

## Cartographies of the Feminine by Janice Cheddie (excerpt)

### Spinning and Spinning

Lynne Marsh's *Ballroom* takes us on a different journey through the concept of spinning, weaving and repetition. In *Ballroom*, Marsh has employed a series of complex layers to produce the image of a woman costumed in a sequined butterfly-top, spinning in a virtually constructed ballroom, partly drawn from the South London 'Rivoli' Ballroom. Marsh's *Ballroom* combines a number of elements, present in Marsh's previous works: the construction of virtual space, produced through video footage and computer rendering, repetition, and the use of costume.

The hypnotic and enthralling aspect of Marsh's *Ballroom* is the way that she has constructed the Rivoli ballroom as a space for the construction of female magic and enchantment. The generic ballroom has been located as a performative space in which we witness the production of sexual identities, and playing out of fantasies, desire and bodily interaction through dance. In Marsh's *Ballroom* the physical ballroom is transplanted and created within virtual space, emptied of all physical presence, apart from the central figure of the costumed woman rotating in the centre of the ballroom ceiling.

Throughout the unfolding of *Ballroom* we find ourselves drawn into the fluid space of the ballroom as both a physical and fantasy space. The physical ballroom is transformed into a fluid territory, through the rotating woman who controls the speed of the circulating lights through her movements. Thus, rather than fixing the territory of the ballroom into a centred locality, we find ourselves drawn into a fluid and rotating space of the woman. The space that woman draws us into references modes of transformation. In *Ballroom* the artist appears as the woman clothed in a sequined butterfly-top, and black trousers, suggesting the physical space of the ballroom as the movement from the chrysalis to the adult butterfly, a temporal moment – but also a moment of duration. Duration, within Marsh's work is an evocation of the body as a libidinal, fluid experience. This evocation of the concept of duration leads us into a meditation on the relationship between embodied duration and the virtual space of the ballroom.

Marsh in *Ballroom* links the temporal to constructions of space through her physical rotations and her bodily control of the sound and light. It is this linkage of time-space, and as I wish to demonstrate, the sonic that Marsh invites us into a consideration of 'haptic' space. Haptic space within Marsh's *Ballroom* is not constructed through close vision, but through two devices within the fabrication of the installation. Firstly, Marsh invites us into the notion of the haptic space – through her construction of the virtual space through the temporal flows of the rotating woman. Like the hula dance of Hawaii the gentle swaying and rhythmic rotations draw us, not into the space of female sexual display, but into a fluid, smooth space, a non-hierarchical space constructed through the temporal flows of the female body. The body in Marsh's work compliments Whall's construction of the female body as a series of flows, intensities and energies that work in connection with other forces to construct our sense of fluid space.

Secondly, Marsh introduces into the notion of the haptic, the role of the sonic in the construction of spaces; echoing her physical exploration of the space as a fluid temporal flow. In *Ballroom* Marsh evokes the physical ballroom as a sonic space, maintaining the link between sound, technological sound production and bodies in movement. However, Marsh's punctum operates on the level of the sonic. The sounds produced are not melodic, rhythmic sounds designed to regiment the body into formulaic dance steps. Instead Marsh renders the sonic as a means of exploring the relationship between the listener's sound, time and place. Thus, the sonic is not an object that one can explore but rather the production of space through a temporal embodiment of the viewer/listener's space. Thus Marsh explores haptic space as fluid, smooth space, without borders or boundaries. In *Ballroom* Marsh highlights the sonic by asking the viewer/listener to reconsider the temporal movements of transition: moments of transition as the movement from one transformative space to another. In this conception of time the body becomes a fluid and intense form of energy and flows.

Janice Cheddie is Research Fellow in Cross-Cultural Contemporary Arts at Goldsmith's College, London.

### Bibliography

Barthes Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Flamingo, Fontana Paperbacks, London 1980. Deleuze Gilles and Guattari Felix, *Difference and Repetition*, Continuum, London and New York, 2001.

Deleuze Gilles and Guattari Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Continuum, London and New York, 2001.

Gargett A., *Eternal Feminine: Natacha Merritt 'Digital Diaries'*; *Postfeminist Deleuzian Figurations*, *Parallax*, Vol. 8., No. 4, 2002, [32-45]

Manovich Lev, *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, Massachusetts and London 2001.

Marks Laura U., *Video Haptics and Erotics*, *Screen* 39:4, Winter 1998