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Yvonne Lammerich

Que sera sera

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Q u e s e r a s e r a

When I came to Canada I was overjoyed to find a country plentiful with lakes and rivers – long, wild uncharted rivers, rivers with tumbling rapids, rivers smooth and still, rivers drifting through needle lakes with still reflecting pools.

Joy turned ultimately to fascination as I came to understand that the character of these rivers and lakes were not “god-given”, nor merely the consequence of geological forces, but also indelibly determined by the will of their key inhabitants – we call them beavers – diverting and controlling the waters for their own survival. I came to realise that what we experience as natural is also subject to whim, to the interaction of force and engagement. Who can predict what beavers will do? Who can predict with certainty what their effects will be?

To predict the future is to engage with the limits of what we know in the present. What we call the present is an oscillation between a host of “Pasts” – multivariably recorded by memory – and a host of futures projected by desire and the instinct to survive. There may be many ways of navigating this path of oscillation, but they will involve a fluctuation between the elements of conditions, beliefs and opinions. It is important to bear in mind that this fluctuation is primarily not between one or other of these elements, but within each element itself.

C o n d i t i o n

We – “we” in the sense of contemporary patterns of “postmodern” behaviour (“as seen on TV”) – are changing our view of how things relate. We appear no longer to be entirely convinced by the idea of a separate Otherness; instead, we embrace continuity in change. We work with changing conditions by representing them to ourselves as resemblances to familiar ones: different, but the same. Identity is definable as oscillation. This is a paradigm shift, one Barbara Stafford notes in her recent book *Visual Analogy*. For artists, this suggests that the era of “criticality” based upon delineating and confronting differences or oppositions is merging into one in which similarity is assuming greater significance. Currently the widely discussed genome project, with its linkage through genetic sequencing of bacteria, mice, humans and flies and whatever else, is undermining our traditional concepts of autonomy and free will.

B e l i e f

This linkage presents us with an active state of compulsion, or sharing of passion. This recognition has led me, for example, to what we might call a “belief-proposition” – that painting as a site of production is inseparable from all other visual practices, linked by their common histories and the viewer’s presence and history. What is true for rivers and beavers is true for painting and people.

The separated discipline is “disciplined” indeed – merely a fragment glimpsed, like a landscape from a car window.

O p i n i o n

What I find especially interesting are works of art whose speculative dimension allows for unpredictability, or whose intended outcome is left unmediated. While one might be tempted to dismiss this as a refusal of consequence, it can also be interpreted as leading to a recognition of relationships that assimilate and adapt to shifting patterns of behaviour – whether on the social or the aesthetic level.

A s p e c u l a t i o n (n o t a p r e d i c t i o n)

I see us playing out a game of resistance and surrender to this new consciousness of change as continuity – whether it be aesthetic, biological or social – which will inevitably affect both social consciousness and individual perception. I imagine works that mirror this through strategies of example and demonstration so that we can survive through respectful co-existence. Like rivers and beavers. Learning to be vigilant of the effect we have in the world; learning to co-exist as neither victor nor victim.

In contemporary world culture, sexuality – sex and gender – has come to be a fundamental component in the apparatus of our identity. As we come to understand complexity as part of continuity and change, this issue will become a site of greater integration, more reflective of inter-human relations. An artist like Matthew Barney is already exploring the limits of difference. In replacing the penis with the testicles as a sign of male potency analogous to the female’s ovaries, Barney merges male and female along the axis of generation rather than power and singular authority.

In the recent Peter Greenaway film – *Eight and a half Women* – father and son have two clearly different and mythic – even Faustian – visions. The father, monogamous and conservative, dies the “perfect” death in the arms – in the Bliss – of an idealised lover. The son, narcissistic and abandoned to experiment, is – in the very youthfulness and smooth perfection of his body – cast out of paradise – rejected by the ideal lover for his inability to yield, to give over to the other. Bliss can’t take him.

It isn’t as if we haven’t been there before. This new baroque age of profusion, constant stimulation and distraction is, like its seventeenth century predecessor, in transition towards defining a new form. It will be a form – and this now is a prediction – which must adapt to surprising encounters in the twist of recurring patterns. If this is a prediction, it is because rivers and beavers have been there before us.



Yvonne Lommerich, *Most Wanted*,
2000. 18 disques, peinture de
tableau écolier, craie; 170 x 130 cm.