

(an)Architecture, Eros, Memory: the Naxsmash Project

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Summary. Consciousness of violence is the negative ground from which there can be production of an aesthetic. The experience of building Naxsmash as transmedia performance, sound and installation, has led to improvisations on presence as subject and transaction between and "behind" the screen. Cyberspace as a Lacanian atopia.

Keywords: memoire, feminine, place, subject, atopia, performance, sexual abuse, trauma, topology, contemporary art, installation, performance

" We thus enter a universe in which logic does not act as a guarantee of truth; instead truth acts to guarantee the comprehensibility of logic (a Heideggerian kind of universe, then), harnessing the letter into a dialectic whose very openness is its best guarantee of closure. "La lettre, ça se lit," Lacan writes – but this writing is already read, needs no reading from us, and is enclosed in pure self-affection...With this the prospect of metalanguage collapses, leaving in its stead a problem of imitation and a vision of psychoanalysis as only infinitely prospective and subjunctive science...adequately described as *pas-tout*, its truth elusively and familiarly figured as woman, everywhere and nowhere, not-all [1].

1 subject and place

To begin with, a short story: a phenomenology, of an installation.

At the entrance, a dark space. Within are suspended a forest of dark, long, transparent scrim. It's difficult to avoid touching them. You must negotiate them as you pass through. Inside, lcd projectors arranged in a transverse triangle emit sound and light through scrim, illuminating and interrupting surfaces and image. The sound has recursive structures, so that it seems to propel itself within, around, and through the internal spaces generated by the scrim. The music turns itself upside-down, inverts itself, slips and falls, and insistently gets back up again as a fugue interaction with the physical space.

Once inside, you obstruct video projection and hear the sound from moving points. Light and image project through your movements and onto your skin. As you enter your reaction and response to the assault of light and sound mediates the presence of the scrim; it activates them as a layering of screens. In reaction to your entrance or non-entrance, to your engagement or non-engagement, to response, the next thing you do or do not do, is performance. Now not only your own screen and audience, but you are also the audience for others' bodies-as-screens. There is, within this space, if you want it, an ungrounded experience to take place, even at the same moment that you experience the groundedness produced by the experience of your own, conscious, intentional behaviors and choices. It is, in short, a constructed experience of the Uncanny, or, in Lacanian terms, an eruption of the Real.

Detail, transparent scrim, Naxsmash suite, digital print on duraclear

The scrim are not empty film, waiting for exposure: there is something upon them. What seems to be on or in them would appear to be still or photographic images, but it is not clear to you that they are in fact photographs. They are saturated, with streaks of orange and red in rope-like strands. Here and there, you can perceive the image of a woman—or parts of her: her hands, her eyes. It seems to be a figure that's locked up,

trapped somehow within or behind the scrims and cannot fully be seen, but she gives you the impression that she is not only seeing you, she is looking at you. The videos also seem to have something to do with this woman moving within the narrow, hollow projections of light. Her face and flashes of her body appear and disappear, in layers. The gaze of a double, her tied up hands, her breathing, moves through the scrims.

You are aware of the communal aspect of your isolation that arises from your awareness of the other bodies reflecting and refracting among the labyrinths of scrim. There is a seductive quality to the violence of the experience in that you know that it is not merely yourself and the screen engaged in this ebb and flow of light, sound, and movement. You experience also, however anonymously, a sense of community with the other disembodied, reflective, severed bodies within the space. You are each of you not only illuminated, spot-lit as it were: you are also comfortably anonymous in your experience of dis- and re-embodiment, so that you are not only alienated by your experience but you are also, by virtue of the shared aspects of your experience, given permission to enjoy the strangeness, to breathe freely for awhile in "eine Fremde", a strange land, as Kafka writes of his protagonist K, when K loses control and finding himself breathing for a period of hours in the arms of a woman he does not know [2]

2 feminine and memoire

The story of this breathing space is Naxsmash, a multimedia performance project now three years into the making.

NAXSmash comes from NAX, and subsequent performance works in the series "Memoires of a Cyborg." NAX involved rediscovery of a site of childhood violence. The name is shorthand for Lake Nacimiento, a place I had long searched for and finally found. I wanted to go to this lake and make a performance video as a way of getting in touch with the traumatic memory at the site of violence. The video documents an act of breathing as if to contain and release traumatic memory from the site. Memory is the recognition or storage of events; memoire is narration of memory. The video was not memoire, because my performance did not tell a story. All I did was, practically nothing: an act almost negligent, and subtle, just breathing.

Saving files, I typed "nacimiento" then "nascent" then "nax". "X" marked the place, but where was it? Nowhere but inside the digital video edits, via erasure and inscription. Smashing the violence through the recovery and digitalizing of a violent memory inscribes the memory in a realm that has no location outside the digital object itself. Concealed in a pun, my "x," factor spliced X as the sign of the feminine inside the media space, as if violated by continuous and limitless edits. I noticed a shift: what had happened to the feminine x, the spot where I was or am, the location of the subject? I was gone, baby, gone. I became witness to my own disappearance. Transposing performance in a new key, in streaming online, in Flash, in installation, in hypertext, I lost track of narrative space. What was there instead? The hallucinatory and decentered aura of the media space was interesting because it was permeated by presence.. As if they were there somewhere below or behind the screen wanting to express themselves, decentered subjects moved into the subjunctive mood. In English, we say, "if we are to go somewhere", if "you were to come here" - a transactional, formalized ambiguity. The subjunctive mood became a virtual memoire.

It is a bit like old times in those high school nights, when "everybody knows" or better, what if "if everybody were to know" that there is some girl who is always getting fucked, night after night, behind the bleachers at the school football game. Then what? She is there but we really can't, or won't see her; she gazes at us in a dematerialized pathos without a story to tell because we are not present to her, to hear her; she is just some girl. I noticed the breathing action by the girl in my video was not 'me'. She was submerged or hidden in the pixels. Violent memory I had released into a cyber spatial transaction, but the memoire of that memory was there and not there. Like the raped girl I could not 'see' myself or 'hear myself' in the performance work. I shifted to a position of working per formatively as a cyborg.

installation view Naxsmash at Media Lab 2002

3 performance atopia

I built online streaming worlds and live installation out of this position: my

consciousness was reframed as object inside the media space. From this position I could work powerfully. I witnessed a new fluency in my sound art, digital stills and time-based media. The work was flowing from a decentered subject, i. e., as I had found a formalized way to sound out story, to make music and image without repression, because "I" was nowhere to be found. In my real life, one of the aftereffects of trauma, is silence and hiding. One does not want to be seen because one fears being hurt again. By shifting across the ambiguous space, from the paralysis and silence of memory of rape, into the mediated double of self on and in the screen, I gathered momentum. I now could make work as a series of processional moments out of this traumatized consciousness. Between violence and sublimity and between a subjective presencing and human interactivity, I built cyber spatial narratives as cuts, or smashes, between layers of ambiguous screen. Like pointing to a topology behind, or beyond the screen, the phenomenology of presence generated exactly from atopia, from formal transformations in digital media, none of which imitate anything we can know. There is nothing there behind the bleachers at the football game. Just code. But it feels real, and that is the interesting part. Because it feels real, it becomes active as a topology.

This position, from within the atopic ground, is paradoxically, negative. It is marked (or stained, to use a favorite Lacanian cliché) by "x" – amusingly, also the chromosome that if doubled, produces female sexual beings. With Lacan we can say that it is feminine, as in 'not-all' and 'everywhere'. From the impossible oxymoron of 'woman artist', I have disappeared like the NAX girl into the oxygenated pixels. Inside, my breathing is a consciousness reframed by the edge of the screen. The consciousness is an active viral force field, 'pas-tout' and 'partout'. This means that I cut through the spaces between everywhere and nowhere. My artistic work performs as if it is of *jouissance*, the excess, the erotic 'too much' beyond the frame or scrim or screen. Just move along the edges of the images, tracing the change. At the end of the day one is still left with the screen, but one has invested itself, and oneself with memory, or rather, *memoires*, of what was experienced in the mediated, 'naxsmashed' space.

Topology, the logic of place, meets its end as its beginning in the condition of cyberspace as a single surface twisted into a continuous, meta-temporal, reflexive process, a mobius strip. Lacan describes the move/countermove that always ends at the same no – place:

Chest law queue le reel new saurian sincere queue dune impasse de la formalization...Cite formalization mathématique de la signifiance se fait au contraire du sens, j'allais presque dire à contre-sens,

" It is thus that the real is distinguished. The real cannot be inscribed except as an impasse of formalization... This mathematical formalization of signification is accomplished against the grain of sense – I very nearly said, a *contre sens* – the wrong way, by interpretation, absurdly (The real in them of its 'fullness' and "that which always comes back to the same place." The apparent invocation of place amounts in fact to the eradication of the notion of place itself ("There is no topology that does not have to be supported by some artifice.")" [3]

The object, the NAX girl, is a shadowy presence in the Naxsmash spaces, both online and in installation. Signals of an entrapped being, she inflects the screen, her motility membrane, like a skin or gut wall, through which she utters a breath of scattered speech. This utterance, suggested through the presence of electronically remixed –and shattered– passages of voice and keyboard, loops back from the point of its origin as an oblique narrative about trauma and violent memory, to return, as its point of origin, as mediated displacements. She cannot be evoked except through the no-place of digital media where she exists nowhere and everywhere, inaccessible and yet full of observable gestures whose significance we invest, or divest, with *memoires* and desires.

installation view, California Museum of Photography 2002

Notes

[1] Melville, S., 1996. *Psychoanalysis and the Place of Jouissance*. In *Seams: Art as a Philosophical Context*. Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, p. 105.

[2] Kafka, F., Underwood, J. A., transl., 1997, *The Castle*. London: Penguin Books, p. 38. "Then she started up, K. having remained lost in thought, and began to tug at him like a child: 'Come, it's suffocating under here,' they embraced, the little body burning in K.'s hands, in a state of oblivion from which K. tried repeatedly yet vainly to extricate himself they rolled several steps, thudded into Klamm's door, then lay in the little puddles of beer and the rest of the rubbish covering the floor. There hours

passed, hours of breathing as one, heart beating as one, hours in which K. constantly had the feeling that he had lost his way or wandered farther into a strange land, than anyone before him, a strange land where even the air held no trace of the air at home, where a man must suffocate from the strangeness yet into whose foolish enticements he could do nothing but plunge, on, getting even more lost." This passage is performed online in my *slipstreamandromeda* <http://www.naxsmash.net/slip/index.html>

[3] Melville, S., *ibid.*, p. 106.