Zoe Beloff. *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.*, 2004. Four-channel, Stereoscopic, Surround-sound DVD Installation. Still: "Eva Projects." All images are Courtesy of Zoe Beloff.

Impossible Spaces and Philosophical Toys: An Interview with Zoe Beloff

KAREN BECKMAN

Introduction

Zoe Beloff works with a variety of media, including film, stereoscopic projection, performance, interactive media, and installation, and describes her projects as "philosophical toys, objects to think with." At a time when many proclaim film's obsolescence, Beloff's work enacts an archeology of film that foregrounds the question of what cinema has been, is, and might yet be. Her work reminds us that cinema has already died many times as it reinvents the medium by engaging the ghosts of its past lives. As some contemporary critics call for a disciplined return to "the medium," Beloff's work, playing on the double meaning of the term, usefully reminds us of the psychic dimensions of the medium and of the way in which its identity emerges partly in response to the way we incorporate and project (upon) it. Mining cinematic and psychological archives, Beloff employs film and related media to amplify the voices of women who have been documented but silenced in psychological case studies. Though her work has a strong narrative dimension, it resists the spectacle, scale, and standardization of narrative cinema and explores the question of how alternative technological trajectories and juxtapositions might allow forgotten or repressed stories to be told differently. As a result of this narrative component, Beloff's work exists in a complex relationship with the category of experimental filmmaking, challenging us to refine our assumptions about the place of narrative in experimental film and contemporary art practice. Finally, as Beloff employs a variety of visual technologies and archival film images, she positions spectators in constantly shifting relations to both image and apparatus, inviting film theorists to articulate spectatorship and authorship in less homogenous ways.

Karen Beckman: Zoe, to begin, could you tell us how you conceive of or describe your own work, which ranges across a number of media, including film, video, photography, and CD-ROMs? Also, given the variety of media you engage, could you

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say something about the challenges of exhibiting your work, and about where you and your work feel most "at home"?
Zoe Beloff: That is a true problem—how to describe my work. People say, "What do you do?" and I just say, "I make images move." I've actually never done any straight photography. I've shot 3-D slides, but they've been incorporated into a moving image work. I think for me it's less a question of just "Oh, I'll choose a variety of technologies" than finding stories and then trying to figure out what form the story would best be realized in. Also my stories relate in some way to ideas and fantasies about technology or early cinema, so the form is also very conscious of those issues. I've been making something like nontraditional moving images or film since the mid-nineties, and I think there were certain things at that time that really pushed me away from being a straight filmmaker. On the one hand, I was watching some avant-garde film performances, and on the other there was a big change in film technology at that time. People started doing nonlinear editing, Avid, and so on, and I remember being disappointed and thinking, "All this new technology to do exactly the same thing that had been done before?" It seemed so redundant, and I thought, "But what *other* cinemas could you make?" And I'm thinking here of cinematic languages, not just of the apparatus. That led me back to thinking directly about the late nineteenth century where there were many cinemas, or what I call "economies of the moving image." It seemed to me that if before there was this multiplicity of possibilities, could there not be again? So every time I make a work, I'm reinventing cinema, as it were.

You asked me about the challenges of exhibiting my work. Well, this multiplicity of cinemas is very difficult! The big problem is that it's so nonstandard, it's really hard for people to see it, because it needs my own technologies. It's not something you can send away on a disc. And that's its biggest drawback . . . many times my work involves multiple projectors, projection devices, special lenses, screens, glasses, whatever . . . and that causes problems. Curators really have to come to my apartment for private screenings. That's frustrating. I'd like to show at film festivals, for example, but I cannot send them my work, so it's not possible.

KB: But in some ways, that viewing of the work in your home resonates with the work itself, no? With *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.*, which represents a turn-of-the-century séance, there is a sense that you're showing us an experience of something like cinema in the home. Is that right?
ZB: That's absolutely true. I mean, you ask, "Where are you most at home, where is your work most at home?" . . . well, at home! For a long time, my work has referenced the home as a place of

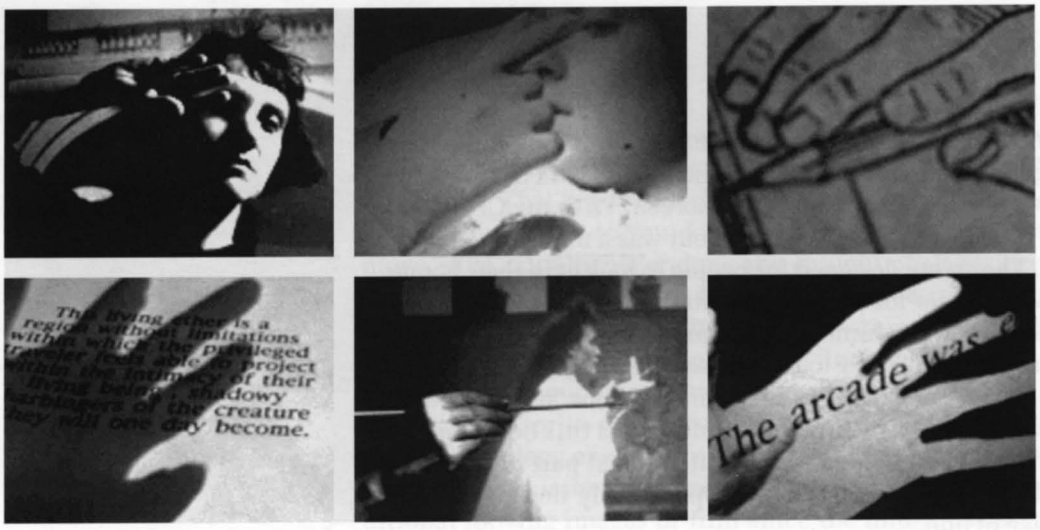
drama. I started collecting home movies as a kind of little psychological theater of the home. Home movies look best at home; they were never made for the big screen. With my CD-ROMs, one of the things I was thinking about was a new form of home movie. They were designed for people to look at in their homes. They were never for public presentation. They were designed for you to be sitting hunched over your computer at one o'clock in the morning listening to this little voice. They are very private works. They were sometimes shown in museums, and there would be a computer just sitting there, and it was this odd object. It didn't belong. At home the computer is just part of the furniture. The CD-ROMs were really specifically designed for an audience of one.

KB: And what's the difference between viewing one of your CD-ROMs in the home from viewing a commercial film on video at home?

ZB: I think there are a couple of differences. One is that you sit very close to the screen. When you click on the mouse, you go on a journey. I really wanted it to be a world in miniature. I always imagined them as worlds that exist behind and beyond the screen. There are a lot of images of hands. My hands making the work stand in for the viewers' hands reaching out to the screen, wanting to cross over to the other side. When I made *Beyond,* I'd never looked at CD-ROMs or video games . . . I just wanted to make my world. But then I played some games. I remember playing *Riven,* and I had this feeling with games, which you play over a long period of time, as opposed to a video, which is consumed in one sitting, that they exist in the state of *always.* Somehow the world of the game is always there, even though you can't access it at the moment; it continues to exist. Whereas a film has a beginning and end, and you don't feel that world exists apart from you or your viewing. It's also a structure of cinematic language. In classical narrative we're caught up in the structure in a different way than in a game, where there are no cuts and angles, shot/reverse shots. It just exists, much more like a landscape in which we can imaginatively travel. With narrative film you're taken on a car ride; you can't go any other way; you can't wander; you can't go back; you can't get lost.

KB: It's interesting to think of wandering and getting lost as a mode of spectatorship.

ZB: Yes, people complained that *Beyond* had no map. Nobody knows how big that world is. Does it have borders? My intention was that you would get lost, that there would be no right or wrong way of going. I would have people call and say, "I was playing it last night and I found a new wing!" [Laughter.]



Zoe Beloff. *Beyond*, 1997. CD-ROM. Stills.

Fantastic! There's something about installations to me that also have this quality of *always there.* In the Eva C. project, there's a sense that those people are always in the room, and they're always enchantedly repeating their drama forever, and you can always open the door and they'll be there . . .

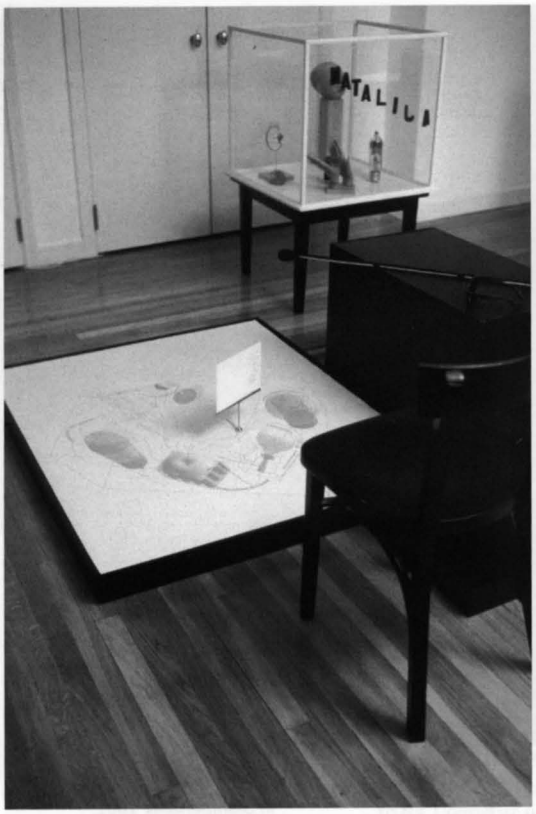
KB: . . . a little like home.
ZB: Yes. [Laughter.]

KB: You've repeatedly employed 3-D effects in your work in a variety of formats, including 3-D film, slides, stereoscopes, and phantograms. Looking at, experiencing, and interacting with your work, I've been struck by how different the 3-D effect in *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.* (2004), where life-size figures seem to move out of the screen into the viewer's space, is from, say, *Claire and Don in Slumberland* (2002), where the characters on 16 mm film seem to recede into the 3-D space created by the slide image with which the film visually interacts. And then the phantogram of *The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A.* (2001) invites a single viewer to poke and prod at 3-D phantom organs in order to stimulate miniature projections of Natalija's nightmare hallucinations on a small screen that sits at your feet. Could you tell us about the appeal of 3-D images for you and about how the 3-D effect works differently in the various contexts and media you've explored?
ZB: First of all I should say that one of the things that fascinated me about 3-D from the start is what everyone claimed it wasn't, which is totally unreal. It's always been marketed as "true life," ever since it began in the nineteenth century. The first time I consciously looked at 3-D it was somebody's uncle's home slides, and they were horrifying. It was in the fifties. People's eyes were red, and they looked frozen, dead. It was a waxwork world. I was completely fascinated by the way in which a stereoscopic camera freezes time for an eternity. That is quite different from

Zoe Beloff. *Claire and Don in Slumberland*, 2002. Performance for 16 mm projector and stereoscopic slides.

ordinary photography, which captures a moment in time. One of the things that has always fascinated me about media the medium is the fact that in its early days it was conceived of as a form of artificial resurrection. It was a way to cheat death so your voice or image could live on. The medium could artificially keep you alive in some way. The freezing of time in a stereoscopic image enhances this aspect of the medium . . . we are looking at reality reconstituted. A 3-D image is like a toy theater or a diorama. It separates space into planes. In *Claire and Don in Slumberland* and those pieces where I use film and 3-D slides, I've created a little stage set using the slides, a box theater into which the characters are projected. But they hover uncertainly in that space. They belong and they don't belong. I could have taken the actors in *Claire and Don* to the landscape where I shot the slides and put them in there, but it would be completely and utterly different. Instead, they hover in an impossible space. There's a weird play of two dimensions and three dimensions.

But then the next step for me was to imagine my characters in *our* space. Instead of putting the characters into a virtual 3-D slide space I wanted them to cross over into our world. This was an idea that was very interesting to the nineteenth century and has been lost. In the séance, the idea was that the phantoms would, really or not, cross over into our world, and the sitters could reach out and touch them, even though they were ethereal. So I was interested in finding a way to create this artificial resurrection. It was a concept that was hard to create in the nineteenth century, but the idea was there. Now we have a technology that makes this possible. In the 1880s, *Scientific American* talked about it when the phonograph was invented. They said, now we can re-create the voice, and soon, with stereoscopic images projected *and* the phonograph, we can create the perfect illusion of life itself. *Eva C.* exists in a way that is radically different from classical cinema but has everything to do with a diorama. So I'm just picking up where they left off. I think when you're making an installation rather than a film, you want to think about the imagery in relation to the actual space. Some people just say, "I can make an installation by projecting my video in galleries," but that's not enough for me, because it's not thinking about space in relation to the idea. To me, classical cinema and installation are fundamentally



Zoe Beloff. *The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A.*, 2001. Interactive video installation. Installation view.

different concepts. You have to think of time and space differently. The *Influencing Machine,* with its virtual diagram that you can almost touch but not quite, evinced an impossible sculptural space that appears as phantom object in a room. In a gallery, I wish to create a work that coexists in the room with you, not a virtual experience that happens way up there, a window into another world.

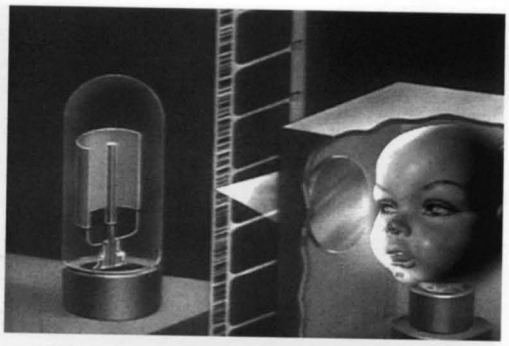
KB: Many of your works invoke the feeling of intimacy. Sometimes this seems to be an effect of the 3-D image or of scale, but at other times, particularly with your installations and CD-ROMs, this sense of proximity, of being implicated, stems from the fact the work requires participation to function. Can you talk about the role of these elements in your work: intimacy, interactivity, scale?

ZB: I've often thought of my projects as examples of what in the nineteenth century were called "philosophical toys." They were toys, but the idea was that you would also learn about science or optics. Consequently, they were small scale to be played with in the home. Cinema grew out of philosophical toys like zoetropes or magic lanterns. I also want the audience to have an intimate relation with the characters. It's important in *Eva C.* that the phantom figures are life size. If you project them too big, they become giants. That's all wrong because the characters appear in our space, unlike conventional cinema where characters are projected on giant screens in a world far apart from ours. I always loved the idea of a cinema in miniature. The CD-ROMs were very inspired by the writing of Walter Benjamin, who could see worlds in postage stamps and toys and things like that. I don't like the idea that something has to be large and bombastic. I mean, a lot of modern art is very large . . .

KB: Right, you only need to go to MoMA to see that, and to get the sense that we're waiting expectantly for more very large art . . .

ZB: Yes, art is huge. And every piece is very far from every other piece. Photographs are *huge* now, and to me that's very macho, a very different kind of aesthetic from the one that interests me, which is a work that will whisper in your ear. Small but monstrous. One of the freedoms of making something as tiny as *Beyond,* which actually is getting tinier as screens get larger—it's shrinking!—is that you could have these *huge* concepts in a two minute QuickTime movie. It's so tiny, and the discrepancy between the large and the small can free you in a certain

way. I think it freed me from being pretentious. There are certain wonderful things that inspire me that are very tiny. I've seen a number of times this collection of the art of mad people from the Prinzhorn Collection—I mean whole worlds in a little tiny scrap of newspaper. People are trying to make a world to get inside it. This is a somewhat foreign concept now, the idea that you just go inside something and it expands out in that way rather than washing over you. Making *Eva C.* I was consciously thinking about creating a version of my QuickTime movies that you could walk into and it would be all around you, phantom figures, floating texts.



Zoe Beloff. *The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A.*, 2001. Interactive video installation. Stills of Natalija's projections.

KB: There's an interesting parallel idea of an intimate, miniature, whispering philosophy here.
ZB: Yes, but it's not cute! In the *Influencing Machine* you touch a virtual body and are put in the position of the phantom evil doctors who were manipulating this schizophrenic woman . . . it's not pleasant. The hallucinations Natalija has are very small, projected six by eight inches, but it's horrifying because you're so close, almost touching . . . poking and prodding.

KB: There has been quite a lot of critical discussion about whether or not performance is possible on film. Some of your work brings performance and film together. Could you talk about the challenges of doing this, as well as about what this encounter produces in your work?
ZB: I can't imagine why performance wouldn't be possible with film. First of all, early films were performed. There was a projectionist who cranked the projector, and how he cranked the projector performed the film in different ways. Music was played with the film or someone was telling the story. The film itself was just one element of a little vaudeville performance. So that's where its roots come from. I was influenced by Ken Jacobs, who did a lot of film performance. I used to just sit there over and over again watching this stuff, particularly in the early nineties. But also, a transformative experience was going to the American Museum of the Moving Image to see some collectors who were projecting with their early film projectors. These are nerdy projector guys! But I realized that with the projection of film in the 1890s, you have a completely different image from what we see when an early film is projected on a modern projector. We can see that film, but we don't see what people saw. That sparked something off for me . . . that they saw something quite different, because of the nature of the projector, because the light was spilling everywhere.

Zoe Beloff. *Lost*, 1995. Performance for hand-cranked 16 mm projector, stereoscopic slides and 78 rpm phonograph.

I began to think that early apparatuses also helped us *see into* the past. In a way those projectors helped me see how people saw a hundred years ago and that was an impetus for me when I made a piece called *Lost*. It involves a toy hand-cranked projector, 3-D slides of long-defunct storefronts from the Lower East Side, like the Lock Shop, or a decaying torso in an underwear shop, beautiful—to me—storefronts of another time. I photographed them all in 1995, and they're all gone now. I would project 16 mm film into the store windows with a hand-cranked projector while I was playing 78s of Jewish Vaudeville on a wind-up phonograph. And I'm projecting forward and back on the toy hand-cranked projector, and the 78s are skipping and everything's happening, and it was always a miracle that I would get to the end of the projection. [Laughter.] But there is something about that difficulty of projection, and the precariousness and delicacy that has to do with how we can see something that isn't there anymore, with a different kind of viewing. We're so used to a seamless viewing. When we go to the movie theater, the projection devices are hidden. We no longer think about the magic of the *act* of projection because it's reified . . .

KB: . . . and it's not vulnerable anymore. You seem to be describing a cinema of vulnerability.
ZB: Yes, it is. Just projecting . . . it's an adventure! I remember, we did a performance called *A Mechanical Medium* . . . Ken Montgomery was creating sound, and I was projecting . . . it was inspired by Edison's attempts to communicate with the dead through technological means, what he called "a telephone between worlds." Edison never really told people what exact apparatus he planned to use, so we just kind of improvised with machines he might have had at hand. So I'm projecting 3-D slides and home movies and Ken is working the phonograph and the theremin, and it's going and going and going and builds up, and then the film breaks. It's almost over. We're in a storefront in Buffalo, and Tony Conrad rushes up with a paper bag and starts feeding the film into the paper bag [laughter] and we got to the end, and everyone was glued to Tony and the paper bag! But it becomes like an adventure, making projection more magical, not less magical. And there's a sense that the images don't really exist anywhere. I couldn't give you the images, as they only really exist in the moment that you project them. I should have said earlier that it's very hard to see my work on the one hand, but on the other, because of its idiosyncratic nature, it travels to all kinds of different places. I've been to performance art festivals. I was invited to do *Claire and Don in Slumberland* at a puppet festival—so these projects allow you to be in different spaces where people are not so familiar with experimental film.

Zoe Beloff. *A Mechanical Medium*, 1999. Performance for 16 mm film and stereoscopic slides with live sound by Ken Montgomery.

KB: Sound plays a central role in your work, from your collaborations with John Cale and sound artist Ken Montgomery to your own use of 78 rpm gramophone records, stripped soundtracks, ghostly aspirations, and so on. Can you tell us about these sound collaborations and more generally about the role sound plays in your work?
ZB: It's very interesting for me to collaborate with people who do something different from me . . . they put you in a different space.

KB: Do you know people who do the same kind of thing as you do?
ZB: Hmm, that's a hard question. Not really. [Pause. Laughter.] I often feel a bit lonely because I don't feel I fit very easily. I'm not very good at joining groups. I kind of wanted, in my early thirties, to be an experimental filmmaker. And people in experimental film were like, "Er, we don't think so. You don't really belong here. We don't think your work is very good." At first I

was really hurt, but now I think in some ways they were right. My work is put into the category of experimental film because I don't belong in Sundance, but I tell stories, I work with actors, things that are an anathema to many people in that world. And then, because I made a CD, I was put into "digital art." There I felt even less at home, because it was very "cyber-this and -that," while I was telling stories from a hundred years ago, conjuring up Baudelaire and dead philosophers. To me, my CD was a kind of cinema and had nothing to do at all with a lot of contemporary digital work . . . I think people just latch onto the computer. To me, the computer is just one of many things I work with. I also work with projectors. "Artists who go to the flea market." That would be as good a category to me as "artists who work with computers." I have this hope that the cyber thing will wither. I hate the idea of fetishizing the computer.

But to come back to sound . . . what perhaps most appealed to me about John Cale, who I worked with a long time ago on *Wonderland* and *Life Underwater,* was that he had a beautiful Welsh accent. He had done a couple of things where he had drone music in the background as he told a story, which was kind of a weird thing to do in rock music. I'm thinking of the "The Gift" . . . for example on the Velvet Underground record, *White Heat White Light.* I was captivated by that, although I couldn't say why at that time. Later, much later, it really influenced me, the idea of a certain quality of voice and just telling a story. In *Beyond,* I found myself speaking in what I call my 1930s BBC radio drama voice, the voice of a medium. I became fascinated by the grain of the voice, the sound of the voice, how evocative it is. One hundred years ago people spoke very differently from the way we speak now. I made a CD of these early voice recordings for the actors in *Eva C.,* so they could really learn how people spoke. The quality of voice is just as evocative as wearing a costume if not more so. In *Claire and Don in Slumberland,* I took the soundtrack from these 1940s psychology films about two young people who were hypnotized, and I recut the soundtrack. I made the soundtrack first; then the actors lip-synched the sound. My images have nothing to do with the original ones. I could have just had the actors say the lines, but then they would speak in a modern way. Even if people don't quite know what's wrong, the quality of the voice from the 1940s is quite different. There's also the idea that the characters don't speak; they're spoken through. A voice from somewhere else comes through you and forces you to speak, which again goes back to mediumship. So there's an idea of the medium as an uncanny microphone . . . being spoken through. Because sound is intangible, it's another way to transport you. I was really fascinated when I began to read how when people reacted to the first recordings they thought that it was

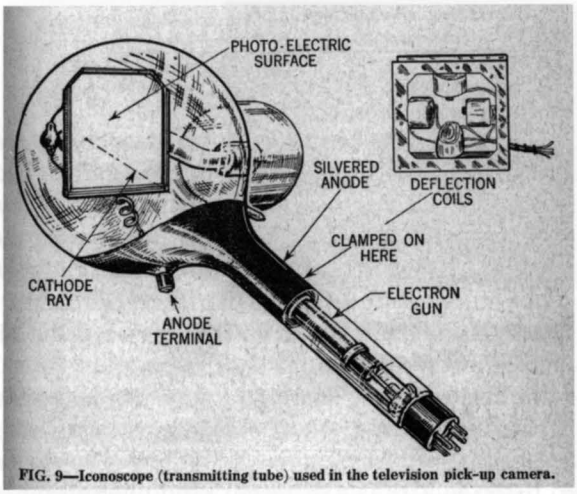
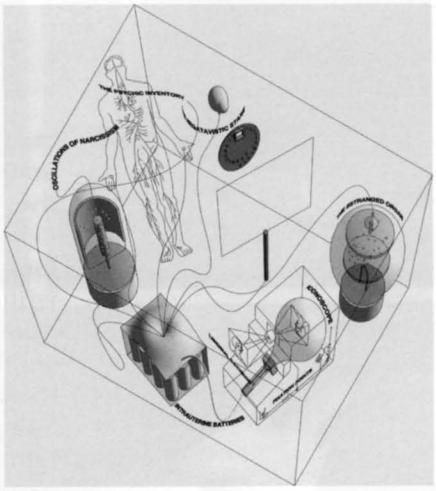


FIG. 9—Iconoscope (transmitting tube) used in the television pick-up camera.



Left: Diagram from Audel's *New Electric Library*, 1931.

Right: Zoe Beloff. *The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A.*, 2001. Diagram.

ventriloquism. I feel like we've become so jaded because we have recorded sound everywhere we go. How can we get back into that space where it becomes strange again?

KB: Do you think there are any spaces of incredulity? Where are they, if they are not in cinema or recorded sound? Has incredulity shifted, or disappeared?

ZB: I'd have to think about that. Sometimes, it appears where things break down. Seamlessness to me works against incredulity. With special effects, there are no breaks; it's so perfect. In the 1990s, there was somebody at the University of Virginia, and he wanted to do something about *Beyond* for his class, and he said, "Why don't you talk to my class via web conferencing." It worked really badly in those days, it broke down, and it was stuttery, and there were very few frames per second. We tried for a while and then we had to go on to phone conferencing. But he said the whole class was completely riveted. It was like Alexander Graham Bell! [Laughter.] So I think sometimes when it seems impossible, it's more marvelous than when it's perfect.

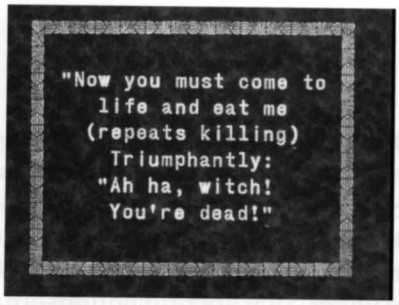
KB: It's clear that much of your work is inspired by obsolescent technology, such as the stereoscope, 3-D film, slides, gramophones, as well as early film, television, and animation. And the phantogram in *The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A.* is modeled on an early diagram of a television's interior in Audel's *New Electric Library* (1931). What does your engagement with obsolescent media make possible in your work, and what do they reveal about what we now describe as "New Media"?

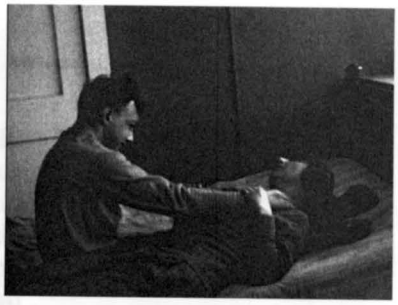
ZB: I'm going to start off by talking about diagrams. When I was in high school, I loved physics, not for the science but because I had this old teacher who could draw perfect 3-D diagrams on a board in many colors. And I was like . . . the art! I wanted to learn drawing. Diagrams fascinate me, especially when I don't know what they mean. Once you know what it's about, then it loses its magic, because it's about one thing. When you don't

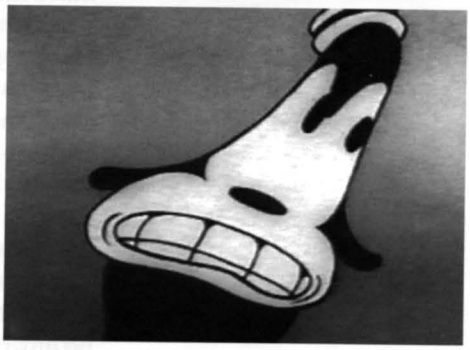
really understand it, it leaves so much room for the imagination. I think it has lots to do with the fact that I don't like narrative closure very much . . . I love manuals . . . I have some manuals from the thirties. I don't really understand them, but they have more potential because I don't. And they were also written in a more poetic language than manuals today. Audel's *New Electric Library* talks about how "Professor Albert Einstein derided radio's etheric medium as a fiction." [Laughter.] I mean it sets your mind on fire! There's the aspect of something mysterious that all technology has that is interesting to me. To look into the past, it's interesting to look at how people saw their past. To listen to a 78 is a different kind of experience, and I wanted to use that. Before cinema was codified into one projector, one screen, and an infinitely repeatable experience, there were so many possibilities that were closed off, and I think it's time to pick them up again.

But I'm not simply fetishistic. I don't collect things for the sake of collecting them. If I collect old projectors, they will have to work hard for me and do their job! They don't sit on the shelf. I want to bring them to life. That's why museums of old movie memorabilia are a little boring. The magic lanterns . . . they're in captivity. Once, a friend and I did a show called "An Evening of Philosophical Toys," and had projectors, magic lanterns, stereoscopes available for people to play with. Everyone cranked till their arms were sore! That's why in *Eva C.* there is a 35 mm hand crank, and you can play with it. I use really early and really new technology together, as in *Eva C.* There's the idea that new is not always better. Since the days of the great nineteenth-century World Expositions, we have been told by industrialists and corporate managers that new is better. I really want to fight that. Why limit it all to the new? Why trap ourselves? Interestingly, some of the newest stuff becomes the most rapidly obsolescent. My CD-ROMs—and this causes me much pain—are obsolescent because you can't buy a Macintosh computer with OS 9 anymore. So you can't play them. I would love a large grant to upgrade them to OS X. And when my slide projectors break now . . . ? They don't make them anymore. The past seems to be vanishing with ever-increasing speed. People's baby pictures will be gone by the time they grow up!

KB: *Claire and Don in Slumberland* begins and ends with complete reels of other people's films, which are less incorporated into your own film than juxtaposed with it in their entirety. Can you say something about the role these juxtaposed pieces play in the work? How do you see the different films interacting?
ZB: Again, it's a question of dialogue. I think a lot about how I could work with other films. For example, I would *never* work with a Hollywood film, not because I think it's wrong or







Top: *Child Analysis.*
Dir. L. Pierce Clark, 1930. Still.

Bottom: *Mysterious Mose*
Dir. Max and Dave Fleischer, 1930. Still.

I'm afraid of copyright or anything like that, but a commercial film brings such baggage with it. For example, I've never understood my bête noire Douglas Gordon. He did that *24 Hour Psycho.* I mean Hitchcock! It's like dragging the weight of the history of Western civilization. And if a film is amazing in its own right . . . Gordon used another early film in which I'm really interested right now called *Neuropathologica,* made by an Italian doctor, presenting a woman having a hysterical attack on a small stage. Gordon used it to make an installation called *Hysterical* . . . he just slowed the doctor's film down. It's an amazing work in and of itself . . . it's very rich. How dare he sign his name to this? To me, if a work is very rich, I would love to present it to people, and create a dialogue, but I would not presume to touch it and make it something else. When I use found footage, it's often quite banal, so I feel that I'm not destroying "a work." It's more like I'm shifting images in a certain direction. These quite banal films have the potential in them to be *something larger than themselves,* and I'm just hinting at that. For example, in *Beyond* I suggest that the women you see from 1920s home movies could be somnambulists.

I put complete films into a relationship to create a dialogue that people might not have thought about before. For example, *Claire and Don* starts with a film made by an eccentric psychiatrist named L. Pierce Clark, *Child Analysis* (1930), and I put it next to *Mysterious Mose* (Max and Dave Fleischer, 1930). To me the connection has a lot to do with trying to manifest the unconscious, something you might not think about if you saw each film separately. So when you get to my work you're already thinking about certain questions, modes of narrative disturbance that I refer back to. These disparate films become one experience in viewing, but I don't eat up other's people's work.

KB: In your essay on *Beyond* you write that through the computer you can make connections not just in theory but in practice "between the birth of technologies of the past in relation to the media revolution of present." In that same essay, you describe the subject of your work as "too theoretical to be a film and too visual to be a written essay" and as something that "operates in a playful spirit of philosophical inquiry." Can you say something about how your work hovers between theory and film, about which philosophical and theoretical ideas have interested and influenced you, and how you have explored them in your work?

ZB: I think that my writing and my cinematic work complement each other, but they're not the same thing. I do a lot of historical research. Yet when you make a work, you want to show and not tell. An artwork should not describe, but conjure up. So a lot of the ideas, for example in *Shadowland or Light from the Other Side* about mediumship and its relation to magic shows, are not described. You might intuit them. Writing about this project is another way to present ideas in a more descriptive, historical, and theoretical way. Filmmaking is for me an emotional experience. I'm afraid of artists who try too tightly to control their visual work. I think that is a danger. I wouldn't want to be that way. Oftentimes as I'm reading more theoretical writing, I find stories. When I was in film school, I would take the most practical hands-on class and the most theoretical comparative literature class, and somehow I still live in those two different worlds. I dream about ideas but in a way that would be entirely unsuitable for a doctoral dissertation. In *Beyond,* I was, say, reading Henri Bergson and making QuickTimes of his concepts. Other people might take notes, but for me these little movies were my attempt to understand his idea; they're sketches of ideas.

KB: In several of your works, you seem to go back to the narratives of hysterics and mediums told from the perspective of doctors and researchers in order to reanimate them from the perspective that seems unavailable to us at this historical moment.

ZB: There's a certain way these women are my alter egos, and I feel really close to them. I want to see the world, show the world, from their perspective in a way that was never done at the time. My friend Edward Miller always says, "You know, they're so lucky to have you!" [Laughter.]

KB: You've explored extensively the relation between mental illness and technology and have drawn inspiration from psychological case studies, psychological film archives, and psychoanalysis. Could you tell us about the role of madness in your work, as well as about some of the case studies and sources that have been most important to you? How did you first get interested in this connection?

ZB: That's an interesting question. The first project I did around some of those themes was a film called *A Trip to the Land of Knowledge,* one of the last straight 16 mm films I made. It is a vast, long, undigested work. I hadn't yet had this idea of separating other people's movies from my own. I started with the fact that I found these home movies of a chap in the fifties who actually had an Auricon, a 16 mm sound camera. They were kind of like Warhol films. Dad would turn on the camera, and

the kids were supposed to perform until the film ran out, and it was a living room theater of hell. It was kind of coercive. They'd play, then they'd give up, and get crazy, where fun isn't fun anymore. That brought back to me an adolescent experience of anxiety and parental coercion. I think there are two very important things. As an artist, I'm interested in the idea of how to manifest the unconscious graphically. Hysteria is interesting to me because it is a visual form of manifesting something that's internal. But I also realized that this is my story. My parents are psychologists . . . in fact my father's a parapsychologist, so in a sense I grew up with this stuff . . . being tested. I mean, not only was I tested psychologically, I was also tested for paranormal abilities! [Laughter.] How can you not fail? I was also physically ill a lot, so there was this image of the stern doctor at the side of my bed with his black bag, a very nineteenth-century figure. I realized I make all these films about women who are manhandled by stern doctors, and as an adolescent I was really messed up . . . I was anorexic and clinically depressed. And where was I sent? To the doctor to be prescribed medication. They were like the doctors at the Salpêtrière, so that's part of who I am. I feel very close to these women, mental cases, mediums, they all had to find unconventional ways to express themselves.

On another level I'm interested in how these women's performances inspired technology in a certain way. There's a back and forth. The doctors had a desire for hysterics to perform, and then they had to find a way to capture these performances. For Augustine, her creative outlet was to dramatize her illness. There's a back-and-forth movement between a real illness and her dramatization of it that is very complex . . . hysteria exists only in the moment of its performance, like cinema.

KB: Much of your work centers either on a single female protagonist, such as Eva C., Natalija A., or on the historical performance, control, and representation of femininity. Do you consider your work to be explicitly feminist? And if so, what do you perceive to be the challenges facing feminist artists and filmmakers at a time when many have found the label "feminist" to be either too constraining or obsolescent?

ZB: I'm going to answer that question really quickly, because I feel like I've answered a lot of it already. My interest in these women is not programmatic. They find me. I want to spend time with them, rather than this being a political decision. And I think I have a closeness to them that makes a collaboration between them and me fitting.

When you talk about "feminist artist," I'm at a loss to know what that word means or how you would define it. I think it would be surprising if people thought a man had made my work.

I've never asked people, but would you think a man had made it? I don't think so. I think it has to do with simple things like a small scale. But why not? What's wrong with that? It's another way of looking. It may not be the most fashionable thing in the art world right now, but I don't really care about that. It's always been difficult for women in the art world, and it's still difficult, but one has to do what one feels is important to do. And that's all I can do.

KB: Will you tell us something about your current project?
ZB: Okay . . . Right now I'm finishing what I think of as a companion film to *Shadowland, or Light from the Other Side.* It has another female protagonist, it's another perspective on the beginnings of cinema, and the film is called *Charming Augustine.* It's about perhaps [Jean-Martin] Charcot's most famous patient, in the sense that the photographs of her hysterical attacks have been reproduced many times, artists have worked with them, but people have not really been interested in her story. I'm trying to make a film in which her story hijacks nineteenth-century medical documentation, transforming it into narrative cinema, what I call melodrama in embryo, and it's causing me much difficulty! [Laughter.] Through her performance, with its vast amount of transcribed dialogue (under the influence of drugs she talked extensively to people whom only she could see) and the photographs, this case wants to be cinema. The form is crying out for cinema, and the medical photographers are trying to invent it, in part to record women like her.

I've also become really caught up in these medical attempts to capture mental states on film . . . "doctor's films." As you know, doctors are not filmmakers. And medical films, including more contemporary ones, are interesting because they shed our narrative conventions, our way of setting up the camera to make the beautiful shot—so, again, they are forcing me to think differently about cinema. I also have a fantasy of a big project, a big installation, an ongoing project, called *A Hundred Years of Hysteria.*

KB: Finally, you've described the act of making QuickTime movies something akin to "casting a spell" and have recently been described in *Artforum* as "a sort of medium." Do you see yourself as functioning, through your work, as a kind of medium, or as a continuation of the filmmaker-magician that we could trace back to someone like Georges Méliès, or as a combination of these two roles (or as none of these)?
ZB: I think all of the above! [Laughter.] I think it would be fantastic to have psychic abilities, to be like Ted Serios and make thought photographs, but I have no talent for that, so I have to

rely on the cinematic medium and take the showman route. I think in any kind of creative production we're all mediums. Things come from nowhere. Sometimes we feel we're spoken through. I don't think we always have a conscious grip on what we do. One idea leads to another, so you have to listen. But I really think of myself more as a traveling showman. The fact that my work references early cinema and obsolete technologies requires me to have that lifestyle, going on the road with cases of equipment. It's like the early projectionists who go from town to town with their show, and I'll say, "I have an engagement in Portland!" I'm kind of an illusionist, but illusions are surprisingly cumbersome. It's amazing the equipment you need to make something ethereal.