



Call of Nurture: A 3- Channel Public Video Installation on Public Breastfeeding as a Gendered Transgressive Act and Maternal Practice

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Abstract

“Call of Nurture” is a public video art installation that contextualizes public breastfeeding as a gendered transgressive act and maternal practice. It locates gender (maternal) performativity in public female toilets, as a site of repression, oppression, and ‘cultural repository’ (Gershenson & Penner, Ladies, and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender 2009). This project primarily takes in the form of a narrative research methodology that consolidates the collective experiences of breastfeeding mothers (including the author as a first-time breastfeeding mother) in the Philippines through the author’s involvement with different grassroots breastfeeding organizations and series of collected first-hand recorded interviews of mothers coming from different social classes and sectors in Philippine society. An in-depth document review on women and representation (in art and media), gender performativity in public and private spaces, and seminal studies from feminist theorists Laura Mulvey, Barbara Creed, and Judith Butler is conducted to support the significance and map out the objectives of this project. The imposed pressures of the status quo on women to keep public breastfeeding “discreet” which is caused by the repressive-oppressive public-private space translate to anxiety and panic due to the conscious recognition of the Male Gaze and a “panoptic entity” that could take in various contemporary forms such as social media. A deconstructed 3- channel video triptych shown in various LED monitors is installed within the zone of transgression and exhibit space and played in a loop. The length of the loop is about 6 minutes. The loop is divided into three kinds of Gaze: 1) The Female Gaze; 2) The Panoptic Gaze; 3) The Male Gaze. A breastfeeding mother is struggling to negotiate her public-private identity in the form of a transgressive maternal performance which is breastfeeding. Original music is played in sync with the deconstructed video triptych. Surveillance cameras are installed within the vicinity to include spectators as participants, which serves as critique and protest to break the repressive-oppressive norms on public performance. Private spaces in public spheres, even those that are assigned as ‘female spheres’ are hinged on the male-oriented public gaze. The project aims to simulate a vacuum where public breastfeeding as a gendered transgressive act is performed while it represses and oppresses the maternal as it intends to elicit the viewers’ voyeuristic fantasies. This public video art installation project arrives as a groundbreaking form of protest media art as it provides an accessible avenue for the general public to discuss, interact, participate, re-experience, immerse and debate on the often neglected narratives of (breastfeeding) mothers and women struggling with public prejudice, harassment vis-a-vis maternal identity.

Keywords: public breastfeeding, male gaze, maternal performativity, panopticon, scopophilia

Themes: women and public spaces, male gaze, maternal identity