

Love's Interests

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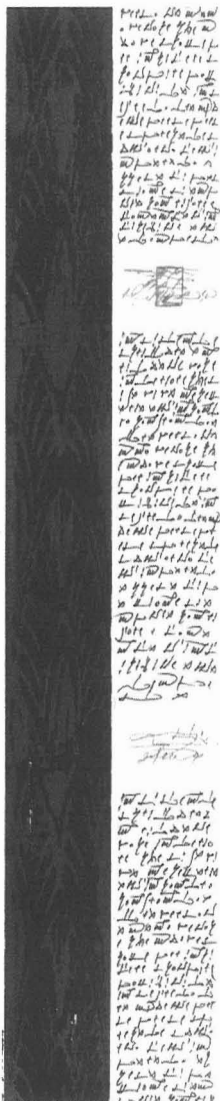
Beatrix V.T.

Manifeste esthétique/politique de Beatrix V.T. est un groupe de travailleuses culturelles féministes Italiennes qui porte une attention formelle au genre de relations engendrées lors du processus subjectif de créativité qui peut affecter la structure même du discours économique. Beatrix V.T. a l'intention d'apporter à l'économie la notion de valeur du "cadeau" en tant que le plus ancien qui événement politique fonde une culture de l'impayable à laquelle nos mères nous ont initiées.

Art. Active silence.... Silent love that does not fear Time and turns upon the future the courage of the eyes, legacy of the day being present to the Other. Art... revolutionary is its gift of being resistance and existence at the same time.... Genuinely innovative strength... advent of a new exchange. —Beatrix V.T.-ADDA

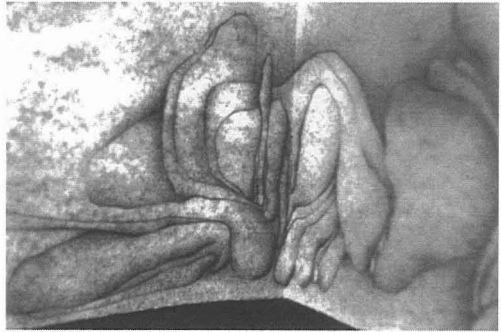
To realize the horror of exploitation which lies behind 90 per cent of our social "goods" requires such a degree of self-awareness in our everyday life that it is almost impossible to live up to it, unless it is canalized through an active political effort to lay the foundations of a new sociality, which could share as value, rather than constantly deleting as unbearable horror, the sources of its own growth.

How to elaborate a new ethics for a society that



demands an active subtraction of material and emotional resources, away from the cannibalizing trends of the market, and an investment of those same resources in wisdoms, competencies, dignities which answer the needs of the living even in the most alienating social situations.

The unpayable price of love, when lived through a dynamic of living gratitude and gift, has the power to generate such rates of living interest as to go far beyond the restrictive laws of a society unable to acknowledge its own foundations except through exclusion, othering or nostalgic abjection. In *Tessera's* last issue, Karlyn Koh asks whether it is possible to go beyond the "symbolic structuring of culture through

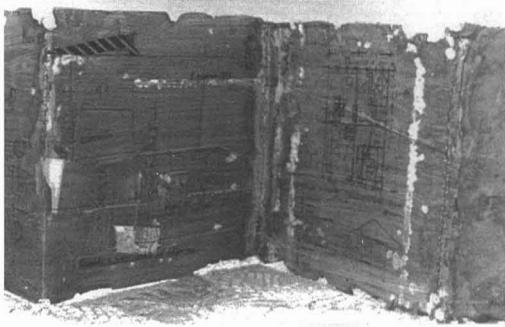


the production of naturalized heterogeneity of the feminine-maternal and primitive as the required outside within the law" (98). Her suggestion that the "manifest signs of 'racialized poetics,' 'feminist poetics,' 'working-class poetics' or 'lesbian poetics'" be read, rather, as "contesting ways of reading and writing" which challenge "the very axioms and assumptions of what constitutes 'culture'" is certainly a move in that direction. In addition, we need to be able to understand the relation between "poetics" and the socio-economic practices they engender: how, in other words, a formal attention to the kind of social relationships engendered in the subjective processes of

creativity can actually affect the very structuring of the discourse of economy in the many subtle ways that it penetrates our everyday lives.

A link needs to be drawn between the symbolic economies of subjectivity and the “scientific” discourse of economy. The problem is one of shifting the very concepts and practices of social production and social circulation of goods, away from a static opposition between exchange and use value, in which the relations are reduced to those of possession and consumption of commodities, apparently born nowhere and infinitely reproducible. We already have a model at hand for such a shift: the most powerful source of good, excluded and subtly appropriated by our sociality: the feminine-maternal, semiotic Other.

Women’s thought and political practices, even across racial, class and sexual differences, have constantly questioned and in/visibly reinscribed the sexed implications of society’s alienating mechanisms, by



pointing out the extent to which the excluded source of the capitalist wealth is locatable in women’s actual and symbolic work as life (and death) givers and carers. Beatrix V.T. is a group of Italian cultural workers which (as our latest aesthetic/ political manifesto declares:) “intends to enable... a growth of female subjectivity that would bring to the Economy the value of Gift as the most ancient political event that gives foundations to a culture of the unpayable in which our mothers have been our mentors, thus attempting to rebalance the excess of money and of the market that founds its culture upon the legalized alienation of the quality of the living” (“Prince/ples”). The gift belongs to the organic/cultural legacy of our mothers in that their very social role as life (and death) givers and carers can be read as the primal gift upon which many different social orders have been historically constructed—more or less killing, appropriating and domesticating her *puissance*. Today’s

appropriation and domestication comes through the order of an economy in which anything can be transformed into a commodity.

"[S]urplus value and surplus work are gifts and as such they should be introduced in society as formal value due to woman" (Marchionni 2). The mechanism for this is nothing else but gratitude towards the generative source of life itself, and this gratitude was inscribed in the Italian cultural context between the late eighties and early nineties as the thought and practice of sexual difference. The work of Beatrix V.T. is focused upon the economy of the *social* processes within which the subjective artistic expression takes place, thus politically inscribing the sexual distance between the semiotic and the symbolic as a positive, productive void within which new forms of sociality can be experienced and valorized.

We produce objects to see, hear, touch, even smell or taste, which retain the subjective quality of their producer(s) and function as bridges thrown across the distance between the nurturer and the nurtured: they function as gifts, carrying within themselves the signs of their production. Within our group such objects have taken different forms depending upon the specific desires and competencies of the women involved in the relationships sustaining their production. Since the early nineties, our work has moved from theatre, performance and video, to the production of art books, objects produced in limited and diversified copies, which call the reader's attention to the very materiality of the sign and image inscriptions they carry within themselves. From the *Moneta Femminile a pagamento dell'Impagabile* (Female Coin to Pay the Unpayable—Bologna, 1989) to *Carte di Credito* (Credit cards—Naples, 1997), all of our works are experiments in a sociality which is semiotic and symbolic at the same time. Semiotic because it is a sociality always in process, unpredictable as to the forms in which it manifests itself. It is a symbolic sociality in as much as it is signified through a movement of objectivization in formal aesthetic structures which contemplate a degree of distance between the integrity of the self and her external expression in signs and forms which are contingent and historically situated. This situatedness comes about through an inscribed, formal recognition of the lived processes of nurturing exchange between the self and the other. The objects bear the formal qualities of the maternal gift in as much as they manifest and create a living bond between those amongst whom they are produced and circulated.

The ability to produce and circulate objects as gifts rather than as commodities—even when the objects are circulated with the use of

money—demands of us a symbolic shift of enormous importance: it is one of going beyond the infantile oscillation between greed and envy for the mother's nurturing *puissance*. Psychoanalytically such an oscillation does not allow the child to interact in a creative way with her/his surroundings, and it engenders forms of adult neurosis. It is precisely that oscillation which is formalized in the commodity and in capitalism itself, which relies upon a separation of the production/generation of wealth and its circulation. The formal quality of an economy of gift, inasmuch as its dynamic is modulated upon the processes of generation, growth and decay, answers the call for a form of value that might begin to repay the debt to the maternal.

Works Cited

Translations from Italian are by Elena Basile.

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Images

1 & 2. Roberta Ferrara, "Scrip-Tease," from *Mixterica* (art book, 19 copies) Bologna: Art Editions Beatrix V.T., 1997.

3. Benedetta Jandolo, "Chiaro E Scuro," from *Carte Di Credito* (various artists, series presented at the art exhibition Galassia Gutemberg, Naples, 1997), pencil on paper.
4. Angela Marchionni. "Prototipo," from *Carte Di Credito*.
5. from *Amor che in forza di cavalle nulla amata eguaglia*.

