

PUSH: the Quest for a Voice, in Search of a Body

A blue door stands in front of the visitor. "PUSH," it says on the door in big characters. Turbulences stream in from the side at the lower part of the blue door, quietly. It is recognizable language: words, phrases and fragments of sentences, comprehensible and yet elliptical, as if someone without a voice or body is blowing her thoughts into the air to let them flow. Yes, someone is making an effort to push open the door, but hesitating, struggling with something... and mumbling seems to be the final resort...

Feel and touch the big blue door. Every now and then, fragments of sound and speech could be heard, apparently from behind the door. Music without melody, speech without sense...

Door opens. No sign of a human world. One enters a white world of running texts busily crossing the empty space without running into each other, just like a huge flyover highway complex in the form of multiple parallel tracks of busy traffic.

It is a world of speechless articulations: there are utterances in words, but only unrecognizable, broken sounds... It is the mind world of someone who needs to express but has no voice.

Any attempt to interrupt the running traffic may provoke squeaks like someone yelling out in pain, helplessly, and calling for attention.

The busy, restless mindscape of inexhaustible thoughts and desires opens to a sunny graveyard in Paris bathed in warm sunlight.

A feminine face is staring at the visitor, almost like smelling the camera lens. It is no doubt an inviting face, her stare soliciting one's queries, not without a touch of sarcasm or mockery.

The graveyard looks strangely ordinary, even a bit monotonous. It is just a graveyard in the broad daylight, or in the flip of a second it blinks the backyard of a sleeping house. The place seems to be hiding all kinds of secrets. One sees nothing, but murmurs (of some female voices) rush in and off like breezes, roaring up this moment and subsiding the next,

Restless murmurs, somewhat suggesting a disorder in language: a mixture of Cantonese, Mandarin, French, English...

If one were no longer capable of resisting the face or its gaze, caress it – it's just a plastic mask of enchanting appearance that easily dissolves into a featureless mass upon an eager rub.

The void in the feminine face opens to the white wall of a house. Is it a wall or a photograph of it? Lines and shapes are slowly emerging, like an exposed photograph in a developing fluid. The actual landscape gradually normalizes from a blaring glaze to normal vision: it is a house in the evening. A woman, called Frances, seems to have rushed out from the house, now running bare-foot on the lawn. Call her, "Frances, Frances." Fragments of her personal details emerge on the lower screen, depending on the voice's volume, like movie subtitles striving to narrow down one's sense-making.

The house is apparently a fiendish dwelling with memories haunting in hisses, whispers and sighs. Murmurs, speech, and poetic recitative...all blend into a swirling wind.

One hidden piece of memory hangs in the form of a voiceless image...

Two pairs of legs hang from above. They belong to two young women whose face and body we can't see.

Are these legs real? Caress and rub. The legs dissolve, and so does the background setting. Another image behind it reveals itself: a window with

barred grid frames opens to a dazzling “outside.”

The grid frame disappears. There is no open space with sunlight, but an iron surface with phone numbers scapped on it like someone was leaving a message in a hurry, or desperately.

It’s up to the curious visitor to discover which numbers have hidden messages and which ones sheer pretense. Or if chance allows, some numbers are there for the visitor to leave his/her messages.

The women are still missing, the waves of their voices jostling and fluttering, their speech fragmentary.

One of the numbers is a secret switch to a sod of flimsy existence...

An empty room. Four modes of impermanence. Light sears through the windows of the glasshouse. History lurks behind these walls, seeping through the tiled floors. Yet you find yourself in a vacuum where time is insignificant, where the past breathes at the moment.

A woman is walking alone in the deep, blue night. Prison bars are building across the screen up-down and left-right, closing the woman behind the bars from the on-looker.

The material of imprisonment is one no doubt: the plot lines of a “normal” woman’s life, like those one reads in popular fiction, or perpetuated in the long histories of melodrama east or west, or the everyday culture of the contemporary times.

The prison bars are themselves running texts from novels of pathetic love. Save her. Demolish the bars. Free her from her entrapment.

Setting free the love-battered woman, the feminine of the feminine, a different woman is seen sitting by a bath tub, performing her gender, subverting the taboos of a well-bred female of propriety, undaunted.

Who she is doesn't matter, for the face is nothing more than a flattering icon.

The room smells rosemary and thyme, pregnant with fecundity and sensuous aspirations. The air is thick with molecules of saturated voluptuous earthiness: breasts, body parts, volumes and weights of expanding flesh. Upon a casual stir, the thick air gathers its momentum to spill out winds, rains, fountain jets and whirlpools. Every now and then, the storm maddens with vague chants and agonized mutters.

Who says consciousness requires a physical body to exist? Here, thoughts and yearnings live without a body. Beyond the human subject and substance...: just take a deep breath and smell my thoughts.

She remains anonymous, but is ready any time to press the shutter release for a playful self-portrait when someone smells enough of the room.

Shutter clicks. The on-looker expects the spectacle to begin.

Shutter clicks continue, taken up by a simple melody on a percussion instrument of single strike at a time. The speechless woman of many breasts opens to another face with big blue eyes.

Talk to her, write to her. Free her from the burden of doubt and queries. Free her from unconvinced surficial plasticity. She's ready to show anyone a few episodes of real life through her eyes.

The doll-like face shatters and goes like vapour. The melody continues a few more seconds after the face is gone and finally fades.

A still red lantern blinks like it is signaling a muffled tune of briskly rhythm. The red hue keeps changing in intensity, brighter now and dimmer then...

Collectibles wanted. Visitors, please leave your wedding stories and love tales of the red lantern.

Many things may happen to a woman. And most map the wedding day as a peak moment or a dividing line.

But this story ends with a self-assured woman, fathoming space and finding room for her body. By moving furniture around within a confined room in the present continuous, she multiplies space for herself.

Space within space, world within world. I act, I narrate ..., therefore I exist. I demarcate, I divide, ... thus space.

Is knowing fathomable? But books are countable. Pile and push.

PUSH. You're back to the starting point of the PUSH journey. Would you like another PUSH?

(literary paraphrase by Linda Lai, May 2003)