

## Confidence, equality and being nice.



I was very interested in the description given of 'a model of artist working today'. I mentally checked the list of things that I do....and felt failure.

Perhaps I am not professional enough? I have over the years as a single working mother (teaching in an institution – tick), continued doggedly to make work but although I run my studio as a small business I do not make enough money to survive (x) I certainly do not have enough money pay others to help me (x). I have not successfully developed relationships or networks with critics, curators, etc, etc (x) or market or promote myself successfully, although currently trying to learn how (?). I do seek opportunities but hate spending all my time trying to get work shown, or funded rather than making the work, either in my studio or feminist performance elsewhere (x elsewhere is a long way from Cornwall, where I'm based and I don't have the funds to do it for free or pay for the privilege).

Argh. I know I'm not the only one failing. I would like to share my work and ideas. Not because of ME<ME>ME but because I really believe art can change how we think.

The list of failures brings me to an article I read recently called: 'Confidence tricks 'in **New formations, summer 2017, no.91, 'Righting Feminism', eds sara farris & Catherine Rottenberg, pp 18-30**, which uses Foucault's concept of the *technology of the self* to critique a contemporary 'confidence' culture in which women are told no-one is to blame if they are not equal – it is their own fault. That sounds familiar...

The article points to 'the brutal effects of patriarchal capitalism ...dismissed as trivial compared to women's own toxic baggage, which bizarrely is treated as self-generated and entirely unconnected to a culture of normal pathologisation, blame, and hate, directed at women' (p.27 )

So whilst it is possible to agree that confidence is good, it is also a type of *gendered* technology of self – as apparently women need it more than men to succeed. Lack of confidence (and success) is being presented as an individual, personal matter that is not connected to 'structural inequality or cultural forces'(p.19). Ah that explains my failure! I have only myself to blame. The few women that local galleries take on, have to behave and be a certain way to be taken seriously.

This as all part of a 'make-over paradigm' that extends beyond the body to constitute a remaking of the subject' (p.28), and we love it, apparently.

I certainly do. And don't. I do want to work hard at what I love and be good at it. I don't want to be a failure but I would rather fail with integrity, than be successful on these terms.

My religious childhood recognizes the smack of patriachalism and control, the belief in being able to change, and search for perfection . ' ..in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, .... [and] immortality' (**Foucault as quoted in the article p.18** ) I was bought up to believe that I had *agency* (freedom) to be better, but to be better I was forced to be a certain way: at home with children, a wonderful mother, wife, healthy, intelligent and attractive, humble, rich, successful....How to be all those things and yourself? Well in my case it all ended messily and I had to rebuild myself from the ashes (my youngest child is called Phoenix).

Confidence. Uniformity. Success. Its 'a one-size fits all solution', compliant with capitalism which destroys individuality, selfhood, and the personal.

Women are not treated equally, the confidence cult says women should be feisty, assertive, possibly dishonest, maybe even taking advantage of others

These attitudes are aggressively capitalist, not feminist or egalitarian. At the same time as they are teaching teachers about their lizard brain, established educational pecking orders do not allow for less ambitious or aggressive types. Yet these are the very type of people they need: caring, and giving – not selling!

Submissive? No thoughtful, maybe kind. Stereotypically womens' attributes, yes, but I will not trying to be nice! Nor will I stop embracing failure, or using personal experience as an assertion of my self (hood), *or* continuing to ask for equality without undergoing character surgery (assassination)!

**Addendum from the article (New formations, summer 2017, no.91, 'Righting Feminism', eds Sara farris & Catherine Rottenberg, pp 18-30, (apologies I do not have the authors listed in my notes, so until I drive 30 miles to Falmouth Uni library to physically check this I have no online access to the article): **I laughed at the story with the Guardian advice about women in leadership using their *factory settings*.****

What does this mean? I'm off to make some work parodying our supposed *factory settings*...