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ARTICLE

The Place Where We Were Last Together: Encountering the Border from Within

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'You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave!'

Hotel California, Eagles, 1977

Hotel Makedonija

The Eagles won the 1977 Grammy Award for Record of the Year for 'Hotel California'. The lyrics describe the title establishment as a luxury resort where 'you can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave.' On the surface, it tells the tale of a weary traveller who becomes trapped in a nightmarish luxury hotel that at first appears inviting and tempting. In 1994, Igor Dzambazov, one of the most talented Macedonian actors and songwriters of the time, made a cover of the song which he named 'Hotel Makedonija'. It was written to capture the traumatic period of transition that the country was going through and to uncover the passive anger that was smouldering among the youth. Funnily enough, the last verse was true as, at that time, virtually no one was able to leave the country. However what connects me with this song is far more personal.

This is my daughter on the steps in front of Hotel Makedonija (**Figure 1**). She requested that I take a picture of her in front of the red neon sign of the hotel in a small lakeside town, where we stayed this summer for a couple of days. When I saw how pleased she was with the image, I asked her why she wanted me to take a photo of her just there. Then she explained quite simply in her broken Macedonia: 'Because



Figure 1: Angelina in Macedonia.

mommy, Macedonia is a really nice hotel.' I agreed with her and said that I really like the lobby and the food. She looked at me puzzled and tried to explain: 'No, no you don't get me mommy, Macedonia is a nice hotel, it is always warm, the food is nice, granny is always happy, grandpa buys me whatever I like, the ice-cream is delicious and I can stay up later. Macedonia is a hotel, right?' And then I realised what she was talking about... For her, our country of origin is a hotel, a transitional space, and you can check out any time you like and leave as if everything stops and awaits your return. But I can never leave.

Indeed this is a unique experience, shaded with maternal ambivalence, guilt, and cultural difference. Many female artists (Ostojić 2005; Biemann 1999; Mock, Way and Roberts 2006), theorists (Ettinger 2006; Ettinger and Pollock 2011, Rogoff 2000) and activists (El-Haddad aka Gaza mom, 2008) grapple with these invisible borders that they have to cross everyday. Borders can be built from outside, they can be physical and tangible, difficult to cross, but passable. Many borders that used to hold us in place have become fluid: old borders have vanished and new ones are in the process of being erected. In this paper I intend to talk about the internal borders, imprinted on the skin, pressed as fresh lines on the artists' bodies. In the last part of the paper, I will talk about the experience of border crossing and motherhood as a highly political state, where the body is split and carries not only the child into this world, but also the cultural responsibility and intergenerational take on the borders that youngsters have to cross. As Tyler (2008, p. 5) alludes, 'theoretical and creative work on the maternal is central to the future of radical feminist politics [. . .] thinking with, and from, the maternal generates alternatives to neoliberal discourses of reflexive individualism which have stultified political resistance to global capitalism'.

As an artist, I draw on the long tradition of vigorous feminist self-insertion, where the body is refigured and it moves from the periphery to the center of analysis (Grosz 1994, p. ix). Where the story of the body and its specific history becomes a focal point that moves and changes perspectives. Arundathi Roy (2004) refers to this in her speech 'Come September':

Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I'm beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it's actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative – they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told.

In the first part of this paper, I will compare and analyse Bracha Ettinger's 'border-space' and Gloria Anzaldúa's 'borderland' concept. Then I will look at the practical implications of these concepts on the artistic work of Tanja Ostojić and Sigalit Landau. In the second part of the paper, I will reflect on the process of creating of my piece *'The place where we were last together'* in which I explore the above concept through my personal landscape.

Borderspace/Borderland

In the following section I will contemplate the philosophical and reflective writing of Bracha Ettinger and Gloria Anzaldúa about borders and bodies. Through a careful reading of their theoretical writings (Ettinger 2001, 2006; Anzaldúa 1987), I hope to explore the maternal-feminine as a structuring dimension of the human capacity for compassion and ethical relations.

Bracha Ettinger's artistic work began with painting the co-inhabited Israeli/Palestinian landscape haunted by intertwining catastrophes. Her layered paintings are depicting what she names the matrixial gaze or 'visual negotiation of the transgenerational transmission of trauma' (Ettinger 1999, p. 91). Art for Ettinger becomes a means of transporting traumatic remnants to opened futures. What is important is how Ettinger articulates the maternal as a concept for crossing difficult visible and invisible borders and transporting trauma. Ettinger's Matrix concerns the state of human subjectivity. The fact of being born is preceded by a long encounter between more than one the gestation stage. Ettinger acknowledges the matrixial dimension of subjectivity, which in her opinion stems from the specificity of feminine sexual difference. She suggests that this notion will make us acknowledge that the violence done to any other human being is at the same time a menace to our

Diary entry, Day 86

Five months pregnant. Entering the UK to enroll for my studies. Received a valid visa. Have to go through Entry clearance. I feel really tired, it was a long flight and my body has slowed down. I am waiting in the line, it seems forever, a dizzy feeling in my head, the plane was late, I have to catch a bus, it's almost midnight, I am going to this town for the first time in my life and . . . I am not alone.

Good evening.

Good evening.

(for a few more minutes, she disappears without explanation through a door behind the post, nausea)

Do you have all the support documents?

Of course.

(I am handing over a folder filled with documents, some of them quite personal, like a complete bank statement for the last three months. She reads them slowly and talks into her chin)

Who is pregnant?

I am pregnant.

(She seems rather surprised, confused and in panic)

You know you are not allowed to give birth in this country.

(I am not quite sure about the legal legitimacy of her statement, but I go with it).

I am aware; I have a return ticket for next week. Here it is.

(She is still uneasy, she leaves the post one more time. She comes back in 15 minutes, I am freezing, hungry and really exhausted)

OK, all your documents are valid. But, you have to go through a medical examination.

(My body is alert)

Can you please tell me what does that mean?

Well, usually it's a thorough examination, can include gynecological check, X-Ray. . .

But, I am pregnant.

Well, the doctor will know.

(She leads me towards a back room, I am considering what I shall do, my brain is slow)

Oh, they are closed, they work only till 10 pm. Well, next time then.

(She leaves, I am standing in front of the closed office, speechless. Was all of this necessary?)

own personal humanity because my humanness was from the beginning shared. We are all born of women.

We live in a world driven by intense greed, self-interest, national, racial, religious and ethnic divisions which have generated new kinds of wars and new kinds of violence: what Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero names *horrorism*: systematic and planned violence against the vulnerable (Cavarero 2009). Ettinger suggests that the true horror of the atrocities committed against defenceless others, wherever it occurs, is not only that their precious lives have been violently destroyed, bereaving families, destabilizing communities, erasing cultures. Acts of violence against others violate what is the gift of feminine sexual difference to humanity: a foundational sense that in becoming me, I became human always with another; to whose trauma and pleasure I may be creatively connected. She suggests a radically new possibility: art as compassion. (Ettinger in Pollock 2010)

Bracha Ettinger (2000) names artworking a 'transport station of trauma.' Her paintings entwine aesthetics and cultural memory with internal personal space. Pollock argues that her work illuminates the challenges we now face in these crises of political violence and despair. The Eurydice series is a visual exploration of borders and memory. Eurydice is a mythic, feminine figure suspended between two deaths, always at risk from the deadliness of a returning gaze (2009, p. 2). For this series, Ettinger adapted the process of photocopying. The found image is first reworked by being passed through the photocopier. Ettinger interrupts the machine, before the source-image can be sealed. All she gets from the machine is the ghost of an image. Pollock writes about this process: 'In its new

materiality, what was once a photograph is now but the fragile trace of a past with which we can never fully reconnect.' (2010, p. 856). To evoke this liminal space, Ettinger uses found documents from public and family archives of photographs, texts by Freud and Lacan, drawings by Freud's analysands, which she passes repeatedly through an photocopy machine, layering a single, heavily textured paper with several images from diverse historical sources so that traces of many histories mingle across time and space on this newly created co-inhabited ground that she calls borderspace. Bracha suggests that in artworking 'something' happens from which the artwork emerges. Pollock (2010, p. 859) elaborates on this:

The artwork is thus to be understood not as the vehicle for a pre-created message. It is instead a screen on which this event—personal (from the inside) or historical (from the outside), from past and present—is projected and unconsciously shaped. Towards this screen (itself a created borderspace) the viewer inclines without knowing the event that has made the work emerge. This borderspace that is opened can, none the less, generate affects and responsiveness that is in part coming from in me, an unknown other to this work and its event, and from the others and the histories I carry, known or unknown. The aesthetic event is thus an encounter of bits and pieces of many subjects, past and present, known and unknown [. . .] The artwork is thus understood as an event; it is also a (potential) encounter. The encounter may not happen for every viewer. [. . .] But the invitation is there to make one's own borders fragile enough to register the being [. . .].

A borderspace is not a boundary, a limit, an edge, a division. It is space shared between different subjects who, while they can never know each other, can, nevertheless, affect each other and share, each in different ways, a single event. Ettinger's borderspace is working in close proximity to what Anzaldúa (1987, p. ix) describes as 'borderland'. She states:

The actual physical borderland that I am dealing with [. . .] is the US/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.

Anzaldúa is eloquent in her analysis of the psychological, the sexual and the spiritual borderland; I would add that technological borderlands could also be included. Particularly the screen as a border territory because, as Anzaldúa (1987, p. 19) continues: 'living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. It is living in the shadows, living being constantly divided'.

This brings us back to the experience of an actual border as the boundary line which has a concrete location and a set of geographic attributes. In reality, however, it is far more complex, borders are traversed on both sides, with a constant leakage of hostile bodies, never able to sustain the separations and protect the inhabitants in the way that the states' huge political mobilization set out to do (Rogoff 2000, p. 136). For Braidotti, being nomadic, homeless, an exile, a refugee, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, is not a metaphor. There are highly specific geopolitical and historical locations; it is history tattooed on the human body. One may be empowered or beautified by it, but most people are not; some just die of it (Braidotti 2002, p. 3). In contrast, for Anzaldúa (1987, p. 3):

borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.

This goes hand in hand with what Trinh Minh-Ha describes as 'boundary events' when she talks about her work process. For Trinh Minh-Ha, boundaries signal endings and beginnings at the same time; 'there where one stops to exit is also there where one stops to enter anew' (2005, p. 207). Boundary events are situated at the edge of many binaries, where thinking is acting on both sides. What comes out also comes in, what reaches great depths also travels great distances. Lucy Lippard (1990, p. 283) adds to the previous discussion,

the boundaries being tested today by dialogue are not just 'racial' and national. They are also those of gender and class, of value and belief systems, of religion and politics. The borderlands are porous, restless, often incoherent territory, virtual minefields of unknown for both practitioners and theoreticians.

Lippard suggests that one's own lived experience, respectfully related to that of others, remains the best foundation for social vision, of which art is a significant part. In addition to this, Francis Alÿs contemplates the poetic/political. Alÿs writes that it is in fact important to spread stories and to generate situations that can provoke (through their experience) a sudden unexpected distancing from the immediate situation, questioning assumptions about the way things are, and opening up a different vision of the situation, as if from the inside. He adds:

I think the artist can intervene by provoking a situation in which you suddenly step out of everyday life and start looking at things again from a different perspective-even if it is just for an instant. That may be the artist's privilege, and that's where his field of intervention differs from that of a NGO or a local journalist. Society allows (and maybe expects) the artist, unlike the journalist, the scientist, the scholar or the activist, to issue a statement without any demonstration: this is what we call poetic license. (Alÿs, 2010, p. 39)

Thus taking a firm position on the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political' becomes imperative.

Border as encounter in the work of Sigalit Landau and Tanja Ostojić

The constant shifting within the dichotomies of private and public is paramount in the artwork of Tanja Ostojić and Sigalit Landau. Their approaches go beyond established borders which have to be crossed physically. Their work reiterates the border as an encounter that stretches far beyond the actual demarcation in the ground.

Sigalit Landau in her piece *'Barbed Hula'* from 2000 investigates the position of women within political power regimes. Found describes the piece:

A female body stands naked against a shoreline. Head back, face out of sight, attention is drawn to her torso, she spins a hoop around her waist. But within seconds, we realize that the hoop is made out of barbed wire. We watch as the spikes pierce the skin, red pools of blood. The body's own borders damaged and rendered raw. (2009, p. 24)

The body is the artist's own and the act was a private performance for only the camera and coincidental passers-by, enacted at sunrise on a beach in South Israel. Enacted against the Israeli shoreline, on a beach between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, the artistic act performed for the camera was located on the distinctive edge of the physical territory that encloses one of the most enduring conflicts of our time. Describing her work as a 'senso-political act', suggestive of her emphasis on an embodied response, Landau provokes a visceral encounter. Through the mediation of video, Landau's body is separated from the viewer by the border of the screen. The screen functions to both unite and divide, introducing another site of instability. Rather than simply confusing borders or attempting to transgress their limiting hold, Landau's performing body here exposes a necessary tension central to the borderline itself. Anzaldúa also suggests the borderlands are loaded with meaning. While borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them, a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. Anzaldúa's borderland is

Letter to my daughter 53

I am 11, writing my homework in the corner of my parent's living room. The TV is on my left hand side, disturbing images perpetuated on the reportage about Kraina in Croatia. I can catch glimpses of people in lines, burning villages, muddy soldiers. And then a shattering image captures my whole body. They are entering a half burned house, everything is on the floor and then there is this cradle, beautiful wooden cradle, untouched in the midst of this mess. Empty. I murmur to myself: I will never have children, never, ever.

in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants: the women, the mothers, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato; in short, those who cross over, pass over or go through the confines of the 'normal'.

The encounter of borders became a theme that many artists from the Balkan region integrated into their work (Simic 2011, Paci 2005, Ivekovic 2005 etc.). Even when crossing violent state borders, the body still carries with it the imbalance and the notion of being different, challenged, objectified. This is an especially complex issue in female art, particularly the representation of the female body in such a condensed situation. There is the underlying danger of objectification whenever the female body is exposed to the gaze of the viewer. In this case the over-identification can be used more productively as a tool to retain a certain distance from the mimed regime and, as claimed by Zizek (1993), to frustrate that same regime of power. This is the method that Tanja Ostojić uses in her inter-medial project *'Looking for a Husband with EU Passport'* (2001–2005) to discuss the border encounter as an autobiographical act (**Figure 2**).

The first phase of the project *'Looking for a Husband with EU Passport'* consisted of a simple Internet advert with an image of the artist's shaved body, followed by the distribution of leaflets and posters in a shopping mall in Skopje, for the project *'Capital and Gender'* in 2001. The next step was a website that enabled correspondence between the artist and her 'suitors'. The project gradually moved from the realm of 'imaginary' to the realm of the 'real' when the artist met and married one of the 'virtual' suitors (the German artist Clemens Golf who deliberately delved



Figure 2: Tanja Ostojic *Looking for a Husband with an E.U. Passport* 2000–05 photos: Rasmus Jurkatam.

into the 'art-marriage' adventure). The final stage of this long-term art and life commitment took place in the realm of complex intertwining of conditions: the artist started engaging with the German state authorities in order to acquire the long-awaited Schengen visa and underwent seemingly endless procedures for long-term residency. After three years of 'fictive' marriage, the couple separated and filed for a 'real' divorce. Obviously, it is very difficult to make the borderline between the 'fictive' and the 'real' in this context, the body and the social freedom offered in exchange for a passport. The main objective of Ostojic's work is over-identification with the established regimes of power and representation through which the objectification of the female body usually takes place. Her body becomes the medium that she uses in order to stress the necessity to question these issues.

In both pieces, the body carries the process of crossing, the gender figure becomes the articulator of the border; that fragile line marking the edge of the national body. It is from here, on this body, according to national(ist) discourse, that all disease, illegality, contamination, and poverty come. This is the most vulnerable, penetrable site, the place where anxieties tend to concentrate. But both Ostojic and Landau

quite vividly carry in their work the autobiographical impulse, never acknowledging that the body has become completely translated into information and technologized in order to be legalised. When we cross the border, our body is demonstrated and performed, exposed and hidden. Similar to medical sites (hospitals, surgeries etc.), border sites (border controls, detention camps etc.) radically expose the body and create extreme conditions of separation between feeling and action. This heightened stasis of separation became a provocation for my piece *'The last place where we were last together'* (2012).

Sewing the Border

The process of marking, of dividing has in fact formed my identity. I come from a country that is divided¹. As long as I can remember, people around me have spoken about divisions, splits and marks lingering from the process of discontinuity. I come from a country that has a divided name. And perhaps that accounts for my body always feeling fragmented trapped in liminal spaces. Naturally, I question the form that a border takes, trying to challenge its accessibility, permeability and potential as a contact and communication zone. In the *'The place where we were last together'* I looked at the state in which the boundaries of inside and outside, self and other, dissolve. I took the maternal as a starting point, since the maternal body points to the impossibility of closure, to a liminal state where the boundaries of the body are fluid.

I explored the maternal through the screen as an object that protects on one hand, and obscures on the other. The screen is a curtain, a window, a digital representation. I was inspired by the long tradition of how women interact with screen as shape, object and signifier. Women hide behind screens, pray in front of screens,

¹ Macedonia officially celebrates 8 September 1991 as Independence Day, with regard to the referendum endorsing independence from Yugoslavia, albeit legalising participation in a future union of the former states of Yugoslavia. Robert Badinter as the head of the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the former Yugoslavia recommended EC recognition in January 1992. Macedonia became a member state of the United Nations on April 8, 1993, eighteen months after its independence from Yugoslavia. It is referred to within the UN as 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', pending a resolution of the long-running dispute with Greece about the country's name.

hesitate and tremble at their sight, feel in control or out of their comfort zone, women are framed by the screen and are able to change the frame. Here I explored screens in a more subjective, evocative way. I am concerned with the term 'screen' and with the different layers that come from its etymology². Is the screen sheltering or revealing? Turkle (2007, p. 307) writes that the screen can be used as a form of bricolage, a style of working in which one manipulates a closed set of materials to develop new thoughts. Or assemblage is, as Latour (2004) puts it, how the screen becomes defined through the way it is connected to material practices, human and non-human, thus articulating its potentiality. The screen was fundamental in shaping my experience as foreigner and mother during my research. Onscreen presence was maintained through use of Skype with the family in Macedonia, video clips and photographs, where mothering was reassembled through the notion of distance and abjection. The relationship with my children and the (in)visibility of my (pregnant and mother) body was a crucial element determining the screen shape, form and material. The shifting between analog and digital screens was an element that determined the method used to document and reflect on the working process.

Diary Entry No 6

I had my first daughter by Caesarian. My body was marked clearly after this experience; I had a borderline on my stomach where my first daughter had met the world for the first time, while I was asleep under anesthetic. During my second delivery (this time in UK) I was offered induction to speed up my birth. The nurses who were examining me and helping me to prepare saw my scar. She was explaining the process and what is happening at different stages. She said that if the induction did not help the process, I would have to have another Caesarian. Almost like a joke she said: 'You know they haven't done a good job with your previous one, our doctors will fix that, so your scaring will be almost invisible.' Suddenly that line, the sewing process that marked the birth of my first child, became a cultural divider of how things are done properly and better. How things are done here and there. And me in between, sewing the memories, patching up the experiences.

² The word screen – as in the screen-based media and its plural form screens, the screens of the digital media – has become a crucial word in the cultural, social, technological and economic landscape of communication. The word has a long history in English. In Skeat's Etymological Dictionary (1963[1879–82]), screen is given two definitions and three broad meanings: 'that which shelters from observation, a partition'; and also 'a coarse riddle or sieve'. The comma in the first definition seems to make light of the distinction between sheltering from observation and providing a partition.

I chose the act of sewing to draw the line, the craft of fastening or attaching objects using stitches made with a needle and thread to stitch three different stories and screens together. To sew the line on screen was an obvious choice to reflect on the possibilities for encounter. This practical exploration entwined aesthetics and cultural memory with internal personal space. The work illuminated the challenges we face during crises of political violence and despair.

The first room was set up as a conventional single channel video installation. There were two sofas where the audience could sit and watch the looped video on a big digital screen. I decided to start with this setting, since the moving images and illuminated surfaces of screen-reliant works provoke a different kind of attention from other art objects, both psychologically and physiologically. On the most basic level, moving and illuminating imagery insistently solicits the observer's gaze and in so doing disciplines his or her body. Illuminated media screens tend to immediately draw the spectator's attention in any context, if only for an instant. The sound played loud, so the harsh mechanical process of machine sewing dominates the room when you enter. The action in the video is quite simple, a woman is sewing on a machine, black stitches on white fabric. But the video slowly unfolds and the sound fades out, while the fabric changes color and starts to melt in a pixelated image, merging into skin-like surface. My intention was to talk about how borders are threaded on the human body and how the marks will never fade away, although the wounds will heal.

The second room was split into two parts. The first object was a pristine white box, with a small glass screen in it, where you can look at the remnants of the last place where two bodies were together. The mother and the child. And a needle, that made the stitch, that remains visible on the female body, a mark that burns with memory (**Figure 3**).

The third room, the last piece was a cradle. In an empty, silent white space. Behind a transparent screen of curtains. When you approached it, you could see the white fabric from the first video, and the black stitch dividing the cradle in two. A sharp shadow on the floor, you wonder, who was sleeping here? It is nearly the same as the cradle of my childhood nightmare, where is the child who was in that cradle? (**Figure 4**)

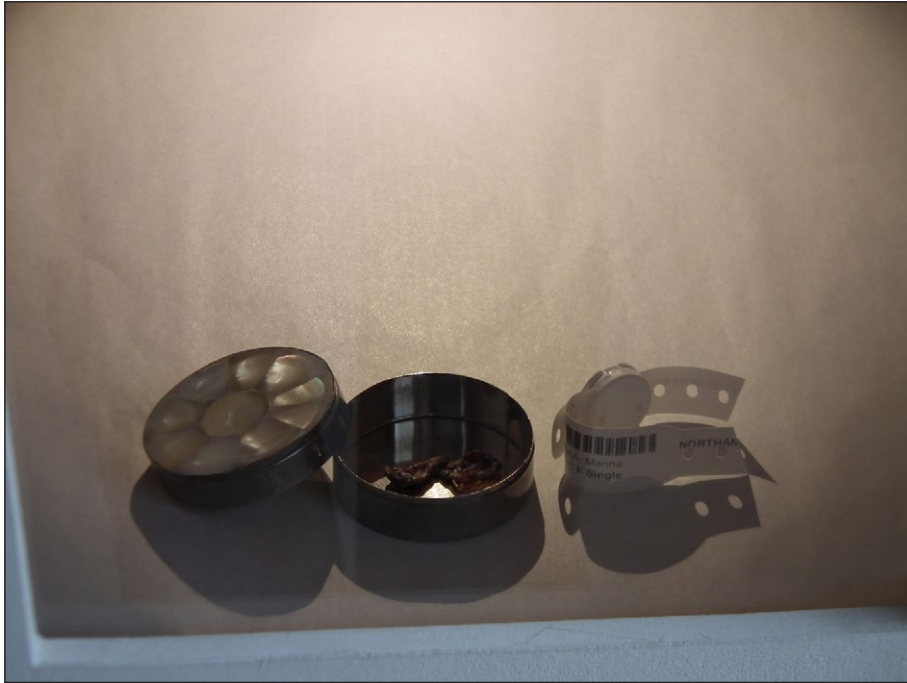


Figure 3: Elena Marchevska *"The place where we were last together"* 2011, installation.



Figure 4: Elena Marchevska *"The place where we were last together"* 2011, installation.

In this piece I looked on the border as an encounter. This encounter remains firmly marked on my body, and is transmitted to everyone who brushes past me. Bracha suggests that through artwork this encounter can appear. The artwork is a screen on which this event – personal or historical, from past and present – is projected and unconsciously shaped (**Figure 5**).

Letter to my daughter 96

When I started working on the last part of my PhD, I started thinking about my mothering and my culture in a different way. The inevitability of failure. I become aware of different ways in which my anecdotes about my life can be read. I am worried about how my stories sound, what they reveal about my past.

I read Bracha again, she describes maternal subjectivity as a process of mother and child becoming together, mutual but different, recognizing each other before knowing. The womb is a site of 'hospitality and compassion for the other in their otherness' (Pollock, 2010). I am comforted by the idea of mutual care between mother and child – an ongoing becoming together. I dwell on the possibility of compassion. I think of you asking me what my childhood had been like.

Same as Bracha, I was a witness to witnesses. When I perform or when I listen I am that too. Silent witness. No narrative.

Aftermath

While working on *'The place where we were last together'* scholarly and artistic methodologies finally coherently came together by intertwining crucial theoretical text with strategic first-person voices (my own, my daughter's, my family's). My thinking on 'voice' bears an affinity with that of feminist law professor and writer Drucilla Cornell: 'I use 'voice' in contrast to muteness that makes feminine 'reality' disappear because it cannot be articulated. Muteness not only implies silencing of women, it also indicates the 'dumbness' before what cannot be 'heard' or 'read' because it cannot be articulated' (1991, p. 3). This links to Bacon's concept of the 'voice of her body' where she asks the crucial question of how a woman artist can be sure that the (artistic, academic, personal) 'voice' she has is being received in the way that is

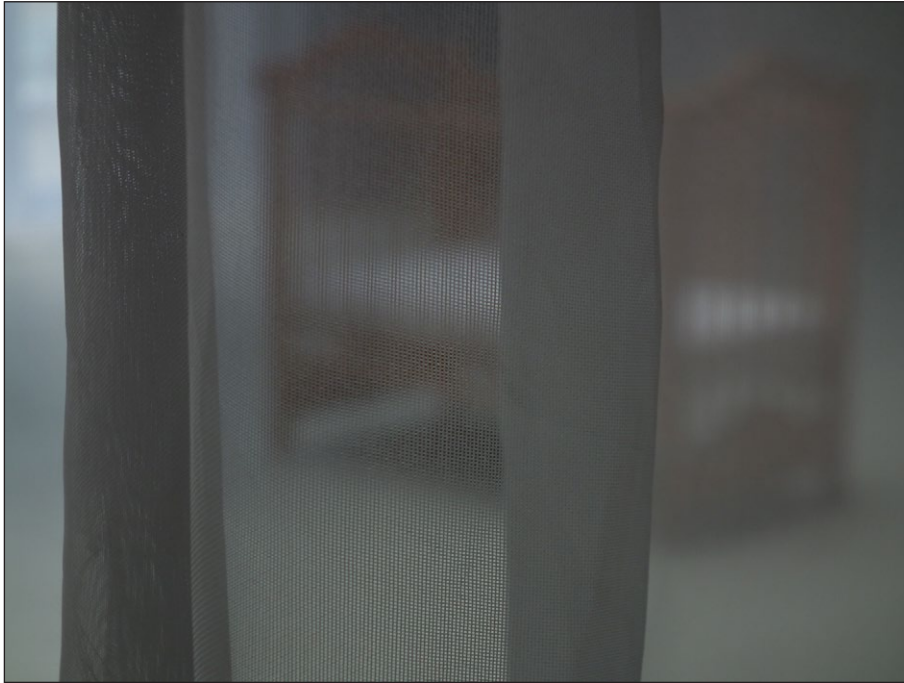


Figure 5: Elena Marchevska “*The place where we were last together*” 2011, installation.

important for her. She further suggests that in order to answer this, the artist needs to attend to a careful process of inner listening and allowing that provides the ground from which she can move to find her body/self (2010, p. 72). Working with feminist concepts of intersubjectivity (Ettinger 2006, Cavarero 2011, Bacon 2010) in ‘*The place where we were last together*’ I explored how to empathetically be in the place of the other and inside one’s self, how to care for another and one’s self. The visual exploration of borders and motherhood that I worked with here renounced patriarchal, sexist, and racist attitudes that separate body from the mind, the intimate from the political, and human beings from each other.

In ‘*The place where we were last together*’ both of my daughters are invisibly present. How to find a way to tell you, my daughters, why I am doing this. A string of letters about my joy and pain, ambivalent motherhood on the border. Remnants of our bodies, umbilical cord, empty cradle, and the process of sewing, sewing everything together on screen, paper, fabric. Through this practical exploration

desire paths were sewn, paths in relation to my maternal task to establish links between borders and cultures. Drawing on De Certeau's (1988, p. 117) notion of 'space as a practical place' Nicholas Crane describes desire paths as:

the imprints of 'foot anarchists', individuals who had trodden their own routes into the landscape, regardless of the intentions of government, planners and engineers. A desire path could be a short cut through waste ground, across the corner of a civic garden or down an embankment. They were expressions of free will, 'paths with a passion', an alternative to the strictures of railings, fences and walls that turned individuals into powerless apathetic automatons. On desire paths you could break out, explore, feel your way across the landscape. (2000, p. 131)

When I delved into this realm, by intuitively following my practice, I could not imagine that it would open up so many sections and passages built by other artists. Or that all of them would overlap with my own memories and artistic process. I dived into an area subjective and problematic, difficult to navigate, but also so familiar and comforting at the same time, that I ostensibly knew that I was on the right track. The past is not separate from the present. I am reminded of this when making decisions for my children every day, on multiple occasions. The past is constantly broken down and reintegrated into the present.

Letter to my daughter Number 59

Since the minute I have you in my arms the name comes. Strange and unthinkable at the beginning, it sticks to my tongue and I say it – Marina. I look at your father, he nods in approval. Marina, Marina, Marina. Your eyes are focused on my face, so strange, I always thought that newborns are not able to recognize patterns. Marina... You are born on an island, surrounded with water; I was born in a landlocked, mountain country, dry and windless.

As Marc Augé explains, in certain parts of Africa, a mother who delivers her child outside her place of residence will often choose a name for the child which is

derived from some feature of the landscape in which the birth took place (1995, p. 53). Augé thus uses this as an example of what he terms 'anthropological place': that is, the notion of space and place as constituent 'of identity, of relations and of history' (Augé in Prescott, 1995, p. 51).

I wish to agree with Augé, but this birth experience was so dislocated from spaces and places. It almost feels like it happened only in my head. I only had you, as living proof that something happened. You, my bridge, my arc, my beholder and the water, the water, everywhere.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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