

Cathrine Elwes 1984

CATHERINE ELWES

Dear Chrissie

OPTIMISTIC FATALISM AND PERMISSION FOR PLEASURE

1. FATALISM

Its odd to be optimistic under THE BIG THREAT, but our global death sentence seems to have given me permission to live. So much so that I have given myself further permission to make a new life in the shape of a child. His presence is now adding to an omnipresent sense of my own mortality – something that depresses me 50% of the time and reminds me every day not to waste time. In the other 50% I cultivate my optimism.

2. OPTIMISM

If the world is bent on its own destruction, how else can I protest but by creating? Pro-creating and creating art. The everyday miracle of birth leaves me more or less wordless at the time of attempting to write. Art is easier to talk about. An optimistic fatalist scrutinises, celebrates and argues with life in the face of daunting contradictions and complexities. She doesn't ignore the pernicious effects of the Social Order, but neither does she skate about on the surface looking for a total explanation to alleviate her anxieties. The art of an optimistic fatalist points to life and says: "This is what we stand to lose, and also this and this and what about that extraordinary desire for a child that got written off as envy?" and so on...

3. PLEASURE

Perhaps it is *only* under the sentence of death that I can give myself permission to please myself – to make art that I want to make as opposed to art I feel I should be making. It's not a question of being uncritical or uncriticisable, but I am trying to disentangle useful ideas from niggling inhibitions that follow the internalisation of Catholicism, Marxism, Feminism and Fear. I suppose I've become a kind of humanist and a born-again pleasure-seeker. The pleasure of the text. The pleasure and the privilege of the artist as she re-creates life with her camera, paintbrush, blow-torch, whatever. The pleasure of 'appropriating the look' (yes, it's possible). The wonderful self-satisfaction of knowing that female consciousness and other 'perversions' of HE have hardly been touched on in art. Rather like being the fifth person to portray the crucifixion. Could be something in this motherhood business... The pleasure in pursuing a feminist aesthetic. Imagine the pleasure of even a small success here!

4. PROHIBITIONS NONETHELESS

AVOID

- a) Lead, carbon monoxide, concrete and steel. They dull the senses.
- b) Food additives. They seriously impair your ability to edit for extended periods.
- c) Cynicism – a great time-waster.
- d) Fussing and fighting. It eats up years.
- e) Living in the past. It robs you of the present.
- f) Guilt – the oldest time-shrinker of all.

Tempus Fugit
Yours
Catherine



still from MYTH 1984 (u-matic videotape) colour)

