

THE SECOND HEART
Philomène Hoël
DOC, Paris. 30.09.2017

1—Refectory, ground floor:

A collective viewing of the artist's most intimate memories projected by robot hovers controlled by two women on the walls of a former refectory turned corridor/ exhibition space.

THE SECOND HEART
Performative film, 4h30

About a month ago I was Philomène's guest in Paris, we were staying in the flat of a friend of hers who was away for the summer. "I am a foreigner in my own country" – she said. Philo was in Paris for an artist-residency at DOC and working on this show, which got postponed afterwards. I'm writing this text after a long day of work in Basel, typing in the live-in studio of a friend-of-a-friend's kitchen, who I never met. I could snoop through her books and sketchbooks but sleeping in her bed, shitting on her loo and writing about her flat while she's away feels already intrusive enough.

Anyway, at her bedside lies a book on choreography and one about polyamory and on the far corner, a poster with yoga positions - the combination of which made me very uneasy. I'm now thinking about that particular kind of anxiousness that makes you mull over past things, and it usually happens after work or when I find myself alone, wandering around. One never gets fully used to being a foreigner, I thought, while skimming through the tombstones at the Père Lachaise cemetery (I know this one, I don't know this one - most I didn't know). I went there because someone told me that the best thing about Paris are cemeteries and anyway the Picasso Museum was closed.

This cemetery is a corridor, not an aim in itself - I distractedly pass through it on my way to somewhere else. It's not linear and easy to navigate as normal corridors and some tourist follow tour guides. What a job. In a cemetery like this one, I don't think about death. I might be thinking about jobs, money, relationships. I don't have the right shoes for this cobbled ground, I get lost and annoyed at myself and I'm haunted by some vicious vindictive thoughts, which give me great pleasure and I'm so glad that none here can see the dirt going through my head. Bless!

After Père Lachaise I went to visit Philo's studio and she showed me around the spaces for her upcoming show. She liked this big bright room you are now in because during her time at the residency she only used it as a corridor to the upper floors. A space with an identity crisis that doesn't know what to be, a corridor in the body of an exhibition space. Philo just texted me on Messenger, there is something very relevant about the first room that I need to know: two young women called Camille and Agathe will be given the robot vacuums' remotes during the show. "I can't be the one controlling my memories".

I imagine the robot vacuums aimlessly and tirelessly roaming around like I did earlier in the cemetery, projecting memories on walls silent like tombstones. The only difference is, I might be able to see the dirt inside them. There was an orange cat in Philo's studio. She informed us that we shouldn't pet him, as he might have lice.

2—Studio 21, second floor:

An intimate viewing of two films about illness on a possibly dysfunctional laptop in a former classroom turned artist studio.

BLUE ILLNESS

1h loop, Video on computer screen and fan
Filmic material: Blue, Derek Jarman 1993,
Intoxicated by my Illness, Stephen Dwoskin 2001

"I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form (...). He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire. (...) In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it -- indeed, a great share." St.

Teresa de Ávila, Autobiography, 1567. The first time I visited Paris it was in high school. We slept in the airport because our flight got cancelled, the food was terrible and on our first day out a guy threw himself down the Tour Eiffel. He climbed the protective fence and was standing in front of me - I turned my head, I couldn't possibly watch - and suddenly there was a blue-tinted grey piece of sky in his place.

I used this story as an ice-breaker when I met Armelle and Tamsyn, who like me were Philo's guests. I feel somewhat guilty to use this anecdote as a conversation aid but as you can see, I'm also using it in this text, and I might use it again. There was a laptop and a fan in Philo's studio. On the screen a video, with shots of a man in hospital rhythmically interrupted by a blue monochrome. At first I wondered if the blue interruption was a glitch, a symptom of the laptop being ill as well but the audio is still working, I don't know. The fan moves slowly left and right, left and right. Do they know of each other, is it a virus?

Derek was a film director, he was homosexual and died from an AIDS related illness at 52. Blue (1993) was his last feature, consisting of a 79 minutes long blue shot, with music and sounds to accompany the voiceover of a text written some months before his death, a harrowing meditation on illness, death and love. Jarman describes becoming partially blind from retinal detachment caused by the treatment, his vision disturbed by blue light.

Stephen was an experimental filmmaker, who had been left disabled by contracting polio at 9. Intoxicated by my Illness (2001) tracks a phase in Dwoskin's life that took him from medical examination to intensive care. Images of him bedridden and suffering are superimposed on memories of erotic encounters, his body constrained by machines and tubes fading into BDSM paraphernalia, nurses into dominatrices. The association between the contingency of pain and visions of love and pleasure in these films made me think of Teresa. She was a nun, a mystic and wrote an autobiography before 1567, describing a life of chronic illness and self-mortification. Tamsyn mentioned her on a train, I don't remember in what context, saying that her autobiography was super interesting but that it "got too much for her". Of course, the first thing I did once back home was to download the pdf and spend an evening in front of my laptop.

Stephen, Derek and Teresa, and their individual, marginalised and overwhelmingly poetic visions of pain, beyond art and even life in a journey towards immateriality. Yet the screen stands there in front of us, the profound physicality of these stories contained in a machine, while this stupid-looking fan moves left and right.

"The monochrome is an alchemy, effective liberation from personality. It articulates silence. It is a fragment of an immense work without limit. The blue of the landscape of liberty". I believe death IS this kind of monochrome, while also being as banal as a Blue Screen of Death (BSoD) on Windows. I'm having a spritz with my old and new friends while watching Philo's work in progress, thinking again about the void of that blue-tinted grey piece of sky on top of the Tour Eiffel and wonder why I'm so desensitised. The skinny orange cat is hanging out in the studio and Philo informs us that he might have worms in his belly.

3—Salle galop, second floor, end of corridor:

A classical cinema setting for the viewing of a classic French film organised by a foreigner in her own country

LE CHAT

24 mins loop, Screen projection

Philo is very excited to show us the editing she made on this very famous film I never heard of before. No dialogues, just a woman drinking and smoking until she kills her own cat and has a heart attack.

I had a lovely day with Philo, Tamsyn and Armelle and I am very happy. I'm trying very hard to keep my eyes open but I fall asleep on the couch and miss the last ten minutes. I'm mortified but Armelle and Tamsyn reassured me, it was normal as it was late and we had a lot of food and drinks and also, they had nightmares all night because of the film. They all felt very sorry for Le Chat.

Philo told me that the husband of the main actress, who looks a bit like a cat herself, cheated on her with Marilyn Monroe. Fun fact: they are both eerily buried next to each other at Père Lachaise. Poor cat. Destined for the sad end of a metaphorical device.

Texte: Valentina Bin