

**Stepping Aside to Enter:** An approach to *Magic Mirror* that invites a floating in thought through selected texts from the French philosopher Michel Serres, in particular his writings on blankness, multiplicity, and noise.

Film-maker Sarah Pucill's first feature length film *Magic Mirror* is an exploration of the relationship between the French surrealist artist Claude Cahun's self-portrait photographs and book *Aveux Non Avenus*, translated as *Confessions Cancelled*. Cahun works with the autobiographical genre through explorations of the self. Visual ideas from Pucill's previous films connect with Cahun's work and resonate within *Magic Mirror*. Pucill explores the inanimate set against the animate, creating hallucinatory spaces, dissolving spaces and fantasies. The film toys with imagined realms, abandoning the static, stable and defined. The self is a multiple, the body becomes many, dressed up and made-up, the voice that speaks is of several and the spaces are private theatres for the many selves within a one, facing a mirror and others watching.

**Nine chapters play** commencing with photomontage animation that draws directly from the collaged images that split the chapters in Cahun's book. The body is cut into parts, moving in circular motion, adding a twist to the stillness of a surrealist collaged image. Arms disappear into hands, then legs join with the hands, extending onto them, deforming them and creating new forms; a kaleidoscopic play with the parts to fairground organ music.

**Voices accumulate in a chorus**, even when a single voice is heard, what it speaks of plays back and forth between sexes and ideas, another picks up in continuation, not responding, not specifically in conversation, but possibly bursting out of one and the same. One and the same that is not defined as a singular body, for a singular body does not house one self, but multiple.

**Bursting Forth** Michel Serres, describes the 'wellspring where two, several and one have not yet burst forth into their bouquet' as the 'primary and tranquil' point (Serres 2011, p.66). What then when they do burst forth into their bouquet? Noise? The background noise of the world brings forth a negative connotation that announces lack of clarity; the disturbance from the background noise of the multiple sounding at once. That state, one cannot bare, it is the bizarre, schizophrenic perhaps; the unstable. Tranquility is defined with clarity, definition, being able to distinguish and define what one hears at a singular moment. Chaos invites the multiple and the multiple in turn becomes described as chaotic.

To imagine the bursting forth of the **multiple speaking as selves** that reside in seemingly a singular physical body, is to allow for, at times contradiction. But in further considering that such an array of selves call onto several physicalities, at once or in variation, all springing from the same body, we call for a state where the contours of the physical no longer restrict. Contradiction is not key for the multiple, but a possibility in comprehending the general discomfort with the multiple bursting forth out of 'one'. In *Magic Mirror*, the multiple is sounded and visualized. Voices speak. It is very apparent that they are different voices, resonating from different physical bodies, possessing varying timbres, pitches and vocal folds and determining distinctions in our hearing. The category remains human, but different. Pucill does not link any of the voices to a specific body, leading in turn the viewer to abandon housing the voices into a physicality with consistent and distinguishable patterns of thought.

The narrative presents multiple performances, **no coherent lines of travel** through thoughts but **bursts of phrases with common dots**, speckled at varying times. The bodies that appear throughout the film are alive and moving, but resonating as inanimate in that they bring forth no characters. They as singular presences, do not attach any characteristics to themselves. The notion of the self is discoursed and played with much like the nature of Claude Cahun's text that the voices read; being male, female, inanimate, he, she, I, here, there, back and forth, the notion of the self multiplies. The bodies in performance alternate, at times dressing in the same as the other, swapping or changing. But a contradiction lies in the use of such words, for they declare the existence of initial fixed states of a specific character or performer that is first established, to proceed to the swap. But in fact it is the costumes that are played with, the bodies dressed in them announce no specifics to them as characters.

The film **pulsates with difference**, but the kind of difference that does not distance or distinguish one from the other, but displays a multiple. The word difference is again another contradiction in terms. Difference implies that a fixed state or a specific state exists and a different one comes forth. But if we were to abolish the initial fixity of a self, abandoning the idea of such a state, what remains are multiples. That is what one watches in *Magic Mirror*, the multiple.

**No Sense of Exit** Within each passage or chapter, performers move within a space, then they are left and another passage begins; bursts of play that do not rest on communication nor provide conclusive messages. The sense of an exit is lost in the experience of watching, for an exit out of a passage implies an ending, a meaning, a destination. We do not exit for there is no destination but continuous entrances. The joining of the visuals and the voices created in each passage or what precedes them in written text or collage does not call for meaning. Without an exit, the subsequent entries recreate the first moments of viewing the film as nothing is concluded at the end of each chapter. This soon sets flight to the flow of the film, where the viewer is no longer holding any expectations, creating a state where there is no exterior or interior confines, one does not attempt to place oneself in the film to understand, one is not within it, nor outside of it, but somehow in a state in-between both. The film does not invite the viewer to identify nor ostracizes one out of its realm of meaning for the notion of meaning is non-existent in the multiple.

'What were you talking about, I listened very closely,'

'The ocean,'

'Me too,'

'The ocean is you, you who swallowed me up.'

**Spaces are enveloped in darkness**, abstracting what is lit for staging. In a space with a lot of light, the light becomes the inversion of the black, the darkness in both black and white becomes the lack of context. The space becomes undefined, marked by curtains, a chess table, a table of cards with hands masked in leather gloves or a closet with a performer stepping inside. All becomes a prop, possible to redecorate, differently. Objects and bodies become parts. We may distinguish what they are, but they shall soon vanish to appear elsewhere with no enforced necessity to link them to where they were once before. In watching, one may abandon memory to the ephemerality of the spaces created by the performers. As the performers appear, a space exists, an abstract space, existing upon

entering. Any context brought forth is by the body that is undefined to begin with, a doll, with multiple possibilities, shedding the singular. This becomes the treatment and the exploration of the self. Opening to multiplicity allows for the body of the creator, in making a work that explores the self, to become disassociated and therefore non-existent. And allows me as a viewer not to position or locate myself within an individual performance to try to understand, and solely watch as I enter spaces that will soon collapse, for the performers leave no trace of definition.

A representation of Narcissus reaches within the water.

'The beautiful child was able to draw the infinite from his reflection, while we remain, always the same, unable to go further.'

**The Unimagined** The moving images of *Magic Mirror* do not establish a space, but in conjoining abstracted spaces and acts give birth to the unimagined. Claude Cahun's photographs may be lined up on a wall, or laid on pages of a book as final images, a realm to enter at a time. But when Pucill restages the photographs making them into moving images in certain chapters, the very process of reaching the final image is portrayed, opening up for unexpected encounters to take place and heightening the potentials of what may become of objects and bodies.

A dough is created in a glass bowl, then two circles are cut, then a female body laying is introduced on which the dough is placed.

'Encounter on a young girls breast, on a custard pie.'

In another space, a devil angel seductress with foil wings and pearl necklace appears, sound contains a space, creating a space in a non-space. The head moves downwards towards a mirror; the sound of cracking glass.

'Hit the void bang in the center.'

**Hallucinatory Sound** Sounds construct not what may be there, but what may be possible within the already non-existent space that we now find ourselves watching; hallucinatory perhaps. We hear sounds of scissors implying the cutting up of the photomontage, or the sound of the breaking glass, or gusts of wind, bringing forth another layer the non-existent space. Sound calls onto the non-apparent in the visual, containing the space of the image and calling onto something yet to exist by Cahun and Pucill's 'dear stranger'; the viewer.

'...everything that gets in the way or irritates my gaze, stomach, ovaries, the conscious cist like brain.'

**The conscious is removed**, a synesthesia of something rather un-conscious takes over, perhaps the body parts in sour pleasure twitching to sounds and voices that speak with no strict meaning but spurts of possibilities that could be brought forth with the disassociated image.

In another space, one performer exits onto the stage, to become another, dressed exactly the same, the distinction between one and the other is not that significant, for neither was defined or introduced as a singular. One body splits into doubles of the same, joined at the elbows and the hips, returning to turn into the other. Features of each performer become

insignificant, features that make up a face, are insignificant.

‘A mouth, nostrils quivering, between swooning eyelids the mad fixity of dilated pupils, in the brutal light of an electric bulb, pale gold, mauve and green under the stars.’

We move over soiled sheets. Two voices speak, two heads appear entangled in each other’s hair, each other’s narcissism, ‘the impossible realized in a magic mirror’, a voice tells us. And yet the voices are not attributed to those seen in the image. In the encounter between who is speaking and who is seen, a blank is created; not a blank of emptiness but that of possibility.

**A blank of possibility** In her earlier work such as *Taking my Skin*, Pucill searches for ways to abandon strict defined relations of who is behind the camera and who is in front of it, creating a loop to disassociate who is informing whom; dictating or directing. In *Taking my Skin*, what is usually one directional becomes a circular loop, in part through the use of mirrors, and this appears once again in *Magic Mirror*, as a double whose gaze with the viewer becomes a loop.

**The Noise of a Bouquet** In *Genesis*, Serres writes of a body dancing, becoming a blank, which reminisces other parts of the book where he speaks of the sea as the birthplace of noise, bringing serenity to our conception of multiple background noise. This is similar yet different to the body of *Magic Mirror*, in that Serres’ blank body does not propose the potential of multiple roles, it is not blank with the direct link to the notion of being clothed in multiple layers. In *Magic Mirror*, as a result of reaching blankness through clothing the body in multiple, mixed or imagined layers, the stage of unclothing exists only in a marriage to the possibility that the body can be clothed into several. The doll is the nude canvas to be staged, but staged in many. In that sense, *Magic Mirror’s* bodies burst forth with an opening into the noise of a bouquet. ‘Background noise has no shore, is it infinite, I do not know, in any case, it is not finite’ (Serres 1995, p.65).

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