

THE SURFACE OF A HYSTERICAL BODY AS AN INTERFACE

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In my paper at ISEA94, I suggested a parallel concept for the masculine “inter-face”: the feminine “inter-skin”. The concept of “inter-skin” was intended to challenge the current interface technology. I argued that our interfaces are only capable of producing a masculine subjectivity by providing access to information through symbolic operations that constitute a Cartesian visual space.

Could a concept like “inter-skin” provide any real space for femininity? When challenging the Cartesian representation of space as the metaphor of knowledge, do we unavoidably recourse to the space of the physiological body? As long as “inter-skin” is considered in the Cartesian framework, it cannot escape the mind-body duality. It will reproduce the surface of the body that is other to the Cartesian mind. If the face of the interface represents conscious mind, does the inter-skin cover the surface of the unconscious physiological body? If vision communicates directly with the mind, is the body under the skin a blind body? I believe we need to define a body that is not an object of Cartesian knowledge and then make an effort to imagine how that body might see.

In Cartesian tradition the mind and the body are two completely distinct entities. The body does not think, it carries out the commands of the thinking mind. The body does not speak either, the mind speaks through the body. However, the history of psychoanalysis knows several cases in which the body has directly participated in a discourse. One of these is the case of Elisabeth von R. who suffered from hysterical pain in her legs. During the analytic sessions “her painful legs began to ‘join in the conversation’ “. The patient was free from pain when the session started, but the pain was aroused when she was under the influence of her memories. Yet, since psychoanalysis was not immune to the Cartesian mind-body duality either, as the French psychoanalyst Monique David-Menard has pointed out, we can designate the discovery of the hysterical body as that which called the Cartesian duality in question.

Elisabeth von R. experienced an intolerable desire that conflicted her duties as a daughter and a sister, having to nurse her sick father and refrain from seducing her brother-in-law. This desire, this forbidden jouissance, reformed her experience of her body. With the pain, a body emerged that could not express itself in any other way. The pain was the physiological manifestward”.

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David-Menard calls this emerging body a pleasure body. It is the body into which the history of the subject's *jouissance* is inscribed. We don't have a direct relation to the real world, nor to our bodies. Our bodies only exist for us to the extent we have been able to symbolize them to ourselves. Our bodies are the work of language. Hysterical pain suggests, that something in this symbolization has failed. Something in the hysteric's experience of *jouissance* has become blocked and the blockage is played out in the body as a hysterical symptom.

The process of symbolization involves, above all, the symbolization of sexual difference. But, to symbolize sexual difference is to encounter the forbidden and the possibility of castration. In that encounter something in the *jouissance* becomes inevitably lost. The hysteric refuses to represent and acknowledge the lost *jouissance*. In this process genital organs become repressed and hysterogenic zones take over the role of the privileged zones of *jouissance*. But the hysteric's attempt to experience sexual *jouissance* through a hysterogenic zone is likely to fail when it tries to exist in the symbolic order.

The hysterical body avoids representing lost *jouissance* by constantly presentifying *jouissance* through hysterogenic zones. David-Menard argues that the hysterical symptom does not take place in the realm of representation (*Vorstellung*) but in the realm of presentification (*Darstellung*). I personally find her interpretation of the *Vorstellung* and the *Darstellung* extremely inspiring. For her, the *Vorstellung* is the realm of absence. The process of symbolization acknowledges the object's absence and represents this absence in language. *Darstellung* is the realm of heightened presence. This presence is sometimes achieved in dream images which may become so intense, that they seem to pass into the body as if in a hallucination. Representation-*Vorstellung* enables us to keep things at a distance by merely representing them. When things refuse to keep their distance and crash into the body we enter the realm of *Darstellung*. This happened to Elisabeth von R. when the words "I am not able to take a single step forward in my life" crashed into her body in a painful way.

If we think of representation in the phallic culture as a process in which the subject's desire becomes regulated in order to serve the productive and reproductive needs of the paternal family, we may ask whether there is any passageway available that could challenge it. Many feminist writers have discussed the concept of hysteria as such a passageway. Catherine Clement asks whether hysteria can function as a transformative force. For her hysteria presents itself as a spectacle, an imaginary stage on which pleasure and suffering circulate. In her refusal to maintain the integrity of the body assigned to her by the phallic culture, the hysteric returns to the imaginary experience of her body. For Luce Irigaray, woman lacks a symbolic system that would enable her to represent her sexual identity. The only space available for her is that of hysteria. We might think of the hysterical attack - an instance of *Darstellung* - as a violent refusal of the

phallic regulation of desire. Therefore, if we think of the current technologies as the instances of *Vorstellung*, we might be tempted to look for the transformative potential of the technology in the realm *Darstellung*. It is extremely tempting to think of the ways how vision might be constituted in the hysterical *Darstellung*. As several histories of vision have pointed out, the Cartesian visual space, even though it is the privileged mode of vision is not and has never been the only one. Martin Jay contrasts the monocular and unblinking Cartesian eye with the dynamic and binocular eye of the baroque vision. Baroque visual experience has a strong tactile quality. The visual space is constructed as the space of plenitude and visual pleasure, as a space full of things.

Undoubtedly it is the binocular technology of the stereographic images, that offers the most perfect apparatus for the realization of the baroque visual space. As Jonathan Crary has pointed out, the stereographic image never is but has to be constantly produced by the spectator through combining two different images into one view. Since the production of the stereographic image depends on the eye's capacity to change the angle of convergence of the optical axes, the most fulfilling stereographic view is provided with the images that with the fullness of things force the eyes to the maximum of change and movement. Rosalind Krauss describes the watching of a stereographic scene as an experience of insistent space. The ambient space of the spectator is removed by the viewing instrument and the vision is channeled into the stereographic space. The eyes that move across the stereographic space have to change the angle of convergence periodically. In a way the eyes enact the experience of space simulating and reproducing the movement of the body that might take place in the exploration of the real space. But, as Crary remarks, the reading of the stereographic image is an aggregate of changes and movements that produce a collage of suggestions for three-dimensionality but never a homogeneous visual field. The space in the stereographic image cannot be logically constructed, where the visual cues are missing; the space disintegrates into nothingness.

There are several features in stereographic images that suggest that they might exist in the realm of *Darstellung*. The view never is, but has to be constantly produced by the movement of the eyes. The stereographic space is an enactment of an experience of space. The heterogeneous formation of the stereographic space does not allow the metonymic and metaphoric construction of that space. It exhibits a hallucinatory quality that does not quite allow us to designate a correct distance between us and the view. The hysterical state of *Darstellung* and the stereographic view both challenge our sense of distance. The question of the correct distance is undoubtedly a central one in the future interface technology. When suggesting a possible link between David-Menard's concept of *Darstellung* and the baroque order of the stereographic space I am not imposing a new definition for the cor-

rectness of that distance. I am merely demonstrating some of the difficulties, that introducing the concept of the body brings to the discussion on interface. These difficulties, I believe, have already surfaced as the interface technology has become more and more attached to the body.

How to engage the body in that discourse? Since talking about hysteria is hardly the answer, I would like to conclude by showing a few slides that document a project in which I wanted to carry out the discourse on hysteria simultaneously in the images of the body represented and the body of the spectator.

The title of the show "Sovitus" is a Finnish word that points to several directions simultaneously. It can be translated as fitting a dress, as a reconciliation (in a biblical sense) or as an adaptation. There is a tendency in the translation displayed towards a narration in which the meanings of the word "sovitus" slide towards the materialization of these meanings, especially in the movement from one language to another. This materialization is carried out even further in the space of the body as the scenes of hysterical hallucinations appear. The spectator enters the scenes through the eyes of a little dressmaker woman. The scenes are presented as stereographic views that position the spectator to the place of the dressmaker and progress in the order of the translation. The series of images is disrupted by another installation, a perverse sewing machine that collapses two repetitive technologies, the mechanical sewing machine and the rotation of a zoetrope into a singular movement in which the voluntary mutilation of a tongue is carried out.

For me, this project was an effort to produce an instance of *Darstellung* and to hysterize the discourse on hysteria.

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