

Reality After Fiction

by Emiliano Gutiérrez

“The room I entered was a dream of this room.”

-John Ashbery

In his recently published book “*Materia Escrita*”, artist Gabriel Orozco writes, ‘When affirming, “*this is not true*” we discover truth. Truth is “*this is not true*” (...) Affirming the contrary is always being right (as some other state of momentary lie). To affirm the contrary is to generate a state of fiction. Lies within lies: state of fiction.’ (Orozco 2014, p.130) When walking around the exhibition *Mirrorcity* at the Hayward Gallery there is a constant encounter of the viewer with this so called lie that generates certain specific fiction or fictions, that when immersing into them seem to go beyond something we could consider a general reality. Something that Jean Baudrillard would call ‘the extreme phenomena: that which happens beyond the end (extreme = *ex terminis*). Indicating that we’ve moved beyond growth (*croissance*), to an excessive growth (*excroissance*) from movement and change to ecstasy (*éxtasis*) and metastasis.’ (Baudrillard 2000, p.55)

For this essay I will be writing on this idea of the blurred line between reality and fiction represented through the work of art, focusing in two installations presented at this exhibition; the first one by Anne Hardy, *Two Joined Fields – Field (^) and Field (decagon)* (2013) and the second one by Laure Prouvost, *The Artist* (2010-14).

In Claire Bishop’s words ‘Installation art differs from traditional media in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are heightened as their sense of vision’ (Bishop 2005, p.8). The work of art becomes immersive. These two pieces are successful in the sense that they both present certain characteristics that help the viewer transcend by being placed in some sort of oneiric plain.

1.

Hardy's *Two Joined Fields – Field (^) and Field (decagon)* generates a magnificent tension between the artwork and the viewer. At first when the participant is presented with a large box that contains the installation. One is pushed to walk around the structure –a large wooden, raw-built, shapeless box, randomly detailed with bits of paper that would seem they don't even belong into the gallery space, and an image of an Indian-American upside down– to find the way in. Then, as one enters the installation the whole ambiance changes. It is not only the strange appearance of the room and the geometric shaped blocks of concrete that decorate it. The tension comes mostly from the changing of the temperature, which is warmer now. 'It's not about fantasy,' says Hardy, 'it's about how odd reality is'*

One of the key points to understanding *Mirrorcity* is the existence of physical spaces and their relationship to fictional spaces, which are the spaces we create ourselves through technology. This ambivalent concept is clearly shown in Hardy's work by the idea of that which is private and what is presented to a public. Various pieces by Hardy are presented in the exhibition and though she's presented physical installations before this is the first work to which the audience can walk into. This blurred line between the private and the public spaces is addressed by Hardy when building and constructing her installations inside her studio, then photographing the structure and finally destroying the installation, thus only presenting large scale photographs in the gallery. This very performative mindset allows the artist to transform her ideas into something tangible, which is then transformed into something uniquely visual that will eventually disappear, giving the audience the chance to contemplate on this situation and allowing the spectator to reflect on this idea of a space within a space, that is, the narrative which exists within the narrative.

This leads me to think of Paul Thek's installations in the late 60s and early 70s, such as *Pyramid/A Work in Progress* (1970); a clear parallel is drawn between his ritualistic and anthropological performativities to create and build an installation, as well as a social and political engagement that pushes towards the transcendence of the viewer and the artist through an artwork that, in a way, announces the death of fiction and the beginning

of reality as a mechanism of the absurd and the odd, as some sort of apparition.

The relationship between the object and the space is also key to understanding what Hardy means by this oddness in reality. The concrete objects presented inside the installation, echo shapes and forms we constantly find within the urban landscape. Even though these installations are represented within a closed space, a reference to the veneer of the daily life outside the streets is part of that reality the artist explores. In an interview for *Apperture* magazine Hardy states 'I am interested in the indeterminate state I perceive in cast-off materials and objects—in rubbish. Something that appears unimportant can become significant and meaningful for an individual who chooses to invest time with it. I think these things can create a space for the imagination that is quite free. I want this quality to be intrinsic to the materials I use in my work, and in the relationship between physical spaces and the images.'** Also, for the *Mirrorcity* exhibition catalogue an 'alternative' newspaper – as called by the curator– presents a series of short texts written by Hardy, taken from fictional worlds and literature that allude to the urban landscape and the way we live in it.

2.

In *The Artist Prouvost* plays the same tension-trick with the beholder but in a very different way. When going into the room you find yourself overwhelmed by the amount of objects casually displayed around you. But the room itself does not generate the exothermic tension, it is a single object, a blanket shaped as some sort of cloud that hangs in the middle of the room.

Prouvost proustian confrontation with one reality –a reality facilitated by her unconventional non-fiction/fiction narratives– created by her and the actual story, which is never told, engages the participant in a labyrinthic play that constantly leads us to a dead-end. The mesmerizing thing about these dead-end is the enlightening quality of it; it ends up telling the story. Prouvost's process starts with words in French, that are translated into images that are either moving or completely fix, sounds and objects that as being placed within the gallery generate a narrative to which we are invited to take over. 'The viewer is boss.' says the artist.

In an interview with *The Brooklyn Rail* Prouvost says 'there is a lot of distance because reality is never what we dream; it can surprise you in a good or bad way, but you always wish you had more or better—people have that desire for everything to be better. These pieces are asking the viewer to make the work, so if there is a sign on a wall saying, "Ideally this wall would be pushed five meters further," you have to use your imagination to see the space differently. I think it's very much that imagination can give us what we want, creating images in our mind. You don't need a real fireplace, you can just imagine it'***.

The artist defies the existential commitment of the participant within the site specific work by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality through the telling of a narrative we are not allowed to know to what extent it is true or false by interposing images in video collages and the stacking up of objects and materials inside the space.

The poetic qualities of Prouvost's work come mostly from her commitment to language. Spivak writes 'The problem of human discourse is generally seen as articulating itself in the play of, in terms of, three shifting "concepts": language, world and consciousness. We know no world that is not organized as a language –languages that we cannot possess, for we are operated as those languages as well. The category of language, then, embraces the categories of world and consciousness even as it is determined by them.'

The artist shows us in her work that she takes into account these three concepts. Language as metaphor, when being overturned and translated through image and object positioning; world when creating an indomitable and poetic narrative; and consciousness when referring to the participant as he who holds or structures the mechanisms of power to unravel the story. The artist is not questioning but finding answers to the unending anguish of being, thus helping transcend the viewer through a small world created both by artist and participant.

3. Decentring

Both Hardy's and Prouvost's mindset leads me to directly think of the rhizomatic thinking, developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972-80). In Hardy's work, mostly by her aesthetical

development of ideas that allude to the organic and eclectic urban landscaping representation; in Prouvost when evoking the aesthetic possibilities of her innumerable narratives. Thinking about these two pieces was like trying to decipher the poetry of John Ashbery. The ranges of interpretation presented in every moment, in every situation, in every element of the work is participatory and engaging because of what they require from the mind to focus onto. They present the thing itself, opened to all possibilities.

Bishop states in her essay *Installation Art: A Critical Theory* that ‘the correct way in which to view our condition as human subjects is as fragmented, multiple and *decentred* – by unconscious desires and anxieties, by an interdependent and differential relationship to the world, or by pre-existing social structures.’ (Bishop 2005, p.13) which lead to think that these two artists engage the participant as its gender –in the most butlerian aspect of the word– is presented whilst confronted with the space. We are not presented as male or female, black or white, Mexican or British –even though we are not invited to deny that part of our identity–; but presented as a unity that is aware of the otherness it is confronting cyclically:

Artist confronts/transcends through artwork...

Artwork confronts/transcends through participant...

Participant confronts/transcends through artwork...

Artist confronts/transcends through participant... and so on.

We reflect on whatever meaning we need to find through the idea that things happen ‘because there is no one “right” way of looking at the world, nor any privileged place from which certain judgments can be made.’ (Bishop 2005, p.13). The work of art is actually putting us out there to contemplate the notions that build the society we live in, how social practice is fundamental to the development of culture; how mechanisms of power are created by ‘higher’ and ‘stronger’ powers we cannot fight but in these realms where the politics of space and spectatorship belong to us, as artists, artwork and spectators; by that moment when language becomes ours for the sake of aesthetics, in the purest way it can be. We go from fiction to reality and then the world becomes absolute metaphor. (January 2015)^a

*From the *Mirrorcity* catalogue.

**Link to interview in <http://www.aperture.org/blog/interview-with-anne-hardy/>

***Link to interview <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/03/art/ideally-this-interview-would-answer-all-of-your-questions-laure-prouvost-with-jarrett-earnest>

^a On question 2 of brief: To what degree and how does the meaning or experience of a work of art depend on context?

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Exhibitions:

- Wangechi Mutu, Nguva na Nyoka, Victoria Miro Gallery, LONDON
- Hew Locke, Beyond the Sea Wall, Hales Gallery, LONDON
- Eric Fischl, Art Fair Paintings, Victoria Miro Gallery II, LONDON
- Yayoi Kusama, Bronze Pumpkins, Victoria Miro Gallery, LONDON
- Turner Prize 2014, Tate Britain, LONDON
- Mirrorcity, Hayward Gallery, LONDON
- Caragh Thuring, ChisenhaleGallery, LONDON
- Berlinde De Bruyckere, Mete tere huid, Hauser and Wirth, LONDON
- Pipilotti Rist, Worry will vanish, Hauser and Wirth, LONDON.
- Laure Prouvost, Mientras no mirabas, Laboratorio Arte Alameda, MEXICO CITY.
- Danh Vo, Ex-Voto, Museo Jumex, MEXICO CITY.
- Ilya y Emilia Kabakov, Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, MEXICO CITY.
- Sophie Calle, Take Care of Yourself, Museo Tamayo, MEXICO CITY
- Pablo Vargas Lugo, micromegas, Museo Tamayo, MEXICO CITY

Fiction affecting reality doesn't mean watching certain behaviors will cause viewers to emulate them. A nuclear powered submarine, and the United States Navy named it the Nautilus after the submarine in his book. Ever heard of the X-Files? The character Dana Scully empowered generations of women to pursue their interest in STEM. Fifty percent of women who watch the show are more likely to explore STEM fields because of their exposure to a strong female character in. Therefore, because fiction is part of reality, it cannot be differentiated from reality. However, there is a difference. Reality and fiction are different things they tell me. I wonder where they drew the line and when they did it, where were we? Simulated reality is a common theme in science fiction. It is predated by the concept "life is a dream". It should not be confused with the theme of virtual reality. Possible Worlds (1990) and the 2000 film adaptation. World of Wires (2012), directed by Jay Scheib. Altered Carbon, Set in a future where consciousness is digitized and stored, a prisoner returns to life in a new body and must solve a mind-bending murder to win his freedom. Science fiction has always been a medium for futuristic imagination and while different colored aliens and intergalactic travel are yet to be discovered, there is an array of technologies that are no longer figments of the imagination thanks to the world of science fiction. Some of the creative inventions that have appeared in family-favorite movies like "Back to the Future" and "Total Recall," are now at the forefront of modern technology. Here are a few of our favorite technologies that went from science fiction to reality.