

Beginning to Write for Myself

It's not easy to write an intro to something that doesn't exist yet. How can I write when I don't really know what I want to say? I've been wrestling with abstract ideas for some time now, but the actual content remains blurry. I thought I might talk about witchcraft in feminist art practices, or about the power and agency of esoteric objects (how can a static object have power over me?). I thought about violence, and gardens, or art making as irresponsible acts of creation, even.

Point is I have too many broad topics and little motivation to choose one and tame it. Each of these topics fall in together for me. They're sticky and hard to separate. So what is the red thread then? I'd say it has to do with power. The visual language of power; the assertion of dominance and dominion in a visual format. But that's the trouble; power is everything, everything has to do with power. That can't be my argument (there is no argument), so I'm back to square one.

Still, I'll try to write. I can start with my thoughts on feminism, art and witchcraft. It is always in the back of my mind, those videos of [Mary Wigman's Heksentanz](#), or the impossible forms of Loie Fuller in her [Serpentine dance](#). Wigman and Fuller lend themselves a power by mythologizing their own bodies, by morphing into something other than human (other than woman). By appropriating symbols and images of the occult, they themselves become the unknowable object. One that claims power, one that returns from a long exile (As Wigman might put it).

But I wonder, is this something that can truly claim agency? In this way, for the woman to assert power she may no longer be perceived as a woman then, right? Or perhaps only a particular kind of woman. As we know, feminist discourse often denies the hybrid identity, in favor of a broad striking conversation that omits the fact that the goals and struggles of women are not all the same. [!!!](#)

But back to becoming an object; by turning yourself into a powerful, invulnerable entity, the female body is able to claim space and dominion. She becomes self contained, deviant of the patriarchal systems that would otherwise lay claim to her actions. But in the process she must deny her own weakness, vulnerability and humanity. The paradox that then appears is that the woman as an individual ceases to exist. [*Judith Butler and her writings on vulnerability influenced me a lot here.*]

I'm making a lot of claims now, to be honest I've been sitting on this topic for a while. There is a lot more to unpack and a lot more nuance to this issue that I am not mentioning, I ought to spend more time looking into this properly. That being said, I don't know if I want to talk about women and feminism and witchcraft for my thesis. As much as I am in love with Wigman's voice, I don't know how to feel about being a woman who writes about the struggle of power and oppression, because (and this is another paradox) in order for the discourse to continue, it seems as though the woman must maintain the position of being the oppressed subject. (<--- !!!)

Maybe I should explain this a bit better; I mean that in order to enter into a feminist discourse I must then concern myself with the continuing struggle of women, by which I am supposed to have authority because of my anatomy. And perhaps this is true and necessary, (I don't want to imply that I do not believe in the suppression of women, and I have certainly always considered myself a feminist), but lately have wondered about how feminist discourse sustains itself. Women (white women) have claimed authority in this conversation by positioning themselves as the oppressed subject, and are able to appropriate power in this discourse as such. Meaning that in order to discuss feminist topics at all (and maintain this space of power), each conversation must begin by establishing that the woman is oppressed in some form, (suppressed, restrained, restricted). I am not saying that this is not true, in many cases this is absolutely valid, but I find I am hesitant to participate in a discourse that contains this prerequisite. If the conversation concerns the unjust 'othering' of women, and how we must fight for power and position in the patriarchal systems that govern us, but then equally depends on the validity of our own oppression for the conversation to hold water

at all, then how can we ever evolve the discourse? Until I find a way out of that rut, I feel it might be best for me to take some distance from it.

So then there is the garden. (you can see why this is more of a rambling than a writing)

What is interesting about the garden is its curation, and the manner with which it manipulates and is manipulated. The garden is a living thing, it requires an element of control in order to remain stable, and without control it will grow wild and choke itself to death.

The general consensus is that a garden is a space for peaceful contemplation. Comfort in spending time in a personal reflection of Eden. You labor over your garden (have power over your garden) and in return it provides a display of beauty to bring you joy. Gardens are the buzzings of life that live right under our noses. They have inspired many a romance, acting as living sites of beauty and nostalgia. They are metaphors waiting to be used, conversation pieces waiting to be had. When you're dealing with a site that holds sights, smells, sounds, tastes, textures, and a whole cast of breathing actors; who wouldn't want to show it off?

It's easy to love the garden, and it performs in all sorts of ways. Dada-Esque happenings can be found in every layer of this little outside world, it's a 'blink and you'll miss it' kind of show, with the plants as active collaborators to your moving composition. How should we feel about owning objects that participate in their own continued existence?

(Again I'm talking about objects. I'm too predictable, a broken record.)

What I love about gardens are the energies that bounce between each living form; worms to root to leaf to molecules (or are they atoms?), then to lung and back again. I learned from Annie Dillard that you'll see all sorts of happenings occurring even inside plants if you take a close enough look. Say you take any old leaf, and you zoom in on the contents of a single one of its cells. Then go a bit further, into that gooey gel that holds the stuff of the cell in place (this is the cytoplasm), then you take a single molecule of that cytoplasm and consider its contents carefully. With a dedicated look you might see 137 electrons of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen all spinning like crazy around a central ring. And within that central ring, you might just be able to make out a single atom of magnesium, hovering, as if hung by some invisible thread. What a performance, right? Even more interesting perhaps, is that if you take that single atom of magnesium, and replace it perfectly with an atom of iron, you'll get a molecule of hemoglobin, which is the same gooey substance that darts through our own veins.

I think about this often, when I consider that there may well be a discrete number of transitions that would turn me into a houseplant.

(If I were a mad scientist I might end up taking a knife to every molecule I came across, unraveling and replacing each element with a frankensteinian precision. Waiting for it to become something new, something I could recognize.)

What must also be mentioned is the deep, underlying violence to gardening as well. In order for it to be maintained you must busy yourself with cuttings, uprootings, trimmings, diggings, tearings and killings of pests. To own something living, and curating its visage as such (punishing any spontaneous outgrowths or offshoots), is brimming with notions of dominion and power, and the pleasure derived from such a thing. [2]

But the garden is violent regardless of your actions. Like Eden, your garden also threatens itself, and will destroy your curation when given the chance. It is a battleground for many critters. Stalkings, rotting bodies and orgies are happening all around you constantly, unseen and unheard. Is violence only violence if it is perceived as such?

(to be continued)

[1] Particularly when the discourse, that is oftentimes abducted by white women, becomes one that talks about the struggles of a singular female caucasian body. Effectively dismissing the

possibility to see the body as something that is multiple, and thus denying the bodies of women that do not fall neatly into a standardized definition of female oppression.]

[now maybe I'm being a bit harsh on the feminists that came before me. I'll be honest, there is much I still need to learn before making these broad sweeping statements. Such claims also dangerously disregards the influence of feminist writers such as Audre Lorde, Nawal El Saadawi, Gayatri Spivak, Alice Walker, and many others.]

[2] *Maybe I ought to start going into what a garden really is, or can be defined as. There are certain types of gardens, like those 17th/18th century ones, the old elite parks through which the rich could stroll, and admire the skills of the gardener who keeps the hedges so good and straight. If there was ever such a thing as a clean garden this would have been it. Then, when the romanticists started having their way they presented to the wide eyed public what might happen if you let a garden grow. It was a good way for them to advertise their beliefs on the sublimity of nature and how humans have mistakenly absconded from the truth of its beauty. But ironically, these new romantic gardens probably required just as much maintenance as the previous emperor styled ones. They simply became a different version of the same upkeep.*