

A Reflection: Remix for Brianne

Lisa Flanagan

The cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange is that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, whereas the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection. ...

Art that matters to us — which moves the heart, or revives the soul, or delights the senses, or offers courage for living, however we choose to describe the experience — is received as a gift is received. ... The daily commerce of our lives proceeds at its own constant level, but a gift conveys an uncommodifiable surplus of inspiration.

- Johnathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism*, 66.

A Reflection: Remix for Brianne is a compiled text layering Kate Chopin's "A Reflection" with images and footage from various film projects. I first read "A Reflection" as an epilogue at the end of a copy of *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories* for a course in graduate school on Fiction of the South. The text has stayed with me and became the epilogue for my first large scale co-directed show as faculty at my former institution, anchoring our interwoven short stories centered on New Orleans. Later, I incorporated the text into a mixed media performance for a Performance Studies International (PSi) conference as spoken text between and among songs, symbols, and imagery of New Orleans cultural celebrations and sites of resistance. The performance was subsequently published as a video essay using overlapping images, video, and stop animation. More recently, "A Reflection" was the penultimate piece in a co-compiled performance with Danielle Vignes, a celebratory remix of the performance of poetry and prose we performed

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at the 2022 National Communication Association (NCA) convention in New Orleans.

Initially, this piece was a video card sent to Brianne Waychoff in May 2022 in conjunction with other videos from a group of friends. We wanted to send her a “virtual hug” while she was receiving treatment for 9/11 related kidney cancer. My initial submission incorporated vocal performance of the Chopin text over some of the previous imagery layered into footage from another film project on surrealist artist Remedios Varo. The Varo film used live action footage, cut paper animation, and hand painted 16 mm film that has been processed digitally applying techniques also used by Varo such as collage, decalcomania, fumage, frottage, and grattage. In the week or so I had to complete my piece for inclusion in the video embrace my thoughts turned to bricolage and how to glean new purpose and meaning from materials, texts, and processes that allowed me to share with Brianne some of the beauty and pleasure found in their “uncommodifiable surplus of inspiration” (Lethem, 66). Brianne passed on July 25, 2022, and this remix has continued as an act of reflection and remembrance.

In her opening sections of both her 2009-2010 performances of *Leftovers* and her subsequent article *Leftovers: Performing Gleaning*, Brianne gleans excerpts from an interview with Agnes Varda discussing her documentary “The Gleaners and I”:

I am strict. I am structural. Following my intuition. Following my connection. You go to the right thing, to the right place, to the right image. People live off our leftovers. People feed themselves with what we throw. And I say “we” because it's you, it's me—it's everybody. A woman working with her intuition and trying to be intelligent. Seeing. Discovering. Trying to be clever. Doing cinécriture.^{12†}

¹² The term “cinécriture” is a neologism of Agnes Varda’s used to describe her style of expression. She defines it as: “The cutting, the movement, the points-of-view, the rhythm of filmmaking and editing have been felt and considered in the way a writer chooses the depth of meaning and sentences, the types of words, number of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or break its flow” (BAM/PFA). This word can be connected with *écriture féminine*, “an ethical writing style (which women in particular can access) that is able, through a phonetic inscription of the feminine body, its pulsions and flows, to open up and embrace the

[†] Footnote number in the original; the second paragraph of this block quote is the footnote text.

difference of the other" (O'Grady 6). *Écriture féminine's* use of the body as both a metaphor and a site of writing offers a way of understanding the body, and by extension history, in constant flux. It is a way of writing history differently and of writing different histories. (Waychoff, 5)

This meta reference to another artist's reflection on the process of gleaning as a mode of expression and creation grounds both Brianne's work and mine. In Brianne's performance and the evocative essay that followed, "gleaning serves as both subject and metaphor as it explores leftover fragments; potatoes in a field, a painting, a family memento, a body remembering" (Louisiana State University). Similarly, my film gleans from analogue film footage and animation techniques; photographs of friendship, cultural display, and performance; surrealist imagery and praxis all cut to the rhythm of a text that inscribes a way of knowing that is both poignant and powerful with each repetition anew. Each time I adapt/perform/remix "A Reflection," I receive the gift of inspiration in "that moving procession of human energy" which provides a sense of "home in the society of these symbols of life's immutability" (Chopin, 158).

I have gleaned further imagery for this final remix from these and other sources, stitching new significance from the surplus of inspiration these texts provide. My 2022 NCA performance with Danielle Vignes mentioned previously included a tribute to Brianne, interweaving our incorporation of some movement sequences and images she created for an Instagram performance, including one photograph I've layered into this new version of the film. Also, in the time between acceptance of this piece for publication and final submission, we honored Brianne's life by marching in the New Orleans Mardi Gras krewe Society of Saint Anne. We walked costumed through the crowded streets overflowing with revelers until our party of family and friends turned to the river to release her ashes alongside others performing their own private rituals of passing. Once again, I remixed this piece further by layering in images of the krewe who celebrated her on Mardi Gras day, 2023.

This remix is a reciprocation of the gift of Brianne's legacy as a performer, writer, teacher, and friend and acknowledgement of our shared commitment to remix/bricolage/gleaning as praxis. My return to "A Reflection" and the layers of imagery from a variety of sources operates in this and other iterations in the same way that Brianne used the dress form in her staging of and discourse on *Leftovers*:

The image of the dress form is used to cover a great deal of territory in this piece, and because it persists throughout the entirety of the performance, interacted with in varying ways, it takes on different meanings. While not defining the nexus of meanings it exists in, it is worth noting that it constitutes what Foucault refers to as “a profusion of entangled events” (155). Likewise, it does not reveal “a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis” (161). Just as the dressed form is actually a bricolage of various elements, the interpretations derived from it also exist in ways that are connected, yet separate (Waychoff, 3).

Further, in *Leftovers*, Brianne’s notion of sampling operates metaphorically as a method of collecting and composing:

Secondly, it indicates an in sampling on several levels that are intimated in this piece: sampling sounds by taking a portion of one recording and using it as an instrument or voice in another, as a way to think about gleaning as in collecting incomplete parts, or samples, and as a way to think about sewing and/or stitching as in picking out samples of fabric or picking out samples of yarn that are then put together. Samplers are artifacts made through needlepoint and are a means of disseminating information. One could think of them as the art of information sharing. Samplers record information. ... An interest in sampling corresponds to the dissemination of information and the idea of gleaning” (Waychoff, 2).

A Reflection: Remix for Brianne samples and stitches remnants gleaned from various texts and performances to honor a friend and scholar “born with a vital and responsive energy” who furnished in her “own personality a good bit of the motive power to the mad pace” (Chopin, 158).

References

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