

Mobile Fidelities

Conversations on
Feminism, History and Visuality

Martina Pachmanová

Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issue 19, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue19.pdf>
e-book available at www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/mpachmanova.pdf
July 2006, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

ISBN: 0-9536541-1-7 e-book
ISBN 13: 978-0-9536541-1-6

First published in Czech as *Vernost v pohybu*
Prague: One Woman Press, 2001
ISBN: 80-86356-10-8

Chapter III. Kaya Silverman 'The World Wants Your Desire' was first
published in English in *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
(print) Vol. 6 July 2000 pp.5-11

List of Contents

Martina Pachmanová Introduction	4
<i>Art History and Historiography</i>	
I. Linda Nochlin : Writing History “Otherly”	14
II. Natalie Boymel Kampen : Calling History Writing into Question	22
<i>Subjectivity and Identity</i>	
III. Kaja Silverman : The World Wants Your Desire	30
IV. Susan Rubin Suleiman : Subjectivity In Flux	41
<i>Aesthetics and Sexual Politics</i>	
V. Amelia Jones : Art’s Sexual Politics	53
VI. Mira Schor : Painterly and Critical Pleasures	65
VII. Jo Anna Isaak : Ripping Off the Emperor’s Clothes	78
<i>Society and the Public Sphere</i>	
VIII. Janet Wolff : Strategies of Correction and Interrogation	86
IX. Martha Rosler : Subverting the Myths of Everyday Life	98
<i>Art Institutions</i>	
X. Marcia Tucker : Empowerment and Responsibility	110
XI. Carol Duncan : Maybe Feminism Has Just Begun	123
Diary of an Ageing Art Slut....(last installment)	136
Katy Deepwell a tribute to the Diary's author	143

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

March 04

It's amazing isn't it - how times flies. I had given up my diary for some time then like a memory of an old friend when one suddenly remembers and says, 'Gosh! I haven't seen so and so for ages.' Only it was 'I haven't written my diary for ages.... I wonder why?'

It's not that I haven't been plodding on as usual but just that I got slowed and weighed down with various ailments. Is the word, ennui? How's that for multiculturalism! Well, I think, ennui was it. Partly it's that mid-life crisis with the aged parents and dealing with 'the reluctant to get involved' brothers and lousy career crap that is so prevalent at this stage of a woman artist's life. It wore me out and I came down with sorts of unspecified skin rashes and weak hair i.e. I began to molt.

AND of course none of my dear friends want to know about it because 'Hey! it is not going to happen to them is it?' NOT.

Worst of all was my entire word program became corrupted and I had to find a new server and install a better program and generally have a nervous breakdown over my computer. How did a machine come to dominate my life so much and in ways I would never let any man?

So I went to ground, sought out a nutritionist and a homeopathic doctor having given up on my regular one who just supplied more creams that got rid of my skin problems for a while but then they came right back as soon as I stopped using them.

Then I discovered an Anglican NUN who does Reikie.... Yes, it's true and I go to a convent right in the midst of the East End. You step inside their walled gates and enter another world - even though instead of hearing just the birds in the walled garden, you get to listen to the police sirens mingling with the babbling water from the fountain. I don't know if it helps but apparently according to her I have some really heavily blocked Charkas and each week she cleans them out. I have come to like these women who vary in age from 25-72. They are not a closed order but go out into the community and what a tough bunch of ladies they are! I stayed for supper one night and the cook makes a delicious baked custard pudding. No one said anything about me having three servings as did their cat called Domenic so they have now earned a soft spot in my affections.

Bet with all her high powered life style has still been chasing after and hoping that her latest who now has lasted an amazing two years (a record!) is going to settle into some sort of commitment...

'Some sort,' I say.

He has now bought a house nearer to London so they can spend more time together or so she says. Em just raised her eyebrows at this information when it was aired as she tucked her baby into the pram. G. meanwhile choked on her cappuccino. The casually dropped statement was inserted into the conversation as we all sat in Victoria Park by the tea pavilion in the winter sun one weekend. We were visiting Em and going for walkies with her new sprog. If you say something enough times you get to believe it, we all thought. But he has bought a house and moved closer to her! Now she only has travel for 1½ hours to see him compared with the 3 hours before. Em being a tease threw her bun crumbs at the pond for Canadian geese to swim and gobble them up then. As she observed them she said in an off hand manner.

'Geese mate for life, you know. If one of them dies the other never takes up another mate.'

'How boring!' Bet blurted out without thinking. Then just sort of sniffed her nose at the birds as they bumped each other for the floating crumbs.

'Imagine,' she sighed and then without a beat 'We saw this great Georgian pile with five bedrooms last weekend just outside that small town west of Brighton. Great for house parties. Can you imagine Christmas down there?'

Nobody said anything. But there were mild choking sounds all round as everyone tried to drink their coffee and not giggle at the same time. Later as I walked back to my house for some rearrangement of my wardrobe by G. who suggested in regards to the move by Bet's man that

'I think he has a new job or is trying for one at University of Sussex. I know Bet wants a house in the country with a man attached but it's sort of like Marie Antoinette playing milk maid.'

I couldn't disagree with her so kept my mouth shut. Beside I needed to focus my mind on what clothes of mine she wants to "borrow." After all Bet had taken me out to lunch at the Tate Modern the week before as the next installment of her 'be nice to artist's campaign.' AND it was a nice lunch. We could hardly contain ourselves snickering at the seduction over lunch that was happening at the next table. I mean it's so hard NOT to eavesdrop when you are almost elbow-to-elbow with the next table. The tables are so close that people comment on what you ordered when the meal arrives asking you how it is and maybe they will have the same. Hardly the spot for a private chat up but he sure was having a go and she was not immune to it. The difficulty was trying not to be seen to be actually listening. We managed somehow. But it was hard work. We tried to discuss the pre-Raphaelite landscape show going up but we faltered half way through a sentence due to the interesting development at the next table. So we had a go at discussing G.'s sex life which caused them to stop mid-sentence.

That same afternoon I met a colleague from work at the National Portrait Gallery. Yes, I now have some work teaching Contextual Studies to suburban 16-18 year olds at a College of Further Education for one day a week! Well, in reality, we had decided to haul one group off to the Cecil Beaton portrait show at my fav. old gallery off Trafalgar Square as part of their project. All those wonderful Mitford girls' portraits were there. What women!!!! After that we then marched them off to a small gallery behind Oxford Street and then when they left for home, he and I found an Italian deli that had wonderful coffee and cakes over which to discuss important art issues! Namely, the clothes everyone was wearing in the Beaton portraits. Cecil sure can take a good portrait. And why were all the society women in the 1920s and 1930s so thin. There was one of Wallis Simpson in a Shaperelli lobster dress to die forlife is not at all fair at times.

Art wise, well things have been a bit slow with my health not being so great. I really did myself in worrying about my parent's health and their general dented demure all last year. This was not helped by my brothers who because they are men somehow never get around to doing what they promised to do or see the importance in chasing up or returning calls to the health worker over her concerns - after all, is it important that my mother does not take my father's medicine as well as her own! This was all ironed out when I suggested we get a pill enforcer i.e. the district nurse to give them their medicine twice a day when she has to go to give my mother her injection of insulin as well. All very simple really but somehow

beyond the male brain.

Last week at 12:30 am in the morning the 'phone went. I woke up thinking Bet has gotten married and was phoning from her honeymoon or my parents have actually overdosed on each other pills or probably some nutter who has got the wrong number. But it was the ex just checking to see if I was okay as he hadn't heard from me in a while. How nice. It almost didn't matter it was so late because he always has such good gossip. He really was concerned.

'Especially the bit about you going bald' he said very earnestly.

'Well, it's all the effects of stress and candida or yeast infection from stress. Anyway you look at it, it's stress. Stress from not enough money, stress from the computer going on the blink, stress from dearest and nearest going off sex, stress from not enough money again, stress from no work - all very legitimate situations on their own but all at the same time is really heavy work. AND I can't drink!!!'

One reason in fact was a rather raunchy Xmas party at the Ivy where I was given an award for my 20 years of fighting for artist's rights which all got a bit too out of hand on Champagne and vintage white wine. It tipped my yeast infection into overdrive. Well what's a girl going to do when she is given 500 smackers to spend at Harvey Nichols? A store that I had created a self-imposed exile from since the 1980s. Believe me, it was necessary! But the culture shock as I entered the door on the first day of the Christmas sale was all too, too much. I managed some how to find my way to the shoe department and then onto Donna Karen concession. In the end after four hours of debating and lunch I decided on a pair of Jimmy Choe shoes and a Donna Karan leather jacket from her signature line. Not much for £500 but what can you expect from Harvey Nichols - hence a new self-imposed exile.

My own work has been slow due to lack of materials, but I have also been working in different materials. For one thing I gave up the M.Phil lark or it gave me up. It was all too much with the parents so ill and me going back and forth to the motherland and trying to hold down a job and get into exhibitions. Something had to give so my brain went dead just shut down. I couldn't string a sentence together if I tried and believe me I tried! In the midst of my re-examination I realised the woman leading it hadn't read what I wrote and the two others there had each only read one essay. No one had talked to each other about my writing until just before they came in, which is why the examination was running one hour behind. I was sweating it out as I had a train to catch for a job interview up north, which I didn't get, but at the time I was hopeful. So in the midst of this

academic catfight, I had my usual out-of-body experience and just couldn't see the point of being there. Slowly as they were haranguing me and I them, I was collecting up my things and began to walk to the door. The moderator suddenly began to follow me flapping about and wringing her hands. I just smiled at her and left. An air of unreality took over my life and I felt euphoric to be leaving the place never to go back.

January was quite exciting really as I started on a new series of work involving old ladies hankies. I have collected these for years. Then Bet had invited me to an opening, which we got lost trying to find it. Eventually we did but it was an opening for a furniture and design store not an art exhibition at the next door art gallery that I thought it was. After a good look at all the things we couldn't afford, we went out for coffee in a late night opening bookshop. Both G. and Bet belong to a book club that for all I can make out exists as a reason to eat cake and network. They keep setting these books to read but I don't think anyone reads them. Dee Dee also belongs to one and when I was at an opening of a mutual friend of ours in a little avantgarde gallery in the East End she was switching off in mid-conversation to talk to all sorts of women who were not artists. They had the distinct air of art administrators about them. After a while, this habit of hers got really irritating.

'Who are these people?' I asked 'What people?'

'Those people who you keep talking to when you are talking to me.'

'Oh! They are members of my book club.'

'What book club?'

'The one that took me 3 years on a waiting list to join and I have gotten a show out of it within the first two meetings.'

I thought a bit on Bet's latest revelations about her club and asked, 'Do you by chance actually read any books?'

'Well!!!! at first I did, but then I realized I was the only one who did so I just bake my tart de pomme and take it.'

Lesson to be learned here I thought. I have since begun a campaign to find a book club that will even put me on their waiting list. However better than a book club is a series of soirees that has been instigated by two artists. Once a month they have them and I have put my name down to host one in two month's time. At the last one we were all sitting in the midst of an installation in one of their houses eating cake. This art piece had sort of taken over the house. Every spare bit of room was a walkway that was raised above the floor. Interspersed were chairs, tables and life's clutter. I was thinking that this last year there haven't

been that many good exhibitions. Then I thought well it's just me. But conversation from several colleagues seemed to confirm this observation of mine. So as you sat down the walk way and it became this sort of elongated table that we were sliding wonderful cakes she had baked back and forth debating this subject. One acquaintance and I had this great cake in front of us that we divided up into equal pieces and handed it around. But there was already several other cakes doing this same so we it just sat in front of us. Gradually we cut each piece in half and shared it. This we did for the whole cake and a pot of tea. It was along discussion I must add. The discussions going on were very stimulating and I greatly enjoyed myself but the cake was utterly divine. As far as I am concerned I have come to the conclusion that cake and art combined with women artists' theoretical discourse on the subject all go too well together. Some of my best insights and debates have been in such situations. I don't know how one would go about integrating this into general use and practice. Perhaps it is best kept where it is a one of those wonderful idiosyncrasies that are gender specific. In saying so I am perhaps calling the wrath of certain art gods upon myself. But I don't care; so pass the cake and tea my dear.

February

I am doing this diary for this one time only by going backwards. Mainly because I have been so physically out of it and lacking in its upkeep. But it is interesting to note events in retrospect. As you might have gathered Em has had her baby and it's a little girl. G. has volunteered to be a fairy godmother as has Bet. In fact they each have gone a little gaga in their own off-hand way about such issues. I had at first thought G. might be a little jealous but in her own way she is quite philosophical about her hunt for the sperm donor of her choice. When she scans the room at openings or art events, we have landed on calling all potential victims as spermers as in, 'Is he a spermer? nudge nudge, wink wink?' She has definitely met a different class or shall I say genre of men.

Artwise late December proved to be of most interest. As I have previously let on I received an award for all my ranting and raving on the artists copyright front. How did they know what my tastes and desires where? Even dearest and nearest took the day off for a lunch at the Ivy where it was held. Well who wouldn't for a free lunch and champers? But more interestingly artwise was my annoyance at an exhibition called Group of Seven launched by seven ex-pat Canadian artists who didn't include Moi. As the issue involved was identity, which just happened to be a subject I was working on for the last few years I felt I should have been informed.

But after I cooled down I realized I didn't know any of them personally and they obviously didn't know me. So I just sent the galleryowner a pack of my work then I phoned up and personally made contact and an appointment at the gallery to show what it was I was so enthused about. AND low and behold she gave me a show in June. Just like that! So maybe I should get annoyed and worked up a bit more. Who knows I might get a few more shows. Dee Dee who has been working her tart de pomme off her but at her book club went green with congratulations. G. just giggled and Bet said 'Nice one girl!' which is high praise indeed.

I did manage to get to a show at the Tate Modern but got sidetracked as I was going up the escalator by someone I knew going down it. An hour, two cappuccinos and one cake shared later I made it to the exhibition. But it was so riveting I only remember it was a German who makes prints but he calls them mechanized paintings. No wonder I don't remember who he is.

January

In January I went out to Cambridge one more time to work with my publisher on some editioned prints to be sold as a special edition as part of the possible show. Well, was it cold! Cambridge has winds straight from the Urals blowing through it. He said this with great pride. I might have survived dressed as I was in my coat and all the clothes I had come in, except for the night before I had stayed overnight with the mother of my friend whose house had heating problems. I have never been so cold in my life. When I inally got home at the end of the second day at night I put the heating right up and sat in my coat until dearest came home. He took one look at me and said. 'That bad Huh?' Then he just poured a scotch walked over and opened my mouth and it flowed down. Warmth spread and life came back after the second one was emptied into me. The work I did was well worth it but what I suffer for my art is truly awesome especially since what I thought was his best scotch at the time turned out to be the crap cooking sherry. But the show will be great. So now I need to get publicity organized and perhaps get G. to help me on a few things.

Diary of an Ageing Art Slut was published anonymously 1997-2004

Copyright © : Elaine Kowalsky, 2004

N.Paradoxa : Issue No. 18, 2004

Who was the author of n.paradoxa's Diary of an Ageing Art Slut?

Katy Deepwell

ELAINE KOWALSKY
www.kowalsky.co.uk

Elaine Kowalsky was an artist based in London. Her untimely death in September 2005 has been a great loss to her family and to her many close friends and colleagues. The 22 installments from her Diary were a wonderful and witty contribution to n.paradoxa which expressed much of her energy, passions, social awareness and sense of humour.

She wrote the Diary for n.paradoxa anonymously. We discussed many times the reasons for doing this column and for keeping her identity secret: primarily to separate her own career from the Diary's playful and witty fantasies about the aspirations and difficulties of being a well-connected woman artist (of a certain age) struggling to gain recognition in London's sexist, ageist and highly competitive art world. A sample of the Diary was broadcast once on Canadian radio. We both had aspirations that it would be widely read and well-received and could gain a broader audience.

Elaine was a prolific artist working across a number of mediums, but particularly in artists' books and prints. She had a studio in Robinson Road in the East End of London. She was the Chair of the Board for the Designer and Artists Copyright Society and a strong defender of artists' rights.

Her exhibitions and works are shown on her website.

Tales from Marian and Dorothy: A Series of monoprints by Elaine Kowalsky was shown from September 6 - October 28 in the Surgeon's & Physicians' Sitting Room, Front corridor, The Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, London E1. These works were also shown at the Freud Museum in 2000 and a small catalogue with an essay by Katy Deepwell was produced to accompany this earlier exhibition.

She had been selected for SKETCH 2005, an exhibition of artists' sketchbooks at Rabley Contemporary Drawing Centre, 24 June - 24 July, Seven Seven Contemporary Art, London 23 September - 9 October. It will be part of the Edinburgh Fringe in 2006. The selected work was the sketchbook North that formed her one-woman show at Platform Gallery, London 2004 and can be seen on her web site.

The Editor of *n.paradoxa*

Katy Deepwell

Copyright © : Katy Deepwell, September 2005
N.Paradoxa : Issue No. 19, 2005