

P.O.T.I.C.H.E. or Poetry Of The Immanent Corpus Hers Eternal



I had been thinking of subtitling this piece “poetry off the page,” which seemed suitably snappy in a sort of louche taxonomical fashion. After all, the first instantiation of POTICHE was the film “Potiche” (10 November 2010), directed by François Ozon, most notably starring Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu.ⁱ This naturally begat its second manifestation, reviews of the film, “Potiche,” reviews penned, for our purposes, here and abroad, most notably here (e.g., 24 March 2011).ⁱⁱ This, in turn, spawned its third incarnation, as *P.O.T.I.C.H.E. or Pathway to Decent Work for Women* (10 April 2011), a collaborative performance by Emilie Clark and Kim Rosenfield at New York’s Zinc Bar,ⁱⁱⁱ which gave rise to its fourth formation, as *P.O.T.I.C.H.E.*, one of my Factory product chapbooks,^{iv} which gives rise to this.^v In spinning this particular top, the pattern that emerges is the familiar circular, which does not adequately

resolve the question of whether the circle is open, or, as Wittgenstein might put it, closed. Put another way, Clark and Rosenfield use the predicates of performance and conceptual poetry to create a new aesthetic object that sticks a fork in the confection and thereby does what radical aesthetics is supposed to do, but often only speaks of doing, which is to offer a radical critique. It is “poetry off the page” as machete, versus bicyclette. The con- that should lie in con-text. I.e., con- as conversation, confrontation, contradiction and conversion, the contrast and contrary played most famously by Antigone. I recently attended a symposium which aimed to address the premeditated relationship of art and politics, and while there was a flotilla of the latter, there was not so much by way of the former. Or, more accurately, the stuff that was proffered was old stuff—not even “the same old stuff,” which might have at least had the benefit of nostalgia—but very new old stuff indeed.^{vi} The kind of stuff that unblinkingly believes no tension inheres between lyric poetics and anarcho-punk-Marxist politics (“one” *is* the loneliest number that you’ll ever hear), or that community and continuity may be mythologized via the direct application of money and haute celebrity (art as aria), or that Mallarmé is just as pertinent politically as he was back in the day (*pari passim*). But, as Wittgenstein said so precisely, “the object is the fixed, the existent; the configuration is the changing, the variable.”^{vii} And so, context is structural. Put another way, a sculpture is always the thing and the air around the thing. And air, as we know, varies. Ergo, recontextualization is text.

In Clark and Rosenfield's piece, the two women read from separate and overlapping texts in overlapping fashion. While Rosenfield read reviews of "Potiche" freshly culled from English-language news sources, Clark read those reviews in fluent French, as translated by Google. Dressed and made up in 1970s summer-cocktail fashion, they flanked a screen framed as a square hole cut in a fabric roll running through the room, up the stage and over the screen, the cloth being the same bold b&w geometric pattern of their matching muumuus. As they read, deadpan, images of iconic feminist art ran across the screen: Orlan, Adrian Piper, Valie Export, Martha Rosler.^{viii} The machine-translation provided another interpretive gloss, so that "To her husband and two adult children, Mme. Pujol is a trophy housewife with no real power. In other words, a potiche." became "Pour son mari et ses deux enfants adultes, Mme Pujol est une femme au foyer trophée sans pouvoir réel. En d'autres termes, *potiche UNE*." (The reviews themselves were not particularly noteworthy—mostly referring to the film as a French confection, mostly admiring Deneuve as La Belle (encore!), mostly appalled at Depardieu's sloppy obesity (de trop!). Culture referents—feminism in the 70s, the then-official relevance of small c-communism, labor unrest and sexual revolution—were lightly conjured and as lightly dismissed: "this is a French farce with a lot on its mind." A lot as in that upon which children play.) The poetry/art audience laughed, mostly, it seemed, at the juxtapose between the light comedic fare under thin examination and the heavy imagery scrolling silently by. And as I watched and listened, the psychological momentum of the entire piece became absolutely vertiginous. First, there was the contradictions between the text presented in English and as represented in French, the French somehow clunkier, the English somehow more utilitarian. The women reading became women, women as woman, woman as voice of the image of woman. And, not to slow things down, but this also evoked the orality and aurality of speech act as act. The text circled around the feminist images, now iconic images, thus also addressing women as woman, and the story of the film as articulated through the reviews, doubled the machinations of the machine-translated text, so that the sheer brutality of the effort to keep the woman within the symbolic order became horrifying. The "real" woman as "reel" woman as "réel" woman as infinitum, as manifest by the textile framing of the image, and textiles, as you know, come in folds. The woman is thus the image of the woman, calibrated as a single unit ("a") only insofar as all fungibles are calibrated in single units (*UNE*), the cut in the cloth over the screen mimicking the cut in the symbolic fabric that the real always represents, or is represented by, like the slit, gash, slice, etc., that is image of the woman herself. As played through the cut in the unfolding fabric. So that woman is revealed as the very image of the



symbolic order, or, more accurately, of all symbolic orders. So that the woman may not be permitted to escape her constitution because she is, in fact, constituting. Or, as Wittgenstein also noted, “To the proposition belongs everything which belongs to the projection; but *not* what is projected.”^{ix}

As it turns out, the disturbing; in fact, the missed was how deeply makes you want what you seduces you into betraying you lack. But that which wish she would: to become lost love, to win the the very best mother of all. another way, la femme au to find another foyer vestibule, the entry/entrée. willing participant in the



film itself was equally thing the critics uniformly disturbing a film it is, as it should not have, or rather your longing for that which *she* could have, and you the good boss, to recoup the bourgeois election. To be To be your mother. Put foyer escapes le foyer only because she is the foyer, the And so you, too, are a process because it is your

process: how much is made of Mummy. It is a raw thing, this performance. Too, much political poetry, like much political art, knows to mouth its politics, but the politics stay in the mouth—warm, more or less chewed, but not absorbed in the corpus. Walls of words that simply erect another kind of edifice. With their “P.O.T.I.C.H.E.” Clark and Rosenfield make political art that is political poetry, the Wittgensteinian fusion of ethics and aesthetics is complete as the process is laid bare. It was a gorgeous performance, and a gorgeous piece. But there is in this the gorge. Swallow, or choke, or, preferably, both.

ⁱ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WiRGcExb0E>. This may not be, strictly speaking, true, as Ozon’s *Potiche* was “a free adaptation of the 1970s eponymous hit comic play” starring Jacqueline Maillan, available on DVD. <http://www.amazon.fr/Potiche-Jacqueline-Maillan/dp/B000J0ZQA0> Reviewers of the DVD are split as to whether

Maillan or Deneuve best captures the part of the “potiche,” though most believe that in the context of text, “elles ne sont pas comparables.” All agree it is “a voir absolument.”

ⁱⁱ A.O. Scott, “Labor Strife? Send in the Boss’s Wife” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2011,

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/movies/catherine-deneuve-and-gerard-depardieu-in-potiche-review.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ As part of a month-long series, “It’s For You: An Interdisciplinary Festival of Collaborative Firsts,” curated by Rob Fitterman and Jen Bervin.

^{iv} No date is available because the chapbooks, all of which are “by Vanessa Place” though they are all other works by other authors appropriated by other authors whom I in turn appropriate, are published as print on demand. In other words, they do not exist until you ask for them. They could exist now, or never, as you choose.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2011/04/the-digital-flood-you-d-better-start-swimmin-or-youll-sink-like-a-stone/>

^v A new review.

^{vi} Which is the problem with the bourgeois attachment to the new for the sake of the new, and the méconnaissance of Pound’s injunction, whereby concept is confused with content, content with affect.

^{vii} *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), proposition number 2.0271. A hypertext of the Ogden bilingual edition may be found at <http://www.kfs.org/~jonathan/witt/tlph.html>

^{viii} WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution. <http://www.moca.org/wack/>

^{ix} Proposition 3.13.