

It annoyingly — again, I admit it — puts words in effervescence thus reminding these future major artists of the hard lessons learned during their studies: always be suspicious of the meaning of words and never invite lecturers to write introductions to exhibition catalogues. They will write about words and never about your works, thus delaying the pleasure of seeing and reflecting on the art produced. *This* introduction therefore stands *in front* of these well-deserving artists' works inviting the viewer or the reader to think the pointlessness of *this* lead when *the real* enjoyment takes place *in* the galleries when viewing the artworks on display and when browsing the artists' pages to follow. Congratulations: *con* = together + *gratulari* = express joy.

Jean-Paul Martinon is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, (also teaching BA Course 'Museums and Galleries: Framing Art').

FORT-DANCING  
by LYNN TURNER

The tale is familiar. So much so it is often quoted without reference to the madness of the text from which it derives as if it conveys our entry into language with the easiest allegory.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of his mother, he plays. At least it is said to be a game; certainly he never cries. The little boy throws the spool away, but leashed by a string it is yoked back. He repeats. Sounds on the edge of words accompany the gesture. The two witnesses, mother and grandfather, affirm that these almost words approximate *fort* [gone] and *da* [there], doubling the boy's actions. Soon he doesn't even need the string. The words step in and he can play at sending himself away and reeling himself back with his mirror image. And this is how it is thought that we manage our immaturity: weak in the world we start a string of substitutions (mother, reel, self, word) that recharge this weakness with an eventual strength.

Moving the world with a tongue, we take ourselves for its masters. Alone we can speak, and we construe this as (a) power.

Without moving from 'he' to 'we' so rapidly, another tale is told. This time there are no strings and her negotiation of weak circumstance is not overcome by substitution.<sup>2</sup> Her game comprises dancing, spiralling, gyrating gestures that mark out overlapping spaces, territories that she partly shares with the mother who is separate but not different from this girl. She does not utter staccato oppositions, she sings. Not just one girl, universalised, this is the pattern of all girls observed in analysis from the perspective of this witness.

Yet in order to take a different path from the boy's story — one that does not reaffirm masculine-as-human dialectical mastery of the world, was the only option to affirm that the girl rhythms another pattern? Another reader

returns to the boy — but also to the writer of his story. Scientific credibility may prefer his neutrality, but Derrida insists upon Grandfather Freud's implication within the scene on which he ostensibly reports.<sup>3</sup> Simple bias is not the issue. Rather as Freud tries, and tries again, to identify a step beyond the pleasure principle, his non-progressive movements mime those of which he writes: those of Ernst, the little boy in question. He sends away [*fort*], he recalls [*da*], he engages in a postal relay that brings everything back home. Home, in this case, is where the institution is. Founding the House of Freud, even as he entertains such a devilish guest as the death drive, Sigmund overlaps the writing of theory and autobiography. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not a species of autobiography (merely because Freud drew on that which was close to hand, his nephew for example), but without quite realising it, this text writes the conditions of autobiography itself. Worse, or better really,

the conditions of that autobiography are not that every toy, or word, or video installation is sent out on performative assurance of return to a consolidated self, all the while replaying the implacable logic of representation. The pleasure principle dogging Freud is a postal principle in Derrida's hands. The demon threatening Freud's account is not a stranger but is already at home. There is no fortification against death (when 'gone' is gone for good). The disappearance of *fort* can always not reappear. Our gestures, our words, our prints can always be signed by another, returning to us unfamiliar, if they return. Our autobiographies, in whatever form they take, *are* counter-signed by others.

The mastery of Freud's boy is not offset by the difference of Irigaray's girl, he is already off the rails. Her dancing is also affected by the vicissitudes of the post; delay, loss, the touch of another. Her spiralling gestures spring from a body that is already

configured in multiplicity (famously by Irigaray's 'lips'). Thus she need not defend against difference by always repeating the same *fort/da* 'game' and thus her 'entry' into the transmission of signs is not one that leaves the body behind, as in the narrative of a weak somatic state surpassed by linguistic substitution. Drawing these practices — playing, speaking, dancing — into autobiography and/or as art, is not tied to the received wisdom that everything is like a language. Rather, autobiography and/or as art tracks the shifting terrains of our bodies, bodies signed, but not ranked, by sex and by species. Students on this singular degree programme do not vie for old mastery but address the constitutive vulnerability in which we all share.

Lynn Turner is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, (also teaching BA Course 'Sexual Poetics'. Currently completing her book *Machine-Events: Autobiographies of the Performative*, of which the present essay gives a sense).

#### NOTES:

- 1 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) in *On Metapsychology*, The Penguin Freud Library V. 11. London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 275–338.
- 2 Luce Irigaray, 'The Gesture in Psychoanalysis' in *Sexes & Genealogies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 89–104
- 3 Jacques Derrida, 'To Speculate — on Freud' in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud & Beyond*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987. pp. 257–409