

Natalie Ryan  
A Void  
Kings ARI  
11.7.08 - 2.8.08

*The body ought to learn to develop the figures of slow motion, of suspense, stopping, fixity, slowness... This art of absorbing energy without giving it back, suspending a movement without falling back, escaping those prolongations which give our bodily processes a certain gracelessness is also the art of slow motion and its tragic effect. We have given up that slowness for the prestige of acceleration.*

- Jean Baudrillard<sup>1</sup>

The compulsion for incessant activity turns us into automatons of urgency. Yet, paradoxically, we exist in haste for the lulling effect. Our movements fuse moments together, as a defensive reflex against the insurmountability of time. Through movement, the minutia of time may be revealed, yet it is quickly engulfed back into itself- almost suggesting our activities can keep up with it's perpetual consistency. The tragic effect of slow motion and arrested movement is that it prevents time's cannibalisation. Instead time gets to exist as loose, unruly fragments escaping the onslaught of ever-more time.

In Natalie Ryan's exhibition *A Void* partially articulated creatures inhabit a black velvet square; their forms suspended as solidified motion. The figures appear unusually cadaverous, as if exposed to some form of instantaneous petrification. They show what Baudrillard labels, "a perfect climax in immobility."<sup>2</sup>

Ryan's work, as a three-dimensional freeze frame, makes us acutely sensitive to our own lack of fixity. We become aware of our incomplete pauses and our constant shifting, as we circle this field of "perfect stops"<sup>3</sup> mid-propulsion. We are witness to a zone of immobility in our vast tract of endless movement; this is not simply due to the animalistic representation of stasis, but the inviolable quality that the velvet texture creates.

The pure black velvet appears untouched, perfectly traceless. To trespass onto it, would risk leaving a history of our violation. Our ceaseless activity connects to a fundamental desire to not leave traces. As though traces drag back a past perception of movement, a leakage of time that makes times self-erasure incomplete.

We become aware of the black velvet border sealing off the space. A detached zone, that feels hermetically sealed despite its openness. Creating an effect close to the "pure presence" that Baudrillard calls "unbearable."<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is not only the suspension of forms, but also the untouchable conditions that help sustain the work's expression of fixity.

With its annulment of motion, the work acts as a reprieve from "the prestige of acceleration." Yet, the suspension creates a haunting effect. The work's self-containment with it's non-motion and unshifting light, separates it from the continuity of entropic decline, in which a permanent shifting towards detritus is unhaltable. Yet, the work seems less a monument for resistance to entropy through suspension or a display of revivable torpor; the animals don't appear to strain in their poses. Instead, perhaps they represent a purified aftermath amidst new conditions. This would seem appropriate as the animal figures evolve from taxidermy models, the cores of a process that represents a rebirth contingent on the stationery, an evolution towards stillness. Reversed anticipation.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, translated by Chris Turner, *Cool Memories*, Verso, 1990. p. 36

<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard, translated by Chris Turner, *Cool Memories*, Verso, 1990. p. 36

<sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard, translated by Chris Turner, *Cool Memories*, Verso, 1990. p. 36

<sup>4</sup> Jean Baudrillard, translated by Chris Turner, *Cool Memories*, Verso, 1990. p. 208

*Get rid of all your inertial energy and come to an immediate stop, like a noise absorbed without echo. (What fascinates us in the colour black, in the black body is this idea of total absorption of light, which is equivalent to the dizziness of immobility for the body).*

- Jean Baudrillard<sup>5</sup>

Black exists in two forms; there is the nocturnal darkness of the absence of light and the solidified darkness of the complete absorption of light by a surface. The former is a default setting, whilst solidified darkness if perfected could allow for a pitch-dark room despite a light being on.<sup>6</sup> The lack of reflected light on black surface, is the working of a 'dark gravity'<sup>7</sup> that is unshifting and unresponsive as it soaks up all light waves indiscriminately.

Kandinsky suggest black is "something extinguished, like a spent funeral pyre, something motionless, like a corpse."<sup>8</sup> The lack of motion is both the absence of reflecting light waves and the effect this causes. Black, with its refusal to delineate shadow from itself, appears permanently fixed against shifting light- there is no visual echo only an absorptive void. Hence, the impact of circling Ryan's installation is visually reticent, as the forms smothered in black and surrounded by black cleave to their own shadowiness. Concealing the specificity of their contours they are "bodies lost in themselves and in space."<sup>9</sup>

The opaque darkness masks the creatures, exacerbating their already partially undelineated frames, "turning the forms back on themselves."<sup>10</sup> Yet, the lack of definition of external features is counterbalanced with an overemphasis of internal nuances, for instance an overly tenuated rib cage or specifically accentuated leg joint. Certain details recede whilst others are highlighted due to the interiority of the taxidermy model constructed to rigidly hold the outer remnants of an actual animal.

These sculptural forms cloaked in darkness appropriately highlight the secret underlying structures devoid of light in the living creature. This allows the figures to escape taxonomic identification, instead sanctifying a shared interior consistency that even the human figure partially ascribes to. In contrast though, as we stand looking at these dry charcoal creatures balanced as though internally crystallised, our bodies flaunt their fluent motion. We are not quiet there yet.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Baudrillard, translated by Chris Turner, *Cool Memories*, Verso, 1990. p. 36

<sup>6</sup> This year saw the announcement of the creation of an artificial substance that is the blackest substance ever to exist.

<sup>7</sup> Term used by Carrol Dunham in her article 'Black Whole: on the art of Barry Le Va', *Artforum*, March 2005, Vol.43, Iss 7, p206.

<sup>8</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, cited in Stephanie Rosenthal, *Black Paintings*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2006. p.15

<sup>9</sup> Description of the work by Natalie Ryan.

<sup>10</sup> Carrol Dunham in her article 'Black Whole: on the art of Barry Le Va', *Artforum*, March 2005, Vol.43, Iss 7, p206.