Invitation to the Looking Project

Description. <u>The Looking Project</u> is technically a computer game in that the aim is to create a collective publication/website via files and edits exchanged by email. The subject is visibility/invisibility (Merleau-Ponty's book of the same name comes to mind) but also the agent's actions, looking at, staring, gazing, etc.

Method. Volunteer contributors ("beloveds," *les bien-amés*) play any role, at any level, in return for credits listed in the web and paper publications. An axiom is that contributors benefit personally, for personal reasons that need not be standardized. Payback comes in the form of insights that can be used in one's own work, accompanied by a guaranteed *jouissance* of writing.

Strategy. To cap the variety that, by definition, accrues to the subject of vision, visuality, visibility, etc., a tyrannical thesis is imposed: the relation of vision to theft, in particular the type of theft elaborated by Norman O. Brown in his book, *Hermes the Thief*. In many ways, Brown imposed a cap on the variety of functions attributed to the Greek/Roman god Hermes by supposing that, within the variety, there would be a single "logic" concerning boundaries and their violation.

A corollary of this tyrannical thesis is that any cap should appear at first to be arbitrarily or randomly imposed. The first positive result will be the economy that trims the expansion of the investigation beyond the point of where any common themes can be recovered. A dictionary is based on this idea, but the tautology of dictionaries is concealed within: words defined by words will eventually create circularities. Freud was one of the first to note how, in the etymology of "home" (*Heim*) there was a dynamic that curved the expansion of meanings back to an antipodal point, "non–home." The curve is concealed beneath the apparent openness of expanded meanings, but the imposed thesis creates an economy of difficulty. As with Lars von Trier's (annoying) film, *The Five Obstructions*, the effective result is the production of a disciplinary result, one that the reader (anyone) can follow by applying the same limits. This makes the text "provable" by the reader's replication of results. This method was employed by Giambattista Vico, with the argument that *unless* a reader is able to "think the text" in his/her own personal terms, the text "dies" as an object, untransferred. This was Vico's argument for textual *jouissance*, belonging neither to reader nor writer exclusively, but *only* as a joint possession.

Procedure. Forty different kinds of looking have been set out, "hypothetically." Each is a challenge to the contributor, a puzzle. However, the contributor may challenge the topic title or even theme, by arguing why and how the idea can be better represented. Each entry in this encyclopedia of looking follows a consistent format, which may be later altered slightly. A title, followed by a short definition of the theme, is accompanied by a quote to provoke the reader. The body of the exposition (1000–2000 words) should connect to the list of interests (next page) laid out by the Dealer (cf. "editor"), who will be responsible for the final results. Although the book content will be subject to the Dealer's (tyrannical) rule, the website version will faithfully record debates and dissents.

Phone a Friend? Collaboration is not strictly limited as invitation–only, but may be extended with permission from the Dealer to third parties who have a better idea. There is a test for authors, a predictor of their success: "Do they understand the project?" The hope is that contributors will understand the project better than the Dealer, but key to this is the understanding of the role of the limit. Lacan has given this in the *matheme*, S($\cancel{A}$): signifier of the lack in the Other. For non-Lacanians, the best alternative reference is to *The Wizard of Oz*, where the Wizard begs Dorothy & Co. to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

Looking Project Rules of the Game

Aims and l*es bien aimés*
Correspondence (among collaborators)
Collation (editing)
Publication (website and paper publication)
Contention (maintenance of debates)
Credits and Citations (cf. "Tlön, Uqbar, *Orbis Tertius*")

FORMAT

40 Entries (number relation to the buffer function of quarantine)

Forty topic titles have been concocted as a starter set. Different titles may challenge any title but must be argued by showing how the replacement addresses the original's issue but improves it in relation to the interests (below).

Each Entry: 1000–2000 words (typically)

Quotation

Exposition/Interests

(including but not limited to)

Relation to Theft (basis: Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief*; Hermes as an "ontology")
Cartography (mapping one thing or kind of thing onto another)
Time Codes (the role of delay in looking's otherwise "instantaneous" exchanges)
Projectivity (projective geometry v. perspectival/Euclidean geometry)
Palindromics (contronyms, mirroring, doubles, call-and-response, echoes, substitutions, rivals)

(The Dealer's) Lacanian interests:

Agent
Act
Product
Retroactive Truth

Paralysis of the Subject
Defect in the Other
Figure–Ground consideration
What Is to be Known or Not Known
Jouissance/Gap/Indescribable

Notation (subsequently supplied by the chef, a "calculus of looking–as–theft")

Notes

manually numbered, smaller font, indented