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Picnic in Paradise

Blootstelling van een onschuldig plekje[1]

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Hanne van Beek

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Abstract

The picnic blanket, as a textile object, is infused with meaning by its colonial history and its inherent use. Its purpose goes beyond providing a soft and dry surface to sit on. By putting down your picnic blanket you can temporarily stake your claim on that piece of land. We might consider the picnic blanket as a private haven in a public space.
The cross-over between private and public space is a dynamic environment that is established by continually interacting and adapting. By collaborating with others in a space everyone can gain some ownership of that space.
Using the picnic blanket as vehicle for investigation, I explore the boundaries of private and public space. Through linking the history of picnicking with the Sublime and particularly the Female Sublime, I establish its significance and the fact that it provides a gendered space.
With the help of Marcuse's ideas on the 'natural state' I define the private sphere as a state of mind. I then look at that notion in relation to public space. The appropriation of public pace as described by De Certeau and the appropriation of mind space as described by Foucault set up a dynamic field by which private space is surrounded. The social navigation of our environment is the constant consideration of willingness to collaborate.
It is something we are all part of, some readily, some trying to resist. Returning to Marcuse, I examine ways in which the private mind space can be preserved. It is the notion of innocence, a state of mind from before 'the fall', that Marcuse and others indicate as providing a barrier against surplus repression of societal judgement. The question is how to maintain this innocence. My personal investigation of innocence, which is presented in this exegesis through narrative, runs parallel to my practice.

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Lastly I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of Charles, our pet rabbit, who inspired my journey but died during the start of it.

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Preface

The earliest memories of picnics for me are associated with death, but a peaceful death. In the Netherlands space is so precious that cemeteries are open to the public as parks, as long as graves are respected. We lived across from a cemetery in an apartment building. It was part of a complex that had shot up just after the Second World War. It was cheaply built with very poor sound insulation. Everybody could hear fights going on two houses down. For children there was a paved area provided to play. It had a shallow sand pit, mainly used by local dogs and cats, and a metal climbing structure. Although there was a strip of grass along the sidewalk, it was bordered with prickly shrubs to discourage anyone going on there. Unfortunately this did not deter dogs, only dog owners.

The cemetery was like an oasis. No dogs allowed. There were even very few people; it might be that they thought it spooky, or that not everybody knew about the bylaw allowing recreation in cemeteries. The grounds were quite large, with only one entrance several blocks away. To gain access I had to go through a different part of town[i]. Not wanting to face confrontation with youth gangs, I made my own entrance through a hole in the fence. It felt like being in another world, green grass, flowers everywhere and the sound of bird song.

In '*My Mother's Wedding Dress: The Life and Afterlife of Clothes.'* Justine Picardie describes how memories are infused in clothing. The clothes become carriers of meaning, memories and associations woven into the cloth, living on beyond the wearer or the wearer's memories. She looks at that quite literally where memories become part of the fabric itself. In the same way my early memories of escape are interwoven with the cloth we used for picnics at the cemetery. Over the years this quality has been transferred, for me, onto all picnic blankets[ii].

Introduction

I regard the picnic blanket as an object that defines both private and public space. Therefore it is important to examine elements of both types of situations. To observe the private space of others openly would be an instant introduction of the outside into the private. To observe someone's private space covertly would be, in the least, unethical. Strategies of empirical research applied to recollection and subjective observation seem to offer a solution. I need to rely on observation, and in particular, introspection and I am primarily interested in examining my own experiences. However introspection offers some challenges, because it demands a dissociation from any outside thought. It is like catching yourself unawares. As soon as you catch yourself, you are no longer unaware. This is a subjective observation, but it is not self-indulgent. It is subjective in that it is untestable, taking place entirely in my own mind. However it will have some objective quality due to the use of suspended judgement. I will not be looking to confirm any ideas but open-mindedly investigate. After 25 years of regular meditation I have experience in separating and controlling my thoughts. Rather than indulging in, and being carried away by thoughts, I am able to distance myself from them and follow them to their origin. In my theoretical framework, I also deliberately intersperse the use of narrative, whereby my own experiences function as illustrations.

The first part of this exegesis explores the significance of the picnic blanket and its link to ideas of the female sublime. The notion of the picnic blanket as a textile object infused with meaning, not only in the way Picardie describes, as generated by my own memory, but also by its colonial history and its inherent use. The picnic blanket might be considered an attribute to trivial activity, leisurely eating out of doors. Seen from a point of view of New Zealand and Australian history, this playful pastime becomes a way in which colonists could conquer the landscape and a middle class attempts to establish hegemony. However, I will set out to show that

it is the act of picnicking and the relation of the blanket with the landscape, that places it within the realm of the Sublime and particularly that of the Female Sublime.

I then examine the way in which the picnic blanket functions as a mediator between private and public space. I use Herbert Marcuse's idea of the 'natural state' and the notion of innocence to establish an understanding of private space. This notion of private space is not just a physical space but also a mind space or even a mental state. It is a private space that is resistant to social pressures. Michel de Certeau's analysis of social structures gives a physical form to these pressures. Where in his first book on everyday life De Certeau focuses on strategies and tactics associated with institutions and authorities, in his second book '*The Practice of Everyday Life Volume 2'* his work becomes even more applicable, for me, when he looks at the neighbourhood. He takes a close look at the micro organisation that provides structure and rules to its communal space. This gives us insight into the social control that influences individual behaviour at a personal level. De Certeau lays open the collaboration that is at the bottom of the appropriation of public space. In my opinion it is not only a case appropriation of public space but also the reverse, the public space intruding on the private sphere. It is a bilateral relationship that I examine via the model of the panopticon, as described by Michel Foucault. In particular Foucault's ideas about 'normalising judgement' demonstrate the invasiveness of observation and authority. By addressing the figure of the Flâneur I place Foucault's ideas back into everyday life whereby the observer of Foucault's panopticon receives his or her authority from the law of common moral.

Lastly I return to the notion of innocence in the writing of Frederik van Eeden. Where Marcuse's innocence is liberating, through the aide of fantasy, van Eeden's innocence has succumbed to the pressures of social control.

In the appendix are included some journal notes on my work. These are not a discussion of my work, but mainly recordings of my experiences and thoughts. Although images of my work are part of this exegesis, I will

not give direct descriptions of the work. For the past two years my practice has been focused on my own experience. To describe my intentions would require a degree of focus on the ‘outside world’ or an awareness of other people. In going outside my self and my own experience I would be letting the outside come in. That in turn would penetrate and corrupt the sincerity with which I have been working. The observers of my work would go through a similar process, where their experience of the work would, at least, be influenced by my discussion of the work. The theoretical framework presented in this exegesis and the themes it offers (search for the natural state, femininity and the active exchange between private and public) should provide an entry into my work, even without an explicit invitation.

The picnic blanket and its place

In his article '*Picnicking, Surf-bathing and Middle-Class Morality In the Beach in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney.'* Cameron White examines the origins of current male behaviour based on historic reports of picnics from the 19th century onwards. These picnics take place in the relative sophisticated environment of Australian suburbs. In the mid nineteenth centuries there were parks formed especially for picnics, to provide shelter and seclusion while at the same time offer unhindered views of the landscape. White describes a fetishised landscape surrounded by a 'civilized' environment; he goes as far as to label the picnic a 'colonial fantasy'.

In her masters thesis '*Picnics in New Zealand during the late 19th and early 20th centuries: An interpretive study.'* Isabella Mitchell (1995, p.54) describes the process of domesticating the bush by laying out a cloth and formally arranging platters and food to be consumed there. She considers this taming of the wilderness an act of colonization, particularly if it is paired with the collection or destruction of plants. This is not fantasy, but a physical action that Mitchell describes as an outing in the New Zealand bush, a genuine wilderness and frontier. Where Mitchell's New Zealand picnickers are fully in the process of 'civilising', they go about manipulating their environment, making it their own, the picnickers at the Sydney parks have a much more passive role in relation to the landscape and are described by White (2006) as 'consuming' the view:

> Picnics usually consisted of a family or groups of friends or colleagues who packed their lunch, together with a rug or a blanket, and made their way out of the city into the 'wild' (a park or a beach)…. The fundamental logic of the picnic was the blanket, which established a controlled, safe, clean and above all, domestic space for the serving and consumption of pre-prepared food. The authority and power symbolised by the blanket transformed the space beyond into a fantasised panoramic spectacle to be consumed over lunch. (p.120)

In the case of the New Zealand picnickers, nature gets overpowered in an act of colonialism. In the case of the Australian picnickers nature gets devoured visually. In both cases it is an encounter with the Other. Mitchell

compares the picnic, as an act of leisure, with the Classical Greek attitude to leisure, which was more reflective and aimed at contemplating the nature of truth and, as such, defined as the goal of life. This introduces a more serious and meditative nature to picnicking. This notion of contemplation combined with a setting within an awesome environment transcends the picnic into something greater.

This relationship with nature, where the picnic blanket functions as a boundary with the Other, sets up the parameters for the Sublime.

In '*Analytic of the Sublime'* Immanuel Kant describes the 'dynamically sublime'[iii] as an aesthetic judgement when "we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us." (p.270) Simultaneously acknowledging power while not being overpowered by it, evokes a sense of elevation. Although the Sydney parks provide safety there is an awareness of the awesomeness of nature that is the appeal of the picnic. A struggle with an overwhelming and genuinely threatening landscape, which was the basis for Kant's Sublime, would not be a pleasant accompaniment for lunch. However the gentler relationship with the environment, as used for theorizing the Female Sublime, is very fitting. It is important to distinguish the Female Sublime from the beautiful. According to Kant the sublime is, like the beautiful, a judgement of reflection, and therefore a subjective process. There are no factual criteria to assess an object's or landscape's sublimity. It is the emotional and mental turmoil one goes through and the sense of elation one gets when coming out of it that sets it apart from the beautiful. It is not the landscape but our own perception of the landscape that makes it sublime. Kant starts his analysis of the dynamically sublime with observations of nature[iv], where we comprehend the fearfulness but, provided we are safe, reason gives us the ability to resist. What makes us judge something as sublime is not so much the object itself, as the mental adjustment we need to engage in when estimating that object. According to Kant it is the mediation between imagination and reason that gives us a sense of elevation we feel when coping with something we realise we couldn't possibly cope with.

> Hence sublimity is contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us.

(p.272)

Therefore true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person. By talking about 'nature within us', Kant establishes the importance of imagination in relation to the sublime. Unlike Edmund Burke who is searching for universal guidelines, Kant introduces a personal sublime that plays in the mind, not just with reason but also imagination.

However, he sets this sublime apart from the beautiful in that it is 'also found in a formless object', represented by an 'unboundedness'. Beauty may seem predetermined for our judgement whereas the sublime refers to an uncertain balance of the faculties of reason and imagination. Edmund Burke (in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful)* makes the comparison one of scale, where the beautiful is of human scale and the sublime out of scale and threatening.

For both Kant and Burke the sublime needs to include an element of fearfulness, which seems ill suited to the conviviality of a picnic. However, in the Feminine Sublime, as mainly described in literary terms of the Romantic Sublime, the focus shifts from overcoming fear to the encounter with the Other.

In *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe differentiates between the beautiful and the sublime by the element of frivolity, something that the seriousness of the sublime could not allow. (p. IX) Without a doubt the picnic has an element of frivolity, however it is the picnic blanket - the beautifully set out domestic sphere out of doors - that is frivolous. The encountered landscape is not. Cameron White mentions 'consuming the panoramic spectacle', however this is a consuming that leaves the Other in tact, to be encountered again on an other occasion. Where Kant and Burke[v] place the source of the Sublime in the repression of terror, the Female Sublime changes this vertical power structure to a more horizontal relationship. Despite an influx of power, transport and ecstasy there is no repression. Patricia Yeager describes it in '*Towards a Female Sublime.'* as "the other is preserved in its otherness." (p.195) A sense of empowerment is achieved without overpowering, without a struggle for possession. Although Cameron White talks of the 'colonial fantasy', his picnic, unlike what Isabella Mitchell describes, is not an act of colonising. It is not an appropriation of the

landscape but acknowledgment of a significant Other from the safety of the domestic realm of the picnic blanket. Key to understanding the relation of the picnic blanket with the Sublime is the encounter with the Other and that the Other, the landscape, should be an awesome force. It is the encounter with the Other that generates the transcendence.

Barbara Claire Freeman argues that traditional theorizations of the sublime depend upon unexamined assumptions about femininity and sexual difference, and that the sublime could not exist without misogynistic constructions of "the feminine." Taking this as her starting point, Freeman suggests that the "other sublime" that comes into view from this new perspective offers a crucial way to approach representations of excess. Freeman considers Longinus[vi], Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Weiskel and Neil Hertz in the context of a wide range of women's fiction, including novels by Kate Chopin, Mary Shelley, Edith Wharton and Toni Morrison. Freeman looks at historic aspects of the rise of the novel and the concept of the sublime in European culture of the 18th century and she links that to the articulation of sublime experience with questions of agency and passion in contemporary women's fiction. According to Freeman, arguments that have seemed merely to explain the sublime have also functioned to evaluate, domesticate, and ultimately exclude an otherness that is almost always gendered as feminine. Freeman is of the view that the sublime is found in the unboundedness of emotion rather than reason. However this indulging in feeling comes at a risk, described by both Thomas Weiskel[vii] and Patricia Yeager[viii], as being perceived as overly sentimental and through that getting lost in cynicism. Regarding a picnic as a ritual symbolising this transcendental encounter, is a good example of this risk. Where in the late 19th and early 20th century it was common to engage sentimentally and emotionally with a landscape, we now perceive these responses as affectations and exaggerated. That does not mean that the landscape now ceases to be sublime, it merely means we no longer articulate the processes that take place in our minds.

Isabella Mitchell's taming of the New Zealand bush is a physical act, not a mental one and as such does not have the emotional and mental turmoil that induces transcendence. It is manipulating and domesticating the

environment, it is not an internal process but external one, aimed at claiming the physical world.

Cameron White (2004*)* states:

> The picnic blanket functioned as a complex sign. At the same time that it represented the inviolacy of domestic sphere it was also invisible/transparent. Thus it celebrated a man's authority over the domestic space in a very public way. It rendered the usually very private relationship between a man and his family visible for all to see.

White writes specifically from a male perspective, indicating a man's mastery over the domestic sphere when on display in public. Since his research centers around masculinity, it follows there might be some bias. I have some doubt whether it is man's authority over the domestic that is on display. Mitchell states that women saw to the preparation of food, the blanket and the lay out of it all, while the men busied them selves with transport, nature and games. Women were in charge of all things domestic, while the men engaged with the outside elements. This establishes a relationship between the man and the domestic sphere where he becomes a visitor. Both the material objects and the social interaction within the confinements of the picnic blanket are a woman's domain, showing woman's authority over the domestic sphere. It is the patriarchal structure within society that then allows man to claim authority over woman and anything that she controls. But no matter who claims it, a picnic blanket establishes the parameters of a space that is no longer public.

'*Cutting of the Tree'* at the MFA studio's at Massey University Wellington 17th May 2008

A Towel in Titahi Bay

Every year the Dutch coastline is occupied by a million German tourists[ix]. On arrival many of them start by digging a shallow ditch that will provide some shelter from wind for their family. However this pit serves another purpose as well: the foreign tourists stake their claim on Dutch land by digging pits. No one else is allowed in their hollow or even on the rim. Even when returning the next day, if the outline of their pit is still visible they claim that as their own and send anyone who might have gotten there before them away. Rather than digging at the beach, the Dutch go through this process by putting down their towel. That is the marker of personal space. For a family unit there would be some space between the individual towels, generally half the width of that of the towel. This also indicates the space that is surrounding the family unit; this should at least be twice the width of the largest towel. Any intrusion on this would be met with indignation. Of course this is only a guideline for what I once thought of as common courtesy behaviour. De Certeau (1998, p.26) calls this a linguistic or behavioural material of propriety, a 'semi learned grammar'[x] of the appearance of language and the body in the public space of recognition. This is a way of behaving that is not directly taught but is inherited through common sense, sayings and cultural practice.

One of my first outings as an immigrant to New Zealand was a day at the beach in Titahi Bay. It was November, I was wearing my bathing suit and put down my towel on the beach. Being on the comparable latitude with countries around the Mediterranean Sea, I prepared for a nice play day in and out of the water. After returning from a swim that was rather more refreshing then I anticipated, I looked forward to lying down on my towel and heating up in the sun. However, I found my towel to be surrounded by four-wheel drive vehicles parked on the beach. The inequality of the tools, my towel and their cars, made my temporary claim on the land invalid. Had I been sitting or lying on my towel the situation might have been different, but just by itself, my towel had no power.

The beach at Scheveningen, the Netherlands, 2006

Despite historical meaning and individual memories ingrained in a picnic blanket, its agency is apparent only during occupation, like my experience of the towel in Titahi Bay. If there is nothing, or no one, on the picnic blanket it remains a private object. But in 'being left behind' it also becomes an object of public concern.
In this way the picnic blanket functions as mediator between private and public space. Its purpose goes beyond providing a soft and dry surface to sit on. Anything that is on it is not for public use. We might consider the picnic blanket as a private haven, if not heaven in a public space.

The cross-over between private and public space is an inconstant environment that is established by continually interacting and adapting. By collaborating with others in a space everyone can gain some ownership of that space. Appropriating space by adaptation is a slow process as described by De Certeau: " The neighbourhood is a dynamic notion requiring a progressive apprenticeship that grows with the repetition of the dweller's body's engagement in public space until it exercises a sort of appropriation of this space." (p.11) He indicates a mutual adjustment, due to consistent exposure. By physically being in a space a mutual acceptance is achieved that results in an element of ownership of the common space. It is something we are all part of, some willingly, some trying to resist. An urge for resistance is generated by a protectiveness of individuality and privacy. Therefore it is important to establish the notion of the private sphere before we can go into the mediation between private and public.

'On the hills above Belmont', a twelve hour performance from dawn to dusk. 24th May 2008

How private is private space?

What is the self like when uninfluenced by the other, the outside, the public?

I was sitting on our deck. It was a beautiful, sunny day. I was watching my eldest son and our pet rabbit, who had been playing on the grass below, now they were having a rest. They were both lying down with their noses touching each other. Charles, our rabbit, was fully relaxed, his shoulders and head where directed to my son, his hind legs where to the side. A position from which he could not quickly rise if there would be an alarm. On this warm day, while lying in the grass, nothing could alarm him. I realised that, in Charles, I had found 'the natural state' that may not be mine, but is something that I would like to be mine.

Over a period of several months I observed and worked with Charles, naturally feeding, nibbling hopping, moving through a happy 'Cadbury land' were everything is food and space of play. This included Charles at 'work'. In the mornings, after he had nibbled for breakfast in his erratic and absent minded sort of way, he would devote himself to the serious task of maintaining his tracks. This entailed cutting down anything that had sprouted up within the track and physically moving any objects that might have fallen there. It was interesting to see how he never lost his temper, got impatient or gave up. There are several explanations for this. One is that he did not understand the endlessness of this task. Another, which I prefer, is that he had a philosophical attitude towards his work and to him it did not matter that it would never be finished, what mattered was the interaction with and appropriation of the environment. At a stage where I had documented his behaviour in writing but not yet in any other media, our rabbit died of an epileptic fit. After this I had to reflect on what this meant. Charles had symbolised more than innocence, a total unawareness of anything 'bad' or hostile. On our walks, when I was trying to train him, he would often hop ahead, as far as the lead would allow, to meet cats or dogs for what he thought would be a friendly encounter. I would catch up to him, thinking I needed to rescue him from their clutches, only to find that, in some cases, his open demeanor had scared off much larger predators. He lived in a world of co-habitation of prey and predators, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

The yearning for a return to the 'natural state', described by Herbert Marcuse as the Nirvana principle, is closely linked to ideas of private and public, where the private is a state of freedom. According to Marcuse, death would provide a shortcut to this freedom, "the return to the quiescence of the inorganic world" (*Eros and Civilisation* p.25). The Nirvana principle is the convergence of pleasure and death. Marcuse separates these two in Eros and Thanatos. The latter is an impulse to remove disruptive stimuli by returning to 'an inorganic state' meaning death. However Eros holds this death impulse in check. Simply put, thanatos is the death instinct and Eros the life instinct. However Marcuse is citing Sigmund Freud (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) when he describes Eros as the drive "to combine organic substances into even larger unities".

In his exposition and critique of Marcuse's Theory of Liberative Aesthetics '*The Flight into Inwardness*', Timothy Lukes puts Marcuse strongly into Freud's camp. In his view the strength of Eros has its origin in the restriction by the father of the son's sexual drive towards the mother. Within Marcuse's work there is some indication that he might have looked at this not as literally as Freud did.

In a lecture given at Stanford University on 7 March 1974, published as "Marxism and Feminism" (1974), Marcuse actively embraced feminism. He used feminism as a model to combat 'perverted liberalism' and achieve genuine freedom. His argument was that, due to social influences, women have an enormous life instinct. Therefore, within them, Eros is a much stronger force then Thanatos. With the balance swinging towards Eros societal restraints are easier overcome. Although he made this observation with regard to women, he clearly states that this is a model that can be adopted by male and female alike to combat what he calls 'surplus repression'. Marcuse agrees with Freud that some degree of repression is necessary for the survival of civilization[xi], however in his view the level of repression has gone too far and results in a surplus. To rid ourselves of this surplus we need to struggle against so called 'objective reason' and consider anew what is good and what is evil. To be able to do this the 'original sin' needs to be committed again. Here Marcuse is referring to Heinrich von Kleist '*Ueber das Marriottenteater'.* Von Kleist states that we need to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge to go back to a state of innocence. Marcuse suggests we test this on "the most disorderly

of all instincts namely, sexuality" (p.199). To maintain this innocence during tests of life, we need fantasy. Fantasy is part of the subconscious and as such is not susceptible to surplus repression of any other repression. From this perspective, fantasy becomes revolution: a refusal to accept repression. Marcuse sees it as the task of art to both encompass and facilitate fantasy and through that enable the struggle for freedom.

According to Theresa Mackey (2001)[xii] Marcuse's critique on Freud's psychoanalysis presents psychologists with an impasse: "whether to help patients realize their individual selves, thereby condemning them to battle with society, or to help patients conform to the demands of society, thereby sacrificing their individuality." Although she is referring to patients, this is something that could be applied more generally. In the continuous interplay of society and the individual one need to consider the context in which it takes place. This entails both physical space and social or cultural space. In '*The Practice of Everyday Life. Volume 2: Living and Cooking.'* Michel de Certeau describes this cross-over between private and public space as a dynamic environment that is established by continually interacting and adapting. Physical presence in a space facilitates this integration. In his view this is a way for people to appropriate space, however I think this process does not take place in a single direction. The continued exposure to public space does not only make one appropriate the space but the space also invade ones self. What occurs is an exchange. The willingness to collaborate is the willingness to share one self with others.

Within social interaction there is an inherent pressure to collaborate, to take on the concerns of others as if they are your own. Slowly ones own concerns and ideas give way to those from the collective. This is partly generated by what I would like to call the democratic element: The consensus on where the 'collaboration' is going, is determined by many voices. This entails that one's own voice will just be one of many, counting for very little. The rules on how to behave are determined by the law of averages. In this I share Marcuse's distrust of democracy. He critiques the notion that democracy offers liberty, and states that, rather than providing freedom it makes us bow to the opinion of many.

Performance at de Dam, in Amsterdam. 16th April 2008[xiii]

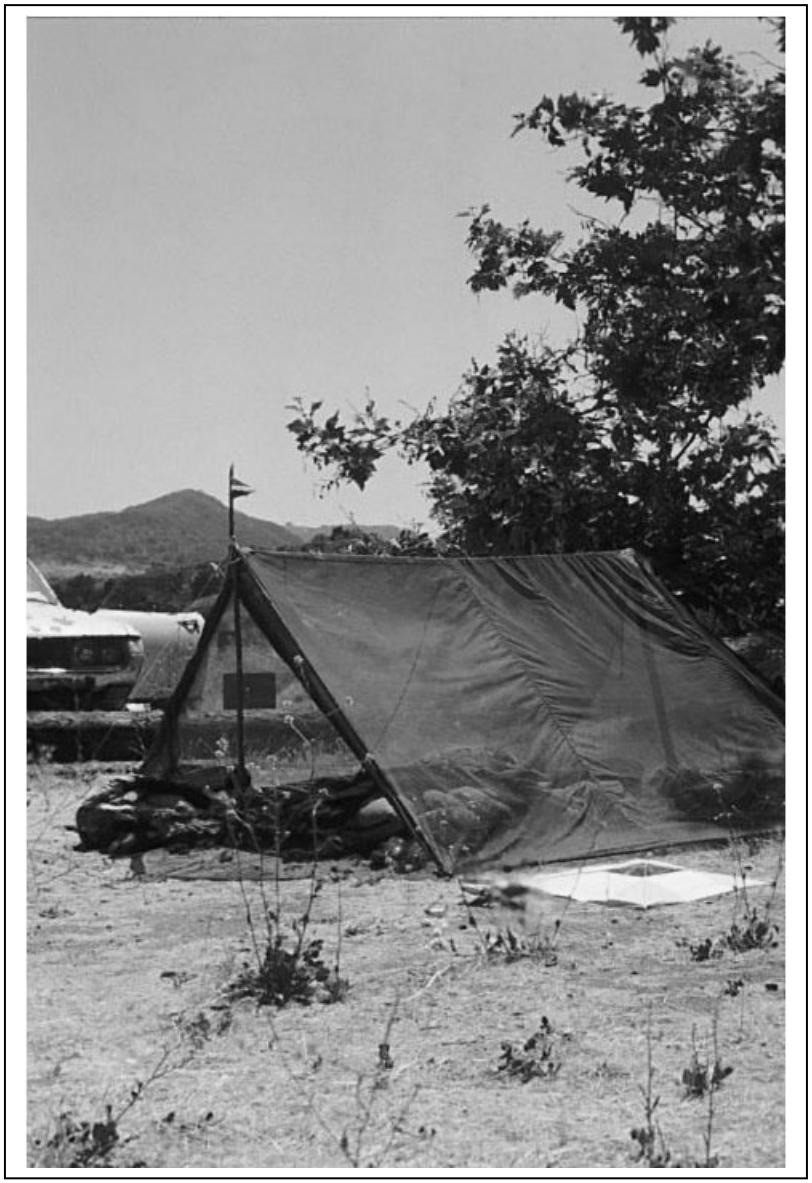
A Transparent tent

In the summer of 1991 I traveled with my partner and long time collaborator Matthijs Siljee through North America. He had been working in New York, but by only staying there, in my opinion he was missing out on what I called the real United States. We decided to take a road trip to the West Coast. We were planning to bivouac in National Parks along the way. Arriving at Land Between the Lakes (situated between Kentucky and Kansas) we received an introduction to 'the fogger'. Before people would put their tent up or lay down their picnic blanket they would turn around in the spot, while releasing insecticide from an aerosol can. This provided a dome of protection against insects. During the day while this was going on, Matthijs and I were thinking 'How quaintly North American'. However in the evening when we were getting ready to snuggle into our sleeping bags, we started to feel differently. The lakes in Land Between the Lakes provided ample breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and having been banned from everywhere else, all of them seemed to want to pay a visit to us. No amount of citronella could keep them away. As we lay in our sleeping bags, looking up at the sky, our view of the stars was obscured by a cloud of mosquitoes. Not even the sound of a breeze blowing through the trees could be heard over the piercing noise of vibrating insect wings. We closed our sleeping bags as closely around our necks and heads as possible. Our faces were still uncovered and we could feel the mosquitoes land there and bite. We used meditation to try to relax so we could fall as sleep. Even after a tense and miserable night we were not ready to overcome our environmental concerns and willingness to encounter nature and succumb to the charms of a 'fogger'. Instead we went to an army surplus store and bought a tent made from mosquito netting. We were enjoying a direct experience of nature, we could see the stars and feel the drizzle and still feel safe and secure in our little tent.

One morning in Texas we woke to the sound of wild turkeys and saw the outline of a tarantula right above our heads. The sun was up and shone from behind the spider, that is why we could not see whether is was on the inside or the outside. Knowing very little about spiders we wanted to avoid a possible bite from this animal.

Matthijs gave it an enormous whack with his shoe. Hard enough to kill it, we hoped, if it were on the inside. Luckily it was on the outside, it flew off and we heard it land several meters off. Once again our little tent had protected us, it secured me in the feeling that inside the tent was our own private space and nothing could get to us. Through our travels we spent many a night in genuine wilderness, however there were also occasions where we shared our experience of nature with other people.

Looking back, nearly 20 years on, I wonder how it did protect us. I now realise this was illusionary private space. From memory we also got changed in our see-through-tent. My notes don't mention it. Apparently I felt so secure that this was a private space that I didn't experience the anxiety of exposure in public, in any case not to the degree where I found it noteworthy. The barrier that was very effective against insects, was nothing like the usual barrier against the intrusion of people. It might well have been the little Dutch flag that excused us from having to behave within the social code (p.15 de Certeau) The fact that we were all camping might helped as well, making our stay transitory and thus the social interaction less organised by everyday propriety (p.29 de Certeau). However this looser environment could equally allow a more aggressive intrusion than in a more established social organisation. That means there is another element that came into play. It is the power of innocence that I had seen at work in Charles's encounter with predators. Our total unawareness of the lack of protection of our privacy made it private. Looking at the picture of our 'private haven', it almost seems to invite intrusion rather than protect from it. The scarcely veiled bedroom scene seems set up to tickle the senses of the observer rather than to provide privacy for those who reside within.



Tent at Casper's Wild Park, National Park in California. August 1991

So how is it that we escaped from the conforming power of observation?

Part of the answer could be found in the fact that our tent was transparent from both sides, the observer was being observed by us at the same time. Currently there is much discourse around surveillance in general and closed-circuit television (CCTV) in particular. Some state that we've entered the era of 'Big Brother', others argue that these technologies don't always favour the hierarchical structure outlined by George Orwell[xiv], Jeremy Bentham[xv] and Michel Foucault, but can also enable individuals, through inverse surveillance, to appropriate technological tools for individual or public purposes. Still others predict a balanced state of a universal "participatory panopticon" in which there is an equivalence, or equilibrium of monitoring and control structures between parties.[xvi] This seems to defy the theory behind the panopticon. The key to the success of the panopticon appears to be the fact that people are observed, without them being able to tell if they are being observed or not. This results in a sense of an invisible omniscience. As the observer cannot be seen, it leaves the watched to watch themselves and make sure they stay on task. Bentham described it as 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example.' For Bentham, however this is still ingrained in the physical structure of a building. Foucault states: "The Panopticon must be understood as a general able model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of everyday life of men." (Foucault, 1977, p.205). Foucault sees it as polyvalent and in a wider context not as an architectural model, but as a metaphor for observation and a tool for conformity in modern disciplinary societies. In '*Discipline and Punish'* he argues that hierarchical structures like hospitals, schools and factories have grown through history to function as a panopticon.

Both Foucault in '*Discipline and Punish'* and De Certeau in '*The Practice of Everyday Life'* build their analysis of power structures on institutionalised authority. However in *volume 2* De Certeau, investigates the micro power structure of the community. Here authority is replaced by common morality. The fact that a neighbourhood is a

micro power structure does not mean that different rules apply. Here too is the power of the panopticon. Common morality is closely linked to what Foucault calls ‘normalising judgement’.

When considering splitting groups into individuals, Foucault asks: “How was one so to arrange things that a homogeneous, continuous power would result from their calculated multiplicity?” (1977, p.173). He finds the answer in ‘normalizing judgement’ and examination. Normalizing judgement takes place by enabling a field of comparison to differentiate between individuals and the setting up of rules of behaviour; a minimal threshold and an optimum as target to be achieved. The judgement that is being normalised is the judgement of the individuals involved, not unlike the synchronising of watches, used to make sure everybody is on the same time when operating separately. This results in a network of individuals working on the same plan and towards the same goal. The reason why individuals would be willing to normalise their judgement is found in examination. This notion of examination is based on the principles of observation, inspection, but most importantly of classifying. Formal examples of examination we all recognise are in hospitals: the doctor doing his rounds and in schools: tests and exams. Foucault (1977, p.184) describes these processes as highly ritualised, but within the network of normalised judgement they take place almost continually in the form of self-surveillance and mutual scrutiny.

Although our world is now covered with surveillance technology, this does not provide a community with the structure of the panopticon. To understand how self-surveillance and mutual scrutiny works within an ordinary community rather than an institution we need to see where the ‘examiner’ is placed. Who is the observer, who dissects the individual lives of the inhabitants of a community?

A Stroll down the streets

It is in this attitude of viewing other people within a structure, to try to make sense of the hierarchy, that we can recognise the figure of the Flâneur. The word 'Flâneur' comes from the French verb *flâner,* meaning to stroll. The essayist and poet Charles Baudelaire has characterized the flâneur as a gentleman stroller of city streets, but with a purpose:

> And so, walking or quickening his pace, he goes his way, forever in search. In search of what? We may rest assured that this man, such as I have depicted him, this solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert, has an aim loftier, than that of a mere idler, an aim more general, something other than the fleeting pleasure of circumstance.[xvii] (Baudelaire, 1964 p.12)

An observer of human life, the flâneur positions herself/himself as an analytical connoisseur of the urban fabric. In a double role of detached observer and simultaneously being part of the urban environment, we recognise the role of the examiner from Foucault's writing. The flâneur, as a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context, is like the doctor doing his rounds. He inspects and classifies. For example when he comes across old, lower class men: 'This wretched thing would have the impudence to replicate and reproduce itself!' (Baudelaire, 1997 p.233) Here, the observer judges his subject as not even being worthy of allocating gender (although the poem was called *The Seven old Men*) or distinguishing it from an other. This places the observer in a clear position of authority. Both Foucault and Baudelaire describe the observer as an outsider, a figure of authority, and as such would not be part of the neighbourhood that De Certeau describes. However within the neighbourhood the role of the 'examiner' is taken up by every one within the community. With the common morality as rulebook, any observer becomes an examiner. The model of the panopticon is pervasive, as is the idea that Foucault (1977) formulated: 'The whole infinite domain of the nonconforming is punishable.'(p.178)

When I was a teenager my father became head of quality control for a foundry, the main employer of a very small provincial town. When we moved there, his position was instantly one of respectability within the community. Our house was in a prominent position, close to the church and one house down from where the mayor lived[xviii]. Right from the start we were in the public eye. For me the move was a strange experience. Although our new place of residence was only 40 km south from where we had lived before, it felt like I had moved back ages in time. The local dialect was very difficult for me to understand and they used grammar that had been abandoned 200 years ago in the rest of the country. It was only natural that I gravitated towards what was called 'the import'. This was the name for people who, like me, had not grown up in the area for generations. Despite not socialising with the locals, it did not take me long to realise that my actions were observed by the local population from behind the net curtains. Occasionally they would be shifted to the side as I walked down the street, to provide the inhabitant a better view of what I might be doing. Any notable occurrence would then be reported to my father at work. I am sure their intentions were not malicious; they just wanted to share in our lives. However my father is a very shy man and these references to his family and private life where painful to him. As a result I tried to restrain myself at any public appearance in the neighbourhood and I strayed further and further away from home to get away from seeing eyes. I had a little sailing boat in a marina about 20 km. away from our town. One day I got so much water over the side that the boat sank. I would like to say that it was due to difficult conditions, however it was just an involuntary gibe that caught me unawares. The boat filled up so quickly it sank from under me as I tried to bail. Only the top of the mast and sail were above water as it was fairly shallow. The conditions were so mild that I could swim, with a painter, to where my feet touched the bottom and I could pull the boat ashore. Once on dry land I could empty the boat out and put it back in the marina as if nothing had happed. It took two weeks for this event to get back to my father.

Every little embarrassment and ‘faux pas’ was noted and the information passed on, causing an enormous pressure to conform. My experience is reminiscent of Georg Simmel’s observations in ‘*Metropolis and Mental Life’.* In a comparison between the life of urban and rural people, Simmel sees beneficial and harmful elements in both. The slow, regular pattern of ongoing association with the same people in rural life, he observes, allows deep emotional connections to form. However this induces a narrowness and conformity of thought, a mesh of communal judgement and stifling individuality.

In urban life, on the other hand, while living among strangers, people can behave, dress and think with more freedom. On the surface non-conformists seem to be able to live as they would like in a city. Due to constant stimulation of an ever-changing environment people are no longer capable of reacting to each of the specific things that happen to them individually. Instead, they develop a ‘blasé attitude’. Desensitised and unable to respond to their surroundings directly, people converge in sophisticated networks for socialising to make sense of the world. Although Simmel doesn’t describe that, it is these networks that in a way can be equally restrictive as the rural communities. Here too the parameters of conformity continue to invade our private sphere. A social dependency can result as numbed senses, caused by too much stimuli, trigger us to define our individuality through comparison with others. Simmel’s city dwellers are still within the panopticon when they need the social framework to define their individuality. In an attempt to escape conformity we need the normalised judgment of the community as a comparison. In escaping we need to determine our position as different from the position of restraint. That means we need to place ourselves in relation to the framework of social conformity, and in doing so we are still not liberated from that restraint. As long as we need this point of reference, we are not free from it.

Performance at ‘Enjoy’ 29th May 2008

Performance at 'Enjoy' 29th May 2008[xix]

Innocence and loss of innocence

Does this mean we are all doomed to stay under communal judgement? An answer can be found in the notion of innocence, a total unawareness of communal judgement and of being observed. Although my own experiences and observations have led me to believe this is a solution, it is important to add a critical note, not from my own observations but from literature. Frederik van Eeden's *'Van de koele Meren des Doods'* ('The Deeps of Deliverance')[xx] was first published in 1900, the heyday of the picnic blanket. The preface to this novel opens: 'Quite erroneously this work has been regarded as the psychological study of a more or less pathological case.' With this, Frederik van Eeden wants to make clear that his novel is a work of fiction, not a work of science. One could be forgiven for thinking this, as van Eeden was a social reformer and psychiatrist and the novel reads like a case study. He describes the detailed history of a woman, Hedwig de Fontayne, a sensitive soul who is disgusted by the banality of life and yearns for physical and spiritual contact. In girlhood this was expressed through an innocent sensuality. She exemplifies Marcuse's idea of innocence in relation with sin. She is initially unaware of the perception of sexual instincts as being sinful. Sexuality itself is not the cause of loss of innocence, but the awakening to the consideration of it being sinful. Once Hedwig looses her innocence, Eros get more and more repressed and Thanatos wins the battle. She finally finds salvation in death. Van Eeden describes his novel as: 'the simple, classical movements of a woman's life, tested to the utmost by melancholy, sin, sensuality, and yet with the triumph of death over death.'

Throughout the book there are many religious motifs, van Eeden himself was leaving behind his strict Calvinistic background to embrace Catholicism. The water in the novel symbolises life and death but also rebirth. With this van Eeden moves away from Calvin's doctrine, where we are doomed forever for our moral lapses. Hedwig is capable, through death by drowning, to wash away her sins and regain her innocence.

In Hedwig's case her own innocence was not enough to sustain her independence from the moral judgement of

society. The contrast in experience between hers and mine might be explained by a difference in time, early 20th century society was much more obdurate in relation to gender, class and other social roles than we experience now. It might also point to a weakness in the power of innocence. However I think that she chose to surrender her position of innocence, as if she chose to move off the picnic blanket into the outside world. A change that caused both herself, as a person, and her innocence, as a state of being, to lose power. A power that was regained at the moment of reunion. In this, innocence, as a state of being, provides as safe haven like the picnic blanket. Like the picnic blanket it only has any power against the outside world when it is occupied.

Conclusion

A picnic blanket is a physical object -it has tactile and associative or metaphoric qualities. As an object it is a substitute for efforts to tame the New Zealand wilderness, and colonial fantasy. It is a viewing platform for the fetishised landscape. While having an element of frivolity, the picnic offers a framing of the landscape that makes the picnickers interact with that landscape, either by physically conquering it of by consuming it visually. This relationship with the landscape poses a paradox. The conviviality of the picnic is contradicted by the encounter with the awesome otherness of the landscape. It is the acknowledgement of the equality of these two different worlds, the domestic and a powerful environment that forms the basis for the Female Sublime.

For me, the picnic blanket is no longer just an object, but becomes a vehicle for investigation. It is an aid in defining both public and private space. In my experience a public environment is a hostile space. De Certeau describes the neighbourhood as a gregarious interaction, where people collaborate for the good of society and ultimately through that for the good of the individual. However for me this is an intrusive action, something that invades private space. This can be understood through Foucault's argument that discipline becomes far more effective when, rather than being imposed on the individual from outside, the subject internalises the communal judgement and morale. This is the idea that we are continuously observed, not by an authority, but our neighbours. Any behaviour that deviates from the law of 'the average' is recorded and passed on through gossip. We are so accustomed to this principle that we perceive our adjusted behaviour as natural, like being dressed when outside or not lying down on the sidewalk. This kind of behaviour, that would be considered natural for animals, would be an indication of something 'wrong' in humans – such as drunkenness or being homeless. These examples might seem nonsensical - clothes provide protection and lying on the sidewalk could be unhygienic. However, on occasions where these reasons would not apply, we still do not indulge in this behaviour for fear of public scrutiny. By mutual scrutiny we keep each other within the bounds set by the community as a whole, thus leaving little space for the individual. In this way the sinuous finger of common

morality penetrates deep into the self and it becomes hard to distinguish between our adjusted behaviour and a genuine natural state.

This does not mean there is no escape from the doctrine of others. Marcuse's description of the 'natural state' gives an indication of what that is like. It is a state of innocence, unawareness of sin. It is a state of mind from before the 'original sin', before eating from the Tree of Knowledge and a life lived in paradise. According to Marcuse this can be achieved through the struggle between Eros and Thanatos that is guided by fantasy. It is this fantasy, sustained by art, that makes an escape possible from the restraints of society.

According to Frederik van Eeden escape is only possible when Thanatos wins the battle from Eros, as sexuality and innocence are not compatible within society. He considers only death can provide a release from societal restraints.

Where Marcuse relies on fantasy, and Van Eeden relies on death to keep us independent from the restraints of society, I feel there is another option. One that has a structure similar to the Female Sublime in that is based on a mutual acknowledgement of power rather than a mutual scrutiny. This does not mean I do away with the battle between Eros and Thanatos. Van Eeden states that Eros and innocence are mutually exclusive in society. Is this not the case in the private sphere? As long as an internal state of innocence is maintained it can support the life force of Eros. The problems start when external influences trickle in and undermine the natural state. The protection of innocence is not dependant on fantasy or death, but can be sustained by choice. Just as, for an optimistic person, negative points are not prominent, for an innocent person communal judgement and restraints lose their power. Only when there is a willingness to leave the position of innocence does the outside world come into play. Innocence is a perception, a state of mind without awareness of sin. This is an innocence that is not corrupted by communal judgement, because it does not participate in the convivial exchange as described by De Certeau. This means there is no appropriation and ownership of public space, but there is ownership of the self. As in the Female Sublime, the Other is maintained in its otherness. This may sound simple, however it is not an unconscious process. It requires enormous strength to resist the persuasiveness of

communal judgement and the joint forces of the outside world. An internal state of innocence can be maintained by itself as long as that position is not surrendered. It is like a metaphoric picnic blanket providing private space in public as long as it is occupied. As soon as the possession of that space is surrendered the power of innocence is lost.

Notes:

[1] The translation of the subtitle is 'The exposure of a harmless/innocent spot.' Like in the English language, the Dutch word for 'spot' can refer to both a location and mark or blemish. The word 'blootstelling' means exposure but comes from the word 'bloot', which means bare or naked.

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[i] This part of town was called ' De Bokkenbuurt'. Like the apartments we lived in, the houses didn't have a bathroom, we had to wash in the kitchen. Being build in the early 20th century and neglected ever since, they were in a bad state. Late '80's they were identified in City Council papers as one of Utrecht's worst slums and all houses were pulled down. The apartments where we lived still stand, but are now lived in mainly by singles or couples. The laundries have been remodelled to serve as bathrooms. The paved playground has been replaced with some greenery and seats.

[ii] In the Netherlands the cloth taken on picnics is primarily to present the food on, not to provide a soft or dry area to sit on. The Dutch term literally translated is picnic cloth rather than picnic blanket.

[iii] The judgement that something is sublime is a judgement that it is beyond the limits of comprehension. This is where Kant divides the sublime in mathematically sublime and dynamically sublime.
The mathematically sublime centers round comprehension versus apprehension. The sublime exceeds our comprehension in its totality, but not our apprehension. Where we may not grasp the magnitude completely, we use reason to apprehend it. Thus our faculty of reason has conquered a unit that was too overwhelming for us to contain.

[iv] The dynamically sublime is an aesthetic judgement when 'we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us' (p.270)

[v] In '*A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.'* Edmund Burke analyses the sublime through introspective empiricism. He explores the physical manifestation of the sublime with the aim to discover universal guidelines for the establishment of the beautiful and the sublime. In Burke's view only terror can be a source of the sublime: '...it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.' (p.36)

[vi] Freeman refers to '*Peri Hypsous'*, Longinus treatise from the first century, whose fame was revived by Boileau's French translation and commentary of 1674.

[vii]In '*The Romantic Sublime.'* Weiskel states: 'To please us, the sublime must now be abridged, reduced and parodied as the grotesque, somehow hedged with irony to assure us we are not imaginative adolescents. '(p.6)

[viii] In '*Towards a Female Sublime.'* Yeager refers to mock-sublimity and absurdity. (p.197)

[ix] According to Centraal Bureau voor Statisiek (central buro for statistics) 1.1 Million Germans visited the Dutch beach in 2005, however this number has been quite consistent through out the years. Many have labeled this occurrence as 'the Annual Invasion'.
Retrieved 18.11.08 from http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/D2CB169F-C065-4C51-BF02-57DB80BF6458/0/2005g77pub.pdf

[x] after Pierre Bourdieu.

[xi] This is based on Freud's '*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur'* (1930; translated as *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930) where he describes the pleasure principle. Through reason the hunt for personal pleasure needs to be restrained for the good of society as a whole and through that ultimately for the good of the individual.

[xii] Although Mackey's writing is primarily a biography and in that sense not very analytical, it gives some insight into how his work was received at the time, and what responses from others were.

[xiii] A description of this performance is part of the appendix

[xiv] In '*1984'* Orwell paints a dark picture of the future where the mind police rules our thoughts through surveillance.

[xv] The English philosopher and reformer, Jeremy Bentham designed a new type of prison building. He called it Panopticon, using the Greek words *pan-* (all) and *opticon* (see or observe) to indicate a structure where, from a central position, prisoners could be observed. Prisoners are in individual cells that are back-lit and open out to the central observation tower. The perception is that the prisoner, even in introspective, reflective engagement, directs himself towards the inspection tower. The control of the observer is thus reaching into the private thoughts of the observed. As the observer can not be seen it leaves the watched to watch themselves.

[xvi] There is, particularly on the internet, an active discussion on the subject of surveillance and counter surveillance. This is primarily technology based. However the motivation for these discussions, how people feel about it, is applicable here in what is exploration of human nature rather than technology.

[xvii] This quote continues with: 'He is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call 'modernity', for want for a better term to express the idea in question.' Not only did Baudelaire give new meaning to the word flâneur, he also introduced the term 'modernity' in his essay *The Painter of modern life.*

[xviii] In the Netherlands mayors are not elected but appointed by the Crown. Often, as was the case in Zaltbommel, they live in an official residence.

[xix] A description of this work is in the appendix

[xx] This is the title under which is was published in English. The Dutch title, when literally translated, means: 'Of the cool Lakes of Death', where the word 'cool' in Dutch can also mean 'brave'. I find the Dutch title both more open to interpretation, as it does not give away that deliverance is needed, and more accurate since it uses the same kind of visually descriptive language.

Appendix

11th March 2008
Mortality in a library receipt,
my own perception and my problems with empirical research.

As I am reading '*The Reflective Practitioner*', I put the library receipt, that I use as a bookmark, in my mouth. While reading I become aware of something moving in my peripheral vision. It is the receipt in my mouth moving up and down with my breathing. It is not that I am moving. I am sitting still, it is not even the heaving of my rib cage as my longs expand. It is the airflow from my nose that lifts the receipt when I breath in and drops down the strip of paper when I breath out.
It very subtly makes me aware of my breathing, of my own body and through that my own mortality while I'm reading. I get up to see what is looks like in the mirror, however the effect is gone. The paper no longer moves up and down but just hangs down, I must have held my head forward slightly so the stream of breath had a stronger effect. No matter what I try I can't 're-enact' it.
Once again I am confronted with the difficulty of communicating my own perception of my self and world around me. If I can't reproduce the effect of this simple observation, it can not be tested. The best I can hope for is that the description of my experience triggers a recollection with someone else.
Although the proximity of others is of constant influence, it seem impossible to me to transmit fully my experiences and observations.
However I do wonder how much of these thoughts are now connected to library receipts or the book I was reading. Not for others, since I can not communicate these ideas sufficient, but for my self and whether the world is filled with objects that transferred meaning.

10th April 2008
Performance at Insel Park Hombroich

The history of the park seems to deny itself. It is a wetland area with several islands linked up with bridges. It contains several buildings designed to house a private art collection. It is a 'classic' art collection in that it seems to cover any area in time and space. Ranging from little sketches by Rembrandt to some of the blue works by Yves Klein, art from Oceania and Eastern countries. As a result very few art students come to visit the park. However the buildings them selves have become the real interest of the park. In fact some of the buildings stand empty. We could say it is the exploration of the relation of nature and cultivation. That is what I was told when I first visited the park as a student, and believed at the time. However now coming back I have a different view. Although the park is filled with trees and scrubs, these are not nature for they are far too cultivated. What we see here is the human hand. First working with brick, steel and glass and then working with living materials. In the manicured trees there is no nature, but equal cultivation. This does not diminish the value of the park but changes its focus from the old nature vs. culture binary relationship to questions around manipulation and conformation. These ideas are very close to colonialism.

The experience of the landscape is an experience not only of a natural landscape but equally the experience of buildings. This is an experience we know is engineered by someone else. Does this make the experience not my own? Does it make the experience less valid?
It is mainly middle aged German couples that come to view the collection. The most current works are from the 1960's and as such safely identified as 'art'. A visit the studio of the artist in residence will not do much to upset that safety. In the 1970's the park was left as a trust and at that time it was prescribed what kind of artists would be invited.
For me too, the charm of Insel Park Hombroich is the combination of fairytale like landscape with stark architecture. The wetland, with bridges connecting the islands, is so unpractical it becomes unreal. Any wetlands in the Netherlands, as in Germany, are milled dry. Not having lived in Western Europe for more than ten years, it is particularly the architecture that stands out for me. Where I used to appreciate the clean lines and smart awareness of space, it is cold and overly correct to me now. Yes it is still clever, but almost heartlessly so. The presence of humans has been taken into account. In Gaudi's and Hundertwasser's architecture we can see humans, they have a bodily presence. But here they are calculated in, humans as a 'factor' and not a living being.
For me the cafeteria is an other major drawing card. The all-you-can-eat buffet is included in the admission price. The food selection has also not changed from the 1970's. Consisting mainly of sour dough bread and potato and egg salads.

I had already been in contact from NZ and although I did not fit within the resident program they were happy for me to

do a performance. I chose the cafeteria, and fitting with what I was doing and the setting asked for it not to be announced or publicised.
I felt extremely awkward as I walked out of the toilets where I had changed. This was the first time I wore the suit in public. I had secretly worked on it while we were staying with my parents. I was too embarrassed to show them the suit, let alone model it for them.
I took some time in the toilets to settle my nerves. These nerves were only associated with other people and what they may think. I needed to be my own human animal self, without interference from outside. Like the contrast between the buildings and the landscape in this park, I aimed to be a natural element within the sophisticated setting of society. Not being an integral part of it but existing side by side. Exposing the animal side we all have and many of us try to cover up. That does not mean grunting, inconsiderate behaviour or 'indulging in low urges'. These are characteristics I associate with 'beasts' rather than animals. When I think of the human animal, it is a neat, careful animal. Exposing this animal however, might have some sexual connotations. Because it is mainly sexual signs that need to be cover up, and are only allowed to be broadcast covertly. It is quite acceptable for babies to be naked, if we overlook current fears of pedophilia. There is a long tradition of photographing baby in the nude on a sheep's skin. This almost alludes back to cave men.
Although I focused on my own thoughts, some of my attention slipped away and I noticed that people were leaving the cafeteria as quickly as possible. Longest lasted a couple on the terrace. They may not have noticed me until they came inside either to return their plates or get seconds and changing their minds. I cannot be sure what it was that made people uncomfortable. Because this is part of the work I do for my MFA there is a need to record what I am doing. That means I had set up a camera that took intermittent pictures. It might well be that people felt they intruded on something. The fact that I did not make eye contact with anyone may have enhanced that feeling. How important is it that people interact with my human animal, rather than fleeing away from it? Up to now I thought what mattered was my own experience, and it is, but it needs to be an experience with people.

15th-16th April 2008
Performances in Amsterdam.
Over a period of two days, I did a series of performances in Amsterdam. Locations included:
De Kalverstraat -the Netherlands most expensive piece of property.
De Minttoren -where in the old days coins were made, but what is now a tourist flower market.
De Dam.
After Hombroich, I felt I needed to go to a place where I was sure there would be people. This also meant I could not put the camera on time release, because I could not guard the camera and perform at the same time. Here the camera needed watching. Mathijs was willing to help me out, and I think quite happy to keep an eye on me as well.
Although I initially expected very little response, since people are blasé in Amsterdam, people stared where I tried to bland in, shopping in de Kalverstraat.
Both the need of using some one to record what I was doing and the fact that I seem to be a curiosity made me choose de Dam as a location. This is a square in front of one of the Queen residences. It houses the liberation monument to mark the end of the Second World War. It is also the place where buskers try to catch the attention from the many tourist that visit the place.
As soon as I walked up to sit at the foot of the monument the people that were there moved away. These were not tourists, but drug dealers looking to sell drugs to tourists. Their reaction might well not be a response to my work but rather that they were not happy to be photographed, since I was clearly not a customer. Within minutes tourists arrived to see what was going on. These were two Italian couples. I don't really speak Italian and they did not address me directly. One of them suggested it might be a fashion shoot, what the others thought of that idea I'm not sure. I also don't know what triggered their next move. But the two wives decided to sit next to me, on either sided while their husbands took pictures of the three of us. I have no idea what they were thinking, they did not try to communicate with me, although the atmosphere was very convivial. I don't understand what drove these people to invade what I would perceive as someone's private space. However there are elements that I really like about the event. The symmetry of the women. To me they were dressed very similarly and sat on either side of me. Most of all I am interested in the idea of how this encounter lives on. Their husbands (like mine) took pictures. What will they say when they show them to their friends in Italy? I have no control over what happens with what people take away from my performance.

7th May – 4th June 2008
Workshops and performances at Enjoy

The first workshop was by Russel Martin and he started with a description of his own practice that centers around dialogue. What was interesting to me was his statement that everybody was trying to get along and that in public meetings like this everybody would feel more or less at ease unless some body would choose to start to undress, that would make every one feel uncomfortable. His statements were more or less confirmed by the behaviour of the people attending. Nobody questioned anything about his practice in terms of its value. Part of his practice is that he refuses to document his work. This is on the basis that documentation is not the work. With a dialogue-based practice, with no documentation, all that is left is the memories of the people involved in the conversations since there is also no audience to these sessions. I questioned his idea of no documentation on two grounds:
- The documentation becomes a work in its self that is reminiscing of the event.
- The fact that he talks about his works is a form of documentation.
Interesting to me was the fact that at that stage I was the only one carrying a torch for documentation, the next meeting of pretty much the same people however nobody questioned the need for documentation. Is this an other example of what it was Russel was talking about, people being eager to get along? Is nobody willing to question anything out of fear of awkward situations?

Reflecting on the rehearsal of my performance made very clear to me what I enjoy about and what is absolutely painful to me. During setting up I was nervous and excited, I enjoyed arranging things in a way I thought would work. At a critique of my work a week before the rehearsal, commends were made about having strategies for working with the audience, and that it was too comical, that it didn't go beyond a hoax. There fore I decided to make eye contact with the audience and not to engage with in any way. As a result I was on display. It made me feel very vulnerable. This is my worst nightmare.
There were also some practical issues like getting uncomfortable sitting on the floor. When I stood up after only 30 minutes one of my legs had gone to sleep and I couldn't walk properly. Also I need to set myself up so I can continue for 6 hours without the need to go to the toilet.

The third workshop was by Charlotte Huddleston and had as subject how to end it and how /why document it. Again nobody questioned the documentation or brought up what they agreed with at the time with Russel Martin. However the idea of the documentation being something other , a work in itself, than the performance was brought up again. Toward the end of the rehearsal of my performance I realised that I would have to end it by myself. I had to break the spell. That was something I had not realised until that moment. In theatre or puppetry performances you can set a clapper in the

audience to indicate the end. Now I had nothing of the kind. I came up with three solutions.
Just standing up. (that was not enough)
Starting to clean up my props. (again that was not enough)
Speaking. At first I said: “I think my time is up.” and followed that up with “I’ve run out of hair.” And that broke the spell as people started laughing.
At Charlotte’s workshop my ending was discussed and generally people liked how I had done it. I repeated, for the people who had not been there, that I had said “I’ve run out of hair.” Johnny said that I had said something else. And of course he was right, however I didn’t think that saying ‘My time is up” is a very strong or considered ending, so I ignored him to cover that up. I will need to consider the end of the genuine performance very carefully. Now I regret not allowing Johnny to speak, because may he meant to say that just saying “I’ve run out of hair” could mean anything including “now I’m going to cut your hair”. This is something for me to think about.
Charlotte mainly showed video’s of a performance series she curated at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 2006.
On Mark Harvey’s work Pippa Sanders commented that ‘It was more generous to the public.’ What that was referring to was that he made an acknowledgement of the audience. The performance was highly entertaining. Many of the performances in this workshop are entertaining and generous. I question however the value of that. For me an art work needs to be neither entertain nor generous, hopefully
it is intense and give food for thought. That doesn’t mean it can’t be entertaining. In fact I would like my work to have some sense of fun. However it is not a criteria by which I would assess a work.
In contrast I liked the awkwardness of the ending of Jim Allen’s work. After he had finished with the newspaper, he sat there for half a minute, rubbed his leg, twitched his foot. And only after he made his move to stand up, did people applaud and became it clear the performance was finished.
The awkwardness was very intense and to me more interesting than the rest of the performance.
At this workshop some one else gave me some more feedback on my performance: ‘I was waiting for something to happen.’ That is also something that I’m interested in, nothing happens, other than that my hair comes of my head and onto the cloth. The awkwardness of nothing happening in an performance is like an awkward silence.

After my performance, several people (only women) told me they felt protective of me and did not want to leave me by myself.
In nature, the young have a natural defense. That is why there are stories of animals looking after the young of other species. Their defenselessness calls a sense of protective duty into place. I am not afraid to be vulnerable.
For me the intimate presence of someone else is much more threatening. Where in the rehearsal the awkwardness came from people trying to walk around quietly, noisy breathing and even dealing as quietly as possible with behaviour that some (not me) deemed inappropriate, the awkwardness in the ‘final’ performance was the intimacy. At the rehearsal there had been several people at one time. In the long performance they were trickling in and out, making it hard for me

not to make contact. It felt as if I was being rude not to acknowledge individuals that were there.
Where before hand I had wondered about the ending, when the last hair was cut, now there was no one there. The ending was of no effect. In retrospective I regret doing this within a gallery setting. By placing it in a gallery I have set up the boundaries of the work as being a work of art. As result people respond to it as art and generally tread very carefully. This is something I'm not interested in. I am more interested in performances where people are not sure what to make of it. Is it a performance or not? Having the same behaviour outside a gallery, in a public space it instantly widens the parameters.

8th August 2008
Swear Jar
I introduced the swear jar at a critique. Unfortunately I feel that people engaged very superficially with the work. I might have set them off on the wrong foot by stating that I had made it the night before. Indicating that maybe this wasn't a serious work. Some jumped to a conclusion I must be catholic. And only viewed the work from a catholic perspective. There is some valid reason for doing that and of course it references the catholic tradition of buying indulgence. However I hoped to raise a much wider discussion on guilt and sin and the absurdity of being able to pay money to relieve you from sin. The main comment was that it was just not enough money, as if a higher amount of money could buy off guilt. Is this indicating that rich people, provided they pay up, are less sinful that poor? I started the conversation with an apology for having swore, to which every one said they hadn't heard and were not offended. Never the less several people suggested that I should pay them, buy them coffee etc. To me this was again too superficial engagement. Why would I have to pay reparation to someone who is not hurt in anyway? The only ones involved in this 'sin' is the person doing it (me) and any victim (in this case it could be argued that God is the victim)

Maddie described it as a 'clanger', apart from being a new and wonderful word to me, it was a welcome description. The awkwardness and the sense of being off or even wrong are something I'm interested in. In the Netherlands there is no such thing as a swear jar. Here I've never seen one, it is this mythical object that has no real embodiment. That is probably where I've gone wrong. It physical qualities did not catch that idea. And instead of presenting it, it should just have appeared in the space.

Having learned from the swear jar, as part of my presentation at the Post Graduate Symposium I put a fundraiser box on the coffee table. It was in amongst the biscuits and after the symposium it got removed together with the biscuits to the office kitchen. Neither I, nor any one else acknowledged it as being part of my work. This was part of a series of works that I did in a subversive way, some in collaboration with Mike Ting who was also reading De Certeau.

26th September 2008
A hairy Singlet.
I am interested in what I call non-performances. Something that is not a performance, but also not not-a-performance, something in between that is slightly uncomfortable. For this purpose I made an other 'costume' to shown my fellow students, during the session in which we discussed my readings (part of Lukes' book on the Kantian origin of Marcuse's idea's) It was a singlet with breast hair embroidered on from my own hair. The week before Mike had shown some of his work and had, very dramatically, removed it from a bag. That gave me the idea that I also wanted to 'reveal' my work. For that purpose I chose to wear the singlet underneath a sort of woodchoppers shirt. To show the work I had to partially undress. I think that made the other students feel a little uncomfortable. But also the singlet itself is uncomfortable in that there is something wrong with it and it makes others look at my chest. One of the comments was: 'That is wrong in so many ways.' Which is a response that was very much to my satisfaction. However this idea of non-performing poses a problem of where the works lives. It hangs in my bedroom and as an object I quite like it. However that is not the work. The work is it being worn out in public without the acknowledgement that it is a work. I tested the work by wearing to two supervisory meetings. The final work was me wearing it during my presentation at the Post Graduate Symposium.
Oh, the embarrassment. As if presenting a paper is not nerve-wrecking enough for me. Part of the critique on my presentation was that I had not discussed my work. It is true I do not like to spell things out. For me that would mean losing something of the work, the element of discovery. Part of what I had presented was a clip form '*A King in New York'* which deals with, apart from its political message, issues of image and appearance and it effect on social interaction. I also showed a clip from '*Themroc'* that through gender concerns also deals with social interaction. To my mind I did discuss my own work, just not explicitly, but in a covert way that suited the work itself, rather than in a formulaic way that is easy recognisable. Like the performances that I am interested in, how I write and talk about my work should be a little ambiguous.

12th January 2008
A sea of daggs,
Our living room is taken over by the blanket I am making. The furniture is pushed aside and it fills the whole floor. Here it looks like an immense sea, however when I placed it in the Great Hall it was dwarfed by the space. I like the idea of that contrast. In private sphere it is a dominant object, hard for people to move around, but in public it will almost disappear.

The Great Hall is a very difficult space to work in. In 2005 Matthijs and I built an exhibition there for Dutch graphic design. The Netherlands is a very crowded country and these posters were set up to grab you attention, but in the Great Hall they became insignificant. To combat that (probably fuelled by national pride) we built 6meter high towers to have some impact on the space. This time I'm not going to 'artificially enhance' the impact on the space. It will look pathetic in the Great Hall; it will be lost and forlorn.

After testing it, I realized I needed to make it just a little bit bigger and not quite rectangular, as a result now there are ends sticking out. While I was working on it my youngest son was trying to climb around it. I asked him what he thought of it. He said it was beautiful but also disgusting. What was disgusting to him where the ends of wool sticking out. To him they looked like daggs. I agree, that it is disgusting, but for a very different reason. For me it is the association with fiber art from the 1970's that is so off putting. I am continuing on from a work that Martin described in a critique as 'bringing back all the things that were bad about art in the 1980's.' So there is something of bad taste about, but at the same time I find it has a persuasive tactile quality. It is quite bodily, but not a glorified body.

Some explanation is needed in regards to my use of 'the female arts'.
In *'Threading Time, a Cultural History of Threads'* Dolores Bausum (2001) describes the virtues and sin of women through the use of sowing, embroidery and lace making. "When early English crafters pierced a piece of cloth with a sharp tool, they called the resulting small hole a prick….. By the late 16th century prick commonly referred to the male genital organ….. In various locales, the public began to associate ordinary threadwork with sexual activity." (p.109)
In the Netherlands the word sewing (naaien) is still slang for copulation.
In a way I regret to allude to my covert use of sexual reference. It has been my private engagement. Even the embroidery-set-fundraiser has been part of it.
Rather than covert sexual semiotics of embroidery, I now work with the sensual qualities of materials. Where before I was interested in the piercing of cloth, I now make the cloth, by loosely weaving and finely crocheting. Where the embroidering was a response to an existing situation (that is a material) I now initiate the situation.

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