



**CITY OF
WOMEN
REFLECTING
2018/2019**



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ON CITY OF WOMEN

“Since the beginning of the City of Women Festival (1995), one could feel a constant flow, like a pulsion of change, both in the programme and in the alternating starting points; the latter represent a concept that has always been broad, not just in terms of content and genre, but also in terms of quality and ideas. This broadness makes it special; it spans different spaces, from autonomous spaces to cultural institutions, from experimental film genres to lectures by the most referential female theoreticians in the Slovenian and international space, it includes socially engaged performances from all around the world and, at the same time, represents an affirmation of Slovenian female artists and activists.

If we try to imagine how a random woman X who comes to city Y feels, we could say that she is captivated, after which she starts looking around, asking herself where she is. Then she experiences a kind of moment of self-reflection. She starts to ponder. She remembers her moments of oblivion, her work. She thinks of Marie Curie, one of the two women out of 9000 students at Sorbonne who obtained a PhD. She does not think about hysteria, she thinks of women Partisans.

Woman X ends up imagining herself talk. She talks constantly. Her speech is born out of nothing, yet contains everything that is outside of it.

**WOMAN X IS
A MEDIUM, A LOOK,
A LOCK, A NECESSITY.
THE CITY OF WOMEN
FESTIVAL IS THE KEY.”**





**THE FUTURE WILL
EITHER BE FEMINIST
OR NOT AT ALL**

STATEMENT BY THE CITY OF WOMEN ASSOCIATION ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March is an opportunity to remember the generations of feminists who have paved the way for us, as well as an opportunity to remind ourselves that we are now starting to lose our hard-won rights and that it is therefore our job to safeguard them and fight for new rights and equality; to pave the way for women who will come after us.

Feminism was not born yesterday and sees further than tomorrow. Artists have always been among the female visionaries who saw further. Some of them would make art that is a mirror image of society, others have let the society know that it could be (and perhaps one day truly will be) more just, or at the very least less hostile to women.

As many of the female artists who have appeared at the City of Women Festival in the last twenty-three years challenged the self-evident truths, right where it hurts, the Festival has always been the target of condemnation, ridicule and insults. But **verbal attacks on female artists have never been as hostile as this year, when they were aimed at the winners of the Prešeren Fund Prize, playwright Simona Semenič and intermedia artist Maja Smrekar.**

The fact that the attacks occurred right on the Slovenian Culture Day cannot be a coincidence. After all, they received the award from a board presided by an artist who expressed his disagreement with the principle of gender balance in the composition of juries for individual fields and the selection of award recipients (this principle has recently been included in

the Prešeren Prize Act thanks to the efforts of numerous cultural workers) with the following words:

“Art knows no politics or gender. Art is art.” That may be true, but the society does not treat female and male artists the same way. Not yet, anyway. Thus, the only one who can afford to say something like that is a man; the only artist with the supposed “right” to a universal statement and standing.

The concept of culture is not neutral either. It is one of the most important elements consolidating the imagery of national identity and state and, as such, can reproduce the repressive, conservative and dangerous idea of the nation’s homogeneity that is only one step away from gender and general social normativity. **For female artists who refuse to accept attempts at the “nation-building” appropriation of their art and bodies, such a nation knows no mercy.** Nor does it want to understand them, as it continues to equate women with nature, which is extremely convenient for political measures forcing women out of the market of paid labour in order for them to be available for exploitation in their naturalised roles as mothers, carers, nurses and comforters.

The national state has always equated the female body with the national body, striving to nationalise it with every new generation for the reproduction of a submissive nation. Simona Semenič’s pregnant belly revealed exactly that. And the responses to the (de-contextualised) photograph of Maja Smrekar show that a woman – as far as the nation is concerned – can only be a woman if she lets herself be sexualised or become a mother, in which case she may only share her milk with a human being and nothing but a human being. It seems that she cannot, under any condition, question the existing order, its guardians and the strict line separating people from other living beings.

Let's not forget: history teaches us that a state that strips women of their right to make decisions on their own bodies (limiting their access to birth control and artificial insemination, prohibiting abortion and requested sterilisation, etc.) also takes away the women's psychophysical integrity and reduces motherhood to the level of forced labour. It also teaches us that only clear and loud advocacy for the specific needs and interests of women, including those who were not born women, can destroy the image of (national, cultural) unity and contribute to the pluralisation of the political space.

A political community is based on antagonism, not obedience. On ambivalence, not on rigid rules. On creativity, not on maintaining the *status quo*. And that is why art can be dangerous. Because it is unpredictable, elusive and wild. Unlike culture, it questions any authority, hierarchy and domination.

There are people who tell us that there is no money because they have to give it to the military, the police, banks, corporations, managers and politicians, while there is never enough money for healthcare, education, science, welfare ... and art. Funding art should not be considered charity from the authorities. It is one of their political responsibilities to form a political community that cannot and will not survive without art.

The future will either be feminist or not at all.









BOJANA KUNST

WOMAN AND THE NON-CULTURAL: A FEMINIST READING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND ART

In one of her short texts, feminist essayist, writer and activist Laurie Penny writes about Frederic Jameson's popular syntagma circulating in various forms among critical left-wing intellectuals that **it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism**. Both ideas of the end are closely connected, and capitalist patriarchy has always defended itself by claiming that its end means nothing but anarchy, destruction and chaos. That is also demonstrated by the explosion of dystopic literature in the last two decades and the mass of apocalyptic fantasies with significant political influence; we are incapable of imagining the end of capitalism without the end of the world as we know it. Part of this end and the shattering of the world is the dystopic dread of a feminist vision of the world (a world ruled by women) combined with the fantasy of a return to "the natural state before feminism". From this perspective, feminism is nothing but a problematic habit of modernity, a triviality that will be wiped off the face of the earth by the apocalypse. According to Laurie Penny, such fantasies can be found both in conservative dystopic fantasies and on the left where feminism is understood as a bourgeois deviation.

So why is mainstream culture so afraid of a feminist future, a future where women have the same power on all levels, and what is wrong with our political imagination that makes it so difficult for us to imagine a feminist future that is not dystopic in one way or another? Why is the power of women getting organised as a collective and changing the world as a collective so very threatening that it profoundly affects people's ways of thinking about the future?

Naturally, there are also many works of science fiction where the future is portrayed in a completely different manner through queer, women's, marginal stories. Many female authors, among them Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler, have built worlds so radically different from the patriarchal literary imagination that the latter is unthinkable even supposing the end of the world. In these worlds which continue the common tradition of organisation, sharing and coming together in order to survive, the rights of men and women are not contradictory or, put otherwise, the rights of one group do not deny the rights of the other group: the forms of sociality thus endure this fundamental contradiction that is impossible to think from a dystopian perspective.

These works produce cognitive dissonance because they represent radical speculations on the forms of sociality where equality, relationship and community-sharing, justice will be at play, but with a radical shift in some of “the natural truths”, such as the role of gender, sexuality, reproduction, the relationship between the natural and the artificial – a reevaluation of culture. When imagination directly undermines the fundamental beliefs, the latter usually fight back, there arises a need for censorship, resistance to speculative proposals that challenge one of the core beliefs in utopian situations: the relationship between woman and the reproduction of society.

How can this short journey into feminist and queer science fiction be connected with a feminist reading of the relationship between culture and art? What these works do is imagine, reveal a different culture that is no longer based on the naturalised difference between the sexes, on the central role of reproduction, on a series of dualisms and differences around which the truths of a culture are constituted.

I believe that art is most closely and most creatively connected to culture in this sense: because it is the ability to imagine, experiment, invent images, schemes, speculative possibilities of what is to come, of worlds that are already and still taking shape.

What feminist and queer science fiction describes is a social structure or a radical utopian culture of coexistence that, at the same time, deconstructs any belief that there is a truth of a given culture, particularly a truth based on gender, racial and any other naturalised difference. Instead, a radically different world unfolds before our eyes, a world of hybrids, of sexual and social relationships that encompass more than just human entities.

It is a world of radical imagination and coexistence that no longer thinks in pairs and dualisms and the structures of power arising from them.

Nowadays, as we witness hegemonic fights in culture that are always more about overpowering one or other set of cultural truths, it is important to keep emphasising how far away these fights are from the feminist political imagery. In these fights (e.g. between populist and liberal tendencies), culture is seen as a kind of sum of all truths about its nature, and many beliefs in the culture are naturalised through these fights (e.g. on the one hand, the role of woman/mother is naturalised, while on the other, precarisation and flexibility continue to bear traces of the patriarchal structure based on the gender difference).

Culture is in a social and political dualism with nature: the dualism culture/nature exists precisely so that, paradoxically, it can naturalise culture in its difference from nature; it is through this process (when culture itself becomes naturalised and nature becomes culturalised) that culture overpowers nature. The problem of every dualistic relationship is that there are no equal partners; instead, the relationship serves as a basis for the sum of ideological and political shifts that further strengthen the power of culture over nature.

Today, we are once again living in a period of intense cultural fights, i.e. fights that stand no cognitive dissonance in their core. I argue that, despite the promotion of differences and diverse identities on the left and open attacks on liberal culture on the right, there is a strong resistance to hybridity and cognitive dissonance on both political poles, which has gotten us into the unusual political situation that we are in today; a situation where there seems to be no right answer to the hegemony of cultural truths that are being rediscovered by populist movements in the last decade. That is why the concept of **hybridity** that, for instance, Donna Haraway incorporated into her feminist discussion on the relationship between nature and culture over a decade ago, introducing her **figure of a cyborg** (which she later replaced with the figure of a dog and the concept of chetutlen), is so essential.

Hybridity is actually an attempt at a radical consideration of denaturalisation and offers a deviation from any normativisation of culture that arises from the dualism of differences. Hybridity demonstrates that dualism is, above all, a way of knowing, not just an ontological category (of how things are) but mainly a category that determines how we know something. When we know and learn something through a dualistic way of thinking, we always produce a relation of difference that is, at the same time, a power relation; due to the underlying intertwinement of both categories, one defining the other, the relation is not proportional, with one category overpowering the other.

This dualistic power relation can also be observed in the relationship between culture and art that I understand as a constant shift in normative differentiation operations based on power relations. The relationship between culture and art is not static but is constantly connected with hegemonic positions of speaking, positioning, determination, evaluation.

This structure of normative operations can be thoroughly uncovered by a female artist whose project of radical imagination triggers the so-

called cognitive dissonance, disturbing the core of a culture's beliefs. It is not the position of an artist agitator, as this type of work is not a commentary and an ironic examination of what already exists. Her work is about something else, not just a radical break with what exists, with values, manners and naturalised truths, but also a break with how we can even know, sense, feel, think something, which is only possible if there is a radical break with how we organise ourselves, how we live, etc.

In this sense, culture and art are normative fields, the boundaries of which touch, shift based on different positions of power. In this debate, the female artist is often instrumentalised to constitute and strengthen the positions of power, which only further consolidates the truth of art in relation to non-art on the one hand and the truth of culture in relation to nature on the other. With the artistic position being reduced to the position of social commentary and the freedom of provocation, it completely misses the core of the artistic position itself.

I also understand the artist's feminist position in this sense; it is not enough for her to defend the freedom of artistic expression but to be right in the middle of this unachieved freedom and constantly interrupt the existing levers of power, e.g. the patriarchal patterns that exist and simply flourish in the midst of the most precarious and flexible relationships, switching to affective currents where, with a lot of voluntary, support, networking work in the production of art, women prevail. Amid the biggest agreement on freedom, we should challenge the fact how this freedom "is not one freedom that is assigned to everyone", how the belief on the freedom of art ideologically supports a certain status quo of artistic production and relationships that, at their core, hide a gender difference and the models of power arising from it.

The feminist perspective helps us think the relationship between culture and art in a hybrid manner, as a set of many contradictions, connections between radical imagination and the production of values, as a constant rejection of any dividing normativity that consolidates the position of one or the other group. It helps us not to attribute art too much power, but it also makes us practice it as one of the forms of a community imagery that can use different powers of expression, creation of images, language, to change the imagery of possibilities of community organisation, life, sharing, relationships, etc.

In this sense, art (and consequently the public role of art) should be defended, as it opens up possibilities for various alternative and different forms of existence and co-existence; at the same time, at the

core of this artistic community, it is necessary to kill the joy of others, including those close to us. In particular, the fantasy of happiness, which can occur in an artistic community, should be addressed this way. For such processes, Sarah Ahmed offers the figure of Killjoy with which she gives a very good description of the feminist position that can also be used for our relationship to art and as a support to a feminist institutional stance. She uses the figure of Killjoy to describe the emotional and institutional dynamics of feminism that particularly strives to resist the cultural order that is founded as the moral order. With their statement, complaint, the feminists kill the joy in a way, not in order to kill the happiness of other people but to point to the bad feelings hidden under the general feeling of happiness in a given situation (that is usually an institutional situation, but it can also be family or an institution where we work, etc.).

According to Ahmed, Audre Lorde teaches us how quickly the freedom of being happy turns into the rejection of what spoils your happiness, and it is this emotional rejection that opens up the possibility for continued sexism, racism, problematic attitude to difference and to the other. The figure of Killjoy appears when we do not agree with the space that we are given to defend the happiness of others. In the late 1970s, for instance, black feminists killed the joy of the feminist movement that, in its aspirations for women's freedom and equality, overlooked the political and institutional understanding of the intertwining of gender and racial differences. This gesture required courage while also having a huge impact on the future political development of feminism.

That is why a female artist's provocative gesture that triggers cognitive dissonance and hits the core of beliefs about a certain culture is not interesting because it provokes attacks on what is different or because it highlights the difference in values and defends the truth of my culture. Naturally, that is an important part of the fight, but the fight is directed at an identifiable object, at the constant repetition of the truth about the other in order to prevent my culture's happiness from being ruined.

But it is much more important to ask oneself what exactly the space of freedom of art means for a feminist artist, this space that she is given as art is given a certain social position of autonomy. Does she feel good in this space, now that she can do what she wants based on the values of this culture?

In the last three decades, the intertwinement of institutional levers of power and affective relationships (referring to Italian feminist Carla Lonzi in this context) is very hard at work in precarious forms of labour and exploitation and completely pervades the understanding of a work of art and of the female artist's position.

The artist's feminist position is thus complex: she must realise that what is gained through the political struggle is always in regression, that she constantly has to fight for what she has already achieved. On the other hand, what is achieved through the political struggle can only be preserved by killing joy within her own ranks. She must therefore call attention to the misogynist and sexualised structure of the entire production of contemporary art, call attention to the problematic gender difference at the core of nomadic and flexible institutions of art, understand the role and work of women in the production of art. This position can be radical and non-cultural, not in the sense of opposition, but in its break with the normative establishment of positions and boundaries between opposite poles and is, in this sense, elusive.

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ALHILAL
MARCH 1952

الحج لله

مارس ١٩٥٢
٦ قرون



هل للمرأة أن تحارب ؟
(عزت ٢٠٠٠)



**WHO IS AFRAID
OF IDEOLOGY?**

DECONSTRUCTION AND LAYERING – THE QUESTION OF THE FEMALE GAZE

The image of woman – her body and social role – has been tied to the concept of the male gaze in film theory since Laura Mulvey. In essence, the cinematic apparatus objectifies the female body, puts it and addresses it in stereotyped roles, in contrast to the male body as the subject and carrier of action, the story and history. In terms of the broader understanding of discursive practices, the issue of the male gaze and the image of woman has long ceased to be considered merely on the level of industry and genre film texts analysed by second-wave feminist film critics and is now being examined on the level of general hierarchical language practices in relation to the positions of speaking, i.e. between the holder of power and the person devoid of power. The question of the female gaze that evades the principles of the phallogentric discourse in the described “nature” of the cinematic apparatus is thus always current. Like Catherine Malabou discusses in her essay *Changing Difference: Woman’s Possibility, Philosophy’s impossibility*, which addresses the question of the possibility or impossibility of a female subject to philosophy, the history of film, the vividness of the medium of this language itself raises the issue of evasion or co-operation with the basic concepts of the medium, the methods and laws of creating a film image. As a result, the works of female authors with a feminist activist standpoint are inevitably tied to the question of language and the subversive and alternative possibilities of speaking/depiction, arching into experimental practices marked by the deconstruction of the image or the medium, i.e. film.

The deconstructivist practice is also a key aspect of the film language of artist **Marwa Arsanios** who lives and works in Beirut and whose work is an intertwinement of different art genres and approaches, from performance to installations and video art. She appeared on this year’s 24th City of Women Festival with her exhibition ***Who Is Afraid of Ideology?*** held at the ŠKUC Gallery. In her video projects, Marwa Arsanios follows the line of documentary film, shifting the directness of the image itself with deconstructivist approaches to the basic elements of the film language itself and the narrative line in a synthesis with a constantly subjective position of speaking, thereby projecting the spectator’s gaze through herself and thus establishing it as female. One of the methods she uses is a personal, intimate testimony that communicates a collective story through a first-person narration: one example of this is the video ***Falling is not Collapsing, Falling is Extending*** that was made in 2016 and draws from the images of the artist’s demolished home. She explores “the life of the rubble”; the latter often mixes with waste in landfills which is then used to build extensions to expand the Lebanon coastline into the sea. These are mostly private investments of

capital magnates who pour this material into the sea to gain more space for private resorts, thereby destroying the ecosystem. The exhibited video was accompanied by sketches and illustrations of various plants disappearing into concrete. This intermedia arrangement provides several perspectives that constantly question the given image, be it in the simultaneous or successive shift of the gaze from the screen to the sketch on the wall, permanently connected to the trail of sound.

"Falling is not Collapsing, Falling is Extending is a work I started in 2015, and at that time, there was a very big garbage crisis in Beirut, the city I come from. There was an eruption of protests concerning garbage that was not picked up from the streets because of some political decision or mismanagement. Also, as you know, a lot of money can be made from waste and garbage, and there is a whole mafia which controls the garbage in local cities around the world, but in case of Lebanon, it was a private company which was supposed to take care of the garbage in the city, and in the contract they said that they will recycle 80% of waste but they did not and, after 20 years, the contract ended and they had just recycled 8% of garbage and it was a huge corruption issue ... There was a protest that started with a small group of people from the city and it became like a movement that transcended class because everyone was affected by this garbage situation. We realized in 2015 there was a plan to extend land for these garbage dumps.

The central protagonist in Amateurs, Stars and Extras, or the Labour of Love (2018) are women from the domestic workers syndicate in Mexico City that was only established in 2015, meaning three years ago. Domestic work is not legally work but falls under the category of help, so it is not recognized as work. This way the state does not have any responsibility in terms of social security toward millions of domestic workers in Mexico City and that is why they keep it in this help category; at the same time, historically, employers have been fully exploiting these people that are employed as domestic workers; because they often live in the employers' house, they can start work as early as 6 a.m. and don't know when are they going to finish. There are no regulations at all in terms of working hours, social security, holidays and all of that."

Marwa Arsanios at the Exhibition Opening

The artist forms her feminist perspective with frequent emphases of the autobiographical moment. In the spirit of current modernity, she connects this mainly with an ecofeminist line and addresses the ever-current issues of woman's social role: her works are a response to the questions of woman's image in the contemporary world, including in the context of reproductive work, e.g. in the video *Amateurs, Stars and Extras, or the Labour of Love* (2018). In addressing the issue of the invisible care work of women around the world (Mexico, Lebanon), her manner of presenting the problem is particularly original: she layers image upon image – portraying the position of female caretakers through interviews with actresses playing such roles in television production. As she outlines the issue of the invisibility of such labour (which is consequently unpaid or underpaid), she also exposes the layered ideological framework – i.e. the fictional representation – that further strengthens and legitimises these stereotypical role divisions. She adopts a similar approach – i.e. exposing the layers of the mechanism of systemic ideology in relation to mythologisation as an ideological blockade – to the media image and reality of woman, heroine-revolutionary in the video *Have You Ever Killed a Bear, or Becoming Jamila?* (2013–2014).

But essential to Marwa Arsanios is the previously mentioned connection with ecofeminism that also addresses the archetype of the female by questioning the position of nature (as a female element) in relation to urban space. She perceives this connection as a consequence of the wars of contemporary capitalism that continue to put woman in a hierarchical relationship of patriarchy embodied by the state apparatus, both in relation to woman and nature.

In this context, particular consideration should be given to the work that lent its title to the exhibition: *Who Is Afraid of Ideology?, Part I* (2017). The video essentially focuses on the autonomous women's guerrilla movement in Rojava that is an important part of the Kurdish fight for independence and has been actively engaged in the Syrian war since 2011. The artist recorded the material in early 2017, in the mountains of Kurdistan. Footage of landscape scenes intertwines with interviews with the members of the movement and with footage of the author herself reading testimonies and conducting interviews by phone or in person. In both the manifest statements and their personal testimonies, the women present their own understanding of the fight that is in constant correlation with the environment, as opposed to the prevailing distinctly patriarchal and rationalistic attitude, in relation to the understanding of war and technology as a practice of oppression and annihilation. In the context of post-humanism, nature and consequently everything, be it a tree, a rock, an animal or a fellow human being, is understood – conditional upon the necessary balance between all of the space elements – as equal. Mutual respect and equality are therefore key motives for the fight, even if this premise does not logically coincide with the

action itself. Thus, respect, in understanding sacrifice for achieving the goals of the fight in the given state (of war), is accepted as the only human move. In the context of the guerrilla fight, women formations are completely self-sustaining and self-sufficient. This way, they are established at least in a partial independence from the system of the central fighting, particularly in moving away from state structures which they see as opportunistic and oppressing in their way of realising human-nature relationships: in the interviews, the members emphasise that the problem is not the individual's awareness or appreciation of the conditions of this relationship but in the fact that the state is the one that exploits the essentialist premises of rational dualism in order to retain and establish their power and authority.

"Have You Ever Killed a Bear, or Becoming Jamila? is a film from 2015 that is dealing with the representation of a Nigerian freedom fighter and revolutionary. The reason why we decided to include this work is because there is a newer version from 2017: Who Is Afraid of Ideology – Part I. It is a film I shot in Qandile Mountains on the border between Turkey and northern part of Iraq. I lived with the Kurdish autonomous women's movement for a short time and, during that time, we talked a lot about their ideology and getting to know their ecological paradigm and I learned how this ecological paradigm can be born from the situation of war which is very contradictory in terms of how to live in an ecological way in the situation of war and threat and when you are in survival mode. It is an experiment of communal life, a very strong one, and very much not based on individual freedom.


Who Is Afraid of Ideology – Part II, is not a film yet but will hopefully become one soon. It is research material from my trip to northern Syria, where I was less than a month ago. There I was trying to take a look at the implementation of this environmental ideology and how it is implemented on a larger social scale and in the society that is at war as well. It is a very precarious situation, but at the same time, it is an amazing social experiment in terms of the application of all these ideas from the autonomous women's movement – the ecological paradigm and what we hope will remain from this experiment, at least this feminist and ecological movement. Hopefully this has already made a huge change."

Marwa Arsanios at the Exhibition Opening

Even if, based on this description, it may seem that the video represents a manifestly propagandist moment with a one-sided presentation of the movement's ideology that is not addressed critically by the artist in the interviews, it avoids this on the level of sound and the visual manipulation of the film image itself, using well-known methods, such as separating the sound from the visual material. Speech is delayed, the fighters' testimonies are linked with the images of the snowy mountain landscape, while their interviews contain the sound of the snowy landscape. These are connected with the footage of the author who lends her voice to the protagonists and interviews them. This way, the final image is fragmented and the data dispersed, the information of a given moment/shot becoming absolutely polyvalent: the image of nature, in its classical sense, is in absolute contrast to the words of war and *vice versa*. By dispossessing the image of its standardised concept, she reveals the power of the ideological connective tissue of information, which she intensifies by using her image and voice as the connecting link. Furthermore, she questions the role of narrator, communicator or artist as the one who puts the selected information into their final order but is inevitably caught in the wheels of ideologies.


This premise can also form the basis for other exhibited works of Marwa Arsanios which use different deconstructivist practices as their method and share a well-thought-out positioning of visual and sound information – in this context, it is also interesting to take a look at the sequel to *Who is Afraid of Ideology?, Part II*, which is still a work-in-progress. However, the presence of this exhibited object is crucial, to a certain extent, as it once again physically uncovers the body of the work of art and the body of the artist herself, revealing the process of creation. Doing this, it also uncovers the mechanism of ideology that will define the work of art itself. It is in this constant movement and shifting of the basic elements that the author perhaps expresses the most productive criticism of phallogocentric discourse, even though digressions into different, often meagerly argued directions of ecofeminism may be questionable.

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Marwa Arsanios is an artist, filmmaker and researcher who reconsiders politics of the mid-twentieth century from a contemporary perspective with a particular focus on gender relations, urbanism and industrialisation. She approaches research collaboratively and seeks to work across disciplines.



WHAT DOES FREEDOM STAND FOR?

Opening Panel Discussion at the *Who is afraid of Ideology?* exhibition by Marwa Arsanios, with Jelena Petrović, Marina Gržinić and Anja Zalta

JELENA PETROVIĆ

What Does Freedom Stand for? is the title of a symposium on the illegality and legality of freedom I organized at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna two years ago. The fluid, blurred and false dichotomy of **illegality** and **legality** addresses the fundamental and arbitrary notion of contemporary society, the notion that justifies the state of war in order to protect its ‘freedom’ by all the means of a ‘democratic’ defence of humanity. These means were and still are: military interventions, austerity measures, refugee policies, humanitarian aid, migration laws, human rights, etc. Means which today (co)produce the neoliberal mechanisms of global governmentality, social, political and economic class diversification, as well as the permanent state of crisis, conflict and terror. Gržinić’s definition of the war-state as a state that is shaped by force, violence and fear is a very precise definition of the contemporary neoliberal state – the major dominance in today’s world is the **logic of war**.

The **war-state** has elements of historical **fascism**, such as: “a sovereign leader, people, death as the management of life”, but also elements of the present neoliberalism, such as: individual freedom and autonomy. Such war-state has twisted the meaning of the capitalist nation-state in order to “sterilize(s) the ‘other,’ evacuate(s) the conflict from public space and neutralize(s) the political”, constantly demanding: “a proliferation of an unbelievable ‘freedom’ of particularities”, for which the best example, I think, is the reconciling agenda of human rights, which keeps strong borders of power between **“central”** dominant and **“peripheral”** oppressed identities. The contemporary state abuses the meaning of freedom, democracy and peace in order to protect the global system based on 1% of the global population. Today, the question of illegality of freedom becomes administratively and ultimately restricted, every struggle to hack and change the system is perceived as a terrorist one. **“Nothing left outside the neoliberal meaning of life” makes fighting the system impossible.**

The past revolutionary freedom functions as a global “cultural heritage,” consumption norm, aesthetic value, fashion or a very pale repetition of revolutionary rhetoric, making very little sense in the material conditions that we live in. It appears rather as a lethargic feeling of nostalgia that is just as misleading. **As some well-known revolutionary thinkers have warned us, past struggles are nothing more than future traps.**



We speak today about a crisis in contemporary social movements. This crisis has been produced in part by our failure to develop a meaningful and collective historical consciousness. Such a consciousness would entail recognition that our victories attained by freedom movements are never etched in stone. What we often perceive under one set of historical conditions as glorious triumphs of mass struggle can later ricochet against us if we do not continually reconfigure the terms and transform the terrain of our struggle. The struggle must go on. Transformed circumstances require new theories and practices.

Angela Davis, The Meaning of Freedom
(written at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of
the Black Panthers Movement)

Or Karl Marx, referring to the 19th century revolution that

The new social revolution cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. The new social revolution cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The new revolution must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content.

The past is always shaped by ideology. **We need art that can bring us poetry from the future, encourage us to fight for it.** That bring us to the title of Marwa Arsanios exhibition and the question: Who Is Afraid of Ideology? And, which one?

 **Jelena Petrović, PhD**, is a (co)author of many scholarly articles, art-theory events, contemporary art exhibitions and cross-disciplinary projects relating to the post-/Yugoslav subjects and feminist history. She was also a guest professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna between 2015 -2017. 

MARINA GRŽINIĆ

If I talk about freedom, I talk about freedom as a category central for necrocapitalism, not just for capitalism and not only for neoliberal global capitalism. Without freedom, necrocapitalism cannot function. So, who is the target of necrocapitalism and especially who is central to freedom? These are definitely the refugees: “to die” is their primary condition of existence. Why is this so?

Necrocapitalism operates with the word *necro*, which is a Greek prefix meaning death. It therefore works as a **politics that governs over death and makes profit** with the instrumentalization of death. In this context, *necro* is not just Thanatos in opposition to Eros; *necro* in necrocapitalism defines the neoliberal global capitalist regime, presently implementing the machinery of war and destruction in order to make profit. Here death is directly connected to freedom. We can only respond with freedom when we are in direct proximity of this capitalism governing over death. So are we under such a threat? Here? We are not! Otherwise, we would not be sitting here, listening, thinking, discussing, and so on. I think this is very important because it is always good to think about the place from which we are speaking, doing and making. In fact, although Europe talks so much about freedom, we are not in necrocapitalism directly, **we live in a necro coloured biocapitalism.**

Biocapitalism, biopolitics is the theory produced by Foucault in the ‘70s when he was talking about the welfare state in Western Europe (France, Germany), saying that the state is doing everything to regulate life. He called this regulation biopolitics, as *bio* means life; biopolitics represents governmentality over life. What does the welfare state do for us, its citizens (it doesn’t matter if you are a second- or a third-rate citizen), we have some possibility to live, but all the others who are not part of the nation-state are left to die, or they are just abandoned, put somewhere else, and so on. A straightforward formula to understand biopolitics or biocapitalism would be: **“make live and let die.”** That is the narrative of biocapitalism.

In 2003 theoretician **Achille Mbembe** wrote a text entitled *Necropolitics*. He saw at that moment in the African context an unbelievable intensification of the neoliberal processes of privatization, deregulation, abandonment, and even more, an incredible structure of militarized power and force that used killing and destroying not

just to kill, but actually to accumulate capital. He said “no, no, Foucault is not enough for us, we need something more intense”; and he coined this notion of necropolitics. Back then, I asked myself: If Foucault’s biopolitics could be resumed as “make live and let die,” what is Mbembe’s necropolitics? The answer was another very raw, small definition: **Necropolitics is “let live and make die.”** Necropolitics therefore means nothing else but the answer to the question who should live and who must die.

Today we have **biopolitics and necropolitics working together**. “Make die” is what we have in Syria, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan. So it’s not just “let die.” It’s a whole machinery of these new war-states which used to be colonial states as well as anti-Semite states. These are France, Great Britain, Germany, the US, Japan and so on, depending on the geo-politics. Furthermore, Mbembe claims “freedom as crucial category in positing death as a political concept.” This practically connects freedom to the machinery of killing, because death is different from the relation of Eros and Thanatos—the libidinal economy of biocapitalism. He links **death as central to political economy**. He shows that going to Iraq and destroying it demands a big reconstruction and capital investment.

That is why death is a political concept; only when we are talking about death in relation to *necro* within necrocapitalism, can we juxtapose freedom to death. Or in other words, we see that death is the space in which freedom and negation operate.


Now the question remains: Where do we stand in Slovenia or Europe?

One possible answer is that we have to remember that we didn’t lose everything. As citizens we can be discriminated, we can be punished, we can be chased, transformed into a second- or a third-class citizen, we can be or are constantly marginalized LGBTQI, yet we still live in a certain way. We have a passport, we can travel, maybe we don’t have enough money but that is not enough to claim freedom. Still, **if a citizen, one is not targeted directly by death**. Of course, this can change and you can be killed because biocapitalism and necrocapitalism are operating together. In ex-Yugoslavia, if you were LGBT, you could be killed. But today we are not carrying death directly on our shoulders, **we are not in the position of a non-citizen**. When you are under direct pressure of death, you claim freedom and try to exercise how to react to the relation between death and freedom. Refugees, those who have nothing to lose, have many ways of how to respond. Immolation, suicide and self-harming, or using different strategies for making oneself invisible, etc. How did the Arab Spring start? It started in Tunisia with the act of immolation.


We are under constant pressure of violence, and our only possible response to this is *democracy* (we all know the mantra: “**you live in democracy, you have to fight for democracy**”). And that is what we do; we fight for democracy. But there is a link between democracy and violence. As I was reading a Latin-American analysis recently, it came out very clearly that there are two options, and they are pretty tricky. One is lynching, and the other is the violence of the mob. Both are indeed present in the European context as well. Remember when thousands protested against refugees in Chemnitz in Germany in September 2018. Right-wing citizens took to the streets, thousands of them, lynching people of another colour. Or in Italy. In 2018 they finally imprisoned the person killing asylum-seekers on the streets (with a twelve-year sentence, he will most probably be set free after a year). This is the new mode of lynching; it’s the violence of the mob. And that is also happening in Slovenia.

Slovenia is the most successful laboratory of neoliberal capitalism. Historically, Slovenia implemented necropolitics at its source. How was the state of Slovenia born? It was born by erasing people, and the Erased are the direct figures of necropolitics — people who lost their citizenship overnight and were pushed to a social and real death. Remember the lynch of the Roma family (Strojan), the attack on the Autonomous Factory Rog in the center of Ljubljana in 2016, or the recent media attack on NGOs protecting refugees as an illegal activity which was also backed up by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The paradox is that **the most illegal is the state itself**. What can you expect from the repressive apparatuses of a country? Nothing else but repression. That is something that we have to rethink and seriously put into perspective. And we need to continue thinking about and reflecting on the positions from which we speak.



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In her pioneering book entitled *Sexism and the War System*, Betty Reardon presents the term war system as a competitive social order, which is based on authoritarian principles, “assumes unequal value among and between human beings, and is held in place by coercive force in the form of threat, intimidation, and even violent coercion. The institutions through which this force is controlled and applied are dominated by elites who conduct the affairs of the state”.

It is not surprising that Reardon attributed the functioning and the maintaining of the war system to the patriarchal system of male dominance over women through economic dependence, domestication, and even violence. *“Patriarchy as the core of the conceptual structure cultivates aggression by frustrating the total human potential through the imposition of rigidly defined sex roles: this is usually a society with authority structures that pervade the military.”* It is a system where members of the society no longer control their own security but the patriarchal state, in negotiating the social contract, has taken the exclusive right to use force (coercive power) in return for protection of the state.

The war system is justified by national, economic, religious, and other elites that generate a specific discourse based on the question of security and the image of the ‘other’ as a security threat. **The war system is conditioned. It needs an imagination to divide humanity into superior and inferior groups, the “racism against the abnormal”**, in Foucault’s terms, that produces hierarchies in human worth, and dehumanizes another sex, gender, race, ethnicity, adherents to another religion or political ideology.


To make this kind of imagination work, a group accepts a discourse that seems coherent and credible to connect individuals in opposition to this ‘otherness’. The importance of such rhetoric is an anxious fixation on a recognizable enemy. The boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is therefore perceived as a survival strategy. It is believed that only by maintaining a cohesive ‘we’, a group can be protected against the objective threats of the anarchic social system. However, this dynamic is vital to hold the ‘external’ outside of our own universe, but at the same time it is also vital that this ‘external’ exists. If there was nothing beyond

these boundaries, the universe would become internalized and aggressive towards itself. In this deluded perception, the enemy must be destroyed, but the enemy must also exist (forever)– because the boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is socially useful, it strengthens the group’s solidarity and defines its limits, and it also provides a scapegoat for the group that has been threatened. If there is no form of deviation, no external other, the group needs to invent it.


The projection on the external group is not always outside the borders of own sovereign entities. The external enemy is also a subset within a society. Foucault points to the historical phenomenon in the case of leprosy: hospitals for lepers (almost) disappeared from collective memory, while buildings were maintained. The poor, vagabonds, criminals and crossbreeds took the place of lepers. With different content, in a completely different culture, forms of social exclusion remain.

We can perceive how many of the women liberation movements around the world deny the hypertrophy based on fear and deconstruct the conglomerate of ‘otherness’. They resist oppressive homogenizing tendencies and cultivate a positive appreciation for differences. They often fight on behalf of the community, the oppressed, of all women. Or in words of Katarina Pavičič - Ivelja “the situation of women is not ‘a women issue’, but a matter of democracy and freedom of all of society. Since capitalism, statism and patriarchy are interconnected, the struggle for freedom must be radical and revolutionary – it must regard women’s liberation as a central aim, not as a side issue.”

Anja Zalta’s article was published in the book *Women against War System* (Furlan Štante, Zalta and Lamberger Khatib (Eds.), Lit Verlag, Zurich, 2017).



Anja Zalta, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her research work focuses on the issue of Islam in Europe, the rights of religious minorities, gender and religion, comparative religiology, violence and religious identities, and the possibility of transforming religious conflicts.

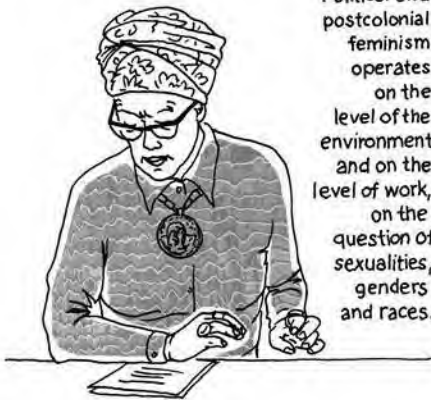




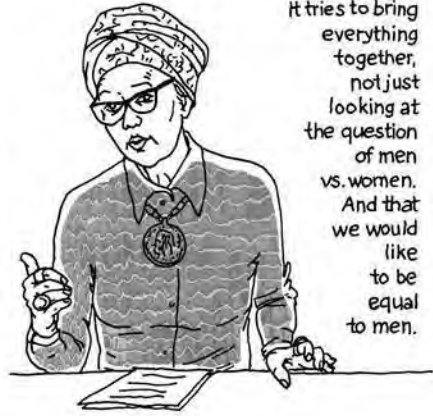
Now you still see few men around,
next year you won't see any, only women.



FRANÇOISE VERGÈS *On political feminism*



Political and postcolonial feminism operates on the level of the environment and on the level of work, on the question of sexualities, genders and races.



It tries to bring everything together, not just looking at the question of men vs. women. And that we would like to be equal to men.

But to what kind of men?
In a society that is unequal, racist and sexist...



... I don't want to be a part of it.



So my feminism is not asking for integration in that society, but for the transformation of that society.



For the emancipation of all people!



“Women perform the biggest share of the lowest paying jobs. They are the ones who clean offices, corridors and toilets late at night or early in the morning. They are also the first victims of environmental disasters and the first victims of structural adjustment programmes. When we talk about unequal distribution of wealth, we have to keep in mind that, even in the most developed countries in the world, women are paid less than men for the same work. It can be concluded that women are the most endangered group everywhere in the world. One must understand, however, that problems that women face in different environments may differ. Coming together is important, as solidarity has always been at the core of feminism.

In addition to traditional or modern patriarchy, the problems that feminists today face include the destruction of the environment, migrations due to wars and the colonial past, the rise in hatred against foreigners and Islamophobia, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, the lack of stable jobs and access to free education. Moreover, it is essential to know what has created the world as it is today, i.e. to be aware of this axis separating the North and the South. Therefore, we must go back to the 16th century that changed the world, its shadow still darkening large parts of our planet. Decolonisation is a process that is not yet complete.

All of these are phenomena that need to be taken into serious consideration.”

Françoise Vergès, from guest lecture entitled *Political/Decolonial Feminism* at 24th City of Women Festival.

Françoise Vergès, PhD, a long-time decolonial anti-racist feminist, is currently Chair of Global South(s), Maison des sciences de l’homme, Paris.

CARE AS VIOLENCE

Round table with Darja Zaviršek, Marta Verginella and Irena Šumi at the launch of *Care as Violence*, a book by Darja Zaviršek (/cf*, Ljubljana, 2018)

DARJA ZAVIRŠEK

Those of you who know me know that, all my life, I have been focusing on two topics: the issue of violence and the issue of care. **Violence has mostly been tied to violence against women and children as well as disabled people, while care has always been feminised.** This book (*Skrb kot nasilje* – Care as Violence, 2018) is the first time that care and violence have come together for me, but in a very special way. It has turned out that many care practices are in fact violent practices and that care is often a normalised form of violence. One of the violent practices that appears in the form of care is, for instance, the long-term institutionalisation and physical segregation of disabled people that restricts their rights by appealing to care; or various racisms, anti-migration sentiments or nationalisms; the infantilisation of young people and the sexual abuse of children by those who claim that they care for them.

Some people thought that my book was about extraordinary and rare events. I wish to emphasise that that is exactly what it is not about. My book is about everyday, common, general situations that are neither special nor rare. That is why I used Foucault's concept of *archipelago* that extends to society through various social groups, individuals, etc.; **I discuss the social, educational, securitisation and pastoral archipelago.** It is worth noting Foucault's warning that *wars took place in the times of peace*. Think, for example, of the wars waged by the Slovenian Erased when the majority population was sailing on the wings of the new state, of liberalisation, the accumulation of wealth, etc. Not to mention the wars experienced by people transgressing boundaries; those experienced by women, the disabled, children attempting to prove abuse, etc. **Care for the frightened, "the worried", is certainly a very political concept as well.** Nowadays, violence is often rationalised with people being afraid. When the German populist political party Alternative für Deutschland was winning in German elections, people started to come together to support it, calling themselves the *concerned citizens*. When Germany uncovered a terrorist group of seven white

men from Chemnitz who were planning a terrorist attack because they were “concerned” about white Christian Germany, and the German left-wing newspaper *Die TAZ* published a giant title the “Concerned Terrorists”. **Care of for the frightened seems to be a legitimate care which can produce violence. The “concerned citizens” often dismantle social hierarchies, giving the impression that people are equal, have the same amount of power.** Birgit Rommelspacher discusses the phenomenon of hierarchical turn when people with more social power claim that they are afraid of people who have much less power and claim that they would threaten them.

Even though the book deals with different topics, the issue of women is present throughout. **Women have been the caretakers of the disabled in public social care institutions; in socialism, they got better education and were offered jobs; often they were convinced to leave the so-called “kitchen slavery” and become nannies, cleaners and attendants in various long-stay welfare institutions for disabled, poor and the elderly. There was little talk of women’s emancipation in such a context.** At the same time, women have also been the users of care; some racist newspapers have warned that women migrants are travelling uteruses and that migrant children are practically a weapon that the non-European world, the Islamic world, is launching against civilised Europe. I also discuss women as the majority population at universities today. On the one hand, there are women who are more educated than men and represent a majority at universities in the social science disciplines, even at the doctoral studies, on the level of the entire EU. On the other hand we can see since 1991 (the year when Slovenia became independent), a radical shift to retraditionalisation, i.e. the situation where women are an object of misogyny, which brings me to the concept of **neo-patriarchy**.

Neo-patriarchy is undoubtedly based on classic patriarchy but has special characteristics. One such characteristic is that it is framed by a fundamentalist, predatory, global neoliberalism that has resulted in a great economic, social and many other kinds of devastations, including ecological. The effect of neoliberalism on men is a multitude of the so-called “losers” of the globalisation, men who have lost their regular jobs. That is particularly true in the post-socialist countries. At the same time, there is a handful of hegemonic, masculine manhood that is winning and controlling the neoliberal, global, predatory capitalism. Why do societies need a scapegoat in this context, a role that is assumed by women? In times of economic, social and other crises, there have always been scapegoats. But today’s targeting of women is no longer about the classic view that they are less intelligent, have a smaller cranial cir-

cumference, are hysteric, etc. **This time, the attacks are directed at another type of woman, namely those who are well educated, economically independent and, in a way, fundamentally threaten the already threatened hegemonic masculinity. The liberalisation of women is supposed to be too extensive and threaten especially men who consider themselves “the losers” of neoliberalism.** Nationalism plays an essential role in this context. It is a situation, previously illustrated by Hannah Arendt, where a certain group of people had power, historically and traditionally, but has lost it. This results in violence and can lead to, for instance, femicide. Today's retraditionalisation, today's attack on women – that they are to blame for the downfall of society, the insufficient number of births, the insufficient care for the family, the occupation of too many jobs, etc. – is an attack on the radical liberalisation that has occurred in the sphere of genders.

In the period of retraditionalisation that we have been recording for a few years, post-socialist countries are particularly interesting area of research, as neo-patriarchy in these countries is explicitly linked with the power of religious institutions, ideologies and nationalisms. **Nationalisms are a fantastic example of how care is constantly used to commit violence.** Recently, Italian fascists walked around the beach beating up migrants under the pretence that they were liberating and taking care of “their women”. During her political campaign, Marine Le Pen would refer to herself as a feminist, emphasising that she cared for women's rights. If we think of a few similar examples in Slovenian discourse: Angelca Liković said that if women failed to bear enough children, we would need a migrant workforce like the Germans. As demonstrated by Nira Yuval-Davis, nationalist policies always bribe women with various treats, e.g. by giving them more child allowance, time off from work if they have more children, other benefits.

In reality, nationalist ideology is connected to fundamentalisms – in post-socialist countries, it is mostly Christian fundamentalism – and the ideology of care is constantly used to discipline women. That is the widest framework in which to think neo-patriarchy today.

It should also be noted that this spring (in 2018), in May, a member of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia Matjaž Gams organised a conference entitled “How to Prevent the Gradual Extinction of Slovenian Nation?” discussing the problematic mechanisms of decreased fertility. He claimed that women’s liberalisation, contraception, abortion, women’s rights, women’s education, forcing women into men’s roles and men into feminised one’s, liberal attitudes towards the children, are all threatening the survival of the nation. **In other words, the problematisation of women’s participation in the public sphere, the prohibition of men’s sexual violence against women, attacks on homosexuality is all part of the same picture.** It is interesting that also the prohibition of corporal punishment by liberals was attacked. Does this suggest that if we start beating our children again, it would be possible to have more of them because it would be easier to discipline them? We should not forget the Catholic doctrine from the 1990s which repeatedly stated that the child has to be submissive to the adult. The ideology and doctrine of **submissiveness** which the child must show the adult is **one of the reasons for sexual abuse of children.** Not celibacy. Celibacy is just a mask to see the priest as asexual and thus exempt from the pool of potential perpetrators. That event, is not a marginal one, but it is a top-down politics, not a marginal sects, paramilitary groups or spiritual societies. It came from the highest levels of Slovenian politics.

Darja Zaviršek, PhD, is a sociologist, professor and researcher at the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Work who also teaches on the international postgraduate programme at ASFH, Berlin.

MARTA VERGINELLA

As a historian, I often wonder why the generation of women who advocated for emancipation, supported abortion and strove for equality within the marriage has raised a generation of girls who are unaware of their legacy or even do not support it. I also find it interesting that, after the introduction of the women's studies and gender studies at various faculties in Ljubljana, the topic is predominantly of interest of only limited part of the women's audience. In order to understand such a trend I believe it is important to take into account long-term socio-political phenomena and to explain what led to certain changes that started occurring in the 1970s. Namely, that was the time when, both in the East and the West, certain laws regarding abortion and marriage were adopted. It is important to note that those regions which exhibited more traditional social patterns showed a certain degree of reluctance towards gender equality.

At this point I am also slightly worried, as I have discovered that a large portion of the female population, meaning the generation of women who reached midlife period in the 1960s and the 1970s, will remain completely outside of history. These women, who have not practiced any particular profession nor left behind any written traces, now often belong to that group of demented, helpless women. Particularly these women, who are also the subject of Darja Zaviršek's book, transform their own resistance, their helplessness due to the patriarchal patterns into illness. That is one topic which, in my opinion, remains outside scientific studies, but also outside the neuroscience and medical studies. By sheer coincidence, I recently read an article, published in the women's supplement of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, which discussed different types of therapies that women could use to ease their climacteric problems. The author of the article concluded that there were, in fact, very few possibilities of using a hormone therapy. Why? Because the medical environment (including its academic part) does not want to conduct a study in the field of endocrinology that may turn out controversial because of opening up possibilities of a whole generation of women to become – instead of depressive – more energetic, more active. Such were the article's conclusions, which do not appear to be so far from the truth and the way, how the woman's body is perceived in certain scientific environments.

But let us return to my favoured perspective, which often makes me search for the answers, also those which address today's circumstances, deeper into the past. In the perspective of *longue durée*, **the power of patriarchy has always been fully present, except when countries, systems, empires were in crisis.** During these critical periods important shifts occurred, what is characteristic not only for the modern era but also for the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. We know, for instance, that medieval communes and particularly middle-class environments in feudalism, which was generally not favourable to women, allowed women to become proprietors, business owners, enjoying the same conditions as men. By turning our attention to periods closer to our time, we can see that World War I and World War II briefly opened up certain professions for women, thus enabling job opportunities that had not existed before the war. However, to be completely accurate, a certain degree of retraditionalisation took place after both World Wars. Similarly, it has also taken place within the nationalism itself, while a part of nationalistic circles had also opened up a public space to women.

I believe that in analysing what has happened to gender relations, we should certainly make a greater use of the category of ambiguity and contradiction. Nationalism undoubtedly sees women as machines, bodies that will give birth to new generations. However, nationalism also provides a space of liberalism that pulls women into the sphere of (higher) education, enables women to grow and be professionally successful. If we study certain biographies – the biography of Marie Skłodowska-Curie is quite noteworthy – we see that the education in the Polish national spirit served her as the encouragement for independent path to university and acquiring knowledge. **These ambivalences need to be emphasised, as it is otherwise not possible to understand how the need for retraditionalisation developed in those environments, where social norms have brought about equality between the sexes.**

I am not certain to call this neo-patriarchy, but I insist that the patriarchy has always existed. It is only the question of which perspective to take. Without a doubt, on the level of norms, on the symbolic level, and on the level of mentality, patriarchy has taken a significant step back in the late 20th century. However, I could always detect the patriarchal patterns in my working environment. I am not surprised that it is so persistent today. While the political context from the 1970s onwards, both in the East and the West, favoured greater women's emancipation and equality between the sexes, the patriarchy has recently again stepped out of the shadows, as the contemporary political context has indulged it.

In terms of the persistence of certain Christian symbols and imagery, the Catholic Church was definitely set aside, but still remained present in socialist Yugoslavia. During the 1990s transition, no particular attention was paid to the social role of the Church, what instruments it had at its disposal, or which symbols it used to weaken the secularisation of the society. I believe that the problem about the former Socialist countries, including Slovenia, is the belief that those were completely secularised and laicised societies. Such a belief has weakened those responsible for maintaining a certain level of care for the secular state, which has crucially contributed to the norms that liberal democracies and socialist countries granted to women. According to these norms most women, including those active in universities and other business environments, found themselves being allowed to enter a particular circle, a particular profession. **This is another key problem that has not been solved by gender quotas, as we once again come face to face with the imagery, mental, and cultural structures that feminism did not analyse and disseminate thoroughly enough. If it did, we would not be here discussing it.**

Marta Verginella, PhD, is a professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; principal investigator of the ERC project EIRENE.

There are hardly any records of there ever existing anything other than patriarchy in human times and spaces. That is why neo-patriarchy deems patriarchy natural. The term neo-patriarchy designates the revival of the ideology which presents itself as concern about social developments, and the need to *care for the frightened*. In the public spheres, many are saying they are frightened because of the loss of the “patriarchal orientation”. This fear and its disorientation is presented as the excuse for the generalised hate speech especially in the social media.

Is there a deep connection between neoliberalism and neo-patriarchy? Neoliberalism currently defines the disintegration of the national state's guardianship over common affairs and its stewardship of social justice and democracy that are subject to all-encompassing privatisation. The state is withdrawing even from legislature: in social media, censorship is now carried out by corporate owners themselves, regardless of any legal framework, national or international. This type of neoliberalism seems to be in an uneasy alliance with neo-patriarchy, as the former thrives wherever democracy is curtailed, but the latter seems out of control.

The disorienting “fear” that generates hate speech is vulgar, *ad personam* and pornographically phantasmagorical. It perverts the facts, and the logic of argumentation along the principles of pornographic narration, and never fails to leave speechless especially the so-called political left. It is impossible to have a rational or an egalitarian or a non-discriminatory discussion with the carriers of hate speech; shocking the collocutors into silence is precisely the strategy of hate speakers who clearly wish for “real” violence – palpable, bloody, physical, mass violence. This aspects makes many people increasingly emphasise certain structural similarities between our time and the rise of Nazism in the 1930s Europe.

Pornography is a discourse that we all know well, but never publicly discuss that is its strength for hate campaigners. The last debate on pornography happened within 2nd wave feminism (e.g. Susan Brownmiller and others) with the view of prohibition of pornographic industry. This did not attract much sympathy because it proposed censoring and criminalising private thoughts and fantasies; however, pornography is much more about violence than about imagination and fantasising. It is a reservoir of violent imagery, a blueprint of flat (creationist) thinking about humanity, and a vocabulary of patriarchy that inform hate speech, and is in itself constitutive of patriarchy.

Pornography relies on unrealistic, meaning-reducing, character-flattening scenarios in all manners of sexual encounters. The way its genres proliferate, many researchers acknowledge that it is increasingly oriented towards explicit violence. Misogyny is central to it: pornography peruses whole women's bodies, from head to foot, while the male actor is always present only by his well-hung middle part of his body: their faces are unimportant. **Porn is entirely based on the time-honoured, constitutive principle of patriarchy: that women are the source of all evil in human society, and should be treated accordingly, that is to say, in punitive ways.** The 60+ different fetishes translated into elaborate genres in pornography inform hate speakers who are devouring this literature only to perversely, and with explicit accusation, present it as the true contents of the "leftist" progressivist movements to emancipate LGBTQ+ and raise knowledge about human sexuality.



Add to this the fact that most young people in their teens get their primary sexual education from porn. A boy of 13 who studies porn to get key info on women's sexuality is served the image of subservient, multi-orifice creature whose body is totally available to man. The information he receives is that a man has no responsibility to his genetic material in the sex act whatsoever; in porn fantasy, there are no unwanted pregnancies, no venereal diseases, no unsafe ejaculations. To what extent does this hidden discourse that we all know and never speak about informs, or even generates misogynous ideologies and speech? Public talk about raped women implies the imagery of pornography according to which violent sex is male prerogative, or else, male nature; talk about unwanted pregnancy is likewise pre-informed through porn discourse that men will ejaculate without restrictions or control, but will have nothing to do with pregnancy itself, even though it is very difficult to image unwanted pregnancy without a man who acted irresponsibly, as we are led to assume that it is his right, or else, his nature, to do so.

The patriarchal logic of categorically personalizing the evil of, and guilt for, of all social troubles extends quite a bit further in the constructions that hate speech relies on, to the point where all perceived evils (that cause "fear" in hate speech carriers) are personified: in eth-

nic (“racial”) Other; in foreigners; in scheming cabals of Jews; in Muslims; in gays; etc. It is difficult to picture a racist who is not at the same time a misogynist and a homophobe. Porn, just like hate speech, peruses the personification of evil logic to the point of building an infallible, flat model that is structured as creationism, of the social world: the moment a given social problem is perceived, the first question posed is: Who is to blame for this problem? Instead of: Which circumstances cumulatively caused this problem?

This personifying logic is constitutive of patriarchy, and by extension, of porn, hatreds of all sorts, exclusive group ideologies (nationalism, tribalism, white supremacy), modern excuses for warfare, and hate speech; all three are aspects of historic, unique creationist principle that underlies patriarchy. It counts on a supra-human agents (like a god) or extra-human givens (like “the nature” of women, the evil Other, etc.) that somehow plagues us, or invisibly directs us. Among all kinds of personified evils (women, gays, foreigners, Jews, Muslims, Roma...), women are the universal matrix in patriarchy as of course pornography is not a phenomenon of our time but goes back at least as far as patriarchy.

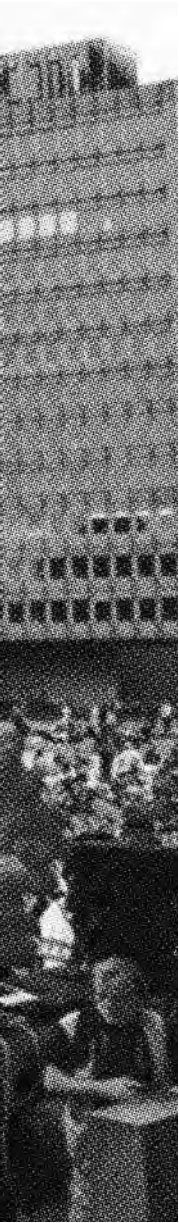
No structural understanding of patriarchy frees us from concern for freedom of speech. Hate speech proliferates in ways that threaten loss of this freedom and all-pervasive censorship. Many are pointing out that censoring public speech only makes hate flourish; the question of who gets to regulate public speech in our globalised, electronic media world is a pressing one. Most hate speech is very uniform, and as we increasingly understand, well-coordinated by globalized political and populist structures that are referred to as alt-right. There are tons of direct, instantaneously spread translations of American religious conservative and white supremacist vocabularies that constitute the international hate speech dictionary; a close inspection shows that this core terminology invariably alludes to canons of pornography. Let me reiterate it is precisely the fact that we all know this literature, but never speak about it in public, that makes hate speech vocabulary universally understood and weaponized as it is difficult to react to it without invoking the same underlying imagery. Therefore, another pressing issue is to get pornographic imagery, ideologies and vocabularies out in the open as thoroughly as possible, and as soon as possible: the light of day alone can disarm it.

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NO FEAR. AGAINST POLITICS OF HATE.



Protest on Republic Square, 2018, photo from www.pomurec.com.

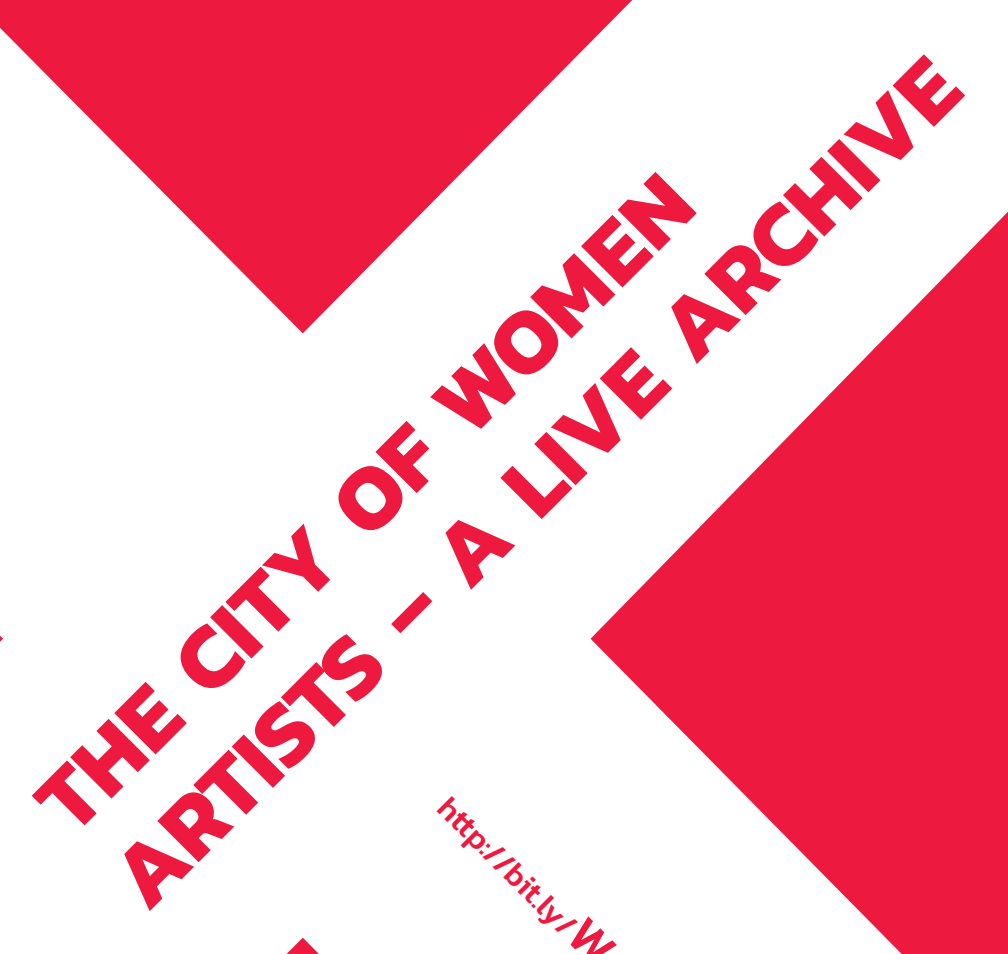


A civil initiative, a coalition of individuals, activists and groups, was formed in Slovenia in the spring of 2018. Together, the numerous participants and supporters of the No Fear demonstration expressed a loud NO to a politics of hate, and our message was taken up and repeated by many. The results of the election similarly point to a widespread refusal of such politics: a strong majority of votes on Sunday were cast in favour of the more moderate parties, while many voters had been so repelled by the pre-election campaign that they abstained from voting. However, denouncing political excesses before elections is not enough to move us closer to the equal and open society we wish to see.

THE NO FEAR DEMANDS STILL STAND:

- ✗ non-authoritarian politics and public debate free of hate,
- ✗ an inclusive, solidary, compassionate society that does not count and divide its members,
- ✗ respect for the rights of LGBTI+ and women, including the inalienable right to abortion,
- ✗ an end to our participation in wars, as well as active endeavours towards peace,
- ✗ restoration and long-term protection of the environment,
- ✗ an end to the criminalizing of migration, and the removal of the razor wire on our border.

All of the worst atrocities in history started with organised incitement of hatred, with a politics that declared certain groups of people worthless and dangerous. Instead of prosperity, it spread fear; instead of solidarity, violence. Today, this politics, with its hollow promises, wants to stage a comeback. We are not fooled by its lies. And we will not allow it to rule us. Regardless of the make-up of the government, the No Fear alliance will continue to work on the ground, in workplaces and organizations. Without any fear. Against the politics of hate.



THE CITY OF WOMEN ARTISTS – A LIVE ARCHIVE

http://bit.ly/WebMuseum_COW

JASMINA ZALOŽNIK

TRANSFER | CIRCUITS

Encouraging the creation of original works by Slovenian female artists is one of the important tasks that the Association of the City of Women has been successfully performing since its very beginning. To the best of its ability, both in terms of funding and content as well as context, it contributes to the development of new productions of various artistic expressions by Slovenian female artists chosen every year.

More than twenty-four editions feature several dozen productions or co-productions that are partly presented in the exhibition/installation *Transfer | Circuits* curated by Alja Lobnik and Lenka Đorojević. A quick overview of the selection of performative works clearly attests to the importance of the support offered by the City of Women to local artists since its beginnings. The selected works present a circuit with the rich digital archive of the City of Women as part of the Web Museum managed by MG+MSUM.

The link between the analogous exhibition and its broader archive collection of the City of Women, freely accessible during the Festival, offers an insight into production encouragements through the prism of artistic productions, consequently shedding light on production conditions and particularly on the multitude of connections and links that have arose, formed and strengthened between the Association and the artists. The variety of views that have taken shape with the actors' management, with their diverse and subjective approaches and more or less intimate contextualisations, continue to entangle the links and relations into multi-layered correlations.

By presenting productions from different periods side by side, I see the installation mainly as a deliberate gesture that reveals the obvious changes in production, even if they are not addressed directly. Furthermore, with every walk around the installation or one of its parts, it condenses, layers, folds and partly transforms information on the interconnectedness of the artworks, authors and producers/curators or the Association as such and its role in the artistic as well as the social and political sphere. Repeating or going back to the presented archival footage also gives rise to a few general findings: the contribution of the City of Women to the revival of some historical figures, the decreased number of performers, the establishment of new names among the authors and, at least partly, the continued support of some artists.

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ALJA LOBNIK

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE RADICAL EXHAUSTION OF THE BODY:

SIMONA SEMENIČ, BARA KOLENC, BARBARA KUKOVEC, KATARINA STEGNAR, KITCH (LANA ZDRAVKOVIĆ AND NENAD JELESIJEVIĆ).

The entry point to my guided tour is autobiography, which concerns the speaking position of *I* and is primarily tied to past phenomena that culminate in the political movement of the 1960s and the slogan *The personal is political*. The latter manifested itself mainly in performative practices that strived to defy the modernist concept of the artist as a genius and establish particular and non-normative identity politics in a feminist manner. The issue of autobiography is also closely tied to the Western philosophical tradition; the discourse of autobiography often had to take a step back in order for science to keep its “modest witnesses” (Haraway) and universality or, tautologically speaking, its philosophical character (Milohnič). Since philosophy still considers *I* as a position of speaking to be an excess of scientific objectivity, it desperately holds onto the universal *we*. But it is clear that no *I* as a position of speaking is independent of social structures and power relations, only in this case, it clearly states where it speaks from. Autobiography also occasions predicaments, as lyrical practice quickly slips into particularity that views the world only in the register where the latter caused personal pain and is unable to address it more broadly. Or, as Burrows would say: do not burden the public with your personal problems. In the history of performative practices, the body has become the central carrier that shows and gives itself in its non-normativity as another body, female, non-white, non-heterosexual, etc.

Simona Semenič's playwriting is a sort of ready-made episode from real life, says Nika Leskovšek in the foreword to *three plays*. She discusses relations between the ruling and the ruled, most often portraying them through men-women relations with all the perversity of inhibited erotics or sexuality, subtly calling attention to everything that is oppressed, suppressed, marginalised, giving it a voice, while other times demonstrating the spectre of perverse authoritative and patriarchal manipulations felt on the “political” bodies of subjects. Her writing is direct, colourful, funny, realistic, ironic, sarcastic, she uses swearwords, her writing is full of invasions of domestic violence, sex, erotics, marked by her sense of humour following a comic-strip-

like logic. While we can thank Jovanović for bringing colloquial language and slang to the stage (Generation performance), Simona Semenič introduces a mix of social and functional language types: swearwords and juiciness come together with insights into the history of drama and a self-reflection of the author's own literary and theatre work (Leskovšek).

Simona's solo performances are autobiographical stagings of the self, ready-made episodes from her everyday life. Simona does not perform herself by questioning the bodily or physical boundary as is often characteristic of performances, where the audience is also confronted with strategic shifts in the staging of the self; Simona delineates this boundary a little differently. Her staging of the self is physical, but this physical lives in language; language speaks to us physically. Writing sheds its skin through the body. Furthermore, her staging of the self is, in way, a cleansing ritual in which she confronts the healthcare system, cultural politics and men-women relationships.

At the Amfiteater symposium, Maja Murnik spoke of the bodies of Simona Semenič, calling attention to the historical philosophical line of Descartes who established dualism between the body and the mind, through a new wave of materialism, where this dualistic position of body and mind starts to dissolve, the body becoming a thinking body and a serious object of philosophical study. Maja Murnik suggests that there are several physicalities with Simona Semenič: the language body, the semantic body that is read on the level of language, topics and their juiciness (swearwords, vulgarism, erotics, sexuality), combines several linguistic positions, thinks about her as an artist in the system of art through a metaposition, analysing the history of drama and herself as an epileptic, mother, smoker, precarious worker. According to Maja Murnik, there is always a body with Simona Semenič, a corpse that is a body only until the funeral; when it is buried, it gets a different status. The body is liminal, not yet and not anymore, no longer alive, but not yet forgotten and buried. Her drama could also be understood as the dead body of the dramatic paradigm. It seems interesting that the text *Jaz, žrtve* (I, Victim; 2007) started circulating among medical staff as a manual providing an insight into the life of an epileptic and, in a way, tore it from the register of the medical objectification of the body. In a repeat performance of *I, Victim* at the City of Women (2018), Simona Semenič was replaced on stage by actress Maruša Majer. Interestingly enough, the acting interpretation, the establishment of emotional horizons and the intimisation of the *mise en intrigue* of an otherwise first-person narration, characterised by a humorous tone of the speaking position of Simona Semenič herself, also reduced the possibilities of addressing broader social and political constellations.

In the performance *Atelje* (Studio; 2008), **Bara Kolenc** takes on the biography of sculptor Karla Bulovec (1895–1957), historicising a specific phenomenon of oblivion, not least in relation to the time when Karla Bulovec and other female artists were active. Despite the time not being very favourable to women, these artists were cosmopolitan, educated at the rare academies that accepted women, e.g. in Berlin and Switzerland, and exhibited their works all over the world. Karla Bulovec was an artist who gave up her own comfort – home, family, everything that was expected from a woman – for art. Her creativity was ambitious, masochistic, megalomaniacal in the visions that she could realise as a woman. The performance *Studio* explored creativity as an impulse, a ruthless desire for creation, wild and destructive, that could rise above the biologically and socially forced necessity of motherhood, while putting even health at risk with its passion. Karla wore herself out with her three-meter statues, kneading clay, puffing on cigarettes and drinking gallons of coffee. It was a radical consumption of the body, but the performance showed that nothing about art is relative, it is always absolute and vital, no matter how we analyse, mythologise or objectify it. It is a sort of Freudian view of the world, fundamentally defined by the creative (Eros) and the destructive (Thanatos) aspect.

However, for Bara Kolenc, the issue of the subject as the driver on stage never really exists. For her, the subject is just one of many materialities, an instantaneous construction, a medium for the things it produces, communicates, transmits; it operates neither as a theatre role that would carry the idea of a psychological or social self, nor the self as the subject on stage with its own autobiography that would exist with a sort of remnant of intertwinement between life and art. The body becomes one materiality, the language another, and collisions between them are rooted in poststructuralism; to her, the body is always subordinated to language, it is the language of the body as there is nothing natural about it, everything is already linguistically encoded. *Studio* is Bara Kolenc's first collaborative project with Atej Tutta, which also represented the beginning of archiving that Tutta carries out through so-called hyper-recording or modulation; Tutta also entered the processes by recording them, but the documentary materials themselves became artefacts of art, derivatives of sort. They frequently found their place in virtual space which is characterised by the suspension of linear time (the visitor can move around this space across several timelines simultaneously, the past, present and future no longer having sharp edges and boundaries) and a significantly wider access that is no longer determined by meeting in real time and space.

A body that often consumes and exhausts itself, is unruly, insistent, excessive and non-conforming, is also characteristic of *Via Negativa*. Bojana Kunst calls this strategy the radical consumption of the body: "In this context, I understand radical consumption as a con-


sumption of the body, acting, presence, a consumption of human (acting) actions and abilities, physical and spiritual strength, affects, in order to achieve an intersubjective effect, an exchange between the performers and the audience (...) As we know, radical consumption is often at the centre of performance and bodily artistic practices in the 20th century and drives live communication situations. A consumption with no effect, the feeling one gets with *Via Negativa* that every consumption is only a depletion and the communication situation is impotent, despite its excessive nature. *Via Negativa* significantly disrupts contemporary power dynamics that can be thought in relation to the mechanisms of subordination and liberation and connected with the loss of the potential of human actions and the powerlessness of subjectivation that has acquired undreamed of dimensions with the development of contemporary forms of power. I see *Via Negativa*'s performance as a carnal and profane treatise on ethics, a radical clash with the time of excessive meaning and imperative pleasure." In *Prvi zakon B. K.* (The First Law of B. K.), as she pedals a bike, **Barbara Kukovec** converts one type of energy into another. What we are witnessing here is not the exhaustion of the body, but constant conversions; the pedalling of the bike produces lighting on stage and enables the video projection where we see her eat food that gives her energy, etc.

Via Negativa also uses a very special practice that could be called lyrical; it is very close to the concept of autobiography, only that it is often loaded with fictional derivatives. The audience have the feeling that they are watching a form of public repentance and that the latter produces pure pleasure which must also take into account "the disgusting dregs of the real" (Kunst). The medium of speech recognition is the body with all its fluids and openings with which we maintain our own obscene pleasure of the voyeuristic economy of the spectator exchange, where the acting body and action is established as a victim in order for us to be able to see the obscene or for the obscene to reveal itself to us (Kunst). This register contains not only the victim position of the speaker on stage; the relationship with the audience also assumes a certain unease on their part. *Via Negativa* does not wish to moderate this relationship but to intensify it to the extreme. That could also be one interpretation of the performance *Stegn se* (Drop Dead, 2011) by **Katarina Stegnar** as part of the *Via Nova* cycle. It toys with being a body on stage, which the artist also developed in her previous performances when she was staging the death of German expressionist choreographer Pina Bausch (1940–2009). In *Drop Dead*, she becomes the body, the audience become the mourners and the theatrical situation becomes a funeral ritual. Katarina Stegnar's partner, walked out of the theatre at the premiere when Katarina announced her diagnosis to the audience. This started the rumour that Katarina was really dying and that, for her, theatre was the place where


she could process her fate. The performance examined the fundamental relationship between fiction and reality, catching the spectator in a trap where he or she really did not know what the author's personal story was and what was fiction. The relationship actress-spectator is a game of power. Katarina toys with the spectator's affects, manipulating with emotional registers and unhinging the spectator.

The **Kitch** duo (Lana Zdravković and Nenad Jelesijević) is part of a genealogy of practices that have been around at least since the 1960s, blending high and low, integrating pop and producing a criticism of consumerism that is also familiar to some avant-garde procedures. The duo has two directions. Firstly, their eternal flirting with trash, kitsch and everything that is said to lack taste. It is a resistance against the elitism of (conceptual) art and its hermetic stance. They also transform the relationship between the audience and the performer and often change the space so that there is no clear hierarchical organisation. The organisation of space is based on the essential decentralisation and desacralisation of theatre. *The Oath* (2016), for instance, turned the theatre space into a Balkan café and the City of Women Festival became the setting of a happening and a real trashy wedding, eroding the institution of marriage through a subversive affirmation and repositioning that equates life and art.

The experiment of transferring spectacle and pop culture in artistic procedures poses the institution of art the question of what the hell it should do with all this enjoyment and showmanship beyond the clean forms usually produced by (bourgeois) art. Kitch's ideology is always in antagonism towards the middle class and the norms and commands on how things are supposed to be and stand. Kitch strives for the affirmation of the base and the worthless, but in a materialistic manner; it strives to determine different production working conditions and distribution of roles. Essentially, kitsch is supposed to have the same structure as crowd psychology; it is both acceptable and understandable, it insists on being separated from high art and it is not tied to one social class, simply appealing to mass taste. It is a sort of confrontation between alternative elitist forces on one side and the narrow-mindedness of the nation-forming culture on the other, which takes place through the exploration of marginal forms where *everything* can quickly dissolve into *nothing*.



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ANDREJA KOPAČ

A QUICK REMARK ON THREE TYPES OF GAZES:

*THE PERFORMANCE I HAVEN'T SEEN,
THE PERFORMANCE I'VE HELPED CREATE AND
THE PERFORMANCE THAT INSPIRED ME.*

The exhibition *Transfer | Circuits* represented a unique curatorial/documentary event that, on the one hand, reflected women's "choreographic" and "performative" writing; on the other, it represented a certain historical insight into the selected authors and their works in the last twenty, thirty years, that have left a permanent mark on the field of Slovenian contemporary performing arts. I can say that a certain reminiscence, together with a new reflection on the pieces, literally painted a deep insight into certain works, into their anachronistic potential and into their fonts from all possible directions, which in their own conglomerate create a performative landscape that is constantly resisting the existing status quo.

ALL BEAUTIFUL RUINS OF SINJA OŽBOLT


I decided to invite **Sinja Ožbolt**, dancer, choreographer and pedagogue, this year's recipient of the Ksenija Hribar Prize for Lifetime Achievement and a person I deeply admire, to open my "curatorial session". There is something special about hearing about a performance you haven't seen. By recapitulating thoughts and events around the creation of *Wonderful Ruins* (1996), Sinja gave a series of disillusioning facts, which are now somewhat appealing, remote and dusty. There is also something inconceivable about the absence of performances that should have been made in the past or in the present, but haven't been, for different reasons. Nevertheless, most wonderful is that the transmission process is now at work with Sinja's students – her utopian, crazy, unthinkable ideas therefore still persist. By them through them/within them.

MY OWN PRIVATE SCREETCH PERFORMATIVITY


Perhaps crazy ideas, somewhat similar to those of **Jelena Rusjan**, with whom I've collaborated in *Screech Orchestra* (2009). It was an amazing, cheerful and sometimes bizarre collaboration; Jelena Rusjan invited her colleagues: Ana Franjić, Barbara Krajnc Avdić, Urška Vohar, Leja Jurišić, Neja Tomšić and me. When we performed this performance in Pristina (Kosovo), professor Seth Baumrin invited us to New York and the touring was great! Nevertheless, I am still asking myself – why me? I am not a good singer, I am not the best performer, I didn't even want to be on stage in the first place – but there I was, singing back vocals and having a great time. What I could do well, is some writing - I wrote the opening song one day in the middle of rehearsal on a sheet of paper in a couple of minutes. "Being Screech" is a unique and unforgettable moment of "my own private" performativity – I am thankful to have been a part of it.

PURE JOY ON A SOFA

Authors **Leja Jurišić** and **Teja Reba** are also "catching" a unique, exciting and ungraspable rhythm. In their "Sofa" performance they establish a place of infinite utterance and omnipotence of performatives, that is, words that have meaning and operate at the same time. As *displacements*. As *circuits*. Between them, and as a whole (with us). In this lies the greatness of the discourse of female authors, namely, there is a singular, a dual and a plural throughout. Always –and all at times. Seeing and tasting "*Plea on a Sofa*" was – a sitting spectacle in a minimalistic, witty and precise discursive format which opened up an endless potential of site-specific (performing) connotations. "Sofa" for me was an important moment on how to bring a private space in front of the audience and stay open for all possible moments to occur suddenly. Pure joy, witty humour and a laughing scene. The fifth wall (finally) falling down.



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PIA BREZAVŠČEK

SISTERHOOD, MOTHERHOOD AND “NATUREHOOD” IN THE PERFORMATIVE, POETIC AND SOMATIC MODI

The three performances I chose have little in common. Still, they all had an impact on my formation as a feminist dance critic. They engage with different modi of performing and tackle different topics, but for me, they all contain a level of intensity that made them a permanent part of my private mnemonic archive.

1. PERFORMATIVE SISTERHOOD

(MAJA DELAK'S *EXPENSIVE DARLINGS*, 2007)

From bad to worse

As regards the performance that speaks openly about the working conditions in the field of contemporary dance, from the perspective of today's rapidly worsening situation, it is astonishing that in *Expensive Darlings*, there are still quite a lot of performers on stage. It is a performance with seven women artists. Without a doubt, in today's conditions, it is a rather large production – in 2008, the crisis also took a toll on the art sector, and uninstitutionalised art forms in particular, such as contemporary dance, were the first victim of austerity.

Interest formation

I was then only entering the contemporary performing arts scene as a spectator and later as a critic. It was also still one of the few performances that I did not have to write about. And from what I had seen, it was a prosperous field, worthy of aspiring to be a part of it or at least getting to know it better. Considering this particular piece, it was fascinating to see seven women on stage, each with her own strong performative and declaratory position.

Female complicity: all for one, each one by her own

For me, it was liberating to see how different performing characters and styles can easily share a stage without it being overcrowded, without anybody being left aside – even Katja Kosi, the translator is not “only” a translator, but an equal performer. It is an exemplary piece of how the stage with its inhabitants can organically modify to ensure everyone her own voice. But still, often stronger amplifying moments happen, when everyone steps together to back up the one who steps forward as a particular performative

statement is being made. Even though the dance field is predominantly a female business with plenty of women, there are proportionally more male choreographers in leading positions. That is why a piece like that – seen through my 20-year old self – was empowering. It gave me the feeling that at least there existed a kind of sisterhood or complicity where solidarity and ego did not block each other (as one of the performers, Barbara Krajnc, said at the end of the performance). The performance opened up a whole world for me, and a wholly feminist one, too.

11 years later

That was maybe a bit idealist of my younger self. Even though it is an auto-poetic performance, reflecting relations and working conditions, even in a critical tone, performance situation is a fiction. Nevertheless, it still seems to me today a piece on community. What is performed is not always what we have the opportunity to live – even if we hope to do so. In deteriorating working conditions, it is getting harder and harder to insist in such a complicity (as is insisting on creating larger group pieces), authors have been forced, in order to survive, in another kind of relation – competition. Today, most of the *Expensive Darlings'* performers are still, in one way or another, working: it is a privilege to witness their development, the shifts in their focuses, their growing process or simply acknowledge life that happened in between.

2. THE POETICS OF EMBRACING THE EVERYDAY: MOTHERHOOD ET AL. (ANDREJA PODRZAVNIK RAUCH'S *TUESDAY*, 2010)

(Non)performing everyday

Tuesday has nothing in common with *Expensive Darlings*. The former is speaking about being a female performer in a performative way. The latter is trying to put performativity in brackets for the purpose of exhibiting a non-performative, personal, profane everyday that has its own specific poetic quality. The performance wants to make explicit the poetics of everyday life through the character of Suzana.

The everyday and the professional

I want to talk a little bit about how I met Andreja Podrzavnik Rauch. I was by then studying and already working as theatre critic at Radio Student. I also worked at the Ljubljana Food market selling bread. I often visited events, round tables and educational events related to dance. I knew Andreja from stage, but I didn't know she knew me. One time she came to the market and invited me to write something for her and her colleagues' book project. We met a couple of times and I got to experience her extremely sensitive way of working.

From the inside out

Later on, I first had the opportunity to follow the creative process (*Tuesday*). Andreja's vision was to follow Suzana Koncut, a former dancer, now a

renowned translator from French. And because Suzana is a single mother, her younger son Jan would obviously also be included (somewhere, somehow). Through the character of Suzana, Andreja wanted to bring some of the poetics of the common in the everyday – rarely thematised and visible – into a performative situation. When viewing the performance again, after so many years, I was shocked, as I remembered it rather differently. It seems I have mixed up Andreja's ideas (her talking about the work) and the actual performance. In my recollection there was, for example, a situation where people were sitting in a circle, with Suzana performing in the middle and Jan on the outside.

The autonomous performance of the woman's mental load in her performance

There are different levels of performance that Suzana and Jan are brought into. Suzana's character is the main narrator, a figure whose physicality and textual material are the main communicated ideas – and Jan whose presence is an integral part of her life, because – as for many (single) mothers – her child is, whether she wants it or not, her permanent (if not physical, at least mental) occupation. It is not a coincidence that Andreja, too, was undergoing intense changes in her personal life – as being pregnant for the third time must have had an impact on the topics she chose to tackle in her art: her view on creation and its conditions, types of subjectivities, its privileges. As if by staging these little-big things of the everyday, she wanted to affirm them to herself and to all of us.

The authenticity of amateurs?

If we leave out Christopher Benstead, the musician, there were no active professionals in the show, as Suzana Koncut, former dancer, had changed her profession already some years back. In that sense, amateurism does not affect the professionalism of the performance, the performers are in a rather comfortable zone – a semi-documentary mode that is beyond personal, an autobiography, beyond intimate that points out singularity, common to all, in which the poetics hide. This performance was, for me, one of the key entry points for writing an article about the role of amateurism in professional performances (*Becoming Child of Theatre*, Maska magazine). Reflecting Deleuze's notion on becoming-minority (woman-child-animal, etc.) in a theatrical situation, I see it as a method that inserts a certain fragility into theatre. Child presence can be read as a wilder presence with the ability to dissolve the conventions of representation on stage.

**3. SOMATIC QUESTIONING OF THE MYTH OF THE NATURAL WOMAN
(TINA VALENTAN'S *WHEN THE MOON IS RISING*, 2008 AND *KALYPSO*, 2016)**

The corporeal wildness

When the Moon is Rising is also connected to this "wildness", not of the

child, but of the woman who was, through patriarchal history, considered to be closer to nature and thus has to be tamed – if not by marriage, child-bearing and rearing, through other forms of institution. I remember writing about her debut solo performance, dealing with our primal carnality or animalic nature, ten years ago on the CoWeb seminar (reviews of shows during the City of Women Festival). It was a good place to practice writing and to make friends, but the archives of the blog are ((un)fortunately?) no longer available. Tina Valentan's exploration of the animalic is somatically based – she lets her body rid itself of culturally expected conventions – which sometimes drives it close to ridiculous. She plays with revealing or hiding the flesh – the animal which we all are. With this problematisation, she is wittily and very early on tackling the ever more important questions about human relation to each other, to other animals, to their own animalic essence.

Human reproduction through woman's flesh

Kalypso – her second solo work followed with an eight-year gap. The upgrade of the core theme is on how the experience of motherhood is tackled. In contrast with Andreja Podrzavnik Rauch's piece – where this is created very sensitively through relationships and negotiations, it happens on a somatic level in Tina Valentan's performance. Motherhood is the very thing which makes woman "closer to nature": she is the bearer of new life, she reproduces, all that is new is born through her flesh.

Reproducing life, producing art

Living the reproductive life of a mother and being an author and art producer are wittily compared and juxtaposed. The techniques are a mix of performative methods – what I mean by that is that they affect the public and the somatic ones – they primarily affect the very body of the performer.

Woman as producer and consumer

Both performances use small round objects which, in addition to their visual and bodily impact, also produce meanings and associations. Grapes frame the body as a consuming entity, a flesh that needs to constantly reproduce itself through consumption. Eggs, on the contrary, show the body as a reproducer, as a creator.

These glimpses into my private mnemonic archive suggest only some of the possible, personally embedded emphases in the vast landscapes that these performances are opening.

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SABINA POTOČKI

A BIG PART OF MY LIFE, A GUIDED TOUR

This exhibition represents a big part of my life, from early 1990s until today, since I was (and still am) professionally (as dancer, producer or programmer) involved with most of the artists presented in this exhibition. I will focus on three – all of whom I also know personally: choreographer, dancer, and dance expert advisor Nina Meško; visual artist and performer Milijana Babić from Rijeka, Croatia; and the techno burlesque collective Feminalz and their ongoing performance Image Snatchers, produced by Emanat, where I am also currently working.

Nina Meško has been professionally involved in dance and choreography for over a decade. Most of her original pieces, created between 1996 and 2007, presented a clearly articulated concept structure and showed genuine interest in experimentation. What is important to stress is that Nina is now one of the few choreographers in Slovenia who are now regularly employed. You may know that it is almost impossible to get a regular job as a dancer/choreographer in Slovenia, since on the institutional level there are almost no positions for these professions. Her first work presented at the Festival was the dance performance *DIE KLEINE FLUGSCHULE* (1999). Her research project *My Private Archive* was featured in 2006. Her project *The State of Things* was produced by City of Women in 2004. I was involved in this work as a producer. City of Women has been “struggling” with production finances since its very beginnings, our main funders – the Ministry of Culture and Municipality of Ljubljana – support the organisation with scarce funding intended only for the festival, so we couldn’t “break through” to ensure the funding for new productions, although we had had all the needed knowledge and experience and there was growing interest among Slovenian women artists. Accordingly, this production was low budget – as most of City of Women productions so far.

In *The State of Things* Nina Meško collaborated with the visual artist Tanja Lažetić. The environment of professional morning dance classes at the Ljubljana Dance Theatre was the stage for the video screen, which presented a series of video interviews with Slovenian dance producers, choreographers, and theoreticians. The authors were interested in their relationship towards their own work as well as towards contemporary dance art in Slovenia and abroad; they

were also interested in their criteria and evaluation of dance performances. The aim of the interviews was to attempt to inform the viewer with the position of contemporary dance in contemporary society, in the arts, and in the production system. The project hoped to tackle the position of the artist towards his or her own creations. The title of the project was taken from Wim Wenders' film *Der Stand der Dinge*, presenting the director's reflections on the film industry and the position of the artist within.

The State of Things was also about the intensive establishment of an area of reflection, as this was a project questioning the conditions and contexts of its own origin. The project staged a high level of reflection of one's own medium, which provided the viewers with valuable insights into those key segments of contemporary dance practices that in most projects remain hidden. The artists discussed the state of modern dance with five key protagonists: Uršula Cetinski, first CoW director, now director of the largest cultural institution in Slovenia – Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana; Matjaž Farič, dancer, choreographer and producer; Mala Kline, dancer, performer and choreographer; Nevenka Koprivšek, director of Bunker Institute; and Emil Hrvatin (now Janez Janša), theatre maker and director of Maska Institute. (Since most of them are still working in the field, it might be interesting to compare their statements from 2004 with their recent views and positions). On the stage, we can see dancers training. The critic and theoretician Katja Praznik wrote the following in her essay 'State of things and the symptoms of the crisis of the dance medium' (Maska journal, 2005):

“What is, State of Things like? And what is the state of affairs? I will proceed from the hypothesis that State of Affairs – as a performance exploring the status of contemporary dance in contemporary society, art and the production system, that is as a performance in which the artist establishes her position in relation to her own work – testifies to the crisis of the medium of contemporary dance (also/at last in Slovenia). (...) Concomitant with the interviews is the dancers' training; two parallel worlds thus emerge: the world of movement, the discourse of the dancing body, and the world of language, the discourse of theory. Both worlds function impeccably,

unperturbedly; neither the dancers nor their coach show signs of taking in the parallel discourse, and vice versa; one world practices dance, while the other talks about it. Thus there an intriguing doubling is created which, in current debates about contemporary dance, its trends and preoccupations, is often manifested in dichotomies between essentialists and conceptualists, dance and non-dance, new dance and old dance, and so forth (...)”

Milijana Babić always creates an imaginative space for engagement. After returning from South Africa to Europe, confronted with an unstable and precarious life as a freelance artist and the brutality of the newborn capitalism in former socialist countries, her previously imaginative artistic journeys started to evolve more and more toward direct political and social engagement through artistic action, including ready-made political actions in public spaces. Her work draws on a number of studies and findings concerning the rights of the weakest and most vulnerable social groups, such as the elderly, unemployed, or women. In most cases, the data sheds light on the violations of human rights, as well as social norms and standards we prefer to ignore or, rather, facts we too often turn a blind eye to. It is rather funny that it was my Belgium colleague, curator Cis Bierinckx, who drew my attention to Milijana Babić. He had seen her work in Durban. But since she lived in Durban for over 14 years, it was not unexpected that we didn't know her work.

SANTA (produced by City of Women in 2004) is a site specific performance, which took place on the streets of Ljubljana during Christmas. Living in a socialist country, we didn't know Santa Claus within a religious context (Christmas), nor was our figure dressed in a red costume; for the New Year's Eve we were visited by a "Grandfather Frost", known from Slavic paganism mythology. Since consumerism and capitalism have cut deeply through Slovenia and the Balkan region at the time Santa was conceived, Milijana was wearing a "classical western" red-and-white Santa costume, on her knees begging in silence in the public space. Accidental passers-by were invited to drop coins into a Coca Cola can. Not to confuse the passers-by with the image of Santa in the red clothes, they receive a colouring-in-drawing of Santa with the message "Colour me and give me a name", thus giving them an option to choose the colour of the clothes on the black-and-white photocopied image.

Being the producer of this performance, I can recall of many hilarious anecdotes, from several police interventions to being chased away by a street beggar, who saw unfair competition in *Santa*. At one time, *Santa* found

herself in the middle of a massive Santa Claus running competition, and the next day the photo appeared on the cover of a local newspaper with a comment explaining that one of Santa Claus contestants used the opportunity for earning some side money. Or, the hilarious image of the begging *Santa*, taken in front of the Venice Biennale main entrance, in high summer season.

Building a Bright Future (2011) is a performative audience game, a collective game of building card towers. “Apart from being just a game, the tower of cards is also an expression, meaning structure or argument built on a shaky foundation or on one that will collapse if a necessary (but possibly overlooked or unexpected) element is removed. Performed by the audience, individually or in groups, for the duration of the exhibition, it simultaneously presented a constantly changing installation. The backs of the cards have been specially designed with an image of a peace chain, with an equal number of men and women, standing for the vision of a ‘bright future’. Each player marked by a badge as a ‘builder of a bright future’, stands for the awareness of individual responsibility. The idea of building a bright future with playing cards is dystopian in its start, as it seems an impossible task to get so many little pieces of paper to balance on one another. However, there’s a possibility that a tower can be built with patience and the correct technique. This happens especially when a profound group dynamic has been created.” (Predrag Pajdić)

The exhibition *Looking for Work* (2012) was based on the documentation of a year-and-a-half-long action of the artist looking for work. It evolved around an ad stating: *Visual artist urgently looking for any kind of work*, which was published on a regular basis in local advertising publications. Looking for work through newspaper want-ads, Milijana was investigating and experiencing first-hand the evils of employment policies which are eroding on labour and ultimately on human rights. She received mainly offers for sex work or other “indecent” job proposals, offers that were underpaid and exploitative. The well-documented process aimed to present “the state of things” in the post-socialist and post-war free market (but socially devastated) climate in Croatia.


Feminalz: *Image Snatchers* is a techno burlesque. It is hard for me to be objective because I am a true fan of Image Snatchers – I have hardly missed a show during the 5 years of their events. Nevertheless, let me first take you a bit into the background of Image Snatchers and talk about them from a historical perspective, since I have been the producer of their work.

Emanat Institute is active in the field of contemporary dance, performance, publishing, and education since its establishment in 2007. I joined the organisation in 2008, after working at City of Women


for 10 years. I have found with Maja Delak, the artistic leader and director, a common ground as well as shared interests in the genres of new burlesque, cabaret, and live practices, which were rather underdeveloped in the Slovenian performance art and dance scene. Presently there is still no formal education related to performance/live art in Slovenia; we were trying to fill this gap with occasional workshops (Marijs Boulogne, Liz Aggiss, Marisa Carnesky, Antonia Baehr, Ursula Martinez, Moira Finucane, among others, whom we presented in collaboration with the City of Women Festival). Establishing Emanat's own *Image Snatchers* was a logical next step (2013). Over the last five years, they've created over fifty acts, using successful strategies of appropriation and recycling to deliver a brand new experience:

“Image Snatchers are an entity without shame, without taboo, without censorship. By liberating themselves, they liberate the audience. This is where their alliance is formed. Nudity, pornography, homosexuality, perversion of pop culture, feminism, transnationality, queer perspectives on gender, and many other concepts that the mainstream Slovenian theatre production is trying to avoid at all costs – this is the thematic modus operandi of Image Snatchers.”

Two years ago, the collective Feminalz took on a new way of working, developing solo work based on their techno-burlesque characters (*Image Snatchers Present: Matilda and her Buns*, 2017). In 2018, another step was made by establishing the *Syndicate of Outlandish Entities*, a yearly platform of edgy urban genres, with elements of cabaret, new burlesque, grotesque, irony and satire, stand-up and live art with strong element of humour and subversion.




Sabina Potočki is a former dancer, freelance programmer and producer in arts and culture.







A black and white photograph of a person from the chest down. They are wearing a white t-shirt with a quote printed on it. The person is holding a camera in their right hand and has a bag slung over their shoulder. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

**Art is still not where
you think you're
going to find it.**

MAJA ŠORLI

BUILDING A FEMALE ARTERY

The feminist tradition in Slovenia has been and is still often repeatedly broken because of ruptures in national-political systems. From the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) to the socialist Yugoslavia and finally to the capitalist Slovenia, women were very busy adjusting to the new states and orders. A variety of transformations within feminist movements occurred in reaction to political changes. In 1991 Slovenia gained its independence and started to transition from a socialist to capitalist country. In terms of the topics directly addressing female issues, women had to defend the right to abortion in the newly adopted constitution. It was a big event in December 1991, with public demonstrations and an important victory to which many of the future collaborators of the festival also contributed. However, for the feminist community it was one of the rare events connecting women.


In the new country, the visibility of women in the public space significantly dropped until the birth of the City of Women festival. One of the performances in the first edition was the play *Alma* (**Uršula Cetinski**, 1995) about the, at that time mostly unknown, extraordinary early 20th century Slovenian traveller, polyglot, theosophist, and writer Alma Karlin, whose story is interesting also because she has been living with a woman companion, Thea Gammelin. The creation of the show began at the same time as the idea for the festival itself (Cetinski was also the festival's director). The show coined or maybe even encouraged research about real personae. A year after Karlin was for the first time translated to Slovene (she wrote in German) and today she's well anchored in Slovenian culture. The show itself was classical in form, however, because of the content – telling a story about an extraordinary forgotten woman, it symbolised a signpost of confident female theatre (Slapšak 24).

The memory of forgotten women has also been provided, years later, in a more experimental way. *I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You* (**Kapelj Osredkar, Jurišić, Reba, Čigon**,


Habib) was announced as a “female map of the city in which memory holders form missing and ignored stories of women who worked their way through the city”. The multi-layered project had two main events: first, a walk around the historical city centre exploring hidden attractions connected to women, including visiting houses where some of the prominent Slovenian women had either lived or worked. Second was a public happening called *Alive Sculpture*, where the creative team stood together with 129 female volunteers and formed an “X” portraying women described in the book *The Forgotten Half (Pozabljena polovica*, Tuma, 2007). The manifestation took place at Congress square, where many crucial social, political and cultural events have taken place throughout history. Part of the project was also a video, *Ljubljana City of Women*, which has two tracks – an audio track, in which two of the artists are interviewing people on the streets. They ask if they remember any important women, if they know if any statue is dedicated to them, to whom they would erect a monument, etc. On the visual video track, however, we see a street colonised by male statues, which are here transformed into female statues. The humorous critique of the under-representation of the female in public space is also an enunciation of the wish for a female artery in Ljubljana’s city centre.

When corroborating the feminist tradition the festival does that by enabling visibility and creating a community of artists and audiences; when it dissents tradition, it does that with provocative programming and by questioning its own position. City of Women successfully fulfils both sides.

Extract from the article *Building a Female Artery in Slovenia: the City of Women festival*, online publication *What drives us?*



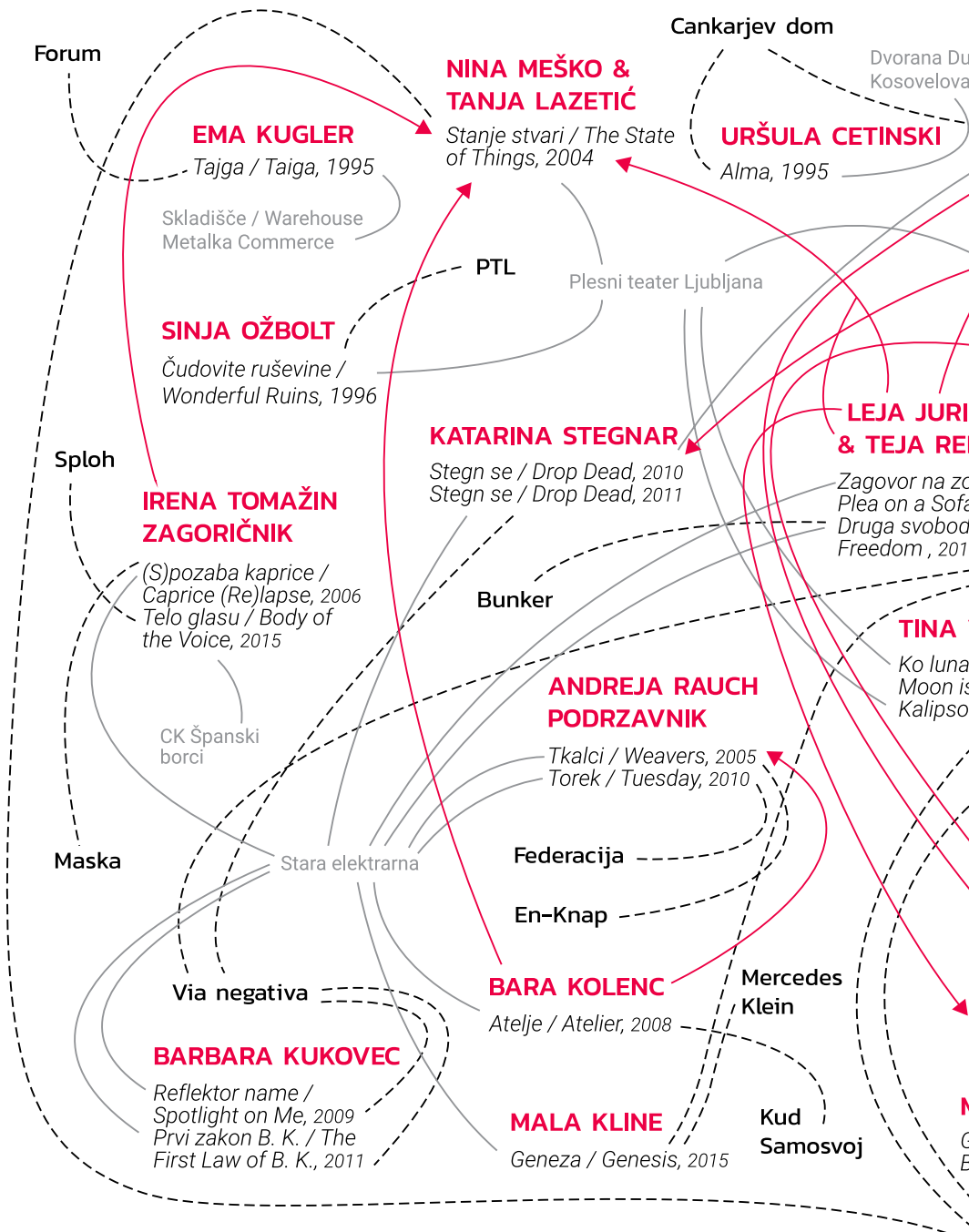
Maja Šorli, PhD, is a researcher, author of scientific articles and artistic theatrical texts, dramaturge, scriptwriter, pedagogue and intermedia artist.





Achtbares
Linke
Emanze!





rdeče / red: umetnice, vključene v razstavo / artists on exhibition

črna poševno / black italic: dela umetnic, vključena v razstavo / artworks by artists on exhibition

črna / black: producenti / producers

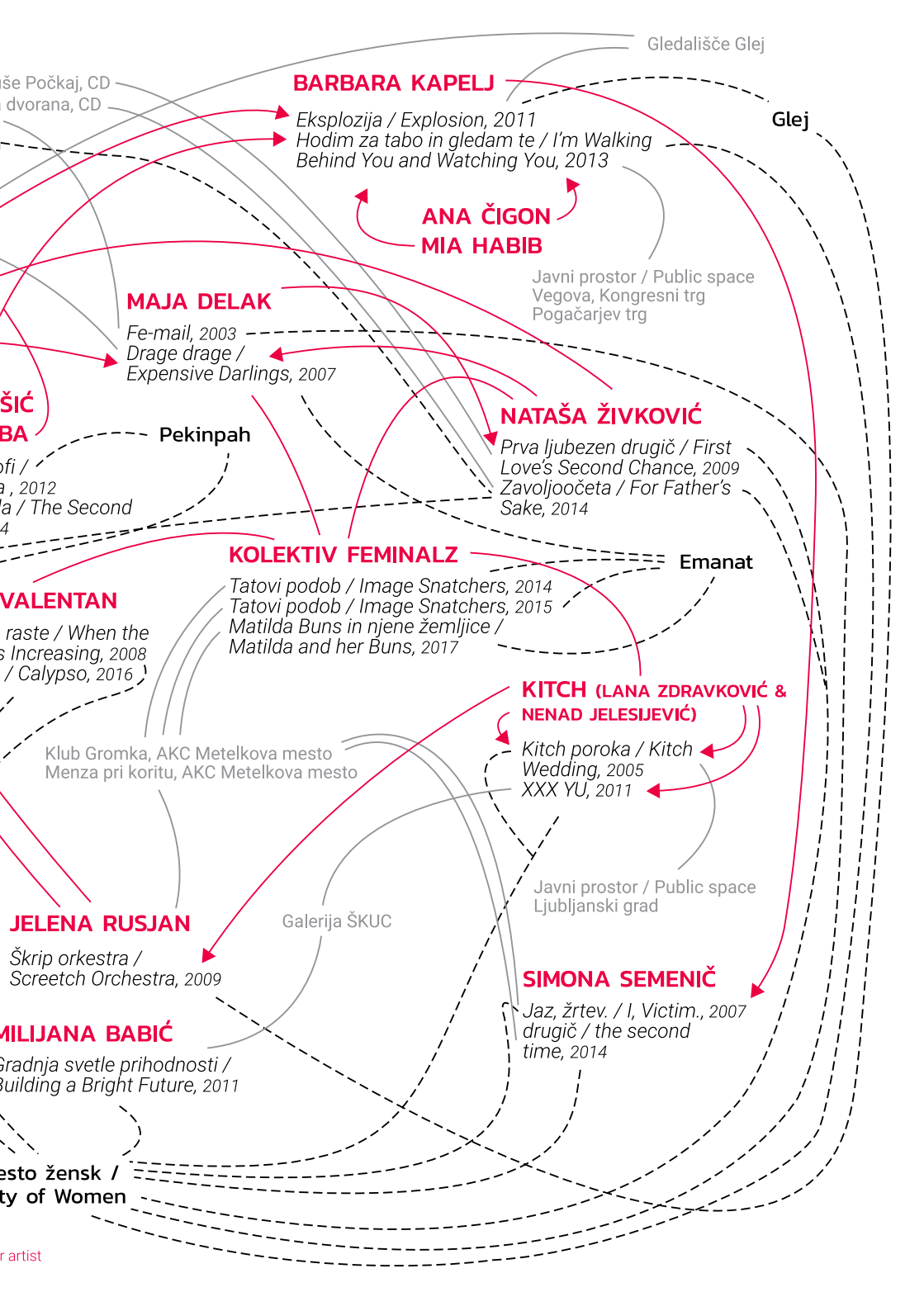
sivo / grey: prizorišča / venues

črtna črta / dashed line: povezava med delom in producentom / the connection between an artwork and its producer

siva črta / grey line: povezava med delom in prizoriščem / the connection between an artwork and its venues

rdeča puščica / red arrow: povezava med umetnico in delom druge umetnice / the connection between an artist and an artwork by another

oblikovanje zemljevida / map design: Ida Hiršfelder



Gledališče Glej

Še Počkaj, CD
dvorana, CD

BARBARA KAPELJ

Eksplozija / Explosion, 2011
Hodim za tabo in gledam te / I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You, 2013

Glej

ANA ČIGON
MIA HABIB

Javni prostor / Public space
Vegova, Kongresni trg
Pogačarjev trg

MAJA DELAK

Fe-mail, 2003
Drage drage / Expensive Darlings, 2007

ŠIĆ
BA

fi /
a, 2012
a / The Second
4

Pekinpah

NATAŠA ŽIVKOVIĆ

Prva ljubezen drugič / First Love's Second Chance, 2009
Zavoljoočeta / For Father's Sake, 2014

KOLEKTIV FEMINALZ

Tatovi podob / Image Snatchers, 2014
Tatovi podob / Image Snatchers, 2015
Matilda Buns in njene žemljice / Matilda and her Buns, 2017

Emanat

VALENTAN

rate / When the s Increasing, 2008
/ Calypso, 2016

Klub Gromka, AKC Metelkova mesto
Menza pri koritu, AKC Metelkova mesto

KITCH (LANA ZDRAVKOVIĆ & NENAD JELESJEVIĆ)

Kitch poroka / Kitch Wedding, 2005
XXX YU, 2011

Javni prostor / Public space
Ljubljanski grad

JELENA RUSJAN

Škrip orkestra / Screetch Orchestra, 2009

Galerija ŠKUC

SIMONA SEMENIČ

Jaz, žrtev. / I, Victim., 2007
drugič / the second time, 2014

MILIJANA BABIĆ

Gradnja svetle prihodnosti / Building a Bright Future, 2011

mesto žensk /
ty of Women



**FEMINISM IS
UNIVERSALISM**

EVA D. BAHOVEC

FEMINISM IS UNIVERSALISM

'I hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman', Simone de Beauvoir wrote at the very beginning of *The Second Sex*. (Beauvoir, 2009, 3) Writing about oneself, if one is a woman, produces a resistance. However, as Cristine de Pizan wrote more than half a millennium earlier, this resistance is not a resistance to one's own womanliness, or to the fact that one is born a woman, born in a woman's body. (Pizan, 1996, 37) It is related to an inaugural uncertainty of a woman's basic position, her place in the world, her site of enunciation from which she can speak. **For a woman, it is necessary to introduce 'the point of view' of sexual difference in the very act of speaking and writing as a condition of possibility of a new beginning, while at the same time she has to confront the necessity of resistance.** This has been conceptualized in Freud and his invention of psychoanalysis. That is why both Freud and psychoanalysis are so important for contemporary feminism, regardless of the fact that it has been contested and denied so many times. (Rose, 1986, 83) But then again, Freud did not figure that out himself. It was 'feminism and psychoanalysis', one of the conceptually strongest currents of modern feminist thought that had to bring it to the surface. (Bahovec in Mesec, 2018, 122)

Beauvoir herself rejected the 'psychoanalytic point of view' as a possible explanation of the fact that, as far back into history as one looks, women were always oppressed. (Beauvoir, 2009, 8) Beauvoir rejected psychoanalysis along with 'the point of view of historical materialism'. Neither Freud nor Marx – that would be her answer to one of the most important questions of her generation in philosophy. However, this can explain her text and her main argument, but cannot account for her site of enunciation, her explanation that the woman as the other has first to write about herself – and she has to do it for other women. Only through other women, through the bond of reading, as Shoshana Felman puts it, could Beauvoir actually become aware of her own point of view: that of **being, or rather, becoming, a feminist.** (Felman, 1993, 12) At first glance this looks like a bit of a paradox. Beauvoir says at the beginning that she has overcome the resistance to write a book on woman, and she had to do that before writing anything else; but it turns out that only after other women have read her book the 'site of enunciation point of view' could be envisioned.

Regarding objections to Beauvoir – that she hated everything specific to the female body and was afraid of her own femininity – one has to expose a kernel of 'negativity' in her conceptualization of the Woman as Other. *The Second Sex* has been one of the most widely read and highly contested books of the century. Recognition of greatness on the one hand and fierce denun-

ciations on the other, declaring the book to be the feminist bible as well as a new birthplace for antifeminism – all of the reactions should be confronted in Beauvoir by consciously choosing the objective gaze from ‘nowhere’, which has to be personally positioned and reflected upon as such.

That is what history has taught us: that feminism is an ambivalent, self-reflective and internally split positioning, and that we need to take this internal splitting most seriously, even if we think that it might weaken our political agenda. As it seems, it is precisely this internal split as a recognition of ‘**a feminism which is not one**’, to paraphrase Luce Irigaray famous title of ‘this sex which is not one’ (Irigaray, 1972), that belongs to the arsenal of the strongest, even most daring ideas of *The Second Sex*. And there is no irony in stating that. There is no ‘irony of the eternal feminine’, as Hegel would like to have it, and no irony related to Freud’s insistence on the woman as the one who has to be put on the side of the lack, or Lacan’s fixation of this eternal site as the one of the feminine exception as opposed to the man and his universalism. The masculine side is the side of the universal, Lacan claims, and the feminine side is that of an exception to this universality. One can wonder that it might perhaps be one of the reasons that his formulas of sexuation in *Seminar XX: Encore*, (Lacan, 1975, 99) are still so largely propagated.

However, *one can strive for a new kind of universalism*. Even in the earliest beginnings of feminist thought in the late middle ages, in Christine de Pizan and *The Book of the City of Ladies*, one can find a feminist demand for universalism. Men have written so many bad things about women, she claims, and have denied women access to knowledge, wisdom and intellectual creation. But as soon as one looks at the history of human civilization, Pizan seems to be telling us, one can find so many women writing, inventing, creating, and, above all, one can find women relying on reason and arguments. All these stupidities and hate speech against women, to use the present-day terminology, which at the time of Pizan were related to *querelle des femmes* and to the *Roman of the Rose* – **all this long time accumulating nonsense is obviously damaging; but it is bad not just for women but for men as well, it is damaging for humanity as such**, for the reason that it is possessed by all human beings and cannot be denied to one half of them.

Misogyny creates an obstacle for the growth of knowledge, narrowing the possibilities of its production, in its progress or decline, as it affects its most important kernel: the truth itself. ‘You say this because you are a woman,’ François Mauriac objected to Simone de Beauvoir. ‘I say it because it is true,’ Beauvoir responded. And there seem to be more truth in saying this than that one could imagine. This truth is related not only to Beauvoir’s basic concepts as the content of her enunciations, but to the site of enunciation as well. *The Second Sex* is a book about the truth, it is a ‘Phenomenology of the Female Spirit’ as much as it is a phenomenology of the human spirit.

But as such, **it has to be pronounced from a specific, partial perspective and feminist situated knowledges.** It is from this embedded point of view that the whole, along with its basic antagonisms and conflicts, can actually be envisioned. To see the conflict, to see ‘the war between the sexes’, one has to take a *parti pris*. **Everything cannot be seen from anywhere, one has to take a certain point of view to see it all.** This is where Beauvoir comes rather close to Althusser, as does the feminist standpoint theory to that of Marx in his critique of Hegel’s idealism. The truth in question is the truth which speaks, the speaking truth, and this is what brings Beauvoir close to French theory and to the new generation of philosophers, related to structuralism and psychoanalysis in post-war France. (Bahovec, 2017, 249)

A quest for universality, beyond the eternal feminine, and apart from the position of an exception. This seems to be somehow inherent in the very core of feminist thinking from its beginnings in the late middle ages to its climax in the 20th century. And it is the case also with the Enlightenment ‘intermediate link’, that of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written against Rousseau as the main advocate and opponent of the Enlightenment. Wollstonecraft’s claim for universality is on the side of virtue, as Enlightenment philosophy of the French revolution most generally is. It is true that the argument of the text is opposed to Rousseau, but its structure of address is a rather Rousseauian one. Wollstonecraft claims for virtue, as she claims for ‘a revolution in female manners’, and in doing so, she criticizes women because they want to be women and promote their femininity, relying on their particularity alone. ‘Oh, you foolish women,’ Wollstonecraft accuses her sex, the desire of being always women is actually the one that degrades the female sex. It brings it beyond virtue, as well as beyond the universal. Women have to be addressed as women; on the other hand, the addressee of Wollstonecraft is mankind and its universal virtue – ‘not as a sexual virtue’ at all. (Wollstonecraft, 1985, 227) The ambivalence persists, and it is a promising one.

Clearly we should add Beauvoir to the line of succession from Pizan to Wollstonecraft, inspired by the Enlightenment quest for universality, present already in Pizan as a feminist ‘*avant la lettre*’. Although Beauvoir wrote a lot of autobiographical works, diaries, memories, voyages and letters, she never got caught in the illusions of a direct access to the personal and that of its transparency. She could not rely on that kind of presumably authentic writing about oneself, which is present in some contemporary feminist authors’ figures as a basic experience – which turns out to be that of oppression, and as such counts as political. **Women should certainly be allowed to speak, but this is something different from describing one’s own, personal, inner, intimate ‘experience’, and talk about their feminine identity as**

something immediately given, as the only real identity – the truth of feminine identity as such. As if an identity could be grasped as given, and non-ambiguous, in its presumed nonconflictual wholeness.


What is perhaps most unbearable about feminism is this coming together of the objective neutrality with a conscious *parti pris*, which as in Freud is always already sexualized. And this precisely is a condition from which one begins to write, and addresses other women by writing. Being a woman, I have to explore my particular site of enunciation, as opposed to a man, who does not have to do so. Being less universally human than he is, the woman, as the second sex, has to be more ‘subjective’, although containing no personal experience. In this, it comes close to Derrida’s inspiring analysis of the politics of the proper name. (Derrida, 2005, 17). **This new kind of politics is important for feminism, considering the long history of forgetting all the female names, hidden from history, not visible for the human kind. However, the politics of the proper name is also ambivalent in a way that it remains open to the misleading feminist demand for getting personal in a borrowed voice, finally caught in feminine identity and the identity politics that goes along with it.**

It is the theory of enunciation, as developed by the linguist Émile Benveniste, and propagated by philosophers Étienne Balibar, Bruno Karsenti and others, that brings about a major break with any identity and identity politics, along with the ‘personal’ in feminist discourse. This looks like a properly feminist endeavour, related to the use of the first person in Pizan, Wollstonecraft, and, last but not least, in Beauvoir. To begin my ‘writing on woman’, using the personal pronoun I, as in Benveniste ‘the ego that says ego’, this presents the very condition for opening up a road to reach the universal, which could be followed in three steps. **First, woman is not born, but rather becomes, woman**, Beauvoir writes at the beginning of the second book of *The Second Sex*. (Beauvoir, 2009, 5) Second, in an interview for *Le Monde*, Julia Kristeva presented her idea of a rhetorical feminist turn of such a depersonalisation in Beauvoir, proposing the following transformation: **one is not born, but I become, woman**. (Kristeva, 2016, 53) This is an important move beyond identity politics of a collectivist (not universalist) mind, but nevertheless does not seem to reach far enough. That is why a **third step** should be suggested. The impersonal ‘one’ in English, or ‘on’ in French, supplemented in Kristeva with an I, could be supplanted further by using another kind of personal pronouns, that of a depersonalized ‘we’.


By replacing Kristeva’s ‘I’ with a ‘we’, which as a pronoun cannot be deduced from an I or an ego, has a structure of address which remains universal. The pronoun ‘we’ is precisely the one that cannot be deduced from an ‘I’. (Macé, 2017, 473) It is totally empty, non-personal, pre-individual, and it goes beyond any identity, biological substance, or symbolic name. The politics of the personal pronoun ‘we’ should thus replace Derrida’s politics of

the proper name. It presents a pure site of enunciation, without anything else. It is a 'speaking truth', such as Lacan would like to have in his return to Freud (Lacan, 1966, 408), but unfortunately without any reference to sexual difference. This truth of enunciation, a feminist 'speaking truth' as specified by the pronominal politics of the 'we', seems to bring on the surface the most valuable moments in feminist thought, and brings together its biggest feminist breaks, related to the names of Christine de Pizan, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir.

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman (Beauvoir, 2009, 293) – by inventing a pure, empty, pre-individual 'we' of a pure 'becoming'? Could this becoming bring some fresh air to that of 'becoming revolutionary' of the 1968 student revolt, and perhaps make a break with what's left of the left?



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