

Fantasy Revisited

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Lynne Marsh
Extrait de *flipped*

Lynne Marsh's exhibition *flipped* re-evaluates the terms of feminine representation and the subversive power of fantasy. Presented in the form of a three-video installation it featured a series of photographs of the artist put 'into action' through the animation of flip-books. The photographs, taken with a timed shutter-release camera, show Marsh 'doing' or performing a combination of playful poses, attitudes and movements. Here we witness the artist embodying a variety of personas through the use of costumes and accessories. She is at once seductive, angry and playful, all the while displaying herself: nude, dressed in shorts with purse in hand, turning a hoola-hoop, or dressed in a motorcycle outfit complete with helmet. The images have for the most part been taken in such a way as to divide the body into two sections – the head/upper torso and everything below the neck – in order to create a distinct division between mind and body, or the psyche and the somatic.

Although *flipped* features the animation of language – the movement of the lips, the hands, the shaking of the head – it curiously does not feature any words. Marsh is visibly speaking in her photographs, and yet the only sound emanating from the video is that of the soft flipping pages. The language that Marsh has chosen to use is instead transmuted through the body, gestures, accessories and the 'looks' that she gives the viewer. This obvious omission of words speaks volumes in the representation of women as seen but not heard. It could even be argued that this 'unspeakable' representation of woman is a condition given to women in society. Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, in her text "Crashing the Language Line," reminds us that "Since gender is an organizing category of language and of society, women are the most universal representatives of a muted group."¹ Thus, in choosing to leave out the female subject's voice and language, *flipped* could be interpreted as an essentialized female body without a voice. As well, the seductive posing of the body could emphasize a traditionally phallogocentric repre-

sentation of woman as sexual. Film theorist and feminist Laura Mulvey, in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” also notes that: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female... In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotiv of erotic spectacle...”² However much this work may appear to illustrate oppression, in *flipped* one later discovers that this traditional approach to a feminist critique (through the representation of the muted female body) is subverted and literally flipped around through the artist’s use of fragmentation and subjectivity.

The flip-books themselves are composed of segmented body images meeting to form a ‘whole’ in the slow-motion gesture of the turning flip-book pages. In these images we see Marsh at once both *in action and* arrested in a myriad of poses. In her video she is like an otherworldly automaton put into motion by mysterious hands. Her disembodied presence, created through fragmentations of her body and slow motion, is best described by Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” He writes: “With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precisely what in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So too slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones ‘which far from looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions.’”³ This sensation of the unreal and expanding space and body is further emphasized through the videos’ use of the camera’s multiple points-of-view. *flipped* has been structured in such a way that the artist is both the public and the subject – she is both looking *out from* the photographs and *down* at the books from the point-of-view of the camera lens. When we realize that the artist has inserted herself into the role of ‘control’, by manipulating the flip-books for her own purview, our own expectations as viewer are challenged. Thus Marsh’s gaze is a closed circuit, leaving the viewer in the position of a voyeur looking into a private self-reflection.

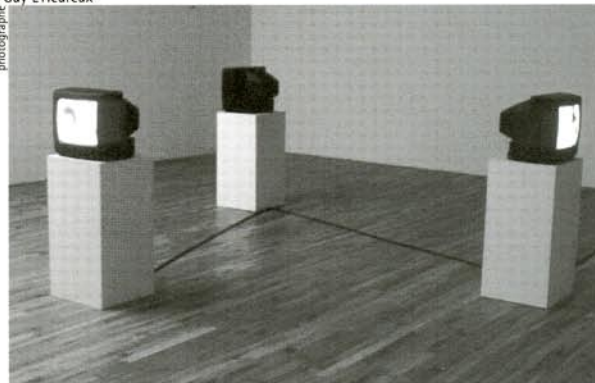
In this way *flipped* involves a fictionalized non-subject, subverted and blurred, where the artist

Lamontagne note que l'installation vidéo *flipped* de Lynne Marsh peut être lue comme une mise en scène du silence imposé aux femmes. Cependant, elle soutient qu'en occupant les positions de réalisatrice, d'actrice, et de public de cette performance, Marsh déjoue les attentes des spectateurs ou spectatrices et les critiques féministes de la représentation. Elle ouvre ainsi un espace d'auto-représentation reflétant la fantaisie et le jeu des considérations féministes.

has cast herself as director, actor and public. It presents a self-reflexive, auto-eroticization of the subject through fantasy and role playing where the negative connotations of female representation have been lifted from the masculinist gaze. If, as Rebecca Schneider proposes in her book *The Explicit Body in Performance*, "The real is essentially impossible, always mediated by desire which gestures but never fully accesses the real it constructs through fantasy," the position of fantasy can be called upon as an important political tool for feminism.⁴ With a fantasy that is shaped by and for women, Marsh turns the tables on the sexualization of the female body by wielding the master's tools and placing herself as viewer and viewed. The fragmentation, slow movement and insular, self-reflexive space created in *flipped* forces a second look at the territory of sexualized female representation. This opens up the possibilities of play, invention and fantasy, which in themselves become new realities and possibilities for the feminine subject.

Guy L'Heureux

photographe



Lynne Marsh

flipped

- ¹ Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, "Crashing the Language Line," in *Boundaries of Identity: A Québec Reader*, ed. William Dodge (Toronto: Lester Publishing Ltd., 1992), 112.
- ² Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Art After Modernism*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 366.
- ³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," chap. in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 236.
- ⁴ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 95.