

# Études britanniques contemporaines

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d'Études Anglaises Contemporaines



Colloque de la SÉAC-SAIT  
Londres, septembre 2005  
« The Infinite Dialogue »

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## *Études britanniques contemporaines*

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Ce numéro d'*Études britanniques contemporaines* comprend la plupart des communications présentées à Senate House les 24 et 25 sept. 2005 lors du colloque « The Infinite Dialogue » organisé par la SÉAC en collaboration avec la SAIT. Le comité de lecture a également souhaité publier le texte d'une jeune plasticienne australienne ayant présenté ses travaux dans le cadre du colloque.

**Colloque SÉAC-SAIT  
Londres, septembre 2005  
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**Numéro 31  
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## Redefining Feminine Representations through Multimedia Arts Practice

Simone Hine

*School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne*

A woman sits beneath a tree with a wooden case placed carefully beside her. One version of this scene takes place on a stage, her body is partially lit by a faint blue light which mixes with her burgundy and pale pink Victorian-style dress to create a deep purple in the parts not shaded by the tree. The object that she sits beneath is not really a tree; rather it is a pair of two-dimensional images of a tree interlocked to create a three-dimensional object. Indoors, this tree, with its varnished wood, appears more like furniture than a stage prop. The woman sitting beneath the tree continues her performance as though creating a convincing world. Upon the stage, she carefully places digital photographs of the patchy grass one finds in the shade of trees, filling in the empty space of the floor beneath the tree. On a screen adjacent to the woman is a video projection of a written description that constructs a disjointed narrative about her reasons for sitting beneath this particular tree. After a while both the screen and the light illuminating the woman fade and a new video appears showing the same woman sitting beneath a similar tree, only this time her surroundings are not constructed, rather she is sitting beneath a lone tree that overlooks the ocean. This scene is framed by an oval border; the image softened by a dream-like haze. The three versions of the scene fold into each other creating a single moment that can only be read through its reference to the other versions.

The above passage is a description of a scene from a theatre performance titled *On This A Night Like Any Other* (2004, Brisbane Powerhouse, Centre for the Live Arts, Australia). As the artist/director of this performative

work, I have called upon my memory of constructing, watching and documenting the work, in order to recreate a partial impression of the piece in readers' minds. I have several remnants at my disposal including documentation, cue sheets, video and music, which I have used to recall the performance in an attempt to reinvoke part of the piece for an audience who has not seen the work. This is a common process for an artist working in a time-based practice even when ample documentation is available; visualisation is required in order to conceive of the work temporally, spatially and conceptually. The catalogue essay for another of my installations, *type* (2003, The Farm, Brisbane, Australia) noted that the essay was written prior to the work's installation and thus was written using the author's internal visualisation of the installation based upon fragments of the work that could be shown or described prior to its installation (Weise 1). In turn the readers of this article will have to rely on the descriptions of the work and the images presented in this article. Visualising the work based upon fragments of visual and linguistic descriptions is not simply the province of documentation but the subject of the work itself. As the above description suggests the works present different versions of the same scene which meld together to form a single event, action, or gesture in the mind of the reader, showing the process through which the work is constructed. This paper will explore the potential for such multidisciplinary techniques to transform the way audiences engage with well-worn images of the feminine from popular culture. Focusing on the two aforementioned works, I will discuss the way text (both written and verbal) is used alongside images to create a disjuncture in traditional reading patterns, which draw attention to codes and conventions used to construct images of the feminine. It is through the formal construction of these works that I create images of the feminine that are at once reminiscent of literary and cinematic tropes and therefore familiar to audience, but at the same time disrupt the reading process by drawing attention to the words on a page, the paint on a canvas or the pixels on a screen. In doing so, literary and cinematic images of the feminine present themselves as fictions, laying bare the process of their construction.

*Type* consisted of six small wooden-hand crafted boxes, each containing different objects. The boxes were placed on plinths that stood at waist

height. On the ground surrounding the plinths was approximately ten meters square of living grass. The six boxes each contained different versions of a scene of a woman walking across a grass field holding one of the small wooden boxes. This scene was displayed across televisions, typed descriptions, digital photographs and paintings. Defined in part by the limits of their medium, each version offers a different perspective on the same scene. This work relies on the audience's ability to envision a scene based on the fragments given through video, painting, text, and so on. Creating a visual impression from written text is an inherent aspect of the readings process and often leads to more complex images or impressions than what is given in the text. A reader's memory is involved in the reading process in two ways: firstly, through the reader holding in memory details of a scene described in the text, and secondly, by recalling appropriate memory images to fill in the gaps left by the text (Schwenger 65-66). Audiences undertake this process as they walk between boxes—collecting information from the contents of each box and piecing it together with prior knowledge to create a scene envisioned by the reader based on the reader's own assumptions and experiences. The fusion of personal and cultural experience becomes an unconscious part of the reading process. This is significant to my work in general as it uses well-worn images of the feminine from literature, cinema and other forms of popular culture. Indeed this minimal scene works as a reference point on which to project numerous Romantic scenes from films, the pages of books or even fashion magazines. Thus audiences will draw upon a combination of cultural codes and conventions and personal experience in order to construct an identity for the woman.

Vivian Sobchack states that cinema audiences experience films not simply through the privileged visual and audio channels, but trans-modally: across the senses. She suggests that cinematic pleasure arises out of the confusion between inside and outside the body, on and off screen. The audience draws upon bodily knowledge in order to experience with the off screen body that which takes place on screen (Sobchack 66-67). *type* created a trans-modal experience incorporating visual and linguistic cues as well as touch and smell. Audiences felt the ground beneath their feet, smelt the earthy smell of the turf and felt the rough texture of paper between

their fingers. The audience member was drawn into the work as a performer; re-enacting the performer's actions as they walk from box to box, experiencing the work across the senses, but to an altogether different effect. The work aims to involve the viewer trans-modally, while at the same time disrupting the audience's ability to be completely seduced by the text. Unlike cinema this work does not allow the audience to identify with a single set of circumstances, perspective, body or experience. Instead the work offers a series of different perspectives on the same scene based primarily on an amplification of qualities associated with the different mediums. The reader is at once asked to envision a scene, but as they walk around the installation it becomes evident that each box contains possible scenarios each undermining the existence of a single unified notion of the female character depicted across all the boxes. The work becomes a series of discrete possibilities that are largely determined by the mediums through which they are portrayed.

Returning to the theatre performance *On This A Night Like Any Other* and focusing on the scene previously described, the stage performers and videos depict moments that might constitute a few seconds in a film and extends them through time. The text then described and elaborated upon the scene providing a linguistic context for what was primarily a visual experience. The text described or elaborated upon scenes depicted visually on stage or in videos. However, the voiceover was not written as dialogue, rather it had the sentence structure of fictional prose. This development of the predominantly visual scenes with sections of writing that were connected through content but not form, created a rift between the image and text used to create meaning. Furthermore, the visuals referred to well-worn cinematic images of the feminine, whereas the text provides a specific context for the woman depicted. Thus the seamless move from general notions of the feminine to specific representations of women is not quite possible within this work, or at least the process is denaturalised.

One of two main principles of Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth century was the separation between plastic representation and linguistic reference. When both of the elements are combined one remains subordinate to the other, either language becomes a description of the visual or the visual illustrative of the text (Foucault 32-33). Take

for example the work *type*, five of the six boxes contained either visual or verbal descriptions of the scene depicted. The only box to use both elements was a box containing a video of a typewriter. The visuals in combination with the audio, gave audiences a temporal sense of the process of writing, while the linguistic element provided the audience with various descriptions of the artwork and the scene portrayed. The visual and linguistic codes were used in this box to support each other, presenting a scene that not only described the installation but referenced the process of description. Thus the visual or linguistic codes were isolated in the other five boxes, only to be brought together in a self-referential way in the box with the video of the typewriter. The work evoked these traditional distinctions between text and image in order to highlight both the limits and possibilities of the given mediums.

It is as though each box contained various possible contents for the single imagined box which is carried by a woman in a field. The sense of a cohesive whole produced by a single story is not possible in this work. The separation between image and text operates in both works to create a disjuncture in traditional reading patterns, which is echoed by the juxtaposition of different mediums including, video, painting, and live performance. The disjuncture created between image and text, moving and still images, spoken and written text, works to denaturalise those things so familiar to us we no longer see them. As Schwenger says "... the act of reading is so familiar that in order really to see it we must take on an unfamiliar perspective" (Schwenger 19). Although Schwenger is referring specifically to reading literature, it suffices to say that it is true of reading images, music and so on.

The visual and linguistic strategy that I have outlined is not designed simply as a self reflexive exploration of particular artistic media, but rather as a method through which to explore otherwise seamless portrayals of the feminine in popular culture. The works juxtapose text and image as a way of disrupting the process whereby images of the feminine are produced and circulated within popular culture.

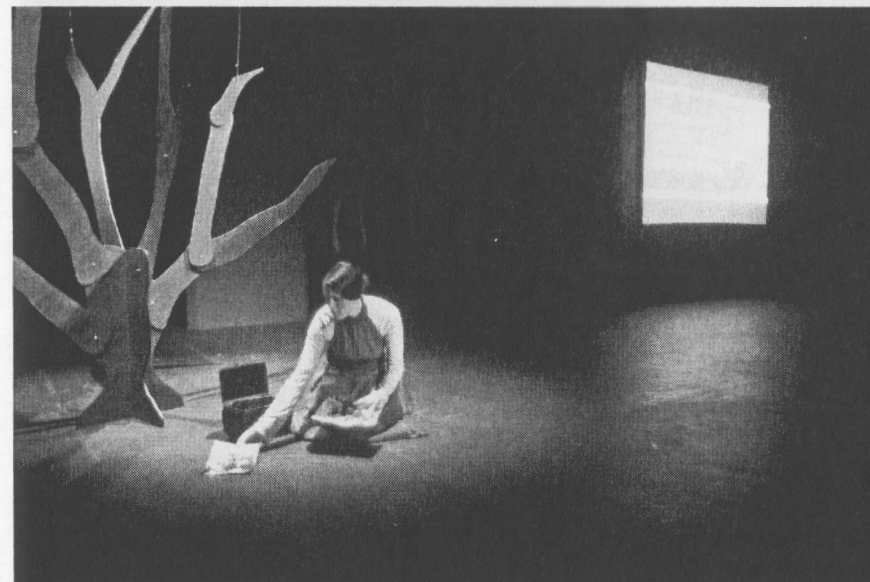
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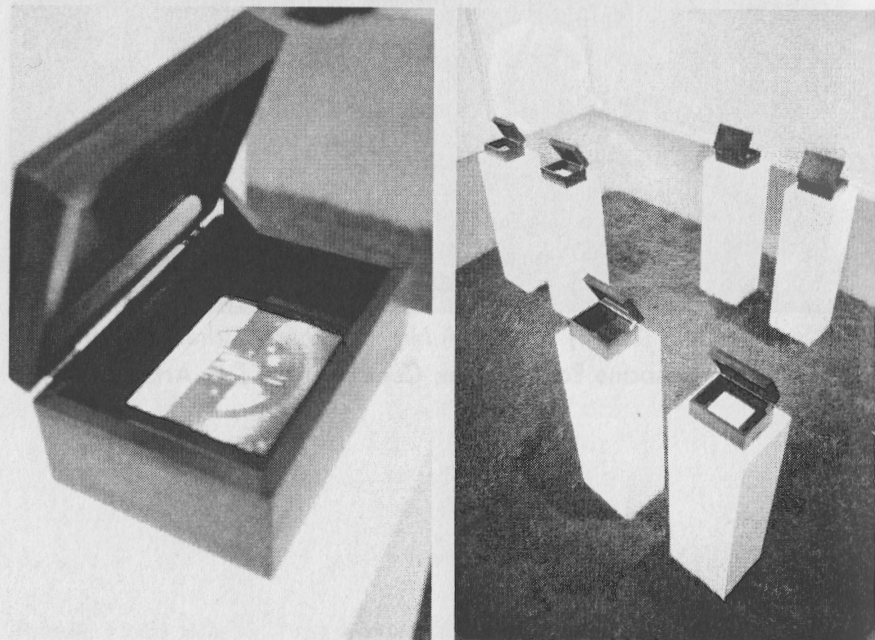
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Simone Hine (2003) *type*, installation, The Farm Gallery, Brisbane:  
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## Résumés des articles/Abstracts of articles

Liliane LOUVEL

### Word and Image: Beyond or for Good Measure?

This paper aims at offering a brief survey of the relationships between word and image, language and the visual. If no image can do without discourse, conversely, language is imbued with the visual. If the two representing systems cannot be conflated, it seems nevertheless justified to observe, describe and draw conclusions from what happens when they are at work. Transposition, transaction, translation are the terms used to describe and analyse the process of exchange, of conversion, ensuring the passage between the two media. The moot point then is to know whether there is a "common measure" between them. "Writings on art" as by V. Woolf or J. Winterson, for instance, provide extreme cases of works the generic status of which still has to be clearly defined. Numerous examples of such hybrid texts are to be found in contemporary British works which may provide a corpus fit for a stimulating intersemiotic critical approach.

Liliane LOUVEL

### Texte et image: (au-delà) de la commune mesure?

Cet article s'efforce de présenter un bref bilan des rapports entre le texte littéraire et l'image, entre le langage et le visuel. S'il n'y a pas d'image sans langage, inversement le langage est marqué par une pensée visuelle. Si l'on ne peut réduire les deux systèmes de représentation l'un à l'autre, il semble, en revanche, pertinent d'observer, de décrire, puis de déduire des conclusions de ce qui se passe lorsque l'un en passe par le filtre de l'autre. Transposition, transaction, traduction, sont des termes utilisés pour décrire et analyser cette opération de change, de convertibilité du dire en voir, du voir en dire. La question se pose alors de l'existence d'une commune mesure entre les deux. « L'écrit sur l'art », comme chez V. Woolf ou J. Winterson, fournit un cas extrême de production dont le statut générique reste à définir. De nombreux exemples de ces textes hybrides, puisés dans les œuvres contemporaines britanniques, pourront fournir de bons sujets à l'approche critique intersémiotique.

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2001 permet de faire apparaître des différences évidentes mais aussi des parentés inattendues entre les deux modes d'expression. Essentiellement : du côté des différences, un fonctionnement inversé (centrifuge, ouvert et problématique chez Munch, centripète, circulaire, conduisant à l'évidence chez Paul Thomas) ; et du côté des parentés, le statut de l'ekphrasis et de son guidage (explicite chez Thomas, implicite chez Munch), le traitement binaire de la réalité chez l'un et l'autre. La leçon générale est que si le dessin de presse ne peut exister hors de son échange avec l'hypotexte artistique, ce dernier se trouve partiellement dénudé en retour par les méthodes plus brutales et explicites du premier.

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Catherine LANONE

**Pain, Paint and Popular Fiction: *The Passion of Artemisia* by Susan Vreeland**

Susan Vreeland's novel, *The Passion of Artemisia*, focuses on the somewhat forgotten life of Artemisia Gentileschi in order to study the construction of the female subject. Using *ekphrasis* as a key device, the novel reads the paintings as clues. For Vreeland, Artemisia's forceful, fully-fleshed women challenge male stereotypes. Thus she negotiates her traumatic experience of the rape trial, subtly subverting traditional Biblical scenes. Using Lecercle's analysis in *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, we will see how "counter interpellation" seeks to respond to "interpellation". Although some of Vreeland's choices are questionable, her novel underlines the link between interpretation and pragmatics, aesthetics and ideology, the male gaze and feminine vision.

Catherine LANONE

**Passion, peinture et fiction populaire: *The Passion of Artemisia* de Susan Vreeland**

Le roman de Susan Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia*, fait de l'*ekphrasis* le fil conducteur d'une biographie romancée, afin d'explorer la façon dont la représentation naît de contraintes pour permettre au sujet féminin de se construire. Vreeland retrace la gestation des œuvres majeures, pour montrer comment Artemisia Gentileschi négocie le traumatisme du procès pour viol en peignant des femmes fortes, agressives, se servant de sujets bibliques pour imposer une vision différente de la féminité, refusant le modèle éthéré, idéalisé des peintres masculins. À la lumière de l'analyse de Jean-Jacques Lecercle dans *Interpretation as*

*Pragmatics*, il convient de voir comment à l'« interpellation » répond donc une « contre-interpellation » picturale. Tout en reprenant les clichés d'un féminisme adapté à la littérature populaire, Vreeland souligne les liens entre esthétique et idéologie, contrainte pragmatique et création, regard imposé et vision libératrice.

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Simone HINE

**Redefining Feminine Representations through Multimedia Arts Practice**

Focusing on two artworks, a gallery installation titled *type* (2003) and a theatre performance titled *On This a Night Like Any Other* (2004), the article discusses the way that text and image are isolated and then juxtaposed to create a disjunction in traditional reading patterns. This process draws attention to codes and conventions used to construct images of the feminine in popular culture. The work creates images of the feminine that are at once reminiscent of literary and cinematic tropes and therefore familiar to the audience, but at the same time disrupts the reading process by drawing attention to the means of their construction.

Simone HINE

**Re-définition des représentations féminines: la pratique artistique multimedia**

Cet article se fonde sur l'évocation de deux œuvres, une installation intitulée *type* (2003) et une représentation théâtrale intitulée *On This a Night Like Any Other* (2004), pour montrer comment le texte et l'image sont dans un premier temps isolés et ensuite séparés afin de créer une disjonction des protocoles de lecture traditionnels. Ce procédé permet de mettre en avant les conventions et les codes utilisés pour construire des images du féminin dans la culture populaire. Les travaux envisagés ici créent des images du féminin qui, d'une part, évoquent des réminiscences littéraires ou cinématographiques connues du spectateur, et d'autre part déstabilisent le processus de lecture en mettant en lumière les modalités de leur construction.

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Vous trouverez ci-dessous un exemple de bibliographie répertoriant les cas les plus fréquemment rencontrés :

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