Cover art by Barbara Bickel. *Soulfully*, mixed media collage on wood, 14 x 14 inches

Published by State University of New York Press, Albany

Printed in the United States of America

For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production by Eileen Nizer
Marketing by Anne M. Valentine

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Integral voices on sex, gender, and sexuality / edited by Sarah E. Nicholson and Vanessa D. Fisher.
pages cm. — (SUNY series in integral theory)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4384-5219-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-4384-5218-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Feminism. 2. Gender identity. 3. Masculinity. 4. Man-woman relationships. I. Sarah E. Nicholson. II. Vanessa D. Fisher.

HQ1121.I58 2014
305.3—dc23 2013029951

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

9

Led by the Spirit of Art

A Spiritual Feminist Arts-Based Inquiry

Barbara Bickel

> All the tales of the spirit, all the tales of love, all the tales of art are the same. We are being itself through spirit, love, and art: and each of these is in all, and all of these are in each.
>
> —Beittel 1992, 26

Many moments make up the whole of my vocational practice as an artist, researcher, and educator. I have consciously attended the art-making process as a spiritual practice that transcends the mind yet summons the body and mind into service for the whole. My circuitous path has been led by spirit, by love, by art.

Integrally informed artist, researcher, and educator, the late Kenneth R. Beittel (1991) understood, as did Hegel, that "Spirit is Artist" (23). Thus through art, spirit can mirror itself back to us. Beittel (2003) moreover defined art as "not a thing but a process, a whole comprised of moments" (39–53). Beittel's integral teachings—which value the spiritual process of art making alongside the scientific and aesthetic dimensions—reinstate the importance of art as process. The processes of art have long been undervalued within traditional domains of Western cultures, which favor the objects of art (Frascina 2009, 1–9).

Beittel (referring to Wilber's integral approach to knowledge[1]) described the three realms of human experience that art encompasses as: (1) "'intelligibilia,' data of the mental level; (2) 'transcendelia,' data of the spiritual level of consciousness; and (3) 'sensibilia,' data from the sense, bodily or physical" (Sacca 1989, 120–23). As an artist, researcher, and educator, I attempt to embody, reflect, and practice within all these realms—what Wilber (2000a) refers to as the three primary "value spheres" (60)—despite the difficulties of attempting to hold and integrate them all (see writing on a/r/tography[2]). To traverse and study these three realms, Beittel (1984) draws from Wilber's basic strands of "abstract principles of valid data accumulation and verification. 'Instrumental injunction, intuitive apprehension and communal confirmation'" (18). My practice follows the lines of these three realms of human experience and attempts to convey *the action* of the instrumental injunction, the *cognition* of the intuitive apprehension, and the *relational feedback loop* of the communal confirmation.

Not reducing my vocational practice to any one domain of knowledge is simultaneously my passion and my struggle. I find myself a nomadic transdisciplinary entity working within the domains of art, religion, and science. My work and praxis is situated in the interior domain of the aesthetic/artist, the collective domain of the moral/educator, and the objective domain of the truth-seeker/researcher. Art is my guidance between, through, within, above, below, and around these relationships. I situate the process of art, as Beittel (1973) does, as "an "ultimate" realm of human experience—that is, it cannot be reduced to nor assimilated by other likewise essentially autonomous realms, such as religion or science. This does not mean that what are here termed autonomous realms cannot interact and overlap, nor does it contradict the belief that all such realms have at base a common human condition" (1).

This chapter spirals back in time to the origins of my integral art praxis, as reflected in my first large body of work, and then loops forward in time, to a more fully integrated body of work. In writing back into my art processes, my desire is to introduce the reader/viewer to the instrumental injunction, to share intuitive apprehension, and to engage, if possible, a communal confirmation that will enable others to explore and further develop an integral praxis of art making, researching, and teaching.

A Spiritual Feminist Artist

The feminist art that emerged out of the women's movement within North America in the 1970s holds elements that, unbeknownst to me at the time, informed my art practice as an emerging female artist in the early 1990s. The central themes of body art, ritual, and expression of the self, found in my art can also be found in the work of numerous feminist artists practicing in the

1970s (e.g., Mary Beth Edelson, Ana Mendieta, and Hannah Wilke). I began to discover the work of these women artists by chance in the mid-1990s while I searched a local public library for books on women artists. At the same time, feminist art historian and writer Lucy Lippard (1995) notes: "Younger feminist artists continue to think, debate, image, and imagine what "woman" is, what she wants, what her experience is, and how that experience varies across class, culture, age; how it forms, is formed by, and can change society itself" (25).

A large part of my art practice is collaborative, further reflecting a feminist aesthetic. Collaborative performance rituals evolved in my work to include coresearchers presenting art to the public as a practice of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 1998), dispelling the modernist "solitary artist" myth and market aesthetics of the Western art world.

Through the re-presentation of the human body (my own and others) my art is dedicated to reclaiming the agency of one's voice/subjectivity while consciously being aware of ones' sex and gender and one's interconnection with the Kosmos.[3] I am (most) always conscious of the power I hold as the artist in each project. This awareness has led me to invite participants to work with me as cocreators, collaborators, and most recently as coresearchers. I hold multiple roles as an artist/witness,[4] teacher/learner, and coresearcher. My task is to create visual artifacts (see figs. 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, and 9.4) that reflect spirit, as enfleshed in the coresearcher, back to them. Through the cocreation of the artifact, the coresearcher and I have the opportunity to see beyond our individual egocentric and ethnocentric-identities and to extend our connection with each other and the Kosmos, at worldcentric and kosmocentric identities.[5]

This broadening of identities is assisted by working with the unclothed body and situating it in a nonrepresentational environment. The naked body can bypass cultural embeddedness and individual expression, which is often expressed through clothing and accessories that situate us in a particular time and place. The strategy of working the ground of the art piece as an abstract environment also assists in expanding identities. Removing recognizable environments from the visual field can free the body from cultural personas, earthly gravity, and the world as we know it. Reflecting together on the cocreative process, "artworking,"[6] and the completed artwork, the coresearcher and I learn together. The connection and learning acquired in the art-making process is then expanded through making the art public, most often in a gallery setting.

Spiritual Feminism

I was exposed to secular feminist thought in art school. It was there I first met women who called themselves "feminist."[7] My art practice of working in relationship with others to expand representations of the body lead me to a feminist

understanding of the world, but not until my years in graduate school did I start to call myself not a feminist artist, but a *spiritual feminist* artist, researcher, and educator. Transpersonal psychotherapist John Rowan (1997) described spiritual feminism as political feminism[8] that uses "the construction of cultural symbols, images, rituals and archetypes of power useful to women in opposing social oppression" (21). He went on to write how "[s]piritual feminists developed the concept of 'womanspirit' to develop tools such as meditation, personal mythology, natural healing, dreamwork, study of matricentric history and mythology." For many spiritual feminists, "[c]hange and touch, process, embodiment, and relationship . . . are at the heart of . . . re-imaginings of God and the world" (Christ 1979, 1). Through their practices, spiritual feminists have and are challenging dominant pathological patriarchal[9] discourses from a spiritual base.

Following spirit as art has been a journey of sacrifice and struggle, yet it is a "choiceless choice" (Krishnamurti 1969) once the commitment is made. The late black feminist poet Audre Lorde (1995) reflected on the struggle of the feminist artist: "And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger" (204). The feminist artist who chooses to make her art visible steps from private into political space, and risks ridicule, misinterpretation, and worse ostracization. Creating art and working in relationship with others became my spiritual feminist education. Working with the human body and visually reflecting the beauty and wisdom held within it allowed my voice to become integrated in my life, where before it had been largely silenced. My art practice became a vehicle to transform myself, and I helped others, from being a silent object to becoming an empowered subject (Rich 2001).

Raised within a traditional Christian family in a Christian-based Western country, spiritual feminism has been an important ground for me to situate within because of my own lived experience of religious hegemony. bell hooks (2000) in her call for feminists writes: "More than other religious faiths Christian doctrine which condones sexism and male domination informs all the ways we learn about gender roles in this society. Truly there can be no feminist transformation of our culture without a transformation in our religious beliefs" (106).

Spiritual feminism offered me a place to critically question the set doctrines I had been raised to adhere to and freed me to develop spiritual awarenesses fed by nascent ritual practices. The ritual practices I found myself developing were augmented by what I was learning in my art practice. The compartmentalization of life—private and public, sacred and profane—was broken down and transformed. hooks (2000) further summarizes the space that I found spiritual feminism offered to me "Identifying liberation from any form of domination and oppression as essentially a spiritual quest returns us to a spirituality which unites spiritual practice with our struggles for justice and liberation. A feminist vision of spiritual fulfillment is naturally the foundation of authentic spiritual

life" (109).

The ongoing questioning of religious hegemony, alongside the struggle to develop, embody, and live a conscious female spirituality in our society (as embodied in the work of Carol P. Christ, Bracha L. Ettinger, bell hooks, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Starhawk) continues to be worked through and developed in my art, research, teaching, and writing practices.

A Body Artist

As a young child my drawings were preoccupied with the human body, mostly women's and children's bodies. Being introduced to life drawing in art school returned me to this reverent fixation. With my refound artist voice I began to express my understanding of the body as a *sacred vessel and container of wisdom.*

I find it curious, but not surprising, that as a self-identified spiritual feminist with an early fascination with the female body, the first major body of work that I undertook was with men. As a young woman following spirit as art, which I now understand as a spiritual practice, I was naïvely entering a contested and culturally defined arena in an effort to understand its perspective and to offer an alternative vision.

With a few exceptions, "women do not often use men's bodies in their work" (Lippard 1976, 133). In the 1994 catalogue *What She Wants: Women Artists Look at Men*, Naomi Salaman (1994) reflects historically how "[w]omen have been allowed to admire works of art—including the male nude—in galleries, but women artists were severely restricted from becoming part of the high culture process of representing the male form" (16). The exhibit, which took place in Great Britain, was in part a response to the feminist antipornography movement and showcased contemporary women artists working erotically with the male body in their art. Aside from this exhibit, my search for women artists working with the male body revealed very few.

Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers

Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers (Bickel 1992) was my first creative inquiry into the historical hegemony of the male artist paradigm. An attempt to transform my own embeddedness within it, as well as to offer an alternate vision of men's identities in our culture through art was my aim.

This body of work began in my final year of art school. My male professor, a well-known photo-realist painter, surprised me during the final critique of the year by commenting the work I was doing was both passionate and humble. My semester in his class had involved minimal interaction with him because

he spent the majority of class time with the male students. Shortly thereafter, a male classmate inquired into purchasing a piece from this series. I realized that something in my art was being recognized and valued by these seemingly indifferent males, which spurred me on to continue my art practice full time.

Regarding the power of imagery in art, feminist architect Susana Torre commented in a conversation with other feminist artists that "[t]he image is an incredibly powerful medium. It can express in synthesis levels of consciousness that are not rationally apparent but can mesmerize people" (qtd. in Lippard 1976, 84). I see the making of female imagery as a tool for generating further consciousness in other women and people in general. Although I was not painting women in this first body of work, the imagery I was creating (as I will explain) was following an archetypically feminine process of cleaning, wiping away, and revealing, rather than an archetypically masculine process of constructing and building up the material surface of the image.

As I return to read the journal notes and articles I wrote during this project, I am reminded of the vulnerable aspects of the project. Foreseeing the vulnerability my invitation would engender, I chose to publicly expose myself first through writing, before inviting the men to expose themselves. I wrote in the article for a local men's magazine (1992):

> This painting series is a personal endeavor in accepting masculine energy, in others and myself, as an important part of the healing journey. As long as I fear and reject the masculine in myself, I will be unable to be in this world as a fully liberated person. My unconscious view (image) of men as aggressive hurtful beings is, and will continue to be, contradicted in this painting series. My unconscious fears are being brought to the surface to be faced and truthed. In bringing this project out to be seen by the public, I intend to raise the same question that is brought up in me: are we ready to accept men as nurturers, loving birthers, and creators of Life? (13)

At the end of the article was the invitation: "Note: if you are a man and interested in modeling anonymously between Sept. '92 and Mar. '93 contact Barbara . . . this particular series is to be exhibited at the M.E.N.S. Network Annual symposium, April 30–May 2" (13).

I worked with 14 men, only a few whom I knew. They ranged in age from 30 to 70: fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, heterosexual, bisexual, and gay. Calls continued to come from men with interest in participating after the project was completed. The men participating had varied reasons for engaging in this work. A number of them were therapists and spiritual leaders wanting to explore their feminine side as part of their personal and spiritual growth.

One was an artist who worked predominantly with female models and wanted to have the experience of being on the other side of a painting. Another had a partner who was an artist's model and was curious to know her experience. One of the men was dying of AIDS and desired to share and leave behind, through his image, part of his journey. A few of the men asked to pose with a close friend as they felt too vulnerable on their own and saw this as a way to honor and deepen their friendship (see fig. 9.2). I found all the men to be on a journey of self-exploration, to some degree, open and curious to be part of this experience.

I met with the men after they expressed interest in the project. I asked them to think about how they wanted to be portrayed and invited them to explore different poses on their own before coming to model in the studio. Working with oil glaze (a wet medium) on wood, the time working with each man was limited to four hours. The entire art process took place with the men present, witnessing and responding to the unfolding of their image. The process was one of covering the wood surface in a dark oil glaze, followed by drawing the figure onto the wood with a colored oil stick. Once I had the drawing in place, I would wipe the glaze away exposing the differentially stained wood grain patterns beneath. The experience was one of wiping away the cultural and subjective self. What was revealed were the unique patterns of the wood grain. The natural wood grain produced the visual effect of musculature on the body. The flesh of the tree united with the transparent fluidity of the human body. In turn, the image became a transparency, a reverse shadow of the man.

None of the men were artist models. Consequently, they were nervous to varying degrees as they entered my studio. We began each session with a cup of tea and conversation about their ideas for poses. I was very aware of the traditional shift in power balance as I pulled on my painting overalls and they undressed and got into their self-chosen pose. At times this tension was spoken about and other times not, depending on the comfort level of each man. One man shared his experience exploring poses while in front of his bedroom mirror. He had the sensation of moving through his whole life development, from birth to his now elder age, through the different poses he held. The pose he chose for the art piece was simultaneously confident, physically challenging, and vulnerable (see fig. 9.1).

After the project had been completed I (1993) wrote: "Each painting that has been created has been a birth, exhausting and somewhat fear-filled. But as I stood with each man looking at the finished painting, we experienced the sense of awe and pride that accompanies new birth. (9).

As I reread my journal notes written during the making of this project I am reminded how emotionally impacted I was working with these men. On September 23, 1992, I wrote:

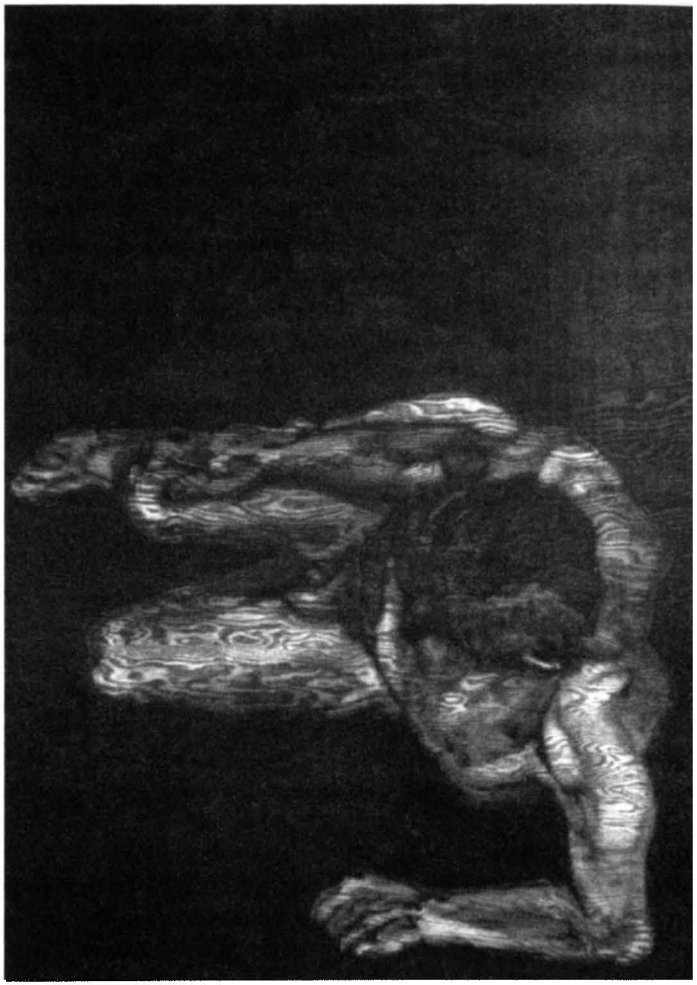

Figure 9.1. Barbara Bickel, 1992, *Unfolding*, oil glaze on wood, 36" × 48".

I have been affected by the models I have been painting—reaching into that dark hidden area of themselves. It's wonderful, an honour and extremely raw and sad. The traditional stereotypes are not present as barriers. The buffers and roles of the human are gone leaving the uncovered human to be observed, studied, validated, recaptured, given attention in a vulnerable space. I am so aware of the hiddenness and darkness that is being brought to light. A depth of desire to be known, understood and seen clearly is very present in these men. It shakes up all the secrets and hiddenness in me.

In my second article I (1993) wrote: "The darkness from which these paintings emerge represents for me the "hidden" place where I have suppressed the masculine. I also see it as the earth's womb and being connected to our source of life. It can also be symbolic of the closed emotional space where men have been "forced" to remain strong and silent. As I reintegrate the powerful masculine energies within myself, these men are opening themselves to the feminine energies within themselves" (9).

Inquiry into *Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers* (Bickel 1992a) through art helped me, the men, and the viewers to enter an altered reality; an alternative way of relating to and perceiving men not based in normal cultural subjectivities but in a subjectivity emerging from the unknown, with vulnerability, and mystery. In the second article (1993) I wrote further how "working with the grain of the wood, the qualities of water and earth emerged unconsciously in the paintings. They are the organic and transforming qualities of the dream state (non-ordinary reality). Healing transformation requires a non-ordinary reality in our concrete and scientific world. These paintings act as a catalyst to dissolving the polarization of men and women in our society" (9).

The dissolving of gender polarization I felt the paintings invoked can be explained as a releasing of the repressed feminine soul into the culture. Educa-

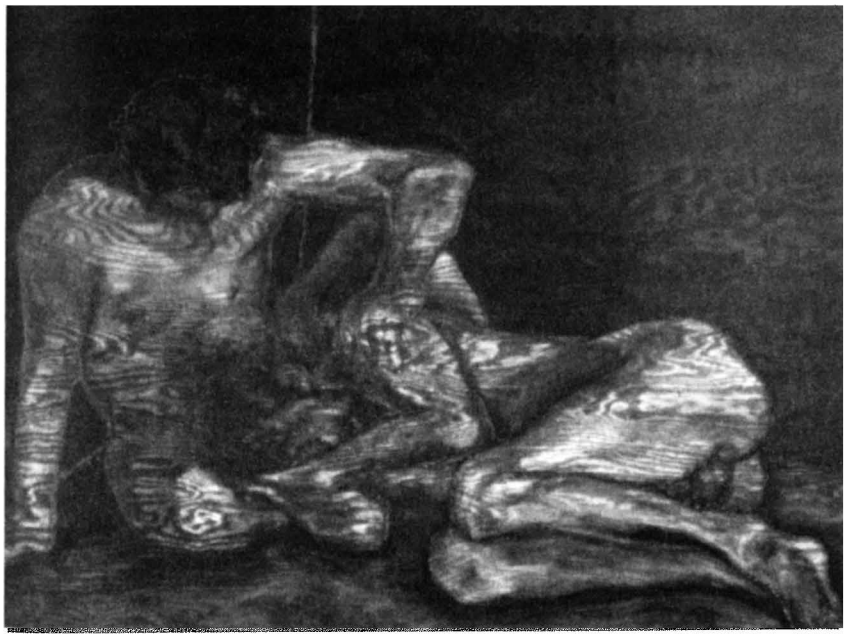

Figure 9.2. Barbara Bickel, 1992, *I'll miss you too*, oil glaze on wood, 60" × 48".

tor Norman Denzin (1995) addresses the struggle of entering and sustaining the work of what he calls the dark side of the feminine soul: "This dark side of the feminine soul calls into question the power of the masculine gaze. This harkening exposes and illuminates the need to an empowering, multi-sensual feminine subjectivity. This subjectivity embraces a field of experience that is more than just visual. When released into society, this multi-sensual field of experience threatens the status quo; but this is an unstable threat, for the feminine gaze must always fight to resist the masculine pull, which is the pull of science, objectivity, law and order, and family" (17).

Although the final product was a visual artifact—a painting—the process of cocreating with the men introduced a multisensual field of subjective experience that that the paintings held and reflected to others.

Working intimately with these men, exploring the dark side of the feminine soul through myself as artist/witness and consciously changing patterned relationships with men present in my life, prompted the realization that I needed to delve into female-to-female relationships. To strengthen my understanding of the feminine soul (*Her*) within myself, I was in need of other women to reflect *Her* gaze back to me.

In 1994 I began work on the *Sisters* project with 30 women, one of whom was a poet. A new trajectory of collaborative inquiry into women's subjectivities and body wisdom took off. In many regards, I have found my work with women more demanding than my work with men because I face a more direct mirror of my hidden self in these inquiries. I have not undertaken a second large project with men since that first series, as I have felt the need to continue and deepen my work with women. My work with men has since been more individualized, working one-on-one with commissions and with my male life-partner in smaller projects, or with male friends as part of projects that work with male and female imagery. Working with men, I am able to keep a safer distance—as a curious, compassionate witness and keenly observant translator. In contrast, working with women, I continually face myself. Their struggles and pain are much more my pain and struggles and hence call me to continue the work of uncovering and understanding the feminine soul in myself and them.

She Knows

The work of *Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers* (Bickel 1992a) was my entry point of delving into the unknown, following the art process with care, while working collaboratively with other humans. Lucy Lippard (1976) noted in her writing on feminist artists that "[a] lot of women's work, and the best of men's work, has an indefinable aspect of *caring* about it" (89). The work *She Knows* (2002)[10]

incorporated learning from 10 years of a collaborative art practice. During these years, I continued to follow spirit as art, and art as process and the cocreation of performance rituals evolved within sacred space.

She Knows, like *Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers* (Bickel 1992a), involved a public call for coresearchers in the inquiry process. This project invited an exploration of women's body memory, experience, and knowing. In my final Artist's Statement (Bickel 1992b) I wrote:

> Knowledge from the body and the unconscious has often been ignored as a valid site of knowledge in a modern age of science. My art practice has been focused on the human body, working predominantly with women in a collaborative process. The underlying base that has flowed through all the work has been the honouring of the body as a sacred vessel and container of wisdom. This honouring contradicts the shaming of women's bodies and the invalidating of women's wisdom that has gone on for hundreds of years in our society. Internalized judgments keep women divided from themselves and others. The feminist art that has evolved in my own practice attempts to reunite this divide. It encourages the reconnection and reintegration of women's knowing.

By entering this dialogue with the coresearchers, and eventually the public, I wanted to counteract the thousands of years of shame and silence the female body/voice has often succumbed to. The six women who answered the call ranged in age from 19 to 55: daughters, sisters, mothers, heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian. One woman was fighting cancer with alternative non-Western medicine and saw this as an opportunity to journey into her cancer-ridden body, learn from it, and share her journey. Another woman was seven months' pregnant with her second child; her birthing plans in disarray as she found herself dealing with her friend and midwife being arrested for unlicensed midwifery practice. Through the project she was able to preperform, while in trance,[11] loving and well-assisted birth with a wise midwife. Later, her eight-month-old daughter became part of the opening performance ritual in the gallery. A few of the younger women found themselves struggling with identity transitions from girls to young women during the project.

Through participating in this project the women located alternate self-knowing and transformed their views of themselves. Significant life transitions, from birth-giving, to adulthood, to death being lived by the women, were significantly assisted by these transformations. As a collaborative practice developed in the early *Sisters* project, I was a participant in this project and took part in the same inquiry process as the women.

The Co-Inquiry Process of *She Knows*

Over the years prior to embarking on the *She Knows* project, my development as a spiritual feminist artist had expanded to include an awareness of my work as a form of research as well as a mode of education. In addition, my experiences and understandings of collaboration had increased significantly. The process of working together began with what I initially called a "body interview" and developed into a facilitated trance. I had been working for several years with trance in my spiritual practice. Trance is an active form of meditation where states of consciousness can be experienced: gross, subtle, causal, and nondual (Wilber 2006). It can be described as a form of dreaming while awake. In the body interview, I wanted to bypass the women's rational mind and invite an engagement with their body, the arational[12] mind, free from physical limitations and this-worldly restrictions. Trance became the vehicle for accessing a deeper connection to themselves rather than a rational verbal interview with me. The women experienced varying states of consciousness in their trances, which included self-reflection, witnessing, and formlessness.

I facilitated by guiding their entry into the trance state. I was there as an anchor and ally during their trance, assisting them in meeting their double and helping the return transition back to present-time reality. I instructed the women to speak aloud and describe what was transpiring for them during their trance. This allowed me to hear and join their journey as a witness. The trance offered an arational bypass from ordinary reality into mystical realms.

Following the trance, the women and I debriefed the experience, and I scheduled a time for them to be photographed. The photo shoot was an opportunity for the women to physically embody the narrative of their trance and to *be* in their body. They were invited to bring music to this photo shoot because my work had shifted from working with still poses to documenting the body in motion. As the photographer I was wit(h)nessing to the women's body as a ground of knowledge.

Working with photocopies of the photos, I began to work on a mixed media collage triptych that would visually represent each woman's trance experience. The spoken trances, which had been tape recorded, became source material for me to work with while creating their art pieces. Understanding trance as spirit invoked, I allowed the wisdom of each woman's connection to herself, her body, and her spirit to wash through me during the art-making process. While engaged in the art-making process I listened to the recorded trance intermingled with the woman's music. While working in my studio, I entered a parallel trance state as I replayed and listened to the trance narratives and music. I would at times lose conscious awareness of the words being spoken. I was not literally responding to the trance narratives but reexpressing and resynthesizing qualities and forms that were revealed through the trance and the photo shoot. Later

the spoken trances were played in the gallery, which viewers could hear as they came near each woman's art pieces, thereby forging a link between the art as spirit, the women, and their particular trance narrative/myth.

The collage work I do has theoretical similarities to integrally informed artist-art theorist Suzi Gablik (2007), who in an interview, shared how as a collage artist she had a "special gift for synthesis" through which she can "take the bits and pieces from everywhere and see how they connect, perhaps in ways someone else might miss. That is, of course, the ultimate integral theory" (271). Her integrally informed theory of art acknowledges the evolution of consciousness that art embodies and attempts to weave together the many strands of our evolutionary history into an integrated aesthetic gesture. Within her collage works she connects and synthesizes multiple views, attaining an integrated vision of the whole that moves beyond the many parts of the collage.

Upon reaching what I felt was a completed synthesis of the triptych, I met with the women to hear their responses to the art. We reflected on emergent themes and patterns together. At this point, some of the women titled their art pieces. The triptych in figure 9.3 was cocreated and titled by Lyn, who was fighting cancer. These pieces reflect her inner tensions and the changing grounds she found herself navigating. The art as spirit reflects her transition from being alone with her illness, to finding a balance within herself, and finally to being compassionately beside herself.

After completing the triptych I made a large-scale drawing influenced by the previous pieces and the reflections they evoked. In the large drawing I wanted to reintegrate the coresearcher with her "double" whom she externalized and interacted with in her trance (see fig. 9.4). Creating a larger-than-life image of the women with an empowered bodily presence assisted the integration of experiences the women were going through. Lyn's large piece reflects the inner experience of crystal healing she experienced during her trance. Her exposed breast, where the cancer began, is awash in an energy-filled amethyst hue as she stretches and holds her still supple and spirit infused body. After completing the large drawing, I met with the women and listened to their responses and reflections on the art. As a form of closure the women entered another trance with the aim of allowing them to travel to another level of understanding in knowing themselves, their bodies, their narrative myth, and being comfortable with whom they were.

The Collaborative Performance Ritual

Performance ritual became the next layer of the project where the women were invited to collaboratively participate. Up to this point the women had worked individually with me. Not all the women knew each other, but they chose to

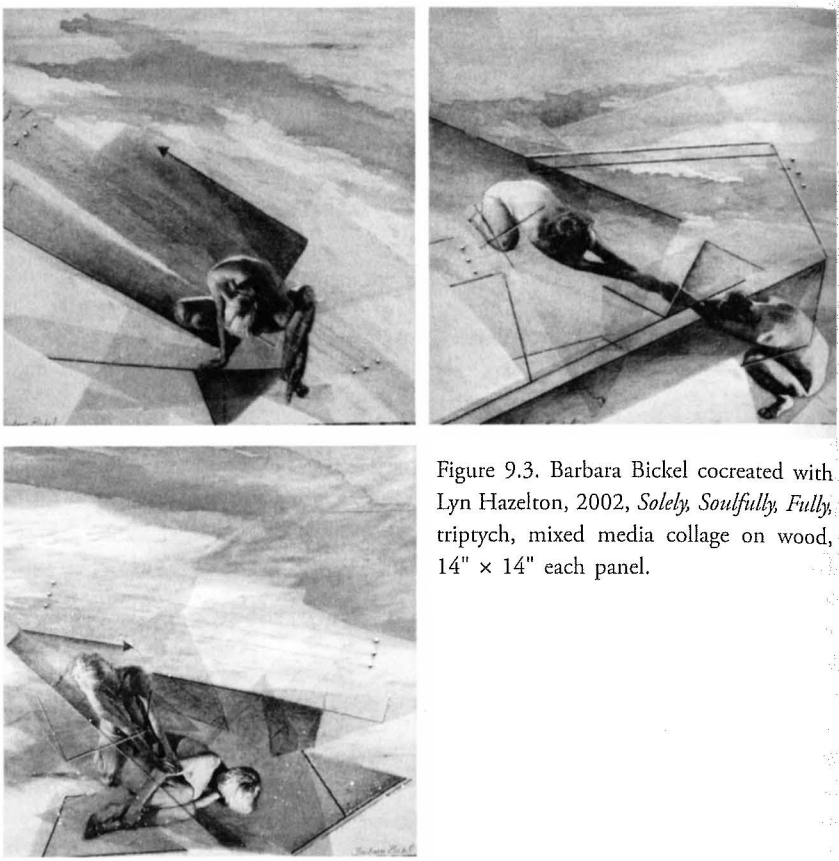

Figure 9.3. Barbara Bickel cocreated with Lyn Hazelton, 2002, *Solely, Soulfully, Fully,* triptych, mixed media collage on wood, 14" × 14" each panel.

take part in the public representation of their subjectivities at the gallery opening through the collaboratively generated performance ritual. I have learned that this last step in a collaborative project is an important aspect of challenging embedded ways of viewing and receiving images of the human body in the traditional gallery setting. In the performance ritual the collaborators fully embody the spirit of the art. They proclaim themselves, through the performance ritual, as women artists to the public.

Artist educator Charles Garoian (1999) writes, "performance art has enabled artists to critique traditional aesthetics, to challenge and blur the boundaries that exist between the arts and other disciplines and those that separate art and life" (19). By stepping into the project as performance artists the women challenged the traditional artist-model relationship and became artists themselves.

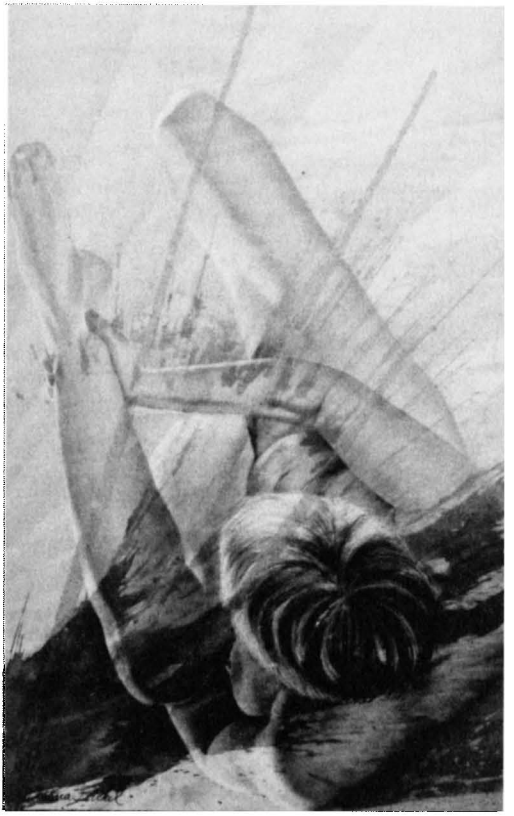

Figure 9.4. Barbara Bickel cocreated with Lyn Hazelton, 2002, *Chrysalis,* mixed media collage on wood, 32" × 48".

To create the performance ritual for *She Knows* four of us met and went through the process of entering a group trance. We opened boundaries and momentarily became one story with many voices. Together we blurred the boundaries between each other and our lives. We included the women who were not physically present by visualizing them joining us in the trance. What emerged from that group trance turned into the base structure of the performance ritual for *She Knows*. We physically re-created the trance experience in the performance ritual. During the performance ritual we created a swirl of energy with a large sheer piece of fabric, called out words reflecting the past and the future, rested beneath the fabric as we listened to Lyn's song of moving forward to death, shared our individual dances supported by the energy of the circle, gathered ourselves into a collective life sculpture and merged our voices

in polyvocal toning. The outer circle of the audience joined our collective sound toning, and we closed our performance ritual by passing a chalice filled with red nectar amongst us, nourishing our bodies with symbolic menstrual blood.

Through the collaborative process as coresearchers and cosubjects we wove our individual selves into a larger circle. Cheng (1999) in her article on the contemporary feminist performance collective, "Sacred Naked Nature Girls," writes about their strategy of "withhold[ing] the colonizing force of male spectorial desire by making the relationships among themselves their foremost performance condition" (213). With a similar action, the performance ritual of *She Knows* fostered a mutually supportive gaze wherein each woman was given the opportunity to be drawn into full vision by the others (see fig. 9.5). I perceived the process of collaboration and the final performance ritual as a re-union of women's fragmented knowledge—merging our movement into a collective herstory. The embodied knowledge traveled beyond the women to draw in and encircle the larger gathering of people who had come to witness and participate in the event. Within the collective sounding of tones made at the close of the performance ritual, male voices could be discerned amidst

Figure 9.5. Barbara Bickel, 2002, *She Knows Performance Ritual* (AMS Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada).

female voices. During this performance ritual I experienced an acute awareness of the solidity of support and participation from the mixed-gender audience that surrounded us.

The enactment of the performance ritual, the synthesis and integration of our individual bodies and voices into the greater whole, embodied Beittel's (2003 [1985]) definition of art: that art is "not a thing but a process, a whole comprised of moments" (90–104).

In the act of revealing and interweaving the story/movement of each woman the women became active, embodied artists and allies. Educators Wilson and Oberg (2002) wrote that "[t]he experience of 'telling tales' is one of disclosure, an act that implies exposing that which would otherwise remain hidden, as well as invisible and taken for granted." Garoian (1999) reminds us that "[t]he practice of performance art is a form of shamanism . . . an ontological investigation that represents the desire to ritualize the fragmented and disjunctive nature of late-twentieth-century experience" (21). In sharing our spirit- and art-led investigation we revealed memories and Kosmic connections storied in our bodies and became agents of recovered memory for human/Kosmos interconnections.

Spiritual Feminist Arts-Based Inquiry

The new understanding(s) that have emerged from this reflective writing inquiry offer readers and viewers a means to further develop an aesthetic integral praxis that relationally encompasses the value spheres of intelligibilia (mind), transcendelia (spirit), and sensibilia (body). As my own art practice has evolved over time, I have found the following beneficial to developing and understanding my art philosophy and practice outcomes, as well as assisting in data accumulation and verification:

1. reading and studying Integral Theory and artists that use Integral Theory (e.g., Kenneth Beittel and Suzi Gablik) (instrumental injunction);

2. reading and studying relational aesthetics (e.g., Nicolas Bourriaud, Bracha L. Ettinger, Suzi Gablik, Lucy Lippard) as a participatory feminist practice that lays the groundwork for disrupting hegemonic relations (instrumental injunction);

3. willingly inquiring through self-reflection and changing the traditional hegemonic artist-model power dynamics (instrumental injunction);

4. generating coinvolvement in the creative process with shared feedback during and after the creating process (instrumental injunction and communal confirmation);
5. entering variable (and induced) states of consciousness through arational practices such as trance, supported by care and trust building, and enhanced by music, poetry, and so forth (intuitive apprehension);
6. including ritual in the cocreative process (intuitive apprehension); and
7. presenting performative art to the community through the art installation, gallery talks, and performance rituals or writing or both (communal confirmation).

Exploring gendered subjectivities through writing back into these two art projects and framing them within an integrally informed lens of data gathering and verification has brought me to a place of pause. I am aware of my artistic/aesthetic self who is appreciative of the profound moments of beauty found in the process of creating these works of art, not achieved without the risk of vulnerability and hurt. I am awake to the moral responsibility of my educator self, who models a practice of letting go to the spirit of art, deeply honors and respects the subjectivity of the other and does not attempt to impose any one way of knowing or learning. Lastly, I am aware of my researcher self, who continually seeks for the deeper truth of who we are behind the dressed-up aspects of gendered subjectivity.

As a relational spiritual feminist artist, researcher, and educator, I have also found how much I require the compassionate wit(h)nessing presence and reflective mirror of the *other* to entice me to fully embody my whole Self. I have found this to be equally true, in part, for my coresearchers. We need to be willing to enter a realm beyond our cultural gendered lives to continue to find, be led by, and develop practices that can engage *Art as Spirit*. My inquiries, which involve a shedding of cultural skins, have brought to light an intuitive apprehension regarding the struggle for all genders to be fully embodied and present in an emerging integral world. It is simply not wholly satisfying for me or the coresearchers to locate subjectivities of their being into only racial, gender, or sexual, categories because when taken alone they restrict us within ethnocentric or egocentric perspectives. A spiritual feminist arts-based practice that uses Integral Theory and practice can include these various roles and containers for our subjectivity, but more importantly also offer us a vehicle through which to transcend these roles and recognize our shared identity as *Spirit in flesh*.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the more than 80 collaborators I have worked with directly in varying capacities since 1991. My learning and development has not been in isolation, but has been fed by the deep connections, at times painful conflicts, and joyful discoveries that are part of collaborative relationships. In particular, I want to remember and honor Rick (Jumping Mouse) and Lyn (Hazel) Hazelton who joyfully shared representations of the dying process of their life journey through these art projects.

Notes

1. Ken Wilber's work is first cited by professional educators in publications in 1982 (by Beittel and Maddenfort), with Beittel being the earliest and most continuous educator in the 1980s to do so, according to Fisher's (2007) survey.

2. Barbara Bickel (2008, 2005); Carl Leggo and Peter Gouzouasis (2008); Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, and S. Kind (2008).

3. Integral philosopher Wilber (1995) wrote, "the original meaning of Kosmos was the patterned nature or process of all domains of existence, from matter to math to theos, and not merely the physical universe, which is usually what both 'cosmos' and 'universe' mean today" (38).

4. The feminine and matrixial version of witnessing, distinct from a phallocentric conception "to witness" where the observer stands back and observes and may empathize—is more accurately conceptualized as "wit(h)nessing" fully with and beside the other in remembrance and experience, as Ettinger (2006) has articulated, in matrixial theory, as essential to a relational paradigm and copoiesis.

5. According to Wilber, "identity," "worldview," and "selfhood" are much the same. For a developmental/evolutionary map of their relationship, see Wilber (2000b, 21).

6. Following Bracha Ettinger's matrixial theory, Leporda (2013) defines: "Artworking . . . a term that has roots in Freud's work of mourning. It is a gradual process of working through consciously and nonconsciously the events of trauma through art" (189).

7. A few years after art school, to challenge my fear of secular feminists I initiated a project where I invited the feminist artists who I knew but who secretly intimidated me to collaborate with me to explore our understandings of the Venus archetype in contemporary society.

8. John Rowan's description of spiritual feminism as political feminism was the first that I found and read. It was after reading his description that I felt a desire to call myself a feminist.

9. Like Wilber's (1996) distinction of natural versus pathological hierarchy, I distinguish between a pathological patriarchy and a healthy patriarchy. I do not believe that all the elements of a patriarchal society are bad or wrong. Women have been part of the cocreation of this system and have both benefitted from and been harmed by it. Healthy hierarchies promote growth and change in the system and use power for

the betterment of the whole system. Pathological hierarchies want to stop growth and change and use power to oppress rather than draw forward. The situated and systemic pathological power does not want to grow and change and does not have the betterment of the whole system as its purpose.

10. The coresearchers in the *She Knows* project include Monica Brammer, Leah Fisher, Lyn Hazelton, Nané Ariadne Jordan, Sophia Martin, and Cathy Pulkinghorn.

11. Trance is a technique for accessing unconscious information and knowledge. Starhawk (1979), a cofounder of the Reclaiming Tradition, writes, "Trance techniques are found in every culture and religion—from the rhythmic chant of a Siberian Shaman to free association on a Freudian analyst's couch" (154). The form of trance that I work with is a simplified form of what was taught to me by my Reclaiming teachers. The journeyer is always in charge of their trance and as facilitator I keep them aware of that. There is no right and wrong way to practice this form of trance.

12. The arational, most often understood and relegated to a definition of the irrational, is a form of knowing that includes the body, the emotions, the senses, intuition, the imagination, creation making, the mystical, spiritual, and the relational, alongside the rational. The arational transcends yet includes all present and prior forms of knowing (Feuerstein 1988). Within the arational feelings, instincts, intuitions, and logical thinking intermingle (Kamenetzky 2000).

References

Beittel, Kenneth R. 1973. *Alternatives for Art Education Research: Inquiry into the Making of Art.* Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.

———. 1984. "Still Other Alternatives." *Visual Arts Research* 10 (20): 18.

———. 1992. *Zen and the Art of Pottery.* New York: Weatherhill.

———. 1991. *A Celebration of Art and Consciousness.* State College, PA: Happy Valley Healing Arts.

———. 2003 (1985). "Art for a New Age." *Visual Arts Research* 29: 39–53.

Bickel, Barbara. 1992a. "*Men as Birthers, Not Destroyers*: A Painting Series of Men." *Lodgepole Pine* 12: 13.

———. 1992b. *She Knows.* Handmade art book, 1/1 ed. Vancouver, BC: Self-published.

———. 1993. "Birthing the Masculine." *Lodgepole Pine* 13: 9.

———. 2005. "From Artist to A/r/tographer: An Autoethnographic Ritual Inquiry into Writing on the Body." *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 2: 8–17.

———. 2008. "Who Will Read This Body? A/r/tographic Statement." In *Arts-Based Inquiry in Diverse Learning Communities: Foundations for Practice*, edited by M. Cahnmann and R. Siegesmund, 125–35. New York: Routledge.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. 1998. *Relational Aesthetics.* Retrieved Nov. 29, 2005, from http://www.dxarts.washington.edu/coupe/dxarts531/reading/relationalaesthetics.pdf.

Cheng, Meiling. 1999. "Renaming Untitled Flesh." In *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, edited by A. Jones and A. Stephenson, 196–207. London: Routledge.

Christ, Carol. 1979."Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience." In *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, edited by C. Christ and J. Plaskow, 228–45. New York: Harper and Row.

Denzin, Norman. 1995. "The Experiential Text and the Limits of Visual Understanding." *Educational Theory* 45: 17.

Ettinger, Bracha L. 2006. *The Matrixial Borderspace.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Frascina, Francis, ed. 2009. Introduction to *Modern Art Culture: A Reader.* New York: Routledge.

Fisher, R. Michael. 2007. "A Guide to Ken Wilber and the Education Literature: Annotated Bibliography." *Technical Paper No. 27.* Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

Feuerstein, Georg. 1988. "A Review Essay on Jean Gebser: Toward a New Consciousness." *Noetic Science Review* 7. Retrieved Dec. 8, 2004, from http://www.noetic.org/publications/review/issue07/r07 _Feurstein.html.

Gablik, Suzi. 2007. "Art and the Future: An Interview with Suzi Gablik by Russ Volckmann." *Integral Review* 3 (2): 271.

Garoian, Charles. 1999. *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

hooks, bell. 2000. *All about Love.* New York: Morrow.

Kamenetzky, Mario. 2000. "Consciousness and Cultural Diversity," Retrieved Oct. 24, 2004, from http://www.geocities.com/pluriveru/marioe.html.

Krishnamurti, Jiddu (1969). *Freedom from the Known.* New York: Harper Collins.

Leporda, Claudia Lindner. 2013. *Wit(h)nessing trauma in Kelsuke Kinashita's* "Twenty-Four Eyes." Edited by S. Andermahr and S. Pellicer-Ortín, Trauma Narratives in Herstory, 188–203. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lippard, Lucy R. 1976. *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art.* New York: Dutton.

———. 1995. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art.* New York: New Press.

Leggo, Carl, and Peter Gouzouasis, eds. 2008. *Being with A/r/tography.* Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Lorde, Audre. 1995. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." In *Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives*, edited by D. Apostolos-Cappadona and L. Ebersole, 203–11. New York: Continuum.

Madenfort, Duke. 1982. "Lowenfeld, myself, and the tragic dream." *Art Education* (Nov.): 22–24.

Rich, Adrienne. 2001. *Arts of the Possible.* New York: Norton.

Rowan, John. 1997. *Healing the Male Psyche: Therapy as Initiation.* London: Routledge.

Sacca, E. 1989. "Typologies in Art Education: How to Live with Them and How to Live without Them." *Visual Arts Research* 31: 120–23.

Salaman, Naomi. 1994. Introduction to *What She Wants: Women Artists Look at Men.* Edited by Naomi Salaman and Linda Williams. London: Verso.

Springgay, Stephanie, Rita L. Irwin, and S. Kind. 2008. "A/r/tographers and Living Inquiry." In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, edited by J. G. Knowles and A. L. Cole, 83–91. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Starhawk. 1978. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess.* San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Wilber, K. 1995. *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality. Vol. 1, The Spirit of Evolution.* Boston: Shambhala.

———. 1996. *A Brief History of Everything.* Boston: Shambhala.

———. 2000a. *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy.* Boston: Shambhala.

———. 2000b. *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality.* Boston: Shambhala.

———. 2006. *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World.* Boston: Integral Books.

Wilson, Teresa, and Antoinette Oberg. 2002. "Side by Side: Being in Research Autobiographically." *Educational Insights* 7. Retrieved Oct. 1, 2003, from http://www.csci.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v0702/contextualexplorations/wilson_oberg/.