

# ART & TEXT



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## *Spider Woman In Australia*

Juan Davila

In Australia, the only options for identity are alienated ones. Its art is alienated because it is blind to the socio-historical conditions that produce it. However, there exist new mechanisms of artistic production and communication which could defeat the alienated socio-cultural habits of traditional art in Australia.

In occupying the pages of an art publication as a mechanism of supporting art, I propose such publication as a producer rather than reproducer of art. This mechanism establishes the immediacy of the materiality of the printed page, contradicting its traditional use as notification of events outside the publication. Art can be a critical intervention in a process of cultural communication and should achieve that through the formulation of transformed messages, not through additional messages. The intervention of the artist in this manner creates a collective art object.

A materialistic view must replace the illusory, idealistic tradition in art. This refers not only to the dry marriage of painting and object of contemplation, but to all those genres that act as material support of representation. This denial of the concerns of contemporary art thinking has, as a result, a complete ahistoricism in the work of the artists. Most Australian artists fail to question the function of their objects in a socio-cultural context. The appropriation of foreign cultural data will continue to render ineffectual their work. Art today questions the "art object" as the material support of an art intention and the proposal is to replace it with the concept of "situation in art". This will abolish the inherent value of the object and rehabilitate the subject of artistic experience as a consciousness of an historical reality. Situation in art refers to the production of art through the enunciation of concepts and behaviour in art. This behaviour attempts to intervene in a specific life situation, dealing with the factors which determine that situation. This intervention is done in specific time and place and through a specific body and life. Art in Australia must assume the conflict of its own history; it should sever the continuity of an art history that never thought of itself as a vibrant force in front of the foreign intrusion. The probable explanation of this masochistic attitude



lies in the wider problem of colonial dependence. The proposed breaking of the continuity designates art as a temporary truth in which one's experiences and those of others will be the only art products that deserve to be considered. There is no "Australian art", but there are Australian issues with which art concerns itself.

In most cases, the art critic in Australia lacks an ideology; he hides the parameters from which he speaks. The art critic proposes an impressionistic appreciation of art, resorting to the concept of "originality" on the one hand whilst on the other denying all real examples of transgression of the status of art by the discourse of the artist, denouncing this originality as demented or foreign. The art critic cannot surpass his condition of being a mere commentator because the new art in Australia is an art socially involved. The art critic represents the formal tradition in which the art discourse was resolved only in art. The artist, conscious that there is no innocent reading, has resorted to self-criticism in art. A discourse upon art that incorporates the psychoanalytic and semiotic concerns, a discourse that subverts the conventional writing and reading, an art-critical discourse that is fused with poetic discourse, is essential.

In the media, the comic-strip has a privileged place as signifying material. It is one of the most important means of art because all the elements of production are shown, and the reader has direct access to the code. This channel of pure "unreality" is unalienating, because there are no hidden messages. The comic-strip refers metaphorically to reality, making form and content indistinguishable. This marginal visionary area has an affinity with the project of Australian art. The pursuit of economical and institutional support for art in the comic-strip industry would eliminate the elite art public.

Other alternative modes of production of signs are the practices that validate the body's significance, its gestures and actions, its biography and semantics. The body is the first vital affirmation of an historical and geographical possession. The fragmented body as illustrated by body-art brings to our view the signs that are suppressed by the socio-cultural discourses. The corporal signs in art are capable of producing and transforming socially transmittable meanings in the symbolic processes of thought and society. The artist can use his own body as a sign of a passionate fight with the historical modes of productions of art and culture. I propose my own life and body as support of art. I inscribe the alienation of my identity in my flesh as a live edition of semantic signs. I defy the sign regulation, verbal and visual, as a form of ideological liberation. My social and historical insertion in Australia are assumed as a transgression. Spider Woman is born.

FIRE!

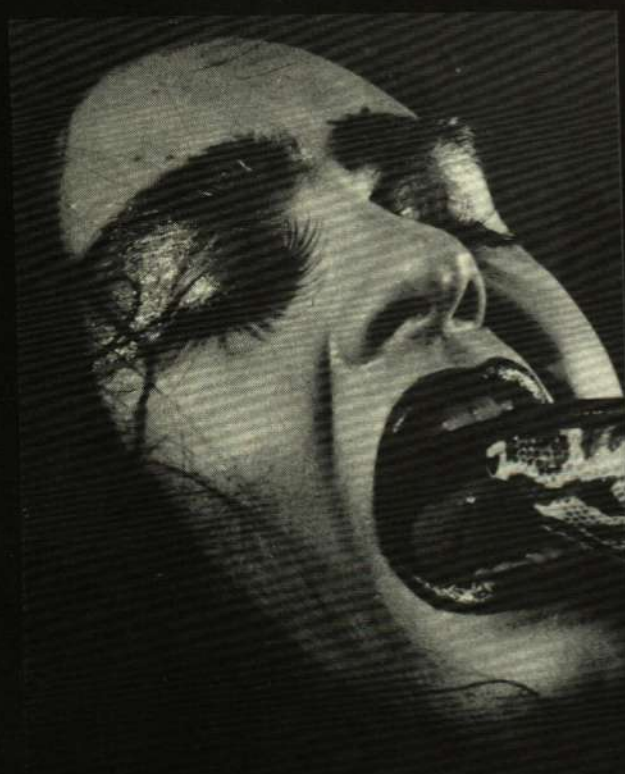


THESE PAGES ARE OCCUPIED FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ART





With this ring I thee web... Black lady I love you too, but...



...left alone in this sunburnt hole... I cry out against the void..



fire with hope the victims of cynical disregard...



wet dream for this thirsty land...

TO BE CONTINUED



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