

Entr'acte
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In Shakespearean comedies, protagonists seeking self-knowledge often become lost in the wilderness—at sea, or in the woods—before they are able to find truth and love. This period of disorientation effects a transitional or liminal phase in which the characters might be further separated from their sense of identity by assuming a disguise—perhaps even a temporary reversal of gender, as when Rosalind becomes Ganymede in *As You Like it* or Viola becomes Cesario in *Twelfth Night*. A common theme in Baroque drama, the principles of this narrative rite of passage could be likened to those of initiation ceremonies required of adolescents in certain tribal ceremonies that involve a period spent away from the community as well as the wearing of masks, music, and dance.

Sharon Lockhart's most recent body of work grew out of a discovery made by the artist on a meandering drive through the forested mountains north of Los Angeles one day. Choosing to drive without a map, Lockhart has described the way in which she stopped at random in a small town, where she met some local people who, in the course of conversation, offered her a place for rent. Lockhart was intrigued and—to her own surprise—accepted the offer without much hesitation. Here, she set up a studio and began the three-year project that has resulted in the film and photographic installation, *Pine Flat*.

The pedestrian, non-narrative choreographic structures of Lockhart's films—in particular *Goshogaoka* (1998) or *NO* (2002)—are clearly influenced by the principles of 'ordinary movement' and chance numeric pattern generated by Yvonne Rainer and others at the Judson Dance Theater in New York in the 1960s. The random way in which Lockhart came across this location, leading to the development of a new work, might be seen to be in the spirit of that logic, reaching back to the origins of Judson in the compositional practices of John Cage, who used the *I Ching*, or of Marcel Duchamp. But the intensity of the work suggests that Lockhart's 'chance method' grew from a deeper need, perhaps an unconscious emotional desire. It might be said to have more in common with Surrealism's loaded notion of 'objective chance', in that she found something that seemed almost to be already familiar. She had been searching for somewhere to retreat from the city, and this town of less than 300 inhabitants, Pine Flat, presented itself as the perfect place.

The resulting work comprises a film consisting of a sequence of episodes and a series of photographs, both picturing the children from the town, who were aged between approximately nine and sixteen. The film is edited in two halves. The first is a sequence of solo portraits, each ten minutes long, in which the children are pictured alone, absorbed in particular activities: reading, playing a harmonica, waiting for a bus, hunting, and so on. In the second section are six group portraits: two young girls fighting for a swing, children kissing in a field, other kids messing about with a gun at the edge of the woods, a group of friends climbing up a snowy hillside, and so on. Whilst the film portraits depict the children in the natural environment, engaged in everyday activities, the portrait photographs are all taken in Lockhart's temporary workplace in Pine Flat, with the kids standing on its concrete floor against a black cloth typical of a photographic studio.

At first description, *Pine Flat* might easily be misread as an anthropological study of the remote town. Lockhart has dealt, critically, with the languages of an-

thropology and ethnography in previous projects. Writing on her portrait photographs, such as *Maria da Conceição Pereira de Souza with the Fruits of the Island of Apeú-Salvador, Pará, Brazil: (coco, ajira, murici, caju, mam, tucuma, taperebá, goiaba, tamarino, graviola)* (1999), and her series of photographs of ‘interview locations’ made in *Survey of the Aripuanã River Region Piatuba Community, Aripuanã River, Brazil* (1999 also), Norman Bryson describes the origins of ethnographic representation thus: “In their high anthropometric form these included posing the natives against lamprey grids (the better to measure their anatomical and racial differences) ... or ... identifying the native population with the abundant fruits of their land”.¹ “Lockhart”, he continues, “takes a certain risk in playing up this polarized aspect of the center/periphery model”, but, ultimately, takes care to move her engagement with her subjects on to a collaborative practice in which she and her subjects are on equal footing, as is exemplified in her portrait of the audience as Manaus in *Teatro Amazonas*, which he describes as a “civic portrait”² of the town.² Arriving at Pine Flat by chance, the position of the community represented in this body of work is—in contrast to the obvious ethnic ‘otherness’ of the Japanese schoolgirls in *Goshogaoka* or of the subjects from the Aripuanã River community in Brazil—not one to be measured by distance from the artist on a world map. Lockhart chooses here to engage and identify with an American community close at hand, and yet in terms of the nature of this particular town—its isolation, its lack of employment, schooling, or shops—she explores a different order of socio-cultural distance.

Rather than taking a documentary or classificatory approach to recording the children who live in Pine Flat, though, or making a work that is straightforwardly analytical in its approach to questions of identification and distance between artist and subject, Lockhart opens up the potential of her media to become a space of encounter manipulated by the richness of fiction. Just as being in the town provided the artist with a retreat from the city, the presence of the studio came to represent another world for the kids, who on the whole had little or no previous experience of ‘art’. The process of making generates, in the work, a two-sided liminality in which both artist and subjects are engaged. In this sense, Lockhart’s characteristic use of the frontal or the static camera shot remains (deliberately) misleading in suggesting passive *vérité*. Yet her manipulation of what we see in the film in particular is hard to unpick: sometimes it is a suggestion to the kids about what to wear, but sometimes also she would buy clothes that the child aspired to wearing, enabling them to appear as they wanted to be seen. Sometimes she directed their actions, and sometimes they improvised or responded to an unplanned occurrence, such as the boy playing his harmonica who looks up at an aeroplane flying overhead. Each of the film studies transforms the portrayal of its subject beyond purely individual specificity: the painterly compositions of *The Reader* or *The Traveller*, for example, recall Alex Katz or Caspar David Friedrich, also suggesting literary archetypes, perhaps. And yet each is incredibly personal. The girl intently absorbed in her book wanted to be filmed in this way simply because she loves to read.

Lockhart’s portraits of the children taken inside the studio against the black backdrop at first imply a degree of standardisation that echoes August Sander’s classificatory study of German society at the turn of the twentieth century. But she deliberately disrupts that logic, too, scaling the children so that they are all the same height and cannot be ‘measured’ against each other, or repeating pictures of some children at different ages to create an uncanny uncertainty about how they relate. Lockhart has written: “Since the one rule I made for myself was to scale all of them to the same height, the final images have a strange discontinuity in regards to identity. It is very hard to see if some of them are represented twice or if there is just more than one sibling or family member. If you can read someone

1. Norman Bryson: “Sharon Lockhart: The Politics of Attention”, *Artext*, no. 70 (August–October 2000), p. 57.

2. Norman Bryson, *ibid.*, p. 59.

as the same person, it still is very hard to tell how much time has passed". *Pine Flat* is a portrait of a community, and yet it is a community that we can never add up in its entirety because it deals not just with appearances, but with interior states of self-perception, as though manifesting visually the way in which in our own minds we do not change with age.

Terence Turner has written extensively on the anthropology of media, analysing the ways in which the apparatus of documentation might affect the study of peoples in anthropological research. Focusing on Turner's exploration of the effect of video technology on the Kayapó tribe in Brazil, Dominic Boyer has recently written of his observation of the extent to which the Kayapó incorporated Western-introduced video technology into their own tribal rituals, as reflections and reifications of their own culture, in particular "to document their ongoing relations and confrontations with the Brazilian government ... to record most of their traditional ceremonies and to communicate between towns".³ Boyer notes Turner's observation that access to the technology inevitably changed their level of self-awareness, and that in "understanding ... video as productive as well as mimetic of social reality, Kayapó video makers became adept at staging scenes depicting various aspects of their social reality", with video becoming an "integrated ritual form". Whilst Lockhart remains in control of the image technology in the production of this work, her films and pictures come with an implicit understanding of these principles regarding the power of the representational image. *Pine Flat* raises questions: how much can or do the pictures present back to the participants a culture that they 'own' and how much is it inflected by Lockhart's—and our own, as globally aware viewers of visual art—culture with the references we bring to modernist painting, structuralist film, postmodern dance? We look into the world of Lockhart's subjects with a sense of distance or depth that may be far greater than the extent of their perception in imagining ours. And yet, though there are a number of levels at which we engage with the portraits—reading them at one level as empirical evidence, then as portraits, and also as aesthetic compositions—we might acknowledge that ultimately the images remain as barriers to the interior worlds of the children. There is an essential sensitivity in Lockhart's work that keeps something private back for them.

3. Dominic Boyer: "Turner's Anthropology of Media and its Legacies", *Critique of Anthropology*, publication pending 2006.

Whilst the sequences in the film *Pine Flat* focus on individuals or groups of children, in the version to be screened in a cinema, the film begins and ends with images obscured by snow and fog in which the children can be heard, but not seen. The opening sequence pictures the forest in winter under heavy snowfall, resembling a German Romantic landscape. The voice of a lone child can be heard calling out again and again, "Where are you?"

With its vivid colours, exquisite painterly compositions, and lucid detail, the world of *Pine Flat* absorbs the viewer from this moment of hazy disorientation as a kind of dream. The outside world, or 'the real', is bracketed out in two clear ways that enable Lockhart to generate a shared alternative reality, or liminality, with her subjects-collaborators. One form of bracketing is made visible in her depictions of the impenetrable natural environment: its bordering dense woodland, snow, and fog that have effected the town's remoteness. The other is in the black backdrop of her studio, signifying the extent to which it has become a 'non-place'—a pocket of territory that operates under different conceptual and social parameters from the given particularities of this close-knit town.

There is also a third and significant aspect of 'inbetween-ness' that defines the project, one that complicates this protected notion of liminality with a charged link to the real. In the version of *Pine Flat* made to be screened in a

cinema, Lockhart specifies a strictly timed intermission between the solo and group portraits. During this intermission, we listen to a recording of one of the boys from the town singing a song by Blink 182, accompanied by his own guitar. Lockhart's decision to insert this song recalls Rodney Graham's sound piece *Verwandlungsmusik* (*Transformation Music*, 1990), which frames, as its main feature, a recording of a Wagnerian passage intended to render in(aud/vis)ible sounds that would belie the mechanics of illusion between operatic acts. Here, though, she uses intermission music as an anchor to the real between the illusory sequences on either side of it, with opposite effect. As the child sings a mainstream pop song, his voice is full of fragile aspiration. The song creates a contradictory image, simultaneously implying that her subject's interior subjectivity 'speaks' and flattening the possibility of this insight with our knowledge that the soulful quality in these lyrics, or this tune, have been found in American pop culture, exported and marketed globally on the basis of just these emotive tricks.

Moreover, though, the inclusion of this passage crystallises the extent to which Lockhart's investment of personal subjectivity is merged with the subjects she represents in the piece. The boy's performance of the song, his desire, links his role in the films to her role as a maker of culture as an artist. It appears almost as a form of substituted self-portrait. This part of the work exposes the extent to which Lockhart's presence in the town, her access to art and technology, opens a two-way window, rather than simply opening the children's world to us. It reveals the extent to which the rest of the film, and the photographs, are not documents, but images that function as projections of the children's psyches, as staged by Lockhart. And how, within this, they inadvertently reveal what she sought out in picturing them.

As well as filming the boy singing, Lockhart made an album of his songs and had it pressed. The flatness of her compositional structure is disrupted in this intermission, and with knowledge of this generous act, by an injection of real narrative. The story she tells through the ritual of making *Pine Flat* is to be found in this passage's revelation of the infinitesimal meeting point between the artist and her subject, the merging of aspiration and desire at stake in their exchange. Lockhart captures, here, the crux of her encounter with the children she depicts: her recording of the boy performing is at one level compelling and romantic in its sincerity and yet it is barbed with a degree of self-reflexivity that allows us to read Lockhart's presence in the equation as neither simply enabling, nor yet straightforwardly exploitative, of his desire to be seen.