

THE SHADOW OF LANGUAGE

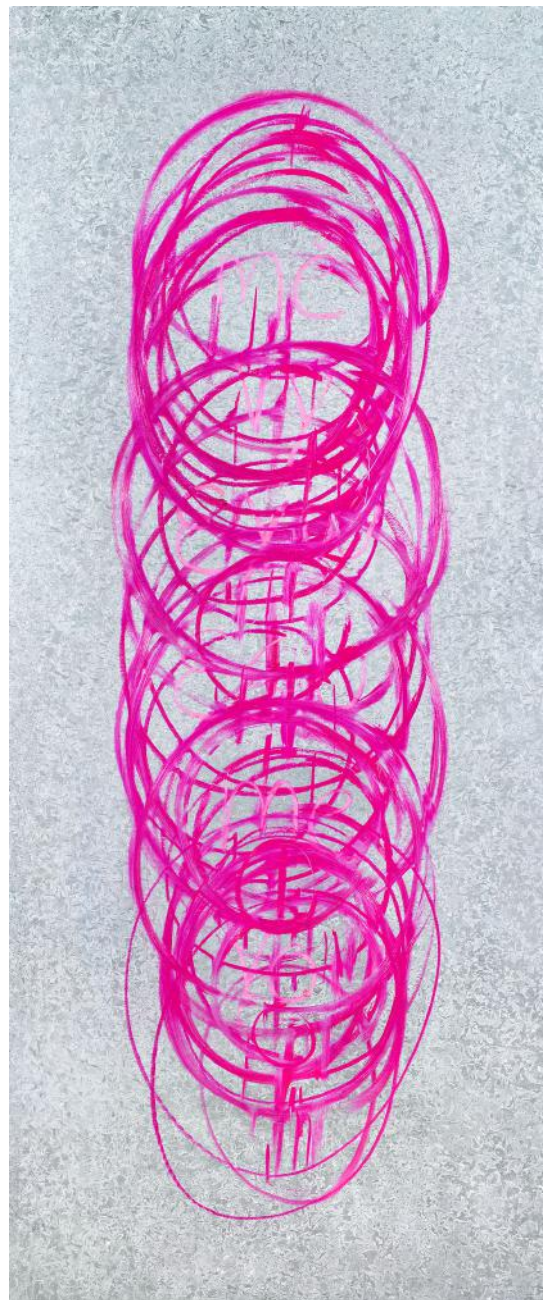
What if the binary always had an other? Not just its opposite, but a third entity. The shadow of shadows. A Greek-Australian coder will immediately read three languages in this exhibition. The Greek of the horizontal neon, the binary code of the verticals and the English obscured by the frenetic pink lipstick traces in the photographs. Language is obfuscated again in *Other* by replacing the linear with the pictorial, bringing other meanings to mind.

The circuitous, ambiguous logic of these works is at once precise and open-ended. It's a delight for a novelist habituated to moving hundreds of thousands of words around in the search for meaning, to encounter such sensate complexity in just a few letters. Meanings multiply the longer you dwell on these distilled phrases. What is lost in translation is highlighted, enriching every word and image.

Raskopoulos's work has always entertained dualities with a third party: notably, Czechoslovakian was the first language she heard but it was Greek and English that furnished her bilinguality. Her decades-long preoccupation with language and translation expanded some years ago to binary code. The repeated circles in the photographic works can be read as binary code as well as the artist's preoccupation with *ensō*, the Japanese discipline of painting circles

said to reveal the creator's character. The dashes of binary code likewise echo hyphens, the typographic bridges between identities and languages. Through one apparently impersonal symbol, meanings proliferate and collide. There is also the paradox of photography itself, how it preserves traces of the artist's body. Or not.

the shadow of language reveals the inherent instability not just of language and translation but also the notions and entities language defines: neutrality and power, gender and humanity; subject and object; desire, fear and predation; action, reception and responsibility. With its apparently genderless articles and nouns, English is ideal for the ur-text in the photographs. We are free to imagine a plethora



of erotic exchanges, participants and moods from these phrases: whirls of possibility as described by the pink lipstick. Or restrictions overlaid by a language not of the body: binary code. And any reference to skin takes us to race, identity, prejudice, division and pain.

Raskopoulos points to the power of pink, from its ascendance to popularity in the 17th century through fashion and interior design, to its proliferation in pop art. Contemporary meanings are dominated by the gay rights movement which subverted the Nazi slur; pink remains an ineffably feminine colour. The temporary nature of lipstick counterpoints the solidity of metal with its dance across the zinc, itself a reference to early printing plates.

Spivak's contention *The other is within the self* becomes gendered when written in Greek. One also thinks of the Jungian shadow: hidden or secret identities and their ritualised expression exist throughout many cultures. As contemporary discourse becomes increasingly fluent in concepts that were once obscure, the word *other*, so long used to disparage and marginalise, moves to the centre, becoming common to the point of hackneyed, even didactic. Raskopoulos' disruption offers a fresh view.

The organ that delivers language also delivers sexual pleasure, a double entendre most famously articulated by Barthes. Perhaps the mouth and tongue are a hermaphroditic erogenous zone, a hole containing a phallus. But it is in the mind that language is born. And in the mind of every viewer a unique interpretation of these refined, clever works will generate.

Fiona McGregor

February 2021

Fiona McGregor is a Sydney writer and artist. She has published 7 books, most recently a collection of art essays *Buried not Dead*, and the photoessay *A Novel Idea*. Her novel *Indelible Ink* won Age Book of the Year. In 2020 she did a photographic performance series *Moving Masks* in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. She is currently working on a duet of historical novels set in Sydney's sly-grog era.

Image: Eugenia Raskopoulos, '6. μέ/vy/εγώ/εσύ/me/you' from the series 'the shadow of language', 2021, pigment print on photo rag metallic, 185 x 75 cm.