

Living in Postponement: 'Teacher of Dance' – Haegue Yang at Modern Art Oxford

By Hannah Newell

Haegue Yang's film piece *'Doubles and Halves' - Events with Nameless Neighbours'* 2009 dissects the upper gallery spaces of Modern Art Oxford. The double sided screen segments the space and breaks the flow of movement through the rooms. Seating has been placed in a corner and is enclosed by the rail of an upwards ramp and the screen itself. Walking past the screen on one side, the viewer's passing attention replicates the subject of the film; quietly moving through damp city streets in the timeless half light to the sound of footsteps and the rustling of trees or plastic in the wind.

However, sitting and listening to the accompanying narration on the other side of the screen is an enclosed and intimately quiet experience, that rues interruption. Yasmil Raymond, who has written extensively on Yang's work, describes her film pieces as a lexicon to the rest of her practice. The contrast of detachment with intimacy is displayed not only in the content of her films, but the careful construction of the physical environment in which they are viewed. Relating to the audience in this purposefully physical way creates an immediacy of experience that is also to be found in her sculptural works. These works appear to be caught in the moment of a gesture: a gesture of *'unfolding'*. Very different pieces display the same delicate intimacy. Origami and intricate cardboard constructions contrast with the size and metallic definiteness of the venetian blind pieces, but the sequence of lattices are just as carefully folded into geometric patterns that sculpt the space around them and the viewer. In her exhibition talk, Raymond defined the work of Haegue Yang as a *'sculpture of movement'*. The works that span the several room exhibition at Modern Art Oxford all have this sense of flexibility, whilst remaining static. They describe an action of opening and closing and moving away from and towards us. For example, Yang's *'Non-Indepliables'* (Non-foldables) 2006-2010 are a series of wrapped hanging racks or clothes horses, skeletal frames clothed in a material skin, that stand, limbs star shaped, suggestive of a tall outstretched body. Yet covered as they are in knitted or non-opaque material, light bulbs illuminating those spaces left unfilled, they are open: permeable to light and air. They are not entirely separate from the space around them yet their porous physicality makes us aware of *'the air curtain that is between us'*. The permeable surfaces of these folded structures sketch out the physical possibilities of contact whilst retaining a strong sense of singularity.

These opening, unfolding sculptures with their permeable skins frame her exploration of the possibilities of connection between separate beings and their relationship to their environment. They are defined by and define the shape of that space; a very human process of *'forever becoming'*. Reflecting this relational aspect of human existence, metaphors for the separation and merging of elements litter the monologue accompanying the film. People move towards and away from each other, flowing like rain drops that *'will someday come together'* as cloudy mists of condensation or running into pools off plastic tarpaulin, itself a consistent feature of the half finished, deserted spaces of Yang's film. The *'nameless neighbors'* are *'half beings'*: detached, yet aware of being both *'doubles and halves'* in dual connection and separation.

'Doubles and Halves - Events with Nameless Neighbours' 2009 also frames the heightened sense of awareness that is inspired by Yang's intimate works. The *'neighbors'* in the film are described as travellers. As transient beings they are separated from the spaces they live in and are therefore cast in the role of the observer. This over-awareness, this care, is a feature of both the look of the work and how it asks to be looked at. The familiar, often domestic elements that make up Yang's sculptures as well as their porosity to the space around them and the viewer themselves make them tender things. Yet their asking for attention is always underlined by their own integrity as defined things. Raymond suggests that it casts galleries and museums as *'caretakers'* or even *'accomplices'* with the work. Once again this defines the works' dual nature of separateness and dependence. It delicately treads the line of being participatory whilst never overstepping its own boundaries. We do not know *'who invited who'*. This intriguing frisson of tension between viewer and work is drawn together in the last room of the show. Yang's newly commissioned venetian blind piece concertinas out from a simplistic order to experimental variety above the head of the viewer. At first the blinds form a regular octagon, mirrored by a star shape extending from its central point. From there, towards the back of the room, this shape is broken up, unfolding and building up upon itself, finally extending downwards to the level of the gallery floor and framing the space of the viewer. Together, viewer and sculpture are caught on the very edge of definable experience; the limits of contact and the moment of movement, both *'living in postponement'*.

<http://www.artselector.com/review/living-in-postponement-teacher-of-dance-haegue-yang-at-modern-art-oxford> (30/06/2011)