

Francesca da Rimini

## Delighted by the Spectacle

### A merry trick

The tale of crone and cunt—catchy as a ringtone in its time. Captured in chronicles, and circulated via mass-produced earthenware figurines, the legendary *coño*, combining intelligence with ingenuity, was pudding proof that a shameless old cunt could still be powerful.

Back story: Demeter (Mother Earth, Distribution Mother) sets out in search of Persephone (*Kore*, Daughter), who has been abducted by Hades (the Unseen One). In Eleusis at the court of King Celeus, the inconsolable goddess encounters the nursemaid Baubo. Concerned about Demeter's refusal to eat, to drink, Baubo lifts her gown, exposing her "secret parts" to all. Her transgressive gesture, a lateral approach to the problem of mourning, drew deep laughter from Demeter who is "delighted by the spectacle." She continues her quest.



Figure 1. Figurine of Baubo, from the collection of Sigmund Freud

The Freud Museum London



Figure 2. Baubo figurines excavated from Priène (Turkey)

### 'The clitoris is a direct line to the matrix.'

The crone's vulva is an indirect line to the Underworld, the home of the dead, where Persephone—the Iron Queen, the Maiden—eventually reigns. Various popular images of Baubo replicate, one being a naked headless torso, the face in the body and the vulva in the chin of the face. Agri-business town Eleusis rebrands itself as Demeter and Persephone cult HQ, hosting the Eleusinian Mysteries. These become the most important, most secretive initiation ceremonies in the pan-Hellenic calendar for the next two thousand years.

### Open Sauce

A *Cyber Feminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* (VNS Matrix, 1991) declared:

we are the modern cunt  
positive anti-reason  
unbounded unleashed unforgiving

somos el coño moderno  
la anti-razón positiva  
infinito liberado implacable

So what to make of today's 'modern cunts'? Impudent Web 2.0 cunts. Famous rich cunts. The bald, the bawd and the bewdiful. Openly saucy. Are they smart or dumb cunts? Unforgiving. Or unforgiven?

Pudenda-external sexual organs, especially of women. The literal meaning is "things to be ashamed of," from the Latin verb *pudere*, to make ashamed.

In December 2006 the shaved pudenda of American pop performer Britney Spears is exposed as she steps out of a car (a cunning stunt?). The captured snatch snaps become an overnight Internet sensation. An earlier flash (sporting *Little Miss Sunshine*) had already prickled popular pornographic interest. This new pictorial sequence is massively linked throughout the blogosphere.

Socialite vixen Paris Hilton is in the driving seat, in the wrong pozzie to get a gander at plucked Chicken Little, Henny's pretty pennies. Some images bear digital watermarks with URLs, others blur or blot B's bits n' bobs, but plenty have her daddy long lips and C-scar revealed glor-yarsely. Raw or hide, the pixelles are essentially the same, so clues in each site's photo captions suggest or reveal the erotic persuasions of those who download-format-upload personalised copies of the shameful/shameless meme.

Trailer Snatch  
Britney's pussy ain't  
that little, eh?  
Britney has no  
panties Britney  
Spears Flashing

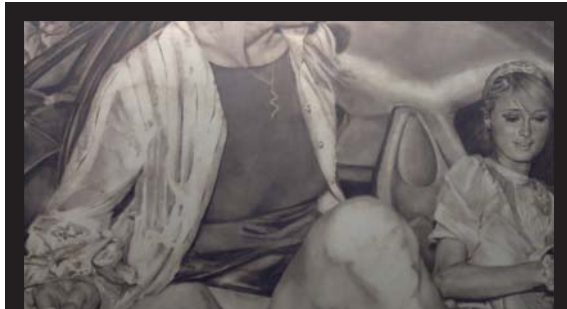


Figure 3a. *Snake Charmer*, Jamie D. Boling, oil on canvas, 72" x 120". Image courtesy of the artist.

Might Freud have included some artefact of these pix in his ethnographic treasure cabinet? The *accidental pudenda*, tantalizingly cropped and re-rendered?

At home in the brave... Recently US presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama was scheduled to speak at a fundraiser at the Plant Zero art gallery in Richmond, Virginia. On exhibition were paintings by Jamie D. Boling. The campaign team asked the artist to remove or hide two potentially "embarrassing" artworks, one of which, *Snake Charmer*<sup>1</sup>, reworked a photograph from the infamous Britney sequence. Boling was pressured to comply and Obama's team veiled Britney, thus averting another net wildfire fanned by prurient flesh mobs.

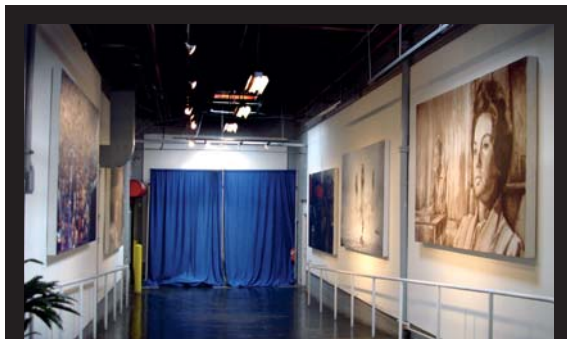


Figure 3b. *Snake Charmer* veiled by Obama's people. Image courtesy of Jamie D. Boling.

### “A wild and delirious joy”

#### Prurient

1639, “itching,” later “having an itching desire” (1653), esp. “lascivious, lewd,” (1746), from L. *prurientem* (nom. *pruriens*), prp. of *prurire* “to itch, long for, be wanton,” perhaps related to *pruna* “glowing coals.”



Figure 4. “Cruel Playpen” from “dollspace,” da Rimini, 1997; Illustration of de Sade’s work from “La Nouvelle Justine,” 1797

Ah, the glowing coals of reckless desire. “Being reckless” in the supply of “objectionable matter” online was criminalized in Adelaide, South Australia, in 2002. *Baise-moi* was banned then [wild chicks who fuck], followed by *Ken Park* in 2003 [teen boy gives good head to friend’s mum]. Pasolini’s *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* has mostly been banned since 1976 [all power is corrupt]. Two complaints saw Winterbottom’s *9 Songs* banned in 2005 [“real sex”, not “simulated”]. Erotic bodies, cinematic or netomatic, are thorns down under.

My immaterial body was born in a place of the dead in 1994. Late one night two of us sharing a keyboard and inhabiting one “Guest” body, engaged with a dyslexic vampire, the\_Unborne, in a morgue at LambdaMOO—the Mother of all MOOs. Life, in all its real virtuality, became amplified, splendid in its splinterings. Far from being *second life*, it was first and thirsty life, queer and unquenchable.

MOOs are text-based, online spaces, enabling users to communicate and code things in real time, social environments. Essential elements are a central database server, the MOO programming language, user-built artefacts, and masses of creative labor and shared imaginaries.

LambdaMOO returned me to childhood pastimes of make believe and “let’s pretend”. Games like *Nightclubs*, where *77 Sunset Strip* and *Hawaiian Eye* spice our *mise-en-scène*. We take turns in playing the dancer on a makeshift stage, wearing a silver flock satin dress, gauzy veil, and little else. The stripper hoochy koochies her customer, her yearning trick. Then we switch roles.

Reading *Coldness and Cruelty* (Deleuze meets Sacher-Masoch) inspired my crafting of a persona who would playfully perform the sexual fantasies of strangers on

secret micro-stages within LambdaMOO. Could she/GashGirl/I construct her self as a discrete mental entity, connected to my self (my ‘true’ self?), and be authentic to both manifestations of self? An existential research project, cliterature, fun ...

I recall the dying words of the poet Laure to Bataille (elsewhere she speaks of “a wild and delirious joy” invading her):

The poetic work is sacred in that it is the creation of a topical event, “communication” experienced as *nakedness*. It is self-violation. Baring, communication to others of a reason for living, and this reason for living “shifts.”

As GashGirl never described herself explicitly, she was a *tabula rasa* for the imaginations of others. Transforming rooms of fuckery evolved the Puppet Quarters, GenderFuckMeBaby's Palace of Unparalleled Cynicism, the White Hotel. LambdaMOO hosted public Sex Rooms for peepers and partakers. But games in the Realm of the Puppet Mistress were conducted in private 'lockable' rooms.

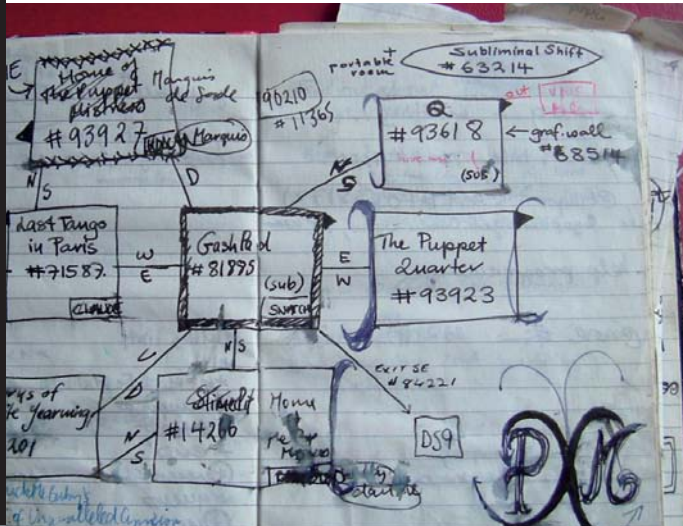


Figure 5. Map of the Puppet Quarter, da Rimini, circa 1995

We (My Puppet, my brother the Prince of Darkness, the Wolf, the slutty cross-dressing maid Special.Jane) played as minds without bodies. Yet our bodies were constantly leaking desire, we were wet and hard, sensing each other even when not connected. Logging in just a formality.

GashGirl's playmates abided by her rule of anonymity. The relations were more *Last Tango in Paris* than *One Night in Paris*. All were allowed to capture the interactions as text logs, for personal pleasure. Thus the games were underwritten by a mutual awareness that the private revels in forever puppet peepshows might one day materialize in public realms.

go west

Last Tango in Paris

A spacious pied-à-terre where Claude receives her guests.

You hear two people talking.

"Because we don't need names here."

"We're going to forget that.

Everything."

You see the Puppet Mistress.

She is awake and looks alert.

Carrying:

- a deeply inscribed xx clawing (asleep)

- Venus in Furs Contract #2768

- ghost of River Phoenix

- GashGirl's Puppet costume chest



Figure 6. Forever Peep, from dollspace, da Rimini, 1997.

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Irigaray’s words resonate:

Exchange? Everything is exchanged, yet there are no transactions. Between us, there are no proprietors, no purchasers, no determinable objects, no prices. Our bodies are nourished by our mutual pleasure, our abundance is inexhaustible: it knows neither want nor plenty.



Figure 7. Holdin on: Golden Shower, digital image by Virginia Barratt. First published in 1997, reproduction in 2007.

“Monstrous gorgeous”<sup>2</sup> to behold

“And now?” you ask.

The lived research, the collaborative art and writing and software projects unfurled in new drift zones. The little ghost girl doll yoko in *dollspace* ... Liquid\_Nation, as fast flowing as Capital in *identity\_runners* ... Deep laptop dance with Netmonster, Internet visualization software, by Mongrel’s gnostic coder, Harwood.

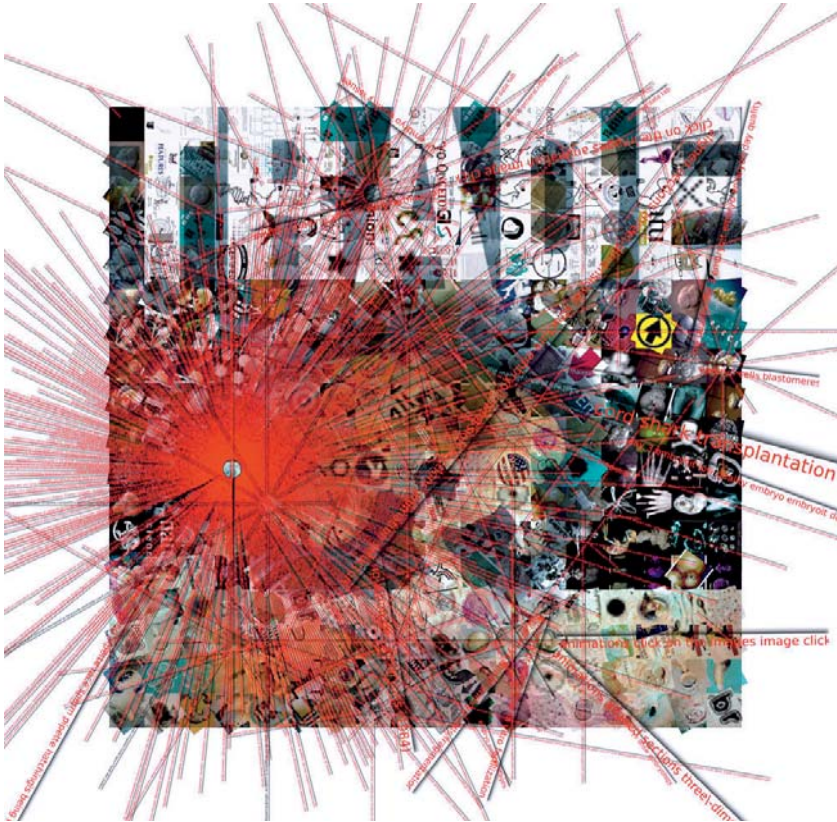


Figure 8. Network visualization created with Netmonster software by Mongrel, from the *Rough Trade* series, da Rimini/Harwood, 2005.

Persian mystic poet Rumi wrote in the thirteenth century:

**Look how the caravan of civilization  
has been ambushed.**

**Fools are everywhere in charge.**

“And now?” you ask again.

The last Pythia at Delphi reveals:

**Tell the king; the fair wrought house has fallen.**

Summoning all our familiars, walking backwards into the future. Now is the time for recuperating myth, recalling the power of lewd jests and public gestures. Reconfiguring our private selves, in positions that are pleasing to us, and rejecting all that demeans and diminishes our spirits.

**The fountains are now silent; the voice is stilled.  
It is finished.**

Let us make new networks with tin cans and string.

Let us cloak our data bodies with the fallen feathers of Bronzewing pigeons.

Hedge-riders<sup>3</sup> suggest the Way.

**A private merrimaking,  
together, publicly.**

1. Jamie Boling kindly allowed the reproduction of his painting *Snake Charmer* for this text.
2. ‘Monstrous\_gorgeous’ was a character created by performance artist and VNS Matrix member Virginia Barratt at LambdaMoo. Monstrous\_gorgeous lived beyond the screen also, performing, writing and presenting lectures. One of the activities of Monstrous Gorgeous was a show of the same name exploring women’s queer and aberrant sexualities curated by Barratt at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia in 1994. See <http://apathologicalvector.blogsome.com>.
3. “hag”, c.1225, shortening of O.E. *hægtesse* “witch, fury”. “Hedge-rider,” used of witches and ghosts. „She who straddles the hedge,” because the hedge was the boundary between the “civilized” world of the village and the wild world beyond. The *hægtesse* would have a foot in each reality. Search term “Hag” at <http://www.etymonline.com>.

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