

Island

Self-Realization In A Less Than Good Society (after Axel Honneth)¹

Fabienne Audéoud

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I had found a copyright-free soft toy pattern of a small fox on a Russian website but I seriously hesitated before taking the machine out of the closet. I wasn't concerned so much by the redundancy of soft toys in art - I actually really like the ones by Cosima Von Bonin and Mike Kelley - but more by fear of a sense of ridicule. Yet, it wasn't as if it was the first time I had put myself in such a situation. When I started to paint a large scale version of Beatrix Potter's bad mice, I had a similar feeling.

Once sewed and stuffed, the fox looked more like a wolf, slightly on acid, gazing lovingly at me. Well, that's not entirely correct: it seemed to me it was craving for love - I succumbed and gave it to him straight away in an outpour of affection which surprised me.

In the series "Fleabag" the brilliant author, actress and director² has her character cry about the fact that she doesn't know what to do with all the love she is left with for someone who has left. Her friend insists that she'll have it. She'll take it. She wants it.

I eventually sewed many other little wolves, coming to terms with the idea that I liked these sculptures calling out for love, and even the fact that they made me address them in a weird voice and smile: "hello little one"...

I tried a stork, but it didn't work. I tried leopard prints, which made them look like they were dressed up, I kept them - I like costumes. Most of the fifty-strong horde in the show are in a navy blue suede-like velvet fabric. They have a very long snout and stand about 40 cm tall.

There are also paintings of she-wolves, gender-happy ones, in awareness of their self-realisation...

In "Guerilla Metaphysics"³, Graham Harman correlates cuteness with characters being slightly under-equipped for the task they perform: "A newborn horse trying to prance on its skinny, awkward legs (...) a foreigner misusing our language in slightly incorrect but delightfully vivid fashion. In each of these cases, the cute agent is one that makes use of tool of which it is not fully in command."

In "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde"⁴ Sienna Ngai, chooses the example of a frog-shaped bath sponge, showing "how much the aesthetic depends on a softness that invites physical touching -or, to use a more provocative verb, fondling. It also demonstrates the centrality of anthropomorphism to cuteness. While the object has been given a face and exaggerated gaze, what is striking is how stylistically simplified and even unformed its face is, as if cuteness were a sort of primitivism in its own right." Ngai then links "formal properties associated with cuteness - smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy" with "specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency." If these formed objects made to be deformed can trigger maternal and tender feelings, they can also provoke "ugly or aggressive" ones. She

¹ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Polity Press; 1996.

² Phoebe Waller-Bridge, also showrunner, writer, and producer for the first season of the series "Killing Eve".

³ Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*; Open Court, 2011.

⁴ Sienna Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories - Zany, Cute, Interesting*; Harvard University Press; 2015.

Island

quotes Daniel Harris⁵ stating that “the process of conveying cuteness to the viewer disempowers its objects, forcing them into ridiculous situations and making them appear more ignorant and vulnerable than they really are.”

Is quoting her quoting Adorno too much in this context? Just this one then: “This powerlessness, (...) makes all art not only seem undignified but even “ridiculous and clownish”⁶.

I borrow the editor’s presentation of Sienna Ngai’s book “Our Aesthetic Categories - Zany, Cute, Interesting” including the essay discussed above : “The zany is bound up with production and engages our playfulness and our sense of desperation. The interesting is tied to the circulation of discourse and inspires interest but also boredom. The cute’s involvement with consumption brings out feelings of tenderness and aggression simultaneously.”

As for the interesting, I'll let you be the judge of it. Its maybe the tee shirts?

The zany, is performed by Floky, the hyper zany and sexy boat builder from “The Vikings” series - blurred.

Fabienne Audéoud

Fabienne Audéoud lives and works in Paris after a dozen years in London and a two years residency at the Jan van Eyck in Maastricht.

It’s after an M.A. in fine art at Goldsmiths that her work, until then mostly musical, focused around contemporary art practices and developed in the 90’s British art scene. It is concerned with power relations, in particular within language, gender and representational issues. Humour is important as well as the notion of performativity, as theoretical and practical approaches to find and/or create spaces where the artist can intervene.

Her collaborations with John Russell and her solo work include video, performances and paintings and was shown in solo and group shows in independent spaces and institutions including: at the ICA, Camden Art Centre, South London Gallery, V&A Museum, Tate Gallery, Gaswork, Eastside Projects and Ikon Birmingham, Milton Keynes Gallery, Modern Art Oxford, Bluecoat and Tea Factory Liverpool, Karst Plymouth, Intermedia Gallery Glasgow, Ormeau Bath Gallery Belfast (UK), Sotheby’s, White Columns and Maccarone (NY), Bregenzer Kunstverein, Kunsthau Graz (AT), Serralves Porto (PT), Art Projects Dublin, Tulca 2017, Galway (IE), CA2M, Tapiès Foundation, MACBA (SP), Moderna Museet and Konstakuten Stockholm (SE), Komplot (BE), Bergens Kunstforening (NO), Vilnius CAC (LT), BAK Utrecht, Smart Project Space Amsterdam Marres Art Centre Maastricht (NL), Museo Universitario del Chopo (MX), Fri-art Fribourg (CH), Petit Palais Paris, Confort Moderne Poitiers, Treignac Project, Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE), Triangle, Marseille, La Salle de bains, Lyon, La Villa du Parc, Annemasse, Villa Arson and La Station, Nice, (FR)...

In October, alongside her solo show at Island, she will be included in large scale exhibition on the French art scene “Future, Former, Fugitive” at the Palais de Tokyo, as well as in Avant Première (with Tonus) and Bienvenue Art Fair (with Le Confort Moderne) Paris.

⁵ Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism*; Da Capo Press; 2000.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Univ Of Minnesota Press; 1997.