

ANIKA YUZAK: METHODS OF DRAMATIZATION

geoffrey farmer

While waiting to cross the street a week ago I noticed a wet piece of yellow paper on the lid of a garbage can. The red ink, which had been used to pen two paragraphs, had created some amazing stains in the process of getting wet and then drying. They looked like petrified rings. I peeled the paper off the lid and placed it in my bag. Later that day, after it had dried out, I read what it said:

We travel through the ancient and justified realms of identity on our way to annihilation with the world in our eyes. Gigantic signs emerge, bubbling up from the City of Bones. Growing from our desires, they crush our senses and take away our pleasure while reflecting them back to us in pocket sized mirrors, again and again in a feedback loop that whirls faster and faster. (a clap of thunder) We see ourselves as children of the revolution, full of regret, (sound of glass shattering) with our well-won right to be individuals and then the dust settles... just silent faces, cheesy subcultures and communities disappearing everywhere.

So open your stands or mail order shops and become your own empowered capitalists, re-work, collect, sew, reject society at large and become a counterculturalist. Start your own band and get specific about your musical tastes. Start your own economies but keep it low-key, alternative and to the left. Heavily identify in aesthetics, it is the only thing that will distinguish you and make you feel stronger.

Welcome to Dracula's Castle!

Dear Anika Yuzak,

I don't want to cause any trouble for you, I know how it may appear, and the words above seem spiteful, hostile, half formed, totally against a certain type of existence or way of being (no one ever falls precisely under these stereotypes...human beings are never exclusively either "for themselves" or "in themselves," never purely subjects or objects...), but it feels as if it might be taken as a description of a certain voice, one that tries to speak out. From what? Oppression! I think it is the same type that has been voiced to me by certain members of the art community, simply put: FROM THOSE ABOVE US! This is the ultimate heavy cloud. What do I mean by this? I think I mean total abstraction, completely vague and without shape. I have fought for liberation! Not just of myself for myself, but I have always come back to its transparent roots, deeply internalized; I try to be careful not to point fingers.

Please bear with me, I know this format sucks. THIS IS A NIGHTMARE!

I have to admit that my first impulse when I saw your work was to talk to you about feminism and not because you are a woman but because of the way the female subject appears in your work. I wondered what type of female subject you were proposing. But feminism! I know you don't need that extra burden. We all know how sexist the art world is. Or am I just being dramatic? My nostalgia is not for 1990s identity politics, although I will always hold it close to my heart, but at least some kind of discourse. I know it must exist in some form.

Once the hypothetical microphones have been adjusted our conversation might go like this:

Geoffrey: What happened to feminism?

Anika: I think that first of all, the "feminist" label is out of fashion, which is terrible because I exist in a society and enjoy the benefits that were won in the hard-fought battles between the sexes. I think the fact that the label is out of fashion reveals not just ignorance of past oppression, but widespread false consciousness.

G: Do you feel that in feminism's shift to "the critique of mass society" that feminist theory has become in many ways simply another version of the countercultural critique?

A: OMG, for sure. I think the concept of "patriarchy," which has dominated feminist thinking since the 60s, is basically just a gendered re-description of what countercultural theorists called the "technocracy." This theory encourages radical critics to blame most social ills upon the totalizing system of enforced conformity that supposedly sustained modern societies. You know, the idea that we are taught to love our own enslavement and what we need to escape from is conformity. And to do so, we must reject culture in its entirety. We must form a counterculture – one based on rebellious freedom and individuality.

G: Do you think that this has had a negative impact on feminism?

A: Yes!

At this point Luce Irigaray would politely interrupt us. The conversation would drift towards the discussion of subjectivity, a gendered subjectivity. Listening I would think, yes, this makes sense, I have always felt that this must be true. We must create a new language.

Sincerely,
Geoffrey Farmer



Anika Yuzak *Pictures of Myself When I Think I Look Good*
Billboard at 1st and Main

Imaginary Feminism

A friend of mine living in Germany told me that at a recent Vanessa Beecroft performance in Berlin, where one hundred lubricated women stood for three hours in nothing but nylons, that a young woman in the audience repeatedly yelled out, "Was über den Feminismus?" ("What about Feminism!?!") I searched the internet to see if it was true. It brought up a posting by Dave:

The hypocritical prudishness of the world astounds me. For those who admire the female art form and are nylon fans to boot, this could be very, very enticing. Has it ended? I am near the Bahnhof!

Then, further down, a quote from her dealer in New York, Jeffrey Dietch:

Vanessa's a new kind of woman artist.... Without question Vanessa is a feminist, but she's a very contemporary kind of feminist. There's a new group of women artists and Vanessa's in the vanguard, and I would also add Cecily Brown and Pipilotti Rist, where the women are using sexual imagery from a very powerful, very feminine point of view, and it's a kind of powerful sexual imagery that can even intimidate the male. If one is present at a Vanessa Beecroft performance, they are not erotic. You feel the power of the women's presence. It is an intimidating image.

I know these words can't possibly be used as a critique of her practice. But if you read her own stories, about her bulimia, the psychotic fits, depression, and compulsive exercising, well.... Vanessa says, "It's almost like an experiment in directing, in an almost brutal and violent way, women in front of an audience ... There are references to paintings, images, movies and texts."

HOLY FUCK! ZOMBIE WOMEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE PLACE!

Picture For Women

Anika Yuzak takes pictures of herself. The pictures detail, in snapshots, moments from her life: *First Time in L.A.*, *Before the Helen Pitt Fundraiser*, *My First Apartment*.... Photographing herself alone and using a single lens reflex camera, Yuzak has taken over 200 photographs in a period of two years. The images are intimate and informal; they index a type of rehearsal that occurs behind closed doors and like test shots they aspire to a potential or ideal while simultaneously being grounded in the candidness of their reality. Within the privacy of her own space, Yuzak is able in a



Anika Yuzak *Imaginary Girlfriend* (Still)

certain confidence to explore different personas, outfits, postures, and looks.

For her exhibition at the Or Gallery, she has selected two of these images to be realized as billboards with the sole curatorial criteria indicated by the work's title: *Pictures of myself when I think that I look good*. In one image Yuzak is posing in what appears to be a small kitchen space, with one leg raised up, in a short skirt, long boots, and purple Lakers T-shirt. The photograph documents the outfit for potential future reference and allows the opportunity to see fixed in print what would be lost in the glimpse of a mirror. This attempt to situate oneself within the hierarchy of all images is a necessary process, one that even if standard norms are rejected must be taken up at some point in normal psychological development. This narcissistic exploration further articulates the heightened state of self-consciousness that the modern subject inherently possesses, and the dramatic tendencies of its psychological state. By utilizing the gigantic media format of the billboard Yuzak advertises a reversal of the commodification of the personal and private life of the individual. Here the only thing being sold is her curatorial criteria and the gesture of mainstream mimicry, one that demands to "show us reality." Regardless of the sociological reference in reading these images the viewer might be ultimately confronted by the images' uncertainty and resistance to interpretation. This resistance in itself might be seen, temporarily, like an impossible void, one that expresses a desire to exist before being signified.

Presented within the gallery is a video in which Yuzak re-performs a role from the movie, *S.F.W.* (1994) (*So Fuckin' What?*). The movie is about an anti-hero played by Stephen Dorff, who after being taken hostage in a convenience store appears on national television for the 36 days of his imprisonment. Filmed continually by the "terrorists," Dorff's character becomes a national celebrity for his nihilistic behavior and apathetic ideology, which is summed up in his continual use of the phrase, "so fuckin' what?" Yuzak uses a small scene in which she crudely cuts herself into the movie, assuming the position of Dorff's girlfriend. Under the assumption that she could act better than the actress Joey Lauren Adams, Yuzak re-performs the dialogue which is a pathetic argument between the two characters. The jarring cuts create a comedic effect. The disjunction between the film and the quality of video that Yuzak uses reiterates the discontinuities of the cuts while doubling back on the underlying structure and themes of the film itself. Although these structures and themes can only be fully understood by watching the film in its entirety, the fragment she chooses is irrefutably linked and therefore adds another level of meaning to her work. The movie's subject matter, that of "terrorists" who keep hostages captive in a convenience store in a society that is desperately seeking to express its nihilistic tendencies, must be understood, if only superficially, as a critique of capitalism's darker side. By participating in the film and by trying to act the role better, Yuzak tangentially implicates herself within this critique. More importantly however and linking itself to the billboards, are the concepts of the imaginary, of fantasy, and the psychological aspects of desire that film and advertising create and play upon. By inserting herself into these realms Yuzak raises important questions about our own agency, and fundamentally, issues that we must contend with in an increasingly complex array of representations fueled by capitalism's insatiable desires.

The End.

Geoffrey Farmer is an artist currently living and working in Vancouver. He studied at Emily Carr College of Art and Design and the San Francisco Art Institute. He has upcoming exhibitions at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto and at MuHKA in Antwerp.