

“ALL’S NOT WELL THAT DOESN’T END WELL (CHILD-LIKE ENCOURAGEMENT): AN OPEN LETTER TO KATE MILLETT”

[For Robin, my Male Muse]

(I have copies of this text which can be taken away after...)

This part will take about 10 minutes...

It's my gut speaking, I don't know if it's right.

**Self sufficiency is not something humans are known for. No woman is an island and all that.
Behind the scenes.**

Feminist art is good for men, and the feminist 1970's are not over. I am just going to keep writing this until I “get it right”. I actually hate art, except for a very small subset. I don't feel that most art addresses the condition of being human, and I cannot, try as I might, understand why this should not be the case. As I have said before, art is made by humans for human consumption. My cat Betsie surely does not care about what I do in my studio or in public artwise, and as artist Hannah Wilke once said, “My bird wears art history on her ass”.

If art is made by humans for human consumption, what is the message it is generally trying to achieve or transmit? What I see and understand most of the time is an art that revels in domination and hierarchy and competition, and believe you me I am no stranger to competition, even in the testosterone-fueled recesses of my mind when confronted by male art I feel is evil. And what is evil? It is more than just art that is useless. It is art which actively seeks to make other people feel bad. And this includes dealing with desire. Some homosexual men are famously bad at this angle, mistaking pornography for expression—and here I am not talking about only some purely explicit images, but also word constellations and depictions of power games, which I find negatively pornographic. I'm interested in why this bothers me so much (Jealousy? Envy? Idealism?).

Sharing—my body is my material: I get naked because women have gotten naked before me. Women have been forced to get naked and I get naked to protest this. I get naked because it is generous and unexpected. I get naked because it is a lifesign. I get naked because I use gay/queer porn. And I get naked because I think my body is prettier and easier on the eyes than my face. I want to experience beauty too. I have that queer right. And my body is a destabilizer: not ideal, but with some rounded curves and a modest penis and balls that soften the often heroic muscled male figure we are given as an example of what we might aspire to, a big cock (even though I've enjoyed a big cock once in a while) and balls. A dilemma. Which body? Racialized body? What must it feel like to be in a male body? An ageing male body like mine? What must it be like to be in a female body? A lesbian body? An intersexed body? Body without organs? Is the penis an organ? Is the clitoris? The clitoris has fairly recently been discovered to be a far larger organ than was ever realized. It blows the sensitive glans head of the penis away by comparison, enveloping the vagina. People sometimes say that even gay anal penetration is heterosexist, I say who cares? I love my prostate massaged by a penis or sometimes fingers, and I love my ass licked by a tongue. I am not so into prostheses, dildos / vibrators etc. Where is this going?

I'll tell you where it is going. It's all about “HOW IT FEELS” (even behind the scenes). I am not sure if this is a good enough text to post to Kate Millett. Kate Millett, born in 1934, is a radical lesbian bisexual feminist Fluxus artist sculptor and writer and filmmaker poet who got nationally (and internationally) famous with the publication of her book “Sexual Politics” in 1970. With the publication of that book she made the cover of “Time” magazine in the United States, her painted image painted by proto-feminist painter Alice Neel. Kate had a terrible time being a “public career feminist figure”—huge swings of highs and lows. Kate and I are manic depressive / bipolar, and all of the feelings of paranoia, confusion, insecurity, anger, frustration, mistrust, and passion etc. that go along with manic depression influenced how she lived her life and chronicled it, culminating in my opinion in the publication of her book “Flying” which was published in 1974—when she was 39 turning 40 years old. Hated by most female critics, the book was criticized for not holding up the traditions of male autobiography! One female critic at the time of publication wrote that: “A book is a work of language, nothing else. It is not flesh and it is not time. It is not life.” So: words are not flesh, they are not life. But they are. Words are all we have: written, spoken, signed, typed...filmic language, structuralism and it's discontents...breaking apart and coming together again.

If we are not to speak as males (both queer visual artists and not), about how our lives FEEL without resorting to rigid structure, spectacular tactics, distanciation (distanciation), superior (as opposed to transcendent) abstraction, elusive ironies and even cynicism, then we cannot truly fully participate in society as individuals and as parts of groups. The forms that have been built must be broken, broken and put back together again, like flocks of flying birds, like phoenixes rising from ashes, again and again, over and over again...

We are all curious how it is to be in the body of another person, and we all have feelings and perceptions about what that would feel like. As Kate Millett writes in "Flying" from 1974, "Vita is annoyed and disgusted with Fred about his work. And about his Keith. "Keith is not his peer." Self-righteously, we agree that we will never understand homosexual men. They are as different a breed as straight men. Growing up as men they do the same things to each other they would do to women if they had the chance. And with each other they lack even the defenses women have against men, the trick of frigidity, for example. Among themselves it must be no holds barred. How they must hurt each other. What agony that world must be for a sensitive man. What a trap of promiscuity and exploitation. We congratulate ourselves on being out of it, ignoring our own pernicious, if more subtle, sadism. We are women censuring men."

One of my rituals is complaining.

These young cunts (female, male, intersexed, beyond the genitals and hormones and genetics) who are reverting to the old power games are corrupting us once again. We need more productive problematics again in thinking and action. The seeds were sown in the 1970's by the feminist art movement for exactly this kind of breaking apart and coming together again.

Filling in structure in unexpected ways, spilling over borders...liquid...

Misapprehension is the enemy. When those innovative of us who are living right in the midst of conservatism (perhaps partly brought on by the AIDS crisis and now the world credit crisis) are being told to stay coloring within the lines.

Liquid melting and fusing is the way forward. Seeping through the cracks...

I am for an art that directly addresses life, which has faith in it's power. I am for an art about sharing, sharing of lived experience, a sharing of how it feels. I am for an art of consumption and digestion and excretion. I am for an art where I can expand the borders of my own body—of my own mind. Where all negativity can be spun & flung back out into the world, thrown back in it's face in a different, even idealistic form. We have so much to digest from previous generations. We want to express ourselves to the best of our abilities. Consciousness raising...why do we want to protest? Because we are still not able to relate to each other properly. "Living one's beliefs" (Ti-Grace Atkinson). What if one just does not fit in a movement, not even partly in many movements, and still has the will to survive and even flourish? I am still and always both/and.

This text has not been easy to write. Chronic depression and misapprehension...speaking out during life as active evolved avenging. Not being spoken for. In dialogue. There are barely any precedents that I can locate for what I am trying to do here.

Except for Kate. She dared to challenge, dared to reach out into the dark. Luminous and passionate.

I will help many carry her (creatively absurdist and compassionately devoted, just and truthful) torch.

Because what seems absurd, irrational, unheard of to the conservative central majority is exactly what we are aiming for in our dissent.

Be strong, even in weakness...

That's all I wanted to say. Thank you for listening.

Doubt, Litany, radical narcissisms, still too US American?...troublemaking for the queer communities