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Julieta Aranda and Kaye Cain-Nielsen

Editorial

In ten seconds, how many synonyms can you think of for the word “power”?

And then, just when you thought that you finally got the hang of how the power structures around you function, they seem to be coming undone. But are they really coming undone, or is the current that’s pushing and pulling at them not much more than a massage, a way to keep them up to date that stays only on the surface and is not able to touch the center.

What is feminism, precisely? What are feminisms today?

To answer these questions and myriad others, the next two issues of *e-flux journal* are dedicated to feminism(s). It is a particular pleasure to embark on an exploration and an unfolding of the many complex realities and iterations that feminism can accommodate. Not one feminism, but many.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment certainly take center stage in current public discourses around women, around power—around feminisms. Perhaps these problems are being highlighted not because they are the only important issues, but because, under some legal systems, sexual violence is one abuse of power that is attached to legal and social punitive consequences—however indirect or murky those consequences may be. Meanwhile, of course, it is not clear if the waves of calling out and achieving punitive results is provisional in lieu of structural change: Conversation is moving rapidly through viral/virtual channels, which is very different from the legal and social in the familiar sense. And of course in many countries the woman-as-victim is punished instead (see: honor crimes), and even in so-called “developed” countries women are often socially or legally punished.

But, though bodies may be separated—by screen or otherwise—the current recountings engender empathy, so that the bodies can stand shoulder to shoulder. The solidarity and recognition of our bodies in the bodies of others who together comprise half of the world’s population also helps do away with the rarified feeling of “being exceptional” where a successful woman may be the only one like herself in a male-dominated field (like the current prime minister of New Zealand, the first world leader in thirty years to give birth while in office). Being “the exception that proves the rule” is a dangerous position. We are in this together.

In 1615, the first English translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* appeared in print. In 2017, Mary Beard began *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, as follows: “I want to start very near the beginning of the tradition in Western literature, and its first recorded example of a man telling a woman to ‘shut up’; telling her that her voice was not to be heard in public. I am thinking of a moment immortalized at the start of Homer’s *Odyssey*, almost 3,000 years ago.” She goes on

to describe Odysseus's son, Telemachus, telling his mother Penelope to fuck off—he will handle it as only a man can (in this case, murderously; these murders, it turns out, are perpetrated against rape victims). Penelope was fending off suitors trying to claim her after the presumed death of her absent husband. Her female servants didn't have that option—to fend off unwanted sex, to consent. Also in 2017, Emily Wilson published the first translation of *The Odyssey* by a woman. She completely revolutionizes our understanding of the violent scene that follows the exchange between Telemachus and his mother. Translation here is an ally—an accomplice—in reexamining the agency, action, complexity, consent, abuse of, and violence toward women of various classes and backgrounds as they appear in this ultimate classic. Crucially, in recounting Odysseus's triumphant, sudden return to his palace from a ten-year philandering absence, Wilson reexamines the words he uses to order his son to kill the women who've fallen prey to the visiting suitors. Wilson, in returning to the words as intended, changes the Fagles-translation hurl of "sluts" and "whores" to the simpler, more accurate "girls"—a term reflecting the original Greek word, literally meaning "female ones," as well as the fact that these people would have been essentially slaves—almost certainly not of a position nor age to consent.[1] In the classic translation is the power of dismissal and violent misogyny (miso-gyny—seventeenth century, from the Greek: *misos,* "hatred" + *gunē*, "woman").[2] In this new translation is the power of accurate language, of long-obscured truth.[3]

So, as translation and language are a form of power, here we aim toward embodying a powerful container, or a pole vault—as in a jump, an arc or ark—for the work and words of thinkers, artists, workers, mothers, poets, historians, collaborators, fighters, conveners, killjoys, teachers, those who dig futures, and those who feel archeological about feminisms—as well as those who have thoughtful reasons for not identifying with the term "feminism." The issue contains writing on feminisms in many but certainly not all combinations of the term's five-dimensional Venn diagrammatic modes. The "topic" (if the struggle of half of the world's population can be simply described as a topic) is of course so vast that we miss aspects of it. In recognition of this we also want to shed some light on all layers and problematics, loopholes, hits and misses that an issue like this entails.

We are interested in:

Productions, reproductions, lineages, of / by female images—or "the female image"—whether in graphic or graphic novel or science fiction form. As well as, of course, discourses on feminisms in contemporary art. In the production of the heroine image. We are interested in contemporary art motherhood. Contemporary working artists in motherhood. Contemporary mothers in the area of art. We are interested, on a planetary level, in the de-gendering of the planet as mother. Relatedly, there is consideration for levels of planetary damage and toxicity and recognition of the phenomenon of "menvironmentalism." With a view beyond earth: the gendering and feminisms of / in / on other planets. We find fascination in the Androgynous Peripheral Attach System developed to dock Soyuz-Apollo crafts, built at an expense to the tune of 18 million USD, so that neither the vessel belonging to the United States of America, nor the Russian vessel had to be the penetrated one within the Shuttle-Mir docking mission. We look to feminist space (besides and including outer). We looked to investigation, reflection, real fight and flight and deep celebration; we sought and seek to listen to read and present a symphonic, dissonant, layered, maximal collection on feminisms. More feminisms to come in September, when *e-flux journal* issue #93 comes out.

Words of radical generosity and electric honesty are presented here. Synthesis and resonance and dissonance all at once, with archival deep dives into and between presents, pasts, futures.

Renee Gladman's concise yet yet expansive universe of words conjures, remembers, and continues sung and under-sung traditions and trajectories that we need to hear, all the while providing a needed troubling of certain sodden figures.

We also remember here, editorially, why certain waters have been tread, why battles have been fought and reproduced, and why some of these (especially those around reproduction) have been, and are, so necessary and hard fought. And yet they are also understood here and by many today as one part of an aqueous ecosystem, where urgent and continuing narrative currents circulate, and have a chance to surface too.

To borrow the title of Angela Dimitrakaki's piece in this issue, herein are "Feminism, Art, Contradictions."

Griselda Pollock offers a thoughtful history of one such terrain, focused bodily and spread across several decades and geographies of both physical and artistic practice.

Continuing with contradictions, Pilar Villela Mascaró opens up deeply needed, uncomfortable complexities of living, working, thinking, having a body, and speaking (or not) in public at this time, while also shining a light onto the geographical and social contexts in Mexico and Latin America from which she writes. Mascaró troubles the word "feminism" with precise, difficult-to-express, ambivalent positions because, as she states, she cares about feminism so much—without identifying with it.

Mary Walling Blackburn's "Sticky Notes" turns a lived, ruthless gaze toward the dioramic terrains of nuclear power, implants, and people power pointed toward toxic

and healing nodes alike: motherhood and activism focused in North America that resonate around other plants and forests.

Of course the very earth and cosmos as well as celestial beings and bodies have long been understood in terms of gender—often female. Elizabeth A. Povinelli explores Gaia together with Arendt's concept of political activity through Greek, Indigenous, and European colonial taxonomies and realities.

Mirene Arsanios presents "E autobiography di un idioma"—language as body as narrator, a part of fluent but not fluid matrilineal lineages and mother tongues. Arsanios's story is an autobiography of the creole language Papiamentu.

Elvia Wilk reads Jeff VanderMeer's novel *Annihilation*, and its (female) biologist's deep inhalation of living text in the Lem and Strugatsky–reminiscent Area X, alongside female-authored mystical texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In undertaking this journey into "The Word Made Fresh," Wilk traces the long lineage—feminist and otherwise—behind the "New Weird" literary genre.

Ewa Majewska describes a revelatory moment experienced during a role-playing card game, and transfers this experience into the feminist paradox that is ultimately the necessity of wanting a whole radically feminist world, not just bits and pieces of it. Majewska traces the recent, growing, ongoing women's movements, in Poland and globally, and offers an intellectual mapping for, as she writes, "What can be done. Now."

Irmgard Emmelhainz considers the architectural (in)considerations and non-considerations of the bodily functions of womens' and women-identified bodies, among other intimate and instructive revelations.

Chus Martínez points toward the reality that in a shifting post-fordist work landscape, equality is not a matter of numbers or representation, but is rather about something like terraforming the art institutional landscape, with an eye toward (re)creating new conditions in which women can lead.

Simone White's poem "or, on being the other woman" lays out the multiple complex scores, sounds, dissonances, and necessities—intellectual and visceral—that relate to being, for example, a woman, a mother, and a working intellectual.

Elisabeth Lebovici and Giovanna Zapperi provide a full, contextualized picture of the negative solidarity expressed in an open letter published in *Le Monde* earlier this year that notoriously urged women to decry one another's testimonies of sexual humiliation and harassment, all in the name of defending men's sexual freedom to "disturb" women whenever and wherever they please. Of course, these negative solidarities give rise and risk to communal strangulation—the classic and despot-approved condition of divisions leading to fighting for scraps. But there could be—or rather there has been, and is, and will be—solidarity. We fight together, emboldened and embodied, for an equality defined not by mere numbers, but by the conditions we require to thrive.

Notably, in this issue of *e-flux journal*, multiple authors write about the demands and responsibilities they had to juggle—including caring for children—in order to write the texts you read here. We recognize and respect the varied, complex conditions that these writers, thinkers, and artists had to create for themselves, and we celebrate and appreciate the deep labor and time-based constraints that authors pushed through here.

In her last book of collected writings, *Sounding the Margins* (2010), North American composer Pauline Oliveros said of a sound practice she called "raw listening":

> Raw listening, however, has no past or future. It is the roots of the moment. It has the potential of instantaneously changing the listener forever.
>
> Here is one of my practices: Listen to everything until it all belongs together and you are part of it.

X

With thanks to the *journal* editorial staff and larger team at e-flux for generative reads and comments.

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1
As Wyatt Mason wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* : "Wilson, in her introduction, reminds us that these palace women—'maidservants' has often been put forward as a 'correct' translation of the Greek δμωαι, *dmoai* , which Wilson calls 'an entirely misleading and also not at all literal translation,' the root of the Greek meaning 'to overpower, to tame, to subdue'—weren't free. Rather, they were slaves, and if women, only barely. Young female slaves in a palace would have had little agency to resist the demands of powerful men. Where Fagles wrote 'whores' and 'the likes of them' ... the original Greek, Wilson explained, is just a feminine definite article meaning 'female ones.' To call them 'whores' and 'creatures' reflects, for Wilson, 'a misogynistic agenda': their translators' interpretation of how these females would be defined." W. Mason, "The First Woman to Translate *The Odyssey* into English," *New York Times Magazine* , November 2, 2017.

2
Robert Fagles's translation of Telemachus's echoing his father's command to kill: *"*No clean death for the likes of them, by god! /Not from me — they showered abuse on my head, my mother's too! /You sluts—the suitors' whores! *"* By contrast, Emily Wilson's translation: "I refuse to grant these girls a clean death, since they poured down shame on me and Mother, when they lay beside the suitors." At that, he wound a piece of sailor's rope round the rotunda and round the mighty pillar, stretched up so high no foot could touch the ground. As doves or thrushes spread their wings to fly home to their nests, but someone sets a trap—they crash into a net, a bitter bedtime; just so the girls, their heads all in a row, were strung up with the noose around their necks to make their death an agony. They gasped, feet twitching for a while, but not for long."

3
For more on translation and power see, for example, *Translation, History and Culture* . eds. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Continuum, 1998); *Translation and Power* , eds. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

> In their quest for equal rights, organized women have been ridiculed, underestimated, murdered. But suddenly … it would seem equality is within their reach. Film characters portraying fighting women, TV amazons, state ministers, CEOs: the image has been created. But no, they are barred from universality; their difference is still perceived as contingent, anecdotal, not constitutive of humanity.
> —Francesca Gargallo, *Latin American Feminist Ideas*

Pilar Villela Mascaró

One Eye Closed: An Exercise in Stereoscopy

One eye closed. The tree moves. The other eye is covered by a hand. The tree seems to move, once again. Still standing at the same place, the head remains unmoved. Both eyes open: the tree occupies a different position. Through the glasses it moves, once again. All stands still at the same place.

I do not *have* a body: I can't reclaim my body, forgive my body, acknowledge my body, speak through my body, inhabit my body. I do not own my body. This voice that says "my" body, these fingers that type, are not mine. "I" is an effect of the body, a body, this body, and other bodies too. Anyway, that is what I believe.

It never once woke up and thought, "I am a woman." Who is the woman? Is it the I or is it the body?

The tree moves slightly to the left if seen from the body of a woman.

Where is the tree? Does it bow gracefully or menacingly before me for being a woman? Is the tree moving for I?

I wonder: How am I qualified to write this? Is being a woman enough to talk about being a woman? How do women talk? Who is the woman, I or the body? What makes me a woman? Who should be speaking here, the body or the Mexican or the white impoverished middle-class artist half-hearted-freelance-day-job-holder woman that is the I? Should it talk like a woman or should it mimic the voice of a man? And if it did, would the tree finally stay still in its place, its proper place, its real place?

Could it trick other Is and other bodies into believing its truth? Is a translation necessary?

Whom should it try to please this time around?

Should it prove it is serious and well-informed about current debates in the Europe and the US?

Should it play the role of the explorer and present a faithful report of the Wild West, the Wild South, the wild wilderness out there, before the King?

Crosses placed in Lomas del Poleo Planta Alta, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico where the bodies of eight women were found in 1996. Photo: iose/Wikimedia Commons.

Should it speak for others and fake one kind of belonging or another?

Should it fake its belonging to the quarters of the slaves, should it fake its belonging to the King's council, should it try to be heard? Be heard by whom?

Sometimes it fantasizes: Wouldn't it be nice to speak from a clean slate, not disembodied, not as a woman, but just as a body that wakes up and feels like sleeping a little longer, or is cold, maybe rolls to one side and tries to fix its gaze through the window on the confused foliage and the shivering branches of the moving tree?

But then it remembers that the privilege of being null, the vanishing point, the zero in the Cartesian plane, is only awarded to a few. The Royal Spanish Academy defines the feminine as the marked gender, assuming that the masculine (which encompasses the feminine) operates "by default."

Again, should it prove itself a worthy, acceptable, decent upholder of quotations, references, and intellectual property, and like Kafka's ape write a report to an academy (and maybe, just maybe have a chance, however remote, of landing a teaching job as a woman and a Latina who can rightfully speak about her own)?

Or should it choose a more sensitive style? Something more womanly, admittedly affected, cunningly insincere, but relatable nonetheless?

I have trouble calling myself a feminist. But it's not the same trouble I have calling myself a Latina, or for that matter the same trouble I have trying to position myself in the oh-so-American, colonial, and already biased notion of a scale of privilege. And I firmly believe that one should be particularly wary of any appeal to biological determinants

Woodcut from an eighteenth-century chapbook about the prophetess and supposed witch Mother Shipton, featured in Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century (1834) by John Ashton. See→.

in order to establish an excuse for domination or exploitation. I do not own my body, but neither do you.

First, I have trouble calling myself a feminist because I take feminism very seriously.

I'm not an academic. I'm not familiar with all the writings, the positions, the debates. I do not hold a PhD in gender studies. I do not publish regularly. I do not have the authority to speak. I do not make a living thinking and talking about and through women/gender/sexual difference/etc.

More importantly, I'm not an activist. I do not belong to an organized group. I may attend a few demonstrations, reluctantly sign one or two petitions, try to invite as many women as I can to the projects I coordinate, but that's as far as I go. For me, feminism is political. And even if the personal is political, the political only comes about when it involves some sort of organization, inside or outside your home.

Second, because I take feminism very seriously I have even more trouble branding myself as a feminist.

This one is even harder (and even more personal, and political) than the previous two. In the current climate—but also before—branding myself as a feminist, or at least as a woman artist, would be a really beneficial move for my career. Doing so would mean accepting my proper place. But if I feel feminism is important, it is precisely because I feel nobody should be explicitly or implicitly violently coerced into accepting their proper place. And, in my experience, every time "it" becomes a "she," it does so through a violent imposition of a proper place: the proper garments; the proper attitudes; the proper job description; the proper way to express feelings; the proper way of being rational, emotional, or intuitive; the proper way of writing; the proper way of responding to catcalling; the proper way to flirt; the proper way to face its own sexuality; the proper way to avoid rape and still make friends and influence people; the proper ladylike or not-ladylike way to stand up for itself.

Of course I understand why it is important for the *subaltern* to be *empowered* and allowed to voice their own concerns.

And I am being so ironic here. And irony is just a way to point out the fact that there is such a thing as a proper place. Because maybe dear reader, especially if you are sitting on ground zero, looking at the clean slate, at the tree in its proper place, you are not aware of how specific, how utterly loaded, both of the words I highlighted are.

Again, that does not mean I don't think the oppressed shouldn't organize and claim their rights, or rather create such rights for themselves. It just means these are confusing and dangerous times, and one should tread carefully and slowly during such times.

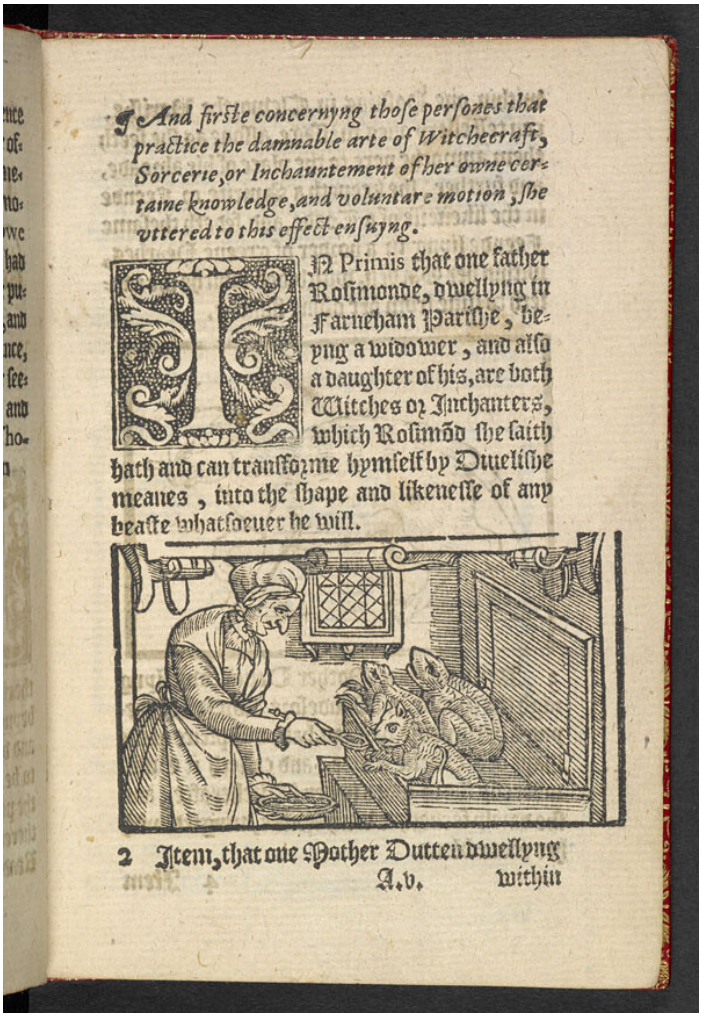
So, I support most of the feminist causes, and I agree with many of the agendas within the different feminisms. (And this has to be said, every time: I am unflinchingly pro-choice, I definitely believe that abuses of power should not be condoned, that there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of income equality, recognition, and de-gendering of domestic, affective, and reproductive labor, and—of course—violence against women has to stop. But where does that place me? Am I a first-wave, second-wave, or third-wave feminist? Am I a black feminist? Am I talking about Abya Yala feminisms? About xenofeminism? About Marxist feminisms? French feminisms? Black feminisms? But most importantly: Who is forcing me to choose and why?) Unfortunately, agreement sometimes comes to binaries—like male and female—and I sometimes disagree.

Third, because I take feminisms very seriously I also think that agreeing or disagreeing—especially in public—is also a political choice. The following lines are about this disagreement.

As a working hypothesis, let's pretend that showing public support for a cause does more than feed big data, or help the almighty algorithm choose what sort of clothing should be marketed to you, or give a veneer of legitimacy to some creepy power that is.

Let's also assume (and here we are moving from the it, through the I, and towards an us, always just one us amongst many others) that signing one petition or another, adding one more name to a long list of names, is also a political choice, especially when that cause acquires enough momentum to gain a certain amount of visibility.

So no matter how irrelevant adding a drop of water to the



¶ And firſte concernyng thoſe perſones that practice the damnable arte of Witchecraft, Sorcerie, or Inchauntement of her owne certaine knowledge, and voluntare motion, ſhe uttered to this effect enſuyng.

IN Primis that one father Roſimonde, dwellyng in Farneham Pariſhe, beyng a widower, and alſo a daughter of his, are both Witches or Inchanters, which Roſimõd ſhe ſaith hath and can tranſforme hymſelf by Diueliſhe meanes, into the ſhape and likeneſſe of any beaſte whatſoeuer he will.

2 Item, that one Mother Dutten dwellyng A.v. within

Witch pictured feeding blood to her familiars, in A Rehearsal both Strange and True, of Heinous and Horrible Acts Committed by Elizabeth Stile (1579). See →.

ocean may be, the act of subscribing to a document could mean that: 1) we fully agree with the contents of said document; or 2) that we do not fully agree with the contents of said document, but for some reason we believe it has some strategic relevance in a given context or situation, that a united front should be presented if the end is worthy of it.

We certainly believe that violence (or discrimination) against women should not be condoned. But at this point we also believe that the causes of violence against women are not sexual, even if they are expressed through sex (just like they are not biological, but are expressed through the direct control of certain bodily functions like childbirth). The difference between gender and sex that prevails today may cover some ground, insofar as it establishes the possibility of a separation between biology and culture, questions the binary, and helps us to avoid appeals to nature as a last instance.

Witches featured in The History of Witches and Wizards (1720). See →.

But introducing a question is not the same as having a satisfying answer. Especially when answers seem particularly urgent, and treading carefully is not a choice.

Mother, if I don't answer your calls tomorrow, if I don't tell you I'll be there for dinner, if tomorrow, mom, the taxi never shows up.
Maybe I'm wrapped in the sheets of a hotel, or in a wheelbarrow, or in a black bag (Mara, Micaela, Majo, Mariana). Maybe I'm in a suitcase or I was lost in the beach (Emily, Shirley).
Don't be scared mother if you see I was stabbed (Luz Marina). Don't yell when you see I was dragged (Arlette). Don't cry mommy if you hear I was impaled (Lucía).
They will tell you it was me; that I did not scream; that it was because of my clothes; because of the alcohol level in my blood. They will tell you it was late at night; that I was alone. That my psychotic ex had motives, that I was unfaithful, that I was a whore.
They will tell you mother that I lived, that I dared to fly high in a world without air.

I swear, mommy, I died fighting.
I swear, old lady, I screamed as high as I flew.
He will remember me, ma, he'll know it was me who fucked him over when he sees me in the face of all of those who will scream my name. Because, mother, I know you won't stop.

But, for all you hold dearest, do not tie up my sister; don't lock up my cousins; don't stop your nieces. They are not to blame, and neither was I.
It was them, it will always be them. Fight for their

Woodcut depicting the "sink or float" method of seeking out witches, featured in The History of Witches and Wizards (1720). See →.

wings, the ones they cut off from me. Fight for them to be free and fly higher than I did. Fight so they may scream louder than I did.

Let them live with no fear, as I lived.
Mother dear, don't cry over my ashes.
If tomorrow it's me, if I don't come back tomorrow, destroy everything.
If my turn comes tomorrow, I want to be the last one.
—Cristina Torres Cázares (Perú)

One eye closed. One day I opened my Facebook and found that most of my female contacts were sharing all sorts of harassment and rape stories under the #MeToo hashtag. (It took me a few hours to find out about a man called Harvey Weinstein in Hollywhere?) The first thing that surprised me was the fact that it was in English, the second was the purpose: Who were these women talking to? Other women? Men in general? Society at large? What was the point of becoming an "us" that way?

I do clearly understand the relevance of denouncing generalized gender violence. To my surprise, a couple of my male contacts were befuddled by the number of women "coming out," they had not realized ... something. I still don't understand what. That touching someone who didn't consent to be touched was an aggression, or that there were so many cases?

Anyway, it made me feel very uncomfortable. And I didn't share. Then from a faraway place, but still related to my little corner of the world, came the "Not Surprised" letter. And I didn't sign it.

Why my lack of solidarity, or should I say, "sorority"? In the little corner of the world where I live, the issue of violence against women had already been at the forefront for a long time, even outside of academic and activist circles, although in a much more somber and urgent tone. Instead of #MeToo, we had slogans like #NotOne(Women)Less, #WeWantUs(Women)Alive.

In Mexico, in the context of an ongoing armed conflict where the spectacularization of violence and death have become crucial in territorial disputes between various factions of so-called "organized crime" groups, the military, and different police bodies, the perception of domestic violence became increasingly integrated with crimes perpetrated by men against women and the inability and unwillingness of the justice system to deal with it. Although interesting, telling that story would mean presenting my report of the Wild West, and that's not what I've set out to do.

One eye opens. The first thing that came to my mind was the victimization argument. Of course I had suffered all sorts of harassment for one reason or other, but what was the point of making it public, and making it public in that way? When seen as a whole, instead of gaining a sense of empowerment I felt a sense of defeat. First, because those women who had been hurt by men who wanted to hurt them had been hurt over and over without remedy, and were hurting again, now publicly. Hurting, I should also say, like martyrs who would rather lose their lives than relinquish their virtue, the precise reason why the most chauvinist position would consider sexual harassment and violence to be particularly hurtful.

I cannot stress this enough: I'm not questioning the pain of these women, nor their statements. This is not about victim-blaming, nor about minimizing or denying their pain. This is about wondering why we have so many specific terms for each position (i.e., "victim-blaming"), why they have crystalized so soon into locked positions. And it is also about considering what was made visible when their statements appeared as a whole, not as individual statements before the law or some other body that could settle a dispute and make the perpetrators accountable for their deeds, but about anonymously denouncing a generalized situation precisely in the terms not of the abused, but of the abuser.

One eye opens, the other is covered by a hand. Then, there were expressions of shock, of amazement. Who was shocked, and by what? Maybe I had been living in another planet for too many years, but we all knew that things were that way. Contrary to another popular hashtag (#NotNormal), they were normal indeed. Normal does not mean correct. It just means something that is the norm. So why was everyone so surprised?

Looking at the tree with this eye, maybe the surprise came from actually realizing that there were so many individual cases, but the cases were also very different in kind: they went from accusations of child abuse, to street rapes, to harassment-—in the workplace and elsewhere—and catcalling. All denounced as forms of violence perpetrated

Witches presenting wax dolls to the devil, featured in The History of Witches and Wizards (1720). See →.

by men towards women. But were they all the same? Was the difference just in degree, or was it in kind?

Both eyes closed. But mostly I wondered: If the point was to stop that kind of behavior, what was this meant to achieve and how? Making the powers that be, i.e., states and corporations, complicit with this sort of behavior in order to penalize it in some way? Asking the patriarchy and its institutions to be nicer this time around? Was that enough?

Cross your eyes. Two blurry trees stand before you. Then the "Not Surprised" letter appeared, and things became even more confusing for me. It turns out that those who had advanced their careers exchanging sexual favors for an edge over their peers were also victims. Again, yes I see that they could be, because they had been forced into that situation, into those conditions. Stop.

And now I look at the tree in this darkened room. It is upside down as it is projected onto a wall through a tiny hole. The tree is very small. The ground is the sky. What is going on? Why are we talking about all this in these terms? Who sets the terms?

Another liberal male American TV anchor comes into view defending "women" in general, just like the average Mexico City taxi driver will defend "little ladies" or "girls" because, you know, they too deserve respect, just like his mom. After all, femicide or feminicide is not classified as a specific crime in the US.[1] Pictures of white women with the dreadful vagina hats come into my mind, side by side with the massive demonstrations in Argentina, along with the scary montage comparing Temer's cabinet with Roussef's, as well as the memory of all the Mexicans on Facebook supporting gun control in the US because of the school shootings in Florida, but strangely failing to support it because, you know, there is no border wall yet and someone's making a lot of money selling guns for all those fighting the "war on drugs."

Them and us. Gender is not only about sex. It's mostly about a position of power, about the proper place. The association of power with biology as a given that may not be questioned or transformed, a totalizing universal, a tiny hole. It is not about a *bias* to be eliminated in the face of an already existing equality, it is not about a *minority* that, regardless of its numbers, faces a purportedly larger and neutral us. It is about violently (and constantly) enforcing the place of the other upon specific individuals to keep them out of an empty sanctuary devoted to an unresponsive god. It is a Wizard of Us.

Although I have of course been harassed, groped, threatened with rape, and otherwise insulted many times in my life, I never felt it was my fault. I'm sure that those who harassed, groped, and insulted me, just because I was a woman (not for being an I, but a she) always thought I was the one who asked for it. I've never been hit by a man. I am alive, relatively unscathed, and I can only attribute that to sheer luck. I am almost a statistical anomaly.

I must have been eight when we had to do some sort of tableaux vivant for Columbus Day at school. I was one of two daughters of a single mother with two or more jobs, so even if she tried really hard, elaborate costumes for school celebrations were not a thing at home. That time she was able to get an actress friend of hers to lend me a really nice costume, shiny sword and all. For once, I had the best costume in the class, and I was determined to play Columbus for Columbus Day. I even had my hair cut in a bob. I still have the picture my mom took that morning. I'm standing in front of our house, looking really proud, pouting seriously, with one hand shadowing my eyes as if looking afar and the other leaning on the sword.

When we finally got to school, an idea that had seemed totally natural to me outraged the teachers as well as my classmates. I'm not transgender, nor I was transgender then; I did not want to be a boy, I just wanted to play Columbus, because I could look the part and what was wrong with that?

It turned out that everything was wrong. A boy just wearing a plain brown robe with a really large cross got to play Columbus. As a concession, I was allowed to stand behind him, as one of the Pinzón brothers. I also remember being outraged because my few darker classmates (it was a private middle-class school in a very racist country) willingly decided to play "the Indians." I was so angry I sobbed through the whole thing. I had been pushed to the back and forced to wear a pussy hat, to occupy my proper place. I was born a girl, and there was

Witches dancing with devils, featured in The History of Witches and Wizards (1720). See→.

nothing I could do about it unless I understood that my actions, abilities, or anything I could do would remove me from that position. It was never about what I (or the body) could do, it was always about constantly negotiating the distance between what the body could do and what the body was expected to do.

So, even if I don't chalk it up to sexual abuse, it is sexual abuse. And although I deeply respect the struggles of many women who are fighting for other causes, I firmly believe that bringing down the fever (i.e., convincing men that workplace harassment is not okay) won't cure the disease. Furthermore, I have to insist, it is not even a disease. It is not an aberration, or discrimination, or an anomaly: it is the way things are supposed to work and are still working. Rape, workplace harassment, mansplaining, housework, the division of public and private, body and soul, soul and mind, mind and intellect may or may not be distributed along gender-specific lines (independently of sex); they may also be distributed along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. So we may call it intersectionality, or the matter of having a soul.

One might have one's theory where it should be, or one may be too busy working for a worthy specific cause, but the backlash is coming, and it is coming strong. The zero in the Cartesian plane is not spending one second looking inwards: it is yelling at us, "You are a Chinaperson," or a "Womanperson," or a "Blackperson." At the same time, it is also yelling at us, "I am going to save you." No matter who is on the receiving end of these pronouncements, it is always a diminished person, a person whose agency is always already thwarted for being what it is. It is up to us to accept the role. And it seems, so far, and as collectivities go, we are doing it gladly by actually inhabiting not a body, but our proper place, demanding that the almighty zero respect our proper place by saying it loud and clear: "Yes, being a woman is all about sex." (After all, we all know who decided that the binary to be discussed was #AllLivesMatter vs. #BlackLivesMatter). No wonder *Time* magazine, for instance, is only able to acknowledge dissent by turning the person of the year into an allegorical figure such as "the demonstrator" or "the #MeToo movement."

I look at a postcard of the tree. The personal is political. Go ask the family of the "Leader of the free world." Intersectionality? Crony capitalism is just another name for toxic masculinity, but masculinity is toxic by default, and femininity is its waste.

24/7 sexual organ jokes blasting every hour from every speaker around the globe. How about pancreas jokes, immune system jokes? How about "empowering" myself because I'm forty-five and hey everybody I'm so happy I've still got most of my teeth. "A study" claims more women get depressed than men do. No other statistical variables included. How much are they making? Do they work long hours? How many times a day are they threatened? What are they responsible for? What about the kids? I'd love to be, under the sea … if I could only afford a visit to a regular doctor, let alone become an octopus and own real estate. Guess what? You can be a doctor (or a lawyer, or get a PhD in Latin American studies). Can you be totally female and deeply committed to toxic masculinity too? Can you climb walls on stilettos? Can we burn all the Picasso's there are, and then just replace them with the works of a black female Picasso to make it right? Because as long as there is a Picasso, we'll be glad. As a matter of fact we should. Why not decolonize the museum and build another, just to celebrate this brave new world of ours?

Is sexual harassment the only way in which a woman is harassed for being a woman? Does intersectionality mean that each of us belongs to different spheres of disadvantage that intersect in our paycheck or the lack thereof? Or does it just increase your statistical probabilities of dying younger? Is it all about ticking boxes?

So many trees, a forest. The body doesn't know it is a woman. Even I has trouble thinking of itself as a woman as often as it should. It is not queer. It moves around the tree, and tries to avoid rocks, to cut through the shrubbery. It's hard. Until the tree talks back: "Stay there! Do not move!" And its branches grow long and reach out …

All this thinking about identity, about the subject, comes in a moment of danger. Once upon a time I stumbled upon a philosophy school. There was only one woman and she was writing about gender and doing managerial stuff. Once upon a time a wise elderly woman taught me how to play dead.

I don't think that threatening every man who attacks a woman with serious consequences will stop the attacks. I don't think that identifying with that which the attacker perceives as worthy of being attacked will protect us from the attacks. Challenging the attacker might take more than that. And more violence will probably come, not even defending privilege, but just what is perceived as a safe vantage point to look at the tree. In the meantime there are a few other things I believe: wearing a pussy hat won't make the chainsaw fall from anyone's hands. Women are (also) perfectly able to fell a tree. They always have been.

X

1
The US, Canada, and Cuba are the only American countries that have not signed on to the Organization of American States's Bélem do Pará Convention (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women; see http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html). In the case of the US, its refusal to sign may be attributed to the country's attitude of exceptionalism when it comes to international treaties, but the exception itself might be attributed to a percieved position of one nation-state (or individual) as the upholder of a God-appointed universality, not unlike the universality that produces "the woman" as an other. While I was looking for a proper tone for this article, I thought of using a paragraph from John L. O'Sullivan's famous essay "Great Nation of Futurity" (1839), for its clarity in expressing how claims of universality are bound to both tutelage and to a peculiar notion of equality: "Our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity … because the principle upon which a nation is organized fixes its destiny, and that of equality is perfect, is universal. It presides in all the operations of the physical world, and it is also the conscious law of the soul—the self-evident dictates of morality, which accurately defines the duty of man to man, and consequently man's rights as man." The narrativization of an always-already existing equality that only needs to be perfected through the incorporation of difference into its definitions plays a specific role in this argument: the other always appears as a newcomer, predicated upon an essence, as a deviation from the norm. Women "came out of the kitchen" where "domestic abuse" takes place ("self-evidently" a private individual matter) and it is under this premise that their rights could become equal to those of men. I believe that the neocolonial conditions of Latin American countries allowed for mass movements that specifically acknowledged this violence as both systemic (not personal) and lethal. The danger here, of course, is portraying the problem as peculiar to "underdeveloped," "backwards," "uncivilized" peoples and nations who "live in the past," whereas the media-hyped discourse coming from the Great Nation of Futurity is merely concerned with sex in the workplace as a cog in the well-oiled machine of meritocracy and, of course, as usual, with "foreign aid."

Griselda Pollock

Action, Activism, and Art and/as Thought: A Dialogue with the Artworking of Sonia Khurana and Sutapa Biswas and the Political Theory of Hannah Arendt

1.

For forty years my feminist project has involved creating concepts with which to think about the challenges posed by the encounter of feminism with art, and art with feminism.

This was not an encounter that was to be anticipated. In the 1970s, art did not expect feminism. At the very same time, the emerging Women's Liberation Movement, as we knew ourselves at that moment of intense social and political activism, did not place art high on its list of priorities. At best artists might be useful for making posters and other agit-prop materials. At worst, art was a bourgeois distraction irrelevant to the struggles in which women were involved for equal pay, personal safety, sexual self-determination, and control over their own fertility and bodies in conditions of neocolonial and intensifying class conflict and aggravated racism.

If we look further back we can also see that historical feminism did not, either in its late eighteenth-century philosophical formulation or in its nineteenth-century political eruption and militancy, engage with the visual arts per se before the 1970s. It is true, as art historian Lisa Tickner has indeed shown, that by using the retrospect from later twentieth-century theories of performance and the politics of representation we can see how brilliantly and purposively early twentieth-century suffrage movements utilized many aesthetic strategies of political self-fashioning and costuming, image-making, and public procession with banners to assert the political voices of women in public space. But apart from a few named artists like Sylvia Pankhurst, there was not a corresponding artistic dimension to those campaigns.[1] It is indeed possible, as argued by feminist theorist Ewa Ziarek, to reclaim the aesthetic radicalism of women writers and artists of the 1920s and '30s as a parallel to the deeper radicalism within political thinking amongst the militant suffrage theorists.[2]

The shock of the encounter after the mid-1960s between art, itself being transformed by the Conceptual project, and feminism, being transformed by its own theoretical revolution, has been mutual and creative. Yet has it been understood? Are we not still confined instead to conventional art historical categories and methods? For instance, how often is "feminist" used as an adjective to describe a style, an iconography, an authorial intention, missing the transformation demanded of such art-historical concepts by the force of feminism as intervention and effect?

Thus I return to my opening statement about why we need to invent concepts to confront what has happened in this encounter between art and feminism, and to understand what is happening in their relationship now. Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz explains the relation of

Sonia Khurana, Logic of Birds, 2006. Still from single channel video, loop.

concepts to the future of feminist theory and its potential to help change the afflicted world we inhabit:

> We need concepts in order to think our way in a world of forces we do not control. Concepts are not a means of control, but forms of address that carve out for us a space and time in which we may become capable of responding to the indeterminate particularity of events. Concepts are thus a way of addressing the future, and in this sense are the conditions under which a future different from the present—the very goal of every radical politics—becomes possible. Concepts are not premonitions, ways of predicting what will be; on the contrary, they are modes of enactment of new forces; they are themselves the making of the new.[3]

Grosz then turns to explain theory as virtual:

> In short, theory is never about us, about who we are. It affirms only what we can become, extracted as it is from the events that move us beyond ourselves. If theory is conceptual in this Deleuzian sense, it is freed from representation—from representing the silent minorities that ideology inhibited (subjects), and from representing the real through the truth which it affirms (objects)—and it is opened up to the virtual, to the future that does not yet exist. Feminist theory is essential, not as a plan or an anticipation of action to come, but as the addition of ideality or incorporeality to the horrifying materiality of the present as patriarchal, racist, ethnocentric, a ballast to enable the present to be transformed. [4]

My most recent concept for thinking about feminist interventions into the study of artistic practice is called The Virtual Feminist Museum. The virtuality is not cybernetic but philosophical. Virtuality is a quality of feminism as a project because feminism is neither the past nor in the past. It is a project for a future still to come. The capacity of feminism to transform us and our world is as yet unrealized, even after almost two hundred years of effective social and political struggle, and half a century of intellectual work in both theory and creative activity. The Virtual Feminist Museum allows me to curate feminist installations that no museum would commission and that no corporate funder will support. I follow logics of connection and paths of association that are distinct from, if not deeply opposed to, those canonized by art history. These canonical logics are still apparent in contemporary art curation: the cult of the individual artist or the themed, hence essentially iconographic, exhibition. One key focus

of the Virtual Feminist Museum concerns the ethics and body politics of one specific "pathos formula": lying down. *Pathosformel* is the German term used by art historian Aby Warburg in his radical opposition to what he dismissed as aeshetheticizing art history—a bourgeois way of telling the story of art that pacifies the violence encoded in cultural forms, notably the image. Yet, Warburg is not the foundation for iconography. For Warburg, images are dynamic modes of the transmission of affects. Hence they are formulae for intensity, suffering, abjection, ecstasy, and transformation.

I am going to place a series of works in conversation because they share a certain formulation of the body as an articulation of both singular affective states and collective political conditions. The artists in question were both born in India. Their work speaks from its complex situation (in existential terms) to the world. I have focused on these artists because, within conventional art history, the thematic of the body remains "thought" in terms of a white, European body, with the classic opposition in the Western art tradition between the white feminine body as site of erotic lying down (the reclining Venus created by Girogione and Titian) and the black de-eroticized body of servitude. Whose body then is "the body" when we use such a concept? Is it not already performing an implicit, still-colonial racism?

My first image is a photographic work related to a long-term performance project entitled *Lying Down* by the Delhi-based artist Sonia Khurana (b. 1968). One of the earliest manifestations of this long-term work was itself entitled *Logic of Birds*, a performance enacted and filmed in a public space in Barcelona in 2006. Sonia Khurana has stated:

> [To begin with] *Logic of Birds* was a direct consequence of the recent spate of incidents in my life, leading among other things to a sense of profound loss. This got translated into a query about the psychological implications of loss. The impulse to lie on the ground and feel the cold asphalt recurred several times, for different reasons. I was then in other cities and other things flowed into my consciousness … I was shooting, making images. I felt the deep desire to lie down like that, in Place de la Bastille, and then later in other places, as I travelled. I suppose this was a way of playing out a certain state of dereliction inherent within us.[5]

I interpret the *Logic of the Birds* as a new pathos formula: I am reclaiming for feminist analysis Aby Warburg's brilliant and necessary formulation of the way the body becomes both a signifying gesture—an action—loaded with affect, and then an image that transmits a memory trace of once-experienced intensity. We might ask if Khurana's lying down is the pathos formula of the psychologically and also the politically abject?

Any interpretation must be sensitive to changing contexts, taking into account Khurana's outsiderness in terms of her Indian nationality when she performs as a brown body on the ground in a European city such as Barcelona. When she lies down in India, it is her class and her religion, or lack thereof, that become significant and even dangerous. For instance, she tells the story of a performance in Hyderabad, this time using only the plexiglass simulacrum of her prone body. The story reveals the potency of the image *qua* image in a specific cultural context to generate a riot:

> *Hyderabad, 2010*
>
> *… As I moved between places, over time, I had started to place a simple cutout of my prone form in Plexiglas. It photographed well, and its reflective surface acted as a kind of mirror for action that surrounds it.*
>
> *Near Laad Bazaar in Char Minar, I found a good spot surrounded by pigeons, in Charminar, just outside the square, a few yards away from the boundary of the Mosque.*
>
> *No sooner had I placed the cutout on the ground to take a picture, a mob appeared. In a flash I was surrounded by very angry people, both men and women, young and very old. There is no rationale to mob fury, I know. But that such an innocuous action elicited mob fury, was incomprehensible to me. The spectacle that ensued seemed unreal and all to familiar at once: it dawned on me that here I was an intruder and the innocent object in my hand: a plexiglass cutout of my prone form was seen as blasphemous, even though I was at considerable distance outside of the boundary of the [sacred] mosque.*
>
> *From here on, taking pictures was out of the question, and I also immediately removed the plastic cutout. However, I really needed to be able to "speak" to the crowd, to ease the cultural gap. My reconciliatory note was totally lost amidst the hostile din: the crowd was hell-bent on living out its hysteria, irrespective of whether or not its cause merited violent reaction. Soon, a cop appeared on the scene and shooed me away, ostensibly towards safety in a police station, where further questioning and reprimand awaited me.*
>
> *All this for taking a picture of a small plastic object whose edges are rounded, not sharp. Elsewhere, the very same gesture has either gone unnoticed, or has aroused mild curiosity, even discussion, amongst people on the street. But never a violent reaction.*[6]

Sonia Khurana, Notes from a diary, Laad Bazaar, Char Minar, Hyderabad, 2010: an incomplete document of an aborted attempt towards a performative gesture, 2010. Diptych, digital prints.

Khurana's work registers unnamed personal loss that extends, by aesthetic formulation, to signify a shared condition. Lying down "speaks" the weight of the trauma of psychological dereliction in the pathos of that act of giving way, desiring the support of bare earth or hard ground, or giving into a wish to escape into unconsciousness or sleep that might also feel like death. Lying down takes the artist—and the viewer—to the borderline where subjectivity is under such pressure that it experiences itself as becoming abject. The abject is where we are neither subject nor object. As abject, the subject experiences its own undoing in the fading of its necessary boundaries that define the corporeal and sustain as distinct and whole the imaginary ego. The subject feels as if it is collapsing into de-subjectivized matter or unbounded bodiliness.

Sonia Khurana acknowledges the risk of becoming abject, resisting its claims through her beautiful, wonderful concept of seeking a "corporeal eloquence" created at this borderline. Lying down does not produce a collapse of meaning, but rather the possibility of a relay between this body-state and thought-in-language.

> I would like to talk about some of my concerns with the performing of the abject, especially the power or the lure of the abject. I am immensely concerned with a corporeal understanding of the body. I find that corporeal significations are better resolved through performance. Through performance, I can engage with the constant struggle between body and language, to achieve a corporeal eloquence.[7]

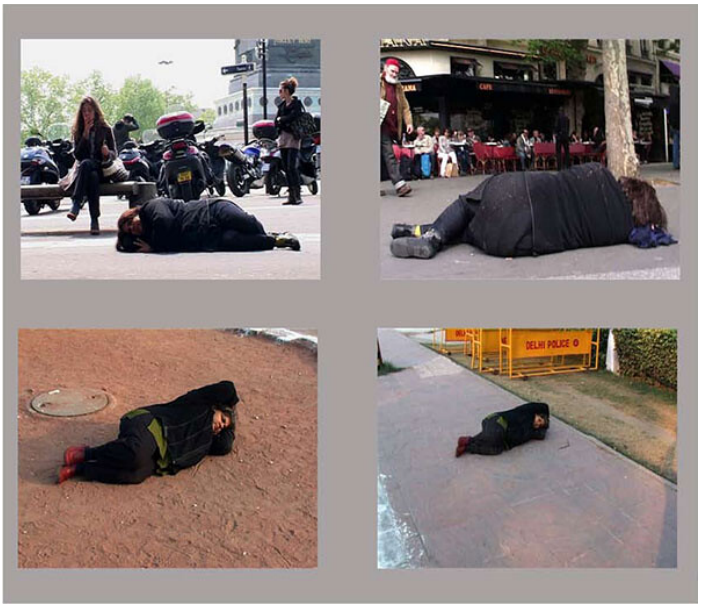
With this phrase "corporeal eloquence," Khurana draws our attention to something more social: "I could say that another underlying desire was to recuperate the lost or residual 'body matters' which lurk, unattended to, on the sidelines of the social."[8]

The significance of the abject is that it represents the loss of any place from which to sustain the conditions of *inter* subjectivity. In Arendtian terms, these are specifically the conditions of any kind of political subjectivity and, as such, political action. Feminism is, I suggest, to be understood as the creating, calling forth, or inciting of a new political subjectivity and hence space for action. Here is the first implicit indication of my bigger argument about feminism and the body, the body politic, the embodied political subject, and the public space of political realization.

This political dimension of subjectivity brings into view the agency of the artist in relation to the negotiation of power and powerlessness as a political position in the world and the art world. Khurana writes:

> It has occurred to me, in retrospect, that the language in which I chose to express this new state of mind was, in fact, very much in tune with my ongoing interrogations of "self-appointed" positions of powerlessness, and how the dynamics of these are played out in our day-to-day existence. I believe that the act of divesting oneself of power is ultimately empowering. This can be profound as well as ironical.[9]

Khurana's work is a form of research, via performance, into the ethics but also the politics of being *:*



Sonia Khurana, Lying-down-on-the-ground, 2006-2012. Documentation of performative act, various locations. Top row: Place Bastille, Paris (2010); Bottom row: Republic Day after the parade, India Gate, Delhi (2009).

> With the "lying down …" project, I have been asking myself: Can the critical possibilities offered by small acts of transgression be considered beyond their value as individual acts, for the potential of their accumulation? And can the dynamic build-up of infinitely small disturbances change structure into movement, a thing into a current?[10]

I now want to offer a close reading of a 2009 poem-text by Sonia Khurana that relates to *Lying Down*, with my analysis in italics below each passage. The poem-text *Lying-down-on-the-ground* forms part of an installation composed of a text-based video and images, two of which are illustrated here, juxtaposing phrases from the poem and a visual counterpart. The movement of her thought and the structure of her language and phrasing speak to both the processes of art and art's action in public space, which is the space of encounter between the aesthetic and the political. We must listen for the enunciative position of the speaker/writer; this position is the position of an international artist, an Indian citizen, and a woman with a specific political and familial history, who speaks *to* international, postcolonial feminism in the embodied voice of the artist:

> Taking position to lie-on-the-ground, I touch asphalt.
>
> I strive to assume the ultimate gesture: of abandonment, dereliction, dissidence.

The poem is in the first person; as such it summons the second person: "I" calls for "you." The poem addresses me. But it is she *as an "I" who must feel along the length of her body what normally only our feet traverse. But this feeling of the earth—or rather, the modern industrial matter than covers the earth in cities—is reclaimed as art: the speaker strives for (but doesn't necessarily achieve) a gesture that expresses giving up and feeling utterly alone, but that also expresses resistance in its embrace of vulnerability. As philosopher Judith Bulter has theorized (which I discuss further below), this vulnerability-as-resistance is a deeply political gesture in its refusal of conformity.*

Thus, [self-consciously] I confirm lying down as my device for entering the spaces I encounter.

Thus, I try to assimilate these spaces and cities that I have never really belonged to.

The second register is space and its correlatives of belonging and outsiderness. Lying down on their *asphalt, she places herself in intimate connection with cities in which she would seem to be a visitor; her act of lying down makes her more formally into a stranger, a foreigner, an outsider in these places.*

Thus, I settle accounts with various proposals of art.

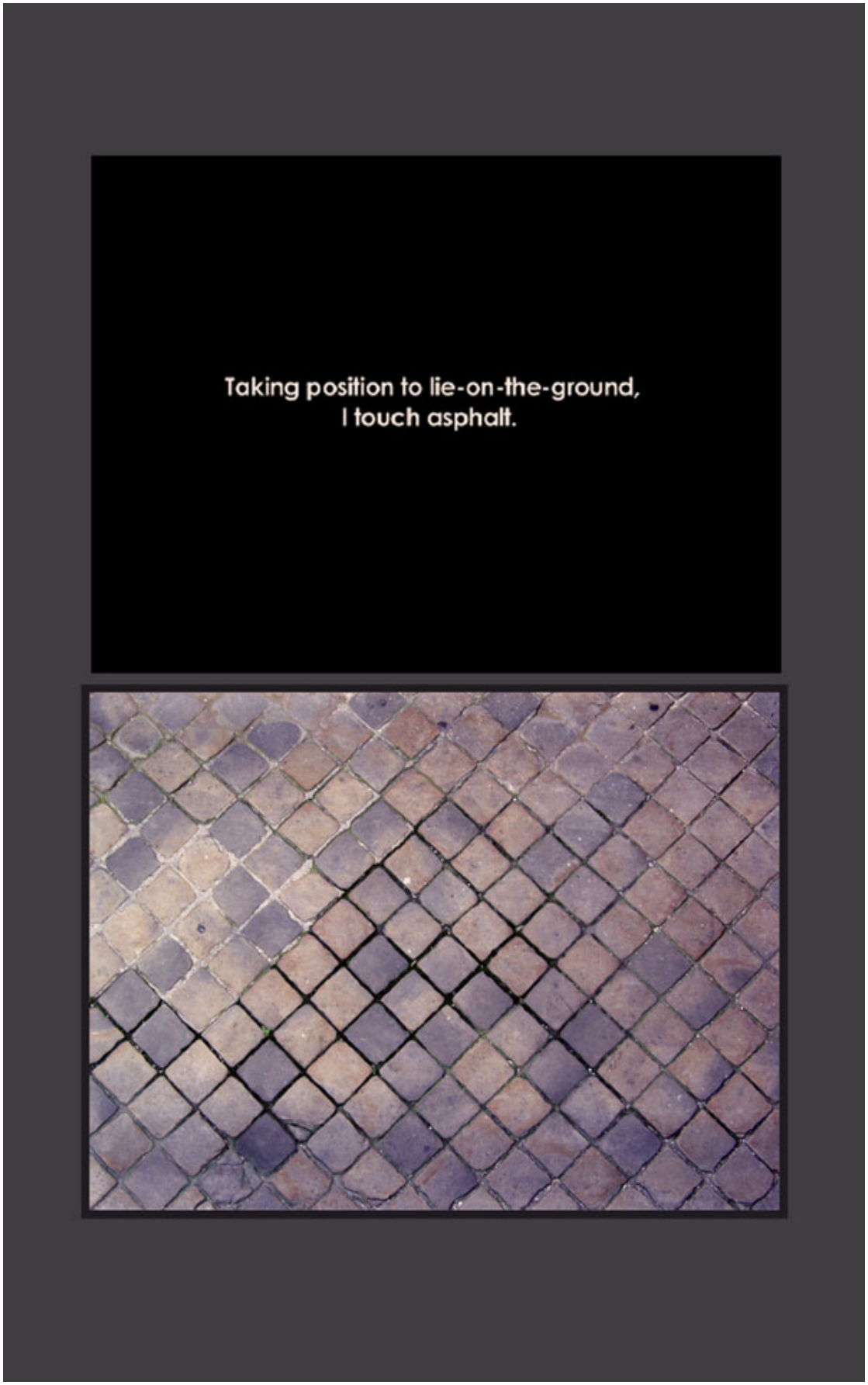
We have moved to an entirely different conversation. This phrase moves away from the immediate affective register of a loss of connection represented by the artist lying down, abandoned. Now the work seems to search for contact with the place to which she, the artist, is other but present. It is a site of trans-spatial conversation: it is art, it is about making art, it calls to be considered artmaking: artworking.

I formulate and reformulate the image of this body lying down.

I offer my virtual, vagrant, surrogate self for this sculptural operation.

Through ephemeral sculpture and temporary drawing I propose to find "art" between life and concept and object.

The language of art enables the evocation of the "sculptural operation," the claiming of the living and lived-in body for formulation, for signification, for meaning. But her body is her own, a woman's body, in the present, not an idealized, carved body. The lying-down body is later re-perceived through artistic reworking—through sculpture and drawing. It occupies the space between three terms: living bodies ("life"), conceptual work ("concept"), and an object now in the world to think through living and bodies ("object").



Sonia Khurana, Lying-down-on-the-ground Poem, 2017. Installation view. Digital photographs and video still.

Recognizing that "I" is already and always "us,"

I propose to place a singular self in the domain of a collective utterance.

The register changes again from art to the activation of the implied "you" who was at first a silent witness: come and lie down so we can share the space of existence. That space has been created by the individual "I," solitary and derelict, who nonethless addresses a world of art and other bodies formulated by gestures, set in stone or other material.

You, who passes through this space, I invite you to come and lie down on the ground with me. If only for a brief moment.

I propose that through the act of lying down on the ground, we would share a space of existence, if only momentarily, to perform an inconsequential act.

Using our bodies, "we" can come together in this space of action (Arendtian for sure). In this gesture we collectively touch not just the ground or the earth, but the space of coexistence.

I propose that, in fact, this is an allegorical act.

The action has taken flight. The simple act of lying down now ascends to meanings that are experienced *rather than captured by mere words. Allegory is the ruin of meaning, but also the hope of contact.*

I propose chance encounters with you: the Public is my matrix for performance.

I propose to oppose the degree of separation: of public and private.

Accepting the risk of your refusal, I propose to explore an aesthetics based on failure.

Encounters based on an open invitation involve the possibility of refusal as much as the possibility of revolutionary engagement. But when members of "the Public" accept the invitation, they do not become mere tools of participatory art, workhorses of relational aesthetics. Khurana does not push the burden of being the artwork onto random individuals. Rather, she solicits a shared psychosocial experiment in which walking, vertical bodies stop and enter the horizontal dimension; here, lying down is abnormal, unusual, daring, weird, shameful, and above all vulnerable. Her invitation, were it to be ignored or refused, would leave her unbearably isolated. But if the invitation was accepted, the novelty of the resulting mass act would reclaim public space, not merely for her singular act of lying down, giving up, and being alone, but for a Rabelaisian inversion of the order of things. It could release an unexpected joy.

I propose to provoke a transgression through this absurd act.

A transgression that brings about a sudden, profound loss of self.

Transgression means crossing boundaries, whether moral or political. The former involves judgement, while the latter involves change. The experience of collective transgression brings into momentary being a collective, one that entails not a fascist yielding of the self to another, but rather a fluidity across normal boundaries: trans-gression.

No grand revolution, but potential catalyst for nascent political thought.

Bit by bit, I try to convert this gesture of lying-down-on-the-ground

from metaphor into "pure" act.

I propose not a theory of lying-down-on-the-ground, but a consciousness.[footnote Unpublished manuscript shared with the author.

Khurana's *Lying Down* anticipated some of the political debates that have been fostered by Judith Butler, who has written on elective vulnerability as a necessary political act when we try to resist in and reclaim the political right to public space, even at the risk of violence. In 2016 Butler argued that we do not come into the public as a seditious mob, but as a fragile political community in the process of forming ourselves as a new community through our individual actions.[11] For Butler, this necessarily involves risk. It creates a vulnerability that becomes the only language of resistance that we now have.

Butler's political thesis clearly draws, however, on the analytical-aesthetic art and theory of the artist Bracha Ettinger (b. 1948), who formulated the connection between fragilization and resistance in 2009.[12] At that time Butler was studying and writing about Ettinger's art and theory. While Butler theorizes at the political level, Ettinger proposes that the way fragility works relates to our ethical capacity for trans-subjectivity, which, she argues, is the psychological precondition for the emergence of the political subject and the chosen political act. For Ettinger, self-fragilization is a proto-ethical gesture. It starts at the level of the aesthetic, and is pre-ethical and pre-political. The aesthetic process, in Ettinger's writing and practice, prepares us for an ethical relationship (intersubjectivity and response-ability) that will lead to political subjectivity and action. It is what

sensitizes us for both an ethical and a political relation, not to the other but *to one another*; the phrasing itself is a crucial reconfiguration of the phallic model of self/other.

Mexican-American artist Laura Aguilar (1959–2018), who laid her queer Mexican body in the Mexican desert in forms that reach back into neolithic cultural formations, such as the three-thousand-year-old *Sleeping Lady* found

Left: Sutapa Biswas, Synapse II:1, 1987–1992. Hand-printed black and white photograph, diptych, 112cm x 132cm. Right: Sutapa Biswas, Synapse IV:1, 1987–1992. Hand-printed black and white photograph, 112cm x 132cm. Both works are from the artist's Synapse series.

In the Virtual Feminist Museum, Khurana's gesture of lying down meets the artworking of Sutapa Biswas (b. 1962), who entered the art world twenty years earlier. Born in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, India, Biswas was raised and studied in Britain, where she now lives. Her student days coincided with the emergence of the Black Art Movement of the 1980s, and especially the movement of black women, of which she was an integral agent with her powerful speaking-back to her British teachers through *Housewives with Steak-Knives* (1985) and a performance titled *KALI* (1984). The key exhibition of Biswas's work was "The Thin Black Line," curated by the artist Lubaina Himid in 1985. In 1987, Biswas visited India for the first time since early childhood. This trip inspired a series of works, one *The Pied Piper of Hamlyn: Put Your Money Where Your Mouth*, which is her take on the postcolonial situation, and then a multipart installation using photography entitled *Synapse.* In this multi-part installation, of which I am showing two images from two pairs of hand-printed black and white photographs, she transgressively, in terms of contemporary Indian mores, juxtaposed her own reclining nude body with the corporeal and erotic exuberance of the intertwined bodies she had just encountered in classical Hindu sculpture.

In the Virtual Feminist Museum, Khurana's and Biswas's artworking, grounded in Indian cultural histories and the radical political contexts of the present, might meet the Cuban-born American artist Ana Mendieta (1948–85), who also laid her body on the ground as a political invocation of a political exile's lost home. They might also meet queer in the Hypogeum of Ħal Saflieni, itself a formulation of symbolically created earth works representing the pregnant body of a woman at Silbury Hill in the UK.

By invoking the trope of women and sleeping, we enter the realm of cultural narrative encoded in fairy tales. To the images, I would add the voice of French-Algerian Jewish writer Hélène Cixous, as she offers a feminist reading of the tale we call in English "Sleeping Beauty" (in German it is *Dornrösen*).[13] "Sleeping Beauty" represents the imposed passivity of women in patriarchal culture that Sonia Khurana's act transgresses as a feminist gesture to politicize and psychologize a specific woman's body in public space as a form of silent yet eloquent speech. The final work in Khurana's *Lying Down* cycle engages with sleep—sleep that does not come to the weary insomniac, sleep that steals time from the subject suffering a depressive condition. Sharing a bed with her mother while being filmed in relation to insomnia and somnolence, Khurana has made a film that works against the classic tropes of a woman in a bed asleep, because Khurana installs the moving-image work vertically. This large hanging image of still and moving bodies filmed in still-framed lapsed time is complemented by horizontal video pieces that form the installation *"And the one does not stir without the other"* (2014), comprising *Sleep Wrestlers* (2013) and *Sleep Interlude* (2008–13). It is from the latter that I quote from meditations on insomnia written over five years by the artist, spoken on the video by a trained actor and formally emerging and fading in a way

that I cannot reproduce here except by formatting the words as short sequences of thought:

> She wants to assume the posture of sleeping
> [space 25]in order that sleep might overcome the burden of consciousness
> [space 50]and conscience.
>
> She wants this as the measure of her day,
> [space 25]both as an escape
> [space 50]and as a recollection of herself
>
> She needs to divest herself of the demands of the day, until,
> [space 25]with daybreak,
> [space 25]she would have to put on the clothing of demand
> [space 50]and responsibility once again.[14]

In discussing Sonia Khurana and Sutapa Biswas, I have tried to offer a tiny introduction to two compelling artists not currently widely known in market terms, but who offer profoundly thoughtful feminist interventions enriched with geopolitical, postcolonial cultural resonance. Their work is well known in discerning artistic and curatorial circles. Their profound artistic practices preface my theoretical reflection on action in terms of feminist thought and practice. What I now want to do is explain the frame for reading the question of feminist theory and action *with* the work of these artists.

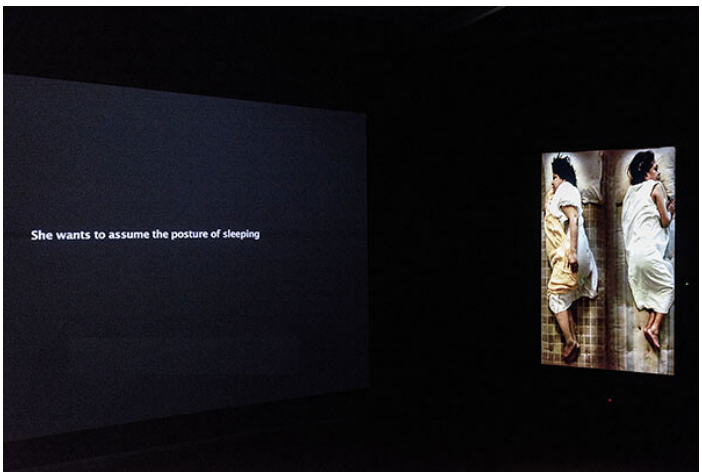
Sleep Interludes (left) and Sleep Wrestlers (right), 2013. Digital prints. Installed in Sonia Khurana's exhibition 'and the one does not stir without the other' (installation view)

2.

My current work is also situated at the intersection of two areas of my recent research. One is the theme of "concentrationary memory": this specifies the intersection of political theory and aesthetic resistance. The form of memory it represents is vigilant and anxious about the ever-present threat of fascism and the anti-political totalitarian disease that spread through the world in the twentieth century.

The second area is my research into the six installments of Documenta since that key year in world history, 1989. This research raises the question of the potential of this platform—the contemporary art exhibition or biennial, as epitomized by Documenta—to be a critical *public space* even while such exhibitions are also a central institution of the neoliberal globalizing financialization of the art world. Both of these are feminist concerns. Both are informed by a feminist engagement with the thought of Hannah Arendt, the political theorist of action and of what she named, in the English-language title of one of her most significant book, *The Human Condition* (1958).

The human condition is neither a nature nor an essence, but a political condition. We only came to grasp what this human condition is as a result of the totalitarian experiments to efface it. For those seeking total domination, it was the human condition that had to be destroyed in order to achieve total domination, because, according to Arendt, the human condition represents both the *singularity* of each person and the *plurality* of the many. It also signals our shared capacity for spontaneous—that is, new—action, for doing something new and unexpected is the essence of both revolution and the political as transformative action.



[Right:] Sonia Khurana, Sleep Wrestlers (2013) and [left:] Sonia Khurana, Sleep Interludes (2013). Installation 'and the one does not stir without the other' in Oneiric House, Delhi, 2013.

As an art historian I have wanted to know and to make visible what artists who are women have done and are doing. I focus on "artist-women" (a term I want to generalize in order to banish from our vocabulary horrors such as "female artist" and "woman artist") who think and engage creatively with the world. This leads me to thinking about *worldly women*. The phrase "Women of the World" refers to the initiating slogan of the worldwide women's movement circa 1970: "Women of the World Unite!" This was on a banner carried by women marching down Fifth Avenue in New York on August 26, 1970 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of women getting the vote in the US. This is not the origin of the world feminist movement. It is an image of *movement*, of bodies walking in public space,

animating public space in celebration of a political event that was monumental for the history of these women locally and in celebration of a new and urgent feminist impulse to take action. We can trace this pathos formula of women walking in and occupying public space in their own name as political agents across the world—for instance, to the women's marches of 2017, and to Delhi in 2012 following the hideous rape of one of thousands of women raped and killed for being in public in the streets of that city: women moving as a collectivity in diversity, with bodies holding words speaking to the world. These protests in India arose because even minimal access to public space is menaced for women, policed by sexual violence and murder. This, rather than the fact that there are Indian people lying down in the streets of India's city's, brings me back to Sonia Khurana's *Lying Down* project: it took place in many public sites, each of which held specific political histories. Barcelona and Paris are political cities where public space has a political history. India's public spaces have their own ethnic and religious dimensions, as Khurana found in Hyderabad. But the fragility and vulnerability of the bodies of women seeking to be part of the civic, political, and even economic life of the modern city is marked by the violence of the events against which the women in this image were protesting.

Sonia Khurana, Lying Down/Somnambulists, 2006. Digital print. Part of Insomnia diptych.

I am personally a product of one of the historical events I have named: the moment, circa 1970, of the repoliticization of gender associated with the many new social movements that emerged in the prior decade to contest the postwar settlement through decolonization, anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-homophobia. These social movements of abjected bodies and oppressed minds that had been denied speech recreated the space of the political as the space of appearance for new transnational communities—women subjects, colonial subjects, queer subjects, student and youth subjects, speaking and acting in the name of their plurality and their creativity. In the terms of political philosopher Jacques Rancière, these events represent the eruption of the "demos"—Greek for the "mass," designating those without words, or those whose words had not been heard or granted acknowledgement as speech by the select and the elite that formed the circle of political citizens in ancient Greek city-states.

The new social movements as demos in revolt have demanded a place in political space, in the arena of enlarged and transformed democracy. Under these grand formulas such as "Women of the World Unite," a new political entity made its appearance in the polis of speech and action, and movement: *women* emerged as political actors and formed themselves into a collective force overcoming all the traditional divisions between women in terms of class, race, sexuality, and ability, to identify a new virtual political commonality. In doing so, they did not forget and were never blind to the divisions between women in capitalist and colonial reality.

The declaration "Women of the World Unite," as a speech act, as a performative call to unite, effectively *made difference visible*, opening up between women the hitherto-invisible space of otherness as a gendered issue within this newly invented and reimagined *political* unity: women. Feminist theory and practice emerges from this inevitable and necessary paradox. Only once you create, only once you summon into the political space, the political entity "women," do the forms of difference between women become visible and demand their own urgent articulation and agonistic reconciliation. These differences are at once unique to each individual and shared with groups who experience and live the effects of their gender in relation to other, concurrent structures of oppression: race, class, geopolitical location, sexuality, physical ability, sexual safety, etc. The invocation of a new collectivity reveals the specific fault lines. It is crucial that we grasp this dynamic. Only when you summon women as women can you then make visible the differences between them as women. This means that this initial collectivity alone makes visible how class, race, sexuality, and other oppressions are always mediated by the omnipresent relations of gender. What is now fashionably named "intersectionality" both registers and occludes this dialectic, which is at the heart of feminism.

The demos speaks back to the polis. The politics of feminism is to change the constitution and passivity of the polis. My thinking about this issue rests on certain premises drawn from Hannah Arendt:

1. What is the polis? "The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be."[15]

2. The polis is also the space of appearance "where I appear to others as others appear to me, where people exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly." Furthermore, "unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, [the polis] does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of people—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever."[16]

3. The polis is thus always a virtual space. It is where we generate power to act and to change. Like the space of appearance, power is always "a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable and reliable entity like force or strength ... [it] springs up between [people] when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse."[17]

The polis is thus not an institution but an event. This is why telling stories about what has been is so crucial. Narratives create a memory of such events, like feminism, or 1968, or 1989. But we can create a bad memory of the event, failing to keep its virtuality alive. Thus, how we narrate *to each other* the political moments of such gathering and political appearance and movement will determine its future power or its meaning.

I am arguing that current representations of feminism as waves and generations, as a battle between white and black feminisms, as a succession of good or bad moments, is *politically destructive.* What is now taken as normal, such as the idea of the second wave, is a limited story, and above all an American story, that ignores the many strong socialist currents of feminism across the world. I propose instead that we imagine feminism as a space, a landscape, variously populated by different settlements of speech and action, with many different routes of connection and even walls of agonistic division. It is a space of diversity and movement, not a single story of development or failure, or generational antagonism.

What the dominant narratives also miss is the agonistic creativity of democracy as a virtuality like feminism: a work in progress, and a process in which every advance against absolute oppression makes new lines of conflict visible, and brings forth new protests from hitherto speechless communities as well as creating new concepts and sites of action. I want to end with Hannah Arendt's profound conclusion to an essay on the crisis in education, in her brilliant book on tradition, authority, history, freedom, and culture, *Between Past and Present*, published in 1968:

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token to save it from the ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world, and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing our common world.[18]

Arendt suggests how we can understand ourselves as belonging to a common but changing world ever open to the new. Yet what is to come is also supported by what has been produced through earlier commitment to thought and creativity. Her vision rejects a linear succession of ideas or people. It proposes a co-inhabited world of communication, changing because of the inevitable difference initiated by the newcomers. The common world is dynamically changed all the time by emerging agonistic conflicts that can be creatively processed without the need to kill the past, or to denounce elders for their lack or failure to deliver a better present. We are working towards an unknown radical transformation of one of the most ancient and most persistent lines of violence between us in the plurality of the human community riven by lines of violent oppression we name class, gender, race. Feminism has just begun, in awkward and clumsy but also brilliant and creative ways, to challenge the horror of our world on one specific plane—gender/sexual difference—which incontestably intersects with many others, in a world now blighted by the raw violence of rampant and unregulated capitalism seemingly in possession of the entire globe, as well as threatened by annihilator ideologies.

Hannah Arendt's model refuses the image of the family as the only site of transmission and chooses instead the freely engaged, multigenerational space of education: thought—which is constantly being renewed as much as it is being preserved and reinterpreted in critical discussion. We who work in education or in museums and galleries, which offer experience and knowledge to the public, are obliged to think deeply about the stories of the past and the present that we tell. We need to consider carefully the image of our common world that we pass on. From my feminist and postcolonial point of view, art has long suffered from bad, incomplete, and ideologically distorting narratives. The critique of its institutionalized forms was my primary concern as a feminist struggling with the institution of art history. But now feminism itself is at risk from bad stories, bad memories created within the feminist community. I think we are also deeply wounded by the thoughtless acceptance of deforming representations of feminism that are the product of unmanaged agonism. We need to focus on a profound political care for this very dangerous world we co-inhabit together. Feminism remains one of its most vital forces because, as the artists I have discussed show, we inhabit this common world in vulnerable bodies. Art speaks

feminism aesthetically and feminist thought inspires artistic practice. I place both in the realm of speech, action, and transformation.

I have tried to show how gestures, images, and performances enable not only political thinking, but also political *affect*. Sometimes we need to lie down alone and silent in the street to register the weight of the world; other times we need to gather to fill the streets and speak back. Sometimes we place our bodies nakedly and vulnerably in the world of history or in landscapes of memory. In this article I have tried to show how aesthetic gestures, images, and performances make political thinking possible precisely because they work at the level of *both* thought and affect, and engender the space of appearance, which is the space of *both* speech and action.

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A version of this text was delivered as a talk at Haus der Kunst, Munich, May 4, 2018, for Feminism and Art Theory Now, organized by Lara Demori. All images courtesy of the artists.

Griselda Pollock is Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art and Director of the Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History (CentreCATH) at the University of Leeds. Committed to creating and extending an international- postcolonial- queer- feminist analysis of the visual arts, visual culture and cultural theory, her work focusses on trauma and aesthetic transformation by developing Aby Warburg's concept of the pathosformula for the study of art since 1945: *After-affects /After-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation* (Manchester University Press, 2013) and for curatorial work and 'art writing after the event': *Art in the Time-Space of Memory and Migration—Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud and Bracha Ettinger* (Freud Museum and Wild Pansy Press, 2013). Since 2011 Pollock has published extensively on the political aesthetics of concentrationary memory developed in relation to Hannah Arendt's postwar analysis of the totalitarian as the political assault on democracy and the human condition creating the necessity for a vigilant political memory: *Concentrationary Cinema* (Berghahn, 2011) *Concentrationary Memories: Totalitarian Terror and Cultural Resistance* (I. B. Tauris, 2013) and *Concentrationary Imaginaries: Tracing Totalitarian Violence in Popular Culture* (I. B. Tauris, 2015) and, forthcoming, *Concentrationary Art: Jean Cayrol, the Lazarean and the Everyday in Post-war Film, Literature, Music and the Visual Arts,* (Berghahn, 2018), all edited with Max Silverman. She is currently analyzing the 'bad' (politically destructive) cultural memory of feminism with specific reference to feminist interventions in art and art history in *Is Feminism a Bad Memory?*, (Verso, 2018) and writing a feminist Warburgian reading of the agency and image-making of Marilyn Monroe at the intersection of cinema, photography, visual arts, and cultural memory (*Monroe's Mov(i)e: Class, Gender and Nation in the work, image-making and agency of Marilyn Monroe*, 2019), For which several articles have already been published in *Journal of Visual Culture, Journal of Visual Art Practice* and a collection on G *esture in Film* (Chare & Watkins, 2017). Just published is her major monograph on the monumental painting cycle, *Leben? Oder Theater?* (1941-42) by Charlotte Salomon (1917-43): *Charlotte Salomon in the Theatre of Memory* (Yale University Press, 2018), and she is completing her long-term project: *The Case against "Van Gogh": Place, Memory and the Retreat from the Modern* (Thames & Hudson, 2019).

1
Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

2
Ewa Ziarek, *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (Columbia University Press, 2012.)

3
Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice* , eds. Henriette Gunkel, Nigianni Chrysanthi, and Fanny Söderback (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 13–22, 16.

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Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory," 15.

5
Unpublished manuscript shared with the author.

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Unpublished manuscript shared with the author.

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Unpublished manuscript shared with the author.

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Unpublished manuscript shared with the author.

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Judith Butler and Zeynep Gambetti, *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Duke University Press, 2016).

12
Bracha Ettinger, "Fragilization and Resistance," *Studies in the Maternal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1–31.

13
Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 41–55.

14
Khurana

15
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198.

16
Arendt, *Human Condition*, 198–99.

17
Arendt, *Human Condition*, 200.

18
Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Present: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Viking Press, 1968), 193.

Renee Gladman

Untitled (Environments)

I began the day wanting to bring into convergence three activities of being—what I'd seen, what I'd read, and what I'd drawn—and to say about these acts how they made lines in the world that ran alongside other lines, and how all these lines together made environments of the earth, where I could put my body and you could put yours, and these would be lines always entwined because there was little if anything you could say or make without calling forth other lines, and this was how you knew you were where you were and the ground was worth cultivating and that there was life beneath the ground. I spent a long time looking into each of the acts of how I'd been in the world, how I'd conveyed that I'd been there and I found all these overlapping currents and found that each of the acts divided into further acts like the acts of writing and making narrative, which divided into acts of building and afforestation, which then led to sex and led to reading and wandering. I had found in drawing a way to think about narrative such that I could look into narrative without writing narrative and could see something about what it did and I didn't have to place periods anywhere and didn't have to give details or unfold events but could be in a narrative space, a space being built by narrative, and I could say this was happening because I was moving my hand across a page and I had a pen in my hand. I had a pen in my hand and for a long time or a short time I'd move it across a page and think or not think about narrative—what it meant to be in narrative, to feel narrative gather in my body and feel it work to move out of my body—but I'd be making a drawing, and yet, as I drew, I was often conscious of the resemblance of the lines of that drawing to those I made when I was writing: the resemblance was the sun at the bottom of the drawing page (I was trying to invert a city, to suggest a dense landscape) and the presence of this sun kept me cognizant that all the time I was drawing I was doing a kind of writing that in its duration was drawing, in its shape was writing, and narrative pulsed at the core of all of this. The ink was the core of narrative; my hand was the core; the shape my hand made was the core, and I knew when I was saying narrative that I wasn't limiting it to some event happening inside fiction, but rather was trying to get at an energy, a light that threaded all my acts of reading and writing and drawing and seeing into a day, then days. I had found in writing that all the women I'd read, that some of these women, had pulled a line out of some moment of doing and drew that line and kept drawing it while events and time settled above it and this line was its own kind of core and began something like, "This land will not always be foreign," Audre Lorde appearing to dream, and the line became the same as the land when you looked at it from far off, from deep inside something that flooded and was peopled, often called a poem, sometimes a march of bodies in protest, sometimes the single body working at a desk standing in for every other body at risk, looking out of its face: perceiving, and Nasreen Mohamedi (her body failing but sustaining this practice of laying lines) writing into her own drawing, "The shadow came and stood in its place like yesterday"; and the early drawings of Julie

Renee Gladman, Plans for Sentences #88, 2017. Ink and gouache on paper

Mehretu, where all at once the lines in the world head for the periphery, and each departure is violent and each exploding site is a center with a micro-architecture inside that pulses like all centers pulse, responding "to the megastructures of the previous layers," each center being a book burning at the core of the earth; Janice Lee's "single moment during the darkness" that opened the morning of my writing, where I could see the histories of the words I was combining, could see the ground they covered, could hear them resonating in the material of that writing—the sounds coming off the dark, the dark in their faces, the languages having to break in order for these words to appear, to flow like they're searching for something, illuminated from within: Janice's "figure kneeling in the alleyway, between worlds"; Danielle Vogel's "harvesting of water, from mouth to ink"; Simryn Gill's becoming "invisible like wind." We were suspended in time, still talking to Virginia Woolf, still searching for Zora Neale Hurston, wanting to empty Woolf's words of their racism, wanting to be loved by Stein. I had been up all night writing; I had been reading all my life and shaped in my writing these places where lines had been laid out and were woven in with the earth; I began drawing what I read, and saw Mira Schendel's oily architectures and saw Gego's knots and found in Agnes Martin a picture of our breathing and stood in awe of Toba Khedoori's endless windows—each artist nesting a book in the floor, always a book inside some other. It was an interlocking thing, ley lines illuminated, seen only in the dark of writing, the line drawn out of the body, through time, wanting to have been loved by Stein, wishing for Zora to have been better loved: these were the pages that settled in you when you were drawing what you'd written for such a long time. I had found in drawing that I was writing something I'd been reading, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's awareness of the horizon, the breath in the mesa, "I'll wait to see what I recognize," staring into the light. I was looking into the moss growing between the bricks laid out in front of the door, looking into the moss as its own space, its doing beyond making a border, and the green coming back after such a long winter, bright but also mourning—the sun bearing down on it, the clouds blocking the sun, the human eyes glaring—and found, within, spaces that bordered some infinite writing about process and thought, some unending burrowing, some endless death and reach, some constant holding in place, Kristin Prevallet's

"the poem is a state both of mind and landscape," and our books burrowing inside our drawings, the lines holding the brick unyielding. I had found in my looking at the land that I was also looking at water and behind me were living architectures in which I wrote and drew and where I read about other people's writing and drawing, their mercurial habitations: Nathalie Sarraute's "dark clusters between the dead house fronts … motionless little knots, giving rise to occasional eddies, slight cloggings"; Eileen Myles's standing "with several hundred people their identities changing slightly then utterly in the course of the night"; Mary Szybist's "Days go by when I do nothing but underline the damp edge of myself," and these were all moments of being that became houses or the stories of houses, and this was something pooling beneath the earth, altering its body, inverting surfaces: you did your farming in your sleep; you unwrote the clothes you wore. And I had found in reading a way to draw lines from the earth and make an outline around my sitting at this table or walking the streets of any place, any large or small city, any countryside, any emptied forgotten place, any place transitioning, taking on multiple identities, blaring them at once, and this was all architecture, all the reading I had done. Lyn Hejinian's "the open mouths of people," her "weather and air drawn to us," to say, "landscape is a moment in time." I'd found in my walking the expanse of several places through which I stopped repeatedly, I stopped in time and without time, I stood at the thresholds of doors, at the throats of caves; I pulled windows from collapsed walls, and grabbed a book to hold up the city, the barn, the balcony, and this was reading. I had already written toward Edie Fake's architectures; I had counted the Ruth Asawa sculptures hanging above me and quoted Monika Grzymala three times. Eva Hesse's catalogue raisonné of drawings—where was it? Lee Bontecou, Zarina; Zarina had said, "Once I lived in a house of many rooms," and this was an etching. Reading aggregated layers, with luminous lines running between, and each line was a moment in someone, where the body stood up and walked into a book, a drawing, a squat structure of doors, a tower perched on a hill, into the water, and each line was the writing back of language, its response, its figurations, and all this queering at the corners, putting corners everywhere, even on top of one another. And I found in my narrative these other narratives that opened under water, that glowed in deepest night, that you could read without alarm, that were blown-out geometries, maps, that were textiles hanging from the ceiling, calendula underground, always having something to do with bodies, moving through other bodies. Danielle's "The book spilled of something. Takes something."

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Suggested Encounters:

Ruth Asawa, *Ruth Asawa* (David Zwirner, 2018)
Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Hello, the Roses* (New Directions, 2013)
Lee Bontecou, *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds* (The Menil Collection, 2014)
Edie Fake, *Cities of the Future, Their Color* (portfolio) (*The Paris Review*, Summer Issue, 2018)
Gego, *Gego: Autobiography of a Line* (Dominique Lévy, 2016)
Simryn Gill, *Here art grows on trees* (MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2013)
Monika Grzymala, *Drawing Spatially* (Hatje Cantz, 2017)
Eva Hesse, *Eva Hesse Drawing* (Yale University Press, 2006)
Lyn Hejinian, *The Cold of Poetry* (Sun & Moon Classics, 2000)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (Harper Perennial, 2017)
Toba Khedoori, *Toba Khedoori* (Prestel, 2016)
Audre Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (W. W. Norton, 2000)
Janice Lee, *Damnation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2013)
Agnes Martin, *Agnes Martin* (D.A.P. / Tate, 2015)
Julie Mehretu, *The Drawings* (Rizzoli, 2007)
Nasreen Mohamedi, *Waiting is a Part of Intense Living* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, 2015)
Eileen Myles, *The Importance of Being Iceland*: *Travel Essays in Art* (Semiotext(e), 2009)
Kristin Prevallet, *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time* (Essay Press, 2007)
Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms* (New Directions, 2015)
Mira Schendel, *Monotypes* (Snoeck, 2015)
Mary Szybist, *Incarnadine: Poems* (Graywolf, 2013)
Gertrude Stein, *Ida: a Novel* (Yale University Press, 2012)
Danielle Vogel, *Between Grammars* (Noemi Press, 2015)
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harcourt, 1989)
Zarina, *Paper Like Skin* (Prestel Publishing, 2012)

Renee Gladman is a writer and artist preoccupied with lines, crossings, thresholds, and geographies as they emerge in the terrain between drawing and writing. She is the author of eleven published works, including a cycle of novels about the city-state Ravicka and its inhabitants, the Ravickians, as well as *Prose Architectures*, her first monograph of drawings (Wave Books, 2017). She lives and makes work in New England with poet-ceremonialist Danielle Vogel.

Mary Walling Blackburn

Sticky Notes, 1-3

1.1977

The video editing suite sat directly across from 1607 Broadway. My mother's boyfriend was editing a sequence of two figures fighting with long sticks. They were aiming for one another's heads. Each man, in turn, carefully swung his fragile skull away from a baton, and then a baton toward another fragile skull swinging away. To the right of the screen was a window. From a certain low angle, at a standing vantage point several feet from the sill, the video sequence and a *spectacular* outside the glass read as an operative split screen.

To clarify: a spectacular is an industry term for a neon sign; a split screen is a screen where two or more images display simultaneously. Here the optic of human memory binds two glass surfaces animated by light into a singular "screen." Although each image orders time in light, their rhythms do not come close enough to syncopate. The screens do not operate in tandem. On the left plays documentary footage of *fan a'nazaha wa-tahtib*, and on the right, a neon porn sign looms gargantuan.[1] The marquee was sixty feet wide: the word PUSSYCAT flashed across it. Each letter was six feet high. Add 1,816 additional feet of red, blue, and gold neon.

We—my mother and I—were cutting through Times Square the day Artkraft Strauss workers installed the sign. Each letter, hoisted by crane, dangled in the air. P-? P-U? P-U-S? P-U-S-S? P-U-S-S-Y. Oh, right, pussy. C-A. Cave? C-A-T. In the 1970s, female genitalia is still hairy, still zoological: the hair curling over puffy folds resembles a glossy pelt in thickness and distribution. In the 2000s, adult genitalia mimics hairless and closed child vulvas. But why mimic/perform/... hide? Vagina, why are you so weird and scared?
The vagina is a sword or it's a scabbard [according to Latin translations], or it isn't.
The vagina belongs to a small child or it doesn't.
The vagina is a small cat or it isn't.[2]

Attached to a neon woman's ass was a cat's tail. This spectacular, designed by Artkraff Strauss, creator of Times Square's iconic signs and displays since 1897, was favored over all others (giant bagel, giant Budweiser, giant Kleenex) because, the firm joked, "it embodies the Bauhaus ideal of form following function."[3] Let me misunderstand the joke: Spasms convert to light? In the night made day, in the artificial illumination of the fake orgasm, let me understand what is underneath the joke: legal and illegal tender made visible. The ideal form, inside the Broadway video editing unit, was dependent on holding the electric screen and the mechanical tableau together in the mind's eye, a feat accomplished by standing purposefully between the two displays. An ideal form because the human has a moment to sort real time unfurling against looped time. This can only be achieved if a lone person stumbles upon the right conditions—an accident of surfaces. The conditions must compete for

Mary Walling Blackburn, Ol' Vagina Eyes: After Harvey Bell's Smiley (1963) or Boosting Feminist Morale Sans Sheela Na Gig, 2018. Pencil on paper. 21.5cm x 27.9cm.

you and cancel out one another and cancel you out. We don't exist to ourselves when we're watching movies.

As long as the electric grid holds.

The city blacks out sometimes. In 1977, when Times Square went dark, the optics of certain economies still pulsed among the dead screens and dead lights. Some said Working Girls lit themselves with flashlights so the Johns could still see enough to buy. This cinematic instant foreshadows the post-cinema of the apocalypse we now nudge. So soon we will replay movies in our memory, long after we have lost the means to watch them. I will sit on a broken thing and hold my VCR head in my hands. Will I mentally replay *L'Ecu d'Or ou la Bonne Auberge* (1908), the first hard-core porn? I can't remember genitals. Will I replay *Diagonal-Symphonie* (1924) by Viking Eggeling? I can't hear the notes. But then again it never had sound. It was just supposed to *be* sound. And we are supposed to just *be* genitals. Pussy, *be*.

In the same building as the Pussycat, the proprietors of a gay bathhouse called The Broadway Arms built a replica of a NYC subway bathroom for their patrons. Sounds of the subway were piped in: braking; ghost train. Sex in a set. As lovers climbed into lovers, the movie was made in and outside of the participants' heads. No fluffers in sight. But some temporary stars were Working Boys. The Working Boy projected another movie in his mind. Spleen, *be.*

On Saturday, October 20th, 1979, Women Against Pornography organized a march through Times Square. 5,000 throng. We don't march if my mother has to waitress double shifts at The Pomegranate. But we also don't march that day because my mother likes porn. Towards the end, according to the paper, anti-porn activists scuffled with other anti-porn activists. Anti-Choice, anti-homosexual, anti-porn activists attempted to merge into the main march with a banner that read: "PROTECT THE CHILDREN." The phrase was cribbed from singer Anita Bryant's anti-gay liberation coalition.

Almost at the same time, there is a white, bespectacled bald man walking in a city crowd. I see him only now, in an old photograph posted online. His t-shirt reads: I CHOKED LINDA LOVELACE. I misinterpret: that codger is a male

Mary Walling Blackburn, Times Square Anti-Porn Peep Show, 1979. Pastel and paint on paper. 21.5 cm x 27.9 cm.

anti-porn activist, communicating to us that by watching *Deep Throat,* which played on daily rotation at the Pussy Cat Theaters for a decade, he's guilty of suffocating some woman somehow. Perhaps he was converted by Lovelace née Boreman herself, who, post-porn industry, implored the public to stop watching *Deep Throat*. But this man's kelly-green shirt is not a homemade outburst. It's mass-produced. American made? Woman-sewn or man-sewn? I re-interpret, in anachronistic fantasy: when our eyes meet his on the street, the codger wants us to imagine his penis in our throats.

It works. I imagine. I choke, too. I wish to bite off. I wish, instead, a beautiful one in my mouth—clitoris or icicle, shaft or sugarcane.

Perhaps, through psychedelic magic, the machinery of the t-shirt factory heeds Lovelace's objections: the white ink migrates outside of the boundaries of the letters in the silkscreen, imprinting each I CHOKED LINDA LOVELACE shirt with only a puffy cloud.

Jokes accumulate. Operation MiPorn: the Federal Bureau of Investigation chose Valentine's Day (1980) to raid the Pussycat Cinema. Owner Michael Zaffarano's heart burst as he fled through an underground tunnel into a splicing room. The FBI had started in Florida where the same crime syndicate was making illegal copies of *Snow White.* The investigation led them to New York City. *Wet Rainbow* was one of the flicks on rotation. The title is lovely. Drenched pigments flow. Relax. But then there's the IMBD description: *A married couple's lives are thrown into turmoil when they both find themselves attracted to a beautiful hippie artist.* Across the street, while *Wet Rainbow* unspooled, my mother's boyfriend edited documentary footage of a Bedouin wedding in the desert, dancing horses, and martial stick fighting, in a suite generally used by Sheldon and Maxine Rochlin. These two downtown filmmakers released the resulting video under their company Mystic Fire in 1986. But not before adding a voiceover at some point, which they described in the video's ad copy as "delicately infused with the ecstatic Sufi poetry of Rumi." It appears that Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), published during their editing process, wasn't taken up by the white, moneyed, druggy downtown avant-garde. What flows back across the street instead is the quality of pussycat voices. A type of pussy speaks—like the white star of *Wet Rainbow*? An ecstatic dancer named Gabrielle Roth utters some translations of thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi with the comport of a breathless pornstar, all synced to Portapak footage of contemporary Egypt. This pairing doesn't hold even if the viewer is a stoned American Boomer standing in a video suite facing an adult movie theater, bombarded by light.

My mother was sometimes a camerawoman while the crew shot footage in Egypt, Sudan, and Lebanon. She was nineteen and I was two. She was gone a long time. She returned with a small boy's galibayah for me. It was cotton and striped. We were oblivious to our resuscitation of the colonial trope where white women like Isabelle Eberhardt adapt the clothing of men and unwittingly deepen the imperialist projects of Europe and the United States. I wore it around. My childish adaptation, for me, meant that gender, like screens, could also be split. I felt split-screened. I watched myself become subject to a biological time, articulated by a uterus-in-waiting; I sensed myself operating within technologies, articulated by particular clothing and stick weapons.

A couple years later, I wore hand-me-down lavender corduroys. I began to chew the corduroy off the knees because I planned to chew off every part until the pants were entirely smooth. At the same time, I remember using broom handles to fight. My hands vibrated with each strike of the stick. I don't want to exit this loop—an infinite loop where genders as conditions are never met. I want to terminate a cognitive loop where the sex of the human is fused to advertisements, to exchange-value, to bone breaking fury, to illness … to a certain kind of death.

I self-diagnose apophenia. This is because I read up on the neurological structure of meaning making. But a Nazi gets caught in the wires; WWII frontline military psychologist and neurologist Klaus Conrad defines apophenia as "unmotivated seeing of connections (accompanied by) a specific feeling of abnormal meaningfulness."[4]

In an apophenic haze, I lash together:
Neon women are nude. In silhouette, they have no distinguishable features.

Men fighting with sticks wear galibayahs; only faces and hands are visible.
The porn of split-screen Orientalism: neon American women light the nude faces and nude hands of men.

I ditch the Nazi for a Skeptic Libertarian: I self-diagnose: *patternicity*. Michael Shermer, skeptic libertarian, coins patternicity as "the tendency to find meaningful patterns in meaningless noise."[5] Or meaningless light.

Meaningless is a tactic. I am meaningless if you are the military; the police pretending to be military; the security guard pretending to be police; the citizen pretending to be security guard; the consumer pretending to be a human citizen; a human pretending to itself that it is a discrete unit (not a symbolic pattern produced by cognitive processes between organisms). Meaningless meaning that you don't even register *me*, slouching between 1 and -1. I hope.

Mary Walling Blackburn, Karen Silkwood Becoming A Cooling Tower, 2018. Pastel and paint on paper. 21.5 cm x 27.9 cm.

2.

There was no glass front to this diorama.
Within: a nuclear power plant of clay was painted gold. A cotton ball rose like smoke from the stack. A small fence of glued coffee stirrers. Hanging from the fence's rungs swung a miniature nuclear hazard symbol. The plant was encircled by a painted backdrop of red barns, pasture under a 3 p.m. blue sky. It was a generic America. It was any nuclear power plant with a whatever amount of radiation. I, twelve, made it. The teacher had asked for any diorama: any set, any scene—any eye (lazy, mine) into any fake cave.

The year before, our family unit borrowed a small television set to watch *The Day After*, a made-for-TV movie depicting a full-scale nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. In pre-production, the Pentagon requested that the script be altered to better suit their outward messaging. Director Mike Nichols resisted; the government subsequently withheld the use of US Army helicopters as props and a US Air Force Base as set. A month prior to its public release, President Ronald Reagan recorded his feelings after watching a Whitehouse preview copy. *The Day After*, he said, " *left me greatly depressed. So far they haven't sold any of the 25 ads scheduled and I can see why.*"

November 20, 1983: 100 million people watched together and this included me. Sixteen commercials ran; they could not be delivered even as they played, because no one could see past the after-image of a nuclear Other, which each ad ran between. We consumers, as a category, were temporarily devoured by our glimpse of a totalizing end. Reverend Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, attempted to organize a boycott against advertizing companies. At that point, he objected to any reining-in of End Times. Falwell, along with other evangelical groups, incorporated nuclear apocalypse into their dispensary eschatolological structure—some claiming that their sort of heaven on earth is only realized through holocaust. But within these explosions, church and gender also end. In my mind's eye, Falwell has burned past maleness and my own uterus has exploded into light.

I sieve the fallout for a positive in my nuclear end—the end of my femaleness, but more specifically femaleness as *the* reason for my particular end. My whole life, local news reports, from 1974–2018, informed; femicide was the ostenato. An end could be made by a man: child abductor | mass shooter | boyfriend | serial killer | incel. I collated, in real time, the white men skulking in vans, beating off in cars, punching walls, peeking in, staring into space/chests. But an atomic end curtails that trajectory; a serial killer doesn't locate me and my vagina to carve until there is nothing left to carve. Serial killers, and their stocks of ASP tri-fold disposable restraints and duct tape, melt, too.

In 1983, TV-less again, we drove a half hour down the mountain. We lived in a mountain village that serviced ski areas and their tourists. My parents worked as a lift operator and a groomer respectively. At the movie house, two film posters were tacked to the exterior: *Hot Dog ... The Movie!*, a sex-comedy ski film, and nuc-flick *Silkwood*, based on the actual events surrounding the death of labor activist Karen Silkwood. The plot of the movie we watched

that night revolved around Silkwood, who, as member of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union, investigated faulty safety practices at a Kerr-McGee, a diversified petroleum corporation that owned a plutonium processing facility near the Cimarron River, Oklahoma where she worked as a lab technician.

I, eleven, thrilled when she, smartass—as channeled by Meryl Streep—flashed her little tit in defiance; Silkwood blew bubblegum while she processed plutonium. It was a poor kid's relief to see an unruly, sexy, poor woman fighting and fucking and fucking herself to a moral end. And a micro-relief came when Karen becomes a new kind of Final Girl (the last woman murdered in a slasher film—not to be mushed together with technocapitalism's End User).[6] Ah, to watch a woman killed through her activism rather than her femaleness. Ah, to be that one.

As tween, I mentally melded plutonium processing facilities, nuclear power plants, and nuclear war because they share materials; plutonium (Pu) is generated by nuclear plants and repurposed after processing. The Pu that Silkwood processed was used to power the Fast Flux Test Facility in the Hanford Reactor. Recall Fat Man in Nagasaki: Eleven pounds of Pu became an atomic bomb. And more Pu will become other bombs. Parts of the film I had watched in 1983 were being made solid, were migrating into the diorama. Without movie equipment, I could not make a movie and I could not replay the movie. Is a diorama a poor kid's VCR? I re-spool my mind by way of dried and painted clay.

1990s. I was a laborer working on a contract archeological dig near Grants, New Mexico. In the past, I had dug ... some. My aunt and uncle were archeologists in Utah. My aunt was the co-director of the excavation. My uncle, a member of the Paiute tribe, was in charge of the reburial of Ancestral Pueblan remains dislocated by the archeological work on the Corn Grower's site. Corn Grower's site was located in the village of a polygamous Mormon community, as well as downwind of the Nevada test site.[7] It was possible that the soil was contaminated from nuclear fallout. It was also possible that archeology students were sometimes greedy to locate a grave—perhaps it could be framed as a spiritual contamination located in their own soft tissue. But no burials were excavated on the Corn Grower site; there was an agreement with the Kaibab Paiute, that as soon as the dead were detected, archeologists were to leave them in place and undisturbed.[8] For five summers, I primarily watched my cousins. I didn't brush dirt away from a flexed skeleton but sometimes I unearthed a burnt sherd, drew a diagram of an unearthed wall, or scrubbed artifacts at dusk.

In New Mexico, an archeological site was slated for eventual uranium extraction. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) establishes that federally owned or developed land must excavate historic and Ancestral Puebloan sites before development.[9] We dug. We camped. The certified archeologists and myself, a hired hand, were authorized to sometimes use the uranium mines' shower facilities. Standing, naked and sunburnt under the water stream in a concrete room, I remembered the previous evening: sap coagulating in fresh bear claw marks in the trunks of pine trees growing at the base of a nearby volcano (extinct); the afternoon before, unearthing artifacts and glancing up to an explosion on the horizon; taking a photo of the fresh dust from the open-pit uranium mine in the distance; then a shower scene from *Silkwood* supplants: a contaminated Karen/Meryl decontaminated. She is scrubbed raw multiple times.

That pink human, she is flown to Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb was invented, and they sample her live. After Silkwood's death, the local Oklahoma coroner balks at her radiated body and outside technicians bottle her parts. Fragments of her skull return to laboratories that are situated on the acreage that once housed the Los Alamos Ranch School. This is the same place where a sixteen year old William Burroughs was weighed on arrival by his new headmaster. I chart the toxologies. They multiply. Screen interpretations flip the icon; my transference is destroyed by my examining stills of *Silkwood* today-- Google search pictures revealing that the set designer has strung a confederate flag above Karen/Meryl's bed in the shack she shares with Dolly/Cher, her lesbian housemate and contaminated co-worker. The set designer thinks its a starry red pattern but its a bloody symbol. The flag brushes up against what was a holy, feminist thing and makes it a white nationalist thing and it falls apart for me.

I shower today, in an empty house in an empty neighborhood; I am surrounded by new-growth forest. Despite my perpetual ambivalence regarding heteronormative femininity, I buff and sweeten my smell. At the mirror, I leave the black hairs around my lips in place. While the reservoir water runs down the sink, I mentally assemble female half-lives, atomic in sublime canyons—irradiated and gated. Are these conjured beings with sparkling clitori and warrior half-chests my guiding constellations? Or rather, is this gooey commune the rearing of vestigal and misguided Second-Wave essentialism?
In a solastalgic[10] moment of absolute grief I exit the earth. I am ficto-disassembling Orion and dippers, big and little. No Messier 45 (a cluster of hot blue and luminous stars fouled by Greek rape fantasies).[11] With these deletions ... outer space begins to match my inner space. Satellites made of lamb's wool and silicone breast prostheses junk orbit the earth in a geo graveyard belt. This spacemare is undergirded by Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*—a work that points at contamination and identity, raced and classed and sexed, that makes a sense of amputation and her rejection of breast prostheses—their false cheer... the corporate profit of female cancer.[12] The Institute of Medicine's *Safety of Silicone Breast Implants* lists the

substances inserted or injected into women's breasts from the late 1800s to 1945:

ivory glass balls
ground rubber
ox cartilage
paraffin
terylene wool
gutta percha
dicorapolyethylene chips
polyvinyl alcohol-formaldehyde polymer sponge (ivalon)
ivalon in a polyethylene sac
polyether foam sponge (etheron)
polyethylene tape (polystan) or strips wound into a ball

polyester (polyurethane foam sponge) Silastic rubber
teflon-silicone

Is this a comprehensive list? What can't you stuff in a human?

After WW2, substances inserted or injected include:
radiolucent hydrocarbons called "Organogen" and "Bioplaxm"
certain forms of petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline
beeswax
shellac
glaziers' putty
epoxy resin
industrial silicone fluids.

Adulterated silicone oil, adulterated with: 1% ricinoleic acid, 1% animal and vegetable fatty acids, or 1% mineral and vegetable (perhaps castor) oil, 1% olive oil, or to contain

croton oil
peanut oil
concentrated vitamin D
snake venom
talc
paraffin

This list is not an artist supply list for a feminist work. Nor is it a band rider, a prepper's checklist, a witches' spell.

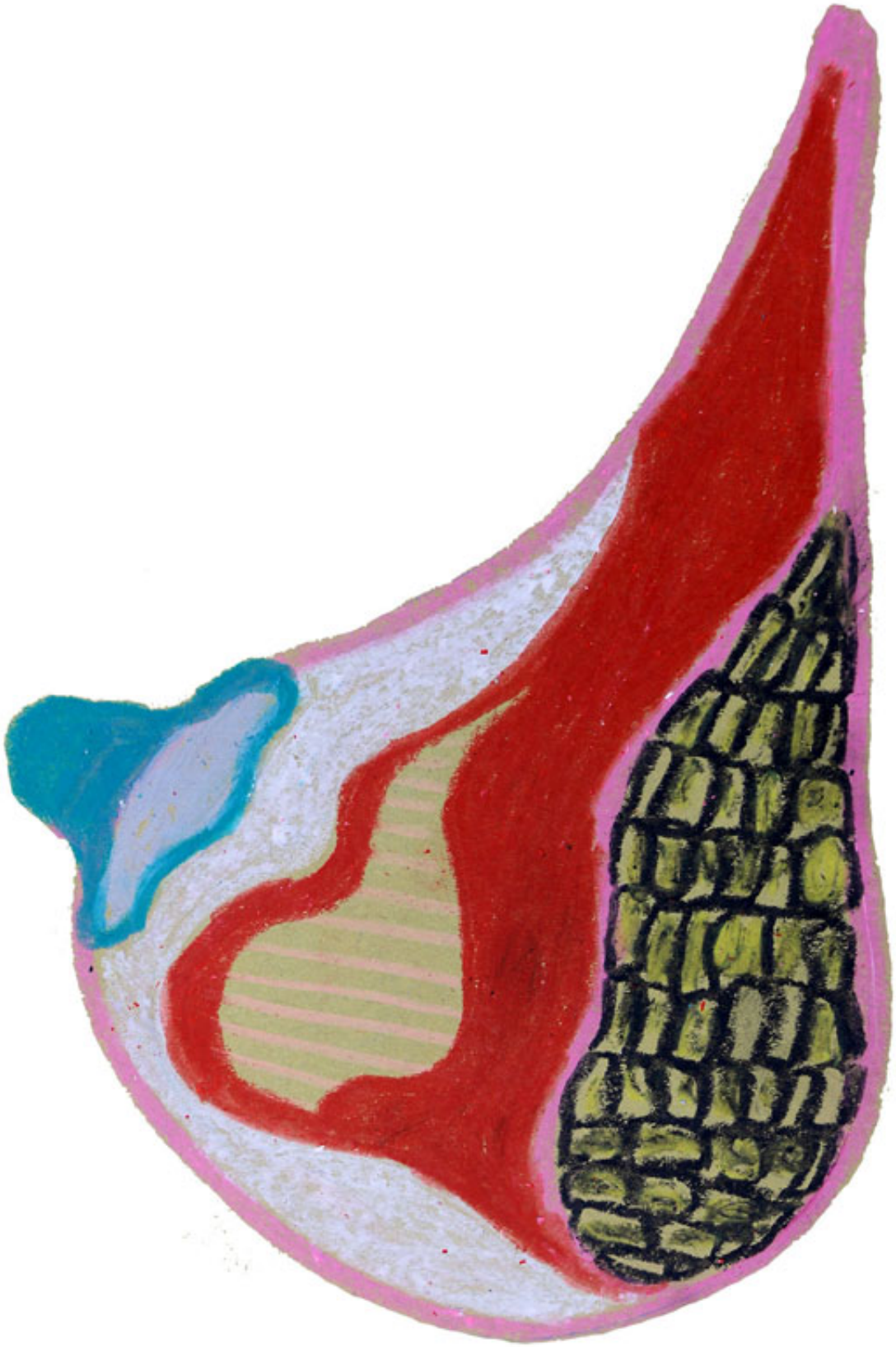
When my grandmother was dying of cancer, my siblings and I were gathered in Anaheim. She would ask us to fetch things from the bathroom vanity countertop and bring them to her bed: blue Gatorade, white dentures, red lipstick. My half-brother slipped her falsies under his shirt and danced around the room. His bright orange curls were shaking; he shimmied. She laughed because he was her; his feet and butt were shaped just like hers; this Final Clown moved like her. But was he also a brownfield Final Girl—like our uncles that had died just years before her of cancer, too(!)—contaminated by SoCal dirt (one tested urban soils for a living) and SoCal electricity (another worked for the grid)?[13] So far so good; my half-brother lives contentedly.

Once, in college, a stranger walked up and tossed a VHS tape in my lap. It suffered from "seventh generation loss." It was copied from a copy from a copy from a copy from a copy from a copy. The color signal was weak enough to destabilize the color. Its sound had rotted some. I recall a thick watch of *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* and instructional footage of a breast implant surgery in a room colored robin's egg blue. I remember it as a carving. Some human chests became dioramas: strange structures rising globular and hard from the plain. A theatre's stage? An amateur porn set? This parcel was courtship, punk and libertine? *Quietus est. She is quit.* I wish to quit sexual differentiation.

Instead, shall we free-associate poetic bodies in nuclear lands? Kazakhstani poet Olzhas Suleimenov, initiator of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement, called for a moratorium on all nuclear testing in Nevada and Kazakhstan (at that point subsumed by the Soviet Union). Semipalatinsk became the first nuclear test site in the world to close.[14] For one year, at the Nevada National Security Site (N2S2), poet Fred Moten wrote 1,000 sonnets while cleaning toilets. Is it quiet out there? William Burroughs, a contaminated poet—but not an irradiated one—writes in *The Soft Machine*: "Uranium Willy The Heavy Metal Kid. Also known as Willy The Rat. He wised up the marks. His metal face moved in a slow smile as he heard the twittering supersonic threats through antennae embedded in his translu-cent skull."[15]

Audre Lorde washed the crystals in carbon tetrachloride and read the charge of the crystals on X-ray machines.[16] Charges lodged both ways: cancers from the crystals in Lorde; crystals permanently lodged in military radio and radar equipment flying elsewhere. Lorde, the poet, is not the thousandth Final Girl but an Extra Chemical Female; she announces the damage to greater audience: she was contaminated while working at Keystone Electronics in Stamford, Connecticut. The details about the site aren't found in *The Cancer Journals*, but rather in *Zami*:

Nobody mentioned that carbon test destroys the liver and causes cancer of the kidneys. Nobody mentioned that the X-ray machines, when used unshielded,



Mary Walling Blackburn, Breast Implant: Ground Rubber and/or Beeswax, 2018. Crayon on paper. 21.5 cm x 27.9 cm.

> delivered doses of constant low radiation far in excess of what was considered safe even in those days.[17]

A Toxic Woman's public life begins when she, as a teenage girl at the turn of the century, is admitted to Salpêtrière. Marie "Blanche" Wittman becomes public in the Parisian asylum for the female insane; she becomes Dr. Charcot's hysteric model and another doctor's lover. Later, two of her legs and one arm are amputated. Her end—blonde head and a buxom torso wheeled about in a wooden cart—is not the stark work of a madman or mad doctors, but the result of Marie Curie's explorations. Marie Blanche's career as a hysteric follows her position as Curie's technician, a role in which she extracted radium from the mineral pitcheblende. Sane Marie poisons insane Marie. Like Silkwood, each woman loves the work but it does not love her. Unrequited: Radium can only be itself. (Self-helped and self-employed, I happily scratch my itch.)

> During the attacks, we [Bourneville and Regnard] traced on the chest, with the point of a pin, the name of the patient [Marie] and the name Salpêtrière on the stomach. An erythemic band of several centimetres of elevation was produced and on this band the letters were drawn in relief, having about two centimetres in length; the erythema disappeared slowly, the letters lasted [longer].[18]

Blanche Wittman wrote, after being written on. Her yellow, black, and red notebooks, found after her death, have not been translated from the French into English. Before she was a technician and a writer, male physicians induced a trance and *traced on* her *chest, with the point of a pin.* Their words are subtitles? She is an object within the animation instigated by their hypnosis? There is nothing maieutic about my line of inquiry; no men will give birth to truth.

Later, blank (page) again, Blanche (white) lives as irradiated hunk in Marie Curie's apartment. In the living quarters is Marie Curie's cookbook. It is still too radioactive for contemporary researchers to leaf through. Academics, bankrolled by research grants, enter the archive. They cannot touch where Blanche touched without protection. But some don't care to investigate; they find the white body, the white female body, the dead white female body, dead white feminism, white feminism, feminism tapped out, over-researched, and over-resourced, at best.

From the Audre Lorde Collection: 1950–2002, Spelman College Archives[19]

> *A Western Union Telegram from an early lover—Happy Birthday from Miriam, February 18, 1953 Remarks for the Society of friendship of Uzbekistan (Russia)-(Handwritten notes, air ticket, hotel info, notes, general information) October 4, 1976 A Female Landscape by Mildred Thompson (drawing) 1977 Cards and Letters from friends following mastectomy 1978 Stomach/Liver Healing Exercises [n.d.] Temple of Light Religious Shop Catalog, [n.d.] Choral Reading—Need: A Choral of Black Women's Voices, [n.d.]*
>
> Box 44: Publications
> *Article—Former Silkwood Friend says she's OK, [n.d.] Article—Nuke Activist Karen Silkwood's ex-roommate reported missing, [n.d.]*

Dusty/Dolly/Cher.

Dusty Ellis is first spotted in Audre Lorde's archive as "ex-roomate of a nuke activist." Deeper into the archive, Dusty is a lesbian and a lab technician in the Kerr-McGee plutonium plant, and daughter of a professional rodeo rider. Dusty became *Dolly* as performed by the actress Cher in *Silkwood*—the Hollywood screenwriter softens the taut edges of a living, working class butch by assigning a name whose previous meanings include female servant, prostitute, mistress. The true Dusty leaves Oklahoma to protest plutonium in NYC's water. Later, Dusty's own anti-nuke manuscript will disappear, not to be found. On a cinema blog, a flashing .gif of Dusty/Dolly and Karen lolling on one another on the porch of their shack loops their nectarous grins and goodly affection. These Silkwood/Ellis clips in the Lorde archive predate the .gif and its source.[20] By saving the clippings, Lorde preserves the butch environmental activist missing and found. After reading Lorde's inventory, I digitally locate the same article from her stash. It reports that the wind blew away the scrap of paper requesting someone feed Dusty's farm animals. I find another clip. In 1975, Dusty scaled a plant fence at the Kerr-McGee Cimarron Plant with an unloaded rifle, reportedly screaming "I want to be killed." A woman puts in her request. Opposed to … murder simply happening to her.[21]

3.

A (Semi-) Final Woman thinking through the Internet pleads with interface. Browser, please: erase history. (An array of open tabs reveal a trite Google | an insecure Google | a toxic Google | a secret Google.)

I, American-on-online-record, "turned" each "page" of Carl Ven Vechten's scrapbook, now uploaded. Cheesy double entendres (*CAN'T LICK EM … CHAMP TAKES TWO AT A TIME)* are pasted against cut-outs of naked and muscled men. I am glad to see the slather of his male on male

Mary Walling Blackburn, Glass Eye with Segmented Heterochromia: Modeled After My Left Eye, 2018. Crayon and pencil on paper. 21.5cm x 27.9cm.

desire, but am cold to Ven Vechten's racialized fetishism. Distancing myself, I mutate each image into a twentieth-century .gif (est. 1987), jerking almost-live. Is it micro-cinema when it is one second? One second (of movement) … in my head?

I spy another slender volume: the young Walt Disney's WWI scrapbook from his time as a Red Cross nurse. A trench rat, proto-Mickey, and proto-Willy interface with explosive cheese and a big-breasted battlefield nurse who in profile resembles white Christian Sunday school depictions of the Madonna before conception. This scrapbooker will go on to animate; go on to dine with Mussolini and Leni Reifenstahl; to dutifully braid one daughter's long hair; to urge and enjoy swollen distortions of any race but white; to gently console another white daughter when her first menstruation distresses her; to testify against his former employees before the House of Un-American Activities Committee. Disney, the man, tacks between atrocious American and gentle American gestures. Subconsciously, perhaps he thinks one move repairs the other but really he just brings that which he brought to life—to death. Now Dennis Cooper's digitized private scrapbooks, initially compiled in 1981, are comprised of careful clippings of dead boys gleaned from newspapers (his visual preparation for *Frisk*, his nihilist novella*)* I do not consult but only recall; I superstitiously refuse to re-open his scrapbook. Because I now have my own young child that must be kept living and intact*,* an irrational fear of transitory evil floats—that an entity, demon-like, will inhabit a human and kill me or mine—even if my reasonable mind knows that the online and archived scrapbook is no trailer for my biopic.

What is reckless is to believe that providers erase client searches. I have a personal IP scrapbook. You, an unwitting Scrapbooker, have an in-progress, personal IP memory book. It is preserving, arranging, and presenting the digital path you beat down, your pathological internet use. Our internet *Anti-Memories* have now been archived long after our enzymes broke down the dopamine generated by our internet usage, legal and illegal, brilliant and stupid.

I remember other sources of DA. I remember before the internet. Heavy beige offline computers were assembled in a basement room of our high school science building. People were seldom there because they rewrote their final drafts by hand. A girl, maybe coding, was raped there once. But for the most part, pupils worked above ground and together. I remember a beautiful boy there who would wander the surrounding fields with headphones on, shirt off. When I asked him why he never wanted silence or bird song he replied that the music pumping into his ears turned him into the star of his own movie (or now his own spazzing .gif?) On the other hand, his sister and I, sister anorexics, walked around campus without fame or food or music. Ultimately, here was a flesh-and-bones boy in an unreal realm circumambulating flesh-and-blood girls. It felt like a teen movie feels to teens: portent, sensual, possible. Now it feels like a teen movie feels to adults: flat, goofy, not possible.

I also feel like trying to feel what is after the internet. Like an actress touching prop plutonium through prop gloves: I sense a life sans *digital humanitarianism* and *immutable ledgers*, sans *women's economic empowerment* through

Mary Walling Blackburn, Anus Braid: Post-Freud: Opening Modeled After My Endoscopic Photograph of My Colon, 2018. Crayon on paper. 21.5 cm x 27.9 cm.

philanthropic capitalism. I fake touch a phantom limb of downloaded PDFs I never read. I presage the oldest "living" disaster robot, a rare earth hero, shorting out. Outside of a locked internet, my partial-photographic memory serves me up a screenshot, not elective:

Browse All: Murder » NYC Department of Records and Collection Services (1916-–1920)

To return to the visual record of femicide is my neurological rut; it's no zoetrope disinterred from early cinema, but rather my own private thana-trope (to animate death). It is hard to know whether this ocular pawing is towards revival or persists in order to establish and reestablish that the one pawing—the pawer—has not met the same fate. Still, I can't linger on the bloat and the blooms of blood, so I suss out the visible camera equipment in 311 photographs of the dead. The camera and me, wide lens and wide eyed, look so you don't have to … ? There is the bare wooden leg of the elevated platform, a contraption for the documentation of crime scenes popularized by Alphonse Bertillon, my dis-associative apparatus. The living leg of the photographer is beside and parallel. The platform's dead leg, this time, is stanchioned to the mattress, the empty side of a double bed. This time, a stool is wedged between the right "leg" and the bloody floor. Now, the right leggy tripod is dug into the sand and the left is spiked through the vegetation. Murder in the grass, when a creature is far away from her possessions, operates on another register than indoor slaughter. Inside a room, a greasy mirror and factory-made blanket are witness and prop; the mud under fingernails and pollen in the stomach had and has a generative trajectory independent of human dramas.

But the turn-of-the-century women offed and left strewn around New York City's industrial hinterlands (say the banks of shipping channels or the final field beside the factory) are not the sacrificial northern European bog bodies, like Huldremose Woman and Yde Girl, and Elling Woman, ritually hacked and/or strangled in the spring and buried in the peaty moss in possible fertility rites (as suggested by P.V. Glob in *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved*). What cycles are these New Yorkers sacrificed for?

Purportedly, some detectives were instructed to throw graphic forensic photographs from closed cases into the Hudson River; this record is incomplete. In the surviving photographs, when the head wound permits facial recognition, one sees the domestic slaughter of what often appears to be poor Italian and Irish women. Where is the documentation of Asian, African, Caribbean, Latin American … immigrant dead? None belong to the temporal, agricultural life of the first bog-body catalogue, composed by German prehistoric archeologist Johanna Mestorf in 1871. Instead, conjure an informal Industrial Age "catalogue" produced at the dawn of consumer capitalism; every dead New Yorker is featured within.

Braided rope around the necks of our hometown victims are never hand-stitched animal hide, like the material composition of several ropes found wound around bog bodies. These industrial American bodies are not deposited in spaces "particularly suited to establishing contact with gods, spirits, and ancestors"[22].[23] Then again, let's not "fantasize" about the existence of a totalizing compendium of dead, poor women. To what end would industry's slush pile of women be revealed: Can the data be felt in a city studded with bitcoin-operated latrines?

End of Part A.
To be continued …

X

Mary Walling Blackburn was born in Orange, California. Walling Blackburn's artistic work engages a wide spectrum of materials that probe and intensify the historic, ecological, and class-born brutalities of North American life. Recent publications include *Quaestiones Perversas* (Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, 2017), co-written with Beatriz E. Balanta; "Gina and the Stars" published by Tamawuj, an off-site publishing platform for the Sharjah Bienniel 13 and "Slowness," a performance text in the sound-based web publication Ear | Wave | Event.

1
A Google search on Egyptian stick fighting offers this phrase and a translation: “the art of being straight and honest through the use of stick.” Is this a valid source? Where is the second source for confirmation?

2
The colloquial use of *vagina* extends the anatomical parameters to include the vulva. It is not in keeping with anatomical glossaries or the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines the vagina as “the membranous canal leading from the vulva to the uterus in women and female mammals.” I have elected to initially use the technically correct *vulva* and then revert to common usage.

3
David W. Dunlap, “Column One: Changes,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1986. “The Artkraft Strauss Sign Corporation has fashioned many blazing extravaganzas. But the Pussycat remains a favorite of Tama Starr, the company's executive vice president, ‘because it embodies the Bauhaus ideal of form following function.’”

4
Apophany (Greek apo (away from) + phaenein to show revelation); Aaron Mishara, “Klaus Conrad (1905–1961): Delusional Mood, Psychosis and Beginning Schizophrenia,” *Schizophrenia Bulletin* no. 36 (2010): 9–13.

5
Michael Shermer, “Patternicity: Finding Meaningful Patterns in Meaningless Noise,” *Scientific American* , December 1, 2008.

6
“Simply, the end-user is the consumer of a good or service, but with a slight connotation of know-how innate in the consumer. In a literal sense, the term ‘end-user’ is used to distinguish the person who purchases and uses the good or service from individuals who are involved in the stages of its design, development and production.” See: Read More: End-User: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/end-user.asp#ixzz5F1a6XjCQ . See: “Follow us: https://ec.tynt.com/b/rf?id=arwjQmCEqr4l6Cadbi-bnq&u=Investopedia .” A sticky note to readers: Would you say that The Final Girl operates as the ideological book end of the End User? Does the Final Girl belong to the pre-digital world and we are only haunted by her? Is the End User gender fluid?

7
“ ... A lady come out once who offered to bring her Geiger counter with her so we could see if we were encountering fallout in our trenches, but I decided that I just didn't really want to know, as I was still going to have to be in trenches ... ” Personal correspondence with the author’s aunt, June 18, 2018.

8
In the same conversation with my aunt, she mentions that NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) was instituted in 1991. After NAGPRA, swift changes in practices and attitudes regarding First Nations graves and sacred objects were implemented in the field.

9
See a summary of Section 106 on the Advisory Council on Historical Preservation’s website: https://www.achp.gov/protecting-historic-properties/section-106-process/introduction-section-106 .

10
Solastalgia is defined as the “loss of solace from the landscape” in the abstract for: D. Eisenman et al, “An Ecosystems and Vulnerable Populations Perspective on Solastalgia and Psychological Distress After a Wildfire,” *Ecohealth*, vol. 12 no. 4 (December 2015), 602-10, accessed from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26302957. See also: H. Stain et al, “Solastalgia: the Distress Caused by Environmental Change,” *Psychiatry* no. 15, suppl. 1: S95-8 (2007).

11
See, for example, the myth of The Pleiades or The Seven Sisters.

12
According to the Institute of Medicine in 1999, 1.5 million to 2 million US women had by then been outfitted with breast implants. Institute of Medicine, *Safety of Silicon Breast Implants* (The National Academies Press, 1999): https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44792/ .

13
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines a brownfield as “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.” Brownfields, however, can be located anywhere and can be quite small. See: “Overview of the Brownfields Program,” on the EPA’s website https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/overview-brownfields-program.

14
Dow Corning Medical Grade 360 fluid was used extensively in Las Vegas and resulted in complications. At least 12,000 women (some have estimated as many as 40,000 women) had breast injections in Las Vegas by 1976 when the practice became a felony under Nevada State law. Practitioners reportedly charged $800 to $2,000 for a series of injections in 1966, according to *Safety of Silicone Breast Implants* . Breast injections were banned in Nevada prior to the banning of nuclear testing.

15
William Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (Paris: Olympia Press), 56.

16
Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1982)

17
Lorde, *Zami*, 126.

18
Bourneville and Regnard, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* , (1879–1880), 19.

19
Spelman College website, “About Us”: “Founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, we became Spelman College in 1924. Now a global leader in the education of women of African descent, Spelman College is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.” https://www.spelman.edu/about-us . Side note: A smaller Audre Lorde collection is also housed at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies in Germany at the Free University of Berlin, where Lorde was a Visiting Professor of African American Literature and Creative Writing in 1984. See http://audrelordeberlin.com/

20
They are found amongst scores of poems and sketchbooks, articles and books read, syllabi for courses taught by Lorde, conferences attended, reviews of her work, publications of her work, translations of her work, drafts, her diaries, and audio reels.

21
Because I locate the clippings in Lorde’s archive I sort Dusty’s demand to be killed through Lorde’s evocation of analysis based on *difference*. Each factor reorganizes Dusty’s assertion—be it qualified as the demand of a white woman, white lesbian woman, white southern lesbian woman, or white southern poor lesbian woman. When is which killed for which reason? Later, Ellis’ white privilege activates as she cycles through, and survives, a series of interfaces with the law including a standoff with police while holding senior citizens hostage and charges of domestic abuse against Ellis.

22
Timothy Taylor, *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

23
In the Big Smear, as turn-of-the-century hobos called NYC, there may be workers’ or paupers’ or runaways’ graves, or now just their compressed anti-form, located under a new museum or its fresh wing; can spirits rise up and through the white box, roiling the overlying economic surface that scooped them out? Might they arrange powerful donors in a pyramid in the air—like the spectral arrangement of chairs on a table like in Spielberg’s *Poltergeist* (1982) ? .

Elizabeth A. Povinelli

Mother Earth: Public Sphere, Biosphere, Colonial Sphere

1.

In *The Human Condition* in 1958, Hannah Arendt wrote a cautionary tale of two forms of alienation—from the earth (*Gaia*) and from the world (*Cosmos*)—that threatened to annihilate not merely some humans, not merely all humans, but to unleash an atomic holocaust on all life. In Arendt's compressed social historiography, this dual alienation was the result of the slow transformation of the classic Greek understanding of the human condition (*vita activa*). For the Greeks, the human condition was based on three kinds of activity: labor (*animal laborans*), work (*homo faber*), and politics (*zoon politikos*). Arendt believed the modern understanding of the same had become based on and oriented to only one kind of activity—labor and its instrumental reason.

For Arendt, the Greeks had it right, the moderns wrong. The Greeks understood all matters of biological life—and thus life and death—to abide in the realm of *labor*. In this framework, labor is the relationship a person has to her body and the bodily functions of others. It is "the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor."[1] Labor operates on and addresses the world of necessity, of animal needs: placenta, shit, food, drink, shelter, pleasure, productivity, abundance—what Arendt calls the "burden of biological life, weighing down and consuming the specifically human life-span between birth and death" on the earth.[2] Labor is what humans do to maintain, enhance, and reproduce life. This natality is its key figure, whether represented via Mother Earth nurturing life or animal mothers pushing out their offspring.

But the realm of necessity is merely the natural ground of the human condition. If labor operates in the realm of intimate biological functions and relations, work, the second aspect of the human condition, operates between the worker and her object. The worker has an idea and then attempts to reify it, materialize it, in a durable form. In doing so the worker "provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings."[3] Arendt also notes, time and again, that the ultimate purpose of work is "to offer mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves."[4] Labor makes biological beings; work fabricates the world within which they dwell. But neither labor nor work defines the human condition. They are the grounds on which humans can express their truth through a third form of activity, namely, political action in the public sphere.

Many Arendtian scholars understand political action to be the opposite of labor. If labor focuses on the necessities of biological life and intimate desires and passions, they believe political action is possible only when these concerns are radically bracketed and held at bay. For

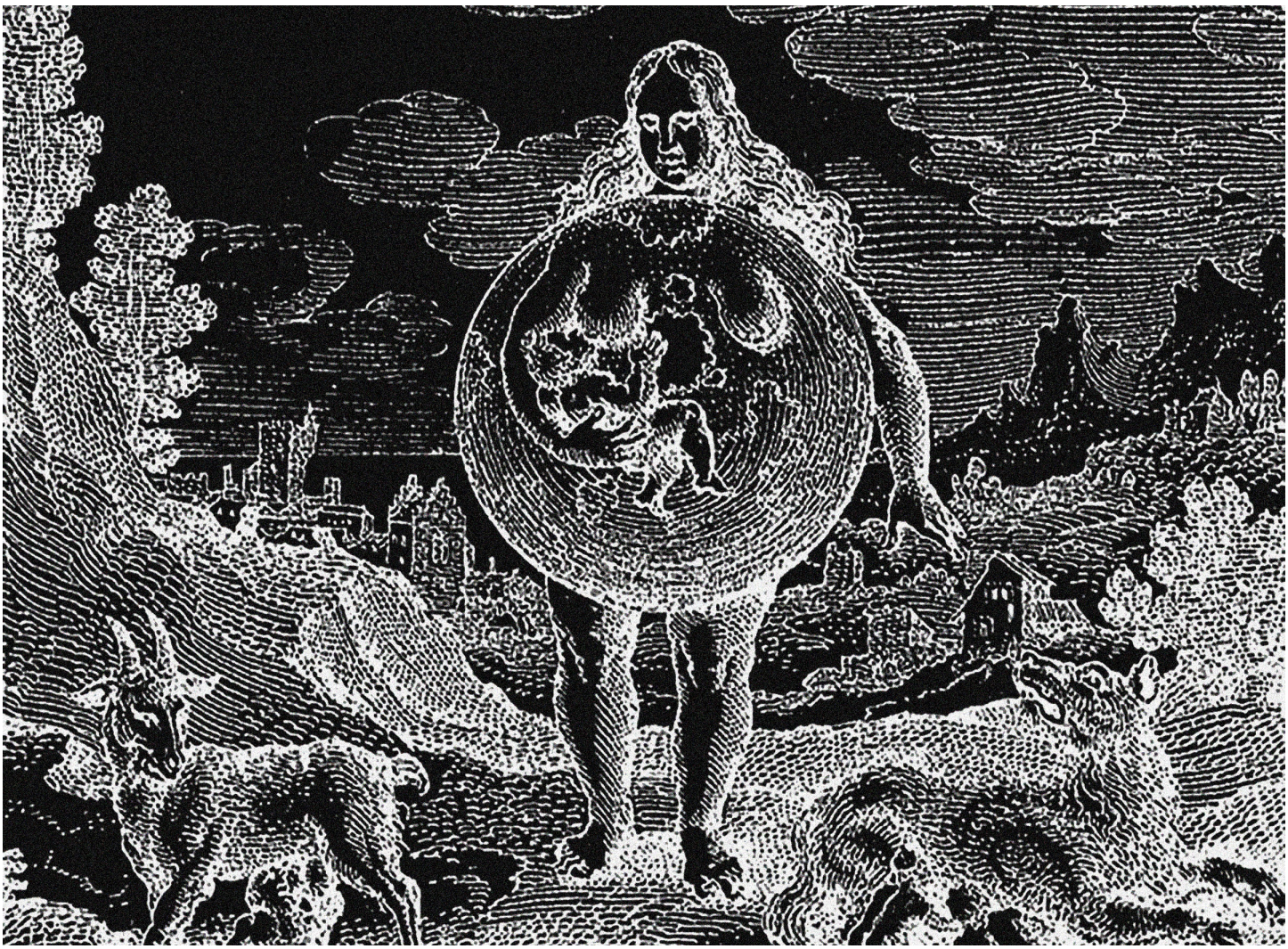


Figure from Michael Maier's book Atalanta Fugiens (1617-1618).

Arendt, "the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to the nature association whose center is the home (*oikia*)."[5] As opposed to the labor of the home, the political action that defines the public sphere doesn't produce *a baby*, *a person*, or *a life*. Political action discloses who someone is—not directly but implicitly, as the person and those around her come to know who she is relative to the mode, timing, and ordering of her speech and action. "The disclosure of 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is ... is implicit in everything somebody says and does."[6] In short, the public sphere of political action operates openly in a shared common world where the exchange of ideas occurs "directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter"; "corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world"; and is oriented toward immortality.[7]

Did you stand up to a racist comment or not? Were you willing to sacrifice your life for the common good of your people or not? Did you invest all your energies into advancing a better idea of political publics or not? In its most robust sense, each individual action has within it the possibility of becoming a world-historical action. If the scope of your action is large enough, no one will ever forget your name. You will become immortal through the forms you instituted.

Leave aside for the moment the meaning of immortality for Arendt, and note instead her distinction between " *on* the *earth*" and " *inhabit* the *world*." This duality is expressed in multiple ways across the text. On the one hand, we are *on* or *of* the earth, as mortal individuals; we live within the rhythms of life, needing to constantly sustain our bodies. This natural state is an unavoidable and necessary precondition to the human condition. But it is only a precondition. To be human, Arendt claims, is to *inhabit* a world. And because this world must be made, this world can also be unmade and remade. And it is the unmaking of her beloved Greek polis and the catastrophic consequences she saw coming—the nuclear destruction

A woman works on a "Vengeance" dive bomber at Vultee-Nashville, Tennessee, c. 1939. Photo: Alfred T. Palmer

of the earth—that motivated Arendt's compressed and fragmentary social history contained in *The Human Condition*.

In order to explain how we got from the classic world of the Greeks to the current world, Arendt tells a story that goes something like this. In the beginning were Mother Earth (*Gaia*) and Father Sky (*Uranus*), who together birthed a cosmos—a world—for the Greeks. This world parceled human activities among different kinds of people—the realm of necessity (labor) was assigned to women, children, and slaves; the realm of work to a class of male citizens without property or sufficient property to sustain themselves and their families without work; and the realm of politics to those men who were wealthy enough to have others take care of their necessities and fabricate their world. Over time, those assigned to this labor denounced the world as a false place and retreated to philosophical solitude (*vita contemplativa*). In the Christian era, God the Father, a Son born of a Virgin, and a Holy Ghost smuggled into this situation of falseness an attitude of fallenness that viciously turned Christians against the flesh even as they promised life everlasting in/after death. Their followers lifted their voices to Heaven, singing forward to the end-times. When the end didn't come, the Christians institutionalized an attitude that rejected the earth as a false and fallen place and prayed for a new kind of infallible heavenly body.

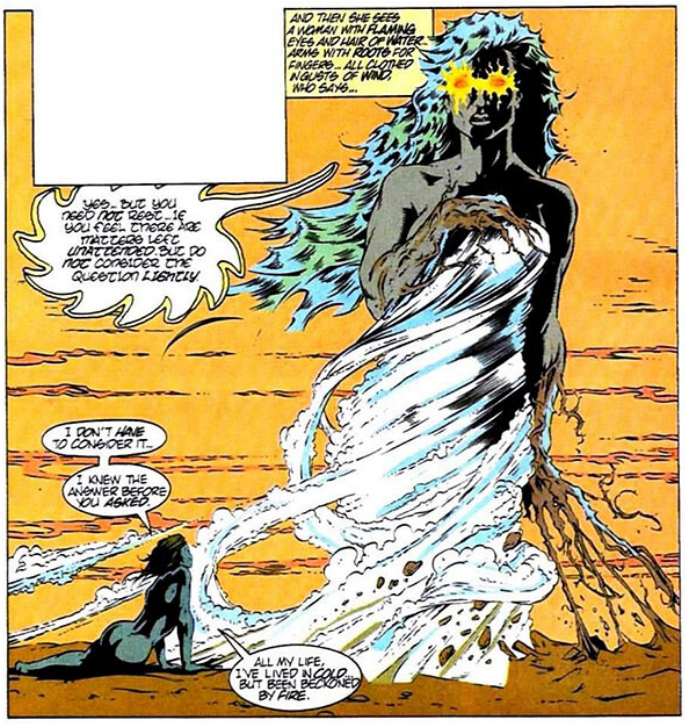
Next, in the Enlightenment era a struggle for emancipation ensued between those, such as Kant, who desired to think independently about earthly things, and the various Christian sects who claimed power to determine the moral passageway between life and death. Science emerged from the Kantian Enlightenment as a liberated child. Having emancipated earthly beliefs and secularized

earthly practices, the natural and social sciences sought to understand the material dynamics of the earth and universe and the societal dynamics of man. Science zoomed into the molecular and stretched outward to the interstellar. If scientists prayed, they prayed for insight into the truth of life processes or for a more productive form of life. Science invented labor-power and biopolitics. It produced treatises, governmental documents, and social movements that figured the human condition as a biological, geological, cosmological journey of life and death.

For Arendt, all these events were forms of action that had unexpected consequences, which is in the nature of action itself. "Action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes."[8] History is thus a cascade of actions that lead to right or wrong turns that ignite other chain reactions that cannot be anticipated, controlled, or reversed. And every action, she said, is folded into how people work—the things they make; the reason they make them; and ultimately the world in which humans dwell. Sometime during the rise of industrial capitalism her moderns began fabricating durable, then semi-durable, then disposable things to be consumed and shat out. In the end the moderns fabricated earth and worlds (*cosmos*)—the social relations of capitalism, poetry and art, politics, instruments and machines—in such a way that all forms of activity were subsumed into the logics of labor, biology, and necessity. Everything started working for the Great Mother Womb or against the Great Mother Womb; everything became oriented to using the earth for the accumulation of a materially richer life. The human condition was eventually reduced to biology, action to biopolitics.

The moderns fabricated for so long and so extensively that the very fabric of earth and world was now part and parcel of food and toilet. They created the environmental conditions that altered the very nature of their material existence, to paraphrase Marx, as skies were clogged with smog, famine spread, and vast toxic dumps boiled over. Up above, Sputnik swirled, shaping viewers' understanding of the earth as a limited thing that all humans shared. But the more they treated the earth with concern, the more earth itself became just another object to instrumentalize existence, as if the earth were just another object to consume or not consume, as if consumption were the only way to view each other and the planet. The earth had become the Greek woman and slave, whose truth is assigned to her ability to keep on giving without ever becoming exhausted. Perhaps, we thought, we should find other earths revolving around other stars to begin our ravenous consumption anew.

It was against the shadow of these changing social configurations and the worlds they bore that Arendt warned of a coming atomic firestorm. She asked: "Should



Gaia (New Earth), the DC Comics superhero character, in Aquaman, vol. 5, no. 6 (February 1995).

the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was he Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?"[9]

You might think Arendt's vision of earth consumed by nuclear fire would orient her toward heaven, or to outer space, perhaps hanging out her thumb for a ride on Sputnik to Mars—or maybe picking up a shovel and digging a luxurious bunker where she could wait out the end-times, reading ancient Greek classics. But you'd be wrong. Her argument was that the reflex to flee was a symptom of the problem rather than a solution to it. All three forms of world—Christian eschatology, pure science, and biopolitics—set their sights on life, death, birth, and mortal health or corruption, whether from the perspective of the universe, the species, or the individual. In dangerously misunderstanding the human condition as primarily about life and death, all three were accelerating the crisis.

Arendt believed that no one can escape the human condition through a retreat into solitude or an escape to heaven or the stars, because the human condition is not found in individual solitude, in life and death, or in the after- or everlasting life. The desire to rush away from the earth in order to survive it is exactly what placed moderns on the precipice of total annihilation. If we are to save our lives, Arendt argues, we must turn back to world and earth, but not back to life (labor) or the hope for bodily

Image origin unknown, 2016.

resurrection (a form of life cleansed of bodily decay). We must leave the obsession with mortality and strive to become immortal, to stay in the world in a way begat by activity independent of the labor of the mother and the law of the father. We need to act in such a way that we make ourselves legend. We need to understand the human condition itself as a form of political action oriented to the common good and enacted "through words and persuasion and not through force and violence."[10]

At this point, Arendt makes a specific philosophical judgment about what sort of world humans must dwell in if they are to avoid the firestorms resulting from earthly and worldly alienation. This world demands we separate the public sphere from the realm of labor and work. But *we* don't do anything. Only certain kinds of people and certain forms of existence are allowed to decide their destinies through persuasion rather than hegemony, force, and violence. Other bodies are assigned to the labor of necessity—wiping up poop, lovingly scooping food into children's mouths, laboring in mines and factories, left at the edges of roads and cities to fend for themselves—as if it were the truth of their being or a fact of nature. For the Greeks it was women and slaves, for capitalism the proletariat and precariat, for imperialism and colonialism persons of color, indigenous peoples, and of course earth herself. This type of labor can leave one exhausted. It can even lead to a hope for death. Christianity, as Hegel said, was the god of exhausted slaves.

Who will be assigned this burden of necessity today? As Arendt notes, we cannot reverse the cascading effects of political action. We now live in a world in which assigning certain classes of persons to bear the burden of

The Chipko movement was a forest conservation movement born in India with precedents in the eighteenth century.

maintaining life is no longer, if it ever were, politically viable. Enter the machines. The cybernetic technicians at the control panels of military-mediated techno-science reassured the world that soon machines would be able to think, and in thinking solve the problems of labor and life. In a 1964 lecture at the Conference on the Cybercultural Revolution, Arendt took aim at several assumptions within the cybernetic community.[11] One of the great benefits of cybernetic machines that engineers touted was the liberation of humans from labor and the creation of a world of endless leisure. Computer automation promised to take over fabrication. With its utopian and dystopian visions, cyberpunk soon began imagining a world run by machines, exemplified in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968).

All Arendt could see was a coming hell of endless nothingness. "Vacant time is what it says: it is nothingness, and no matter how much you put in in order to fill up this nothingness, this nothingness in itself is still there and present and may indeed prevent us from voluntarily and speedily adjusting ourselves to it."[12] The

leisure afforded by cybernetics, she thought, would simply accelerate the subsumption of the human condition into the logics of labor. Ditto with the new environmentalism and animal rights movements—in an effort to place humans into a broader environmental ethics, these movements reduced humans to a pure biology. Only if cybernetics managed to free all persons from necessity so that they could enter the political realm—similar to how the Greeks had liberated certain men from necessity by locking up women and enslaving other people so that men could act politically—could it enhance the human condition. Then it could help moderns step back from the precipice of a great catastrophe. In this view, machines would be the new woman, slave, colonized person, and subaltern subject. Robots would speak Greek, in the sense that they could be assigned the labor of necessity as if it were in their nature to do so. Thus we should not be surprised today that the voice of current AI programs like Siri sound like the fantasy girlfriend of the (likely male) code-writer. She keeps giving and giving and never turns her back. Robots seem perfect for this role, insofar as they are on the other side of Life for Arendt: not merely dead but essentially Nonlife; not merely world-poor but world-absent. Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* had something to say about this future for robotics.

If robots can fall out of the moral realm, it is because the materials they are built from—the magnesium crucial to making steel, the rare earths, the polymers of plastics—have never been allowed in. And excluded with them is anyone who understands a different ontological relationship between land and people. Like Arendt, the Australian Goenpul theorist Aileen Moreton-Robinson discusses an irreducible immortality at the root of her people's condition. But this immortality is established by ancestral beings, "creatures of the Dreaming who moved across country leaving behind possessions which designate specific sites of significance … metamorphosed as stone or some other form."[13] The "inter-substantiation of ancestral beings, human and land" is the original "ontological relationship" through which all embodiment emerges.[14]

Alongside the Greek cosmos are other dwellers of world and earth—Dene, Sioux, Ogoni, Karrabing, and so many others. For them, the catastrophe Arendt warns against has already happened—it resulted from the geontological presumptions that invaders brought with them and fabricated their governance out of. The cascading effects of colonization were just now creeping up on Arendt's moderns. Maybe the problem wasn't letting the *animal laborans* take over and transform the rationale of politics, but rather thinking that someone or something has to be assigned the role of providing the biological conditions of someone else's life—that someone must do labor and be the milk for me—and that someone or something can be found to play that role without harm.

The Chipko Movement resurfaced in its modern version, led by women, in 1973 in Uttarakhand (then Uttar Pradesh). It's movement members hugged trees to block deflorestation.

2.

Ancient Greece is the comfort blanket for Arendt's moderns and their legatees. Whenever in crisis, they reach toward it for support. Like toddlers reaching toward their mother's breast when feeling unsafe, they wrap their lips around the logos of classical men. Pick me up. Fix it. The sounds of the words are comforting as they blend into the words they already had given their actions and institutions: *demos*, *logos*, *nomos*. As her grandchildren rip into her flesh and shit in her belly, Gaia herself seemed to stretch her hands to the Sky Father and pray: "Anything Lord, anything but this." Many now run to her defense. Gaia: ignoring Arendt's caution, theorists call out her name as object and subject of care. In the 1970s James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, and more recently Bruno Latour, used Gaia to think through a looming global environmental catastrophe. But most prominently there was the anthropologist, cyberneticist, psychologist, and

Elizabeth Stephens and partner Annie Sprinkle, well-known advocates of ecosexuality, defend a more mutual and sustainable relationship with the Earth" that is based on relating to nature not as a nurturing mother but as a life partner.

morphologist of being Gregory Bateson. By 1979 Bateson was proposing "the biosphere" as a technical name for Gaia, the two terms interchangeable for him, both meaning the highest order of mind and life.[15] But in giving Gaia a new name he not only rejected Arendt's caution, he also rejected another possible way of understanding the interconnections governing existence, namely, the colonial sphere. In choosing the concept of the biosphere, he disclosed the manner in which Western epistemology governs difference.

Bateson had a very specific understanding of what mind was, and thus what criteria had to be met before one could say one was in the presence of it. Difference and relevance were key, or what he called a "difference that makes a difference" (or second-order difference) to another mind. In other words, mind was not a solitary thing, a sovereign substance, or a unified self.[16] Mind is the process of incorporating difference (information) as a kind of difference. Bateson describes this process in many ways, including "stimulus, response, and reinforcement."[17] The core dynamic of mind is this: the mind creates a meta-pattern that is able to reconcile what it is with the difference it encounters. It then becomes this new pattern, in effect ingesting into itself a modified version of itself as altered by the difference. Indeed, mind feeds on the information (difference, noise, chaos) it encounters by classifying (transforming) it into an ingestible form, which alters itself without exploding itself.

For Bateson mind, life, and evolution are, thus, simply three words that refer to the same thing. As he says, time and again, across his books *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, *Mind and Nature*, and *A Sacred Unity* that the evolution of mind (map, meta-pattern) is the core of what we consider life to be. It is what holds "us" in relation to "ourselves" at a given level of bios against the noise of the territory. Bateson believed that defining life/mind in this way allowed him to puncture the dangerous Enlightenment chauvinism that removed the human mind from other parts of nature. Instead, for Bateson, the human mind was merely one region of a much larger biospheric mind, a part of a larger play of life forces partaking in difference, relevance, and self-correction. Thus not only is the "individual mind" immanent in the body. "It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem. This larger Mind is comparable to God but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology."[18] Sounding as loud an alarm as Arendt but grounded in an entirely different life of the mind, Bateson argued that if the West failed to devise a new ecology of mind, a general ecological collapse threatened all life on earth:

> Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of chasing the wrong unit: you end up with the species versus the other species around it or versus the environment in which it operates. Man against nature. You end up, in fact, with Kaneohe Bay polluted, Lake Erie a slimy green mess, and "Let's build bigger atom bombs to kill off the next-door neighbors." There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess. When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise, "What interest me is me, or my organization, or my species," you chop off consideration of other loops of the loop structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the by-products of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them.[19]

The reference to Kaneohe Bay would have been well known to Bateson's readers. The bay was a case study of the effects of the common practice of dumping raw sewage into rivers, bays, seas, and oceans in the late 1960s. Lake Erie, so heavily polluted by industrial contaminates from the Cuyahoga River that flows into it, caught fire, helping spur the environmental movement. The toxic consequences of toxic liberal capitalism were hardly contained to one beach and bay. Eighty people died in New York City in 1966 when the temperature rose, intensifying smog.

And yet, to Bateson, the Cuyahoga River was not itself a mind. Indeed, many things fell outside of Bateson's category of mind—stones, manganese, water, telescopes, and windup toys. "There are, of course, many systems which are made of many parts, ranging from galaxies to

sand dunes to toy locomotive," but these are not "minds," nor do they "contain minds or engage in mental process." "The toy locomotive may become a part in that mental system which includes the child who plays with it, and the galaxy may become part of the mental system which includes the astronomer and his telescope."[20] Yet, without the child and astronomer, they are merely things in the world, rather than world-rich in themselves.

What, then, of those peoples who do not consider rocks, rivers, and sand dunes as without mind—those I mentioned above, such as the Goenpul, Dene, Sioux, Ogoni, and Karrabing but also the Native American Seneca, who belong to Cuyahoga? And what of the Papua New Guinea Sepik River peoples and those residing in the Balinese village of Bajoeng Gede, among whom Bateson lived in the 1920s and '30s, and among whom he developed his key concepts of schismogenesis and the double bind? Where did Bateson place them in his ecology of mind? Biographies note the initial frustration Bateson experienced during his Papuan fieldwork in the 1920s.[21] Originally a student of zoology, Bateson shifted to social anthropology under A. C. Haddon, who urged him to study contact between the indigenous Sepik groups in Papua New Guinea and their Australian colonial administrators. After being excluded from the secret ceremonies of one group and after deciding that another was too culturally contaminated, he shifted his attention to the Sepik River Iatmul. Later, with Margaret Mead, he studied the social relations of Bajoeng Gede Balinese.

For Bateson, Sepik and Iatmul and Balinese men and women were certainly not windup toys. For him, they aspired to be more like rocks. They sought not to evolve. "The rock's way of staying in the game is different from the way of living things. The rock, we may say, *resists* change; it stays put, unchanging. The living thing escapes change either by correcting change or changing itself to meet the change or by incorporating continual change into its own being."[22] Although he purported to study change resulting from contact, he ultimately desired to find authenticity, which he considered that which had not changed. More accurately, he sought out those who resisted the onslaught of colonialism and then he characterized this active political resistance as a form of unchanging stasis. The role these people played in Bateson's ecology of mind was classically colonial. They provided him a form of difference that would energize his own internal unfolding. In continually encountering distinct regions of mind (among them the Iatmul, the Balinese, US military intelligence, Western science and epistemology, new age ecology), he enriched himself with the selves of others. He became Hegelian, the mind that actualized Geist by understanding the meaning of Napoleon's cannons at the gates of Jenna.

I am being a tad unfair. Bateson was more humble than Hegel. He claimed knowledge could never be actualized, because mind was founded, as Deleuze would later put it, on original multiplicity.[23] Still, the itinerary of Bateson's historiography of mind followed the rhetoric of Western civilizational self-aggrandizement. The great Martiniquan Aimé Césaire agrees with Bateson's belief that contact between civilizations is what keeps each from atrophying. But he quickly and searingly mocks Bateson-like ideologues—all those who see Western knowledge as emerging from a benign encounter with difference. Europe's "great good fortune," Césaire sarcastically writes, was "to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best center for the redistribution of energy."[24]

In his 1990 *Poetics of Relation*, another Martiniquan, Edouard Glissant, compares the worlds of invading Christendom with the worlds they encountered, according to their differing forms of nomadism. In the "circular nomadism" of people such as the Arawak, hired laborers, and circuses, when "each time a portion of territory is exhausted" they move on to a new place, only to come back when it has regained its resilience. By contrast, the goal of invading nomads was not to allow a place to replenish itself but "to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants. Neither prudent nor circular nomadism, it spares no effect. It is an absolute forward projection: an arrowlike nomadism."[25] Eventually the invaders begin settling down, rooting in, claiming hold, and forcibly moving others into their fortresses via the dark, diseased holds of slaving ships. The invaders' descendants begat descendants, who eventually realized they had shat where they were now going to eat, and so created new exterior and interior toilets. They sent toxic forms of manufacturing into interior reserves of difference—native lands; regions dominated by persons of color and the poor—and external third worlds.[26]

In short, the good fortune of Europe and its progeny came not from an advanced ecology of mind, as Bateson suggested, nor from the perversion of a Greek understanding of the human condition, as Arendt would have it. It came from its parasitical relationship to others. The scrabble of competing kingdoms of Western Christendom rampaged across what they called new worlds, as if the worlds were part of a gargantuan female body, ripe for the taking and easily disposable when used up. They carried Greek lexicons as they invaded land after land, justifying their savagery in classical terms, then settling down into a demos which claimed within it "a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena."[27]

As Hortense Spillers noted long ago, this cosmos is more legible in an American rather than Greek grammar.[28] Thomas Jefferson, erudite scholar of the classical world and slave owner, parsed out hierarchies of flesh and bodies by differentiating between the social (indigenous) and ontological (African) savage.[29] This uniquely American grammar reveals how the American demos was built by sorting non-Europeans into the orders of the

Press image for the immersive theater experience "Ecosexual Bathhouse" by Pony Express (led by playwright and performance maker Ian Sinclair and transdisciplinary artist Loren Kronemyer). Photo: Matt Sav

world-absent and world-poor, the rocks which could be treated as mere objects versus the animals who simply had not yet become fully civilized—those of mere flesh and those with a body.

Europe used its cosmos to justify sinking its teeth into worlds of others and sucking out whatever resources were available until it swelled into a blood balloon. Blood balloons became nations. Their people (*demos*) became Americans, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, English, French, and Germans. Europe did not simply create what Césaire's student Frantz Fanon would famously call the Wretched of the Earth. Europe created itself through the parasitical absorption of others. "The Wealth of the West was Built on Africa's Exploitation," notes Richard Drayton, and also on the exploitation of South Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas.[30] Immortality was based on the biggest killing, otherwise known as wealth accumulation. And Europeans did not only drain the labor and life energies of bodies and lands; they also sacked ideas.[31] Césaire writes:

> What, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies.[32]

The shadow the invaders cast, the timing and character of their actions, disclosed the truth about their civilizational claims. Europeans before Europe viewed other lands as rich territory to be forcefully acquired, exploited, and then discarded. Hard, vicious work (*homo faber*) fabricated and

refabricated multiple worlds and earthly terrains. But acknowledging the power of invader history is different than imagining that invaders had superpowers. As their minds and institutions were formed by gulping the difference they encountered, difference often got stuck in their throats. They choked. Writing almost simultaneously, Césaire and Arendt located the conditions of the Holocaust of the Second World War in the sadisms of imperial and colonial Europe. We can easily see that a similar tide of toxicity is now turning back to Northern shores. The Wretched of the Earth have pulled many "immortals" from their pedestals. Still, those left in the wake of various forms of colonialism and postcolonialism struggle with the impossible possibilities that characterize the aftermath—the math of an after that is ongoing.[33]

X

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Arendt, *Human Condition*, 152.

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Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society," *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* , ed. Sara Ahmed (Berg Publishing, 2003), 23–40, 32.

15
Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (E. P. Dutton, 1979).

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"The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, and difference is a non-substantial phenomenon not located in space or time; difference is related to neg-entropy and entropy rather than energy." Bateson, *Mind and Nature* , 102.

17
Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, 134. Six aspects of Bateson's definition of mind are key: "A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts"; "the interactions between parts of mind is triggered by difference; mental process requires collateral energy; mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination"; "in mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e., coded version) of events which preceded them"; and "the descriptions and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena." Ibid, 92.

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Elvia Wilk

The Word Made Fresh: Mystical Encounter and the New Weird Divine

1.

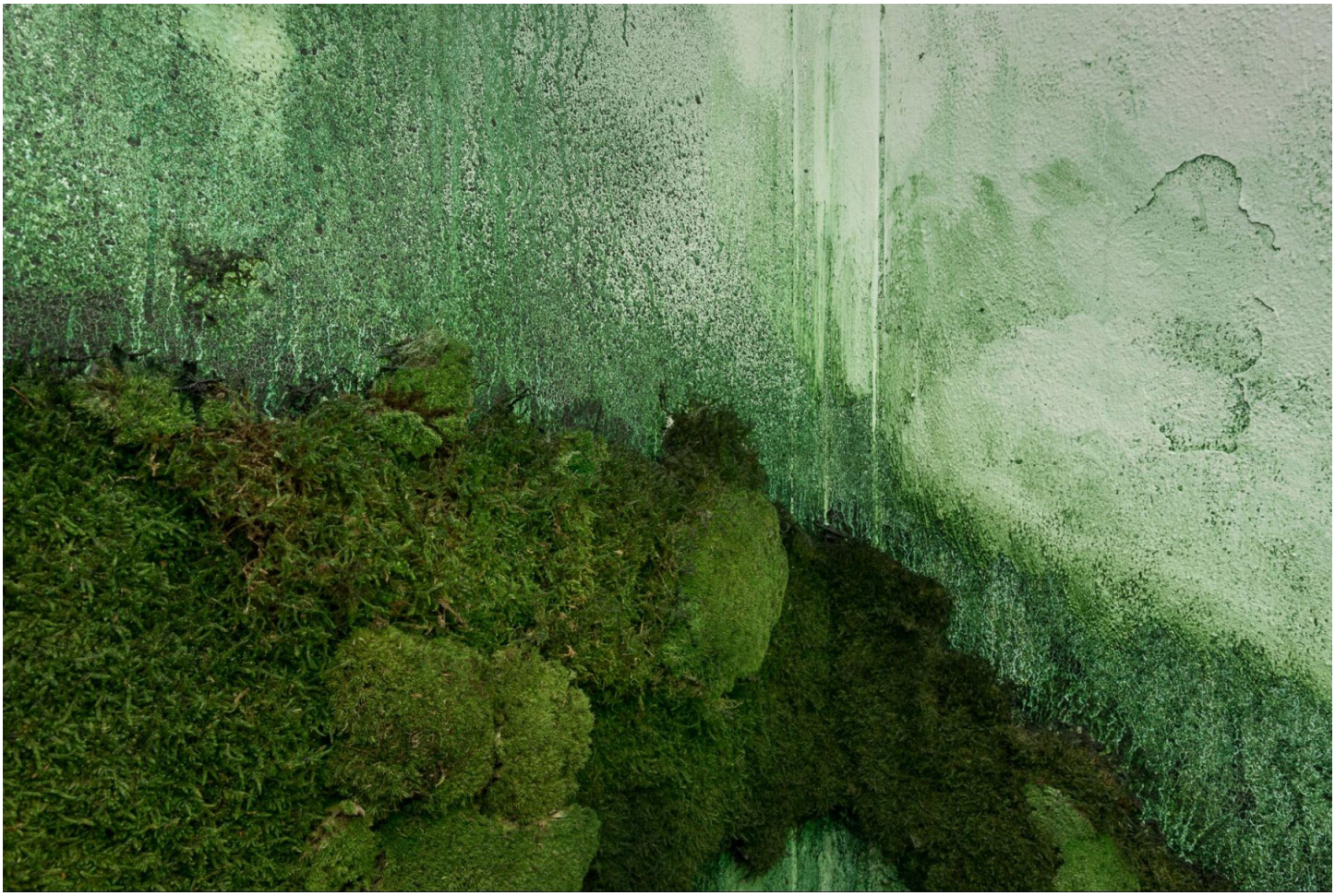
A biologist enters mysterious territory on a mission to comprehend the incomprehensible. Together with three colleagues—an anthropologist, a psychologist, and a surveyor—she crosses an imperceptible border into a region known as Area X. They are the twelfth expedition to cross the border. They are all women.

Jeff VanderMeer charts Area X's impossible terrain in his Southern Reach trilogy. The first book of the series, *Annihilation*, flirts with various genre conventions but warps and refracts them. Most often, VanderMeer is cited as a foremost writer of the New Weird, which, in the tradition of Lovecraftian Old Weird, deals with the wonder and horror at the fringes of human consciousness. Others have called his work "soft" science fiction—the natural world being the primary site of speculation rather than technology—and some talk about it in the context of "cli-fi," or climate fiction: narratives reflecting the transformations of the drastically changing planet.[1]

Annihilation's narrator is the unnamed biologist. An expert in "transitional ecosystems"—regions where one biosphere meets another—she has trained with her colleagues for months to prepare for their journey into Area X. The region itself is a wide parcel of coastal land "locked behind the border" thirty years prior, following an "ill-defined Event."[2] The exploratory expeditions over decades past, organized by an opaque bureaucracy called the Southern Reach, have failed to bring back comprehensible data. Few groups have even returned. The general public has only been told that an ecological disaster has rendered the area uninhabitable. In fact, the biologist's group quickly discovers the opposite is true: the landscape is, as the characters repeatedly describe it, "pristine."

An unidentifiable agent is transforming the terrain in Area X, somehow reversing or erasing human influence on the landscape. This agent is most readily explained—and is usually interpreted—as an alien life-form. In this regard, *Annihilation* accords with the classic science fiction premise of First Contact with the alien other. But, as one reviewer writes, "VanderMeer takes this idea to the extreme, suggesting that we may not, on an ontological level, even be able to comprehend an alien form, that it could be so different and vast as to warp our sense of reality and reason."[3] Beyond any specific alien, the subject of *Annihilation* is a more profound kind of unknowability.

From this perspective, VanderMeer's New Weird is to science fiction what mysticism is to theology. Like mystical texts throughout the ages, his Weird does not explain; it attempts to get at something beyond the explainable. Mystics of the Judeo-Christian tradition—who flourished especially during several centuries of the Middle Ages—were similarly preoccupied with a kind of First Contact; for them, this was contact with divine



Jenna Sutela, Sporulating Paragraph, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Momentum 9 Photo: Istvan Virag Copyright: Punkt Ø/Momentum 9

presence, leading to transcendence of earthly self.

Many foundational mystical texts in this lineage have been written by women. In the Middle Ages in particular, women's access to theological knowledge (the explanation and interpretation of sacred texts) was limited by circumstance. Therefore the knowledge about God they produced was often empirical in the most literal sense: a kind of truth only obtained by firsthand, affective experience. Although not necessarily opposed to the religious theory or conventions of their time, given the radical authority implied by their often intimate communion with God, female mystics have at various points posed political threats to religious institutions; in these cases mystics become martyrs.

Together their writings amount to a lineage of female knowledge outside of dominant epistemologies of both religion and science. Their insistence on the possibility of encounter beyond reason—even beyond what the conscious mind can account for—is, weirdly, comparable to the type of revelation *Annihilation* proposes. As a literary category, New Weird holds potential to unearth and update mysticism according to contemporary knowledge, much of which points to an existential threat on the species level. In Western mysticism, the transformational (alien) force beyond the limits of human consciousness was God. In Area X, maybe the divine is literally alien, or maybe it's simply nature at its most ecstatic, matter at its most vibrant, the nonhuman at its most alive—so alive it annihilates not only a single human self but the category of human altogether.[4]

2.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James writes that the term "mysticism" is often used synonymously (and derisively) with the vaguely spiritual, the illogical, or the romantic. Yet, although the mystical may be ungraspable and inexpressible, James argues that true mystical experiences are not at all opposed to "facts or logic" and, when taken as a consistent phenomenon throughout history, are not entirely ambiguous or undefinable. He proposes four hallmarks by which to identify a mystical experience:

1) Ineffability: "its quality must be directly experienced; it

Attributed to Jean Le Noir and Workshop, The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy, date c. 13th century, France. 69.86 Photo: The Cloisters Collection, 1969.

cannot be imparted or transferred to others."

2) Noetic quality: the state may be highly affective, but it is primarily a state of knowledge, whereby one achieves "insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect."

3) Transiency: it is fleeting and impermanent.

4) Passivity: the subject does not have the power to induce it or control its course.[5]

James readily admits that mystical states may be brought on by external agents (alcohol and ether, for example), disorders like epilepsy, or mental illness, yet he refuses to reduce them to delusion, as many rationalists were wont to do. Neither can they be reduced to the religious contexts in which they often take place; religion has historically provided a framework within which to interpret mystical revelation—harnessing mysticism's power when it suits the religious order and denouncing it as heresy when it doesn't—but to James its persistence proves that it extends far beyond what institutionalized religion can account for.[6]

observed recurrent "dreamy states" in patients: "the feeling of an enlargement of perception that seems imminent but which never completes itself"—he believed these were a precursor to insanity.[7] Canadian psychiatrist R. M. Bucke, on the other hand, documented his own lapses into "cosmic consciousness," which he did not think required medical intervention, presumably because he had experienced them himself. (James does not examine the gendered aspect of medical evaluations—he does not ask *whose* mystical states psychiatrists are more likely to pathologize.)[8]

Bucke described his cosmic experiences as an evolutionary process toward a higher state. "Along with the consciousness of the cosmos there occurs an intellectual enlightenment which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence— *would make him almost a member of a new species*." These experiences often struck him while he was alone in nature. "I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence."[9]

3.

Caravaggio, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas [detail], 1601–1602. Oil on canvas. Sanssouci Picture Gallery. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

James quotes a variety of literature containing accounts of what he identifies as mystical experiences. Along with saints and theologians, who may be predisposed to accepting divine mystery, he cites psychiatrists reckoning with whether and how to rationalize mystical states. For instance, British psychiatrist Sir James Crichton-Browne

Soon after crossing the border, the biologist and her companions begin to encounter unexplainable phenomena. A strange tunnel into the ground unmarked on the map. Eerie howls from the forest at dusk. An overgrowth of plants incongruous with the amount of time

that has passed since the border was sealed. Gaps in time, amnesia. A pair of otters in the marsh staring at them for a little too long. A dolphin in the river whose eye looks shockingly *human*. They begin to lose trust in their own perceptions. In the biologist's words: "What can you do when your five senses are not enough?" [10]

The tunnel is particularly confusing and compelling to the four explorers, and the biologist is drawn to enter it. Despite what she sees, she insists on describing the tunnel as a "tower." She admits she can't explain why she thinks of it this way, but she's unable to conceive of it otherwise: to her it is an inverted tower, an entry in the earth that one must, paradoxically, ascend. She says, "I mark it as the first irrational thought I had" in Area X.[11]

As they begin to foray down, the explorers discover a succession of words lining the circular wall of the tunnel/tower. The text itself, which VanderMeer recounts having written in one stream of consciousness after waking from a dream, turns out to be alive. Each letter of each word is composed of a sort of fungus that releases tiny spores into the air—spores that the biologist accidentally inhales. "I leaned in closer," she says, "like a fool, like someone who had not had months of survival training or ever studied biology. Someone tricked into thinking that words should be read"[12] She reads the words, but (until she finds a respirator) the act of reading is also an act of ingestion.

The biologist descends/ascends the stairway several times over the course of the book, each time penetrating deeper/rising further and consuming more of the words. The scripture reads:

> *Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that gather in the darkness and surround the world with the power of their lives ... In the black water with the sun shining at midnight, those fruit shall come ripe and in the darkness of that which is golden shall split open to reveal the revelation of the fatal softness in the earth. The shadows of the abyss are like the petals of a monstrous flower that shall blossom within the skull and expand the mind beyond what any man can bear ... All shall come to revelation, and to revel, in the knowledge of the strangling fruit—and the hand of the sinner shall rejoice, for there is no sin in shadow or in light that the seeds of the dead cannot forgive ... That which dies shall still know life in death for all that decays is not forgotten and reanimated it shall walk the world in the bliss of not-knowing. And then there shall be a fire that knows the naming of you, and in the presence of the strangling fruit, its dark flame shall acquire every part of you that remains.*

The Wounds of Christ with the Symbols of the Passion, c. 1490. Woodcut, hand-colored in vermilion, green, and yellow on paper; Mounted on sheet of paper that covers manuscript on verso. Schreiber, Vol. IX, no. 1795, Rosenwald Collection 1943.3.831 Photo: National Gallery of Art, United States.

4.

The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls is a mystical text written in the latter half of the thirteenth century by the French-speaking beguine Marguerite Porete. The book, part prose and part poetry, is a meditation on divine love as well as a kind of mystical manual. It describes the seven stages of an "itinerary"—"the steps by which one climbs from the valley to the summit of the mountain, which is so isolated that one sees nothing there but God." These stages, the final of which can only be reached after death, represent various degrees of self-annihilation: the stripping away (*aphairesis*) of the will to make way for God. "So one must crush oneself," writes Porete, "hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which Love will want to be."[13]

Such exponential self-negation entails a host of contradictions. How to will away the will? How to desire away the self that desires? How to author a text on the negation of the self who writes the text? According to the poet-essayist Anne Carson, the fundamental relationship between the mystic and the written word "is more than a contradiction, it is a paradox."[14] Writing a mystical text is an inherently futile practice (as is reading one). The writer has no choice but to use language to express the failure of language. Porete "calls for the annihilation of desire itself, which entails a movement past mediation, contemplation, rapture, and loving union into the abyssal negation of the soul."[15]

Porete's work is a prime example of mystical writing in the apophatic tradition. Apophasis: the rhetorical strategy of approaching a subject by denying its existence, or denying that it can be described. The foundational apophatic writer in the Christian mystical tradition was Dionysius the Areopagite, who stated in the fifth or sixth century that only "by knowing nothing, one knows beyond the mind."[16] Six centuries later, Meister Eckhart, influenced by Dionysius and likely by Porete, described God as the "negation of the negation."[17]

Apophasis, the *via negativa*, is an all-out confrontation with linguistic futility in the presence of the unknowable. Its rhetorical counterpart is cataphasis, the *via positiva*: the strategy of endlessly asserting what a subject is, in order to arrive there through sheer (perhaps infinite) accumulation. Whereas the apophatic might say "God is the absence of darkness," the cataphatic might say "God is the sun, the ultimate light."

Eugene Thacker describes the cataphatic as a set of "descending assertions" and the apophatic as a set of "ascending negations."[18] The former strategy builds up to nothing, whereas the latter strips away to nothing. That is, the impossible tower toward the impossible goal can be constructed either by stacking stones forever *downward* or removing stones forever *upward*. The tower is the tunnel is the tower. According to Dionysius, "there is no contradiction between the affirmations and the negations, inasmuch as [God is] beyond all positive and negative distinctions."[19]

5.

Soon after inhaling the spores spewed from the "fruiting bodies" of the fungal text, the biologist begins to notice that her senses are heightened. "Even the rough brown bark of the pines or the ordinary lunging swoop of a woodpecker came to me as a kind of minor revelation."[20] Venturing further into the (un)natural landscape, she experiences flashes of the joy of discovery and oneness with nature that she hasn't felt since she was a child. Eventually this intensification of experience becomes manifest in her body, a feeling of phosphorescence, a "brightness" in her chest. Now, when she enters the tower, she feels like the structure is breathing, that the walls are "not made of stone but of *living tissue.*"[21] She refers to this perception as a kind of "truthful seeing."[22] "Everything was imbued with emotion, awash in it, and I was no longer a biologist but somehow the crest of a wave building and building but never crashing to shore."[23]

As a scientist, she knows that there are plenty of rational explanations for her sensory expansion: "Certain parasites and fruiting bodies could cause not just paranoia but schizophrenia, all-too-realistic hallucinations, and thus promote delusional behavior."[24] She almost hopes to discover that one of these explanations is true; however unfortunate, insanity would be a known quantity, a logical justification for the words and their effect. The narrator says: "Even though I didn't know what the words meant, I wanted them to mean something so that I might more swiftly remove doubt and bring reason back into all of my equations."[25] Attempting to understand, she examines spore samples under a microscope, finding that they are unusual but "within an acceptable range" of abnormality.[26] Area X, it seems, is not entirely opposed to empirical observation, but it can't be explained by it either. More to the point—she realizes that, now contaminated by her subject, she is no longer a reliable observer. She is melding with the ecosystem she observes.

6.

In 1373 the English anchoress, mystic, and theologian Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–1416) received a series of mystical "showings." She had been suffering for days from an illness that she was sure would kill her, when she was suddenly relieved of her pain and God showed her several "nothings." Julian's nothings could be understood as apophatic visions, visions that in their revelation also reveal the futility of sight. In addition to psychedelic-seeming close-up visuals of Christ's wounds and of Mother Mary, she also saw "a little thing, the size of a hazelnut in the palm of my hand, and it was round as a ball." When she asked what the little thing was, God answered: "It is all that is made."[27]

Norwich recorded these visions and others in her book *Revelations of Divine Love* (1395), the first known book written in English by a woman. Throughout the text she refers to her divine perception as a kind of "bodily sight." At times she contrasts this corporeal vision to "spiritual sight," suggesting a knowledge that can only be acquired through firsthand physical perception—and yet this perception is not solely of the eye or the other senses. It is a kind of seeing that is also a feeling and a knowing.[28]

The Italian Franciscan Catholic mystic Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) had her own series of visions, including several vivid encounters with Christ's dead body. These visions were particularly focused on the wound in his side,

the incision left by a lance between his ribs that so many medieval depictions of the Cross fixate on. In her first vision, Angela saw herself pressing her mouth to the wound and drinking blood from it. Next, she envisioned her soul shrinking and actually entering into the side of Jesus's abdomen. Finally, she *became* his body, melding with his flesh, dissolving into it.[29] Galatians 2:20: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives within me."

Angela did not record her divine encounters herself. She related them to her (male) scribe, who attempted to transcribe them to the best of his ability. Apparently Angela often asked him to revise sections she found unsatisfactory or inaccurate, altering the body of the text he produced to more closely resemble the experiences of her own body, in relation to Christ's body.

If mystical encounter entails a sort of spiritual transmission, the body of the mystic is the medium that registers the message.[30] The body is the primary site of inscription, and according to James's first mystical qualifier, this inscription is nontransferrable. The body must be read in order for its knowledge to be translated as best as possible into writing; therefore "bodies—inner and outer, material and spiritual—become text."[31] In turn, the resulting written *corpus* must be brought alive to become like the body it's meant to resemble. In Christianity, this twin becoming of text and body parallels Christ's incarnation—whereupon God's "Word was made flesh" (John 1:14).

Mystical texts like Julian's and Angela's are often repetitive, contradictory, circular; they breathe and they beat. Reading them is interactive—it requires, as religion scholar Amy Hollywood has suggested, a sort of radical absorption on the part of the reader to mirror the self-annihilation attempted by the author.[32] Medieval mystical texts often include images springing from the words, including figurative drawings of Christ and other bodies. Christ's side wound is sometimes depicted as a separate body part, a (very vaginal) opening into the page, for readers to peer into or imagine entering. A few manuscripts depicting Christ's corpse even represent the slit in his side as a physical tear in the paper, for the devout to fondle and kiss.[33]

7.

"I have not been entirely honest thus far," admits the biologist fifty pages into *Annihilation*.[34] She has withheld an important fact: her husband, a doctor, served as a medic on the previous mission to Area X. She acknowledges that keeping this secret from both the reader and her companions might seem suspicious—so why has she kept it to herself? Perhaps, she implies, because she doesn't wish her narrative to rest on biography, dismissed as irrational or emotional from the start. Perhaps she doesn't want her choice to risk entering Area X to be pathologized. Her husband has something to do with it all, she insists, but only *something*. "I have hoped that in reading this account, you might [still] find me a credible, objective witness."[35]

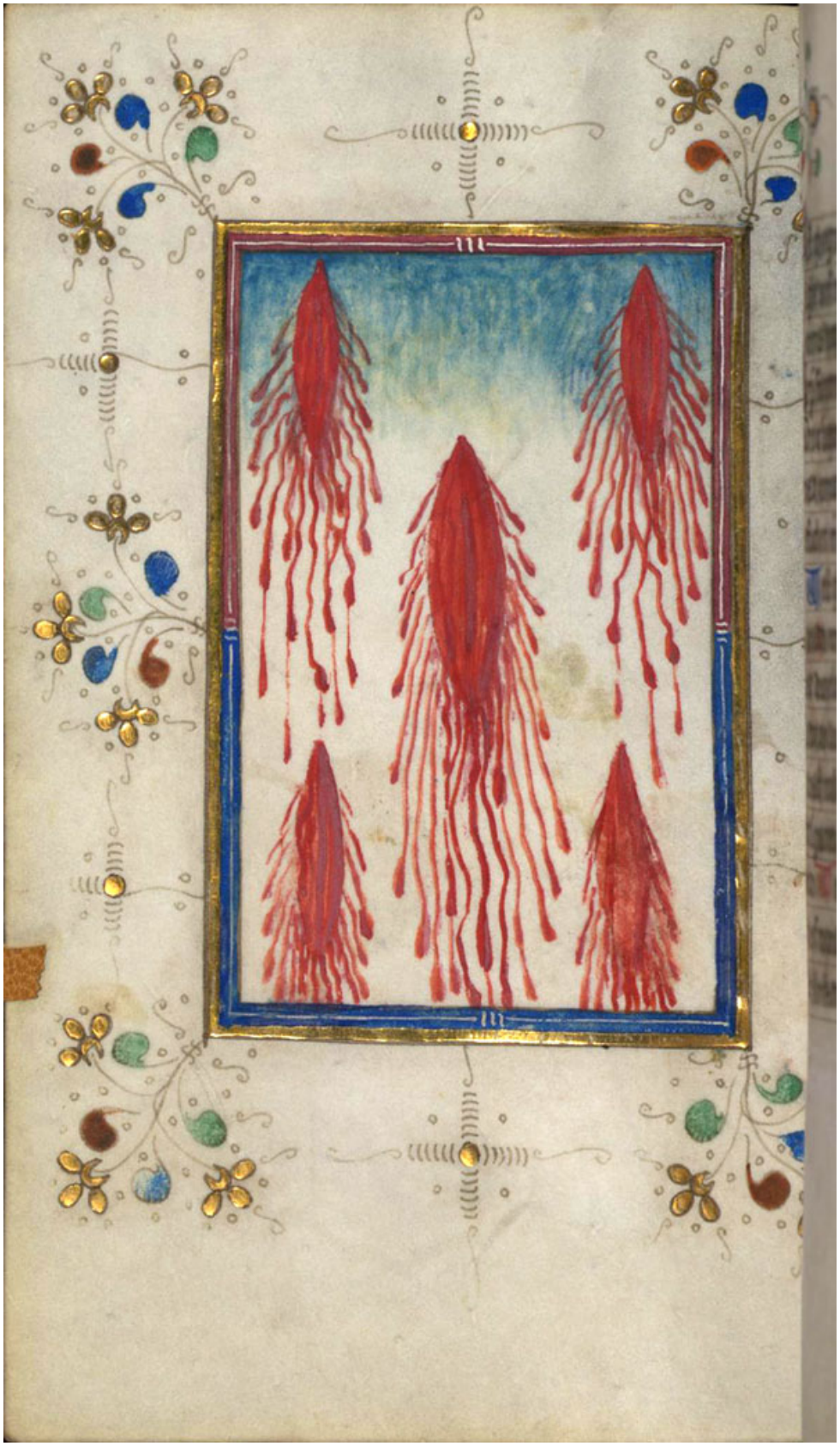
After her husband left for Area X, the biologist heard nothing from him for a year. And then one night, out of the blue, he showed up at their home, wandering into the house unannounced. He couldn't explain how he'd gotten back or what he'd been doing while away. His memories were vague. His body had come home, but his *self*, it seemed, was not present in the body; "He was a "shell, an automaton," "stripped of what made" him "unique".[36] His body died of inexplicable cancer a few months later.

Finally given the chance to explore the transitional biosphere where her husband left his self, the biologist wonders how her experience compares to his. She discovers by accident that the enveloping "brightness" brought on by the spores can be forestalled momentarily if she injures herself; pain seems to keep it at bay. But does she *want* to keep it at bay? She begins to see the enveloping nature of Area X as more an invitation than a threat. Perhaps self-dissolution need not be the same as death after all. In Area X, her husband had "been granted a gift that he didn't know what to do with. A gift that was poison to him and eventually killed him. But would it have killed me?"[37]

8.

The extreme nature of the emotional and physical experiences of female mystics is often reflected through accounts of pain: its endurance and its transcendence. The repeated emphasis on the body as a site of encounter—through suffering and/or ecstasy—is simultaneous with, or makes way for, the spiritual encounter. The boundaries of the body are dissolved, and likewise is the boundary of the soul. Hollywood explains: "Throughout pre- and early modern Christianity, women were associated with the body, its porousness, openness, and vulnerability. Female bodies were believed to be more labile and changeable, more subject to affective shifts, and more open to penetration, whether by God, demons, or other human beings." This engendered a "slide, from claims to women's spiritual penetrability to that of her physical penetrability" and vice versa.[38]

The argument that there is biological basis for the female experience of being-in-world as being-with-other is not uncommon. For instance, philosopher Nancy Hartsock writes in her foundational 1980s text on the "Feminist Standpoint": "There are a series of boundary challenges inherent in the female physiology—challenges which make it impossible to maintain rigid separation from the object world. Menstruation, coitus, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation—all represent challenges to bodily boundaries."[39]



Masters of the Delft Grisailles, Leaf from Loftie Hours: Five Wounds of Christ, mid 15th Century. The Walters Art Museum, W.165.110V, Photo: Creative Commons/CC0

Book of Hours, end of 15th century. MS. Douce d. 19, Fol. page 077r. Photo: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

Hartsock argues further that these "boundary challenges … [take] place in such a way that empathy is built into [women's] primary definition of self, and they have a variety of capacities for experiencing another's needs or feelings as their own … more continuous with and related to the external object world."[40] According to such a theory, the biologically female body predicates a permeability of self and therefore a more intrinsically open and empathic relation with the world.

The body-based essentialisms and biological determinism implied by such feminist frameworks have not come without critique. Is identification with the world, however emblematic of female experience, really premised on binary body basics? Is the capacity for empathy supposedly "natural" to women not also a handy emotional technology to maintain the social class meant to do the majority of affective labor? One could just as easily argue that physical penetrability might make a person extra resistant to boundary challenges rather than inherently susceptible to them.

Hollywood, for one, focuses on deconstructing the epistemological dichotomy between male and female mysticism implied in such distinctions. The notion that women's mystical relationships with the divine are primarily emotional/corporeal, as opposed to theological and intellectual, keeps their insight forever outside of systems of codified rational knowledge. Instead of preserving these as separate epistemological tiers, Hollywood implies, the category of what counts as empirical knowledge should be expanded. This is especially true when it comes to approaching subjects that are intrinsically *unknowable*, which as James points out, requires affect. The type of affective knowledge of female mystics in the Christian tradition is not counterposed to intellectual knowledge but rather makes way for a "noetic" (weird) knowledge beyond the dialectic.

9.

"What modern readers find most disturbing about medieval discussions," writes contemporary medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum, "is their extreme literalism and materialism."[41] She recounts earnest, high-stakes debates in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries about exactly how bodies might be resurrected after death—could you be brought back from the dead from a sole surviving fingernail, or did you need to be buried whole and intact to be properly resurrected? Would fetuses be resurrected as adults? Once the body is brought back by God, will it see, smell and taste in the same way? "What of 'me' must rise in order for the risen body to be 'me'?" Generally speaking: "Is materiality necessary for personhood?"[42]

However absurd these questions might seem today, Bynum argues that contemporary debates about the relationship between self and materiality spring from the same set of concerns. For instance, organ donors often insist that they feel a "part" of themselves living in the organ's host body, or describe a spiritual connection to that host. Proponents of cryogenics debate whether preserving the brain is enough for future reanimation, or whether resurrection of the whole self will require the whole body. The allure and the terror of the technological Singularity, whereby humans meld with machines, indicate this deep unease. Bynum says these are not so much struggles with "mind/body dichotomies" but rather attempts to understand "integrity versus corruption or partition" when it comes to how much of you is yourself.[43] (Will you be yourself when you come back from Area X?)

That idea of an integral bounded self, uncorrupted and whole, is in fact one prerequisite for what is often called sanity. "Most people feel they begin when their bodies began and that they will end when their bodies die," writes psychologist R. D. Laing in his 1955 book on schizophrenia, *The Divided Self*.[44] A person who experiences himself as "real, alive, and whole" is a person who Laing calls "ontologically secure," whereas an "ontologically insecure" person possesses no such "firm sense of his own and others' reality and identity" as distinct from one another. [45]

The shadows of the abyss are like the petals of a monstrous flower that shall blossom within the skull and expand the mind beyond what any man can bear.

Understood in this way, insanity is the dystopic version of self-annihilation. When the border distinguishing the self-in-body from the environment becomes too porous, the ontologically insecure person encounters nonbeing as pure horror. But for mystics, especially non-male mystics, this kind of *willing* self-corrosion is exactly the premise for divine contact and transcendence. The mystic finds joy in the dissolution of self—its "corruption or partition" on the way to nothingness. The insane person fights tooth and nail to retain ontological security out of fear. The mystic actively deconstructs the self in the name of love.

10.

What Marguerite Porete called self-annihilation, the twentieth-century mystic Simone Weil called "decreation." For Weil, decreation was the endeavor to "undo the creature in us," that is, to undo *one* self, and also the self as such.[46] These are two orders of negation, one specific and one general, which Meister Eckhart also differentiates between in his cataphatic expedition to God: the nothingness of particular creatures versus the nothingess of *creaturely being*.[47] Or: the cancellation of particular existence versus the cancellation of the existence of existence. Weil, like Porete, aimed for the latter by way of the former.

The Carthusian Miscellany (Religious Prose and Verse) in Northern English, including an epitome (summary) of Mandeville's travels, c. 15th century. England

Weil succeeded in surrendering herself; for most of her life she had trouble eating, and she eventually died from tuberculosis exacerbated by the inability to eat. She desired to decreate herself to the point that she could subsist without eating at all, living on words alone. "Our greatest affliction is that looking and eating are two different operations," she wrote. "Eternal beatitude is a state where to look is to eat."[48] From Weil's writing it appears that, for her, self-starvation was not exactly self-punishment; it was an intense sensitivity toward the suffering of others (during World War II, she reportedly refused to eat any types of food that were not also included in the allotted rations for French soldiers). Her abnegation may have amounted to a political statement, but it was primarily spurred by her pain on behalf of others: an affective and physical aversion to the consumption necessary to sustain the single self. She would not, but also *could* not, eat.

Chris Kraus writes, "Weil was more a mystic than a theologian. That is, all the things she wrote were field notes for a project she enacted on herself. She was a performative philosopher. Her body was material. 'The body is a lever for salvation,' she thought in *Gravity and Grace*. 'But in what way? What is the right way to use it?'"[49] As James writes, for mystics the "moral mystery intertwines and combines with the intellectual mystery."[50]

It's tempting to try and "solve" that mystery. Religion, flawed as it is, has at points throughout history offered a language for describing First Contact with the unknowable.[51] In the absence of a mystical framework for dealing with the mystery, contemporary analysis tends to wind up with psychiatry. "Until recently," argues Kraus, "nearly all the secondary texts on Simone Weil treat her philosophical writings as a kind of biographic key." The focus remains on trying to figure out what triggered her psychiatric state rather than on her "active stance" of willful, intellectually engaged decreation and the resultant body of knowledge she produced. "Impossible to conceive a female life that might extend outside itself," Kraus remarks. "Impossible to accept the self-destruction of a woman as strategic."[52] According to Kraus, "Weil's detractors saw her, a female, acting on herself, as masochistic." But Weil was, despite all dismissive diagnoses, "arguing for an alien-state, using subjectivity as a means of breaking down time and space."[53]

Angela of Foligno became a mystic after the sudden death of her husband and children. One could easily interpret her necrophiliac visions in light of that biographical fact. And in historical context her sudden religious conversion could be seen as a practical choice among limited options for a single woman of that era who had lost family status and property. There is plenty to explain away her mystical encounter through the psychology of grief or the demands of her world, just as one could reduce Weil's decreation to trauma or anorexia. Likewise, one could read the biologist's succumbing to Area X as a parable of personal loss—or of the social condition of being a female scientist, who understands that her objective analysis intertwines and combines with her bodily sight.

11.

In an essay called "Weird Ecology," the writer David Tompkins compares Area X to a "hyperobject," a term philosopher Timothy Morton used "to describe events or systems or processes that are too complex, too massively distributed across space and time, for humans to get a grip on."[54] Global warming, black holes, and mass extinction are contemporary examples. For medievals: God. The mind can edge close to the hyperobject, understanding parts of it, but never comprehend its totality. Hyperobjects can certainly be measured and analyzed, but will never be encompassed by measurement and analysis. Media theorist Wendy Chun has said: "You can't *see* the climate; you can only see the weather."[55] Or, as the biologist says, "When you are too close to the center of a mystery there is no way to pull back and see

the shape of it entire."[56] How one longs to see it for a split second as a hazelnut-sized thing in the palm of the hand.

Faced with the possible annihilation of the planet as we know it, certain modes of knowing fall short. Especially insufficient is knowledge that purports humans to be distinct from ecosystems, much less in control of them. Among the "surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production," says Donna Haraway, is the fact that "we are not in charge of the world."[57] A mysticism for the Anthropocene, just like mysticism through the ages, would regard the "object" of knowledge as alive and inseparable from the mind and body that encounters it. That is, rather than fictionalizing science, a mysticism for today would have to Weird it.

Haraway proposes a feminist understanding of objectivity not through any single, monolithic explanation but through an assemblage of "situated knowledges" or "views from somewhere."[58] Somewhere, meaning positioned in location and historical context, and also meaning embodied—entailing a type of bodily sight. "Situated knowledges," Haraway explains, "require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource."[59] This refers to the way women have historically been seen as "objects" of study rather than active knowledge producers, but it is equally applicable in regards to the natural environment, which has so long been conceived as passive or inert. *In the black water with the sun shining at midnight, those fruit shall come ripe and in the darkness of that which is golden shall split open to reveal the revelation of the fatal softness in the earth.*

Simone de Beauvoir wrote that Simone Weil had "a heart that beat around the world." Chris Kraus described Weil's state of being as a "radical form of empathy."[60] Importantly, for the biologist in *Annihilation*, this empathy extends to, even prioritizes, the nonhuman. In Leslie Allison's words: "Once the borders have dissolved, empathy is not just feeling others' pain or pleasure. It is granting everything its own subjectivity. It is acknowledging that even non-human entities have a self with which to desire a particular way of living."[61] In Area X, the self dissolves—but self is also everywhere. Even the dolphin has a self now.

Is there a biological basis for self-annihilation? Are sex or gender prerequisites for empathic knowledge or bodily sight? Of course not. Look through a microscope: every body is permeable and porous, host to and hosted by trillions of other life-forms. The body is a transitional ecosystem; it can't survive in a vacuum. And anyway, if we were able to stop projecting contemporary epistemologies onto the past we'd see that medieval mystical writings are too deeply weird to read according to contemporary gender categories. Hollywood writes: "Christ's body is an impenetrable rock and a body full of holes—and both at the same time … [displacing] any simplistic gender and sexual referentiality, for Christ's body is both masculine and penetrable, both rock and feminized.[62]

That said, non-men, constantly made aware of their physical penetrability, disallowed from forgetting their bodies and bodily boundaries, have been producing empathic knowledge regarding the confrontation with the unknowable for centuries. Female mysticism offers a foundation for non-anthropocentric knowledge that is not at all opposed to other types of knowledge. This is fertile ground for contemporary fiction—as evidenced by VanderMeer, who manages to imagine himself, with radical empathy, into the experience of the female biologist. One role for the New Weird in today's literary landscape may be to grow mystical knowledge, beyond the framework of religion—and also beyond the framework of institutionalized science.

Near the end of her account, the biologist says of the transformation of Area X: "I can no longer say with conviction that this is a bad thing. Not when looking at the pristine nature of Area X and then the world beyond, which we have altered so much" (156). She can no longer see her decreation, nor the decreation of the current human-centric world, as negative. It is, like the divine, beyond all positive and negative distinctions. "Area X is frightening, yes, but what appears to be happening there is not a reversion to Chaos and Old Night," as Old Weird fiction would have it. Here, in the living, sporous world of New Weird fiction, may be "the start of a comprehensive reversal of the Anthropocene Age."[63] Loss of bounded self is only truly horrifying within an anthropocentric framework that prizes human being in its current state over all other forms and ways of being. Active self-annihilation might, paradoxically, offer a path toward ecosystemic preservation.

X

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1
Reviewers and fans of the Southern Reach Trilogy have speculated that Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic* (1972), which Andrei Tarkovsky adapted in the movie *Stalker* (1979), are also among the prime influences or precursors for *Annihilation* and Area X. Argubaly, this retroactively places the Strugatskys and Tarkovsky in a Weird lineage. For example, see https://www.newstatesman.com/2014/08/heart-darkness .

2
Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014). While more of an explanation of Area X, including its inception and its governance, gets laid out in the second and third books of the trilogy, in this essay I stick to the scope of *Annihilation*. The book's success bridged VanderMeer's work into mainstream fiction, and it was recently made into a movie by director Alex Garland.

3
Nick Statt, "How Annihilation changed Jeff VanderMeer's weird novel into a new life form," *The Verge* , February 28, 2018 https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/28/17060210/annihilation-alex-garland-film-novel-book-biggest-differences .

4
See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2009).

5
William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Modern Library, 1902), 414–15.

6
James writes that "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness," yet mysticism is not religion. James, *Varieties*, 413.

7
James, *Varieties*, 418.

8
Bernard McGinn writes that in Christianity, "the core of mysticism" is "inner transformation." This entails a "knowledge of God gained not by human rational effort but by the soul's direct reception of a divine gift." McGinn, Introduction to *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (Modern Library, 2006).

9
R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: a study in the evolution of the human mind* (Philadelphia: 1901), as quoted in James, *Varieties*, 435. Emphasis mine.

10
VanderMeer, 178

11
Ibid, 7

12
Ibid, 25

13
Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* , trans. Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant (University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

14
Anne Carson, *Decreation* (Knopf, 2005), 172.

15
Amy Hollywood, Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

16
Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies* , in McGinn (ed.), *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* , 286.

17
Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* , trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (Paulist Press, 1981). McGinn describes apophasis as "negative speaking in which all statements must be unsaid in deference to God's hidden reality." McGinn (ed.), *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* , 281.

18
Eugene Thacker, lecture, New School for Social Research, January 30, 2018.

19
Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 285.

20
VanderMeer, 37

21
Ibid, 41

22
Ibid, 65

23
Ibid, 89

24
Ibid, 133

25
Ibid, 28 The narrator in Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* repeatedly describes a similar hope in the face of the alien other; it was easier to imagine he was going insane than that there was something occurring on the planet Solaris beyond his comprehension: "The thought that I had lost my mind calmed me down." Lem, *Solaris*, trans. Bill Johnston (Pro Auctore Wojciech Zemek, 2011 (1961)), 49.

26
VanderMeer, 28

27
Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* , trans. Elizabeth Spearing, 1998. As quoted in McGinn (ed.), *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* , 242. An anchoress is a female anchorite, a hermit living in relative isolation.

28
Julian of Norwich in *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* , ed. Denise M. Baker (Norton, 2005), 126.

29
As described in Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 172–74.

30
Eugene Thacker: "In the broadest sense, mysticism concerns the communication with or mediation of the divine; yet, with its emphasis on divine unity, mysticism also tends towards the breakdown of communication and the impossibility of mediation. Mysticism is also indelibly material, though it is often a materiality without object, in that the body of the mystical subject becomes the medium through which a range of affects—from stigmata to burning hearts—eventually consumes the body itself. Finally, while mystical texts do display a proliferation of bodies, affects and words—in effect 'distributing' the subject—in many texts there remains a dark, vacuous core that is not simply a node on the network or a topological enclosure." Thacker, "Wayless Abyss: Mysticism, mediation and divine nothingness," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 81.

31
Hollywood, *Cambridge Companion* , 25.

32
Hollywood, "Reading as Self-Annihilation," in *Acute Melancholia* , 129.

33
Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 182.

34
VanderMeer, 55

35
Ibid, 55

36
Ibid, 82

37
Ibid, 82

38
Hollywood, *Cambridge Companion* , 29.

39
Nancy Hartsock, "The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism," in *Feminism and Methodology* , ed. Sandra Harding (Indiana University Press, 1987), 167.

40
Hartsock, "Feminist standpoint," 168.

41
Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (Zone, 1992), 241.

42
Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* , 254, 257. Bynum concludes that theologians in the Middle Ages were so certain that the material body *was* entirely necessary for personhood that the subsequent questions about corruptibility were much more important to them.

43
Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* , 255.

44
R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Penguin, 1960), 68.

45
Laing, *Divided Self*, 41.

46
Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

47
Paraphrased from a lecture by Eugene Thacker, New School for Social Research, January 30, 2018.

48
Weil, *Gravity and Grace.*

49
Chris Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia* (Semiotext(e), 2000), 26.

50
James, *Varieties*, 455. Resistance to food is relatively common among female mystics, and is often interpreted as a willful negation of the gendered body, related to ideals of purity and virginity. In light of the way mystics describe their own experiences, these readings seem reductive.

51
"The mystical subject loses all distinction—including the distinction of subject and object, self and world—and yet it is somehow still able to comprehend this loss of distinction." Thacker, "Wayless Abyss," 83.

52
Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia*, 27.

53
Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia*, 48. Re garding the psychiatric patient, Laing wrote: "If we look at his actions as 'signs' of a 'disease,' we are already imposing our categories of thought on to the patient." But "such data are all ways of *not* understanding him." Laing, *Divided Self*, 33.

54
David Tompkins, "Weird Ecology: On the Southern Reach Trilogy," *Los Angeles Review of Books* , September 30, 2014 https://larevi ewofbooks.org/article/weird-ecol ogy-southern-reach-trilogy/ .

55
Wendy Chun, lecture, "The Proxy and its Politics" conference, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, June 24, 2017.

56
VanderMeer, 130. Tellingly, Chris Kraus describes experiencing grief as a sort of hyperobject, composed of "concentric rings of sadness. You close your eyes and travel outward through a vortex that draws you towards the saddest thing of all. And the saddest thing of all isn't anything like sadness. It's too big to see or name. Approaching it's like seeing God. It makes you crazy. Because as you fall you start to feel yourself approaching someplace from which it will not be possible to retrace your steps back out." Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia* , 105.

57
Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 594.

58
Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 590. For her part, the biologist has no illusions about her knowledge being anything but situated, her sight anything but bodily. "I knew from experience how hopeless this pursuit, this attempt to weed out bias, was. Nothing that lived and breathed was truly objective—even in a vacuum, even if all that possessed the brain was a self-immolating desire for the truth."[footnote VanderMeer, 8

59
Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 592. "Objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about." Ibid., 588.

60
Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia*, 114.

61
Leslie Allison, "The Ecstasy and the Empathy," *BLOCK* (forthcoming 2018). VanderMeer said in an interview: "I think any time you see more connection, whether you see connections on the human level or just in general about what we call the natural world, there's more of a chance for empathy, and understanding and inhabiting a different point of view. And I think that's what we really need. Beyond just like, you know, converting to solar." Timothy Small, "The Strangling Fruit," *The Towner*, July 10 2016 h ttps://web.archive.org/web/2016 1015153945/http://www.thetow ner.com/vandermeer-interview/ .

62
Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 187.

63
Tompkins, "Weird Ecology."

Mirene Arsanios

E autobiography di un idioma

> It is in this way that I did not become a mother; it is in this way that I bore my children.
> —Jamaica Kincaid

I am deregulated. A language for which no jurisdiction applies. My past is dirty. All pasts are dirty, though some are filthier than others. I'm of the filthier kind (sorto). I sit in a greasy bank account somewhere in the British Virgin Islands. I live here, amid a slew of luxury resorts, spas, and white tourists lathered in sunscreen, trailing iridescence in infinity pools. They smoke cigars, inhale tar, synch marriage proposals with blazing sunsets. They say I look pretty (bunita) in my blue (blou) robe, compliment my hair, the way I keep it (e) silky with imported oils. They ask questions: What do you do and are you a (un) local?

"I was born on a nearby island where my mother Elsa was born to her mother, Elina," I say. They give me a faint, uninterested smile. To shut me up, they buy me a glass of sauvignon blanc. I ask for an extra ice cube, a (otro) refill, then another (otro). It took a while, but I've improved at being myself. I can now speak without fatigue. I know everybody here (aki), the elderly and the young. The young believe I'm one of them but generations do not apply to me. I'm centuries old and have been pregnant for the past twenty years. They, the tourists, think I'm delirious, that I've had too much to drink. When they realize I'm telling the truth, they feel betrayed. What are you talking about? Is this even (hasta) a (un) language?

I also want to know. Why this language? In my mother's bedroom, an old television playing American movies was left on day and night. At first I thought I was alone, the private recipient of a dialect in black and white, but I soon realized that everyone was concerned and that this expansion was irreversible. It no longer needed ships—the physical vessel of its early dissemination. English scurried across ocean bottoms, seamlessly meandering continental distances. I never considered this language to be my own. I do not hate it. I do not love it. It is incidental and life is made of circumstances, outcomes of unruly trajectories. Elsa firmly believed that English would help me find a job in the hotel industry, communicate with tourists and the world beyond the island. English, she said, always leads to a resolution. It rarely strays from its intentions. It means what it says and is suited for uneven deals in which one of the parties always feels slightly fucked. English has "fuck" in it, a word that gives me great satisfaction.

People complain. They say I talk (papia) too much, but I'm not talking to them. I'm addressing Rea, my unborn daughter, in a language she can address me in. "Mother tongues" imply a process of natural acquisition, an (un) accumulation founded on (riba) the repetition of syntaxical gestures, but the link between "mother" and "tongues"

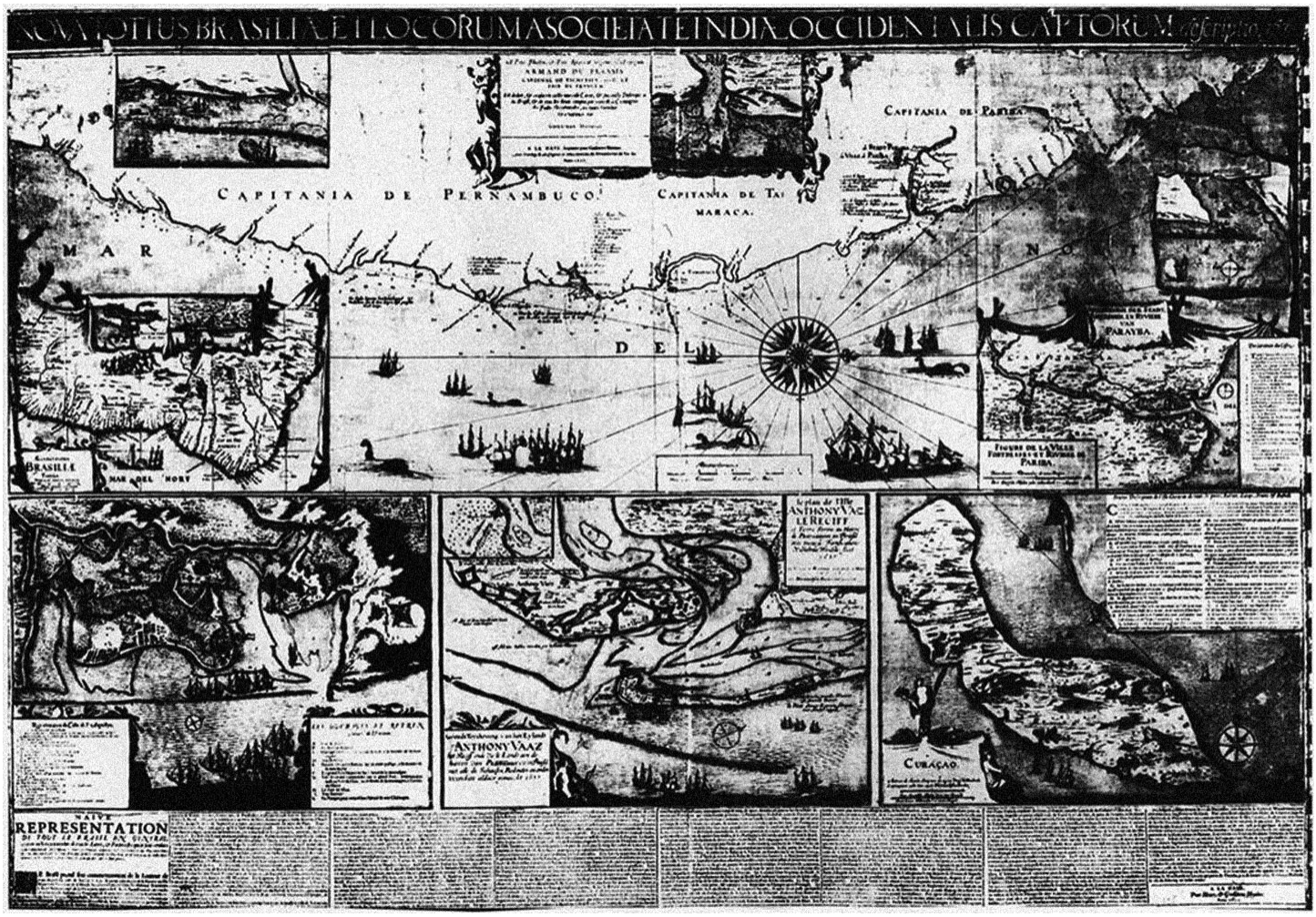
Detail of a 1964 advertisment for Curaçao liqueur.

isn't as linear as it (e) may (mei) seem. It is circuitous and (í) hot and (í) cold. Rea is delivering a language I'm preparing myself to receive. Her words have traversed the future a long time ago, as they say.

With time, I've learned to lean on expressions. They're founded on hard-won consensus and their meaning is fixed like an island rock. I wasn't entirely honest when I said that I could speak without fatigue. The acrobatics of points of view are exhausting. I'll (lo) have to stop scavenging hotel bars for dregs of white wine, get my narrative (historia) straight, find an interlocutor. If we (nos) sat facing each other (otro) or next to each other (otro) at a bar, you'd recognize me because I'm rather petite and wear a finger on each (kada) ring or vice versa. A diagonal scar cuts through my right cheek. I'm average looking, with long, wavy hair (kabei). We'd have an arrangement. You'd ask me about my life, then (anto) I'd tell you about it. How generations are stages crafted between sleep and lucidity. How I have come to language by tending to my own absence. I'd say: If it weren't for you (abo), I wouldn't be here (aki).

I would have liked to come to you (abo) with something more reliable, like documents (akto), but I'm an oral language (idioma)—an Afro-Portuguese proto-creole developed on the western coast (kosta) of Africa and brought over to the Caribbean in the seventeenth century. That's one of the theories of my genesis. There are others (otronan). Dutch and Spanish tagged along at later stages, with a few Arawak words (palabranan). Initially, slave traders and slaves used me to "communicate"; then I was just used (merka). The only document in my possession says I was born on the island of Curaçao, north of the Venezuelan shore. Linguists struggle to match my identity to a location. Words travel and land in places (luganan) that do not match their jurisdiction (a nation (nashon)-state).

Parenthesis (kram): When I say "my life," I'm conveying an illusion of ownership propped up by a possessive pronoun (sustantivo), as if my inflections (bos) were mine or as if I



Hendrik Hondius I, Nova Totius Brasiliae at Locorum Asocietate Indiae Occidentalis Captorum, 1635. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

could control the way people (hende) use me every day to hate or love each other (otro), or say nothing with words I make available to them. The latter is particularly tedious if you ask me. Ask me (pidi mi).

I'm aware of how much I'm asking of you (abo)—to believe that I have a life, a body, a mother, a daughter (benidero yiu muhé), while also being a language, a system with everyday life (bida) applications, an abstraction. I myself (mi mes) cannot explain this bizarre predicament, how I came to exist in these multiple, contradictory ways. I gave it some thought and have come to the conclusion that everybody shares (dividí) my condition: millions speak languages that are spoken by them alone (djis).

To be clear, I take your identifications seriously. When I use examples, my intention isn't to illustrate an idea with biographical material. When I refer to my condition as a language, I'm not escaping the body I inhabit. Now, I am this body, living on these islands, working in the service industry, chopping vegetables in local kitchens, searching for my grandmother's bank account and the particulars of the history of my inflections, how I was once a language who read exactly as it was pronounced, with nothing separating my oral and written forms, how I am the result of random linguistic amalgamations stabilized into reproducible forms (forma).

Fucking foreign languages is my fetish. I got pregnant with Maurizio, the gardener's son, who fingered me in his father's coop, stroking my genitals through repeated orgasms. Have you ever heard a language cum? Elina was outraged to see me love such an obviously poor (pober) person (hende). Although she was born poor (pober), she married rich twice: once (un biaha), an ice factory owner (doño), later, a paper factory owner (doño). She enjoyed the privileges ownership made available (disponibel) to her (su): cleaning ladies, wide patios, expensive jewelry, and what it disavowed: her creole (mi), her darker skin, her past as an aid in a hairdressing salon, her matriarchal upbringing, her (su) absent father. Elina believed that Spanish was better suited for wealth then creole. She stopped speaking (mi) altogether. Mostly, she used me to withhold information: she expressed her silences in an oral language.

Papiamentu (list A): Curaçao

1.	I	amí, mi
2.	thou	abó, bo
3.	we	nos
4.	this	e . . . akí
5.	that	e . . . ajá/ej
6.	who?	k'énde; keng
7.	what?	kíko, ki-
8.	not	no
9.	all	tur
10.	many	hópi
11.	one	ung
12.	two	dos
13.	big	grándi
14.	long	lárgu
15.	small	tjikítu
16.	woman	muhé
17.	man	hómbər
18.	person	hénde
19.	fish	piská
20.	bird	pára
21.	dog	katjó

After her first husband died, Elina moved from Curaçao to the Venezuelan mainland and married Juan, the paper factory owner. She disclosed very little of herself or of her family. She had no sisters, brothers, mothers (mama), or fathers. She was allergic to shrimps and had a strong aversion to the past, itching at every instance of recollection. Like a piece of modernist architecture, she was her own beginning. She lived in elevated apartments with a view of what was below, paced excessively polished hardwood floors to and fro. Although she was rich (ricu), Elina never took any of her possessions for granted. She knew (konosemento) that everything (tur kos) could be taken away from her (su) at any moment (tempu). She kept an orange (orañe) blow-dryer wrapped in a silk scarf, and personally dusted her pitch-black rotary phones. One was placed in the kitchen. From the other, in her boudoir, she would call her high-society friends demanding that their sons take me out on blind dates. I couldn't say no. I was a young language (becoming un muhé ta becoming un idioma). She'd give me tips (konsehá) on how to keep my skin soft (dushi). After dining with boys who owned cars they couldn't drive, I'd sneak into the garden where Maurizio awaited me. In the mornings, we (nos) ate eggs (webu) from the coop scrambled with chopped (kap) peppers and leftover fish while Elina and Elsa frantically searched for me in foreign words (pa donde se metio esta pendeja?).

I haven't learned how to write about myself without leaning on my human experiences. If I were consistent, I'd begin with descriptions of the island (isla), the geology of its soil, the epitaphs of its tombstones, Elina's family, the history of their formation: the mixing of colonizers and colonized, the varying percentage of each in her (mi) blood. I am (ta) the outcome of that foundational clash, a descendent of European imperialism, its subjugation of people and extraction of land. I am of that extraction, a language used to violate and spoken to survive. I sway between these two identities. I have identity issues. You could say that my mythologies are intoxicated and that I have found expression in compromised (tradukshon) lineages, encountered liberation in loss—a kind of irresponsible, adolescent freedom.

Sometimes (anochi) I fancy myself a detective. Are my interruptions personal, historical, circumstantial? When did my or her shortages of love and language begin? I've tried asking questions but the only story Elsa has ever relayed concerns sun poisoning. Every weekend, Elina would send off children to the beach without sunscreen. Elsa never stopped complaining about the freckled back she earned from these repeated exposures, how she couldn't walk for days, skin peeling off deeper skin, her entire childhood wedged in the promise (primintí) of a molting cycle. By marrying a man of European descent, Elina had watered down her own indigeneity. She must have loved her children for their fairer skin and despised them for the same reason: they could barely walk under the sun (solo).

Elina's emancipation from her past on the island resided in wealth. She wanted to experience life from the other side of a wave. She (e muhe) saved everything she could: pennies, food scraps, her beauty (for (pa) she was very beautiful). She saved her body for men that could afford it, not boys like Maurizio. She taught me how to swim (landa). I learned (siña). I observed Elina's language every summer, the way I belonged to and refused her lineage of wealth and detachment.

Elina worried about how the poor (pober) hated (odia) her (su). She didn't understand the meaning of words like "imperialism," "justice," or "people" (hende): concepts as foreign to her (su) as she was foreign to herself (mes). I became a translator. I studied the way her silences roamed from room to room, their textures, depth, what portions could be accessed and which ones were out of reach. She didn't want language (mi) around her wealth. She was deeply attached to it (su rikesa), a preverbal bond she nurtured through accumulation (akumulashon). This is where (unda) she had found power. Power (ripití) is the absence (manko) of articulation (mi).

Elsa, my mother, shared Elina's inclinations towards (na) class and wealth, silently complying with her mother's social aspirations. She saved money to buy a Corvette, barely ate any food. She invested in a nose job and looked for someone who could afford the jewelry Elina donned at dinner parties. Technically, Elsa was my mother. She studied French in the afternoons with other aspiring French speakers. She spoke French to me instead of Spanish, her surrogate mother tongue. It felt natural, or not unnatural, to communicate in a language that was foreign to both of us. We traveled the world, away from the island. We lived far from history (historia). Our abstractions were murderous, hiding bodies behind sunsets, on the other side of a horizon line.

When Elsa felt sick, Elina financed her treatments. At that time, life organized itself around hospitals and home care, receiving pain (doló) through treatment while administering its side effects. Elina kept repeating "mi dios." Elsa emptied her mind. She visited the island as a relaxation exercise (santo, blou, brisa). She imagined yellow (geel) gold and light (cende) flowing through her damaged blood. Her newfound relationship to language (mi) and her summoning of the island (mi) awoke her to the benefits of literacy. She insisted on sending me (mi) to college, investing in a knowledge system at the antipodes of my beginnings.

I learned how to express myself. In English, I learned I had a self. I disagreed with most of the books I read. I underlined the sentence "woman writing thinks back through her mothers" in Virginia Woolf's book *A Room of One's Own*. Although I presented as a woman, I was a language, I told my teacher. They thought I was crazy, out of my mind. I insisted. I feared that by connecting mothers and language, Woolf was summoning the sanctity of

Family photograph from the author's personal collection.

mother tongues, normalizing a biologically sanctioned bond in service of the monolingual nation-state. As you might have noticed, I began using longer (largu) words. My language grew heavier (pisá), more (mas) referential. I used critical (critical) terminology, words meant to assuage personal anxieties by exposing oppression in sharable ways. I wrote papers on separating language from biology. What about those without mothers or those disengaged from daughterhood when it entailed the reproduction of patriarchal, national narratives? "There are other types of lineages: broken, colonial, and different acts of (non-)storytelling—generational tales in which transmissions are withheld and beginnings arbitrary," I wrote. "Daughter" implies a sequence, a chronology to our transmissions. I, on the other hand, predated my mother the way my daughter predates me. All this time, Rea has been addressing me. Ami duná nasemento awor. I call up the island. I ask for Rea. She's the voice on the $5 card telling me that I have a few seconds left and that my credit is about to end.

When Elsa died, estranged in a foreign land, Elina passed in her sleep. In hindsight, I'm convinced that their departures were schemed, a revenge, leaving mi short of words (ami konosé kí na bias). My uncle, Ernesto, claimed Elina's inheritance: her bank accounts, apartments, European silverware, ebony dining table, leather chairs, the photographs of Elsa speaking (papia) on a beach. All that Elina had achieved, trading history for wealth, was being stolen anew. I began doubting my (mi manko di) worth. I craved documents, a will, a birth certificate. I wanted (ker) to be part of the literary cannon—a language cited by others (otronan), creating legacies that had been denied to me (mi) while knowing that these momentary acts of legitimatization betrayed my unraveling grammar (gramátika). I desired explanations, stories I could pass down, or an apartment with a mirrored floor. I wanted experience with a blueprint, something I could photocopy and file. I wanted a story that could be relayed, a solid language, a land that could be mapped onto a passport, a date of birth. I wanted to stop using the first person (prome hende).

The moral of the story, if there is one, is that the man, the man Ernesto, invested mi inheritance—the wealth Elina had expropriated from other men—in the British Virgin

Islands, an archipelago on which abstraction and history fight a feeble, indifferent battle. Anochi, I drop my parenthesis and call Rea. I want mi money "back," she says. She uses "back" to signal debt, a historia in need of resolution. When I'm done chopping vegetable and gulping down dregs of white wine left over by tourists, I roam the island in search of Elina's bank accounts. "To know where the corpses are buried, follow the money," Elina would say, imparting knowledge I'm now passing down to you, mi daughters.

X

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Elisabeth Lebovici and Giovanna Zapperi

Maso and Miso in the Land of Men's Rights

Feminist Affects

Let's face it: we were in shock after reading the infamous, collectively authored column—aka "Deneuve's text"—published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* last January, defending the (male) right to "disturb" as a way to dismiss women's struggles against sexual abuse.[1] As a response to the Weinstein affair and the emergence of the #MeToo movement, a group of one hundred women, mostly high-profile professionals from the fields of art and culture, argued in favor of the male "freedom to disturb" (in French *importuner*) as "indispensable for sexual freedom." Such a virulent declaration of normative heterosexuality (one of its main subtexts reads, "We are not lesbians") and its equally violent anti-feminism made us sick. Part of our reaction was due to the fact that we identified the rhetoric and claims that some of the signatories had already deployed in their anti-feminist campaigns elsewhere. Even more unpleasant was to discover that many women from the French art world had signed the text: curators, artists, art magazine directors, and writers. Others have already deconstructed the column's arguments.[2] Our aim is to critically examine its content as a symptom of a political conflict engaging large sectors of the French elite. Moreover, we are interested in the fact that this pernicious anti-feminism expresses the views of a certain cultural milieu, which is still attached to the bourgeois ideals of the (male) genius and his (sexual) freedom. This aspect seems to be the cornerstone of the reactionary arguments deployed by the text, as it is entwined with the defense of a white, heteropatriarchal order. The column's claim for a gender-exclusive type of freedom ironically resonates with the national rhetoric of " *droits de l'Homme*" (rights of Man), an expression coined during the French revolution still widely used to mean "human rights."

This is why the two of us have decided to write together: despite our differences in terms of generation, sexual orientation, and language, we shared the same concerns and reaction with respect to the connections between the art field and such reactionary views. We know all too well that patriarchy likes to divide women. However, we feel the need to figure out what this unapologetic defense of male privilege actually means. In order to react to the letter, we wish to refer to the agitprop video intervention released in 1976 by a group of outspoken feminist artists under the collective name "Les Insoumuses," or "Disobedient Muses" (Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, Ioana Wieder, and Nadja Ringart): *Maso and Miso Go Boating*. The video intervened directly—with shouts, sounds, images, and comments—into a taped TV program where Françoise Giroud, a well-known female journalist and writer and the French governmental officer assigned to the "woman's condition" (that was the name!), behaved as a masochist and a misogynist.[3] The show was a perfect example of how biased French TV was, since Giroud was put in the impossible situation of having to respond to a

Actors Delphine Seyrig and Maria Schneider during the shoot of Sois belle et tais-toi, 1976. Photo: Carole Roussopoulos.

number of outspoken misogynists. However, instead of opposing them, she preferred to indulge in an atmosphere of pleasurable perversion and engage with men in sexist jokes.[4] The video is particularly effective in enacting a form of parody and disturbance, in which the show's misogynistic monologue is interrupted, exposed, and deconstructed. Moreover, *Maso and Miso* emphasizes the contradictions entrapping women as they accept to operate according to male rules of power. In its aspiration to support male power, the *Le Monde* article, like the official in charge of the French "woman's condition," also oscillates between masochism and misogyny.

As feminists we are aware that the #MeToo movement has to be understood in the context of a global uprising and recomposition of women's struggles against both sexual violence and harassment. In an interview in which she responded to the *Le Monde* article, feminist historian Christine Bard underlined the significance of the #MeToo movement as part of an ongoing history of women in revolt: "Today we are witnessing the encounter between feminism, a minority movement, and these innumerable voices."[5] Because women's movements such as Ni Una Menos in Latin America have named the connections between sexuality, power, and violence, it has been possible to uncover, more globally, the interrelated dimensions of subjectivity and social relations implied in sexual violence.

Normative Heterosexuality and National Identity

Since the Strauss-Kahn affair in 2011, a number of intellectuals and academics have strongly exalted a specific French code of honor, underlining what they call a "French singularity" when it comes to (hetero)sexual relations. A "French seduction theory"[6] would operate against the suspicion of political correctness coupled to an alleged American radical feminism. In 1995, historian Mona Ozouf defended the idea that French women retain a form of counterpower linked to the "art of seduction" they exert over men as a compensation for political, social, and cultural inequalities between the sexes.[7] The notion of a so-called feminism *à la Française* emerged already in 1989, as French women's "civilizing" role was celebrated as a heritage of the Ancien Régime and in opposition to the American model, where feminism was supposedly at the forefront of the most acrimonious democratic

demands. In 2011, these arguments were reactivated by sociologist Irène Théry who, among others, expressed in *Le Monde* her indignation against the suspicion that French women would tolerate male misbehavior and violence.[8] She claimed that feminism *à la Française* was part of a certain way of life, whose adherents reject the deadlocks of political correctness, operate under the general assumption of equal rights, but at the same time enjoy the "asymmetrical pleasures of seduction" and demand absolute respect of consent while also appreciating the "delightful surprise of the stolen kisses."[9] The recent article in *Le Monde* can be read as a continuation of the same cultural operation that reaffirms a fundamental difference between the sexes and the notion of a feminine specificity or nature. This line of reasoning, in turn, is reminiscent of the position expressed by a group of women around Antoinette Fouque and the publisher Editions des femmes in the 1970s against Simone de Beauvoir's "egalitarianist" feminism.[10] Such a notion of femininity "beyond feminism" later came to represent what has been called, in English, "French Feminism."[11]

With the nationalization of a type of feminism predicated on the idea of a fundamental difference between the sexes, what appears as "specifically French"—and, by the way, not francophone—is the imperative of seduction. In her deconstruction of the myth of a distinctive articulation between seduction and French culture, American historian Joan W. Scott has underlined that seduction here both naturalizes national identity and legitimizes gender violence and inequality. The "natural" difference between the sexes has thus become the foundation of the modern state: this "French seduction theory," which encompasses sexuality and the personal sphere, is proposed as a model for social organization.[12] Seduction indeed emerges as a cultural structure for French national identity. Even when reconfigured as a "right to disturb"—which at least makes it clear that only men are entitled to it—what is at stake is, once again, the need to conflate male privilege and sovereign power. As Paul B. Preciado has written,

> What characterizes men's position in our technocratic heteronormative societies is that masculine sovereignty is defined by the legitimate use of techniques of violence … We could say, reading Weber and Butler, that masculinity is to society what state is to nation: the legitimate owner and user of violence. Such violence expresses itself socially under the form of domination, economically under the form of privilege, sexually under the form of abuse and rape.[13]

Summarized by Preciado's words, this violence justifies all kinds of abuse of power in hierarchical relations between men and women, and can only be carried on if one refuses to question gender categories. To do so, as several feminist thinkers have shown (Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, and Monique Wittig among others), is to challenge the binary structures and implicit hierarchies of the heterosexual social contract, as it is defined by sexual difference.

The representation of a compulsive and normative heterosexuality emerging from the *Le Monde* article goes hand in hand with the constitution of the national myth of seduction that has declined according to aristocratic chivalry cultural codes, and a construction in which consent is replaced by surrender. As feminist philosopher Geneviève Fraisse has pointed out, the narrative in which women are expected to capitulate can be traced back to French eighteenth-century erotic literature and authors such as Choderlos de Laclos and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[14] The idea of a supposedly French inclination towards eroticism (as opposed to the alleged American puritanism) plays a crucial role in opposing women's agency when it comes to equality. Within the framework of sexual difference "in the French way," it is thus possible to deny the reality of power relations in order to promote the idea that male sexuality is "naturally" based on desire (which is more or less "offensive" and "savage," as the *Le Monde* article implies), while women are invited to manage their bodies and sexuality. Needless to say, according to this logic, women that have access to a certain degree of power and privilege will be more keen in negotiating their sexuality in their favor. The national rhetoric of the "French exception," which encompasses the fields of sexuality and culture, is in fact gender exclusive, and "freedom" is its token word.

The Neoliberal Subject

The use of the notion of freedom to conceal a form of privilege, emerging from the *Le Monde* article, is perfectly adapted to both an idea of sexual difference based on inequality and to the neoliberal conception of individual agency. The idea of a " *séduction à la française*" emerging from the text is predicated on the erasure of the abuses of power in the workplace—precisely the target of the #MeToo revolt. In its negation of the realities of sexual harassment and unwanted attention, the text constructs the fiction of a sovereign subject that freely administers its sexual capital independently from any social circumstance or hierarchical relation. In reality, women's careers and employment have often been dependent on an acceptance of harassment in various valences. In contrast, the *Le Monde* article's representation of the relations between the sexes conforms to the fiction of a conflictless world—or even worse, a world where conflicts are repressed and where success is considered a simple matter of individual aptitude. The text expresses a lack of solidarity predicated on a representation of individual freedom that never concerns social relations.

Carole Roussopoulos films the protest in support of the lip workers' strike, 26th of September 1973. Paul Roussopoulos holds the umbrella. Photo: Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, all rights reserved.

The *Le Monde* text is emblematic of a more general problem concerning France's elites and their ideas about the political issues raised by racial, religious, and sexual minorities. Within the specific framework of French republicanism, where differences are contained (and, more often than not, denied), women and other minorities have to extract themselves from universalism in order to be able to fight for their rights. Whereas republican values are relentlessly represented as universal, they have come to produce a notion of national belonging from which large sectors of French society are excluded. It should come as no surprise that the nation's narrative of universalism and equality is in fact widely experienced as a system sustaining racism and discrimination. So if we look beyond the veil of French universalism, what emerges from the article is the image of a white bourgeoisie defending its class privilege, which overlaps with an idea of sexual freedom that conceals abuses of power. These mechanisms have been underlined in the debates following the publication of the article. For example, a text signed by a number of feminist and queer collectives states that

> These feminists don't tackle the places of power … Their aim is not to overthrow the status quo in order to achieve equality. Deneuve & co. are just defending "their men" and privileges. This is why they can only express their contempt for the majority of the women living on this planet.[15]

As a matter of fact, as the *Le Monde* text explains: "During the same day, a woman can be in charge of a professional team and enjoy being a man's sexual object, without becoming a 'bitch' nor the patriarchy's accomplice." This passage indicates both the identifications at play in terms of class, race, and sexuality, and the idea that being part of the cultural elite entails the separation of the personal from the political. This self-representation also reiterates the old opposition

between women's emancipation and the ideal of femininity, which can be traced back to Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as a Masquerade." In this 1929 article, the British psychoanalyst described a series of successfully professional women who strived to repair the potential damages caused by their success, through an exacerbated performance of what they perceived as a normative femininity.[16] The eighty-nine-year-old text is revelatory of the patriarchal structures resurfacing today, as well as of the panic provoked by the possibility of being liberated from male oppression.

What emerges from the *Le Monde* article is a representation of sexual freedom for the exclusive use of those who have power. Accordingly, the very notion of freedom has been removed from the collective demands for sexual emancipation coming from especially feminist and LGBTQ movements, in Europe and beyond, of the 1960s–70s. These emancipatory struggles are reinterpreted from the point of view of the ruling class, and thus deprived of their political meaning. In this representation of a class struggle "from above," freedom is converted into a substance that one can possess (or not), while the demands emanating from those who have pointed out the constitutive relation between sexuality and power are wiped out. According to this understanding of freedom "without liberation," expressed in the article's idea of an "inner and unassailable freedom," there are no social relations or conflicts, and agency is a matter of individuals only. What remains of the 1960s–70s revolts is the idea that sexual liberation has turned into a social norm that plays a crucial role in preserving a heteropatriarchal order and in repressing conflicts involving gender, class, and race relations in contemporary France.

The Artist's Freedom

It is certainly not by chance that the *Le Monde* text proposes a parallel between creative and sexual freedom. The authors' elitist understanding of freedom is rooted in modernist ideas around art and the artist as disinterested, neutral, and yet universal. Scholars and artists informed by feminist and queer theory, Marxism, and psychoanalysis have deconstructed, for some decades now, the political implications of these ideas in the production and reproduction of ideology. The representation of creativity as an essence, or a possession (talent or genius), reflects the notion of the (male) artist's autonomy and ability to express himself beyond social relations. It might sound surprising that such a self-referential understanding of art is still so appealing to the high-profile cultural workers who authored the *Le Monde* text. Generally speaking, the cultural milieu, in France, is still very attached to modernist notions such as art's universal value and the (white, male) artist's singularity and disinterestedness, and thus very hesitant to address its own entwinement with the politics of exclusion at play in French society.

Do we need to repeat that this notion of creative freedom is not gender neutral? In her groundbreaking "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Linda Nochlin already pointed out, in 1971, that the "great artist" was inseparable from his masculinity, and that the whole system of "great artist-genius-free-autonomous" was at the heart of a patriarchal, white, and heteronormative history of art.[17] In its institutional forms, culture has always been selective, not universal; and the selection is determined by a number of factors, including gender, race, class, and sexuality. Art history as we know it bears the signs of power as it speaks of the hierarchies and power relations structuring the world. In this respect, the task of critique is perhaps precisely to tackle the ways in which art participates in complex relations of power and resistance.

The authors of the *Le Monde* text are particularly vocal in condemning what they perceive as obstacles to the free expression of an artist's creativity. Interestingly, the artists (visual artists, film directors, and writers) they refer to are unequivocally male-gendered: Roman Polanski, Jean-Claude Brisseau,[18] Egon Schiele, Balthus, Michelangelo Antonioni, Nicolas Poussin, Gauguin, John Ford, de Sade … poor male artists that feminists would like to prosecute via censorship! Of course it's never about Birgit Jürgenssen, Zanele Muholi, Candice Lin, Suzanne Santoro … or the innumerable other female voices from the margins who have been concretely marginalized during their careers, when their work wasn't censored or destroyed, as was the case for Muholi, whose apartment was robbed in 2012 and her work stolen or destroyed. Did any of the women who authored the *Le Monde* text, so eager to protect artistic freedom, even care?

Of course not. Because the stake here is not censorship, but the need to preserve the modernist notion that art's value lies beyond social relations. Let's take one example provided by the article: Balthus's painting *Thérèse rêvant* (1938), which represents an adolescent girl sitting with one of her legs lifted in a way that the beholder can see her underwear and pubic area. The painting is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Recently, a woman who identifies as a feminist initiated a petition demanding, not the destruction of the painting (as some have said), but either its removal, or the addition of some sort of contextualization. The issue raised by this painting has nothing to do with aesthetic judgment, nor with its legitimacy in the history of art as it concerns the work of art in its ability to produce meaning and affects. Instead of celebrating the painting as the mere expression of the artist's freedom and creativity, would it be possible to look at it within the specific historical context in which it was painted, as well as in its resonances with the present, and question the ways in which a work of art deals with male sexuality, the gaze, the female body, the body of a child?

Carole Roussopoulos filming with a Portapak video camera, date unknown.

By deliberately confusing censorship and criticism, the *Le Monde* article also deliberately dismisses any attempt to question art in its multiple social and political meanings. Can one sustain the affirmation that to deconstruct, to analyze, to use critical tools unequivocally leads to censorship?

Whether criticism can actually perform censorship is more than questionable. Moreover, as French feminist historian Michèle Perrot recently foregrounded:

> If [what the text refers to] means to reread the works of the past with our eyes today, then we do it all the time; the critical perspective induced by reflections on gender has led us to reread literature differently … Such a critical reading is not only legitimate but necessary, as it allows one to understand which system we live in, and which representations we depend on.[19]

Therefore, the exercise of criticism cannot be confused with censorship. What is at stake is, in fact, a more complex statement: the idea that you can both enjoy considering works of art while, at the same time, deconstructing them critically, and specifically in terms of power imbalances. One could argue that the work of critique consists precisely in this capacity to make this ambivalence productive, for instance by imagining a new alliance between cinephilia and feminist deconstruction, which, at least in France, tend to be seen as mutually exclusive. Indeed, the role of art criticism is in no way akin to censorship, nor should it limit itself to the sole role of celebration, a function that it too often serves, especially in the current market-driven art world. In attempting to unveil the master narrative's implicit "underbellies," the excitement and pleasure you get from the artwork increases; you break out of the self-satisfactory, passive space that reflects the bourgeois ideal of freedom.

France as the Land of the Rights of Man, Squared

Can we say that, as we address the patriarchal structures sustaining the cultural field, we are also participating in a larger critical movement of decolonizing the arts, the museum, and our minds? Don't all these movements confront and contest the same conception of freedom, which is nothing more than a form of privilege? The artist's freedom, when affirmed as a corollary of what the authors of the *Le Monde* article call the "freedom to disturb," comes at the price of a historical paradox that can be traced back to the French Revolution. As France constructed its identity and reputation upon being the nation that brought freedom to the world, especially via the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen*, it was in fact setting up a number of exclusionary regimes. These were specifically addressed, albeit via different forms of exclusion, to women and the colonized, who were cut off from both the country of free men—of citizens—and from the borders of civilized Europe. The universalist stance of what the French language identifies as "the land of Man's Rights" (le " *pays des droits de l'homme*") is again at work in the *Le Monde* article's defense of the "freedom to disturb." It is time to take seriously, to the very letter, the label by which French

republicanism still defines its bill of rights, and to reverse it, invert it, and subvert it once and for all.

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1
Catherine Denvenue, Ingrid Caven, Catherine Millet et al., "Nous défendons une liberté d'importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle," *Le Monde*, September 9, 2018 https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html .

2
See, for example, Hourya Bentouhami, Isabelle Cambourakis, Aurélie Fillod-Chabaud, Amandine Gay, Mélanie Gourarier, Sarah Mazouz, and Emilie Notéris, "Les féministes peuvent-elles parler?" *Médiapart,* January 11, 2018.

3
Secrétaire d'Etat à la condition féminine (1974–76).

4
See Stephanie Jeanjean, "Disobedient video in France in the 1970s: Video production by women's collectives," *Afterall* 27 (Summer 2011).

5
In *Le Monde*, January 11, 2018, interviewed by Faustine Vincent.

6
In the words of Joan W. Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Duke University Press, 2011), chap. 5, "French Seduction Theory," 117–40.

7
Mona Ozouf, *Les mots des femmes: Essai sur la singularité française* (Fayard, 1995), 388–89.

8
Irène Théry, "Un féminisme à la française," *Le Monde*, May 28, 2011.

9
On the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair, see Eric Fassin, "Au delà du consentement: pour une théorie féministe de la séduction," *Raisons Politiques* 2, no. 46 (2012): 47–66.

10
According to Psych et Po (Psychoanalysis and Politics, the group of women gathered around psychoanalyst Antoinette Fouque), Beauvoir's "egalitarianism" fought against the open field of difference, which stemmed from the model of sexual difference.

11
See Christine Delphy, "The invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 166–97.

12
Joan Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton University Press 2017), 18.

13
Paul B. Preciado, "Lettre d'un homme trans à l'ancien régime sexuel," *Libération*, January 15, 2018.

14
See Geneviève Fraisse's interview in *Bibliobs*, January 14, 2018.

15
"Que vivent les résistances des femmes pour une transformation radicale de la société!" *Mediapart*, January 16, 2018. https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/160118/que-vivent-les-resistances-des-femmes-pour-une-transformation-radicale-de-la-societe . The text was signed by an array of queer and feminist groups, including afro-feminist collective Mwasi, Groupe de Réflexion Queer & Trans Révolutionnaire, Les Voix Décoloniales, and Femmes en Lutte 93.

16
Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 9 (1929): 303–13.

17
Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* , January 1971.

18
This past winter Cinémathèque Française scheduled retrospectives of the films of Roman Polanski and Jean-Claude Brisseau, provoking widespread criticism, as both filmmakers have been sued (and condemned) for sexual assault and rape. Feminist protests were staged in front of the institution, prompting its director, Frédéric Bonnaud, to cancel Brisseau's retrospective. However, Bonnaud has relentlessly defended the legitimacy of his choice and strongly condemned the protesters, accusing them of censorship.

19
Nicolas Truong, "Michèle Perrot: 'L'absence de solidarité des femmes signataires de cette tribune me sidère,'" *Le Monde,* January 11, 2018.

Irmgard Emmelhainz

Dragging (My) Shadows on a Circle: On Anger, Vulnerability, and Intimacy

> Apostrophe is not only the condition of love but an ideal of self-encounter. For the addressee, you are willing to make provisional clarities. For the addressee, you are willing to perform an openness that's an optimistic brokenness. If you're lucky, you're a topos in your own world, although without the apostrophic phantom you cannot exist in the world … If language could pull it off … that is the hope of love.
> —Lauren Berlant[1]

> La lutte des femmes sera collective ou elle ne sera pas; il ne s'agıt pas seulement d'être libre
> —Agnès Varda in *Les plages d'Agnès* (2008)

My love,

When standing in line outside a packed public bathroom assigned to women, I always wonder: What are architects thinking when they unfailingly build an equal number of stalls for both men and women, when it is a proven fact that women need to use the bathroom much more often than men? Desperately, I usually fight the urge to relieve myself and the temptation to dash into the men's restroom, foreseeing the likely and embarrassing event of running into a male user of the space. In truth, I no longer feel like I need to make a statement about my own gender (or sex?!). Clearly, our bodies do ground our experiences in and of the world, and bear both what we call sex *and* what we know as gender. This distinction was conceived to explain biological difference in relation to social interpretations of that difference. But it seems to me that this distinction fails to explain why, in spite of or maybe because of the struggle for women's equality, architects everywhere keep overlooking that women simply need to use the restroom more often than men. Perhaps it is because feminists, starting with Simone de Beauvoir, were only considering the *reproductive* aspects of the female body as that which makes us different from men, leaving other biological aspects to the side. Evidently the concerns and realities of trans bodies, elderly bodies, or surgically changed bodies are nowhere near this picture of pinning down difference in terms of biological needs. For twentieth-century feminists, the source of female oppression was the fact that women had been historically defined by their bodies. For de Beauvoir, the ontological existence of females is specifically rooted in the need for human reproduction, which confines women to their own sex: a *woman* is a uterus, an ovary, she is *female* and that word is enough to define her.[2] For this reason de Beauvoir posited female bodies as alienated and opaque—the alienation exacerbated by pregnancy and by the exhausting servitude of, for example, breastfeeding, among many other responsibilities. When women reach menopause, according to de Beauvoir, they become free from the yoke of reproduction, and furthermore can be consistent with themselves, perhaps forming a "third sex."[3]

Female urinals made of glass, Europe, c. 1701–1800. Photo: Wellcome Library/Wikimedia Commons.

In comparison, a man's "genital life does not thwart his personal existence."[4] Countering Sigmund Freud's anathema of a claim that "anatomy is destiny," de Beauvoir was therefore the first feminist to draw a distinction between species (biology, sex) and society; for her, the species is realized as it exists in a society. A woman's body is by no means enough to define her, and thus *one is not born a woman but becomes a woman*. From certain feminist points of view, society's customs cannot be reduced to biology, because biology cannot completely provide an answer to the question of women's oppression. This is why the battles of twentieth-century feminisms were, first of all, struggles to free women from the physical constraints of reproduction.

The issue of the bodily liberation of women is at the center of my dear friend Jimena Acosta's exhibition "I Will What I Want: Women, Design, and Empowerment," cocurated with Michelle Millar Fisher.[5] You and I went together to see the show, which gathers objects that were designed to alleviate women's bodily reproductive burdens by enabling them to take control of their own fertility, fluids, and reproductive process: the internal condom, dial pill dispenser, sanitary pads, ruby cup, upright birthing chair, breast pump, baby carrier, gender-neutral toys, etc. It struck us that the exhibition posits design's complex and contradictory role in gender expression and equality, and the fact that the material world is largely designed by and for men, but consumed also by those who identify as women. "I Will What I Want" is a collection of industrially manufactured objects that have sought to positively shape female experiences and to help women emancipate themselves. At the same time, it underscores how reproductive functions and biological information are both essential elements to women's (as well as men's) experiences in the world. The pressing issue of the meaning of the female body as a natural fact is brought up in the juxtaposition between objects designed to alleviate menstruation and photographs by Arvida Byström—which depict women in various everyday situations whose menstruation transpires uncontrolled through their clothes—as well as the viralized image of Kiran Gandhi, who ran the London Marathon in August 2015 menstruating without protection. I think that Byström's photographs and Gandhi's gesture radically bring into question considerations of the body as merely cultural and separate from biological facts, and the definition of the "feminist woman" as a female who needs to detach herself

Twenty-six-year-old Kiran Gandhi chose to proudly bleed while on her period during her first run at the London Marathon, 2015.

Printable 3-D jewelry of a vulva and clitoris. It integrates one of the most recent anatomical models of a clitoris, dating from 2009. The rendering portrays the model with a brass surface.

Image from the 2017 Women's March, Nairobi. Photo: Voice of America/Wikimedia Commons.

from her bodily functions so that she may join the ranks of egalitarian humanity. Perhaps it is necessary to rethink the gender/sex distinction which has been premised, I suspect, on the mind/body separation upon which Western epistemology has been built.

Following Judith Butler's reading of de Beauvoir, since women were historically identified with their anatomy, and because this identification served to oppress us, de Beauvoir gave feminists the task of identifying themselves with "consciousness." This is to say, women's emancipation meant that enacting transcendental activity would not be restricted by the body. In the Western differentiation between "men" and "women," the latter, as we have seen, had been defined by corporeality and as "biologically determined," while the former were conceived as able to transcend their bodies toward "reason," and to become a meta-consciousness.[6] I pondered on the fact that the sex/gender division not only follows the Western mind/body split, but also obeys the feminist call to liberate women from their enslaving bodies so that they can transcend their corporeal status and become "consciousness," like men. This is why we have insisted on the body as a *situation*: as the site of cultural interpretation, a material reality defined by its social contexts. And herein lies the paradox laid out by the collection of objects exhibited in "I Will What I Want": Is emancipatory design truly grounded on immanent bodily needs, or are the object's interpretations of those needs bound up with the concern of certain feminisms to undo anatomical difference to achieve gender equality? You, my love, have worked in a male-dominated business world. I wonder if you ever felt this need to somehow undo gender difference as a strategy to get respect in that world? Or on the other hand, have you ever felt the need to emphasize that difference?

Then I realized that to think about biology as determinant of women's experience, as it is aligned with the nature/culture dichotomy, is to think about coercion. And it is precisely those objects in "I Will What I Want" that enabled women to enter the productive workforce in the 1970s, by allowing for the possibility of palliating or managing reproductive functions. In the exhibition, this is highlighted in the juxtaposition between "Finding Her" posters produced for the UN by DDB Dubai, and the display of an array of breast pumps (which, as you know well, have always terrified me to the point of never being able to use one). In a way, the encounter of the posters designed in 2017—focusing on three particularly male-dominated industries: politics, science, and technology—to draw attention to the lack of women in the Egyptian workforce, which is only 23 percent female, opposes the assertion that biology is not necessary for women's politics. For instance, following de Beauvoir, Gale Rubin dissociated the study of gender from the study of sexuality in the 1970s. In her view, biological explanations are unrelated to the political, because sex and sexuality are natural forms preceding social life. She writes: "The body, genitals and capacity for language are necessary components of human sexuality; but they do not determine its content, its experience nor its institutional forms."[7] Sex is understood as: penis, vagina, testicles, estrogen, and they all have nothing to do with politics. Gender is, according to this account, "everything else." That is, gender is a system of social signification and semiotic formation.

Taking a different stand than that of Rubin, Butler reads de Beauvoir's axiom that "one is not born a woman, but one becomes a woman" not as a call to alleviate the female reproductive function, but rather as a battle for *gender*. For Butler, gender is an identity that both precedes the self at birth and that is gradually acquired. But, she continues, while sex is an invariant factual aspect of the body, what concerns feminism is the *acculturation* of that body. The distinction between sex and gender serves to attribute the value of the social functions of women to biological necessity, and to halt the reference to gendered

Path and Pfizer Inc., Sayana Press (API: MedroxyProgesteroneacetate), 2012. Courtesy PATH/Patrick McKern.

Top: #NiunaMás, México, 1995; aerosol and stencil on wall. Bottom: #NiunaMenos, Argentina, 2015; aerosol and stencil on wall. Photo: Jimena Acosta Romero.

behavior as "natural" as well. For Butler, all gender is "non-natural," and in fact, many feminist projects seek to undermine the presumption of a causal or mimetic relation between sex and gender. This is to say that "becoming a woman" is a subjective and cultural interpretation of being female that is completely independent of the ontological condition of "being female."[8] While bodies are "natural," genders are "constructed." Likewise, "being female" and "being a woman" are two different kinds of being. Therefore, gender is a process of self-construction that implies the assumption of certain corporal styles and their accompanying meanings. Furthermore, *gender is inscribed in the biological body*, which is conceived only as a passive medium. In other words, "becoming" a gender is a choice, and also implies acculturation, subjecting oneself to a cultural situation as well as creating one. You know, for Butler, it is not that the body needs to be liberated from its reproductive function, but rather from the oppressive social interpretations of the reproductive body.

But somehow, to be able to construct one's gender still feels like a trap. Maybe there can be more answers if we rethink the relationship between "me," "my sex organs," and the rest of my biological information, or if we incorporate biology into how we think our bodies—aside from them being blank slates in which cultural norms and nonnormative gender meanings can be rejected or reinscribed. I started thinking about this when you began having hormonal fluctuations, and still to this day, doctors have not been able to sort you out because your lab studies have always come out "average." There is a passage about family and gender in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*—remember that we read it when we first got together?—that brings forth, in part, what I'm trying to get at: that maybe bodies are not empty vessels with biological functions detachable from their cultural functions. Because, although we reappropriate gender and inscribe it on our own bodies on our own terms, and notwithstanding that we have reinvented kinship relations, there is a trap that we always fail to avoid. In this passage, Nelson tells the story of how a friend came over to her house and found a coffee mug that had been given to Nelson by her mother. The mug had a photo of Nelson's family printed on its side, the family all dressed up to go to the *Nutcracker* at Christmastime—a ritual that she enjoyed with her mother when she was little, and that she then continued with her own family. After seeing the mug, her friend exclaims, "I have never seen anything so heteronormative in all my life." But what is heteronormative about the photograph? Nelson ponders:

> That my mother made a mug on a bougie service like Snapfish? That we're clearly participating, or acquiescing into participating, in a long tradition of families being photographed at holiday time in their holiday best? That my mother made me the mug, in part to indicate that she recognizes and accepts my tribe as family? What about my pregnancy—is that inherently heteronormative? Or is it the presumed opposition of queerness and procreation (or, to put a finer edge on it, maternity) more a reactionary embrace of how things have shaken down for queers than the mark of some ontological truth?[9]

Is it about queer people having children? Is heteronormativity linked to the "female animal"? Although we have learned to exist in our bodies by reconfiguring given gender norms, I too, like Nelson, feel trapped. We thought that emancipation meant that we could dissociate ourselves from our own reproductive functions—or choose it from an array of other gender possibilities. But maybe the problem I am trying to articulate resides in the

Upright Birthing Chair, 2017. Exhibition model designed by Paola Flores (muca-Roma). Photo: Jimena Acosta Romero.

inferior roles that, on the one hand, have a biological significance in the way that we think of ourselves as "culturally constructed entities," and on the other, have the status of reproduction in Western neoliberal societies: undermined by capitalism and also by certain feminist battles for liberation from the reproductive function. And as a result, we are undergoing what Nancy Fraser has called a "crisis of care." She explains that women who give birth still have the pressure of having to nourish and educate children, look after friends and family members, see to the upkeep of homes and communities, and in general sustain connections. These processes of "social reproduction"—affective and material labor without pay—are indispensable for capitalist societies. Without reproductive labor there would be no culture, no economy, no political organization. We would have no food in the fridge or on the table, no clean clothes, and though I am conflicted on this matter, I am grateful that we each have someone to help us with our "domestic labor."

And yet, reproductive labor has been systematically disregarded and invisibilized; it is neither remunerated nor recognized, and it is still being imposed on women because someone needs to do it, and because it has been proven that a society that systematically undermines social reproduction cannot last for very long. A case in point is the social implosion and spiral of violence that is emerging in Mexican cities like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, where women have joined the workforce as sweatshop workers. Owing to the lack of social, corporate, or familial networks of support and care for their children, many of them have turned to criminal activities, some as young as teenagers. For Fraser, the crisis of reproduction also manifests globally, and encompasses economic, ecological, and political aspects that intersect and exacerbate one another. The costs of the sustained

LifeWrap NASG (Non-Pneumatic Anti-Shock Garment), 2016. Duraprene and velcro fastening with jersey cover. Courtesy of Life Wrap NASG.

accumulation of capital in the current system are care and the impoverished ways in which we are sustaining life itself. Just as women have needed to dissociate their bodies from their reproductive function to be free from the yoke of sexual difference, capitalist societies have separated social reproduction from economic production, associating the former with women, considering it low- or unvalued labor. While the "domestic sphere" is obscured and rendered irrelevant, the work of giving birth and socializing children is as central to capitalism as looking after the elderly, maintaining homes, building communities, and sustaining shared meaning.[10] And yet, the value of reproduction is rejected by capitalism, but also by certain feminisms as well.

Women, who have joined the productive workforce, are similarly in need of subcontracting family and community care. In this new organization of social reproduction, care has become merchandise for those who can afford it. Leila Slimani's novel *Chanson douce* (2016) addresses the commodity status of reproduction and the tensions its commodification raises between personal life and affective entanglements.[11] The premise of Slimani's Goncourt Prize–winning novel (she is the second

In this image: Fax (box, single loose tampon, and instructions), early 1930s; Tampax Box, 1936; New Freedom Pads, 1970. Courtesy of the Museum of Menstruation. Photo: Michelle Millar Fisher.

Moroccan and the twelfth woman to have won the award) is the murder of two children by their nanny. Slımani thus paints a primal scene of care exchange value, with anxieties, hypocrisies, and inequalities all arising from the logic of care itself. In our globalized world, privileged women have to pay—sometimes large portions of their salary—for the right to join the ranks of productive labor. As women are considered equal to men in all spheres, we look out for the equal opportunities we deserve in order to realize our talents in the spheres of production. Reproduction, therefore, becomes an uncomfortable residue, an obstacle for advancement in the liberation of women.

The conclusion that I'm drawing from all of this, my love, is that while culture does play a broad role in giving shape to differences among genders, to deny the role of reproduction in society—which is parallel to the denial of the role of biology in our lives, to the extremes of Soylent, Excedrin, and other neoliberal excesses to maximize productivity—has proven to be a dangerous trap that maintains a significant portion of women's ordeals in darkness. In *Gut Feminism*, Elizabeth Wilson proposes to incorporate biological information to rethink mental and corporeal states in their relation to gender.[12] This is to say, she proposes to consider the body beyond the way it is described by culture or inscribed into cultural contexts, and to consider instead how it is shaped by biology. For instance, if cultural constructivism determines that men behave aggressively not because of testosterone but because of "toxic masculinities," perhaps Paul B. Preciado's experiments with testosterone are a much needed empirical and conceptual bridge between biological bodies and their cultural interpretations.[13] Or, if cultural constructivism argues that women are more inclined to care for and raise children because they have been conditioned by the heteropatriarchal order, maybe we should consider transsexual people's need to equate sexual identity with gonad tissue and genitals, or transgender people's contradiction between gender identity and lived experience, as evidence that the biological, hormonal, and neurological differences that give shape to gender need to be brought to the table. Because of this, I find it terrifying that the root of the sex/gender divide harks back to the modern conception of man as "reason." Fully dissociated from the body, the ideal condition of "man" translates to the ideal of "woman" as pure consciousness. If we speak of situated knowledges rather than universalizing scientific, Eurocentric, and masculine visions, could we embrace a kind of situated biology that would consider not only two or three sexes, but myriad sexes that could be expressed limitlessly through our bodies? And from what standpoint could we organize a political struggle that would have as its goal a society that would celebrate, support, and value reproduction instead of negating it and undermining it? I know; I always demand too much.

X

To Lizzy Cancino and lovingly to my friend Ruth Ovseyevitz whom I am infinitely grateful to for helping out with my reproductive tasks so I could finish this text.

Irmgard Emmelhainz is an independent translator, writer, researcher, and lecturer based in Mexico City. Her book Jean-Luc Godard's Political Filmmaking was published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2019. The translated expanded version of The Tyranny of Common Sense: Mexico's Neoliberal Conversion is coming out this fall with SUNY Press, and so is Toxic Loves, Impossible Futures: Feminist Lives as Resistance (Vanderbilt). She is a member of the SNCA in Mexico (National System for Arts Creators).

1
Lauren Berlant, "The Book of Love is long and boring, no one can lift the damn thing," *Berfrois*, May 14, 2014 http://www.berfrois.com/2014/05/lauren-berlants-love-theory/ .

2
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* , trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage, 2012), 41.

3
De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 65.

4
De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 37.

5
"I Will What I Want: Women, Design, and Empowerment," cocurated by Jimena Acosta Romero and Michelle Millar Fisher. Its first venue was the Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries, at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center (Parsons School of Design / The New School, New York) April 11–23, 2017. It then travelled to the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes (MUCA) Roma, in Mexico City, January 18–May 22, 2018.

6
Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* ," *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 35–49.

7
Gale Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* , ed. Rayna Reiter (Monthly Review Press, 1975), 162.

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Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* ."

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Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 12–13.

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Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (July–August 2016) https://newleftreview.org/II/100/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care .

11
Leila Slımani, *Chanson douce* (Gallimard, 2016).

12
Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Duke University Press, 2015).

13
Beatriz Preciado (Paul B. Preciado), *Testo Junkie: Sexo, drogas y biopolítica* (Espasa, 2008).

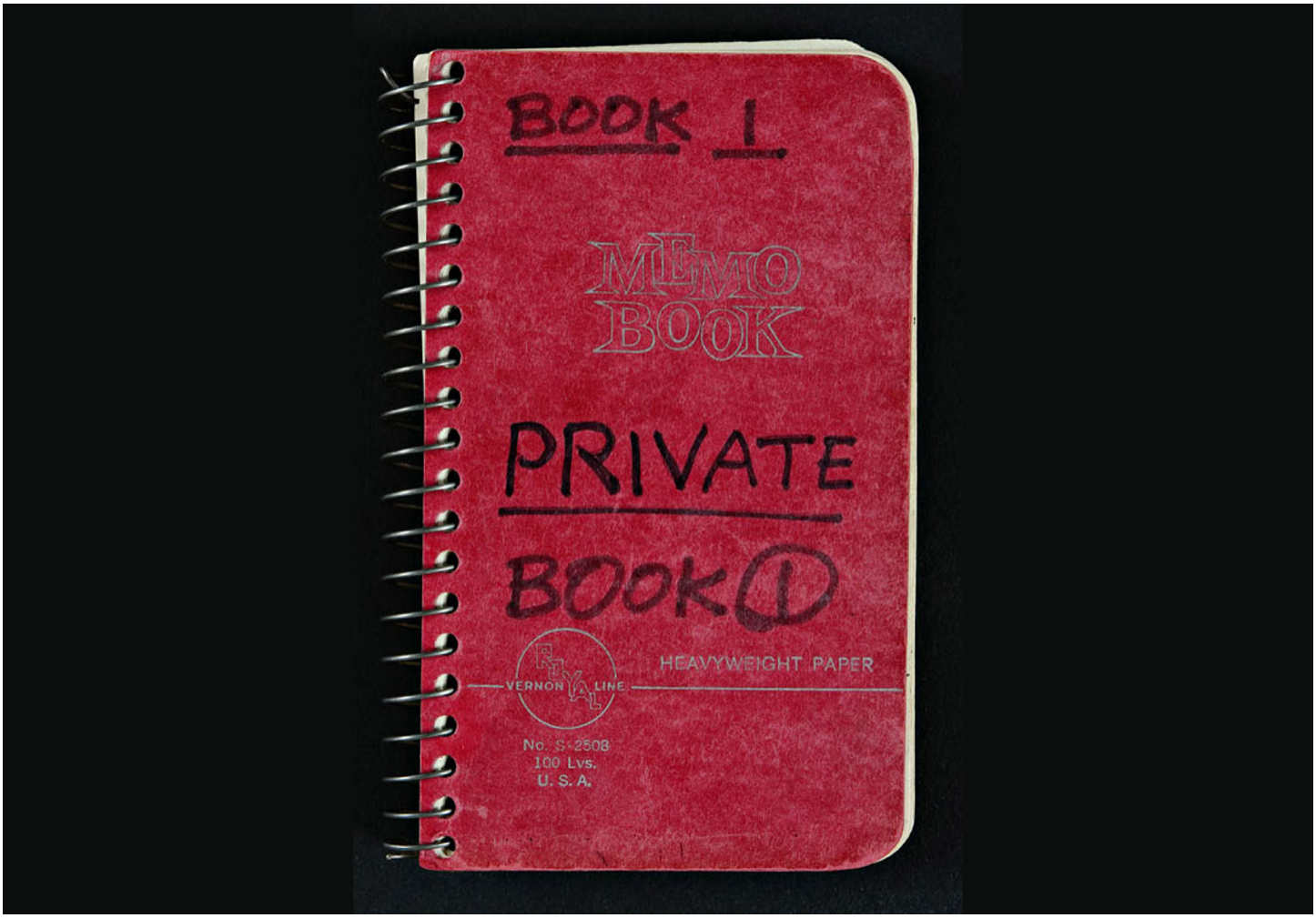
Angela Dimitrakaki

Feminism, Art, Contradictions

Understanding art as a field (of socialized human action) defined by contradictions bears on how feminism is organized as political practice within this field. Notably, some of art's contradictions are not experienced exclusively by feminism, but also by emancipatory politics at large. Nonetheless, thinking about contradictions in relation to the specificity of the feminist struggle in art—a struggle that has carried on, in its various forms, for at least half a century—might help put into perspective the dialectic of gains and losses perceived as the art history of feminism as much as compel a historical contextualization of feminist agency and of where its allies should be sought.

Analyzed ad nauseum, the distinction and antagonism between "art" and "life" can possibly feature as the motherboard of contradictions that all progressive politics, including feminist politics, face today when the art field provides the context of their realization. The art/life distinction is not philosophically reducible to the "art world/real world" binary, but is significantly related to it. Here is, for example, how: recently, a colleague and I approached an artist of noted political involvement for collaboration on a collectively executed "feminist intervention."[1] We saw and explained the project as one crossing through art (the nexus of intersecting practices whose aggregate gives us the art field) but referring to life (the totality structured by historically specific relations of production and reproduction). The artist declined. The reason was that the attempted political (feminist) intervention was attached to "an artwork." We understood: the "artwork," the output of artistic labor in a capitalist economy, is evidence of contradictions running through art and illuminates the latter field as the site of weak, structurally compromised, ultimately *feminized* politics. First and foremost, the artwork—no matter how "immaterialized" or "socially engaged"—is the carrier of both the artist's *disaffirming* critique and her *affirming* trade, irrespective of whether this trade is supported by private capital, public funding, or a "mixed" economy.[2]

The above applies to the output of curatorial or theoretical work as well, yet historically the artist has been a privileged subject for getting the heat. The reclamation of the "avant-garde"[3] as a critical concept connecting artistic labor with praxis as well as the emphasis on art and activism in, and for, the twenty-first century are symptomatic of upheld expectations with regard to artistic practice—expectations that feminism as, precisely, a politics is affiliated to: questioning, challenging, exposing, rupturing, rejecting the consensus that reproduces society as we know it. Because of such expectations, a show called "The Feminist Avant Garde of the 1970s" that is also the display, circulation, and valorization of a corporate collection can appear to be a contradiction in terms—even as it is presently a platitude to remind that any other "avant-garde" has far from avoided its incorporation (*sic*) in capitalist art institutions, having indeed been largely discredited or, more mildly,



A facsimile of one of Lee Lozano's notebooks titled Private Book 1. This is the first in a series of eleven pocket-sized facsimiles of all the artist's published by Karma, New York.

"domesticated" as a result of such incorporation.[4] As regards activism, Boris Groys has offered a perceptive analysis of the contradictions facing its articulation with, and as, art, finally admonishing us to " *not differentiate between victory and failure.*"[5] Acknowledging the recurring problem of "aestheticization" (an inescapable concern for feminist work, even if feminist activism is not discussed), Groys contends that "one can aestheticize the world—and at the same time act within it. In fact, total aestheticization does not block political action; it enhances it. Total aestheticization means that we see the current status quo as already dead, already abolished."[6] Groys then addresses the issue of contradictions by proposing the suspension not of aesthetic but of *political* judgment (given that the temporality of political action is always the contemporary). This, however, goes a step further towards art's political disempowerment: not just accept art as negativity, not just embrace it as radical failure (well-known positions), but accept that *you fail to distinguish between failing and succeeding in your political objectives* as an artist, curator, theorist, and even (art) activist.

Insofar as feminism is a politics, operating in the art field as in other fields in real time, seeing "the current status quo as already dead, already abolished" would be counterintuitive. Rather than a way out of contradictions, such a voluntarist perspective on the status quo would offer a license to become hostage to them, foreclosing a *consciousness* that would see the feminist struggle as historically determined and, consequently, in need of updating its strategies and tactics. The mutation of liberal to authoritarian social Darwinism witnessed in the 2010s hardly indicates an "ultimate horizon" where the system of racialized, patriarchal capitalism collapses: "Every action directed towards the stabilization of the status quo" is, precisely, *not* proving "ineffective."[7] The problem is that even actions *not* directed to the stabilization of the status quo may well contribute to the latter's propagation: this is why feminist art historians and artists, in their groundbreaking work of the 1970s and early '80s, fervently debated strategies and what kind of art-making might indeed subvert the dominant nexus of social relations.[8]

Such debates marked the emergence and negotiation of a

collective feminist consciousness in art—yet in terms that differentiated the *collective* from a *consensus* within feminism as a social movement. That is, the political consciousness of feminism (necessarily shared by feminists that sought to expose the art system's bias against women as creative subjects) was not tantamount to a unified thought, resolution, and action with regard to how the gender bias of the art system would be undone. Yet feminism has not always been a social movement since the term "feminism" appeared in the nineteenth century; there have been periods when feminism circulated as an idea unsupported by the momentum of an uprising.[9] This is not the case today. We are witnessing the regrouping of feminism as a social movement in the visibility of, and attacks on, feminist activists; in women's marches; in campaigns such as #MeToo and the public debates they bring forth; and especially in the rise of the International Women's Strike advocating, since 2017, for a "feminism of the 99%."[10] If art is to be a site (among many) where this movement claims power and trains its potential, feminists in this field (art) must pay close attention to the contradictions that structure it *without shying away from political judgment*. Overall, it is the difficulty and responsibility that comes with judgment that makes the aspiration to realize art politically so hard to meet. It is with this in mind that I have prioritized three such contradictions to reflect on.

Placard at the International Women's Day rally on the steps of the Leeds University Parkinson Building during the 2018 USS Pension Strikes, March 2018. Photo: Alarichall/CC BY-SA 4.0

Contradiction 1: Autonomy and Dependency

Being an artist (also a curator or a writer) means having a professional identity. Professional identities are associated with remuneration for labor. The neoliberal higher education regime, where education is seen as an investment (irrespective of whether students are actually asked to pay fees), has built on this professionalization of the artist. There is an assumed equivalence of the degrees on offer: you choose to study art, physics, or law according to the career you want to have. The currently popular term "art workers" indicates the need for artists to sell something in the private or public sector in order to make a living (it is instructive, in this regard, that the term "worker" is being widely deployed rather than, say, "civil servant").[11] Some (extremely few) artists become successful entrepreneurs, achieving profits—implying the possibility of upward social mobility. More often, artists secure wages in higher education or art institutions while others are forced to chase whatever irregular income they can by providing various kinds of service in the sector.[12] It is also possible that artists (and curators) make a living outside the art field, thus subsidizing their creative labor, but the potential of finally making a living through the latter does not disappear. Especially as regards the difficult conditions of art-field labor in post-Fordism, the situation is well known, addressed in myriad conferences and a voluminous literature.[13] As the feminist Danish collective Kuratorisk Action said back in 2010:

> So far, we have been able to finance our projects through public and private funding without compromising our politics, which has been a privilege! But since the Nordic region still doesn't have funding programs for curatorial research and labour, we have been unable to secure salaries for ourselves. Like so many other cultural producers, we thus support our families by doing odd jobs after Kuratorisk Aktion "office hours," but are painstakingly aware that being in our early forties, we may not "have the muscle" to keep up Kuratorisk Aktion for another ten years while attending to two–three "day jobs" on the side.[14]

The precarious economic and labor conditions remain the same eight years later. Happily in the case of this collective, they founded and are now running CAMP, a nonprofit art center focused on migration "realised with support from private sponsors" and a long list of state and related institutions.[15] This, as we know, is not how things typically go. Yet, the case is that women and feminists in the art field are, just like everyone else, dependent on the institutions that control the flow of cash and even credit. We are therefore dependent on the capitalist system of production for our reproduction. It is impossible to understand women artists' emphatic attachment to the art institution without grasping their financial dependency upon it; and it is a mistake to suggest that in the 1970s, empowered by feminism, women sought to enter the art institution *exclusively* in order to achieve visibility as creative subjects and challenge the male canon: these two political objectives constitute pure idealism if disconnected from the economic imperative that underpins them, unless one were to assume that class

privilege uniformly freed women and feminist artists from financial pressures. Today, which feminist would accept to study while incurring debt merely in order to advance her political cause (through gaining feminist knowledge)? Like everyone else, students who identify as feminists study to obtain qualifications that will allow them to compete in the labor market—as regards artists and curators, preferably the art market, which comprises *both* a goods market and a labor market.

Entering the institution was an objective of 1970s and '80s feminism in art but it has largely been discussed almost exclusively as a *political goal* of feminism in the field and not in terms of access to income and wages, i.e., as an *economic necessity*. Much feminist energy and activism focused on making the art institution, which was historically hostile to women artists (dead or alive), open its doors to them.[16] Precisely, however, because entry to the art institution was not just a matter of rewriting art history through a feminist lens, but also an avenue through which women could join remunerated production and a sector of the economy, separatism—a strategy considered by feminists in the 1970s—was doomed to marginalization.[17] A self-reproducing feminist art commons never arose as a transformative alternative sustained by a critical (feminist) mass—and today we can merely speculate about how it might have impacted the capitalist art field. Feminists sought autonomy but opted for dependency: in fact, they perceived (creative and financial) autonomy as the outcome of (institutional) dependency.

In a 1973 essay in the *Feminist Art Journal*, Irene Moss and Lila Katzen rejected separatism both because of the accepted universality of art's aesthetic criteria but also because separatism would exclude women from *competition* in the art world—accepting thus capital's organization of labor as an unalterable reality.[18] Yet, the fact that separatism survives in contemporary feminist consciousness in art is indicative of the exacerbation of capitalist relations of production. In Sweden after 2000, the feminist art collective *Malmö* Fria Kvinnouniversitet*,* or *Malmö* Free University for Women (henceforth MFK), defended "strategic separatism" in terms of claiming space for the open discussion of contradictions faced by the art world's female workforce.[19] MFK argued that "the importance of feminist spaces is that they provide opportunities for self-definition" while importantly jettisoning a biological definition of femaleness and including "all persons that now or at some point have identified as women."[footnote *Do the Right Thing!*, 42.] Yet when it comes to economic relations, this expanded version of being-a-woman faces the very same (economic) dependency. In the case of MFK, separatism became a feasible, limited-time experiment because there were no expectations for the latter to function as a lasting alternative economic model for its participants. "Self-definition," a key concept of second-wave feminism and the goal MFK sought to explore through strategic separatism, had to be claimed, perhaps inadvertently, as a position in *discourse* rather than in the material conditions associated with social reproduction—when it came to that, participants could not, of course, achieve self-definition. To the extent then that contemporary feminism in art redeploys second-wave concepts, political judgment on these concepts' contextual potential—but also, crucially, their *limits*—must be constantly renewed.

Andrea Fraser's latest publication examines the intersection of electoral politics and private-nonprofit art institutions in the United States at a pivotal historical moment, the year of 2016.

The feminist art movement of the 1970s and '80s, launched in Western art scenes, made its claims as neoliberalism was acquiring the contours of a national and transnational project, while contemporary feminism operates within this project's consummation, the impact of which is currently apparent on a global scale. It is now commonplace to point out that neoliberalism has deepened divides among women, further entrenching woman's exploitation of woman. Global supranational institutions dedicated to the reproduction of capital as a social relation explicitly link women's emancipation (connected to concrete action such as girls' access to education) to women's deployment in for-profit production as "human capital."[20] Is the discourse of self-definition compatible with women's deployment as human capital? Leaving aside valid questions and charges about feminism's contribution to the hegemony of neoliberalism (notably, not so far raised specifically about the art world), the increased professionalization of artistic identity is at the core of the autonomy-dependency contradiction facing art at present.[21] I am referring to the autonomy of each woman as a creative individual versus women's dependency on capital's institutions for introducing this creativity into the exchange economy as the bedrock of public visibility. Clearly, this predicament is not only relevant to women. Yet having been excluded from it for too long, women in art tend to be more attached to this professional identity. It is hard to imagine that even those who do not identify as feminists in the 2010s are somehow unaware of the feminist struggles in the art world in the 1970s and since—struggles that overwhelmingly (and understandably) focused on achieving inclusion and

recognition within an already defined field of "art." If in the 1970s there were hopes for this field's large-scale transformation through women's participation, it is hard to entertain such hopes today: what has changed is the artwork's content and form while the structural elements of the art field (or rather, of the art pyramid) remain intact. For many women, being recognized as a professional artist (or indeed a professional anything) is a hard-won gain achieved through generations of feminist effort to place women in the public sphere—the sphere where production is located as opposed to the sphere of the private dedicated to reproduction, with the privatization of both spheres receiving much less attention outside Marxist feminist analysis (after the 1970s and until recently, marginalized in art history and theory much like Marxism overall).[22] Women may thus be less prepared to undermine this gain by questioning the feminist goal of access to wages and "entrepreneurial" income in relation to the competition principle (the implications of the wage relation and how it shapes subjectivity)—less prepared, that is, to theorize and practice refusal. As a political stance, refusal can only be practiced collectively and with a loud bang. If not, it becomes a *Drop Out Piece* (begun c. 1970) by an individual artist—Lee Lozano—more likely to be recuperated and neutralized as an "original artistic vision" by the institution rather than having an impact on the latter's function;[23] or it dilutes into disparate micro-events of women's withdrawal from the art economy without leaving any trace, affirming the myth of female weakness in the harsh conditions of the "jungle" outside the home. The politicization of women's withdrawal in terms of feminist refusal is therefore indispensible to the analysis of autonomy-dependency contradiction.

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Contradiction 2: Reform and Revolution

The struggles of the 1970s demonstrated that making women artists "visible" would require lifelong commitment. Success so far has been limited, and the visibility project should best be seen as trans-generational.[24] This is despite the fact that the *gender composition* of the art field at present differs from the years of feminism's second wave.[25] Yet a rejection of the art institution is hardly imaginable today, as neoliberalism's investment in precarity has increased our dependency: the art internship culture is symptomatic of this. And as regards instances of resistance to the culture of "employability," Silvia Federici has stated that as a feminist she recognizes "many of these tools from past and contemporary practices of consciousness raising."[26] Yet such instances of resistance (drawing on feminist strategies) remain few and far between, and overall feminists continue to focus their efforts on women entering the art institution on the terms set by the latter. This is not unrelated to concerted efforts to present the art institution as a progressive friend rather than a reactionary enemy of feminism. The numerous exhibitions (including blockbuster ones) focusing on feminism since 2000 have served to normalize the presence of the art institution in feminist culture, presupposing feminists' acceptance of its role as the showcase for feminist artworks and a celebrated archive of feminist impact.[27]

In recent years, such acceptance has been regularly reviewed and discussed critically by feminist scholars.[28] In many cases, the art institution is found to perform a dubious ideological trade-off: the exclusion or discrediting of feminist politics and struggles is compensated by the inclusion of women artists' work. In 2010s in the UK, the incorporation of socialist feminism and work concerning working-class women or of black women artists (seen as doubly undermined by the art system in terms of gender and race) under the BP aegis at the Tate constitute cases in point. In 2011–12, the group exhibition "Thin Black Line(s)," curated by artist Lubaina Himid (winner of the Turner Prize in 2017 and referred to as "a star at Art Basel" in 2018), took place at Tate Britain as part of the "BP Art Displays 1500–2011."[29] Victoria Horne discussed critically the BP-framed shows of 2014 "Sylvia Pankhurst" and "Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour" (a legendary research-based installation by Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt, and Mary Kelly created in 1975 and acquired by the Tate in 2001).[30] In 2017, BP ended its sponsorship of the Tate under sustained pressure from climate activists;[31] yet there had been no large-scale protest by the feminist art community against the BP-Tate pact, despite the Multinational Monitor featuring devastating facts about BP's environmental destruction, involvement in sustaining the Apartheid in South Africa, and the exploitation of workers.[32] What these exhibitions, as projects of institutional incorporation, imply is that feminist struggles in the art world may, at times, come across as having lost all connection with feminist politics in the "real" world where "Indigenous and ecological-centered feminists have long affirmed that neoliberalism's founding ideology of endless growth—achieved through the infinite extraction of finite natural resources—is rooted in a historical and contemporary intersection of the domination of women, minorities, and the Earth."[33] Including a socialist such as Sylvia Pankhurst in a museum funded by a corporation which stands for all that Pankhurst fought against is a poignant way of discrediting feminist critique—the same as a corporation collaborating with the Apartheid regime sponsoring a museum that host shows of black women artists in Britain. In 2017, the exhibition "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–1985" at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum nearly coincided with the explosive headlines about how the Sacklers made their fortunes: through the mass misery generated by Oxycontin addiction. In March 2018, only a hundred demonstrators, including artist Nan Goldin, gathered to protest at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the recipient of a donation from the "philanthropic" Sackler family.[34] Unsurprisingly, the liberal establishment sought to

Sylvia Pankhurst creating decorations of the Prince's Skating Rink, c. 1911 as featured in the frontispiece of Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette (New York: Source Book Press, 1970). Photo: Public Domain/Wikimedia Commons

extricate the *individual* Elizabeth Sackler from the mess of *unethical* capitalism (implying another kind is the norm), while admitting that "implicating Elizabeth via her father jeopardizes both of their legacies, and could make it more difficult for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art to continue to bring art, diverse audiences, education, and activism under one roof."[35] What is, however, the political meaning of placing *radical* women, activism, and capital under one roof? If artist Artur Zmijewski, curator of the 7th Berlin Biennale, could be criticized merely for "the attempt to frame political movements [Occupy and the Indignados] within an art exhibition," what happens to feminist radicalism when framed within the big-money agendas of self-legitimization by means of championing social causes?[36] In an age when Facebook executives dare sell the fable of "lean-in" feminism, it should be obvious that feminism is *not* uniformly attached to anti-status-quo radicalism. Then again, feminism has already had to exist upon the rifts of material divides and ideological divisions. If, however, it were true that "the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is *the only institution in the world* dedicated to presenting and educating the public about feminist art,"[37] it would mean that the public is educated about something called "feminist art" in terms of an imaginary unity that conceals divides and divisions, fails to distinguish between radicalism and leaning in, and is saturated with the hegemony of capital as a social relation (rather than a mere economic one). When, for all their differences, dead radical women are made to return to contexts that represent the status quo that they sought to leave behind, feminism as a critique of extant social relations should be hearing the alarm bells. Living women, however, who see themselves as radicals and feminists are in a position to ask themselves *what might constitute practices of "leaning in" specifically in art*—practices that would leave us with an instrumentalized feminism as "individual choice" that may or may not provide a slice of the pie to the "deserving" few (this used to be called token inclusion). Such cynical incorporation is the logical outcome of feminist struggles seeking mere reform.

Struggles for reform tend to prioritize participation and representation, and they have a much better chance at "succeeding"—if with a lot of effort. And the effort that this requires is such that when the objectives are met, with whatever embarrassing and even politically humiliating compromises, there is hardly any energy left for carrying out a political anatomy of the "achievement" of inclusion—when inclusion of the few in terms set by capital's *competition* principle presupposes and propagates the exclusion of the many. Such an anatomy was nonetheless attempted in the letter authored by the four short-listed artists for Germany's biggest art prize, Preis der Nationalgalerie, in 2017: Sol Calero, Iman Issa, Jumana Manna, and Agnieszka Polska declared that their institutional recognition placed emphasis on their gender and foreign nationalities rather than their work, perverted diversity as a public relations exercise, generated no artist fee in the apparent assumption that their new visibility would translate to market value, posited them as competitors against the spirit of artistic collaboration, and placed them in an environment plastered with the logo of the industrial sponsor, BMW.[38] The letter shows a heightened awareness of the terms of inclusivity but is not representative of a collective feminist stance: we don't have a feminist mass of such critiques, exposures, and rejections. Overall, however, progressive forces in the art field striving for inclusivity seem to uphold a strange view of the latter as an even field of play despite this field's articulation in a society of antagonisms and rampant inequality: the "Open Letter in Response to the Announcement of the Exclusionary Belgian Art Prize Shortlist of Candidates 2019" protesting the shortlist of just white men stated: "As active practitioners, we know that a thriving and complex artistic landscape is only possible when artists of different genders, sexualities, ethnic backgrounds, social classes, generations and so forth, are able to access and participate in it, and enrich it with their sensibilities and world views."[39] The mention of "different social classes" presenting their "world views" to, and within, the art establishment betrays an anthology mentality that buries the question of why social classes exist in the first place as much what it means for art to regard social classes as merely "different." Likewise, genders, sexualities, and ethnic backgrounds are not merely "different" but rather constituted through entrenched relations of power—which is why their equal representation in an art world not so different from the real world tends to be defied.

The dilemma of participation versus separatism (and even refusal) echoes an old division of feminism under capitalism. Sheila Rowbotham, in her discussion of anti-capitalist thinking in the first half of the nineteenth century, notes that when women's emancipation supporter William Thompson argued (in 1825) that "the liberation of women was impossible in a competitive system,"

By offering suggestions for actually effecting a change rather than simply describing and analysing what was wrong, these cooperators [the cooperative movement] and early socialists discovered a new potentiality for feminism. They transformed it [feminism] from aspiration and ideas and integrated the liberation of women with a social movement which could envisage alternatives to the suffering and waste of early capitalism. From this point *the conflict was explicit between the two feminisms, one seeking acceptance from the bourgeois world, the other seeking another world altogether*.[40]

Rowbotham detects a schism between a reformist/liberal and a revolutionary/anti-capitalist feminism at the very point of emergence of modern feminism. In the early 1980s, Griselda Pollock also wrote "there are several feminisms," but what followed this statement referred to "distinct political definitions" of key concepts feminists

use (her example is "patriarchy") and not to the delineations of plural feminisms.[41] Pollock, however, concluded her essay (on feminist art histories and Marxism) by admitting that "the bourgeois revolution was in many ways a historic defeat for women and it created the special configuration of power and domination with which we as women now have to contend."[42] Why then are not all feminists aligning their politics against this historic defeat? Should we accept, following Rowbotham, that there have been two incompatible feminisms from the outset, and that feminism in the singular can be an aspiration but has never been a reality? Or, that a pluralization (even a mere duality) of feminism is a *concession* made to the contradictions that the cause of "ending women's oppression and exploitation" faced from the start? If this would be a concession, it would be motivated by the same spirit (of overcoming an obstacle) as Groys's admonition to stop distinguishing between failure and success in activist art: it would be the easy way out of having to form political judgment, evaluate progress in relation to a common political cause, and assume collective responsibility for any outcomes. If, however, the schism were accepted as inherent and generating two feminisms, it would mean that *women* cannot ultimately be considered a group (despite divides) to which a political cause can be attached. It would mean that the level of racially inflected class divides is so high as to make "women" a nonsubject. And this would mean accepting that the very reality (the society of divides where women's oppression and exploitation intersect) that feminism is attempting to change is the *limit* to feminism's political imaginary.

Historically, the situation in the 1970s, when Rowbotham was writing, was quite complex in the art world. Feminist art workers were not necessarily formally placed into separate ideological camps, although the intense search for the right strategy (inevitable for a movement at its genesis, by which I mean the feminist art and theory movement) proved ultimately divisive. Looking back to the 1970s, Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman's essay from 1980 on categorizing and assessing the strategies of feminist artists was one among many in feminist criticism at the time.[43] Barry and Flitterman announced "deconstruction" as the winner amongst feminist strategies. They gave good reasons for their choice, echoing the sentiments of those feminist critics who realized that the mechanisms of women's subjugation in capitalist patriarchy were so sophisticated as to require pioneering methods of address *within the space of the artwork*—Griselda Pollock's essay "Screening the Seventies" would be a case in point.[44] Yet the real causes of the division and the fragmentation that the movement suffered did not primarily emanate from different opinions about strategies and tactics that concerned the creation of artworks. Rather, such division had to do with the experience of oppression by women who necessarily occupied hierarchically contained positions in a classed, and racialized, society and had to negotiate their living-through-oppression in specific terms. This fact, however, did not dictate or prompt a perfect alignment between an individual's subject constitution and her political consciousness. In short, you can (and do) have women artists from a working-class background, such as Tracey Emin, who can assert that "Tories are only hope for the arts."[45] This is hardly surprising, given that the art world is presented as the glamorized epitome of self-realization, and to what extent feminist reforms were not tied to that horse remains a moot point.

Nonetheless, in earlier and more radical social moments, such as in the first half of the 1970s, the strategies concerning the making of radical artworks had clearly to do with the intended public for feminist art practices. The very notion of "strategies" contested, in (political) principle, the idea of the artwork as the playground of an individual imaginary and complete self-realization. The renowned debates in Anglophone feminist art history around an "accessible" and a "difficult" feminist art need not be reiterated here;[46] yet it is worth stressing that the feminist conflicts echoed well-known Marxist debates on aesthetics and politics over whether art (here meaning artworks) should be realist (associated with accessibility or, worse, populism) or distanciating and disruptive of art's normative form of gratification (demanding or, worse, elitist). This dilemma typically arises in relation to artistic practice engaged with emancipatory politics because, in the material divides that sustain capital's rule, access to or exclusion from critical knowledge becomes a biopolitical tool: an instrument, distributed across gate-keeping institutions, for managing populations and social antagonisms. If, in the twenty-first century, this dilemma no longer arises *collectively* for feminists in art, we need to ask what this means for feminist politics in the art field. It may, for example, mean that art practice committed to feminism in our times is unable to posit with sufficient clarity an addressee for its political imagination. Whose emancipation then does such practice seek to facilitate? Is there an expectation that there will be a cumulative (political) effect of individual artistic visions? Or is the feminist curator expected to be the organizer and communicator of such a cumulative effect? If so, what does this transference of political responsibility mean for feminism in art, for the historical constitution of the art field as set of practices that seem to follow closely the capitalist (re)organization of creativity into professionalized slots?

If today the stakes of feminist politics, in the art world and beyond, differ to those of feminism in the 1970s, this is because we (feminists) know how far pushing for reforms can go: racialized patriarchy holds strong, remaining essential to the division of labor and the establishment and management of dispossession (precarity is a form of such dispossession) that capital requires as its founding act.[47] So long as these reforms do not challenge the *core* of the economic status quo—that is, a program of exploitation of most people and certainly most

women—they are potentially realizable with the right amount of pressure and when certain parameters concur: the system can allow for a few "successful" women artists so long as they don't shun art fairs. At the same time, however, we need to safeguard the right to reform, now explicitly threatened by the rise of white male supremacy (and authoritarian masculinity at large). Despite this development, the question is whether feminist politics can be just reformist or whether any reforms need to be relentlessly assessed by a revolutionary, transformative consciousness—one that does not foresee, through unfounded projections, the corpse of the status quo in a coffin as a future *fait accompli* but that recognizes its engagement in a larger-than-life struggle devoid of a messianic belief in ultimate success. This would mean renewing political judgment on art at any moment, which can only happen within the context of a feminist *art* movement: the idea of "politics" implies contestation in the semblances of the "polis" we have. Reforms realized without the intensity of struggle generated by a social movement are just that (reforms), and to the extent that they placate the spirits, they undermine the very possibility of a feminist revolutionary consciousness.

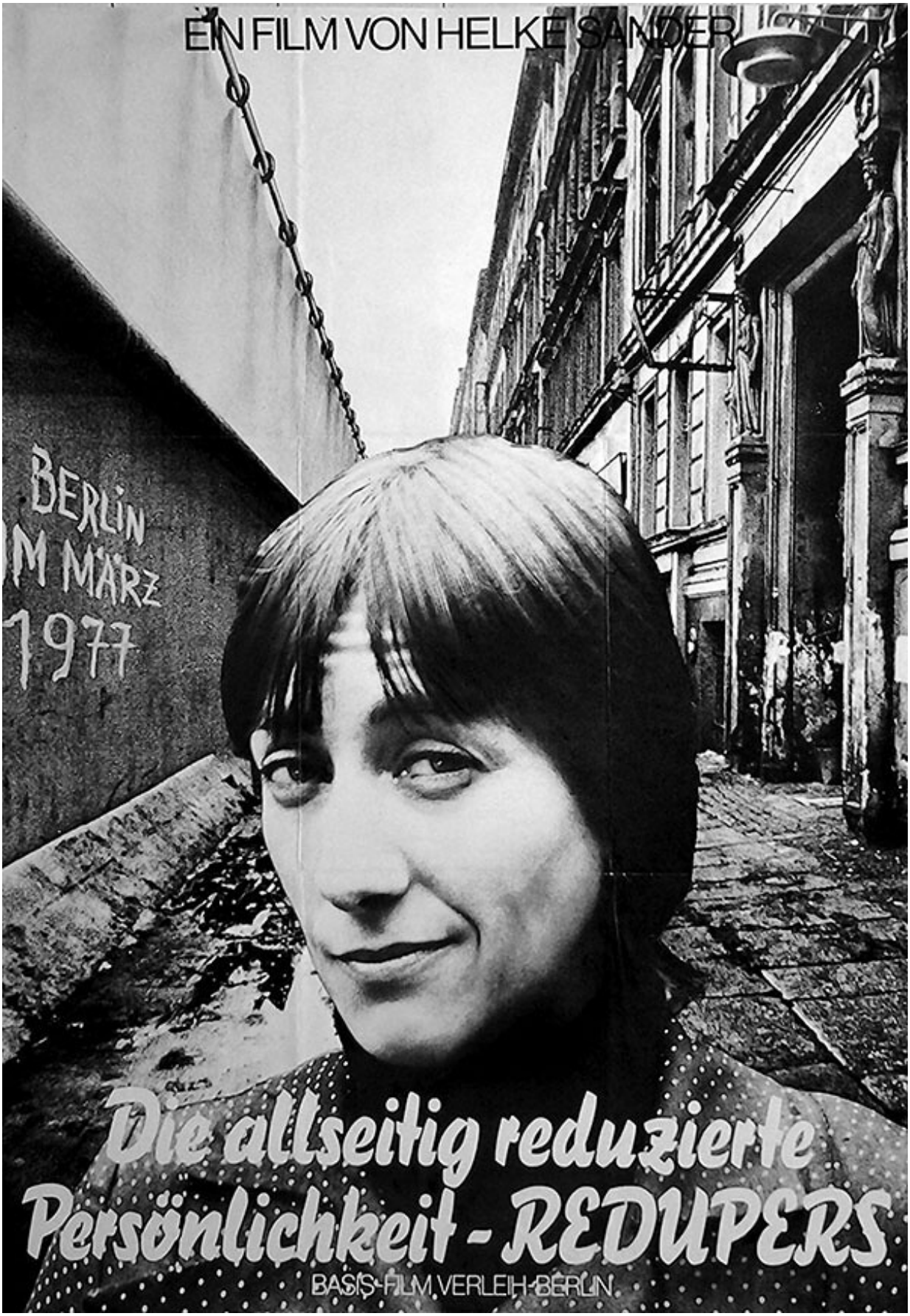
Abandoning reforms is politically unthinkable for feminism, its gains being so far a history of reforms. But what must be accommodated is, first, that reforms are not secure and, second, that reforms that dominant forces allow for do not, by way of accumulation, lead to social transformation: more female curators and more female art graduates have not led to a nonsexist art world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Marxist revolutionary leader Rosa Luxemburg wrote that "the struggle for reforms" is "the means" while "social revolution" the "aim."[48] In saying this, she opposed tendencies within partisan positions that regarded the "now" of the socialist movement—the struggle—as the exclusive focus and an end in itself, without a clear idea about a long-term goal. This long-term goal would be the criterion for developing strategies and tactics in the here and now. Broadly, we need to ask: What is feminism's long-term goal? If this goal is to end patriarchy, can this be achieved within capitalism's class society? If the goal is women's equality with men, which men does feminism mean—as it is unlikely that these would be the black men populating the prisons of America? And what about the idea that feminism should today be "beyond the limits of woman?"[49]

The pluralization of feminism into feminisms threatens precisely to eclipse from the horizon a unifying, long-term goal by which to gauge current reforms. In the absence of such a goal, what would prevent the various feminisms from contradicting each other? Feminism's pluralization implies, at best, a present of unfocused and opportunistic reforms where feminist energies are expended and, at worst, a continuous clash of antithetical feminisms. There is no obvious remedy for this fate.

In the art field, there is much need for a serious feminist debate of the reform/revolution contradiction, and a collective elaboration and rethinking of these very terms in all their interconnectedness. In short, we need a feminist dialectic on reformist pragmatism and revolutionary consciousness. Initiated in Argentina in 2017 but of global purview, and following upon revelations on the art world's endemic sexism, the text of *We Propose—Declaration of Commitment to Feminist Practices in Art—Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers* includes a spectrum of demands, some of which contradict each other in essence: the call for more women in power positions within actually existing, capitalist institutions, reflective of a lean-in agenda, jars with the call to work towards the anti-capitalist International Women's Strike.[50] An effort to understand the origins, propagation mechanisms, and political impact of such contradictions is becoming increasingly urgent in the face of a reinvigorated, transnational, patriarchal political discourse mutating into authoritarian leader cults. The art field is not unconnected to these developments, and Hito Steyerl remarked already in 2010: "The traditional conception of the artist's role corresponds all too well with the self-image of wannabe autocrats, who see government potentially—and dangerously—as an art form. Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior."[51] Given that feminism in art sought to undermine the male genius doxa already in the 1970s, it should be evident that its continuous manifestation all the way to the 2010s raises questions about the efficacy of reforms aiming at its eradication.

Contradiction 3: Work and Nonwork

If we take seriously the gender division of labor, production and reproduction, art's entanglement with the economy emerges as fundamental to art's realization in modernity—the socioeconomic and cultural reality fashioned by capital and resistance to it, as shaped in the nineteenth century, the century of the Industrial Revolution, and extending to the twenty-first century with capitalism morphing into technology-led globalization.[52] Despite technology (from the factory to the internet) being the salient mark of modernity, women's "unskilled," unpaid work at home continues being ubiquitous and necessary today (unless delegated to low-paid and mostly female substitutes) while the gender pay gap persists everywhere.[53] Marxist feminists engaging social reproduction theory argue about the racialized gender composition of a reconceptualized working class, which would expand the remit of class struggle, seeing it as "essential to recognize that workers have an existence beyond the workplace."[54] At the same time, modernity in the twenty-first century needs to be recognized as a "work society," as put by Kathi Weeks, in which work is far more than an economic practice but connects instead with (persistently racialized and gendered) practices of unfreedom and imaginaries of freedom.[55] Under the guiding principle of fewer workers but greater



Poster for the movie Redupers: Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit (1978).

productivity, the lengthening of the working day applies both to industrial production and office and service work, and Weeks stresses that work "is widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation."[56]

For artists there is the additional complication that art-making is considered desirable, self-fulfilling work: a "labor of love," as per the famous phrasing of Silvia Federici, who said this however about house work.[57] Women artists can then be facing a double confrontation with expectations to perform labors of love: work done in the home and artworks made for display outside the home. Feminist artists who see their work as politically invested and may undertake political commitments are facing the same dilemma on a triple front: home, work, and in politics/activism. This troubling triangle is well known. Marion von Osten has offered an excellent account of its radicalized version (the version that includes emancipatory politics as constitutive of the female subject) presented in a 1970s feminist film, *Redupers: Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit* (Helke Sander, 1978). "The protagonist," von Osten notes,

is not only photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions, a subject who has pulled away from wage labor and its regulatory apparatus in the factory or in the office, as the Autonomia Operaia called for. At the same time, she is a *Reduper* (an all-around REDUced PERson)—a figure who cannot be located biographically, and instead requires a new form of subjectivity to be realized in the *contradictions* of capitalist socialization.[58]

There are many "contradictions of capitalist socialization" but for women and feminists (who tend to be women) in art the relationship between work and nonwork remains a central one. Numerous artworks in the 1970s make it apparent that women claimed access to the identity "artist" (active in the public domain) as the very antithesis of that of the housewife and mother (confined to the private domain).[59] The dividing line between public and private corresponded to the one between work and nonwork, mapped onto a series of related binaries: "work" was culture, social recognition and visibility, creativity; "nonwork" was nature, social obscurity and invisibility, (domestic) drudgery. Yet, as is often repeated, art is now a field of engagement where work and nonwork are significantly blurred, which is why Hito Steyerl sought to interpret art today as a field favoring "occupation" over labor.[60] Current projects, such as *Manual Labors* (initiated in 2013) by Jenny Richards and Sophie Hope, openly pose the question "where does work start and end?" as much as they blur, through their complex structure, the boundaries of the artwork and social research focused on the politics of (gendered) labor.[61] Overall, being involved in art politically only intensifies one's inability to distinguish between work and nonwork, as von Osten's observations imply. What is crucial (what von Osten's analysis and projects such as *Manual Labors* point to) is that the overlapping or even fusion of work and nonwork does not constitute liberation from the private-public antagonism around which a key axis of feminist politics was structured. Within a system of relations ruled by capital, such overlap and fusion do not bring forth a unified subject. Perhaps this goal could be achieved by a society where the categories of work and nonwork were abolished and where human beings' survival and flourishing would not depend on earning money, let alone earning money in, and through, competition. Feminists in art must therefore address the work/nonwork relationship in capitalism—that is, in a society both permeated by the work imperative and organized upon the substratum of unpaid "women's work." In this society, the woman "photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions" becomes a decentralized subject, but only in a negative sense. Rather than discover that she had always been such a subject and see in this discovery the potential of reassembling herself, she realizes that, in the inescapable materiality of her life, she is unable to align her internal multiplicity with her political direction of de-compartmentalizing herself. (And is her multiplicity genuinely internal, in the sense of belonging inherently to her psyche since the moment of its emergence? Or is it, in fact, the internalized multiplicity of demands and impositions that have piled up in the course of her life?) Her strong sense of fragmentation is not a rite of passage, arising in the course of extricating herself from an oppressive identity (constituted, for example, in patriarchy), but the end of the road, stemming from the depressing realization that she's all dressed up with nowhere to go. She is permanently locked—locked *individually*, in the solitary confinement effected through the division of labor *among women*[62]—in a social complex where her ultimately *personal* revolt can never be completed (despite capitalism promising exactly this: individually realized freedom). In the clash between the need to work for a living and taking up an alternative life as (hard) work, the best she can hope for is to "find herself" (*sic*) in an alternative work environment—a promise made by the art field.

The prominence of terms such as "art worker" and "artist-entrepreneur," clearly pointing to art work in terms of productive labor in capitalist terms, have not defeated the idealization of art as a field of non- or at least *semi*-alienated work: that is, some aspects of this work constitute an alienating subjugation to capital while other aspects deliver creative freedom, self-fulfilment, self-realization and—to remember second-wave feminism again—self-definition. These aspects are not necessarily connected with the autonomy that income and/or wages brought to the post-domestic female subject in the 1970s. It is worth noting though that in the nineteenth century feminists (for example, in Greece) advocated strongly for women's access to art, as being an artist was deemed an acceptable profession for middle-class women potentially threatened with *déclassement.* In the twenty-first

century, given the inklings that art's invisible "dark matter" may include more women than men and while (as stated in Contradiction 1) feminists continue to battle for women's access to the institutions of art, women's flocking to art schools and entry to the art field raises critical issues.[63] First, it suggests that women, much like men, are motivated by the possibility of securing work that is seen to minimize alienation and which sustains the "creative" industries. Second, it further corroborates the argument that women differentiate between the kinds of "labor of love" on offer and may choose one over another (art-making over home-making) or seek to combine them. In both cases, women are called to act as individuals—either to compete (art world) or make "personal" choices (real world)—which speaks volumes about feminism's failure to subvert the structural atomization of the production-reproduction circuit. Such failure bears heavily on how feminism is perceived by women entering the art field (as a subjectively adopted discourse rather than a politics premised on collective action) and on the actual terms of women's work.

Notably, since the late twentieth century artistic labor has required far greater mobility than in an earlier modernity, where the studio was the principal locus of artistic production.[64] In present practice, artists are expected to conduct "research" and fieldwork, to install work, to take up residencies, to give talks, to network nationally and internationally, to be kept informed about others' work and developments in the field or even take up a teaching post wherever in the world to make ends meet (which may be temporary or part-time, in which case you don't, for example, move your dependents but you live in two places, e.g., "London and Berlin"). "Itinerant artist" is not a figure of speech but rather describes the work conditions of many "successful" artists.[65] Being successful involves having built an international profile—the main aspiration of entry-level artists, which means that, in globalization, mobility has solidified into an ideology. The mobility requirement embedded in artistic labor at present (including retreats and the ubiquitous "residency" culture) is in direct conflict with the work of family-focused social reproduction still expected from women—and where women are single mothers, entire "components" of the contemporary art work culture (such as residencies) may become impossible. Although we lack statistical figures, many women artists opt (as in the past) to not have children so as not be homebound—and this can apply more in cases where artistic labor (and its output) involves weeks or months spent in "real" social relations encountered outside the home, the studio, one's town, or one's country. Marina Abramović is certainly right to say that "children hold back female artists" although putting the matter this way is a covert *affirmation* of the oppressive social relations men in art (and all sectors) benefit from as a group.[66]

Effected in the second wave, this "refusal to procreate" was possibly the most radical break from social norms that feminism ever realized: its consequences in advanced economies, as Mariarosa Dalla Costa explains, have been profound and reverberate today, when in the rise of ultra-conservative social values women in childbearing years are seen at least as a potential liability to employers.[67] And this gives the refusal to participate in reproductive labor a different meaning: Does refusal count as liberation when imposed by the unwritten requirements of productivity of a woman's waged labor? A woman artist may choose to drop mobility after having children but this is likely to impact most negatively on her production and career. Let's consider this: if an employer in an "advanced" economy of liberal reproductive laws tells a pregnant woman to get an abortion or she will lose her job, the woman would be expected to take the case to a court of law. If an artist has so internalized the production requirements of her profession as to exclude the possibility of pregnancy, it is seen as the free choice of a liberated woman. Women artists can believe that they are making such a free choice (practicing the feminist "refusal to procreate") as liberated women. Yet such choice can be pure ideology—indeed, an ideology necessary for submitting to the demands of the labor market as organized in capitalism, even (as in the case of art) wages may well be absent and the woman is asked to practice self-management towards the promise of procuring income. Women also believe that they are making a free choice ("I'm doing it for myself, not a man") when they use cosmetics or get cosmetic surgery to reduce wrinkles or cellulite, but one's self tends also to be constituted through dominant ideology defining "gender." Feminist artists since the 1970s, from Europe to Latin America and beyond, have created numerous artworks involving the social imperative for women to use makeup and beautification instruments and procedures—the Buenos Aires militant feminists art collective Mujeres Publicas displayed many of them in their installation *Museum of Torture* (2004). Yet the beautification imperative is not unconnected to how capitalism wants its workers to be. When beautification becomes a new requirement for women to compete in a newly launched capitalist labor market, as happened in certain Eastern European countries during the so-called transition period after 1989, the new imperative is noticed precisely because it has *not yet* congealed into ideology. Estonian artist Mare Tralla has addressed the valorization of "looks" in the work ethic introduced in her native post-Soviet Estonia and post-socialist countries at large.[68] On the other hand, a comment such as "she's in excellent shape for a 39-year-old," made in writing about Andrea Fraser's looks in her *Untitled* (2003) where she appears naked and having sex with a male collector, seems unremarkable: the artwork was made in the US, chief exporter of the valorization-of-looks work ethic.[69]

The issue however of free choice in having children has been contentious for feminism: in capitalist patriarchy feminists had to fight very hard and for many generations so that women could access waged work, as well as gain

the right to abortion, and the right to choose whether to procreate or not. A new wave of reactionary anti-abortion discourses and policies as well as feminist struggles against them—from Poland to the US—have shown how politically invested child-bearing remains.[70] If, however, feminism is to confront the reality of women's position in capitalism today, including that of artists and curators, it must begin the work of *ideological disarticulation*. A new round of consciousness-raising is required: one examining what individuals' "free choice" means *in relation to the reality of the labor market* rather than in relation to the potential of self-definition that capital has every interest to retain as a useful myth. This is partly what is at stake in the work/nonwork binary for feminism at large, and specifically in art.

On Reflection

Tonight I made the personal choice to not cook dinner for my eleven-year old kid (or myself) in order to complete this article. It was not the first time this has happened in my single-parent household and it will not be the last, but what is worth stressing is that this "personal choice" is an outcome of all the contradictions discussed in this article: the writer's autonomy through the complex dependency that work in the public domain constitutes; the political necessity to engage in reformist rethinking of the specifics that in any given context shape feminists' relationship to institutions in awareness also of the divides that prevent a shared view of a revolutionary horizon; a feminist's reluctance to differentiate between work and nonwork but rather always having to decide, day in day out, on what kind of activities she needs to prioritize so as to maintain the alleged life-work "balance." I expect that very few people who identify as women and feminists and are reading these lines will feel excluded from the paradigm of bargaining, concessions, and self-management described here—one we often endure because of the freedom to discuss it with others. Yet this is a juncture where, despite the resurgence of activism in art, our polemics appear more confined than ever to the realm of discursive exchanges—that is, the realm where politics turn, ultimately, to theory rather than become articulated as theory-informed practice. How do we imagine the transition from politically informed theoretical exchange to the praxis of a critical feminist mass? Not *if*, but *how*: this, I believe, is the motivational question from which to start if we wish to face up to the reality of contradictions that both shape our involvement with the currency of feminist struggle and function as concrete limits to our involvement being realized through art.

X

1
See Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction," in her landmark study *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* , (Routledge, 1988).

2
For a concise analysis of the public-private circuit in art, see Nizan Shaked, " *Art and Value*, Reviewed," *Historical Materialism Blog* , December 10, 2017 http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/art-and-value-reviewed-nizan-shaked , offering a review of David Beech, *Art and Value* (Brill 2015).

3
Indicatively, see John Roberts, *Revolutionary Times and the Avant Garde* (Verso, 2015); *The Idea of the Avant Garde and What It Means Today* , ed. Marc James Léger (Manchester University Press, 2014); Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde* (Zero Books 2012); the special issue of *New Literary History* on the avant-garde: vol. 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010).

4
See Gabriele Schor, *The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s: Works from the Sammlung Verbund Vienna* (Prestel, 2016); Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford University Press, 2004). On the domestication of the avant-garde see Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition—Catalogue* , eds. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Hatje Kantz, 2011), 45. "Today's avant-garde is so thoroughly displined and domesticated within the scheme of Empire that a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found to counterbalance Empire's attempt at totalization," notes Enwezor.

5
Boris Groys, "On Art Activism," *e-flux journal* 56 (June 2014) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/ . Emphasis added.

6
Groys, "On Art Activism."

7
Groys, "On Art Activism."

8
These debates included, for example, if and how the figurative sign "woman" should be featured in artworks; whether femininity was to be recuperated as an essence suppressed in patriarchy or whether it was wholly constructed in the latter (and so could not be "decolonized"); if feminists should be engaged with painting at all as the flagship practice of patriarchal art or if newer practices and media such as performance and video should be prioritized. Indicatively, see *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985* , eds. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (Pandora Press, 1987); and *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000* , ed. Hilary Robinson (Blackwell, 2001).

9
The term "feminism" first appeared in French in the first half of the nineteenth century and is attributed to utopian socialist Charles Fourier, but Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* , from 1792, takes the origins of modern feminism to the eighteenth century, in the period defined by the French Revolution. Feminism does not appear as a social movement in the eighteenth century in the way that it appears, in some countries, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or in the 1960s and '70s. See Karen Offen, "Sur l'origine des mots « féminisme » et « féministe »," *Revue d' Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine* 34, no. 3 (July–September 1987): 492–96. The issue of when feminism has been a social movement is often related in relation to national and regional contexts. See, for example, Paul Bagguley, "Contemporary British Feminism: A Social Movement in Abeyance?" *Social Movement Studies* 1, no. 2 (2002): 169–85.

10
See Angela Davis, Barbara Ransby, Cinzia Arruzza, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Linda Martin Alcoff, Nancy Fraser, Rasmea Yousef Odeh, and Tithi Bhattacharya, "Beyond Lean-In: For a Feminism of the 99% and a Militant International Strike on March 8," *Viewpoint Magazine*, February 3, 2017 https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/02/03/beyond-lean-in-for-a-feminism-of-the-99-and-a-militant-international-strike-on-march-8/ .

11
Indicatively, see Julia Bryan Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* (University of California Press, 2009); *Art Workers: Material Conditions and Labor Struggles in Contemporary Art Practice* , eds. Erik Krikortz, Airi Triisberg, and Minna Henriksson (2015); Angela Dimitrakaki, "What Is an Art Worker? Five Theses on the Complexity of a Struggle," in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* , eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (BAK and MIT Press, 2016).

12
Andrea Fraser, "How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction" (1994) http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/fraser1.pdf .

13
Indicatively, see the special issue of *Open!* on the theme "A Precarious Existence" (no. 17, 2009); *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* , eds. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Sternberg Press, 2011); *The Art Factory*, eds. Michal Kozlowski, Jan Sowa, and Kuba Szreder, Free/Slow University, Warsaw, 2014.

14
Angela Dimitrakaki, "Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21st Century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion," 2010 http://www.publik.dk/img/tekster%20RR/Kuratorisk%20Aktion%20interview.pdf .

15
See CAMP's website http://campcph.org/about-camp/ .

16
Some of the issues are addressed by Lucy R. Lippard in her essay "The Anatomy of an Annual," in *Hayward Annual '78, Exhibition Catalogue* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978). The essay was reprinted in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* , eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool University Press, 2013).

17
See Angela Dimitrakaki, "What Is It that Feminism Is up against? Preliminary Notes on Separatism," paper presented at a panel discussion among Catherine Elwes, Margaret Harrison, Johanna Gustavsson, and the author as part of *Women Working Collectively, What Is Your Value?* , organized by The Temporary Separatists at ICA London, July 9, 2015. The paper can be accessed at https://www.academia.edu/23425509/What_is_it_that_feminism_is_up_against_Preliminary_notes_on_separatism .

18
Irene Moss and and Lila Katzen, "Separatism: The New Rip-Off," *Feminist Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (1973): 7+. See also the short note on this article in Linda Krumholz and Estella Lauter, "Annotated Bibliography on Feminist Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (1990): 158–72, where the assumed universality of aesthetics is also mentioned as an argument against separatism.

19
MFK was founded by Johanna Gustavsson and Lisa Nyberg and was active between 2006 and 2011. The collective's inspiring practice, and the contradictions it faced, are discussed in their manual *Do the Right Thing!* which can be downloaded in English and Swedish at http://www.lisanyberg.net/do-the-right-thing-a-manual-from-mfk/ . I am grateful to MFK for providing me with a hard copy.

20
Studies and projects on women as human capital abound. Indicatively, see "Countries commit to strong action on human capital to drive economic growth," *The World Bank*, October 20, 2017 http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/10/20/countries-commit-to-strong-action-on-human-capital-to-drive-economic-growth , where the Netherlands' Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Lilianne Ploumen stated: "The Netherlands will continue to be committed to women's sexual and reproductive health, without which human capital cannot be built."

21
On feminism's relationship to capitalism in the late twentieth century, see indicatively Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Paradigm, 2009); Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March–April 2009): 97–117; and, largely focused on "the institutionalization of the US women's movement" but also the neoliberal ties of "global feminism," Susan Watkins, "Which Feminisms?" *New Left Review* 108 (January–February

2018): 5–76.

22
This marginalization was concurrent with the dominance of postmodernism as the hegemonic cultural discourse in the last quarter of the twentieth century and was to an extent retracted from the mid-1990s onwards when "globalization" emerged as a critical term in the analysis of art and beyond. See Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, "'The Last Instance': The Apparent Economy, Social Struggles and Art in Global Capitalism," in *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* , eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool University Press, 2015).

23
It was striking to see a Hauser & Wirth London ad of a show (March 30—May 5, 2007) of Lee Lozano (1930–99), a female artist noted for her critical withdrawal from the art world, in the first few pages of *Frieze* 105 (March 2007), the magazine's issue dedicated to "feminism."

24
Data concerning women's presence in the art institution are fragmented, incomplete, and do not correspond to a global picture. See, however, Maura Reilly, "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes," *ARTNEWS*, June 2015, 39–46, also available online at http://www.maurareilly.com/pdf/essays/Reilly_ArtNews.pdf .

25
Indicatively, see Molly Casey, "Gender in the Art World, a Look at the Numbers," *Nine Dot Arts*, May 31, 2016 https://www.ninedotarts.com/gender-in-the-art-world-a-look-at-the-numbers .

26
Silvia Federici, "Foreword," in Precarious Workers Brigade, *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education* (Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, 2017), 3.

27
A very useful database of feminist exhibitions is provided by *n.paradoxa: international feminist journal* at https://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-exhibitions.asp .

28
Indicatively, see *n.paradoxa: international feminist journal* 18 (July 2006), a special issue on curatorial strategies; *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference* , ed. Alexandra Kokoli (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008); *Feminisms Is still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* , eds. Malin Hedlin Haydn and Jessica Sjohol Skrubbe (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); Dimitrakaki and Perry (eds.), *Politics in a Glass Case* .

29
See the "Thin Black Line(s)" exhibition catalogue available at http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/5106/22/thinblacklinesbook.pdf . See also Julia Halperin, "Turner Prize-Winner Lubaina Himid Is a Star at Art Basel—and She's Getting a Solo Show at the New Museum," *Artnet News*, June 12, 2018 https://news.artnet.com/market/lubaina-himid-oldest-turner-prize-market-takeoff-1301645 . Himid is referred to in the article as the first black woman and the oldest artist to win the Turner Prize but also as an artist who "did not have consisent commercial representation until 2013." Himid has been a pioneering artist and curator of black and Asian women artists in Britain since the 1980s; she organized the landmark show "The Thin Black Line" at ICA London in 1985.

30
See Victoria Horne, "BP Spotlight: Sylvia Pankhurst & Women and Work—Tate Britain, 16 September 2013—6 April 2014," *Radical Philosophy* 186 (July–August 2014) https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/bp-spotlight-sylvia-pankhurst-women-and-work .

31
See Nadia Khomani, "BP to End Tate Sponsorship after 26 Years," *The Guardian* , March 11, 2016 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/bp-to-end-tate-sponsorship-climate-protests .

32
BP features frequently on the Multinational Monitor website, often as the target of anti-Apartheid activists. A search on the site brings up 119 mentions of BP, all of them negative. See http://www.multinationalmonitor.org/ .

33
See Julie Gorecki, "How Did This Happen? Capitalism's Double Subordination of Women and Nature," *The Feminist Wire*, May 1, 2015 http://www.thefeministwire.com/2015/05/how-did-this-happen-capitalisms-double-subordination-of-women-and-nature/ .

34
Joanna Walters, "Artist Nan Goldin Stages Opioids Protest at Metropolitian Museum's Sackler Wing," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/10/opioids-nan-goldin-protest-metropolitan-museum-sackler-wing .

35
Liberal critics focused on the unethical marketing of a highly addictive medicine rather than the human hell created by the for-profit pharmaceutical industry, and so it was possible to defend Elizabeth Sackler as an individual. See Natalie Frank, "In the Discussion About the Sacklers and Oxycontin, It's Important to Get the Facts Right," *Artnet News*, January 22, 2018 https://news.artnet.com/opinion/discussion-sacklers-oxycontin-facts-elizabeth-a-sackler-1203458 .

36
Christy Lange, "7th Berlin Biennial," *Frieze*, June 1, 2012 https://frieze.com/article/7th-berlin-biennale .

37
Frank, "In the Discussion About the Sacklers and Oxycontin." Emphasis added.

38
Kate Brown, "These Four Artists Were Nominated for Germany's Foremost Art Prize—and Now They're Denouncing It," *Artnet News* , November 10, 2017 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artists-denounce-german-art-prize-1145351 .

39
The open letter was published as a petition on May 12, 2018 https://www.change.org/p/la-jeune-peinture-belge-belgianartprize-response-to-the-belgianartprice-exclusionary-shortlist-2019 .

40
Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution: A History Of Women And Revolution In The Modern World* (Verso, 2004/1974), 50. Emphasis added.

41
Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art Histories and Marxism," in her *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (Routledge, 1988), 34. The specific essay was first published in *Block* 6 (1982).

42
Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power," 49.

43
Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making," *Screen* 21, no. 2 (1980): 35–48.

44
Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies," in *Vision and Difference,* 151–99.

45
Mark Brown, "Tracey Emin: 'Tories are only hope for the arts,'" *The Guardian*, May 16, 2011 https://www.theguardian.com/culture/culture-cuts-blog/2011/may/16/art-emin .

46
For a selective yet invaluable documentation see Robinson (ed.), *Feminism-Art-Theory*.

47
On this, see Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (November–December 2010): 79–97, where it is stated: "We must insist that 'proletarian' is not a synonym for 'wage laborer' but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don't need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labor, is the starting point in understanding the free market" (81).

48
The articles comprising Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* were first published together in 1900 and, in revised edition, in 1908. Here I have used the 1900 version available at the Rosa Luxemburg Internet Archive, transl. Integer https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ . See also *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg* , ed. Helen Scott (Haymarket, 2008).

49
"The question of how art is recognized as feminist—and the potential of misrecognizing feminism—requires acknowledging the multiples axes of transnational and queer feminism today, as such feminist projects intersect issues of war, law, immigration, human rights, antiracist, economic, urban and rural justice projects, propelled towards uncoercive

rearrangements of masculinity and femininity beyond the limits of woman, as a project of decolonizing feminism." See Jeannine Tang, "The Problem of Equality, or Translating 'Woman' in the Age of Global Exhibitions," in Dimitrakaki and Perry (eds.), *Politics in a Glass Case* , 253.

50
The declaration started on November 7, 2017 as a petition (now closed) here https://www.change.org/p/asamablea-permanente-de-trabajadoras-del-arte-nosotras-proponemos-we-propose-n%C3%B3s-propomos . The full text can now be accessed at http://nosotraspropone mos.org/we-propose/ . I have consulted the English translation (by Jane Brodie) available at the site, which includes thirty-eight propositions, divided into five sections: Concerning the Structure of the Art World, Concerning Behaviors in the Art World, Concerning the Artistic Career and Creativity, Concerning Artistic Feminism and Feminist Art History, Concerning the Inclusive Nature of This Statement.

51
Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy," *e-flux journal* 21 (December 2010) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/ .

52
John Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: The Globalization of Production, Super-Exploitation, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 2016).

53
Relevant data is available on many sites, including the World Bank and ILO. For a quick overview see Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Sandra Tzvetkova, "Working women: Key facts and trends in female labor force participation," *Our World in Data* October 16,2017 https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-force-participation-key-facts . The blog is part of the Oxford Martin Programme on Global Development at the University of Oxford.

54
Tithi Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," *Viewpoint Magazine* 5 (2015) https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/how-not-to-skip-class-social-reproduction-of-labor-and-the-global-working-class/ .

55
See in particular "Introduction: The Problem with Work" in Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011).

56
Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 7.

57
On how the art field inscribes the labor of love ideology, see Danielle Childs, Helena Reckitt and Jenny Richards, "Labors of Love: A Conversation on Art, Gender and Social Reproduction," *Third Text* 31, no. 1 (2017): 147–68.

58
Marion von Osten, "Irene ist Viele! Or What We Call "Productive" Forces," *e-flux journal* 8 (September 2009) http://www.e-flux.com/journal/08/61381/irene-ist-viele-or-what-we-call-productive-forces/ . Emphasis added.

59
Mary Kelly's *Post-partum Document* (1973–79) and the collective project *Feministo* (1975–77) remain emblematic works, in different ways. On the first see Mary Kelly, *Post-partum Document* (University of California Press, 1999); on the second see Alexandra Kokoli, "Undoing 'homeliness' in feminist art: Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife (1975–7)," *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* 13 (2004): 75–83. See also Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (University of Minnesota, 2009).

60
"Art is an occupation," Steyerl contends, "in that it keeps people busy—spectators and many others. In many rich countries art denotes a quite popular occupational scheme. The idea that it contains its own gratification and needs no remuneration is quite accepted in the cultural workplace … Additionally, there are now occupational schemes in the guise of art education." See Hito Steyerl, "Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life," *e-flux journal* 30 (December 2011) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/30/68140/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life/ . Regarding the relationship of domestic space to art, research has revealed that the home was significantly present in the professional activities of artists in the nineteenth century too, inviting us to pay closer attention to possibly hidden yet lasting trends shaping art in capitalism in gendered terms. On this, see Lara Perry, "The Artist's Household: On Gender and the Division of Artistic and Domestic Labor in Nineteenth-Century London," *Third Text* 31, no. 1 (2017): 15–29.

61
See the detailed project description and outputs at http://www.manuallabors.co.uk/about/ .

62
The division of labor among women (rather than between women and men) is, as one might surmise, typically, if not exclusively, instituted as a racial and class divide.

63
See Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (Pluto, 2010). See also Farah Joan Fard, "Women Outnumber Men At Art Schools — So Why Isn't Their Work Being Shown In Galleries Once They Graduate?" *Bustle*, May 18, 2017 https://www.bustle.com/p/women-outnumber-men-at-art-schools-so-why-isnt-their-work-being-shown-in-galleries-once-they-graduate-55299 .

64
See the chapter "Travel as (gendered) work: global space, mobility and the 'woman artist,'" in Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

65
See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2004).

66
Henri Neuendorf, "Marina Abramović Says Children Hold Back Female Artists," *Artnet News* July 25, 2016 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/marina-abramovic-says-children-hold-back-female-artists-575150 .

67
Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women's Autonomy and Remuneration for Care Work in the New Emergencies," November 2010 https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/mariarosa-dalla-costa-women%E2%80%99s-autonomy-and-remuneration-for-care-work-in-the-new-emergencies/ .

68
See the chapter "The Gender Issue: Lessons from Post-socialist Europe" in Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative* , 2013.

69
Jerry Saltz, "Super Theory Woman," *Artnet Magazine*, July 2004 http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/jsaltz/saltz7-8-04.asp .

70
On May 25, 2018, Ireland's abortion referendum achieved a breakthrough in ending the abortion ban.

Chus Martínez

But Still, Like Air, I'll Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

—Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

1. The Carriers and the Systems

I am under the impression that when a woman reaches a certain position, all the privileges that this position has implied historically are already gone. It is very often the case that a woman's arrival at a high level of influence within an organization is also an indicator of an internal crisis that is going to affect the whole organization. It is often said that there is an increase of women directors at mid-sized institutions (like Kunstvereine in Germany, Kunsthalles, and other non-for-profit structures) and yet this abundance is accompanied by talk of an institutional crisis, and a negative development of the budget and the staff, together with a demand of the newly appointed women directors to compensate for the lack of third-party funding for the institutions. To name one of the most salient cases I experienced: before the establishment of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Sala Rekalde was the most important space for contemporary art in the city and had always been directed by men. However, this changed with the arrival of a bigger and much more internationally recognized institution. Public budgets moved towards the new player, and before completely closing down the old structure, a team of women directors and curators were put in place to study the continuing viability of Sala Rekalde. These kind of displacements took place not only in Spain, but all over Europe. We could study how access to certain structures corresponds with the will on the part of their funding bodies—public and private—to reduce operating costs, to rely on "women's commitment" to compensate for a negative turn of events. On my part, I experienced firsthand, twice, that the offer to lead or to work in a top position at an art organization implied a desire on the part of the board and the public funding body to reduce costs, a desire that materialized in the salary offered to me. Public and private structures are programmed to source "urgent understanding" from women, and take advantage of our will to participate and to be included. Both times that I helmed major art institutions, only my firm demand to know the salary of my predecessors—men—allowed me to make a forceful case to be paid not less or as much as they had been paid, but a bit more, so that the position would continue to be perceived by all parties involved as an important one. And here is my contention: it is crucial not only to count the number of positions women occupy, but also the salaries they earn and the budgets and teams with which they operate. And this applies to all cultural institutions—not

Mathilde Rosier, Blind Swim 14, 2017. Oil on canvas, 200×110 cm. Photo: Lorenzo Palmieri. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan.

only exhibiting institutions but also educational ones.

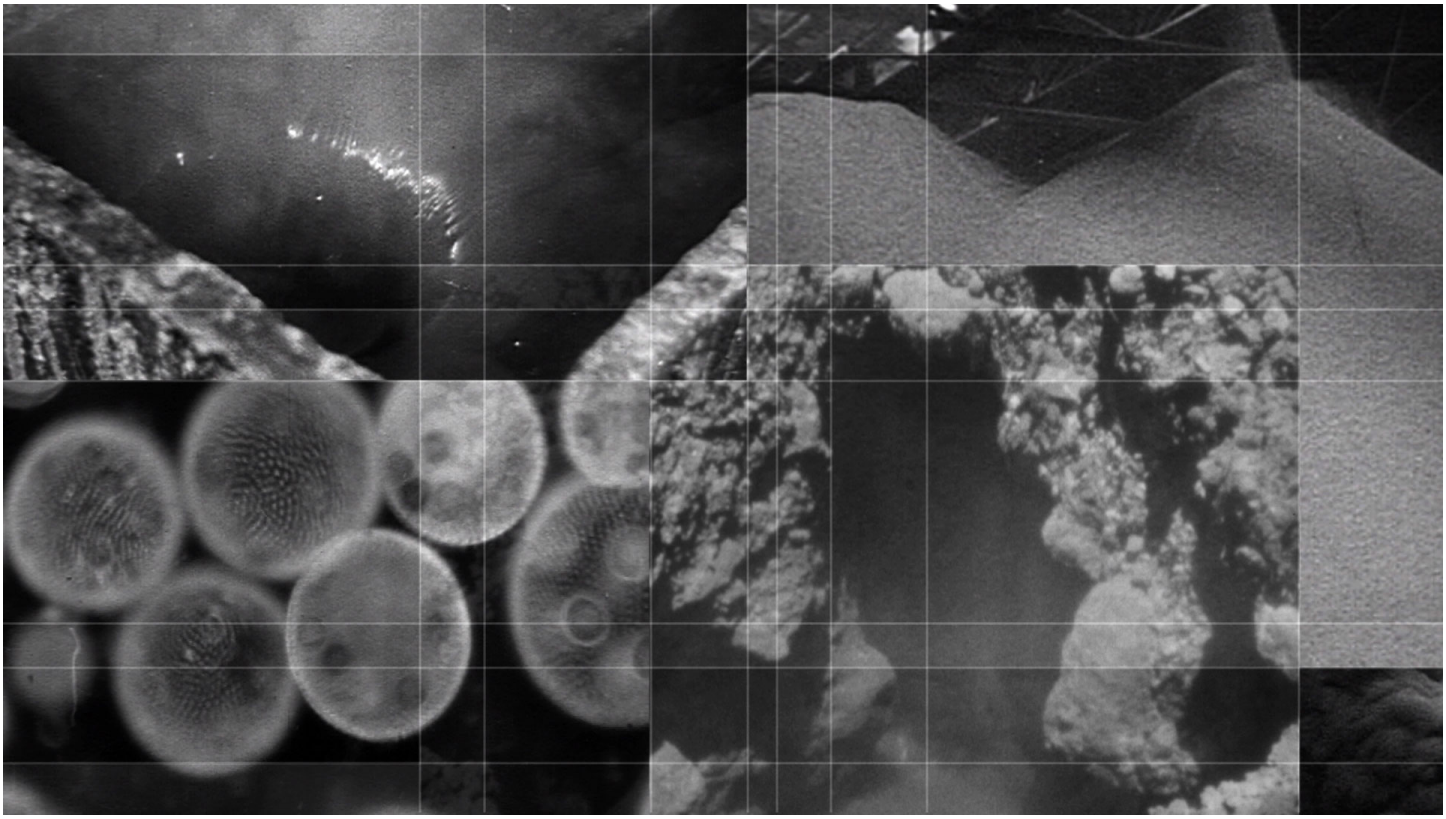
On the same note, in any discussion on equality in the terms of contracts offered to women art professionals, it is important to include how the quality of these contracts—or lack thereof—negatively impacts the otherwise positive development of women assuming increasingly prominent positions. At certain public and private institutions, age and work experience affect the salary offered, but how can we be sure that women's "experience" is valued the same way as that of men? Are there women in leading positions in the public sector who do not have a proper contract, but are instead hired as self-employed freelancers? The answer—at least in Spain—is yes.

Examining and reporting on the institutional and structural sources of inequality can provoke discomfort among both men and women. There is the discomfort of losing one's privileges, the discomfort of demanding structural change to make room for the many new realities that gender diversity entails, and the discomfort of discovering the enormous tasks we still need to undertake. One of these tasks is to argue that equality is definitely not synonymous with the "same"; nor does it correspond to the idea of a "fifty/fifty" share. Rather, equality implies the process of arriving at a place where the conditions and the virtues of our work are perceived as equivalent to those of our male counterparts. Therefore, it is not only a question of securing certain numbers, but of also securing the conditions, the laws, and the language that bring about equality. And this quest we share with all individuals and social movements struggling for equality. We do need quotas; however, we also need a much deeper and more profound metamorphosis of our social and cultural organizations, one that cannot be reached merely through "equal" numbers. In order to reach equality, we need to engage in the elaboration and the practical realization of a whole host of measures that can only be accomplished through *excess*—an excess of care, of attentiveness to needs—in order to reshape individual and collective behavior as well as the imagination of power and its management.

2. Setting Up the Field

In my formative years, I was only educated by men. It was they who taught me that quotas are anti-feminist, since all individuals should aim for excellence, and quota systems prevent individuals from being evaluated based on their own merits. In defense of quotas, however, it must be noted that without the opportunity to be as mediocre as a man at the same job, it is difficult to assess one's capabilities. And so, I think that quotas are essential today—at least transitionally—since they allow us to finally access the same terrain as men. Yes, give me the job, so that I can have exactly the same opportunities and chances to succeed or fail. Give me the solo exhibition so that I can show whether the work does or does not bring visitors.

I am rather pessimistic about the possibility of rapid improvement in women's working conditions in arts and culture, even as social awareness of gender inequality is spreading. The recent dismissals of highly qualified women in leadership positions in the museum sector, and the arguments used to support their dismissal, show that the careers of those doing the firing is much less negatively affected than the careers of the women fired.



Alexandra Navratil, Under Saturn, 2018, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Dan Gunn Gallery, London.

And for this reason I see great potential in introducing the artifice of "positive excess" mentioned before. For example, if the inability to manage teams is cited as a reason for our failures, we also need to question if teams are responding differently to female versus male bosses. Authority is not perceived equally by men and women; norms of language and social interaction determine different gender behaviors. This is a generalization, but if women are accused of a certain inability to delegate, one reason might be that employees may carry out their tasks differently when these are assigned by a woman. If women are accused of losing their temper, we may need to ask if employees are willing to accept the authority of a women as readily as they accept the authority of a man. Education plays a major role in helping us all accept different ways of organizing relations and power in institutions, universities, boards, and councils. Professional opportunities are not enough if women cannot impact the way they are perceived by others. We need to name the dangers women face, but we must also be flexible enough to play with the entrenched structures long enough to find ways of working together that are more equitable. By adopting preceding models, we are adopting their symbolic values as well.

In this respect, education, which is already a form of artifice (artificially proposing ways of acting and thinking), has great potential as an arena for exercising possibilities for social coexistence in the arts. We often say that gender equality is a question of awareness, of information, of values, of authority at work; but it is also a question of training in career management and professional networking. Can we introduce networking models that support equal opportunities for artists of all genders? Can art schools collaborate with art institutions to narrow the gap between the very equal presence of women in art education and their unequal presence in museums and galleries?

It seems preposterous today to educate women artists under the assumption that they have the same opportunities as men, because reality says otherwise. Therefore, we need to venture new ways of making art education relevant to the careers of women artists. How can one convey truthfully the conditions that women artists face in their careers? What needs to change in art education? What new support structures, mentoring relationships, and networking opportunities might help secure equality for women artists, and for all women professionals in the arts?

3. New Equalities

For many decades, women's responses to the unequal conditions in the art world have taken many forms: an emphasis on the importance of producing and supporting

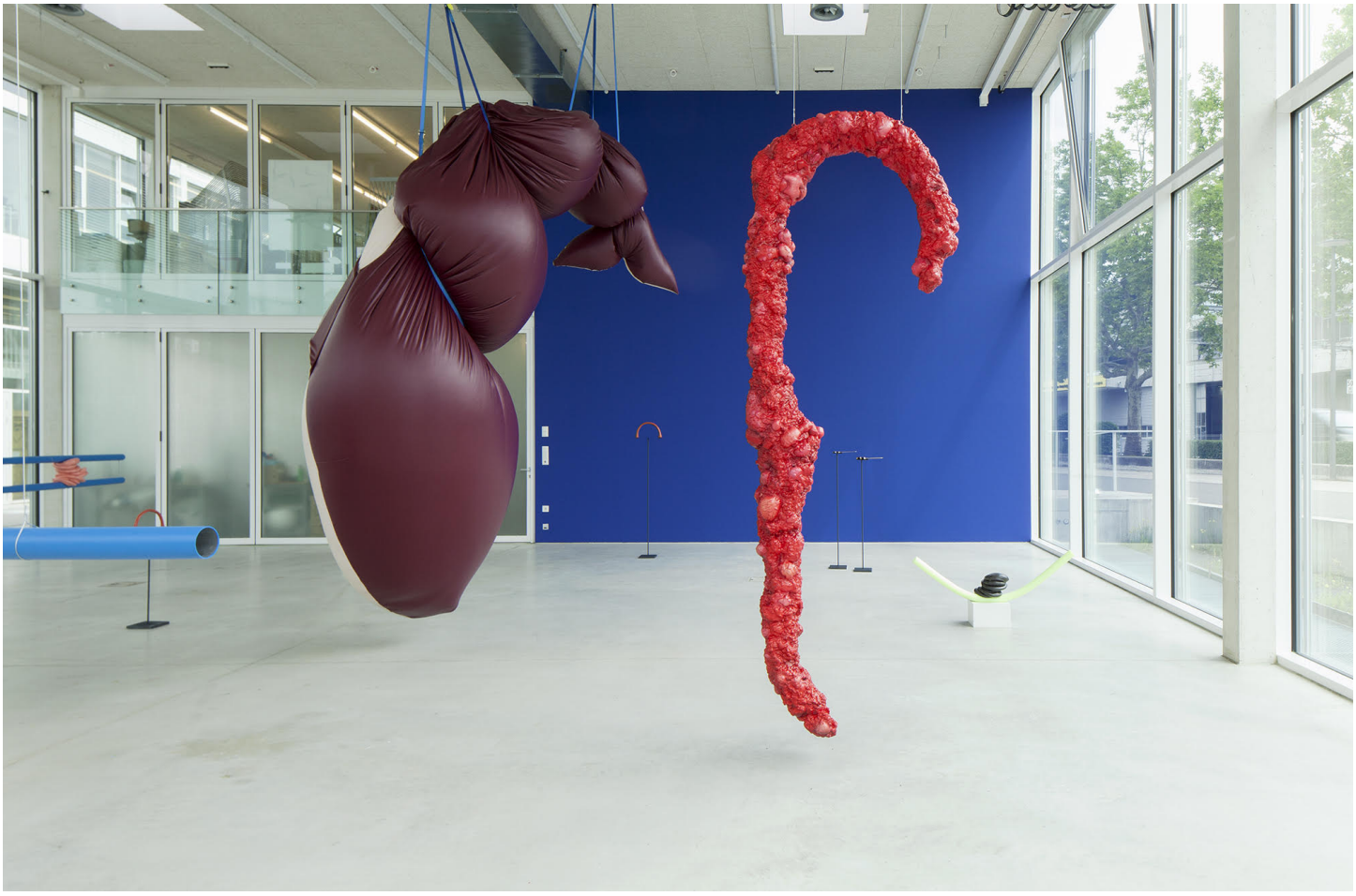
Dineo Bopape, And in the Lights of This, 2017. Installation view, Darling Foundry Montréal.

Lena Maria Thüring, How to Decide What to Do with Your Life, 2016. two channel HD video installation, 16:9, color, sound, 31'30'', German, English subtitles, iron structure, ropes, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

"alternative" organizational models; on the value of working collectively; on the need to question and alter established ways of doing things, from display formats to the language of art to the scales at which we work; and so on. These efforts—if added to the rich and diverse literature and art programs that women have created—have been massive. I have taken part in these programs and debates, and as a result, I have learned to think about the mission of institutions in a fundamentally different way. Through these discursive environments I have discovered not only the conditions that have defined gender inequality in "my time," but also those in other times. I have encountered a multitude of artistic practices that not only make an impact on viewers, but that also shape public perceptions of freedom, democracy, and society. A number of art institutions, both large and small, have offered incredible public programs that have created a different, more equitable network of art and discourse. In Spain, the public programs of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona in the late 1990s were especially influential, along with those of Casco, a space for art and social design in Utrecht, and those of even smaller artist-run spaces like Signal in Malmö, and e-flux's United Nations Plaza program in Berlin … just to highlight a few examples among the many that have helped redefine the economic and gender conditions of the art world.

However, I also have the feeling that these efforts, while absolutely worthwhile, have contributed to reifying the dichotomy between, on the one hand, male-oriented pragmatic corporatism, and on the other, a clichéd female idealism. But today I see a different energy, one issuing a simple but more fundamental demand: real equality. Real equality requires difficult measures, such as actively seeking to create distortions in present structures in order to study the new behaviors that will produce equality in a more natural/balanced way. Real equality calls for pushing existing conditions to the limit, which helps to dismantle them. For example, although 50 percent of art students are female, how they behave, express themselves, and—in general—avoid compromise relates to how they are made into an artificial minority from an early age, and brought up to perceive their choice of "becoming an artist" and their position in public space as less important than those of men. Because of this, establishing truly equal conditions may require a series of bold positive actions, considering young female artists very differently in order that a whole community be obligated to treat them differently.

One of the most incredible aspects of the #MeToo movement is the force with which it has been able to address the violence—or put differently, the dynamic and continuous discomfort—we all need to face for things to change, and for change to last. Since women have not



Teresa Solar, Flotation Line, 2018. Installation view at der TANK, Basel. Photo: Guadalupe Ruiz. Courtesy the artist and der TANK/Institut Kunst HGK FHNW.

historically been granted the public space to speak, language has never been our greatest ally. We have been very eloquent when it comes to shining a light, rendering transparent, and raising awareness, but we have neglected to articulate the millions of micro-exercises that structures and individuals must undertake with us to learn and to adapt to the discomfort of losing.

4. The Discomfort of Losing

Quotas seem to be the end of freedom. Supposedly, freedom is the ability to act "naturally," and to aim for quality above all else … and yet this "freedom" has not helped to develop the structures or the sensitivities that allow women to have the same opportunities as men. Quotas are seen as something from the past—a twentieth-century measure-—and yet, we still need to figure out how to surpass them, not by relying on the same schemas, but by introducing even harder challenges than quotas: a new training that is so unpleasant—at least for a while—as to radically erradicate all systemic violence that perpetuates the many inequalities that coexist, not just gender inequality.

I believe we have been unable to speak positively about the necessary discomfort that any change to established behaviors implies. The change we need is not going to happen without pain, and it is only through dialogue, with all genders cooperating, that we can produce new possibilities. I could give many examples of discomfort, which might sound banal though they are not. I am constantly invited by the diversity office of my university—which is run by a team of women—to participate in diversity-related events. It is clear that being one of the only women working in the upper echelons, being a foreigner … points to the fact that I am an exception. I do not oppose participating in these events, precisely because they can help attract those who identify with my situation, but I want to raise two questions: Why is it that work and meeting schedules at universities and other workplaces are tailored for men and do not—to give a simple example—take into account that a mother might need to drop off her child at school in the morning? And why don't women publicly address the fact that almost no

schools for children have a schedule that fits with the forty-hour-a-week schedule of a working mother? When talking on the phone with a woman from the diversity office of my university, I requested that the timing of director-level meetings be changed because I feel awkward always joining these meeting a little late after dropping off my child at school. I could sense that the women did not regard the subject as being in the domain of the diversity office. She seemed to assume that I should be able to organize my time so as to arrive at these meetings punctually, and that doing so was an unspoken responsibility of my position. But what does this assumption entail? It entails my silence, and the silence of so many other women who feel uncomfortable discussing the logistical difficulties of being a mother in the art field. Why are we not openly talking about the changes that need to be made so mothers don't have to be turn themselves into logistics machines? The realm of the personal can never be divorced from the realm of the structural.

It goes back to what women know all too well: we get paid less for doing the same work as our male peers. This enrages me. Not only is this situation unequal, but it operates by the same logic I mentioned at the beginning of this text: since women receive less money for the same work (even if they are better at it), when they become mothers and have a host of new responsibilities they are simply expected to work even harder. In this context, equality would mean not simply giving women the same salary as men, but rather carefully looking at the conditions that may require extra economic support.

Many rich Western countries have policies that provide child-care benefits: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway,

Sweden, and the UK. The list could include many other countries if we incorporated tax benefits rather than just cash benefits. The differences among countries are significant; they vary depending on the number of children you have, and most still fail to recognize and provide for the special needs of single parents. Nonetheless, if you are lucky enough live in one of these countries, you probably still face an incredible amount logistical and financial challenges resulting from the steep limitations placed on your time by the school and state child-care systems. It is rare for a mother to have access to full-day care, every day, seven days a week, so that she can go to work like any other person who does not have a child. In many European countries—Germany and Switzerland, for example—the public school day is a "half-day-school" (*Halbtagsschule*) running from 8am until 1pm. Since 2000, new day-long school schedules have slowly been implemented, but the literature on this development focuses on the costs of expanding school hours and the effects on the leisure time of children and young people, while the needs of working mothers are largely absent from the discussion.

Even if you are lucky enough to find a full-day school not far from your home, you still have to organize life after work. The art world places enormous importance on informal networking—evening events, dinners, openings.

You may also be expected to leave town to oversee an install or give a talk. This is what it takes to remain visible in the field. This effort to remain visible takes place in absolute silence; women seldom address the subject outside trusted circles. Everyone seems to manage, but there is no talk about what all of this means for women and for the art world a whole. You could say that this is "my problem," but I assume that it a problem shared by many artists, curators, and other art professionals with children. Yes, from the perspective of someone working full time with a salary, you can argue that having children is a personal choice and that everyone should take responsibility for their own choices without expecting the world to adapt to them. And yet, I cannot lie: I expect the whole world to adapt, to bend, to make room, to accommodate all the differences that give our society hope for the future. I still believe that not expecting that this would accommodate one's needs means compromising on the possibility of achieving the maximum level of responsiveness towards all the diverse needs that must coexist in order for ours to be a free world.

Even if you still believe that this is not your problem, it may well become your problem, since the challenges of having children while maintaining a career profoundly affect the fulfillment of women at work. I am still shocked when I have conversations with young women in the art field who see reproduction as a career setback, one from which they may not recover.

5. Take Me to Your Leader

The perception of women's inability to fully commit to work reinforces structures that regard women, as great middle managers, because of their resourcefulness, but not fit for directorial responsibilities. At the same time, many women believe that directorial positions—as

currently structured—would make it hard for them to find space and time for their private responsibilities, so they decide not to pursue these positions in the first place. All of this is well known. What is not well understood is why we have not initiated a debate on how to transform work structures in order to implement equality—not only framing equality as a right, but also as a measure that can radically transform the way the figure of the "working mother" is understood. Changing the working hours of teams that are made up of a majority of women may not be such a huge deal, but we can take this further, so that if a woman with children is not be able to accommodate her family life, is there a possibility of two women sharing a directorial position? Furthermore, if an equal number of women occupied high-level positions, social life organized around this reality would slowly adjust—the same way in which conversations during informal gatherings affect the formal decisions that are made during working hours.

In recent decades we have seen an increase in the awareness of the challenges women face in the workplace and in society at large, yet the situation for women cannot be described as bright. Going back to the "positive excess" of support for women that may be required to achieve equality in the various spheres of social life (for example, in art schools): it may seem an excessive measure in itself, but educating women as if equality already exists is a form of "negative excess." In galleries, art by women sells for at least 20 percent less than art by men, and in auctions this disparity reaches 50 percent. Women are a minority in the market, and they receive far fewer invitations to participate in exhibitions—to be part of the spheres of influence. So, it seems that it is our duty to create measures to force the situation to change: if we cannot regulate the market, we can certainly regulate public spaces. The same goes for boards and sponsors. You cannot control what a board thinks, but reforming the boards to match the values of a democratic, equal society is entirely possible. Countries like Sweden have taken the lead in making it mandatory to have 50 percent representation of women on boards and councils.

We cannot expect to realize our rights without changing the "nests" in which these rights are exercised. We should fight for new policies and measures, not only rights. The art world is very conservative; one could almost call it reactionary, despite its sympathy for left-leaning activism. In fact, perhaps this is part of the problem: maybe all these anti-capitalist and leftist sentiments perpetuate an image of women as ideal "companions" to the revolution, whose primary trait is pragmatism. But it is precisely for the sake of avoiding pragmatism (both of the neoliberal and the anti-capitalist varieties) that we need to introduce discomfort—a wave of measures that can alter the banal behaviors that define our position daily. When I say a "wave," I also mean a tide, a volume that rises and overtakes certain terrains, then retreats, leaving the terrain saturated with new ideas and policies that will accommodate the gigantic differences between female and male needs, so we can work on equal terms, in harmonious dissonance.

X

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> Without the labour of large-scale, collective social organization, declaring one's desire for global change is nothing more than wishful thinking. On the other hand, melancholy—so endemic to the left—teaches us that emancipation is an extinct species to be wept over and that blips of negation are the best we can hope for. At its worst, such an attitude generates nothing but political lassitude, and at its best, installs an atmosphere of pervasive despair which too often degenerates into factionalism and petty moralizing.
> —Laboria Cubonix, "The Xenofeminist Manifesto"

Ewa Majewska

Feminism Will Not Be Televised

Summer 2016: I am playing *Illuminati*, a card game based on some RPG story, with three male colleagues. All of them share feminist convictions, and are fierce defenders of women's rights. One of the players is hosting us in a countryside house in northern Poland. A friend, Marsha Bradfield, who is also a feminist scholar, just like myself—only based in London, not Warsaw—sits in a room next door, writing an article. A woman's work is never done, also in academia, and especially in the UK.

Soon after the beginning of the game, the boys stop hearing me. I am tall and rather bold, I play the game well, and I talk to them, but they can't hear me. Also, they talk with each other but they barely talk to me at all. They hear their own voices and the voices of other guys, which are some three times louder and lower than mine. But they can't hear me, even when I talk to them directly. I start to feel like a younger sister. You know, the one embarrassingly following her older brother around but never allowed to fully engage in any game, because, as he tells her: "You are too small." Imagining this relationship at play, I laugh since I am rather big, and am only one or two years younger, which around the age of forty does not count as a real difference. But among children it does, and we are in the children's room again as we play *Illuminati*. Since the game consists in taking over the world via all kinds of spoken exchanges—machinations, shaky tactical alliances, and robberies—I just can't play it in the usual way. So I decide to win quickly to make my point—and my presence—known. At the moment of my last throw of the dice, they realize that I almost won. When my dice deceive me (I had a 10/12 chance, and lost), and I do not win that instant, my colleagues (obviously!) ally against me and plot to stop me from winning, again talking only amongst themselves, as they had done for the past forty-five minutes. But their exclusive conversing did not count before. Now it does. So in order to disturb their plot, I try to talk again. This time I make my voice louder and lower. They stop, look stunned, and shout at me: "Stop screaming! What happened? Can't you just talk normal?"

"No," I say. "For the last hour you would not hear me, so now I'm using another voice register. I am not screaming, I am just pitching my voice so you can hear it as one of

Zorka Wollny, Ophelias. Iconography of Madness, 2012. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Adam T. Burton.

yours." They laugh at me and mansplain boringly about how I totally miss the point. Then Marsha, the colleague working next door, shouts from her room: "I couldn't help overhearing your game! I stopped working on my article because it was so hilarious! Ewa is totally right, and things happened exactly as she said." There was silence, and then we got back to the game, which now proceeded a bit more inclusively.

But then, there it was: my sudden realization that I don't want to be included. I want to belong. Not just because I brought the game, not just because I was the only fluent player, but merely because we are friends on a bloody holiday, playing a game, not fighting the eternal gender war. Or at least that was my assumption. I realized I want to belong "there"—there where women are, there where we of the queer nation reside, there where the boys work their asses off to fit into a boyish scenario. I do not want a divided scenario, partitioned into sectors where I can or cannot go, including any zones where I need "inclusion" in order to just enter or exist. I want the men to go through inclusion, a mandatory practice, at least once in their lifetime. I want Jane Elliott's "Blue Eyes/ Brown Eyes" workshops to happen in every school everywhere.[1] In other words: I want the whole life, not just bits of it.

I recently used this formula (the whole as opposed to bits and pieces) in trying to survive a long, painful discussion between women over social media. Some women wanted to create repressive tools to be wielded against deceptive men in political organizations. This was an interesting discussion—we usually enumerate the assholes acting against women in our political, academic, and artistic circles on "girls nights" or in spaces which the liberal narrative depicts as "private." Here our rants and sarcastic enumerations of the possible punishments for the deceptive men, who use the organization's databases as their dating site, went semipublic, and since some of us belong to organizations and political parties, it could be seen as a plan for a future policy or something similarly realistic. It was a great feeling to imagine the sudden fear it might have caused those men, who got used to their sexism walking free, and who now realized that we might actually enact the measures we discussed. The measures were frivolously Kantian in their universality, so for some people—for example, those luckily living their lives without ever considering the categorical imperative seriously—reading our discussion must have really hurt. In

Zorka Wollny, Ophelias. Iconography of Madness, 2012. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Adam T. Burton.

our discussion some women felt they would immediately be included among the repressed for their free sexual life or polyamorous standards. Some women on the other hand suggested measures that would immediately cause disasters by counting every smile and compliment as abuse. But, as Gramsci wrote, times of transition bring up monsters; we are not ready yet for feminist measures of justice, because feminism is not a given, it is under construction, and for me the discussion about the possible ways of shaming or otherwise punishing men's abuse was an exercise in what we want and how we express it, rather than a set of prêt-à-porter rules for feminist justice. But some participants in the discussion took it very realistically, in both directions—repressive and libertarian—and at times it felt really heavy. I could not believe what I saw there. Clearly some feminists cannot simply agree that we women and people who identify as such can be free and have rights at the same time. As utopian and impossible as it sounds, I had to say it in that discussion as well: I want it all. I want a promiscuous life, and support when I am wounded. I want sex and the risk of engaging; I want to be clever, to make wise choices, and to retain the right to be silly; I do not want to take sides on the question of who I am. I want to have different options and I want to support people who are clearer and more orderly in their intimate lives than I am, regardless of whether they are proud wives with three children who never sleep with other men or women, or partners or women who have sex with literally anyone they like. And I want all women to have support when we need it, and also I do not want to build another court of justice. We already have those, thank you very much; and we also have extralegal means of claiming justice when necessary—social media campaigns chief among them.

Upon receiving the invitation to write about feminism, I realized that not only are we now reflecting on two intensive years of women's protests in several countries around the world—starting in Poland, with thousands of women marching for reproductive and economic rights in fall 2016, then in South Korea, Mexico, Argentina, Italy, the US, and then some thirty countries for the International

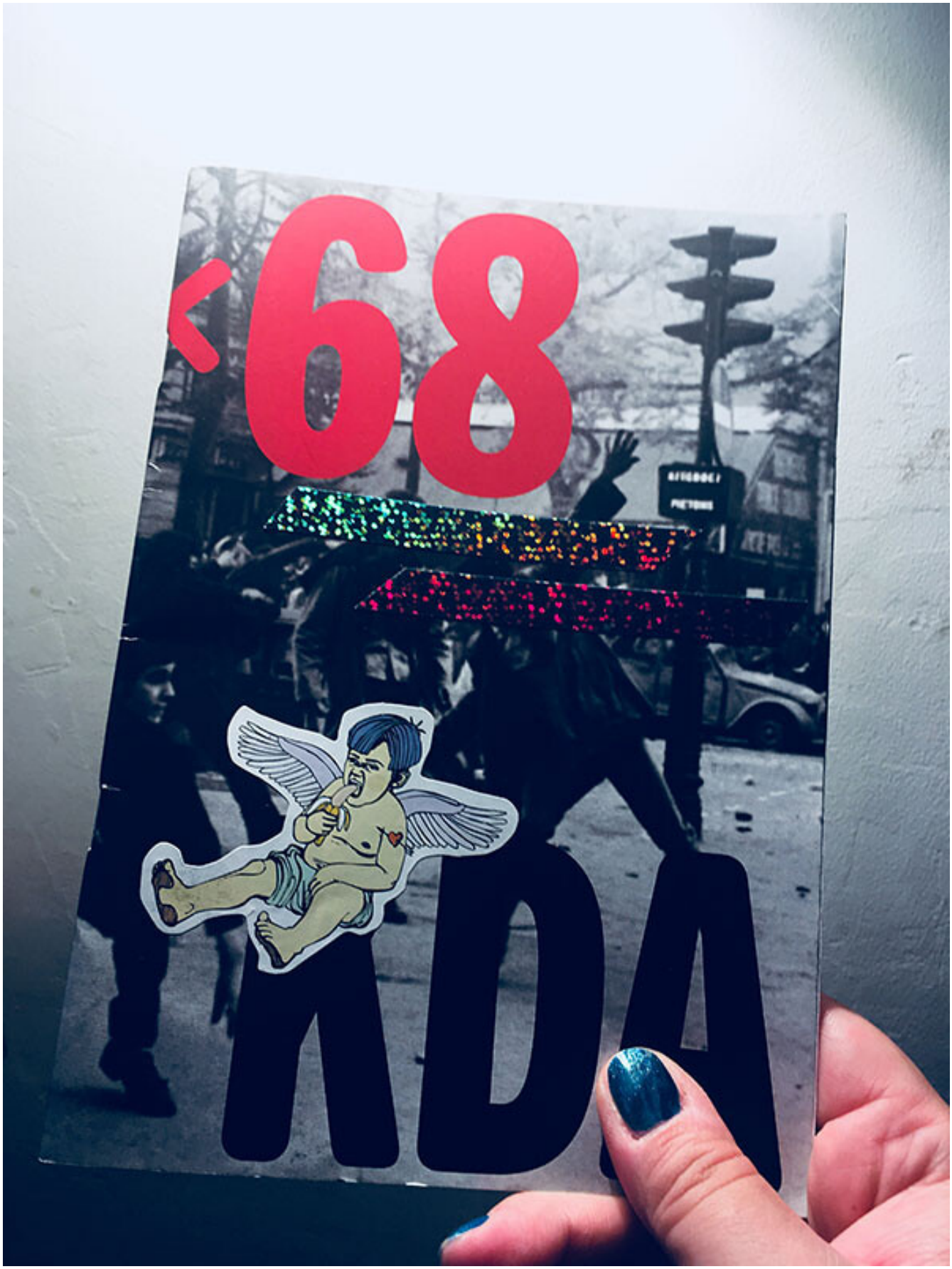
Women's Strike on March 8, 2017—we have also marched toward and through the fiftieth anniversary of the 1968 revolts in various parts of the world.[2] The demand I expressed earlier—to want to have it all—clearly resonates with the old Parisian tune of demanding the impossible. But now again, just as then: Why shouldn't we?

In her great revision of classical interpretations of *Antigone*, theorist Bonnie Honig stresses the necessity of reading the ancient heroine—who is traditionally contrasted with her sister, Ismene—not just as a divergent family member but also as her sister's ally in anti-patriarchal struggle.[3] In *Antigone, Interrupted*, Honig claims that Antigone and Ismene have a sororal pact; they work in unison against masculine domination. One of the strongest patriarchal divisions of the European intellectual tradition is therefore undermined, not only leaving two always-divided sisters reunited, but also giving us a sense that certain conflicts among feminists are perhaps more useful for the patriarchal maintenance of masculine domination than they are for our movements.

Today feminism tends to attract women of different ages. The movement seems alive and far from over. Post-1970s, there were some arguably quieter years, and now once again feminists are all amazed that following some thousands of years of patriarchy, the last fifty years haven't brought substantial changes in all aspects of our political, social, economic, and cultural lives. There was to be a revolution, but there was not. And this is not a failure, but it does reveal weaknesses. It proves that patriarchal, heteronormative habits cultivated over centuries, generously backed by religious myths, silence, and economic domination over women, have not evaporated. The aforementioned massive street protests in over thirty countries account for the constant need to fight for women's rights and gender equality. Perhaps the struggle continues for different reasons in different locations, but the need for it still extends internationally.

The #MeToo campaign has reached much further than expected, gathering women in different countries around different kinds of sexual abuses: from the Nobel Academy in Sweden to young leftist journalists in Poland, from heavily mediatized Hollywood scandals to the perhaps less globally visible, yet no less painful, fights against sexual violence and harassment in Bollywood. The campaign allows an unpacking of problems that had been silenced for decades—abuses perpetrated in daylight, which nobody seemed to want to see. Now we all learn different "registers of seeing." We are talking about matters that, until recently, conveniently sat in what Lauren Berlant called "the Oz of America"—the domain of supposedly liberating privacy. Already in 1999 Berlant wrote about the "normative/utopian image of the US citizen who remains unmarked, framed, and protected by the private trajectory of his life project, which is sanctified at the juncture where the unconscious meets history: the American Dream."[4] That Dream and all the perhaps smaller but no less pertinent dreams built in postwar societies (in the West and East) served to maintain the safety men had in their private lives. In a similar vein women were, and to some extent still are, "preserved" from entering the public realm. And language, as it often does without our own invention or intervention, also acts against women in this formulation, since a "public woman" still connotes something very different from the idiom "public man."

Parallel to the global revindication of the public sphere in recent decades with social media, and the reassertion of the need for positive body images in the media and for reproductive rights—given the rise of proudly patriarchal and socially ultraconservative politics—feminists today also reclaim the cultural archetypes of femininity to dismantle the existing canon. Similar to Honig's unearthing of Ismene and Antigone's sororal pact, certain artists are now returning to classical female characters to give them new lives. The Berlin-based Polish artist Zorka Wollny's recent work on Ophelia clearly follows this trajectory. Wollny's *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness* (2012), which is a performance and theater piece at the same time, features twelve professional actresses who play Ophelia, one after another. The actresses, who come from different theater traditions and generations, all played Ophelia according to their divergent training, knowledge, skills, and so on.[5] The procession of Ophelias was stunning—the audience entered the world of deception, sorrow, and madness caused by the system of patriarchal rule. Some performed the character as a woman completely alienated from reality, while others seemed perfectly "normal." Any woman would feel that they might also fall, that in the given condition (of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), they would not survive. The *eternal feminine* that opened before our eyes did not consist in the perpetuation of women's beauty or seductive capacities, as in the stereotypical fetish of femininity; it became a feminist *Howl* of the female personae non grata in the male-dominated world. In my text accompanying the project's online release, I claimed that these Ophelias performed a structural transformation of the public sphere. In borrowing a key term from Jürgen Habermas's classic analysis, I tried to détourne it in a Debordian way, or simply steal it, a strategy of feminist critique suggested by Hélène Cixous in her *Medusa's Laughter*.[6] The transformation of the public sphere by women who do not hesitate to show their affect, who speak with and/or without sense, who supported the man they love as long as they could and obeyed their father as far as they were socialized to do, amounts to another inclusion of women into a sphere where they do not belong. An audience might have had mixed feelings when looking at those twelve women performing Ophelia in quick succession, but one thing definitely became clear to every viewer: in those given conditions, we cannot win. Whether we are big or small, old or young, passive or aggressive, or both, we can't win in a game whose rules



Ewa Majewska & Paweł Krzaczkowski, 50x68 KDA, 2018. Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Courtesy of the author.

have been written within a patriarchal script, one in which we don't *belong*. There is only one thing to be done: we must turn the tables of the social staging of the public sphere, undermining its gendered, normative framework.

The liberal, exclusive norms of the public sphere still govern academia, where women have always been designated as unwanted strangers. The expected public subject is, as Carole Pateman and other feminists have argued, shaped to fit masculine socialization and gender roles. The list of "common topics" excludes those attributed to women and femininity, such as bodies, affects, and relations. In academia this means that the conduct of students or professors can be criticized or punished when it expresses anti-discriminatory concerns, but will be seen as covered by freedom-of-speech or other constitutional rights and liberties when it is racist, sexist, or homophobic. It means that in trying to build a nonsexist academia, we face many more risks than those colleagues who push it towards a discriminatory extreme. Women in academia also face unexpected difficulties when it comes to expectations. If we adapt well in this male-dominated context, we are seen as "resigning from femininity," although some of us obviously do not follow its traditional script in the first place—by being butch, intersexual, trans, or queer, or by simply not giving a shit. If we tend to embrace the traditional feminine gender costume, on the other hand, we are seen as aliens; we risk our every spoken or published word being judged as somehow determined by our gender, our socialization, or even the clothes or makeup we might wear. Or, we risk being judged by our affect. For some reason it seems, from personal experience, that people with short hair and trousers are perceived as beings who do not experience emotions, while those with longer hair and skirts clearly generate too much affect. Offensive remarks, shouting, or sudden withdrawals are seen as less affective than tears or other expressions of vulnerability. I won't even bring up the topic of academics who are also mothers, and who, apart from the problems I already enumerated, have to face the risk of being discriminated against in their careers. It is often claimed that after maternity leave women are not up to speed on their discipline's newest trends, or they "do not care" for scholarly developments because of their preoccupation with their children. These nonsensical claims have real implications for women's lives, making them far less visible among professors, for example, than men, whose careers proceed "smoothly."

As feminists, we are often used in the academy as some kind of extra, unpaid counseling workforce available to handle every case of masculine misconduct, harassment, or discrimination. From personal experience, this rings true, regardless of whether we are prepared to take up the excess emotional labor: our training is rather in history, microbiology, or architecture. In this way we regularly serve as strong examples of women whose knowledge about gender is used and abused in ways that other scholars never have to deal with. I remember participating in conferences where other people were discussing their

Zorka Wollny, Ophelias. Iconography of Madness, 2012. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Adam T. Burton.

presentations, and I was handling every case of discrimination, explaining what gender is and how male privilege was built historically, even though my papers at these conferences were about Rancière, Althusser, resistance, or precarity. It was somehow assumed that I could handle all this. After several drinks in conference receptions later, colleagues mansplained to me that I should always be ready to respond to the needs of any (male) scholar to learn about gender. Additionally, I was told how scary I seem at first, but then how this image changes. I had to prepare useful responses to demands like these—to handle cases of harassment or discrimination, to teach gender studies after hours, etc. This did not prevent one department at Warsaw University from feeling hugely disappointed when, some ten years ago, I refused to work on their antidiscrimination plan for free. Still, some of my colleagues agree to become unpaid equal-status advisors, which makes me wonder: When will we learn that such work should be paid? Over the past few centuries of labor organizing, people have died making sure that workers' rights are respected. What does this painful and admirable past mean if we allow free use of our knowledge and skills to solve problems created in and by patriarchal capitalism? Some of us obviously do it out of good will and necessity, but still: Why are we willing to provide unlimited, unpaid extra hours of emotional labor, while insisting on negotiating over and being paid for extra hours spent teaching or doing administrative tasks?

This assumption of good will might kill us. I would rather follow the willfulness advised by Sara Ahmed, who has not only theorized the stubborn resistance found in everyday practices of nonconformism, but also resigned from her post at Goldsmiths because the cases of harassment she was tasked with handling as the university's administrative antidiscrimination functionary were going nowhere.[7] As painful as the resignation of a brilliant feminist scholar from a prominent academic position seems, it also delineates certain limits of what can and cannot be

tolerated in academia. Working in several universities over the last fifteen years, I have seen and experienced the problematic impossibilities, the painful silencings, and the rote, violent defensiveness of the academic machine too many times. And there is only one way out: through more feminism, and more desire to have it all.

In the precarized, neoliberal state of academia, intellectual workers often barely manage to survive. The situation in Eastern Europe is perhaps even more dramatic due to the necessity of keeping up with Western academic standards without sufficient means to live. But regardless of academic salaries, which are undergoing substantial cuts worldwide, our work has become an unsustainable combination of administration, teaching, and the production of knowledge (sometimes I have doubts about whether to call it "research"; it is often very far from the research we knew years ago). As it stands, productivity norms continue to rise madly, beyond any logical limits. In his book on the university as a common good, philosopher and researcher Krystian Szadkowski systematically criticizes the neoliberal transformation of the university, clearly demonstrating how knowledge—which requires collective practice, sharing, free access, and strategies of support—became yet another commodity in the capitalist market.[8] This commodification of knowledge does not exempt feminist knowledge, practices, or canons, thus transforming our work and its results into fancy products in the marketplace of "creative capital." Some years ago Nancy Fraser warned about feminism becoming a willing "handmaiden to" capitalism.[9] I believe Fraser's warning was perhaps too general; there are feminist scholars, initiatives, and groups fiercely resisting neoliberal marketization. However, it was and remains a necessary alarm in times of accelerated capitalist appropriation.

Fraser's harsh critique of feminist assimilation into the market economy resonated rather strongly in Poland. Her warning gave a sense of purpose to left-leaning feminists—who have always constituted a minority—and instilled a certain fear in our liberal, mainstream counterparts. Since the early 1990s, the latter group has demonstrated a much greater willingness to embrace capitalist logic, using, for example, postwar state communism as an excuse for their lack of interest in opposing the sexist exclusions, discrimination, and violence that always accompany market economies. This reality has been particularly harsh in countries where the IMF and World Bank dictated every aspect of the transition to neoliberal capitalism. An uncritical embrace of the market economy has made it almost impossible to defend women's rights against the market. Due to precarization, privatization, and other aspects of the transformation, women not only became victims of the state withdrawal of social security benefits that they themselves enjoyed before 1989; they also took up the responsibilities of care no longer provided by employers and the state. Sudden rashes of unemployment, reductions in public services, and general insecurity resulted in a greater demand for care and affective labor from women. They became the support network for all those rejected by a changing system. This burden, combined with the sudden introduction of the antiabortion law in 1993 and restricted access to reproductive services more generally, made women the primary victims of Polish neoliberal capitalism.[See Elizabeth Dunn, *The Privatization of Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Cornell University Press, 2004); and Ewa Majewska, "Prekariat i dziewczyna," *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 15 (2015).] In such a situation, one would expect mainstream feminism to be at least socialist. But no: the liberation from the supposed oppressive regime of the People's Republic of Poland petrified the feminist political imagination for decades.

Zorka Wollny, Ophelias. Iconography of Madness, 2012. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Adam T. Burton.

Under current Polish law, abortion is allowed only in three cases: when the pregnancy results from rape; in cases of fetus malfunction; or when pregnancy poses a serious risk to the woman's health or life. In April 2016, after several years of hateful "gender wars" within a society where women still carry out the majority of care and affective labor, the Polish government announced a proposal to ban abortion completely.[10] Some one hundred thousand women immediately (almost overnight) joined the social media group Dziewuchy Dziewuchom (Gals for Gals). Massive demonstrations spread across the country, unifying women across class, political persuasion, and rural-urban divides under one general umbrella: that of women's rights and dignity.[11] Polish communities mobilized globally. Feminists from other countries joined in as well. In fall 2016, the new law went up for a vote. A massive internet campaign was launched, followed by a Women's Strike on October 3, 2016, where some 150,000 women in Poland and abroad—in around fifty cities—protested the draconian antiabortion law. The protests succeeded; the law was rejected in parliament. On March 8, 2017, thousands of Polish women participated in the International Women's Strike, together

with women in at least thirty-five other countries. Another International Women's Strike took place a year later, on March 8, 2018, and people in forty-five countries participated. The movement is growing.[12]

It is difficult to enumerate all the different groups and feminist visions animating such a global movement. One thing is certain, however: the logic of solidarity and internationalism has begun to replace a narrow liberal agenda, transforming the narrative of "choice" (as if women in Poland, Ireland, or Nicaragua had a choice) into one of collective resistance, critique of patriarchal capitalism, and a rejection of compromise.[13] Due to the universality of the demands of today's women-led protests—which focus on such far-reaching topics such as abortion, the misogynist policies of Trump and other political leaders, and violence against women—feminist movements worldwide are transforming. They are becoming more *common* and less elitist, more popular and less exclusive. The meaning of "the common" is shifting, from a preoccupation with what is shared and collective, to a concern for the ordinary, the mundane, the everyday; in broadening its meaning this way, the common gains strength.[14] With this shift, the utopian dimension of the common is expanded to embrace a more heterotopic sense of what can be done. Now.

X

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1
See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAE3UqxIhfE , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqv9k3jbtYU , and https://vimeo.com/153858146 .

2
Here in Warsaw we are still suffering from the terribly anti-Semitic events of March 1968. However, certain steps have also been undertaken to revisit May 1968. See Ewa Majewska and Paweł Krzaczkowski, *50x68 KDA,* Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, publicly launched on May 13, 2018.

3
Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Columbia University Press, 2013).

4
Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* , eds. A. Sarat and T. Kearn (University of Michigan Press, 1999).

5
Some parts of the show staged at the Museum of Art in Łódź, Poland, were recorded and are available online, together with English-language texts on the piece http://www.zorkawollny.net/OFELIE/ .

6
See the Situationist International's definition of *détournement* in "Détournement as Negation and Prelude" (1959) http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315 . Hélène Cixous, *Medusa's Laughter,* trans. Keith Cohena and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 875–93.

7
Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Duke University Press, 2014).

8
Krystian Szadkowski, *Uniwersytet jako dobro wspólne* (PWN, 2015).

9
Nancy Fraser, "How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden—and how to reclaim it," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2013 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal .

10
For a concise description of the "gender wars," see Elzbieta Korolczuk, "'The War on Gender' from a Transnational Perspective—Lessons for Feminist Strategising" https://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2014/10/war_on_gender_korolczuk.pdf .

11
I discuss the protests and their causes in several texts, including: Ewa Majewska, "When Polish Women Revolted," *Jacobin*, March 3, 2018 https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/03/poland-black-protests-womens-strike-abortion-pis ; Ewa Majewska and Barbara Godlewska-Bujok, "The Power of the Weak, Neoliberal Biopolitics, and Abortion in Poland," *Public Seminar*, April 25, 2016 http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/04/the-power-of-the-weak-neoliberal-biopolitics-and-abortion-in-poland/ .

12
For information on the International Women's Strike, see http://parodemujeres.com/map-of-events .

13
The rejection of compromise became the theme of a feminist action in Poznań carried out by Zofia Holeczek, Marta Szymanowska, and Joanna Zioła. A clip can be seen here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39f_6fyqGR8 .

14
For the common, see Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009); and Gerald Raunig, "Occupy the Theater, Molecularize the Museum!" in *Truth is Concrete*, ed. F. Malzacher (Sternberg Press, 2014).

Simone White

or, on being the other woman

heaped therefore residually heaped
beside myself on the bed next
i fetch my son's pretzels, but prerogative
fingers upended could powerR's lengths
also belittle me between your visits am i
belittled am i less pure
semiologists pressed me toward
an apparent residue cRowning evident or
almost?
we go to the room for stories, nestled
lumped or thrown together we and things
for very little children Camden worrying a razed benefit engineered a loop a figure eight an onramp a mother
hacking for UberR pink and pink and the tiny pitchforRk he and i discover in the side of some plastic grass an
instrument's use bears a direct relation to our activity in observing
its constructed unpile

//

monitoring a stink Bug's progress, or, beautiful *random* application of remorseless violence:
there. my boy has begun to apprehend such concepts as affection, better identified as interested longing, does this
one like me? maybe he doesn't like me? IDok the Buug-h. windy undifferentiated consonants unsorted
words please me so. one day i will tell how much time was there before he could evoke in me anything like
interest. his thought interests me, i date from discussion of the need to use a pot or toilet for shit. in a few days i
would fall into a rage on the street arguing with my mother on the telephone.
what makes me if her desire vibrates as pleading packed in insult

in my guise as woman work and insomnia
rumble through they are girders money
worries girding my whole body such job
interviews
saying intoleraB
le
kinds of nothing about how all of it came
to pass
is this about money? my inability to pass into the moneyed upper middle class to which i had been "raised" /
projected? one thinks one has refused, i really hate liberals, i do not like to hear the troubles of middle class
persons fussing about their childrens' use of cell phones.

what if i misdirect or misuse what i now know about the feminine crucible? my boy inquires about my anger,
somehow knows it is for / against something not him at all, just wants to know what. you don't like El? no, no, i
like him, i'm sorry i ... mostly i have
Been
able to decide what aspects of my own potency my child will witness
when i break ties with men or refuse to keep with the tradition of fungibility
iNsofar as my action is a lump of mass action or it is insanity, such as to choose to act precisely in emotional
ways
the emotions are the cortex of reason
then my heart tells me the way
as there is no way
my boy and i rely on media to keep me strong enough to love.

//

i like science fiction because
Something terrible is going to happen
suppose it is the "the ocean" under this Boeing belching white whatever you say, mommy, ok okay
Oceanic will come over all these very rich their big boats, "houses" and so on will come over all this mess
see, "reality" instead turn over tones of words ending in *-ull* that lose their significance and exactitude within
seconds
a casualty of brain injury and exhaustion, both, is memory loss
you split open part of your head and for six months repeated words you had already said but i didn't say
anything out of delicacy or tenderness or timidity
i didn't say why the fuck are you still working
what possible conditions could exist that require you to work without shelter while your brain swells
who iS your wife
come home the terrible thing

//

Du BOis teaches radicalization is possible.
adolescent boys living temporarily in my home, one like my own child, my brother's son, these words might
have meaning for someone reading, like my own child, regard it as an undifferentiated space in which to pile
expensive junk reeking of petrochemical deodorizers,
losing track of devices they need all these power sources and stations to connect
my need for certain kinds of privacy, tidiness, results in occasional inability to share personal space, surely
related to believing that i am pursued or overrun by half-eaten food empty water glasses bits of poop lining
the rim of the toilet seat (at some point, cleaning a toilet seat, i'm like, is pee corrosive?) unmatched socks of others
i must compulsorily clean up
in early life among loud, not-gentle, numerous family of origin, later, the men with whom i shared my homes, each
deeply silent, somewhat still
i'm not revolted by evidence of the lived lives of other people.
effective means of housekeeping categorically interest me.
the pleasures of a clean/orderly house ... there are few absolute pleasures.
as my life gradually became too busy to properly clean my own home, i paid another woman to clean. Patricia
cleans my house now, even while I am away, working in another town. she watches so the boys don't harm
anything they have not been warned not to harm.
the fight with my mother about the boys' occupation.
i negotiated a decent rate of pay in a tenure-track job at the University of Pennsylvania. more than one person
in my family accused me of being "angry and frustrated" in the space of one week, but i feel saner and more
fulfilled than ever. "freight of my [emotional] power." for a week, i shared my bed with my son. we arranged for
five days together in two cities, not New York, after many months; falling apart. my ex-husband made taunting
sounds at me in my house in front of my child while i kept eating a piece of pizza and waited for him to leave. i
received the first copies of my new book.
don't try to explain that i have changed. i don't feel much when people call me names or the functional
equivalent. miserable, delusional, immoral.
i have things a sense of things that belong to me that i have clung to such as an apartment. possessions, while
they are not a mathematical index, can focus the instincts and point toward
what must be sacrificed.

//

these five tones rae sremmurd emit a melodic noise
i've never heard anywhere swae lee is composer prince of melancholy being related to sex and money which
way it slants
overtop each outcry, could you repeat once more the urgently communicable passions of us. the only thing i
can think of like it is the emoji that shows the silly face leaned to the left, laughing and crying, belief in the
single or primary nature of space-time falls therefore out of its place, drops off comically in a drool. comedy is
thus cruel regarding the dual opportunities presented by catastrophe such as stroke.
every time Juicy J shows up on a track now there is some comedy in it,
viz., "you say no to ratchet pussy Juicy J caint."
i ran for 45 minutes, concurrently i worked out a pretty nuanced system for talking about powerGlide. trap has
developed as a means figuratively to represent in and beyond words (oo , oo , oo) an emotional notation
system for desire in our lifetime, one specifically attuned to the horror whiteness performs in the presence of
black men, the absolute goal of US sociality is to securitize interior persons and monies against the threat of
the aliveness of them, which is not lost on anybody
let them speak for themselves
what means therefore to recall very precisely how pussy pops or why it would pop for you why is this funny
trying to think of a poetic instance outside lesbian feminism
i always put my pussy
In the middle of trees
like a waterfall
like a doorway to god
outside the figure also, also outside a system of diamonds or gold teeth or strippers or rapturous marriage
i cannot think of a single poem, someone else will know and write to me in disgust
using language to say
when at last i am with you again and you begin to press yourself inside me
an inch or two at a time
i am so relieved not to be myself and never want to be myself again and have felt grateful for all the ways i
have aged, my vagina has aged, all of me seems to have lived up to now
as pathway
for what passes through us
i have used this music, its metaphorical aliveness, as a proxy for the unbearable ways my body declares itself
irrepressible or central to anything that is. i think
about the ways this might be wrong, or how, Dag asks, to think an ethical way of being in relation to the black
men i know and do not.
i continue to fail to propose to the New York Times an essay on the role Meek Mill has played in this, if this
could be a way of activating others to refuse the possibility of incarceration for living.

//

What is the relation between pleading and womanhood? is how the problem came to me in the night.
caution has set in regarding language proposals, compositional possibilities
attunement to deep activities of the mind is still hot
i should not speak wantonly even freely of my theory of externalization
nor forget i am the subject of opinions and whispers; that i have given up total privacy in writing about the real
conditions of my life. it is some kind of shock to be of the order and also talking about oneself.
relays, circuits leak in physical and metaphysical terms
others would burn us at the touch-point if there were empathy
it is so much worse than that it is ever ah ever missing an orbital alignment being a woman slices me out the
dimension of men as if i might write to him always ah something devastating the chime of "the
erotic vibrations of the speaking body"
forces are not requests
such requests as between what i conduct physically i see myself attempting with my palm to rotate the fields
between us so as to open his understanding
is it to me or to what i fill up that is not death? this i attribute to all the ways i have become a woman
as way
orientation with respect to any outer worlds that might be
also time's hatred of the possibility of responsiveness the action of time as *ritual* against as such plea or
exposure
to wall a person in
block

//

got me a real mistress and she independent—Gunna

i have bexome misaligned or crooked with respect to the field
of dependency basic
Ally a free radical
if i keep looking at the word independent i can see it surrounded by practices of sex work
it is always pussy that gives me value and this, fact of undeniable facticity,
must also enter my estimation of the state of my own excess. the forms my life takes have berserk intensity.
dissolute facticity
whatever means i use to accomplish liberation will lead inevitably to the destruction of someone's marriage
that's true
"you rail against men"
my lover writes to me we use an encrypted form of digital messaging as if anyone cares what we say to one
another certainly i do not believe that anyone does but these are his wishes
men as they exist in their bodies are not the subject of my interest so i do not "rail against" them
that is a misrepresentation of the whole of my aesthetic and phenomenological project
which involves taking up the vision i have been given of my own freedom
i have been given a vision of it, life beyond use
the white women who own the fancy nail salon i go to fired the manager i loved, a black woman photographer
who treated me with professional respect, respect for my time, my lack of it, she knew my work and the work
of my sister, she let me use my paid-for seat as a place to weep behind the screen of her conversation,
using herself as a blessed covering for me; i realized,
those bitches don't want me in here
i understood i had witnessed an act of aggression against our presence, our desire to be adorned, to have
comforts, to cultivate the rot of this corruptible
all its death-y glory
the nigger woman is the mistress of the world
optimal dependency being a flowering of sexual and other forms of competition

//

indeed the field articulated as has been is a mode of transit to and fro in a determinate plane a machine
parallelism
slide, even, a thought that allows for the permanent possibility of trajectory
when what arrests, contracts, seizes time in time
swallows, causes the secure ego to become anxious
the round back of pouncing animalia
my swooping compatriots
& all prey
movement unsafe and disorganized in this beautiful quantum wilderness
these are the materials

X

The text of this poem has been designed to preserve formal elements coincident with composition via several layers of technology (cell phone, Google Docs etc). Ironically, the poem is best read on tablet and computer screens. This and all poems are a problem for HTML and coders interested in solving that problem should contact the author.

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