

...MIGHT BE GOOD

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REMARK: DEEP THROAT; CONVERSATION AS REVIEW

By Marley Freeman and Mary Walling Blackburn



Still from *Deep Throat* (1972)

Marley Freeman, painter, works out of a studio in Brooklyn. Mary Walling Blackburn and Freeman watch together a clip from Deep Throat (1972), a 61 minute pornographic film; its premise being that the clitoris of the starring actress, played by Linda Lovelace, is located at the bottom of her throat. The plot requires that the patient's discomfort can only be alleviated by oral penetration. Her medical "struggle" is documented without the academic formalities of Jean-Martin Charcot's late 19th century photographs of female asylum inmates in the throes of performed feminine hysteria.

In the wake of Deep Throat's release, the idea of the film manifested in variant public forums ranging from the pseudonym for the informant that revealed the peregrinations of the Nixon Administration to a troupe of puppeteers clamoring that audience members throw change into "deep throat," their collection sack. Here, Freeman and Walling Blackburn begin with Deep Throat to touch upon the elusive "feminine mark", the politics of abstraction, and the wobbly aesthetics of joy.

Mary Walling Blackburn [MWB]: Do you recall that art historian who did not make good on her promise to parse the "Feminine Mark" (in contrast to the Feminist Mark, the Neutered Mark, the Pan Sexual Mark...)? I find pleasure in this clip from Deep Throat when I begin a perverse organization of the marks made by cream pie.

Marley Freeman [MF]: I'm not so clearly pleased by this pie mark. The scene feels forced—more like a sadistic pleasure, picking a zit or trampling a plant, and as far as this historian and that feminine mark—at least she opened the question. If only to cause my discomfort in her ability to address the question once it was opened. It is like the movie! Release can only be accomplished through oral penetration. Abstractly, it's an uncomfortable goal.

This kind of pleasure is as feminine as it is masculine, but if we're talking about the feminine, (as I initially recalled the scene)—the man makes the first move and the ladies take the scene. Is this pleasure?

MWB: My pleasure is not so much located in the gendered order of the pies thrown but in the moment when the cream obfuscates Lovelace's features; suddenly I forget everything that precedes it—what once was a porn star is a new sort of animal without features, male or female. Can this mysterious being, visually akin to the Mississippi Fouke monster or yeti come as an object that lands outside of gender? Is abstraction an effective WIMMIN'S PORN? (laughs) For me, the abject includes the socially mandated feminine, but for some the abject is a socially constructed notion of the feminist monster.

According to Lovelace, the scene, and every scene, is coerced. She gently requests that viewers refrain from watching Deep Throat. Believing her, I chose to view a documentary of its making and limit my watching to the skin free scenario that begins with a sled dog team and ends with cream pie.

Although she's been creamed, so to speak, is it an injustice to evacuate its intended meaning...to imagine that the pie doesn't stand simply serve as a thinly veiled metaphor for a blow job? Can her throat's function never be transfigured?

MF: Ah, so I begin to understand. The interest is in the abstraction. The neither here nor there. This photo is from my walk to work, it reminds me of your assertion. My favorite part about this photo is the color of the pavement. It's wet and over the hot cement from the summer heat. It is sensational with out the same baggage of history, given what we know about the film because of HER experience, and the discomfort the film puts in me. In that sense, abstraction becomes the aggressor and the friend. Both concealing and making palpable her experience.

MWB: You make paintings where the abstraction is both our aggressor and our friend, but the friendliest mark that has ever surfaced on your canvas is the accidental track of an animal that traversed your drying painting. Because you showed up at the lecture that promised to examine the Feminine mark, I imagine the feminine mark as your abject thing. But the feminist mark? Sometimes your titles exhume the feminist concepts that animate the form but that process of titling is akin to my perversion/recuperation of Deep Throat in that it works at the worked surface...it comes after the material fact of our pleasure and discomfiture. Your titles sometimes release us from the ambiguity of the marks...they tell us what side you are on.

MF: Mary, you are correct about the abject marks within my paintings, however those marks may or may not be feminine. I don't know what a feminist mark is because I have never seen one.

MWB: Could it phenomenologically be related to The Loch Ness monster?

MF: What does that mean?

MWB: This monster is a very specific node in our culture that is built upon absence. Theoretically, we could always be looking in vain for the feminist mark.

MF: ...That collapses the abstraction into it's final understanding. An understanding of Lovelace.

MWB: You mean that a mark-making beholden to abstraction allows us to recover Lovelace?

MF: It's the abstraction of the moment that makes us able to project, the joy and the horror in her face.

MWB: A belated reading of Lovelace, even against her will, releases this viewer—me—and allows for the illusion of a reverse transmogrification...What was monstrous is now unidentified animal.

MF: When it's just her face with all that cream on it, we lose track of everything. It's not about the porn. It's not about the pie. It's about her joy and it obfuscates all the crap and the clip.

Marley Freeman is a painter living and working in Brooklyn.

Mary Walling Blackburn, Dallas/Brooklyn, was recently included in the Paper Monument anthology, Draw It With Your Eyes Closed and has written for E-Flux Journal, Cabinet, Triple Canopy and Afterall Journal.