

. : . . . : Julie Becker . . .

by Chris Kraus



Julie Becker's *Researchers, Residents, a Place to Rest* is a tormented fun house, a Magic Theatre for the next century. Like all the best art, it preempts philosophical extrapolation because it is totally alive, a switching-yard of discarded tropes, cherished talismans and cultural associations. The laboratory has become a charged field, a world set into motion by a mad scientist (or perhaps, since Becker makes no effort to escape her own identity as a Serious Young Woman, a deviant librarian) who has mysteriously disappeared. And yet, unlike the magic-box constructions of the novelist Paul Auster, whose work Becker's might superficially be compared to, *Researchers and Residents* offers mystery stripped of charm and romantic mystification.

The diaries of two children, Danny Torrance and Eloise, are the protagonists of this installation. The absent residents never get to speak. They are spoken for by their empty rooms strewn with Becker's version of dollhouse objects (Sophie Calle meets Barbie in an SRO?) and the hopelessly generalized notations of a resident researcher. But the children, through their diaries, speak to us in their 'own' words.

Both children are inventions of American pop culture. Eloise comes to us from the 1950s, the privileged heroine of a storybook set in New York's finest hotel. The original Eloise, a precocious icon of a time when privilege was thought to be transferable, gushes in the storybook about her fondness for hotel room-service ("They always know it's me!"). But in *Residents* Eloise confides an inner life: "Do you think," Becker writes in Eloise's tidy notebook, "people say the stupidest things to get what they want." And then she catalogs key words to sprinkle through her love-letters:

"purity
DESPERATION
CREATURE
Longing
until the end of time
loneliness
Ruins
Temptation
Differences
Sameness
Trusting
Joined as one
Special
Endearing

Lasting..."

Danny Torrance comes to us from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, the popular film in which Jack Nicholson portrays a block novelist, whose job as winter caretaker of a resort hotel frees him up to become a psychopathic killer. His son Danny, a child of the more-threatened, less-articulate recession 1970s. Danny's notebook, as imagined here by Julie Becker, is an excursion into horror, much scarier than the movie.

"Dear Tony," Danny's diary begins, "today dad went to look for work in some hotel in the hills. What will happen if he gets the job? He never asks me what i think about where i will move to.

Where do Danny and Eloise's inner lives converge? Are they Becker's alter egos? And what about the refrigerator cartons in the gallery? And the seedy workroom where an Oldies radio station drones on like ambient background to a crime scene? `Something is wrong here.' The success of *Residents* lies in its cinematicness. There are no alter egos. The artist-as-director is everyone and everything, refracted into shards and reinvented through the story.

Ferocious longing and intelligence.

Chris Kraus

Chris Kraus is the author of *I Love Dick* and *Aliens & Anorexia*, and coeditor of *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*. Index called her "one of the most subversive voices in American fiction."

