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Liz Ellis 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang?' An account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art
Practice an analysis of the Britpack phenomenon
Tomur Atagök A View of Contemporary Women Artists in Turkey
Hilary Robinson Nine Snapshots from living and working in Belfast
Katy Deepwell Questioning stereotypes of feminist art practice as 'Feminist Aesthetics in an
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A Dialogue between Jill Scott and Katy Deepwell, developed in person and through email for n.paradoxa

Jill Scott (b.1952) grew up in Australia where she completed a Degree in Film, Art and Design. From 1975-1982 she lived in San Francisco where she finished a Masters Degree in Communications and became Director of Site. Inc-an experimental gallery funded by The National Endowment for the Arts. During this time, she was also exhibiting internationally as a video and performance Artist. Her work is mainly focused on the relationship between the body, history and technology. In 1982 she returned to live in Australia to work as a Professor in New Media at the University of New South Wales, Sydney and exhibited video installations in USA, Europe and Japan.

In 1985, sophisticated video post production techniques led her to experiment with computers and 3D Animation. From 1992-95, she was the Guest Professor in Computer Animation and Interactive Art at the Kunste Hochschule in Saarbrucken Germany and now works as a co-ordinator and Artist-In-Residence for the ZKM, Medien Museum in Karlsruhe, Germany. She is also a research fellow at CAiiA (The Center for Advanced Inquiry into the Interactive Arts) University of Wales., Great Britain, leading towards a Ph.D. in Media Philosophy.

Katy Deepwell: I became interested in finding out more about your work after seeing your installation *Frontiers of Utopia* at the DEAF exhibition in Rotterdam called *Virtual Frontiers*, September 1996. *Frontiers of Utopia* is a computerized sound and video installation which at four 'interactive' stations presents the lives of eight different women in the twentieth century. Through the computer scene and interactively triggered film clips, aspects of their lives, aspirations and political credo are presented. Other objects of interaction are

electronic suitcases and by using a key the viewer can unlock archival footage, sounds or graphics from the timezones. Viewers may further prompt the character with questions and are offered brief reflections from the character in response. These fragments of autobiography allow the viewer to gain an understanding of what has happened to them, the development of their political views and their personality. These 8 characters are linked by their attendance at a Virtual Dinner party, in a interactive photograph on a central table where the viewer may initiate dialogue between any two of the characters Is *Frontiers of Utopia* your first work of this kind?

Jill Scott : Actually, it is the final work of three works about memory, idealism and technology. Other the related works are documented on my new WWW Site <http://www.zkm.de/artists/scott/>

Before this, in fact as early as 1976 I created interactive performance artworks, which fed these issues including the use of video surveillance in installations. I was always interested in the idea that the viewers could become performers in the installation space or editors of various parts of information about the relationship between history and herstory, idealism and the body.

Katy Deepwell : Do you think different media provoke a different kind of audience response or level of engagement ?

Jill Scott : Yes, definitely. Mostly, we are taught not to touch an Artwork, in multi-media or in Virtual Reality, we are encouraged to participate by making associations through real touch or the illusion of touch. This idea ties in with cognition and the way our memories work, and for some artists who are working with history, transportation through these devices has a great appeal. The interactive style fits with and emphasizes the type of content. I wish to explore.

Katy Deepwell : The eight characters in *Frontiers of Utopia* represent different ideals and aspirations in women's political struggles : from 1960's student activism; the hippie movement; struggle of and for the proletariat ; to 'technocracy'. Do you see the combination of characters - ranging from revolutionary to utopian as a challenge to essential views of women's history or 'utopian' liberal / progressive models because you are showing the enthusiasms and the pitfalls of such positions ? Or do you see it collectively as a commentary upon the many plural strands which exist simultaneously within feminism?

Jill Scott : Actually, I was interested in taking an archetypal set of idealism from this century and rewriting the history to include Herstories. Women need to be written into history, by women. All of the characters are based on interviews with real women

who lived during this century and they were dreamers. Utopia also means no-place, and a Frontier is always at the edge of change. In this way Frontiers of Utopias is both a comment on feminist theory, but also a more universal comment on the fact that this century, change is running behind industrial progress.

Katy Deepwell : Are people able to recognize the kinds of identity politics/ types that each of the characters represents?

Jill Scott : Yes, people can easily recognize the types, simply from the fashion and the attitudes, however, deeper investigation yields more knowledge

Katy Deepwell : Can you give an example ?

Jill Scott : Yes, perhaps two cases would be interesting. Gillian, a socialist Marxist from the 1960s seems a clear enough cliché, but when you start to click on her suitcase archives, you find out about her disappointment. Her lover has disappeared to China to join the peasants, and she reveals her middle class education as she shows this disappointment. In another case, we find out about one of Zira's reasons behind her *new age* idealism, as she has struggled with the fears of breast cancer.

Katy Deepwell : In G.Bender and A.Ross' *Culture on the Brink* (Seattle,Bay Press,1994), Margaret Morse describes VR as operating with an immersive environment which she says is more like 'oral logic' than 'identification' processes used in film. What she means by this is that it seduces you into incorporating, consuming or digesting the world from a singular viewpoint collapsing the boundaries between the simulated world and the 'real' : unlike 'identification' where the representation acts like a mirror against which one compares oneself. I wondered what you thought about this distinction - in terms of the scenarios for the viewer that you design and given your interests in film and as you recommended the book to me?

Jill Scott : I think that the challenge of interactive cinema is to put the viewer in the role of the editor, allowing for personal mix and match of information. I guess I'm still a filmmaker. I tend to disagree with Morse, I would hope we all carry a desire for identification on our shoulders, even if it means extending our notion of self to include multiple selves and multiple identifications. Once a secretary from the ZKM said to me. 'I really see myself up there in all your characters' and I was pleased for her..as both her memories and her sense of self were multiplied.

Katy Deepwell : You have said Brecht provided you with a means to approach the characterization. Can you explain what interests you about Brecht - his use of typical characterization (even stereotypes) and the idea of distinction for example - in relation to *Frontiers of Utopia*?

Jill Scott : Brecht was in fact, a big influence. In the social realism of the Dinner Party section of *Frontiers of Utopia*, these characters can meet from different time zones. People find it very appealing to matchmaker and see the generation gap clearly. For example, the viewer can select Pearl, the thirties aboriginal to talk to Ki, the Chinese from 1990 and surprisingly enough they are too shy to talk. A great deal of time went into writing over two hundred conversations, while always keeping in mind the essence of the characters reactions and the paradox of meeting over time.

Katy Deepwell : Is there a relationship between this dinner party and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*? Or any other aspects of feminist herstory?

Jill Scott : Yes it is a sequel if you like, but in Chicago's *The Dinner Party* the people are absent and I was interested in experimental documentary and creating more of metaphor for time travel. The feminists references are explicit in both Chicago's work and my own but she was interested in very sexual references.

Katy Deepwell : *Frontiers of Utopia* rather than simply presenting an immersive experience for the viewer, was through interactivity asking the viewer both to connect with the character's memories and histories but also reflect upon their own identifications through the presentation. I have seen this described as a presentation of non-linear time, what do you think is the significance for women of this style of herstory? Do you know Julia Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time' where she discusses cyclical and monumental time in contrast to linearity?

Jill Scott : Yes, of course I am a fan of Kristeva. I particularly like the way she fuses the notions of fluidity and the effermeral, with the crossing of time. I think that webs of consciousness are non-linear networks, terribly wet and organic slippery concepts. This makes it extremely difficult to reflect on experience and on history as a sequential set of events, though most men try to do so.

Katy Deepwell :. What kind of responses have you received to *Frontiers of Utopia*? From men?, Or from different women?

Jill Scott : It is a very popular work, mainly because the social and political issues discussed in it are still under discussion. Access to it relies heavily on the level of

curiosity of the viewer as well as his or her interest in the concepts of memory and associations. It is also quite humorous. For the women it is like a mirror, for the men it reminds them of the other (including their mothers and sisters)

Katy Deepwell : In an interview recently with Josephine Grieve, you said that *Frontiers of Utopia* appeared very relevant in Europe because the issues it represents are still under discussion, can you say more about this (vis-a-vis feminist politics) and why Australian (or American?) audiences reactions were different in character ?

Jill Scott : Perhaps the diversity of representation of idealism could be listed here keeping in mind that almost all the characters in *Frontiers of Utopia* have European roots. Mary (1900's) is a rural Irish socialist Idealist who immigrated to South America to start a Commune, Emma is based on the famous Russian immigrant, Emma Goldman (1900's) who was an anarchist and free speech avocet, Margaret (1930) is the capitalist, a designer's secretary from America, Pearl (thirties) is a servant and is concerned about equality and freedom for her aboriginal people, Gillian is a student radical from the sixties and art student, Maria is the classic hippie, escapist and feminist from the sixties, Zira is a new age programmer from the nineties and Ki has just been given political asylum in Australia after her involvement demonstrations in Tienanmen square. The diversity of politics is representative of the diversity of politics still questioned here in Europe, where the new closer encounters with its eastern half and problems with immigration raises the same questions.

Katy Deepwell : Your work seems to concentrate on memory and conflicting historical realities, even if in a time traveling mode - do you think this could be described as a gendered contrast to male fantasies of technology i.e. Baudrillard who conjures up an image of the (male) viewer lost in a world of hyperreal surfaces and overload of images or even Stellarc's fantasies in *PingBody* of 'remote control'?

Jill Scott : Well I am a women and I work from a woman's point of view, however I am not too sure if issues of memory and historical realities are a gender specific rather processes and attitudes towards it may be more or less sensitive depending on the person. I do know I am pleased when I discover men's work to be fluid, poetic and less tied to bombastic construction or shock value, like the work of the people you have mentioned.

Katy Deepwell : Perhaps it's necessary to be more explicit here about what constitutes a woman's point-of-view - since you've created a work trying to point two eight different positions which women have occupied in the twentieth century- how is this informed by your views as a socialist or as a feminist if one

talks within the framework of identity politics ? Or if one is talking about feminist perspectives as insistent on both a critique of the status quo and an insistence that the world is seen differently by women because of their social, historical, ('biological?') economic, even technocratic, position within it ?

Jill Scott : Lets see, well frankly these are my views and I am not ashamed that they show how old I am. Firstly, I still believe that women constitute fifty percent of the worlds population and in this light they must be given a voice by both women and men. This of course included the old feminist ideals of equal pay and equal representation. Now, I am interested in a type of resistance from within the system rather than an escape, and I think that if women do not get involved in Technology they will be left out of it in the future, particularly if they ignore the implications and ethics of genetic and micro biological progress I am also interested in another more controversial realm: an emergence of both female and male energies could occur in one body, a type of post-gender world, where cyborgs replace the notion of the goddess. Donna Haraway is a great influence on my ideas at present.

Katy Deepwell : As someone who has presented a view of certain shared idealism's and strategies for scrutiny through your virtual characters, do you believe feminism may still present a metanarrative for women (even in Lyotard/Jameson's versions of postmodernism as a critique of metanarratives), or could you say something more about your own situatedness in certain political/art structures as a woman/feminist ?

Jill Scott : Yes, I think it is interesting for women to make meta-narratives, Forme appropriation is a service to collect and distribute archival research and then to rewrite history. As an artist I see my role as a funnel for transformed information but I also think being an Artist is an anarchistic action, certainly the level of obsession is similar.

Katy Deepwell : Do you think there is a set of gendered approaches to women's use of new technologies in installations or internet projects ? Some people have suggested that this is centered in an idea of connectedness....?

Jill Scott : This is an interesting question, on one level I hope that the non-linear and poetic sensibilities of some virtual and multimedia environments can be extended by women's alternative approaches, but on the other hand I do believe strongly in invention, lack of reaction or conformity and individual approach. Someone should make a study about this, I would like to see the results.

Katy Deepwell : What seem to you to be the most pressing issues in feminist theory in relation to women, art and technology ?

Jill Scott : Mm.. Perhaps the most pressing issue is to join the Women-in-Technology Movement, if we do not become involved in re-designing the future, we may well be left out of it all together. This means being recognized as having a voice, and of being committed to a level of professional practice and organization, again resistance from within.

Katy Deepwell : **Is women-in-technology a group? Or is it just the idea of women becoming more involved in the use of technologies for feminist ends?**

Jill Scott : Yes, I think there is a loose group, and many of us know each other but it could be much bigger, I imagine there are many isolated cases.

Katy Deepwell : **Can you describe your current project and Ph.D. work called *The Digital Body Automata* and what is the Bionic World View ?**

Jill Scott : Sure, *The Digital Body- Automata* is about the transformation of the body through technology. It explores transformations of the body which employ digital, mechanical or molecular technologies; I like the idea of a movement beyond conventional representations of the organic body, but also find it scary. This mixture of fascination and horror is a great place to start building an Artwork from. Anyway in the Digital Body, there are three parts-

A Figurative History has five different historical characters in it who are comments on the desire for different types of transformation. They are Frankenstein's Monster, Pandora, The Data Body, The Cyborg and Lady Miso (Robot).

In a second section called Interskin, I present some contemporary fictional and factual metaphors and references to art and medicine. which may yield new interpretations of the body from the different identities of men, women, children and other.

In the third part, Immortal Duality, the exploration of genetic engineering is discussed, particularly the relationship between bioengineering and nanotechnology, as well as myths surrounding ideas of alternative states of immortality.

The final aim here of the three works is for the viewer to be able to identify the specific role of women in the representation and transformation of the body, and the possible impact of biotechnology on the process of human reproduction and procreation.

Katy Deepwell : **Could you say something about the background to this research?**

Jill Scott : Well for the last two years I have been reading a lot of books-but since 1976, I have explored the relationship between technology and the body, through a

set of theoretical and visual concepts. Focusing on the body as a sculptural material, manipulated by digital and analog media, and as a performance artist, I was influenced by the transformation of the body in the 1970s through the treatment of the body as an art-material. Later, through Media Art, I stayed aware of the more recent Post-Modern discussions about appropriation of the organic body. I am interested in transformation. I guess the end of the century is an appropriate time to think about it and recently I spent a good deal of time in California looking at simulated models of protein growths and hearing about analysis of biomedical research. I think we are heading for a change in the notion of reality as we know it. Last week a sheep called Dolly was cloned and there will be more strange news coming.

Katy Deepwell : What ideas in the proliferating literature on representing the body interests you most ?

Jill Scott : Lots. I am interested in the enrichment of our imaginations and the amplification of our powers of cognition and perception that Brenda Laurel talks about. For the representation of the body and the processes of binary technology, I think Barbara Maria Stafford's books on mapping the body are great (e.g. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art & Medicine* (Boston: MIT Press, 1993) *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Boston: MIT Press, 1996). Some current scientific and technological research suggests the possibility of actually re-designing the organic body, at a micro-mechanical, digital or molecular level and I read lots of this stuff to get to know what the maniacs are really thinking of doing (e.g. Hans Moravec) I am interested in particular developments in molecular Biology which could lead us to see our bodies not only as technical interfaces but also as re-designed constructions. Donna Haraway is the most interesting for me in terms of the liberation concerned with the impact of new science on human behavior and values and my favorite piece of literature for its empirical notions of time space is *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson. (e.g. Donna Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs & Women* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989) see also C.Gray *The Cyborg Handbook* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995)

Katy Deepwell : Kathleen Woodward, again in *Culture from the Brink*, made for me two very interesting points 1) the postindustrial prophets focused on information as at the center of the communications revolution, rather than biotechnology's and 2) that the same new communications and cybernetic networks as they entered the body in more fantastic and spectacular ways through medical imaging increasingly rendered it as immaterial, 'unseen' - the delusion of an impregnable body disappeared as the body itself dissolved in hyperspace. This she argues is at the root of many fantasy scenarios in films

and video games. She also points to the crisis which both age and sexual reproduction present to these images? I wondered how you saw you own work with the body intervening in this realm?

Jill Scott : The second point you mentioned from the analysis of Woodward interests me, as through the constant mapping and coding of the body, old reductionist attitudes about ourselves are constantly re-inforced. I would say that if these conditions of science continue, new ethical issues about the concept of mother and gender will have to be addressed yet again. But hyperspace is a different story and may be even present a preferable existence for some, as there the data body could become manuable and multiple, able to transform into any shape or construction. However, in both of the above scenarios if women continue to wait around in the background, their bodies may well be left out of both worlds altogether. So come on girls, you can appear in all forms and shapes and technology cannot only be fun, but you can speak through it!

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