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In Residence: Ann Lislegaard- slowly spinning
(Oslo, Kunstneres Hus, 2001)

“...her hand moves lightly over the surface of the wall...”
By Barbara Clausen

...her hand moves lightly over the surface of the wall...

Continuously investigating cognitive patterns and synoptic connections with sound and light, Ann Lislegaard's work teases the transitive senses and the acoustic abilities of her viewers. Catching the in-between layer of perception and cognition, she links the physical and psychological realm, using the body of the viewer like an oscillator. Her installations generate physical responses and feelings similar to seeing the heat vibrating off tarmac paved roads, catching the fading traces of light on a stage, or the dizziness when standing in the middle of a busy street, trapped by the sound and vision of cars zooming by at high speed.

It's like being touched without touching something. Physical contact is not necessary. Corporeal responses are triggered through our receptive abilities in relation to the sonic and visual qualities in her work. The root of these explorations is perhaps to be found in an early piece, “electric Net”, from 1992. Attracting and fencing off viewers, “Electric Net” was installed across the space, charged with low voltage, omitting pulse-like, static sounds and small electric shocks upon skin contact. The consequence of simply turning around to leave would be contradicted by the temptation to go and satisfy the curiosity of touch, prompted by the rhythmic sound and visual enclosure of the net. By using sound as a tool for visual reinforcement the necessity of contact and movement was compensated through the viewer's ability to visual cognition.

Her exploration of the nature of attraction, a significant key to Lislegaard's work, is literally demonstrated in the small-scale sound and light installation “!” (2001), lurking for the visitor at the entrance of the exhibition. The play with the suspense of constant expectation is emphasised by the fading pulse of a red circle of light and the rhythmic sounds of a female voice inhaling and exhaling her breath, mimicking moments of pleasure and realization. As a visual teaser, a kind of glue that connects and disrupts the concept of touch, movement and sound, it is similar to the titillation of an orgasmic feeling; an overcoming, intimate emotion that without the pressure of an anticipated climax has the potential to repeat itself. “!” signifies an indescribable emotion that is felt, not seen, heard, not listened to, an encounter of something lost and found that creeps under the skin and is constantly searched for. Offering a solitary experience of intimacy and projection, the effect Lislegaard creates in “!” is similar to the addictive feathers science fiction author Jeff Noon describes in his novel Vurt 1. The feathers are dreaming devices

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that once placed in the mouth of the user conjure “real life” experiences and fantasies. These trips are consumed through the sense of taste and vision, affecting the body as a whole. Noon creates images through written words, Lislegaard through vision and sound. The feathers (despite their potential use as writing devices) as well as “!”, induce a visual and physical experience for their users, a situation of longing, impossible to create alone.

A flat wall floating in space made translucent by images projected on to both sides. The conduit of perception in “Nothing but Space” (1997) is our physical relation to the scale of the double-projected image. Technical Lislegaard documented and filmed the movements and orientation in her studio through a mirror foil. Liquid images float across the screen, seductive, permeable, negating any orientation that seams, cuts, walls, or angles can offer. Figures cross the amorphous sphere, disappearing into a band of melted objects and walls, continuously swallowed by the rhythmic flow of the camera movement. A parallel space spreads across the surface of the screen, centrifugal in its effect, a visual vortex, a mercury concave trapping of visual images. Tempted to fall into the space, the viewer is trapped within the space looking inside from the inside. The “other side”, like a mirror, is inaccessible but present, creating the illusion of a hollow cave, an unreachable circular horizon stretched out in front of our eyes. The physical and psychological dialogue between the depicted space and the spectator is established through the viewer, who like a filter turns the information into a reverse reaction of the senses; causing a physical reaction of vertigo and attraction. The cognitive vision is tested for its haptic capability. The need to touch, to relate is satisfied through the visual capacity with all other senses joining to reinforce the perception.

“...we find ourselves experiencing in words, on the inside of words, secret movements of our own.” 2

Gaston Bachelard’s insightful comment to the unlimited space words can give, is relevant to Lislegaard’s occupation with sound. She is able to create a movement within words and images reminiscent of the fascination Bachelard describes as an “experience of words”. Through the audible instead of the visual she investigates the possibilities of “experiencing words” on a physical level. “Corner Piece – the Space Between Us” (2000) reinforces this revelatory effect by using sound as the main source of information. An intermittently light corner nurtures the visual input, two flat surfaces confining the spectator, creating an environment of perception rather than an image. An architectural construction of a perfect corner is set up as the double of the real corner in the exhibition space. The corner, a minimal structure—that stands in awareness of all the corners we have come

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across in the past—is not a visual limit but a situation of being. The physical presence of the viewer completes the corner structure into a space—an imaginary third wall rises behind.

Sound flows into the solitary cavity of confinement from speakers installed in each of the four outer corners of the installation. Repeated layers of words and sentence structures, sometimes blurred and broken by silence, a non-linear story, an acoustic impression that forms images in the mind, enforces the connection to the voice. A description of a woman spoken by a female voice, depending on the speed and level of tones, is visually emulated by throbs of light from behind the construction. A Morse code of intimate and structured messages enwraps us with words that through whispers, reiterated, echoes, swivels and stops, constantly change the pulse of language. Gradually the speakers shift positions from I to you, to her, the spectator slowly intertwining his or her presence with the spoken words. These phrases of sounds and words trigger an array of images that are produced by the tension of the cognitive imagination and the confining reflective environment. The structures of words and sounds in “Corner Piece – the Space Between Us” are proliferated in their physical appearance through the careful installation of light and space, evoking a silent dialogue between the viewer and the installation. Spun together by sensitive tactile-like threads of visuals and acoustics, the viewer becomes entangled by a physical extension of the sound through his/her own reflections.

Lislegaard's perception and use of sound ranges from silence, ambience and text. Form, light and image become vessels, tools for her sound and text structures. By twisting the content and expression, she redefines the limits of experiencing sound. Beyond mere listening, the layers of words in “Corner Piece – the Space Between Us” and the rhythmic sighs in “!” may touch upon the poetic, but stay within their given context of filling space, instead of inscribing a flat surface. As visually translated in “Nothing but Space”, they are composed to fill a parallel three-dimensional space, open and closed at the same time, aiming to let the movement of the spectator direct the duration of the piece. There is not one clear narrative that is defined by past and future; her narrators always speak in the present. A final moment, a final resolution is not given by the artist but must be experienced individually by the viewer. In “Nothing but Space” the spectator becomes the seam, the glitch that lets the images in their abstract and realistic quality come to a beginning and an end.

Regardless of her choice of medium, Lislegaard draws the viewer close, as listening to the murmurs on the other side of a wall. The motivation of listening or observing is not based on voyeurism but curiosity, transcending into a physical absorption within the movement of words and images. Her carefully balanced way of linking the spectator and the installations, “Corner Piece – the Space Between Us” and “Nothing but Space” plays with the sequence of reception and cognition, whereas “!” holds firmly onto the in-between moment. The arrival of the