

FLORENCE

Beryl Korot

Video threads cut from footage of waterfalls, snow storms, boiling water.

I look and listen to the result in front of me, this weaving of moving time, and think of Florence Nightingale. Who was she?

I go to Amazon and have books of her writings sent to the house. I fall in love with her words and select phrases spread over hundreds of pages to make a poem. We collaborate. Since childhood I've written poetry. Now it is with someone else's words.

Florence, born in 1820, intensely rejects her upper-class English destiny and seeks a life of meaning and purpose. At thirty-four, she sets off with a ragtag group of women to save men outside of Istanbul during the brutal Crimean War and transforms what had been complete neglect on the battlefield into a system of caring for the wounded. The year is 1854.

In 1974, I find myself working in three media simultaneously: in print (as coeditor of *Radical Software*), in video, and in weaving. I am drawn to the ancient technology of the handloom as the first computer on earth in that it programs pattern according to a numerical structure. I am drawn to the loom after being involved in print and video because I am interested in creating works on multiple channels of video—get people out of the house, into public spaces, expand the image, play with time, experiment with for-

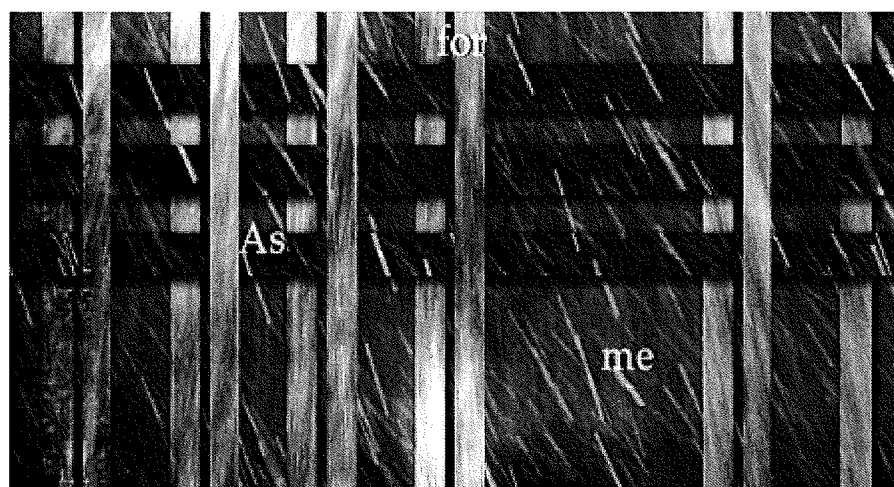


FIGURE 7.1 Beryl Korot, *Florence* (2008).

mats for presenting information—the loom is the sine qua non of technologies based on multiples. But what really fascinates me is that the information in all three of these media is encrypted in lines: in video the electronic camera reads an image at thirty frames a second, line by line; we read printed material line by line; pattern on the loom is built up line by line, or thread by thread. Time is an important component of this linear structuring in terms of how quickly and effectively information is received and stored. Instant storage and retrieval systems characterize modern technology while tactility and human memory remain earmarks of more ancient tools.

Texere in Latin refers to web, texture, structure, or translates as weave. Throughout the years, different ways of visualizing thought have been manifest in my work. The loom has remained a potent metaphor for organizing information. Here the thoughts are manifest in falling words to create a new sense of reading and time as each word has its own position, speed, and transparency as it moves down the canvas. Unlike my earlier works, where the structure or information in the work was analogous to the organization of threads on a loom (*Dachau 1974, Text and Commentary*), here the moving threads form the background or web to the falling words.

FLORENCE

God has something
for me
to do
for him,
Or he would have let me
die
some time ago.

Women dream,
Dreams which are their life,
Without which they
could not live,
Those dreams go
at last.

*Did not God speak to you
during this retreat,
Did he not ask you
anything,*

He asked me to surrender my will,

And to whom,

To all that is upon the earth.

But

Oh

You

GENTLEMEN

We are steeped to
our necks in blood,
The wounded left lying
up to our very door.

Occasionally,
the roof is torn off,
the windows blown in,
And we are flooded
under water
for the night.

IMAGINE
all December,
in the trenches,
lying down or half lying down,
without food,
only raw salt pork
sprinkled
with sugar,
rum and biscuits.

When we came
there was not a
sponge, nor a
rag of linen.

Everything is gone
to make slings
stump pillows and shirts.

Oh my poor men who
died so patiently.

As for me,
I have no plans,

If I live
I should like to go
to some foreign hospital
where my name has
never been heard,

Free myself of all
responsibility,
anxiety,
writing,
administration,
and work
as a nurse
for a year . . .

If not for the
story I have to tell,
I would never enter
the world
again.