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Ria Verhaeghe, Glenden II

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Every day we are overwhelmed by thousands of images. We live in a culture dominated by imagery. Just as these images sometimes linger on in our minds, Ria Verhaeghe keeps them in her image archive.

She, however, works selectively. Only images that need attention, that show links, or lead to new connections will be archived. They create a reality which lies in-between images and which fluctuates as it were, so that new meanings, new narratives become possible—the imaginary as well.

What is so fascinating to realize is how, in her work, Verhaeghe does try to recognize, in the sense, not of identifying, but of acknowledging the other. From this perspective, she is open for the unknown in the world and as an artist points out the different, the not immediately visible, the in-between which is seldom recognized in our reality—what lies between two images, between two legends (therefore the dyslectic “glenden”) on both sides of a newspaper sheet.

She saves what vanishes between the folds of existence, rehabilitating what is lost. In the abundance of imagery, she cares for the anonymous. For example, a newspaper image with a dying person cannot be thrown into the waste bin, but receives a place in her “provisoria,” a temporary place as an interval in time.

In this sense, Verhaeghe creates a transitional space where nothing is definite, but where everything contributes to the creation of meaning, always another meaning, never fixed. She finds the finite and fixed positioning of a picture, of a word, dreadful, since the possibility for further development, for a connection is taken away. Her urge therefore is to reconnect these loose hanging threads with each other.

Modernity has caused separation and categorisation, everything is treated separately and most of the time by an expert. It is high time these connections are made again. What is torn apart is picked up by Verhaeghe, reconnected and reposed in the sense of repositioning, of giving a new place, a new meaning.

In the exhibition, Verhaeghe has digitally linked newspaper images with multi-coloured lines as if telephone wiring. The materials used in her work are very meaningful and mostly refer to connecting, in the sense of “communi-caring,” especially with respect to latex and cotton

mesh. These are indeed protective materials, widely used in the care of recovering patients. In this sphere of compassion, aesthetics is linked to ethics in an artistic process of healing. Through, and in, empathic affinity, I withdraw from myself and allow attention for the other. Verhaeghe's oeuvre in this manner contributes to the cultivation of a relational ethics of becoming.

In other words, her work always carries within itself the affirmation of the potential for a transformative, creative process of becoming. Affirmative aesthetics and ethics celebrate the generating power of life and allow us to go beyond pain and grief. By extending her attention to many others and taking them under her protection, the artist takes the "being other" into an affirmative flow of words and values and, consequently, resists the negative. Her vital and relational work is part of a creative, creating power, which generates and brings to life possible futures.

Her work does not take the individual as a central reference point but the relation. This implies openness towards the other—in the positive sense of mutual affection, of possible connections in mutually shared realities. Verhaeghe's work shows a compassionate witnessing of the life and suffering of the other, a form of empathically shared presence, and is therefore so important in the shaping of our thinking in a twenty-first-century culture.

Many thanks to you, Ria Verhaeghe, for your intensely meaningful work!