

In Search of *Deer/Dear* (1978-2020)

Part I: Ode to the Choral

How many things have I meant to remember but have placed aside, instead choosing a breath of restfulness? Restfulness replaced by lethargy, replaced by forgetting.

But it keeps dying, all of the time—

—the fugue, a chase. My words and my language resembling yours, the pitter patter of our tongues darting across the room. An act to assist a sculptural form, the physical imitation of one another.

Combined, we become interdependent. I leave feeling warm, smiling to myself about the power of a group of individuals. Strangers, who slowly over breathing exercises and tea become companions.

A body given over to a voice. It's much easier to keep your self at home when there's a common activity at hand. Hands, weaving stories. A circle of candles, what do you mean?

Searching, I find myself amidst case files. Public information, a certified stamp, an old President:

Thanks for your efforts to bring about a new beginning _____. We need the dedicated efforts of all citizens and I know I can count on you to help spread the word. With best wishes for an enjoyable evening.

Not the right track, time to recount my steps. These creatures, nose painted red and eyes purple:

In her artwork, _____ uses various media to bring social realities into view, while grounded in the observation of a lived history. Known for her performances in the ____s and ____s, she also worked in video while completing drawings and installation.

Wolfwoman, it seems almost uncanny. *Please sing along, it's all I can think about—the end to all of our dreams.* None of this seems right, a feeling in my stomach. 'Questions of war and peace, weapons stockpiles, and generalised public fear seem unending'.

Double X, I want to know you more. I write to you and you don't respond. I wonder what you're doing now, do you have a garden? You create these works and I think they're awful, small miniatures alongside a cake. What makes this an essay, what makes this anything? A format or a structure, guidelines or referencing. She's shared so many of these things, I wonder what she got out of it.

I try and find out more about what was involved, but instead find out more about you. A single mother at eighteen, tuberculosis as a child. 'Art was ... not an object, ever'. Your parents died young, and your grandmother raised you. I wonder how the local news know this, did you tell them? *Twin corners*¹, *from dreams. Hard into soft*².

¹ A pile of metal shavings and a photograph that depicts a woman's private anatomy.*

*Consider here the uncomfortable language for the female body.

² Features, as the reader might imagine, rather explicit sexual situations.

You wrestle a ³man and strangers watch, how did you get there? *Hair piece*. I really want to read this text but try as I might, the font is just too small. I keep trying to keep myself interesting, but the page doesn't seem to exist. Something to swallow back, relax. It seems almost funny, this bygone era ever held a feature point. All these people pulled together, I wonder how many times I've read your name and not realised. 'How can the individuals responsible for some of the problems that we see think the way they do?'⁴

'Why are we not learning from history? Or, how we can learn better from history, through a look to the archives, or by looking to the older performance projects that are in danger of being lost?'

I listen to your history, collective action. Community arts, a revival of your feminist past. The F word, something I've heard at the beginning. How funny these things we speak of again and again in the end lose meaning. You don't speak about it at all, and I wonder if it's because you think nothing of it. Maybe you regret it, no longer enjoy it. I burrow a hole and misplace my tracks again, retrace, restep. 'Her works have often positioned the audience as participants in a wider conversation on the gendered and defamiliarised body, the perils of commercialised spectatorship and consequences of the increasing militarisation in contemporary society.'

I try and find out more, I wonder how other people research. No such luck, cast my mind back to what he said some weeks ago. Kind man, gentle voice, towering above, bear like. We needed them to survive, we relied on them. This gives us a connection to them that's different from others, yet still something that becomes trampled eventually. Once held a god, soon to be mass farmed produce. Your vulnerability was in the amount of you. A solitary animal, only coming together in rutting season, one for every ten hectares. In open conditions, they aggregate into herds with a distinct social structure. How strange that your bones can define the meat economy of Mesolithic societies. Your bones become both utilitarian tools and decorative objects, alongside unworked antlers in burials—a sign of your symbolic resource. Your social behaviour, the gendered and fertile symbolism that leads us there. A lake of rich metaphorical and metonymic possibilities. As we move into a time of domestication, you find yourself becoming a symbol for free land, surrounding the field. We used your horns to dig, marking flint mines and enclosures, but that doesn't draw away from their ritual use.

³ See here: woman. A role reversal, man dance, women in a real life struggle. Critical art theory read alongside.

⁴ _____, cited in Saisha Grayson, interview, 'Agitprop!: A Conversation with Martha Rosler, _____, and Andrea Bowers', *E-flux* (2016) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/71/60518/agitprop-a-conversation-with-martha-rosler-_____-and-andrea-bowers/ [accessed 15 April 2020].

An unexpected amount in the north isle, how did they get there? it's asked, there was a separation between the two islands, they must've been brought over. Others argue they could've climbed the bridge. The Ring of Brodgar, large quantities in the tombs of Yarso and Ramsay.

[Note to self: this needs to include more about the spiritual significance of deers, Paganism, ecological importance, the list continues.]

Part II: Two Way Glass

Nancy Buchanan, _____⁵ artist, performed the work *Deer/Dear* in 1978, a month unrecorded. I first read about the work in a book I don't remember the title of, I believe by Lynn C. Miller, whilst reading about women's autobiographical performance.

Buchanan performed the work as part of ARIADNE: A Social Art Network (1977-82),⁶ which was co-founded by Susanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz. Originating as an extension of Lacy and Labowitz's public performances, the collaborative couple make clear on Ariadne's website that 1977 was a time of 'no cell phones, no internet, no social media'. It was estimated that one in three women would be raped in their lifetime, a statistic that now has become one in five.⁷

Ariadne aimed to bring together women in the arts, media, activism and government to highlight sexual violence against women. Lacy and Labowitz's media strategy, a technique employed throughout their public performances, was held critical to the project's public success. Two seminal works *Three Weeks in May*⁸ and *Record Companies Drag Their Feet*⁹ became the framework for the project. When looking for *Deer/Dear* on the archive site, it remains hidden amidst Lacy and

⁵ Feel free to insert your own congratulatory language here.

⁶ Ariadne, daughter of Pasiphae and Minos, the Cretan king. Known for helping Theseus escape the Labyrinth, Ariadne falls in love with him, only to be abandoned and as a result hang herself*

* or, she was killed by Perseus, who was most renowned for beheading Medusa**

or, Theseus carried her to Naxos and left her there to die, before she was rescued by the god Dionysus, later marrying him*

***or, Dionysus demanded Theseus to leave Ariadne on Naxos. The flux continues. Each ending makes for an arguably peculiar choice in a feminist namesake.

⁷ UK Faculty of Public Health, *The Role of Public Health in the Prevention of Violence*, <<https://www.fph.org.uk/media/1381/the-role-of-public-health-in-the-prevention-of-violence.pdf>> [accessed 21 November 2019].

⁸ Closing circles of art, activism and politics. A three-week production encompassing over thirty activities, focusing on the prevalence of rape in LA. Community organising, art performances, exhibitions, media strategies, press conferences and city councils bring together Lacy and Labowitz's work for the first time.

⁹ Collaboration between Labowitz and WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women), a singular artistic and political intervention, they claim. A call to the boycotting of record companies that use violent images of women to sell records. It was specifically designed to be covered by newspapers and TV.*

*Reading group suggestion: How might this activity change if to be recreated in 2020? Would the work still function the same and what role would social media and streaming platforms play? Discuss.

Labowitz's works, despite being the first site listed when searched online. Three photographs and one for a background. No date or description. It's unclear how Buchanan became involved, but she was a co-founding member of the Women's Building,¹⁰ where events for Ariadne took place. Part of the tribe, I suppose. The Hillside Strangler, turning the perspective away from fear. Artists in a media intervention.

The thing that I really have learnt and I'm gaining more confidence in, is the potential of artists as image makers to really make a change in society in terms of the images they project of women and that's just as important as a political organisation and the things that they make. So possibly what can come out of that in terms for me is that I'm more and more building up the idea that image makers or artists can do events like this even by themselves and have it be important, it just depends on how you feel about that importance and to train a society to accept it as important.¹¹

Aside from the images on Ariadne's website, I find little else about *Deer/Dear*. A few reviews, the content of which tell me the overall basis of the work: Buchanan recounted her 'horrificing dreams of violence, then related them to the waking nightmare of violence against women through recalling the violence she has herself experienced'. In presenting the work, Buchanan states:

I think of this performance as a travelogue in fear. It was a slide show/narrative which represented the beginning of consciousness about an unpleasant state of affairs: as women, we do have a great deal to fear, but we are simultaneously trained to be fearful of the world and to disregard our fears as symptoms of weakness and paranoia. ... I was moved to make this piece when the body of a victim of the 'Hillside Strangler' was found near my house—this reactivated my personal feelings about danger, which I usually repress.'

[Note: I need to discuss more about how this, in a way, infuriates me. A change of attitude in the last 42 years. Very little now focuses on women's fear, weakness or paranoia. Is this true? Discuss.]

In the documentation, three women stand with the necessary accessories: antlers, a studio floodlight, a wall stapler. I don't know which one is Nancy. I don't know much about Nancy really, if I think about it. I try and contact her for more information in January, but she doesn't write back:

Hi Nancy,
My name's _____ and I'm a _____ at the _____ in _____. I recently came across your work *Deer/Dear* whilst reading about Ariadne. I was wondering if you could tell me a little more about the performance, as all I've been able to find online and in books is four images and two short reviews. I'd love to hear what you did and spoke about during the performance if possible. I'm interested in the performance as my practice follows similar themes and I would be interested in following the work in my own response, forty years later. Many thanks,

¹⁰ A non-profits arts and education centre located in Los Angeles, led by Judy Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and Arlene Raven.

¹¹ Stranger on the street, 'Lacy and Labowitz Edit 4 Jan 2018' <<https://vimeo.com/315972778>> [accessed 15 April 2020].

I want to recreate the work, as I write, which I begin to do in February this year. I soon have to stop when studio access closes in March due to _____.¹² I'm thinking about the use of antlers, the inherent gendered nature of them. It seems strangely ironic or not well considered to be used on Buchanan's behalf. A signifier of dominance, fertility. One's bejewelled and it's horrible. The women alongside you wear cargo pants, a sort of hunters, safari uniform. A woman¹³ lays covered by a sleeping bag, shoes nearby. What might we learn from the recreation of events, mimicry, the archive in feminism? History will repeat itself, I'm reassured. We've seen it all before, telling stories, writing narratives.¹⁴

Like a hunter fooling the prey, I copy you, become you. A state of mimesis. Think about how our mythologies impact our real ecologies—hunting rituals, dances and song. Stalking and celebrating. After we killed all the wolves, the population grew, became an emblem, but also a hindrance, for the local climate. It's different for Nancy in LA than the west coast of Scotland. The reality is different now, still. A plaything for the upper class. A build up to the main event, we're part of one big greater network. It's a perpetual loop of learnt behaviour, condemned to self destruct. As quickly as power is learnt, it can be removed too.¹⁵

¹² Do you find this part boring?

¹³ you, Nancy?

¹⁴ Consider here the use of autobiography, Adriana Cavarero, Bracha L. Ettinger.

¹⁵ Read over from the beginning, start over. Insert your own artist's name and work here. None of it matters. Structures and formats are made to be expanded, the old cliché: rules are made to be broken. Dismantle systems; maybe, maybe not.



Fig. 1: Images are not critical, we must remember that.



Fig. 3: 60,000 times faster than text, a quitter's way out.



Fig. 5 Images however have a greater activation in the Brodmann area 46 and BA 37, who would have thought.

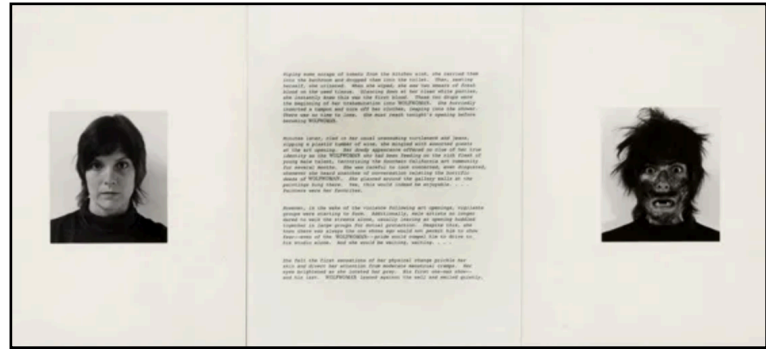


Fig. 2: Writing does not need imagery, the visuals are there to support.



Fig. 4: Both activate the premotor, inferior frontal, posterior inferior temporal and parietal areas.



Fig. 6: We're changing and evolving for different reasons, you and I differ in our motor skills and hemispheres. Slightly, but not to any great length.