

## Subordinate clauses on entanglement, intuition, *praxis*, and being a female maker-of-things

On December 12th Juliet asked me to say something about being a female music-maker, a question to which I was surprised to find that I had no coherent or meaningful answer. Over the next month I spent many hours, several conversations and roughly 6,000 words trying to work it out, eventually coming to the conclusion that the difficulty stemmed from the deep and often buried entanglements between my womanhood and my artistic identity ('entanglement' is a concept I take from [John Borrows](#)). I have distilled all those words, spoken and written, into a series of statements of belief, following Virginia Woolf's [assertion](#) that these matters are ones about which, rather than attempting to tell the truth, "one can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold". I share this text in the hope that it might be useful, thought-provoking or consolatory, but also (perhaps mostly) because I value the question that was posed to me, and want to give an honest and serious answer. I speak about 'women' and 'womanhood' because that was the frame of the question, and because that is what I am and what I know. I do not by any means claim that these are things experienced exclusively by my gender.

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I believe

- that my womanhood has been inextricably entangled with my artistic identity, because I am one finite, embodied being, living in societies that are to varying extents patriarchal;
- that this entanglement has had especially pernicious effects on my ability to self-determine when it has occurred within the structures of musical institutions, beginning in the pedagogical institutions of childhood and continuing to those of professional adulthood;
- that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate those experiences from other experiences of the violation of my individual and bodily autonomy;
- that in recent years there has been a gradual change in my artistic trajectory towards a focus on embodied practice in which I cultivate (in the form of sound, writing, action, interaction...) what emerges from my mind-body in response to my environment, and in which the returning of what I make/do to my immediate environment creates feedback loops that I have come to consider constitutive of artistic practice;
- that in following this path I feel many resonances to classical (Aristotelian) notions of *praxis* (which in classical thought referred to the embodiment of knowledge through ethical and political action in the public sphere) in particular the notion that "there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular

situation. For the end in itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation" ([Bernstein](#));

- that this path has led me to reject, unless I can find a usable side entrance, ways of working in which formal and aesthetic goals are determined in advance;

- that it is interesting that Bernstein's description of Aristotelian *praxis* could serve equally well as a description of the artistic practice of situation- and site-specificity;

- that these currents of change in my artistic practice are connected to a search for deeper autonomy and self-determination in ways that demonstrate a relation (still too hidden for me to speak about clearly) between my practice and the entanglement of my womanhood and my artistic identity;

- that the search for autonomy is also a search for a practicable method of creatively and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of my own existence;

- that this, to a great extent, is how I understand folkloric song;

- that folkloric song is a powerful model because it demonstrates how, through the principle of transmissibility inherent to embodied technique, the individual search for autonomy and meaningful engagement becomes (and always comes from) that of others;

- that besides their instantiation of this deeply connected practice, the force of feminist and indigenous rebellions (those of [Las Tesis](#) in Chile and [Las Flores Nativas](#) in Argentina, to name two I have been following recently) derives also from the ways in which they reframe their entanglements as sources of knowledge, power and action;

- that in part I am drawn to these acts because they show me a way towards creatively and meaningfully engaging, through embodied practice, in the transformation of existences other than and beyond my own;

- that this is the same attraction that has led me in recent years to seek out, as though following a compass, the work of artists who are women;

- that Virginia Woolf was correct [when she said](#) "It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure";

- that Audre Lorde was really onto something when she framed intuition in terms of desire and the erotic, and theorised about their potential to act as driving forces in processes of self-determination and empowerment;

- that the mechanisms of desire - reaching out from our own safety and self-containment, towards something else - are the same whether our object is a person or an idea;

- that "the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire" ([Lorde](#));

- that "The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible" (ibid.);

- that "within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavours, my work becomes a conscious decision - a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered" (ibid.) ;

- that there is a relationship between: violations of autonomy; artistic practices built on self-determination; the notion of embodied technique as "transmissible and repeatable knowledge of the relatively reliable possibilities afforded by human embodiment" ([Ben Spatz](#)); the power that embodied technique has by virtue of its being a shared capacity; the intuition as erotic; the redemptive - not pathological - need and desire to care ([Lorde](#) again); the possibility for entanglement to be a source of strength; the interdependence of thought and action, means and ends; the notion of *praxis* seen in this sense as "one unified process" of interpretation, understanding and application ([Gadamer](#)); my need to sing, write and make;

- that practice is the method by which this complex web of entanglements can be lived by, with and for other human and non-human beings.

*Sophie Fetokaki, Athens, January 2020*