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Hannah Perry and Clunie Reid:

Maybe She's Born With It

Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.
Donna Haraway, 1985

Though we appreciate modernity's benefits, sometimes it oppresses. For every modern convenience is an emblem of the attitudes that guide our science and technology, our corporations and bureaucracies – all the institutions that reduce us to data. The self must accept this reduction, which comes to it in different forms from every institution, whether academic, economic or political.

Carter Ratcliffe, 1988

Information and knowledge are distinct from one another – I learned this at a lecture in a Lower East Side Gallery several weeks ago. The virtuoso mathematician-philosopher (slim-tailored suit, smooth brow) hinged his argument rationally and persistently on this peculiar detail while barely breaking his speech for a sip of water or a ragged breath. When data are recorded in keeping with specific parameters or a particular notation, he said, contextual – that is, *atmospheric* – information is simply lost if it is too obtuse or too oblong for the appointed algorithm. In an abstract sense, this produces a certain dread: systems cannot absorb the complexities of the living! The fact is pragmatically consistent; using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to document, for example, the object information of a miscellaneous collection of artworks (the exhibition checklist), breeds a keen familiarity with the concept. There are never enough categories to adequately capture exactly how and when a work was made, in what media, metric measurements framed and unframed, why it was later modified, where exhibited and so on. And anyone who has worked with medical records understands the potential danger of losing track of marginal comments that might have been granted greater prominence in a doctor's handwritten note than in the 'additional info' dialogue box that

appears after scrolling past a long column of principle symptoms on an LCD screen – what if that funny palpitation, diagnosed a mild heart murmur, isn't so irregular after all? A case of ventricular fibrillation stimulated by high blood pressure, perhaps, but by now it's too late: you've gone into cardiac arrest.

Why do we allow the invisible and seemingly innocuous forces of data capture cause us so much anxiety, or worse, wear away at the foundations of human knowledge? Why reduce our own definitions of ourselves to the form of the profile, the social mask, the CV? We follow the expected norms, conform to all the usual standards, lower our gluten intake, go on The Pill...

I have a beautiful apt on the Upper East Side, a lot of sensual Art and Sculptors.

I'm a red wine lover I hope you are too I have some amazing bottles
...IF U CANT BE OPEN BY EMAIL FIRST THEN DONT BOTHER, CUZ I NEED SOMEONE READY, WET, AND SIZZLING HOT FOR WHAT U WANNA GET...JUST LIKE ME, SWEETNESS...



(Clunie Reid, *Take No Photographs Leave Only Ripples*, [New Museum "Free"] DIS Images)

Even our occasional erotic dalliances, mediated by online forums, require human verification; vetting our political identity (mw4w, m4m, NSA) yet seducing by the book (red roses, say you'll love me forever). Man is a technological animal, they say. Yet despite the strong imprint of web 2.0 modes of social being – which sometimes expand badly into already awkward three-dimensional situations – theories of radical contingency at the front edge of contemporary philosophy support a certain irreducibility of the info-material core. There's always something funky, thus human, that resists quantum logic and remains. Maybe this re-valuation of residue can be ascribed to the resurgence of the post-human cyborg at the present moment, whose rapid processing of information belies a deep (even Paleozoic) knowing; and whose project, per Ryan Trecartin, amounts to "rethinking the word humanity as an object with a goal" (*K-CorealINC.K [Section A]*, 2009). Doesn't the pervasive formulation 'IRL' already contain an implicit skepticism of what is real? Messages relayed at an intimate hour have no bearing on daylight dynamics, so long as one cleverly (cynically) establishes the false situational premise, by invoking an alternate version of events: the condition of 'real life' as social media MacGuffin. 'How different you are to your profile!' we sigh, with lowered gaze; regressing into the parallel conversation unfolding silently at our fingertips. Or, consider the matter in reverse: injunctions to un-plug, if only for a few minutes, smugly presume that reality can never be virtual. To imagine the line goes 'off' when we go off-line is to neglect the knock-on effects of our own synthetic inventions. Back in the AOL-era 1990s, when communication was just beginning to filter through more sophisticated digital conduits, Nick Land was already ambivalent about the average user's technological drive. He chastised a *Wired* interviewer in 1997:

Your question suggests that there's some pre-existing social pool of libratory, revolutionary, emancipatory creative potential that could be expected to spontaneously express itself as soon as it had an opportunity to do so. But there is no such intrinsic power of innovation latent in the human organism that's just waiting to bounce out onto the web.

Simulacra produce simulacra in the absence of friction. Spaces conditioned for content development subtly dictate subjectivity in ways that are difficult to enumerate. If what tumbles 'out onto the web' in the ensuing years is less recognizably human in character, maybe this will manifest in the so-called IRL of behavioural patterns in the coming-of-age of younger, more fully-technologically-absorbed generations. (Cyber-skeptic Evgeny Morozov reminds us that the Sony Walkman was once thought to cause anti-social

behaviors such as parricide, lest we fall in the trap of generational thinking.) The psychological experiment proposed by sexual reproduction at this moment in Western history appears particularly fascinating: in the absence of war, history and the Judeo-Christian tradition, will the spectacularised mode of Pop consumer culture force the utter dissolution of spleen, or sustain the erotic / cognitive distance between man and machine?

If organization (biological, corporate, state) is the suppression of difference, then self-organization and self-regulation are also forms of self-censorship; subordinate to the system. The increasing biopolitical transformation of institutionalized regimes of control, which, since the 1970s, have sought to manage humanity on the scale of the individual, can be resisted if the post-human subject maintains her *specificity* – that specificity ultimately afforded by knowledge rather than conveyed by information. Not a fact, but a certain *je ne se quois*.

How would you describe your relationship to mainstream media growing up?

HANNAH PERRY- Where I'm from people generally used to read tabloids rather than broadsheets, which is a class thing. I didn't really hear of *Face* or *ID* or *Vogue* until much later. I never bought magazines to read.

CLUNIE REID- I'm still catching up; I had a sheltered upbringing.

Do you think romance is a cultural construct?

HP- Not really.

Truth, Love or Beauty?

CR- I hope you're joking!

The more I consider these funny factors which affect certain genres of social life today, the more I wonder whether radical contingency – a damning of the system – might really be an aberrant strain of radical Marxist feminism (seeking the annihilation of patriarchal structures, as opposed to reformation or strict separatism), for its concept of the non-equivalent; the ineradicable rub. Of course, as we experiment with the non-contiguous possibilities for self-presentation enabled by contemporary telecommunications, it's easy

to fall back upon stock notions of the performative. Simone de Beauvoir's famous conception that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", is as significant a statement today as it ever was; insofar as it assigns no exclusive sex to ontological subjectivity – gender comes *after*. (This theoretically ongoing process of 'becoming' perhaps anticipates the developmental stasis in the late-capitalist doyenne of recent French thought, the *jeune-fille*.) For the Freudian Julia Kristeva, a notion of contingency is wrapped up in the promising complexities of the Western European feminist project of the late 1970s:

'... demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way nonidentical, this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate through projection and revindication'.¹

Kristeva plainly rejects De Beauvoir's linear understanding of becoming-woman; enacted outside progressive time, a feminism such as this neither patiently awaits an embodied future nor reclaims historic precedents for ideological purposes. In opening up space for multiplicity and contradiction, it fails utterly to acclimate to reductive systems of organization that structure high-functioning and productive contemporary life. It is irreducible, fluid, nonidentical. Even Nietzsche, writing in *The Gay Science* at the end of the 19th century, permitted himself to molest the moral foundations of justification: "Let us even beware of believing that the universe is a machine: it is certainly not constructed for one purpose". Cyclical time is mystical time and chaos has no teleology either.

When collecting sound or images for an artwork, what draws you to a particular picture or material?

CR- It varies enormously. I need a range of imagery from a variety of sources in terms of who's made what, for who, or for what function. Also those made for unclear and unknown purposes. It used to be more personal in terms of a sort of erotic mediation but I'm more interested in things outside of myself now.

HP- I might be moved when reading a book or poem, looking at an image on a billboard, or re-watching some old footage and noticing a specific gesture. As I encounter these things, I'll start to see other

¹ Women's Time, trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 19-20.

imagery linked to it in my mind – it's a continual process of linking associations. Each film is sort of presented as a series of vignettes, with different sections introducing characters, situations, ideas or mise-en-scènes. In this way I can bring up both culturally and personally relevant moments and see how they are interconnected, without a single ambition, opinion or issue overriding the composition, but several; ultimately presenting the viewer with a sentiment, a feeling.



(Hannah Perry, *Happy Paralysis*, Les Urbaines 2012)

What is your take on fashion, vis-à-vis consumerism, and in particular its prescription of gender and sexuality?

HP- I think fashion and consumerism are very different things... it's complicated.

CR- I don't have a take on fashion but it seems intrinsic to the idea of 'Youthitude' expressed by Tiqqun. In the proposition of the Young-Girl (*jeune-fille*) as the manifestation of Capital beyond the mimetic it's impossible to generalise comparisons of masculinity or femininity because it's an update on the theory of the Spectacle, that is, beyond all essentialisms and organic identifications.

A year before the artist Lee Lozano commenced her *General Strike Piece*, a ruse under which to slowly extract herself from the New York art world, she noted in her diary:

Event

May 11, 1968 – Start to put eye-line on upper lid instead of lower lid. This is result of photos of me taken at Bob Stanley's loft in which eyes with line on lower lid don't look too good. Have been putting eye-line on lower lid since about 1960.

Later

Stopped using eye make-up entirely.

In this banal entry, a seemingly superficial, self-conscious self-loathing intensifies to sheer rejection of the specified consumable beauty product. The event of enlightenment – produced by the evidentiary information in the photograph from Stanley's loft – enjoys a time stamp, whereas the act of self-salvage is an untimed reaction that has no basis in *event*, but is over time exercised as a mode of being (*being without eye make-up*). While there is little need to pathologize Lozano's behavior as a woman (why wear foundation if it is too tiresome to apply?), it seems relevant to consider her gestures as a painter. The black line, in its fixed position on the lower eyelid, merely underlines the viewing orbs of the artist; firmly yet playfully punctuating her acute perception. On the upper lid the accentuated curve of the thick black line winks restlessly, if soundlessly – alluding, perhaps without intention, to the flirtatious and demure; the commodified attributes of Western femininity. Removing the trace of kohl altogether introduces authorial ambiguity, and perhaps a flattening of expected emphasis. Human features in their unaided, pre-surgical, so-called natural form, absent any caricature. Is shit getting real? What's the DIGITAL TRUTH...!?

How do you understand collage in terms of authorship today: is it appropriation, détournement, fair use?

CR- The category 'collage' is not interesting since it implies the historical continuity of medium specific practices of the 20th century. *Détournement* assumes a stable legibility of the original in the first place and the secondary manoeuvre that is also inadequate to current reality as an endless feedback and recuperation system. Copyright law is a different matter.

HP- Are you asking about authorship and appropriation in a moral sense? I actually film a lot of my footage myself, of my friends and family – I make it look 'found' to confuse it.

Can you speak a little bit about your work with video?

HP- There is an element of nostalgia, but I'm also interested in the quality of the footage from a material point of view, looking at the different surfaces and textures. When I transfer new footage onto VHS I like to edit it analogue, with a couple of VHS players and a deck. It's really hard to control how the frames will jitter. I like this lack of control, as it produces footage that surprises me. You can't predict the lines and the colour that result; it's exciting. I try to push this idea when making new work.

CR- I have been working in video since 2007 but only showing it sporadically. Quite often my still images come from videos I've edited either as superimpositions or layers of a digital montage (photographic not cinematic). The videos are a way of dealing with sequences of still images in order to up their intensity and make them immersive through duration and pulse. I never think in terms of narrative, more of abstract and material sensation.

Hannah Perry and Clunie Reid are two artists whose work bends back the coded systems of normative representation present in contemporary society via the hyperactive distributional channels of an 'attention economy'. By extracting and recombining all of the 'data' of cultural matter – either from detached, post-sexual imagery sourced online (Reid) or filtered through the unique social relationships of everyday life (Perry) – each exercises a renewed form of control through techniques of editorial composition. Though neither Perry nor Reid work directly via the web to produce what might be categorized as internet (or post-internet) art, their individual performance/video/installation practices inevitably reflect the changing attitudes and actualities that seep from the mediatic ether into so-called IRL —thus negotiating the fluid boundaries between modes, mediums and imagined realities as well as probing the post-human ethics of information overload and the irreducibility of the subject.

If they have changed now it is not because they have resigned themselves to reality . . .

What're you gonna be girls, sinners or winners when you die?
While It Lasts, Hannah Perry (2012)

Fuck my Junk Status
Shamanic Nietzsche Notes (Gun Version), Clunie Reid (2012)

The critical artist today possesses a certain self-conscious humor that is neither indulgent nor cynical, which lies somewhere along the spectrum between the absurdist Valley-Girl affirmations of a Trecartin Tween and the severely misanthropic social 'performances' of Lozano. A radical position, if it is to be considered thus, contains a degree of distrust towards the institution (a queering of patriarchy, in Fuck-The-Man-style punk that is at odds with today's consensus-based liberalism, and which Kriestva's invocation against progress espouses), as well as a reconsideration of what those institutions might be. This position might give rise to a sort of art that causes friction, revolving consistently around internal concerns and providing traction against the smooth, the slick and the outwardly professional (without disappearing altogether as ephemeral). For Reid and Perry, whose primary material is imagery, the challenge is to eviscerate 'retinal art' and other common forms of sexually appealing visual content derived from the gristmill of Western pop culture, where Kim Kardashian carries the banner for Helen of Troy. These dyspeptic moments might occur in, for example, the gaffer tape frequently used in Reid installations that not only questions their intrinsic value (as authentic or high-value objects) but also pokes fun at Derridian deconstruction (his fixation on the frame of the artwork as a point of dissenting from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*); or when the serpentine line of marching dancers in Perry's performance, *Erotic Discourse* (2012), break the rhythm of rudely stomping stilettos and move powerfully to the beat of the live-mixed sound, casting large abstract and surreal shadows into the high corners of a gutted warehouse room, at a scale which diminishes the attendant video projections.

How does writing feature in your practice?

CR- I'm not a writer at all but I've been trying to generate stuff in relation to other texts and images more broadly, as a kind of associative note-taking, but it's really just sort of arbitrary; lists and sequences. Defacement has become a cliché of my own making so I'm developing something else. I want language to have a more autonomous function and no longer be seen as a response to the image.

HP- The text in my videos I mostly write myself – jotted down and mixed-with things I've read, anything from social theory to philosophy, novels or poetry. Very little comes from Internet sites but people often get confused and think its all from YouTube!

In the announcement of their 'Open Office' exhibition, Arcadia Missa invoke the textual metaphor present in each artist's practice: "In the creation of new sentences, Perry and Reid also illustrate the vulnerability of the image." Transcribing and mis-transcribing, editing and marginalizing stock representations, culled from the experience of comfortable contemporary post-Fordism (exacerbated by an enforced division between 'on-' and 'off-' screen sociality), both Perry and Reid warp viewer expectations of substance and surface, public and personal – whether by means of cool distancing from the grime of a pulsing South London rave party (Perry) or through the cheeky liner notes to a work of rather masculine, yet ultra-serious, pop-philosophy (Reid). But the works examined here are far more productive than they are reactive, each engendering creative processes that do not fetishize any sense of 'the new'.

Video is a time-based media, and as such something of a cybernetic language, displacing the biological system of signals physically expressed by the human voice. Rather than enforcing an antithetical relation between information and knowledge, organic and artificial, the artists posit a synthetic mode of operations by setting a pace (viz. frame-rate) that invigorates more than imposes a machinic rhythm. Linguistic sense may aspire to a (literate) universal – the alphabet is an ancient technology after all – but poetic meter reverberates within a register that is *felt*.

Joy happens
 It's too fatty
 Blood in the Mobile Deep
Shamanic Nietzsche Notes (Gun Version), Clunie Reid (2012)

And the melody
 nothing else mattered
While It Lasts, Hannah Perry (2012)

A coincident degradation of imagery, through a vernacular of pulsating inscription (Reid) or dreamily spun-out intertitles heavily inflected with hip-hop (Perry), further stressed by various strategies of repetition, focalization

and deceleration, ultimately reveal the strength of our personal investment in images of the illusory (youth, power, sex, lifestyle) and the prescriptive nature of these desires. The artists plainly show that atmospheric data can be processed in multiple and chaotic ways; the artist-user-viewer-consumer impervious to the status of unwilling avatar.

With me and in me is a problem that only I can solve because
I am the only one who can feel them
Antonin Artaud

Through her act of confusing the machine of surveillance, in producing an unexpected and irreducible cuntscape/mise-en-scène – located in the shiftiness of an attitude rather than the fixity of an object – the artist asserts the complexities of living intellectually, sexually and virtually by (gracefully) forcing poor imagery to embarrassing, numinous limits. This ‘complaint’ against systematization gives pause; but is neither a galvanization of activism nor a bathetic political gesture. Rather, by inverting or thwarting (still) dominant aesthetic modes, these artists throw a wrench in the further progress of an increasingly managerial culture of production, in a slow and conscious attempt to strike back against 21st-century inertia: *the body is dead, long live the body*.