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Sounding Expanded Affinities

A Polytemporal Approach to Reconceptualizing Egalitarian Social Relations

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Abstract

My doctoral submission, *Sounding Expanded Affinities*, examines how strides toward gender equality might be made, but it postulates that this is too difficult while marriage remains at the core of our patriarchal value system. This patriarchal system is one which oppresses women by manipulating subjects into its preferred roles often in subtle, chronic ways, using repetition and pairing as its tools. The doctoral submission then formulates a synchronous model of time to critique and disturb the operation of convention, to evaluate alternative forms of relationships, and finally, to propose a new relationship form with egalitarianism as its aim.

I approach the doctoral project as an artistic practitioner first. Therefore, I have extracted a methodology from my sound installation work that I refer to as “polytemporality”. I borrow this musical term to bring together thinking from different historical moments about how women might achieve greater equality. The project focuses on the United States context, specifically the period between the nineteenth century and now. I ultimately build on this research into earlier utopian proposals for gender equality to develop an idea that I call “expanded affinities”: this is a proposal for a more egalitarian form of relationship. The two terms are both method and subject of the artworks, dissertation, and writing that comprise my doctoral submission, *Sounding Expanded Affinities*. I see the two as linked since I believe that gender inequality is reinforced by notions of linear time. “Polytemporality”, which I define as a synchronous sense of the past, present, and future, is therefore meant to disrupt the normative ideas about gender within relationships. The word “polytemporal” further serves as a conscious nod to the politics of polyamory, or, non-monogamy, taken up in this text. The notion of expanded affinities builds on my research into earlier historical attempts to form more egalitarian types of relationships in intentional communities or through experimenting with different modes of relating. It is a concept that contributes to feminist and queer critiques of heteronormative constructs insofar as it decenters marriage and biological kinship, and redistributes the state’s economic investments in those forms of belonging to the individual instead of the couple. Expanded affinities is ultimately a way of relating that exceeds present-day restrictions and hierarchies within love relations.

The first two installations that are part of *Sounding Expanded Affinities* are *Utopians Dance* and *A Reeducation*. Together, these two installations take up the initial terms of gender identity, feminism, sexuality, utopian communities, and alternative economics. The third installation includes the radio play *ReCast: LIVE ON-AIR* in which feminist voices from across 200 years are brought together in an omnipresent radio station to discuss relationship forms. Polytemporality is not only the method of writing, but the form too, as *ReCast: LIVE ON-AIR* aims to create a hybrid sense of time in the physical and aural space of installation. The dissertation appendix includes reprints of my script and book from the abovementioned installations.

I use the polytemporal method in my dissertation as well. Chapter one introduces the concept, and chapter two offers an historical analysis of the patriarchal nature of marriage that also identifies the residual asymmetrical power structures from the past that still exist today. The third chapter evaluates the egalitarian potential of ethical non-monogamies for women, in part by examining earlier historical communities where non-monogamy was practiced in order to create more egalitarian modes of relating. The fourth chapter introduces the concept of expanded affinities as my alternative to ethical non-monogamy that is intended to be a more inclusive and more equal relationship form.

Together, the concept of expanded affinities and polytemporality allow the personal register to speak across time to create bonds beyond the constraints of the present, of the couple, and of gender roles. The installations provide an element of embodiment and performativity; the dissertation offers analysis and scholarship; and the artistic writings contain fractured narratives. It is my hope that such an interdisciplinary approach to form and expression will work to forward the frames within which feminist art and discourse can take place today.

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