

KETTLE'S YARD

The Six Senses: Sight

Scopophilia: At home with 'Linderism'

By Emma Wilson

Little Women, a mother's courage, the Pill, the hyperloaded cocktail of estrogens and progesterone, the honor of virgins, *Sleeping Beauty*, bulimia, the desire for a child, the shame of deflowering, *The Little Mermaid*, silence in the face of rape, *Cinderella*, the ultimate immorality of abortion, cakes and cookies, knowing how to give a good blowjob, bromazepam, the shame about not having done it yet, *Gone with the Wind*, saying no when you want to say yes, not leaving home, having small hands, Audrey Hepburn's ballet shoes, codeine, taking care of your hair, fashion, saying yes when you want to say no, anorexia, knowing in secret that the one that you're really attracted to is your best friend, fear of growing old, the need to be on a diet constantly, the beauty imperative, kleptomania, compassion, cooking, the desperate sensuality of Marilyn Monroe, the manicure [...].¹

This is Paul B. Preciado's list of the 'codes' of white heterosexual femininity. It is in mind as I look at *Linderism*.² Preciado envisages the twilight of heterosexuality, from a testo-transformed future. He recalls the lack of join between himself and factory-designed gender, his sense of being 'in deep shit' in his pre-testo childhood. The images flit by like double spreads in a magazine.

Like Preciado, Linder closes in on the psycho-sexual control of female bodies, the need to be pure and little, cosmetically beautiful, pharmaceutically controlled, impressionable, and mouth-open, available, like a sex doll. She returns to images from the print culture of 1960s and 1970s childhoods, those liberal moments when an image repertoire, what girls were seeing, was ballet albums with gossamer frocks, Ladybird fairy tale books, and Myra Hindley, Linda Lovelace, *Penthouse* and *Playboy*. Linder's work involves archiving those pictures, their psychic imprint, and, through radical acts of juxtaposition, covering them over, re-purposing them, exposing the traumatic clash between porn and girl, while opening hope for looking and pleasure.

Unlike Preciado, who quits white femininity, Linder leaves space for ambivalence. She chooses cuttings, ephemera, scarlet and fuchsia roses, nudes, glossy lips. While trashing



Fig. 1: Linder, *Fluidic Photograph of Thought*, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Modern Art, London.

the culture they come from, her serial returns to images can seem like a way of treasuring them as gorgeous, lurid. Linder honours a fascination with cutting out, the pictures so glossy you want to hold them to your mouth. She offers a reminder of childhood, scrapbooks, collage, the tactile smoothness of the pasted image. Collage for girls was once a way of making the world through found images, dreaming, toying with visual pleasure. Collage for Linder is an active work of confrontation, drawing on an aesthetic of shock, and also an intimate, memorial, domestic exposure of femininity, sexual trauma (her own and a generation's), and hidden stories.

Nan Goldin named her 2010 show about desire awoken by images *Scopophilia*. As Amy Tobin writes, 'Like her contemporaries Linder troubled the representations of women's bodies in fine art, advertising and popular culture' but, she continues, Linder also sees possibilities for 'remaking the trappings of femininity for a different kind of glamorous embodiment'.³ Pleasure in looking, scopophilia, is what Linder liberates and critiques, borrowing images of the body erotic, nudes from porn and from the Western tradition in art. She teases out their pleasure. She takes images and lets their meanings live and swirl. Her art is sex-positive, opening to girl-on-girl looking. She slips porn in among images that hold other vital feelings. She asks what porn looks like in the virtual feminist museum. Her work is levelling, irate, and also contemplative, open to pleasure, and also to hidden depths of grief and unnamed feeling.

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Linder's photomontage *Fluidic Photograph of Thought* (2018) (Fig. 1) is on p. 9 of the *Linderism* publication. A soft porn image shows two girls. The image is black and white, retro. The girls' breasts are naked. They are in stockings. One wears white knickers, the gauze-like fabric showing the darkness of her pubic hair. The girls are posing, their legs open, mirroring each other. Their skin looks soft, like naiads'. Their faces are affectless, deadened. Linder's intervention is to place an image over them. It is a swirl, a shell, an anamorphic blur which slides from the face of one girl to the sex of the other. It is an outsize vulva, a filament, a warp, the world. The blur refuses disclosure and yields feeling. It estranges the porn photo, cutting the girls' faces from their bodies, drawing attention to their sense of this mortal coil. Yet dividing the image also showcases the girls' open legs, critiquing the beaver shot, the origin of the world. The vulva is so large here it covers the page.

Linderism creates its own double spreads of Linder's images. To the right of *Fluidic Photograph of Thought* is one of Linder's research images, Antoine Wiertz's *Les Deux jeunes filles (La Belle Rosine)* (1847). In a variation of the theme of Death and the maiden, a naked young girl contemplates a skeleton. Like the porn girls, they are face to face. The ribcage of the skeleton mirrors striations on the imposed image which cuts across Linder's photograph, drawing attention to the blur as mark of death, like the stretched skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533). Like Agnès Varda pasting up an image of Death and the maiden by Hans Baldung Grien on the set of her film *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961),⁴ Linder appropriates a theme from the Western tradition and invests it with vernacular feminist energy. Rosine's hand rests on her arm, her pose reflected, made more sexual, through juxtaposition with the accompanying photograph. The pairing of the images also opens the fissure in *Fluidic Photograph*, making that image the more contemplative, on the side of Thanatos.

A photograph of Linder's mother in the mortuary at the Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, Wigan (2017) is pasted in beneath *La Belle Rosine*. The image shows the fake bedroom where Linder's mother was laid out after she passed. Linder joins Sophie Calle filming her mother's last living hours in *Couldn't Capture Death* (2007), and Tracey Emin carrying her mother's ashes in *A Fortnight of Tears* (2019), drawing on the feelings of this rite of passage.⁵ In Linder's photo, the bed with its striped cover, the patterned curtain, the ghostly light, show the room as banal yet also otherworldly, transitional. The presence of the bed exposes the rapid turns from sex to death. Beneath is *Mask III* (1977) (Fig. 2), a garter belt in black patterned lace, that is a mask, a face (like death's head images in Annette Messager's art). Linder's work is part of a feminist move to encounter the artist as daughter, feeling her way with her own erotic identity and rebellion, while apprehending her mother, and other women, as sexual, carnal, and mortal. This is the same territory as Annie Ernaux writing in 'Hôtel Casanova' about her mother's physical decline.⁶ Next to *Mask III* is *She's too much for my mirror* (2008) where strawberry red lips are pasted over the invisible black-and-white mouth of a woman. The lips make a gash of colour. The woman's mouth is covered over, but the sheen of the lips, their fleshiness, is beautiful.⁷



Fig. 2: Linder, *Mask III*, 1977. Courtesy the artist and Modern Art London.



Fig. 3: *Portrait of Helen Ede*, c. 1920s. Photograph by Hugo van Wadenoyen, Kettle's Yard Archive KY/EDE/6.

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Fig. 4: Artist research image, View of Helen Ede's bedroom, Kettle's Yard, 2019. Courtesy Linder.

An artist research image opposite shows the hot water tap with 'H' insignia in Helen Ede's bathroom at Kettle's Yard (2019). 'H' is for hot, and for Helen. As part of *Linderism* the exhibition, Linder also intervened in the House at Kettle's Yard shedding new light on Helen Ede, Jim Ede's wife. A black-and-white profile photograph of Helen appears in the catalogue (p. 4) (Fig. 3). She is in a reverie. In the catalogue she is set next to a drawing, *Head of Nefertiti* by Louisa Hodgson. Helen's neckline, the light on her breastbone, offers an inkling of her hotness. In a photo of a room in the House, opposite in the catalogue, is Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture of a naked figure, *Dancer* (1913). Next to the dancer in *Linderism* is a book illustration by Anne Anderson, *The Miller's Daughter* (1922), from her work on Grimm's fairy tales. Rumpelstiltskin opens the door to see the captive daughter idle, unable to spin straw into gold. Her own golden hair hangs down in sensuous plaits and tresses. Like the imp, Linder opens the door onto Helen, her sensuality, a photograph of her empty bedroom capturing a shadowy image of the artist herself in a mirror (Fig. 4).

Helen's bed recalls the fake bedroom in Wigan. Helen too is a missing woman. Moving on with motifs of the female gothic, the next page of *Linderism* includes an artist research image still from *Rebecca* (1940) where Mrs Danvers, silhouetted against the light, opens gauzy curtains in Rebecca's empty mansion. The mark of dead Helen, of her pleasure, is somewhere in the Cambridge house. The hunt for Helen is playful too. Across from Mrs Danvers is Alice, in one of Tenniel's illustrations. She has climbed onto the mantelpiece in the Victorian drawing room and is pressing her hand on the mirror, her shape reflected, before she passes through the looking glass.



Fig. 5: Installation view of *Linderism* at Kettle's Yard, 2020. Photograph by Matthew Booth.

In Helen's bedroom Linder creates an installation, long satin gloves are filled out as if animated (Fig. 5). They recall the work of Louise Bourgeois which was exhibited here before. There are stockings and shoes, a coral lipstick. Linder opens a tiny hatch at skirting board level. Helen and Jim used this to pass notes to one another when he had visitors below and she was hidden alone in her room. The hatch is like a miniature opening, as if Helen has suddenly, like Alice, grown nine feet tall and has to lie down on one side to look through the garden door.⁸ In Helen's room, the act of opening the hatch draws attention to the strange affective geography of the room, of the couple's relations. Did Helen crouch like a child to retrieve her messages? Did she recline on the floor, stretched out, her body fallen from the vertical?⁹ In *Linderism* there are close-up images of the hatch, open and shut (both p. 3). Beneath is an illustration by Emil Doepler from a book of Norse mythology showing the children of the god Loki and a giantess, one of whom is a vast sea serpent. The snake child's long stretched form seems to hint at Helen lying prone, lounging by the hatch. The image of the artist's wife and muse reclining, horizontal, is a frequent figure in Western art, already sunk to melancholy in Bonnard's frequent images of his wife Marthe's bathing treatments, or refigured playfully in Agnès Varda's multiple takes on Jane Birkin.¹⁰ Linder pushes one stage further to imagine what it feels like and looks like to be alone stretched out. Opening the hatch, being in the room, even as it is now empty, offers a hint of Helen's former inhabiting, her intimacy.

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Next to the snake, and the hatch, is an artist research image, *Girl in her dressing room at the Folies-Bergère* taken in Paris in about 1937–39. The girl is naked apart from a full-length bridal veil, with fake orange blossom and pearls at its crown. She holds a looking glass in her hand and a powder puff, while cologne is on the dressing table before her. Looking in at her face, her hair, I see she suddenly looks like Helen. Her naked pose, its lightness, looks out to the naked form of the Gaudier-Brzeska *Dancer* and the girls in *Fluidic Photograph of Thought*. The catalogue, this album with its spread of images, lets these connections briefly appear. It offers a dream life for Helen, figures peopling her reverie.

Linder takes pleasure in looking. Her feminism leads her to attend to and reshape ephemeral images, illustrations, and figurative art, through collage and juxtaposition. She is interested in images of nakedness, stretching, reclining, and keeps on showing what is hidden in them, what can still be felt, what is still material for reflection. She takes on images of exposure, submission, posing, and shakes up the meanings and feelings they hold once severed from their intended circuit. In *Scopophilia* Nan Goldin aligned in a slideshow photographs of paintings in the Louvre and images from her own catalogue of images of her loved ones, enjoying the strange alliances and resemblances. In *Linderism*, looking, dreaming, cutting and pasting, become ways of picturing secret lives of women and girls, cis and trans, of grief, sexual trauma, creativity, and pleasure. The closer I look at these images, the more I play with them, the more there is to see.¹¹

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Notes

¹ Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013), p. 120.

² Amy Tobin and Alina Khakoo, *Linderism* (Kettle's Yard/Koenig Books, 2020), p. 44. The excellent essays in this catalogue have inspired many thoughts here. This writing is a response to the catalogue.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴ Agnès Varda, *Varda par Agnès* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1993), p. 48.

⁵ Thanks to Kitty Grady whose work on Tracey Emin was an inspiration.

⁶ Annie Ernaux, *Hôtel Casanova et autres textes brefs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020).

⁷ Lips write large are used too in the poster art for Alina Marazzi's found footage documentary, *Vogliamo anche le rose* [*We Want Roses Too*] (2007), about Italian women's lives in the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸ *Linderism*, the exhibition, creates a wonderland play of scale in the oversize Linder wallpaper on the stairs and the differently sized images.

⁹ See Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass and London: the MIT Press, 1993).

¹⁰ In *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1988). For further discussion of the figure of the reclining nude in the work of women filmmakers and photographers see Emma Wilson, *The Reclining Nude: Agnès Varda, Catherine Breillat, and Nan Goldin* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

¹¹ I am grateful to Amy Tobin and Alina Khakoo at Kettle's Yard, and to Isabelle McNeill, Georgina Evans and Louise Haywood of the collective Tactics and Praxis, for the opportunity to hold an event at Kettle's Yard in February 2020 in the context of the exhibition *Linderism*. I invited Carol Mavor and Esther Teichmann, each an artist and a writer who in different ways in her work explores secret lives of women and girls.