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I met Faith Wilding (http://www-art.cfa.cmu.edu/www-wilding/index.html) at the Digital Secrets conference at Arizona State University in the Fall of 2000, where she was performing with the SubRosa (http://www.artswire.org/subrosa/) collective. In their presentation of the BioTech Sex and Gender Education Show (http://www.artswire.org/subrosa/SexEd%20Web/index.html), SubRosa facilitated a genetically sound and professionally approved union between my genetic materials and those of Joel Slayton. (Your children *will* work for our children.) Wilding is an artist, activist, professor, administrator, serial collaborator, and prolific scholar of electronic culture. In this email Interview conducted in May of 2001, I asked Faith about artworlds, collaboration, interventionist art, and the models that lie behind activism and activist art today.

(1)Brett Stalbaum: Your career has intersected with a vast array of the smaller artworlds that constitute the capital A, "Artworld". A modest list would include your work in traditional media and as a performance artist, both of which are highly exhibited and published within the realm of the 'Art Institutional Complex'. You participated prominently in very influential conceptual/activist/feminist art movement(s) from the 60's through the present. You are a serial collaborator, from your early work in Judy Chicago's Womanhouse, through Critical Art Ensemble and currently SubRosa. You have experience in academia as both professor and administrator. In recent years, you have been prominent in electronic/network art and activist discourse/work, and are a respected scholar and prolific writer on activism, feminism, art and electronic culture. Based on your deep experiential perspective, the place I would like to start is by asking you what your analysis of the 'Artworld' is at this moment?

(1)Faith Wilding: You are right to point out that the "Artworld" is composed of many intersecting smaller worlds which together create quite a broad cultural economy. Oppositional or "alternative" cultural workers often imagine a monumental bunkered Artworld with an impenetrable hierarchy of museums, galleries, international shows, important curators, collectors, magazines, etc. which they will never crack. And of course this system does exist in spectacle. Monumentality after all is the spectacular business of capitalist culture. But it lives and feeds off a much more fragmented cultural economy where varying and shifting power relations operate. Oppositional and resistant cultural producers must be careful not to romanticize and essentialize "outsider" positions because these are easy to categorize, co-opt and render ineffectual. In fact, I don't think radical and resistant artists should spend a lot of energy worrying about co-optation since it will happen anyway--rather, we must think about being flexible with our own tactics and moving faster than they can move. The strategy is to pirate anything we can from the top-feeders and use it to nourish the bottom feeders. More than ever, inventive tactical thinking and action are necessary. I have been around long enough to know first hand that the Art System works in cycles.

In my own case I experienced it something like this: Feminist art (and the Feminist Art Program which produced Womanhouse) was cutting-edge and hot in the 70s; condemned and silenced as essentialist and non-theoretical in the 80s; rediscovered, imitated, and historicized in the 90s; and food for dissertations, publications, exhibitions, and new formations–especially cyberfeminist formations in the 21st Century. I don't feel connected to (or very interested in) the Artworld at the moment except insofar as it is always interesting to see how its trends show the surfacing of what has been brewing in minoritarian cultures for a while. A good example is how museums like the Whitney (BitStreams) or San Francisco MOMA are now jumping on the electronic and net art bandwagon. Of course, it is their job as museums to do so as this is a significant new wave in art making. On the other hand they as usual are museumizing this work and showing work that is for the most part easy, pleasurable, and entertaining. And of course it is still on the model of the art star or lone genuis, the signatory, owned, and copyrighted work. That's to be expected. Museums can't afford to become part of the gift economy which operates among many of the critical artists and activists in electronic culture.

In my current collective practice with subRosa I do benefit from my connections to diverse aspects of the art world. Writing, lecturing, performing, guest teaching pay our production bills. So there's always the round of university lecture trips, artist residencies, teaching jobs, and publications (which in Europe and Canada actually pay real money). I've also connected to the electronic culture circuit especially in Europe, and subRosa is beginning to be invited to perform at festivals and conferences there. Currently, I have submerged my individual career with that of the subRosa collective. Such an act can be sure death in the Art world'although with prominent exceptions such as Group Material, for example. It is actually an interesting experience to try to re-educate people and legitimating institutions — such as granting institutions, universities, museums, etc. - about how to deal with a collective rather than with the already certified quantity of a prominent artist or personality (which to my surprise I seem to be in some of those little art world circles we've talked about). It makes for a sometimes difficult but enormously educative dynamic within the collective also, by the way. I see the Artworld as a limited and specialized platform. And it is the platform which I think I have the least credibility in. My interest is in continuing to build across platforms and to sully the waters of what an art "career" might be.

(2)BS: You point out the symbiotic relationship between the model of the artist as genius/outsider, and the top-feeders of the art institutional world. Opposed to this are the models of collaboration and the "gift economy". Reading between the lines a bit, I think you point too problems for the gift/collaboration model that are related, (but sometimes extend beyond), questions about art-career considerations and resources. There are issues of contradiction, leadership, identity, credit, tactics, consensus, accounting and accountability that impinge, (from both inside and outside), as collaborations enter the consensual sphere of the art system. Many art collaborations can't sustain their internal relationships, living fast but dying young. Yet there is a joy in being submerged that is strongly cohesive. Could you tell us something more about this dynamic in the context of collaborations like Womanhouse and SubRosa?

FW: I'll try to talk a bit about my experience with aspects of collectivity--which I don't think is the same thing as collaboration. Collaborations usually have a more informal, or less ideological basis than collectives; they are usually entered into on the basis of pooling expertise and for the purpose of getting a specific project done. There are many examples of collaborations in the Artworld, for example, painters collaborating with dancers; video artists with performance artists, and the like. Usually each collaborator is credited by name. Ownership of the work redounds to each artist separately.
Collectives on the other hand are usually formed for political or ideological purposes. Collective members usually share similar political goals and desires--though they may have different degrees of political radicality. Collective members also share the desire to work together and to count this process as centrally their "work." Many collectives use only the group name for identification and don't label individual parts of works produced with the name of the member who was responsible for making it. This is often a problematic negotiation when it comes to trying to enter the Artworld system. More about that below.

According to the above criteria, Womanhouse was a collaboration. It was done by a class of students, under the leadership of two teachers, in the first academic year of the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts (1971-72.) Some women artists from the community were brought in to collaborate with us and were separately credited. Each room within Womanhouse, and each performance, was credited with the name of the woman who made it. The content and form of Womanhouse was evolved through consciousness-raising sessions. Since we were always working together, there was constant feed-back and response for the work and lots of informal kibitzing about

processes and aesthetics. Each room strongly carried the stamp of the artist who made it, and in a way owned it. At the end of Womanhouse we auctioned off as many of the artefacts as possible in order to make money for the Feminist Art Program. After Womanhouse we never made another project that involved all the members of the same group.

It is interesting to track the way that Womanhouse has been credited in the process of historicizing the Feminist Art Program. For example, you used the phrase "Judy Chicago's Womanhouse" in your first question. And indeed Womanhouse was usually credited to "Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and their students" in any write up about it at the time, and it has largely remained this way until recently.In the 1995 exhibition "Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art" (curated by Lydia Yee at the Bronx Museum of Art and traveled to MOCA, Los Angeles in the same year) several of the original Womanhouse rooms were recreated, and artefacts represented, including Beth Bachenheimer's Shoe Closet, Judy Chicago's Menstruation Bathroom, Sherry Brody's Lingerie Pillows, Brody and Miriam Schapiro's Doll House, and Faith Wilding's Womb Room. Also exhibited was the Womanhouse film by Johanna Demetrakas that features many of the performances from Womanhouse including my performance "Waiting." The catalog for the exhibition lists the individual names of the artists and the titles of their works. Since the original of my Womb Room had been stolen from Womanhouse in Los Angeles, I created an entirely new crocheted room in the Museum. (Footnote: I have written about my ambivalence in remaking this piece in "Monstrous Domesticity", published in MEANING, Ed. Mira Schor and Susan Bee.)

Since this exhibition, I've noticed that several of the (student) participants in Womanhouse and the FAP have been invited to participate in exhibitions,conferences,and publications as individual artists separately from Chicago and Schapiro, on the strength of their current status as artists and their participation in feminist art history. This is especially true of Mira Schor and myself.

My performance,"Waiting", also has rather an astonishing history of publication and exhibition. To my surprise it has become a signature piece of feminist art in general, and a large part of my "claim to fame" in particular. I am baffled by the paradoxes this poses for me ideologically. On the one hand, Waiting came out of a feminist process and context of collaboration, and a feminist art politics which was trying to break down all manner of art world hierarchies and the notion of individual genius. On the other, I find myself being sought out as the creator and performer of "Waiting." Long ago I hi on the tactic of permitting Waiting to be performed by anyone who wants to perform it. Now I permit people to use it in publications if they run a caption that contextualizes the performance within feminist art practice and the Womanhouse collaboration.

Jump cut to my current work with the subRosa collective, which began when I became a Fellow at the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University in Fall 1998. The STUDIO was founded to encourage and facilitate art, science, and technology collaborations mainly between people on the CMU campus. Previous to coming to CMU (as a visiting professor in 1995) I had spent about ten years in New York, working and exhibiting in various guises as individual artist, a member of the Heresies mother collective, a founding member of WAC (Women's Action Coalition), a member of Old Boys Network (a cyberfeminist group based mostly in Germany), and working on projects in association with Critical Art Ensemble.

As a STUDIO Fellow, my intentions was to form a cyberfeminist collective and to initiate a multi-part project called 'Sex and Gender in the Biotech Century.' Consequently a group of between 15-20 women graduate students, faculty, and non-university affiliated women began meeting regularly mostly at my house for a reading, discussion (and eating) group. We focused on studying biotechnology, new reproductive technologies, feminist health activism and critique of the medical/military system, feminist theories of difference, feminist cyborg and body theory, and issues related to gender and technology. Gradually, the group began to self-organize as we started our first projects: a campaign flyer announcing the founding of subRosa as a " (reproducible) cyberfeminist cell"; two interdisciplinary public forums on Women, Health, and Biotechnology; and two issues of a newsletter/flyer called @Second Opinion. (See the subrosa website for texts and descriptions: www.artswire.org/subrosa)

As we began to work together our personal differences became more and more evident, as did our very differing desires about working together. Only one or two of the women in the loose group had ever been part of a collective or collaborative group before; nor had many of them been in a women-only group. We debated a great deal about how--and whether--to form a closed group and if so on what basis since there were so many differences between us. In a way the current subRosa cell of about 6-8 core members is still forming and coalescing. It is as much through embodying our differences and our conflicts as through conviviality and working together that we are evolving the forms of our collectivity. In the past year we have done three different

performances/exhibitions (Knowing Bodies, Miller Gallery, CMU; Sex and Gender Ed in the Biotech Century, ISA Digital Secrets think tank, Arizona State University; Expo EmmaGenics, Intermediale Festival, in conjunction with the 7th Annual Performance Studies International conference in Mainz, Germany) that have centered on the market forces and eugenic thinking that drive the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART). Currently we have produced "The Economies of ART", a text/image piece for nparadoxa (July 2001); an article on feminist responses to aspects of biotechnology for a book to be published by Kunst Forum in Germany; and a subRosa anthology of texts and visual projects. In other words, we have been intensely active for a new fledged collective all of whose members have full-time day jobs.

SubRosa works with new media and digital technologies in tactical ways. Currently we are quite self-contained technologically within the collective whose members between them have skills and experience in video, digital imaging and animation, photography, WEB pages, graphic design, desk-top publishing, writing, plus the usual traditional art skills of sculpture, painting, drawing, fiber arts, print-making, sound, and installation work. At the moment we have no members who can do advanced programming, 3-D animation, robotics, or machining. We are interested in combinations of high and low tech, and in detourning consumer electronics. Currently, half of our members do not live in the same city so we do a lot of work and communication on-line and virtually. We are committed to embodiment and conviviality as an important part of our practice of trying to live our differences. Thus we spend time and money to have flesh meetings, embodiment (spa) days, and retreats. Nevertheless all of us feel the alienation of physical distance acutely. And it has made our work together more slow and more difficult.
Another factor which is having a strong impact on the collective is the increased competition and professionalizing of art careers within graduate schools and universities which a tight job-market and over-production of MFA's have contributed to. Almost all subRosa members are now MFA grads and are either in their first jobs as professors or as graphic or WEB designers. In all these professional positions there is pressure to produce and show one's "own" work. No matter how successful a collective may be, it is often problematic to use collective work as career activities documentation in personal job applications,or for professional promotion packages. Never mind that many artists are now practicing collectively or collaboratively; never mind that the process of working with electronic media and digital technologies often requires interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge--the professional (art) world still wants its geniuses and its signature artists. It still wants to know (on grant applications and in hiring and promotion interviews) "What part of this work did you do?"

These hard realities begin to create problems when it comes to documenting and crediting collective work. For example, if the best way of documenting a performance is to make a short video piece about it, should the emphasis be on making the best possible documentation of the piece, or making sure that everyone's contribution gets pictured (represented) in the video? What of the person(s) who did not perform/make something that is visible in the video such as designing the WEB page or writing the script or doing the documentation during the performance? What of the member who could not travel to a particular performance and thus is not documented? My personal principle is that the work should be shown to its best and clearest advantage no matter who is personally pictured or not pictured, because a strong representation of the collective work helps everyone in the collective. But then I am in a very different place professionally than all the other members who are younger than I am, and for the most part are just starting out professionally. So we try various tactics of satisfying both the need of making the collective work look good and the need to make each individual's contribution visible.It is at these moments that the real differences between collectivity and collaboration become quite evident. One tactic we've adopted is to credit projects with our collective name and then append a list of the names of collective members and associates who worked on it. Each member is also free to make separate documentation which highlights her particular contribution for her own vita. This brings up another difference between collectivity and collaboration. Collective work is often not separable into individual contributions especially in the conceptual phase. While we each have distinct skills and expertise, we evolve concepts together and several members often work together on various components of the performance/installation. Ownership is a topic that arises in several connections. Who owns the collective work, especially if the collective membership changes or the collective dissolves? It seems self evident to say that it is owned by those members of the collective who made the work together. But things are never that simple. For example, with Womanhouse, the question has come up many times about who owns the rights to reprint documentation of Womanhouse. The concept of gift economy and joint ownership is a difficult one for the capitalist economy of the Artworld to understand. It has been pointed out that women are often more reluctant to participate in the gift economy because they have less capital (in every sense) to spend. Again, my personal practice is gift economy and anti-copyright and free circulation and use of ideas and images (with proper credit if

possible). But this raises many tricky questions when one is dealing with the work of people who are not being paid, or are being underpaid, and who are working full-time at a job in order to support themselves and their art practices. There's also the problem of commissions and/or support from institutions or grants that want to have some ownership or credit recognition in work which they fund. Trying to keep one's work out of the capitalist economy so it can circulate freely in the gift economy means that one must be very canny in the way one accepts and uses support money.

These are some of the issues of collectivity I've encountered in different guises in every collective I've been part of.

(3) BS: I'm really interested in your ideas about sullying the waters for the model of the art career. Can you list a few of your favorite tactics?

FW: Well, I think I've already mentioned many of them: gift economy; anti-copyright; interdisciplinarity; allowing others to perform your work for free with no strictures on how they do it; working collectively, anonymously. Not confining oneself to performing or showing in art spaces or recognized museums, but seeking audiences everywhere and anywhere; refusing signature styles or purity of method, media, or materials (Feyerabend's Against Method is always a good kick in the pants). Working with consumer media and electronics that don't have the patina of "art media" on them. Experimenting with audience participation which cannot be controlled or pre-determined--this is different than most so-called interactive art where viewer interactions are essentially pre-programmed and limited to a set of responses. In the kind of information theatre subRosa is interested in we hope to set up a situation in which the exclusivity of expertise and specialization is debunked, and viewers are given contextualized information that they can choose to respond to in many ways. In our performances we try to deflect questions as to what WE think towards what the participant thinks, to encourage more autonomous thinking and action on the viewer's part. I further sully my art career by writing, lecturing, teaching, and including all those things as part of my self-definition of being an artist.BTW,this has made me difficult to hire in traditional media-specific art departments.

(4 a. b. c.) BS: A remarkable element of all of your practice is that it is interventionist. Copy-left, feminist, and collective work, are types of market intervention. SubRosa's information theater intervenes in bio and body discourses in an intentionally pedagogical, audience-shifting manner. I use the term interventionist because almost as soon one says "political" or "activist" alongside the word art, a number of models immediately glob onto the conception of what that kind of art is all about, and tie its meaning very strongly into an orbit of history and practices. I'm only observing this; it can be unfortunate, fantastic, or neutral. The point I'm working toward is that artist-activists need to understand the art and activist models, (not always one and the same), that the artists are situated in. So, I'd like to ask you the following questions on behalf of artists who are doing work in this general territory.

(4.a) BS What are your observations about the models that run behind the activist art of today?

(4. a) FW. I think you are right that people tend to associate "activist" with a certain kind of historical practice. I remember that at the Last 5 Minutes Tactical Media Festival (1999) in Amsterdam I got rather sick of the word "activist" because it was being applied so loosely to every kind of project that had a hint of political content. I think there can be political art without it being activist (all art is political in the sense that all art operates in a social/political context.) But "activist" is perhaps not really a useful term anymore (though I still use it) since it connotes so many different things to people. Same problem with"artist." Same problem with "cultural worker" or "cultural producer." Same problem with "feminist" or "cyberfeminist" for that matter. I like the terms "resistant" and "interventionist" and even "pedagogical" more because they are more specific to the goals or aims of this kind of work. Most so-called "activist" practice these days seems to follow two main models:

1. Direct actions against specific targets such as companies, government authorities; or specific campaigns to influence legislation or public opinion and policy. Examples might be the Clean Clothes campaign,ECD FloodNet, No more Prisons, Boycott Monsanto, WTO sit-ins and demos, and the like. This model uses activist political tactics against authority like strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, occupations, net-terrorism, hacking, etc. This model is usually more territorial and issue specific.

2. Discursive, exploratory projects whose goal is to create interventions into and disturbances of the public spectacle and representations of complex contemporary issues; such as biotech and bioinformatics, the Human Genome Project, globalization, restructuring of work, eco and environmental policies, and the like. This model uses

performative, participatory, and/or pedagogical tactical media, often creating a kind of information theatre in which participants manipulate objects, perform experiments, or actions which give them understanding and tools to make more informed opinions about the issues. This model adapts itself situationally to various venues and audiences.

(4 b)BS: What level of understanding does a group need in order to successfully mediate, (or perhaps debunk authority), in fields other than art?

(4 b) FW: That is an interesting question which can often be answered only in the doing. The kind of projects we're talking about here take a certain amount of theoretical research and reading, and learning some basic hands-on processes. This is really no different than learning coding, or photo shop, or machining. Collectives such as Critical Art Ensemble have worked with scientists on specific parts of projects such as obtaining recombinant yeast with human DNA in it for the Cult of the New Eve project (about the Human Genome Project); and creating transgenic bacteria. It is relatively easy to learn enough science to demonstrate or teach people to perform certain experiments or processes that will help them understand basic scientific procedures (thus debunking some of the authority of science. As my doctor used to say "A monkey could learn to do a Pap smear"). subRosa has consulted and worked with medical doctors, biologists and fertility experts, as well as business entrepreneurs, to produce some of our projects like Vulva de/ReConstructa; Sex and Gender Ed in the Biotech Century; and Expo EmmaGenics [www.cmu.edu/emmag]. We are always trying to combine real information and learning about the subject matter, while providing critical analysis which exposes the ideologies that drive these discourses. So there is an interesting combination of the Real, the metaphorical, the critical,and activist practice-- which is where the art of it comes in, I guess. Irony, mimicry,appropriation, detournement, mingle with the Real in complex and not always transparent ways. Our disclaimer is that we are not scientists, but that we are informed artist amateurs creating a platform on which non-specialists can be informed enough to intervene critically in public discourse and critique of authoritarian structures or systems.

c) BS: What future opportunities do you see for effectively intervening in systems?

c) FW: I think there will always be ways of intervening. As recent hacks of bunkered militatry and government sites have shown, no system or structure is impregnable. It will become harder and harder to penetrate them, but people will become more and more ingenious. Finding ways of teaming up with people who work in these systems is a good tactic because there are dissidents and disgruntled or critical workers everywhere. It should be possible to find models of intervention that do not make individuals too vulnerable to punishment. In my experience, it is pretty easy to tap into people's desires for autonomy and their hatred of authority. That's the affirmative energy activist artists can try to free up for creative resistance. Currently, for example, subRosa is very interested in looking at the medical system with particular emphasis on women's health and treatment. Now we know that practically everyone has a problem with this system and there's loads of potential resistance right there waiting to be tapped and directed productively. We have historical precedents in civil right and anti-war civil disobedience, in the Feminist Women's Health movement of the 70, in activist groups like ACT UP, WHAM, and WAC whose strategies and tactics can be studied and mined for ideas. We can learn from these practices about what worked and can invent them along new lines that take into account changed political and technological conditions. This is especially true of activist art that takes on the subject of biotech, for example. As long as we stay flexible, situational, and understand the importance of strategic thinking, and tactical specificity, we should at least be able to create substantial disturbances and disruptions of late capital status quo.
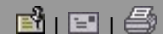
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