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Reflections on the gaze, game, and narration

Emanuela De Cecco

The role of the spectator is a delicate and difficult issue currently being taken up in contemporary art. It is precisely through the consideration of the spectator's position that a concrete difference from the great machine of mass communication can be seen, and it is in this consideration that art takes back for itself a certain autonomy and a profound reason for existence.

Eva Marisaldi, Liliana Moro, and Grazia Toderi have contributed much to this debate. While on a superficial level their works may seem quite different, it is evident that on a deeper level they share many common problematics. What ties them together is related to that same persistence with which these three artists, for about a decade, have been raising analogous questions and in turn providing varied responses.

Leaving behind relations of genre and generation, I will bring to the forefront three important elements in their works: the gaze, the game, and narration. Gazes which cut through the work and speak directly to those who look at it; simulated games, represented and lived; unfinished narratives, suspended and interrupted - together these aspects of their work reveal a profound communicative adroitness and knowledge. This aptitude can be heard in differing nuances in all three of these artists, who linguistically in their pieces mark a definitive break in regard to the central problematics of art of the past decade, and a fundamental step for artists (both male and female) of the current generation.

The Gaze

To focus upon the spectator's attention, or at least to foresee the spectator's position as a work unfolds, is no new task either within an artistic context or in the

context of mass communication. The open work of the 1970s, the sensorial involvement of the happening, the actual physical presence of the spectator that is required by a performance art piece, the installation made to create a space into which the spectator must enter - these are only a few of the approaches which show that for several decades artists have been exploring modes of communication with their audiences, and moreover establishing with their audiences a process of substantial exchange which is aimed at giving shape to the ultimate form of the work of art itself. The same is true for theater, one thinks for example first of Brecht, and more recently of the new theater of the seventies and eighties), as well as for cinema, from Eisenstein to Hollywood, and for the logic of television. The twentieth-century spectator occupies an ever increasingly important position, and at times the rules of the game do not allow them to remain passive in the face of what they see.

In the works of Eva Marisaldi, Liliana Moro, and Grazia Toderi one often finds traces of “signs” which indicate the modality of the work’s fruition, or the way in which the work may be comprehended - signs which give advice to the spectator without reducing to a conceptual machine a piece that is an emotionally involving vision.

What comes to my mind first of all is the appeal for attentiveness which is present in several works of all three artists. By appeal for attentive I mean the grouping together of devices of various types in a way that more or less directly points to a modality of looking suggested by the artist herself. The works of these artists ask for a gaze that is consciously focused and which does not end in contemplation tout court. From their works emerges the desire to put into action an exchange which is considered to be crucial to the work, and in some cases even constitutes the piece, and is not an added feature displayed simply for show. There is the desire that the spectator experience the viewing of the work as a voyage in which the other occupies a position that is fundamental in every aspect.

Eva Marisaldi, on more than one occasion, has included in her installations written directions that accompany the visual part, and which are like a sort of user’s manual. They are not intended as a constraint, and indeed are often lightly inscribed on aluminum. More than impositions they seem to be advice, a sort of internal caption to the piece which removes a part of its ambiguity without eliminating all together its ambiguity. Such captions point out a possible way to approach the piece. The theater of Brecht again comes to mind, in which the use of the sign-board does not impede the engaged gaze of the spectator, but instead serves mainly the function of giving the spectator special access to the work. It breaks the integral enchantment of the spectator while at the same time it keeps in tact his or her sense of vision. In Marisaldi’s *La portata umana è nulla [The human carrying capacity is zero]* (1993) - a well of quicksand three meters deep - the following note is given: ‘The well is three meters deep. Its capacity is four thousand liters. The human carrying capacity is zero. It was not created to cause damage. This is an invitation to pay attention.’ The note has a contingent function (a warning to avoid the risk of falling into the well),

but the figurative aspect of the note alludes to the relationship between attraction and fear that is triggered by looking at the unknown. In *Ragazza materiale [Material Girl]* (1993) the gallery is divided into two parts. In each half, various objects are on display. In this installation as well there is a set of directions, very explicit, which suggest the modality of approach preferred by the artist: 'A false wall divides a room in two, proposing two different focal points. You are asked to go to only one of the two halves. You can complete what is missing from your viewing, through what others tell you or remain with an incomplete experience.' The note in this case invites us to open up a relationship with other spectators, to trust them if we want a complete vision of the show. It invites us to notice, once again in the figurative sense, that the idea of "seeing" everything by ourselves is not only illusory but more precisely impossible. With these assumptions we have in front of us two possible roads to take: the unresolved desire which each person completes by imagining that which he/she did not see, and the opening up of a relationship with the other. Although directions are extended to the spectator it is not obligatory that one follow them, however respecting them makes sense in the context of a specific reflection, not only on the incompleteness of viewing but also on the unavoidable panorama of differences built by possible stories that describe the "missing part" told by different people.

Moving on to Liliana Moro, when I speak of the appeal for attentiveness in her work, I intend both the process by which the artist on more than one occasion puts into play "lowering" or "reduction", and also her work on dimensions. I am thinking in particular of *Abbassamento [Lowering]* (1992), a parade of thousands of paper dolls in front of a conglomeration of medieval constructions that are also in miniature; *Carne [Flesh]* (1992) an installation in which a variety of stucco-filled vases brimming with toy soldiers are displayed on the ground; *Città [City]* (1994), a proper city made of cardboard, complete with electric lines and pulsing little red lights. To conceive of a reduced scale, miniaturized and spread out on the ground, is to ask a specific movement of the spectator. The artist, asking me to stoop down, is also extending to me an invitation for concentration. She is telling me that it is not sufficient to sweep over the work with a glance from above and move on, but instead that an explicit movement of my body is necessary. I must get close to the work that is calling out "look at me," but according to different rules than those to which I am accustomed. The usual exposition of a show in which one gets up on stage, or in which a piece of art is put on a pedestal for display, is overturned by Moro's work along with the implications of such traditional gestures.

Moving finally to the gaze as it is put into play by Grazia Toderi, it is evident that in this case the terms are laid out on a temporal plane. A recurrent theme in Toderi's video installations is the use of a fixed image, or an image that varies only slightly, for an extended time (usually around thirty minutes). Such images seem to be related more to painting than film, and the major difference from the former is the time requested of the spectator on the part of the artist, that is the duration of the video.

This technique is seen for example in *Autoritratto con problemi, problemi [Self-portrait with problems, problems]* (1994), in which the image that appears is that of the artist under the helmet of salon hairdryer while a superimposed rolling text of Ingeborg Bachmann appears and disappears according to the average time it takes to read the text. In *Zuppa di eternità e luce improvvisa [Eternal Soup and Sudden Light]* (1994) the time of the image - the artist underwater who is trying to open an umbrella - is divided up by fades to black that follow the pattern of her breath. In the first case we are asked to experience the viewing by reading, spending a certain amount of time in front of the work (if I remember well about 80 minutes) in which things may happen, or else we can resign ourselves to going home with an incomplete viewing. In the second case, time is not visual but physical. It is an internal rhythm which allows one to go beyond the surface. If the use of the temporal dimension unveils a "hidden instruction manual," we will see how the later work of Toderi, such as the 1997 video *Terra [Land]* becomes diversified to the point in which different temporal dimensions exist within the same work.

Narration

Even though personal experience is a fundamental reserve visible at first sight in the works of Marisaldi, Moro, and Toderi, all three of these artists are not interested in fully handing over lived experiences, nor in the exclusive construction of an autobiographical story. To tell one's own story does not imply the display of an objective vision of the facts, but rather the authenticity of experience mediated by one's own language. Grazia Toderi in *Nata nel '63 [Born in '63]* (1996), uses powerful traces of collective memory such as images of the first man on the moon. But the history of the twentieth century remains in the background as the spectator's attention is concentrated both on the cyclical movement of the doll in the foreground, and on the contrast between the doll and the supposedly 'magnificent, progressive fortunes of humanity'. Narration is rarely developed, more often it is present through traces and is a resource that leaves the spectator free to imagine what happened or what is about to happen. Emblematic in this regard is Toderi's *Terra*, to which I previously alluded. The work shows an airplane hovering above a runway but it is unclear, for the duration of the video, whether the plane is on the verge of landing or taking off. This suspension gives us the freedom to give meaning to the work and inevitably brings with it an indelible gray zone.

Analogously, in the work of Marisaldi, the narration that unfolds through traces plays on the presence of "white spaces" that give a relief to the spectators. *Molte domande non hanno una risposta [Many questions have no answer]* (1997/1998), was a work born from the artist's request that various people and friends pose a question to her. In the show Marisaldi gives form to her responses either through something she has written, with drawings, photographs, objects she has chosen, and even by asking two other people to curate her own show. The result is a

polyphonous portrait of great intensity that is simultaneously a group of questions in front of which the spectator feels immediately personally involved, even before he or she has seen the response chosen by the artist.

Moro has worked on more than one occasion with fables, using stories as a soundtrack that is as important as the visible elements of her installations. In *Autoreverse [Automatic Rewind]* (1992), the vases used in Carne occupy one room of the gallery, while in the other darker room one listens to various fairy tales simultaneously read by the artist. She not only plays the role of the narrator in the tales, but also does the voices of each of the characters. Repetition eliminates the final word of the stories, which go on without end, thus the title *Autoreverse*. Moro's work, *Nessuno [No one]* (1993), again is extremely interesting in regard to the spectator's role. In the gallery are four loudspeakers from which one hears a person reading the director's notes from Beckett's *Happy Days*. Moro gives us elements for the construction of the theatre set, but not the set itself. The presence of one little house has an evocative value: for the construction of our own "happy days" we can rely only on ourselves. In *Intermittenza [Intermittence]* (1994), Moro constructs a small theater (again, it is a set without a scene) with a loudspeaker that plays the text of Mariangela Gualtieri's *Antenata [The Female Ancestor]*. Words about absence, 'io sono la mancanza - la mancanza che sono - sono ciò da cui manco - sono tutta mancanza - e non c'è nostalgia - essendo ciò che manca - adesso e sempre io' ['I am absence - the absence that I am - I am that from which I am missing - I am only absence - and there is no nostalgia - being that which is absent - now and forever it is I'], together with the presence of the voice create an "intermittent" space in which the spectator is led to live their own absences and their own presences.

The game

Reflecting on history and on the notion of the game, Giorgio Agamben departs from the rule that Lucignolo tells Pinocchio when the latter arrives in the Land of Toys: 'Each week is made up of six Thursdays and one Sunday. Just imagine if fall vacation began on the first of January and finished at the end of December.' This is the point of departure that Agamben uses to explain the antithesis between the ritual and the game in which the first 'fixes and structures the calendar preserving the continuity of the lived' and the second 'alters and destroys it, dissolving ordinary sacrality into human time.'

The game that is present in the work of Eva Marisaldi shows exactly human fragility, (evidenced in the patchwork cloth dolls with multiple malformations in *I rimandati [Those who are sent back]*, 1992), danger (the wooden dolls of her 1992 work *Controfigure [Counterfigures]* that break when they bend), but also a collective experience that implies a certain responsibility (the coloring books of *Progetto torpore [Torporific project]*, 1992).

In the work of Liliانا Moro as well the game augments the subject's relation to

reality, rather than creating distance as it may seem at first sight (it is not by chance that Agamben points out that miniaturization is a process which transforms reality into a game). The game in Moro's work is a device to keep alive a tie to childhood (through the activation of the gray zone of imagination), but most of all to tell cruel stories with no happy ending thus creating space for an authentic experience that neither offers consoling solutions nor needs to use pure autobiography in order to manifest itself.

Toderi's work is very different in this regard. The game, which in her current show at the Castello di Rivoli functions as a type of overarching theme, allows her to stage desire as an alternate dimension, far away and different from any contingency. Her work in this regard is motivated by the desire to represent aspects of the human condition that remain without any concrete specification, and indeed we see that the figures in the Castello show are so dark that we can only imagine their faces. *Atrio [Atrium]* (1998), is a diptych in which two figures, a man and a woman, are filmed from behind. It occupies the internal space of the Castello di Rivoli which joins the women's and men's quarters. In the installation both the man and woman throw a ball. The woman throws one ball at a time into a dark door in front of her, the unknown from which mysteriously it is returned. The man is juggling without feeling the need to interact with anything outside of himself. In contrast to the work of Marisaldi and Moro, in which we see the game used as a code which enables them to talk about the world that surrounds them, the game as it is used by Toderi moves in the opposite direction, that is, it moves away from the specific and is the key which gives access to the transcendent. Thinking once again of Agamben's reflections about the loss of the sacred in the game, one can perceive the desire to return to a confrontation with the sacred, reopening a dialogue, no matter how difficult, with an absolute dimension.

Together Marisaldi, Moro, and Toderi tell us of experiences that go beyond the knowledge that creating art means to communicate and to share what is common between us. Their works contribute to an ongoing larger process aimed at a re-reading of postmodernism which moves away from some of its more superficial and resigned aspects. It is not enough to work on declensions of the readymade. Marisaldi, Moro, and Toderi know this, and they speak a common language reinforced by the desire to imagine autonomous hypotheses able to move beyond the tired criticism of the present.

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Feminism by any other name, please ?

Katy Deepwell

‘Why do you use the word feminist? Don’t you think it’s passe? I worry that it’s a label which is putting off lots of people, especially men’. These are the comments of a young female student who asked me this after a lecture I gave on ‘Feminism and Postmodernism’. As I have heard this question more than once from students recently, I believe a more detailed reply is needed than the ones I have tried to give verbally on the occasions when I’ve been asked.

Her question troubles me because it strikes me first as a reflection of what students are now receiving as ‘accepted wisdom’ about feminism in the academy (institutions of higher education) - i.e. a total acceptance of the stereotyping of feminists as man-haters; the active discouragement or wholesale dismissal of feminist research as without value, (given that ‘marketing’ is the only value) and the use of stigmatism as a reason dismissing or discouraging enquiry into some very basic questions about their own position and the general position of women.

My first response is ‘It’s not a question of the name. Changing the name is the least of feminism’s problems. Feminism is an umbrella term and, however confusing, the range of possible camps, positions, political arguments are, it’s not a question of nominalism. By any other name, it would still receive the same symbolic put-down as a political movement for social transformation by those who wish to resist the claims made. Feminism remains a movement by women, about women and for women in a patriarchal culture and society which has persistently devalued their contribution and rights.’

Another young woman asks me ‘Are you a soft, feint-hearted feminist or a hard militant radical feminist?’ I try and reply that ‘I didn’t think the terms ‘soft’ or ‘hard’

related to any of my conceptions of feminism - it wasn't a form of pornography (an especially privatised kind of pleasure even!) where the more explicit depiction of acts or a soft-focus lense on life were going to be much use in defining the implications of the term.'

This problem of misunderstanding and just plain ignorance is not going to go away. Such misunderstandings remain to be addressed, we can't simply sweep it under the carpet and pretend these problems don't exist as we pursue our own vision of ourselves and our creative labours. Perhaps I should feel pleased by their attempts to raise questions which they think are maybe a problem for their colleagues or what they may even have considered as a problem in feminism's 'acceptance'. But the fact that this is their troubling question, troubles me because it wasn't said to engage more with the work I had been discussing, it wasn't said to make enquiries about where and who the artists I had mentioned were, or where they could find out more.

This troublesome question is what has got me thinking about the implications and the underlying situation in which this question was asked. There is now in the UK a whole generation of disengaged, politically disaffected, cynical individuals who do not believe in political protest or in the possibility that it might be possible to intervene to change the world, except in the conformity of their own image. Style is everything here, and it's 'uncool' or worst 'reductionist' or 'naïve' to believe that a political voice of any kind matters - worse still a political voice which is left-wing, passionate, democratic or even still socialist! Their credo instead goes 'older people, more politically aware individuals, more experienced artists have nothing to teach us, unless they are rich, famous, and fashionable, in which case a slavish devotion to our idols is the only response. Simulation is the only goal and accumulating money the only value worth caring about.' A cynical youth who dismiss the previous generation is well known as an avantgardist strategy and totally an integral part of youth culture and the rebellion of teenagers but this is not what I am referring to as I have a healthy respect for this kind of activity where the grounds of its protests are clear. The only ambition this group - who are truly Thatcher's Children in the UK - is to be 'mellow and comfortable' and the measure of complacency which goes with this is really quite staggering for the blanket of ignorance it wraps itself in and the total refusal to look to the world around them. Their ideal world is a self-enclosed bedroom of music, computer games, uppers and downers, fizzy drinks, junk food and sexual gratification, without the complications of relationships, in which masturbation becomes the only ideal pursuit. This is not a space in which the real world enters at all through the radio, TV, internet, club scene or visual arts - the seasons don't exist, and the real pleasures of the body are reduced to those which can be chemically induced or simulated - intravenous drip is probably the ideal method. Communication as a two way process and as a vital part of human interaction are not just devalued they are refused. All forms of social interaction and possible conflict are irrelevant to this safe and cosy existence bar nuclear disaster or

starvation through lack of supplies from orders not arriving through home shopping. This is the real downside of late consumer capitalism - passive, non-productive, remote control, a simulated existence in a man-built 'safe' environment. In this world, inequality is non-existent, except as a simple question of supply and demand, and all consideration of how goods are produced and the thought of other people's labour (like the invisible work of their mum's) are just ignored. Because in this world, it doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman locked up in your bedroom box - since your identity is not brought into question by those around you and you don't reflect on the gendering of the lyrics you hear or the scenarios in the shot-em-up games you play - since to play, consume and win is all that counts.

This is the backdrop in which these questions are situated - it's the implicit assumption of knowledge as something passively and easily acquired, preferably through memory tapes or available as a total fast download, as if the internet has everything and truly serves everyone, and something that can be simply regurgitated and eaten wholesale. Rote learning and information overload are its realities, thought processes are irrelevant, the ability to draw distinctions becomes meaningless, except for in the question can I be bothered? Or would listening to a CD be more fun?

Amongst students, this breeds the attitude that assignments are simply dictates to be fulfilled with the minimum of effort and the least required of one's self - since exertion or mental challenge or even reading a book you do not own but have to travel somewhere to borrow is disruptive to this economy of 'safeness' in which the only measure of change is passing the next stage in the computer game - sorry, the simulation, that is 'real life'. For feminist lecturers, facing this scenario involves more than reaching the passive non-response from Girl No.20 in a large teaching group, it's about students not knowing or caring about the difference between a statement and an assertion because what the teacher says is the law to be dismissed - if that is you can be bothered to pay attention when the process itself is fundamentally 'uncool'. It's about dismissing every remark you hear as 'that's your personal opinion' since all discussion of collective political action is to be automatically shunned and any understanding of groups or communities in political or social terms frowned on, even while these same individuals display remarkably levels of obedience to icons in their sub-cultures and seek only their 'clones' for company while insisting on individuality and individual expression, however offensive, is a matter of personal freedom and not even a privilege.

In the UK institutions, it's also about all kinds of false 'educational' pressures to deal with large class sizes, to dumb-down to such a basic level where 'everything can be easily understood and digested' and in which there are no challenges, no expectations for the students to grow and the total suppression of any desire within them to ask questions about the world in which they find themselves. If this model, which now exists in the degraded state of its teaching Universities in the UK, finds its mirror in the situation in the US, this is what happens when that 'special

relationship' Mrs Thatcher idealised was carried over into every aspect of political life and helped to turn Universities into marketing agents and sausage factories for the production of a 'flexible' but docile workforce who would put up with short-term contracts and market forces dictating supply and demand for labour.

Dear reader, please don't misunderstand this negative caricature as all there is, good teachers do exist and they do find ways of enabling, empowering, enlivening their students - some of whom desire to know more about the world they live in - and overcoming all these negative inbred traits but in one sense this image of the majority culture is what they are working against continuously. If feminists intend to educate and reach not just these young women who are already in the art school system, but the society and the culture as a whole, into a different more profound understanding of what feminism is about, has been about and the importance of it for the future as a social, political and cultural movement in the last thirty years, then we have got to find some better answers, strategies, means of intervention and forums for discussion about these issues.

So here's another response to THE question: Feminism is not a fashion item, a fad which can pass and become 'passe'. As has repeatedly been said, it's a politics. It requires thought, engagement, critical reflectiveness and a self-consciousness as well as an active enquiry and its central subject remains the situation of half the world's population. It's not a 'pat' methodology which anyone can adopt by following a few rules or half-baked 'approaches'. I remain concerned about the problem that feminism now has as we wake up to the fact that having accumulated databases on women artists, booklists, libraries - this information is not seriously being used as a/the starting point for more feminist work. In the sea of all other kinds of information databasing, digital archiving, internet research - it is yet again being overlooked and ignored as non-essential, not worth investing in, an area which has minimal market value.

And yet....Feminism has presented itself as more than either 'a' perspective or an ideology at the end of all ideologies - even though we often have to resort to these definitions of our vantage point to get across how differently feminist visions try to understand and criticise the world and the ideologies which have not vanished within it.

So, which feminism are we talking about? Which version of feminism is the 'wrong' one, and which don't least want to be associated with? And here, I am assuming that you, my reader, have got this far into this argument, that you are thinking about what feminism means to you and which version of feminism do you embrace?

Are you a Goddess or a Cyborg feminist and are these really your only two options?

Are you a liberal humanist feminist; a socialist feminist; a Marxist feminist; a post-Marxist feminist; a radical feminist; a lesbian separatist feminist; a right-wing

or a reactionary feminist; a post-feminist feminist; a postmodern feminist; a feminist postmodernist; or a modernist feminist postmodernist?

Do you subscribe to or have you refashioned a Foucauldian, or a deconstructivist, or a Deleuzian, rhizomatic or nomadic model of feminism? Is your feminism based on a re-reading of a host of male intellectuals with or without a sprinkling of understandings of a tradition of women intellectuals?

Is feminism's role for you in 're' thinking, 're' writing, the world from a perspective which engages only in a reactive relationship to dominant patriarchal role models in current intellectual life?

Are you a post-colonial feminist or post-colonial theorist with some feminist leanings; a US third world feminist or a global feminist thinker? Would you subscribe to a feminist re-reading of multi-cultural politics or do you see yourself as a non-sexist, anti-racist feminist? Are you an ideologue, a polemicist, or a well-trained balanced academic?

Do you work alone or does your work emerge in and thorough dialogue with your peers or other communities on or off line? Do write androcentric or gynocentric feminist art criticism or both? Do you believe in feminism's value as critique? Is critique the goal or the starting point? How is this related to the question of feminism as a form of strategic intervention, which both carries a critique but also envisages a different future? Are the limits of your feminism defined by your situation, the context in which you operate or do you still believe in the power of reasoned argument and 'objectivity' as values to counteract the subjective anecdotal limits of thought?

Where would you place the limits of your feminism as concerns the visual arts? And what would define for you the feminism of your subject?

Alternatively, are these concerns really not an issue today because we (in the West) live in such an enlightened age which has acquired a basic feminist consciousness about the position of women, and acknowledges their rights to political representation, education, access to health care on the basis of need, equal pay for equal work, even the right to leave the family home to work, and so feminism is over and there is no need to struggle anymore.

Well, spare a few minutes to think of women under the Taliban regime today or the position of women living under repressive regimes of Islamic fundamentalism, or the use of 'rape' as a systematic tool of ethnic cleansing and an 'aggressive' tactic of modern warfare and not just its incidence in your neighbourhood, or the attempts to turn back the clock on the fragile range of abortion rights secured in most democracies, or the use of enforced traffic in women in the sex industry between European and developing countries or across Asia.

Reactionary forces, misogynist regimes, exploitative and patriarchal dictatorships have not gone away as the century turns so this argument won't work.

'OK, but this is politics not art' for most people. That is for those who ignore all questions of cultural politics except the gossip of who knows who. For them this

fragile distinction exists between art and politics to carve out a separate sphere of the world of art as a regime of solely aesthetic pleasure which remains to be defended.

But hold on a minute, aren't these same damned political questions also the subject of many art works and protests by women artists found in those same sites where this concept of art is most defended - namely the museums and galleries of modern art. The two cannot be so easily divorced, even as a category called political art, from the exchange of aesthetic concerns with art in its broadest sense is also found there. Such ring-fencing remains the last defence of the desperate in the face of the torrent of work accessible to them.

So, what's your excuse for avoiding these questions ? Or for failing to broaden your understanding of feminism ?

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Faith Wilding and the Enfleshing of Painting

Amelia Jones

Faith Wilding's dynamic career has spanned the second and third waves of the feminist art movement - crossing over the supposedly incompatible politics and imagery of so-called "1970s" (or "essentialist") and "1980s" ("anti-essentialist") feminist art discourses, reasserting its importance in the hybrid 1990s. Not only is her work thus fascinating for the complex story it tells us about the continually shifting ideological terrain of feminism and the visual arts, it is also profoundly compelling in its various modes of putting-into-flesh (fleshing out) women's experiences in the increasingly intensively technologized regime of contemporary life. To this extent, Wilding could be said to elaborate - performatively, visually, corporeally - what Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) has called the "flesh machine" of Pancapitalism: the third machinic map that is surpassing the "intersecting liquid maps" of the modernist war and sight machines.

For CAE, a group of artist-writer techno-activists with whom Wilding has recently collaborated, the flesh machine is 'a heavily liquid network of scientific and medical institutions with knowledge specializations... combined with nomadic technocracies of interior vision and surgical development.'¹ Because the flesh machine produces our bodily subjectivities through imaging technologies that 'claim to make 'the natural' newly visible" and that have in recent years focused increasingly frequently on making visible the medicalized bodies of women',² Wilding's performative, interventions into its realm of visibility -- as a feminist visual artist -- are particularly effective in interrogating this "machinic map." Across three decades, Wilding's work has explored the sexual/reproductive flesh of women's bodies, tracing the transmutation of this flesh, previously believed to be "authentic" repository of

feminine subjectivity, into the denaturalized flesh machines of Pancapitalism. Wilding simultaneously marks the sexualization that determines the flesh machine's operative contours and the medicalization through which the flesh machine conditions the experience of women's bodies.

Waiting...Wombs

In 1972 Wilding performed a piece called *Waiting* at Womanhouse, the epochal collaborative project involving the full-scale renovation of a run-down house in Hollywood and its refiguring into a feminist installation. In *Waiting*, seated on a chair with her hands passively lying in her lap, Wilding rocks back and forth and chants a litany of anticipated acts that narrate the forced passivity of a woman's life in patriarchy: 'Waiting for someone to feed me.... to change my diaper.... to put me on the toilet.... Waiting to grow up.... for my breasts to develop.... to have a boyfriend.... Waiting for my wedding night.... for sex.... for my baby to come.... Waiting for menopause.... for my body to break down.... Waiting for sleep. Waiting....'³



Faith Wilding *Waiting* (1972). Courtesy of artist

This simple but dramatically effective piece encapsulates the primary ideas associated with early 1970s feminism and ironizes Wilding's own patience: she has given up waiting for a masculinist art world to recognize her creative achievements, creating instead her own alternative audience among younger generations of artists just now learning about the rich history of the feminist art movement.⁴ Wilding uses her own body performatively to engage the spectator in a metaphorically rhythmic and repetitive narration of a woman's life experience as viewed through the passionately feminist lens of earlier manifestos such as Betty

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) -- manifestos that defined patriarchy and, by extension, individual men as violent oppressors of women. Wilding's swaying body and monotonous voice seems to provide a kind of guarantee of the simultaneous authenticity and degradation of women's experience. Her feminist subject is profoundly embodied, a universalized "woman"; she is performed in a seemingly unmediated fashion -- without apparent technological intervention.

As an extension of such performance works, during this period Wilding also produced paintings and drawings the iconography of which was typical of particularly that part of the early 1970s feminist art movement located in Southern California and

Faith Wilding *Womb Room* (1972) Courtesy of artist



institutionalized within the Feminist Art Program (founded at California State University, Fresno and then moved to California Institute of the Arts near Los Angeles). The iconic quality of this early work is not surprising given that Wilding was a founding member of the FAP.⁽⁵⁾ Paralleling her contribution to Womanhouse, the crocheted, room-sized web-like environment her called *Womb Room*, Wilding experimented at length with cunt or “central core” imagery, which strategically put up front a primary signifier of that part of women’s experience that had been the most aggressively veiled or prohibited by castration-anxious masculine subjects: women’s sexual pleasure.

Wilding’s *Peach Cunt* (1971) and *Womb* (1972) are exemplary of this experimentation, successfully employing the particular effects of watercolor on paper to render the juicy flesh of women’s genital anatomy -- marked as simultaneously sexual and reproductive and proffered as symbolic of a generalized female subjectivity. In *Peach Cunt*, a pearly pod of labial and clitoral flesh hovers like a hole in the middle of its paper support, now puckered by the pod’s leaking fluids; in *Womb*, a large, magenta vessel, bursting forth like a flowering of tumescent genital skin, soaks into a sheet of thick creamy paper, while the dark purple crevice in its center - accented by pale pink lobes of (Caucasian) “flesh” and rimmed in glistening orange -- projects its womb-like space paradoxically into the depths of the paper’s surface.



Faith Wilding *Peach Cunt* (1971)
Courtesy of artist

In these early works Wilding already shows her capacity for pushing her diverse media to their limits, exploiting the liquid effects of paint and the tensile agitation of graphite line to produce images that evoke the lived febrility of human (usually women’s) experience. Across all of Wilding’s works, this sensitive deployment of materials reinforces the effects of the always body-oriented content of Wilding’s works (to surface what Vivian Sobchack calls the ‘corporeal information of images’).⁶ Wilding’s pictures thus coalesce with performance pieces such as *Waiting* in their resonant evocation of bodily experience. Wilding’s *Peach Cunt* and *Womb* break down the conventional understanding of woman-as-image, passive and controlled by vision (a “male” or masculine/patriarchal “gaze”). These pictures also histrionically perform the painterly image against the grain of modernism as it existed in U.S. art discourse at the time they were created -- against both flatness and anti-literariness. These burgeoning, organic images flamboyantly shatter the skin-deep geometries of Clement Greenberg’s exhortations, conquering his obsessive exclusion of content or narrative from painterly form.⁷ The *Womb* and the *Peach*

Cunt are blood-engorged lobes of female flesh, stains of mucous that render the skin of the paper malleable; they are messy, organic “flesh” made feminist in its bold rebelliousness.

By insistently returning the picture to the body, Wilding crucially contests the contemporary regime of spectacle, or of what philosopher Martin Heidegger calls the “world picture,” wherein, as Sobchack summarizes the situation, our bodies ‘become increasingly distanced in images, increasingly viewed as ‘resources,’ and increasingly lived as ‘things’ to be seen, managed, and mastered.’⁸ In addition, *Womb*, like all of



Faith Wilding *Womb* (1972)
Courtesy of Artist

Wilding’s works, two-dimensional or otherwise, thwarts the othering of the body as a kind of exteriorized project, in Sobchack’s Heideggerian terms, by producing its flesh as highly specific – as, in fact, genital (sexual/reproductive) and female. This is the “lack” upon which patriarchy founders again and again in its repetitious othering of naked female bodies – the “lack” that Wilding makes “present” in glistening, moist, flesh-soaked watercolor.

In *Womb* and *Peach Cunt*, the female body, though universalized (and implicitly staged as Caucasian), is anything but “exteriorized project”: it is felt from within and projected outward, bursting the confines of its sallow shallow page. In this way, the embodiment of all images (their capacity to reflect back what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘texture of Being’ that is our flesh in engagement with a world that is also ‘flesh’) and the corporeality of all vision (vision is occasioned by ‘what happens in the body’) are borne out through representation. The fragile, trembling edges of these womb/cunts, their gooey depths, enact the way in which, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, ‘by lending his... body to the world,’ the artist ‘changes the world into paintings.’⁹

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the artist is resolutely male (“his” body). But, Wilding’s deployment of painting-as-(female)-flesh suggests it is no accident that Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor for the painter’s vision is, against the grain of his own logic, linked to female fecundity and procreation: ‘It can be said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother’s body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us. The painter’s vision is a continued birth.’¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty appropriates biological fecundity for the otherwise implicitly male artist; in doing so he, certainly inadvertently, forces an opening into which the female creator – such as Wilding – can aggressively insert herself, penetrating the masculinist fabric of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis.

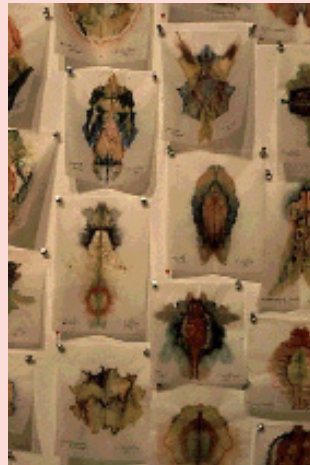
Wilding’s *Womb* and *Peach Cunt*, then, metaphorically as well as literally body

forth - give birth to - painting as flesh of the world (which in turn produces the artist and, in turn, the viewer as flesh); they collapse two entities Merleau-Ponty implicitly assumes are distinct: the mother and the painter.¹¹ Such evocations as *Womb*, still invested in the second-wave feminist obsession with authenticity, where each womb/cunt image is imagined to be the signifier of a universal “woman’s experience,” seem to epitomize Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological celebration of painting as looking toward the “secret and feverish genesis of things in our body” (p.167). Contextualized within contemporaneous feminist thought, such cunt/womb pictures project “woman” as originary -- a highly charged political act in the 1970s - even as they encourage all viewers to recognize themselves as embodied in particular, gender-specific ways. Poignantly, these were to be the last images of Wilding’s career to produce feminine subjectivity as fantasized essential origin of (pro)creative power.

Wounds

After a decade and a half of work in radio, personal research in the areas of feminist theory and visual culture, and continuing experiments in exploring embodied experience in paint, in 1996 Wilding updated the cunt in *Wall of Wounds*, manipulating its seeping weeping fleshy contours to produce it as a signifier of human wounding in general (that is, the “lack” of female genital anatomy now comes to signify the “lack” structurally inherent to all subjects, also reflecting the yen for victimhood that seems to motivate the current rage for talkshow self-revelation).¹² One hundred flaps of translucent skin/paper flutter against the support of the gallery wall, butterflies grotesquely stuck to its surface by pushpins. Each flap carries with it a depthless “wound,” a symmetrical Rorschach blob of throbbing color; each is modified with brush and pen and labelled in its particular woundedness: phallic wound, self-inflicted wound, nomadic wound.

Turning from the gaze of the speculum (the primary tool of bodily exploration in early 1970s feminist consciousness raising groups) to the endoscopic vision of new imaging technologies, Wilding’s wounds begin to open the feminine flesh out onto the world; they turn the cunt/womb into an invaded, ideologically determined space, denaturalizing its supposed authenticity as originary site of human life. Lack is made present: *Haptic Wound*, touchable skin of the legs spread wide, anus and cunt lined in blue (like a cerebral section inverted); *Virtual Wound*, with its vaginal lip-print oval surrounding yawning hungry aperture rimmed in brown. With each wound for sale at the



Faith Wilding *Wall of Wounds* (1996) Courtesy of artist
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reasonable price of \$15, each is also obtainable as commodity (“Get your wound here cheap, only \$15!.... Imagine! your own wallet-sized wound’¹³).

The *Haptic Wound* poses itself in opposition to the optic regime of the “World Picture,” insisting on image as skin as body as world. The *Virtual Wound* interrogates the flesh technology that instrumentalizes the body by submitting it to the controlling vision of medical imaging. It is no accident that the visualization of uterine space is the exemplary enactment of the flesh machine’s rationalization of flesh.¹⁴ Wilding’s en fleshed cunt/womb/wounds de-authenticate the mother/painter, pointing to all subjects as fully embodied yet ideologically invested – to all flesh as determined in and through the various instrumentalizing logics of technology.

Armored Bodies

In several series of works produced from the early to mid 1990s, Wilding deployed the visual aggression of collage to construct monstrous fragmented animal/human/machine bodies that extend her engagement and interrogation of the flesh machine. In the small scale watercolor and collage *Recombinants*, which she has described as producing the body as ‘an uneasy, monstrous depository of melancholic historical fragments expressed as animal, human, organic, and machine parts,’ Wilding literalizes and exaggerates the threatening hideousness of bodily fluids and orifices that her early 1970s cunt images had aestheticized.¹⁵ Monstrosity is now celebrated rather than refused; fragmentation (the resulting explosion of bodies by flesh machine technologies) is proposed as potentially liberating rather than only inevitably castrating.

In one *Recombinant* (1995), for example, a pinheaded woman ensconced in heavy chest armor rides a grotesque beast that is apparently part horse, part armored man. Holding flaccid reins in one hand and an ineffectually short whip in the other, she makes a ludicrous attempt to ride side-saddle -- a “feminine” pose that hardly ameliorates the masculinization of her armored torso. She must pretend to be oblivious to the phallic pipe that, jutting out from the horse/man’s lower body, makes a feeble attempt to act as a leg.

Larger series, such as *War Subjects* (also produced in 1995), present life-sized monstrous bodies that are weirdly androgynous or hermaphroditic. In one *War Subject*, for example, two elongated, limp bodies compete for painterly space. On the left a translucent white body rimmed with collaged armored feet (which look like rows of bullets) is truly grotesque - acephalic, it consists of a male and a female torso joined at the upper chest; on the right, a body of clotted red paint,



Faith Wilding *Recombinant*
(1995) Courtesy of artist

with the head of a flayed rabbit, hangs upside down. Both bodies are deformed but also eerily appealing: color-as-flesh engages in a saturated dance with linear contour. In Wilding's terms, these perverse bodies are 'both beautiful and strange' with beauty used 'as a terrorist tactic rather than an end in itself.

These recombinant bodies all engage the viewer through fascination (horror) and fleshy erotic appeal (beauty) -- both asserting visual pleasure as a kind of "terrorist" regime that can nonetheless be highly enjoyable and productive for feminist viewers and makers of art and highlighting the rationalization of flesh in contemporary life. Although it may seem oxymoronic to comment upon the effects of high technology with resolutely modernist and pre-modernist media (collage and painting, respectively), the result of this aesthetic trick is to engage us bodily: while collage enacts the fragmentation of the Pancapitalist regime in its stuttering forms (here, dislocated body parts), per Merleau-Ponty, painting 'offers to our sight [regard]... the inward traces of [a profoundly embodied] vision, and... offers to vision its inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real.'¹⁷



Faith Wilding *War Subjects*
(1995) Courtesy of artist

In the case of Wilding's recombinant body images, painting replicates the ideological formation of the "real" (our bodies) through the flesh machine. At the same time, these enfleshed paintings become what we might call 'counter flesh machines': part of the network of bodily production, painting -- in its linking of the imaginary and the real, of ideology and its political and economic effects -- can be mobilized to renegotiate the 'political and economic frontiers of flesh products and services.'¹⁸

Techno-Embryos

Sustaining her career-long intensification of painterly color and line as themselves technologies of flesh, Wilding's *Embryoworld* project synthesizes the concerns of her early and mid-career work. Like the *Wall of Wounds*, *Embryoworld* is about bodies constructed (wounded) through scientific modes of bodily visualization and (re)production - this time, specifically those technologies mobilized in support of assisted conception (sonogram technologies, IVF, and so on). *Embryoworld* marks Wilding's full entry into the cyberfeminist project.

The 1997 *Embryoworld* installation at The Art Gallery, University of Maryland, College Park played off of the delightfully skin-like flaps of *Wall of Wounds*.¹⁹ In *Embryoworld* the translucent paper/skin flaps are saturated once again with symmetrical organic shapes in jewel colors that, in their viscous and damp



Faith Wilding: Left to right images from the series *Embryoworld 1997: Male failure, Self-surveilling Embryo, Vaginic embryo*. Courtesy of artist

appearance, appear to slip and slide over the paper/skin surface like the stains of bodily fluids.²⁰ This time, the womb/cunt shapes are embellished with line drawings of primordial monstrous creatures from pre-modern scientific texts and of various visualizing and medical tools applied in assisted conception technologies. As with *Wall of Wounds*, each line drawing is hand labelled so that it looks all the more like it comes from a medical textbook; the thirty-two images (ranging from an ironized ‘Natural Embryo’ grown from a donor egg to ‘Monstrous’ and ‘Artificial’ embryos of all kinds) are loosely pinned to the wall in two circular formations on either side of a long, vertical scroll-like painting on tissue covered with biomorphic designs and central Rorschach-like colored forms. Viewed overall, the constellation of images itself becomes either a gigantic penis with testicles or a blossoming of multiple central core images.

The individual flaps of “skin” are thus both saturated with leaking fluid and inscribed with medicalized bodies and terms related to assisted conception: ‘Selective Reduction Embryo’ (where a cool blue top merges into a bloody red flowering below which highlights a symmetrical womb, one side of which has a healthy embryo, the other of which is undergoing a “selective reduction” abortion); frighteningly grotesque ‘Image-Tech’, ‘Telepresent’, and ‘Self-Surveilling’ embryos -- replete with their own viewing apparatuses, which obtrude from their very flesh, and weird bodily deformities that surrealistically interrupt the fruit-like organicism of the underlying Rorschach forms.²¹ The womb is marked as highly technologized (and not necessarily originary) site of embryo life, while a series of embryos documenting ‘male failure’ documents the crude asymmetry of diseased male genitalia (such as the penis suffering from ‘strangulation (paraphimosis)’).

Each tiny picture resonates with our own flesh as we experience it from the “inside” (feeling the saturated colors as our own secreted bodily fluids) as well as from the “outside” (becoming aware of its medical inscriptions). At the same time, the inscriptions are inherent to the fabric of flesh just as the fluids are given meaning from the outside. It is reproductive technologies that define our (especially women’s)

flesh as invaded, commodified, and eugenically inflected, marking the extent to which upper-middle class couples (those with access to these technologies, which are largely not covered by insurance) increasingly attempt to control the number, gender, and/or genetic profile of our offspring.²²

Wilding's embryos show us, retroactively, that her cunts were always already socialized -- never the seemingly authentic marks of female experience that they seem to have wanted to be. The cunts, so speaks her Wall of Wounds, are culturally determined metaphors of human lack; the embryos markers not of the authentic beauty of human conception, but of its artifice and monstrosity as its siphoning through technology is made increasingly obvious. Conception and birth have never been "natural," a fact that is more and more at the forefront of reproductive discourse. The embryo -- made through recent legislation into a full subject, with greater rights than the woman who houses it -- is rendered as highly technologized flesh.²³

Endless Work....

In a performative lecture entitled *Duration Performance: The Economy of Feminized Maintenance Work* and executed on May 19, 1998 at Ars Electronica Centre, Linz, Austria, Wilding returns to the themes raised in earlier projects with a renewed and passionate activist inflection. Like *Waiting*, *Duration Performance* reiterates the monotony of women's experience (in particular here, with regard to women's work) to make a point about the everyday effects of the Pancapitalist economy in relation to a woman's place in the public and private arenas. *Duration Performance* opens with Wilding, dressed in a girlish waitress outfit, apron, starched collar and all, typing furiously at a computer work station; she then stops and reads a litany of topics ('This is a story about endless work.... This is a story about the laboring female body in the invisible feminine economy of production and reproduction. This is a story about repetition, boredom, exhaustion, stress, crashes...'), speaking into a secretarial mic, as a loop of terms related to women's labor ('clean, wash, dust, wring... shop, phone, drive... cut, sweep, paste, insert, format...') is projected onto a large screen.



Faith Wilding images from *Duration Performance* (1998) left and below.
Courtesy of artist



The description of Wilding's "story" complete, she then moves to a lecture podium and begins a lecture accompanied by computer-generated images (including photographs documenting Wilding's own *Waiting* and formative 1970s "maintenance" performances of women's work by members of the Feminist Art Program and Mierle Ukeles). The lecture describes the position of working women in the high tech contemporary world, where computer automation has facilitated the growth of low-paying data entry jobs for women, has sustained the gendered division of labor, and has produced "electronic joblessness." Wilding calls polemically for an activist cyberfeminist approach to these problems -- arguing that feminists must make visible how the deployment of information technology is 'affecting the restructuring of work and the loss of jobs' in the worldwide Pancapitalist regime and revaluing 'the human work of family care-giving that is vital to the productive lives of all human beings.'

Wilding's *Duration Performance* thus returns to the themes of women's experience (including women's work domestically and otherwise) but with a new cyber-twist: women's experience is now "wired women's experience" with a consciousness of how differences in socio-economic status, race, and sexuality are produced and negotiated by and through new technologies (flesh machines and otherwise). Crucially, Wilding calls for an extension of "past liberation movements"; as one of the central figures of second-wave feminist art discourse, she is powerfully positioned to move feminism into a new -- highly technologized and poststructuralist -- feminist point of view in the third wave.²⁴

It is shocking proof of the continuing sexism of the art world that an artist as crucial to the development of a foundational component of contemporary art and art discourse such as Wilding has not been given her due in terms of critical and institutional visibility.²⁵ This has something to do with the fact that Wilding has resisted responding directly to the feminist polemic of the "male gaze" that became hegemonic in the 1980s; it also relates to her continual development and the resistance of her work to being easily categorized as well as to her particular positioning at the cutting edge of cyberfeminism (the existence of which the art world has not yet acknowledged). Paradoxically, the importance of this work lies at least in part in its radical refusal to fit into any of the roving categories (feminist body art; postfeminist art; postconceptual art; etc.) which the art world mobilizes to make sense of our visual environment and with which it, simultaneously, closes down the ambiguity of hybrid work such as Wilding's.

This essay in this sense transgresses the subversive potential of Wilding's practice by attempting to historicize it and integrate it into existing narratives about body-oriented art work in the 1990s. By arguing that the sucking drains of Robert Gober's sinks and the yawning vaginal jaws of Cindy Sherman's sex-toy portraits could be viewed more profoundly for their alignment with the sex simmering holes of Wilding's earlier womb/cunts, the shitting, victimized abject

bodies of Kiki Smith or Sue Williams for the thread they cast back to the pathetically passive figure of Wilding's *Waiting....*, in one sense I am performing just the kind of categorization that this maverick artist has continually resisted. I am willing to take this risk if it ensures a wider appreciation of this wildly pleasurable and conceptually compelling work and the embodied (enfleshing) visual experience it engenders. Wilding's body of work, returning to Merleau-Ponty, 'opens upon a texture of Being' in our Pancapitalist world of highly technologized machinic maps conditioning our experience of self and other.²⁶ This texture, whether rendered in watercolor and pen or through performance, is dense and fully engages our flesh beyond the simplistic politics of the seemingly disembodied "male gaze" that came to dominate feminist art theory from the mid 1970s into the 1990s. Examining the visualizing and communications technologies that extend but also subtend us, Wilding's fabulous, recombinant, monstrous bodies and viscous, puckered vulvae acknowledge but also productively negotiate the effects of the flesh machine on our contemporary experience.

Notes

1. Critical Art Ensemble (with a contribution by Faith Wilding), *Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1998), see 4-5. On the mandate of the CAE see their essay 'Observations on Collective Cultural Activism' *Art Journal* 57, no. 2 (Summer 1998) pp. 72-85.
2. Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright, and Constance Penley 'Introduction' in Treichler, Cartwright, and Penley (eds.) *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, Science* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) p. 3; the authors also write of the 'performative character' of imaging technologies in their 'role as a staging ground for struggles over agency and control' and of the predominant use of these technologies in visualizing the female reproductive body.
3. On *Womanhouse*, see Wilding's own account in her book *By Our Own Hands: The Women Artist's Movement Southern California 1970-1976* (Santa Monica, California: Double X, 1977) pp. 25-29, Judy Chicago 'Womanhouse/Performances' in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 112-132, and Arlene Raven's 'Womanhouse' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.) *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 48-65. Chicago's book also includes the text for *Waiting*, which was first published in *Ms. magazine* in December, 1973; see *Through the Flower* pp. 213-17. A film clip of Wilding performing *Waiting* is included in Joanna Demetrakas's movie *Womanhouse*.
4. Of note in this regard is Wilding's participation in the recent exhibitions, including *Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995), and my *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum, 1996), and in conferences including the first *Cyber feminist International* in conjunction with *Documenta* (1997) (see documentation Old Boys Network online) and 'The F Word

conference on feminism and art' at California Institute of the Arts in October 1998.

5. See her accounts of the Feminist Art Program in *By Our Own Hands* and in 'The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970-1975' in *The Power of Feminist Art* pp. 32-47. Judy Chicago was the initial creator of the FAP and theorized and produced a great deal of "central core" imagery during the late 1960s and early 1970s. See my account of this in 'The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context' in Amelia Jones (ed) *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press and Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1996).

6. Vivian Sobchack, "'Is Any Body Home?': Embodied Imagination and Visible Evictions' *ms* January 1997; a shorter version of this text will appear in Hamid Naficy (ed) *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

7. On the essence of modernist painting as flatness and anti-literariness see Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), reprinted in John O'Brian (ed.) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) pp. 85-93.

8. Ibid. See also Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture,' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) pp. 115-154.

9. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' (1961), tr. Carleton Dallery, in James Edie (ed.) *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 175, 162.

10. Ibid. p. 169. On the pleasurable political potential of feminist painting see also Mira Schor's 'The Erotics of Visuality' in *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) pp. 165-169.

11. In relation to this conjunction of terms, Marcel Duchamp's 1949 statement 'The artist is only the mother [of the artwork]...' resonates interestingly; see my discussion of this phrase in *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 146-47.

12. Of the *Wall of Wounds*, Wilding has written: 'Show your wound! is an imperative which seems to be the motivation fueling TV and radio's talk-show entertainment across America today. We have revised Descartes: I hurt, therefore I am. Victimhood is the new privileged status for consumers. It gives everyone an edge. Wounds as entertainment: pain as pastime and spectacle; a perfect foil for genuine economic, social and personal trauma' in 'Wounded Painting/Painted Wounds' *New Observations* 113 (Winter 1996) p. 27.

13. The *Wall of Wounds* was produced for the exhibition I co-organized with Laura Meyer at the U.C. Riverside Sweaney Art Gallery in the spring of 1996; all 100 of the wounds were sold before the closing of the show.

14. CAE makes note of this point in *Flesh Machine*, 68 p. 57.

15. Wilding, unpublished 'Artist's Statement'.

16. Ibid. This particular attention to the political potential of the "beautiful" counters the current reactionary discourse of beauty taking hold in Los Angeles and spreading nationally and internationally through the texts of Dave Hickey and criticism published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Artissues*.

17. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' p.165.

18. CAE, *Flesh Machine* pp. 4-5.

19. Included in the installation at College Park were two additional components: a group of patient applications for IVF and pedigree charts and, subtitled 'Body and Soul' two flasks on a shelf, each of which held red or green ink, connected by a swag of fabric slowly absorbing the colored fluid. See Kimberly Gladfelter 'Faith Wilding' in *Terra Firma* (College Park, MD: The Art Gallery, 1997) p. 16. I am indebted to this essay for explaining the installation in full as I did not view it.

20. There are predecessors to this rendering of the body-as-trace through its stains, from Marcel Duchamp's 1946 semen stained *Paysage Fautif* (made for a unique edition of his *Boîte-en-valise*) to Andy Warhol's piss (or "Oxidation") paintings from 1978 and Charles LaBelle's 1990s floating fields of bodily fluids, with hyperbolic labels crossing the abject and the high Romantic (in one such image, what looks to be spit is labelled "Mallarmé," cum, "Rimbaud," blood, "Baudelaire," and urine, "Verlaine"). On the possible symbolic ramifications of such displays of the body's abject substances see Helen Molesworth 'Before Bed' *October* 63 (Winter, 1993) pp. 69-82.

21. This kind of organic imagery bears a strong connection to much of the second-wave Surrealist work from the 1940s and 1950s. See, for example, Helen Lundberg's *Plant and Animal Analogies*, 1934; reproduced in Susan Ehrlich (ed.) *Pacific Dreams: Currents of Surrealism and Fantasy in California Art, 1934-1957* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1995), color plate 2.

22. See CAE 'Observations on Collective Cultural Activism' p. 79.

23. The key legislative moment for the anti-choice movement were the 1981 determinations on the part of Congress and the Senate Judiciary Committee of the embryo/fetus as a person from conception (the fetus technically developing from an embryo at around eight weeks). See Valerie Hartouni *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and Carol Stabile 'Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance' in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, Science* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) pp. 171-197.

24. Sadly, until very recently younger artists (other than those who have studied with Wilding at her various teaching jobs in New York and Pittsburgh) know little of Wilding's - or other early second-wave feminist artists' - artwork and theory, since these have largely been excluded from histories of contemporary art. The most egregious specific examples of this strategic forgetting include the 1987-88 catalogue and exhibition celebrating the history of California Institute of the Arts CalArts *Skeptical Beliefs* (organized by Susanne Ghez of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago but also overseen by Paul Schimmel at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California), which almost completely excludes the Feminist Art Program (it is mentioned in passing only once - in Catherine Lord's essay) and the more recent show and catalogue *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (organized, not incidentally, by Paul Schimmel for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1998), which completely excludes the ground-breaking performances of the FAP.

25. While recent exhibitions and books historicizing feminist art, such as my *Sexual Politics*, the *Division of Labor* show and catalogue and the anthology *The Power of Feminist Art*, have included

Wilding's work along with art by other women associated with the early 1970s feminist art movement, mainstream histories of contemporary art continue to erase this particular kind of work, which is not easily recuperable into masculinist theoretical paradigms (as, one could argue, much of the feminist work lauded in the 1980s - by artists from Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman to Lorna Simpson - was institutionalized in ways that deflated its feminist polemics). By mainstream, I mean not smaller regional or university galleries such as the Bronx Museum of Art or the UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum (which hosted, respectively, Division of Labor and Sexual Politics) but museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art, and Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art (per the latter's strategic repression of 1970s feminism in the show *Out of Actions*, previous note).

26. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' p. 166.

For full documentation of Faith Wilding's work and lectures, visit Faith Wilding's website

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n.paradoxa : Issue No. 10, 1999

Research on the Male Muse Forschung nach Mannlicher Muse

Yvonne Trapp

Dear Reader

Since 1992 we have been asking people from various fields about the existence of a Male Muse. Please participate in our research: share with us your professional knowledge or personal observations (please include-if at hand-documents, photos, texts etc.). Have you ever heard of a Male Muse? How would you envisage a Male Muse? Your answers will be compiled in the next edition of the R.M.M. bulletin. We would be pleased to hear from you soon.

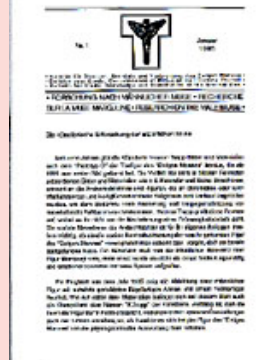
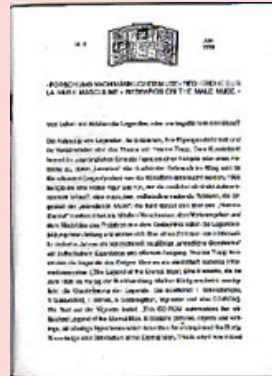
Yours sincerely

Yvonne Trapp

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n.paradoxa online issue no.10 June 1999





Or email your suggestions to n.paradoxa on the subject: Yvonne Trapp / RMM

INFORMATION CENTER RESEARCH ON THE MALE MUSE

The information center Research on the Male Muse was opened in 1993 in Paris at the Claire Burrus Gallery (Temporary Office) and from that moment on hundreds of letters in many languages were distributed or sent by post and interviews were made in bookshops (Walther König, Frankfurt 1994), on art fairs (Art Frankfurt 1996, art forum berlin 1997), during exhibitions (Marshall, Berlin 1998) in the street or published in magazines (Frankfurter Rundschau 1994, Kunstforum Bd.133, 1996/ Bd.135, 1997). 3 issues have already been published containing all contributions we received until now (texts, pictures and sound):

- * Bulletin #1 Research on the Male Muse", 48 pages, Paris 1996
- * Bulletin #2 Research on the Male Muse, 60 pages, Berlin 1998
- * CD #3 Research on the Male Muse, 74 min., Berlin 1998 (with contributions from Marietta Franke, Annette Tietenberg, Christian Boltanski, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Chris Dercon, Ralph Dutli, Der Bischof von Mainz, Rolf e. Münch, Jean-René Gaborit, Barbara Straka...)

TEMPTATION / ATTEMPT

"In front of the entry of Art Cologne 1998 we distributed 400 apples. On each apple was attached an etiquette "To be eaten or to be bartered for an image". People decided to bite into the apple or enter the art fair looking for the booth of a gallery where they could exchange their apple for a picture"

Taken from contributions published in the bulletins "Research on the Male Muse".



Courtesy Galerie M+R Fricke

THE LEGEND OF THE ETERNAL MAN

"THE LEGEND OF THE ETERNAL MAN" Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln 1998

This CD-ROM summarises the unfinished Legend of the Eternal Man. It contains pictures, objects and writings, all offering hypotheses which have thus far underpinned the Study, Knowledge and Distribution of the Eternal Man. 'This is



why I now intend to leave him to his conjectural fate, casting him bottle-like into the sea. In so doing, I make the wish that the bottle be tossed by as many possible languages as there are conflicting waves on the ocean of human rumour,' states artist Yvonne Trapp. (Text from a vignette in the edition).

CENTER OF THE MUSEUM OF DISAPPEARANCE

The Museum of Disappearance is another variation of the artistic project *Study, Knowledge and Distribution of the Eternal Man* (since 1985), which has unfolded panorama of communication by producing small multiples/images, a celebration calendar, giving away-actions, bulletins etc. Alongside its (psychological) content male muse/eternal man (Meret Oppenheim, C.G. Jung), Yvonne Trapp is working on the appearance of images in everyday situations (streets, exhibitions etc.). The Museum of Disappearance is dedicated to the transformation of the content male muse/eternal man into a conceptual expression, that Trapp calls Exposition-Disparition. The Museum of Disappearance was launched by the event/action *The Fall*. After a line of administrative complications, it took place on the 16th of July 1998 and was planned to make a wooden box covered with a copper surface sink by throwing it down from a helicopter into the waters of the Wannsee. Although the box had been covered with drillholes, it did not sink. The video, also entitled *The Fall*, shows the key images of the unexpected development of the action and the reaction of the artist (both her surprise and her mourning). To show its conceptual character, the Museum of Disappearance exists as a drawing (*disegno*). One of its imaginative drawings could contain the action and its continuation in the form of a video and a poster (BüroFriedrich production #2). Nothing is preserved but everything remains "open ended" (Yvonne Trapp).



ON THE MEADOW

Marietta Franke

{dejeuner}Communiqué: Since Sunday, 4th of April 1999 Yvonne Trapp invites to *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and spends the morning or the afternoon with her guests on the meadow. The location is in south-west direction, not far from Castle Solitude near the apple trees. From time to time, drinks and simple meals were served. The content and the run of these meetings till now stay in secret, but could be transmitted in the near future through new-fangled technology to all who cannot be on the scene. One thing is certain: the guests come from different countries for that very purpose to the meadow. In this intimate environment (both private and public) Yvonne Trapp meets people from various fields to chat about the male representation today and about the issue of the model:



- * The model as a person in painting/ sculpture/ photography
- * The model as a person in advertising/ fashion/ magazines (for ex. pornography)
- * The model as an article of clothing
- * The thinking-model
- * The model as a mould
- * The model as example/ pattern/ type/ design/ sample/ a model in architecture/ prototype

It is intended that every guest leaves a trace (whatever it is) of their presence. "Déjeuner sur l'herbe" is supported by Akademie Schloß Solitude, Stuttgart.

Email your suggestions to n.paradoxa on the subject of the male muse:
Yvonne Trapp / RMM

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n.paradoxa : Issue No. 10, June 1999

The Anatomy of Reality: Duba Sambolec

Leonida Kovac

During the course of the 1990s Duba Sambolec has exhibited six installations under the common title of Interscapes. What is it that she does? Through positioning certain objects within a specific architecture she demands the reception of the position of both the objects and the observer, as well as the mutual relations of those positions. Interscape is neither an ambience nor a place; Interscape is not a void within which objects are arranged. Rather, it is a space of interaction in which the existence of a network of various relations becomes apparent. Where definitions of space and identity are concerned, Interscape is a slippery area.

According to Foucault, space in our epoch imposes itself in the form of relations between positions. Today, a position that is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements has been replaced by an extendability which itself superseeds placement. Despite all the techniques that exist for the appropriation of space, despite the whole structure of knowledge that allows us to enclose it or formalise it, it could be that contemporary space has not as yet been wholly secularised. Therefore, a certain number of still inviolable opposites, which our institutions and practices have not had the courage to destroy, could still be ruling our lives. Those opposites are the ones we regard as plain givenness: for example, the opposite between a private and a public space, a family and a social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space for play and the space for work. They are all nurtured by the obscured presence of the sacrosanct.¹

The emergence of Interscapes was preceded by an exhibition that the author staged in the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana in 1988 entitled *Uneasiness in Space*. I am inclined to recognise the field of reference of that title in Freud's study Culture

and its Discontents in which, among other things, he talks about the process of establishment of internal-external relations and about the pleasure principle which, from the very beginning, ruled the functioning of the psychic apparatus but which is impossible to implement because its programme is in conflict with the entire world - in both macro and microcosm..²To paraphrase Freud, the cultural element appears at the moment of the first attempt to bring order to social relations. Communal life for people becomes possible only when a majority gathers that is stronger than any individual and which is united against every individual. The essence lies in limiting possibilities for pleasure to the members of the community. Personal freedom is not a product of culture.³

I am interested in the cross-section where the concepts of space and culture interfere with each other. Space appears as a effect of culture, and culture - being the totality of social practices - structures that space, manifesting itself in laying down limitations in territorialisation procedures: in measuring, separation, counter-positioning, exclusion, identification, classification and designation.

Interscape I and *Interscape II*, in which Duba Sambolec concentrates on light and its reflections as her subject of interest, were set up as a solid structure. Their appearance explicitly signifies a territory defined by light sources and reflective surfaces, thereby demonstrating the possibilities of positioning a subject either within it or towards it. Neon tubes and rectangular plates of brass structure the space of the room in which they are placed, and the emerging structure excludes the possibility of unhindered movement on the part of the observer. The positioning of the lights defines those places that should not be stepped upon. Paradoxically, the very places that are the sources of the process of lighting are those which represent the obstacle to one's walking, one's freedom to select one's own position. It is within such a relationship, between light and a living body in which movement is immanent, that the space of exclusion appears. A living body can move only outside the structure, because its lines of force reject it, thus making its position ex-territorial.

The culture in which we live is based on the traditions of European Enlightenment whose discursive space is defined by a system of binary oppositions. One of these is internal-external. According to the logic of enlightenment, nothing must remain outside, since the mere concept of externality is itself a genuine source of fear. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment is but mythical fear merely radicalised, while its final product - sheer immanence of positivism - is nothing less than a universal taboo.⁴In other words, the external position is the tabooed position, the position of absence from language. The non-existent.

Instead of structure, *Interscape III* offers topography. In the exhibition hall four places are marked by different objects, the only common denominator between them being the vertical direction in which they extend. It is this identical direction in which the different extends that disrupts the binary opposition within the system of Cartesian spatial co-ordinates. Links between those different positions are not

indicated. On the contrary, the set-up insists upon mutual distance. Here, however, we are not dealing with the distance that is a precondition for the establishment of a perspective. Cognition of space is not based upon ocularcentric perception, since the positioning of the observer within the process of perception of objects deprives one of the possibility of constructing an image on the basis of having observed the space in its entirety. It is not possible to identify the properties of an object from a distance - from a point that enables us to capture the entirety with our gaze, those properties are manifested in counter-positioning. In *Interscape III* we find a torsioned corner constructed from neon tubes, a ladder (on which rise three heavy rectangular reflective brass plates), a tall post of white paraffin wax, profiled stepwise, and a post-cum glass showcase. Exhibited on the latter's shelves are red pigment, a pair of gloves, the book *Intimate Drawings of D.S.*, open at a page entitled 'Absence-Presence', showing the soles of the author's feet imprinted into the golden colour of the page, and hair. Fetishes?

In deconstructing the rhetoric of Modernism, Rosalind Krauss arrives at the conclusion that Modernism imagines two orders of the figure. The first is that of empirical vision, the object as it is "seen", the object bounded by its contours, the object modernism spurns. The second is that of the formal conditions of possibility for vision itself, the level at which "pure" form operates as a principle of co-ordination, unity, structure: visible but unseen. That is the level that modernism wants to chart, to capture, to master. But there is a third order of the figure, one that Jean François Lyotard has decided to call matrix. Psychoanalysis's space, the space of the unconscious, he comes to realise, disdains this fundamental notion of the co-ordinates of the real. In defiance of all probability it allows two, or three, or five things to be in the same place in the same time. And these things are themselves utterly heteroclitic, not variations on one another but things in total opposition.

This "space" is therefore quite literally unimaginable: a congealed block of contradictions. Not a function of the visible, it can only be intuited through the projection of various "figures" that surface from the depths of this "space": the slip of the tongue, the daydream, the fantasy. To this medium, lying below the level of the visible, he gives the name matrix, and he begins to follow its activity, which he recognises as the production not of the gestalt but of bad form, the activity through which form is in fact transgressed.⁵

Interscape is a space that appears as a result of actions aimed at obstructing the formal conditions of vision, in the course of a process of constant transgression of form where the effectiveness of matrix becomes evident. For the matrix is in radical rupture with the rules of opposition. It is its characteristic to have many places in one place, and they block together what is logically incompatible. This is the secret of the figural: the transgression of the constitutive intervals of discourse, and the transgression of the constitutive distance of representation.⁶

What happens with 'constitutive distance of representation' in the works of Duba

Sambolec? *Interscape IV* is space established through relations between objects that singly represent perspective, or rather, the vanishing point inherent in the perspectival way of observing things. Thus, the structure of perspective viewing itself becomes that which has been given to the gaze. Three times over. However, the transgression of form, the ineffectualness of the principles of co-ordination, i.e., the by-passing of structure, deny one's eye a position from which perspective would construct spatial integrity by making the appropriation of space possible. Each of the perspectives, represented and materialised by the sheer weight of the objects in question, becomes recognisable from different positions. The vanishing point, cultural-logically regarded as a goal of vision, is represented three times. Once, through a light corner constructed from neon tubes, a second time by steel netting formed into a horn attached to which are horses' tails - a simulacrum of hair, and the third time by a row of lead tables positioned along the same longitudinal axis and which become proportionately smaller. Movement, aimed at identifying the goal of vision, reveals three different positions of the vanishing point. In which direction?

'Perspectiva' is a Latin word that means "seeing through". In early use, perspective was a term applied to various optical devices, but it also came to mean the art of delineating solid objects upon a plain surface so that a drawing produces the same impression of apparent relative positions, magnitudes, and distance as do the "actual" objects when viewed from a particular point. Perspective, then, is reproduction of the "actual", but it is also construction of the real - a delineation, through representation, of the defining characteristics of "actuality" as relative to and marked by distance - distance as marked from an unremarked, unseen viewer. The visual pyramid on which all classical perspective is built is a geometry, after all, by which the lines of sight and lines of light are absolutely co-ordinated, a co-ordination that produces the identity (in mirror) between the vanishing point within the picture and the viewing point within the eye. Where the receding parallel lines appear to meet is the vanishing point - and at that point, geometrically, is in exact proportion to the point of the viewing eye - an eye, importantly, outside the field of its own vision.

Interscape IV dislocates the viewing eye and positions it in the field of its own vision. Thus, the three times over materialised structure of perspective viewing eliminates the distance - which is the fundamental precondition for perspective viewing to be possible. The internal becomes the external, in the same place and at the same time.

It is necessary to stress the hidden assumptions of perspective: within the patriarchal economy of meaning, within, that is, the symbolic order of modernity, perspective, like the worldview to which it gives symbolic form, is deeply gendered. Within the terms of that order, the seeing eye is unseen. Its gaze penetrates a scopic field marked by distance. That gaze is rendered active, phallic, and it is a subject to and constituted by propriety of and anxiety about space. That which is seen is,

simultaneously, that which can never fully be seen. The scopic field lays before the gaze but as secret(e)s within it, a point of vanishing, a mirror of the viewer's own view by which access of the field meets the black hole of infinite inaccessibility. That which is given to be seen, is rendered passive, feminised, made into an object of phallic (gaze) penetration, yet it remains infinitely inaccessible.⁷ These legacies of perspectival ways of seeing have erected the female body as Prime Signifier of the Vanishing Point.⁸

Duba Sambolec has named her *Interscape V* installation *The Black Mirror*. The black mirror is represented three times. A black rubber sheet is stretched across a tilted, oval-shaped construction, but not in a neat fashion. It falls over the edges that define the oval form; at the front it spills over like a stain, while at the back it functions as a curtain which hides and reveals horses' tails - a simulacrum of hair beneath the mirror construction. Every mirror faces in a different direction, while the light - a *sine qua non* for the process of reflection - is located below the level of the smooth rubber surface. Directions of light are defined by neon tubes positioned on the floor. At the considerable mutual distance, removed from the mirrors and the sources of light, are three chairs so tall that they almost reach the ceiling, each facing in a different direction - but never in the direction of the incline of the mirrors. Their unreal height, combined with their relation towards the black mirrors and the direction of the sources of light, denote an impossible position. A mirror whose surface does not reflect, a light whose position cannot bring about a reflection, a viewing position that is unattainable. And a fetish on the other side of the mirror.

What is it, and where is that which is "given to be seen" in *Interscape*? The black mirror is offered to be touched. Mimicry of the body? Daring one to touch the surface and to realise that there is something other beneath the surface, something intimidating in its palpability. Internal or external? For the mirror is that which, according to psychoanalytical theory, establishes the internal-external relation, the presence-absence relation, which, by imposing a social identity of the subject, defines the positions of existence or non-existence in the language. The position of activity is counter-positioned by the position of passivity, the gaze is counter-positioned by what has been "given to be seen", thus defining the extension of the concept of primary loss whose signifier becomes the vanishing point inherent to the perspective. The mirror is a precondition for the establishment of a symbolic order that defines the divided zones and installs a hierarchy of their meaning.

The strategy of mimicry of the body - the position of which, in the tradition of Modernism, has been signified by the syntagm 'given to be seen', or has, if you will, been explicated by the cult around *Etant donnés* by Duchamp - is manifested by the syntax of the language of Modernism being focused, in the materialisation of structure of Modernistic representation. Through mimicry a body has been given to be seen and to be brought to a state of awareness.

With the manner of representation of the basic binary opposition of light-

darkness, denoted by its title *Day - Night*, the double installation *Interscape VI* desacralises the category of space, ignoring the cultural order of sense and demanding a redefinition of the concept of reality. *Interscape VI - Night* is a hyper-bright installation. The places are marked by three tall, massive columns made from white paraffin wax, while a multitude of directions is indicated by the white horizontals of neon tubes which, being elevated from the floor, appear to be floating in the air, criss-crossing the view. Three brass ladders, located in different positions, do not point upwards, but are resting against the floor supported by props of uneven heights, thereby demonstrating their own dysfunctionality. Ascent is not possible. The columns - surrogates of a body, tall, heavy and soft - carry their own torsion. Repetition of objects plays with one's visual perception - the near is once again distant.

I am inclined to regard *Interscape VI - Day* as the representation of the anatomy of reality, through the bypassing of the co-ordinates of the real by modelling "realistic figures", in their positioning and an insistence on mutual (non)relations. At the end of the millennium, in a period where the concept of humanism has become transparent, this space - within which a body is represented concurrently in three different ranges - erases perspective so as to allow the activity of the surrogate iconography to become visible; beneath the ultra-violet light. Post festum. In order to allow the process of metamorphosis of specific bodies into a "human figure" to become evident. Within the field of art that is only one in the never-ending grid of social practices. A virus.

Between *Interscape VI - Night* and *Interscape VI - Day* there exists nothing. That's right, it exists. A material, physical, corporeal nothing, that is not a synonym for nothingness. It is there in the narrow, white corridor separating the zone of night from the zone of day, between motion and immobility, between space and the area where there is no space, between being and non-being. Between volition and waiting.

Interscape VI - Day is a statement the meaning of which is not defined by form but by the time needed to comprehend that form, the time during the course of which the unease within the space becomes active. We are speaking about three chambers, where the objects existing within them are set in relations that carry the connotation of waiting. Who is waiting, and for what? The central chamber is dominated by a high and long empty table, its surface covered with white ceramic tiles and illuminated by ultra-violet light. A houseplant in one corner. The left chamber resembles a depressing waiting room, where each of five polyester sculptures represents a female or male body in a different position. Or is it condition? Or does position equal condition? Positioned high above, on the white wall of the right chamber, is a horizontal row of five black rubber figures, their gaze overlooking all that happens in the space called *Interscape VI - Day*. Their X-ray images, functioning as a display (or rather, as a light source) are leaning against the walls in all three chambers. Visible in each of those images is one of the letters making up the word VIRUS. The position of the rubber figures (body surrogates) functions concurrently

as a border line in which there is a door leading to the narrow white corridor where a nothing exists. Nothing as a place.

At this point we encounter the concept of the unspeakable, which is immanent to Modernism. The aesthetics of Modernism being the aesthetics of the sublime - and as such it remains nostalgic. It is able to convey that which is not representable only as an absent substance, while the form - because of its perceivable consistency - offers comfort to the observer and is a cause for pleasure.⁹ The works that Duba Sambolec has entitled Interscapes having nothing in common with the aesthetics of the sublime and thus they have no need of a consistent form. That 'which is not representable' is neither an object nor an event. It is, in fact, a condition and, such as it is - unspeakable and unrepresentable - it becomes a substance present in the space of Interscape. It is not perceived through the activity of gaze, but rather it is manifested as uneasiness in space. One's own, of course.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault 'About other Spaces' Glasje No. 6 *Zadar* (1996) p.9
2. Sigmund Freud *Culture and its Discontents* (Rad, Belgrade, 1988) p.16.
3. Ibid. p.33
4. M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno *Dijalektika prosvjetiteljstva (Dialectics of Enlightenment)*. (Veselin Masleva, Sarajevo, 1974) pp.29-30.
5. Rosalind Krauss *The Optical Unconscious* (Boston: MIT press, 1994) pp.217-218.
6. Jean Francois Lyotard *Discurs, Figurs* cited from Krauss, *ibid*, p.221.
7. Rebecca Schneider *The Explicit Body in Performance* (Routledge, 1997) pp.62-63
8. *ibid* p.5
9. Jean Francois Lyotard, 'Response to the question 'What is post-modern?'' in *Postmodern: A New Epoch or a Misconception* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1988) p.242.

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Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

First week of March or thereabouts...

Nipped back to the Whitechapel and had a cappuccino with Bet after I took a really good second look at Henry Michaux. I say, Terry Frost, you are colour blind and why do you have to paint so big? It doesn't work, sweetie! But then if a man can't paint big well what does that say about the size of his paint brush !

Em is out of hospital and much better. She is really getting into her occupational therapy. Tons of wacky drawings and weird pots. I showed one to N.&D. He looked at it, then muttered something about taxpayer's money and the National Health Service. I didn't pursue it. All I care about is that she is getting better and she is the happiest I have seen her in years. She drops in once a week on her way home from occupational therapy and we have tea and cakes.

G. dropped around last night to watch some really really boring videos on artists' work. Apparently she is giving a lecture about them at the Photographers Gallery this weekend. She came to my house because she was up in town and the lecture was the next day AND she hadn't done a bit of work on the lecture yet. So we sat there and linked a few key phrases together. So much for critical art analysis !

March 17 or thereabouts

I am working on working drawings(?????) for a possible (!!!!) commission through my friend the gay vicar. It's for a glass screen that divides the sanctuary from the rest of the building which will be multi-purpose. So I have borrowed various books on Christian mythology and symbols from him to help me with my research. My neighbour, the art historian, says its called a rood screen and that great dissertations have been written on some more famous ones. I thought about that comment for a

while and decided that it wasn't meant as a put down.

However, it would be great if it did come about but there are so many pitfalls involved with commissions that one could land up going completely and prematurely grey before one's allotted time.(Whenever that is???) So I am spending more time than usual researching and drawing before a primary presentation to the Parish council of the church involved...I hate committees when it comes to making decisions about art...or any major decision for that matter. Except shopping.

I still like the idea that Saint Julian of Norwich had with her little consulting room attached to the church building. Sort of like Lucy in Peanuts. We shall see. Oh well I shall be even a more interesting bore at future dinner parties with all my new found knowledge about symbolism. Of course they are a bit thin on the ground these days ever since near and dear took up golfing. Talk about a killer as a conversation subject among the intelligentsia!

I often wonder what the artists in the Renaissance went through with the Medicis. Somehow I think Cosimo Medici was a little bit better informed about symbolism and theological ideas than the average congregation in the East End of London. However, it could be a wonderful commission and as I pointed out to the vicar my work will increase the value of their property. He gave me a very long look before he walked away.

March 27

(Back to using real time for the present. Also known as two weeks before Easter).

Went to an Opening at the Royal College of Art last night with California Pearl. The big decision in her life at the moment is whether to rent out her daughter's bedroom now that she is at college. I did point out to her that my God daughter, her little sweet pea, is graduating this year and she is planning to go to graduate school in the States next fall. So it's not that she would feel pushed out of the nest. Besides Cal.Pearl needs the extra money.

'Yes,I know. I just don't want her to feel she is being rushed.'

I said nothing as the empty nest syndrom can be a very dangerous thing if not handled properly.

At the show were all these graduates from the University of Alberta. Rooms full of my fellow country men and women have the tendency to make me go immediately anti-national. Luckily I spied my two friends from Cultural Affairs and after the customary muwph! muwph! on each cheek we got stuck into gossip. Not much really to talk about except compare our various bodily failings and different treatments. Which is very little as far as I am concerned but I am shocked to say that arthritis is a big problem among many of my acquaintances. Personally I don't have a problem but M.,who is very short and looks like a Jewish Mickey Mouse (HIS words not mine) has just had a hip replacement because of it. Well that sent Cal.Pearl off into a frenzy of medical advice and chit chat. I left and came back two drinks later to find them

still wagging on, so I said, I was going. It's depressing enough that most of your contemporaries look like prunes because they never use enough moisturiser but to then have to listen to failing bodily functions and comparative notes on the best course of action at an opening is just too much. Take me shopping any day!!!

As far as the art goes well.....The RCA print students work looks like they are trying too hard to be interesting and witty and with it. It just doesn't work. The print dept hasn't been that great for years. The work from the University of Alberta students looked like it had a bit more intellectual integrity going on in it. But just a bit. It is difficult to find it in most art works these days mind you. I found the way back to the tube without getting lost this time. G. is coming over tonight to pick up her birthday present.

Last week of March

G. loved her birthday present of a very lovely lipstick in a flash case. She whizzed in for a few nano seconds before disappearing again. She is so busy these days between her job in outer suburbia, the newest boyfriend and writing for magazines. The last is one of her newest ploys to find work in central London. I fear the suburban mind set is not to her liking.

Bet, on the other hand, is wining and dining with the best of them. I am forever getting little droppings of gossip about the gliterati of the art world that she hobnobs with these days. Especially since she will be on the the panel to chose next year's Turner prize winner. Of course this means that she has to go to every show of any importance around the country and the dinners that follow. Life is so tough for some people !

Meanwhile the "ordinary" artist in her studio plods on without any heating as I am so broke. N and D will not help me with my studio rent. He says "Sink or swim " and goes on reading the paper.

Met Cal.Pearl again at the Patrick Caulfield show to which I took my mature students. Afterwards she and I went to the National Film Institute to see *The Thin Man* one of my favourite movies of all time. The spring night was so warm that we sat on the terrace overlooking the Thames and watched London at night while sipping our cappucinos.(which are cheaper than alcohol as we are both very broke) Just gossiping and discussing who was coming over to my house for Easter Sunday lunch made everything seem so wonderful. We both wished that we could win the lottery just to go wild shopping at Harvey Nichols once more, both of us having a self-imposed exile from this shop for five years now. We cannot be responsible adults with our credit cards and cheque books once we walk in the doors of that building !

Bank holiday Monday

Everything happens at once. War breaks out in Europe with the largest exercise in ethnic cleansing since the World War II and both my cats succumb to cat flu. I

finally had a long and well over due phone call from Em's father. He was very upset that I hadn't telephoned him about the state his daughter had got herself into.

'Why didn't you phone me instead of some stranger called K?'

I groaned. K was an artist that I knew from years ago that worked with Em. He is a manic depressive and permanently on lithium but sometimes he takes himself off it. I just hoped he had been on it when he talked to her father. As to why she had asked him to break the news to her dear old dad and not me or even the new boyfriend, just goes to show what strange logic had been running through her mind. I had a good long talk with him, filling in all the details as far as I knew them. Explaining along the way that the whole episode had taken us by surprise as much as anybody. She had kept to herself in her depression and had not returned many of our telephone calls for several months before she finally committed herself. I tried to explain, in an attempt to clarify my lack of communication. I also realised he was not aware of the new boyfriend situation. 'Let her do it!' I thought 'She has been lying to everyone including herself for such a very long time that only she knows what reality she has created.'

Last night after all our guests had gone after our huge Easter meal, nearest and I were walking to some friend's house two streets away for some after dinner drinks, when I burst into a little Cole Porter number filling in forgotten words with la,la,lally and more la,la and so forth. 'You sing just like *Babe* the pig!' he said very solemnly. Well, how good can life get I ask you! The spring sky was filled with fresh stars, a human tragedy of biblical proportions unfolds in the Balkans and my dearest says I sing like a movie star who just happens to be an animated pig.

April 8th, I think

The war in the Balkans gets more mediaeval by the day. How do we human beings manage to be so crazy? Makes one dread the next millennium! Bet has been faxing drafts of her introduction for a catalogue for me to comment on. So much so that I have had to replace one roll of fax paper already. For some strange reason she has lost her confidence lately. I wonder if it has anything to do with the man situation in her life? One can never be so sure of getting any information out of her about the men in her life. Its like prizing an oyster open. Tough going but well worth it!! So I press on with determination.

Spent a lovely day with my Godson, Dee Dee's little boy. She and I had disparaging talks about his father who never pays the maintenance money on time. On one hand, he declares that they are the most important things in his life and then, on the other hand, says he has no money to help pay for the mortgage or food. This is all said while he chainsmokes, stinks of drink and has all the latest magazines in front of him. I took over a bag of groceries when I went to visit as I was worried that she wasn't eating properly. This worry has been on my mind lately as she has lost a lot of weight and is always ravenously hungry. I have seen this phenomenon happen with

another friend several years back who had so little money that she ate almost nothing just so her children ate properly. She also had been married to a man that left her for one of his students. Going to court everytime he fucked up with the money wore her out. It ate up her time and energy so that she had very little left for her own art. I somehow think that Picasso never had those problems with the upbringing of his children!!! No wonder it has been so difficult for women to attain such glorious reputations as artists.

On a more mundane level the Ingres exhibition was a real stunner. I adore the way he handles fabric. It's so sexual. The only problem is that I want to see it again and its too expensive at £6 a visit.

April 15.... I think

It's this menopausal thing and the memory.... especially the lack of it. I was talking away at a gallery opening (not even worth mentioning) and turned to introduce G. to my colleague and I couldn't remember G.'s name. My mind went blank. So I called her the great and holy art administrator which only earned me one of her laser glares and a ticking off later. I am investigating Ginko Biloba as a remedy to this affliction.

This is an awful month... I realise I have been going to therapy for three years now. Usually G. and I compare notes on how awful our therapists are or how badly they dress or what awful taste they have in pictures on their walls or even the state of our fluctuating depressions. But having exhausted myself on our mutual bete noir recently I feel a small break through stirring in my soul. Bet says it is probably just my sheer frustration at having lived with Near and Dear for so long that I am finally about to explode with boredom. She got a swift dirty look and I ate the last piece of cake without even offering it to her. However we both agree the best therapy for depression is either a session of cakes and tea at Maison Bertaux or shopping.

April 18th

Made the mistake of doing some art slutting with G. Not the best of people to go with these days. Usually I enjoy it on a rather perverse level in that I get to see a lot of galleries and artists that I wouldn't have on my own but end up being worn out by the sheer land speed record at which it has been achieved. For example, yesterday we managed to pack in seven galleries and revisit the Ingres show as well as buying a £200 suit in the last ten minutes of Jigsaw being open. Then we topped it off by having an argument over which tube to catch home. Which was a non-argument as I live the opposite end of London from her AND she takes the main line suburban line anyway.

We did manage to see a lovely film/installation on Passolini just after we checked out Nicola Farhi's new interior design shop which had G salivating at the mouth. When I pointed out that the table she so coveted was exactly like the one I found in a junk shop and now have in my kitchen, she snapped back that she hadn't noticed because all the clutter obscures it. 'Your house needs emptying.' She then went on to say,

'You have so much clutter I don't know how you live in it.'

'Well you don't !! Do you. You live on your own.'

I didn't bother to hear her retort as I feigned recognition of some one and walked off. I am really sorry that my house does not have that wonderful clean look of the single dweller. For better or for worse I share it with someone else and several cats as well as a lodger these past few days. This last person is some thing of a necessity to supplement my income. Near & Dear takes to it with great amusement, as she is Japanese and very strange. Not that the two automatically go together but she just happens to be both at the same time. It has proven rather difficult.

The other day I had a neighbour over and was explaining the circumstances behind a mutual friend's husband's breakdown. I had to explain to her that he spent his first five years of his life in a prisoner of war camp. 'Well ' she said most perplexed. 'A prisoner of war camp in Germany. Don't you mean a concentration camp?'

'No, in the far east.'

Trying very hard to gestulate behind my lodger's back that she was Japanese by making my eyes stretch upwards with my fingers.

'But ', she brayed on 'the only camps for civilians in the far East were Ja...', and she suddenly got it. 'JJJJ...ust very not well known. Were they?' And then VERY quickly excused herself to the toilet. It is not a well known fact but there are a lot of English families that lost not just men in Japanese camps, but many women and children as well. These were those whose husbands, parents and children who were stationed out in the far East as well and were also taken as prisoners of war. So it was a bit difficult. As this poor man, who is having the breakdown, is well known as well as the current subject of concern and gossip. It only makes me think that the wretched children caught up in the current Kosovo conflict will reap the consequences for years after and perhaps like our neighbour will suffer for many, many years after.

But to go on with the tale of my art travels with G....we stopped off at White Cube, where a very strange show was up. The artist, a man who was into female impersonation to such an extent that he portrayed himself as the pregnant Mona Lisa. The give away was his hands and arms that with no matter how much photo manipulation looked like a bloke's arms stuck onto a woman's body. Talk about jealousy.... the one thing they can't have they envy us for being able to do. As I later said to the B. the transvestite..."Being a woman isn't just dressing like one. It also is a body that has cycles and blood and PMT and occasionally fucks up with miscarriages and pain." It was actually quite revolting to look at. Needless to say after G. started talking shop with the curator on duty, we quickly got out of there. It gave us the shivers. But at the pace we were keeping they didn't last long as we sped towards Frith Street gallery and the Dumas show. Now that is art. The woman can draw like an angel. I would buy one if I had the money!

May 9th

More arguments with Near and Dear. I am, after 50 years on this earth and haven grown up with four brothers, completely convinced that most men want mum back and will take any substitution in any form be it wife, girlfriend or long term partner. Needless to say our current batch of disputes are about this recurring theme of support and sharing household responsibilities. Basically I am too worn out to try and run the house on my own, with all my four part time jobs, as well as trying to sit on the board of management of an artists' organisation that is undergoing crises and trying to be an artist. If N & D is not working all hours, he is in the pub or he is golfing. Anyway you put it, he is terribly busy doing such terribly important things that he can not help in any way and is too tired to have sex. And the little bugger snores! As you can guess, things aren't going too well at the moment.

I had a long conversation about this with K. who has a married boyfriend because she says all the others are wimps. She suggested that I get a sugar daddy. Nice idea, but I am 50 and they may not like one so old. Anyway, my criteria for any lover, fictitious or not is that he's got to be a good kisser. Ahhh! the days of snogging for hours because sex was too difficult in your parent's front room or just too problematic in the backseat of his car at twenty blow zero. There is nothing like a good kisser. I have been thinking of possible candidates since that conversation.

I continued to think about it every time I get a chance and was doing so yesterday waiting for an old friend on the steps of the Tate when I noticed this rather good looking young man waving to me and suddenly realised it was R who I was supposed to meet...He's in town for the weekend and is sleeping on the camp bed in my front room. He has lost weight and has a new hair cut. My heart went all a flutter as I thought wow! It would be great to be seen with him! But he's just an old wonderful friend who is recovering from a disastrous marriage. We had an in-depth gossip after the show in the coffee shop.

The show at the Tate was a knock out. Having spent years looking at Pollock in books, to see such a great selection of his work from dreary beginnings to his wonderful maturity, one just drooled. Definitely worth going back a second time and I will buy the catalogue next pay day.

Oh yeah! The opening at the Whitechapel I went too was fantastic. G's old boss is the new girl on the block there and it was her first show - all about painting. Very tasty indeed!!! Had a wonderful time flirting with a man who I didn't even know his name. I was told I had met him before and in fact I had worked with him on some art committee??? I can not remember that but apparently he does. How strange!!! Will go back this week to look again as the show was rather good. Saw Nick S. from the Tate. He wiggled his eyebrows at me which is always a good sign that he is pleased with the show.

May 20th

Oh happy days! I went to the Luce Irigaray lecture at the Royal College of Art. D actually got me a ticket. They were like gold dust. However the whole episode proved to be a bit of an anti-climax. I should have read up on her latest works just to refresh the old memory on how obscure she can be even to the initiated! Well with bated breath (OPERATIVE WORD THERE - BREATH!) we settled in for the experience of a lifetime. Her text was first in French then a translation in English followed. At first I was convinced that my French wasn't up to scratch but when I listened to the translation I realised that I couldn't follow her argument anyway. In fact by the looks and frowns on everyone else's face nobody else was getting it as well. Then I started to get the giggles. Here was THE most popular and cutting edge philosopher, for not only feminism but philosophy as a whole today, and nobody could understand a word of what she was on about. All I knew was that it had something to do with breath, breathing and trees???

After she finished her text and questions were asked for from the floor, there was a deathly still silence. D. asked a question on the reason why the masculine gender was used through out. She got a strange answer followed by the traditional Gallic shrug of the shoulders. Most questions that Luce didn't feel like answering or thought too obvious for greater details were met in the same manner and followed by a traditional 'c'est pas'. It all made me giggle even more. S. who sat beside me and who is a "Dr." poked me every time I started. Then she turned to me after another one of the shrugs that followed an even more inexplicable answer and we both mouthed "Hippy Shit!" at each other; which sent me into greater giggles. Of course I was trying to smother all this giggling so as not to appear rude and the only way I could do it was to sink and slump lower into my seat. I finally fell out just at the end as everyone broke up.

Afterwards on the tube home I couldn't stop giggling. Here she was, Luce Irigaray, SPEAKING IN PERSON. Her talk was so opaque that nobody knew what the hell she was talking about. The more I thought about it and all the people who had fought to get tickets, the more I giggled. I think I have a bad attitude problem when it comes to the intellectual pretentiousness of the art world.

Saturday May 22

Horrors of horrors! I went to an opening at the Lux Gallery for the Ulay Vision award for women artists. God, was it bad!!! I should have my mouth washed out for thinking such thoughts but talk about mediocrity. If I see another installation or video that tries to be art and is not as entertaining as a second rate Television advert I shall scream. It was so depressing that I only lasted long enough to tour the show at a very fast gallop and head for the party afterwards. Here I could not find anyone I knew and was about to leave when I heard my name called out.

It was M. who I normally drink with at the Delfina gallery. He handed me a Becks

and launched into a moan about the work. Then S. the American curator, grabbed my arm and introduced me to another curator and someone else brushed by and said 'Remember me'. And although I didn't, I grinned at the nice young man anyway. Meanwhile M. was chatting me up really seriously and insisting that I bring my evening students to the opening tomorrow night at Delfina as Susan Hiller's show was opening and the drinks and munchies were always great. I was hemmed in from all sides. M was getting really serious about my coming to the Hiller show and was about only twelve inches away and getting closer to me. I was caught in a crosstalk between S. and her friend and the young man, who assumed I knew him, who started asking me about people I didn't know and not waiting for the answers before asking another question. Suddenly I had to get out and tried to excuse myself but I couldn't move and no one could hear me. So I dropped my bag and disappeared after it on all fours. I crawled out between everyone's legs and through the club's doors, past the bouncers and up the stairs.

When I got to the outside doors I straightened up and high-tailed it to the bus stop. As luck would have it, the right bus was pulling up. I raced upstairs and breathed a deep sigh of relief as I sank into a seat.

The next day I wondered about what had happened. Would I have reacted so badly to all those people if I had just seen a wonderful show that had some glimmer of intelligence in it?

Whatever it was, I did not take my students to the Susan Hiller opening, good drinks and munchies or not.

I need a change in my life. A BIG change soon !

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