

Presentation NAPAR Conference ASU, Tempe, Arizona
Saturday January 22, 2011 3.35 – 4.10 pm Mohave Room

Barbara: Good afternoon and welcome to the labyrinthal womb of the Gestare, Art Collective.

I am Barbara Bickel an artist, researcher, and educator. I'm an Assistant Professor in Art Education and Women Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale where I teach art as an inquiry and meaning making process.

Medwyn: I am Medwyn McConachy a community artist, teacher and ritual priestess. I create labyrinths, performance rituals, photographic and textile artworkings that express my deep love of the Earth and co-engage others in wit(h)nessing Her ancient wisdom. I live on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada.

We are two members of the Gestare Art Collective. Gestare is Latin for the verb 'to carry' in the womb. The collective evolved within a framework of women's spirituality and began collaboration in 2007. The four founders of the collective currently live in 4 different geographic locations.

As women who are committed to living as process artists in relationship with each other, the earth, cosmos and all its inhabitants, we honour gestation within our inquiry and pedagogical practices. Our individual art practices include mixed-media drawing, sound composition, improvised vocal sounding, video, photography, textiles, writing and ritual arts. We share our individual art practices and develop our collaborative projects through digital communication and artist residencies.

Barbara: Our presentation today invites you into the artworkings, (by which we mean the art and the processes), of the Gestare Art Collective spanning two artist residencies at The Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts on Toronto Islands, Canada in 2009 and 2010. As spiritual feminist artists we engage a praxis of inquiry through ritual labyrinth making, walking, sounding, and spontaneous movements documenting and creatively rendering these experiences. Today we

give you a glimpse of artworkings from individual and group arts-based inquiries into issues such as: the devastating BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; the politically fraught 2010 G20 summit gathering of global leaders in Toronto; the embrace of the culturally repressed qualities of Matrixial borderspace(s) that disrupt rational phallogentric language; the creation of a body parable through placentas that might communicate a transformative philosophy of birth; and encounter with the modern, singular 'artist' myth that is so well defined and perhaps even 'deified' within the larger phallic sphere of the art-world, and to bring forward deeper understandings of what it means to be ethical co-relational collaborative artists. Collaboratively inquiring requires that we reach deeply into relationship with each other, our cultural environments and the natural world. This exposes and brings the fragility of individual and collective vulnerabilities into the field of our inquiries.

Medwyn: The labyrinth, which we have brought into this space for you to experience today, is one of our inquiry tools. It is an ancient cross-cultural symbol that offers a single pathway through a number of circuits to the centre and back again, its unicursal design echoing the spiral form in nature. Through creating and walking within the unbound boundary of the labyrinth the imagination can be guided into transformative patterns of thought, pass through gateways into the ancestral world, and potentially restore com-passionate interactions between self, society, and the earth. In our labyrinth workings we find the labyrinth emits vibrating threads of connection between us as artists for our on-going site-related artworkings.

Barbara: In our theorizing and writing about our artworkings we draw from the concepts of *chora*, the ancient Greek word for space, and *matrixial copoiesis*, a radical theory developed by feminist artist/philosopher/psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger that situates itself in the symbolic intrauterine space of the womb. In the collective's labyrinth ritual praxis, pre-linguistic sounds and movements of *chora* are activated while matrixial bordercrossings and linkings reveal collective and individual significations, cultivating shifts in perception.

Chora, as understood by philosopher Julia Kristeva is related to language-- as the space between-- where signification occurs in the "cleavage between words and meanings". In addition, Kristeva compares *chora* to the maternal experience of birth-giving. *Chora* is also connected to the word chorus. Contributing to the chorus of sound is a foundational practice of the art collective and is a component of the gestation and birth of our artworkings together.

Medwyn: Ettinger's post Lacanian theory is radical in that it places the female body as the originary source of every human being. Starting in the gestating space of the womb, the theory is thus pre-gender. Ettinger describes copoiesis as an aesthetical and ethical co-emergence that occurs through intimate encounters between several partners, *I* and *non-I*. In these co-encounters partial subjectivities are shared and exchanged. This creates a vulnerable and fragile connection to other because we are not individual celibate subjects but relationally and ethically bound to the other. Her art and theory offer an aesthetic and ethical feminine-based relational language to articulate our collaborative Gestare art praxis. Her theory calls us to critical ethical awarenesses of the impact our artworkings have on each other and others with whom we are resonating within the matrixial sphere, whether cognized or uncognized. Ettinger's theory evolved within her individual art practice, is impacted by her practice as a psychoanalyst and by her location as a first generation child of Holocaust survivors. In contrast to Ettinger's solo art practice, the Gestare Art Collective enters the matrixial realm collaboratively, extending the arts-based understandings of potential connectivity, wit(h)nessing and co-poiesis found in Ettinger's solo artworkings.

Barbara: During the residencies we collectively co-created four performance rituals on the beach as well as engaged our individual art practices. We experienced working and wit(h)essing on/with the land and the water as a gift. The art, as an action and expression of wit(h)nessing and borderlinking with the earth, becomes a gift in return to the earth and the community.

We've designed today's presentation to offer you an abbreviated experience of our labyrinthal matrixial collaborative artworkings. We start with a meditation on images of our individual art and video stills from our group performance rituals accompanied by a mixed audio recording of a recent sounding we made. Following the mediation we will invite you into an experiential process of soundmaking yourself while walking the labyrinth. A chance for you to engage with the maternal space of the chora and the matrixial. We will guide you through this and participation is entirely by your choice. We hope to have time for you to ask questions and share some observations about your experience before we complete the session.