

Candice Breitz

KAUFMANN REPETTO

Cleft-lipped, navel-less miniature mutants—dressed inexplicably in Devo-esque jumpsuits—are the chilling bogeymen in David Cronenberg’s 1979 horror film, *The Brood*. Scarier, though, is what unleashes them: the unorthodox therapeutic practice of Dr. Raglan, who seeks to treat the antiheroine Nola Carveth by excavating her repressed rage through spirited role play. As a result of Raglan’s questionable methods, his patients’ emotions become somatized symptoms: whether welts, glistening pustules, or, in Nola’s case, the titular squad of undersize assassins, who bud parthenogenetically from her abdomen and later try to bump off her daughter.

The Brood’s therapy scenes, isolated from the rest of the film, make up one of the two channels in artist Candice Breitz’s 2013 video work,

Treatment. (The show was presented by Kaufmann Repetto in Milan at the Andrew Kreps Gallery space.) For the other channel, she cut together footage of her mother, father, and therapist, who all obligingly recorded lines from *The Brood*’s script in an austere sound studio padded with dark-gray pyramid acoustic foam. Their voice-overs serve as the sound track for the simultaneous screening of Cronenberg’s scenes and Breitz’s edited recording-session footage, and it’s clear that Breitz expended significant effort coaxing precise performances from her team, whose delivered lines sync up eerily well with the mouthings of their Hollywood counterparts. But beyond the simple appeal of such skillful ventriloquism, *Treatment* (commissioned by the Toronto International Film Festival) draws power from the creepy elision of reality and cinematic fantasy: “Since Hollywood harvests the drama of everyday life for its plots, the narratives of Hollywood movies resonate uncannily at times,” Breitz said in a 2005 interview. She asked: “Are my feelings coincidentally just like these Hollywood feelings, or are Hollywood feelings based on my feelings?”

A fascination with duality and multiplicity has long underscored Breitz’s art, whether in her 2009 piece featuring identical twins, or in looping mashed-up clips of grandes dames such as Susan Sarandon and Meryl Streep inhabiting the roles of mothers in various Hollywood films. And while some of Breitz’s works (as in a 2005 piece in which Michael Jackson fans sing “Thriller”) foreground the inherently off-kilter nature of a doppelgänger by juxtaposing it with its model, in *Treatment*, it was Cronenberg’s original scenes that became more upsetting when paired with counterparts. In contrast to the contemporary feel of Breitz’s own footage, *The Brood*’s Farrah Fawcett hairdos and wood-paneled, earth-toned rooms add their own kind of horror—the grotesquery of datedness.

As film buffs have noted, Cronenberg made *The Brood* right after a bitter custody battle with his ex-wife. How much of the film was autobiographical, then? That question itself was clearly doubled in Breitz’s filmic reprise: Left unsaid is the extent to which Cronenberg’s script—which traces the effects of a singularly acrimonious divorce and extreme psychic disturbance—resonates with her own biography.

Even the production process itself provoked speculations galore. Did her role as director, calling the shots while her parents delivered take after laborious take, upend long-entrenched family dynamics? And did Breitz’s real-life therapist’s decision to emerge from her office and participate in *Treatment* represent a transgressive element in the work, constituting a boundary violation (as certain psychoanalytic traditions would see it) in service to art? In the end we learned tantalizingly little about the artist’s personal relationship to *The Brood*, except for one small but telling detail Freud himself might have enjoyed: Nola Carveth’s terrorized daughter, like Breitz, is named Candice.

—Dawn Chan



Candice Breitz,
Treatment, 2013,
two-channel video
projection, color,
sound, 9 minutes
11 seconds.