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Patrick Poulin et Josette Lanteigne

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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INTIMATE PROJECTS

After dealing with neofeminisms and politics, ETC presents a second issue about neofeminisms, this time on intimacy. Seven articles are featured within this theme, which is about practicing art freely outside social norms. Creative women's relationships with their social and/or community environment, as well as with the earth, reveal their secretive and independent natures. Their practices diverge from their masculine counterparts'. It is a matter of personal relationships which involve only the possessor of a human body, who thinks beyond any biological or cultural diktat, or even beyond any social consensus.

Gentiane Bélanger offers a reflection on the work of a young research and art collective from Montréal composed of Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley: *Leisure Projects*. In doing so, she reflects on the legitimacy of a world of feminine connotations that is often considered trivial. Following a residency at the Banff Center for the Arts in the summer of 2007, *Leisure Projects* examined the role of women's representations in the natural setting of the Canadian Rockies, which are historically associated with masculine or masculinist explorations.

Olivier Vargin studies women's representations in Eastern European contemporary arts, particularly in the Polish "post-89" era. Vargin considers the notion of gender as well as that of sex-related roles among female creators. These creators bring a new attitude to Eastern art because they experience modified and manipulated representation of their selves just as in the West, something that greatly contradicts the form and spirit of practices and attitudes common in Eastern European countries prior to this era.

In two different interviews, Sylvie Parent speaks with the coordinators of two major institutions devoted to female artistic practices in Montréal: Roxanne Arsenault of La Centrale, and Bérengère Marin Dubuud of Studio XX. The successive mandates of La Centrale art gallery and of Studio XX are described and related in parallel with social movements since the 70s. Arsenault tells us about the diversity and richness of the creators' commitment, when they work with the community. Marin Dubuud tells us about the complexity of the different new media territories being explored, which represent an overwhelming era of technologies as well as quasi-unlimited possibilities.

Marc James Léger questions the prefix "neo" of this issue's title, looking to determine if it is justified to separate the feminism in art of the 60s and 70s from that of the current third wave. Using the works of theoretician Johanne Lamoureux, he examines the contemporaneity of the work *Untitled* (2003) by the artist Andrea Fraser, seeking to determine what is intimate or personal about "her" politics.

Caroline Loncol Daigneault's article presents the ecofeminist approach of Jeane Fabb, which is primarily considered from the angle of women's association with Nature, an angle that has historically been mistreated and unfairly perceived. It is also considered in regard to Fabb's work of dialogue, as she has been acting with deep sensorial commitment and passion for Nature for the last thirty years, in a spirit of contemplation. The diversity of her works includes other interventions, such as dialogue with other women, to sound them out about their own experiences with Nature.

Isabelle Hersant draws attention to a machist art history - which changed and rewrote art history. She claims that the legacy of 70s militant art, both rich and complex, allowed women to gain ground of their own, while also leading them to become enemies of themselves.

Contrary to these struggles, Hersant takes the practices of two women who chose to live in New-York, Ana Mendieta and Francesca Woodman, as examples of intimacy—both having met tragic destinies at the end of the 70s. In their works, the private and the poetic are expressed through a "symbolic dimension of their bodies, serving a questioning of philosophical significance." Their questioning went beyond any doctrine or dogma, something that our times seem to be missing, according to Hersant.

In 2008, two female creators exhibited works that were outstanding in terms of their peculiarity and bravely feminine character. This boldness that engaged many spectators' attention belongs to Sylvie Cotton, who occupied, during 45 days, a tiny exhibition hall of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, in Québec City.¹ Was the boldness in occupying a place so heavily loaded historically, that is, the confined cell of a condemned person in an ancient 19th century prison? Was it that this 21st century activist spent entire days exposed to the scrutiny and words of thousands of visitors? Or is it her strange inclusion in the heart of the deepest silence of all, that of [religious] retreat? Sylvie Cotton systematically played the "game" of confinement—and held on—even if the expression isn't exactly appropriate; because she also took advantage of these extreme conditions in order to push the creative act to its limit. This has given way to the spoken word and its effects when meeting the other, and liberated the written word, a word that is on paper like an invader. In this space as small as a single bed, a space connected to a narrow passageway and surrounded by brick walls and arches filled with history, the artist had spread out some shelves on the walls above and around the bed, and filled these with a suite of small artifacts/symbols/motifs from her vocabulary, the inhabitants of her creative world. Great courage indeed because this

project is about resistance, yet it is also about tenderness and compassion, all clichés that were making past feminine art a supposedly minor and stillborn one.

Lucie Duval recently presented a series of photographs of sculptures (*Mainmises*) at the Laboratoire de l'Agora de la danse, in Montréal.² Her works of great semantic refinement feature arrangements of white workers' gloves made in China, like those sold in hardware stores. These gloves are put together on dummies, and they make odd clothing in a *mise en abyme* of the creative act. In beige monochrome, on a white background or slightly shaded, the white ensemble evokes a grace that is far from the reference to Chinese working classes, which is actually one of the raw materials of her works. Yet, they also call upon the work of seamstresses and designers from all cultures, including ours. The paradox here—and this is yet again very bold—lies in the fact that we are placed in front of references to sewing symbols, and so exposed to another cliché of a feminine art that was never historically placed above domestic craft.

Sylvie Cotton and Lucie Duval offer reformulations of feminine art that, although related to a recent past, now occupy anew lands and territories that were once desolate.

Isabelle Lelarge

Notes

¹ Sylvie Cotton's participative action was entitled *Faire du temps* ("Doing time"). It was curated by Nathalie de Blois and presented in the old cell block of the Charles-Baillargé pavilion, in what is now the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, in Québec City, during the *Manif d'art 4*, held April 24th to June 15th, 2008.

² Curated by Mona Hakim, Lucie Duval's exhibition *Mainmises* was presented at the Laboratoire de l'Agora de la danse, in Montréal, from October 15th to November 8th, 2008.

NEOFEMINISMS/NÉOFÉMINISMES

FROM PARLORS TO GLACIERS:
LEISURE PROJECTS

Hey Babe, take a walk on the wild side.
Lou Reed

For a long time, the conquest of mountains has been the prerogative of men—at least this is what History tells us. However, History is not considered a progressive order forming a linear narrative anymore, and it is now approached as a large database allowing new readings, new combinations, and the subversion of disparate narrative elements.¹ In this spirit of cultural recycling, a young Montréal collective indulges itself with explorations of archives, anthropology of the present, and historical reconstructions and reenactments, in order to question the structures of their values and to manipulate their historical milestones.

The amplitude and complexity of *Leisure Projects'* cultural mandate hardly fits in a single designation. This collective was founded by the artists/curators Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley, and it draws on a polymorphic esthetic, feeding a view that has many implications. *Leisure Projects'* presence can be felt in magnificent society parties featuring beaded dresses and champagne, in the silky comfort of fur coats at an ice hotel, in the eccentric hairdos of ancient wigs, or in the amber blaze of lemon-flavored tea in Chinese porcelain. Yet, a very sharp critique percolates under this soft exuberance. With the scope of its reflections and its propensity for parody, *Leisure Projects* brings a new critical framework to the tourism and leisure domains, and it questions these cultural sectors' underlying contexts of participation. In a more implicit manner, *Leisure Projects* attacks a form of sexist marginalization. Proudly carrying a leisure ethic and an idle sensuality, it works subversively for the legitimization of a whole universe considered futile because of its feminine connotations—a value judgment that Pierre Bourdieu holds to be a kind of symbolic violence against women.² *Leisure Projects'* repertoire ranges from the glamour of big receptions to daydreaming, and includes everything that is likely to be described as exquisite, delicate, gracious, refined, intuitive, excessively frivolous and delightfully charming.

During an artist residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts, in the summer of 2007, *Leisure Projects* had the opportunity to broaden the range of its artistic interventions—from parlors to glaciers—with the project *Brushing Up Against the Wild*. The art and research collective went in the heart of the Canadian Rockies to explore the many cultural fantasies that are associated with this ice fortress. A cradle of Canadian romanticism, Banff National Park reached its mythical peak at the turn of the 20th century, and still carries a cultural charisma and a natural ideal that are a strong part of the configuration of Canadian identity. Specifically adopting a feminine point of view, *Leisure Projects* sifted through Banff's memory, looking for accounts revealing the fantasies that certain feminine protagonists might have experienced while exploring this alpine area. Indeed, if mountains

are often seen and exploited as a breeding ground for masculinist achievements and ideologies, the intervention of Leisure Projects rather suggests that a feminist autonomy has grown within Nature's rusticity, therefore unbalancing these sexist connotations.

Whether talking about Gaia or Mother Earth, or using metaphors concerning purity, pristine-ness, fertility or rape, femininity is traditionally associated with the natural world.

Having her image confused with that of a Nature restrained by Man's assaults, Woman happens to be manipulated and shaped like some raw material used for the blooming of the human logos as the masculine gender cultivates it. So it comes as no surprise that main feminist currents locate women's liberation in the avoidance of any association with Nature, seeking rather to reappropriate the hierarchic symbols of culture and reason. The result is an anti-essentialist position that presents the differentiation of genders as a social construction that is strictly based on normative principles.

However, some feminist currents have looked to extract a new feminine identity from this association with Nature, especially under the aegis of eco-feminism. Yet, these valorizations of a feminine alterity by association with Nature are accused of propagating an essentialist myth. For many contemporary feminists, Mother Earth is a poor standard-bearer, as she does not question the patriarchal background of genders. Rather, Nature connects with certain feminist views in their quest for resilience and autonomy from societal norms. If the wilderness cannot be considered the ultimate boundary or *tabula rasa* of culture anymore, it is nevertheless filled with possibilities to reconfigure culture's inherent relations of power. By analogy, the wilderness potentially becomes a place that provides possibilities beyond a diminishing correlation between "Nature" and "femininity"—as maintained in the patriarchal matrix. Stacy Alaimo uses the expression "situated theorizing" to designate the located critique of the power mechanisms that instill racist, sexist and hetero-sexist principles in Nature.¹ This tendency to theorize situationally is evident in visual art, as *Brushing Up Against the Wild* shows. Working with site-specific events, this project establishes a discursive ground that is specifically delimited and where Canadian identity, mountain culture and a socio-normative division of genders are brought back to the negotiating table.

As Leisure Projects is more inclined to work with existing content, the collective immersed itself in the archives of the Whyte Museum and of the Banff Centre, looking for narrative documents or photographs of nonconformist women who left their marks on Banff's History. Many stories tell us about the life of upper class women arriving from Eastern Canada and the United States, attracted by the spirit of liberty, marginality and flexibility that was associated with Banff's rocky surroundings. Leaving a mundane future sure to be made up of a prestigious marriage and a world of salons, these women migrated to the mountains, seeking the sexual, physical and identity autonomy which the area allowed for. These feminist migrations are in the tradition of that, better documented, of Mary Austin in the Mohave Desert. For a long time, Austin was appreciated for her naturalistic writings, and she was more recently recognized for her feminist thinking. She is now considered a model for her use of Nature in an anti-domestic feminist view.² Whereas Austin's attachment to the desert bears the spirit of the frontier—characteristic of the American culture—the feminist stories listed by Leisure Projects relocate Western mythology in the Rockies as well as in Banff's tourist atmosphere. So, it comes as a paradox that the archives' samples discovered by the collective attest to a phenomenon of feminist emancipation within a mythical framework that is, in its broad lines, generally described as carrying machismo with its promotion of rusticity, temerity and virility.

Leisure Projects first selected some suggestive images, and then performed the scene depicted in them before photographing them again. By making theirs the story of these women, Carruthers and Wesley were looking to put themselves in the shoes of some of their subjects, and to experience the special context that framed their feminine presence in the mountain landscape. Some of the reenacted images are dotted with Canadian symbols (like the famous Hudson Bay coat, with its now archetypal stripes), which suggest the complex tangle of femininity, Nature and colonialism in the construction of national identity. In the same approach of reenactment, the residency of Leisure Projects ended with a tea ceremony at the Banff Springs Hotel, presented in concert with a silent ballet performed while wearing period clothes. As young female dancers were doing *chassé-croisé* and arabesques on the hotel's terrace, the guests came in for the tea service. Miniature glaciers (decorated with Lilliputian figures in the fashion of Kaspar David Friedrich) served as table centers as well as conceptual interfaces between the magnificence of the tea room and that of the landscape framed through the panoramic windows. Both bearing romantic connotations, Banff Springs Hotel and its surroundings are treated by Leisure Projects as marks of a collective imagination, a cultural fantasy socially constructed and kept alive, embodying what the collective designates as "a dangling and attainable fairytale."³

Whether in the dreamlike atmosphere of a situation or in the extravagance of a gesture, the wit and fancy of Leisure Projects are far from being accidental or simply esthetic. For a long time, the world of fantasy has provided the feminist imagination with possibilities and outcomes that, though never materialized, evoked a future liberated from present conditions. Incidentally, for Judith Butler, fantasy is considered to be a concept similar to that of utopia, and she emphasizes its importance in the opening up of genres: "*Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home*".⁴ It is easy to understand how Banff National Park—evoking the Frontier and the wilderness—could have kept alive a spirit of freedom for women who were looking to thrive away from restrictive norms. The fanciful aspect of *Brushing Up Against the Wild* is about the typically feminine imagination that has developed at the turn of the century, with its complex relation with a more masculine mountain culture.

Contrary to Mary Austin's anti-domestic view, where Nature is separated from culture, the stories fished out by Leisure Projects show attitudes that are less dichotomic. The women in Banff instilled part of their domesticity in their experience of the mountain, and they made a typically feminine cultural production out of it, through dancing, drawing and painting. According to Bourdieu, these dispositions to domesticity seem to ruin the attempt to escape genders dictates, assuring the supremacy of the patriarchal model: "It is perfectly unrealistic to believe that symbolic violence can be overcome by the only weapons of conscience and will, because the effects and the conditions of its efficiency are most durably felt at the intimate core of human bodies, in the guise of dispositions."⁵ The way Leisure Projects looks at these practices show rather a subtle phenomenon of subversion which give rise—through imagination and fantasy—to an intimate feminist perspective that is more than politicized. The means of cultural production attributed to women (belittled for this reason) are not completely abandoned in *Brushing Up*. Rather, they are used in a freer context, creating an intimate appropriation of mountain culture. As the discoveries of Leisure Projects have shown, this informal production eventually led to the creation of the Banff Centre for the Arts, which in turn makes this particular heritage official, based on its status as an institution recognized by the national artistic community. By revealing the progressive transformation of "futile feminine hobbies" into a legitimated culture, Leisure Projects shows one way, that of fantasy, through which the subversion of symbolic violence becomes possible.

Appropriating History, Leisure Projects develops a distinctive feminist position, on the sidelines of every clear-cut position about essentialism. Leisure Projects thus highlights the subtlety of contemporary feminist thinking, and draws a portrait dotted with nuances and with exceptions that elude ruling. It is the very principle of fantasy as well as the critical potential of Leisure Projects: to be ruled by no order but the dreamlike drift of imagination.

Gentiane Bélanger

Notes

¹ See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, Dijon, Presses du réel, 2004; Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," in *October* n° 110, Fall 2004, pp. 3-22.

² Pierre Bourdieu uses the expression "symbolic violence" to designate the implicit or symbolic belittlement of women's power, forcing them to have influence by proxy, as a "power behind the throne." Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998; *Masculine Domination*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002.

³ Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 10.

⁴ Stacy Alaimo, "The Undomesticated Nature of Feminism: Mary Austin and the Progressive Women Conservationists", *op. cit.*, pp. 63-84.

⁵ Leisure Projects, *Brushing Up Against the Wild*, 2007. Text consulted on August 12, 2008, at www.leisuregallery.ca/events_and_projects/brushing-up-against-the-wild.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 29.

⁷ Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

WOMAN IN EASTERN EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY ARTS: THE POLISH EXAMPLE

Besides changing the behaviors, lifestyles and day-to-day lives of everyone, as well as praising egocentrism and self-satisfaction to the skies, the "post-89" period also fosters not only a new market economy and greater freedom of speech, but also an important sociocultural emancipation: it introduces new norms and new forms (in short, a new "culture"), and so a new reality soon appears. A new reality where layoffs, promotions, divorces and family disturbances transform the way people think and behave psychosocially. A new reality that yields to a "totalitarian democracy" or "democratic totalitarianism" subjected

to a new despot: that of communication and marketing. Women are victims of such pressure and totalitarianism; they are victims of the new rules and standards. It is a new era, in which the human body, social representation and the "Way of Beauty" impose a new diktat on Eastern European women, a seemingly inescapable diktat made of colors, gloss, sequins and all kind of creams.

Having been "spared" by the cult of an image other than a socialist one for forty years, women are now being imposed new canons of esthetic, which often decide the nature of many social relationships. In this respect, the image as object of devotion dictates deep social changes. The "Way of Beauty" is mapped out.

Like Western women, "post-communist era women" are dragged into a system that is essentially based on appearances and self-image, a system pressurized by marketing, virtual or top-model figures, stars, etc. Constantly assailed, if not harassed by a flood of advertisement images, visual concepts and trends of all kinds, and even sometimes by the people surrounding them, women are forced to follow and are subjected to the so wonderful "Way of Beauty," of current trends and models, at the risk of being excluded from their own environment. If "to look like" and "to appear" are still enduring ideas in the Western Hemisphere, the content of self-representation changes, and so do many works of the new generation of Polish artists.

Contrary to the artists who were fighting for the feminine cause and conditions in the 70s and 80s, and who were longing to renew their relationship with their own bodies, Eastern European artists of the 90s and 2000s evoke the setbacks of liberalization, an "after the orgy" (Baudrillard), at a time when the extremes have been liberated. This artistic "movement" (if we can call it thus) is close to feminist art in the sense that the latter is art made by women and about women, art that reflects and analyzes what it is to be a woman and an artist in a patriarchal culture, and it explores its own social reality, as well as the structures that condition it. This movement denounces the downsides of sexual emancipation and its monopolizing (or even its hijacking) by society, politics, economics and corporations (of all kinds). As in feminist art, this movement of female artists integrates the concept of gendered social relationships (that is, the *Gender*, or the role of the sexes) into most of its artistic practices. It tends to reexamine and redefine the [Eastern European] woman's place, role and functions (whether, sexual, social, cultural, political or economical) in today's society.

With artists such as Anna Baumgart, Alicja Zebrowska or Julita Wojcik, the Polish artistic scene is one of the most eloquent cases. The image of Woman has been an important part of Polish contemporary art over the course of the last fifteen years, with shows like *Architectures of Gender*, (2003), *Anne, Marie, Madeleine – Photographie polonaise contemporaine*, (2004), or with the works of Monika Duda, Marta Deskur or Katarzyna Gorna.

Expressed through topics such as sexuality, social relationships and social conditions, and just like social reality, female representations in society is the subject of keen attention, both critical and lucid, from Polish female artists.

Often criticized as well as censored, the treatment of the female figure in Polish contemporary art upsets because of the words and the images it can produce regarding women's conditions and identity in Polish society.

Monika Duda's "Unmade" Woman

Monika Duda is a feminist artist who was born in 1967. Like her illustrious predecessors (Natalia Lach-Lachowicz or Ewa Partum, for instance), she analyzes the representation of the modern woman in society, someone who is under the pressure of a normative world in constant pursuit of [artificial] ideals.

Showing scaly skin, "deformed" color and a "stared at face," a self-portrait one never exhibits, and baring the skin's surface of any cosmetic artifices, the work of Monika Duda is a distortion of the representation of women. Made up of a dozen photographic self-portraits taken over six months (from January to June 1999), her *Unmade series* closely scrutinizes Duda's face. Without artifices, Duda directly invites to a literal understanding of her artistic message. The reiterative structure of the photographic series strengthens its documentary objective. Every self-portrait speaks for a story and an evolutionary process, between insipidness and beauty, Nature and artificiality. It evokes in many respects the portraits of women made by American photographer Richard Avedon, as well as Hannah Wilke's unique self-portraits taken during her illness.

Through her works, Duda offers a slideshow about the representation of today's Eastern European women, and she performs the demythologization of this image. Her works invite us to reflect on the conditions that make up the identity of today's woman [object].

Marta Deskur's Feminine Icon

Born in 1962, photographer Marta Deskur captures all of the pieces of a transformed sociocultural reality. She's among the new generation of artists moving like a "camera" all over the place, trying to under-

stand the new social order. And so, Marta Deskur works on the different interactions between social hierarchies. Like Janine Antoni's *Mom and Dad* (1994), and in sharply contrasted photographs such as *Modus* (1992), *Au-delà de Marie-Madeleine* (1994) or *Quelqu'un d'autre emploie vos yeux* (1996), her work addresses the codes of identity, and those of a social order and reality, that have undergone quite a bit of change since the end of socialism. It consists mostly of photomontages and video-photographs, which always serve to reflect on the individual (especially female) and its representation. Marta Deskur engages social issues such as immigration, women's situations (especially that of virgins), traditional values, people's relationships (*Rodzina* [Family] cycle, 1999) and everyday life.

In *Rodzina*, Deskur reverses social roles by giving women more responsibilities, leading her to expose family structures of a matriarchal type. In her following works, Deskur became interested in a more feminist thematic, clearer and more visible, as in the show *Dziwice* (virgins) presented in 2002. Unlike in the show *Marta Deskur Rodzina* (Marta Deskur family), the artist delves deeper into the problem of the presentation's authenticity, with the help of digital image manipulation. In *Dziwice*, Deskur reveals the extent to which the Western representation of the female body depends on an idea about virginity (through the figure of Mary), an idea that, as Julia Kristeva wrote in her essay *La haine et le pardon* (2005), forces "the exclusion of women from sexuality, a punitive chasteness that seems to be the price to pay for admitting women into the sacred as well as into the representation."

More than just a local portrait, Deskur's plastic treatment of women aims at offering a true mirror reflection of the representation of Western Woman.

Katarzyna Gorna's Madonnas

Born in 1968, Katarzyna Gorna is a photographer and an installation artist who produces impressive works with black and white photographs in large format. The singularity of her compositions immediately gives the creator away. The pictures are simple, monumental and similar in their staging, and the plays of light give way to an Italian Seicento sculpture. It is a parallel theme that the artist voluntarily maintains by emphasizing Christian iconography's traditional motifs. Such is the case in the compositions of Italian Madonnas in *Madonnas* (1997) or later on with *Fuck Me Fuck You Peace* (2000).

Gorna clearly makes multicultural identity and women's general conditions the subject of her art. Her works give an expression that is openly feminist, offering a view on the human body, on the body's own acquisition of identity, on sex and sexuality, on women's liberation as well as on the influence of mass culture or tradition. In her work, Katarzyna Gorna presents the sociocultural and sexual transformations rattling Polish and Eastern European societies. These transformations highlight the emancipation of Polish women in the 90s, and they are featured in works such as *Sumo* or *Double Portrait*.

Gorna's work attempts to abolish sexual identities as well as the fixed roles imposed by culture. Without any display or pathos, she shows the essential liberation of the human body from the normative, moral and machist shell that is imposed on it by a rigid and prudish Polish society. Gorna's work also calls to mind one of the last works of fiction drama published by Nobel Prize in Literature Elfriede Jelinek, *Der Tod und das Mädchen* ("Death and the young lady"). Its main theme is the inability of women to assert themselves in a world where they are overly depicted by stereotypes.

The Emergence of a New Feminist Art?

If Eastern European women have long remained behind the "Curtain", envying their Western counterparts' beauty products, clothing styles and way of life, they are now closing the gap, only a few years after 1989. There is now an empty space, an absence that is filled by a new diktat, one of views and appearances whose boundaries, midway between eroticism and pornography, are often blurred. It is the diktat of the image, of esthetic norms like those of Barbie's world: the fantasy of impossible beauty, the personification of the ideal Woman, with her inflatable doll body, her thin waist, her molded, voluptuous breasts and her rigid smile.

If the woman of civil society is actually free, an indelible copyright is stamped on her image nonetheless. Myth distorts reality rather than informing us about it, according to Roland Barthes. Eastern European female artists understood this well, seizing on this phenomena almost immediately. Eastern European contemporary arts are more than aware of the new transformations affecting Woman's image and conditions—from Katarzyna Kozyra's distorted bodies (*Laznia Damska*) to Monika Duda's chameleonic self-portraits (*Unmade*) to Elzbieta Jablonska (*Supermatka*) and Marta Deskur's (*Rodzina*) roles of mothers to Alicja Zebrowska's objects of sexual desire and fantasies (*Narodziny Lalki Barbie*—"The Birth of Barbie Doll") to Jelena Radic (*Slika*) or to Vlasta Delimar's performances. They reveal, from every angle and in a dialectic close to reality, a woman that is both emancipated and im-

prisoned, who is victim of and guilty of her own condition, subjected to the extreme drifts of a specific "society of spectacle" that is yet unknown to the Western Hemisphere.

Olivier Vargin

Olivier Vargin lives in France. He is Doctor in Art Sciences and art critic.

Note

¹ Among these artists, we could list Maja Bajevic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Jelena Radic (Serbia), Vlasta Delimar (Croatia), Orsolya Nyitrai (Hungary) or Alla Esipovich (Russia).

LA CENTRALE, FOR AN INCLUSIVE FEMINISM INTERVIEW WITH ROXANNE ARSENAULT

Sylvie Parent: *Nowadays, some women are reluctant to claim a feminist identity. Many don't relate to the radical feminist stereotype. Does La Centrale—an organization founded at the beginning of the 70s stemming from the feminist movement—have to address this feminine malaise?*

Roxanne Arsenaault: There were several feminist waves, some more radical than others. Often, the most radical fringes of a movement will obscure our idea of it. Yet, this radicalism was often necessary to really express ourselves and make things progress. This said, I think that women today don't want to be perceived as victims, an image associated with radical feminism. Every position that we come to earn needs to be secured. My view on feminism is positive. To be feminist is to stand up for equality between women and men—for everyone's equality in general.

S. P.: *You are part of a young generation of artists and cultural workers. How did you become familiar with the history of this art gallery and, the different feminist movements it has known?*

R. A.: La Centrale has existed since 1973. It is one of the oldest artist-run centre, and the first feminist gallery in Canada. I know several feminist women, and so several different types of feminism. I get to discover its different waves through the women who are active at La Centrale as well as through the many activities that we hold there. What is interesting is that, when La Centrale was founded, the mandate did not specify in writing that the centre was run by women and for women. At the beginning, a certain percentage of men were showing at La Centrale. This really caught my attention because you would have thought it would have been very radical at first and then decreasingly over time, whereas just the opposite happened. In the 80s, a more radical movement formed at La Centrale. At that time, members thought it was more pertinent to have an exclusively feminine becoming at every level of the organization. This policy lasted several years.

S. P.: *Is it possible to ensure continuity between generations of women while making room for a renewed feminism? How is this done at La Centrale?*

R. A.: La Centrale is, above all, a very democratic place. Obviously, sometimes it takes more time to arrive at a decision in a democratic context because everybody must be consulted—yet this value remains important to us. There were more radical waves, when we wanted to break with the past, go in other directions, and claim our own space. At some point, there was a sort of scission with the founding members. Then, towards the end of the 90s, beginning of the 2000s, an attempt to renew ties with them again was made, in order to consider La Centrale's entire history. So, the idea of reuniting the voices of women who have different opinions on the gallery's history, but also on feminism and contemporary art in general, is our principal driving force today. It is essential to acknowledge the contribution they made to La Centrale. As we wrote in our new mandate, intergenerational exchanges are also important. Of course, our gallery presents contemporary art and our mandate is to foster experimentation in visual arts. You could rightly say that this gallery presents more emerging artists, but this is also the case in other artist-run centres. Many young people are pushing up, but we need to encourage all of these visions of contemporary art, visions that are those of artists from different generations, at different moments in their career, with different types of recognition. So, I think that by gathering all of these suggestions in one place we are creating a richer environment.

S. P.: *La Centrale has adopted a new mandate. Could you tell us a little about it?*

R. A.: The centre has always been recognized by government authorities, and everyone agrees on the fact that La Centrale is an important part of the history of women's art. Despite everything, we have always reflected on our mandate, whether with the public or the members. We started questioning it in a more official manner around 2004-2005. To do so, we held study days with the members and we surveyed about a hundred people in the visual arts milieu, people who had an opinion on La Centrale's mandate. The survey was very direct and systematic. We wanted data to analyze, which we got, as well as several

comments. In the end, I think we did well, because the present mandate is not so much considered as a new one than as a modified one. We maintain our feminist position, but it is a position that is more inclusive. We're affirming the ideas that already appealed to us, but that hadn't yet been included in our mandate, like gender theories, for example. Incidentally, Women's Studies often include the analysis of other groups of study on gender and queer theory. Moreover, because gender theories were already part of our programming, we now had to write them into our mandate. Next, there's the intergenerational exchange we spoke about earlier. Finally, cultural diversity is also considered. It is always a bit delicate, because this expression is much overused. This said, the artists represented in most of our centres are exclusively North American, and "Western", G8 countries—in short, expressing an "all-white" view. La Centrale wishes to break this habit and program voices and practices that circulate less, if ever. After all, La Centrale was founded for the very same reasons (i.e. to diffuse voices that were unrepresented in contemporary art). In this respect, it is worth noting that the *Global Feminisms*' catalogue—from the Brooklyn Museum's important feminist exhibition—deals with the same principle ideas as those in our mandate, proving that feminist's preoccupations in 21st century contemporary art are widespread.

S. P.: *ETC magazine is publishing two issues on neofeminisms this year, the first one, already out, is on politics. In this second issue, several authors consider the notion of the intimate in feminist practices. This notion seems to have always been important in feminist practices, from one wave to another. Whether through references to sexuality, to domestic reality or to identity, many women have explored it. Now, and within the context of the modification of La Centrale's mandate, do you think that these references are still very present in feminist art? Are they very present in your current programming, for instance?*

R. A.: Yes, of course, they are always present. After all, sexuality and intimacy are closely related to the notion of identity, which is at the core of several feminist debates. Integrating gender theories into our mandate, it goes without saying that these references are mirrored in our programming. Moreover, I think that references to the human body always be linked with feminist practices. This said, we should not overlook a whole generation of artists who try to distance themselves from this, with the use of new technologies or through a more formal approach. These artists often want to distance themselves from this notion of intimacy, which often links them to an art categorized as being more "feminine."

S. P.: *This fall, La Centrale will organize an important event on new feminisms in contemporary art. The event will be over by the time this interview gets published, I'd really like to talk about the activities that will be featured in this event and about their relation to the modified mandate.*

R. A.: We called it *Gender Alarm: Nouveaux féminismes en art actuel*. This bilingual title is a bit long, but we thought it was important to unite the two communities.

Obviously, with a title such as *Gender Alarm*, of course the event is about gender, but then feminism is a matter of gender. The event was designed by Onya Hogan-Finlay, a member of our team, Leila Pourtavaf, president of the board of directors, and Sonia Pelletier who initiated the project. Onya and Leila were the ones who worked hard on this event's content—and I lent them a hand. So, there will be a show over the course of two weeks for which we have recruited artists representing the mandate's diversity. There will be other activities as well, such as an evening of screenings (of a wide variety of feminist videos in contemporary art, and some archive films that show the context in which the different feminist voices expressed themselves), an evening of performance during the opening, and two workshops. One of the workshops will be about feminist organizations reorienting their mandate, and the other will be about language and especially about the use of the feminine in the French language. Language isn't neutral. It is important to realize that we can take a clear stand by the manner in which we write and translate. This workshop will be led by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood.

But the main feature is a round table about feminism in contemporary art, which will be held on September 26th. We have invited renowned speakers such as Thérèse St-Gelais, who was obviously very present during our reflection process, having done her master's thesis on La Centrale in the 80s. Her expertise is undeniable. Trish Salah, who works at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute and who is interested in gender issues, will also be among the invited guests. As will be Helena Rickett from the Power Plant, another important figure who has written a lot on this topic. Finally, Denise Brown of the Leeway Foundation in Philadelphia will relate her experience as member of a feminist organization whose mandate was modified. All of these people will express their take on the modification of our mandate as well as on other issues related to it. We have also invited Julie Châteauvert from Dare-Dare, a feminist artist with a more radical position. All of these people will bring a variety of opinions to the round table, which we hope will lead to lively discussions.

S. P.: *How do you foresee La Centrale's programming in the next years?*

R. A.: We're slowly building a programming with our new mandate in mind. This requires time with the call for projects, and there will inevitably be some delay. I think the diversity issue will be important, because it is to our advantage to have a plurality of voices, a representation of the various types of feminisms. We will have to ensure the intergenerational presence by finding artists who push back the boundaries of art and visual experimentation, yet emerging from different generations. As for the cultural diversity, we have begun to prospect for artists through a call for projects on an international scale, in hard-to-reach countries. So, we want to make sure that our upcoming programming represents all of the aspects of our mandate. We also want to keep planning a great many events. Currently, I think our centre is among those that organize the most activities in Montréal—that is, about 25 to 30 every year, which is an impressive figure for an artist centre with only three employees.

We program about seven shows at the gallery as well as many events such as conferences, performances, concerts and workshops. We often work in collaboration with other organizations, for special events. I think it is important to maintain this level of activity without sacrificing quality, and to provide a place for emerging artists.

We want to develop our conference activities with women artists from many disciplines—such as musicians, visual artists and filmmakers. We also want to build bridges with the surrounding community through our neighborhood committee, to improve our relations with our neighbors. One of La Centrale's dearest wishes would be to have a multilingual website and someday, even perhaps be able to offer residencies and workshops. I think that most of the artists who visit us at La Centrale consider our space to be welcoming and professional. So, despite all of the upcoming changes, we will look to preserve these qualities that are so important to the centre and to the artists it promotes.

Interview conducted by Sylvie Parent, September 2008.

Note

¹ Programming Coordinator of La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse (Montréal), Roxanne Arsenault has been involved in the gallery's activities since 2004. She has a background in visual arts and in art history, and is very active on the Montréal music scene.

QU'EN EST-IL DU « NÉO » DANS LE NÉOFÉMINISME ?

Le thème du néoféminisme, proposé par *ETC* dans le cadre d'un numéro sur les productions du féminisme contemporain, nous contraint à questionner le préfixe « néo », afin de déterminer si on doit y voir le signe d'un retour aux stratégies élaborées dans les années 60 et 70, période qui se situe avant la « troisième vague » du féminisme « poststructuraliste ». Ici comme ailleurs, l'idée d'un retour, m'incite à aborder le contexte politique actuel, non seulement sous l'angle du féminisme mais également de toute critique politique culturelle, voire de toute articulation de la culture dans le contexte de l'ingénierie néolibérale des industries culturelles. Sous ce rapport, je pose la question de la contribution du néoféminisme aux formes d'art les plus avancées de notre époque, y compris les formes d'art collaboratif, activiste et relationnel qui sont, en apparence, très éloignées du domaine de l'intime.

En harmonie avec l'idée d'un retour aux anciens modèles critiques, je voudrais évoquer un texte publié par Hal Foster en 1994 : « *What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde ?* »¹. Ce faisant, je suis bien conscient de mélanger des pommes et des oranges, ou le féminisme et l'Avant-garde, mais je le fais, justement, pour poser la question de la place féministe dans la production avant-gardiste actuelle. Comme modèle exemplaire de production engagée, je propose une œuvre de 2003 d'Andrea Fraser, *Untitled*, que je commenterai plus en détail dans la suite de cet article. Les motifs de mon choix sont qu'elle correspond au mot d'ordre répété des féministes, à savoir que « ce qui relève de la dimension personnelle est politique », et qu'elle prend une signification particulière dans le contexte d'une critique institutionnelle d'inspiration féministe et d'une subjectivisation d'obédience psychanalytique de l'articulation de la politique et de la culture.

Dans « *What's Neo ?* », Hal Foster examine la manière dont les artistes de l'après-guerre se sont remis en selle en tentant de transformer les stratégies des avant-gardes historiques du début du XX^e siècle. L'objectif de son essai était de fournir une évaluation mesurée du travail des artistes de l'après-guerre en remettant en question la vision pessimiste des néo-avant-gardes proposée par Peter Bürger dans sa *Theory of the Avant-Garde*². Comme Jochen Schulte-Strausse l'établit correctement dans la préface de la traduction anglaise, parue en 1984, l'approche marxiste de Bürger n'est pas nécessairement compatible avec le poststructuralisme français. Il existe entre eux une certaine incommensurabilité que Foster fait ressortir en recourant au concept

psychanalytique d'« action différée ». Alors que Bürger terminait son livre en concluant qu'une théorie adéquate – et, par le fait même, une pratique adéquate – de l'art engagé n'existe pas, Foster considère que les artistes des années 50 ont effectué un travail important en vue de récupérer des procédés avant-gardistes comme le collage, l'assemblage, le ready-made et la sculpture construite. Bien que les artistes des années 50 aient réussi à agir ainsi en dépit des contraintes institutionnelles, ils n'en ont pas moins dissous la critique d'avant-guerre de « l'art en tant qu'institution » (Bürger), en permettant à ses stratégies de s'institutionnaliser à leur tour et d'être récupérées par l'industrie culturelle. Ce qui a conduit les artistes des années 60, comme Broodthaers, Buren et Asher, à mettre au point des stratégies de résistance au compromis fondées sur l'exploration de la structure de la production et de la réception artistiques.

Indépendamment du modèle complexe que propose Foster, qui fait intervenir la temporalité et l'efficacité critique des pratiques artistiques, je voudrais m'arrêter à ce que son essai suggère concernant la pertinence critique des pratiques artistiques des années 90, par rapport à l'héritage de l'Avant-garde. Ce que son essai a de plus révélateur à ce titre est l'affirmation que « Notre présent est mis à mal par les critiques féministes du langage révolutionnaire, ainsi que par d'autres soupçons qui questionnent l'exclusivité des institutions artistiques aussi bien que celle des discours théoriques. »³ Foster soutient que les artistes contemporains s'impliquent dans des stratégies collaboratives et de subtils déplacements – or il n'y a rien là qui soit sans précédent historique. La nuance essentielle est cependant que la critique de l'Avant-garde et de sa politique de classe évolue de nos jours au moyen de recherches portant sur le genre et les différences ethniques et sexuelles, comme on peut le voir dans les travaux d'artistes comme David Hammons, Robert Gober et Andrea Fraser.

C'est dire que la valeur du concept d'avant-garde ne tiendrait pas uniquement à ses rapports avec la transformation et la reproduction radicales de la sphère de la production culturelle, ou à sa dénonciation de l'illogisme de l'autonomie relativement à ses déterminants économiques, mais, aussi, à sa souplesse en regard des structures sociales autres que celles qui sont associées à la politique militante ou révolutionnaire de classe. Le rapport entre l'avant-gardisme et les luttes identitaires a été souligné par la critique d'art et historienne montréalaise Johanne Lamoureux dans sa « Réponse à Hal Foster »⁴. Sur ce thème de la pertinence du discours avant-gardiste pour comprendre les pratiques déconstructivistes et féministes actuelles, Lamoureux rappelle que toutes les pratiques qui sont critiquées dénoncent et démontent les apories des systèmes qui cherchent à les circonscrire⁵. Dans un article plus récent sur le concept d'avant-garde, Johanne Lamoureux s'appuie sur l'histoire de l'art féministe et particulièrement sur l'essai charnière de Carol Duncan, « *Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting* » (1982), pour souligner le parti pris de l'Avant-garde au XIX^e siècle sur le plan du genre, de la masculinité et du conformisme, un phénomène que Charles Baudelaire avait été le premier à faire ressortir, dans les années 1860. À l'encontre de l'opinion répandue que l'Avant-garde désigne une classe raffinée d'intervenants culturels, Johanne Lamoureux soutient que les vertus de l'originalité ou du « métropolitainisme » n'ont jamais emporté d'adhésion universelle et que dès les années 1850, l'avant-gardisme était « une déviance institutionnalisée que chacun pouvait interpréter à sa manière »⁶. La véritable Avant-garde, celle des Courbet, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Cézanne et Gauguin, englobait ceux-là mêmes qui l'ignoraient ou la rejetaient. Toutefois, avec le temps, les avant-gardistes finirent par la rejeter uniquement pour projeter leur différence sur l'écran d'un Autre, marqué du point de vue du genre ou de la race, en s'appropriant des codes extérieurs aux canons européens tout en invalidant toute prétention à l'innovation. Ensuite, dans la période de l'après-guerre, la question du progrès boucla la boucle avec la montée des mouvements anticolonialistes, des droits de la personne, du féminisme, des droits des homosexuels et des manifestations contre la guerre.

Johanne Lamoureux termine son article en posant la question : « Comment devons-nous articuler et évaluer la pertinence de l'Avant-garde en regard des pratiques artistiques actuelles ? » Les traits caractéristiques qui se sont révélés insupportables, écrit-elle, ne sont pas aussi constants qu'ils ont pu le sembler, dans la mesure où ils ont subi des transformations sous la pression des théories féministes et postcoloniales, qui ont contribué à mettre en évidence des « postures identitaires hybrides et fluides » au milieu d'espaces socioculturels reconfigurés. La dimension critique de l'Avant-garde, semble-t-il, peut être utile. Toutefois, le louvoiement prosocial du texte de Johanne Lamoureux devient évident lorsqu'elle soutient que le caractère « performatif » des pratiques critiques contemporaines n'a pas besoin de se voir accoler l'étiquette d'avant-garde. Mais on pourrait poser la question : qu'est-ce qui est dissimulé par l'historisation du concept d'avant-garde et comment la politique de classe intervient-elle, le cas échéant ? En se rangeant derrière le modèle de négociations de Foster par opposition au modèle d'hibernation de Bürger, Johanne Lamoureux se tourne vers l'identité et la théorie

de la performativité pour sauver la mise à l'épreuve avant-gardiste des limites institutionnelles.

Mais quel avantage pourrait tirer une pratique critique de la renonciation à la mise à l'épreuve ou à la transgression des limites institutionnelles au profit d'une réflexivité qui s'attache à exposer les règles du jeu, en accord avec la tradition de l'autonomie radicale ? Si on accepte l'argument de Bürger selon lequel la fonction sociale de l'art ne dépend pas des œuvres particulières qui sont produites, mais des institutions elles-mêmes, alors la force persuasive de l'Avant-garde pourrait ne pas être dans l'exhibition de formes de libération ou d'innovation créative, mais, plutôt, dans la démonstration des modes de domination à l'intérieur desquels les œuvres sont produites. Dans la mesure où les institutions culturelles cherchent à éliminer cette tension entre institution et critique, les protestations des artistes tendent, au présent, à s'appuyer encore plus sur les aspects intimes du soi, de l'affect et de la sexualité en tant que signifiants de la subjectivité. De ce point de vue, la question du néoféminisme acquiert une importance particulière.

Le rapport entre la prestation d'un service artistique et la recherche, par les industries de la création, de nouveaux marchés sur le plan des identités plurielles, des styles de vie et de tous les types de « travail vivant » fournit un cadre permettant de comprendre l'œuvre d'Andrea Fraser, *Untitled* (2003). Pour cette œuvre, Andrea Fraser a pris des dispositions avec la Galerie Friedrich Petzel, afin de trouver un collectionneur qui accepterait d'avoir des rapports sexuels avec l'artiste, étant entendu que cette rencontre serait documentée. Il en est résulté une bande-vidéo silencieuse de 60 minutes, où on voit Fraser rencontrant un homme non identifié dans une chambre d'hôtel. L'œuvre précise que le collectionneur devait être hétérosexuel et non marié. La vidéo non « éditée » fut tournée au moyen d'une caméra fixe, en faisant appel à l'éclairage existant dans la chambre d'hôtel. La vidéo monovox, présentée dans des galeries au moyen d'un petit moniteur, a permis à l'artiste d'obtenir des honoraires de 20 000 \$US, plus des redevances supplémentaires provenant des reproductions à tirage limité. Dans la vidéo, l'artiste et son collectionneur prennent quelques verres, s'adonnent à des jeux préliminaires, ont des rapports sexuels d'une durée approximative de dix minutes, puis durant les vingt minutes suivantes, ils se caressent et échangent des propos sur l'oreiller.

Untitled est un développement que Fraser associe à une critique féministe des institutions faisant appel à la subjectivité comme siège – institutionnellement conditionné – de l'imaginaire et de l'identification. En 2003, à l'occasion d'une table ronde sur le féminisme et l'art, elle disait comprendre son travail comme un effort pour intégrer les aspects interventionnels de l'art féministe des années 70 à son engagement dans la construction de postures du sujet féminin à l'intérieur du discours de l'art⁶. Elle ajouta qu'une éthique de la critique institutionnelle saisie à travers le prisme féministe du caractère spécifique d'un site (ici, celui de la subjectivité) et une critique réflexive portant sur la subjectivité sexuée l'avaient amenée à s'intéresser à la condition d'être dominant – tout en reconnaissant le statut de l'artiste, dans les termes de Bourdieu, comme le secteur dominé de la classe dominante. Cette prise de conscience l'a mise à distance des préoccupations explicitement féministes, ratifiées dans leur intégralité par les institutions culturelles, au profit d'un engagement envers ce qu'elle considère comme « les forces [économiques] les plus déterminantes » des sites où elle a œuvré.

Dans un essai portant sur le destin de la critique institutionnelle dans le contexte d'une remise en question collective, transversale et activiste du capitaliste cognitif ou immatériel, Brian Holmes donne à penser que les œuvres comme celles de Fraser conduisent à la complaisance, à l'immobilité et à une perte d'autonomie. Il y décèle une « gouvernementalité de l'échec où le sujet ne peut rien faire de plus que d'étudier sa propre prison psychique, avec quelques produits de luxe comme compensation »⁷. Par opposition à Holmes, qui insiste pour dépasser les disciplines artistiques et universitaires, je pense qu'il est essentiel de tenir compte de la complexité de la stratégie de Fraser. Dans un texte de 1994 intitulé « Comment fournir un service artistique », et dans l'œuvre d'Helmut Draxler, *Services*, qu'il accompagne, Fraser examine la définition économique de la fourniture de service comme « une valeur qui est consommée au moment même où elle est produite ». Pour elle, cette définition fait partie des conditions de travail des artistes professionnels. Elle en conclut que la dépendance est une condition de l'autonomie artistique ; quant à l'indépendance, elle tient au fait que nous décidons nous-mêmes qui nous servons et la manière dont nous les servons. Ce qui rend l'analyse de Fraser de l'idéologie professionnelle singulièrement importante pour nous, à ce moment précis de l'époque du capitalisme cognitif, est qu'elle reconnaît le problème de dualisation constaté par Marx en rapport avec le travail non productif, qui est défini par opposition au travail salarié et à la propriété des moyens de production. La croissance d'un secteur de services non productifs et d'un salariat professionnel entraînant la dévalorisation de la

classe laborieuse et étant associé au statut et aux valeurs de la classe moyenne fut théorisée par la suite par Siegfried Kracauer, dans *The Salaried Masses* (1930), par C. Wright Mills, dans *White Collar* (1953) et, plus récemment, par Hardt et Negri dans *Empire* (1994).

Ce qui rend des œuvres comme *Untitled* pertinentes pour questionner le lien entre le néoféminisme et la Néo-avant-garde, c'est leur revendication d'une autonomie critique, la distance qu'elles prennent par rapport aux principes économiques de hiérarchisation. Non seulement sa performance à double action lui permet-elle de « devenir riche », mais l'artiste y parvient en s'opposant à l'insistance postpolitique du capitalisme tardif suivant laquelle on doit lubrifier la machine des réseaux de relations, et contre la domination de ce que Slavoj Žižek appelle la *métapolitique*, où les antagonismes politiques sont pleinement reconnus, mais uniquement parce qu'ils sont rapportés à une autre instance – la sphère économique – où ils se jouent de manière plus appropriée¹⁰. Dès l'essai de Lénine intitulé « *Party Organization and Party Literature* » (1905), il fut évident que les Avant-gardes socialistes recherchaient autre chose que l'autonomie de l'art. Les questions que des personnages de marques comme Žižek posent de nos jours demandent que nous considérions l'importance relative de l'État et de la politique parlementaire, dans une conjoncture où la répétition risible d'un parti révolutionnaire héroïque peut avoir un effet à retardement. Un tel parti pourrait appuyer son intervention historique sur la nécessaire délégitimation des négociations pluralistes et des revendications à la différence fondées sur l'identité. Si un tel parti existait, la force de l'intime pourrait sans doute trouver son corrélat dans l'organisation de sa propre disparition, la dimension personnelle devenant, elle aussi, *métapolitique*.

Marc James Léger

Notes

¹ Hal Foster, « What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde », in *October*, n° 70, automne 1994, p. 5-32.

² Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, traduit de l'allemand par Michael Shaw, Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, [1974], 1984.

³ Hal Foster, *op. cit.*, 26.

⁴ Johanne Lamoureux, « Réponse à Hal Foster : ou le « recyclage » comme répétition esthétique », in *Protée*, automne 1995, p. 80-83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶ T. J. Clark, cité dans Johanne Lamoureux, « Avant-Garde: A Historiography of a Critical Concept », in Amelia Jones (éd.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art: Since 1945*, London, Blackwell, 2006, p. 195.

⁷ Johanne Lamoureux, « Avant-Garde », p. 207.

⁸ Andrea Fraser, « Feminism & Art: 9 Views », in *Artforum*, octobre 2003, p. 142.

⁹ Brian Holmes, « *Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions* », in *Transversal*, janvier 2007, <http://eicp.net/transversal/0106/holmes>.

¹⁰ Voir le traitement par Slavoj Žižek des formes de désaveu de la logique propre à l'antagonisme politique dans « A Leftist Plea for « Eurocentrism », in Rex Butler et Scott Stephens (éds.), *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings, Volume Two*, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 183-208.

THE LADY'S SLIPPER JEANE FABB AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE MOTIF

"In the light of the male logos, the earth can only show itself as silent, dark, wild, and threatening. How would it be if we could show the earth in a new, nonoppositional light—in a way that lets the dark be dark and the wild be wild rather than dispensed with as irrational? How would it be if we could show that seemingly threatening wilderness not as other and not segregated to the male institution of the domestic, but as "home", in other words, as belonging-place?"

Carol Bigwood

"One of the roles of female culture has always been to reach out and integrate art and life, idea and sensation—or nature and culture."

Lucy Lippard

The masculine has traditionally been defined by public life, light, action and culture, whereas the feminine was defined as its obscure counterpart, closer to privacy, intimacy and Nature. In considering this arrangement of values, some ecofeminist views have put forward that the association of women to a *wild* and *untamed* Nature has given way to the exploitation of both, if not to women's longstanding exclusion from historical or political issues. Consequently, many women—intellectuals and artists—have tried to untangle the associations of woman with Nature, whether by integrating the characteristics of the masculine in their practice, or by deeply working anew the question of genders. Others have chosen instead to revisit the relation *woman/*

Nature in a positive way, putting to use the plainly subjective singularity of their experience. Jeane Fabb is among the women artists who sought to bring out the intensity of the relationship between woman and the Earth, in the 70s and 80s. Today, with great finesse, her works still look into the troubled space of Nature and the feminine. Jeane Fabb has been exploring the dialogue between art and Nature for thirty years, through her own practice as well as by her involvement as co-founder of Boréal Art/Nature, where she acts as art director. Emigrating from England at the age of seven, Jeane Fabb settled in La Macaza in the Laurentians, a place where she creates works and art interventions that are shown and produced in Québec as well as abroad. It is impossible to fully relate the variety of her artistic mediums—she is into sculptures, performances, photography, video, ephemeral site-specific practices—nor the richness of the issues that drive them: the ecological, social, historical, sacred, economical, political and metaphorical aspects of Nature are all considered. Yet, a constant remains: the will to bear witness to a close and fundamental connection with natural places, and a strong interest in the experience of women with the Earth. Jeane Fabb's position, explicitly local and subjective, supposes a gentle reciprocal exchange between the artist and Nature. Far from projecting a conqueror attitude, these art interventions rely instead on a contemplative motif representing a Nature with which a dialogue is possible.

To Gather, to Collect, to Shelter

The Laurentians are well known for their forestry and tourism industries, but the underlying history that interests Jean Fabb is not as well known. It concerns the women of this region and their special bond with Nature. To achieve this, in 2003 Fabb undertook an *Intimate Journey*,² through which she invited nine women from La Macaza and the surrounding area to participate in an interview. In the privacy of a room, Fabb asked them to describe a place they felt an attachment to. As the interviews progress, cornerstones were identified in the Laurentian forest, places where often the women go to and simply exist, alone, on a rock, in a lake, by a tree. Some evoked the beauty of the area and its comforting effect, the feeling of security it induces; others claimed that the time spent at "their" spot allowed them to reconnect to an "inner space." Fabb added a dimension to these secrets by placing a Lady's Slipper at the heart of the *Intimate Journey* project. The Lady's Slipper is an indigenous and androgynous looking orchid, a fascinating flower with a peculiarly bulging third petal that is both translucent and covered with a network of purplish veins. Over a period of two years the artist went into the woods filming the flower, under different angles and lighting, ultimately creating a video of about fifty minutes in length. This video portrait of the Lady's Slipper constitutes an enigmatic and continuous framework onto which the sound of the interviews is superimposed. During the recording sessions, photographs of the flower were scattered on the walls. The flower sheltered the women's confidences, marking them with its, feminine and masculine duplicity. The women then revealed why they were attached to a particular place, why they related to it. At the junction between positioning oneself in Nature and identity positioning, Jeane Fabb points to places that are fashioned from the inside by relationships, not boundaries. With *In Her Slippers*, she opens a space (physical and metaphorical) where the experiences of women and their places in the forest can be told. As Carol Bigwood reminds us, the term *place* supposes an opening: "*Chora, 'place,' is related to the Greek words chorea and choresmai, which means 'make room for,' 'give way to,' 'to fall back,' and 'withdraw.'*"³

To Gather, to Collect, to Harvest

In the wake of *Intimate Journey*, over the last two years at La Macaza, Jeane Fabb had been developing a video cycle entitled *Intimate Ground*. She enters the forest with her camera, reproducing the gestures so often repeated by women who go out picking. Attentiveness and Intention accompany this solitary ritual, where she presses on and out of the paths, gleaning medicinal herbs or seeds. A very simple context is put in place: a large sheet of fabric covering the body transforms the experience into an extraordinary one and isolates every gesture, as a large piece of cloth unfolded on the ground isolates roots, bones, foliage, flowers, pine nuts, plants. While she walks from one point to the next, she films her shadow; as she stops by to pick, the camera's objective closes in on her hands, hands that search, collect, uncover, pull up, and follow the gold seam of the *Goldthread*.

These gestures are not well-known; they have not been the object of a "picking tally," as others have been of a "hunting tally." Searching the ground, Jeane Fabb extracts elements from Nature, and she also lets tiny movements emerge, hidden from view, long-lost movements that were now part of History. The hands of women dealing with the fruit of the picking articulate a know-how forming in the camera's objective a repertoire of signs to decipher. Fabb acknowledges the

value of this experience and by trapping them in a single framework allows this long dialogue to unfold.

To Collect Oneself, to Receive, to Meditate

The Nature to which Jeane Fabb refers and speaks seems to be endowed with subjectivity, and it brings to mind the philosophical works of Merleau-Ponty. In *The Visible and the Invisible*,⁴ he invites us to consider a Nature that is neither objective, nor inert, nor silent. Even better, it is at the core of Nature's invisible and enigmatic structures, perceived by the sensitive experience, that thought and language draw their motivation. In a way, everything is part of language, which in turn is not humanity's prerogative anymore. Each and every inflection of the mind, every articulation of the intellect is nothing but the extension and expansion, through us, of polymorphic and moving elements concealed in Nature.

A large part of Jeane Fabb's work (what she calls her *actions* in the Nature) seems to cultivate this kind of presence and attention to the world, where the boundaries of the subject—resolutely tuned in to its surroundings—become porous. This was the case in Wales with *Crywdro/Wander* (2003), the Chiapas with *Imagen Negra* (2002), and Iceland with the expedition *Sans Traces* (1999). Most of the actions include a very simple constant in their storylines: dressed in black, the artist paces the ground of an often remote site. In specific locations, where she experiences a distinct feeling or emotion, Fabb asks to be photographed, sometimes captured hurriedly as she rushes through the landscape, sometimes staying still as a rock. Whether in a forest, a moor or a valley, the artist sets up the proper conditions for an encounter, dedicated to the observation of the quality and the variations of a dialogue with a specific place. She says: "*I chose simple dark clothing as a shifting boundary between inner and outer. [...] An invitation to an intimate narrative between myself and the land.*"⁵

Jeane Fabb acknowledges the association of women with the landscape by substituting the hegemony of an objectivizing and eroticizing gaze for the subjective and sensory experience of the body. He or she who is capturing the landscape is no longer behind the camera, but enveloped in the image. In the same frame: a patch of sky, a woman, the land. Strangely, about it reminds me of two images: Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman in Front of the Setting Sun* (1918) and Jeff Wall's *Stereo* (1980). The former shows a woman in front of a landscape, turning her back turned to the viewer, acting as a relay for the gaze; the latter frames the naked spread out body of a young male wearing headphones, the depth of field running through the channels of *inner experience*.

A comparison between these three works may seem odd, yet they share a representation of absorption or of *interlace*. Photography is more than documentation here. It allows the artist to deal with the issue of the gaze while displaying an interlocking play: absorption of the landscape, personal absorption, and absorption by the camera. Actions in Nature allow for a contemplative collection of thoughts, giving rise to an underlying conversation that the artist tries to make visible.

Other Narratives

For Jeane Fabb, the expression of women's intimate experiences with Nature is *gripping*. The artist strives to account for positioning, gesture, and dialogue that are hardly visible or translatable and that, if not the preserve of women, indicate a way of *being and doing*: a way of *collecting, gathering, picking, meditating or absorbing oneself* in a Nature considered as a "subjective body," which gets entangled in the mesh of actions and videos. This is also put forward by Christine Ross in an essay on the feminine subject: "A body is at work, but so is the ecosystem; between them is a fragile exchange whose outcome is unpredictable."⁶ This is also, for Fabb, a necessary and fruitful exchange where the supposed obscurity of woman and Nature feed the language and the story of its narratives, without mystification.

Caroline Loncol Daigneault

Notes

¹ Boréal Art/Nature is an artist-run centre founded in 1988 and located in the Upper Laurentians. Its mission is to explore new relations between ephemeral experimental art and Nature by organizing artist residencies and expeditions.

² This project gathers together all the stages of a project that has led to the video installation *Dans ses sabots à elle*, which was presented in 2005 at La Centrale (Montréal), at the Arte X Arte gallery (Buenos Aires), as well as at the Centre d'exposition de la Gare (L'Annonciation).

³ Carol Bigwood, *Earth Muse: Feminism, Nature, and Art*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993, p. 291.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 2007 [1964], 359 p. English translation: *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968.

⁵ Jeane Fabb, quoted from her website: <http://jeanefabb.ca/>.

⁶ Christine Ross, « Le féminisme et l'instabilité de son sujet », *Instabili, La question du sujet*, Montréal, La Centrale et Artexes, 1990, p. 18. (In French)

ERRATA

- We inform that the article "Yvonne Rainer: From Choreo-graphy to Cinemato-graphy", published by Chantal Pontbriand, in *ETC* 83, p. 20-23, was initially given as a lecture, in English, in the symposium *Women and the Avant-garde/Les femmes et l'avant-garde*, University of Florida/Sorbonne, Paris, 2007.
- Nous prions nos lecteurs de noter que dans la livraison 83 de *ETC*, dans l'article de Michèle Cohen Hadria, intitulé « La stratégie des Iraniennes », p. 25, le crédit des œuvres *In Love with a Red Wall*, ne doit être attribué qu'à Maria Kheirkhah. Toutes nos excuses à l'artiste.