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### Frances Scholz | The Traveler

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On the surface this might look like a wry science-fiction joke: a beaming platform (*Docking Station*, 2021) in a corner to stand on, a glass plaque (not quite ball) held up by delicate metal tendrils that transform white light into shades of variable color (*The Traveler*, 2021). Frances Scholz has been interested in the dangerous straightness of science-fiction and the plausibility of the implausible for a long time. But this is not about an easy escape from global warming, by beaming ourselves out to the moon, say. And yet it is about beaming, and the qualities of light, and it is about solutions, somehow. These objects ask about transparency, transmission, and doubling. They ponder the rift that opens between truth and fiction, sense and non-sense, reality and representation, and settle into the operations of those limits. They are mobile or porous membranes if you'd prefer.

So how do I beam you through this? There are so many ways.

Here is one. Frances' investigations begin, or stand on, a sensory index or image of an idea. I'm talking about that glass in the corner. You can stand on it later to see if what I'm saying makes sense. A technique was developed specifically for these works, fusing different glass and a process of deformation with heat to form a three-dimensional surface. Looking through the glass, the shades you see are activated according to your position and to your relation to a source of light. The swirls of color that deflect the light the dichroic filter glass transmits are snippets from an image which comes, via an indirect route, from the history of Western philosophy. Its origin was a photograph of a ladder Scholz was using in her studio and whose momentary reflection she captured as it paused on plastic film. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein had ended *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, his work on the relationship of the world, thought, and language, by telling us to throw away the ladder of logic he'd constructed in it. One way to understand this imperative to discard is that we should abandon the whole attempt to have beliefs about reality, irrespective of whether these are true or false, or simply nonsensical.

What do you do as an artist engaging with the real without belief?

You make a film about a dead branch in a courtyard and in an empty room. It's a small thing, humble, almost nothing: a piece of wood shot outside during a storm, and then inside from different points of view, with small tags affixed to it as if it were an object from an archeological dig: face covered in silver. But even this most mundane, non-metaphysical of object arrives to us with its light deflected. What we see is ourselves, in the West, on view in that room, all of the first growth forests cut down under the onslaught of the coming storm. But it's also a likeness of Yusra Mardini's arm, the now Refugee Olympic swimmer who swam the dinghy she was on to safety. Twenty people going from Turkey to Greece were saved that day. Greece is not the sole origin of philosophy.

You are standing on an image of that ladder. It's a playful thing which doesn't attempt to understand or master the philosophical discourse that it points to. It is no longer a concept about logic. As it opens us to what Wittgenstein would later explore, the material effects of language and the worlds they bound, it also continues to hold us up.

Frances Scholz has exploded the image of the ladder into a thousand parts onto canvases and glass in nearly immaterial doubled lines and trembling shadows. First shown in the series *Shadow Paintings* (2014), the image of the ladder was never an original. Since its first doubled origin as photograph, its multiplying continued in a proliferating circulation as it was printed back onto the plastic film, its contours now indistinguishable from the folds on the film itself and subject to the movement of the light refracted on them. Scholz uses a projector to transfer her images onto the opaque membranes of canvas, outlining the areas to paint with tape. The light beam sometimes catches on objects that stand between the projector and the canvas (cords, a table corner, a column covered in strands of residual tape). Things interfere. Materials get reused. What is positive space in one instance becomes negative space in another.

But other images than ladders have also caught on canvas or on walls. One comes from Leibniz and concerns the membranes of monads, about which Gilles Deleuze wrote a book entitled *The Fold*. Subjectivity folds the outside in. The soul is a monad, without doors or windows, which pulls its clear perceptions from a dark depth. Although it reflects the world in its entirety, it is full of obscure folds. Another image is an unruly horse's mane, shaking with the unvanquished beauty of a colt, held down by cowboys in the pen before the rodeo, and refusing

its bounds. Western exceptionalism. Again Wittgenstein: "Within all great art there is a WILD animal: tamed."<sup>1</sup> Only Scholz doesn't want it tamed.

The goal is not to be faithful to an idea, a philosophical system or series of investigations, or even to know them in the sense that a philosopher or historian might. Instead, the goal is a practice in which an image of the idea triggers something via partial borrowings and references that are folded through material iterations and meandering repetitions. Scholz' work is inflected into a certain direction by an idea that no longer pertains to its initial domain, nor is limited by it. The idea is projected into another form, perhaps even somewhat haphazardly, based on sensory rather than symbolic data (and judgment). Its layering and proliferation are gleeful. Beaming. Scholz beams.

Meaning occurs in the proliferating circulation of the image. It's about productivity but it also leaves blank space on the canvas. It could be interesting to trace the subterranean course of the ideas and their appendages, the systems they are inscribed in, as kinds of negative spaces that also inhere in the material simply by dint of the ideas belonging to them and to history.

This courses through this glass, as through veins, like the impalpable, invisible image of awareness in matter.

So how do we beam up? We know the history of Western exceptionalism. Western art is insensitive, in a different albeit similar way, inasmuch as it has become the privileged locus for aesthetic sensibility and has for the most part ignored what is not easily perceptible. As for Western philosophy, it is ignorant in the sense that it has cut itself from its material transformation and remains stuck in the hiatus between thought and matter. I want to note that Wittgenstein sought to escape this with his notion of philosophy as therapeutic and his investigations into linguistic forms of life, and he succeeded, on his deathbed, to utter, "Tell them I've had a wonderful life!"<sup>2</sup> We only think we cannot be beamed up. We ourselves have forgotten or limit our capacity for beaming. Being beaming. Beam.

An undercurrent here, unconscious perhaps but visible, is the female. The sculpture beaming us up looks like a uterus, and Frances has been making paintings of shapes hidden behind columns that resemble Poussin's column woman from 1647/48. "The woman seems made of cut glass," writes T.J. Clark.<sup>3</sup> As women, we have to fight for the right to expression, for women, the struggle for expression, and for it not to seem to us like an ego trip, but overall the need to allow ourselves expression... See, I trip over myself saying it. The uterus is not an organ of the body. It is actually a gift from the cosmos, a portal in the body that lets something through. It's a disk that beams down from the moon.

Part of "Berlin Childhood," an ongoing collaboration between Aura Rosenberg and Frances Scholz based on the texts in Walter Benjamin's chronicle *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* is the film *The Moon* (2020). At night, as the moonlight occupies his room, Benjamin experiences a displacement as if he had been forcibly delocated, pushed out, or forward in time, so that he doubts that he can actually take his present place back on his bed. Signs are unreliable, says Benjamin. Benjamin's great granddaughter Lais who reads his words in the film is another of these conceptual slippages, and I apologize for the term, for the young woman is spiritual, pure wit and crystalline clarity and depth. But she also is also the beautiful effect of a beaming that has come to us through an absolutely opaque and unknowable transmission, sperm and history and politics and art.

We perceive surface eruptions of the network, here and there, when we are lucky to come upon them. At other times, you can skim the surface of the iceberg of the immense expanse, and trace one possible course on it, intuiting a few lines and impulses of sense born out of a process that is more akin to self-immolation in the splendor of unmanifest awareness than to whatever small thing we've called thinking or perceiving.

So how do you beam up?

Frances follows some of these lines, and here her works offer different cuts of that whole, from the surface down inside, unlodging small dregs of the way that history and politics inscribe themselves in matter. Signs are untrustworthy, glass is transparent, but we don't yet know what that means.

This is an aesthetics of jubilation. Its process of projection and beaming has been arrived at through decades-long experimentation and an extended dialogue with the history of painting. It speaks for itself. What can I say that it doesn't, but to interfere or add muskiness to the vibrancy of its hues and the precision of its forms? Scholz' mastery is to capture this inside transparency of color and gesture. Transparency misperceived looks very much like thin air,

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 240.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 81.

<sup>3</sup> T. J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020).

but is it not perhaps a greater condensate which folds so much into invisibility? How is dialogue with the history of painting made visible? Is it in the application of paint, in the decisions about form-making? Might a certain ease point to an ideal of freedom as a reflection on form itself: form within the inform, form and non-form, or the possibility that form can shut onto nonbeing? I notice a manner, if not a meaning, a way of hopping from one surface to the next. The thing proliferates...

A philosophical stand is taken to be 'metaphysical' insofar as it involves one in legislating on a *priori* grounds what can and cannot be. "The light flowing down to us from the moon is not meant for the scene of our daytime existence [...] Why is there anything at all in the world? Why the world? [...] Its nonbeing would have struck me as not a whit more problematic than its being, which seemed to wink at nonbeing."<sup>4</sup>

Beaming also describes a state of bliss.

Noura Wedell

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2006), 117.