

from 'Birthdance'

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Nais(d)ance

Tiré d'un livre que l'auteure écrit / dessine, ce texte vient du chora sémiotique, tel que Kristeva le décrit, lieu des pulsions primaires, pour subvertir le symbolique. L'auto-graph(e), l'art corporel, fluide et multiple, se réalise dans des ante-representations verbales et visuelles où l'artiste dessine son autoportrait avec des aquarelles 'saignantes'.

-INBREATHOUTBREATHINBREATHOUT-
BIRTHDANCEBIRTHDANCEBIRTHDANCE

the birth word

bearing o
 w
 n

the birth canal

i mustmustmust push but my midwife asks i wait a lip remains

**whenwhenwhenswollenwithfertilityflowingbreastsriseno
earthquakereleasingfruitopeningbellyuniverseripelife**

enter here

exit from there

at this crux, this

centreftheuniverse

TRANSITIONTRANSITIONTRANSITION

now i am round i am full and you are the new moon
come forth arise appear increase grow spring be born

i heave on the bed i kneel on the floor i thrash

i push and i push and i gasp and i push and i push and i gasp

breathinbreathoutbreathinbreathout
birthdancebirthdancebirthdancebirth

ioieioiviviyioioiuiyiwiliilili hiuihihi mimipihi
eieiwiwiwioioi

we break the mesh of time and space
in the vortex closing and opening

i have forgotten

i forget

the birth word

Some fragments

'Towards a theory of embodied writing ...'

birthdance forms part of a book I am writing / painting. The writing / painting is embedded in the body of the woman, who both mirrors my experience, and who does not because the utterance is warped by the medium of the language – both verbal and visual – I must construct to de-construct the patriarchal mystifications surrounding the (woman / body) during pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding.

Écriture féminine: 'Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies –'¹ For the French feminists, Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva, an entry into the repressed of the maternal, the preverbal, archaic, semiotic, is both a subversive act and an act of self-creation.² Because the 'woman, associated with pregnancy, birth and child rearing, is placed in a category outside social discourse ... the full meaning of woman is repressed.... Écriture féminine speaks from the babybody discourse.'³ An archeology of the self: peeling away layers to release the maternal energies, the mother tongue. There is an excavation / resurrection of the babybody / motherbody. During the process of birthing I was (unexpectedly) 'there': I was wholly archaic, preverbal, semiotic. Symbolic language, the language of the 'father,' is, as I found out, a totally inadequate guide to the tremendous, primal forces that operate during birthingiving.

Auto/graph(e): body/art: the body giving birth to the child / the woman / écriture féminine. The flow of signification is not linear but multiple. It de-emphasizes the psychoanalytic (Freudian) ideas that civilization is formed by cutting off the maternal / archaic (dislocating, repressing, burying.) The mother is the base of everything, and she must be brought back into 'culture.'⁴

I homebirthed.⁵ The normal birth in a normal hospital is so full of abnormal practices that I view mainstream medicine's treatment of the woman giving birth as the locus of one of the central controlling devices of woman,⁶ confining and restricting the powerful abundance of woman's birthing as rational discourse constrains écriture féminine.

When I became pregnant I became aware of my body as never before. It was changing in fundamental and drastic ways. I began the paintings as a visual journal of my journey into the maternal body.⁷ They are self-portraits, (although none of them 'look' like me.) Done in watercolours, paint bleeding into wet paper, I entered trance states where the paint took on the fluidity of the energies within pouring out. While the pigment dried, I watched the paintings transforming, co-agulating into form from the original lake of colour. As the paintings progressed I was able to turn the representation which kept surfacing into fluidity.

Like the painting, the writing of pregnancy, birth and the post partum period also struggled with representation. I view representation as the main signifier of the dominant male discourse.⁸ The verbal and visual iconography of representation comes to us from thousands of years of patriarchal accumulation. But the kind of representation I partook of is, I hope, subversive. The pregnant woman, surrounded by red paint / blood, overflowing sensuality, jars notions of the 'femme fatale,' overloads patriarchally ascribed categories of the mother / the whore. The woman writing of birth as a primal rite of passage that precludes the male is also disruptive. And so: birthing: excessive materiality: the locus of creation: exploding the signifier (as in a woman giving birth) beyond 'the production of meaning,' and de-stabilizing the signified (of its conventional representations) in the process.

For me, the body is the unconscious, and when the unconscious thinks, it thinks the body, which is what our thought is composed of.

A gesticulation of the biology of the imagination.

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 245.
2. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian G. Gill, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), and, *Powers*

- of Horror, trans. Leon Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
3. Jane Silverman Van Buren, 'The Maternal Metaphor,' in her book, *The Modernist Madonna, Semiotics of the Maternal Metaphor*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 14.
 4. A wonderful book on the archetypal mother / earth is *The Great Cosmic Mother, Rediscovering the Religion of the Self*, by Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). A good sourcebook is, *Birth, An Anthology of Ancient Texts, Songs, Prayers, and Stories*, ed. by David Meltzer, (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981). Also, the cluster of books on the Gaia principle, such as *Gaia, A Way of Knowing*, ed. by William Irwin Thompson (San Francisco: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), are very interesting and could be analyzed as explorations of 'maternal' philosophy in the context of planetary consciousness.
 5. Adrienne Rich, in, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1986), writes of bearing her three sons under general anaesthesia in the 1950's. She felt denied of the experience of birthing as well as the process of giving birth to herself (see pp. 175-186.) I felt (even in the 1980s) that I would only be able to give birth to my child / to myself in the fullest possible extent at home.
 6. Three books I found particularly useful in de-mystifying the medical establishment's treatment of pregnancy and birth are: Mary Daly, *Gyn / Ecology, The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body, A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), and Ann Oakley, *The Captured Womb, A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984).
 7. A number of feminist art historical books on both contemporary and ancient images of woman and of the goddess enabled a realization that the pregnant female body has not been celebrated since prehistorical times until this century. These sources, along with a desire to dialogue with my changing body, motivated me to paint (my) pregnant / birthing / breastfeeding body.
 8. Representation is the reproduction of what we have been taught to see. The term 'significator' is borrowed from the tarot: it is the card through which the whole reading turns.