

## GHOSTS PAUL PFEIFFER

Paul Pfeiffer's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* is an installation consisting of a bath with plastic shower curtain, tiled walls and the shower running. There is nothing especially remarkable about this except that it is a reconstruction of the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, 1960. In addition its simulacral condition is signalled by the fact that it is constructed to a scale of 1:1.5, which is to say it is fifty percent larger than an average sized shower of this kind. The artificiality of this construction is amplified by the fact that it is surrounded by a scaffolding-like structure holding microphones and cameras and penetrating through the shower curtains into the shower: a reconstruction of the kind of rig the filming of *Psycho* would have used.

Noticeable by their absence are the actors, the director, the film crew etc. This is a *mise en scène à la Mary Celeste*, and the viewer is very conscious that he or she has been placed in the frame. The rhetoric of absence is common in Pfeiffer's work. It is also evident in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* a series of photographs of basketball games in which Pfeiffer meticulously erased the ball. The game is transmogrified into a mystic match wherein the players play with nothingness.

Another of Pfeiffer's cinematically oriented installations *Dutch Interior*, 2003, (at the MIT List Visual Arts Center) refers to the film *Amityville Horror*, 1974, bringing the cinematic device of point of view into the domain of installation. The installation consists of a video projection of the point of view of the inhabitants of the house. This is thrown onto a screen into which has been drilled a viewing hole allowing the viewer to look into the picture to see the scene from the point of view of the satanic presence. Pfeiffer explains:

you're viewing this otherwise ideal suburban house from behind a bush, or peeking around a tree, or peeking in through a window or through some corner in the house that really wouldn't be the place where a human being would stand. It's either too low or too high. Or from someplace that would really be uninhabitable to an adult human, maybe a child, but maybe not even that. {PBS Pfeiffer 2004}

Pfeiffer was particularly struck by the role played by the staircase which became 'a central corridor along which a meeting of gazes occurs between the human

inhabitants, the family, and this non-human inhabitant, the devil.' {PBS Pfeiffer 2004} Pfeiffer recalls: 'there's many really disturbing scenes where you're looking down the staircase at the family coming up or looking up the staircase at the priest coming down.' Pfeiffer reconstructed the hall and central stairway of the house working with a professional miniature set designer. The result is a dollhouse-sized diorama which is fitted with a miniature surveillance camera that shows a view from the top of the staircase. This view is projected onto a large wall and as the viewer moves closer to the wall the image becomes pixelated and one can see a hole with light emanating from it. When the viewer looks through the hole they see the diorama itself which is built into the wall. Pfeiffer explains 'you find yourself looking through the peephole and looking in the opposite direction from the bottom of the stairs and the entryway of the house, upwards towards the second floor where the camera is.' But the camera is hidden. In a sense this work is immersive in another sense it stresses the rhetoric of the mirror or hall of mirrors that seems so fundamental to postmodern art.