Animated Rudeness

ANNE WILSON'S
Errant Behaviors

by Gerry Craig

ABOVE: ANNE WILSON *Errant Behaviors* Installation at SoFA Gallery, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2005. (Composer: Shawn Decker; Animator: Cat Solen; Post-production Animator and Mastering: Daniel Torrente). Courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, and Paul Kotula Projects, Detroit.
ANNE WILSON *Errant Behaviors* Installation at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2004. (Composer: Shawn Decker; Animator: Cat Solen; Post-production Animator and Mastering: Daniel Torrente). Courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, and Paul Kotula Projects, Detroit

Manners. Decorum. Irrelevant when you are alone, for what does it mean to be rude if there is no one around to offend? Polite children learn not to hit and to suppress the auditory release of bodily sounds such as burping in the presence of others. The values that determine borders of civility and offense shift with culture, class. and gender, the social contract a slippery slope of potential transgressions. Subverting boundaries of middle-class propriety is a terrain Anne Wilson has explored in multiple materials over her career, such as embroidering hair onto domestic textiles where it isn't supposed to appear. Now with animation and sound she introduces the temporal and a larger human story.

Wilson's video/sound installation *Errant Behaviors* (2004) emerged from *Topologies* (2002), her large sculpture of deconstructed black lace, hair, thread, and pins organized in micro networks across an expansive white horizontal table-top space. *Topologies* politicizes the bourgeois value from several centuries that needlework fulfills a woman's nature and thus maker and object were a reflection of the other. Embroidery, with its aristocratic connections "…was a perfect proof of gentility, providing concrete evidence that a man was able to support a leisured woman, so

that by the eighteenth century 'women's work', as it was called, played a crucial part in maintaining the class position of the household." [1] In her miniature worlds devised from knots, dissected black lace, and towers of pins, Wilson subverts the feminine, gendered stuff of embroidery and propriety. The constructions reference many possible systems—microscopic colonies, infectious disease, imagined futuristic cityscapes, textile and cyber networks—but certainly they are not a sampler of femininity and reflect a world view of women who've been outside the parlor.

However, these props of domestic culture also suggested to Wilson a child's fictional world and new aesthetic or narrative relationships. Using *Topologies* as subject and set, Wilson photographed it from different angles, then utilized stop-motion animation software to create *Errant Behaviors*. The video installation of stark black and white scenes develop a psychological charge that transcends class and gender references of textile work. The embroidery material as projected image is a generation removed and transformed into characters that act out with an anarchy and latent aggression that is far from ladylike. Although material and content begin to diverge with her transition into the fourth dimen-

sion, Wilson finds a correlation to textile production—how the frame-by-frame construction of animation is an accumulation, much like the structural development of lace. "The stop-motion animation is likened to the way a textile is made; it has irregularities and foibles inherent in the process, different from video. It has a low-tech quality that was visually appealing and could be done on available software at home." [2]
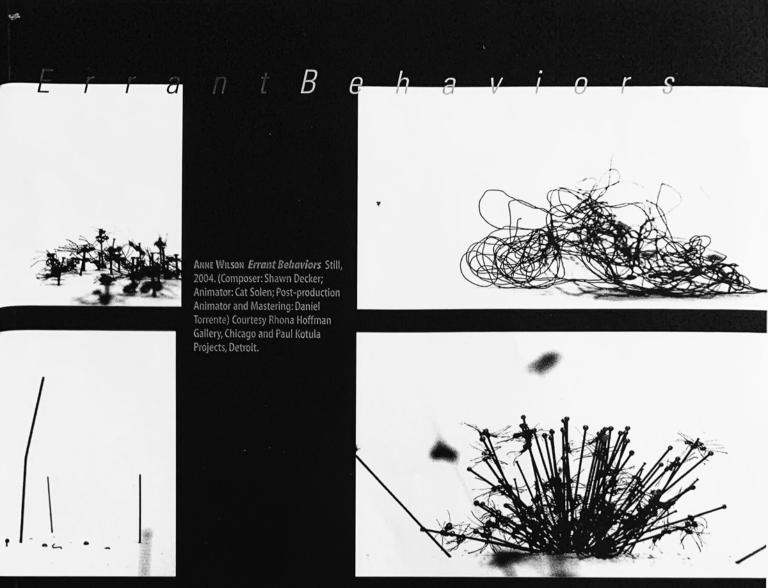
The low-tech quality of the moving image helps the viewer successfully enter into Wilson's drama of subtle, rude behavior, but scale and duration are equally important. The viewer is situated between two eight-twelve-foot-wide screens that angle out from the back wall, occupying the wedge in a single-point perspective within the suggested vanishing point of the dual cinematic landscape. The projected images of animated pins and thread on the screen renders a human viewer only slightly larger than the characters when standing and overwhelmed by them when sitting down. The fixed camera position mimics the perspective of each viewer, while the long single perspective sequences offer a low-tech anxious version of reality from earlier cinema. (Recall the dizzying alienation of the final seven-minute unedited take in Antonioni's *The Passenger*.)

These decisions of scale and perspective are backgrounded, however, in service to the instincts, primal urges, and actualized aggression played out in random partnerships across the two screens. Sexual liaisons, quarrels, petty jealousies, rejection, along with more childish pleasures of hitting, farting, and defecating are manifested in the jerky action of gold top pins and black lace in an empty white spatial field. Pins behaving badly. The humor is offset by sometimes sinister and ominous qualities of death and annihilation; in one segment, battalions of pins gather as armament and snap to attention, or in another scene, bits of lace inch their way across the surface until they collapse in exhaustion and defeat.

The erratic behavior in *Errant Behaviors* seems to suggest the plasticity of human nature. The characters are without gender, class, and culture as they exemplify the id, the oldest and unconscious part of the mind. Perhaps Freud's oedipal complex was too narrowly defined, for jealousy, hate, and potential aggression as well as love can be directed at

ANNE WILSON *Errant Behaviors* Still, 2004. (Composer: Shawn Decker; Animator: Cat Solen; Post-production Animator and Mastering: Daniel Torrente) Courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago and Paul Kotula Projects, Detroit.

a variety of family members/genders depending on the cultural manifestations of the nuclear family. "The instinctual drives that Freud was concerned with are capable of a variety of gratifications. And it is culture which is primarily responsible for the various patterns that we see."[3] Just as gender is stripped inside the installation, so is material and sound transformed by scale and duration so that their cultural specificity is lost. This leads the viewer to experience qualities of tension and release that are fundamentally without culture or geography. Shawn Decker's eerie, improvisatory sound track of field recordings and found sound is an equal partner in the placeless reverie and anxiety, the drone of a cicada sustained to the breaking point within the infinite landscape of pure white.

In the past, Wilson has used the material message of found textiles to interrogate how craft and context might redefine a feminist position in art. With her newer animation and sound collaborations, she moves further off the textile grid to offer viewers an experience in the psychological gratifications of transgression. Like residual sound left in the walls after the music is over, her matrix of networks exist in liminal states where social controls are secondary to the universal pleasures and conflicts of being human.

—*Gerry Craig is an artist/writer, and Head of the Department of Art, Kansas State University.*

1. Parker, Rozika & Pollock, *Griselda, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, p. 61.
2. Phone interview with Wilson and the author, July 11, 2008.
3. Roazen, Paul, *Freud: Political and Social Thought*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1970, p. 47.

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