English, healthy chunks of the 1967 ZOCK manifesto pamphlet, "one of the most fanatical nihilist credos

ever written." In short, William Levy's latest offering is a compelling read in every respect.

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