

In Other Words

Fly me to the moon, and let me play among the stars, let me see – I want to see – what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars, in other words...

The phrase *in other words* suggests the presence of two lexical layers that share a meaning but appear different: *Let me play among the stars* means *in other words, darling, I love you*. In this way, one set of words or images can serve for another, acting as a mask over the original, enhancing its emotional or aesthetic impact while revealing something of its integral nature. Writing the lyrics for *Fly Me to the Moon* in 1954, Bart Howard used a celestial metaphor or mask to reveal love. Julie Born Schwartz's film installations use constellations of images adjacent to the subject; images that function as masks through which the actual subjects – love, death, and memory – emerge.

In Born Schwartz's installation *Fly Me to the Moon*, first shown in London in 2011, a film documents her and Lenn, a septuagenarian singer and lover of opera and theatre, watching a video of a stage performance of *Turandot*. We hear Lenn throughout, though he and Born Schwartz remain off-screen as if talking from the stage wings. Lenn reminisces about meeting his wife, falling in love, and using music to cope with bereavement. Meanwhile, on screen, the frame is filled alternately with silver and white theatrical masks from *Turandot* and shimmering galaxies. [Figure 1 and 2] Whether filming actual masks or metaphorical ones that 'mask' and supplement voice-overs, the additional layer of interpretive possibility provided by these masks means that Born Schwartz's films are more than straightforward documentaries. Her interviewees rarely if ever appear, yet by showing imagery relating to their lives, they are revealed with elliptical ingenuity.



FIGURE 1

Film still from Born Schwartz (2011) *Fly Me to the Moon* film 9 mins 05 sec looped, colour, stereo sound, 4:3



FIGURE 2

Installation shot from Born Schwartz (2011) *Fly Me to the Moon* film 9 mins 05 sec looped, colour, stereo sound, 4:3

In addition to being adjacent to the actual subject, Born Schwartz's imagery is first-hand, but drawn from secondary sources. Filming directly from television screens or photographs, she presents model, video and photographic reproductions of operas, galaxies, landscapes and paintings rather than original and immediate sources. This form of delay is itself a mask, and encourages us to revise distinctions between reality and fabrication.

Furthermore, Born Schwartz investigates people whose lives are shaped by fabricated images. In her 2009 film *Leda and the Swan*, for example, she visits Niels, an art connoisseur, sex addict and author of erotica who collects miniature pornographic dolls. They adorn his tabletops and keyboard, lounging under red lampshades and photocopies of Renaissance nudes that he pastes to his walls. He explains that the models and paintings capture the different stages of womanhood and offer 'the most brilliant impression of the mind of a woman'. Like theatrical masks, however, the dolls are glamourised images of reality, and Niels' concept of femininity is an amalgamation of the real and illusionary.

In her installations, Born Schwartz situates photographs in proximity to film projections to set up correspondences and space for interpretation. It is with photographs, she explains, that the projects begin.¹ Pinned to her studio wall like memos, they create not only an atmosphere, but also an entire concatenation of associations and fictional limbs with which the projects run. The genesis of *Fly Me to the Moon* was a photograph of painted mountain peaks against a pink and blue backdrop, which Born Schwartz took in a geological museum. [Figure 3] Similar to the filmed galaxies, this landscape is virtual and impossibly distant. Yet it is also physical and immediate, made from plaster and paint, like the Turandot

¹ Born Schwartz interview, 4th June 2012

masks. In its original installation, the photograph hung on a wall to the stage right of the film projection, and between them stood a model sailing ship on a plinth. Entirely black, delicately rigged and set ablaze or cast in silhouette by the glancing projection, the ship suggested metaphorical passages between near and far, life and death, and actual and virtual. [Figure 4] Celestial imagery in both *Fly Me to the Moon* and *Leda and the Swan* signals an infinitely distant place, yet one that is tangible here in replicated form. *In other words*, death and love are at once impossible to comprehend in full, yet also accessible in part, through fabricated replicas, fragments of memory, and images left us from another time.



FIGURE 3

Archival print, 72 x 53 cm, from installation by Born Schwartz (2011) *Fly Me to the Moon*

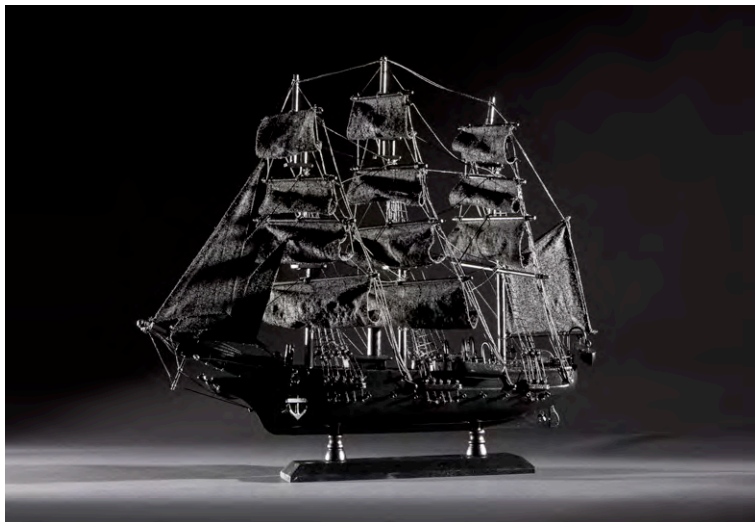


FIGURE 4

Sculpture, 50 x 46 x 13 cm, from installation by Born Schwartz (2011) *Fly Me to the Moon*

Recently, Born Schwartz has been investigating phantom limb syndrome. While the more documentary aspect of her practice has led her to talk with a neuroscientist researching sensations of pain in missing yet insistent limbs, Born Schwartz began the project with a photograph from her own family archive.

[Figure 5] Judging by the colouration of the photograph and the décor of the interior it depicts, it seems to have been taken forty-something years back – and stored somewhere damp in the meantime, because by now its surface is misty with mould. At the centre right of the image sits a boy cradling a cat. The boy, perhaps ten years old, wears a mask that makes his cheeks as wide as the cat's. The boy and the cat stare out from behind their cheeks, as if charging the camera with energy. A Barthesian collocation of photography and death makes the boy ghostly, and this is only amplified by the presence of his mask. Perhaps the boy is a phantom – a limb of the family that is no longer present and yet refuses to disappear. The Turandot masks perform something similar to the boy's, emitting an expression that says *although I'm a mask I am actually here; I'm a phantom you can see*.



FIGURE 5

Lamda duratrans print, 75 x 53 cm, from installation by Born Schwartz (2012) *Close to me*

Phantom is a pivotal term in a discussion of Born Schwartz's work because of its etymology: although meaning 'illusion' or 'figment of the imagination', it derives from the Greek verb phrase 'to show', thus merging the virtual with the real, making visible what is not. In his second book on cinema, Deleuze discusses this merging and flipping place of virtual and real, past and immediate.² Imagining eras as infinitely large sheets of time, and instances of memory as points or images that occur sporadically upon these sheets, he says that experience is a partial and semi-fictional constellation of images. The real and virtual, or document and artifice, are not poles apart but exist in collaboration – a collaboration, we could say, like that of a mask with a face. The virtual is, *in other words*, reality wearing a mask.

The photograph is a point drawn from a sheet of time or source of energy, and alchemically imbued with the past. Like a mask, the photograph is fragmentary

² Deleuze, G (trans. Tomlinson, H and Galeta, R) (2012) *Cinema 2* London: Continuum p.p.118, 119 [First published as *Cinema 2: l'Image-Temps* (1985) Paris: Les Editions de Minuit]

and stylized, yet despite all this, it is revealing. Some years back, while living in New York, Born Schwartz attended a theatrical course that used tribal masks from Bali as conduits for performance. She remembers the energy with which the masks were charged, and its transferral to the actors and play. The way in which Born Schwartz describes the Balinese masks is similar to her likening of the camera to a battery that absorbs and emits energy. The mask, camera and battery are devices invested with energy; performance and photography feel magical as a result.³ Joseph Nicéphore described the effect of light and chemicals in his first photograph as 'downright magical',⁴ and expanding on this, Born Schwartz describes as magic the way an image is detected by the optical nerve and transferred through synapses into emotion and memory.



FIGURE 6

Sculpture, metal, fabric, plastic, 160 x 40 cm, from installation by Born Schwartz (2010) 'Perpetual Motion Machine' in *Magnetic Levitation*

³ Born Schwartz interview, 18th June 2012. Born Schwartz's 2010 film installation *Magnetic Levitation* drew upon the metaphorical and visual association between a large battery and a box camera. Investigating a religious group that worshipped a battery, Born Schwartz constructed her own replica battery. Mounted on a tripod, the resulting object bore a striking resemblance to a large format camera. [Figure 6]

⁴ Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in a letter to his brother, Claude on 16th September 1824. Quoted in an article by Gernsheim, H (1977) 'The 150th Anniversary of Photography' in *History of Photography*, Vol. I, No. 1 available at <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/wfp/heliography.html>

Early on in W.G. Sebald's book *Vertigo*, a character concedes that a vivid memory he has of an alpine town is in fact the recollection of a stylised picture, and as a consequence, he doubts his own memory and avoids images for fear they displace or destroy other memories he has.⁵ If we follow a Deleuzian approach to recollection, however, memories are always muddles of real and virtual, and so images do not threaten them. Accepting this, rather than resisting it as Sebald's character does, allows our minds freedom to remember, fabricate and ultimately process emotion. In *Fly Me to the Moon*, Lenn watches the Turandot video over and over, his voice tearful but smiling. According to Born Schwartz, he is happy to pause the video and rewind it,⁶ and this indicates that he both embraces its capacity to overpower him emotionally and acknowledges that it is a fiction, an image, a mask.

Becca Voelcker

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Sculpture, metal, fabric, plastic, 160 x 40 cm, from installation by Born Schwartz (2010) 'Perpetual Motion Machine' in *Magnetic Levitation*

⁵ Sebald, W.G. (trans. Hulse, M) (2002) *Vertigo* London: Vintage p.p.7,8. [First published as *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990) Frankfurt am Main: Vito von Eichborn Verlag]

⁶ Born Schwartz interview, 18th June 2012.