



THE CULTURE OF CHATTER

REBECCA MARKS ON THE CHATTER OF CULTURE

Lorna Brown, *Threshold (cont.)*, video projection, 2007
photo: Blaine Campbell

Chatter takes place at an accelerated pace. Rapid, incessant and unimportant, it is quickly over and easily forgotten. It requires our presence but not our attention, and this inattentiveness and absence of engagement quickly leads to a state of boredom. Lack of surprise, knowing what is coming next and not having to work at understanding all play a part in distancing our relationship with the world around us. Chatter is about surface, not depth. With an ironic, inverse effect, the works in *The Chatter of Culture* employ repetition, articulation and temporality to achieve a meditative re-engagement with the subject of boredom and chatter.

Is this going to be another piece of writing on culture that will go unnoticed and unremarked upon? Will it be boring? Will it be forgotten? I have been struggling to write this for over a week. Trying to be articulate in the face of this work and this show. Living in the state of demonic anxiety that is mapped out in Lorna Brown's *The Structure of Boredom (After Oden)*. Ironically, I am not living in the state of demonic boredom, although you might be as you are reading this. I'm trying to write clever, witty concise observations that will engage you but I am boring myself as I try to formulate revelations that will hold your attention. I have been writing for days.

There is an interesting interplay between surface and depth that occurs both conceptually and physically in Lorna Brown's *The Structure of Boredom (After Oden)*. Brown has covered the windows of the gallery with a white material upon which a 1970s pop-psychology diagram is mirrored and rotated to

form a lacy, endlessly repeating pattern that looks like wallpaper. This diagram, which is an exterior mapping of an interior process, is applied to the surface of the building as a kind of barrier between the outside chatter of the street and the inner, contemplative space of the gallery. There is a depth of content in the surface pattern not usually found in wallpaper. In order to decipher this content, which maps the stages leading to demonic boredom, the viewer must slow down and focus their attention on the diagram, which effectively counteracts a state of boredom. This papering of the windows also acts as a visual metaphor in that it signifies a kind of vacancy or cessation of activity that is usually a precursor to boredom.

I keep writing the same sentences over and over, in different ways, mixing up the same words, endlessly repeating them, covering pages and pages without ever getting anywhere. I have covered the surface with words but have managed to elude the kind of depth that I want to convey to you about the work.

The work of David Zink Yi focuses on gestural expressions of the body as a way to articulate individual and cultural identity. Like trying to make visible that emptiness in your mind that precedes a coherent thought, Zink Yi in his video piece *Ahummm*, verbalizes and inscribes those pauses or spaces before comprehension as worthy of attention. Noises that are made but have no meaning are suddenly present – they express an effort that is at odds with what appears to be a kind of automatic writing. It is hard to determine if the voice precedes or

follows the writing; it appears as if both actions inform one another as they fluctuate back and forth. Like the work of Lorna Brown, this video endlessly loops and repeats in a continuous pattern that eventually becomes surface noise that can be easily bypassed. It is only when you slow down and pay attention to deciphering the content that something meaningful emerges.

I find it ironic to be sitting here trying to write down my thoughts about this work and the process almost exactly mirrors the scene being played out in the video. Except where Zink Yi is verbalizing and writing a kind of nonsense, I have to try to make sense in the writing that I am doing. His groaning way of speaking as he tries to articulate what he is writing – or write what he is articulating – perfectly expresses the effort it is taking to capture and get my thoughts down in some kind of eloquent way that will be meaningful and hold your attention.

In Lorna Brown's *Threshold (cont.)*, 27 quotes defining boredom have been extracted from various sources and are presented to the viewer in short, easily consumed portions. Projected from a computer housed inside a plinth, the words at first form an intelligible pattern of light that slowly stretches and creeps across the floor. The quotes materialize legibly within the bottom two feet of the wall and then quietly disappear. Interspersed between these passages on the subject of boredom is a small graphic of two arrows rotating in a circular pattern, a visual indicator of the time that it takes to process information being received. This work induces a kind of meditation on, and physical manifestation

of, the condition of boredom. The quotes exist on the periphery, out of the direct line of sight, and contortions of a physical and visual nature are required to come to an understanding of what is being presented, which thwarts rather than induces the very state that they are referencing.

I am chattering on in a way that doesn't quite do justice to the experience of the work. I feel a kind of irritation and impatience as I wait for the words to develop into clear, articulate thought, but they are slow in coming. I want to get through this quickly and finish it up. It is the last thing that I need to tick off my list and then I can wind down. I will have no responsibilities or deadlines or expectations and I can sit around and relax and do nothing, which will be bliss... for a while.

The works in this show are contemplative gestures about states of being. There is a continual displacement of the state of boredom through the energy required to decipher the information presented in the diagrams, quotes and video. The slowing down, meditating, processing and articulating actions that take place are ironically the things that engage us with our surroundings and alleviate the boredom that takes place in the face of cultural chatter.

Are you listening to what I'm saying? Are you with me so far? Are you bored yet?

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