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Thank you to MUMA and to Shelley and her team

I have wrestled a lot with what to talk about today – the secret life of objects? The slippery relations between animate and inanimate?

I kept falling into the trap of description. The distillation of decades of Shelley's practice, whether solo or with others, is, here, beautifully austere & compelling –

Since we are here and you, like me, have some awareness of what the work is, I decided to do more of a riff on the name of this project, and to see where that took me, & us.

When/I/am/not/there

When - any time actually but we use 'when' to pinpoint something in time

I - conventionally taken to mean self & the constitution of subjectivity - but - who is I?/who or what is the self?

I only exists in relation to other – without the other who is the I – with many others who is the I ?

Then there is the dynamic relationship between subject/object – conventionally seen as binaries.

I is supposed to have ownership of subjectivity, in actuality **I** is always in flux, mobile, malleable. As is the other, or the object of, or in relation to, the **I**.

Convention is for social and political order, for standardisation and, ultimately, immobilisation.

Sometimes **I** am a subject and sometimes **I** am an object – always among and interacting with the many. Those that we can sense and those that we can imagine – all of which we can think about from various perspectives/positions.

Am not – action though not, here, a simple reversal of am, to be – see the aforementioned I – **I am not – not I** – this is a conundrum. If I am not I then who am I? when am I? where am I?

There – commonly taken to mean place, over there/not here – but - **not there** either! – so where? – the dynamics of movement

In thinking about this, I came to the feminist philosopher who remains a touchstone for me because of her examination of language as we are still taught it.

What follows is from an essay of hers **When our lips speak together**. Luce Irigaray has worked to understand and break down conventional thinking around what ‘women’, in all their multiplicity, are, and to shift language towards an acceptance of plurality and flux – of being and doing, as much as speaking or writing.

I’m going to read a paragraph or 2 from **When our lips speak together**:

Continue, don’t run out of breath. Your body is not the same today as yesterday. Your body remembers...Your body reveals yesterday in what it wants today. If you think: yesterday I was, tomorrow I will be, you are thinking: I have died a little. Be what you are becoming, without clinging to what you could have been, might be. Never settle. Let’s leave definitiveness to the undecided: we don’t need it. Right here and now our body gives us a very different certainty. Truth is necessary for those who are so distanced from their body that they have forgotten it. But their ‘truth’ makes us immobile, like statues, if we can’t divest ourselves of it. If we don’t annul its power by trying to say here, now, right away, how we are moved.

You are moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never ‘are’. How can I say to you, who are always other? How can I speak to you, who remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? It is multiple, devoid of ‘causes’, ‘meanings’, simple qualities ...

These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end ... this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. This life—which will perhaps be called our restlessness, whims, pretences, or lies.¹

Ω

So, Why is it important to shift the conventions of language whether in speaking, writing, moving, appearing, forming...? These conventions themselves can be fluid and do change but change has usually been determined by those who control the conventions. Within and across certain forms of thought and expression change is also entirely possible – indeed I for one recommend it. But it is a rarity.

In her essay for **When I am not there**, under the heading ‘semiotic probing’, producer Zoe Theodore notes -

To figure/the figure

To shape/the shape

To exhibit/the exhibit

To display/the display

To perform/the performance

In an attempt to make sense of something somatically...Shelley would often ask the dancers to think about the problem via language, without falling into the trap of chasing utopian or ideological ideas. For example: Is it exposition or disposition?²

Ω

¹ Luce Irigaray (trans Carolyn Burke), When our lips speak together, **Signs** vol 6 no 1 Autumn 1980 pp 69-79 (C.Burke Intro Signs pp 66-68)

² Zoe Theodore, Choreographing the archive: Shelley Lasica’s When I am not there p 114 MUMA 2022

These are indeed conundrums – puzzles in meaning with no clear answers that allow us to move out into the open space of other feelings and thoughts, and therefore different actions. We do have to go there. We do have to consider both somatically and semiotically – how, for example, ‘to shape the shape’, ‘to perform the performance’?

Recently I’ve been reading Georgia Sagri who is professor of performance at the Athens School of Fine Arts. She emphasises performance as a medium, and as enabling interdisciplinary practices.³ While Sagri is determinedly, overtly political, the politics in **When I am not there** may seem muted. I see them, however, as deeply embedded through the collaborative approach to image, object, the space, language and action, and the perpetual transgression of the old, exhausted binaries. The languages of bodies, minds and objects working together in spaces are here, moment by moment, in flux, a mobile state of transformation which we have been fortunate to participate in, and therefore be actively changed by.

Thank you.

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³ Georgia Sagri, **Stage of recovery**, Divided Publishing, Brussels 2021 pp 43,79