

Introduction by Dia's Director

Susan Hiller's work has been recognized in major exhibitions internationally, most notably in a retrospective held at the Tate Gallery Liverpool last spring (1996). After practicing anthropology and archeology in the United States Hiller began to work as an artist in London where she moved in 1973. Sensitive to both the possibilities and the limitations of all artistic media, Hiller has never confined her work to any one in particular. Involving writing, painting, performance, photography, video, projections, and found objects as well as collaboration with others, Hiller's art is well described by herself as a kind of "archeological investigation, uncovering something to make a different kind of sense of it."

DREAM SCREENS

Throughout her work Hiller has been preoccupied with dreams and dreaming often as means to explore the boundaries around our ideas of self, of time, and of reality-the most basic terms of our experience.

In works such as *Dream Mapping*, 1974, she collaborated with many friends to create diagrammed dream descriptions that, collectively organized, blurred the distinction between shared and individual experience, between reality and dreams.

Belshazzar's Feast, 1983-84, was inspired by a series of reports collected by the artist about late-night sightings of mysterious images appearing on television screens after broadcasting had ceased. Infused with the sound of chant, storytelling, and accounts of the ghostly television images, this installation centers around a mesmerizing video of fire.

In another work, *Magic Lantern*, 1987, fragmented ambiguous human voices served as a backdrop to moving and overlapping projections of pure red, blue, and yellow discs of light in an otherwise dark room. The content of *Magic Lantern* was neither the light nor voices provided by the artist, but the images and sounds imagined by the viewer before and after experiencing the abstract audio-visual effects.

Hiller's latest work, designed specifically for the web, draws upon ideas explored in these earlier works. The sound (or text) accompanying *Dream Screens* is ambiguous: part recollections, part dream images, part catalogue of collective historical documents (the artist remembering scenes from films that have the word "dream" in their title, and recounting them in chronological order). The images are infinite variations on a monochrome field of color, with flickers of light or non-light appearing in the interplay between them as the viewer clicks a mouse anywhere on the activated computer screen. Between image and sound, the piece arrests the viewer's gaze and provokes wandering thoughts. This "web browsing" is aimless. No information is provided. Instead, the space of the screen is designated for us, the viewers, and for our dreams.

Dream Screens, like Hiller's other art, is extremely aware of its own context, historically and presently. Although minimal in outward appearance, the work's complete description would include an encyclopedia of citations ranging from ancient chant to contemporary monochrome painting, from Freud's invention of psychoanalysis to the history of film, from anthropology

to psychology. Its abstract form is consciously situated amidst the contrasting density of useful and useless images and text which expand exponentially on the internet like the very boundaries of the universe (which itself might be heard in the pulsars recorded on Princeton University's web site that the artist cites).

Hiller's *Dream Screens* here in cyberspace suggests something fundamental about biological human existence: that the experience we trust as real and external is equally a function of our own internal desire to see and hear--the imagination that fills a blank screen. And that imagination itself derives as much from a collective understanding centered around common objects (like old movies) as from our own unique constructions. Dreams, reality, virtual reality seem less distinct. Susan Hiller's compelling investigation may allow us to "make a different kind of sense" not only of this nascent digital medium, but of ourselves.

Michael Govan
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Acknowledgments

Dream Screens by Susan Hiller, the third in Dia's series of artists' project commissioned specifically for the web, is the result not only of the artist's design and direction, but also of others who worked with her. This project was initiated by Lynne Cooke, Curator, and realized by Sara Tucker, Director of Digital Media. Thanks to David Coxhead, Thomas McCray-Worrall, Bryan Taylor, and John Keyes; to the people who creatively read and translated, including Teodora Diamantopoulos, Claire de Graw, Jens Hoffmann, Olga Kapitskaya, Nicole Klagsbrun, Jutta Koether, Warren Niesluchowski, and Stephan Urbaschek; to Tracy Leipold and Alex Noyes of Mercer Street Sound; and to Frieze Magazine and the Tate Gallery Liverpool.

