Human Camera

During my recent visit to London at the end of March I spent some time at the ‘Altermodern’ show at the Tate, I came across the work of Lindsay Seers for the first time. Was it indeed the first time? The work addresses a deeper level of memento and recalls that type of memory, where one never is entirely sure if it really happened ... or was it just a dream? Seemingly too blurred and too irritating is the disposition of the questions behind these visualizations. To interrogate the way ‘perceive seeing’ might easily question our whole system of cognition. And as the Altermodern Exhibition Guide reflects on Seers work, such attitude "evades the boundaries that are traditionally set up between fact and fiction by asserting that the photographic medium collapses them.”

Suffering from a condition called eidetic memory (photographic memory), Seers was too consumed visually with the world around her to ever feel a need to speak to anyone else. Until at the age of eight, she saw a picture of herself, asking, “Is that me?” *"Her eidetic memory faded with the onset of language. This traumatic loss of her memory led her to ‘become’ a camera,"*[7] and later, a projector. I later discover that the construct hosting the film is a model of a maquette she makes in the film. It is a replica of the first film production studio, built by Thomas Edison, "heralding a decisive moment in the development of photography into film"*[8]. It is poignant that we should occupy this mock-up 'environment', potentially sociopathic, this manifesting of Seer’s as a mechanical device, removes herself subjectively in place of an objective recording device.

(review via interface)

In a self description Seers defines her concept of interweaving the own biography with issues and questions about perception as follows: Lindsay Seers has made hundreds of images using her own body as a camera, where her mouth cavity is the camera body and her lips the shutter and the aperture. The photographs she has made with this method are red from the light that passes through the blood of her cheeks; they are framed by her teeth and blurred by her body movement. Her life of being a camera has forced Seers into different character traits including a vampire, a ventriloquist and an alien, which have emerged from the bizarre act of photographing in this embodied way. Her obsessive and peculiar picture taking cannot satisfy her desire to represent experience.

This lack has led Seers to give up her melancholy life as a camera and we now find her turned into a projector. The movement, of seemingly throwing images out of the body rather than swallowing them has become a more effective means of expression for Seers. (link)

In 2002 John Hilliard has written a nice short essay about her earlier work drawing on cinematic references of the concept of camera embodiment:

If Henry Cornelius’s 1955 film I Am A Camera (based on Christopher Isherwood’s Berlin Stories) doesn’t literalise the title’s proposition in it’s on-screen action, then Dziga Vertov, speaking of his seminal 1929 avant-garde production The Man With The Movie Camera, comes closer: ‘I am the machine which shows you the world as I see it.’ Better still, in Death Watch (Bertrand Tavernier 1979), a TV journalist (Harvey Keitel) has a video camera implanted in one unblinking eye, constantly transmitting a live image (of a slowly dying Romy Schneider) back to the station. He is a camera. So to is Elia, protagonist of Euridice’s erotic novel f32 (Virago Press, 1993), whose disembodied
then reunited vagina develops a lens and operates as a stills camera. The camera body is their body, the aperture one of their apertures. In the three films, that orifice is the eye; in the novel, it is the vagina; and in the photographic work of Lindsay Seers, it is the mouth.

The body as a vessel, as instrument, as receiver and transmitter, reflexively paralleled with the recording and projecting mechanisms of film, photography and video, is a consistent feature of Seers work. Many of her still images are characterised by two themes: the artist herself as both the viewing subject/ recording instrument and viewed object; the comparability between photography and vampirism.

To make a picture, the artist first disappears into a light-proof bag, places a pre-cut piece of (usually) colour negative paper at the back of her mouth, then positions a black gum shield (with a pin-hole) in the front, using either her lips or her hand as a shutter to cover the opening before and after the exposure. In the Auto-Cannibal series (1997/9), she wears vampire teeth, holds up a hand mirror to reflect her face and the environment behind her, and takes a photograph. In these pictures not only do we see the reflected, staring, fanged and caricatured head, distended by the pinhole’s wide angel effect, but our view is through the jagged frame of the photographer/vampire’s teeth. Moreover that frame produces a shape remarkably reminiscent of a winged bat, and the whole image is blood-red in colour. It is, in fact, literally blood-red – the penetration of light through the photographer’s cheeks, coloured by the network of the capillaries, leeching onto the paper. Made similarly, Fallen (2001), more simply frames a tilted vista of trees, presumably as registered from the mouth of the fallen vampire. Seemingly less complete certainly less comical, these understated images are nevertheless stronger, and the wintry colour-drenched trees a disturbing contrast to the crimson-mouthed surround.

In another series, Black Bag (2001), each individual work comprises of a pair of photographs. One shot, black and white, glossy, objectively evidential in style, shows the artist as victim – lying in a hotel room; propped against an up turned boat on a beach; sprawled on waste ground by a wrecked and abandoned car. The other, the view from the artist’s mouth, matt, coloured, is highly subjective and saturated in lurid redness. With this second shot the tables are turned. It is as though the hapless victim is in fact the lure, a brooding predator, surveying and registering the desolate locales through the distorting and contaminating filter, waiting for its prey.

The vampiric reading of photography centres on a particular perception; that the fatal kiss of the shutter steals an unrepeatable moment of existence, yet in so doing invests its subject with eternal life. The photographer is both the predator and saviour, and when the photographing subject is also the captured object, then the vampire sucks its own blood in a self-perpetuating cycle of dead and undead, of mortification and reanimation.

Metaphorically, Lindsay Seers indeed adopts the guise of the vampire in performing as a photographer, but literally, she is a camera. She tilts her body, calibrates her speed, waits for her moment, opens her lips – and snaps.

Further links:
interface and moremilkyvette review of the latest show It Has To Be This Way, Matt’s Gallery, London, March 2009
elder review at circa and Gasworks

UPDATE: Thanks to a just recently discovered post on we make money about the show I became aware this important and till now missed out link to Edison’s Black Maria.
The gap as the metaphor for the void / empty space which is necessary to have other things evolve. 
-> to get a 'moving' / streaming image - a changing image -> thus the gap as the moment of free space, defining the closed 'programmed' space / the scripted space, which needs the break to get the next action running / the next character introduced -> bits, morse, pulse, flash, etc.

GAP*

The gap as the metaphor for the void / empty space which is necessary to have other things evolve. 

Mind the __ GAP* ?

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The movement, of seemingly throwing images out of the body

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The gap as an unavoidable element of the process of perception, and as a result of the subjective perception of the world around us, we should occupy this mock

The gap is not just a break in the continuity of events, but a necessary condition for the emergence of new ideas and perspectives.

Laura U. Marks

introducing Laura U. Marks

Laura U. Marks – Taking a line for a walk (TCR)

Harri Laakso – Grey Matters (Aftercrop)

Recently

03.25 Alice in Wonderland

03.08 kickstART.ca – crutchmaster

02.22 upcoming Paralympics Vancouver

01.02 ⋯ things that happen to the body, things that can’t be undone

01.01 ⋯ and move on: an outlook on Out of Context by Les Ballets C de la B

12.31 looking back on 2009 ⋯

Monthly Archives

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