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EDITORIAL

What started with the question, "How do artists portray themselves to the world?" has throughout the past year and a half in discussion with the women represented in PERSONA given way to a more nuanced set of investigations – in short, artists and writers navigating their way between interior and exterior fields. A persona is a mirrored self, something that simultaneously reflects and obscures, and it is the imbued qualities of this reflective shift that many of the writings here touch upon.

PERSONA is the second magazine in a series of periodicals that have evolved in response to the questions raised by female artists who took part in a series of meetings entitled "A conversation to know if there is a conversation to be had." The first magazine, titled LABOUR and published in 2011, addressed the question of "women's work" – using the lens of the feminist critique of unpaid labor to look at the contemporary condition of the artist – one of the more explicit topics in the "conversations." A more implicit theme throughout many of the meetings was the topic of self-presentation, performance, and the face at the front of the art "work."

Throughout the process of compiling, it became evident that at the heart of the publication are the two seemingly unconnected themes of embarrassment and refusal, which in this context I believe serve to expand our understanding of the persona of the artist. Let your ride begin through the towering public sculpture Mae West on a journey to meet a number of characters often in reflection of or reflecting on other characters and the radical possibilities of these meetings – in friendship, in admiration, in desire, in remembrance, and in candor.

Melissa Gordon, 2013

COLOPHON

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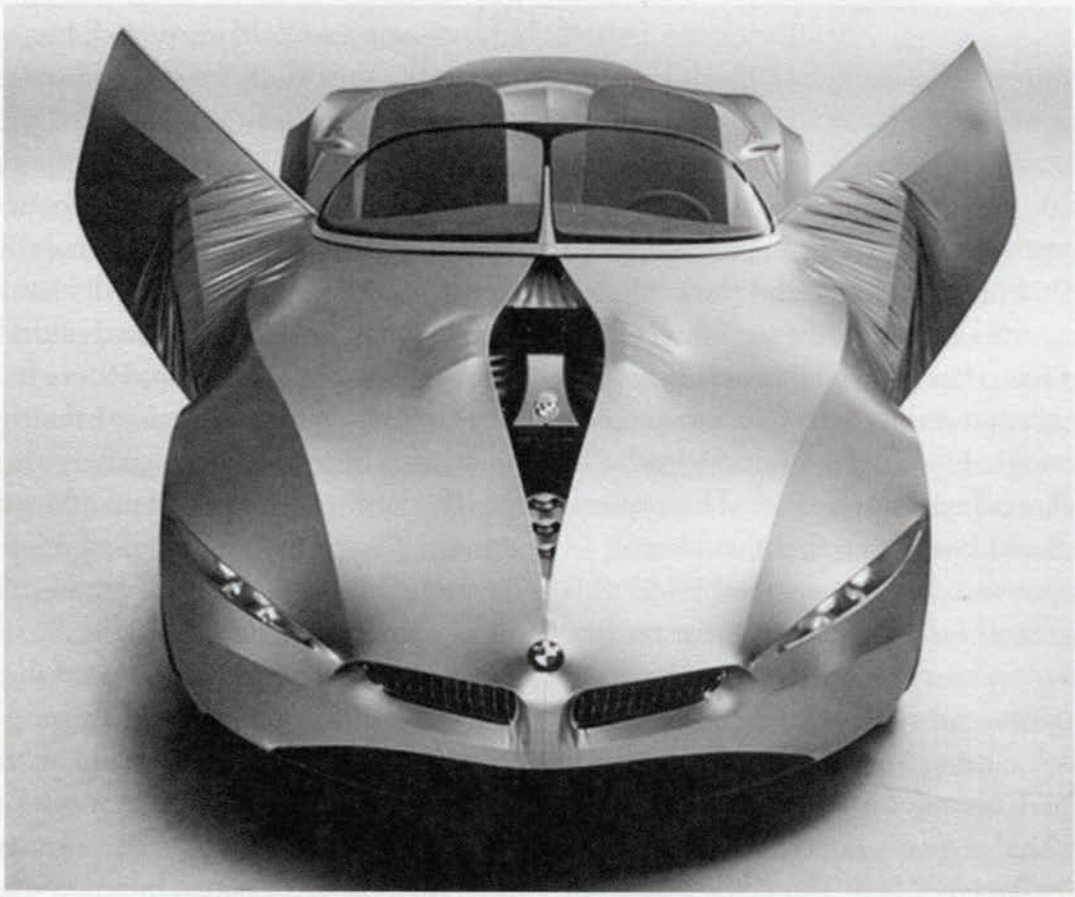
Cover image: Postcard of Princess Gina of Lichtenstein from the special edition of the original collective sex pulp novel **Naked Came the ****** published on the occasion of the Rita McBride retrospective exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein in the year 2000. The postcard was placed in the pages of the paperback as if someone had left it there. The postcard came with a postmarked stamp from the Principality of Lichtenstein, it was sent to Rita McBride by Gina Ashcraft and has been in the possession of Melissa Gordon since 2003. (Photo: J.A. Slominski)

PERSONA — ISSUE 2

GINA



MEKKA

MY SIXT GOLD MEMBER CARD lay in pieces around the car rental desk. I had lost it with the clerk. She's a real piece of work, and she didn't like me much either. She is the kind of Bavarian babe who has a ready dirndl under her orange service coat. No two-meter counter is safe enough, I surmised. I felt the gyro-motors in my advanced carbon-reinforced legs spin into action mode and I knew then that I was losing control. I flew in one easy bound over the bulky counter, thinking, *Shit! I really have to get that tune-up, my sparks overexcite on a dime*. This is the third time in a week that I've simply lost my head over petty bureaucratic matters. This key-carrying dirndl-head needs to learn a lesson. Pivoting in mid-air, I land with my thighs clamped around her chubby neck just above her décolletage. I hear the sickly whine of the servomotor as my inner thighs crush her carotid artery. That's what you get for not giving me the car I reserved! Dummkopf! Clamp, swish! My heart racing, I begin to feel myself letting loose a screaming orgasmic moan. So embarrassing! I thought I asked my technicians to disconnect the audio portion of my pleasure sequence? Fuck! Where are those keys?

There, in a little cardboard box labeled VIP, I eyed the unmistakable GINA Schlüssel. I could tell instantly by the amorphous, silvery carbon surface that this node-shaped object was the key to the light, visionary model car called GINA (an ingenious acronym for Geometry, INfinite, and Adaptations). I grab the key as the gasping dirndl-bitch turns to get a look at me one more time. She is lucky: it won't be the same next time, I can feel that between my legs. The urge is so very urgent.

I stormed off to floor three of the parking structure, stopping at the door marked "Damen" for a quick pit stop. These long flights really screw with my gyro-capacities. I am built to move constantly, not to sit for thirteen hours in legroom plus. I swivel my whole upper body so I can pratically see the tiny service hatch located just above the waistline of my new Louis Vuitton Kusama polka-dot pants. The hatch opened with a hiss and I accessed the adjustment screws of my carbon bio-enhancements. I reset the sensitivity level to around normal and watched as the discreet LED light finally glowed purple. Feeling better immediately, I close the hatch and glance at myself in the washroom mirror. Staring back at me was a blonde girl with a wild and sensuous mouth, high cheekbones, and disdainful silvery gray eyes. A small purple bruise had puffed up and slightly blackened my left cheek, and there were scratches on my forearms. *You look like shit*, I muttered under my breath as I exited the little girls' room.

The large corridors and people-moving expanses at Franz Joseph Strauss Flughafen (named after some Bavarian politician, not the composer's dad) were oddly empty, come to think of it, the whole airport had a deserted feel. As I navigated the last sequence of elevators and escalators and turned right into the open concrete of the-less-than glamorous parking structure, I spotted the GINA model in the row of black Bimmers lined up for business travelers who have yet to arrive. It must be really early in the morning. Standing in front of Parkplatz 210, the vehicle of the future stood ready for my guidance. A little scant for my tastes, too aerodynamic, although I do like speed and horizontal movement. So this is what Bavarian out-of-the-box thinkers are pushing these days. I circle the car, standard procedure for rentals; I am focused on the body and finish of this model, looking for scratches or dents that might cause me problems with the insurance. GINA's skin is made of silvery fabric, a mixture of woven titanium and Lycra, stretched over a mechanized electro-hydraulic skeleton of carbon tubes and complex profiles. Imagine the offspring of a one-night stand between a zeppelin and a 60s Grand Prix car. I continue my search for flaws and realize I should be looking for tears in the cloth, or maybe mustard stains from a Würstküche, like a dry cleaner. This car has more

in common with a Speedo than a Prius, there's no sign of such mundane details as a gas cap or trunk latch. Fräulein Dummkopf will charge me extra for bringing it back empty, I'm sure. Even the turn signals and taillights operate behind the fabric, shining through when activated. The engine itself hides under a long slit in the hood that opens like the zipper of a wetsuit.

Node-key in hand, I rub the carbon surface fondly, moving up and down, with little jerks and circular motions. Rubbing with more force and driving repetition, I can feel that I have nearly located the spot that will open GINA's operating system. Suddenly, a saucy electronic voice erupted from inside the node, "SEX is emotion in motion."

"Yeah, and I used to be Snow White but I drifted," I sass back.

With renewed vigor I press forward and around, encompassing the whole node with a grip from my left hand, ring finger continuing circular movements. Need access! Come on, come on! The carbon still feels soft and smooth to my touch, but a stiff wind blowing off the Alps keeps the material cold and my hands are turning deep purple. I blow hot breath until moisture gathers in a small convex curve on the node and I re-focus my attention, pressing my thumbs on either side of the indent with an upward force. Bingo!

GINA opens and like laugh lines on the sides of a perfectly smooth smile, the door peels back, wrinkles at the joint, and coaxes me in.

I know my destination, Effnerplatz, but not my target, they give you the target's name and photo only at the last possible moment. That's Company procedure. GINA's engine comes to life with the sound of metallic perfection, utterly complex, frictionless.

"Take me to Effnerplatz!" I command, hoping that this will initiate the autopilot, instead the saucy voice responds, "I generally avoid temptation, unless I can't resist it."

The car seals itself with a hiss, the seats shaping themselves to embrace me, claustrophobia rampant, but it's better than outfit-killing seatbelts, and we are off in a huff. GINA knows her way out of the airport, accelerating down the ramps and out into the wintery Bavarian morning. But is she headed for the Effnerplatz as I requested? I desperately press all the buttons fitted into the fake carbon fabric of the dashboard, a slit opens in the recess between the seats and out pops a small rectangular monitor with rounded corners – thank god for GPS. The screen flickers and comes to life with the chubby pink face of a middle-aged bureaucrat, little concentric rolls of fat create dimples on his forehead. He's sporting a thick, bristly mustache that extends below his nose like a dust broom, his close-set eyes are distrustful, his mouth pasted with a sardonic twist. Rather unappealing.

I am thrown back against the upholstery as GINA banks into a sharp right turn and plunges into the dirty glass and steel canopy that marks the beginning of the Mittlere Ring tunnel system.

"Cultivate your curves – they may be dangerous but they can't be avoided," commands the voice of GINA. It's a chatty system. I start to whisper to myself, gaining control of my breath, palms sweating as I grip the overstuffed steering wheel. Nearly at Effnerplatz now when suddenly an audio track accompanies the image of the pink, fat-faced man.

"Agent Ashcroft, your target tonight is Herr Udo Christianheim, corrupt politician and known sculpture-hater, presently holding the position of Bürgermeister and Master Burger of München. He will be giving a speech this afternoon at the inaugural celebration of the new tramline link that will travel through the Mae West tower, the largest carbon artwork on earth at Effnerplatz, and continue via Cosimastrasse to St. Emmeram in the Oberföhring district. It is imperative that you terminate Christianheim before he boards the tram for its maiden voyage."

Now the little monitor starts to smoke and the image putters into a bikini-clad model presenting a GINA on an enormous lazy Susan. I hear the salesman, he sounds like a German Steve Jobs.

"In reality, the aspects of crash impact, stiffness, and right correct handling can be handled in a space-frame type vehicle entirely without skin. Therefore, to go away from metal skin geometries – " It's a damn infomercial! I whack the little screen with my reinforced carbon boot hoping to get back to my assignment information but the sickly salesman voice continues its come-on, " – let tooling be a different issue, materials to lead the way, let the material do the talking. Content over dogma!"

This is a disaster: I know my target, the place, and approximate time for the hit, but all the other details are missing. As usual I will have to ad-lib – just then GINA pulls into the Effnerplatz traffic circle. I see it! The most beautiful thing my sore, optically enhanced eyeballs have ever rested upon. A towering hyperboloid made of the most luscious black carbon, its enormous members reaching endlessly skyward. I remember my geometry; biquaternion algebra and vectors from quaternions produce hyperboloids from the equation of a sphere: so sexy!

"Stop the car! *Halt!*" I yell, and GINA, sensing my passion, veers toward the curb and "parks it like it's hot." The door opens and I'm outside staring up at my new love, overwhelmed by her tapering waist and the twisting movement of her limbs. I want to climb up into her, straddling the woven carbon uprights, carbon on carbon, synthetic skin on synthetic skin. The sky is darkest purple, against which the gleaming blackness of the hyperboloid cuts its irresistible silhouette. I lunge and leap, in four bionically enhanced strides I reach her and start to climb, up and up, twenty meters at least, until I reach the first junction of her tubular perfection. Oh no, the pleasure sequence again, I scream with delight, rock back and forth, red and flaming, and full of shame.

My mood is ruined, my moment over. I remember my assignment and gather my focus. Hard to believe that even with all that training and discipline, I can lose it so easily over a pretty hyperboloid. Get your act together!

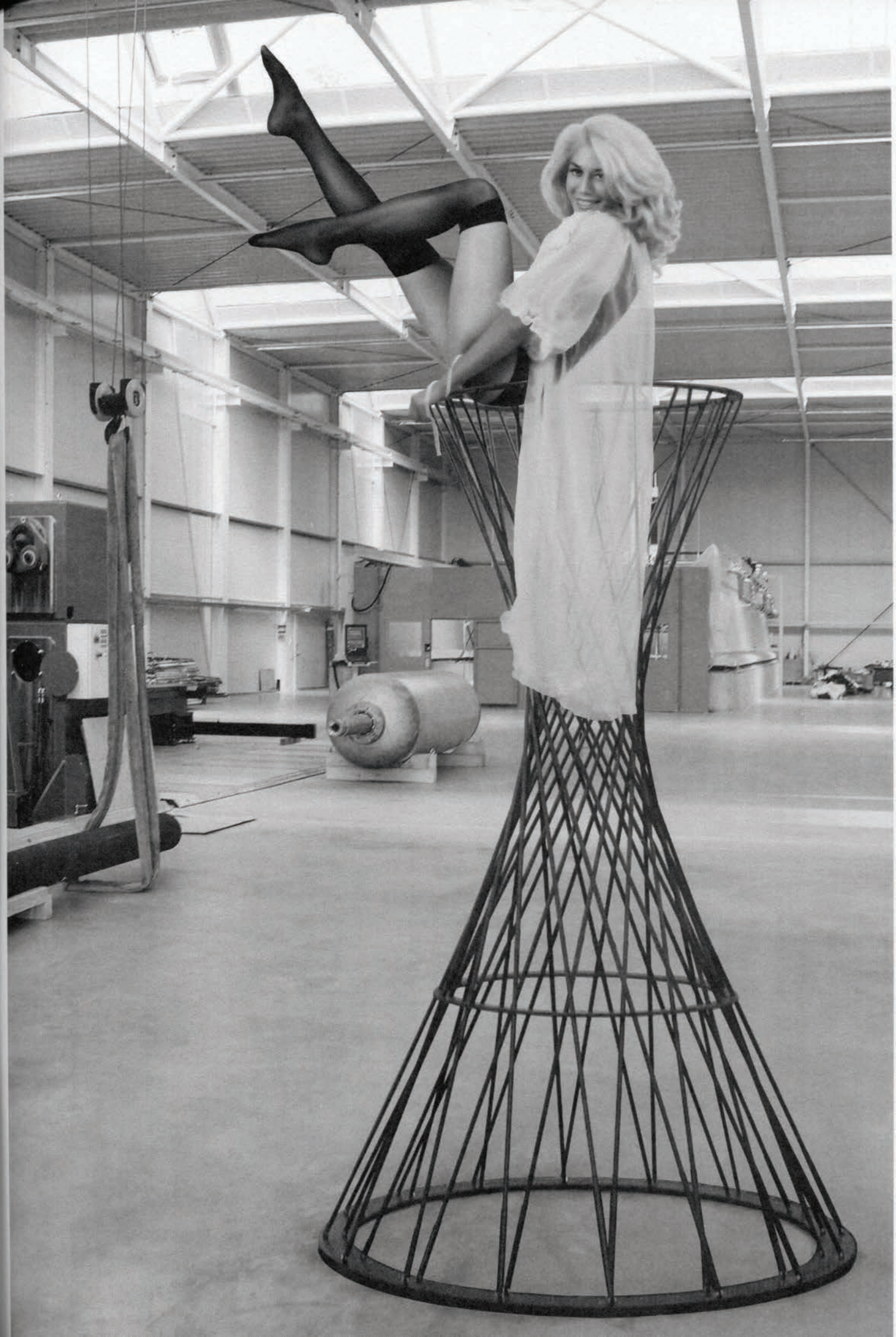
I can hear the Alpenhorns, the Hackbretts, and zithers not far away. It's Volksmusik, the tram inauguration must be underway. It's time to get back to work. With my hearing enhancements alerted I follow the horns due north. It's snowing and raining and cold. Not many people have decided to come out for this Winterfest. Can't blame them, all this official fuss, Lederhosen, and beer for a nineteenth century tram made in Japan. I am trying to assess the progress of events. I want to be on the virgin tram ride through Mae West. How hot will that be! But probably I will have to forgo the fun to keep my job.

I perch atop a makeshift festival stand and survey the area. This will be easy, there he is, Herr Udo, a sitting duck! I read in the program that he will be the third speaker. The first two speeches are excruciating, it's hard not to fall asleep. I am a bit jet lagged, it's uncomfortably cold and wet, and I'm still suffering from two pleasure-interruption moments already this morning. That can be damaging to my systems – all that interruptus! Finally, the third speaker takes the podium.

With a great leap and a twist, I fly through the air to the speaker's hut, landing in position on the canopy's edge. The Alpenhorns are sounding to welcome the mayor and I have used this moment of distraction to move seamlessly. As he settles into the microphone and begins his congenial crowd greetings, I descend without hesitation in a reverse curl off the roof and land with my legs squarely atop the shoulders of this pathetic man made of mere fossilized calcium. He lets out one brief squawk before I squeeze his thick neck with a quick thrust and scissor kick. His spine is severed and his head falls like a rag doll's onto his left shoulder. I swiftly hoist my torso back onto the canopy's roof, before the small group of onlookers can blink. I slide onto the moving tram's roof, sidestepping the electrical wires.

Satisfied and without shame, I ride atop the tram like Wonder Woman. Legs apart, in a stable V-shape, with my arms reaching toward the heavens, I feel the power of my position. I let out a roar and begin to weep as we cross through and under Mae West. Looking up I marvel once again at its purity and elegance. It shines with the silver light of a winter sun, it isn't just the surface that shines, it's the structure itself. It is surface and structure in one brilliant geometry.

I feel this moment will last forever.



HOGARTH PRESS
RICHMOND

TWO STORIES

TWO STORIES

HOGARTH PRESS
RICHMOND

PRESS AS LIBRARY:

AN INITIAL REPORT

ISLA LEAVER-YAP

ON THE PALOUSE, in Whitman County, there are two of the largest special library collections in Washington state, housed in Holland and Terrell Libraries. The first is North America's largest collection of books on fishing, containing titles like *The Academy for Grown Horsemen, Are Fishermen People?, Bait Casting with a Thermometer, Come Duck Shooting with Me, Come to the Land of Many Lakes, Come Wade the River, Poems of Gun and Rod* and *Women Can Fish*.

The second, sitting opposite, is an even larger collection: the personal library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf. It contains over 9,000 books, and the titles range from natural history volumes, the classics, the library of the historian Leslie Stephen (inherited by his daughter Virginia), books gifted by family, friends, and publishers, as well as books read to ruin, or some not read at all, and a smattering of political periodicals gathered throughout Leonard's life as a political journalist and editor.

Unlike institutional book collections, personal libraries are rarely structured according to any outward facing logic. The meaning of structure, if any is to be had at all, is exclusively reserved for the individual. In Petite Plaisance Cottage on Mount Desert Island, Maine, for example, the novelist Marguerite Yourcenar would order her collection of books not according to alphabet, but according to a timeline of the historical setting of each story. Her personal library uses fictional time as the sorting principle for reading (the arbitrariness of life and the Western alphabet is no way to best order a private library). Her collection echoes translator Alberto Manguel's dream library, where he imagines a collection in which all genres, styles, and stories coalesce

into a single uninterrupted stream, to be dipped into at any moment along its single continuum.

While the Woolfs' library has transitioned from Leonard's domestic disorder in Rodmell, England, to a more transparent system of institutional classification in Whitman County, the physical appearance of each of the titles betrays their original role. This was not a precious collection pickled for posterity, but, akin to the purpose of the angling library opposite, it was a toolbox. Many books are well-thumbed, spines broken, pages dog-eared or scrawled with notes. The more heavily read titles, bruised by overuse, show evidence of Virginia's reparatory bookbinding: newly painted lids cover old ones; spots of dried glue are visible in the seams of the casing; the faded wash of her inky handwriting perfunctorily traces the spines. This is a personal workshop where ones peer's and one's tools are indistinguishable. Embedded within this kit, and punctuating the shelves of this couple's library with affirming regularity, is the Woolfs' joint endeavor: the hand-printed books of the Hogarth Press.

The Hogarth Press came into material being in 1917, but the idea of creating such an imprint appeared in a much earlier conversation between the Woolfs on January 25, 1915, Virginia's birthday. She recorded in her diary, "Sitting at tea, we decided three things: in the first place to take Hogarth, if we can get it; in the second, to buy a Printing press; in the third to buy a Bull dog, probably called John. I am very much excited at the idea of all three – particularly the press." Regardless of John, who never cropped up either in conversation or reality again, Hogarth House was not bought according to domestic desires, but specifically to have large enough rooms to house a printing press. And so the press sat in the Woolf's dining room before its expanding size consigned it to the kitchen.

This was a publishing press conceived not just as a self-publishing enterprise, though it more than fulfilled such a role, but as a press that could also construct a particular kind of personal library within other people's homes, one that mirrored the workshop quality of the Woolfs' own. Repeat buyers were a common feature on the subscriber lists, and public libraries that presently own complete or near-complete series of the Press have often been able to significantly expand their collection in bulk from only a few donors. The conceptual, physical, and editorial investment of the Hogarth Press articulated the contours of the Woolfs' personal taste, while also revealing that their perception of readers was simply an extension of themselves. The Press worked towards producing a future library, a collection imagined beyond the Woolfs' own shelves of Hogarth House. This was literary narrowcasting: a library here could be reconstructed, there.

Classicist and poet Anne Carson observes how the narrative voices in Virginia's short stories constantly shift pronouns, from "we" to "one" to "you" to "they" to "I." The swell of voices is always in transition. This fluid movement between individual personas and collective ones was not simply confined to the content of Virginia's fiction, but also existent

The Latest Fashion

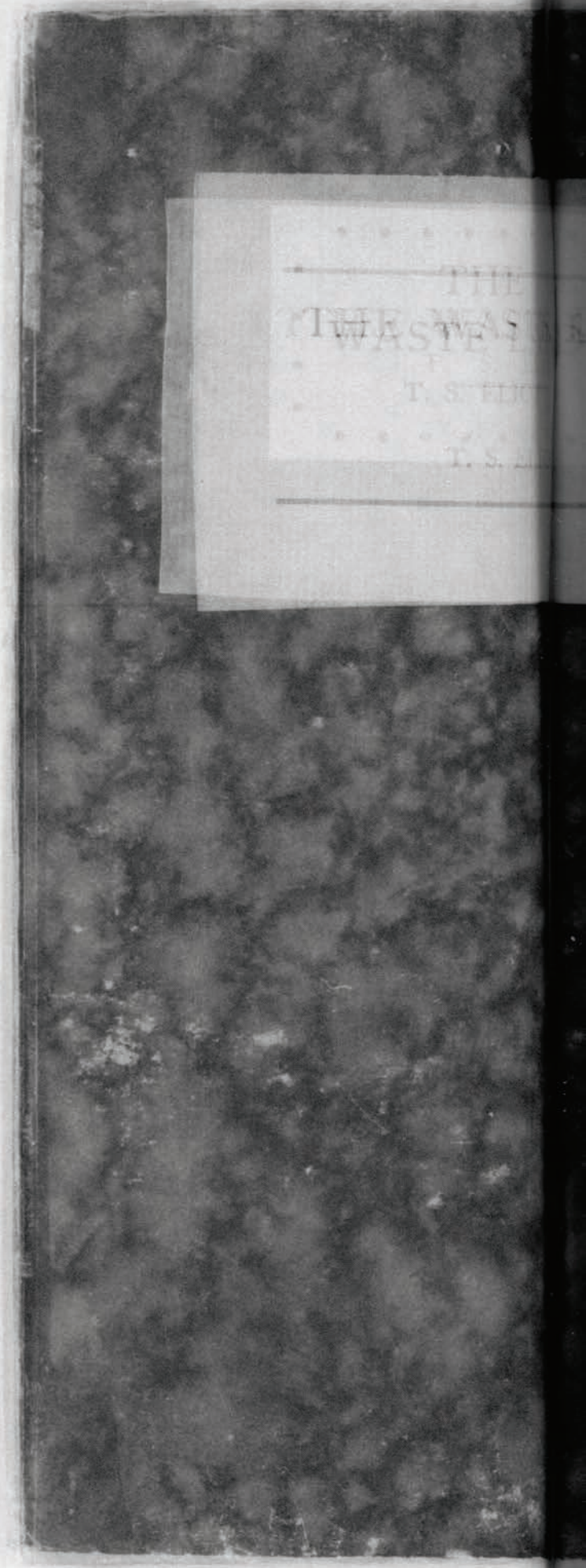
The book I have now is green, very pale. Eight volumes turned into one that I hardly want to read. At first there is discussion of the bustle – how far should it bulge? But it won't last much longer. The silhouette is changing. He writes, instead, of the pleats in the back. A surprise, you think, that he cared about these things. But now, in late August, I can only think of the unchanging things. He suggests jewelery. If I arrive early he will give me a necklace to wear. He says we are between seasons. A few more weeks and the fabrics and lengths will be settled. Very well, I will do little for now. I will think of how the people will trickle back and of how my evenings will fill. There is hardly any point in seeing the few straggling plays, much better to wait. My daydreams of the empty streets and the work done are best forgotten. That novel, yes. Half read, yes. If I had gone to his Tuesdays I would have paid attention to these things.

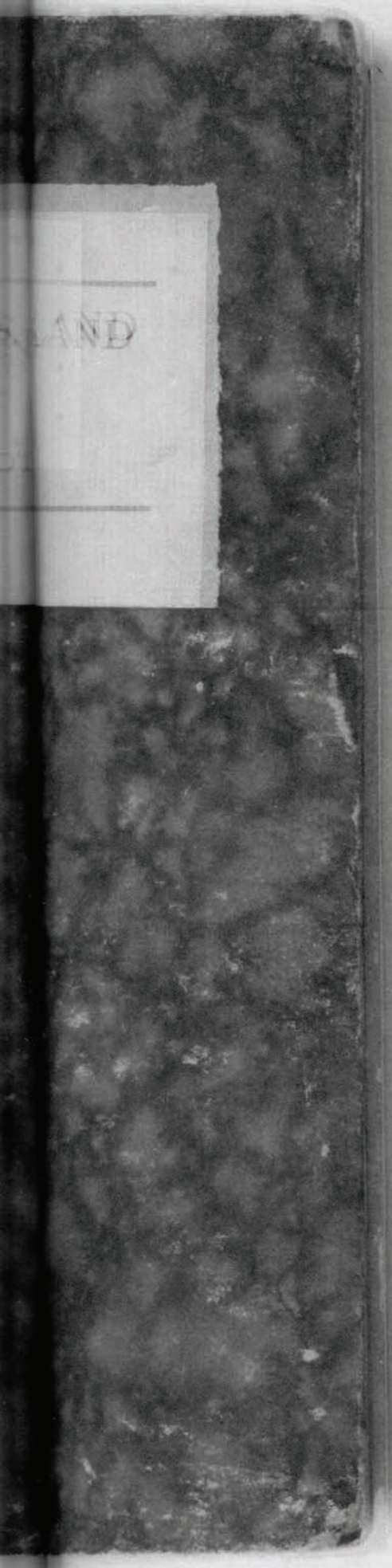
TWELVE ORIGINAL WOODCUTS

ROGER FRY

in the collaborative address of the Hogarth Press' early productions. Writer, editor, typesetter, printer, designer, bookbinder and, finally, reader – these were *promiscuous* roles, collapsed and reworked according to availability and practical requirement of each title. The private press was still a central part of the literary avant-garde publishing at the time Hogarth was founded, and the production of small run first editions remained *de rigueur*. (T.S. Eliot, for example, whose long-form poem *The Waste Land* went straight to serialization and commercial publication, realized he'd skipped a step and quickly sought to amend his error and cement the avant-garde status of the poem by publishing 450 copies with Hogarth, typeset by Virginia.) Yet Hogarth still traded on its intimacy as much as its collectability. Books designed with private circulation in mind – such as the posthumous publication of poems by Leonard's nephew Cecil Woolf, whose title page doubles as his epitaph – are testament to the intimacy of the Press' collective productions and emphasize the relationship between the Press and its early audience. Particularly acute in the Hogarth Press' first publication, *Two Stories*, is the relationship between writer and reader. The slim volume comprised Leonard's "Three Jews" and Virginia's "The Mark on the Wall"; before it even reached its wider audience, *Two Stories* had precombined its authors and readers, editors and publishers. Its making was a collaborative rivalry, played out in thirty-one pages.

Despite their passion towards the act of publication, the aesthetic qualities of the Press were never much fetishized and the style alarmingly unorthodox. The cover designer rarely had the chance to read the text prior to providing the artwork, Leonard never mastered the art of evenly inking the blocks, and paper stocks were often inconsistent. (*Two Stories*, for instance, appears in a variety of covers: some blue Japanese grass paper, others a graphic red and white honeycomb fabric, and the rest simply in plain wrappers). Virginia's binding, meanwhile, was a haphazard combination of gluing and stapling, and the pair sometimes amended typographical errors simply with a few frustrated pencil marks before posting off the books to their subscribers. After writer Laura Riding Gottschalk announced her divorce and consequently





dropped the married part of her name, the Woolfs – then in the midst of printing her poem *Voltaire, A Biographical Fantasy* – decided to overprint the now redundant "Gottschalk" with a thick double strike-through, rather than correct the title page through reprint. (Riding's dedication to her ex-husband inexplicably remained on the following page).

It wasn't just the text that was treated with exuberant disregard. During the printing of *Two Stories*, Dora Carrington's illustrative woodcuts were "edited" by the writers-cum-publishers when they decided to cut off part of the design to improve ease of printing (Carrington was retrospectively notified of this modification by letter). Katherine Mansfield, meanwhile, commissioned her friend and Scottish Colorist J.D. Fergusson to produce the woodcuts for her cover of *Prelude*, but Virginia so disliked Fergusson's design she declared she could hardly bear printing it. A brief falling out between Virginia and Mansfield was reconciled when the latter decided it was enough to simply print illustrated copies for Mansfield, while Virginia's personal copy remained blank. Mansfield wrote privately to a friend regarding the incident, "To Hell with other people's presses." (She began her own press, Heron, shortly after.) Virginia's sister, Vanessa Bell, meanwhile, threatened to never work with the Press again after a turbulent series of discussions about her own artwork for Virginia's *Kew Gardens* – the first major financial success for the Press.

Despite the many arguments over basic tenets of design and collaboration, the early output is nonetheless characterized primarily by its jacket and cover design. Initially publications were wrapped with decorative papers Virginia had picked up while on her travels, but the Woolfs soon engaged the artwork of Vanessa Bell and her close friend Roger Fry, both of whom had established the design enterprise Omega Workshops some years earlier with Duncan Grant. Fry's daughter Pamela Diamond, an expert in marbling, is also likely to have been involved, but design details remain scant in their attribution of authorship. Most striking, however, were Fry's covers. Using rolls of stiff wallpaper, he would throw paint randomly onto its surface, layering the paper with proto-abstract expressionist splatters. The rolls of wallpaper would then be cut up into individual book covers. Although Fry's paint splatter gesture was essentially decorative (rather than conceptual) it nonetheless contains the declarative flourish, the "I made this," and his designs remain the most compelling of all the hand-printed editions.

There were a number of limitations dictated by the publishing output: most obviously length and size – obvious hurdles for a cottage industry such as theirs, and in 1918 the Woolfs were unable to take a manuscript titled *Ulysses* from an Irish writer named Joyce because of the manuscript's length. Besides, Virginia thought it an "underbred book." But the Press remained small and responsive, and thus offered the Woolfs an uncommon degree of maneuverability. They possessed the agency to give voice and shape to the output of younger writers,

PRELUDE

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

make distinctly un-commercial choices, and indulge niche interests that spanned the writings of Freud, poems by Robert Graves penned under a pseudonym, Maxim Gorky's biography of Tolstoy, and, importantly, a test site for their own short stories and essays. It legitimated a certain type of critical reading for these writers, a type of reading that could end up with physical dissemination. In short, it offered both freedom and ever-increasing degrees of financial stability upon which the Woolfs could rely.

But the Hogarth Press was also a form of personal therapy. Leonard initially conceived of the laborious and time-consuming work of the Press as a valuable distraction for Virginia, one that could alleviate bouts of psychological strain she experienced often during intense periods of rewriting. The setting of type, methods of binding, rigorous editing and proofing – these activities would provide a material occupation parallel to the act of writing, and of reading. (The role of typesetting in relation to a modernist approach to language did not escape Virginia.) But the therapy was not simply for her; it also busied the convalescing John Woolf, Leonard's youngest brother, who helped typeset Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* while he recovered from battle wounds. For Leonard, meanwhile, it was an emotional endeavor; John Lehman, who ended up co-directing the press with Leonard, described it as the "child their marriage had never produced."

"Press." Perhaps it is not by accident that we use the same word for both organization and apparatus. "Press" describes the effect of the contact that occurs between elements, the collision between things that generates a publication – a fugitive pattern of information made materially contingent. "Press" is an event developed under great collective pressure. What occurs after this pressure is applied is, however, a publication. How to assimilate the gulf between these two moments is more of a reflective endeavor.

On December 10, 1930, Virginia wrote a letter to an unidentified correspondent. It is likely that the person to whom it was written never existed; Virginia chose to use the letter to address criticism of the Hogarth Press leveled perhaps by external parties, though certainly within her own circle, most notably by her sister. She was, in effect, writing to herself so that she might read it for herself – an action that had many variants among the associates of the Hogarth Press. She wrote, "I agree that the colour is uneven, the letters not always clear, the spacing inaccurate, and the word "campion" should read "companion." All I have to urge in excuse is that printing is a hobby carried on in the basement of a London house; that as amateurs all instruction in the art was denied us; that we have picked up what we know for ourselves; and that we practice printing in the intervals of lives that are otherwise engaged." Virginia concludes, "In spite of all this, I believe that you can already sell your copy for more than the guinea you gave, as the edition is largely over subscribed, so that though we have not satisfied your taste, we hope that we have not robbed your purse."

Single and multiple exposure photographs taken of the hand-printed Hogarth press books from the E.J. Pratt Library, Toronto.

IN FRIEND-SHIP

CÉLINE CONDORELLI

TO TRY TO SAY SOMETHING, I try to think, and find my trajectory through collecting and navigating through material. Perhaps this is a way of doing things that creates close ties and connections between things, people, and myself, and that is something that more often than not has the feel of a friendship of sorts. I work by spending time with things I have collected, the references that I carry along, like friendly voices in my head, which also include the essential voices of inspirational thinkers from the past that populate my thoughts and conversations and are in this way, also present. Friendship then, is perhaps a condition of work in my practice – a fundamental aspect of personal support, a condition for doing things together. I consider friendship, like support, an essentially political relationship, one of allegiance and responsibility, and I'd like to address it as a specific model of relationship in the large question of how to live and work together – and autonomously – towards change, as a way to act in the world. Being a friend entails a commitment, a decision, and encompasses the implied positioning that any activity in culture entails. Working together can both start from and create forms of solidarity and/or friendship, which are therefore pursued as both condition and intent, motivating actions taken and allowing work undertaken. With this peculiar awareness in mind, I have been collecting material that exposes what it may mean to consider friendship as a condition for thinking, and does so through the specific friendship of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy.

There is in Hannah Arendt a concept of culture that is, to my view, close to what I would call friendship as outlined above. She defines it as "the company that one chooses to keep, in the present as well as in the past." She quotes Cicero saying he'd rather go astray with Plato than hold the truth with Pythagoras. What Cicero means by this, I imagine, is that he prefers the company of Plato than a so-called truth, especially if proclaimed by a bore like Pythagoras. The politics of such a judgment are of an alliance, of whom one would rather be with. The word friendship does not actually appear in her text, and "the company one keeps," as I understand it, is neither the exclusive group of friends nor the production of life, but *cultura animi*, a kind of humanism. In this way the choices and alliances that we make all the time, (like which books to read and refer to or with whom to work and think) are instrumental in the formation of culture. I find this notion of friendship and/or culture quite empowering, perhaps even liberating, and I was interested in not just understanding it in general abstract terms, but through the specific situation of Arendt's friendship with McCarthy, taking place and speaking to me through twenty-five years of letters they exchanged, and numerous books and publications with which they helped each other.

The ancient tradition defines friendship as an exercise in freedom, which needs to be exercised in freedom, meaning exclusively by and with free and equal subjects. As usual, such a freedom is defined negatively: freedom from oppression, coercion, from unreasonable external constraints on action, but also from affects and inclination, from the slavery of desires, etc. However, jurisdictional equality is what counts – so that in a world in which women and slaves are not considered part of the polis, of the democratic space of the city, but just occupy the physical space of it, then friendship can only take place amongst men. This means that according to that tradition, freedoms like friendship can only be exercised by free men and that in a world in which women are subaltern, they cannot be addressed in friendship, and are therefore also excluded from its discourse. As the discourse around friendship is born and develops in ancient Greece, where women and slaves are excluded from democracy, this rather heavy footnote is bizarrely carried through the history of philosophy all the way – but only sometimes consciously so – until it reaches us; so that this discourse, like many things, replicates the same exclusions in which it was born. Hannah Arendt – the only woman on the philosophers's shelf – revives the polis-model of freedom and places politics in the realm of action (what she calls *vita activa*, active life), but in her terms separates it from labor (the production of humanity's own survival) and work (the construction of the material world). She doesn't explicitly exclude slaves or women from the space of democracy, but neither does she include them; and she continues to disqualify what has traditionally been attributed to women and slaves – sensuousness and materiality.

In revisiting the small but rich philosophical discourse on friendship – Aristotle, Montaigne, Derrida, Agamben, and Blanchot – I found that it is a discourse of friendship among men. It is shocking how powerful these definitions still are in modern philosophy. Nietzsche argues like this: "Are you a slave? Then you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? Then you cannot have friends. All-too-long have a slave and a tyrant been concealed in woman. Therefore woman is not yet capable of friendship: she knows only love."

Derrida does address this problem in one chapter of *The Politics of Friendship*, and yet the issue remains. No women philosophers have written about friendship, to the best of my knowledge, and more crucially, there seems to be something inherently patriarchal, perhaps fratriarchal about these constructions of friendship, that are based on the idea of a nation of brothers (and the terrifying notion that we can only live together because we are the same, we share the same land, the same birth, the same blood, the same language, etc). Simple, haunting questions emerge from this: can I use a discourse that excludes me, and how? Should I produce my own? And how would a discourse on friendship that includes women be structured?

Nietzsche says: not yet. What is the yet to be reached? Which qualification does woman need to fulfill in order to graduate to the capacity for friendship? And how about the friendship that women and slaves could have together and with each other? Freedom from affects begs another question: I could never accept Socrates' decision that women

should not be present at his death because they would be over-emotional. Why should affect not be part of how to die? And why should the discourse of philosophy, that one imagines is what Socrates wanted to die surrounded by, be free from affects? I guess we know that this could never really be the case, but what kind of freedom does the exclusion of desires propose? Surely there is also a desire for freedom in freedom too?

So for one I am concerned with the possibility of friendship between men and women, and of course between women themselves within philosophical discourse. But a perhaps more constructive process is to think less of the whys of exclusion, and instead focus on how to produce an inclusive discourse on friendship, or how to include women, as well as the territories historically attributed to them like affects and materiality, in a discourse on friendship. For this to happen I needed to start by thinking through how friendship, as a relationship, takes place.

Johan Hartle responded to me by saying that "friendship is an affectionate relationship in and through which humans mutually increase their *potentia agendi*, their vital capacities. Spinoza sees, in a classically philosophical way, friendship's highest potential in the communal development of the intellect. But the intellect here just functions to differentiate and develop the body and its affects. Spinoza's approach to friendship is to some extent exceptional, as he does not accept any ontological separation between mind and body. The formation of the common or the *res publica* is, in that sense, as much an agreement in terms of bodies as it is in terms of intellects. In this way, the construction of a people is the construction of shared affects.

"One must therefore also *con-sent* that his friend exists… and this happens by living together and by sharing acts and thoughts in common. In this sense, we say that humans live together, unlike cattle that share the pasture together…"

I really like and am drawn to the idea of living together and sharing acts and thoughts in common, in a way that what is shared is not things, objects, property, qualities (being brothers, men, French, artists, or whatever) but an activity, a process of co-existence through doing and thinking. What this proposes is a process of association that remains open as to what or whom may partake in it.

Furthermore, could a woman speak *in* friendship? By engaging in the work of friendship we can arrive at what Arendt recalls with her friend Mary McCarthy: "It's not that we think so much alike, but that we do this thinking-business for and with each other." The *thinking-business* is work in friendship, and friendship at work.

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN CÉLINE CONDORELLI AND AVERY F. GORDON

This conversation formed Céline Condorelli's first part for the **How to Work Together** project, a shared programme by Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire, London.

Avery You have been thinking about friendship quite a bit and you have written at least two texts about it, including a conversation you published with the philosopher Johan Hartle. Why?

Céline As you know, I've had a long-term interest in support and support structures and friendship is one of the most fundamental forms of support in practice. When I was working on my book *Support Structures* friendship was opening up all kinds of questions but it was too big of a subject for me to address in one chapter. The primary motivation for writing the texts you mention was to start to directly explore the notion of friendship. I started by looking at how it appeared in philosophical discourse and immediately I encountered two hurdles: first, no women philosophers have ever written about friendship – which is still unbelievable to me. And second, all these beautiful philosophical texts written by men explicitly exclude women and slaves from the realm of friendship. So, to begin, I had to ask how I could work with these conditions, and whether I would need to invent a discourse of friendship based on those amongst the excluded. Another aspect that was important to me was to address friendship in action, to think about it as a practice. The philosophical tradition demands defining what friendship is in theoretical or abstract terms, but I was interested in how to be and work in friendship, in inhabiting it as a condition.

I've been thinking about friendship on two levels that I'm not sure can be entirely reconciled. One level of it is as a way of associating yourself with other people. The reason why we're sitting together talking is also because we are friends: and we are working together at the same time. Another level has to do with friendship as a way of associating yourself with ideas or befriending issues. What Hannah Arendt called "this thinking business" (her description of the work that she and Mary McCarthy did individually and in relation to each other) is done from a position of closeness to something or someone and it requires a particular proximity that I believe is fundamental. In other words, there is intimacy in relationship to people, and also in relation to issues, that I would call friendship. What ideas, issues and people do we want to spend our time with? [She holds up a book] Why did you bring this book to our conversation?

Avery I brought John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* [Oxford University Press, 1999] because when I read your interview with Johan to prepare for our conversation, I was interested in your remark that philosophers had excluded slaves from the domain of friendship. Of course, in most slave-holding societies, slaves suffer various civil and social disabilities; a slave-holding society in general treats the slave not as a friend but as property or labor or stranger or barbarian. In a slave-holding society like that in the United States, the slave was treated as a complete nonperson – a nonhuman human being – and was legally prohibited from free association, from kinship, from reading and writing and so on. John Hope Franklin is one of the most venerable African American historians in the United States and this book is a careful and detailed account of how slaves managed to run away, where they went, who helped them, how they avoided capture (or didn't). It makes abundantly clear how necessary friendship and friendly support was for both surviving and, if undertaken, successful escape from plantation life. Friendship, working well together, helping out, solidarity, keeping secrets: these were crucial aspects of African American slave culture because the absence of public recognition and support (worse its criminalization) meant that you had to create your own systems of support within your own cultural milieu. You've been taken captive and the state and society are organized around keeping you enslaved and so obviously they cannot be trusted with your well being. This is a dangerous situation for people and something of what you're calling friendship and support is utterly essential, and necessarily secret, visible only to those who can be trusted. Necessary for teaching or learning how to read and write or for marrying or maintaining kinship relations or keeping your old name still spoken. Necessary for stealing some food for the road or turning a blind eye when someone else does. Necessary for all that's involved in getting on and travelling the "underground railroad" – the network of routes, safe houses, and assistance – that Black and White abolitionists maintained.

Women, slaves, the lower classes, migrants – the exclusionary foundations of Western notions of sociality are clear. And yet in many ways these groups of people provide one of the richest archives of friendship practices throughout history. Friendship has been treated by philosophers as an abstraction, and primarily as a cipher for theories of the political, which make it fundamentally exclusionary. We are speaking here of ways of thinking about friendship that begin from the practical activities of the excluded.

Céline I had an intuition that it is exactly amongst the excluded that more interesting models of friendship in practice can be found. Looking for women's friendships, for instance I found them among the suffragettes, and I also looked for models of friendship in my work on the commons. In both these cases, friendship works as a modality of social change, which can produce other forms of doing things, and these are more than just about work. The suffragettes were or became friends in their struggle to change women's conditions, which is something we could call work, but also and mostly this was about how they wanted to live, and how they wanted other women to be able to live. I went looking for mentions of friendships through letters and documents and again did not find it discussed explicitly, yet something that became apparent was the warmth of the dialogues, the clear solidarity imbedded in the acting together, the small gestures of personal kindness included in what I would call a larger care towards women's conditions. It struck me how few individuals emerged from the movement as clear representatives or spokeswomen, which was also true in relation to the Greenham Common's women peace camps, where solidarity rather than hierarchy predominated.

Avery 19th century women's friendships were an important research topic for early second wave women's historians in part because the intimate and elaborated world of women's friendships was a bit of a public secret: people knew but didn't know that friendships kept nonworking women from going mad in their restricted private lives, and kept working class women from disaster and drowning in work, and also provided a respectable cover for lesbian women to love and live together. Women's friendships were also important to the second wave because they were seen as anti-patriarchal, a way of shifting one's investments and attentions away from a male-centered existence and way of life.

We are finding other references or models for thinking of friendship...

Céline ... with people who are subject to exclusions and restrictions of various sorts, like the women who fought against nuclear militarization with knitting and face paint, and the runaway slaves who formed their own self-governed communities.

Avery Yes, the maroons and the quilombolas, who also model a particular kind of "utopian" politics, again based on solidarity and horizontal relationships. Pirate societies like the "pirate utopias" Hakim Bey wrote about, or pirate culture aboard ship, as Marcus Redeker has shown, have interesting and elaborate friendship systems and rules for maintaining solidarity and equality in piracy. These are all other references than the philosophers for thinking about friendship.

One of my favorite examples is Jacques Rancière's "bad" workers – all those militant poets, artists, and workers in the 1830s and 40s who formed these little friendship circles, hanging out together and trying to figure out how to lead a life in which they didn't have to be a worker. *La nuit des prolétaires: Archives du rêve ouvrie* [1981] is my favorite book of Ranciére's. It is a very beautifully researched and written book and it is also very mischievous. Rather than finding one's freedom or liberation in the degraded terms in which you are oppressed, these workers rejected the whole workerist ideology that dominated political thinking then (and still does to a large extent). They said: "we want to paint, to write poetry, to philosophize, to wander around thinking about the world, about beauty, ..."

I'm very interested in the politics – or more precisely, the onto-epistemological affects (the lived political consciousness) – of disidentification. That's to say when you disidentify with what they want or expect you to be (whoever the "they" is in any given situation) with whom, then, do you make friends or common cause? What options are available to you?

You mentioned the suffragettes earlier – women rejecting traditional domestic roles for women and fighting for the right to vote and to work and to own property. Although many of these women were imprisoned and force-fed when they went on hunger strike, because they were, in the main, educated and from the middle and upper classes, their imprisonment was temporary and obviously political. And like other political prisoners, prison helped provide a context for further solidarity and organizing. By contrast, at the very same time, poor women who refused to identify with and perform the roles assigned them as either good workers or good mothers or moral women were sent to workhouses for confinement and "correction." We know far less about how these nonconformist women related to each other in the workhouses and debtor prisons – did they befriend each other or not? How did they talk to each other, and about what? What "thinking business" might they have done with each other? To answer these questions requires a bit of invention. For these women to get out of prison they would have had to persuade the authorities that they were "corrected." This would have introduced an additional element of dissimulation into their lives and into the archive that we, today, must read around. Rancière's bad workers were, well, at least recognized as workers. These women did not even have that recognition.

Céline To return for a moment to *La nuit des prolétaires*, how did they form their little society? Did they all work to survive?

Avery They worked – they were plumbers and cobblers and tailors and bakers and the men who emptied the sewers. They met at night, often staying up all night, drinking and talking and writing, which is why Rancière called the book *La nuit des prolétaires* – the night of the proletarians.

Céline What's beautiful about that is that it suggests that friendship is a way of doing intellectual labor together, and also as an escape from work, in order to become more than one's work, more than a worker.

Avery I agree. In effect, they were developing and modeling a way of living that was designed to abolish the divisions between mental and manual labor and between productive and unproductive work that are organic to capitalist work relations. And at least in Rancière's very specific political interpretation in the 1980s, they were also...

Céline They refused to be defined by just being a worker.

Avery Exactly. And, in this sense, they also refused to be for the intellectuals the model worker politically and offered a more complex and richer model for what worker solidarity means.

Céline Who's the friend of the bad worker?

Avery The other bad workers! [*laughs*]
So far, our experimental laboratory for theorizing friendship includes women, slaves, runaways, and pirates of all genders / sexualities. I'd like to add another reference. You know sociologist Asef Bayat's book *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* [2009]. He uses the term "quiet encroachment" to describe the cooperative activities among the poor in the world's largest cities, such as Cairo, where poor people must essentially take care of themselves because the state has abandoned them. Bayat says that quiet encroachment doesn't call attention to itself and is oriented around ordinary practices of everyday life. It's an interesting model of cooperation, it's definitely a support structure or set of support structures, and it certainly involves a certain degree of friendliness in our expanded terms.

Céline Well it's very real and pragmatic. These are small and immediate actions that don't have to do with a higher level of awareness of politics, but rather with accomplishing specific tasks and surviving today and tomorrow.

Avery I think that Bayat's point is that there is a highly developed awareness of politics and this awareness in part produces the specific "quiet encroachment" modalities by which people get what they need and help each other out. In Cairo, for example, five friends or relatives or neighbors can help a family build an illegal apartment in two

evenings without being caught. It takes a great deal of knowledge to make this happen hundreds of times all over the city: practical building knowledge, knowledge of the city and its resources and housing policies, and political knowledge too. The political awareness is embedded in an attenuated form in these other knowledges and in the common practices shared by people who are usually not (yet) organized as political actors. Bayat says that much of the preparation for organized collective mobilization is invisible, but is nonetheless happening. All of a sudden, there are a million people in Tahrir Square (which happened right after he published the book). People asked: "how could that have happened?" But of course that's the whole point of quiet encroachment: you are not announcing the preparation because you don't want to or you don't even know you're preparing (yet).

Céline The preparation is not announced in the terms of traditional politics. It is just there as a support structure, and that is another really interesting model for thinking about friendships offered by the excluded. Of course, this does not undermine but rather sidesteps how important male friendships are, or the friendships of the powerful, between and amongst power and of those included by it. It is the other friendships that offer more potential for us here.

Avery They offer more potential if you're interested in upsetting the order of things, because a certain kind of male friendship is also one basis for the perpetuation of unequal power and authority. A certain kind of male homosociality – *the old boy's club* – characterizes intimate circles of power where men make deals and trades and promote their friends and enjoy a comfort among themselves and sometimes play scary games with each other too. And the Manichean notions of loyalty and inclusion that divide the world into friend/enemy is most assuredly a legacy of the great institutions men have invented and forced upon the rest of us – the military, the monarchy, the monastery, the prison, the factory.

Céline We've traced a nice line here, in order to look at friendship as a model for working together. And the route to follow is exactly through those friendships that are excluded from the friendships of power, which is why the friendships among women, slaves, and castaways are good pointers, good models. In all of these descriptions – whether it's the bad worker, the 19th century woman, or the runaway slave – friends help each other out, and in doing so also make common cause. Friendship is essential to understanding these cooperative relations and at the same time not separate from taking sides with the issues at stake, so that they are all forms of personal and political friendships. I would say in the cases we discussed friendships work on both levels, which is interesting to me, because perhaps that means they can provide real models of resistance to a system. Befriending issues is also the point at which the scale of friendship gets larger, at which while still being an elective affinity and working on a personal level, it also has consequences on a larger scale.

Avery The bad worker, the runaway... We haven't yet talked about imaginary friends, of which I have many. I think we would both agree that all friendships involve a degree of fantasy or imagination, and some might say that that the best friendships are those where the attachment to the fantasy is greatest. But I mean the imaginary friends we invent.

Céline I have some of these too, but they are usually historical figures, like Lissitzky, with whom I have a really good friendship, in my mind. [*laughs*]

Avery Lissitzky is an inspiring friend to have! I have many friends who are characters in books, who are definitely my friends and have been so for a long time. When I was a child, my first friends were imaginary and they were very dear to me. I don't think I would have survived the rather difficult family life I experienced without them. Even as a child, they were considered "childish" and then later a pathology, but I was very loyal to them. Others were inventions or people who lived in my dreams. They are still important to me and raise this question: when you are thinking, to whom are you talking? Who is your audience, who is your immediate interlocutor?

DEAR MARISA MERZ,

When an artist admires another artist, what is there to say? And how to say it, while avoiding the typical pitfalls? How can I trust my words, when art's first language is not written or verbal? Meanwhile, I mean to avoid platitudes: high walls hide an empty center. But will plain words form false roadblocks, flattening the tone and tempo of your practice, which already explains itself perfectly, visually?

I can only come up with the antique exchange of the letter. I'm not interested in staking claims: I want a subjective exploration. Letters reveal the author rather than the addressee, who remains a figure glimpsed in the corner of the eye. Here is a collection of thoughts that start from the viewing of your work, but depart from their subject, each thought seeking its own destination.

IDENTITY IS A DISASTER

A distractingly dramatic start. Here's a phrases from Maurice Blanchot: *the disaster de-scribes*. The disaster can't be interrogated: it exceeds description while it abruptly reorders the order of things. We can speak around the edges of disasters: of solutions, firsthand accounts, aftermath, but the thing itself? Not at all. It is always too much; ungraspably excessive.

The faces in your work also exceed description, but what is the manner of their excess? Here's a face from your 2003 exhibition in Winterthur, Switzerland, a soft knob of charcoal contained by a light contour line, with a vague hint of two eyes and a mouth. To me, this face seems less to be struggling to *become*, than engaged in a struggle to *dissolve*. Like the disaster, it's a blank spot that strives to disappear, perpetually pulling its visual markers downwards, underground, out of sight, but still obstinate in its confrontational presence. This obstinacy is its excess.

And like the disaster, they are also absurd. One could say that the disaster is a string of terrible jokes wrought upon the landscape and its inhabitants, terrifying punch line following punch line. I don't mean to say that your faces embody such terror, they possess a gentle, rather than brutal, absurdity. But they also speak to absurdity's nature, a flip-flop between the humorous and the irrational. The first is aligned with humanity and sympathy, the second with helplessness and despair. When two such different elements cohabit, there is "too much": excess energy is generated by being more than one thing at one time.

But I don't mean to mystify. The matter at hand is this face. And here is a quote from you, from 2009: "The face is a void, an emotion, I think." You were speaking of another face, but perhaps this could be applied here. A void should be the opposite of an emotion, but here they both are, apples and oranges, tigers and gazelles. Maybe in the world of action and image, opposites can inhabit the same space. Maybe it's only in the world of words where opposites negate. In order to truly speak of the world of action and image, of seeming opposites inhabiting the same space, one must *de-scribe*.

Marisa Merz, **Untitled**, 2003
Mixed media on paper,
100 × 50 cm
Kunstmuseum Winterthur Collection

THE VEILED WOMAN IS THE ORIGINAL SURVEILLANCE CAMERA

Some of your paintings seem to be women with veils. And then there are your woven copper pieces that drape across walls, floors, through space. They're transparent, and like all transparent objects, dare the viewer to claim that *they know, have seen, understand.*

There's much debate about whether a woman with a veil is a woman subjected to the will of another. But a veil is essentially a form of visual blockage, a means of protection – *visual chain mail.* From inside the veil, one can see everything. From outside the veil, gaze is compromised, always partially glancing off the unperturbed surface. A veil exaggerates the separation between viewer and subject. Who would presume to know the subject, when the subject separates itself so? Who presumes to know *me*, that primal designation of self contained within the self?

Exaggerated separations take the form of shapes that exceed geometry, and this person wonders who is watching whom. A surveillance camera watches us, but when we look back, we can never travel through its smooth eye through to the other side. The camera becomes a decoy for the withheld subject. She is watching, but we can't see her. Veils create fictional entities that result from the combination of the veil and the subject it blocks from view. Fictional entity, decoy, who are we talking about?

Poetry has so many words for passively blocked vision – but of a self-knowing blockage? Obfuscation operating as an assertion of self-worthiness? What is the word for that? I can't tell if the woman with veils is watching me, and it is her prerogative to keep that knowledge to herself. That this quandary can be captured in a painting is, for me, nothing short of magical.

AN EXTRA MAGICAL THING WE CAN'T HAVE

It's easy to think of art as an additive series of gestures: paint is brushed onto a canvas, plaster is massed upon an armature, where there was nothingness is now visuals, sound, thought; the passage of time results in the accumulation of events and impressions. However, there's an older model of art, which posits the process as a series of subtractions: the subject is revealed, freed from within. Daphne was always inside the marble in a state of semi-frozen transformation, she just had to be *found.*

Initially, the additive and subtractive seem like symmetrical opposites, and yet, on further thought, it seems they are more incompatible than oppositional. It's completely different to form something out of nothing, than it is to encourage latent being to emerge by subtracting excess. A similar polarity of incompatibles could be drawn between *knowledge* and *use-value.*

Marisa Merz, **Untitled**
Unfired and painted clay, iron,
16 × 16 × 12 cm
Courtesy Fondazione Merz, Turin
Photo: Paolo Pellion

Knowledge is a new world quantity: I know the cow down to its molecular makeup, its development back to the primordial, and its future as an engineered species. Use-value is an old world quantity: the cow serves a purpose and may be manipulated, but her history, future, and present consciousness are not fully controlled. She has a use but is not known. I can bring her out to the field, into the sunlight, but what she is behind those eyes, I can't say. Behind the eyes is an extra magical thing that remains unknown.

We live in a world in which everything has been laid out for picking and prodding, in which all can supposedly be understood. Rather than opposing this to an invented past of innocent brutal non-knowledge, I'd rather say this: we live in a world that is more innocent than it was before, frozen in pre-adolescent arrogance. We don't know any more than we ever did, but our access to the true difference of others has been blocked by our virtual structures. I am perpetually sheltered from the elusive.

I can approach the elusive in your work. It does what the elusive does, which is avoid my gaze. As humans, we offer fractions of ourselves to other humans while we keep the lion's share for ourselves, because we cannot help ourselves. Emotional depths are contained in turned backs, half-seen profiles, glances from the corner of the eye.

Sincerely Yours,
Jen Liu

27–30:
Pages from **Eau de Cologne** magazine
published by Monika Sprüth between 1985–93


Eau de Cologne
Nr. 1 - 85
10.00 DM
CINDY SHERMAN

Rosemarie Trockel
Monika Sprüth

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL UND MONIKA SPRÜTH IM GESPRÄCH
FOTOGRAFIERT VON BERNHARD SCHAUB

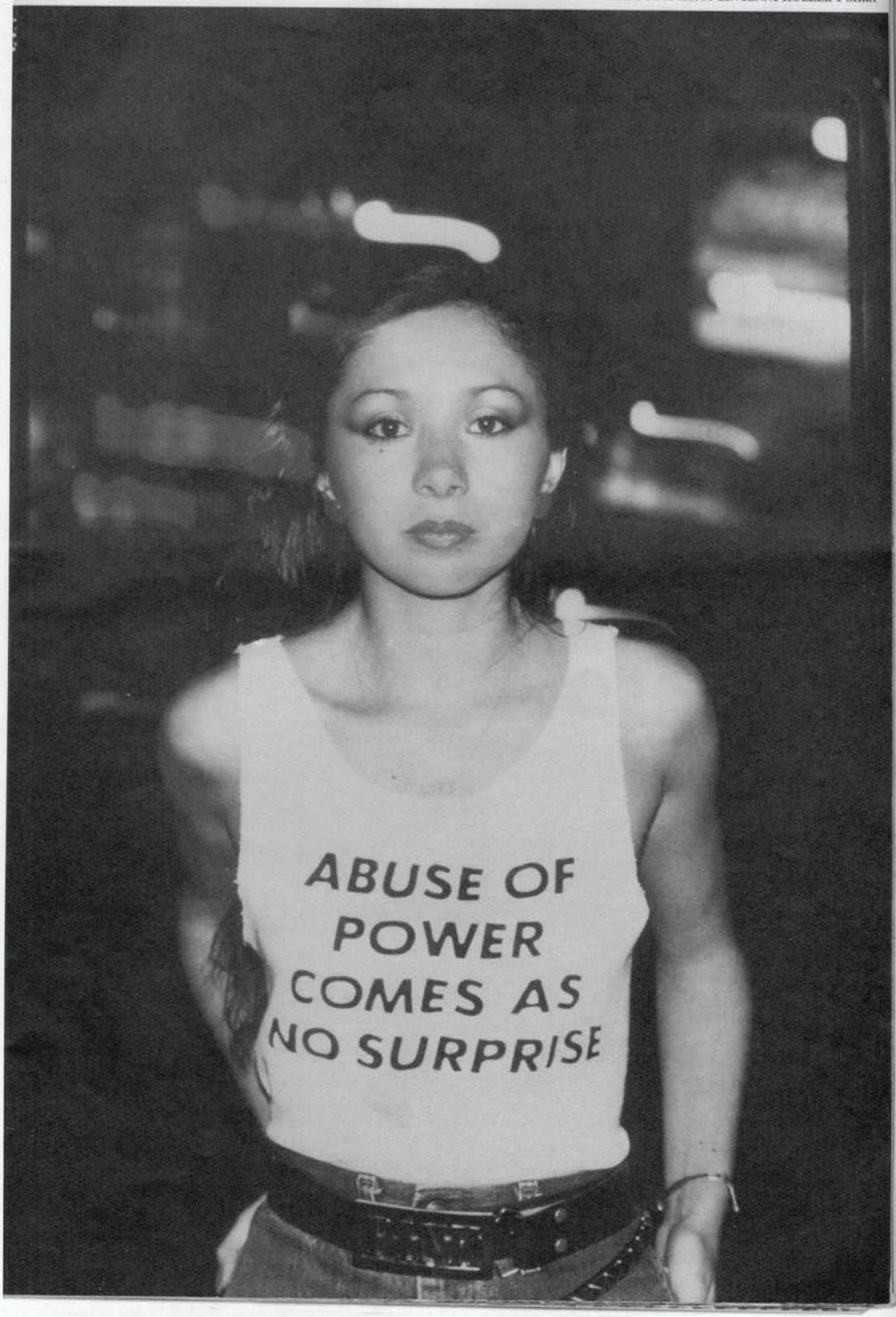
Cindy Sherman

1954 in Glan Ridge, N. J. geboren
lebt und arbeitet in New York

...»Es gibt das stereotype Bild von dem Mädchen, das ihr Leben lang davon träumt, Filmschauspielerin zu werden, und sie zieht los und versucht, das auf der Bühne, im Kurzfilm oder Spielfilm zu schaffen, und entweder hat sie Erfolg oder keinen. Mich interessiert dabei mehr der Charaktertyp des Versagers, der versucht, so was zu machen und es doch nicht macht. Vielleicht, weil ich das auch irgendwie in mir habe, und – warum sollte ich so was nicht mal versuchen – weil ich die Wirklichkeit solcher Phantasien untersuchen wollte, der Phantasien, daß man abhaut und wirklich ein Star wird.« ...
Cindy Sherman, 1982

CINDY SHERMAN FOTOGRAFIERT VON SCHAUB-DAHN

LADY PINK TRÄGT EIN JENNY HOLZER T-SHIRT



THE DESIRE TO DESIRE IS ALSO A DESIRE

Sabeth Buchmann: Your work first came to my attention in 1993, when you published your essay "Writing Out of My Armpit" in the first feminist edition of the magazine *Texte zur Kunst*. What I found remarkable back then was the precise and matter-of-fact observation of the role and function that feminist discourse plays or could play in the art market, and that this discourse is fighting at a location where it is not just about identity and representation, but above all about questions of production. More than ten years have passed since then and I would be interested in how far your position regarding feminism has altered since that time?

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN SABETH BUCHMANN AND JOSEPHINE PRYDE

Josephine Pryde: I think back then I was working on the assumption that if the art market got interested in feminist positions, then that had to be a good thing. But I was also trying to describe in that article what I thought was the stuck place that came along with that relationship. I had an inkling that to assert that bringing all the funny writing about women and the informal fluid sex between them and how it was different, and about "textuality" and things too, and then force it into a gallery in the form (or lack of form) of some artwork was to potentially ignore other conditions and compromise your feminist politics a bit. Of course, there were different sorts of galleries and different ways of introducing discussion topics into them, but my experience in the 1980s and early 1990s was largely art market impregnated and I wanted to write about how I thought being "100% girl" in a gallery was not necessarily the straightforward political statement it might appear to be, and what the advantages as well as the disadvantages of that might be.

SB: At the time the article appeared, you were working as an assistant for a gallery in New York. What was your first performance in the art field? Was it as an assistant in galleries, or was it as an artist, or was it as a writer?

JP: I think it was probably as this girl who was around.

SB: What does that mean?

JP: I was around and I wasn't really producing anything particular, like paintings or stuff, it was very indistinct what I was doing, so I was kind of around and I was quite good at talking a lot.

SB: But wasn't this kind of indistinction typical for the early nineties? I'm thinking of anti-eighties attitudes that were performed at that time, attitudes against straight and rigid notions of art production. It seemed to be more important to participate in certain kinds of atmospheres and discourses, to act as a commentator, as somebody who is more interested in creating contexts and clever ideas about art production. Perhaps this is only my retro-fictitious perspective.

JP: There were attitudes around at the time that were anti-eighties, like being anti-shoulder pads, but I think this moving around that you describe could even be said to have been an attitude against that anti-eighties attitude. It was as irritating to be nailed down as an alternative to the object-producing artists as it was to be called a maker of bibelots, so you had to get out and about a lot to avoid that trap, too.

SB: I think that at that time I was much more idealistic towards the possibilities that feminism offers culturally and socially. Maybe that was to do with the fact that I didn't see myself as so involved in the art business but more in the in-between area between activism, art and theory, between university and political groups. Did your position within the art business influence your commitment towards feminism?

JP: I may have written about the art business but that didn't necessarily mean I was skeptical about feminism and the chance it offered either to alter the art culture or to make radical changes beyond it. As for commitment, well, that was a hard one to work out. The ground for women artists was sort of donated and not donated at the same time. Maybe that was truer for the generation just ahead of me, but still. Being feminist was definitely the default position assigned to women artists, but to occupy it obediently would not have been feminist exactly, so you had to find a way to do something else if you were interested in pushing things a bit. That included seeing your friends and male contemporaries as feminists as well.

SB: Reading your text, I sensed an aversion towards a certain feminist mainstream in the art business, towards Kiki Smith, Janine Antoni, etc. Maybe I wanted to read that in there, because I didn't like the affirmative pathologizing of the female body.

JP: I certainly didn't like that stuff either. It used to really worry me. Now I see it rather as phenomenally bourgeois, more bourgeois than even I can hope to be, and interesting for that reason. I saw an exhibition by Susan Hiller in the Baltic in Gateshead recently and it contained artworks that were fascinated with

the uncanny, or the invisible, things that we can't see every day. I thought that, taken altogether, it was a strikingly unapologetic bourgeois exhibition. Usually you see more apologizing. I think there was a little bit of that dynamic in Janine Antoni as well – the argument that eating disorders were "not usually discussed" but that Janine Antoni's art would correct this circumstance. This need to bring out what was assumed to be generally repressed through what was, and is, a very specialist discourse – art. I guess it is a horror, but it is also totally hilarious when you think about it.

...

SB: The personal is political – what about that as a connection between artistic and political activities, then?

JP: What happened to that slogan? Its original meaning seems pretty well evacuated now. I've talked about this a little with women friends in London. And I saw a talk by Joan Jonas at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna last year. It was just after the Bush and Blair governments were saying that the war in Iraq was over, the war was supposed to be over, and Jonas looked very unhappy about George W. Bush, really terribly unhappy, like she had to apologize to her audience. If I remember rightly, what she said was that this slogan, the personal is political, which we have worked with for so long, she said that she felt it didn't now mean what it had once meant. I think what she was referring to was that the phrase had once been used to point to the ideological infiltration, or occupation, of what you might otherwise have thought was just your personal life, or organization of life. This ideology could also be identified and fought politically, and one way of fighting that politically or recognizing or seeing that that ideology did occupy things like the family and the way family and labor and work were organized, was to start re-asserting the personal, to try to dismantle those invasive forces. But maybe over the years, within populations of Western democracies anyway, this has in major ways mutated into a drained expression of the self, or a statement of "since things happen to me, and since I have an opinion, then that is what's important." This could be called a process of de-politicization. Maybe you could say a process of the personal being de-politicized.

SB: Do I understand you correctly, that feminist concepts carry a co-responsibility in backlash politics, in the way they are taken on not only by George Bush but also – at least in Germany – by the SPD and Green coalition government, inasmuch as they no longer put an equality-based politics on the agenda but rather a promotion of the family?

JP: By the New Labour party in Britain, too. Telling people that their opinions matter is a technique used by business that politicians use too – only, your opinion mattering is a very different thing to your realization of your self as a political subject. But I don't know if you can start dishing out accusations of co-responsibility in these questions – maybe there was somewhere that feminism took a wrong turn, or sold out its slogans, but I don't have a theory yet where that might have been. On the other hand, feminism probably never set out to change the world exactly the way it has ended up doing. How far could it be credited with a backdated intent that hasn't worked out in any case?

...

SB: In your exhibition *Brains & Chains*, you refer to Eva Hesse, amongst other things. If I have understood you correctly, what you're concerned with here is the "model swot," above all the one embodied by women artists who could be, or who are, established in the art business.

JP: Yes. I got interested in working with my own embarrassment.

SB: In what way?

JP: Well, then I would really have to say some really very embarrassing things.

SB: There is no embarrassment that we can't handle here.

JP: Yes, I think there is.

SB: When I first saw a picture of "Chains," I thought it was a certain critique of specific feminist readings of Hesse's work: A critique of its identification with the so-called fluid and eccentric. I felt a little uncomfortable with the idea that you could have quoted a well-known work only in order to deconstruct its reception by recoding it in an ironic manner. Or did you adopt *Untitled* because of identification, because you feel affected by it?

JP: Identification is a complicated process, because you might think you identify with something and you like that. But then you start to dislike it. But then you actually quite like the fact that you dislike it, too. When you see the pictures of Eva Hesse at her opening in the Kunstverein in Düsseldorf, and she looks really pleased and she has a little beehive and a glass in her hand and you think, this is her first solo show and she has tried really hard and this is... the idea is touching. My heart goes out to her bobbing around in the art world. It reminds me of the affecting part in Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* speech, where she cries. Where I cried when I saw the video. Where she remembers how her mother didn't... the things that her mother had wanted and didn't achieve. I think that's the part of the speech, when she cries?

SB: Yes, but I take that as a non-ironic comment on the pressure and constraints especially women artists in the art world have to face. But the fact that she cries in her late performances has already become part of her performance as a professional persona. If we think of female pop stars, the production of emotions is due to the politics of attention within modern media culture.

Foray

Don't expect me to tell you about the ending. I had imagined her with long, straight hair but it was in plaits coiled around her head. Her face the white-out of a Flemish portrait. And you know how still they are. All that morning had been given over to consideration of the facts. He says it pleases him to think of the way the rooms looked before we arrived. I only saw them later, after the drinks, after she had tripped at the doorway, after they began whispering about her agitation. At her age she couldn't get away with buying second-hand. Just for that moment I felt sorry for her. I stopped listening and concentrated on her extraordinary skin. As we walked up the stairs I told her I didn't like meeting people in corridors. She had trouble leaving her own house. Then she wrote saying she'd been given a puppy.

JP: Perhaps. But it's somehow just there that my idealism about the world comes flooding back.

SB: Does the repetition of certain models of the woman artist have a direct impact on your procedures and imagery? Are they at the same time about becoming readable by the art market?

JP: It's true that there is an interrelationship there. When I worked on a show called *Metalltanz* that I did together with Michael Krebber, I started out by thinking about adopting the female hysteric as a role to work in, in part to counter the figure of the male dandy that I knew featured in his art at that time, but in the end I dropped that idea once I made the actual photos for show.

SB: Is the performance as an hysteric more about over-determined repetitions of already gendered roles?

JP: Yes, maybe, like a tick. Like the ticks hysterics are clinically said to have developed. But eventually you come to a point where I think you have to renounce anything progressive in adopting a hysteric role. Hysteria is a dead end in a sense, because the hysteric always has this special secret treasured in her unconscious that is only lethal as long as it remains vague. I found that being able to drop something as a dead end was nonetheless useful for getting in the mood for this show. Because part of the reason to think of a counterpart in the first place was to work with that big glaring open space, which was: OK, here is what Krebber is doing, he is a more established artist than I am, he is more well known, and the open question is: What is the woman who is doing this show with him at the same time going to do?

SB: I'm curious.

JP: So, you then try to inject something into that real situation which isn't even viable, and that is a much more interesting way for me to work than thinking of a proper, viable model that can go on and on and that I can talk about forever.

SB: Your work in that show, like in the shows *Marooned* and *Serena*, consisted of photographs, which it occurred to me were done in a very professional manner of style and hanging.

JP: Getting the pictures framed was one way of signifying that I was making art, and that this time, I meant it.

SB: Looking at the photographs one senses a certain kind of connoisseurship – somebody who loves to evoke auratic effects.

JP: When I got interested in working seriously, around 2001, I got interested in those things too. And that meant looking around at how other people were working. I also became interested in what seemed like an out-of-date literal approach to the job. One that really focused on objects in the image. Like catalog photography. I mean, you could interpret Gursky as working literally, because he photographs Prada stores and stock exchanges, or the masses on the beach. Literally photographing what, though? It's quite vague, Gursky, when you think about it. Is it really about globalization? How "we" live now? What is that? I wanted to work literally too, but against someone like Gursky.

SB: Was that the reason why you've decided to use photography? Was it the medium you preferred in order to establish a recognizable aesthetic language?

JP: Pretty much.

SB: What about Louise Lawler, for example? Your works reminds me more of hers. That has to do with the notion of the allegory that came up with the so-called Picture Generation and appropriation art in the early eighties.

JP: How does that work?

SB: Lawler is an artist who again and again passes the projections that were and are directed at her from the side of critical discourses back to the reception: her fan-like Warhol reception is an example of that. I find that in her works, the desire for a critical position within the art business becomes legible as a component of a distinct image production. I don't know if my impression is correct that you also try at precisely that; if in your texts and art works style politics becomes a motivation?

JP: I think there's a lot less intent involved in my approach than that question implies. But I like style politics because they can exclude a certain contrived naïveté from the discussion. I think at one point writing articles for art magazines meant getting something down in black and white, but my perspective on that may be changing a bit. It has also in the past been something I've done for no better reason than that I am a nasty little show-off.

SB: But the question remains, in an art business where things are sold, where it is really to do with art deals – then who wants to hear about a critical position? To whom is this criticism addressed?

JP: Let's say that in the visual real estate world of a certain kind of exhibition production, the offer to the artist is: here are the big empty white-walled rooms where you can now criticize something. The subtext is always "we know it is very unlikely that you will explicitly affirm, for example, capitalism here" and this is incorporated into the offer. And the assumption that the criticism could have a successful object also underwrites the offer to make a critical exhibition. As if capitalism, for example, were discrete enough to be criticized anyway. So this more glamorous side of the criticism – supported by a kind of insurance blanket based on the visual real estate's ongoing value to the elites interested in investing in it – is definitely connected with a kind of achievement – an altruistic substitution of personal artistic achievement for an achievement of a goal, via the images and texts, and the criticism built up with them. It is like you say, a kind of production of desire... But the desire to desire is also a desire. And you could then also say: The desire to desire to criticize capitalism is also a desire.

SB: ... a desire that is mostly as illegible in the gestures of the assertive evidence and self-legitimation claims of critical exhibitions and projects as it is in claims of "quality" and "important critical artists." Immaterial critical discourses allow themselves to be fetishized just like a material product. However, what does it mean for an artistic stance that does not want to abandon the critical point of view; that takes up a dispute with the hierarchical value system of the art business and the increasing acceptance of capitalistic logic? Can something like that allow itself to be translated through its own desire? Are collectors interested in the formulation of such questions?

JP: If no one is interested, including collectors, then am I a better loser than if they ARE interested? Is no one interested because I am just muttering in the background, and is muttering in the background only something that can be evaluated as any kind of valid refusal by friendly cultural people on the left in any case? This word "critical" is made to work very hard in art. My new theory is that a lot of the art that says it is critical is actually more like failed journalism.

Journalism with the actuality or force of the story taken out, shipped around the world and treated as art. When you say critical... what do you mean?

SB: Critical is more general than political. It means to operate within or inside a system and at the same time to keep a visible distance towards the art market – a position that was claimed explicitly by the avant-gardes of the 1960s... If you thematize the function that art has for capitalist logic, then I would like to talk about the function that fashion has for you and your work. Is it just that you are interested in fashion? I have heard people say that we cannot think about art without thinking about the fashion industry, because the modes of reception, of styles, of taste that are established there are more significant for contemporary culture than the market conditions of the art industry.

JP: If I think about fashion, which I don't all the time, then I don't want to think about it so that I can say it's all just about fashion anyway. As you have mentioned, fashion is in-built not to criticize itself, it's a very, very affirmative realm. When I started printing in a darkroom where fashion photographers were also sometimes working, I was attracted to the kind of freedom with which they approached some story that they were going to use to make their fashion photographs – the good ones anyway, who were trying something out. Like, I've got Eva Herzigova here, and there's some deer, and it reminds me of when my grandmother did this and there's an old castle over there and she's wearing this dress and it's dawn and this is the story, isn't it fantastic. That kind of blithe, ingenuous positivity and way of moving forward, that critique-free zone, becomes interesting. Why though? Is it just the chance to be happy and unafraid? Rather than trying to say art is very good and clever and can achieve its critique, the fascination with fashion modes is about not achieving that critique – it's about not achieving the object of the criticism in an obvious way. On the other hand, to put it more simply, all this fantastic image stuff and style and the consumer world can leave me very confused and over-excited, and making my own photographs is quite a good way for me to try to stay calm.

SB: Doesn't *Serena* touch on the historical implications of commercial photography within high art-photography, although it's executed in a hobbyist manner?

JP: I thought that show looked quite professional, actually, but basically, yes. I was sick of the opposition between commercial and art photography that was being used in discussions about art, whilst at the same time it was perfectly obvious that at that point in the late 1990s in London, artists were being implemented in new ways by the developing lifestyle industries. Friends of mine in London at that time were really crucial in pointing that out to me.

...

SB: What about Rosalind Krauss' concept of the "obsolete medium," which also plays an important role in Benjamin? With reference to Marcel Broodthaers, James Coleman, and William Kentridge, she argues for the discovery of new media through the use of traditional media that are in decline. Krauss is of the opinion that media specificity, the abandonment of which she blames above all on historical conceptual art and international installation art, could be a premise for the assertion of a realm of aesthetic experience divorced from the products of the culture industry. It is again a kind of very idealistic maintenance.

JP: Yes, idealistic maintenance – it's like a maintenance job to maintain art as idealistic. If you can still talk about the art business as a whole, then one thing that you can say about it is that it incorporates the idea of idealism as a way to keep trading, which is essentially a cynical approach. I like this expression, "international installation art." Sounds like the Radisson chain or something. The way that book about the obsolete medium looks, though, that Rosalind Krauss book – I haven't read it, I've seen it, it really looks like a reason to bomb the Tate Modern bookshop, the way it's packaged. It looks like something that could really infuriate you.

SB: Nevertheless, I believe that your way of working has a lot do with allegorical procedures, whose re-evaluation in the 1980s was due to Walter Benjamin. By that, I mean also the dialectics of aestheticization and de-aestheticization, sublimation and de-sublimation, auraticization and de-auraticization of the imagery you use. If one compares it with common modes of photography like the Becher school and Wolfgang Tillmans, one wouldn't be able to categorize it in terms of post-conceptual, neo-pop and/or journalistic photography. Also, the way you do the hanging of the works seems to quote more modernist conventions. But your work is located on a different playground. It is interesting that you speak at the same time about the expression of a certain kind of melancholy and about the lack of difference between a photograph of a fashion model and of a china rabbit. It's like the melancholic, who tries to empty the world of pre-given meanings...

...

JP: If you think a little bit about how quickly images are made, it is a little bit like admitting that I can't keep up with how quickly different images are made, and that it isn't about keeping up anyway. Those works are often developed for different contexts as well, contexts that can be taken literally. It is a little bit like continuing to plunder histories of photography and just to take what I want, when I want it.

SB: That, I think, is too simple a notion of appropriation because it pretends that you can intend and control the adopted material besides its inherent meanings. ... Even if I don't think that this is the point you were making before, I would like to know what you mean exactly by saying your topics and subjects are not significant? Does this imply that you're more focused on modes of reception than on modes of production?

JP: It isn't so much that the topics and subjects I use aren't significant. It is difficult though to weigh that up. At a certain level, if you've agreed to do an exhibition, then you are complicit with producing the reception.

SB: Then do you make the standards for the reception of photography into a condition of your production? But that still doesn't say anything about how and in which way your artistic decisions come into being.

JP: It becomes like a kind of intuitive game with yourself.

SB: I don't mean to say that I understand the concept of intuition as the expression of a naïve attitude – in that case, intuition would merely imply that artistic decisions were based on gut instinct.

JP: My gut belongs to me!
It's my body!

SB: But intuition can be an exact method, if you think about Bergson's concept of it, where it's about the ability of memory concerning the synthetic perception of time as a counter-model to the rationalization of thought through the advanced industrialization and mechanization of the living world. In the sixties, the concept of intuition was turned towards serial, Fordist, production-orientated procedures, which is where I see a link to your exhibition *Brains & Chains* and its reference to the information society. With such references (which have in fact already become slightly clichéd) are you looking to establish a legible objectivity for your artistic positions? In other words: doesn't the deployment of a social paradigm come along with much more of a replacement function for intention?

JP: A replacement function for intention? I liked the last thing that you said about a replacement function for intention.

SB: The decision to make the factuality of a social paradigm into a premise for a work has something more declamatory than intuitive. I had the impression that the aesthetic surfaces of the information society are your theme. Which representations go through the aesthetic cleaner, through the dirt of the machines and the work of the cleaning-up technologies? How can one work on aestheticization against aestheticization?

JP: With a sense of humor.
Or very seriously. Or not at all.

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Following spread:
Marie Lund,
Handles, 2012
Bronze, 89 cm & 69 cm
Courtesy Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Croy Nielsen Gallery, Berlin

Clickety Click, 2012
Aluminium suitcase, carved wooden figure, 55 × 40 × 20 cm
Courtesy Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Croy Nielsen Gallery, Berlin

FRAU MIT VIEL ZEIT

EVA KENNY

WHETHER OR NOT this is from a real film or a montage of images from all 1970s movies set in New York, it's compelling. A woman, watched from across the street, steps out from between two parked cars into the street and looks to see if any traffic is coming before crossing. Complete absorption, making sure she is clear to cross, looking like she has things on her mind and somewhere to get to in a hurry. Behold the iconography of feminism and its most beautiful incarnation: a mind-mix of Meryl Streep and Annie Hall, posited against the dreadful 50s bored housewife drinking and pilling her way through restless afternoons and evenings. Having something to do and somewhere to go became the aesthetic of feminism as well as its reality. Breathless from something that involved mental as well as physical stimulation, this American archetype combined the impression of health with a sense of reality. How air seemed to move around her as if she was a real person who existed in real dimensions.

I'm a fashion magazine editor, lying in the bath in the Upper West Side apartment that I don't have to share with anyone, smoking a cigarette with my one dry hand. The other is on top of my substantial pubic hair. In the room, the sound of one drop falling into

the bathwater; outside, a car horn is blowing in the street. For dinner later I'll have a sandwich and a cold beer from the deli and then go out to my friend's birthday party – my gift to her is a *book*. Fantasizers of the simple life: didn't you think you would be able to touch your job or even sense it as a tangible thing, near the tip of your tongue? Now the tip of your tongue leads you towards something that doesn't have a name yet.

The sound of Cuban heels clicking distinctly on the pavement one by one as a car passes by. The one cigarette that might be smoked after sex, the one apple a day. Looking busy becomes a way of inhabiting feminism, as one costume amongst others.

I'm a newspaper reporter jumping out of somebody's bed, putting my jeans and brown boots on and rushing to the smoke-filled newspaper office where the sound of printing machines creates a roar. My male boss calls me by my Irish-American surname into his office and tells me I'm treading on thin ice. For lunch I meet a married male friend and have French fries and coffee. We are filmed through the window of the restaurant and although you can see me gesturing and my friend laughing, all you can hear is the sound of the traffic outside on Lex.

If you ask me what my idea of a perfect night out is, I'd have to say getting the newspaper, looking up a movie and then going out for pizza afterwards. Or if it's raining, I don't mind staying inside eating a piece of cheese and reading. It can be nice to get caught in a café in a rainstorm and know you have to spend the rest of the afternoon in there, talking to your date and listening to the distinct sounds of the coffee machine and teaspoons touching the saucers. If it keeps raining, you might have to make a run for it and arrive at the movie theater breathless with drops of water in your hair. I guess what I mean is I don't find it too hard to focus.

In the time it takes to recognize kitsch I could have already taken a shower, gone to the café with my laptop or got a good seat at the library feeling awake. Lunch is a series of rallies to the fridge and handfuls of nuts. There is something lurking around the corners of my lips that comes with a sense of having been noticed, a slightly raised voice. That faint smile, the obscure awareness of being perceived, the grace of presence.

Diderot: "It is the difference between a woman who is seen and a woman who exhibits herself." Bogost: "It is the difference between cigarettes

and iPhones." A history of browsing by the woman who lives in my parents' neighborhood includes the Simon Community, Cancer Research, Womens' Aid, the DSPCC, Friends of the Elderly, and Barnardos. Worried that she won't be seen by other humans or her legitimate presence will be questioned, she takes a hard line with the charity shop assistant, complaining that the price is outrageous, asking to see the manager or referring to the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act of 1980. Asking for a light, holding it all together. Go-to, iconic, rare, Illuminati, apple cider vinegar benefits, Facebook, candida overgrowth, what is swag, Morgellons, who has looked at my profile, *glowing*, MacKeeper.

I'm Jacqueline du Pré and I dated Rodin for a short while. I mean it was actually never that serious, just a few nice dinners and nights out together. We're still great friends, but in the end it mostly came down to competitiveness and that can be destructive – I guess my career was really starting to take off and he had a few years to go before he got any recognition. You know he once told me that he never started smoking because he just didn't have the time.

I'm a statue of Nike in the Louvre extending my wings there, just thinking about the aesthetics of the protestant work ethic, the fantasy of unanalyzed complexity in everyday life, of pure immediacy. Why do people have such a hard time with that? Leaping into unmediated experience, a rush of air all around me, things seem less frightening. Of course it helps that I have no head, just drapery.

Polemical Contention: *IF* feminism was the masculinization of women, we are now living in the flaccid tip of its detumescence.

Previous page:
David Hockney, **A Bigger Splash**, 1973

This page:
François Truffaut, **L'homme qui aimait les femmes**, 1977

"I WAS STARTING TO PRODUCE MY OWN PLAYS, AND THAT WAS EXPENSIVE. AND I DIDN'T HAVE ANY OTHER MEANS OF SUPPORT."

CHRIS KRAUS TALKS TO ALISON CARR

Chris Kraus: You're wondering what I used to do in the clubs? Well, it was a hustle bar. The topless dancing was there just as bait. The real job was to sell over-priced drinks, which were equated with sex acts that optimally were never performed. For a $20 Perrier split, you'd sit on a banquette in the lounge. A $150 magnum of champagne – apple juice, actually – would get you into a back room, where you'd proceed to sell more "champagne." The guy had to believe if he kept buying drinks he'd eventually get laid. But no one's that dumb. The hustle, like gambling, was a particular taste. I worked in these clubs in the late 70s, early 80s and wrote about them in a story called *Trick*. They were shut down by Department of Health in response to AIDS. You had to think fast on your feet all the time. Sometimes I'd get exhausted, take out a Kleenex, do a hand job, and take the $50 tip. Once or twice a blowjob, that's about it. But you could be equally well tipped for having no sex at all. Of course as soon as a guy comes, he's gonna go! [*laughs*] There was a lot of talking and very little actual sex.

Alison Carr: Was that something you prepared for? Before you went to work, how did you prepare for that kind of experience?

CK: Well, like any shit job, you try and let it take as little out of your life as possible. I tried to keep living my life until half an hour before work. Then I'd throw my clothes in the bag, get a cab uptown, and be Sally West for seven or eight hours, two or three or four nights a week. The rest of the time I tried not think about it, except for buying the costumes. In those days, they were not very elaborate, it was all thrift store stuff: a ratty blue feather boa, a little 1940s fitted jacket I'd wear with a pair of spike heels. It was ridiculous. I didn't give a shit about the costumes.

The job had nothing to do with my sexuality, it had nothing to do with me. You had to wear makeup and heels, but beyond that, it was not very exacting. The students I met in LA when I arrived in the mid-90s who were lap-dancing had to be *so* into it. It was much more professionalized. I could never have done that. *Art students* getting silicone shots to better compete! I mean, shit.

AC: So you never felt that you did things to your body like waxing or shaving that you wouldn't have done ordinarily?

CK: Oh no, you didn't have to do those things. I don't think I even waxed. All you had to do was get up in some nylon underwear, or a G-string and a feather boa and shake around and sell drinks.

AC: Did you have dance training or did you enjoy dancing in nightclubs?

CK: Like anyone studying theater, I'd taken some dance. But really, you could do anything – jiggle around, do an interpretive modern dance – so long as your top was off by the end of the second song! By the start of the fourth, you had to be on the floor. It didn't look anything like what you see in the clubs now. There were no poles – just a table where you'd get up and jiggle around. It was a hustle – getting an empathic line into the guy and figuring out how to play him best. What is he looking for? How can you make him spend?

AC: Is there any part of that that you enjoyed it then?

CK: Well, I liked to do it well. At one point, I got very competitive and became one of the top bottle sellers. Doing it "well," of course, just means making more money. The more bottles you sell, the more tips you get. I did get a certain kick as a nascent writer in being able to get this verbal dance going with some of the men. I was good at that. About a third of the women were art girls, and everyone had their own thing going on. Some were rock musicians, one was a choreographer – her thing was much more physical. Mine was more verbal.

AC: Have you got any explanation for why there were so many kind of artsy people in the scene?

CK: Mmmm. Yeah, because it paid *very well*. You could just walk in, get hired, and make $300 a night, which was a lot of money at that time.

AC: Quite a bit now! Quite a bit of money now! [*laughs*]

CK: Well, at the time, $300 equalled about three weeks of rent.

AC: Wow.

CK: The reason I needed so much money was, I was starting to produce my own plays, and that was expensive. And I didn't have any other means of support.

AC: So did your experiences change your attitude to your own body?

CK: It did. It took me years to cultivate a relationship to my body after doing that work.

AC: So you became disembodied?

CK: Yeah, yeah. Because I was so detached from the sexuality I had to project in the club. It had nothing to do with me. When I left the club, I'd put on camouflage gear. In order to keep those boundaries clear, I looked like a total dyke. It was years before I could integrate femme-ness into my own persona or life.

AC: That's interesting.

CK: I wrote a little about it in *Aliens & Anorexia*,[1] dressing in camouflage gear and being completely asexual whenever I was not in the club. I didn't have a boyfriend for most of the time I was doing that work.

AC: So was that your way of recuperating from overexposure?

CK: Well, it was confusing. Because if what went on in the club was "sexuality," it had nothing to do with me! Going out to CBGBs at night, I'd see these girls stuffed into these bustiers with their tits hanging out, and wonder *why would you do that if you're not getting paid?* [*laughs*]

AC: Returning to the talking aspect, I've never heard anyone talk about the talking as part of the role of the sex object, the showgirl. Was there any part of that that you enjoyed? I wonder if you can talk a bit more about the talking.

CK: Oh, sure. I love talking. But just to back up a bit, it was years before I could reclaim any femme quality, or sexuality, in my persona. When I moved to LA, for various reasons, I began to take an interest in recreational sex. And within that realm, gravitated to BDSM, which, you know, at least had a structure! It wasn't about romantic love, it wasn't abject. As a submissive, I hooked up with several dominant men who introduced all these trainings and games focused upon the submissive becoming more femme… and I thought that was fantastic. It was less cynical, and had much more to do with my own pleasure than anything in the clubs. There was a reciprocity to the exchange. I wrote a little about that in *Video Green*.[2]

AC: So how long a time period was that between giving up your hustle bar work, how long a pause between that bar work…

CK: A long time. I stopped dancing in 1982… it was about thirteen years.

AC: How was your relationship with your body during those thirteen years, were you still a bit out of your body?

CK: Well, I was married! [*laughs*] I think most people agree there's kind of a sexual deep-freeze that takes place in a long-term, monogamous marriage …

AC: Back to the question I was asking about speaking in the showgirl role, that sounds…

CK: Yes?

AC: Fun.

CK: Yeah. In my case, it was more conceptual. Not sex talk at all. More like engaging people through stories, or digressive conversations about ideas… I guess I was practicing to be a writer.

AC: That's kind of fun.

CK: Yeah. I was reading all the female Japanese court writers at the time – *Tales of Genji*, *Scheherazade* – where the story itself becomes a form of seduction.

AC: Did you get good feedback from that? Did you find that men enjoyed that?

CK: Well, yeah, I mean I had my niche. [*laughs*] I did really well with lawyers. I did well with a certain kind of hustler, people who were cynical and had a strong sense of irony. It was such a red herring for them to encounter someone like this in a sleazy tit bar, right?

AC: [*laughs*] Yeah.

CK: An intellectual. [*laughs*] So it was all about being kind of the crazy girl, kind of a Nadja trip.

AC: You must have enjoyed that!

CK: Yeah, I couldn't really do the other thing, grinding my cunt around on the floor, with much conviction, but I could do the Nadja thing very well.

AC: That's very interesting.

CK: Yeah. The clientele were a particular type of person. Anyone who just wanted to get off could walk four blocks over to the piers and do it for 20 bucks.

1 Chris Kraus. **Aliens and Anorexia** (Semiotext(e)/Native Agents, 2000).

2 Chris Kraus. **Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness** (Semiotext(e)/Active Agents, 2004).

There was plenty of vastly cheaper, actual sex to be had. Like gambling, the hustle bars played into somebody's hubris and masochistic streak at the same time. It's complex, a way of losing yourself. Like in a casino, there were no clocks in the club. Time would just disappear.

AC: So you must have learnt something about humanity or men.

CK: Not just about men – everyone was equally odious! For someone who already had a fairly jaded and misanthropic view, the work in the clubs certainly reinforced it.

AC: So you went with your misanthropy.

CK: It was reinforced. No matter how intimate things felt during the con, there was always the moment when the customer would wake up and abruptly leave. A curtain dropped down, the connection was broken. They had a strong instinct for when they'd had enough. At that moment, the tables turned and it became clear they'd been using you like a drug. So that was a toxic double helix, enacted over and over again. The girls were not nice to each other. And the management was abhorrent. I mean, everyone was just out for themselves, it was like a perfect microcosm of real life [*laughs*].

AC: Were there any silver linings to this cloud?

CK: I don't think so, no. I don't know that I regret doing it. I'd certainly rather things had gone a different way. I would have preferred to have independent money and not have to do that, but given that I did not, and it seemed imperative at the time to produce those plays, it was a way of pursuing my work. When I see younger women doing it now, I don't see a happy outcome. I don't want to be the person who says Don't do that, but given how professionalized it's all become, I don't see any way for the woman to win. It just takes you down this very dark street. The risk is that it takes over. You always begin by seeing it as a means to the end, but gradually it becomes the content you're working with. A therapist I met once remarked how many young women were "lap-dancing to pay for their therapy," and that seemed uniquely evil to me. Like agreeing to see an addict while he or she is still in the throes of addiction. It's counter-productive and unethical. The only way that you can get clarity would be to stop.

AC: So do you feel nervous or worried about the dancers that are part of the burlesque scene?

CK: Oh no! The new burlesque scene's a whole other thing. It's absolutely delightful. These people are completely on top of the game. They're doing it as an art form. They've studied the tradition, they've met the old strippers, they create the costumes, those replicas. No, I think it's absolutely wonderful. I was on the Sex Workers Art Show tour with a couple of stars from that world – Dirty Martini and World Famous *BOB* – and I just adored them. They are brilliant performers. I don't see the New Burlesque as sex work at all. It's more like a cabaret form. There's no comparing. The difference, of course, it's that the performer is in charge.

AC: Is that how you felt, did you feel not in charge?

CK: I was maybe more in control than someone doing regular escort work… The hustle makes you feel nominally in charge. But the toxicity of it permeated the rest of my life. It was a kind of carnie atmosphere but there was a real ugliness underneath, and you can't get away from that. [*pause*]

In the end, it's sexuality reduced to an exchange: body, money, money, body, that's it.

AC: I wonder if, if that your brain was part of it 'cos you were doing some kind of performance and talking, I wonder how that kind of plays out with the idea of the body, 'cos you've got a little bit of the brain happening in what you were doing, so I wonder if that meant that you had a very particular experience, I wonder if that changed your experience compared to the women you were dancing with.

CK: I don't know. But because I was kind of *whoring* my charm, my relation to it got kind of messed up. Or maybe clarified.

AC: Did it take you while to get back into being charming, for yourself?

CK: Once you see anything's use-value, it's hard to go back...

AC: [*laughs*] Are you charming now?

CK: I can be.

AC: [*laughs*]

CK: That kind of charm got channelled into my writing. This is not the same kind of charm you exercise to teach or give a reading. Charm as seduction is something else. It's a tool, it's a mask. It's a mask that I used a great deal in writing *I Love Dick*.[3] That book was a kind of performance, and the idea of the mask was very important. I remembered it from studying acting. The "mask" isn't fake – it's more an awareness, a slight exaggeration or push, of certain gestures or tendencies you observe in yourself.

AC: Do you think about theater school and stripping, your kind of work as, as being something very similar, because they were happening at the same time, or...?

CK: Yes, I do. The work in the clubs is a kind of performance, but you're always in an abject position because you need to go home with $300, and if you don't, you've wasted the night. Performance and writing have other objectives than money. I'm sorry, but it just boils down to a class-based thing. If you need money, you will always be in an abject position of need. In Colette, all the old whores play the stock market or buy real estate. In *Cheri*, the narrator spends afternoons with the other courtesan-retirees discussing their stocks [*laughs*].[4]

AC: It's interesting that you've used the word abject and also in *Trick* you use the word glamor, and they're two words that I write about a lot, glamor and abject, so I don't know if you have anything to say about those words...

CK: I'm writing something about Simone Weil right now. Among other things, she worked on a Renault factory assembly line for a year and a half. Work that she – as a philosopher, klutz, and sickly, underweight person – was extremely unsuited to. But she believed the leadership of the Communist Party, of which she was a part, had become very estranged from the physical experience of what it is to do routine factory work. She needed to have that experience in her own body, before she could "represent" anyone in that situation. And it was completely abject. Deadening. Any work you do purely out of financial and survival needs is probably going to put you in an abject position. It's the same for someone competing for tenure.

AC: [*laughs*] Yeah. Yeah.

CK: So my goal became to be independent. And I did that.

AC: Good. [*laughs*] Was the abject something that was revealed to your customers, or was that something that this kind of mask that you've mentioned prevented them from seeing?

CK: Oh no they ate it up, that's what they're there for.

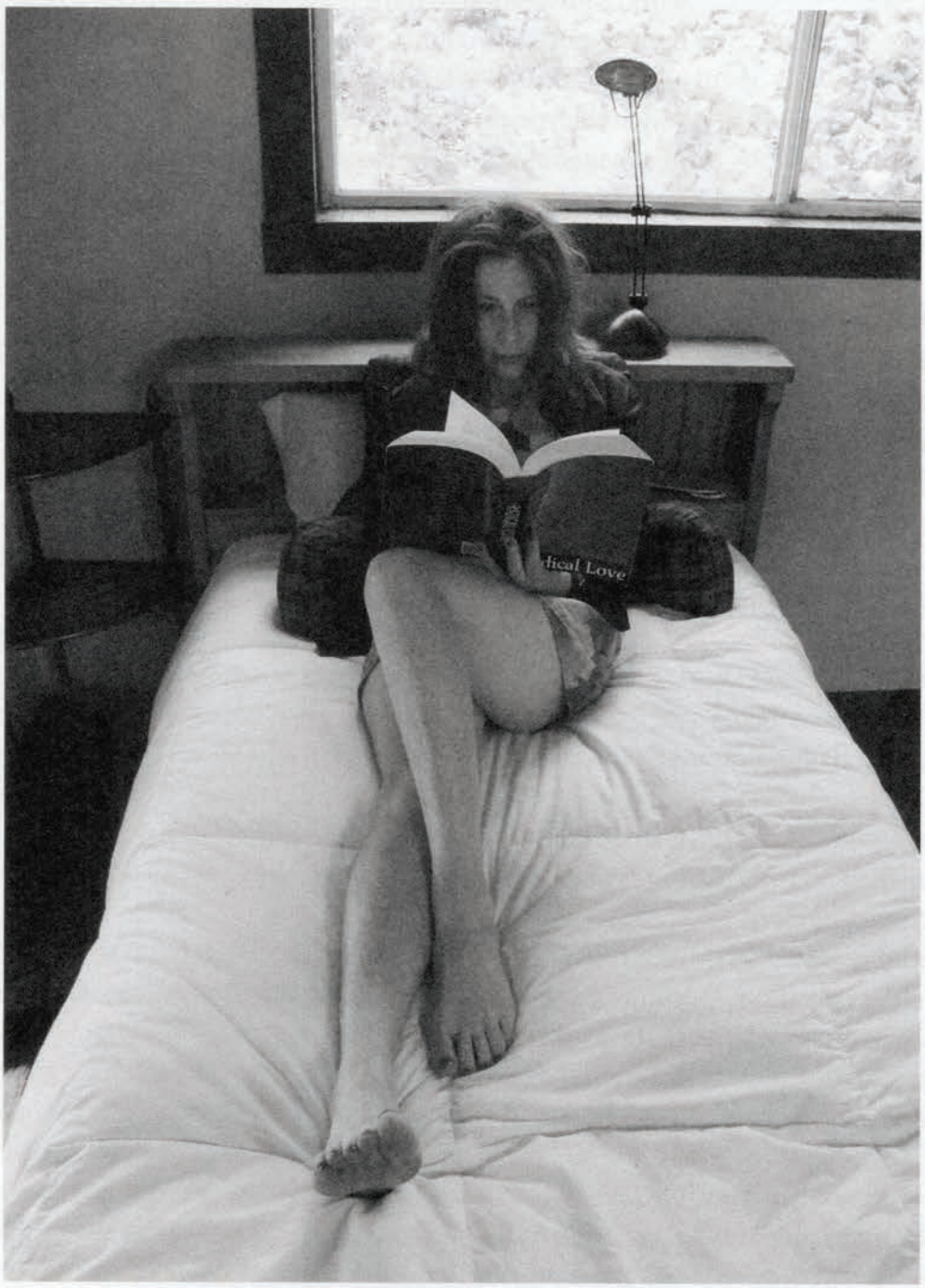
AC: Right. OK.

CK: Of course. The debasement that they're witnessing is part of the kick.

AC: Right. That's interesting. So you didn't feel that you were creating an impenetrable body, something that was you know, you didn't feel that you were becoming a hard body to them, but you were a soft body.

CK: No. No, I never had that kind of commitment or conviction to the physical mask. I know what you're talking about, and I think people who have to do the pole dance thing, who have to do a much more professional version of it, that's probably how they cope. But I wasn't nearly half way down that road of professionalism, where it became that. It was pure dilettantism. [*laughs*]

3 Chris Kraus. **I Love Dick** (Semiotext(e)/Native Agents, 1997. 2nd edition 2006).
4 Colette. **Chéri** (1920) and **The End of Chéri** (1926).



Chris Kraus (photo:Reyaldo Rivera)

AC: [*laughs*] Do you think that's saved you psychologically, I mean, do you think that helped you in the long run, that lack of commitment to it?

CK: No, I mean nobody wins, right? Nobody wins. The damage for me was this estrangement from myself, going through these porno-calisthenic moves while my head's someplace else. A Cubist mind/body split. It's not a desirable thing.

AC: No. [*laughs*]

CK: [*laughs*] But I don't really think there's any way to beat it. And I really dislike the kind of stripper memoir genre, like the one that Lily Burana wrote fairly recently; it's so false.[5] That bravado just cannot be real.

AC: So are there any narratives of this that you, you don't see as problematic?

CK: Any positive, uplifting narratives? No, I don't really see any. No, I don't. [...]

It became important to me to make my own money after that, and not to be dependent on others. And I did. After arriving in LA, I saw a chance to make my own

5 Lily Burana. **Strip City: A Stripper's Farewell Journey Across America** (Miramax Books, 2001).

money, and that seemed better for me than the tenure-track line. I bought apartment buildings that give me some rental income, and that allows me to decide when to teach, and for whom. I'd be in a very different position now as a writer if I didn't have that income. I always felt strongly about the singularity of my work, and knew it wouldn't be easily fundable. Which means you have to either have family money, or marriage money, or make your own. It takes a long time for me to write a book – as much as five years. I write catalog essays and journalism for extra income in between, and give lectures and readings, but if I were completely dependent on that income, my work would be completely different. I couldn't do the work I do now without an independent income. This is awkward, maybe, to disclose, but I think it's important – especially in the U.S. where people are led to believe that there's something wrong with their work if it doesn't result in financial security. When in fact, many of the most prominent artists and writers have relied upon outside support for at least the first part of their careers.

AC: So…

CK: Very few people are able to support themselves through their work after art school, or even at all. If you can't spend years after school developing your work and career, nothing kicks in. And how do you do that without independent means?

AC: I haven't figured that out.

CK: Right. I mean, how do you do it? You can't. It's almost impossible to create a body of work, and do all the professional networking things that go with an art career, if you have to work thirty or forty hours a week at something else.
[*pause*]

So in a way, working in the tit bars at that moment in New York in that dilettantish way was almost like the G.I. Bill! Do you know how important that was to American art?

AC: No, tell me.

CK: OK, well, after World War II the G.I. Bill enabled anyone who'd served to go back to school for free. Not everyone went to college in those days. It wasn't online. It was four or five years, going full-time. For the first time, working class people had access to four or five years of free time during their youth. A lot of amazing artists and writers, who might otherwise not have appeared, developed their work thanks to the G.I. Bill. Poets like Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett – all those people who came from lower middle class families in the Midwest, had that leisure given to them. And it was a great thing. So that's the upside, I guess. The tit bars did provide a certain amount of free time to young women who couldn't have afforded it otherwise.
[*pause*]

AC: Well thank you, I'll leave it there.

CK: Oh you're welcome.

SOMEBODY

KAROLIN MEUNIER

IT BEGAN WITH LETTERS. Which is probably not a coincidence, if letters have the function of what Virginia Woolf called "the school of writing for women." As if, in this particular space of correspondence any kind of writing and thinking is allowed and thus excessively exercised, like a kind of underground training for the invasion of the public. A few years ago, a friend introduced me to Chris Kraus's novel *I Love Dick*, a text written in 1997 in the form of love letters between the couple Chris Kraus / Sylvère Lotringer and another person, Dick, who wrote back only once. Letters that were meant to be letters to a person triggered a different form of writing, which then became a performance in itself. This writing, later published in a book, but still in the form of letters, has often been misunderstood as the documentation of a correspondence rather than, let's say, a performative exploitation of one. The correspondence was initiated and at the same time appropriated, occupied. An addressee was needed, constructed, and dismissed by means and for the sake of literature. And the one-way correspondence functioned as a kind of backdrop for the persona of the writer that was established in the course of the writing, not least by responding to the demands and needs of her figures. Chris Kraus's work has since become a recurring reference for me to think about the inherent split in all forms of speech that are both a narration of experience and its abstraction implied by the dual task of making oneself the subject of the narrative and at the same time by allowing the "I" to talk undivided in order to reveal the subtext of one's own behavior.

Not excluding sexuality and the experience of failure from her self-descriptions (and those of her female protagonists), as well as inserting autobiographical facts, many of Kraus's texts sound like revelations. However, they are characterized by the use of stylistic devices, which undoubtedly dispel identification, and the question of how much truth or biographical reality such revelations contain becomes irrelevant. Another distinction Kraus makes herself is not to mistake "candor" for "confession": "While confession pursues its cheaply cathartic agenda (will everything "change" once the confession is made? Doubtful...), candor is essentially disinterested. Candor is a willingness to speak to the present with a certain presence." (*Stick to the Facts**) As an alternative to the confessional model, candor seems no less performative, but it may work against the identifying moment of admission, preferring the provocative dynamic of forthright speaking-out and to set a story in motion by telling and sharing it and not to pin it down to one person and their feeling of guilt. When a person talks of themselves, the circumstances and intentions *do* make a difference. However, while Kraus denies the cathartic aspect, her writings nonetheless affirm an interest in the personal as material to be consciously deployed. And candor, the quality of being open and honest in expression, is not an easy task. For me, it would seem more suitable to immediately try to get away from one's own candid words and their tendency to produce all-too-definite narratives and identities. The feeling of distance that opens up to one's own experiences perhaps explains the sense

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of unease that accompanies this kind of speech. At the same time there is the desire to experiment with the possibility to observe and describe oneself. And I think it is precisely this risk and excitement of telling the "truth" that connects the idea of self-disclosure as a technique with another motive in Kraus's work which is a conceptual perspective on sexuality and the fascination of a social interaction determined by rules.

In the critical essay "Emotional Technologies" she writes, alternating constantly between first and third person, of an artist and art critic in Los Angeles whose perspective could obviously be that of Kraus herself. Kraus links up observations of the art scene in LA, with her – or her female protagonist's – excursion into S/M dating with the techniques of Polish experimental theater director Jerzy Grotowski in the 1960s: "There is no experimental theatre in sadomasochism. That's why I like it. Character is completely preordained and circumscribed. You're only top or bottom. There isn't any room for innovation in these roles."** The expectation that sexuality and artistic work, as well as talking about these things, will involve authenticity, is suspended if specific rules are followed. To accept clearly defined roles as specifications for one's own behavior, for movements and acts of speech, might establish a distance to familiar patterns of activity. These, however, neither throw into question the intensity of what is experienced, nor do they cancel out its effect – even invented or stylized self-disclosure can provoke relief and shame, or conversely the sensation of self-empowerment and rebellion. The counter-project staged by Kraus, in which subjectivity is dissolved by the fixed roles of sadomasochistic practices in order to eliminate the obligation to experiment and innovate, may sound like a thought-play as extreme as it is bold. And yet, this example really does show the ambivalent relationship between, on one hand, sheer exposedness to a situation controlled from outside, and on the other, the intent to create an experience of exposure to control.

And why am I interested? More generally, it is about the way in which people decide to present themselves publicly, and the range of options available for such presentations. I am surprised when others are willing to open up their minds, but, apparently, I like to be drawn into it, at least for a while, to borrow some of their experiences. I have never been a table dancer. "She liked that somebody else could play that role."**

* Chris Kraus, **Stick to the Facts.** In **Texte zur Kunst**, Issue 70, May 2008.
** Chris Kraus, **Emotional Technologies.** In **Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness**, Semiotext(e), 2004.

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THE 32 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EMBARRASSMENT

– IT'S AN AESTHETIC, NOT AN EMOTION

EVA KENNY

1. Embarrassment is a twentieth century "new feeling!"

2. Although the Shetland Islands in the 1950s might seem like a place where life was vital and where the gap between reality and image, work and workwear, or farm and table was narrower, really it's where the modern concept of embarrassment was invented. When the sociologist Erving Goffman went there in 1949 to research his dissertation, the basis of his first book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he examined the way work and modes of self-presentation interacted. Sufficiently alienated by the society in which he found himself, the encounters he analyzed were the ones available to him; therefore, no accounts of home life or truly intimate situations, only people interacting in professional or highly stylized encounters in a changing society.

3. Goffman's thesis, that life was not characterized by the difference between authentic and inauthentic behavior but was rather an entire series of performances, was presented in dramaturgical terms or, in other words, the language of theater. A former film student and influenced by Georg Simmel's formal sociology, his main contribution to the field was to consider the encounters between individuals as important as those amongst groups and each individual an *actor* in this interaction. The main source of embarrassment, he contended, was when "the front region," or one's desired self-presentation, collided with or was unsuccessfully separated from the backstage. The private preparations made for public performances take place in the backstage area; an intrusion from the backstage, like a rumbling stomach, interrupts whatever interaction is taking place up front and is likely to cause embarrassment to the actor.

4. Goffman took so seriously the drama implicit in everyday social encounters that using artistic imagery to draw out these concerns was the only way to prepare for the fact that "one false note could ruin an entire performance." Supporters of Goffman's have noted that he did not use the theater or "frame-analysis" as metaphors but saw the avoidance of

embarrassment as the entire drama of human encounter. Those who did not orient themselves towards their audience accurately, or at all, were not blithe, carefree or absorbed; they were "unwitting." The appropriate orientation of a performance was everything.

5. [Note: if the art historian Michael Fried were to give Goffman some advice, it would be on the problematic relationship of performance to embarrassment; in other words, often it's not the solution! What Fried described as theatricality, aka the embarrassing excess of presence in French painting in the age of Diderot, was the problem exactly of finding dramaturgy where one looked for spontaneity, presence, radical simultaneity and self-identity. Should such a conversation ever take place, Fried might say "if you didn't put on so many performances there might be less danger of them going embarrassingly wrong."]

6. It seems important that the terms Goffman used to define embarrassment are drawn from the world of theater, and that his later work, *Frame Analysis*, of 1974, was just as implicated in the language of art. **In other words, the ushering-in of embarrassment as a sociological term was couched in aesthetic terms.**

7. Goffman's critics, Alvin Goulder especially, wrote that because the Industrial Revolution had ended and the familiar world of labor had changed, all that was left was the *performance* of work, and that the imagining of all social encounter as performance exactly denoted the progress of western capitalism in the direction of soft services promoting the empty husks of labor as holiday destination, style, and kitsch. Thus Goffman's "model of the self describes only the self of advanced capitalism, the self of a service economy where men are indeed producing performances rather than things." Following this line of critique, embarrassment comes into its current meaning through Goffman, as we become aesthetic objects to ourselves through our work; it becomes fixed in that meaning at a time when the world of work is changing and when we start to think of ourselves more as performing creatures to be observed from the outside.

8. The staging of "make-work" caught Goffman's attention in the hotel where he lived and worked while on the Shetland Islands. The kitchen, or backstage area, could be invaded at any time by a hotel manager and it was important to always have a set of positions ready to assume when he entered. Some people had to give the appearance of being busy when their boss came along; on the other hand, he noted, that some women couldn't be seen to work at all and handicrafts, books, or writing paper they had lying around at home would be hidden away when visitors came, so they could appear as women who didn't have to do anything whatsoever. In this scenario, since there is no *product* to speak of other than the performance, it's understandably important to get the performance right.

9. The main alternative to the world of performance, by the way, was the experience typical of the housewife in her home, where the practically Heideggerian mode being felt when everything is unthinking and perfect, is called euphoric interplay: "all her attention and interest is accorded to the pots on the stove or the bannocks in the oven."

10. How does Goffman change the way we see ourselves into a presentational, essentially alienated model? Is it the case that he believes in very little interiority or identity and only in performance? For example when he writes that "embarrassment, especially the mild kind, clearly shows itself to be located not in the individual but in the social system wherein he has his several selves," the implication is that there is no individual for embarrassment to be located in, and that it too comes from the outside, in the social system inhabited by the subject.

11. What changes to the word "embarrassment" allowed this to happen? [Now shift to the etymology of embarrassment and write how our contemporary understanding of embarrassment somehow knows that there is an aesthetic quality that has been forgotten (suppressed?)]

12. Before it was a sociological term introduced in Goffman's work, "embarrassment" meant a number of different things.

13. A word from Arabic, *baraza*, that supposedly meant both rope and pregnancy, split into *baraçao* in Portuguese and *embarazada* in Spanish. *Baraçao* means a halter, collar, or rope, and is used to indicate an obstruction or conflict. Importantly, it has the additional implication of varying dimensions: the word refers to one part of a longer piece of rope. This mobile or active bit of rope is the part that gives us the word embarrassment, and in English, the expression "to have enough rope to hang oneself" seems to have a similarly ominous sense of flexibility.

14. The first known written use of the word in English is recorded in Samuel Pepys' diary entry for January 28, 1664: "This day I received a good sum of money due to me upon one score or another from Sir G. Carteret, among others to clear all my matters about Colours [flags] wherein a month or two since I was so embarrassed and I thank God I find myself to have got clear, by that commodity, L50 and something more; and earned it with dear pains and care and issuing of my owne money, and saved the King near L100 in it." In its early use in English, embarrassment meant a lack of money – not embarrassment *because* of the lack of money, but the actual lack of money. "I was embarrassed" meant "I couldn't pay the bill," not "I was embarrassed *because* I couldn't pay the bill."

15. In French the word *embarras* meant first of all a blockade or obstruction, as for example in Thomas Corneille's "The Labyrinth, or, Fatal Embarrassment," performed in London on 2 May 1664, reviewed thus by Pepys: "The poorest play, methinks, that ever I saw, there being nothing in it but the accidents that fell out, by a lady being bred up in man's apparel and a man's in a woman's." In 1726, the play *L'Embarras de Richesse* by the Abbé d'Allainval made known the phrase in French whereby an "embarrassment of" something meant superabundance or excess, of choice, of riches, etc. This use entered English and is still commonly used. For example, "Suddenly, however, we were facing an *embarras de richesses*." Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street Years*, 1993. Simon Schama, in his book *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, uses the phrase as a way of understanding a certain discomfort in the Dutch temperament with unprecedented material superabundance, resulting from colonial exploration.

16. The word in German doesn't share the same etymology, but in the German philosophers I've read there's the same connotation of excess in the word *peinlich*. Kant wrote that pedantry is "the embarrassing excess of detail"; Heidegger called dialectics "an embarrassment to philosophy." A painfully unwanted surplus is at stake in these understandings of the word.

17. Henry James' 1896 collection of short stories *Embarrassments* shows a significant shift in the word's use to refer not to money but to specifically technical, writerly, problems. It seems in these stories to refer to excessive quantities not only of money, or choice, but of something more akin to personhood or presence. [How does this bring me to the motivating question, which is, Why would "it's embarrassing" be a term of aesthetic evaluation?]

18. During the nineteenth century this way of using *embarrassment* seems to develop somewhat. Reading T.J. Clark's book on Impressionism, *The Painting of Modern Life*, for example, there seems to be an explicit focus on the petty snobbery of the reception of paintings in Paris in the 1860s and 1870s; an obsessive classification and recognition of social cues, and the excessively particular quality of the model for Manet's painting *Olympia* that made people angry and uncomfortable in a specific way.

19. Darwin wrote extensively about blushing at the very end of his life, describing it as the one expression that has no analogue in animals, but didn't link it specifically to embarrassment, only referring to shame and feelings of confusion that were linked to what he calls excessive attention. Blushing on the side of the face that is aware of being observed or being stared at is common, and even excessive positive attention produces this strange experience. The reason he didn't use the term *embarrassment*, however, was because that's not what the word meant at that time.

20. Freud also wrote about shame and the "narcissism of small differences" but didn't write about embarrassment – because that's not what the word meant at the time.

21. Keep repeating "Because that's not what it meant at that time."

22. Jordan: "Here's a word, *embarrassment*, coming along, hopping from one meaning to another; here's a weird new feeling that has no name – BOOM. At a certain point they run into each other." It's not that people "didn't get embarrassed" in the past, but that's not what the word embarrassment referred to. Nor is it that people didn't use the word "embarrassed," but they used it for different things. Now all of these older meanings of the word have been transplanted, in the postwar period, into the field of social interaction.

23. **Embarrassment was an aesthetic before it was an emotion:** whole point is to make this case. Before it was read as an emotional experience it was a way of measuring: too much, too little, too close, too far, too accurate an indication of how implicated you, or some earlier version of yourself, are in a ghoulish performance unfolding in front of you. Your own diary entries, an accidental reply-to-all, your suppressed first novel.

24. Robert Edelmann: "It's a luxury emotion." Is embarrassment the luxurious new affect of the 20th century? Emmelyn: "It's not like you would have been embarrassed defecating in a public square, while having a meeting, in the middle ages."

25. Shame, by contrast, is for dark solitary rumination in the forest / countryside [Norway??] – embarrassment is the constant first world problem of the post-industrial-revolution burning hotly through dozens of potentially embarrassing situations per day. With more people around there are more non-verbal apologies to make with your face.

26. Argument: embarrassment is the emotion du jour.

27. Chris Kraus says in *Video Green*, her book about the 1990s Los Angeles art scene and particularly the efflorescence of MFA programs, "'It's so – theatrical,' is about the worst thing you can say about anybody's work in the contemporary art world. Theatricality implies an embarrassing excess of presence, i.e., of sentiment." An "excess of presence" is the best working definition of embarrassment I've found so far, because it's how embarrassment becomes modern. It traces the path from a way of measuring something like money to a way of thinking about the self, towards performance as product in de-industrialized labor, towards the idea that capitalism is no longer kept outside the body but becomes internalized: another way that experience is saturated in the language of exchange.

28. Is there a physiological side to embarrassment? Problems of liver, excess, qi, stagnation. Like a snake shedding its skin and the culture of hyperexfoliation and overaccelerated cell turnover that promises a more exciting life but possibly a sooner death. Hangovers, liver problems, sweat, waking up clustered in shame. [???]

29. Everything I've read about traditional Chinese medicine points to there being a two-character explanation for this problem. Too hot – burn with shame. Too cold – impassive, slow to emotion.

30. What's the difference between Freud's *The Narcissism of Small Differences* and Benjamin Buchloh's "Regime of Compulsive Differentiation?" From *The Taboo of Virginity*, Freud, 1917: "'Crawley, in language which differs only slightly from the current terminology of psycho-analysis, declares that each individual is separated from the others by a taboo of personal isolation,' and that it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them."

31. What does it have to do with art per se? How can we understand embarrassment as a productive part of contemporary art outside of its or alongside its emotional meaning? Repeat, it's not about feeling embarrassed because something is like this or like

that. It's about thinking of embarrassment in its pre-emotional sense, as a way in which art deals with something too much [uugghhh], too little [awkward], too near [too recently past], too far [racism?]. **Not to do with the social anxiety produced in and around art, "the art world," etc., but the structure of embarrassment in producing certain aesthetics.**

32. Playing with these poles. Insert some kind of moving abacus graph?? SmartArt?

33. Understanding embarrassment as a structural part of visual art that displays maybe what it shouldn't display or conversely that doesn't make sense in terms of *positive presence*.

34. Things in art that interest me re this topic: the committed avoidance of a fixed position, the sense of excessive presence and faux nonchalance… the art of "putting" or "placing," a productive sense of embarrassment that pushes things onwards, or the possibility of things just coming to a standstill.

35. The difference between embarrassment and shame – who knows? As Robert Edelman says "they're just different." In art, a kind of purposeless and deviant insouciance, wastefulness and masturbatory performance… male shame after masturbation is what? In relation to political art is what? Sense of safe, controlled release?

36. Martin Kippenberger's total rage and loathing at the idea that German cultural identity could be "reconstructed" "positively" "through art" is manifested particularly in such shows as *Die Ist-Nicht-Peinlich Bilder* ("The It's-Not-Embarrassing Paintings") and *Lieber Maler, Male Mir* ("Dear Painter, Paint Me"). In reaction to his overwhelming sincerity, Kippenberger's spiteful renditions of Gerhard Richter's grisaille paintings show a couple trying desperately to derive pleasure from their awkwardly-positioned mutual masturbation, and a crazy fluffy-looking dog. The horror of well-intentioned painting seems like a pretty big theme in the Rhine region around the 70s and 80s.

37. In the biography of Kippenberger by his sister Suzanne, she picks out *Peinlichkeit hat keine Grenzfell* ("Embarrassment has no limits") as his "words to live by." How did he practice this philosophy in his painted and sculptural work as well as in his public persona? *Frau Mit Viel Zeit* ("Woman with plenty of time") amongst other paintings in *Die INP Bilder*, *The woman with plenty of time*, stands out amongst the paintings of Kippenberger in his Y-fronts and so forth, as a marker of embarrassment, replete with bathos, poignant gazing, poised indifference, failed performance. The weakest link between late Picabia and the modern world.

Mater

They didn't know her at all. For me she was a sorceress. I would sometimes hide upstairs and before she came back I would clean the house from top to bottom. Now I am close to the house but perfectly safe. I can see her dress spread across the stairs. I can see that the guests have brought costumes. The tiger has put on a tweed jacket, and when it is her turn the actress uses her headscarf as a prop. They are sitting in a semi-circle listening to each recital; some people close their eyes. All day a mother's voice has been playing in my head: the melody, the timing, the inflection. She says Ah, so clever, there you go, that's it.

38. What is the relationship between NOT doing something because it's embarrassing, which might be the predictable logic, and doing something precisely because it's embarrassing?

39. And what does that say about OUR TIMES? How does contemporaneity announce itself these days? Through the idea of "MAKING SOMETHING NEW" which is inconceivable as such and therefore totally irrelevant, or making something that posits itself as being hyper-aware of the immediate [art historical or otherwise] past and positions itself directly against this? In what way can embarrassment be read as an allergy to the immediate past, or to that which is otherwise somehow too close? Contemporaneity is manufactured or expressed in an oppositional relationship, through the hatred of the recent past.

40. Or Milan Kunc and *Embarrassing Realism* for example: "We wanted to create an international folklore style." "I was in love with Renoir and Walt Disney." Where bad taste becomes the epitome of taste, or at least where there's no way to distinguish between something being "good" and being "so bad it's good."

41. Deal with "Painting Beside Itself" by David Joselit. As in beside itself with horror, grief, etc.?

42. Relationship to EXPRESSION and problems with the contemporary idea of expression in art. Relationship to BAD PAINTING and the greater discussion of painting as dead, over, etc. Isn't that the motivation behind so much self-professed bad painting: that painting is an embarrassing thing to do anyway, so some kind of distance has to be erected between *it* and what you're doing? The act of painting becomes kitsch, performed, or assumed? [Deal with *irony*.]

43. What are the alternatives to this situation? Exhibitions that show earlier versions of work, repetition without embarrassment, comfort with an earlier stage. Aldrich quote on Daan van Golden "Initially it is embarrassing, this literal referencing, but at the same time the awkwardness is so particular"; the Matisse exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. Revisitation, display of process, acceptance.

44. Sky Ferreira: "Everything's embarrassing." Theme tune of dissertation.

45. What's embarrassing about pregnancy?

46. Can anyone tell me more about this mysterious Arabic word that means both rope and pregnancy?

47. What's aesthetic about all this?

48. How taste can be described like a virus: It's over, so over it, I'm soo over it. "It's been done" as the worst insult you could imagine. Summed up nowhere so eloquently as the Jay Z song *Off That*. Whatever you about to discover we off that, you about to tell her you love her we off that, etc. Same with video for *On to the Next One* – makes the point with contemporary art [multiple Illuminati articles about the video on Youtube].

49. Embarrassment motivates obsessive newness and a sort of contemporaneity demonstrated by out-of-jointness to the times. Constant putting of oneself at an angle to the times – isn't this the narcissism of small differences, where the idea of progress is replaced by the compulsive highlighting of what differentiates you from your peers?

50. "I'm Isabelle Adjani, going nuts in the subway because Daniel Day-Lewis just broke up with me via fax."

51. Comes down to the two following observations / curses "May You Live in Interesting Times" and WTF?

QUITTING

A CONVERSATION WITH ALEXANDER KOCH ON THE PARADOXES OF DROPPING OUT

FOREWORD (Stephen Wright)
In the course of researching my end of our upcoming book on shadow practices, I have been grappling with the ethics and politics of trying to detect and draw even modest attention to initiatives that have deliberately sought to impair their coefficient of specific visibility. But I guess the most radical way for an artist to get off – and stay off – artworld radar screens is simply to *quit* the artworld. To bail, but to do so as an (ultimate) artistic gesture. Berlin-based theorist Alexander Koch has initiated and carried out some fascinating research on this unwritten chapter of contemporary art history – the history and conditions of possibility of what he calls the *Kunstausstieg* (kunst-verlassen.de). What follows is an excerpt of a converstation between us.

Stephen Wright: You have developed an utterly original line of enquiry in art-historical research: the investigation of artists who quit art, or who at any event drop out of the artworld, and who do so not through fatigue, boredom, or old age alone, but rather as a pursuit of their artistic activity. Almost by definition, that's an unwritten chapter of art history, because convention dictates that visual artists should not be merely visible, but have the highest coefficient of artistic visibility possible. I'd like to start with what I understand as your counterintuitive motivation for your interest in this blank page in art's history: that quitting art or the artworld has a critical dimension. Artworlders typically think of doing art as productive of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which critics typically laud for its emancipating, intellectual and above all perception-busting content. That may be true to some extent, but you have argued that "today, it is increasingly obvious that art, as a social, discursive and institutional system, is fettering us more than liberating us; that it is shrinking our space of thought and agency. By drawing attention to the limiting qualities of the art field in its current form, by sensitizing us to the option, if need be, of simply leaving the playing field, of quitting it for a different one, of accepting the role of the artist but also being prepared to give it up – these are just some of the ways in which the figure of the artist who quits art can be of use to us."

Alexander Koch: I liked the idea that there might be historical skepticism about the artworld's ability to inspire social hope. And I liked to imagine that this skepticism might have remained unnoticed exactly where it had become most coherent: in the decision not to make doubt-in-art yet another object of art, not to give mistrust in "visibility" in the art field still more visibility.

You are right to ask to what extent this decision has a critical dimension. Remember all those classical gestures [sic] of refusal in art: empty canvases, closed galleries, silent artists. I see that sort of silence as a fundamental mistrust in art's contribution to social and individual change. I wondered if emptiness, silence or announced attacks on museums (who ever fired a bomb on anything?) were already the radical peak of such distrust. And I found that there was a possible step further to imagine: just leaving the canvases, museums, and artworld as a whole, alone with themselves and seeking out other endeavors. But then, as you mention, how would we know about such steps, once they were taken? That was the most challenging question for me on the methodological level.

With regard to different notions of the critical dimension of artists' dropping out, in my latest lecture on the subject I suggested separating the progressive dropout from the regressive dropout in order to separate those forms of withdrawal from the artworld that were looking for an encouraging perspective elsewhere, from other forms of withdrawal that were not looking for such encouragement. In my case studies Charlotte Posenenske stands for the former type, Lee Lozano for the latter type of withdrawal. Whereas Posenenske chose social science to pursue her enquiries on participatorial practice, Lozano ultimately chose retirement in resignation.

SW: Before attending to the paradoxical methodology required by trying to study what is no longer there, or even how you distinguish between "regressive" and "progressive" dropout, let us pursue a little further the critical dimension of withdrawal. Do you see "regressive dropout" as a-critical? And in the potentially more complex case of "progressive dropout," what kind of competence or incompetence do you see artists as bringing to their new fields of enquiry? I don't mean this or that artist in particular, but artists as a whole – or at any rate, those artists who are inclined to undertake a progressive dropout. I am presuming that they don't merely become social scientists or long-distance runners, political activists or house painters like any others, but pursue these activities as artists – or at least with the self-understanding of artists, even if they don't necessarily make that self-understanding known to others.

AK: Do I see the regressive dropout as a-critical? In a general sense, it might be said to be critical as it stems from discontent and points to the limits and borderlines of an artistic practice. In a more particular sense, where criticism is understood as a contribution to an open situation, as something that pushes things further, as something progressive, this position is decidedly a-critical. This is why I think this distinction between the regressive and the progressive dropout is helpful. It helps not to idealize, nor to standardize artistic dropouts and to ask in every single case: where does the withdrawal lead? What is its perspective? What is its proposal?

I disagree with the notion of withdrawal expressed in the second part of your question. I see no sense in attributing to individuals a self-understanding of artists after they have quit an artistic practice and the role model it relates to. The whole point of my proposal is to de-naturalize the notion of "being an artist" by saying that you can stop with it at any time. The future is open – even if you were an artist. We should see artists as people like everybody else. People with an education, a profession and an evolving biography that includes choices and changes of one's profession, changes in what one believes in and what endeavor one goes for, including changes of one's self-understanding. Why should anyone be condemned to be an artist, only because he or she had had that role for a while? If one quits a profession or a passion for another, past experiences will give a certain color to any future activity of course. But whether these might be helpful or not cannot be answered in general.

And there is nothing in general to be said about "competences" here. If a dentist and a mathematician

become filmmakers, would we expect their films to make a difference because of their competences in dentistry and mathematics? And if we assumed their films to look more scientific, more rational, less poetic than films of non-ex-dentists and non-ex-mathematicians, wouldn't we only show how limited we believe other peoples' minds are and how little chance we see for their lives to develop? I'd say the same about artists becoming mathematicians or dentists. All the rest is cliché. Why would an ex-artist potentially bring more creativity, more imagination or more self-responsibility to natural sciences and medicine than anybody else? I think Richard Rorty (whom we both admire) would actually support me here. If artists merely become social scientists or long-distance runners, or if they do become social scientists or long-distance runners "as artists," would sound for him a) as really hard to distinguish, b) unclear what this distinction is good for, and c) sound like an attempt to find something essential about what artists are, exactly in the very moment of their disappearance, whereas my theoretic proposals of the artistic dropout try to contribute to an anti-essentialist perspective on that disappearance. The idea of the progressive dropout is this: if your ideas, your passion, your individual capacities or the issues that don't let you sleep at night, reach beyond what art has to offer you, there is nothing that binds you to it. Except maybe an old fashioned artistic self-understanding that I hope to disqualify.

SW: Could it not be argued that the dichotomy between progressive and regressive dropout is a little too neat? Is there not some degree of both in any decision to quit an artworld? What you disparagingly call Lozano's "retirement in resignation" could perhaps be redescribed, as Richard Rorty would say, as a serene and considered choice to seek fulfilment in life in a way that only a passage through and then out of the artworld would enable… On the other hand, is it not something of an illusion for a discouraged artist to seek encouragement elsewhere – as if social science, or whatever, could somehow save art from the corner it has painted itself into? Or, worse still, a means of art actually expanding its purview by moving into other life-worlds?

AK: Doesn't it sound like a perfect progressive dropout scenario to seek fulfilment in life? It is the best you can do if you could not find fulfilment in art. This was not quite the case with Lee Lozano though. She got anything but fulfilment in life. "Retirement in resignation" is what fits perfectly with the thirty years between her dropout and her death. To make the argument clear, I'll take the extreme case of the regressive dropout. The case I have always considered to be a specific exception in withdrawal is suicide. It is an exception, because it both is and is not a withdrawal. It's getting you out of something, but it's getting you nowhere. My distinction wishes to qualify the withdrawal in order to find out what it's about. It has become a fashionable attitude in art to resist, to abstain, to refuse, etc. Most of the time these gestures are empty though, since the point is not just to resist. The point is, for and against what. The regressive dropout gets you nowhere except out of art. The progressive dropout gets you somewhere else.

As for the second part of your question, I feel you miss the point I try to make. I agree, if artists go for social science or whatever in order to SAVE art from its discouragement-engendering character, they will meet with illusion. If they intend to overcome art's discouraging character, they rather should give up art instead of holding on to it. It is certainly not social science that will save art. But people should trade in their artistic practice for social science or whatever if this exchange encourages them to meet their hopes and passions and to be more content with what they do. If there was no such encouragement, why would anybody have taken this kind of decision after all? And hoping to expand the means of art into other life-worlds is a naïve vision of such worlds as well as of the means of art. This whole idea of expansion actually helps us to see the misunderstanding between your question and my notion of dropout. It is exactly this notion of art's expansion into other life-worlds that my theoretical and historiographical endeavor was seeking to overcome. I do not see any ways or means for art to make sense anywhere else except in art. I do see different means for different needs. And if we were to judge our means with regard to our needs, we might find that the means of art are

one option – but not the only one. We might wish to have different means at hand at different times for our different needs and purposes. Why would we deliberately limit our means to the means of art? Such self-limitation would urge us to suppress our needs and purposes, which would be the most debasing thing we can do.

SW: Let's come back to a question that has been implicit until now: that of your methodology. You have deliberately framed your research on artists dropping out in art-historical terms – as a supremely ironic but nevertheless scientific line of enquiry. How have you negotiated that paradox? How does one go about detecting, researching and then ultimately documenting withdrawal? Isn't there a danger of repatriating in the fold of artworld visibility those gestures that sought to avoid just that? It would seem to require extraordinary dexterity to avoid the methodological quagmire on either side of the divide!

AK: I think I can give my answer a critical turn concerning methodology. I was in fact seduced by the paradoxical appearance of my subject for a while. How can we observe disappearance? Or worse still: absence. Not absence in an aesthetic sense, known as a major subject in aesthetic theory. But the absence of a social actor. The absence of a person who chose to be elsewhere than where we were accustomed to seeing them. What could an art historian say about someone who deliberately turned his back on art, including art historians? Why would art history consider "elsewhere" (than art) a place to notice? I found though, that any paradoxical concept of the phenomenon was in danger of mystifying the problem instead of solving it. The paradoxical and the mystical relate. I concluded by taking a pragmatic perspective. What does that mean? It means a choice against scientific empiricism and for the very ideas that made the people I could have written about wish to not serve as empirical assurance for historiographical methodology. It meant to respect and to commit to their individual decision without making it an "example" and thus a symbol. I decided not to pull into the light of my own historiographic hunger all the cases of withdrawal that I could possibly grasp. I found it was cynical and misleading to deliver a list of dropout cases just to sate my hunger. It would have meant undoing what they had decided. Instead I focused on a handful of names that had already been repatriated by historians (including myself in the case of Lee Lozano at the beginning of my research), by market forces and by the institutions. In short, I found it was most provocative and theo-retically most coherent and responsible to let the artworlders make the artworld and let the others make something else, dropouts included. I needed a few case studies in order to historically approve that "making something else" was more than an illusion and not just another "concept" of artworlders.

DROP OUTS:

Melissa Gordon: We began talking about the dropout while developing the contents of PERSONA, and originally our discussion developed because I wanted to print the Cady Noland essay "Towards a Metalanguage of Evil" in the magazine as it is a text I've been fascinated with for a couple years now.

Marina Vishmidt: I think that's a good place for us to start, because "Towards a Metalanguage of Evil" was a point of entry for you into these questions about dropping out, and also because I was not so familiar with Cady Noland's work until you told me about it. I was coming to the topic from a more general reflection on what it means to drop out and it helps that you are coming from somewhere more specific. So, from our previous conversations, it seems another advantage of starting with that text is that it raises questions about value and cynicism.

MG: I found the essay while looking through old Documenta catalogs, and having known and respected Noland's work but knowing that representations of it are rare, and writing by her even rarer, I felt like I had found a treasure. And when I read it I thought, here is a lost manifesto in art history! After investigating the various myths around Cady Noland's practice, I began to think of the text as a "dropout piece" – a statement of refusal akin to Lee Lozano's "The Dropout Piece" (1970) as it pre-dated Noland's exit of the art world, and seems to deal with the machinations of being an artist. It made me all the more intrigued to learn that Cady Noland currently holds the record for highest amount paid for a piece of art by a female artist.* So yes, value and cynicism are definitely at stake. It's unfortunate but in keeping that Noland didn't allow us to re-print the essay in PERSONA. In it she states that the text outlines a "meta-game available for use." Throughout, she describes two characters playing the game: one is X, a psychopath, and the other, Y, the person who is the subject of a con or "snow-job." This question of the game is fascinating – I wonder if the dropout as a character is inherently playing at a game. Do you think that artists who have dropped out are performing an artistic gesture, or maybe more radically trying to alter the "game board"? Maybe it's good to talk through other dropouts: You know more about Charlotte Posenenske, another dropout.

SLACKERS, SOCIOPATHS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARINA VISHMIDT AND MELISSA GORDON

MV: Well, she went in a more lateral direction, so rather than making a kind of gesture of "I'm leaving the art world," she just left and went to study industrial sociology – she made a decision to concentrate on activism.

MG: So do you think her drop out didn't embody a critique of the art world? Leaving the sphere of "social critique" to become a "social worker"?

MV: Well, in a sense it did since she decided that she had reached the limit with what it was possible to do in that world.

MG: So maybe if we can think of Noland's drop out as a critique of value (a cultivation of value through the adamantly and negatively defined boundaries of authorship that are pertinent now in the lawsuit with Sotheby's)** – then Posenenske's action is a critique of the usefulness of an artist/artwork?

MV: Yes, it could be looked at in that way. It was a decisive choice against working in that social and professional milieu, against the only metaphorical possibilities for social action that she was encountering there.

MG: It's interesting to consider that what Lee Lozano did and what Cady Noland did and what Charlotte Posenenske did are all radically different gestures even though they are the same "action." For me that is what is so fascinating about the dropout: The angle from which you look at it as a viewer shifts the role of the artist. It's almost a prism through which to view an artist, or a prism that the artist positions around them.

MV: So perhaps what makes it the same "action" is that all three are staging an exit from the same "place" – the art world; this hypothetical site is what lends these different gestures the consistency of an action.

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* Cady Noland's "Oozewald" (1989), was sold for $6.6 million in November 2011, the top price for a living woman artist as of this writing.

** As of June 27, 2013, **Art in America** reported that Sotheby's, representing a Noland in dispute, has won a claim to remove an artwork from sale by invoking the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990. (artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/news/2013-06-27/sothebys-wins-in-dispute-with-jancou-gallery-over-cady-noland-artwork-/)

But what kind of action does "dropping out" constitute? Does the artist leave while remaining an artist? Does the artist stop being an artist or does the artist just disappear off the radar? If art is an institution, then are the two somehow equivalent rather than alternatives?

MG: Exactly. The editorial for this magazine is on mirrors, because I feel that this idea of the thing that obscures and reflects is very much to do with what you show to the world, your physical presence and how you choose to present yourself is as much something that obscures, reflects, and presents at the same time.

MV: That's the idea of the persona isn't it?

MG: Yes, and I feel that position becomes very clear or crystallized in the object of the dropout. At first it appears that dropping out is a very cynical act but now I wonder if it is actually cynical at all.

MV: Yes, I am not sure whether it is an act that can mainly be defined by cynicism. What it means for a woman artist to drop out is different anyway from a kind of generic "dropping out" from the art world as an abstract gesture (though no doubt it is always performed in very concrete and disparate circumstances). From the perspective of an art practice, dropping out accentuates the invisibility of the woman artist. It is like a double invisibility, doubled in the performance of that which is anyway the case. I think maybe by cynicism, we mean something more like seeing dropping out as a tool that gets deployed when you disappear while remaining within the art world in some manner, i.e. neither by disappearing completely nor by appearing somewhere else, like Charlotte Posenenske. But continuing to be present somehow, in a way that accentuates your value and mystery. At the same time it is a refusal to fully articulate your presence, while you are also refusing to explicitly situate your absence, and this is more like the Cady Noland case. So I think cynicism is maybe a modality that comes into play there but it would be hard to reduce it to that.

MG: Your description of the action as a tool points to a usefulness in it. I guess it's good to remember that dropping out happens all the time – it's a strong undercurrent in the art world. It is not only a decision – maybe it's a field that exists, that it's almost a medium rather than an act. That's maybe extreme to call it a medium!

MV: So to drop out becomes indistinguishable from what would otherwise be identified as failure?

MG: I saw an interesting talk by Lisa Le Feuvre on failure (which she gave in front of a Buster Keaton film), where she was discussing the condition of failing as a determined process: letting things go or letting things happen, letting things take over, and so failure starts to become a conditional, mutable term in relation to value. So for an artist to declare that they have failed means that they are already in a position of power – power in relation to the frame of failure. The dropout as a character must touch on this power dynamic. If failure is a normal condition that people are subjected to, the dropout becomes an owned failure.

MV: Yes, exactly, it's a way of wresting back control over the meaning of failure and re-casting it in terms of a purposeful gesture, so that it becomes part of an *oeuvre*, not the fading of an *oeuvre* or its abrupt disappearance. In that sense, it becomes immaterial whether or not there is a failure, that becomes just one of the glances the "dropout" prism can enable the observer to have. It's a performative elision of failure and success, control and relinquishing control. I think what you're saying about a field is important – now I'm thinking about a field versus a gesture and does the gesture become visible within the field or within the larger field of the art world? Does it become visible as something, does the field of dropping out become noticed, rather than dropping out that manages to set itself out from the field, as a kind of gesture, or monument, a perceptible void. Darkness visible – something that can be historicized or categorized as the drop out, as Alexander Koch writes about.

MG: I don't agree with Koch's definition of certain dropouts as 'unproductive', it places things on a scale.

MV: Big failure.

MG: Yeah, if you're going to do it, fail big!

MV: On the other hand it can be too big to fail, meaning no matter what you do it will be somewhat sympathetically assessed, like if you're Anselm Kiefer. Or Tracey Emin.

MG: That's interesting! Isn't that a real condition in the art world – that things become out of touch and stop being pertinent to the incessantly hyper-contemporary art world – is that in itself a drop out? Dropping out through excessive success?

MV: So with the discussion of the dropout, there is also, or primarily, a taxonomic quandary, which is how the gesture of dropping out both redefines the field but also how the field is constantly mutating so it becomes harder to recognize when someone is dropping out because anything can be done as art, as art is endlessly permissive now by definition.

So then it becomes a matter of whether you do whatever it is that you do, which is not necessarily recognizable as art, in the social and categorical milieu of art. Or whether you make a point of saying that's it, I'm leaving art and… So it does come back to the leaving behind of the social realm, which is the decisive attribute of the "dropout"? It doesn't seem that simply ceasing to "make" art is a sufficient condition for it. You have to announce it, however broad or narrow the cast of your transmission. Because of course you can stay in the art world and not do anything for twenty years if you're rich and famous. Obviously with Cady Noland you can leave and your work continues to exist.

MG: But if you're not [famous] then you just leave and nobody cares.

MV: Nobody knew you were there, nobody knew you left.

MG: But this is why I am attracted to the conundrum of talking about the drop out – making invisibility visible. This was and still is a goal of feminist art historians – to pull out the forgotten history of women artists. I don't think the dropout is at odds with this, but maybe as a gesture it is trying to activate something, or playing a long game with the knowledge that women artists traditionally have been forgotten due to lack of institutional backing and context. Back to the question of value: when someone drops out, or changes path, they have all this work, these objects or ideas that are left behind, and the place these objects find themselves in and the company they keep (if not in a rubbish heap) becomes more important than the artist themselves, which is the ultimately important thing while the artist is "present."

MV: Sure, because the art world works more on the principles of not so much supply and demand but scarcity. Value is assigned with regard to scarcity, and that is also in terms of research and presentation ("archival turns"), not even directly the circulation of works in the art market.

MG: That is definitely one value system. I think the other side is a speculative market that invests in the character of the [living] artist.

MV: Yes, that seems to be about building a relationship to the artwork in the market that is couched in terms of passion or interest which and that is what lends value to that relationship to an object or to an archive and that's how it becomes property, through this discourse of passion.

MG: That's really interesting.

MV: I was thinking of a recent artist's feature film set in LA, documenting how a particular non-art site of identity performance became part of a milieu of queer politics. At one point in the film there's an incident when the bar is represented in the lifestyle supplement in the paper in an objectionable way, and the filmmaker goes to this journalist's house and says how dare you write this and you're endangering all these people as well as being disrespectful. So there's a kind of loving possessiveness there, protectiveness, but that's also open to question on the basis of class, and capital, however you perceive the latter term operating here. There's the consideration of the frame

of representations – it's an ambitious project with high production values and good circuits of distribution – so it's like the kind of love or the kind of connection that you build becomes part of your ability to mobilize that through the privilege that you already possess. Though I'm not that interested in this discourse of privilege because I think it's politically disabling.

MG: Sure, like English class kind of privilege?

MV: I'm thinking more of the American scenario of privilege politics – as in, if you're speaking from a position of privilege but I'm speaking from a position of this other privilege, and this has to be clarified before anything else. Anyway, that got me thinking about the economic dimension of passion, how passion is convertible into property.

MG: Do you mean the passion the artist invests in the work?

MV: I mean you have a commitment that you are in a position to capitalize and what it is you have a commitment to might not, I guess. Whether it's an object, or whether it's a dead artist or whether it's a "community," these all become variable in a property market, since the market – commercial or institutional – is structured by the mysterious "properties" of authorship, however dead, that is constantly reiterated to be in the sphere of discourse running parallel to those valuations.

MG: This links back to the question of control and ownership that is so pertinent in the Noland essay, as well as to many acts of refusal and opting out. Noland's examination of the psychopath seems to be interested in games and power dynamics – control of the camera and control of image dissemination – this is the role of the sociopath, which I think she is making a parallel with to the larger art world. The unraveling of the Noland power play is like a whirlpool sucking everything down with it. A re-valuation is created by relentless refusal to "do" or to "play." I wonder how this can help unpack the issues at stake in the value of women's art works in their relation to women's "work."

MV: I like the devaluation/revaluation of labor hypothesis in the gesture of "dropping out," both voluntary and involuntary, as you point out. How you can disappear from the scene in order to enhance your control over the value of your work, by thematizing or turning into a gesture what is experienced as a defeat or lack of further possibility, a caesura or stop in other circumstances, the circumstances that affect women artists most and for unmistakable reasons. So there is a negation of the conditions of production – if removing oneself can be considered a negation, at least on an individual level – and then a re-investment, both that the art world makes in you and that you make in it, in Cady Noland's case as "part" of her practice, or in someone like Lee Lozano after her death. Tacking between the practices of negation by women artists shows a landscape of work-labor.

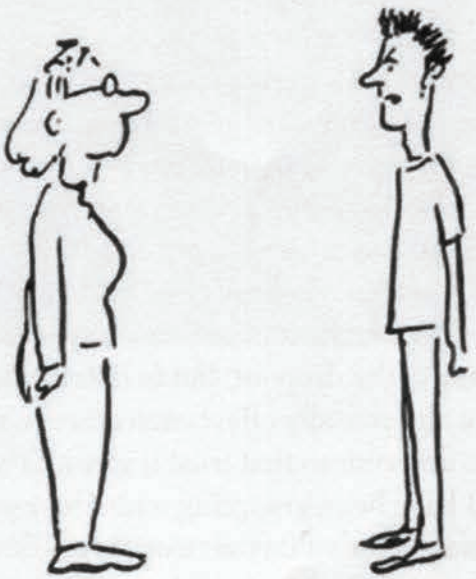
MG: Yes we're back to the lens of the dropout and the angle it puts on "laboring." I think it's also important to point out that what we are speaking about stands opposed to the myth of the male artist as embodiment of practice (in its most obvious form the Kippenberger complex which still lingers) that has become a cliché. Maybe the dropout is the only gesture to fly in the face of the obscenity of professionalization. Or as Kraus says "Real glamor lies in obscurity… the discovery of things that haven't been altered by media glare." When Noland makes the parallel between the psychopath and an aggressive entrepreneur, in 1987, is this not the dark trajectory of the "professionalization" of artists? Frustratingly we come back to a necessity for a "mythic" character – both in the dropout and in the thing it wishes to criticize.

MV: I was looking at the *21 scenes concerning the silence of Art in Ruins* publication [Eva Weinmayr, *21 scenes concerning the silence of Art in Ruins*. London: Occasional Papers, 2010] that I have with me here, which is obviously also very much about the force field established by the vacuum of certain personalities or certain practices – dropping out as a way to achieve mythic status while living without the ignominy of performance. I think this idea of dramatized absence, a gesture of renunciation which can only be

noted as such if undertaken by someone who already has a prestige, against the background of all the unnoticed dropping out (I am reminded here also of Sholette's "dark matter") [Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 2010], a protest against a system of celebrity and commodification which presupposes a system which can register your exit. Fast trip, long drop. Dropping out as taking a position or leaving a position. Dropping out as a legible move in an acknowledged grammar. The physics (what kind of forces are generated in the exit by larger and smaller bodies) and metaphysics, the quantum gravity of the drop.

MG: Yes, if there's no ground to fall onto, falling becomes a performance, dramatized like you say. The question of prestige trails our discussion. More and more I'm interested in the slacker – the 90s casual producer. I wonder if the slacker – someone who actively eschewed mass media, who reveled in being "bored" has been absorbed in the practice of "not" making things, in the practices of artists that came about in the late 90s, Rikrit Tiravanija or Vanessa Beecroft for example, but has the potential to be a more radical position.

MV: That gets into a lot of dense and confusing territory about the relation of art to non-art practices recognized through or as art. But maybe that's a precipice we need to approach if we're talking about value and transvaluation, in dropping out of art but also the re-valuation of "women's work" as art as a second-wave feminist project, and now all kinds of other things that don't explicitly refer to feminism (as in the comic on the right). I don't know.



"The works that you did in th 70s are suspiciously similar to the ones I am doing now."

MG: Maybe like in the comic, a potential problem with defining the dropout as a radical gesture of re-valuation – like the re-discovery of forgotten female artists – is that it has to be "reaped" by someone (i.e., a curator) who controls voice and contextualization. If the second-wave feminist art project was attempting to flatten the value space between art and non-art actions (personal and political), then the historic trajectory of the dropout

becomes both exemplar to that flattened space but also acts like a spanner in the works. It's the *negative act of production* that produces a positive effect.

MV: I think it's important to make distinctions. I was thinking about a discussion at the Truth is Concrete art and activism fest in Graz earlier this year, specifically of Stephen Wright and his reference to "invisible" art practices, or practices with a "low coefficient" of art – the question of how indefinitely and by what mechanism the category "art" is extended to different kinds of activities, so when does that category become inoperative? Is it a matter of intentionality, declaring a "dropout" or a "step out of"? Is the power of the "dropout" to stage or expose the indeterminacy of the "art" field, and then the aspects of value, speculation and, as you've mentioned before, trust, become problematic? And the politics of that somehow come into focus, as though it were simply a "personal" relation between art and capital, and not the class location and relations within art as well, and in relation to other kinds of labor, visible and not.

MG: There is ownership in emptiness. This has been a trend in the past couple of years: the main entrance hall to Documenta XIII with its heavy curatorial presence, Ann Goldstein's first show at the Stedelijk Museum which was mostly empty, the "Invisible" show at the Hayward Gallery. I think the question of trust and institutionalization are imperative, not only in the reading of the dropout, but in determining how things move and causally effect each other in the art world. Who determines that trust is given? This is a question I have been grappling with a lot recently. Who determines the value that trust bestows: it is not problematic because objects are 'unseen', but rather that trust touches on the invisible structures that are at play in the art world, like Jo Freeman talks about in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*.

MV: With the idea of "invisibility" that is, again, a staging or a pointing to the evacuation of signification that is one of the main conditions for contemporary art: a registration within one particular gesture or set of practices of a larger necessity for art. There is an emptying out of value or a suspension; this is part of art's powerful compulsion as a practice and as an investment too. In the end, it's just funny also to discuss the gesture of "dropping out" of art, since art itself could be seen as one giant zone of sanctioned "dropping out." But like with any zone of exception, it performs "mystic truths" about the rule, as Nauman liked to say.

MG: That is exactly what the dropout stages – like a change in lighting to show the outline or silhouette of what is happening.

WINIFRED KNIGHTS

NADIA HEBSON

WINIFRED KNIGHTS (1899–1947), little known British painter, was the first woman to hold a Rome Scholarship. In the 1920s she forged a path that married Continental modernism with an austere British figuration. Considered to be one of the rising stars of her generation, she represented Britain at the Paris Exposition of 1925. Her early death at 47 and a chronically slow painting process – a total of just seven finished paintings throughout her career – has resulted in an obscure reputation.

What Knights actually left behind was a discrete and expanded legacy. Comprising of not only an intense but diminutive body of work, but also an intelligent and frank correspondence, a scattering of keenly felt observations and the careful documentation of a persona; manifested through the design and making of clothing and props, employed both in her paintings and the navigation of every day life. If her body of work is recast to include the paintings, the clothing, interior design and the correspondence, a very different legacy emerges from the one she is currently ascribed.

Winifred Knights in studio 6, British School at Rome, 1923
Courtesy the British School at Rome

Winifred Knights, **The Deluge**, 1920
Oil on canvas, 152.9 × 183.5 cm
Courtesy Tate, London

Knights studied at the Slade School of Art, University College London from 1915 to 1917 and from 1918 to 1920; a prize-winning student, she was shortlisted for the Rome scholarship in 1920. "The Deluge," now held in the Tate collection, was her scholarship submission. Four shortlisted artists had two months to prepare a painting on the theme of the deluge. Judged by a panel including Henry Tonks, John Singer Sargent and Philip Wilson Steer, along with other Slade luminaries, Knights' submission won her the Prix de Rome without competition. A prestigious prize, the awarding of the scholarship was followed by a flurry of publicity and even at this early stage in her career, Knights' distinct dress received attention. *The Daily Sketch* ran a regular feature entitled "We Take Our Hats Off To" and on October 6, 1920 the paper included a photograph of Knights with the caption "For Looking The Part As Winner Of The Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting," continuing with "her appearance accords in every particular with the decorative canons laid down by the most up-to-date art circles." Later when the competition works were shown at the Royal Academy in February 1921 and "The Deluge" along with a photograph of Knights made the front page of *The Daily Graphic* with the caption: "Girl Artist Remodels the Flood" … "The ark suggests the modern concrete buildings, and the figures are those of present-day men and women. Critics declare the painter a genius!" The figures indeed were present-day men and women clad in Knights' distinct dress, and in later works, particularly those made during the tenure of her scholarship, the stylized clothing played a key role in setting the paintings' acute tone.

Knights' Rome scholarship ran from 1920–23, during which time she was resident at the British School in Rome and Anticoli Corrado, thirty kilometers outside Rome. The purpose of the newly instated scholarship was to instruct young painters in the art of decorative mural painting through a study of Italian Quattrocentro painting. Both Sargent and Tonks believed this instruction would foster a new school of decorative painting that would result in public commissions, predominantly for municipal buildings, across Great Britain. For a short time this vision of the elder statesmen of the British Art establishment flourished; the majority of ex-Rome scholars received notable commissions back in the UK. However, for Knights these mural commissions never materialized. The same egalitarian view that allowed her to study at both the Slade and the British School at Rome did not follow into her professional life, and twinned with her chronically slow process, the career of a decorative mural painter was not a path open to her. However other non-mural commissions did follow, most notably a painting for The Milner Chapel at Canterbury Cathedral.

Throughout the majority of her time at the BSR, Knights maintained a frank and detailed correspondence with her mother, Mabel Knights, and her aunt, social reformer Millicent Murby. The correspondence, now housed at the UCL Archive details a young woman's entrée into an exotic and highly social environment. With a levelheaded seriousness Knights finds her footing in the complex academic setting and in effect creates a persona through her distinct choice of clothing and her ebullient but serious manner. Throughout the correspondence, Knights carefully details and often illustrates a number of the outfits she designed, assembled or made. Outfits for everyday studio wear/working, along with formal dresses, evening wear and costumes for the many fancy dress parties and balls held at the BSR and other academies in Rome. From the start of her career Knights clothed the figures in her paintings and drawings in these ensembles. The clothes are characterized by their subtle colors, unusual fabrics and understated design. Crucially, Knights' palette runs through the clothing to the paintings and this visual scene setting is key to the paintings often austere but sensuous tone.

What status do we ascribe this clothing now? If Knights were working today, the outfits would undoubtedly stand as works in their own right. In reconsidering Knights' legacy, it seems vital that the clothing she employed is brought into play. While reading a duplicate of the correspondence held at the BSR archive, I came across notes of a previous researcher working in the 1990s. The commentary states that there is little to be found in the letters "... just a great deal of dancing and dressing up." To underplay the clothing's importance is to misrecognize the complexities, strengths and ultimately the subtext at play in the paintings themselves.

In a total of seven completed large-scale works, Knights' self-portrait features in six. The body of work represents a sense of the making of an individual's concerns, observations, and experiences as they progress through a brief life. While in all likelihood, Knights would not herself have named the costuming as a practice, it is key in understanding her edifice and by extension the breadth of her legacy.

Although Knights' scholarship came to an end in 1923, she continued to live and work at the BSR during 1924–25, where she formed a relationship with fellow Rome scholar Thomas Monnington. Knights and Monnington were married in Rome on April 23, 1924 and while Mrs. Monnington was present, Knights wed without the full support of her family. The correspondence held at the BSR, itself a facsimile of the UCL correspondence, becomes sporadic after Knights' marriage to Monnington. It appears that the confidences shared in the earlier letters with mother and aunt are now shared between husband and wife and hence rarely committed to paper. Knights and Monnington returned to the UK in December 1925 and January 1926 respectively. Setting up home and studio in London and while commissions and teaching ensued for Monnington, and to some degree for Knights, they struggled financially.

As early as 1921 Knights acknowledged a frustration with the slowness of her working process; defined by a scrupulous draughtmanship, each element within the larger paintings was painstakingly condensed from a number of preparatory drawings. Architecture, figures, landscape were all carefully transcribed from life and as Knights' career continued, the paintings took increasingly longer to complete. Her last commission for the Milner Chapel at Canterbury Cathedral took five years from 1928 to 1933. A process characterized by a focused, cumulative looking must have been undoubtably hard to maintain after the birth of her son, John Monnington, in 1939. Although John Monnington was only eight when his mother died, he vividly recalls her drawing daily. During this time Knights also advised on the interior decoration of Eltham Palace, the Courtauld family's art deco residence in South London. In a period where an artist's career was defined by narrow creative parameters, Knights' output didn't fit. Her early death in 1947 has compounded her obscurity, and without a later body of work to frame the early career, her creative legacy has been little regarded.

My own introduction to Knights' oeuvre started with a single photograph seen while on a scholarship at the British School of Rome in spring 2008. Taken in 1921 during Knights first months in Rome, the photograph acts as both an assertion and an invitation. In considering this image it was somehow no surprise to find a practice that moved beyond established definitions – particularly beyond early 20th century definitions. Knights both struggles with and enjoys the possibilities of her femininity and her work for me is shot through with a cognizance and self-reflexivity that connects it to now. Knights knows we are looking at her but her gaze shifts back to the work in hand, we must consider her in the act of looking and thinking.

I'm here in the middle distance, mid-career, teaching job, childless by choice, in the studio figuring out what painting could be. Way out on the periphery, you may not know my practice, but you may recognize me: unusual clothes, subdued colors, men's shoes. I always give the same rejoinder about my shoes.

None of my details matter as they are coordinates that may or may not explain a real or inferred connection to the painter Winifred Knights.

Look at this photograph: Studio 6, British School at Rome 1921. Straw hat, lute, birdcage and a reproduction of Antonella da Messina's Portrait of a Youth. *The young woman seated at the easel contemplates a drawing in progress, a study for the larger incomplete work.*

[...] I've stood on the highest balcony of Villa Medici in the small hours and at some point later in the day momentarily glanced at Antonella da Messina's youth and whilst the pairing of a grey linen skirt with a discrete cambric blouse makes perfect sense to me the painting remains unfinished...

I know Messina's portrait of a youth, Studio 2, British School at Rome, January 2008, I had a copy with me. Why? Clear-faced, quiet tension, a rim of linen against a fleshy neck: skin, tears, curls against sweaty foreheads, grey marl, dead black, laid light, every inch desire. You know I know precise northern European paintings aren't about the narrative.

Arriving in Rome in 1921, are you in a state of perpetual excitement? At twenty, you are an exemplar of maturity and discretion as your guardians define it; your masterpiece The Deluge *repeats it, slatten grey, geometric forms drag the eye from left to right. Continental modernism meets a complex British figuration. The world is tilting. A dull light catches a series of flat dead planes, the eye scans back across the immersion. Near silent. Figures step into their own shadows.*

Is the background the past, seemingly exhausted and the foreground this precise moment?

I now know that that's you standing right of center, self-portrait in a grey dirndl – or are they culottes? A plain center parting, hair fixed in a coiled bun at the nape of your neck, faintly austere I thought at first. I misunderstood. Make sense of the details.

I am scanning the photograph of you and Barbara Hepworth at leisure in the cortile, she's yet to form, a slight figure blinking in the Roman sun, clothed in gauzy Edwardian shift, the conservatism of youth. You've broken free, complex like your painting, eluding categorisation. In your correspondence it reads as if things make perfect sense, paintings don't take five years to complete. Your later doubts remain a long way off: The impossibility of painting? The ridiculousness of picture making? Too clever or not stupid enough to be just a long-game painter? At this moment I need to tell you the other resident artists (all men, all mediocrities) need to be kept at bay.

Barbara Hepworth and Winifred Knights at the British School at Rome, 1923
Courtesy the British School at Rome

March 22, 1922, *you describe a humorous incident that had occurred near the Spanish Steps a week previously. Two young men accost you, both painters; you must surely be an artist's model, those extraordinary clothes. In six languages they persist. Grey green convent coat, black stand collar, drawn at the neck, breast and hips, three neat rows of ebony buttons, sleeves taut to the wrist, from hips to calf, a perfect bell of worsted fabric. Charcoal picture hat, high heels and a ferruled cane. The get-up is audacious. With a grin, you reply when would you have time to sit, you're an artist in your own right. Not to reduce you to a tableaux of outfits against an early 20th century backdrop. But I do you a disservice if I skim over this as some inconsequence, those daily acts of toilette, the precise designing and fabricating of the clothes or are they costumes? This careful measuring of a persona. Your modest thrill at your headway in the world, a patient receiver of persistent compliments, that consistently misunderstand and misrecognize the quarter you hold (your depth, your seriousness, your facility, perfectly sentient – all spelled out in the paintings). These things: jackets, bust bodices, shirts, stockings, hats are and are not just clothes but no one around you can take this thought, this possibility any further. I surprise myself when I name this as your life's real misfortune; from here it casts a long shadow.*

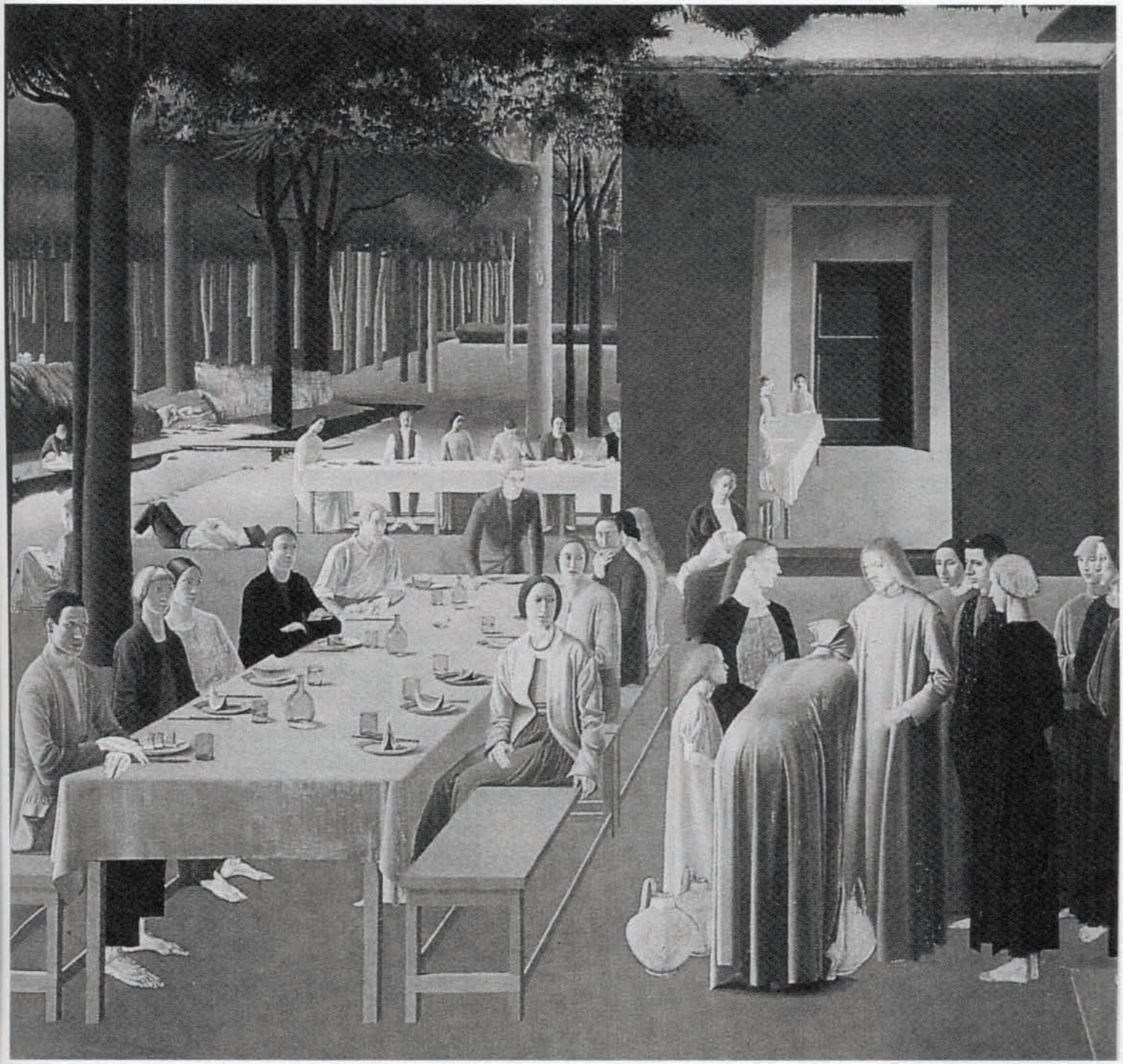
The scenario at the Spanish Steps isn't a solitary incident, your correspondence and the recollections of those who knew you name many more. Harlequinade, dancing in the library, standing naked in your studio in front of the borrowed mirror. You are an improbable thing, self-styled, here and then gone. At that moment beyond comprehension, beyond your own comprehension. Quietly announcing your presence in the world through a series of complex but discrete actions. Cutting a dash that focuses attention and garners respect is an intelligent move, conscious or not.

From 1921 to 1925 all constituents for you are in balance: self-belief, facility, sense, health, and the attention of others. Your strength as a painter is to coolly meld your own narrative into distilled taut scenes. Level-headed and precise, somehow this is a compliment. Yes, Spencer, a hint of De Chirico, but above all Piero, whose women manage to out-manoeuvre the one dimension. How apt. By being present in all your paintings (and a great deal of your contemporaries) you are the axis from which the tone proceeds.

Space marked and truncated by precise geometric forms, terracotta foreground flat to the eye limned with shifting black diagonal (irrigation ditch). Outside under dense ilex an austere meal takes place. Women, men, seated in squared opposition. Coral pink ellipses pattern across a blue linen tablecloth. Distilled narrative sense where the least important element is the story. Look to the right, not the left. Branch coral necklace traces the nape of a neck, hand rests on the tables edge, table rests on the terracotta floor, floor bisected both in the foreground and left hand mid-ground by disturbed aqueous line. Tension forms in the conversation, the forms in conversation, the smell of last night. Index finger, loose in your hairline recalls the tear of the zip, the zip's snag of your hair.

In the architecture of the paintings there are gaps, physical, where one world ends and another begins. Sometimes bridged and sometimes not, by hovering forms that cast a direct shadow onto the ground below. Two feelings are irreconcilable. Formal devices reduce the world to planes of complimentary colours: rust finds its opposite in a peerless sapphire, aubergine skirts a slub grey. Tone to emotion as mute bone walls catch the last light of the evening sun.

Elements of the paintings become irresolvable. Bare linen, reverse silhouettes mark this shift in psychology. I need to tell you this painterly device makes perfect sense. A metered image complete from seam to seam is a thin excuse. As dull as pewter.



Winifred Knights, **The Marriage at Cana**, 1923
Oil on canvas, 184 × 200 cm
Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

THREE EMBARRASS

Dr. A criticized me for not taking action. I should have left in a cab. He enacted for me an arch way of dealing with L when he is in this state – i.e. of embarrassing him. He was actually trying to teach me to be bitchy. He was doing this bitch act with considerable enthusiasm, admitting that it was a game. When L introduces me as an amateur painter, I should say very coolly that this is a fine line and in the eye of the beholder who isn't always the most knowledgeable judge. This does not sound right for me. I am not good at bandying around theories like this. I am not good at playing this kind of cool and arch game.

DARIA MARTIN

ING THINGS

This paragraph, a diary entry, one of thousands from my late grandmother's journals of the 1970s, describes her conversations with her Jungian psychoanalyst, and, in rich detail, her dreams. She was also a painter. Here she records how her analyst coached her to socially humiliate her husband, to play a reserved and towering persona, an art world bitch. But she's unwilling, or rather, ill equipped, to take part in the role playing, to perform in a theatre of hailing cabs from public parties. She mulls, in a private and introspective space, about the limits of a social world around her.

I'm left wondering by this short account, and my identification with it, about some things relating, specifically, to temperament, persona, and *embarrassment* in the art world. How are our internal worlds circumscribed or revealed by episodes of embarrassment? What passageways or ruptures between private and social worlds does a blush, an awkward drop of the head, point to? If my grandmother was embarrassed by the episode of her husband's aggressive behavior, is embarrassment a twin sister of "persona," a slipping of her social mask?

Here I will think aloud about how artists might relate to our inner lives, at a time when we're expected, regardless of the media we work in, to be public performers. When the political and social roles and context of art are pressing (for example, in efforts to protect our "precarious labor"), and collective artistic efforts desirable, how do we continue to navigate our "internal worlds"? I'll use the embarrassing confession of my own foibles as a case study in awkward moments.

Here are three things that make me blush:
– I have a crush on the artist Joseph Cornell.
– I wish I could express more empathy in the art world.
– I often daydream about doing something else besides art.

We got as far as my mother's handbags and it brought to mind my active dislike of my mother's sentimental objects. They were part and parcel of the whole Victorian thing that I rejected in adolescence. Fussy and obsolete, sentiment, detail, subtle sensibility. I always felt like clearing the decks and saying "Off!" I still like big surfaces, clean lines, clear decks, all-white rooms, with no space reserved for little trinkets that are kept and loved like fetishes. But my dream daughter is not like this and is fascinated by these old fashioned objects. I can see that my paintings also are full of idiosyncracies, private reservations, corrections and all kinds of complications and sensibilities. The grand simplicity I admire is certainly not mine.

Again, my grandmother confesses, in her diaries, a conflict between what she imagines she should fancy, and what, in her heart of hearts, she cherishes. Consciously, she feels she should enjoy "all white rooms with no space reserved for little trinkets" while unconsciously (in life and in her art) she nurtures an attraction to "idiosyncracies," "corrections," "complications," and "sensibilities."

Luckily, today (unlike when Greenbergian modernism reigned), artists don't so much have to choose. Our idiosyncratic daydreams, our mash-ups of fandom, are often welcomed within the white walls of the gallery. And yet, why does it embarrass me to admit I love Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes?

My dream daughter is not like this, Cornell's "Medici Princess"

Embarrassment is hard to define. But surely it has something to do with opening and closing, or the interruption of unself-conscious enjoyment. Cornell, as you must know, is the quintessentially "repressed" artist. Some think him precious and nostalgic. He was an "armchair traveller," journeying only in his mind, keeping his confessions close to his chest. His closeted quality seems nostalgic in an era of social networking and openly displayed identities.

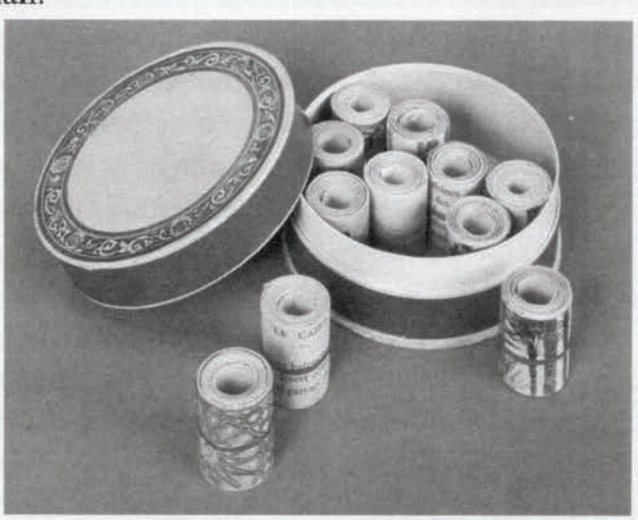
He was also extremely introverted. He lived nearly his entire adult life – apart from a few years at a Massachusetts boarding school – with his mother, and his brother in a house in Queens. He almost never left New York City. He spent a lot of time in bookstores and junkshops, browsing for what he called "the lift." In the basement of the family house, he kept dossiers full of clippings and images evoking his various objects of fascination – the poet Mallarmé, the ballet dancer Fanny Cerito – many of these char-

acters from the 19th century. He also kept boxes full of feathers, balls, mirrors, cups. Over the course of several decades, he recycled and reconnected these objects and desires in his "shadow boxes," like cross-sections of his day dreaming mind.One could imagine that Cornell was, in his reclusiveness, avoiding embarrassment, the shame of awkward social interactions, of being out of step with his times. At Cornell's peak of production, in the 1950s, his art was deeply unfashionable, too late for the Surrealists and well out of synch with the performative heroism of Action Painting. In the privacy of his basement studio, where few others ventured, he physically assembled his associations, concrete manifestations of his day-dreams. Cornell's introversion was like a bell jar that preserved his fascination with his materials, his concentration on bygone film stars, his attention to 19th century poets – and that shielded him from unrehearsed extraversion, the awkward pressure to say earnestly what he meant, to perform a masculine swagger. His inward look was a shameful turn from the directness of Pollock's "every good painter paints what he is." Today, an inward-turning personality is equally out of step with our networking times, yet, increasingly, introverts have their advocates. A recent article in the *New York Times* resuscitates introversion, celebrating its virtues against "the new groupthink" in workplaces and schools, the contemporary assumption that creativity comes from "an oddly gregarious" place: Introversion – along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, and shyness – is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man's world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. Extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but we've turned it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform.The high-visibility article, like a number of others like it, and the various new self-help books they promote, goes on to praise contemporary and historical introverts who, "like artists do their best work alone."

Avoiding embarrassment:
Joseph Cornell's basement workshop

Cornell, clearly, did his best work – his only work – alone. Yet, Cornell wouldn't really interest me if he didn't embarrass me a little. And didn't embarrass himself. After all, his interior worlds, despite being literally compartmentalized and boxed, do not remain closed to prying eyes. They reveal his desires, even as they occlude. He wraps his secrets tightly, yet he displays them for us, inviting our curiosity – or our pity. Cornell compresses, then expands, then contracts again. His very shyness about his obviously masked passions is embarrassing. Does he really imagine we'd be shocked to learn of his true desires?

Cornell's objects of desire stare back at us coolly from behind crosshairs. He writes a review on Heddy Lamar in *View* magazine, which she ignores. He sends a gift to another idol that's regretfully not wanted. He shares his disappointment of dreams unfulfilled, asking us to be a shameless dreamer too, to collude in playing the naïf.



Displaying secrets: Joseph Cornell's "Le Caire"

He says my ego boundaries are not evident. I seem to make myself available to all kinds of impositions. I also sort of jump off and make people's causes and troubles my own. Overexcited. He says this is because I don't have my own standpoint and then these things rush into the vacuum and use me. This is true.

My grandmother confesses again. Within her circle of friends, "Sight and Insight," a group of women painters who worked in the legacy of California Abstract Expressionism, she is socially porous, all too receptive. Her analyst advises that she needs to establish defensive limits, a skin to enclose her own needs. In fact, between the 10,000 pages of her ten dream diaries she details her needs, her dreams, exquisitely. Yet her introversion didn't seem to protect her from a strange openness to others' emotions.

Artists, in some social personae, might be receptive in a sense, inviting romantic projections. But what's worse than acting "overexcited," empathic, in the art world, of not having a proposed standpoint? Embarrassing to be connected, intrigued, swept away – by a person, or indeed, by an artwork. Shaming to admit to wanting to feel a visceral response to art, as Emily Dickinson does to poetry: "If I read a book, and it makes my whole body so cold no fire will ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. Is there any other way? These are the only ways I know it."

It takes a judging eye to tame these kinds of impulses and desires: in my grandmother's case, her analyst's, in mine and perhaps yours, a gallerist's cool glance. Perhaps embarrassment (the word comes from the French *embarrasser*, to block, hamper, or impede), plays a structural role, a function, in the artworld, which in in many ways imagines itself as open, fluid and ever-changing, and yet simultaneously relies on "in" crowds, exclusive knowledge, and "cool" performances. Openings and closings.

Because being an excitedly empathic artist is embarrassing, I've submerged this way of being into the subject matter for films. Recently, researching an art project, I've been chatting with people online who are unusually empathic, who've, in fact, been diagnosed with a neurological condition ("mirror-touch synaesthesia") in which touches to other people's bodies, and also sometimes emotions experienced in those bodies, register as palpable experiences in the synaesthete's own sensorium. One such correspondent confided in me the kinds of embarrassments that accompany these gifts:

> *The reason that I don't think my synaesthesia has had a positive effect in platonic relationships is because I have discovered that social interactions are largely formed around the understanding that there is a "public" and a "private" part of a person's emotions. There are emotions that they believe they are publically displaying, and then there are emotions they think they are keeping private. When I experience someone's 'private' emotion and I respond to this, people tend to react badly, or the situation becomes very tense and awkward.*

This synaesthete experiences other people's private worlds, ("almost like a homunculus of the other person in my brain," he says) but the last thing others want to hear from him is his enthusiastic reflections on those worlds. The communication is normally one-way, rushing into his inner world, where it accumulates, like unwanted stock. When the tide is reversed, the "gift" reciprocated, this cargo is rejected, and embarrassment, or even its close relative, shame, results, along with the desire to retreat from the situation. But before the stalemate of awkwardness, this synaesthete's response to the other's private world was surely enjoyable for him, a welcome return of the one-way flow of information, an unblocking of a jammed circuit. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank argue in their book about psychologist Silvan Tompkins' work, *Shame and Its Sisters*, this basic emotion is dependent on enjoyment; like embarrassment, it is defined by its inhibition of enjoyment, its stumbling on a block or a barrier. They quote from Tompkins:

> *Any barrier to further exploration… will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure… Such a barrier might be because one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or because one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger.*

I imagine that my synaesthete acquaintance is often ashamed to find himself smiling at strangers, people he thought he knew, whose interior worlds had mingled, momentarily, with his.

Artists, however, are lucky: we are capable of reflecting internal worlds – others' or our own – through our artwork, without necessarily committing a social faux pas.

But we do weather at least a small risk: for example, in my own work, I have tried to translate a friend's childhood nightmare to screen; I hope she doesn't see me as a stalker, prying where I shouldn't.

DOUBTS

He says that introverted people must cultivate their mask. Introverts – creative men – must recognize their own proper masks, ideal opposites, and in trying to become those nearly impossible other selves, to create the dramatic tension from which art arises. I don't know about this. Maybe in the case of an actor.

My grandmother's analyst insists that introverts engineer a social mask through which to successfully interface with the outside world. He goes farther, imagining that the attractive pull between the inner world and the outer mask constitutes the magnetic space from which art is extruded. My grandmother isn't sure.

Artists are now trained in art schools and within the "industry" to manipulate dramatic masks: press release, pubic talk, look, take, appearance, position. Publicly, I am "professional" and, I think, fairly convincing, in these mannerisms. Privately, I harbor doubts about my place within the profession. Primary among these doubts is the fact that I am not "obsessed." Am I really an artist? I don't feel quite that driven, to be honest. Just concentrated. Does this doubt – the gap between my internal world and my public persona – "create the dramatic tension from which art arises"? Another doubt. Perhaps, as my grandmother says, this catching up game is just the trick of the old-school actor who crafts a "shell" (like Lawrence Olivier finding Othello's walk) and then fills it with life. Is "pretending" a starting place for art?

I've noticed, in the contemporary art world, a few accepted "types" or roles that artists play. An extraverted model includes social networking of course, but also often the validifying embrace of "objective" theory, the legacies of conceptualism, dry and cool: "*I'm interested in ...*" An introverted model extends the romantic myth, the validifying embrace of subjectivity, of artists' singular vision, hot and wet: "*I'm obsessed with...*" Are these not both performances?

What is behind an artist's statement that they are "obsessed"? And why should so many of us feel pressured, as my grandmother was by her analyst, to perform a role out of synch? If one is not actually Yayoi Kusama, what does one mean by obsession? Speaking of oneself as "obsessed" – a pathology in line with persisting projections of what an artist should be – is protective, shell-like. As such, this self-labeling may be as much of a cynical mannerism as "bitchiness" – a figleaf over the nakedness of embarrassment, the heads-down of a reveal.

Could leaving room for embarrassment result in an artist's strongest performance, albeit a risky one, apt to induce stage fright? One needn't be forcefully declarative or even articulate to perform, and to reach inside others' minds. Again, Sedgwick and Frank provide a prescient account:

If, as Tomkins describes it, the lowering of the eyelids, the lowering of the eyes, the hanging of the head is the attitude of shame, it may also be that of reading – reading maps, magazines, novels, comics, and heavy volumes of psychology, if not billboards and traffic signs. We (those of us for whom reading was or is a crucial form of interaction with the world) know the force-field creating power of this attitude, the kind of skin that sheer textual attention can weave around a reading body: a noisy bus station or airplane can be excluded from consciousness, an impossible ongoing scene refused, a dull classroom monologue ignored, and none of these is wholly compassed by a certain pernicious understanding of reading as escape. Escape from what? The "real world," ostensibly, the "responsibility" of "acting" or "performing" in that world – yet this reading posture registers as extroversion at least as much as introversion, as public as it does private: all a reader need do to transform this "inner life" experience to an audible performance is begin reading aloud. Even this may not be necessary: Freud refers our sometime fascination with the sight of a child entirely caught up with playing to "primary narcissism," as if something about

sustained and intense engagement simply *is* theatrical, trances themselves entrancing. The additional skin shimmering as if shrink-wrapped around a body-and-book, or body-and-playing/working environment, sharply and sheerly delineates the conjunction or composition, making figural – not escape or detachment but attention, interest.

Perhaps artists should not resist the pull of this "shimmering skin" of concentration – attention to what truly engages. Maurice Blanchot believed that "writing is withdrawing language from the world," and yet public solitude is, of course, also a sharing: a double movement. In the words of Emily Dickinson, one of Cornell's beloved poets:

I'm Nobody! Who are you?/
Are you – Nobody – Too?/
Then there's a pair of us!

We enjoy watching others quietly play, absorbed, as I enjoy the spectacle of Joseph Cornell's deep introversion. He, like my grandmother, is "not good at theories;" he was out of touch, "wrong," insensitive to his times. Cornell sublimates erotics, and so causes embarrassment and disjuncture, but also fascination.

I'm closed, I open, I close again.
I spill my guts, and wish I hadn't.
I reveal something I didn't intend to.
My gift is sent back to the store.

A MOTIVA

NEW HISTORICISM has taught us that history is not a fixed, objective truth, to be directly accessed through due diligence, but a narrative construction that, having meaning and relevance for the present, shapes the future.[1] The history of the 20th century and of Modernism has, of course, been "made" in the male mold, dominated by male voices and perceptions.[2] Yet things are changing. During the 20th and into the 21st century many more women artists than in the past have produced a significant body of work. For the first time in history, this work begins to provide a female heritage that has, in the 21st century, been made available to a current audience in exhibitions like *Elles@pompidou* which rehung the 20th century collection using only work by women. I have noticed a fascinating pattern of work by contemporary women artists made in response to, or dialogue with, women artists or designers of previous generations; a pattern of work "making" history "in, of, and from the feminine" (to borrow a phrase from Griselda Pollock[3]) and opening up the possibility of a different future.

At the Berlin Biennial in 2008, a myriad of responses to the "Modernist experiment," were installed in Mies van de Rohe's iconic Modernist building, the Neue Nationalgalerie[4] which, with its rigorous grid structure, glass walls, and vast uninterrupted interior space, was a paradigm of masculine Modernism. I was particularly struck by the contributions of three women, all born in the 1970s, who had set up dialogues in their work with the practice of women artists or designers active in first half of the 20th century. They were an international crew: the Iranian Nairy Baghramian working with Swiss Janette Laverriere (b.1909), German artist Susanne Winterling responding to Irish architect and designer Eileen Gray (1878–1976) and Paulina Olowska (with whom I had previously collaborated) bringing attention to her Polish compatriot Zofia Stryjenska (1891–1974). Baghramian and Olowska developed those dialogues further by curating exhibitions in the Schinkel Pavillon, of Laverriere and Stryjenska, both of whom have been relatively "lost to history." The former exhibition opened just before and the latter just after the Biennial itself, thus bracketing the whole show. The artists might be seen as "making" history in a quite literal sense: in the physical facture of a contemporary practice that draws on second wave art historical understanding and knowledge and then looks back, beyond second wave feminism, to speak in the present to a current audience.[5]

A TED HISTORY

SUE TATE

1 See for example Haydon-White, **The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation**. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.
2 Walter Benjamin's history of the victors.
3 A concept developed in the context of and used as subtitle to **Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art**. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
4 Built during the Cold War it was both a reconciliation (bringing home Mies, who was forced to escape the Nazis) and an ideological statement about the "free west."
5 Refusing the danger Walter Benjamin reminds us of, that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably." "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in **Illuminations**. London: Pimlico, 1999: 247.

Feminism, of course, is a political project, not just a methodological approach, and the feminist intellectual in the cultural field works not just to understand the world, but to change it. As a feminist art historian I have shared in the emotional journey of the second wave, from the exhilaration of engaging in paradigm-shifting thinking and research and a sense of conviction in the 80s that irrevocable change had been effected, to a growing weariness with constantly maintaining a critical stance in the face of a misogynist backlash.[6] The 21st century brings an awareness that, whilst there have been huge advances for women, in many ways change has *not* been effected despite the rigor and excellence of the critique that has been presented. And now, along with many others, I feel concern that second wave understandings are being historicized (fixed in a defined past, rendered passé and irrelevant) and a fear that what McRobbie has recently termed the "disarticulation" (the "undoing")[7] of feminist ideas will cause an irreparable rupture from the current generation. Collaborating with Olowska and my encounter with her work and that of Baghramian and Wintering in Berlin, with its intergenerational historical reach, gives me cause for optimism in the face of some of these fears.[8]

In *Gender and Genius* Christine Battersby offers a historical understanding of the predicament of women artists, when she sees them as not just "outside tradition," but as actually *structuring the spaces* between the "bold lines" picked out by conventional art historians and commentators. It is only now, she argues, "after a lengthy period of sustained effort by feminist historians and critics, that are we at last learning to see the *depth of those spaces.*"[9] Exploring those depths, to develop a feminist aesthetics will take more, she argues, than just slotting women artists into existing histories. They must be positioned

> *... in two different, but overlapping patterns: the matrilineal and patrilineal line of influence and response that swirl through (and across) the intricate network of relationships out of which we shape our past.*

Crucially, though,

> *to understand what the woman artist is doing, and the merits or demerits of her work, she will have to be located in a separate female pattern that, so to speak, runs through the [male pattern] in a kind of contrapuntal way.*

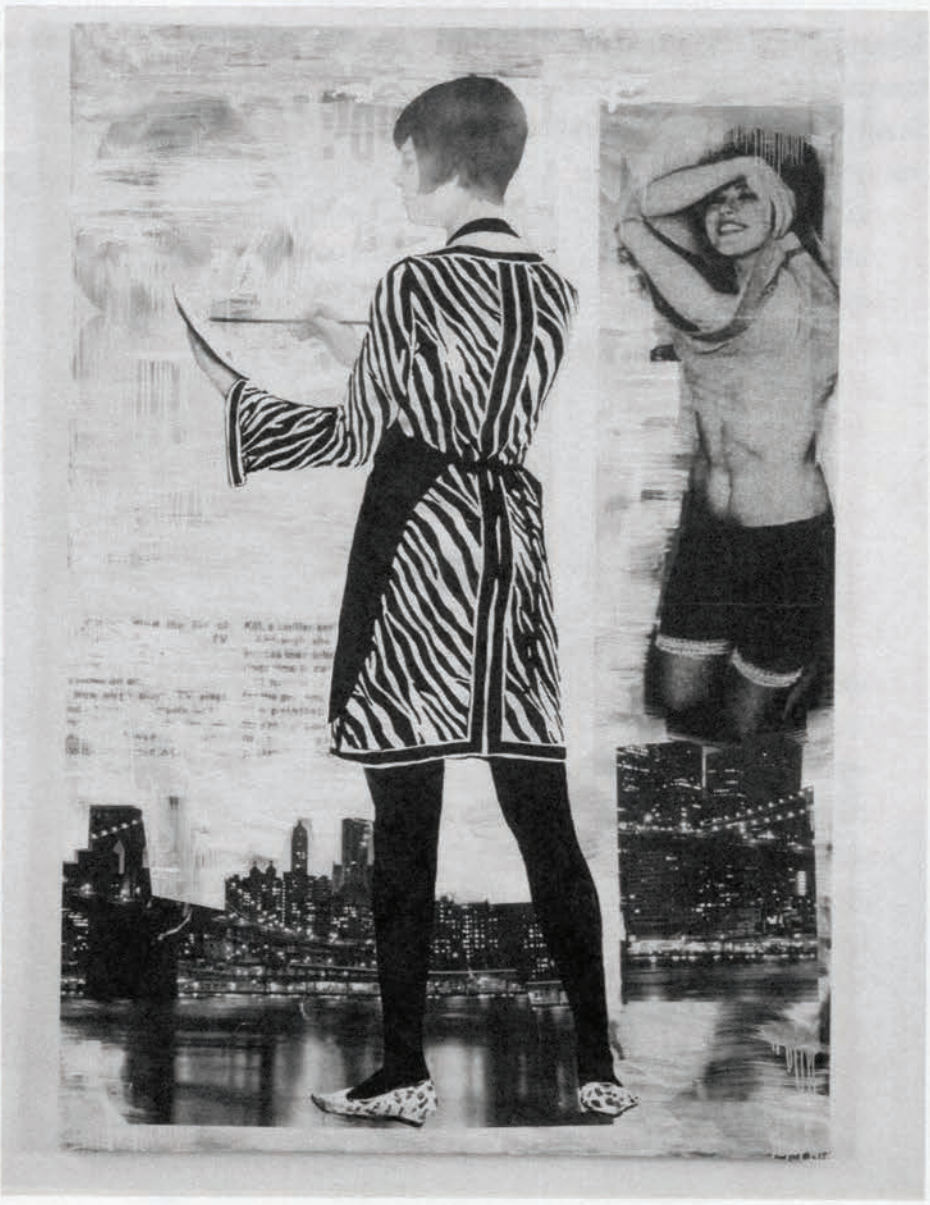
Irigaray has drawn attention to the desperately damaging effects of our (male) "monoculture" in which women are "unrealized" and men cut off from relationality (in her term "unblossomed") and promotes the necessity for a female subjectivity to be identified and cultivated in order "to reach a more just and fulfilled culture."[10] What that subjectivity might be, how to cultivate it, can seem impossibly difficult and slippery, but surely a *truly* avant-gardist task appropriate to fine art. Hilary Robinson, in *Reading Art Reading Irigaray*, exploring the role of fine art practice and criticism, identifies, in Irigaray's writing, two necessary elements: the establishment of woman-to-woman genealogies "that create the possible space for a 'becoming' as women,"[11] and the concomitant development of a syntax appropriate to a female morphology. The idea of an "appropriate syntax" is complex and perhaps contentious, but, as Robinson advises, I have tried to stay "attentive" to it as "a cultural reserve yet to come," testing and exploring "its gestures and practices."[12]

Conventionally, a genealogy is a line traced through the proper name, the name of the father, within which women appear only provisionally. But in *Sexual Subversions*, reflecting on the contribution of Irigaray and other feminist philosophers, Elizabeth Grosz offers a very different definition:

> *A genealogy maps the interconnections between the production of knowledges, bodies and powers. It is thus a motivated history, a history of the "birth" and transformation of contemporary institutions, practices and procedures.*[13]

I am interested in such a "motivated" history. As a feminist art historian, an aspect of my work is "making history" in the conventional sense of writing women back in, not just in order to set the record straight, but as a political project, to make them available in the present. The literal making, the facture, of contemporary artists, drawing on knowledge produced by cultural scholars and working in dialogue with women artists of the past, can "make" history in an embodied and vivid way; creating woman-to-woman genealogies, a "space for a 'becoming' as women" thus contributing to the "transformation of contemporary institutions, practices and procedures."

My route to the encounter in Berlin in 2008 started in Somerset in the spring of 2005. I had been researching Pauline Boty, the British Pop artist who died young in 1966 and had identified in her work a proto-feminist engagement with mass culture that had been problematic to, and thus, until recently, excluded from, the feminist art historical narrative. I hypothesised (in 2004)[14] that her oeuvre, when better known, would be meaningful to a current generation of women artists negotiating a media-saturated visual landscape. Paulina Olowska (who has been described as engaging in a "life-long feminist project; albeit one that confuses the boundaries of feminism")[15] had come across a painting by Boty in Lodz museum in Poland and, finding great resonance with her own work, she tracked me down: a splendid materialization of my theoretical hypothesis. A day of fervent discussion and pouring over my archive gave rise to a joint article in *Swingset* and a ten-foot high painting by Paulina exhibited in London: *Pauline Boty Acts Out One of Her Paintings For a Popular Magazine*, bringing the life sized figure of herself the artist in the picture, into dialogue, across the decades, with Boty.



Pauline Olowska, **Pauline Boty Acts Out One of Her Paintings for a Popular Newspaper**, 2006
Oil and collage on canvas, 220 × 150 cm

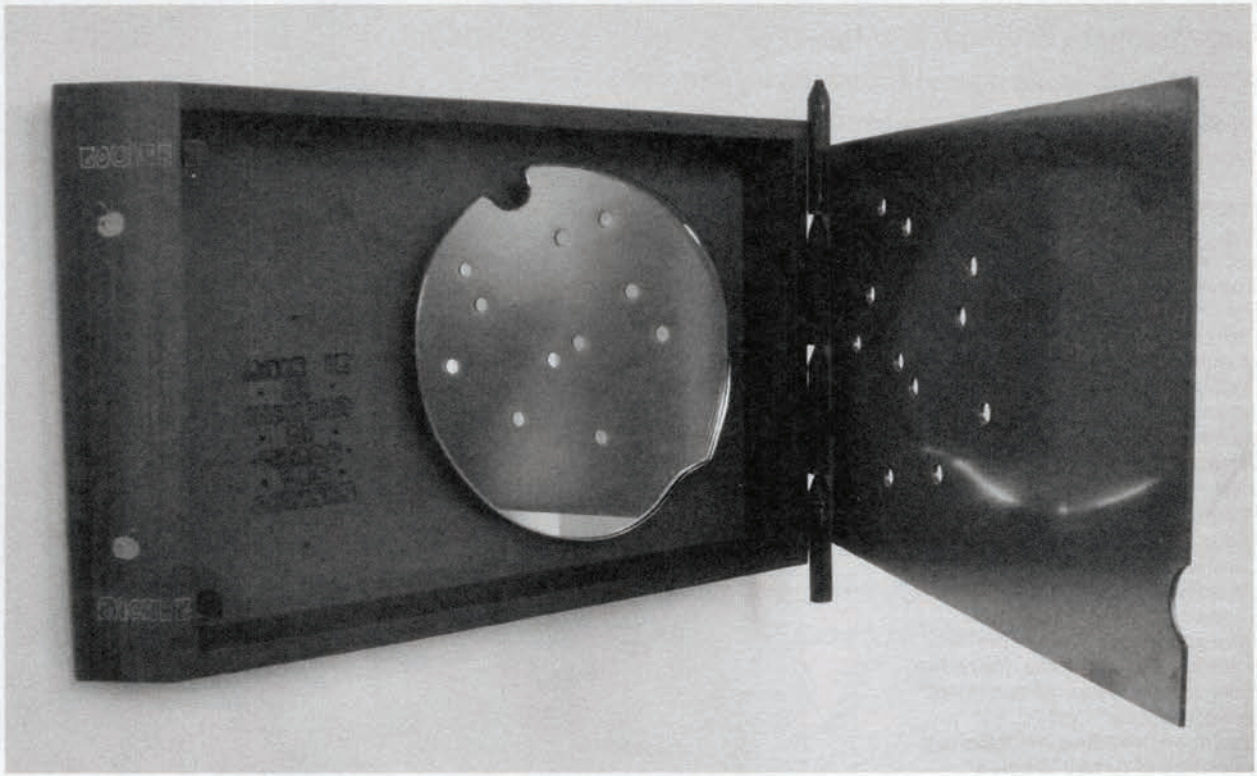
6 Susan Faludi. **Backlash**. Doubleday, 1991.
7 Angela McRobbie. **The Aftermath of Feminism**. Sage, 2009.
8 In the last two years I have also seen, among my students and in activist groups in Bristol UK, the green shoots of a younger generation turning to feminism to provide a framework or platform from which to understand and grapple with their own dilemmas and experiences of the world.
9 Christine Battersby. **Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics**. London: The Women's Press, 1989: 152.
10 Luce Irigaray, ed. Luce Irigaray **Key Writings**. London and New York: Continuum, 2004: viii, x. Not to put too fine a point on it, she goes on to assert that "Working for the liberation or construction of a feminine subjectivity and a culture of two subjects, we are really working towards the liberation of humanity itself, towards another time of our becoming as humans." (xv)
11 Hilary Robinson. **Reading Art Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women**. London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2006: 151.
12 Ibid., 93.
13 Elizabeth Grosz. **Sexual Subversions**. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989: xviii.
14 **Gendering the Field: Pauline Boty and the Predicament of the Woman Pop Artist in the British Pop Art Movement**.
15 Monika Szewczyk in **Paulina Olowska: Zofia Stryjenska. A Prior** magazine (the 5th Berlin Biennial), 2008.

These collaborations fed into my reading of the historiographical importance of women Pop artists, published in *Feminism Reframed*,[16] a response, of course, to Pollock and Parker's ovarial book *Framing Feminism* of forty years earlier – and Olowska's painting was used as the cover image. So already, a segue between theory and practice, a weave between different generations, already a layered history-making was taking place.

The Biennial opened at the Schinkel Pavillon, an octagonal space much smaller than the Neue Nationalgalerie which encouraged dialogic installation, with a collaboration between the nonagenarian designer Janette Laverriere (b. 1909) and the Iranian artist, Nairy Baghramian, born 62 years later (1971). The Swiss-born, Paris-based designer, although successful, has not been granted a place in the 20th century design canon, worked across generations with Baghramian, sharing aesthetic interests. Together they designed an exhibition structure that unwound into the octagonal gallery to provide both an interior space and outer promenade, as it were, where light streams in (while the viewer looks to the world outside). Mirrors and mirrored objects designed by Laverriere, were hung on both interior (dark green) and exterior (white) sides of the walls, further denying an inside/outside polarity.

In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray argues that if the hierarchical difference between the sexes is to be overcome, and "for a dialectic of the couple to occur we need an art of perception that that cannot be reduced to pure innerness or pure outerness but passes ceaselessly between the two." Similarly Bracha Ettinger's concept of "the matrix," extensively drawn on by Pollock in considering a female subjectivity, rejects the "inside versus outside polarity." A rejection that is given form in this cross-generational collaboration.

Laverriere had made many of the pieces for the show and, without the constraint of a commission, was able to give free reign to her delight in allegory and reference. A key work was the encased mirror entitled "La Commune, hommage à Louise Michel," 2001.



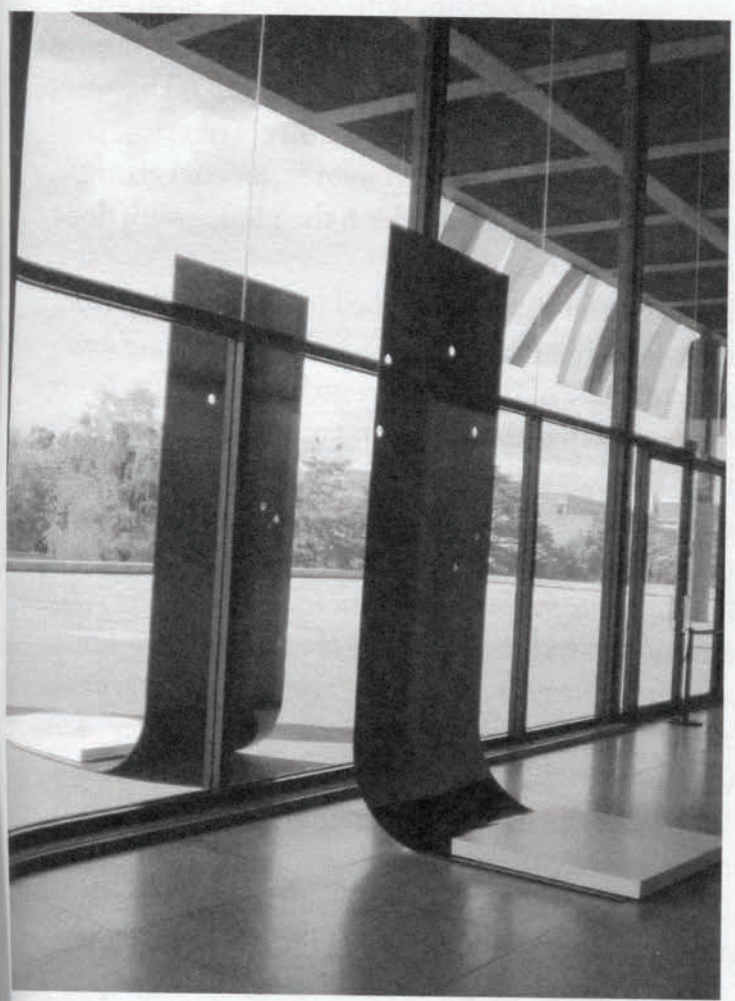
Janette Laverriere, 'La Commune, hommage à Louise Michel', 2001

16 See S. Tate. "'Forward Via a Female Past': Pauline Boty and the Historiographical promise of the Woman Pop Artist." In **Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference**. A. M. Kokoli, ed. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2008: 177–205.

17 Beatriz Colomina. "Battle Lines: E1027." In **The Architect Reconstructing Her Practice**. Ed. Francesca Hughes. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996: 2–25.

Heroine of the revolutionary Paris Commune of 1871 and much respected in her own time, Louise Michel is another (female) figure now largely "lost to history." The bullet holes that puncture the casing and cartridges forming the hinge of the mirror reference the bloodshed of the defeat of the Commune when as many as 30,000 Communards were summarily executed. The cut-out shape of a cherry and text reference the song *Les temps de cerise* ("The time of the cherries") written in 1866, which after the fact became associated with the Commune. The song also has resonance (the time of uprising, energy, engagement) for leftist and anarchist activists to this day. *Ils reveinadront* ("they will return"), Laverriere adds, in encouragement to a current audience.

For her piece in the Neue Nationalgalerie, Baghramian appropriated the main shape of Laverriere's casing and bullet holes but used a radical shift in scale and doubled the form to take on the proportion and implications of the Modernist building.



Janette Laverriere, 'La Commune, hommage à Louise Michel', 2001

Nairy Baghramian, 'La Colonne Casse', 2008

In an essay in the Biennial catalogue, Beatriz Colomina points out that Mies's designs for a transparent "universal space," rather than setting up a dialogue between interior and exterior, flattens the view of the outside world into the effect of a 2D screen image: "In a sense there is no outside in Mies. The interior simply expands to absorb everything." In her double genealogy of female homage (to Laverriere and back through her to Louise Michel), Baghramian draws attention to and challenges Mies van der Rohe's dogmatic abstractions by placing her doubled upright, nearly two-meter high forms, inside and outside the glass wall. Rejecting phallic singularity, the lyrical form of the black metal plates, bearing the bullet wounds, are sprung, held in tension, and, gracefully poised, draw the viewer into bodily experienced engagement.

The transparency of Mies's building, lifted from his own designs for a Bacardi Rum office building in Cuba, was completely thwarted in Berlin as the contrast between interior and exterior temperature meant that it suffered constantly from condensation. It was this ironic failure of "universality" that Suzanne Winterling (b. 1970) commented on, in *Eileen Gray: The Jewel and Troubled Water*. Gray (1878–1976) was one of the few women of Modern architecture. Rejecting its formulaic nature, her *pièce de résistance*, *E1027*, is a house in the south of France built in the 1920s, that used, in the words of another feminist architectural historian, Caroline Constant, "the notion of the experienced body… to transcend the reductive nature of the total view." Le Corbusier, the other Father of Modernist architecture along with Mies, became obsessed with the building and between 1937 and 1939 took it over, covering its walls with his own murals: an act described by Gray's first biographer as a "rape." He went on to remove her name from any reference he made to the house and died swimming in the sea below it. Winterling was energized by feminist scholar Colomina's powerful essay[17] drawing out the obsessive and sexualized nature of Le Corbusier's actions on *E1027* and by Constant's analysis of the building. Occupying the two symmetrical cloakrooms (the only elements that broke the interior space) with two sets of identical work (again a duality not a singularity that we might

see as an appropriately female syntax), Winterling placed Eileen Gray at the heart of a heartless building. The Neue Nationalgalerie seemed to Winterling to be so "obviously in opposition to Eileen Gray's ideas ... I just wanted to put the microphone to Mies and then Eileen." She installed photographs, a doubled portrait, a dark image representing Gray's effacement, an architectural model and a poster of Gray's wonderfully asymmetrical *Nonconformist Chair* blazoned with "ANGER Scorpio Rising." In each cloakroom they were accompanied by a film of a panel of jewel-like, glittering and gently dripping condensation, finding a fluid beauty in the "failure" of the building while the projector, like a beating heart, constantly thrummed.

Paulina Olowska's attempt, on the other hand, to stage a response to the work of Polish artist Zofia Stryjenska (1891–1974) in the Neue Nationalgalerie might be seen to have been foiled by the building itself. That disappointment is, however, thrown into meaningful relief by the resounding success of its re-staging in the very different space of the Schinkel Pavillon at the end of the Biennial.

Between the two wars Zofia Stryjenska had been highly acclaimed, working across genres as a painter, muralist, graphic artist, book illustrator, as well as designer of kilims, toys, posters, stage sets, and costumes. Her highest profile work was the commission to design and paint six large murals for the Polish Pavilion at the 1925 Expositions des Arts Decoratifs et Industriel in Paris. She typifies the predicament of many women artists who fall between the "bold lines" of established movements. Her vibrant, energetic, colorful work drew on Polish and pagan traditions. But it was too idiosyncratic and insufficiently accurate historically for the folklorists. On the other hand it was too representational for the purist, Modernist Unism movement in Poland at the time, so she fell from both narratives. After World War II, she refused to join the Communist regime's Union of Polish Artists and "was systematically relegated to insignificance, her contribution to Polish art ignored."[18] After the fall of the wall Stryjenska's diaries were published in Poland and Olowska wished to bring her to cultural visibility for a wider audience. In a painted dialogue re-creating a number of Stryjenska's works in monochrome, Olowska's selections play with scale by enlarging all the figures to life-size so they relate directly to the embodied experience of the viewer. Removal of the color that was so important in the original work is a mark of Olowska's respect and simultaneously focuses attention on the line and the dynamism of composition in Stryjenska's work. Importantly, it asks the viewer for an effort of interpretation.

Olowska struggled with the scale of a building that does not relate to the human body. She thought of displaying her work in the canteen, and when this turned out not to be possible she "just gave up": dominated by the grid formations above (the law of the father) the work was also trapped and rendered inaccessible behind the railings around the stairwell. At the Schinkel Pavillon, the artist curated a show that closed the Biennial; Olowska used the floor patterns from Stryenska's design for the 1925 exposition, again in gray scale, exploding from the center of the room. She took her paintings from the Neue Nationalgalerie and hung them from the ceiling, interleafing with them original paintings and poster designs by Stryjenska and vitrines with ceramics, postcards and designs: Stryjenska and Olowska were interwoven, layered together. The viewer walked between, behind, through the works, in direct physical relationship with painted figures, an energizing, embodied experience which the photograph does little to convey.

The whole space seemed to dance and gyrate, bringing to mind Irigaray's account (in *Sexes and Genealogies)* of the gestures girl children use to cope with maternal absence – one of which (unlike little Han's *fort da* game, recounted by Freud) is the dance

> *she dances, and thus forms a subjective space open to the cosmic maternal world ... This dance is also a way to create for herself a territory of her own in relation to her mother... in a way the daughter has her mother under her skin... The girl tries to reproduce around and within her an energetic circular movement that protects her from abandonment, attack, depression, loss of self.* (Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp.97–8)

Speaking with Olowska again the day after the Schinkel opening, she laughingly wanted to withdraw the term "responsibility" as too earnest, speaking instead (and on behalf of Baghramian and Winterling) of

a creative dialogue, that combines our own personal experience and practice with the idea of having another artist as a metaphor for our struggles now, it's not an homage because it is not nostalgic, more active and radical, the idea of a companion that shares our experiences.[19]

The work discussed in this essay reveals a wonderful intergenerational weave, a woman-to-woman genealogy, that runs "contrapuntally" around and through the male Modernist line represented by Mies's building. A syntax of duality, of the collapse of inner/outer distinction and an appeal to an embodied experience emerges within this dual historical movement. None of the work resorts to a polemical rhetoric but, as Hilary Robinson argues (drawing on Irigaray), "achieving an appropriate subjectivity for women... is a point of political and cultural struggle."

Walter Benjamin reminds us "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably." Contemporary artwork that enters a dialogue with women working during the Modernist era can ensure the ongoing visibility of images of the past, strengthening the matrilineal line, and these three artists are far from being alone in doing this. For example, Goshka Macuga in her Turner prize show at the Tate in London (2008) responded to the design work of Lilly Reich (the often overlooked partner of the Modernist architect, Mies van der Rohe) and brought attention to her exquisite handling of translucent materials. Lucy Skaer (b.1975) used an interview, in Mexico, with the Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington (b.1917) who died five years later, as a basis of video and sculptural work: "Leonora (The Joker)," 2006. Ursula Mayer's film *Fur/Le Déjeuner en Fourrure*, 2008, wove together the imagined reveries of Dora Maar, Meret Oppenheim, and Josephine Baker (consort and muse to Picasso, Surrealist artist and innovative and boundary-breaking dancer, respectively).

This body of work would be impossible without the contribution of second wave feminist art theory and history. Yet, reaching back to the early 20th century, it is also a reminder of an enriching long history of women and art within which second wave feminism is an important – but not the only – episode. This multiple generational and cross-disciplinary endeavor provides the ground for a motivated, transformative history, that opens space for a becoming as women.

18 Danuta Batorska. "Zofia Stryenska: Princess of Polish Painting." In **Women's Art Journal**, Fall 1998/Winter 1999.
19 Interview with the author, 2008.

THE NATURE OF ELITISM

AN EXCERPT FROM "THE TYRANNY OF STRUCTURELESSNESS," JO FREEMAN

"ELITIST" IS PROBABLY the most abused word in the women's liberation movement. It is used as frequently, and for the same reasons, as "pinko" was used in the fifties. It is rarely used correctly. Within the movement it commonly refers to individuals, though the personal characteristics and activities of those to whom it is directed may differ widely: An individual, as an individual can never be an elitist, because the only proper application of the term "elite" is to groups. Any individual, regardless of how well-known that person may be, can never be an elite.

Correctly, an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent. A person becomes an elitist by being part of, or advocating the rule by, such a small group, whether or not that individual is well known or not known at all. Notoriety is not a definition of an elitist. The most insidious elites are usually run by people not known to the larger public at all. Intelligent elitists are usually smart enough not to allow themselves to become well known; when they become known, they are watched, and the mask over their power is no longer firmly lodged.

Elites are not conspiracies. Very seldom does a small group of people get together and deliberately try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably maintain their friendship whether or not they were involved in political activities; they would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their friendships. It is the coincidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any group and makes them so difficult to break.

These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.

Some groups, depending on their size, may have more than one such informal communications network. Networks may even overlap. When only one such network exists, it is the elite of an otherwise Unstructured group, whether the participants in it want to be elitists or not. If it is the only such network in a Structured group it may or may not be an elite depending on its composition and the nature of the formal Structure. If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group, thus forming factions, or one may deliberately opt out of the competition, leaving the other as the elite. In a Structured group, two or more such friendship networks usually compete with each other for formal power. This is often the healthiest situation, as the other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power and thus to make demands on those to whom they give their temporary allegiance.

The inevitably elitist and exclusive nature of informal communication networks of friends is neither a new phenomenon characteristic of the women's movement nor a phenomenon new to women. Such informal relationships have excluded women for centuries from participating in integrated groups of which they were a part. In any profession or organization these networks have created the "locker room" mentality and the "old school" ties which have effectively prevented women as a group (as well as some men individually) from having equal access to the sources of power or social reward. Much of the energy of past women's movements has been directed to having the structures of decision-making and the selection processes formalized so that the exclusion of women could be confronted directly. As we well know, these efforts have not prevented the informal male-only networks from discriminating against women, but they have made it more difficult.

Because elites are informal does not mean they are invisible. At any small group meeting anyone with a sharp eye and an acute ear can tell who is influencing whom. The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively, and interrupt less; they repeat each other's points and give in amiably; they tend to ignore or grapple with the "outs" whose approval is not necessary for making a decision. But it is necessary for the "outs" to stay on good terms with the "ins." Of course the lines are not as sharp as I have drawn them. They are nuances of interaction,

not prewritten scripts. But they are discernible, and they do have their effect. Once one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things.

Since movement groups have made no concrete decisions about who shall exercise power within them, many different criteria are used around the country. Most criteria are along the lines of traditional female characteristics. For instance, in the early days of the movement, marriage was usually a prerequisite for participation in the informal elite. As women have been traditionally taught, married women relate primarily to each other, and look upon single women as too threatening to have as close friends. In many cities, this criterion was further refined to include only those women married to New Left men. This standard had more than tradition behind it, however, because New Left men often had access to resources needed by the movement – such as mailing lists, printing presses, contacts, and information – and women were used to getting what they needed through men rather than independently. As the movement has charged through time, marriage has become a less universal criterion for effective participation, but all informal elites establish standards by which only women who possess certain material or personal characteristics may join. They frequently include: middle-class background (despite all the rhetoric about relating to the working class); being married; not being married but living with someone; being or pretending to be a lesbian; being between the ages of twenty and thirty; being college educated or at least having some college background; being "hip"; not being too "hip"; holding a certain political line or identification as a "radical"; having children or at least liking them; not having children; having certain "feminine" personality characteristics such as being "nice"; dressing right (whether in the traditional style or the antitraditional style); etc. There are also some characteristics which will almost always tag one as a "deviant" who should not be related to. They include: being too old; working full time, particularly if one is actively committed to a "career"; not being "nice"; and being avowedly single (i.e., neither actively heterosexual nor homosexual).

Other criteria could be included, but they all have common themes. The characteristics prerequisite for participating in the informal elites of the movement, and thus for exercising power, concern one's background, personality, or allocation of time. They do not include one's competence, dedication to feminism, talents, or potential contribution to the movement. The former are the criteria one usually uses in determining one's friends. The latter are what any movement or organization has to use if it is going to be politically effective.

The criteria of participation may differ from group to group, but the means of becoming a member of the informal elite if one meets those criteria art pretty much the same. The only main difference depends on whether one is in a group from the beginning, or joins it after it has begun. If involved from the beginning it is important to have as many of one's personal friends as possible also join. If no one knows anyone else very well, then one must deliberately form friendships with a select number and establish the informal interaction patterns crucial to the creation of an informal structure. Once the informal patterns are formed they act to maintain themselves, and one of the most successful tactics of maintenance is to continuously recruit new people who "fit in." One joins such an elite much the same way one pledges a sorority. If perceived as a potential addition, one is "rushed" by the members of the informal structure and eventually either dropped or initiated. If the sorority is not politically aware enough to actively engage in this process itself it can be started by the outsider pretty much the same way one joins any private club. Find a sponsor, i.e., pick some member of the elite who appears to be well respected within it, and actively cultivate that person's friendship. Eventually, she will most likely bring you into the inner circle.

All of these procedures take time. So if one works full time or has a similar major commitment, it is usually impossible to join simply because there are not enough hours left to go to all the meetings and cultivate the personal relationship necessary to have a voice in the decision-making. That is why formal structures of decision-making are a boon to the overworked person. Having an established process for decision-making ensures that everyone can participate in it to some extent.

Although this dissection of the process of elite formation within small groups has been critical in perspective, it is not made in the belief that these informal structures are inevitably bad – merely inevitable. All groups create informal structures as a result of interaction patterns among the members of the group. Such informal structures can do very useful things, but only Unstructured groups are totally governed by them. When informal elites are combined with a myth of "structurelessness," there can be no attempt to put limits on the use of power. It becomes capricious.

This has two potentially negative consequences of which we should be aware. The first is that the informal structure of decision-making will be much like a sorority – one in which people listen to others because they like them and not because they say significant things. As long as the movement does not do significant things this does not much matter. But if its development is not to be arrested at this preliminary stage, it will have to alter this trend. The second is that informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away. Their influence is not based on what they do for the group; therefore they cannot be directly influenced by the group. This does not necessarily make informal structures irresponsible. Those who are concerned with maintaining their influence will usually try to be responsible. The group simply cannot compel such responsibility; it is dependent on the interests of the elite.

Full text available at: bopsecrets.org/CF/structurelessness.htm

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Gina Ashcraft is a site specific artist that travels the world. Her exploits are chronicled in the Ways series: Heartways, Crimeways, Myways, Futureways, as well as Naked Came the **** (all collectively authored pulp novels edited by Rita McBride and company) The question remains: is she very good or very, very bad?

Sabeth Buchmann is an art historian and art critic, and is the Professor for Modern and Postmodern Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Recent publications include catalogs with Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, Hélio Oiticica, and Neville D'Almeida.

Alison Carr is an artist, working in photo-graphy, video, performance and writing. She completed her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts in 2009 and BA (Hons) Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University in 2001, where she also recently completed her PhD How do I look?. Her research explores the labor, glamour, and agency of showgirls.

Céline Condorelli is an artist who works with architecture. She is the author and editor of Support Structures published by Sternberg Press (2009), and one of the founding directors of Eastside Projects, an exhibition space in Birmingham, UK; she is currently Professor at NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti) Milan.

Jo Freeman is an activist, political scientist, writer, and lawyer.

Avery F. Gordon is a Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 2012, she was the Anna Maria Kellen Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin where she worked on a collaborative project with Ines Schaber exhibited at dOCUMENTA (13). Her work focuses on radical thought and practice and over the last several years, she has been writing about imprisonment, war and other forms of dispossession and how to eliminate them.

Melissa Gordon is an American artist living in London. She is a painter, printmaker, and editor. Her upcoming catalogue Material Evidence, in relation to her 2013 exhibition at Spike Island, will be published by Sternberg Press.

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Eva Kenny is a writer who lives in New York and is currently writing her dissertation on the topic of embarrassment in relation to contemporary art at Princeton University.

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Jen Liu is an artist who lives and works in New York. In her work she explores overlapping formal structures and histories, consolidated by fictional constructs.

Marie Lund is interested in the material and process of the sculptural object, and the work often situates itself in an ambiguous temporal order where it is not clear whether a form has been left unfinished or been worn down.

Daria Martin is an artist-filmaker. Her 16mm films aim to create a continuity or parity between disparate artistic media (such as painting and performance), between people and objects, and between internal and social worlds.

"Industrial designer, public artist, sculptor, architect, producer, author... **Rita McBride** has forged the path for the 90s generation of multidisciplines, unconventional sculptors of mellifluous space, people, environments, and most particularly products." (Jessica Morgen, Artforum, May 2012)

Karolin Meunier is an artist and writer living in Berlin.

Josephine Pryde is an artist. In 2012, she showed Miss Austen Enjoys Photography at Kunstverein Düsseldorf and Miss Austen Still Enjoys Photography at Kunsthalle Bern and is currently working on a catalogue connected to those exhibitions.

Audrey Reynolds is an artist and writer. Her work includes sculpture, painting, text, and spoken-word audio. She studied at Bath College of Art and Chelsea College of Art, London.

Lucy Skaer studied at Glasgow school of Art. On graduation she co-founded the collaborative group Henry VIII's Wives, whom she exhibited with for ten years. Skaer has held solo shows in the Chisenhale, London, Kusthalle Vienna, and Kunsthalle Basel. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2009. This year she has held solo shows in CAB Burgos, Spain; Mount Stuart, Scotland, and Yale Union, USA. She currently collaborates with Rosalind Nashashibi as Nashashibi/Skaer, and lives and works in Glasgow.

Elisabeth Subrin creates conceptually driven projects in film, video, photography, and installation. Her work seeks intersections between history and subjectivity, investigating the nature and poetics of psychological "disorder," the legacy of feminism, and the impact of recent social and political history on contemporary consciousness. She lives in Brooklyn.

Sue Tate is an art historian based in Bristol. Her work with the legacy of the British Pop artist Pauline Boty has revitalized interest in a forgotten career.

Marina Vishmidt is a London-based writer and critic occupied mainly with questions around art, labor, and the value-form. She has just completed a PhD at Queen Mary, University of London on Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital. She is currently writing a book with Kerstin Stakemeier on the politics of autonomy and reproduction in art (forthcoming from Textem Verlag).

I NEVER MET SHULAMITH FIRESTONE, but I've been immersed in a representation of her for seventeen years. While researching second-wave feminism as a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I was shown a documentary portrait of her filmed when she was a student there in 1967. The 16mm film, titled **Shulie**, was produced by four Northwestern University graduate film students: Jerry Blumenthal, Sheppard Ferguson, James Leahy, and Alan Rettig. In it, Shulamith Firestone, 22, argues confidently for a life on the margins. Though it had been filmed almost thirty years before, she seemed eerily contemporary. The filmmakers document her waiting for the train, photographing trash and workers at a dump yard, painting a young man's portrait in her studio, working at the US Post Office, and enduring an excruciating painting critique before an all-male panel of professors. She discusses her views on art, religion, language, men, motherhood, and race. Because the filmmakers had a mandate to document the so-called Now Generation, questions about time, generations, and what constitutes the "now" recur throughout.

The directors had no way of knowing that Firestone would go on to become a key figure in the Women's Liberation Movement and produce one of its most radical texts. Still, the seeds of her nascent feminist theories are embedded in the film. So too is her bold vision of how to live as an artist. Employing an intimate, lyrical, cinema verité approach, the directors successfully captured a young woman's complexity and fervor during that critical historical moment. And while Firestone notably chose to withhold information about her political activities, it's all there: the intensity, the irreverence, the challenges to religion and gender roles, and her self-described alienation. On camera she is intense, funny, flirtatious, ironic, driven, audacious, coy; an intellectual badass.

After watching **Shulie** so many times it should have staged a revolt in my VHS deck, I was given permission to work with the material. Obsessed with the ways the original film spoke to contemporary issues surrounding gender, representation, and the legacy of the 1960s, in 1997 I completed a Super 8 fictional adaptation. Also titled **Shulie**, it was a shot-by-shot remake with intentional deviations and slippage and an introductory section that sets up the film with contemporary footage. Using friends as actors and crew, I collaborated with the uncanny lookalike Kim Soss, who was also the production designer. One of the original directors, Jerry Blumenthal – an award-winning filmmaker and producer, and co-founder of the acclaimed Kartemquin Films – generously racked his brains to help me find the original locations and shared his memories of the original production.

The completed project left me with questions that I've wrestled with for many years – questions that have only intensified in light of Firestone's recent death. I'm often asked why I made the film, which I have written about in aesthetic and theoretical terms *here* [elisabethsubrin.com/index.php?/press/-trashing-shulie/]. But what first compelled me was the chutzpah and spirit of this incredible woman, who went on to write not one but two books that unapologetically confront some of the most controversial, taboo subjects in our culture. She was just a kid when she began writing **The Dialectic of Sex**, a mature, brilliant work synthesizing the ideas of major philosophers, historians, sociologists, novelists, and public figures. Twenty-eight years later, in **Airless Spaces**, she took on the cruelest companions of an intense psyche – mental illness, poverty, and alienation. Both books are provocative and exposing, but in some ways, **Airless Spaces** is even more courageous in its utter refusal to insulate us from the hell of psychic disorder.

As a graduate student and then an instructor at the Art Institute in the 90s, I was troubled by how Firestone's experiences there reflected my own and those of my female students. The resonance seemed a sad testament to the work that remains unfinished today. Resurrecting that era across exactly thirty years of history felt like urgent and essential work. But after sending Firestone a rough cut of the film via her good friend Robert Roth, I learned that she didn't like it. Roth told me Firestone said that as an artist she appreciated it as a labor of love, but she hadn't liked the 1967 version and didn't see how mine was any different.

Crushed and conflicted, I decided not to publicly screen the film – not for legal or ethical reasons, but for emotional ones. Five months later, a mentor and feminist intellectual challenged my decision. She argued that we have a right in this culture to contemplate, cite, and respond to the ideas and representations of public figures without authorization. And that in the spirit of Firestone's own revolutionary call to arms – her argument that women must "dare to be bad" and resist the tyranny of niceness – I should share my own provocative work. In the spirit of Firestone's incendiary writing and activism, I decided to show the film. Being, perhaps, an obedient bad girl, I allowed it to be screened only conditionally: in arts and educational contexts, with extensive educational materials, limited publicity, and strict presentation conditions; and whenever possible, with myself there to contextualize the project, especially in New York.

It's complicated to address someone's legacy when at times she no longer wants that recognition. And it's a delicate decision to present someone in that moment of becoming. Firestone, by many accounts, saw herself first as an artist. While most artists don't suffer from mental illness, studies have shown how often the two go hand in hand. In the original **Shulie**, she expresses her passion for her work with such an intense, almost hypo-manic fervor, perhaps a subtle indicator of things to come. Having explored mental illness in my own wor I'm familiar with its vicissitudes and th ways such diseases can both illuminat and distort one's intellectual, emotiona and perceptual fields. One cannot help but wonder how that affected her feelings about her work and influence.

One of the most enduring legacies of second wave feminism is its insistence on respecting multiple subjectivities. As Firestone and I never met, such an opportunity to hear each other was los Over the years, Firestone's friends hav reported her varying reactions towards the film, from begrudging approval to much distress. It is heartbreaking to contemplate that a reverent film that reignited interest in her work would have caused her pain, and for that I'm deeply sorry. Now I've been asked to both show the film in her honor and to withhold it in her honor. Once again, the dilemma: which Shulamith Firestone do we honor? There's the artist, the trailblazing activist, and the writer of important, provocative books there's the author who alternately allowed and withdrew those books from publication; and there's the woman who suffered from mental illness.

Was her withdrawal from the life of the public intellectual another prescien and willful insight? Or in complying with her (occasional) wishes, thus letting her ideas become less accessible to new generations of readers, are we ultimately responsible for allowing another brilliant woman's voice to be slowly erased from history?

I asked myself these questions every time I showed my film. When I was told about her death, I pulled the film from distribution. As we mourn Firestone's untimely death, we should honor the actual woman's legacy, not a fictionalized conceptual art project.

A few weeks ago, the feminist writer Jennifer Baumgardner, who made rigorous efforts to republish **The Dialectic of Sex**, told me that in her conversations with Shulamith she seemed neutral about my film but felt I hadn't captured her spark. Clearly her objections were stronger at times, but I love that she still knew this about herself. Shulamith Firestone was completely out there. She was on fire. And that passionate flame is irreducibl and irreproducible.

Elisabeth Subrin
(nplusonemag.com / on-shulamith-firestone-part-two)

Kim Soss and Larry Steger on the set of Shulie, *Chicago, 1997*