

Foreign Exchanges: You who look, may not see.

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“May I help you?” “No thank you. Just looking”.

To look is to scan, taking in selectively without commitment, to consume, gliding over endless surfaces, to shop, desiring, inhaling without exhaling, to project without reflection. To see, is an intimate act, recognizing that the one outside of oneself is different and at the same time very like oneself. To witness this simultaneous sameness and difference of “you” requires a commitment from me of extra-ordinary proportions, a self inquiry into interior places within myself I cannot know (places where I am “you” to me), an inquiry without which there can be no recognition of the difference of you...only an infinite return to my projection disguised as you, a mirrored blindness. My blindness restricts the possibility of empathy and reciprocity, but loves to parade as human intimacy.

Strange, that I recognized an estrangement with myself at an early age.... in my body, in how my clothes felt next to my skin, in the way my feet often tangled with the ground, in my language and efforts at communication with you, in my signature... ultimately in my reflection. I would look at myself but who would look back? I became you to me, as foreign as I to you.... or Tu to Toi.

In this textual reflection, I look to see how I have been looking to see me in order to more deeply see you, with empathy, equanimity and reciprocity.

Exploring Self-Comfort, 1974

Single channel video, B/W, 12 minutes, original ½" reel to reel
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design



A video camera tapes the artist live as she watches her image framed by the monitor in front of her, and responds.



How does one see her own mirror reflection, there where she is not present?
Is the image present or absent...or somewhere in-between? And if my image is in-between,
where am I and who is this other reflected as me? Is this dystopia of relations similar to the
split I feel when I encounter your difference?

Egon Schiele always fascinated me as an artist passionately engaged with the visceral experience of otherness. In his drawing, *The Artist and His Model*, 1910, Schiele records a triangulation between himself as the artist outside the frame, drawing his reflection as a conscious and perplexed artist with his gaze upon his model. Meanwhile, the model is completely engaged in looking at her reflection in a full-length mirror. He can paint her. He can represent her but he cannot get between her and herself...he can never “be” her. If she, as the model, is to be a reflection of him, then is Schiele also saying that he can never “be” himself? This recognition is of a psycho-somatic split, one informed not only by cultural forces of gender, race, class, sexuality, language, ethnicity...etc., yet by deeper, more liminal, ambiguous and uncertain forces. Schiele recognizes the double otherness between he and his model and between he and himself. Meanwhile, we as viewers, are caught as complicit in the same dilemma...



3. Schiele, *The Artist and His Model*, 1910, black chalk.

...just by looking.

The Artist and Her Model

De Zaak, Netherlands, 40 minutes, 1986

Inter-active, site specific performance, 3 slide projectors, 60-35mm slides, curtain fabric, props, tableau arrangement after Northern Renaissance painting



In *The Artist and Her Model, I*, the artist, assumed the position of looking at myself looking at the model. As I explored her nude form reflected in the mirror I carried, she became both my reflection and independent of me. The viewers, sitting in the shadows of the dark room, were lured out of themselves and into the mesmeric tableau image (above). At the end, once the room lights were turned on to cancel the dream-like effect, they were revealed as caught looking at a naked woman. Where was the audience, in a gallery, or in a medical clinic?



In 1987 I developed "X-Rayed", an immersive theater of mutability. "X-Rayed" was a calling to audiences, and myself, to enter into a psycho-somatic engagement with interiority and social identity, an evocation to awaken and confront abandoned selves, predators, ancestry, sexuality...death...to see whom we can become.



X-Rayed, 1988, Whitney Museum of American Art (image, the model)
20 minute multi-image dissolve program, 300 35mm slides, 8 slide projectors, sound

A woman explores herself while being watched. Can she maintain her attention and not lose herself to the gaze/desire of another? The other in this case was me, another woman using the camera as a scope, to see of her model what she could not see of herself.



X-Rayed (Altered), 1990, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (image, the artist)

In the private process of creating *X-Rayed*, the model and I worked as a familiar TU, however, when the work became public at the Whitney Museum, we fell out of TU and into the formal TOI. On seeing herself as a cinema size publicly projected image, the model could not accept her image, could not enunciate why and accused me of betrayal. The mutual recognition and empathy we had with each other shifted into an unfamiliar territory of difference where we were now strangers. It was amazing how we so quickly became less than human to each other. I invited her to develop a public performance within *X-Rayed*, to expose her anger and confusion. Still, the model wanted to sue me, the artist. To avoid civil litigation and the potential condemnation by a patriarchal justice system of this work exploring “a woman exploring her herself”, I chose to never show this work again publicly with these images of this “model”.

I was truly baffled and saddened. What was it that I could not see? In 1989, I recreated the very same work formally, but substituted myself as model in her place. I knew that I would have to enter into the image of myself to recognize what I felt separated from. *X-Rayed* became *X-Rayed (Altered)*. With another woman photographer, we reproduced the images that I had taken of the model, now with me as the subject. I imitated the form of the model's body, image by image, and asked the photographer to wait until she could sense that I had dropped through the form more deeply into my own body before taking each picture. It was a slow and intimate process, moving from form to substance, outside to interiority, from TOI, back to TU.

Only on first viewing myself as reproduced in these images, did I begin to recognize the radical nature of seeing myself. My knee-jerk reaction was one of rejection. I cried for two days, not able to accept that me...naked and vulnerable. It took two weeks of deep self reflection to recognize and accept my internalized feelings as shame, guilt and self loathing ...feelings I was blindly projecting onto these pictures; two weeks to see the body in these images as innocent and independent from emotions which lay suppressed in my body/mind, like histories which had not passed, histories parading as present tense.

The aesthetic impulse abstracted from life, necessarily had to drop back into daily life for the intention to come full circle, a calling to audiences, and myself, to enter into a psycho-

somatic engagement with interiority and social identity, an evocation to awaken and confront abandoned selves, predators, ancestry, sexuality...and death, without which the split between me, myself and you cannot be transformed, and “I” cannot become...and “you” will never be.

Many years later I studied to become a conflict mediator and in 2007 created *Foreign Exchanges*, joining strategies of aesthetics and mediation to create models of engagement across personal and social conflict. In March 2008, I, with mediators Ken Cloke, and Joumana Silyan-Saba, developed *A Mirror Reflection of You*, a Public Dialogue forum in Los Angeles, to review the entrenched cultural conflict in the Middle East as represented by the film *To Die in Jerusalem* by Hilla Medalia, 2008.

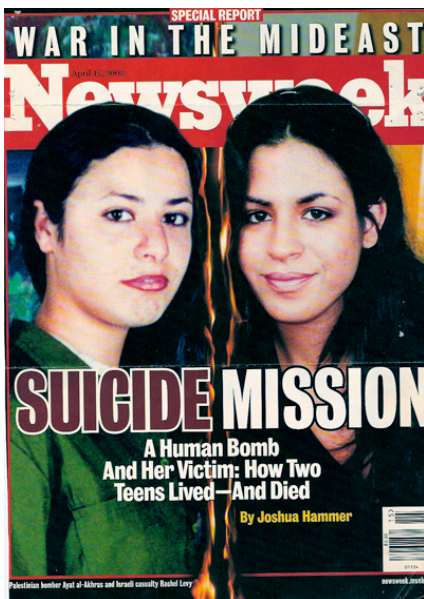
A Mirror Reflection of You, reframed this film, which was powerfully and very consciously constructed to communicate the possibility of re-conciliation between 2 mothers, one a Palestinian and one an Israeli Jew, each of whom had lost her daughter in 2002 to deadly cultural violence. *To Die...* documents the filmmaker’s desire to have the mothers meet and reach each other through their shared pathos of a mother’s loss. However, when they finally meet four years later, each fails to “see”, “feel”, “hear” the differences of the other, differences which are simultaneously psychological and political, interior and social, subtle and obvious. Ultimately, *To Die in Jerusalem* compellingly constructs the sentiment that re-conciliation is impossible.

What are the physical and social environments that underlie their “face to face” meeting, and how do these shape and determine both the nature of their meeting and the way in which we, the film viewers, meet them?

Because they and the filmmaker could not resolve their meeting physically, face to face in a environment of mutual safety, (the Israeli mother was afraid to travel to Gaza; the Palestinian mother could not cross the Green Line into Israel) the filmmaker chose to arrange a meeting via satellite television. Each woman is watched by a television camera as each woman views the other’s image represented on a television screen, the same image via the same news medium through which they daily encounter likenesses of each other represented as enemy.



The mothers cannot “see”, rather bounce off of the flat, glass screen image of the other and back onto themselves, blind to any interior or social interests driving the other’s and her own positions. Their dialogue spirals towards futility and impossibility, the very mythos, which continues to fuel the fires of conflict for so many Palestinians, Israeli Jews...and for all of us who are endlessly affected by and have also internalized this same myth of the impossibility of my seeing you.



Six years earlier, April 22, 2002, I was struck by the Newsweek magazine cover image of a Palestinian female youth and an Israeli Jewish female youth, both who were killed when the Palestinian youth detonated herself in a crowded Jerusalem market, and who looked uncannily like each other. I spent the next three years developing *Sightlines*, an exploration of their mirrored blindness.

In 2008, these two youth were revealed to me to be the very same daughters of the mothers portrayed in the film *To Die in Jerusalem*. The daughters looked so much like each other in scale and features, that the Israeli forensic scientist interviewed in the film *To Die...* explains that he could not decipher which body parts belonged to whom. It was as if one person, with double parts, had been exploded ...two women but one body, two faces but one image... a likeness so seamless that difference could not be deciphered...and yet it was this sameness which blinded them to their shared humanity.

For *Sightlines*, I commissioned forensic scientist Dr. Irma Rodriguez, from Chihuahua, Mexico, to sculpt the heads of the disappeared Semitic women. Irma worked with Mexican oil clay in a manner she had used for years to recreate many Mexican others eradicated by violence. No one culture or nation is privy to violence. Violence and conflict are human and as such, we are all implicated in each other's violence.



Sightlines, 2005, from a photographic series, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Each woman's gaze will forever seek to see and be seen by the other.

You, who are like the me I don't know, must be obliterated. The sentiment we know well, "I fear the you whom I do not know", mirrors a sentiment we all need to recognize, "I fear the me that I myself don't know". The honest difference between Tu and Toi is how familiar one is with oneself. The familiar I, is the familiar You.