

MYSTERIOUS SKIN: MELANIE MANCHOT

Contemporary takes on the concept of subjectivity see it as the amalgamation of so many different effects – of biology, of society, of language, etc. We are not subjects so much as we come to occupy the places where subjectivity is registered, where it becomes legible, which has less to do, it seems, with our own identity than with some perceived difference not only from other people and places but also from ourselves. In other words, we are not who we think we are; we cannot see ourselves, or listen to ourselves, as others do. We are not, in short, subject to ourselves.

It is one thing to comprehend this curious situation; it is quite another to run up against it, to feel it in all of its immediacy, as something other than a simple fact of discourse. Melanie Manchot's newest video installation, *Security* (2006), which goes on view at Goff + Rosenthal in New York this month, offers us something of that immediacy by picturing a series of seven bouncers, culled from the 'superclubs' of Ibiza, getting naked for the artist and her video camera. In one sustained take after another, each physically imposing figure stands outside his respective club, in the place, one presumes, where his physicality is an asset of necessity rather than vanity, removes his shoes and clothing, and then stands, fully bare, in many cases fully depilated, for a number of seconds, before redressing.

Erotic it is not. Nor is it voyeuristic, for that would imply that Manchot's bouncers were unaware that they were being filmed, which is patently not the case. What they do, they do for Manchot, her camera and by extension us, the piece's potential audience. In this it is an act of supreme generosity, and in some cases bravery, for each of Manchot's 'sitters' – in their expressions, their hesitations, their failures to follow through – demonstrates the great distance travelled between being nude and being naked: the former meaning 'without clothing'; the latter, 'without protection'. It is the bouncer's job, after all, to form a barrier of protection, to limit access, to select, or perhaps to compose, the contents of his club from the materials standing on line. This is the scenario of subjectivity, the place of interpolation, one which drastically changes during the publicity of the day.

Here place remains as important to Manchot as it had in previous works, such as *Groups + Locations* (2004) and *Neighbors* (2006), in which, respectively, Moscow's public spaces and Berlin's neighbourhoods played an integral role in picturing subjectivity. With *Security*, however, the argument has become at once more general – we're dealing with a kind of labour rather than nationality – and more specific – these are individuals, each with a different body, to which they are subject in different ways. Jonathan T.D. Neil

MELANIE MANCHOT,
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Security, 2006, multiscreen video installation.
Courtesy Goff + Rosenthal, New York, and Fred London Ltd, London

