

Nursing History's Factory of the Future – Iain Kerr

1.

When Von Justi writes the *Elements of Police* in the late 1700's he is part of a developing tradition of using the term "police" to refer to all the elements of national governance that are productive – that foster the development of its citizens lives. Police as a term – before it gained its more recent derisitory connotations – was a general term for a broad sweep of new governmental concerns involved in the production of the social (religion, commerce, hygiene, manufacturing, servants, domestics, nurses, roads, bridges, the poor etc.). This development that brings together these seemingly disjunctive and incommensurable fields is best seen, as Pasquale Pasquino notes, as the production of a new form of space that traverses across people and things – new forms of *public* bodies – the factory worker, the family, the factory, the home, the nurse, etc.

Nursing develops as part of this nascent modern disciplinary apparatus centered on the formation of specific types of individuals, and individualities – distinct aggregates and dynamics occupying and producing vast zones of our modern topos. These new formations were essentially normative in their constitution – which is to say they were based in ideals of behavior, thought, elocution, stance, dress, and disposition. It is into this vast modern topography of the microphysics and micro-technologies of ideal bodies and their spaces that this exhibit unfolds a new cartography. While this exhibit is partially historical we are not in the past of nursing per se – or in a simple critical history of a form of production of knowledge – but rather in, what Foucault would call a complex history of the present. The past has been brought to bear on the present. The present of ethics. The present of care. The present of the body. The present of our inter-relations. *And what of nursing in all of this?* Nursing, it seems, this exhibit is suggesting, is a type of fluid field where these issues (ethics of care/bodies/relations...) define its actualities. So to the degree this exhibit never addresses nursing directly – but always through the intermediary of the uniform – it is addressing the context of nursing as a profession of *mediations* – mediations between seeming insides and outsides, between centers of expertise (doctors) and patients, between competing definitions of health and sickness, between the healthy and the sick etc. And in striving to maintain an open space of constructive experimentation in this tenuous zone of passage (which is the uniform) J. Morgan Puett and Mark Dion enact a space of com-passion in its literal sense. Com-passion as the co-presence of the unresolved multiplicity of spaces between us at all moments (that which we endure in the most direct sense – live). While this might seem overtly mystical, the space that they open up – this opening of compassion – co-being – is far too complex for any such a simple response – it is densely packed with starches, frills, mythologies of terror, fetishes, war, desire, teflons, politics, gender, and improbable futures – how could this space (nursing) be anything less? We are suddenly aware of a complex opening out of (from) modernity – the vastness of the space moving from Von Justi – the space between and across

peoples and things – and its unsuspected density in which the artists call forth new ethical ontologies.

2.

What of this future? Art of the future – that which deals with alternative ontological propositions has been, for most of the previous century, the art of the laboratory. The laboratory is the model and locale of ex-nihilo creation and distance that signifies the avant guard. Certainly here, in this exhibit, we could imagine that we have entered a form of critical laboratory – much would seem to point in this direction.

Half way through the exhibit one enters the factory proper -- and at this moment one realizes that the whole exhibit has been extending outward and back into this complex space (there are no real boundaries between what is to be seen as this factory and the rest of the exhibit). The factory is slowly making uniforms – “ideal uniforms” for contemporary nurses based upon an elaborate set of focus groups with nursing students, nursing practitioners, nursing scholars, and others. “We” are seemingly peripheral to this event that is unfolding. The address is more specific than “we” first imagined -- address is perhaps the wrong term – a deeper, more enmeshed, exchange is unfolding parallel to the exhibit (much like the onto-aesthetic charge of J. Morgan Puett’s work in the fashion industry). The factory becomes a site and model for systems of interaction that are complex, direct, collaborative interventions into ongoing fields of activities (nursing) to begin to develop new ontological forms, potentialities, and directions from within an assemblage – rather than an art of commentary, critique or aesthetic elaboration.

The “ideal” of this ideal uniform has also changed – no longer is the disciplinary model of identity engaged – but we enter a shifting world of modulations centered on forms of continuous sampling. This is not offered as an alternative – rather it acts as the future horizon of action. Identity, self, history, and all forms of systems of recognition now confront modulating topological questions and the shifting multiplicities that they generate.

The question of the present of the praxis of care becomes most apparent here where histories, stereotypes, and science fictions are all forced into a system of modulations – ideals, and unities are carefully pushed outside of the discursive trajectory of norms – and in doing so bioethics and its belief in utilitarian modes of praxis that underpin so much of the contemporary medical field is not so much critiqued as swept aside.

3.

A type of science fiction surrounds the factory and addresses the space of the ideal uniform (could the historical elements be seen in a similar manner?). If the nursing uniform in this exhibit poses the question of how do we construct this ethical/material space between us (care) it becomes most apparent along the walls surrounding the factory where the diorama’s of the uniforms of the Bio-terrorism Nurse, the Diagnostic Nurse, the Post-Apocalyptic Nurse, and the Intergalactic

Nurse appear. (The Nurse Grimm installation is also part of this surrounding wall in its funereal/futural shiftings and dislocations). The far-fetched dates of these diaramas act less as predictive terms forecasting unknowable futures and more as codes for a form of folding – the folding of more and more complex distances – ontological distances onto the givens of the present (here it is best to see the diagrams and their texts in this catalogue directly). The uniforms address a shifting present critically with new forms of *being-with* and in doing so not only critique the assumptions of the present but materially begin the concrete exploration of these new ethico-aesthetic spaces. The fabrics and design of these uniforms rethink how we are self-present, self-aware, how we constitute ourselves part of larger material social systems – they address and participate in a new complexification of our extended beings -- pushing them in relations – allowing us to embrace ourselves as this transversal of in-betweens in direct manner. The nursing uniforms of the future present distinct ways of rupturing the impasses of bio-ethics and creating new spacings of modes of being/becoming that speak to/from nursing and address us as a liminal site of nursing – also unfolding across and into new forms of ethical becoming.