

The Familiar Reconfigured

Hassan Khan

Janna Holmstedt's precisely configured technologies of communication sensitize the subject to a context. This is a context that is not framed as an absolute truth or stable reality but rather as a system that unfolds through a specific network where meanings are constructed. In her piece *Receiver-Modules* (2003) Holmstedt constructed a system of transmission that took into account the very act of perception, while allowing "information" to be transferred, communicated- to resonate.

An empty gallery space except for two modules, rough wooden structures attached to the windows overlooking the icy landscape, projected video-echoes of the view, and the modernist museum on the other side of the road. Inside each module one is invited to look out at the familiar reconfigured. Headphones on and narratives unfold- stories 'collected' or 'read somewhere'. An obsessive border-crosser uncomfortable in any fixed territory, the machinations of 21st century Swedish pollsters, an 18th century fashionable practice, and the way plants synthesize light.

Receiver-Modules is a proposal towards a more precise form of communication- by utilizing the architecture of the gallery space as a cultural signifier embedded in a specific locale- rather than a merely formal construction, Holmstedt manages to sensitize the viewer to a context that is too easily subsumed by the glamour of the act of consumption. The constructed image of the gallery-goer as a privileged refined consumer is subverted by placing the viewer as object- in the very act of engaging with the piece. The viewer in the window is forced to become the object of the outside world's unabashed look. A technology of communication in such instances becomes at the same time a technology of the self- a situation where information becomes expanded, or as Holmstedt puts it becomes "communication".

The narratives, which are used to literally overlay one's perception of the world, are about perception and an awareness of the strategic nature of positioning as much as the actual unfolding of specific fabrications. However what distinguishes Holmstedt's work from much of her contemporaries is an interest in a specific content, a serious and conceptually rigorous research into the nature of the networks that create meaning and hence context. Holmstedt manages to offer an experience where context is explored through a highly personal field.

One finds a playful and gentle, sometimes wistful, destabilization of accepted modes of communication and by extension normative definitions of the self, hence the artists subjects are in the end those who activate the work- those who use (rather than look at) it.

Narratives here are not only the content of the action that unfold but also signifiers of a specific strategy, the manifestation of a cultural unconscious, an eruption from the archive of the predetermined. Therefore the artist becomes a mediator, a designer of a political technology where the transmission of information, its very form, hints at the potential of alternative communicative networks. Networks which according to Holmstedt resist "simplifications, fascination and seduction, essentialism" and most importantly, I would argue, "oversimplified social constructionism". For if, after Foucault, a large amount of cultural production suffers from a perspective where the subject became only the sum of its parts, a constructed signifier lacking agency- Holmstedt evades this common trap by insisting on a form of engagement as one of the vital sources of her aesthetic theory.

Engagement is related to an aesthetic theory where "visiting" (Hannah Arendt as cited by Holmstedt) different positions allows us to be "inside" (at one) rather than alienated by our tools of communication- this is further complicated by Holmstedt's proposition that we function in a constant state of liminality, a "leakage". This "borderland" is a much more dangerous site than either that of the alienated outsider or the fully integrated social being. It is where questions are necessary. The profound paradox in formulating a position where a specific identity cannot be fixed while at the same time maintaining an ethical position where responsibility is grounded in the context it functions within is insistently proposed. Agency is emphasized rather than denied.

Therefore the interest in merely exploring these networks is mitigated by the insistence on allowing them to unfold in a manner that ensures the audience's full awareness and responsibility for their choices. One finds a constant crisscross of gazes locked in a fascination.

People like to look at each other and in each look one also looks at oneself; narratives about the world are also primarily narratives about the human subject.

Holmstedt's 'exploitation', as she puts it, of communicative strategies holds within it the seeds of a politic where ethical positions are continuously contextually redefined. One finds in these works an inspection of the networks that define meaning as it functions in everyday life. Hence mass media, not as a tired source of ironic kitsch but rather as a strategic and affective element in the construction of the world, becomes in Holmstedt's work an integral element. Thankfully Holmstedt is deeper than to be merely concerned with parodying the stream of representations that flow through the billions of TV sets warmly embedded in millions of living rooms all over the world. She is interested in the very relationship that this technology allows- her investigation is on that level quite structural. The work in a sense argues that the sort of networks created by this relationship strives towards hindering communication rather than enhancing it- and for Holmstedt communication is not some kind of new age soppy sentimental ideal- it is a rather messy affair with plenty of "misunderstandings, resonance, flow, associations" and thankfully plenty of "noise".

Hassan Khan works with text, image, sound and performance. He lives and works in Cairo, Egypt.
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