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A lot of Indian land was surrendered in treaties. From what I understand now, a lot of Indian people consider it not a surrender but a gift. The thing about colonies is that the whole idea of a colony presupposes a particular attitude towards land. It's an ownable commodity, not simply the support for human beings, for human life. Some people can take it away from other people, own it more and have more right to it than someone else. I guess what I keep thinking is that the "immigrant self" for you and me maybe is an image of our ambivalence. The place that we occupy is contradictory in so many ways.

Anna Gronau

In A Different Voice, 1986

The examination of the self and its images of ambivalence are often conceptualized in Western society as an intensely personal odyssey. Psychoanalysis is the favored paradigm of cross-examination. Through its discourse, the fiction of a unified consciousness is deconstructed and the "self" redefined through binary oppositions of identification and desire, of presence and absence, of a masculine ego and a feminine other. The cultural imperatives and ethnocentric assumptions that underlie these dichotomies, however, are more rarely interrogated. Gronau's tenuous call for the necessity of such an interrogation in the quotation above anticipates the motifs of self and "place" that are explored as sites of complexity and contradiction in her new film Mary, Mary. Mapping from the "talking cure" context for the "I", the compulsion to repeat the self into existence is central to the construction of an intense subjectivity in Gronau's new film. It is also the object of critical scrutiny. For in Mary, Mary: the elusive process of sifting memories to locate the "self" strains against the containment of discourse; autobiography is engaged to reveal the paradox of historical dislocation.

A: I got a phone call. The footage was found. I looked at it but I was disappointed.
M: It was exactly as I remembered it.
A: It must have been a screen memory. You have to decide if this is a film or a dream.

M: (screams) "If that there King was to wake," added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out-bang! just like a candle.'

'I shouldn't!' Alice exclaimed indignantly. 'Besides, if I'm only a sort of thing in his dream, what are you, I should like to know?'

(screams) 'Ditto' said Tweedledum. 'Ditto, Ditto', cried Tweedledee.

This encounter between Anna, as the director of the film, and Mary, as the central character of her script, occurs early in the film at a scene shot at the Toronto Zoo. During the verbal exchange, the camera pans slowly between Anna and Mary, separated by an underground aquarium window whose errie light bounces shadows off their faces. When Mary screams the "dittos" of a Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the camera returns to the place from which Anna was speaking. She has vanished, leaving Mary standing alone, a large polar bear floats behind her, suspended in the water and entrapped behind the glass of the underwater tank. At this moment, Mary is transformed from a character to a cipher of the filmmaker's imagination; a mirror of her physical absence. She becomes the object of a subjective transference, a cinematic double occupying a site of absurd symmetry where remembrances of the past intertwine with images on the screen, where dreams of the living and the dead become the disjunction between "place" and "self."

I dreamt I was at Bay House to make the film. It was very early morning and I was walking through the house with my camera.

I went down the stairs, and I was struck by the stillness and the serenity. Everything in the house seemed especially "in place," as though it was all there just for me.

As an object of transference, the place from which Mary speaks and dreams is an apartment in Toronto; a location of retreat where the isolated process of writing the film's script is recreated. As a cipher of the filmmaker's imagination, the place of which Mary speaks and dreams is an old house on a bay on Lake Ontario in Prince Edward County; a repository of childhood fantasy and family history. The Bay House, with its garden of "green grass buzzing and poplar twi kling" becomes the "screen memory" of the film; a recurring motif where the past and present will finally meet. In the first scene of the film, the camera traces a path towards the front door of the old house, looming on the horizon—a black and white mirage, ominous and silent, emptied of people and of context.

The second image of the Bay House is conjured like a ghost from the archival footage of which Mary and Anna have spoken. Two women, dressed in Victorian white dresses, emerge from the door and walk in the garden. The folds of their dresses swirling in the wind, their grainy, dreamy movements are caught in the memory that super-8 film evokes. These women clearly belong to this place; their bodies move with ease and confidence.

Never dabble in autobiography. Unless you want a perfect world that perfectly excludes you.

Mary's movements are less sure, less
Philip Monk

Struggles with the Image

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In the preface to Struggles with the Image, Monk suggests that his work as a curator, far from displacing the critical program put in place by writing, represents a practical demonstration of the local history for which that writing has argued. Moreover, as the organization of these essays indicates, this move toward the practical, the demonstrable, would be consonant with a trajectory already at work in the writing itself (from general speculation to local representation). It would be interesting to ask how the terms of this history have altered in the passage from critique to curator, from private voice to public representative. The task I undertake here is however, a more circumscribed one. Restricting myself to the essays, I wish merely to suggest that their progress is in some simple sense a movement from general to particular, theory to practice. Far from representing the application of a politics elaborated in the early works, the appeal to the 'local' that characterizes Monk's later essays comes to butts precisely different theory or model of community. The final effect of this revision is, I would suggest, a saturating over of that gap, that moment of violence or difference, that the early writing represents as constitutive of any community project.

Monk's analysis of a violence endemic to the social relation is of course indebted to a reading of Hegel that has dominated French thinking since the lectures of Alexander Kojève. What Kojève emphasized was the struggle for recognition that grounds the social relation, a struggle that is, for Hegel, resolved in the developmental history of The Phenomenology. (The normativizing tendencies of the Hegelian system would reduce 'violence' to a mere moment in a progress whose telos would be a transparency of subject to subject). One way of getting at the point of the French revision of Hegel is through the work of René Girard, a thinker who stands as the inspiration for the second of Monk's essays. For Girard, there can be no definitive overcoming of the violent indifferenciation that founds the community relation because such an achievement will always require recourse to a representation that is itself violent. The model for this violence would be the pharmakos or scapegoat figure who facilitates in her or his exclusion, the differentiation and exchange of identities necessary to the constitution of any community.

This violence of the image, precisely that violence entailed in the becoming image of the other, is given a specifically sexual inflection in the third of Monk's essays, 'Breath of Promise'. But this sexual inflection is perhaps less significant than the historical one that accompanies it: for what distinguishes the work in question here (Picasso's Les Demoiselles), what marks it as exemplary modernity, is the way it refuses any totalizing indentification of self and other, image and viewer, the way, in other words, that it recognizes violence at the very origin of the social.

The passage of one image to the other, from The Entombment to The Demoiselles, is a narrative transformation: from the presence of promise to its absence. On my side, the narrative is the representation of fascination—putting its drives in motion. To represent the 'breach' between the two images—the breach and the space between—is to register the gap between me and them. Representation leaves an absence in its origin.

But, and herein lies the paradox to which Monk's work incessantly returns, to 'represent this breach' is already to have forgotten it; difference itself will not be identified. It is for this reason that there can be no simple passage from The Entombment to Les Demoiselles, only an endless oscillation between a death that is once lost and exhalation and the compensations of narrative:

The breach of promise is a breaking of the symbolic: the breach stands me in the gap between the two images. In his second chapter, Monk extends the terms of the analysis described above.

Dot Tuer