

AFTER HIKING MILES INTO THE
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Tony Oursler's work, which is using the new media and new concepts of physics and psychology, is continuing the inquiries of a long and great tradition of natural magic. But there has been another crucial shift, since Robertson created the *Phantasmagoria* in Paris in the 1790s and Goya drew the monsters in his own head. The showman Robertson believed he was throwing light, in the spirit of the new age, on the processes by which superstitious credence in miracles and devils and spectres had duped people, and Goya's ironies and satire struggled against fantasy and credulity. By contrast, the spectres that haunt us now have achieved the unsettling cartoon being of media reality; they have also regained their mystery and power to disturb. For, as one of Tony Oursler's apparitions says: 'It sure is dark out here'.

Marina Warner, extract from "Ourself behind Ourself, Concealed ...": *Ethereal Whispers from the Dark Side*, in *Tony Oursler: The Influence Machine* (London: Artangel, 2000) 73-5; 76; reprinted, with variations, in Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Fred Tomaselli

Interview with Siri Hustvedt//2007

Siri Hustvedt Each week, I teach a writing class to psychiatric in-patients at New York Hospital, which has been a very interesting experience for me. I've discovered a couple of things. Firstly, psychotic patients are far more creative than the non-psychotic ones, and they are often cosmologists, that is, they're very interested in mythologies that explain how the world is organized. I know you've drawn upon your own experiences with drugs in your work and, as you may know, there is a connection between drug-induced hallucinations and those due to psychosis, probably because of shared neurochemical activity. Is psychosis something that interests you?

Fred Tomaselli I guess you could say that I'm interested in all kinds of altered states, which of course, would include psychosis. I love the work of many lunatic outsiders like Henry Darger or Adolph Wölfli. Primarily, I'm attracted to how vividly they depict their inner states, but then, that would apply to any great artist whether they were nuts or not. Maybe it's because I've suffered through my own bouts of bad neurochemistry and self-medication, but I don't believe you need to

be crazy to be insanely creative. I am, however, fascinated by charismatic madmen and their ability to create mass hysteria. In many respects, the history of the twentieth century is defined by madmen – from Hitler to Pol Pot to our current situation. I'm intrigued by how easy it is to manipulate individuals so they lose themselves to a mob or a mass movement. We humans think we know who we are, yet our psyches end up being such porous, leaky things.

Wherever there are charismatic, deluded leaders, you also have the struggle of utopian ideologies. The utopian struggle was also central to modernism, which was just beginning to crash and burn as I was stepping up to add my voice. I've been kicking through its wreckage ever since. Works like *Goth* (2000) try to address this issue by looking at the imposition of utopian ideology on the American landscape. The seemingly peaceful painting of a town is actually composed of various dwellings that depict different radical religious and political ideologies – everything from Thoreau's cabin to the Aryan Nations compound. Instead of a bucolic piece of heaven, it's town of hate and conflict.

Hustvedt In my own work, I'm obsessed with the fact that distinguishing between the imaginary and the real is ultimately impossible. We have a cultural code for making this distinction, but looking at your pieces, I get the feeling that you are similarly obsessed with the blur between these categories. I loved the archive sheets of eyes and ears – the photographs of both real and artificial eyes and ears that you have used in your work. The effect it creates is uncanny. Can you talk about your interest in the border between fantasy and reality, nature and artifice?

Tomaselli I guess it comes from growing up close to Disneyland. I've often told the story of how, after hiking miles into the wilderness and discovering my first real waterfall, I immediately began looking for the pumps and conduit that make it work. My assumption growing up was that everything was a construct. As I've become older, technology keeps adding to the menu of artificial realities. Plastic surgery is getting better and more routine, computers are getting more powerful, drugs have become more sophisticated, and politics have been reduced to advertising. Our culture of escapism has irrevocably shaped our world. It has helped elect our leaders, and is also one of our dominant commodities. Under these circumstances, the 'real' is the strangest thing there is. [...]

Fred Tomaselli and Siri Hustvedt, extract from interview, *Another Magazine* (Autumn/Winter 2007).