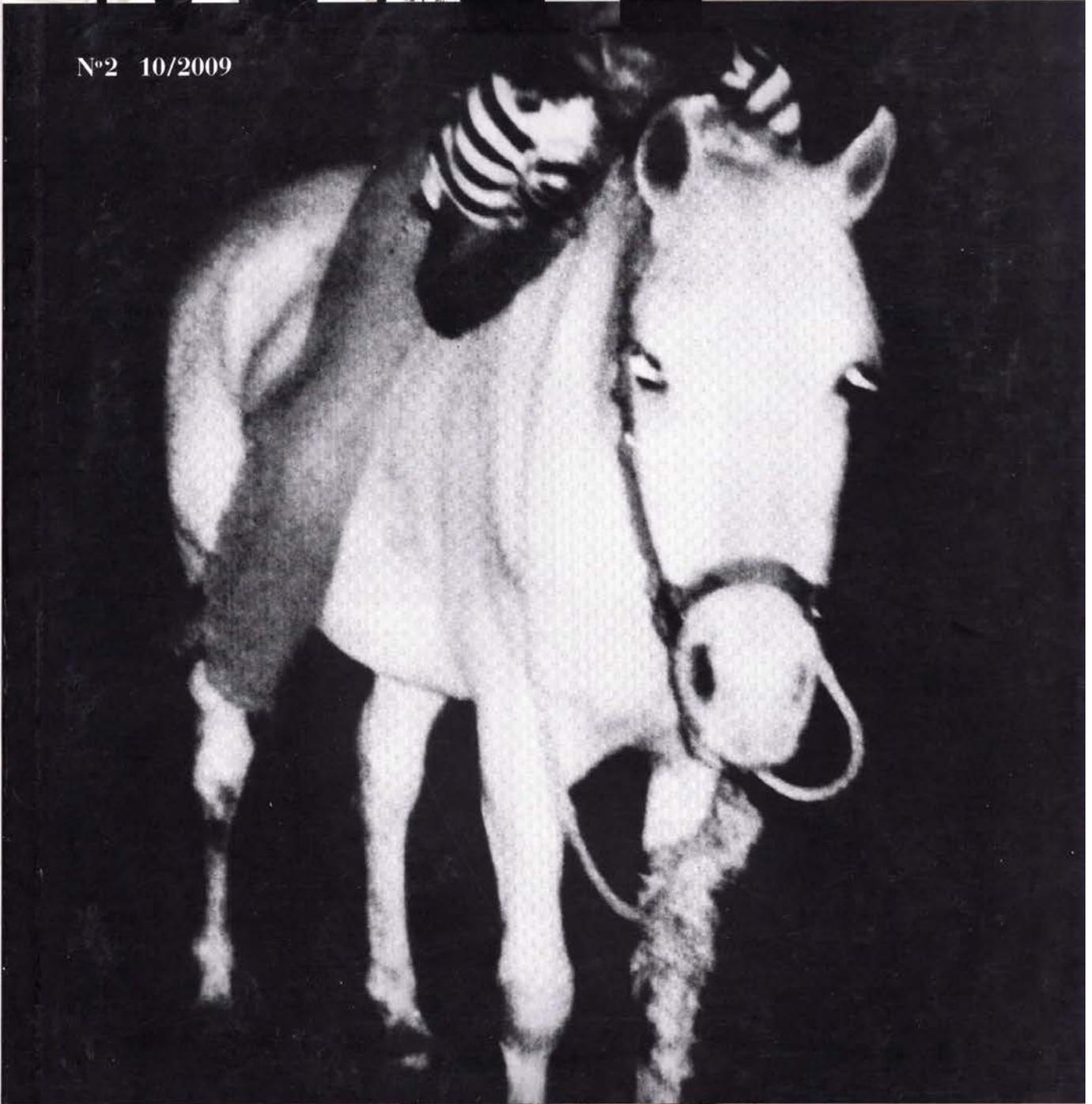


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Paper Trail *Do You Love Me?* at Kunstverein Munich Jay Chung

Do you love me? Before we reach Cornelia Gockel's affirmative last line in her review for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* - "Yes, we do!"¹, we learn that Lutz Bacher is a pseudonym employed by a female artist who, despite not having had, until now, a solo show in Europe, has been exhibiting since the Seventies. She has been associated with the Pac Hearn Gallery, but she has been overlooked for many years by the art market. She couldn't care less whether or not she is an "artist's artist", and she doesn't like to be photographed.

Bacher's exhibition at the Kunstverein Munich has 22 works in it. *Tank* is an olive green plastic army tank, mounted on the wall as if its treads have ground in cracks as it rolled upward, perpendicular to the ground. Another wall has the remains of a salvaged billboard photograph for Nissan (Car Billboard). At the far end of the exhibition, an extremely large pair of jeans is stuffed with the little foam balls that come out when a beanbag chair bursts. The work is called *Denim*. *Blue Car* is a soapbox derby car. Some blue writing is scrawled on one of the wheels. A giant cloth pincushion doll made of cloth fills the center of the main hall, splayed flat on a board as if on a tilted operating cable. This is *Big Boy*. He has a penis and an anus. It was made by Vincent Fecteau, on commission, years ago. Video projectors flash intermittently on and off around it. *Sea of Love*. The reflected light is the only illumination in the room. Cast plaster horse heads. *Horses*.



In another room, light sand is piled thick over the entire floor, making the room into an indoor beach of sorts; it's called *China Beach*. Strung overhead, something between a photo and a banner. The photo, an overhead view from a hang glider. *Glide*. Some smaller, red pincushion dolls pile up into a dark corner behind a hidden door. The stack of featureless bodies, positioned as if they were escaping from a fire, is known as *The Devil Made Me Do It*. On the ground, red letters from a sign, a "Y", an "E" and an "S". *Yes*. If it was meant to subliminally suggest a response to the exhibition's title, it works.

This isn't the first appearance of the title "Do You Love Me?", in Bacher's oeuvre. In 1995, Susan Kandel reviewed a show of Bacher's at TRI gallery for the *Los Angeles Times*. This exhibition was centered on an 11 1/2 hour video, also entitled *Do You Love Me?*², in which Bacher filmed a large number of her friends and colleagues as she asked

them questions about herself. Kandel describes the respondents in the hot seat: it's apparently an unnerving place to be, but it's not made clear exactly what it was that made it so uncomfortable. One could easily imagine a piece like this one, even with its extreme duration, to be a pleasant exercise in collegiality, but it seems as though the subjects felt harassed, either by the situation that Bacher had constructed, or simply by something about the artist's bearing. According to Kandel, it might be because Bacher absents herself as much as possible, isolating her interlocutors to the point of self-conscious vulnerability.

"In some ways," Kandel writes, "it's like being forced into a cold shower." Whereas Gockel characterizes Bacher as a dissenter, someone who has found, in spite of the commodification and speculative practices of the market, a way of working that is independent from and ambivalent to the ever-accelerating search for young talent, Kandel portrays her as an icy psychoanalyst.

¹ Gockel, Cornelia. "Fischer Umgang mit Amerikas Träumen.", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 July, 2009. Web. 31 July. 2009.

² You can almost picture how the terse and comical headline looked in the context of the *LA Times*' culture section: Susan Kandel, "Love Me? Shows Off Self-Obsession", in *Los Angeles Times* 6 April 1995, p. 10. Print.

It is justified that Kandel ties Bacher's video at TRI to psychoanalysis. More specifically, Kandel connects the work to Rosalind Krauss' 1976 article, *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, in which Krauss describes the subset of early video art that addresses the doubling and reflection of the subject³. The medium of video art, Krauss hypothesizes, is not material, but psychological. To elaborate, Krauss paraphrases Lacan's *Language of the Self*. According to Lacan, the analyst, in treating the narcissist, provokes frustration: first it's simply that by remaining completely mute, the analyst causes the analysand to lose patience with the one-sidedness of his own monologue. Upon closer examination, however, the source of this frustration is not the analyst's silence, but the patient's own inability to fully coincide with the 'self' he has constructed for the analyst's benefit. The narcissist, fully invested in his projection into a fantasy of himself as object, is unable to overcome the perpetual alienation and frustration of being primarily "for another". This scenario, as Krauss sees it, is fundamental to the videos she mentions in her essay; she even speculates as to whether it is the scenario for video art as a whole.

Over the course of the article, Krauss holds up several examples of artists working in this vein, including Vito Acconci, Richard Serra, Peter Campus, Bruce Nauman and Joan Jonas, but it is her reasoning for how these artists' treatment of narcissism is relevant for the artworld taken as a whole that is still interesting today. For example, about Richard Serra's *Boomerang*, which records Nancy Holt struggling to describe aloud the mise en abyme effect of an audio feedback loop of her own description of it:

The prison Holt both describes and enacts, from which there is no escape, could be called the prison of a collapsed present, that is, a present time which is completely severed from a sense of its own past.



Krauss also speculated as to why this kind of video art seemed to be on the rise. She says that although she will only be able to systematically treat the workings of the art market at a later date, she does have one point to make immediately:

I do wish to make one connection here. And that is between the institution of a self formed by video feedback and the real situation that exists in the artworld from which the makers of video come. In the last fifteen years⁴ that world has been deeply and disastrously affected by its relation to mass-media. That an artist's work be published, reproduced and disseminated through the media has become, for the generation that has matured in the course of the last decade, virtually the *only* means of verifying its existence as art.

In other words, videos like *Boomerang* resonate because their primitive use of electronic feedback provides an analogy for the artworld's obsession with regarding itself in its own media reflection. Embellishing on this idea, Krauss makes a point to distinguish the reflexive from the reflective. She defines the reflexive as being critical in its insistence on two counterpoised and distinct entities. The reflective, however, which Krauss relates to narcissism, blurs distinctions, making it impossible to separate self and reflected image.

One could certainly place Bacher's *Do You Love Me?* at TRI within this context. This is not to say, however, that the video is an illustration of *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism* or even narcissistic tendencies in contemporary art. In fact, Lacan's scenario is far more productive as insight into another theme in Bacher's work, the creation of an authorial position that is self-alienated insofar as it is a construction, a theme visible in, or at least implied by her *Playboys* series. More on this later.

With respect to the prison of a collapsed present, Bacher's latest exhibition in Munich exhibits this quality in spades. It's not so much the objects taken individually, but by collecting seemingly arbitrary things, linked as a totality only through their

³ Krauss, Rosalind. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" in *October*, Vol. 1 (Spring 1976): 50-64. Print.

⁴ In other words, since 1960!



status as so much junk, the exhibition steers one to think of the disappearance of the auratic, the cast off, the indisputable accumulation of detritus left in the wake of the growth of a society obsessed with mass-media. Bacher's objects are not quite of the present, but they definitely don't constitute or embody any sort of history. Pop America personifies this ahistoricity, and it's thus no surprise that the theme of its Dream comes up. Curator Stefan Kalmar brings the subject up in a video interview with Bacher, who responds:

I think I have been more drawn into this at a certain point, not just by you, but my own kind of understanding that I had done all these various things and they do have all this sort of American-ness, and so I think that I'm aware that I've been drawn more consciously into that. Originally, how that, I think, came about—and I'm now telling things which I don't like to tell—it really did have to do with a kind of struggle over making work that had a kind of, you know, making conceptual work, but not making a certain kind of pretentious, dry, conceptual work.⁵

This excerpt is exceptionally frank—for a large part of the interview, it is Bacher who goads Kalmar; she intentionally prompts him to provide an exegesis for the work:

What would you consider to be my process? How do I actually discover things that are ordinary or extraordinary? How do I make them my own, or not my own?

Why would Bacher rely on Kalmar, who has—as is made explicit at the outset of the interview—only had exposure to Bacher's work for a relatively short period of time, to provide answers to these questions? Interviews and texts concerning Bacher reveal as much about the authors as they do about her work. Could it be that this interview strategy is an auto-

⁵ Kunstverein Munchen, *Lutz Bather: Do you love me?*, Web. 31 July 2009. <http://www.kunstverein-muenchen.de/2008/en.01.1.php>.

reflective process, a practical application of the earlier video *Do You Love Me?* Rather than insisting on a historical or subjective continuity, Bacher only allows herself to be reflected by the media of the present. The consequence is that any continuous, unrefracted narrative of her work remains somewhat unavailable.

In a strange and hallucinatory way, this ahistoricity is even contained in Bacher's reflection in the press. It has been common to mention in a text about Bacher that she has been working since the 1970s—the phrase pops up often enough to make one take notice. One early appearance is in the brochure that accompanied her exhibition at MATRIX gallery in Berkeley in 1993. In another text, this time in a 1992 issue of *Artforum*, Liz Kotz writes:

To note that this remarkably contemporary examination of submerged homoeroticism and disguised aggression was made by a woman, in 1975, in Berkeley (!), goes against everything we have been told about feminist art making in the 70s.⁶

Was it that 1975 was considered past history in 1992? It was just as distant as 1992 is to us now. In a more recent article, one author, perhaps a little naively, writes that Bacher has been treating her themes since the 1990s. With Bacher's work, allusions to the past repeatedly appear, but what this past entails remains a bit vague. Today, one can see this in Bacher's recent retrospective shows at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and P.S. 1 (2008 and 2009); how they portray the notion of the work's relation to its past, and how their examinations begin to approach the inevitably unstable and shifting context in which it has appeared.

Bacher's relation to recent history is directly recalled twice in *Artforum* by Jan Avgikos, albeit at two different times, and in two different modes of discourse. The first reference is in her review of Bacher's retrospective show at the Contemporary Art Museum Saint Louis, "Women Artists of the 70s", Avgikos states, "the topic is white-hot. Suddenly everyone is receptive⁷." The second, from five years earlier in 2003, is more considered, and perhaps also less trend-oriented:

The influences that derive from feminist art are so pervasive as to be immeasurable, and it turns out the questions once posed by women, for women are of critical import to everyone. (Remember Lutz Bacher's Vargas pinup images shown at Pat Hearn in the early '90s)?⁸ In the politicized climate of those times, the works achieved meaning on the basis of who was presenting them—a woman, not a man.⁹

In this case, Avgikos is writing in a panel discussion about the significance of feminist art and its legacy. Her argument is compelling: as in the above quote, she makes the point that feminist strategies have become generalized to the point where they are applicable to everyone and employed universally, that is, without any consideration for their origin. The subject living in the current globalized society, she claims, is "feminized". Secondly, she notes that despite its universal relevance, feminist art and its historical discourse are ironically still relegated to a marginal position in terms of institutional acknowledgement. The politicized discourse that once surrounded now established artists such as Roni Horn, is now considered contingent and peripheral to their present-day importance. Avgikos ends by speculating that feminist art is poised to be the next big thing, because its "emotional reservoirs" may hold the potential to satisfy the current craving for authenticity.

Avgikos' last claim seems a bit specious, especially as it addresses work that, by means of a thorough critique of authenticity, sought to attack the entire system of valuation that the authentic implies. Unfortunately, authenticity is still today something like a synonym for collectability. The promoting of it as such provides us with an answer to the question as to what murky quality of the past is being invoked in the case of Bacher's press when someone writes "since the 70's". Yet despite these caveats, Avgikos' overall analysis is still provocative. What do we make of that feminist discourse that has been brushed off as if it were irrelevant, as Avgikos puts it, "as one would remove dust from a sculpture"?

Both Kotz and Avgikos point to the fact that there is a disparity between the images Bacher presents and the fact that she is a woman, a disparity that they claim determines one's reading of the work. One can more specifically point to the source of Kotz' excerpt; it comes from a longer piece on Bacher's oeuvre up to 1992. Completely in sync with prominent debates from the period in which it was published, the central themes and arguments of this text, entitled *Sex With Strangers*, are based

⁶ Liz Kotz, "Sex with Strangers", in *Artforum*, September 1992, pp. 83-85.

⁷ Jan Avgikos, "Review: Lutz Bacher at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis", in *Artforum*, 9 September. 2008. p. 210.

⁸ Interesting that Avgikos writes "remember".

⁹ Linda Nochlin, Andrea Fraser, Amelia Jones, Dan Cameron, Collier Schorr, Jan Avgikos, Catherine De Zegher, Adrian Piper, Peggy Phelan. "Feminism & art [9 views] - Panel Discussion", in *Artforum* 9 October 2003, pp. 140-150.

around problematizing gender. Accordingly, the set of works that Kotz has chosen for her focus in the piece are remarkably different from the works that one sees mentioned in Bacher's current press. The works that Kotz chooses, for example, *My Penis*, and the namesake for the article, *Sex with Strangers*, have a deliberate and explicit connection to violence and sexual politics. The fact that Bacher, as a woman, reproduces the violence by appropriating images is paramount to Kotz' and, later with respect to the Vargas pinups in Bacher's *Playboys* series, Avgikos' unpacking of the strategies involved in Bacher's work.

To explain the complexity of Bacher's position, Kotz cites Judith Butler and Kaja Silverman, who write in opposition to earlier theories of female identity. Paraphrasing them both, Kotz writes:

Women artists must first assume masculine identities in order to dismantle or disperse them. Butler's own project has focused on strategies of parodic imitation and gender insubordination evident in many lesbian and gay cultural practices. Her key insight is that the copy of the origin displaces the origin as origin, offering a compelling account of why female artists might choose to copy or reenact male representations [...]¹⁰.



As an example of how these ideas are present in Bacher's work, Kotz points to *My Penis*, a video loop of a small segment from the rape-trial testimony of William Kennedy Smith. In 1991, William Kennedy Smith was acquitted of rape despite a large amount of evidence indicating his guilt. His relation to the Kennedy family attracted a media frenzy, and most likely played a factor in the outcome of the case. One key aspect of the trial was the relative ability of the defendant to appear articulate. As a doctor, Smith was easily coached to eloquently refute the medical evidence against him, while much was made of Patricia Bowman, the plaintiff, breaking down into tears repeatedly while on the stand¹¹. Bacher, in looping the tape, reduces Kennedy's testimony to a single sound bite in which he says: "I uh, did have my penis"¹².

Kotz writes that Bacher's appropriation of Smith's statement amounts to an assuming of the male voice. Bacher, she says, "inhabits the male voice so forcefully as to verge on impersonation". This interpretation of *My Penis* is reiterated in another text, also concerned, perhaps coincidentally, with understanding feminism's past, and the legacy of older feminist artists; the text is called *Bad Girls Come and Go But a Lying Girl Can Never Be Fenced In*. Its author, Alexandra Juhasz, describes Bacher's piece like this:

After the tenth or fifteenth repetition of "My Penis" it becomes clear that Smith's penis is nobody but Bacher's, whose video antics have turned his cherished member from phallus to farce.¹³

¹⁰ Lis Kotz, "Sex with Strangers", *op.cit.*

¹¹ Bowman also claimed that when she was raped, Senator Ted Kennedy was nearby and did nothing to help her, despite her cries for help.

¹² There are a couple of different transcriptions of the sound loop. This one comes from a pretty outstanding account of the work from Dodie Bellamy: "Lutz leaves a message on my phone machine: 'meet me at the Best Western, 9th and Harrison Saturday between two and four'. When Sing and I arrive, Lutz in gold sunglasses is stretched out on a plastic chaise lounge beside a swimming pool littered with algae and leaves. Her husband is across the parking lot in a station wagon and Sing jokes that's a good place for a husband. Lutz smirks and points to a row of identical turquoise doors, 'Go on up to room 202 it's open.' We climb the concrete stairs, enter a coordinated cube of beige salmon teal, pastel cityscape above bed of blond veneer, a space where the most elementary distinctions are constituted but also threaten to break down a muffled voice from the bathroom draws us in eerie flicker across white and blue tiled walls we pass the shower and face the toilet: seated upon it is a video monitor and inside the tube is a person, a looped tape of William Kennedy Smith [...]" Dodie Bellamy, "Dear David", in *Lingo 6*, Hard Press. Web. 31 July, 2009. http://www.cultureport.com/NEWHP/lingo/authors/bellamy_dear_david.html.

¹³ Juhasz, Alexandra. "Bad Girls Come and Go But a Lying Girl Can Never Be Fenced In." *Feminism and Documentary*. Ed. Waldman, Diane and Janet Walker. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 95-116. Print.

Yet not everyone was buying the idea that the male voice could be critically assumed and inhabited, even in 1993. In that year, at Pat Hearn Gallery, Bacher exhibited *Playboys*, a series of commissioned reproductions of the iconic pinups of Alberto Vargas. As Avgikos claims above, the meaning of the paintings was based on the understanding that they were not being exhibited by a man; their status as pornography was being destabilized and subverted in the service of a disassembling of the male gaze. But in a skeptical review for the *New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman says about *Playboys*:

What's disturbing is the calculation that because Vargas's illustrations have been appropriated by a woman, viewers can be persuaded through convoluted texts that they pose complicated questions about sexuality and politics. It's not a great leap to imagine someone eventually hawking the current *Playboy* centerfolds as the Conceptual artwork of the female head of Playboy Enterprises.¹⁴

Kimmelman points out, in a strangely bitter way, that the critique implied by *Playboys*, or at least the critical text accompanying *Playboys*, was even then inadequate. One can read into his last sentence that neoliberalism has trumped the question of gender identity because it already takes, on the one hand, the problematizing, but also on the other hand the fluidity of identity for granted. Kimmelman basically arrives at a similar conclusion to Avgikos'—that feminist practices have dissolved into common practice. He just withholds any credit to Bacher.

For others, including Elizabeth Hess writing for the *Village Voice*, *Playboys* had a somewhat different valence. While Hess gives credence to the idea that by appropriating the Vargas pinups, Bacher is dismantling the male gaze, she describes the artist's gesture as one that only confirms the pinups' already dysfunctional status in the image world of the nineties. Instead of saying that the reading of the images is dependent on Bacher's gender, Hess states that because of the effects of "a decade of radical thinking", the Vargas pinups are already, even before their reproduction in the gallery, powerless. In her words:

They have come to represent a paradigmatic heterosexual fantasy that has been annihilated by the feminist movement [...] They're dead, awaiting necrophilic attention.¹⁵

Bacher, then, is not repeating a male voice, but rather a dead male voice—a voice that has been cast off. In being part of the detritus of our culture the voice is essentially abhorrent to identify with. The pinups, in the parlance of the times, are metaphors for abjection.

The abject: neither subject nor object. Nor is it an object (Kristeva)¹⁶. The term describes an indefiniteness that occurs when one can neither fully identify with nor completely disassociate oneself from something or someone. Julia Kristeva, the concept's main proponent, analyzed the abject in a multitude of texts, not least Dostoyevsky, Borges, Proust, Joyce, and Artaud. In that the abject was taken as a breakdown or challenge to the constitution of subjectivity or, taken in a wider sense, the hierarchies of society, it proved immensely compelling for critical theory and art theory. The abject also came, probably thanks to Kristeva's own writing, with an abundance of pre-fabricated imagery, most of it scatological in nature.

The term comes up repeatedly to haunt texts relating Bacher's work, even to this day. Glen Helfand writes about Bacher's 2008 show, *ODO*, in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*:



¹⁴ Kimmelman, Michael. "Art in Review: Lutz Bacher, Playboys." *New York Times* 24 Sept 1993. Print.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Hess. "Gallery of the Dolls." in *The Village Voice* 19 October, 1993.

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia, 1992.

The images have a stream of consciousness quality similar to the contents of an e-mailbox, where personal notes comingle with abject spam.¹⁷

If Helfand only depicts a brush with the abject, Bacher's *Huge Uterus* (1989), might be said to deal with it directly. The work partly consists of a long video depicting an operation on the artist's uterus. Despite the fact that the image of the uterus is often linked to the abject¹⁸, the connection in this case would not be so clear, were it not for the doctor's own commentary, which also inspired Bacher's title. This is best described in Bacher's own words, taken from what might seem like an ironic submission to Leonardo, the Journal of the International Society for the Arts and Sciences. Her description was excerpted from the ISAST online database F.A.S.T. (Fine Art Science and Technology):

Huge Uterus (1989) includes the 6-hour real-time video record of the recent operation on my uterus. During the video/operation, the surgeon writes exploratory notes such as that used here for the title: "Huge uterus ... with many tumors ...no cancer... the tissue is healthy except for tumors...remove tumors ... The uterus is an organ that heals well naturally".¹⁹

Huge Uterus, in its implicit acknowledgment of the dehumanizing effects of technology, plays the foil to the other selections from the ISAST database, which are far more optimistic in their assessment of what were then new possibilities.

At one time, the abject was fairly common theoretical ground; it's lost a lot of currency as art theory in the last years. Nevertheless, those associated with it (taken from the Tate Modern's press material), Cindy Sherman, Louise Bourgeois, Paul McCarthy, Gilbert and George, Robert Gober and Jake and Dinos Chapman, are far from being discarded themselves. Perhaps, analogously to Avgikos' remark about feminism and subjectivity, the abject has been universalized. But as much as the art theoretical applications of Kristeva's abject seem wound up with a particular time, when one looks backwards, one can still see a clear continuity with Krauss' text from 1975, as they both find their inspiration in the Lacanian narrative of psychosexual development—Kristeva also intertwines her definition of the abject with the definition of narcissism. The abject, she says, is like a collapse caused by narcissistic frustration.

Abjection is therefore a kind of *narcissistic crisis*: it is witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called "narcissism" with reproachful jealousy, heaven knows why.²⁰

Kristeva goes on to say, using a monetary metaphor:

It is precisely at the moment of narcissistic perturbation (all things considered, the permanent state of the speaking being, if he would only hear himself speak) that secondary repression, with its reserve of symbolic means, attempts to transfer to its own account, which has thus been overdrawn, the resources of primal repression.

What Kristeva is saying is that the feedback loop of narcissism, permanently recycling its own present, can eventually exhaust itself, burn itself out, so to speak, giving it no option but to reach deeper into the repressed, which is then allowed to become visible. In the next sentence, Kristeva continues: "The archaic economy is brought into full light of day, signified, verbalized."

Does this explain how the figures of shit and blood became currency? Maybe not, but it would be far more subtle and interesting to think of this narrative in terms of Krauss' ideas regarding media feedback. As a case in point, one might consider Bacher's *Closed Circuit*, shown recently as part of the group show of the same title at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The video consists of 10 months of footage from a surveillance camera mounted above Pat Hearn's desk, edited down to 40 minutes. According to Daniel Kunitz' review in the *New York Sun*, the video begins after Hearn was diagnosed with liver cancer²¹. Liz Kotz writes that Hearn died shortly after it ends²². Taken in the context of *Huge Uterus*, and *Do You Love Me?*, *Closed Circuit*'s title, its subject and its methodology speak volumes. In a text for the 2001 show *Rhetorik der 13 berwachung von Bentham bis Big Brother*, Kotz writes that the subject of the video is:

¹⁷ Glen Helfand, "Lutz Bacher: ODO.", in *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. 2 December, 2008. Web. 31. July, 2009.

¹⁸ e.g. David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988), a movie that features identical twin gynecologists.

¹⁹ Lutz Bacher, "Huge Uterus." in *Leonardo*, Vol. 24, N°.1, 1991, pp. 87-88.

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

²¹ Daniel Kunitz, "Time to Spare" in *The New York Sun*, 8 March 2007. Web.

²² *Ctrl[space]: Rhetorics of Surveillance*, Web. 31 July. 2009. <http://hosting.zkm.de/ctrlspace/d/works/03>.

The generic "white-cube" of the commercial art gallery; and, inescapably, as the metaphoric "prison," the structures of psychic and physical confinement which must be reproduced internally to become a coherent subject.²³



"You can take the girl out of the box", Kotz concludes, "but you cannot take the box out of the girl." To dispute her point, however, one could compare her description of the video with Holland Cotter's for the *New York Times* from 2007:

In the [video's] 40 minute version at the Met, Ms. Hearn, chatting with clients and friends and downing quick meals, is the star and the piece itself has become a document of art-world history since her death in 2000.²⁴

The press' reception of Bacher's *Closed Circuit* was, in 2007, pretty complete in its consensus. They all describe the work in more or less same terms. Any trace of polemic is absent. It seems as if these articles, fixated on the symbolic economy of Hearn's personality, are looking past the earlier self-criticality of Kotz' interpretation. The descriptions vaguely resemble what serious art writing is supposed to repress: the who's-whos of tabloid journalism.²⁵

Which brings us back to the present, and with it the dynamic at play in *Do you Love Me?* at the Kunstverein Munich. In explicitly pointing to narcissism, *Do You Love Me?* presents the viewer with at least two axes of interpretation, both of which have been approached previously with respect to Bacher's work. Is the show to be read in terms of the object? One can certainly make the case that the ready-mades on display here are part of a recuperation of banished objects. They can be seen as having been expelled from the present, but then pulled back by Bacher to fill a void in a self-reflective image oblivion that has simply used itself up. And the second? According to Krauss, Lacan's analytic project is:

One in which the patient disengages from the "statue" of his reflected self, and through a method of reflexiveness, rediscovers the real time of his own history. He exchanges the atemporality of repetition for the temporality of change.²⁶

These metaphorical questions of oblivion and recovery go a long way to account for the ambiguous and enigmatic qualities of Bacher's recent exhibition and even her long-standing body of work as a whole. One last image: A blurry black and white photograph of a bridled white horse. Its eyes reflect the gaze of the camera. A woman wearing a striped shirt rides low on its back. She clutches its mane. The photo is part of a series of advertisements for a group show from 1981 entitled *Photographs and Words*. Each artist involved submitted a one-page advertisement in *Artforum* for the exhibition, the only stipulation being that it contain a line with title and dates of the show. This is Bacher's contribution. The caption says it's called *The White Horse*, and it's from a work measuring 8 inches by 30 feet. The work is entitled *The Big Picture*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Holland Cotter, "Art In Review: Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan", in *New York Times*, 6 April 2007.

²⁵ The question remains, have we, in having become accustomed to claims of self-reflexivity regarding work that poses itself as art historically, media, or market "aware", conflated reflexive with reflective?

²⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 58.