

Preface

Exposure: Who will read this body?



Image 1

Bickel, B. (2003). *Who will read this body?* video still. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(video camera documentation by Nane` Jordan)



Image 2

Bickel, B. (2003). *Who will read this body?* video still. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(video camera documentation by Nane` Jordan)

Exposure

I open this thesis with images (1 & 2) of my female body, the artist/researcher/ teacher's body, in the literal act of writing upon my flesh. The still images come from the video that documented the private performance ritual that began the creative process of this autoethnographic and a/r/tographical thesis project. The invitation to the thesis art installation nine months later carried this image (2). It is not always clearly visible what I, the artist/researcher, am doing.

The images have been responded to as intense and vulnerable. Often viewers are uncomfortable looking at them, at times responding viscerally with nausea. The images make visible a body-based aesthetic of immanence,¹ which for many is the aesthetic of the abject² body. The thesis project culminated in a multi-media art installation entitled *Who will read this body?* It documented the often fragmented and uncertain journey of integrating text and the body through art and writing.

I documented the private performance ritual, which became key to the research. I chose to exhibit the video and black & white photo documentation in art installation pieces to the public. The decision to expose my autoethnographic

¹ Immanence is used here within a sacred context, meaning "... that the Goddess, Gods, are embodied, that we are each a manifestation of the living being of earth, that nature, culture, and life in all their diversity are sacred. Immanence calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth, to live with integrity and responsibility" (Starhawk, 1989, p. 10). In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in her classic *The Second Sex*, uses the term 'woman as immanence' where women ...are defined as Other, marked as different, permanently subordinated to and overshadowed by male subjectivity. In a world so ordered women are enmeshed in the material, local, familial, biological, and relational. They lack an authentic subject position from which to act freely and to choose projects of self-realization which expand into an indefinitely open future. Defined and constrained by their position as Other, women are 'doomed to immanence'" (Warne, 2000, pp. 264-265).

² "In Kristeva's schema, the abject is always ambiguous: desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous; and moreover, the process is never simply one of repudiation: 'It is something rejected from which one does not part' (1992:4)." (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 7).

research as art was extremely difficult. It is a private and personal act made public and thus breaks many cultural taboos. In my dilemma of deciding upon the significance of exhibiting this art I asked myself: How can exposing images of the body that illicit shame and disturbance be a form of pedagogy? My response was (and is): modeling vulnerability as a woman in a sexist world is, teaching, reminding, embodying, validating, liberating, and gift. The art demonstrates the act of troubling the reconciliation between the mind and the body³. It is meant to be witnessed and remembered, questioned, thought about and written about; as I endeavor to do in this thesis.

³ I am aware that the use of the words *body* and *mind* in this Preface re-inscribe an oppressive modern dualism. This accurately portrays my own initial privileging of the body over the mind. I have throughout this thesis journey realized my own complicity in this split and use body/mind in the remainder of the thesis.