



ACID CUT
FLOWERS

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Emily Wardill and Ian White



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by Emily Wardill and Ian White

2 00 8



THE PLAYERS

EW

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

IW

Douglas Sirk

EW

George Lakoff

IW

Yvonne Rainer

EW

Frank Luntz

IW

Walt Whitman

ACID CUT FLOWERS

SCENE 1



EW

The Anima Mundi is conceived of as being like a vast underground reservoir, not of water, but of memory. All humanity's past experiences, thoughts, dreams and hopes are contained in this reservoir, the contents of which are constantly being increased by contemporary experience. The Anima Mundi, then, is mankind's treasure chest of emotion, thought and spiritual striving; a treasure chest that, as the centuries and millennia have elapsed, has been enriched by the images and thoughts of living men. It is possible, so it is held, to come into contact with the contents of the treasure chest, either accidentally or deliberately.

IW

One thing collapses onto another, or comes from an imaginary relationship to another. Like the Antiques Roadshow. Objects tell stories, store images. Nothing is just itself and I see everything in all things. Once I saw a doorknob at school, as I was walking up the stairs in the H-block, and in the way that it became a fish-eye lens I realised something about Virginia Woolf.

EW

It is also possible for the individual to establish contact with the Anima Mundi deliberately by the use of occult techniques based on the use of ritual, meditation and symbol. The poet W.B. Yeats who was a devotee of the magical arts, was adept at the use of these techniques. He recorded, for example, that by thinking of a symbol traditionally associated with mankind's long lost age of primal innocence he was able to induce a visionary experience in another man. The latter found himself in 'a walled garden on the top of a high mountain, and in the middle of it a tree with great birds on the branches, and fruit out of which, if you held a fruit to your ear, came the sound of fighting.

How do these images function for us now, almost as props to be picked up and to have ideas attached to?

Interviewing Fassbinder on his education in Steiner school ...

[*IW moves into a position that represents the interviewer, EW moves into a position that represents the young Fassbinder*]

IW

Has anything of the ideology of this school remained with you?

EW

Only a single phrase sticks in my mind: “children have to grow like flowers,” without punishment when they do badly, without reward when they do well. As an idea I think that’s beautiful, but things don’t happen that way.

PAUSE

IW [*shouting*]

AND WHAT DID HE DO AT AGE NINE?

EW

At age nine he wrote a theatre piece about flowers that fall in love.

IW

A child said What is the grass? Fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

An now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly I will use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their mothers’ laps.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and women, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

EW

Look at this, this is how it should be, and this is how it is. I would like that life was better than it is. This is how it should be and this is how it is.

And then, if children do grow in this way – without punishment and without reward – we are left just with what they work out for themselves – how they grow without compliments which might act like a photograph which halts time.

IW

Ab ovo. The end in the beginning. Poor Roland Barthes.

[*points a finger in the air to announce a demonstration, moves to a different position representing RB*]

It can happen that I am observed without knowing it. But very often I have been photographed and knew it. Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of “posing,” I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. I feel that the photograph creates my body or mortifies it.

EW

If a person is described to themselves then that description becomes part of themselves again and they are halted.

In ‘Despair’, Dirk Bogarde comes into the studio of the cousin of his lover (with whom she is having an affair) and asks to see a painting that he remembers ‘of flowers’, it turns out that he has remembered it incorrectly and is in fact of fruit.



These objects become symbols for the way that Fassbinder became his films and his films became him. They become objects with consequences,

A jar that rolls off the edge of the table
 Broken glass that reflects a triangle of light onto your face
 I ask if that is a scar above your lip
 And you threaten to put a scar next to mine.

And that trap of repetition, that circuitry that relates to the body and to the circular dialogue that will never break out of the structure of Fassbinder's films. Will hard lines and soft flesh wait or even rise above petty disappointment and recorded voices?

[*IW repeats after EW*]

How dead are those recorded voices and are they any more dead than the living ones? What I mean is, when we hear those voices spoken in a way which is cold and as though the person speaking them were allergic to what they were saying, is that any more dead than when we hear the recorded voice? Is that what these voices are?

EW

In 'In a Year of 13 moons' made after Fassbinder's Lover Armin committed suicide, we hear at the end, when Erwin/Elvira has killed himself, the recording from the psychiatrist's session playing over his psychiatrist looking for the body in the flat. Like a predictive voice over, the story is the story of the just dead, casual and full of pathetic self pity. Played over real-time action, the voice becomes like a set of eyes, watching back over an event at which it is not physically present. The voice is like the voice over that sweeps through instead of describing.

The voice before becomes the voice over and, Christ, how that crushes up time into a shrunken cage or cages.

What I mean is, is the recorded voice any more dead than the real voice and is that why rhythms [*swallow, wait and sound surprised*]

Is that why the speech here is as though it existed before?

That's what I mean

The speech is as though it existed before if it is read rather than spoken. It has an entity of it's own aside from the speaker and, as such, it is pre-existent.

To make something that appears to have always existed. And that it might have it's meaning so fully imbricated within it's material that there is no need to distill it.

That the meaning is the falling down and the sound of words.



THE LOVE SCENE

Here is a clip from 'All that heaven allows' where the children would like the mother to replace her dead husband with a television set, rather than the gardener, played by Rock Hudson, who she has actually fallen in love with.

Fassbinder + Sirk are the 2 characters in our love scene.

Sirk was known in the USA for making shmaltzy melodramas, bound by structure but which are, again, are inhabited with human detritus. Many of them were box office hits. He used melodrama as a way to comfort the audience and allow them into a space which was familiar. Once welcomed into this space, Sirk would litter it with the discomfort of social prejudice.

IW

Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* is a melodrama – it is based on melodrama – it is called *Lives of Performers (A Melodrama)* although we might not notice this when we watch the film, rather it is about just how people move in flatly lit space like a non-dramatisation, a spare form:

[as IW speaks these next lines both IW & EW move consciously to imaginary points on the stage. His voice becomes quieter as he talks and then EW continues with the lecture, speaking over him]

A enters, sees B & C, pivots to face upstage

A enters with D. Both are laughing. A notices B & C, then moves towards C

A enters, followed by D. He grabs her wrist, swings her around, looks into her eyes.

A enters, sits in the chair between B & C. D enters, sits on the floor with his head in A's lap. A stroke's D's long black hair.

A enters, followed by D, who stands behind her with his arm around her waist. A loses her composure, starts to laugh. The both 'break up,' look at the camera.

Same as preceding. The don't 'break up.'

A enters, followed by D. He kisses A head to toe.

A enters, lies on couch. D enters, tries to rouse A. When A doesn't respond, D runs out. D then does a series of double takes – starts to re-enter, looks at camera, exits, re-enters, goes to A, backs up, sits in chair. D then begins to converse with B & C in a casual way.

'Fear Eats the Soul' is the beginning of the Sirkian inspired films. In the early 70's, Fassbinder became obsessed with Sirk ,

“ Before Sirk , I believed that serious work meant shunning the Hollywood model. Hollywood movies, which do in fact emulate precise models, seemed quite stupid to me. Until then, my semi-cultured European scruples held me back, but Sirk...made me understand that it was possible to pursue this path”

But this love scene is not just about a love of Fassbinder for the films of Sirk – it is to do with the role of love within the melodrama as a binding device which is not cerebral but bodily. And these bodies are fallible and jealous, riddled with psychosis and neurosis and paranoia. Corrupted nervous systems.

Hedi Ben Salem , the main actor in 'Fear Eats the Soul' who Fassbinder met in a sauna in Paris had to be taken out of Fassbinder family because he tried to stab another

member in a fit of jealous rage (he thought Peter Chatel had become Fassbinder's favorite). This is after him taking a bite out the cheek of Chatel and Fassbinder, on Peter's complaint said

IW

' Don't lie, you did it yourself'.

EW

The love is a love of the mechanics of human relations – the consequences of actions and humanity...

IW

Lives of Performers doesn't look like a melodrama and then the final section of the film shows a group of dancers performing 'Lulu' – a version of G.W. Pabst's film *Pandora's Box*, in the form of 35 tableaux vivants, 35 shots. Tableaux vivants. The body made mechanical, or a still image, a photograph. Lulu is the story of a prostitute, her marriage to a rich suitor, his jealousy and their tragedy. Mechanical relations and uncontrollable passion. Melodrama.

EW

Rainer, after writing to the director, made a pilgrimage to Sirk's retirement home in Switzerland. Rainer was 25, Sirk past 70. This is what Sirk said when remembering the meeting at the age of 83:

IW

..We discussed Art and Literature, theatre and cinema, until the wee hours of the morning. For some reason I no longer recall, I began to speak of classical Spanish Theatre, mentioning the extraordinary productivity of Calderon and of Lope de Vega, to whom his contemporaries attributed a thousand plays. Calderon had, I think, gotten to about half that number. And all of this work, I told my guests, had been created with the strictest adherence to formal language and style. To make a long story short, Rainer, who had listened to me attentively, suddenly said “ I would like to be as prolific as they were” As we know now, these words were not simply the expression of a desire.

EW

In a professional career that lasted less than fifteen years Fassbinder completed 35 feature length films as well as television series, twenty four stage plays and four radio plays.



When Sirk talks about ‘Formal language and style, he is talking about something which Fassbinder recognised in him as he did in Calderon. It was a structure that could be used to familiarise subjects which were present but hidden. Fassbinder talks about this as a means to communicate with larger numbers of people and hence as a way to profligate ideas that would otherwise be delegated to the underground.

IW

Frank Luntz wrote a document on words that Republican speech writing with a whole lexicon of words that you should and should not use. He now conducts focus group on Newnight. He say:

EW

Symbols of America are as important as words. From the Statue of Liberty to the Lincoln Memorial to the American Bald Eagle, what you show can be as important as what you say. Use symbols to help convey your agenda more powerfully.

IW

George Lakoff is a founding senior fellow at the Rockridge Institute where he applies

cognitive linguistics to the study of politics, especially the framing of public political debate. Talking about framing and the use of metaphor within political speech writing in order to construct stages within which ideas will be housed, talks about the way in which this helps to bridge the communication of ideas.

EW

....when your brain changes, when a frame enters your brain , it becomes a new common sense. And the facts hitting your common sense will be ignored. The facts will be trumped by the frames, explained away, not heard - once your brain changes.

IW

He argues that we think metaphorically and that conservatives in America have figured this out and are constructing ‘Strict Father’ paradigms within their speech patterns. You need a Strict Father because there is evil in the world, and he has to protect you from evil. It’s important to the family and children are born bad and need a strict father to teach them right from wrong.

EW

NEVER SAY

Tort Reform

INSTEAD SAY

Lawsuit Abuse Reform

The term ‘tort’ has very little meaning to the average American and at best reminds one of a French Pastry. “Lawsuit Abuse” is something most Americans understand and resent. If you really want to make your case, add the word “frivolous”

IW

At the Rockridge Institute, Lakoff is trying to find a way by which democrats, progressives, can use the same techniques to win power and also to achieve some kind of unity for the left , rather than ‘exposing’ the maintenance of fiction within conservative rhetoric -

Frank Luntz - put out a section on the environment . In it, he discussed global warming and this was leaked on the internet. In it, Luntz said

EW

“ the other side is winning because they have science on their side, but we can turn it around. We can win through language. We can use words like “ healthy” “ clean” “safe” when we talk about coal plants, nuclear power”.

IW

You've heard the president at his press conferences :

EW

"we need a nuclear power plant that is healthy, clean and safe".

IW

They name their environmental initiatives after those words - like

EW

"The Clear Skies Act"

IW

that increases pollution:

EW

"The Healthy Forest Act"

IW

that allows clear-cutting. Notice that they could not call it

EW

"The Dirty Skies Act".

IW

They could not call it

EW

"No tree left behind"

IW

Sirk is the Strict Father too - he is in control of his characters and they fit into his plan. We are comforted by his control - his linear narrative which is always resolved and always whole.

Embryonic stem cell research

Tax relief [*sighs*]

EW

Fassbinder, on the other hand as much as he admired and loved Sirk, shows us how it

feels to be inside of those structures and how claustrophobic they are. The constraint is the same with both directors but with Sirk it is comforting and with Fassbinder it is restrictive. It makes you sweat under the studio lights - they are too much, arses are almost bursting out of trousers and people stand too close. Tell me that your make up is too thick and always that you were a theatre director first.

First a theatre director.

IW

The American theatre director Robert Wilson describes his fascination with Marlene Dietrich in an article published in Pin Up, Issue 3, Autumn/Winter 07/08:

[*assumes a position that represents Wilson*]

I first saw her in about 1968. I guess, when she performed on Broadway and I had no idea at the time that I was going to work in the theatre. I was fascinated with her. Then, in 1971, I was performing in Paris for a few months, on my first major work, Deathman Glance. The fashion designer Pierre Cardin was producing it and he was also presenting Dietrich at the Espace Cardon, which had just opened. I went to see her 17 times! I was just totally blown away by how precise she was in each performance. She would remove a tear every night - it was always right there at the exact same time.

[*wipes away a tear*]

EW

You are sweating it all over the place and it makes your make up run and the skin looks pocked under the foundation.

Cheap.

And lonely

The constraint of the action to human reaction (bodily) becomes political. It is as though you related some kind of interdependence of thought - a kind of dialectics or relativity - with the body rather than with the mind so that it becomes pathological.

And with physical, not just mental, consequences.

Claustrophobic like a studio where the lights are making it too hot.

How to make a short amount of time seems like a long amount of time

(*leave a gap here*)

beats which slow down and speed up.

How to break out of the frame like Dore.



There are links here to the way in which Fassbinder saw Sirk using melodrama to question societal structures in a way which was easy to swallow. In 'All that Heaven Allows' an older woman falls for her gardener and their relationship sends the suburban 50's society cracked.

[*IW sways repeatedly*]

EW

In 'Fear Eats the Soul' the same story is used but updated and made less glossy somehow that Sirk's version -

But it isn't just a dramatic structure, it is a religious structure - one that chimes with a religious belief wherein stories are familiar and inherently moralistic. Lakoff talks of giving a paper at a linguistics convention on his idea of 'Strict Father' paradigms and how 2 of his friends who were Christians approached him afterwards to tell him he'd almost got it right but that he needed to read Dobson. James Dobson is on 3000 radio stations and is the most popular newspaper columnist in America. He has so many people writing for his materials that Focus on the Family needs its own zip code in Colorado Springs. He is a member of the Christian Coalition and has been teaching strict father childrearing for over 30 years for people in churches and day care centres all over America. He is a major spokesperson for the religious right. When the compromise on the nuclear option was announced, he came out and said that it was a betrayal of right wing principles.

It is this image - this use of the image as a device to capture and contain ideas that carries us back to the use of stained glass to transmit stories. The language uses an imaginary image or stage to make itself a thing. The language cannot be a thing without a stage and if it is not a thing then it will not be able to master the physical.

IW

'they have science on their side'

EW

the real must not get in the way of the fiction.

These cartoons from Kings College in Cambridge, from Shrewsbury and Lichfield Cathedral - are like this language again - repetitive, staged, melodramatic and with red, black, lip pink 'kiss my lip!' people as 2 dimensional shapes that slither and are less important than a rectangle of light.





THE DEATH SCENE

Fassbinder's last film - the fact that it had to be cut to reach a mainstream audience.

The cut, the falling to black

The colours

The sex scene with spit.

Your heat

Your trees

Your silent mind

We want to buy it for cheap.

Whereas with Querelle, Fassbinder needed to cut the length of it so that would achieve greater exposure - it would become a comfortable length, with these stained glass images, the cuts are more drastic and counter-intuitive - they splice away the side of a face

STABBING

and make collections of things that would not usually be associated - two fingers, a cuff and a knee.

Images are repaired and still look broken. People are arranged.

Their eyes point in different directions on the same face.

And they fall to black.

(IW throw flowers at EW who ignores him)

Repair and Fassbinder and Sirk - they repair the parts of human interaction which are broken and they break them so that they can be repaired by them. They broke their own perfect stories and didn't put them back together NOT as some kind of Postmodern Pastiche- with stuff all over the place, but instead they put them back together in the same order but with breaks which had been repaired. And Fassbinder's people are more broken than Sirk's - The money is on the table in Fassbinder, the woman is thrilled to be in the restaurant the Hitler once ate in .

The money is on the table and everything costs something.

Everything costs something.

It is not as though things appeared as if from nowhere and people were not held together in economic cradles.

An the bird wept down to take a fearsome love from nothing but flat lines

Nothing but flat lines. s

And these images that are laid onto glass are called 'cartoons'

And the light that shines through makes these cartoons living, activate the story as with film. Just as with Fassbinder's flowers that fall in love, the light falling through these cartoons demand that these stories remain open and always growing.

END

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Play written and performed by Emily Wardill and Ian White
Designed by El Vonne Brown

LET is a series of ___lets for experimental writing

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