

Wit(h)nessing Eyes Close(d)

"Art then grooves the enactment of erotic aerials of the psyche conducting and transmitting and assembling joint gazes..." (Bracha Ettinger, 1999)

To wit(h)ness one must cross a threshold into intimacy-- an intimacy that embodies both close encounter(s) and distant or aerial point(s) of view. Through entering altered state(s) I wit(h)ness with close(d) eyes what is within and beyond my grasp. In the artworkings of this series I access altered state(s) through the practice of trance (an awake dream that I speak out loud) and through vocal soundings, both of which I digitally record.

Trance is the genesis of the artworkings in this series. Drawing from historical images of myself, collected from photo shoots over the past fifteen years, the practice of re-wit(h)nessing and re/producing images of my trans/per/forming woman(s) body through time and space is filtered and enlivened through the before/beside/beyond sensorial aesthetic journey of the trance.

The audio re-cycling and re-playing of the trance in the studio allows the sounds, words, images, and sensations to co-emerge and co-fade as they transport knowing(s) and non-knowing(s) through my being, through my arms and hands and onto the canvas. Artworking(s) respond to the oral trances, influencing aesthetic considerations such as the form/shape of the body being rendered, and the space/ground/texture of the canvas and art materials.

Through co-encounters in the space/time of trance the raveling, unraveling and re-raveling of what artist/theorist/psychoanalyst/activist Bracha Ettinger theorizes as the matrixial, is expressed. The art of this series offers auditory and visual working awareness(es) of matrixial borderspace(s), where the female body/voice is freed from the transparent gravity of hegemonic phallic cultural norms that have dis/placed all that is feminine into the location of the Other (in a paranoid gaze). The matrixial gaze resists such hegemony and provides viewers and listeners opportunity to be transported beside, before and beyond the phallic gaze.

Ettinger's post-Lacanian theorizing radically extends postmodern thought to include a matrixial subjectivity that begins in the womb and is thus prior to gender. Matrixial subjectivity is understood as encounter, the feminine moving towards a co-subjectivity that is not based on castration theories and the individual versus the other model (Pollock, 2004). Ettinger's art and theory workings (only recently discovered by me) offer an aesthetic and ethical feminine-based relational language to articulate the artworkings, with the bodies of others I have co-created with, since 1991.

In the unbound large hanging canvases the female body is traditionally drawn and represented, with/in/on a disrupted enviro/scape. The co-emerging of the figure and ground causes the viewer to liberate attempts to restore the body to singular completeness and to fully see it in co-relationship, distinct yet a/part of the matrixial ground.

The womb borderspace of the matrixial is further co-encountered in the video projection piece entitled, Wit(h)nessing Eyes Close(d). The originating collaborative performance ritual this artworking responds to and extends, is present through the recording of the original four sounding voices of the Gestare Art Collective. In the originating co-performance ritual which took place at the

edge of a lake, the women of the collective re-joined through resistance and wit(h)nessing with/in several placentas made from felted wool by one of the members, Nané Ariadne Jordan. Through co-performing they psychically encounter a re-co-birth and a co-transfusion of matrixial blood. I returned to the site of the original co-performance ritual as an individual and vocalized sounds while listening to the collective's recorded sounds from the original performance ritual. In the re-co-encounter of past/present/future in this responsive artworking a differentiation in jointness occurs. What appears as a solo performance ritual in the video projection onto collaged and stained canvas is co-joined with the collective through reverberations and co-presencing of sound and visual memory traces from the originary collective performance ritual.

The gallery installation encounter event becomes a triadic co-mingling between the audience, the sound of the artist(s) voices, played through speakers in the gallery, with the visual artworkings on the walls. The co-joined audio and visual experiences mediate an inside/outside resonant chamber that invites a restorative aesthetic co-encounter of co-subjectivity with/in the matrixial m/Other. Within the matrixial borderspace(s) encountered in this installation, the prevalent cultural aesthetic of the voyeuristic phallic gaze that devours human subjectivity as objectified Other is interrupted, and the potentiality of transmitting and assembling joint gazes based on co-response-ability and vulnerable co-compassion for/with self and others is offered.

To create a co-encounter of matrixial praxis (theory + art practice) in the exhibition site, an art slide-showing and lecture with Bracha Ettinger, recorded in the Netherlands in 2009, is present in the gallery in the form of a looping internet video. In this 45 minute talk Ettinger poetically unravels matrixial theory for her audience of listeners and posits that "art is a channel for seduction into life and can provide us with the occasion for wit(h)nessing in an era of resistance." Ettinger's disorienting and reorienting orientation is elaborated as a co-performance itself with my own art, thus co-enacting a combination of virtualities and possibilities of realities to co-emerge for the audience in the exhibition encounter.

Note:

The Gestare Art Collective co-founders include Wende Bartley, Barbara Bickel, Nané Ariadne Jordan and Medwyn McConachy.

References

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Pollock, Griselda (2004). Thinking the feminine: Aesthetic practice as introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the concepts of matrix and metramorphosis. *Theory Culture Society*, 21(1), 5 – 6.