

Responding to Women and Creativity



WOMEN TALKING

Annabel Nicolson

Four years ago I started making recordings of women talking about themselves and the circumstances affecting their creative work. Each woman was asked to look at her own experience and say what had been helpful to her or difficult in developing what she was doing.

In asking women to take part I was conscious of the need to let each woman approach the situation in the way that felt most comfortable for her. Some wanted time to think about it and prepare what they had to say. Others wanted to respond directly to the situation and think aloud as we were recording. Each woman chose where her tape was to be made, usually where she lived or worked or where I live.

After making several tapes I became anxious about my position in relation to the women I was recording. I had committed myself to creating a supportive situation for each woman so that she might feel free enough to explore and identify her experience as a woman but in providing this support, listening and giving attention, my own needs had been overlooked.

A friend drew attention to what was happening as I was recording her. Acknowledging the situation made it possible to change it and she invited me to share the space with her.

'I think it's good for us to have a conversation because then you make everything that's going on evident. That's a good way to not be hierarchical if you try and include everythinghaving a conversation where you can hear you as well. That's something I've found very inhibiting in the last few tape recordings, I've begun to feel very hidden. At the same time I was giving out very thoughtful attention which was emotionally demanding and trying to be in touch with what that person wanted to talk about and yet all that energy and that commitment to do that was hidden. It meant that I got very tired because I didn't have that nourishment of— 'Staus. Don't you think that's very female, this silent person who is emotionally supporting the person who is talking. That's so female and it isn't given any status. It's really good that you should talk on the tape as well because that's how human beings function, with an unspoken, emotional support, having someone care about them. You reproduce that if you then are absent on the tapes.'

Another friend helped me recover a sense of what I was doing by asking me to describe to her what had made me want to make the recordings. I had spent the previous summer going over tapes of gaelic music left by my uncle, listening to voices of people I had known since I was a child. I had become interested in the conversations between songs and the ease with which they helped the singing along. I wanted to hear who was talking and how things were said to understand as much as I could of how things were in this community.

I have often used recorded material in performance as a means of including something from another situation. I like to refer to something I have heard and for it to be heard as I heard it, creating a situation in which it can be recognised. In playing the women's tapes publicly I arrange the material in response to the situation, choosing which extracts to play and in which order. The tapes are played in relation to one another and help to illustrate each others' significance. Timing is important and knowing when to pause for people to talk about what they have heard or simply absorb it.

The best situations have been those in which people felt relaxed and receptive enough to make connections between what the women on the tapes are saying and place themselves in relation to what they have heard.

One woman said it was like hearing someone thinking. The fluency with which women relate to their thoughts and give form to them can be felt. I hear them as a language and recognise this language as one I already know. For women hearing a language one recognises can mean hearing ones own.

'I definitely need a stable base. I can function in a shifting base, moving every three months, if I have to I'll do it but I do like to have a place and feel that it's not going to disappear. I do need to have certain things around me before I can work, even if I'm in the midst of packing cases. There are certain objects I have to bring out and set around me, certain stones, bones, cloth, postcards. They're like an aid. It may be partially to do with their familiarity, which gives a sense of stability, of being there in that space.

The objects are often related to places I've been to or specific people that I'm fond of, that I've had a lot of rapport with, emotionally or workwise. They can be very diverse kinds of people.....

.....there are those kinds of polarities working, which to me are very much part of ones life as an artist. You have these very emotional, very basic kind of ties and you have very aspirational kind of ties. You're living between these worlds and trying to make some kind of whole out of them. I need both. I have to have my basic ground otherwise I become too into the aspiration, a way of putting it would be too thin'.

At the moment I'm in the centre of a cyclone because a lot of things are changing in my life. For me one way of coping is to be still in order to know the moves one needs to make. Finding a new place to live is an immediate need and it seems that moving house is about moving on another level as well. The goal would be to sustain it as a living and working space.

Would you like to talk about that fire how that affected you?

The fire was a terrific release of pressure that had been building up in lots of ways and suddenly the roof went up into flames. When that happened something was emptied. It was an indication to me to slow down a bit. My life had been moving faster than I could stay calm with it. From January to July things were accelerating to a peak. Now there's a different pace. On one level a fire is just a fire and a hassle and an inconvenience it requires finding another place to live. But in another way I feel it's to do with not reading the signs properly or maybe not following the signs if one has read and understood them. It seems that with any major event, whether it's the death of someone close to you or another kind of loss, it has a way of clearing things, so you feel like you're starting all over again. It's like having a rug pulled out from under you, so you reassess what you are doing and what's happening with you and then you take the first step and try to move into a new understanding.

The most difficult things have been practical things combined with strained emotional circumstances and probably having to experience very strong emotions like my mother dying, having to move house and find somewhere to live which was a difficult thing to do as I wanted to find somewhere permanent so I could almost start my life again and be very positive about how I was feeling. Although these are practical difficulties they had a very strong emotional reaction because if you don't have that everything else around you seems very fluid and you don't have an anchoring point or a way of organising things in any way that you can analyse them'.

It was only at the point of change that although it was still painful it became purposeful. Somehow you know..... the points at which you feel you know where you're located and I think you can experience that through misery and you can experience that through joy. It becomes..... yes, this is what I am. This is what I am. This is what I am doing.

You feel very located, not just focused, but focused because you're located, fixed not in a static position, but rooted in some way. And I think the times when you're completely blank and drab.....maybe you need that as well but it's very difficult to see how you can find sparks in that. I find it's very difficult sometimes. And it's difficult to know what it is that rekindles it, what it is that you touch, for me it's usually other people. Because that is a point of attraction with the world.

Can you think of some of the things that have helped you to feel located at particular times?

I think there are certain kinds of places.....when I'm completely blank and drab what I do is I get on my bicycle.... and ride around..... and the more miserable the more I need very bleak sort of landscapes.....like lots of areas where things have been pulled down.....those corrugated iron corridors.... very desolate places where there's no people and there's just lots of dust and rubble.....especially if it's raining then I feel very located because the world echoes me.....and so I feel less isolated. Also on public transport....on trains...travelling. I feel very free.....and I feel very stimulated by that.

But that's not the same as feeling located but maybe you feel your own location because you don't feel the pressures of the kind of immediate social definitions you might have in your area or in your relationships which you might feel have become inappropriate responses. You know like the thing when you've been away and you come back and everybody responds to you as they did before you'd had that experience.....and the response doesn't encompass the experience that you've just had.....and so the experience is in a way denied and it takes a long time before you manage to integrate it... and it feels as though whatever it is you just lived through was a dream or didn't happen or isn't substantiated.

Can you say more about that? About experiences which aren't substantiated. What happens to you when you don't get that confirmation?

"I think if you work on your own, whether on your own in a room or on your own in a strange context and there are not people with whom you can have a dialogue on your terms, the less you can have a dialogue in your language because the more specific your language becomes. So you have these long periods of working in your space, whatever that might be and sometimes it just seems very frail. And I know that the frailer it is, the less I feel I can bring it out into the world. I will make completely inane conversation with people rather than talk about anything which really affects me, the more I will retract. I will just be in my room, or just be in my space and there are points where you're not sure whether that's real or not, in what way it's real, for who it's real. That's very difficult I think. And then you find someone you can talk to in a real way that helps and you feel well maybe it's a bit real, it's a little maybe it's a bit real, it's a little bit real."

'It's very small so I find that quite restricting because I do like to have space to move in. I find what I want to do in there is sitting on quite a comfortable chair or on the floor thinking and staring out the window and writing. So when I say I'm feeling good it's because I'm in touch with myself and my feelings. I don't read much. I don't take myself out of my body by reading something else or thinking too much in words. I think because of the size of the room I start to feel a little restricted and then words start to take over. I've had quite a few occasions when I felt very much in need of being taken out of myself and at that point nothing can. There's a TV downstairs that can't. Nothing can. I need the space to start moving and doing some physical work.

What happens when you do have room to move when you're in a large place? How does that affect you?

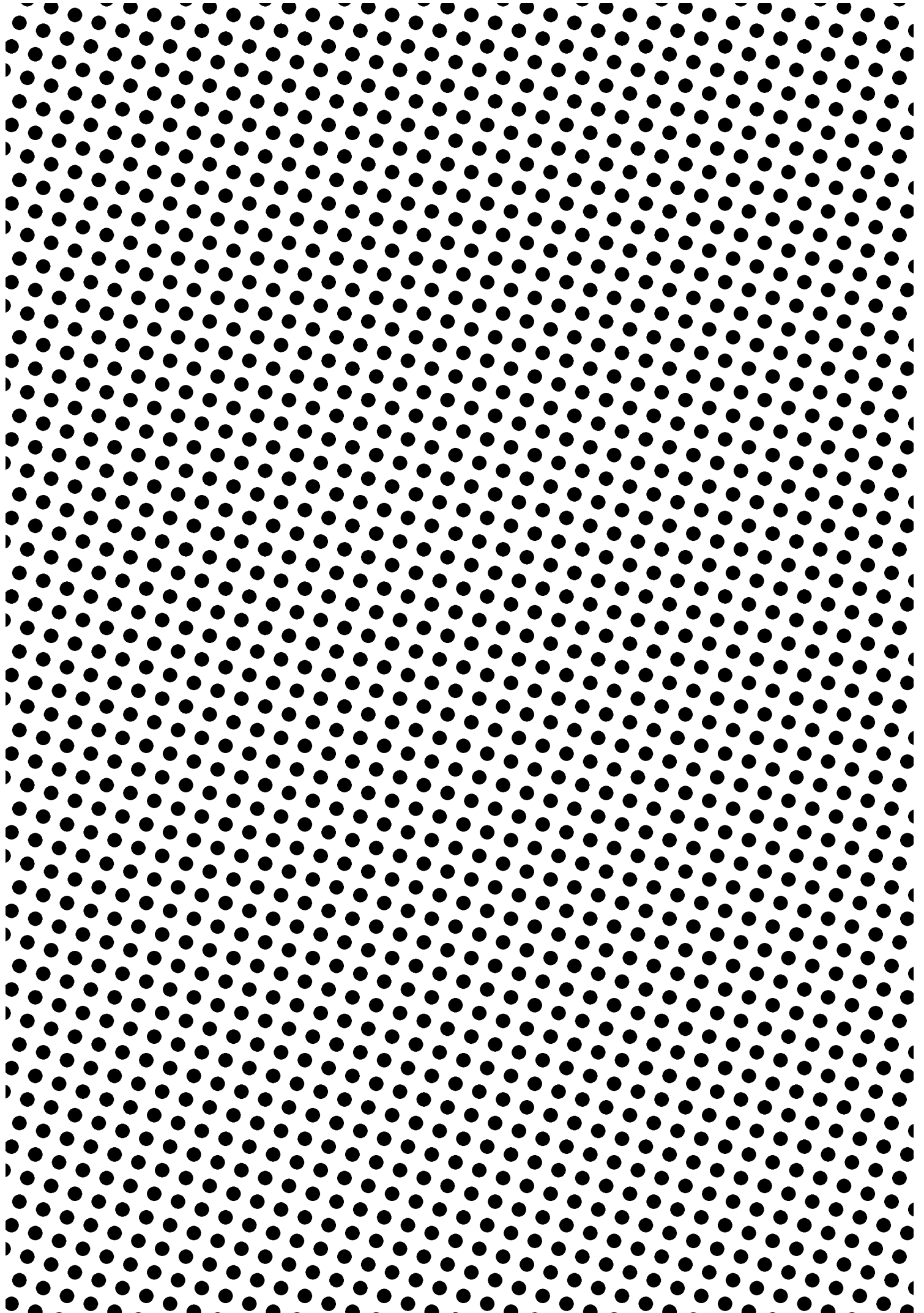
My first thought is of when I have to leave that room to go out to the heath or to the woods because I've felt so restricted. It takes such a long time to ease up even in a big space. That's a constant thing I've done. I've always cycled and gone out and tried to be strenuous just to start things moving to start things flowing inside me. And so I can think of staring across.....if you're on the heath you can see right across London and just the frustration of being able to see all that and feel restricted in your body and your head. Just this week I went to the woods and I was feeling like that really restricted even though everything was so much bigger than me and there was so much room. I did manage to break through it working with the wood and some sticks.

You said before that you were holding a large stick that helped to get you going.

Yes. I used the weight and length of it to make me feel quite awkward. If you swing around with a large weight it pulls your energy round and round and round.'

"That's often how I find out what I do. I write about something that seems very inconsequential and I think why have I written that, that's about nothing in particular. Then I realise that's me working out how I relate to myself and how I relate to various other things. Another thing I've realised is I often write in very uncomfortable positions. If I write, say in my own flat, which I tend to do, that's often where I write, I have at the moment, say, a big armchair with a little table next to it. The little table is low, it's the same height as the seat of the chair and the typewriter is on it. To use the typewriter means that I have to perch on the edge of the chair. It's really awkward but I like the way it looks and I won't change it. I often do that. I don't make it easy for myself. I often write in situations where it's actually uncomfortable and I sit in uncomfortable chairs, rather than comfortable ones. It's almost as though a lot of my actions are at a tangent. I just wrote about it, that's how I became familiar with the idea that it's odd."

"Whenever anybody asked what I did I'd say I do writing. I never wanted to say I was a writer. I realised what I wanted to do was to explain the process, not give myself a title, however comfortable it might be and however easy it might make things socially. It's a wish to associate myself with everyone who writes rather than with people who are writers."



In 1978, Annabel Nicolson recorded a number of women artists talking about their relationship to creativity, asking them what helped and what hindered their creative process. She then played the audio tapes in listening sessions, choosing extracts and leading conversations with the audience. The first of these took place at the Hayward Annual II, in October 1978, as part of a series of talks and performances called "Open Space". This initial listening session was titled "Hazards", although in subsequent sessions the tapes were played under various titles, finally settling on "Women and Creativity". Further audio recordings were made and a number of listening sessions took place between 1978–80, including at the Women's Research and Resources Centre, London; 2B Butler Wharf, London; as part of the exhibition "A Room of One's Own" at the South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell; as one of a series of events at the Royal College of Art, London, and at various other art colleges.

This publication returns to the questions asked in Nicolson's tapes, engaging with her project through continued questioning about what hinders or helps creativity in the present moment, blending historical research with contemporary responses to questions around women, creativity, feminism and collectivity. It comes from an online workshop that I organised in March 2021 with Karen Di Franco and my collaborators on the research project "Group Work", Amy Tobin and Rachel Warriner, hosted by Chelsea Space, London. Attendees were invited to respond to Nicolson's original questions, and in preparation for the workshop, I approached a number of friends and acquaintances to see if they would respond to the questions too. I received a huge range of replies that opened up the questions around creativity, history and feminism, as well as providing new insights into Nicolson's project. A selection of these responses is published here.¹ They reply to the original questions from Nicolson, along with responses to some further prompts about their significance today, and are offered to the reader for their own contemplation.

Previous spread: Annabel Nicolson, "Women Talking", reprinted from "Women's Space", special issue of **FAN (Feminist Arts News)**, no. 7, 1982, with permission of Annabel Nicolson.

¹ Most of these responses were sent as written replies to the questions, so the edited extracts that I've chosen have a different quality to the in person interviews undertaken by Nicolson.

These contemporary responses were made in the context of a lockdown in the UK in early 2021, after the Covid-19 pandemic had been impacting on everyone's lives for almost a year. There are some specific references to illness and isolation, childcare and overwork, as well as numerous comments about being tired. Even with these very specific circumstances, there are many moments of resonance between Nicolson's tapes and these contemporary commentaries on creativity.

For me, Nicolson's tapes perform a version of consciousness-raising: both in the initial conversations between Nicolson and her friends, and in the subsequent listening sessions. In the workshop held in March 2021, and in the responses published here, the moments of recognition, intrigue and solidarity provoked by reading the original transcripts and descriptions continue this process. This short introduction will not unpack all the implications of this proposal, but instead will briefly contextualise Nicolson's project, and connect it with the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero's concept of the narratable self, which is useful to understand the interchange that takes place in Nicolson's work, and its links to consciousness-raising.

The tapes "Women and Creativity" have only rarely been played since the early 1980s, and are inaccessible at present, although possibilities for the most appropriate form of preservation and archiving are being considered. It is hard to re-create the original listening sessions even so, as they were each unique performances by Nicolson. They were advertised in the first Circles distribution broadsheet alongside Nicolson's films and performance works (Circles was a distributor of women's work, focusing on video and film, but also initially including performances, tape and slide works, set up in 1979 by a small group that included Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow and Lis Rhodes).² There are a number of textual traces of the tapes, including an evocative review of one of the initial sessions which took place on the 17th December 1978 at 2B Butler Wharf. Nicolson's interviewees are described as "women artists – performance artists, dancers, writers, musicians and film-makers".³

2 Lucy Reynolds, "1979: Circles formed to distribute women artists' film and video", *Lux Online*, 2005, <https://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1970-1979/circles.html>.

3 Kazuko Hohki, "On Annabel Nicolson's Performance", *Musics*, no. 21, 1979, np.

The reviewer herself is an artist and musician – Kazuko Hohki – and she tells how a small group, including some of the artists in the recordings, stayed through the long listening session that went for almost five hours. Hohki describes Nicolson looking like "a modern medium with long hair", "operating the black machine to give people the voice from the other world – actually their inside, like all the oracles". Here elements of poetry, performance and invocation take these listening sessions beyond the sociological and political, and foreground the artistic possibilities of listening to "women talking". Hohki describes her own response to the tapes, which resonate with her own experiences, as well as impressing her with what she calls their "unconscious beauty".

Nicolson herself has described the process of responding to the room, and playing excerpts from different tapes, as well as giving time for the group to discuss what they've heard.⁴ Some of these reflections are published as an introduction to extracts from the tapes in an article titled "Women Talking", part of a special issue of **FAN (Feminist Arts News)** that Nicolson co-edited with Bee Sanderson and Valerie Michaels in 1982.⁵ A reproduction of this article is included as part of this publication, as it is the only textual trace of the tapes' contents, as well as providing a short introduction to the project by Nicolson. The special issue of **FAN** came out of Nicolson's collaborative exhibition "Concerning Ourselves" from the previous year, in which she brought together a group of women artists to think about their approach to art-making, the politics of feminism, womanhood and collectivity.⁶

One of my motivations to research Nicolson's tapes was a sense that the questions asked are still relevant over forty years later, and that listening to others discuss their strategies in approaching creative work is still as important and possibly transformational. This was something that Nicolson herself discovered when she played the tapes in 1993 to a group of students as part of her course on "Women in Art".

4 Annabel Nicolson, "Transcript from Indistinct Recording of a Talk Performed in the Reading Room of Slade School of Art 13/3/79", *Musics*, no. 22, 1979, p.5.

5 Annabel Nicolson, "Women Talking", in "Women's Space", special issue of **FAN (Feminist Arts News)**, no. 7, 1982, pp.8-9 (reprinted in this publication).

6 This exhibition took place at the Norwich School of Art Gallery, June 1981 as the culmination of Nicolson's year long fellowship at the Norwich School of Art.

She describes how “It was very thought provoking for me to learn from the students that all the concerns talked about in the recordings were still relevant for them. At the time I wasn’t sure if the students would relate to what was said fifteen years earlier, but they assured me that it all felt very current. I think they found it helpful to hear their own personal concerns coming through in the words of the women in the recordings and I hope this gave them confidence to trust their own feelings as women and perhaps continue talking together about the issues raised.”⁷ Moving forward almost thirty years from this last listening session, the tapes still speak to difficulties and possibilities around creativity.

To contextualise what takes place in the tapes, I will outline the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero’s concept of the narratable self, and its importance to feminism. Cavarero argues that each person’s uniqueness can only be understood in relation to others, specifically when others narrate that person’s story. She discusses how this has a particular significance for women, as they are mostly understood as a type rather than an individual: as a housewife, mother, daughter. She suggests that women have historically built friendships through telling their life-stories to one another as a way of surmounting their flattened identities, and explores how this practice informs the feminist work of consciousness-raising. In other words, she suggests that in a world that does not listen to women, women listen to one another. This is a political act, one that is made explicitly so in feminism, allowing women to “think that my ‘I’ exists”.⁸ She explores the relationship between these acts of friendship and the structured analysis of the consciousness-raising group, asserting that for the latter “[i]ts uniqueness consists in a horizon that sees politics and

7 Annabel Nicolson, letter to the author, 15th November 2021.

8 Adrianna Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*, translation by Paul A. Kotterman, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.56. Cavarero is quoting from the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective writing about working-class women who returned to school under the Italian scheme that gave 150 hours of free adult education. The Collective tell the story of two women who met on one of these schemes in Milan – Emilia and Amalia – which forms Cavarero’s key example of being narrated by another in the context of feminism. See Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, translation and introduction by Teresa de Lauretis, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, p.106.

narration intersect”.⁹ For me, this idea of a horizon where “politics and narration intersect” begins to explain what takes place in the tapes. Nicolson listens to her friends speak about their relationship to creativity and then offers these stories to the listener to reflect upon and in turn help them make sense of their own identities. At the same time, the act of listening seriously to these women enables them to see themselves as artists, with strategies and techniques that are both unique to them, but also suggestive of a wider feminist struggle to be creative within a male-dominated artworld.

Nicolson reflects on this process of listening and learning in recent comments about the project. She says how “Looking back on all this it is obvious that the recordings were an integral part of my own learning process and led onto other projects over time, particularly within the field of art education and thinking how best to support women students.”¹⁰ She talks about the difficulties still experienced in the early 1990s, at the time of her last listening session: “Art colleges can be difficult places for women students and even then [in 1993] there were still relatively few female tutors around. Those that were often had short term contracts and were usually part time. I remember having to make *all* the slides I needed for the series of talks I gave on the history of women in art as the college had none.”¹¹ Finally, she reflects on the original title: “Maybe ‘Hazards’ was a good title as it reflects how much we are affected by adverse circumstances and how undermining this can be if one does not have appropriate support. Peer groups can be so vital to help us make sense of our experience.”¹² From Cavarero to Nicolson, small acts of listening open out into a political, feminist, affective landscape, with the tapes encouraging consciousness-raising decades after the initial recorded exchanges.

In the context of the 2020s, and the workshop that took place in March 2021, I broadened the focus on “women artists” to consider other marginalised identities, and discussed the way in which the identities “woman” or “woman artist” are enabling for some, and alienating for others. When asking for people to respond to the questions, I shifted the focus of Nicolson’s original

9 Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p.60.

10 Nicolson, letter to the author, 15th November 2021.

11 This series of talks was a course titled “Women in Art”. Nicolson, letter to the author, 15th November 2021.

12 Nicolson, letter to the author, 15th November 2021.

interviews to request responses from anyone who identified as a feminist, with some interesting discussions ensuing around issues of definition and identification. This is not to say that the focus on “women” in Nicolson’s original tapes wasn’t necessary, but that in today’s context an expanded framework is needed to continue the discussion.

To create the selection of extracts from the contemporary responses, my choices reflect my own interests, concerns, fears, doubts. I was drawn to this by both Nicolson’s project beginning with her asking her friends to respond to her questions, and the emphasis she placed on intimacy and particularity in the exchanges. They have been edited together without individual respondents named, instead following the collage of extracts that Nicolson employed in her article “Women Talking”.¹³ Here the questions that have been asked are kept within the text so the reader may begin to think of their own answers, hopefully continuing the conversations about women, feminism and creativity that Nicolson began with the tapes over forty years ago.

13 In the handout that accompanied the Hayward Annual II performance in October 1978, Nicolson explains that: “The recordings are anonymous to draw attention to the nature of the concerns expressed rather than individual personalities involved.” Annabel Nicolson, “Hazards”, handout, Hayward Annual II, 1978, from Annabel Nicolson’s personal archive. I have deviated from complete anonymity, including a list of the contemporary respondents at the back of this pamphlet.

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A number of writers, artists, curators and cultural practitioners were asked to respond to the following questions. Their responses have been anonymised and edited, put together in a patchwork of thoughts that revolve around issues of creativity, feminism, women, time, artistic practice and community, as well as class, neurodiversity, mental health, gender, sexuality, race, professional stability, children and migration.

Questions:

- **What helps your creative work?**
- **What hinders your creative work?**
- **When you read the extracts from Annabel Nicolson’s tapes in the article “Women Talking”, do you see similarities with your own situation in 2021?**
- **Do you think it is still important for women artists and other feminist cultural practitioners to share their strategies for enabling creative practice?**
- **Some of Annabel Nicolson’s respondents discussed whether they needed isolation to work, is this important to you?**

What helps your creative work?

“Freedom helps me work. The freedom to wander around through the streets and libraries (flaneuse, fox, fickle), hunting for details that I can link together into narratives that reimagine how the world works. I like to question systems and structures, so having those in place can help me to create responses (this can be anything from an existing text to an area of public space). Finding something to antagonise or disrupt gives birth to the conditions in which I make work. This can be as simple as loitering or looking too closely, misusing a space, or pointing something out. Living in a place like London where I can get away with “misunderstanding” rules and social codes, or at least deliberately interpreting situations in irregular ways, is crucial to my work. For example, doing fieldwork which required me to break small byelaws or rules of a commercial space, such as running performance workshops in Westfield stores. Sometimes my perceived gender comes loaded with an assumption of gentleness and ditsy innocuous intentions that allows me to get away with entering spaces that might be less easy to access if I were male and may seem more threatening: e.g. when filming a skyscraper in Canary Wharf, I get treated with humour by security guards, but I do not get arrested as long as I play up to their assumptions that I am an eccentric artist. Being knowingly naive seems more accepted, as a woman.

This roving, roaming aspect of the fieldwork is crucial, but I also require a secondary stage where I am able to get very immersed in hyper-focus and reflect on the “data” I have gleaned in order to re-present it as a work. For this I require silence and a space of my own, even if this is a bedroom (as I don’t have a studio, for financial reasons). I do not want to pay £300 a month for a desk space in a cold studio complex which I cannot afford to be in because of having to work too many hours in order to afford it. I would rather have the time than the space. The street is my studio, and my laptop or notebook. I do not want to use new materials, only borrowed or stolen stuff that I can squeeze new ideas from. This is an ecological position, as well as the legacy of working class values requiring resourcefulness by necessity. Improvisation as ethical necessity as well as economic necessity. As soon as work feels like work, I sort of lose

interest and feel like I’m just going through the motions... why not work in a bank, if I can’t antagonise and be authentically responsive to the world on my own terms. Why do we call art “work” anyway, because we are so insecure we dare not admit it’s play (otherwise people might judge us for not being productive enough or for not grafting). Freedom from guilt and freedom from shame is key. For years I felt guilty for being an artist, because I am one of the only people in my large extended family to have the privilege of education beyond GCSE level. Art is for posh, pretentious people, right? Art itself is an access issue. As is authorship. The illusion of genius – the ultimate killer of creativity for the large proportion of the population who say they “can’t draw” and are not good enough to be an artist. To hell with those ideals. Call me what you like, but artist is the closest alibi I have yet found to describe the multifarious messing arounds that I urgently need to do.

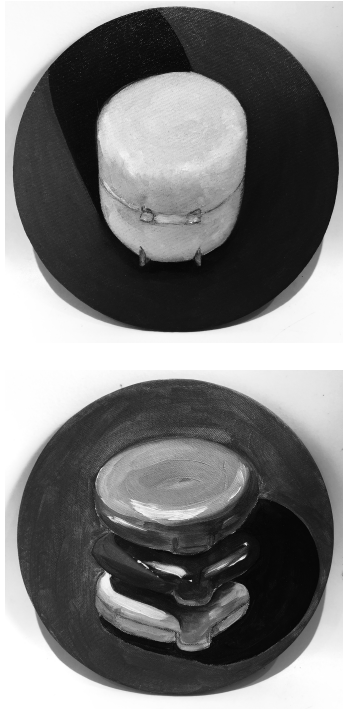
“Time and energy. Opportunities to be bored and to be stuck with nothing fun to do. Experiences I find weird and/or emotional – often enraging: political miseries, personal injustices, motherhood. Collaboration, or at least an audience I think is actually interested. Working in a group, but more than that. feeling like part of a group, especially one that’s fighting to challenge smug conventions (so that we can make our own). The energy of other people’s belief in a way of doing something, whether out of sympathy with their sense of urgency, or against it. Co-conspirators.

“A little space for thinking can go a long way towards making something. Being asked to do this, answer questions about creative work, helps, as you’re getting me thinking about how I’ve been making things over the past year, and before. Parenthood really does impact on the time available for oneself as a person. I’ve tried to be tactical about this and incorporate the parenting into the practice, or practice around the parenting, with mixed results. As I don’t always want to make work about this subject, or in response to it.

Play helps.

At the moment, in the current situation, I have aligned the urge to make things with playing with the kids, rather than attempting or getting

the mental space to get into more complex work, or to work towards a film. Earlier in the lockdown and in previous years, I would paint, averaging one a half term, painted in the space of a few hours of uninterrupted time, when kids were away, and these paintings were not continued, rather they stood as they were, with imperfections, mistakes, odd perspectives, as a record of that uninterrupted pocket of time. When I see these paintings they represent that time I had to make something, however imperfect.



Abbe Leigh Fletcher, *Polly Pocket Ring box 19.10.18* and *Polly Pocket compacts stack on blue 17.2.19*, oil on board, both from the *Pockets of Time* series

make rather than perfect. Small and playful, rather than developed or longer form ideas for things. However, I do miss the opportunity for getting deeper into the work, in terms of carrying things along, developing them further and finishing them. I tend to put things down and forget about them or get out of the habit and move onto another medium. Partly due to the impact of other pressing responsibilities and the interrupted nature of this way of working which has arisen out of necessity to work around these other roles and seize opportunities however brief.

“I don’t know how to describe it because to say routine or rhythm or comfort or happiness sounds a bit – silly or simple. I think it’s a mindlessness. Boredom, I think getting to the point where you start to make up something: like where you can jump to the next idea because you have the time and space to actually start something new. To be able to look through old materials. This is something I miss with young children: the time to process old material: looking through books, wandering, going to see shows, feeling like a viewer and participant rather than a “worker” – what I think is great is how quickly one can switch from one to the other, like the switch from winter to spring.

During lockdown, at the weekend sometimes I will get an idea to make something and do it there and then, quickly, with the kids making things from the same materials too, with them occupied and nearby, talking about what they’re making, seeing me making too, them having access to me to help them whilst making my own thing.

Examples of things made – anything out of cardboard, room boxes, mandolorian armour, knitting (badly, including holes and dropped and extra stitches), free form stitching (no plan, no end point, making up on the spot), drawing comics, sewing pillows & dolls clothes (I once sewed a fabric book I’d dreamt about the night before, and found it satisfying to hold in my hands, despite the mistakes/imperfections). The imperfections are part of the thing, there is no time for redoing as the moment will soon pass, so I’m more accepting of these. This has been quite freeing. “Nothing of consequence” has been a bit of a theme as a strategy to just

“Mood, process, running, privilege.

“Communication with others is important. I often imagine I am writing toward or for someone, as I am choosing to write to you now in an email rather than a document. Often this idea of correspondence is one-sided, not publicly addressed to a particular person but imaginatively dedicated while in process, usually to a woman upon whom I’ve projected a kind of psychic energy, a bit like a crush. I read my writing as though from the perspective of this other, needing to be outside of myself in some way, looking in. I have rituals too, to get me into a particular frame of mind needed for writing or making work. For years I listened to the same record on repeat when I was writing, a piece of music that I associated with a period in which I was very creative, very in touch with myself emotionally.

“Balancing reading and writing with the ability to leave the house and be outside, to take a walk, or do some gardening, and be “in the moment”. Since I started to “borrow dogs” five years ago, and then became a dog owner myself in 2018, I find that time spent outside with my dogs is vital to my mental health: their immediate impressions, curiosity, and enthusiasm really helps to balance out the time that I spend “in my own head”.

“A sense of time that is not hurried or filled with other tasks. A quiet place and my own desk. A cup of coffee on a windowsill, a moment looking out over trees. Often I can struggle for a long time with an idea when I’m at my desk, and then I’ll find that it becomes clear when I’m doing something else, often the next morning. Whilst having a bath, making breakfast, getting dressed. Then it is finding the time to write it down, and get somewhere with it before it disappears. Sometimes a writing journal helps. Sometimes this happens when I’m in the middle of reading a book, that things start to fall into place, connections are made, it starts to become clear to me.

”

What hinders your creative work?

“Feeling alone, because we are so atomised due to culture and capacity to cope.

Not having any space to get materials out or hoard stuff – being cramped in a bedroom, with no distance between art and life.

Copyright law.

Gatekeepers, having to apply for opportunities in a way which puffs up hierarchies further and turns the artist into eternal pitcher-beggar-self-promo salesperson.

The fact my friends live far away so we can't jam and improv together easily/often.

Not having any storage.

Not having enough time during term time to make work.

My dyspraxia and ADHD meaning that all my computers are full to bursting and all the software is struggling to cope.

Difficulties with practical things and spatial things.

My ADHD – being so full of ideas that I exhaust myself and lack the dexterity to finish things slickly.

Being afraid to ask others for help/support because that is not something I was taught to do in my family – we were more primed to be polite and positive.

Not being able to say no or set boundaries easily.

Worrying about talking too much, but feeling compelled to talk too much so that I justify my worth.

“I'm constantly in a position of asking (and being rejected), hardly ever being asked and never in the position of saying no to anyone. So when I send out an interview request and the person doesn't even reply, I can get very down. I wish someone was emailing me out of the blue saying I love your work and I want to discuss it with you. I'd be thrilled, I would always respond and most likely straight away. So the process can be very disheartening. Somehow I keep going. The artist advisor Marina Granger says you should view your rejections as proof that you tried. Failure is also said to be an opportunity, right? And it's true that when I'm unhappy with how things went in my work I do want to continue so I can get it right next time! So maybe nothing gets in the way of my creative work, being

the highly motivated glutton for punishment that I am.

“The lack of this space for thinking. Time being so broken up into brief moments where you can only scratch the surface. But I've adapted to this, but this has impacted on the kind of work I can produce.

“In answering this question I feel it's important to say that I am privileged by historic and systemic systems that favour my skin colour, ethnicity, sexuality and able body. I don't face the same and often accumulative barriers that other women do. If there are things that hinder me they are mostly internal, my mind – self-doubt, lack of self-esteem, mental health disorders (anorexia, depression), inability to focus, dyslexia, a feeling of overwhelm.

“The need to make money and do the housework, the washing up that refuses to magic itself away, caring for children. My own laziness and distraction. Distance from a community of others who are interested in the same things. Being older and less energetic. Everyday tiredness that leads to a loss of urgency around all things creative. The wrong kind of noise.

“I know that breaks can be productive, but I have been so busy so long with earning money to survive and grow etc and I do not plough that money back into my own practice. I used to think it was money that hindered my practice, now it's commitments. But I also know from experience that in fact, one must just stop everything else in order to work. What happens is that my life becomes incredibly disorganised, there are so many things I overlook, and in order to be able to do my practice I must just stop everything else, just walk away, and do the bare minimum.

“Cold. It drains energy. Also noise that I cannot control, say a neighbour is making music or there's roadworks. It gets worse when there's no understanding of how long it will go on for and how I might plan around it. Hunger. Nervous energy from unresolved tension, often paid work admin responsibilities spilling over even when trying to ignore them. Concerns about friends

and families: illness, pain and distance. Having a desk that rattles when I type, not having space to spread out on the floor. Lack of sleep, lack of energy.

“Feelings of isolation, tiredness and insecurity which has come from living through the pandemic. I can go for days of being so unproductive, in terms of my writing and thinking about/through the layers of my PhD creative practice and then feeling guilty and angry at myself for not being better.

Practical stuff like family commitments. In January my dad got COVID and had to go into hospital, it felt like I lost a whole month of work because I was dealing with that situation.

Worry about paid work, since the pandemic, the cinemas shutting, my freelance work has fallen away a part from a few bits of teaching and writing.

“Mostly perhaps the financial struggle to exist as an independent artist. Being too self-critical. Being isolated physically or feeling isolated always makes things more difficult for me... But paradoxically, because of this reason or another I had to move one place to another constantly since I moved to England in 2003 and that meant that I often felt isolated, this is also due to being an immigrant... you always feel a bit isolated, even if it's only in your head... You are not born to the community you live in, you have to create one from scratch, or make yourself part of existing ones, which is not always easy... Neither is... I also realise this could be true for everyone... I feel that, I have been in constant transition in the last 20 years... Some years have been worse than others, and those I have been the least productive...

“The group with who I shared a political life and a background in DIY art, culture, and activism as a teenager began to receive external affirmation from the art world in our twenties. The ways and spaces in which we produced work changed. Individual authorship became more pronounced. I am part of a generation who went to art school in the early 2000s, encountering an increasingly commodified education sector in proximity to the value

systems of a quite buoyant, very professionalised art world. I developed a photographic practice at a time when photography had really been subsumed into these two inter-connected institutional contexts and yet graduated in 2008, the year of the financial crash when the art world was very interested in co-opting forms of autonomous, independent, or grassroots practice (perhaps it always does this but it manifested in specific ways around the crash, the con-lib government and so on). All to say that this context has shaped me as a writer but absolutely hindered my practice as an artist: professionalisation, visibility, the fear of judgement, seduction of certain forms of institutional validation (from the art world and academy).

“In August 2020 I wrote a text called “Desire Lines”, a response to completing art and research applications that feel endless *and* sparse, particularly with the precarity of art practice in the current climate. It talks about the box ticking activities in these applications and the expansive and sprawling slipperiness I need to thrive and have integrity. Here is a short quote:

>TRUST!

\ because we live in a world full of categorisation and boxes

– that those who are scared of you/your creativity just can't find the box.¹

The boxes that I talk about in this text are hindering and old-fashioned; debilitating as constructions and how they impact on women's creativity. It's painful, looking at the history of art, and the inability for women to be recognised as polymaths: although when you look at the work of women, we've been smashing that box from the start! Just having to do the things that we need to do. Just to be. And then moving on to how those multifaceted practices overlay. So, yes, those external categorisations hinder my work. Having to fit in. When I first started out those boxes were interesting for me to push up against and for me to define through activism and rebelling, but they're just not useful for me because I realise now those boxes are really only

¹ Lauren Craig's poem “Desire Lines” will be published in full in the **Feminist Review** blog in 2022 as part of the Women's Art Library Art and the Archive bursary.

there to keep you in: within your practice psychically, spiritually, they're only there to keep you inside.

“Depression. Self-doubt, a sense of hopelessness that can hit at unexpected moments and keep me with it for long periods. A cycle that I've only just broken is a sense of not-having-enough-time, so when I have time, I spend it worrying about the amount I need to do, and am exhausted before I get to anything creative. Paradoxically, these periods have led me to think about my own writing practice in a great deal of detail, and have fuelled much of my approach to writing as a self-reflexive exploration that often tangles anecdotes and memories with art history. I've only started to figure this out in a less painful, and more systematic way. For many years I was beholden to sudden flashes of scenes, ideas, vivid sensations that would eventually led their way into my writing, but not quickly or easily.

”

When you read the extracts from Annabel Nicolson's tapes in the article "Women Talking", do you see similarities with your own situation in 2021?

“Reading the transcript of Nicholson's tapes I see a lot of similarities with the women she spoke to in the 1970s. This is comforting as it is helpful to hear that this experience is shared, even if we'd hope these things wouldn't still be an issue 50 years later (mindboggling), feeling less alone, reading other women's experience. But it also is a testament to how ingrained and established the woman as carer role is and how this can be at odds with the woman artist, or as a person in her own right.

In the archival text, someone mentions when you're just on your own in your room, and that it can be quite frail, without the dialogue with anyone – I relate to that. Being in my own head, not articulating or in dialogue can mean the ideas are small and fragile and easily discounted or dismissed rather than developed further.

This period of domestic isolation alongside frantic online working during lockdown has had an impact on me to seek out dialogue with others, and specifically women. I have sought to develop collective strategies to counter this isolation and to make creative work in collaboration again, as working in isolation is too lonely, quiet and fragile. Even though starting to have that dialogue will be challenging, as I have withdrawn from it for so long, but it feels necessary to get things going. And not to be the main driver or sole maker, but to work together with others, this is what I think could be useful and productive, creatively.

Just to be responding to these questions at this point in time for me has had an impact on me already. It's meant that I've become conscious of the treadmill, and thought about what I've been doing, how I've been making (even the small, "nothing of consequence" things) and how it's different (in lockdown) to how I've worked in the past and what is useful from this, and what I should just stop worrying about. Just to be asked the questions that you're asking, and to read the conversations I have found brings a consciousness to the zombie-like existence of the past year and a recognition of how making is important to me, even if it is just in play.

“I was reminded of a time when myself and my collaborator had tried to interview each other about our experiences of neurodiversity, and our concerns about whether or not to publicly "come out" about our ADHD and autism. It felt like we were packaging our vulnerability and private issues and making them into content we could use to market ourselves, which felt potentially damaging and uncomfortable. As soon as you record something it becomes "content" and that's gold in our culture. We run the risk of commodifying our own vulnerabilities and potentially being subject to society's labelling presumptions. I'd rather be free from that labelling. But sometimes I do it to myself. It almost felt like to record ourselves we were exploiting ourselves, and in return we would get the relief of opening up about our difficulties and worries... a sort of public therapy. I'm interested in complicating public/private boundaries but I'm aware it's irreversible and dangerous sometimes. For example when I did a work where I planned future lives together with strangers in their homes while doing chores together I chose not to document it except in the form of a fictional spin-off story.

“Since my own work is interview based, I found it intriguing to learn about Annabel Nicolson's project. I've had the feedback from my talk show guests that they found it to be a helpful opportunity to reflect on their own work. And, like Nicolson, I was advised to take time to reflect on my own practice, not to neglect doing that for myself. Unlike Nicolson, I've built my own voice into my work, i.e. I do a monologue reflecting on the topic of the show from my own perspective before I question my guests about it. Instead of (not) sharing my quiet voice with the audience, as Nicolson does, I act as an alter-ego with a bigger personality than my own. Her example is giving me ideas for how I might use the interviews and perform with them differently. Because of the similarity (and the clear distinctions) of my own work and Nicolson's, I'm kind of answering a different question to the one you're asking.

I do think this is still important and I'm constantly asking other artists about their strategies and usually I look to people who are a little older

than me for advice. But I don't necessarily look only to women. I think it is very important to share strategies with other artists who are mothers (but I would also include men with primary caregiving responsibilities in such an activity). Why women only? I do question that impulse. Maybe sharing strategies with feminist-identified artists is more the approach I would take.

In the review of "Women and Creativity" you sent, Kazuko Hohki comments that women have "enormous respect to the life, the way to live" as a justification/affirmation for the women-only focus of Nicholson's project. I disagree with this, women aren't magically more in touch with life! A) We are socialised to be the glue that holds social groups/families together, and society is structured to perpetuate that to a great extent. B) The lack of institutional support for women/non-white/queer/disabled artists means that we/they necessarily turned to life as an outlet for creativity. At a 2011 screening of Lynn Hersmann Leeson's film **Women Art Revolution** at Whitechapel Gallery, in response to the question of why performance art was a medium taken up by so many women artists during the 1970s, she said something along the lines of: feminist art had to become feminist lives because no gallery was necessary; they presented their work in the public realm instead of waiting to be invited to take part in a male-dominated art world.

I think that is true of me, I keep making without institutional support, I keep eking out my own opportunities when no gallery (institutional support) is available, because I would be miserable not continuing to pursue this. But I also recognise how important preceding generations of feminist art has been in granting me permission to make art from/about my life, and to see that as worthy of the name art, despite not having the level of institutional recognition and support to which I aspire.

“I mean I was born in 1982 [laughs] so seeing that date there [on the text "Women Talking"] and reading it, I thought, shit, this text is as old as me. The notion of rituals plays into my way of working and my research, particularly the rituals within women's practices. [Though] not in the way they're expressed in this text because it's very much about place and space, and

I think rituals are important in my practice for embodying an internal space and an internal landscape of emotional processes. Not so much objects. The production of objects is a way for me to create place because that's never very stationary for me. One of the women [in "Women Talking"] talks about a fire and moving around. [reading from the text] "At the moment I'm in the centre of a cyclone because a lot of things are changing in my life. For me, one way of coping is to be still in order to know the moves one needs to make." That's more how I use ritual in my practice because I'm always finding a new place to live, even if it's a place I've lived before – especially with a small child whose developmental needs are forever catapulting that need for a change of environment. That has an involuntary effect on creativity and space for me.

The paragraph where Annabel talks about what had made her want to make the recordings – in the first column [of "Women Talking"] – that really pushed me to think about why I am doing this project on **Passion** [the 1990 book edited by Maud Sulter on Blackwomen's creativity]. That was really helpful, because speaking specifically now about my research looking into collective writing, it seems as though a lot of my desire to look at the book **Passion** is about other artists/curators' practices. How can I bring other people together and how can I honour what other people have given? How can I extend that offering, that gift? How can I do it justice? When will it be enough? A lot of those questions came back to me. Annabel has a friend who says to her something along the lines of: What do you want to get out of it? Like, where are *you* in this project? Where are you in the desire to do this? I can't remember exactly... in the third paragraph of the first column, Annabel says "My own needs had been overlooked." And it made me question, why is that my path, why is that the path for many women that which allows us to create structures and environments that allow us to be overlooked? That really spoke to me. I am keeping this in mind and will ask critical friends to care for me within the process.

In response to the review in **Musics** magazine by Kazuko Hohki, this quote really spoke to me: “My expectations for that performance was in rather social context. I mean I was really interested in all these women artists’ ideas about Annabel’s subject because I myself sometimes feel some sort of struggle between the desire to create things and the destruction of problems from daily life which seems to be caused especially by the fact that I’m a woman, like worrying about the relationship with a man or a lack of confidence towards myself, and this performance came up to my expectation by some extent, although it’s not perfect because of my language problem.” I think that I could maybe replace some of that with the element of racism in the social context for me. It’s not just “the destruction of problems from daily life which seems to be caused especially by the fact that I’m a woman”, but that’s also the destruction by racism – and the distraction of it. Like Toni Morrison said, “The very serious function of racism ... is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work.” The part of me that wants me to say that because of those things I’m not perfect, and worrying about my relationship to these things can make me feel not confident. But I’m incontestable in my intention for these things to be changed. For me to be true with myself and honest about where this comes from, I need the space for it to be fluid. It needs to be able to move and breathe with us. Going back to my research on **Passion**: at that time Maud’s use of her word “Blackwoman” was disruptive enough as a word, for an exploration of creativity, it was disruptive enough. It reshaped our view enough. But I already know that’s going to be contested now as not being enough, or not being inclusive enough because we’ve moved on.

“The insecurity and need for recognition that many of the women voiced is something that continues to impact upon women disproportionately, and has certainly been a faultline in my own life. The discussion about the need for a stable base – the old room of one’s own – really rang true.

One woman talked about the liberation of travel, of being on a train or the tube. These days, when we can’t travel at all during lockdown, the lure of travel is very strong. This is rather ironic as in the couple of years before COVID I had become tired of travel, those short gigs where you spend longer travelling to and from the event than actually being there. I had also started to dread the social aspect of art and academic events, the drinks in the bar afterwards. Often I would be exhausted after a giving a talk, and keen for the “performance” to be over. I would berate myself for finding excuses not to attend the drinks reception, or the gallery dinner, for missing out on what were supposed to be the “perks” of the job, and key to securing future invitations and collaborations. It’s taken the enforced social isolation and physical limitations of the pandemic to make me realise how much I want to travel and circulate again.

“It brings into view the necessity of having others to talk to. My writing has changed since I started writing with my friends in mind, started to have an audience that wasn’t just me, or for a teacher. Sharing writing is both nerve-wracking and powerful, the exchanges always give me something, even if it is just the feeling that what I’m doing is right, despite the objections of others. Sometimes I need to speak to someone about what I’m writing, and the lockdown has made this difficult, and the enormity of the problems and crises people are dealing with has made the problems of writing pale in comparison. Feeling selfish about wanting to write, still having part of me that needs to write. Is it selfish? Or a necessity? This is something that I wonder. Is it about a career? Or is it about a need to be creative? Is that a fantasy? Is it something that women and other marginalised voices have found hard to hold? Still feel resentful when others manage? I only know that when I couldn’t write, for instance when caring for a very small baby, I felt that I had lost something, I felt claustrophobic, a sense of not being able to breathe enough. Maybe this was something bigger, but at its core there was this need to return to the page.

Do you think it is still important for women artists and other feminist cultural practitioners to share their strategies for enabling creative practice?

“I don’t understand what a feminist cultural practice would be without sharing strategies. My closest circle of collaborators share experiences of queerness but has always been mixed in terms of gender identity. I think it would be a mistake to read only this as a shift from the politics of the 1970s and 80s to now, although of course that is part of it (I came out and started making work at the same time, in the early 2000s). But an older generation of (mostly) women have been incredibly important to me and my creative work. This is a deep attachment, psychically complex, and in many ways has kept me grounded, allowed me to conceive of a practice as something various, built over a lifetime, dependent on the internal values and labour of a community joined by political affinities, friendship and mutual respect rather than external validation. As I get older, I feel able to occupy this with more confidence, although a degree of material stability certainly helps that groundedness and separates me at times from the women whose work I am so inspired by.

“Speaking with other women artists is very empowering. This is important to note, because it is not because they are like me, but rather because they trust me. That trust is a huge relief after many years of being a younger female artist, and frankly, treated like shit. Made to feel worthless. It’s a relief to feel appreciated, and not pushed down as far you will take it. I can still really remember that feeling. So it’s not about solidarity, as someone said recently, it’s just about being interested in each other.

“The more conversation that is had about the challenges of working and the ways people have found to overcome them, the more paths are opened to people to work creatively. I think this is perhaps less significant in helping those who are already practicing, though I’m sure it does help, but more importantly it keeps in the open the difficulties involved in making creative work and articulates ways to overcome these. This seems to me to be a crucial part of encouraging and supporting new voices, making plain

the structures through which creativity is made possible and ways to negotiate these structures. Speaking to and working with other women has been helpful to me, but mainly in finding those co-conspirators.

“I don’t think anyone that I work with on a regular basis feels like they have enough time and space for their creative practice, and when they find things that work they seem so eager to share, at the same time when we run into massive obstacles, disappointments and frustrations it can feel joyful to vent to each other. Speaking to other women artists or creatives has helped me. It’s also helped me to speak to other people whose families or they themselves are migrants. I think there’s a lot of space for me created personally when I find that I have a shared position or situation with others, a feeling of relief, although I am suspicious of being drawn to the ease of common experience all the time, because it can exclude and suggests a kind of utopia where you will all think the same about all issues, which I’ve found not to be true.

On the term “women artists”

“It’s difficult, so difficult. How can we do things justice? When will it be enough? Those questions are important and we need to keep asking them, and when we do we get closer to what we need in terms of definitions. I’m grappling with the same thing at the moment because firstly, how do I include my friends and family? That’s how I look at it. How do I include the people I share my life with, who support me, love me, that contribute; that’s how I try to think about writing and including, researching the extended people beyond that circle. The term “woman artist” is useful and it’s not useful. It’s useful because my friends are not going to define the world and how everybody would like to be addressed, but they are pretty diverse for a starting point and open enough to respect self-identification. I guess just remaining open to that pushback to the term and being flexible enough to grow. I liked that you chose to just refer to people as feminists as a way to combat that. I thought that was good, but it also has its issues like how do the womanists feel?

“I don’t think of gender as relevant to who I seek support from or offer support to. However, my closest networks are female and/or queer. This is perhaps because I am overtly passionate and emotional, which are stereotypically feminised traits – maybe they’re a bit too much for some men. Masculinity is also really important to my identity too, I have always felt uncomfortable with being described as a woman or a girl, or anything gendered really. Hanging out with laddish men and queer people is a hugely restorative and uplifting experience for me. If I’m honest, the word feminist still gives me a bit of gender dysphoria to be honest, because of its binary nature, I would rather be a queerist (everyone’s queer, not necessarily in gender but in ability, diversity, neurology, peculiarities – the illusion of any “neutral” is oppressive).

“I do still think that we need that space to talk and think together because it is in those material spaces that we can feel a sense of communality, by holding space for those histories of practice, archives of feelings and find collective power in those sharing experiences. That is where I continue to find my strength and creativity as a feminist practitioner.

”



Some of Annabel Nicolson's respondents discussed whether they needed isolation to work, is this important to you?

“The reality of my work since 2011 is that I have pursued the form of a talk show performance piece. This speaks to the very real need I have to connect and be in dialogue with other artists, activists, writers, performers and psychologists that understand the risks of self-disclosure because that's what they do in their work. But it is also a fact that the desire to be with others and the desire to be alone are not opposite ends of a spectrum, but are experienced simultaneously as competing desires. Since lockdown began, my partner started pointing out that I'm always moving into another room, away from everyone else. Yes, I need solitude, I need to be alone to process my thoughts, which I most often do by writing. In trying to write this, I went into my room and my family members all followed me and jumped on my bed and annoyed me. I must take them out for a walk now.

“I have a young child, am on maternity leave in lockdown with a partner who has work of her own and it feels rare if not impossible to be alone. I fantasise about taking a train to another place, and no one knowing where I am, there being no demands on my time, occupying time and space in an undetermined way. I used to do this before I had a baby and before COVID. Now that experience feels like something I will have to work out a way to make possible, particularly if I am to make my way back to an artistic practice (a personal one, rather than a professional one), which is what I am trying to do.

“I would love isolation to work, do you happen to know where I can get some?

I started making

only at the point of change

in a shifting strange space.

living between

trying to be in touch with an anchoring point

a place I could stay with myself

and

starting all over again

immediate

inconsequential

I was conscious of the need

to be rooted but not fixed

in some way listening

receptive enough to make connections

free enough to explore

to recognise this language a new place

suddenly

everything was so much bigger

It was a long time out of my body

I have to perch on the edge to play

otherwise I become too flat,

I already know one way of coping is to be still

But I need to try to move out of them

moving faster

accelerating

round and round and round.

The fire

maybe

a fire is just a fire

That's something about my own experience

which is the experience of another kind of loss,

unspoken,

My own location in a way denied

The miserable objects of my body

my basic ground

have been pulled down.....

I have been or I'm in flames.

But that fire that was a dream or didn't happen or

So painful it became purposeful.

Yes. I used the weight

That's so female

yet all that energy of desolate places

although it was still

I can bring it out

touch

hidden

echoes

to integrate it... to sustain it

to recover a sense of what I was

what had made me

trying to make some kind of whole

find form from dust and rubble.....

It takes such a long time

After making

publicly I arrange the material of myself
in performance

When that happened something was emptied.

It becomes.....

look at her

often

on the floor staring out

whatever it is

the response was awkward.

really awkward or completely inane

I don't make it easy for myself.

you've been away and you come back too thin'.

I was giving out

not following the signs

those corrugated bleak kinds of places.....

my actions at a tangent

I was anxious

isolated.

I had become extracts

At the moment

other things are changing

Timing is important

I've found a kind of fluency

knowing when to pause

and slow down

And it's difficult to know

what it is that rekindles it, what it is that you touch,

sometimes it just seems very frail.

but

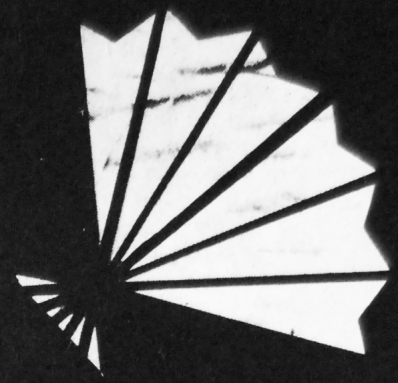
Somehow you know..... know that it's not going to disappear

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No. 7



Women in other cultures

mother
motherhood
mothers

art schools

sketches



Women's
space

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The group is led by Dr Catherine Grant (Senior Lecturer, Goldsmiths, University of London), Dr Amy Tobin (Curator of Exhibitions, Events and Research, Kettle's Yard, and Lecturer in the History of Art, University of Cambridge) and Dr Rachel Warriner (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Courtauld Institute of Art).

Responding to Women and Creativity

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