

Response to Nine Texts: De-constructing the Body



Introduction

This writing is a direct response to the nine different writing styles of H el ene Cixous, John Rechy, Rosalind Krauss, Nadia Seremetakis, Anna Sanderson, Madan Sarup, Jacques Ranciere, Liz Magor and Marcel Proust.

I construct interiors and situations within the bodies of their writings; interiors and situations that work with and fits with each individual style of writing. "De-constructing the body" as it follows on the next nine pages is an interactive piece of text that implicates the reader in the same way that performance-based art does with the viewer.

Gala Kirke: "From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)", table and chair installation, painted window, text, room size 3 x 4 x 2.4 metres, November 2002

“Inter-views” before and after

(with H  l  ne Cixous)

*daisies. she starts to take them off the wall.
they do not please her Anymore.
until she discovers there are More of them underneath.
so she rests.*

The place looks unfinished. But it is somehow complete. The wall is now showing three different daisy-type wallpapers and looks very untidy, but that’s just her. She lets the process itself decide when it is time to pause. It will correct itself.

*it is called Swan white.
at certain moments it almost looks green..
no, blue..*

She painted one of her walls white. The ‘pause’ comes back. This wall is like the ‘pause’ itself. My body rests for a second here. I can hear vibration.

There are three simple armchairs positioned in a triangle with a little round table in the middle. The table is central. I look at her notes while she is busy finding a Beethoven CD. I haven’t started asking questions and already feel she is answering.

*she runs to the phone.
how did she know it was going to ring?
or is it Me starting to understand Before?*

She comes back with two cups of green tea. A little bit spills on the floor, that is the moment when I notice the carpet. It looks a very ordinary gray at first, but then you notice footprints on it. From different angles and with different light you see different marks. Is this the After?

I notice there is a photo of a girl hanging on the wall and assume it is someone from the family. But to my surprise I find out she is ‘nobody’, or ‘everybody’ in this case. She is a potential reader, she is everybody.

***“ little girl
I write like the child learning to walk:
she rushes, faster than herself, as if
the secret of walking were ahead of
her.” (H  l  ne Cixous)***

I am on my way home now. Sitting on the bus I start rereading my own notes with the thought of my footprints on her carpet. It takes around twenty minutes from here to my place.

Autobiografia Novelou

(with John Rechy)

“Autobiography changes from moment to moment. It is not what happened, but what is being remembered.” (John Rechy)

We had to move. The place was too cold and damp. My sister was at risk. She almost died when she was three of a kidney infection as a result of the cold and wet conditions in our flat, so my parents started looking for a new place immediately. She also had, as the doctors later discovered, a congenital disposition called “renduplex” (one of her kidneys was doubled and for this reason non-functional). It was explained to me as a child that there was a high chance my younger sister would get very sick again so I had to be a good girl and not to give anyone trouble.

I was the healthy one and that equaled not being problematic.

Unfortunately no one was concerned about how the healthy child of the family was going to cope with moving. Leaving Miško Hudec, my dearest friend from just across the road, leaving all the secret places we’d only recently discovered and bunkers we’d recently built. Leaving my little heart behind. Sitting in my old room on my very last day there I was busy explaining to him how important it was for my sister to live somewhere else, somewhere better. Secretly I hated my parents, secretly I was very angry and wasn’t that good girl everyone knew at all.

The new place was big. It was a four-bedroom place and I had the advantage of the first choice. I chose the smallest room in the flat, kind of hidden. Looking from the window in my new room it seemed I was never ever going to see my friend again. It was just a different suburb we moved into, but in my seeing and understanding of the world it might as well have been a different planet.

I kind of enjoyed watching my room getting furnished – all that familiar stuff having to fit into a different cubicle. The carpet was the only new thing (my old one went to the kitchen); the rest of it was familiar. All the walls in my room were very white; there was no sign of any drawing on them. This time I was not going to let my sister draw on them. She had to learn. And this time, for the first time, we were not sharing a room. This little place was mine and only mine.

My sister got the room right next door. We never got tired of knocking on the wall that we both shared. We even created an alphabet similar to one of Morse’s, but it never worked quite as well as his.

Only after a whole year of living in our new apartment did I finally decide to go outside and play with the local kids. It didn’t go well. A bunch of us kids decided to steal some newspapers from the local school’s collection. One of the teachers saw us but managed to catch just me. She wrote my name and address on a piece of paper and swore to contact my parents. I came back home crying. I couldn’t quite understand why my parents didn’t get upset. Today I know they were just happy for me to finally leave my room. From then on everything got better. I made new friends, we visited Miško Hudec’s family as often as we could and my sister never got sick again.

“Of course nothing I have written here is true. All of it is invented. All of it is remembered.” (John Rechy)



Gala Kirke, "From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)", table and chair installation, painted window, text, room size 3 x 4 x 2.4 metres, November 2002

Informed

(with Rosalind Krauss)

The scale of the map hanging on the wall says 1:1 500 000, but more likely to be 1:500 000, that's how big it seems in this room. This room is only twelve square meters and the bookshelf itself takes up at least one quarter of the whole space. There is no window, but the air-conditioning system seems quite reliable and has not broken down once since 1984. The second half of the room consists of a table with a computer sitting on it. The computer is always on and if she leaves the door open, a 'Flying through space' screen saver is what you will most likely see. There is a vase with flowers sitting on her table at the moment as well, but the water hasn't been changed for days and the flowers are dead, rotting. The smell is evident, but she doesn't notice it anymore.

The phone has maintained a crucial communication device. It used to be white but has got that 'yellow office patina' now.

The Memory of The House

(with Nadia Seremetakis)

I am sitting in the car trying to get some sleep, before it's my turn to drive. My eyes are closed, resting. It is almost winter, people are burning fallen leaves in their gardens. This particular smell takes me a few years back to my starká's ["starká" – slang word for grandmother] garden. Her house consisted of four rooms, but it was only one room, the kitchen, that felt inhabited. The rest of the house seemed like a museum to me. I for example never saw my grandmother's bed not made, regardless of how early I got up. It's like she never slept. It always had that golden bed cover beautifully stretched over it so it looked more like a big table than a bed. Once I couldn't resist the temptation and jumped on it from the top of the old chest of drawers. It costed me kneeling in a corner in my grandmother's kitchen and domáce vezenie [home prison] for one whole day. Kneeling in the corner wasn't so bad. Even though I had to be facing the wall I knew exactly what was going on behind my back. And there was always something going on in my grandmother's kitchen. The beautiful smell of cooked food, the 'earthy' smell of the freshly dug potatoes and then the sounds – the sound of Muro (the cat) snoring, the sound of starká opening the newspaper, the sound of her watering the plants. No, kneeling wasn't so bad at all.

My starký ["starký" – slang word for grandfather] always had very red cheeks and nose. We children all knew from grandma's complaining it was from the drinking of slivovica [Slovak national home-made spirit]. He usually just disappeared 'downstairs', where none of us grandchildren were allowed for unspoken obvious reasons. 'Downstairs' was God's forbidden place where my grandfather kept all his drinks that made my grandmother so angry. Sometimes he wouldn't return for hours. I missed him.

This was by far the warmest room in the whole house. A stove, an old styled kitchen bench, a wobbly table, windows with red, pink and white geraniums, a sofa with old wooden toys underneath, black and white photographs of some soldiers and the most exciting corner of the room – a small area on the wall where all Walt Disney's stickers from aunty Mary were pasted. Aunty Mary was an emigrant in America!



Gala Kirke, *mama*: "From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)", still from "Looking in", VHS 240 min, 2 min. loop, 2002

Found Looking

(with Anna Sanderson)

“Go somewhere where you can concentrate on looking. It doesn’t matter where. How do you look?”
(Anna Sanderson)

I am in my room.

From where I am sitting I can see two bottles of *Avon Advance* “leave in” conditioner, the stuff that my mother used to send me in all her parcels until I told her I’d moved on and started using something different.

It happened around 1994 when I first used *Advance* leave in conditioner. I thought it was fantastic and decided to buy one each time it was discounted, which happened to be most of the time. It became a pattern and the whole family started using it.

After many years I finally gave up on *Advance*, but I am not ready to give my last two bottles up just yet. The hair is long gone, cut short three times; those two bottles represent everything that’s left. No I am not ready to give them up just yet.

Home and Self

(with Madan Sarup)

Back then I lived in a not very inviting block of flats. It was in Battersea in London. They were built around 1950. I moved into the flat in 1963 when I was thirty-three. You could see them from miles, big yellow things. All the flats were identical, but I do recall seeing mine somehow differently. It was a dodgy area. I remember once when a lift in our building broke down, the people who came to fix it couldn't understand what a nice man like me was doing there. I told them I lived there and they just shook their heads in disbelief. But for me it was the first time I lived on my own, no flatmates and no cats. And I did enjoy the weird sounds coming from the neighboring flats. It was this strange 'big building mumble'. I liked it.

My flat? 7th floor. Right wing. 17 B. Two bedrooms, one kitchen, one bathroom, one toilet.

I usually sat and typed in my kitchen. It was the only room that fitted my gigantic table. I had to cut its legs when moving in otherwise it wouldn't fit into the lift. It was a beautiful table given to me by my mother's relations who emigrated the year after my family. I left the table there when I was moving out. I couldn't get it through the door even with the shortened legs and I didn't want to cut them any shorter. In some way it felt right to leave it behind.

All the walls in my flat were empty. I would love to have a photograph of my parents hanging somewhere, but I didn't have one. I hardly have a memory of them. My mother died when I was five and my father returned to India when the war started and died in the partition in 1947 just after I turned seventeen.

There was only one thing in the flat, apart from me of course, that could reveal my true identity – the carpet in my bedroom. I got it from my wife, a girlfriend back then, who bought it from some Indians and guaranteed me it was made in India. I have never checked.

I believe her and those Indians and have never wanted to investigate any further. I feel that finding out the truth of the history of this carpet would never answer as much as my wife's story does. And that is the way I look at everything.

Dear George, Melinda, Lisa, Jon, Barry, Tim and everyone ...I am most proud to become a part of this wonderful book.

Thank you.

Madan

The Process of Preserving

(with Jacques Ranciere)

“The process of identification is a process of spatialisation”.

(Jacques Ranciere)



Gala Kirke, “From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)”, lamp installation, simulated wallpaper, text acrylics on lampshades, photo-copy on board, print on foam board, room size 3 x 4 x 2.4 metres, November 2002

This place would hardly be a year old. It's barely furnished and is being kept extremely tidy – all in white.

sterile?

Everything is in a definite order; everything is there to be used. Everything.

practical?

It could not be more different to the place where he grew up. His mother's house was anything but practical. It was a chaos, which only she could keep in order. She was a notorious collector. She probably collected everything and kept everything since the age of ten. The valueless pieces were her soft spot. She always felt for underdogs.

The dust was very significant. There were things she would polish over and over and there were certain things she wouldn't touch for years. “Dust remembers and preserves” she used to say.

With her and her house gone now, this is the way he remembers. The imitation would never work and he couldn't live in that house and polish memories. This way he remembers better. The dust in his memory preserves everything.

Everything.

Sterile?

Empty?

No, just spacious enough to store his memories.

Disconnecting

(with Liz Magor)

empty body
empty shelf
blue carpet
Dirty window
a box stuffed with
bits of polystyrene
she has long forgotten
domino piece
glass
her open suitcase
where is she?
playing outside with the cat.
disconnecting

cotton buts
drawing pin
ring mother note
different room
and a different domino piece
they match, she doesn't know
old armchair
will serve the others
empty glass
empty smell
Snowdrift
where is she?
hiding
disconnecting

she leaves
and leaves
and leaves

Aspen White
Pocket Watch white
Avalanche
Polo Mallet White
Breakwater White
Poncho White
Candelabra White
Portico White
Country Stove White
Resort White
Design Studio White
River Rapids
Dover Cliffs
Riviera Terrace
Dune White
Roadster White
Edwardian Linen
Sail White
our Sack White
Sailor's Knot
Journal White
Sneaker White
Killington White

Montauk Driftwood
Tennis Court White
Petticoat White
Tackroom White
Picket Fence White

Tuxedo Shirt
(Liz Magor: White House Paint)

Pleasure of Sounds

(with Marcel Proust)

She was telling us her story. I did not just listen to it, I lived it. The experience went far beyond my body. I did not want her to finish. Ever. I looked around, but could not see anything or anyone. It was just me, my conscious unconsciousness (unconscious consciousness?) the story and her voice. Later on I was passing the same story on. Why did I want to lie and tell everyone it was mine?

Doesn't this also happen when one reads? The reader can (should, is expected to?) appropriate the authorship. The author sometimes encourages you to replace his voice with your own. You read and the text becomes 'yours'. Where do you go from there?

Every now and then I can hear different sounds and voices when I read. But there are a very limited number of books and texts that have such an effect on me. Sometimes it happens only once sometimes I reread and the sounds come back even more powerful.

Favourite sounds include:

The sound of someone typing (trained hands, no gaps, constant movement).

The sound of certain voices (quiet slow talking, lots of pauses).

The sound of turning magazine pages.

The sound of my mother knitting.

The sound of rain, fire and silence.

Outside sounds –

constant happening.

The place where sound sensation takes place is the interior of my body. The signal is being sent after echoing in my ears, straight to my brain where it is processed by neurons and sent away by pulsing blood to the rest of my body. And then after only a few minutes the sensation is gone. Trying to bring it back never works. It is always spontaneous and unexpected, I have given up on trying to bring it back. It happens just like stars happen, just like trees happen, just like we happen. It always does.

Gala Kirke, *mama*: "From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)", still from "Looking in", VHS 240 min, 2 min. loop, 2002



Kitchen

(with Gala Kirke)

Practical – sensible, realistic, useful, no-nonsense

I have just looked for this word to make sure that it is the appropriate one-word description for the place I live in. And yes, practical fits fine. My place is practical. A standard (normal, usual, regular, ordinary, typical, common, average) room size, a minimum of furniture (very functional), hardly any decorative (ornamental, pretty, attractive, pleasing to the eye) pieces.

Boring, monotonous, uninteresting, mind numbing, dull. Unexciting?

No, just very simple. Easy, uncomplicated and undemanding – ideal for me and my complex-self.

How would I be if I never left home? Still sitting in my mother's kitchen having Lipton tea with lemon? No. I would be here where I am now having a hot drink of a different kind. Blackcurrant maybe?

I don't have a favourite (preferred, much-loved, beloved, desired) place. I just like many places. I just like.

The mornings have always been my favourites. The anger and sadness from the night before disappears. I make an appointment with my hairdresser. She cut my mother's hair once. My mother fell asleep.

Comfortable-relaxed, at ease, contented, happy, easy, calm.

Uncomfortable-not: (relaxed, at ease, contented, happy, easy, calm)

I need them both.

My father left my mother.

He never loved her as much as he loved me and my sister.

He went to town barefoot when he found out I was leaving.

I never left.

Four chairs, one big table, a map of the world on the wall. Absent body.

Indoor plants, a calendar with our birthdays and name-days marked.

The view of a bus stop, a road and a supermarket.

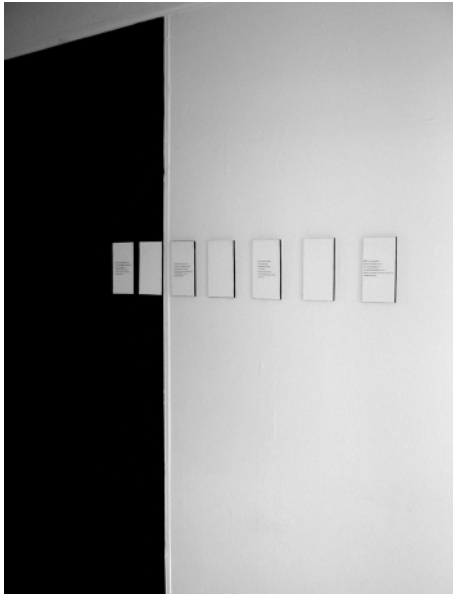
I am still sitting there.

“...the reader who is ‘reading the room’ leaves off reading and starts to think of some place of his own past. You would like to tell everything about your own room. You would like to interest the reader in yourself...”

...the reader has ceased to read your room: he sees his own again. He is already far off, listening to the recollections of a father or a grandmother, of a mother or a servant, of “the old faithful servant”, in short, of the human being who dominates the corner of his most cherished memories.”

(Gaston Bachelard)

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Gala Kirke attended the University of Zvolen (Slovakia), and completed her studies in Dunedin, New Zealand at Otago Polytechnic School of Art. She is currently studying at the Dunedin College of Education, completing a Graduate Diploma of Teaching. She is a practising artist and her most recent exhibitions include: *From Collective to Personal (The Story of a Fictional Archive)*, Site Exhibition 2002, Otago Polytechnic School of Art, Dunedin and *Post-Areas: A Leap of Fake* at the Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, 2003.

Gala Kirke: "From collective to personal (The story of a personal archive)", detail of text: "De-constructing the body", print on foam board, November 2002