WomenCinemakers Biennale, Berlin, DE
Official Selection, 2018 for Derangements – a monster study



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Interview transcript, below.

1) Hello Lynn and welcome to ***WomenCinemakers***: your practice is marked out with such captivating eclecticism, traversing the boundaries between performance art, dance, theater, writing and new music forms. Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production, we would invite to our readers to visit ***http://www.lynnbook.com*** in order to get a synoptic idea about your artistic production: in the meanwhile, would you tell us what does address you to such captivating multidisciplinary approach? Moreover, how does your *cultural substratum* due to your *25 year history of interdisciplinary artistic practice* direct the trajectory of your artistic research? (*See note below)

Thank you for including me, a relative 'outsider', as I am not a filmmaker per say. However, I've returned to making video art these past several years as a core part of my artistic practice. I think of my work as more syncretic, than eclectic – a binding and weaving of modes of production appropriate to the concepts I want to develop. I would say that the marrow of the work is the body; not only my fleshly one, but also my voicing body. I have an abiding interest in the cultural construction of bodies, including social, political, spatial and indeterminate coalescences that we don't necessarily think of as Body. I think of one of the concept streams of the larger project, Derangements, that relates to what I'm trying to say. I'm very interested in contemporary scientific research concerning the "human" microbiome which demonstrates that there are trillions of cells that are on, in and around each of our bodies that are not human. This kind of idea lodges in my consciousness, forming symbiotic relations with a range of ideas and practices that center on what it means to be a Body in the broadest sense of the word. So the trajectory of my life as an artist necessarily engages my very physicality that began with an early involvement with modern dance that then migrated to body-based performance art within a visual arts setting. These expansive explorations included early experiments with video, film and other media. In graduate school at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, studying feminist and critical theory led to an activation of my voice as an extension of bodied existence and as a poetic-political tool. Language play through creative writing became important and entwined with my new music and sound art experiments, and so on. It was really a matter of I/my body being the site of inquiry and experimentation; the push across different disciplinary and cultural boundaries is an essential part of a delimited practice.

*I wanted to update the '25 year history' given the website ends at 2011 and the bio is older. I've been making interdisciplinary work for more than 35 years at this point. I am working on updating my website, but for now have been focusing on my Vimeo site with the video works from 2012. I would appreciate that site being included: https://vimeo.com/lynnbook

2) For this special edition of ***WomenCinemakers*** we have selected ***Derangements - a monster study***, an extremely interesting experimental short film that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article and that can be viewed at ***https://vimeo.com/156461926***. When walking our readers through *the genesis* of ***Derangements - a monster study***, would you tell us how did you develop the initial idea?

Derangements – a monster study *is part of a larger transmedia project that I've been working on since 2012 called* ***Unreading for Future Bodies,*** *a suite of video works that, at the meta level are concerned with reading, reception and knowledge making as performative acts. I'm interested in challenging and reworking the book form itself in a highly mediated cultural regime, magnified by a super-saturated technological one.* ***Escapes*** *is the first video, framed as a 'book of poems', and can be viewed interactively by clicking on individual poems in any order, or watching the full piece chronologically online at:* ***https://vimeo.com/lynnbook****. This is where I got interested in ancient narratives from Greece and the Mediterraneo. Here the Phaedra figure is a sign of infinite escape, not a woman fated to die. In* ***Derangements – a monster study****, I'm tracking the Chimera figure, an impossible 'she-monster' whose multiplicitous, ever shifting body/ies becomes our guide. The expedition is the organizing principle that drives the explorer to unknown places to experience, study and develop theories about what is found there. I'm currently creating an archive of my work over the past 40 years (my first video document is of a performance event in 1979). This is also a kind of expedition. As I am looking back at materials from the process of making a performance project titled, Gorgeous Fever, about women, madness and power, I am finding what I think are my first notes on the Chimera. That's 25 years ago; so you can see how my interest in bodies and their reinvention is central to my guiding principles.*

3) We have appreciated the way you have provided your short film with such a poetic quality, capable of establishing emotional involvement in the viewers: what were your *aesthetic decisions* when shooting and what did you aim at triggering in the spectatorship?

I am glad for your interest in the aesthetic ethos of the work. I remember making an early performance that involved projected still images at Chicago Filmmakers and having someone tell me that my work was cinematic. I think that is due, in part, to my interest in the image as a reverberant site for abstract interpretation. I also understand images to be vectors for reading culture, and as an artist who performs her body, I am keenly aware of not only being 'seen', but being 'read'. And because my body is a highly sensitized medium I am attuned to how I project subtlety as well as power. Meaning gets carried along from image, to action, to word, to sound and so on – it's fluid as much as it's fixed. Or at least that's what I have come to insist on in my work. In this video, I love the intersectional 'stage' of the screen, where image/text/sound, etc. converge and force new ways of reading, of interpreting, of knowledge making. This confusion of signs asks that the viewer must feel (and hopefully question) their own sensing bodies so that at a cellular level they understand that they, too, are becoming Chimera; they, too, are monsters, being monstered… In terms of all this being in my purview when shooting occurs, well, no and also yes. I believe in a kind of live composing, and trust that. Clearly this is connected to my performance practice, which, from dance to new music, has privileged improvisation as an essential method for locating organizing principles. It's important for unearthing that which cannot be articulated through language, cannot be touched by the rational mind. That said, I always have a kind of map, a body of knowledge derived from material and theoretical research, writing and strategic planning. In this particular shoot, the camera people, costume and make-up artist, grip and sound recordist were also spectating, so my performance reflects that condition of acute and unexpected intensities that arise from a more open ended framework in a dark, timeless box.

4) Centered on the Chimera figure, ***Derangements - a monster study*** draws the viewers to explore the ever blurring boundaries between ancient myths to concepts of hybridity that marks our ever changing contemporary age: how do you consider the relationship between ancient cultural heritage and contemporariness?

Somehow, it seems to me that books, knowledge – how we come to know – is at the heart of this question. Ancient, and in this case, Greek, but also other more remote cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East gave birth to contemporary narratives, paradigms, etc. The more easily transmitted bits, or what suits the ruling elite, are embedded in the power structures of today's world, and that in turn dwells in the innermost parts of us. We, each of us, enact or react to these layers of, as you say, 'cultural heritage', but that sounds too nice for my meaning. Blurred boundaries, while at first appear to be a confusing state of affairs, are in fact, the antidote to this 'inheritance' that wants to streamline, reduce, and otherwise make individuals, bodies into a data point. Hybridity is an entangled condition of being 'many-bodied', therefore resistive to the crush of increasing technologization of life. This impossible, but very real problem of bodies that don't neatly accord with norms, is a kind of dangerous freedom.

5) ***Derangements - a monster study*** deviates from traditional filmmaking technique and seems to aim at developing *the expressive potential of the images and the symbols* that you included in your work: how much importance do you place on *symbolically charged* images in your work? In particular, how do you consider the relationship between poetry and your filmmaking practice?*

Great question as we often have only the map that we know how to read to venture into new terrain. My reference points have been located in contemporary dance (bodies mapping space), the visual arts, including video (I got my hands on my first black and white surveillance cam in 1979), and by extension, dramatic image, performative gesture (it should be noted that I never formally studied theatre). It can definitely be said that I'm a deviant, but without the assumption that I'm deviating from the (central) concern of filmmaking, in this case. I will say that film theory was really informative early on when my work was gaining critical heft through studying critical French feminisms, psychoanalysis, semiotics, the Frankfurt School, etc. I was interested less in technique and more about experimentation of forms through time-based media as it intersected with performance. Just as, much, I was interested in the overall condition of spectatorship and the constructing of bodies, consciousness, and so on. I use symbolically charged images (often enacted by me and having cultural, social and political dimensions) as arrows that point to structures of signification to be felt, deciphered, and reflected upon by the audience-viewer. Poetic treatments of language, that I've used in performance and now as a central thesis of the Unreading series, dissociates meaning from norms, including personal habits, as well as social standards. The intersection of poetic language with culturally resonant images invites the audience-viewer to be a more acute participant in their own interpretative and transformative potential. Derangements – a monster study points to the chimera and also splinters the idea of it as a fixed thing, an artifact, from some ancient civilization. After all, this 'she-monster' was already an entanglement of earlier, pre-literate stories, fears and beliefs before the Greeks gave 'her' an ancestral family tree – hierarchical, patrilineal, yet inscribed as heretical, as, well, we have the word today, chimerical.

*I did some slight editing of the question to make it flow a bit more.

6) We have particularly appreciated the way ***Derangements - a monster study*** highlights the ubiquitous interstitial* points and *mutual influences* between human interaction with nature: how do you consider the role of direct experience as starting point for your artistic research? In particular, how do the details that you capture during daily life fuel your artistic research?
*(spelling corrected)

The chimera figure is a kind of transmogrification of 'nature', which was seen as a threat, something to be tamed, named and otherwise contained by patriarchal forces. To become powerful is to control – land, animals, other people, etc. To name that which always escapes control – wild animals, fire, sexual desire, etc. – is to exert some kind of dominion over it, or at least the appearance of it. S/he/it is the epitome of restlessness, of threat, because Chimaera is elusive, unstable, nomadic. These kinds of ideas arise from a practice led research mode that is radial or rhizomatic, in structure, and admits an array of forms and approaches. I read theory and poetry, investigate new scientific findings, keep an audio journal, do a lot of writing, and shoot from the hip. ***Derangements*** *(the full work to be completed in 2019), has probably has more than 200 hours of footage from studio grade cameras to iPads, digital still and cell phone cameras. It has at least 50 hours of audio recording, more than 500 still photos, a collection of drawings, and close to a 1000 pieces of text. A key phase of development for this project occurred in 2014, on coastal Turkey, Cirla|, Antalya, in proximity to 'Mt. Chimera', or as the Turks call it 'Yanartas', meaning flaming rock. Chimera's point of origin is contested for many reasons (and this is also what makes the subject so interesting). S/he/it is a sign of change – deep, elemental, bodily transformation. I knew that I must conduct an expedition to this fire breathing mountain that became a monster in early myth, and so I did, spending 20 days there conducting research and a closing exhibition through my lived experience of the place in the delirium of summer's heat in August. While this wasn't a starting point (where is that, anyway?), it was momentous for the project's development. Actually, the footage used in* ***Derangements – a monster study*** *was shot first, in the artificiality of a production studio (which is also apropos), at the university where I teach in North Carolina. Almost a year later, I'm in Berlin (where I have taught many workshops in the summer), then coastal Turkey. Within 5 months, I'm in Istanbul, investigating the politics of space and cultural consumption, which I considered part of the network of relations between the many-branched (many-bodied?) streams of my working practice. My task is always to make another body of my work, a work-body that breathes, that has traveled afar, that has news to show and tell when it returns.*

7) Sound plays an important role in your video and we have appreciated the way the minimalistic and refined soundtrack that you created with Shawn Decker provides the footage of ***Derangements - a monster study*** with such an *ethereal atmosphere* and as well as the way you have sapiently structured the combination between *performance gestures* and *sound*: how do you see *the relationship between sound and moving images*?

Sound has always played an important role back to my earliest multi media performance projects. Since the early 90s, a significant stream of my artistic activity has occurred within contemporary new music settings that lean towards experimental, free jazz, sound art. In Berlin, for instance, I've performed most recently at an underground noise space in Neukolln and a couple of years ago at an international jazz and improvised music festival in Austria. Here my performance orientation focuses on the work I do as an extended vocal artist using electronics and sound or Foley effects, often in duo collaborations. I've made a few audio recordings and of note for Women Cinemakers, I co-produced a recording of adventurous women composers called ***the dice project****. The first video in the* ***Unreading*** *series,* ***Escapes****, in fact, emerged out of one of these collaborations with Shawn Decker, a Chicago based sound artist.* ***The Phaedra Escapes*** *was the title of the duo concert he and I performed in Chicago, Vienna and Slovakia. I was invited to create an online work of some sort from that project, so I decided to extract what I considered to be 'sound poems' from the live concert recordings. That became the basis from which I developed the image and text material from – sound was first. By the way, my interest in the Phaedra figure had its origins in a project called* ***Froth*** *that I was commissioned to create with a small opera company in New York City concerning a French Baroque opera by Rameau. This is where I found Phaedra, who I thought of as the negative sun in the dark heart of the gorgeous music of* ***Hippolyte et Aricie****. Eventually it transformed into a multimedia concert project with video projections with 3 other women, including my long term Viennese collaborator, Katharina Klement. Sorry, I love the title, so I will mention that, too –* ***HOLE: in search of opera without Opera.*** *So you can see the overlaps and expansiveness of my interests in sound and performance, moving image, text, etc. For* ***Derangements****, the full project, sound will come in at a later stage (unlike* ***Escapes*** *where the*

sound led the making of the video). In this way, ***Derangements*** *is more typical of a film, with a 'soundtrack' added, although source sound, my performative sound and text, etc. will be maintained for the most part.*

8) Many artists express the ideas that they explore through representations of the body and by using their own bodies in their creative processes. German visual artist Gerhard Richter once underlined that "*it is always only a matter of seeing: the physical act is unavoidable*": as a multidisciplinary artist deeply involved in dance, how do you consider the relation between *the abstract feature* of the concepts you explore in your artistic research and *the physical aspect* of your practice?

I would say that I have a deep involvement with bodies, with lived experience as physicality, consciousness and transformation. Dance was a starting point when I was a young student that enabled me to contact what I called 'the power of the physical'. Over the years I interrogated concepts of Body as theorized in feminist theory, phenomenology, and ideas of the trans or post human. Since Richter is a visual artist, he would privilege seeing first. I get a curious feeling that he's a bit disturbed by 'physical acts' that are 'unavoidable', as if to say he prefers the distance (and therefore control) that sight allows over the immediacy and unpredictability of bodies. He does, however like to keep the 'hand in' his works; and figures do appear, their bodies or faces smeared across the canvas. It seems I am attracted to both intensive, fleshly presence, as well as the abstract, but very real conditions that attempt to locate and capture the ultimate moving image – the body (that) is seen. And who can't help un-see other bodies, when we find it so difficult to 'see' our own, except in partial, fragmented and mediated ways? Something else about bodies that I'm thinking of in this moment is the French idea of longue duree. The Body also has a deep history on the planet with layers of structures and forces that intersect and morph. Maybe I'm trying to create a continuum for imagining this transience and depth simultaneously through my performing body, my becoming Chimera in ***Derangements – a monster study****.*

9) We have appreciated the originality of your approach and before leaving this conversation we want to catch this occasion to ask you to express your view on the future of women in contemporary art scene. For more than half a century women have been discouraged from producing something '*uncommon*', however in the last decades there are signs that something is changing. How would you describe your personal experience as an unconventional artist? And what's your view on the future of women in this *interdisciplinary* field?

It's very important to speculate about this, because in doing so, we bring an unwritten, unseen future into view. I would call this a speculative practice that imagines women artists making 'uncommon' creative works in inventive ways. It's just as important to create the critical visions that guide the structures for women and all Others to venture into radically unconventional territory. Interdisciplinarity is more bridge than field, I think. The view begins by stepping out of specificity and technological prowess and into less familiar artistic areas with open curiosity. Disciplinary paradigms, knowledge and craft are important, but I think they limit creative, transformative potentials in all kinds of ways, by their canonical weight to intractable architectures. The world is alive, culture is mobile and who knows change more than women – the ones who often are the first (and last) to navigate life passages. Some might call this improvisation – or revolution.

10) Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Lynn. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

The Unreading for Future Bodies series that includes Derangements – a monster study will have a third work. For the moment, I have titled it Fragmenta and it will weave together multiple voices of women and girls from across time and culture whose desire for knowledge transcends the risks in obtaining it. Guest filmmakers and video artists will contribute material to a syncretic network structure that becomes archive, repertoire and possibility. I'm not sure what all that means, but I think it's especially resonant today, both in

collaborative focus and participatory structure. Maybe we can work on this together! I also really want to make a new audio recording that circulates as that – probably a CD, but will also have a web presence. One thought is to actually take the occasion of making sound for Derangements as a springboard for that. Finally, I'm in the process of creating an archive of my creative works over the last 40 years with the support of my university and incredible former students interested in aggregating experimental work like mine to create an online presence for interactive access with my artistic, as well as teaching work. It's super exciting to see the digitization and preservation of works - over 300 video and film objects, audio and a host of process artifacts that include sketchbooks, journals, performance texts, photographs, and more. It's so fascinating and deeply fulfilling to see the entwinement of roots with desires growing – and deranging – the current works.