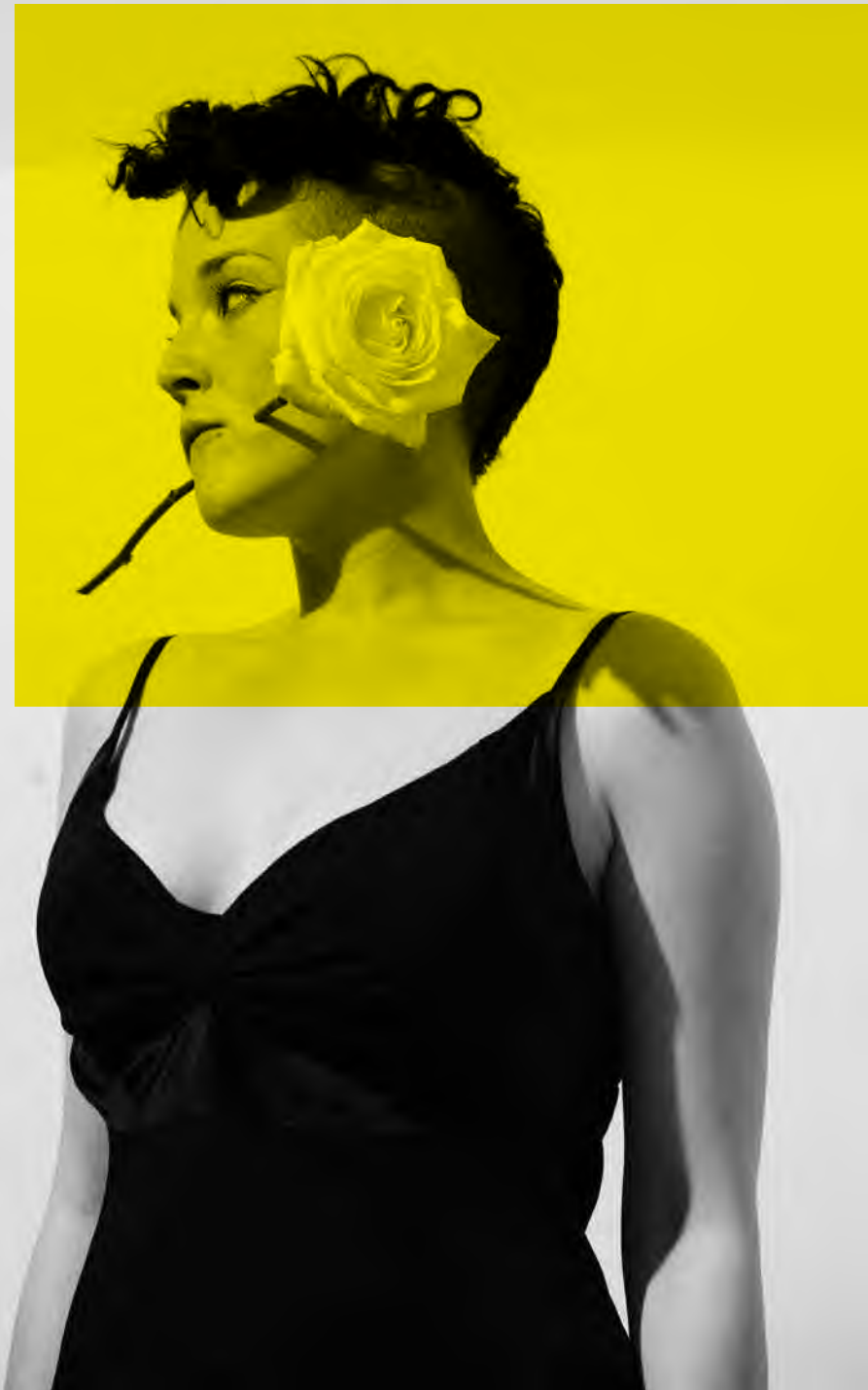
CITY OF WOMEN

IMMERSIVE REFLECTION 2017/2018

#FEMINISM

HAS BEEN
OUR WORD
OF THE YEAR
SINCE 1995.
EVERY
SINGLE
DAY.



“The City of Women festival has contributed to putting Ljubljana on the cultural, intellectual and social map of Europe in an important way. It is a well-known and highly esteemed festival, much discussed in European intellectual and academic circles. (...) The festival has made a strong impression on me especially by virtue of maintaining high scientific and intellectual standards and artistic creativity, as well as having an ear for current international topics. It is a unique blend, appearing at the most suitable moment. (...) I can honestly say that the City of Women festival counts among the few events deserving of serious international attention, and measures up to any cultural event in any capital.”

ROSI BRAIDOTTI,

philosopher and feminist theorist, guest at the festival in 1999

CITY OF WOMEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SABINA POTOČKI

WHERE, WHEN & WHY CITY OF WOMEN

In her contribution at the conference The Archive as a Process. How to Archive Contemporary Performing Arts and Keep Them Alive? *Sabina Potočki illuminated the archiving methods and the genesis of both the City of Women Association and the Festival. The conference was part of the 23rd International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women.*

***Sabina Potočki** is a freelance producer and former contemporary dancer. From 1997 to 2007 she was the programme assistant, executive producer, programme co-selector and programme coordinator at the City of Women Association, and the organizer of the International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women.*

Not many people, even in Ljubljana, know the details about the establishment of the City of Women festival. Perhaps it is worth saying a few words about the socio-political situation in Slovenia in the early ’90s of the previous century. After quite strong feminist movements in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s in Slovenia, as well in SFR Yugoslavia, many local feminists were actively involved in the processes leading to Slovenian independence. On their initiative, the Commission for Women’s Policy *(Komisija za žensko politiko)* of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia was established in 1990, and in 1992, shortly after the first multi-party elections in Slovenia, the Governmental Office for Women’s policy *(Urad za žensko politiko)* was opened. Its director Vera Kozmik and a group of progressive female and male politicians of the time decided to offer political, financial and logistical support for the establishment of the International festival of Contemporary Arts City of Women. Thus, the first edition of the festival in 1995 created a unique – and today almost unimaginable – situation, a fusion of high politics and civil society, with activism, contemporary arts and culture representatives working side by side. Although the festival was well supported “from above”, the broad network of civil society curators acted on the principle of working “from below”. The first edition of the festival, which borrowed its name from the title of Christine de Pizan’s book *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405), was rather impressive. According to the first festival director Uršula Cetinski it was comprised of over 50 events in five dynamic days, during which the creativity of women was brought to the centre of cultural and general attention in Ljubljana as well Slovenia.

The first edition of the festival was organizationally, logistically and financially strongly supported and exceptionally well organized. The festival was conceived and organized by numerous art, culture and theory experts from Slovenia and abroad (14 regular festival curators and organizers and a huge number of external collaborators and partner organizations were involved in the programming and festival preparations).

After the first festival edition, the political pressures both from the left and the right were strong, and both were mainly negative towards the festival, so the Office for Women's policy officially withdrew, and the festival started to be organized by the City of Women Association, established by the original team of programme collaborators and festival supporters.

Already in 1996, the festival thus lost political support and the majority of its funds, but that same year, the newly established City of Women Association overtook a rich legacy of the first edition of the festival. To maintain the quality as well the quantity of festival events, the Association and the executive teams of the festival had to adopt "guerrilla organizing strategies", in order to be able to replace the missing local funds as well to maintain the "high standards" of the first edition with a much smaller team of collaborators.

I will not go into the details of all the archiving activities related to the history of City of Women, but I would like to mention that already in 1995 we set up an internet page (which was rather early, since, for example, the first Slovene web directory Matkurja had only begun operating in 1993). Beside the City of Women home page, a bilingual festival brochure is produced each year, including other additional promo publications and flyers. Most of City of Women activities are documented on photo and video, and a festival trailer is made each year.

For the 20th anniversary of the festival, in 2014, I voluntarily worked on archive pages, where one could find in one place all the details related to the history of the Festival and the Association, a full list of the programme curators, including their short CVs, other partners and festival collaborators, members of past festival teams, volunteers, and technical collaborators. Also included were images of the past twenty City of Women catalogues.

One year later, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the City of Women Association, a special edition of the Journal for the Critique of Science, Imagination, and New Anthropology *(Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo)* was published, where an extensive thematic section was dedicated to City of Women, a precious and important historical overview written from various perspectives.

Visit the following links to read more about the history of the City of Women Association and its festival.

http://bit.ly/CoWArchive

http://bit.ly/CoWCZK

City of Women 2017: a reflection

MARY OSBORN & EMMA MØLLER

We arrive late at night on 2nd October 2017 to Metelkova City, a squatted military barracks, now autonomous social centre, in Ljubljana. Greeted by Amela Meštrovac holding a box of tea bags, milk, "štruklji" and keys to an artists' residency flat called The Asylum Studio *(Atelje Azil)*.

We are Mary Osborn and Emma Møller (osborn & møller), two curators and producers who have come together to form an international curatorial collaboration. We are interested in performance as a practice that can disrupt structures of oppression, rethink hierarchies, illuminate the slippery boundaries between bodies and offer a space for critical empathy. We have been invited to Ljubljana as curators-in-residence, to spend the next two weeks immersed in City of Women's artistic ideas and programme.

WE SPEAK ABOUT RESISTANCE.

City of Women 2017: a reflection

Over fourteen days, we see a diverse range of art. A solo dance piece in a large theatre (**Oona Doherty**), an immersive promenade through a gallery (**Eszter Salamon**), exhibitions of sculptures made not for us but for the ocean (**Špela Petrič & Miha Turšič**), a sound walk through the city (**Irena Pivka & Brane Zorman**). We attend lectures, we talk with new colleagues at conferences and over the sharing of food. Porous, complex, and non-discriminatory in its prescription of form, all that we see and hear points back to resistance.

We find resistance embedded deep in the festival programme but also in the daily life of Ljubljana, glimpsed as graffiti on the streets, harnessed and exemplified in squat culture and overheard and explained to us in day-to-day conversation.

WE LISTEN CLOSELY WE WATCH INTENTLY.

osborn & møller

ESZTER SALAMON & TEJA REBA

A DIALOGUE

Dialogue has always been in the centre of the City of Women Festival. A dialogue between artist Eszter Salamon and artistic director of the festival Teja Reba took place at the Balassi Institute Ljubljana during the festival. In their conversation they discussed the practices of "rewriting" histories.

T. R.: Can you tell us a few things about yourself that you think are relevant in order to understand the discussions that will follow?

E. S.: I have studied classical ballet and have practiced folk dance with my mother. So I have had two parallel practices since my childhood – high art and popular traditional culture. Then I went to France in the nineties and started to practice contemporary dance, which was very influenced by German expressionism and American postmodernism. I was suffocated as a dancer. Contemporary dance didn't mean freedom or emancipation. It was just another kind of training. My education has framed my critical thinking towards movement. I thought that something has to be invented, so this is why I wanted to create other symbolic spaces or real physical spaces for movement. And the perception of movement became a strong issue, questions such as what it means to present a body on stage, what it means to be a woman on stage, what it means to exist in very strong coded behaviors or movement possibilities related to gender: all this became pertinent.

Talking about the relation between tradition and contemporaneity brings me to one of your early works *Magyar Tàncok*. Can you talk about it?

I created that work in 2005 and I invited my mother to cooperate. She taught me Hungarian folk dances when I was in kindergarten, 3 or 4 years old. Practicing and performing Hungarian dance was a kind of family tradition, it was actually a revival of the tradition in Hungary, but through that same practice I could also go abroad. As this was in the era of socialism and the procedure of getting a visa was not simple, it was not so obvious for a person to travel at that time. Through folk dance, we could travel around Europe. It is actually interesting to see how codes and restrictions bring freedom and allow you to move, literally. One thing is mobility in terms of choreographic movement, but there is also mobility in space. Geography.

So this piece was a kind of conference that I created to publicly share questions about how to save some popular knowledge from the past. When doing so, you also meet with impossibilities. In Hungarian dance, women have to behave in a certain way; there is no solo dance for a woman. I always wanted to dance the male dances: they are much more virtuoso and full of humour and physicality. For this piece, I learned several dances from my nephew and other men. I overcame the impossibility of the place that was designated for me, a place designated for me to exist in. When I left Hungary, I moved away from this practice, but my family went on. Of traditions we usually talk from a more general point of view, from an objective perspective, in the sense of their meaning in the life of a community. I wanted to address these diverse experiences from a personal point of view. I was departing from singular experiences, lived both in a particular historical context and through my own private story, which was specific. It is a piece about personal and yet professional autobiography. And it was a way to lay out the threads of how dance is always linked to representation. We tend to think of dance as emancipatory, but it is in fact always linked to ideology. For example, think of postmodern dance: yes, it creates a rupture with classical ballet, it breaks certain norms, but basically it too constructs a universal body. The universal body is always a white male body. When you understand that dance, movement, body don't exist outside the realm of society and the predominant ideology, then you have to ask yourself what alternative ideology you want to work with or live in.

Let's talk about those two historical dimensions: the autobiographical and the ideological. I am interested in how hegemony and its attached discourse relates to the body. You have created many works that touch upon this question.

I was always busy with the linking of my story, which I thought I shouldn't leave out, and the story of dance history, a more official history let us say. I want to problematize the gaps between the two and also to relate my ongoing work to history. As a choreographer, I have never been interested in inventing movement, a certain style. I was interested in problems, questions, trying to work in many different methodologies for each particular work. I am interested in creating relationships, links with history, and question those same links. In 2013 I wanted to make things more explicit – to deepen my questioning about how to put things in relation and make that relation more dynamic. I decided to dig into a very large time span – over a hundred years – a zoom out in time, but also in geography. I wanted to create a different perspective on dance practices and dance history, on the history of West-

ern Europe or the First World and the history of modern dance in the period 1913–2013. Of course, every history is a fiction, it is always subjective, it is a theatre, so I tried to think of how the history of modern dance has created its own fiction: on the map we see Russia, Germany, North America. In order to create one's history, what has to be put aside? There is one frame: everything that falls out of it is forgotten, it doesn't exist. Coming from the semi-periphery (Hungary) these facts were pretty clear to me. So I zoomed in on the history of colonialization: the wars, the falling apart of empires, the creation of nation states, the new types of war. Three hundred wars happened in this time frame. I didn't want to work with war specifically, but with the blind spot of history, with things that one suppresses, so I searched for ancient dances that have been colonized.

I chose 1913 as this is the year of the creation of the legendary *Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky and Nijinsky, premiered in Paris. The work of modernity that has revolutionized music with the reinvention of tonalities, and ballet with the new body. Modernists bring new form but not new content. In this case, the libretto has a problem: it is about the pagan myth of rape. A myth that is still carried out in the everyday space of patriarchal society. I wanted to relate this symbolism of rape to a larger contextualization of violence, sacrifice and destruction. I researched war dances from all continents, except Europe and America, China and Russia – the big empires. I didn't do anthropological research: my project was to create a practice expressing what we can learn from the material that we encounter in this research. We developed a physical practice of embodying dances, inhabiting the gestures of the others. Dance has a haptic dimension in itself, it is about eating the gestures of the other.

I insisted on forcing history to meet histories. That is how the work became a zombie piece… the revenants… *The Monument 0*. The 0 stands for not being anthropologically, ethnologically founded, it is not a proof, but a negative, something that does not yet exist, something underground. It also inaugurates a series of *Monuments* that I created later.

With historical unconsciousness met, the lectures became pretty horrible. Among the dancers with whom I worked and who came from many different contexts, great and violent encounters happened, the work provoked a lot of suppressed content. This encouraged me to start discussions with people outside the dance world, outside of Europe. And the work is precisely about a non-European perspective, and maybe about the impossibility of any such perspective.

I am now interested in focusing on dance education. Because again, what do young people still learn today? Ballet and postmodern dance techniques. Neo-colonization in the arts continues under the umbrella of democracy and capitalism, and we don't question it, because it is nice. And dancers start to move the same way, they do the same movements, it is nice, the movements are beautiful.

In certain works you open up the scale to a maximum, and in others you scale down drastically, you focus on details, particularities, subjectivities. Such as in *Melodrama*, where you pick up the story of a Jewish woman, named Eszter Salamon, born in the southern part of Hungary, near the Serbian border, in 1949.

This is a solo work that I perform. I speak at the table for two and a half hours. It is about a person with the same name as mine, we hear her life story, from her birth till 2012. It started as a conceptual idea. I wanted to question the name, I found several Eszter Salamons. It is a strange encounter, a bag of projections that come over you. How to create a story out of several stories linked by a name? How to create fiction out of documentary material? This lady was a fantastic storyteller. A story of Hungary, of a certain geography, of more than a half century was drawn in front of me. A history of a woman's life and a story about women's history. This lady went to university, but was still beaten by her husband. Her life story became the frame where I could reflect on history, on the banal and the unbelievable. I am not an actress, I don't like theatre. So how to tell the story in the way she meant it to be told? What to choreograph, when there is no movement on stage? It became about self-presentation, a choreography about the ways we edit our lives, the way we arrange them, celebrate them, even if they are shitty, banal or miserable.

I developed this work for a museum/gallery space, working with older French actresses. Through immediacy and proximity, the work on the suspension of disbelief takes another turn. There is menopause, violence issues, being beaten, being old, aging, speaking about sexuality in an open way; in the reactions you understand how public space is owned by bodies and what is not being spoken. Women's autobiography in public spaces is one of my concerns.

Women's biographies were often forgotten or marginalized. This brings us to the work you are presenting at the festival. Who is Valeska Gert?

Coming from a Jewish bourgeois family, Valeska Gert was influenced by the cabaret scene and Dadaism and became a solo artist, making short performances from 1916 on. She broke with the idea of the mute dancing body and showed her back to modern dance almost at its beginning. She worked a lot with filmmakers: Pabst, Renoir, Fassbinder, Fellini. She immigrated to the US in 1936 and returned in 1949, to Zürich and Berlin. She opened bars where she could perform and invited artists to perform there too. And she was pretty much forgotten. She is as important as Nijinsky, but a woman, and a Jew.

The artistic hegemony – creating your school, style, empire – is one way of making art, it is making a brand. The other way is more experimental, critical. And more difficult to include into common remembrance.

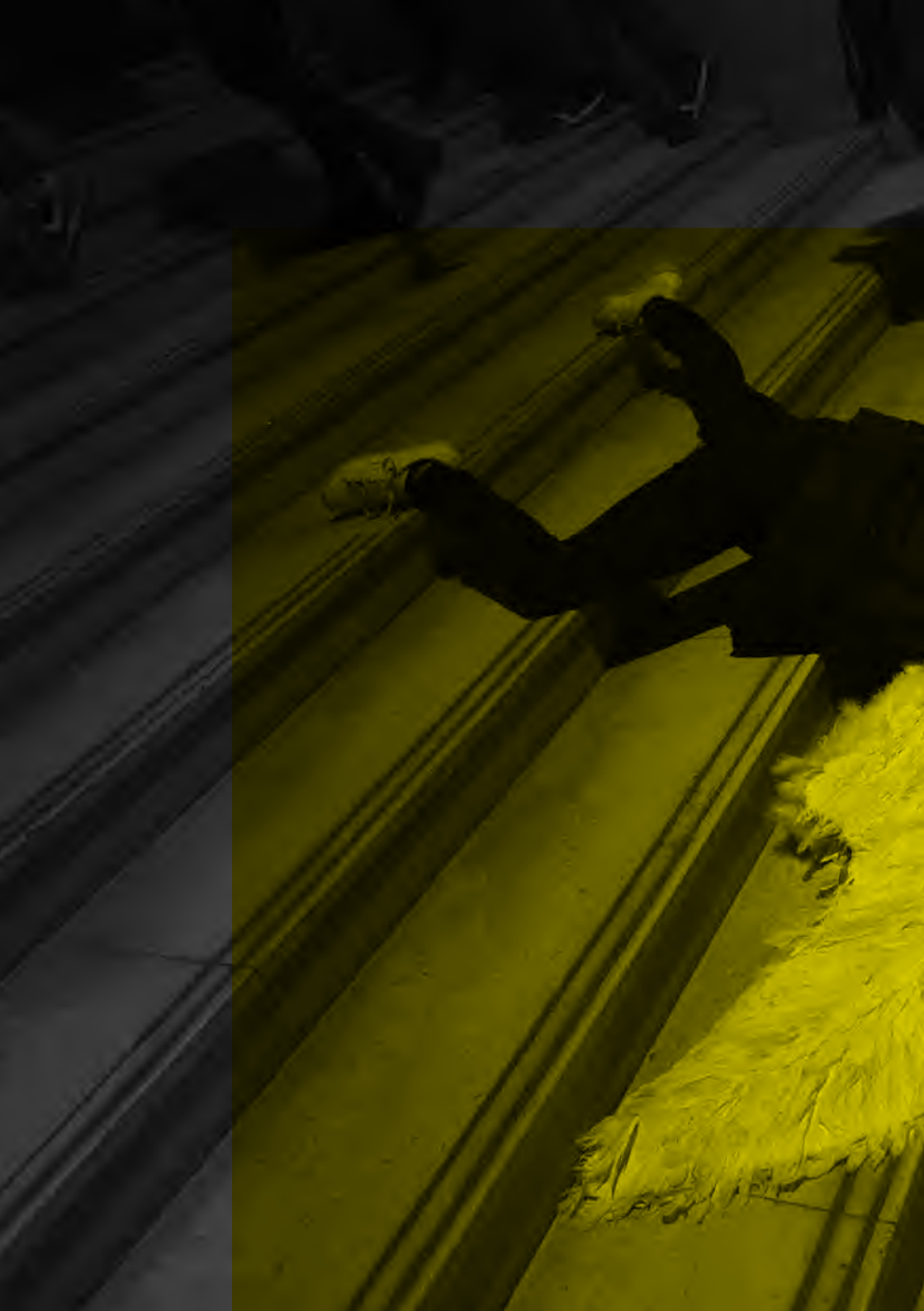
How did you approach the erasure? Did you collect materials, fill the gaps, work with the unknown?

I played Sherlock Holmes a bit. I might have a pleasure in digging even if there is nothing to dig. I invent, write and speculate on history. And never throw in the sponge.

The work is not about reenactment, or paying an homage. I am not interested in the past in that way. In Valeska Gert I was interested in finding what activates me today. What has this radical person done, and how I can use that energy, without being correct about it. I am not interested in being correct. She wasn't either. She was a crazy, intense performer, she hated the bourgeoisie, she invented parody, she danced with her voice and exposed material such as aging, sexuality, prostitution, death. She stated that modern dance has nothing to do with its time; nothing to do with the streets, with the social reality. She couldn't cope with nationalistic, romantic, German mythology, so she tried to find other dances, and she rejected the incestual position that says: your culture is your culture, and your identity is your culture, this is your place, so stay here. I decided to create a work that reflects on that, and not on the documents of her dances as such. It is much more based on her autobiography. The archived material is tiny. She created 50 or 60 works, but four at most are spoken of, so I speculated about that – I invented the work from the title, or from a picture, or from a short description.

What is your opinion about the victimization of the female?
(question from an audience member)

Persecution means persecution. No rights means no rights. But we shouldn't talk only with the vocabulary of domination. We have to invent more tools in order to include the complexity of positions; we should learn from those positions and put them in the right place. Dichotomies are long stories, but we have to invent new stories. Use our imagination. I am an artist, not an opinion maker. Simplification is so dominant in any knowledge, but we should make knowledge complex and complicated.



City of Women 2017: a reflection

On our second night, over beer, we are told the festival this year is taking place in the charged run up to local and national elections. We are told about a new political party that has emerged, the Voice for Children and Families (*Glas za otroke in družine* – acronym G.O.D). Born in a country which has had two recent referendums on same sex marriage (the first rejecting, the second recognising) this is a party that 'expects divine assistance' in it's aim to overturn same sex marriage laws, maintain binary gender norms and family structures, that would replace the words embryo and foetus with "unborn child". During this conversation, we notice our first bright yellow 3D printed clitoris pin badge - the symbol of this year's festival. We are given our own, we wear them proudly in the street, in the theatre, in the gallery, in bars, cafes and at bus stops, in Ljubljana and in our home cities. We see glowing clitorises everywhere, and in this soft and playful public action, we see pleasure exemplified in resistance, and how pleasure can powerfully resist.

At the same time we understand that what is evolving in this place and in wider Europe is a state of emergency. We're reminded of a text that has been seminal to the development of our collaboration, Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* where she says that *'Inside the word "emergency" is "emerge"; from an emergency new things come forth. The old certainties are crumbling fast, but danger and possibility are sisters.'* Pleasure and fear, danger and possibility, emergency and hope, City of Women exposes the social reality in which art is produced, and it quickly becomes clear to us that they do not shy away from possible sites of difficulty, conflict and contradiction.

Laia Abril's exhibition ***On Abortion*** is the first materialisation of this. The exhibition takes place at Kresija Gallery in the centre of town and documents personal histories of abortion. A woman is sharing a confession booth with a priest in Rome where she has been given one Holy Year of Mercy, where Pope Francis - in an apparently 'transgressive' move - has given priests special permission to absolve women and others involved in abortions. Not to undo the sin, but to let forgiveness be possible (as though that were as good as we should ever expect). Her secret recording of this personal moment is no longer secret, because we are invited to listen to it through gallery headphones in the exhibition. We hear the woman be asked how many sins she needs forgiveness for, just murder or adultery too? We think about power, fear and shame and the forceful way bodies are made to internalise these intimidations, and these hidden dark spaces that offer false refuge for them to be supposedly released. As we listen, we look at the bright gallery walls and the large windows that point out to the busy street, and hope that this woman knows how powerful it is to hear her words escape from that place into this space.

As well as being in a central shopping and tourist area, Kresija Gallery is situated opposite one of Slovenia's most famous Catholic churches. A church that - this time last year - was home to an anti-abortion campaign which used a projection of an "unborn child" across the entire front face of the church as it's primary public landmark. The exhibition is open for the duration of the festival, welcome to those who have read about the exhibition and those who stumble across it, simply drawn in by the eye-catching eeriness of the sepia prints through the open shop-front style windows: we appreciate the boldness in spatial proximity. we speculate over potential protests. City of Women understands that sites of potential conflict and difficulty are where the real work happens and pushes out far beyond itself.

Photo: Mateja Veble

WE APPRECIATE THE BOLDNESS IN SPATIAL PROXIMITY. WE SPECULATE OVER POTENTIAL PROTESTS.

osborn & møller

City of Women 2017: a reflection

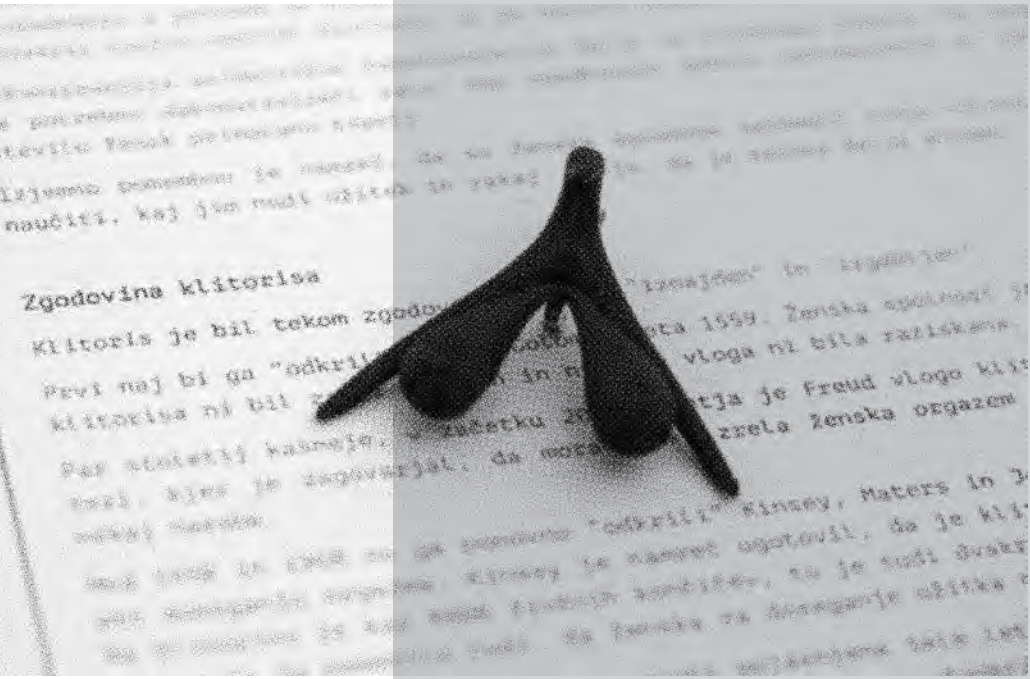


Photo: Nada Žgank

We continue this conversation during a lecture by Paris based professor of sociology **Éric Fassin**. Fassin's lecture takes us through the importance of the "Nature" argument in order that religion and tradition might maintain a transcendent form of authority that is removed from politics and democracy, outside of the history of control. This is illustrated in a decree from Pope Benedict 16th, that "Human nature also needs to be protected, just like the rainforest", implying that 'natural' institutions like heterosexual marriage are at risk of extinction and the state must therefore step in to support. Fassin illuminates the sinister way that this argument has been used in nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric, as these groups argue that it is necessary to preserve 'endangered identities' (e.g. a vote for us is a vote to return to the countries 'natural' state) and in anti-immigration politics (e.g. 'A rise in Islamic communities is a threat to women's and LGBTQ rights', from groups of people who have no intention of being transgressive in this area), a kind of 'homo-nationalism'.

On a more hopeful slant, Fassin has observed a shift in these authorities attempts to claim control of the body (i.e. abortion) to the control of symbols (i.e. same sex marriage). With this he playfully points out that *"if all you can hope for is to control symbols, well it can only be symbolic"*. Sexual democracy, therefore, where there are no transcendent authorities and the body itself can be a site of transgression and democracy - in and of itself, beyond symbolic politics - brings us great hope. At City of Women, we see, hear, and feel this embodiment of sexual democracy move from theory to action:

IV

Five dancers attempting to make visible a process that reflects the performance of gender as a fluid process of becoming, of shapes, sounds, endings, beginnings, repetitions.

// Performing Gender – Dance makes differences //

The tart sound and red smart of a body repeatedly slapping themselves in the lower belly bulge.

// Jija Sohn, Performing Gender – Dance makes differences //

A medley of guttural sounds and indistinguishable references forming in the mouth and limbs of a body as it becomes a site of transformation, perhaps even an exorcism, of repressed masculinities.

// Oona Doherty, Hope Hunt //

Two bodies moving between rooms and the stone walls of a gallery usually exhibiting works of fine art, exposing breasts, spit and embodying a living archive of a forgotten female force.

// Eszter Salamon and Boglárka Börcsök, The Valeska Gert Museum //

An imprint of a body on a bed of fresh cress, caused by an artist who stands in wait blocking the sun from the growing seeds, marking a relationship between humans and nature that makes neither transcendent of the other.

// Špela Petrič, becoming.a(thing) //

City of Women 2017: a reflection

Fassin's lecture asks us to think about gender through a different lens, beyond identity politics, he demonstrates that to talk about gender is to talk about relations of power. This conversation continues at the gender.net conference on the final festival weekend. Over two days, we hear representatives from organisations, artists and activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia come together for a rare opportunity to speak about their work and the social and political challenges faced by queer and feminist communities in their local contexts, and to acknowledge the wide range in difference amongst ex-Yugoslav countries. We hear inspiring stories. Despite a common narrative of hostile environments and limited resources, there is no limit in energy and necessity to make these festivals, events, publications and actions happen. And, as discussions unfold, we record conversation snippets:

V

share resources // demand a permanent confrontation with the past // take action // educate // choose antimilitarism // recognise difference // engage young people // face hierarchies between different generations of feminism // talk about feminisms, not feminism // "As a woman, I have no country" (Virginia Woolf) // go beyond identity politics // give public figures the most sexist statement of the year award // break out of isolation // break out of the safe space (safely) // occupy spaces that are off limits // be seen // be dirty // invite more members // open up // show alternative representations of the body // include contradictions and open up to new encounters // unlock the values of feeling // don't just represent, embody // make space for both possible and impossible feminisms

We speak about the balance between a need to create safe spaces and an urgency to disrupt public spaces that are out of bounds. We think back to Laia Abril's *On Abortion* still sitting opposite the church.

PIA BREZAVŠČEK, KATJA ČIČIGOJ, JASMINA ŠEPETAVC

"FUCK THAT FUTURE!" OR HOW TO DEPLOY A RADICAL CRITIQUE OF THE PRESENT TO TEAR THE FUTURE AWAY FROM PATRIARCHAL RELATIONS

Self-interview among three Dolphinians as a continuation of the reading canteen No Reading. No Eating *of the 23rd International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women*

For its 23rd edition, the City of Women festival invited the Dolphinians (i.e. members of The Sisterhood of the Proud Dolphin) to prepare a reading-culinary workshop. We conceived the workshop under the motto *No Reading. No Eating.* in line with the style of the initial meetings of our reading group – as a workshop where we discuss selected feminist texts while preparing and consuming food together. The choice of texts was made with regard to what appeared to us as the central thematic axis of this year's City of Women festival, which ran under the motto Nation_Nature_Norm: a critical reflection of reproduction, its ideological patriarchal naturalization and the possibility of its reorganization in a non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, egalitarian way. For this purpose we chose and read three texts: an anthropological study about the forms of exploitation of women's reproductive work in different cultural-historical formations, *Natural Fertility, Forced Reproduction* by Paola Tabet; a chapter from a manifesto of 1970s US radical feminism, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* by Shulamith Firestone, which also brings an attempt at a utopian imagining of a radical transformation of forms of socialization and reproduction beyond the nuclear heterosexual family; and the text *(Re)producing Futures Without Reproductive Futurity: Xenofeminist Ecologies*, by the Xenofeminist collective, which tackles these topics today by confronting feminism with queer and other critical theories on one hand, and with ecological threats on the other. In selecting the texts our aim was to navigate between the critical and the utopian, as well as to tie the work of radical feminists of the 1970s with the present social context and contemporary feminist currents and thus rethink the renewed (or never faded) need for a radical critique of patriarchal relations and the imagining of the possibility of different forms of communal life.

After the workshop the City of Women invited us to write this article as a reaction to it. The article was written by the members of the Sisterhood who actively organized the workshop at the festival: Pia Brezavšček, Jasmina Šepetavc and Katja Čičigoj (even though, of course, the Sisterhood itself counts many more active members). We decided to style our article so that

it would spring thematically from the workshop and the topics opened by this years' City of Women, while also broadening them with regard to our current activities and interests. We have thus set ourselves the task of fashioning a Dolphinian self-interview, i.e. to have each of us pose the other two one question which she considers requiring an answer from the specific addressee due to their theoretical interests, current projects or recent activities. In this way, we continue the conversational form set up at the workshop, where it was also accompanied by the preparation of snacks. At the same time, these questions are a continuation of our sisterly practice which consists in developing a methodology for mutual listening and learning as a specific practice of "kinship".

Pia: In current neo-conservative circumstances, do you think it would be helpful to radicalize feminism theoretically as well? Do you see a connection between the soft theoretical relativizations of feminism and the fact of a slide into renewed discussions about the prohibition of abortion etc. in practice?

Katja: This is, I believe, a key question for contemporary feminism, also because it pokes directly into the problem of the relation between theory and social and political practice; between theoretical production and social context. I think we could hardly talk about direct causality, for this would entail ascribing to theory too much power for social change; on the other hand, I think we can undoubtedly draw a connection between social context and theoretical production which could shed light upon the (im)possibility of an effective reaction of the latter to the former. To put it differently, I do think that certain social contexts facilitate certain forms of theoretical production (even if they do not thoroughly determine them); on the other hand, with a transformation in the social context, a question may be raised: how can a certain theoretical production, which came about in reaction to different social circumstances, react to the changed state of affairs? Let me be more concrete: I think we could say that the social consensus about the relatively well-established gender equality in the allegedly "developed'", allegedly "liberal" West, which has been relatively broadly accepted up until recently, has facilitated a certain type of theoretical production in the field of feminist theory and philosophy which you may call "soft" (as opposed to, for instance, a "harder" radical feminist line). Meanwhile, recently (with the tightening of attempts at limiting or abolishing women's reproductive rights, with the progressive exposure of sexual abuse, mobbing and rape in the academic world here and abroad, in the world of business, the entertainment industry etc.), it became clear even to the general public, whose opinions are probably shaped more by the media and social networks than by feminist analyses or state statistics (which have been continuously reporting about the subordinate status of women in the world), how very illusory the post-feminist picture of achieved social equality was, even in the West. In this shifted so-

cial situation, we can undoubtedly ask ourselves whether "soft" theoretical lines offer any kind of conceptual tools for tackling – both understanding and fighting – repatriarchalization, or rather the uninterrupted and global patriarchal nature of society. At the same time, we may of course also ask ourselves whether the post-feminist consensus, which perhaps facilitated the "softening" of the charge of feminist theory (in the West), as described above, is not at least partially responsible for the weakened and delayed fight against the progressive attempts at encroaching upon the human rights of women.

I further think that it is possible to answer your question in two, in fact related, ways, depending on what is meant by the "soft theoretical relativizations of feminism" – this fortuitous designation brings to my mind two phenomena which are perhaps connected by the up until recently widespread postfeminist illusion of achieved equality, which I mentioned above.

On one hand we can ascribe these relativizations to many critical theories which called into question certain assumptions of radical and other feminisms which Western historiographies like to call "second wave": the assumption of the universal nature of the signifier "woman" as the subject of feminist struggles; the assumption of the almost timeless, ahistorical and culturally non-specific nature of patriarchal relations which women are subjected to. This kind of relativization of feminism by way of its critique – a critique of its pretensions at universality and ahistoricity, pretensions which erase from the theoretical focus the differences among women, differences between women, men and others, as well as differences and changes in women themselves (as Jasmina writes in the following question) – can be located sometime at the end of the 1970s or the beginning of the 1980s, when black feminists (in the US and partially in Great Britain and elsewhere in the West) started pointing out the racial, but also class blindness of dominant white feminism and its blindness about sexual orientation and other factors of women's social locations such as age, ethnicity etc. Other critical theories followed, i.e. lesbian and queer theories (starting with Judith Butler), but also decolonial theories and decolonial feminisms. These relativizations of feminism have, on one hand, turned into the present consensus about the necessity of an intersectional analysis of gender (a notion introduced in the 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw), which became a kind of "dogma" of Western (academic, as well as activist) feminism. This, I believe, actually happened for good reason: it is undoubtedly true that when we talk about the oppression of women from a feminist viewpoint (in a global sense), we cannot take into account only the forms of oppression which affect Western, white, heterosexual women of higher classes; inasmuch as feminism is a fight for the rights of *all* women, it undoubtedly has to take into account *all* women. However, it is one thing to warn about the urgent need of an autocritique of the feminist movement and theory in light of their own egalitarian, universalist pretensions; it is quite another to abandon feminism (and perhaps an egali-

tarian and universalist political orientation altogether) because of past (and undoubtedly often still ongoing) errors and oversights.

To put it differently: these "relativizations" of feminism are not necessarily a problem, if by relativization we intend warning about the mistakes and oversights of certain forms of feminism, as well as alerting us to the necessity of thinking about other forms of oppression affecting women which are no less (ontological, biologically, socially or historically) "primary" than women's oppression. On the other hand, the problem arises when such critical practices deny the possibility and legitimacy of any feminist (theoretical or practical) orientation by denying the existence of a specific form of oppression, which is the oppression of women (whether we call it patriarchy, male domination, phallocentrism, androcentrism or anything else), by denying the systemic, collective and global nature of the latter and by denying the existence of a social group affected by this specific kind of oppression ("women"). Feminist theorists (e.g.: Iris Marion Young, Linda Martín Alcoff, Sonia Kruks, Christine Battersby, Alison Assiter, Kathi Weeks and others) have long discussed how to conceive of the relative generality and ontological reality of this category without falling back upon essentialism, faux universalism, psychologization or even biologism, and have showed this to be possible without referring to some given and unchangeable nature, identity or experience common to all women. And recently, the philosopher Catherine Malabou (in the book *Changer de différence*) pointed out the political need for a renewed theoretization of the collective nature of the violence against women and the relatively general, ontologically real nature of the signifier "women", by confronting deconstruction on one hand, and the critical discourses of queer theory and gender studies on the other.

In fact, Malabou does ascribe to theory or philosophy a relatively great amount of power, when she says that there is a certain kind of "complicity" between – if I use your words – the "theoretical relativizations" which deny the ontological reality of the signifier "women" and the everyday – sexual, domestic, institutional – violence against women. This may appear as a bold, paradoxically too "optimistic" hypothesis about the power of theory; upon a close reading, however, we can see that "complicity", analogy or parallelism, do not imply causality; to problematize the theoretical denial of feminism because it dangerously fits patriarchal social relations does not entail ascribing to it responsibility for the latter. It does, however, entail warning that feminism may be theoretically delegitimized and by that patriarchal social relations (unwittingly) sanctioned by theories which deny the reality of these relations, as well as the result of their feminist politicization – the consciousness of the existence of a specifically oppressed social group of women and of the specificity and relative generality or global nature of their oppression. This also entails preventing or at least hindering and slowing down the possibility of their critical reflection and transformation.

If on one hand we can understand your term "theoretical relativization" as referring to the critical discourses which problematize (a certain type of) feminism, I think it could also refer to certain contemporary theoretical derivations of feminist thought which explicitly consider themselves feminist. Problematizing the "phallocentric" or "androcentric" nature of different disciplines, including philosophy, is undoubtedly important, since it helps us put some distance between ourselves and what is presented to us during education, often without much critical filters, as the unquestionable "canon" of Western thought which takes itself to be the thought of human civilization as a whole; at the same time such feminist problematizations help us consider the material reasons for the absence of women from this canon – both as authors and "objects" of investigation (it is well known that in philosophy, women are often allotted the place of a denigrated sexual stereotype). Nevertheless, I would say that a certain theoretical production springing from such problematizations of disciplinary canons of Western knowledge often limits itself to thinking through the theoretical and philosophical consequences of feminist critiques of the philosophical canon, making it often unclear what this has to do with feminism understood as a fight against patriarchal social ties.

To put it differently: certain theoretical currents of feminism, I would undoubtedly call them "soft", which dominate certain academic milieus today, often locate the feminist nature of their enterprise in a shift in theoretical orientation, e.g. a different way of thinking the relation between matter and form, substance and accidence, determinism and freedom, body and soul and more of these kinds of analogously dualistically formulated conceptual pairs. Even if they are in themselves perhaps fascinating endeavours, I think that the meaning of such considerations for thinking the social mechanisms of women's subjection and their abolition is often lost in this kind of theoretical production. Thus, we may for instance begin from an affirmative appropriative gesture which takes what in the history of philosophy has been coded as feminine – matter, for instance –, tear it away from the negative connotations of passivity, derivativity etc., and ascribe to it an active, self-engendering, self-forming nature and thus form a fascinating, even philosophically creative or innovative theory (or metaphysics). This however makes me ceaselessly wonder how such a reevaluation of certain topics in the history of philosophy helps us understand the progressive attempts at restricting women's reproductive rights or the perpetual sexual violence (whose target are incomparably more often women and feminized subjects, than heterosexual men). Some might consider this question "vulgar", claiming that theoretical feminism cannot be measured against such everyday concerns. And yet, if theoretical feminism cannot be measured against "everyday", "vulgar" concerns of women – why still call it "feminism"? I do not deny that it might be possible to shed new light upon some feminist issues with a transformed conceptualization of certain topics in Western philosophy and metaphysics; it is true, however, that I have not read many works written by such "theo-

retical" feminists which would attempt this, or even succeed in it (and I think I can honestly say I have read a lot of this kind of writing).

I think here we strike upon the heart of the problem addressed by your question. I would say (again, some might say, in a sociologically vulgar manner) that this kind of "soft" theoretical production (by which I mean the second way of understanding the "soft relativizations of feminism" mentioned above) often comes about in certain cultural, academic milieus where it is structurally, materially "possible" to think feminism without women's "vulgar", "everyday" problems: I am referring here to the academic milieus of Western universities (but honestly I am not convinced it is essentially different here; the problem may also be endemic only to certain departments and disciplines), where the relative material stability of the writers on one hand, and the achieved formal legal equality of women in the wider society in question on the other, and perhaps the (up until recently) relatively liberal social climate, can facilitate dealing with feminist issues in a way which understands the latter mostly as issues of western metaphysics or its critique (or even its affirmative reinvention). As said, regardless of how philosophically fascinating the results of such a climate may be – and it is probably clear how important the material conditions of life are for the quality, not only the quantity, of intellectual production – the problem arises when the climate turns or when these theoretical results are confronted with the problems of women who have breathed radically different climates: precarious women, migrant women, non-white women, working class women from underprivileged social milieus, but also with the "vulgar" everyday problems of all women in a progressively neo-conservative sociopolitical conjuncture.

Again: how can we make use of such a theory in contemporary tightened social conditions? I see here the connection between the "soft theoretical relativizations of feminism" and the "fact of the practical slide into renewed debates about the prohibition of abortion etc." which you mention: theories which spring from and are based upon a certain postfeminist consensus about the achieved social, political and other kinds of women's equality, have difficulties, by definition it seems to me, when faced with the conditions of women's actual inequality in all fields of life. I would therefore conclude by saying: undoubtedly, a politically and theoretically more radical feminism is today more than welcome, even urgent – which I will try to show in my next answer as well.

Jasmina: Let me refer to something brought up by Tjaša Pogačar at our workshop at the City of Women festival in relation to our articles in the magazine *ŠUM*[1]*:* by multiplying the differences feminism has to acknowledge (between women, men and

[1] See: http://sumrevija.si/en/issues/sum-8/.

others; among different women; within women themselves), localization became the key academic practice – i.e. the recognition of the location we come from and the limitations which entail that we view every problem only partially. Though necessary, localization can on the other hand entail the kind of relativization alluded to by Pia, i.e. a certain blockage to the radicalization of a politics which could allow us to take a broader stand in relation to certain problems, while simultaneously also fragmenting feminist politics into a multitude of particular problems which no longer find a way of connecting into bigger (and stronger) communities. How do you see the tension between particular locations and the universal? Is it necessary to bring back into feminism the uncompromising discursive stances of our forerunners and start operating, at least partially, with notions of universal women's liberation?

Katja: I have already partially answered this question in the first half of my previous answer, when I tried to sketch what appears to me as potentially problematic in the particularistic approaches to feminism (or its critique). If we multiply the specification of the locations of women who talk and write about feminism, and consequently the problems which affect them as women, we run the risk, so to say, of not being able to see the forest for the trees, to use this common phrase. Every problem addressed is thus presented as *this* particular problem of *this* particular woman from *this* particular social location (differentiated according to race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age etc.) and nothing can any longer be considered a problem she has to face precisely because she is a woman – and in this sense a problem which other (perhaps all?) women as women, are subject to – and who can therefore address such problems together, as common problems. Analogously, if we agree to talking only in our own names as women in particular social locations (differentiated by race, ethnicity, age…), which necessarily limit our experience and our thinking, we run the risk of limiting the purchase of the problems addressed (and perhaps of the solutions offered), to our particular situation, or the situation of our immediate social circle.

I think your question points to one of the key directions for feminist reflection today: how not to give up on the sensibility to differences among women, between women, men and others, and within women themselves, as you say, and at the same time avoid neglecting a systemic way of thinking which understands the domination of women as a collective, global phenomenon – and analogously thinks the liberation of women on a collective, global scale?

At the reading workshop which was part of the City of Women festival, we read authors who could actually be classified as part of such a systemic,

universalist current: Shulamith Firestone, Paola Tabet and the Xenofeminists. During feminist disputes (which Western historiography presents as so-called "waves"), the first two have often been targets of rejection precisely because of their intention to think women as a collective subject, subjected to a specific, but in its purchase relatively general and global form of violence, and because of their insistence upon the necessity of articulating what you call "women's universal liberation".

At the workshop we also read a text by the Xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks. One of the members of the collective, Helen Hester, recently published an article on *e-flux* titled *Promethean Labours and Domestic Realism*[2], which addresses precisely the problem of the currently dominant refusal of related universalist, or as she says, "promethean" (feminist and more broadly emancipatory, also anti-capitalist), theories and orientations. Hester ascribes this "anti-promethean" orientation to "postmodern" (critical, political) theory, which substitutes the attempt at a systematic analysis of social relations and the thinking of their radical transformation for local interventions and partial strategies. The problem with such strategies, according to Hester, is their illusory nature on one hand (the belief that the powerless can beat the powerful without any kind of organization or systematic intervention), and melancholy on the other (the belief that emancipation is more appropriately an object of mourning than an actual political aim).

Contrary to this attitude, Hester points to the need for a more ambitious, "promethean" politics which could, it seems to me, be called emancipatory, radically egalitarian and universalist in its scope. Hester emphasizes that such "promethean" (anti-capitalist) policies often remain blind to feminist issues, such as the necessity of reorganizing reproduction: the advocates of promethean, anti-capitalist theories (all male without exception), often understand reproduction only as a particularistic barrier to fulfilling higher political goals. Against this, Hester advocates the necessity of bringing feminist orientations into promethean projects – we can add that, as Marxist feminists (Silvia Federici, Mariarosa dalla Costa and others) warn us, no uprising can last and finally be won without paying attention to the material realm of reproduction of the lives of those involved. Meanwhile, Hester also advocates a promethean radicalization of feminism. In the abovementioned article, she conceives of this radicalization mostly in relation to the question of organizing reproduction and communal life beyond the private dwelling of the nuclear family and the sexual division of labour.

However, I think that we can also link this to a call for radicalizing feminist theory: in contrast to feminist theories which, for instance, take sexual difference or women's alterity to be an inevitable (symbolic, cultural, social,

[2] See: http://bit.ly/CoWeFlux.

psychic, biological) given and advocate the "respect" of differences or the equal affirmation of the allegedly timeless sexually binary nature of humanity (i.e. an affirmation of historically disavowed "femininity"); but also in contrast to feminisms which, in a Foucauldian manner, accept the inevitability of power, the inevitability of hierarchical relations, and merely aim at their partial undoing or substitution, at localized transgressions, at the substitution of one form of governmentality for another, with Hester and the Xenofeminists we can today perhaps try to strive for a more ambitious, "promethean" feminism. This kind of feminism does not consider any area of human existence – be it sexual difference, reproduction or power relations – as immune from possibly radical (political, collective) intervention and change. Hester ascribes this kind of feminism, among others, to Shulamith Firestone, whom we read at the workshop – "a Promethean in both name and nature!" – and to all the feminist attempts at a radical (practical, theoretical and/or utopian) reinvention of social relations and reorganization of communal life.

Especially in light of recent events which are progressively taking over the media and attesting to the global nature of women's oppression, this kind of ambitious, "promethean", radically egalitarian and universalist orientation of feminism seems to me to be of utmost importance today. I believe that even particularistic, localized "relativizations" of feminism find their place, in my opinion the most politically productive one, precisely within such a "promethean" orientation: as autocritiques of feminism when the latter, if I may say so, fails to "live up to its (universalist, radically egalitarian) concept" – when it illegitimately excludes the problems of certain women from the domain of its thinking, critique and intervention. It is interesting to me that such an understanding of feminism is not to be found only in the abovementioned "promethean" authors read at the workshop, as well as, among others, Simone de Beauvoir, the materialist feminists (Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy), and, I would dare say, at the very least Mary Wollstonecraft and the radical American feminists; but it is also to be found among those who are often listed as representatives of particularistic critiques of feminism – critiques which instigate calls for an epistemology and politics of location in feminism. Here I'm thinking, for instance, of black feminists like Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith. In a speech, the latter articulated an understanding of feminism as an in-principle universalist project which must strive to think the systemic subjection of women – *all* women *as* women:

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, Jewish women, lesbians, old women–as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. *Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.*[3]

"The inherent definition of feminism," according to Barbara Smith, is therefore a universalist one: "free *all* women." We are but one step away from a promethean feminism: instead of affirming one's own particular position of exclusion, instead of aggrandizing it into an a-historical principle of differentiation (i.e. the forever and for all eternity existing, but historically suppressed sexual difference), but also instead of humble partial transgressions of particular instantiations of power, instead of particular refusals of particular forms of governmentality – "how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (as Foucault wrote)[3], instead of searching for alternative ways of being governed, for more acceptable forms of submission, but also (and especially) instead of the desire to govern others, to direct their thinking and function as a moral and/or intellectual authority – instead of all that, then, a radical denial of power as such – and of all the alterities, hierarchical inequalities produced by it. The motto of such a "promethean" feminism of universalist orientation could thus be: do not fall in love with your own alterity!

I would therefore agree with the direction indicated by your question and by Pia's question above: I think feminism could afford some promethean ambition once more: "Feminism should be Promethean, and Prometheanism *must* be feminist" (Hester 2017); "the revolution will be feminist, or it won't be" and feminism could be revolutionary – and universalist and radically egalitarian. *"Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement."*[4]

Katja: Both Firestone and the Xenofeminists foreground technology as an issue of central importance to feminism. They both consider technology to be both the bearer of the potential for social change, for freeing women from reproductive work in the broader sense (both in terms of the immediate reproduction of life or the work-force, and in terms of care, domestic, emotional and sexual labour more broadly) and for establishing alternative forms of the social organization of reproduction beyond the heteronormative nuclear family; on the other hand, they both warn about the danger of using technology to the end

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[3] See: Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.): *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983, p. 61.

[4] In his lecture *What is Critique?*, Foucault immediately qualifies the critical stance asking itself "How not to be governed?" by rejecting the radically egalitarian interpretation: "We do not want to be governed and we do not want to be governed at all" and trading it for the abovementioned relativization of this demand. In a rather non-promethean and relatively humble way, he thus designates critique as "the art of not being governed *quite so much*" [emphasis ours]. See: Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), translated into English by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter, p. 44-45.

[5] Smith in Moraga and Andaluza, 1963, p. 61.

of an even harsher exploitation of women and for entrenching heteronormative models of communal life. How do you see the need for simultaneously critically addressing heteronormativity and women's subjugation, as it emerges from such critical-affirmative considerations of technology (reproductive or otherwise)? And the other way around, how could we conceive of a queer-feminist appropriation of technology?

Jasmina: When we were reading Firestone, I found it exceptionally interesting that among the demands expressed in a book written in 1970 (besides the most well-known demands/assumptions for the future, such as technological innovations which would free women from reproduction), the author writes that all women should be able to programme. I later watched the American series *Halt&Catch Fire*, which in fact talks about the beginning of the personal computer revolution; in it we can surprisingly find two women in the two main roles of computer geniuses. In the middle of the series (when we already come to the '90s), one of them remembers how she enrolled into Berkeley in the '70s when it was completely normal for her to be a woman, which in the '90s was not the case anymore. For at the time computer science was rather seen as administrative, supportive work, with some maintenance tasks, but when it became one of the fastest growing industries which in a few years' time could take you from your garage to a business worth millions of dollars, women were slowly pushed out of the game.

I am not saying the trend is not changing, or that, at least if we consider university enrollment, we can notice every year a certain effort to bring girls into science and technology, but the problem remains: the most visible example of a corporation charged with machismo, misogyny, career-blocking etc. has recently been Google. Thus, Firestone somehow instinctively announces where power will be located and what spheres we have to enter in order to attain it. In what directions would technology be developed if more women and queer people were part of it? This is the question raised already by Firestone, the question we raised through our readings at the City of Women reading canteen, and the question also highlighted by the Xenofeminists: what kinds of technologies for the support of reproductive and care labour (which still today largely falls upon women) would be developed? (My grandmother, for instance, always used to say that the washing machine was God's gift to her because it meant that she did not have to wash ten people's clothes manually and so she had a little more time to write her stories. Later, when she was already in a wheelchair and lived with my mother and me, she would often roll off her bed at night, partly in her sleep, partly already in demented deliria. When we then had to pick her up, my mother and I would probably consider a robot assistant for lifting to be God's gift.)

However, in no case are these considerations unambiguous: if the kind of technology announced by Firestone were developed and women were no longer giving birth, this would raise the question of whether everyone would consider this liberating (Firestone assumes that no one really wants to have the experience of pregnancy), of who would have control over such technology, what it would actualy entail for the relations between the sexes and, in case we could control the "quality" of the foetus, what kinds of bodies would be excluded from the "harvest" (let's remember the discussions about the gene for homosexuality which somehow implied that if we were to find it and learn how to manipulate it… we could prevent homosexuality?). Then there is the development of robotics: the *Guardian* has recently produced mini documentaries on the topic; they went to a guy who is developing an AI she-robot (next year, apparently, it will be possible to buy her for a few thousand pounds). Contrary to analogous Japanese projects, for example, this robot is far from being a convincing AI, but for the moment this is not the creator's aim anyway. For now, the robot will mime emotions believably enough to keep emotional and sexual company to the human who will buy her – assuming this will be a man – and her reactions will be coded in a stereotypically comical way: "How was your day, darling?", "What would you like for dinner?", "What would relax you?"

And since it would be supposedly quite complicated and expensive to have this pimped up sex robot walk, she is paralyzed. Her maker said that she does not need legs for what she will be used for anyway. Isn't this a nice summary of the patriarchal techno dream, to be seen at work in almost every sci-fi movie where extraterrestrials walk the Earth, Earthlings travel in space, virtually all conditions of life have drastically changed, but relations between the sexes (and there are still only two), violence against women and the primacy of heterosexuality remain as the only reliable variables in the future, as an assurance: Everything will be OK. OK for whom? I mean, fuck that future. Anyway, if I remain in the here and now: what does such a synthetic emotional and sexual worker entail for prostitutes who do not engage in sexual work voluntarily, and what does it entail for those who do? What does it entail for the wives bought in global peripheries (well, as long as the robot does not have legs, she probably cannot replace them, for who would then cook, clean etc.). What does it mean for people who actually need emotional and sexual company? In what ways and on what grounds can you build relationships with non-human entities?

And what does that mean for the synthetic form of life itself, if she could, hypothetically, learn and demonstrate her own will? And if she finds herself in a violent, exploitative relationship? I would hope that she would rebel… But no, wait, she has no legs to run away anyhow. It's a bit caricatured, but to make it short, we need to enter such conversations and developments, for they are not far from our own reality. Then there is gaming, with the

problem of violent sexism in games and beyond. Women in the industry and actresses who at times publicly warned about this issue and developed alternative contents were brutally attacked on the web by those who thought games were becoming feminist. Again, things are changing also in the direction of an increased feminist awareness, but sometimes at the pace of one step forward, two steps back…

On the other hand, people are entering technology and science, for example through DIY biohacking projects, which they try to render accessible and share with as wide a circle of people as possible. Gender-hacking, for instance, is an example of a queer intervention, which besides its broader subversion of the sexual order, also has very concrete consequences for transsexual bodies which otherwise could not have access to hormones, even if they wanted to; then we have, for instance, the more polished network of lesbian, queer and allied people in technology called Lesbians Who Tech…

To make it short, my knowledge here is limited because people in the humanities, natural sciencesand the technical professions live in artificially separated worlds, but these conversations are necessary, and we should all learn from each other about them (this will be my next five-year learning plan). Not only learn about the social implications of technology in general, but about the shape science and technology could take if more women, queer people and other minoritarian subjects with no access to them today, were included. What if these subjects were feminist ones?

Pia: Is the concept of the queer family an oxymoron? What do you think are the strategies which could bring the inherently utopian nature of "queer futures" back down to earth?

Jasmina: Not if you expand the concept of the family. I will first quickly trace the sociological dimension: while in the system of "the straight mind" (I am here channelling M. Wittig, who talks about the unquestioned discourses in the field of all disciplines and ideas, discourses which also involve sexual binarisms and sexuality and present themselves as dogmatic, unchangeable, natural and apolitical), the family is equated with the nuclear structure of father, mother and two children, it turns out that the great majority of families we encounter are permutations and deviations from the privileged system of heteronormativity – there are plenty of children with single mothers, children with single fathers, fathers with ex-wives, mothers with ex-husbands, current wives or husbands and children from different marriages related to one another in sometimes unclear ways, matriarchal families of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and aunts, but also sons, couples without children, couples with adopted animals, single people with animals/without them, with friends or without…

Then there are families we actually designate as queer: two women or two men with children or without, with pets or without, with a plurigenerational horde of (blood) family members – mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins… – and with a chosen family of friends or with broader supportive queer communities, then we have polyfamilies with more adults and a few children, with animals or without, we have relationships which include asexual people and which due to the (prevalent, but not exclusive) absence of sex the majoritarian society would designate as aromantic, even though they are actually not… By listing (only some examples of) alternative family forms, it appears that if there was a rule related to families, it would not be the presence of mother and/or father and child, but rather the diversification of family forms, we could even call it the queering of the concept of the family, constantly transforming, expanding, ramifying, to include all the forms which are not recognized from the outside. Life is marked by that vital power which cannot be simply bound by frameworks, something always has and always will find its way out – which is what the concept of "queer" also talks about (from framed to queer!). An additional remark would be that children themselves are surprisingly queer: the theoretician K. Bond Stockton writes about how children do not "grow up", but rather ramify sideways, which to me seems quite an apt metaphor for how children seek and make partial connections, how they act outside grown ups' categories (which define what gender and pleasure, and after all, childhood, are supposed to be) or in liminal spaces. Even though at a certain point they start "growing up(wards)", not only literally, but also metaphorically (after all, society as a whole is structured to direct them this way), the queer moment remains somehow inherent to childhood.

While the Dolphinians could read Donna Haraway's appeal: "Make kin, not babies" at our event on this years' City of Women, the queer appeal would be similar: Have babies or not, but in any case, build a community. In this sense queer considerations of the family, its queering, transformation and expansion, may function as a potentially strong political force (despite the understandable scepticism of queer theory and practice about the family as an institution).

When it comes to utopia, it is true that queer theory has an ambivalent relation to the future: while we know that in the '80s and '90s queer theory partially substitutes for the earlier gay and lesbian identity politics, the shift in relation to the future is also key. Gay and lesbian movements (I am talking about the West) spring from a different historical moment, from strong movements for civil rights at the end of the '60s when people thought they found themselves in the swirl of revolution and that they would change the world. Queer theory, on the other hand, is less tied to life than to death, to the bodies falling due to the AIDS epidemic and the lack of responsiveness from the majoritarian society. It must have been difficult to believe in the

future when every week you had to go to four of your friends' funerals. This is why queer life becomes tied to the moment, to pleasure here and now, and for this very reason, it can at least partially fall prey to a perverse cannibalization by capitalism, which supposedly put an end to history and to any alternative future anyway.

At the same time, LGBT and queer fiction, theory, performance and practice are full of utopian thinking about a different kind of future. Take, for instance, Wittig, who writes novels about lesbian guerilla fighters and goddesses, and at the same time draws upon an extremely lucid analysis grounded in materialist feminism, an analysis of the history and present of women's and LGBT people's oppression, which predicts the repetition of a similar future, if we do not accompany our analyses of the state of affairs here and now with imagining what is possible – and I am not talking here only about "real" possibilities (Wittig, anyway, describes the real under the rubric of the straight mind which presents itself as the limit of the possible), but about the potential which far exceeds these possibilities. Analogously, the queer theoretician Muñoz takes the concept of utopia seriously and foregrounds it as his political starting point. This is not just any kind of future, but the future clearly tied to queerness and its political potential, the longing which pushes us forward. Crucial here is that he does not give up history but looks backwards in order to set up a future horizon.

This way he also grounds the concept of utopia (in artistic practices and the everyday, which offer a kind of map), so that it avoids being a free-floating concept without actual political worth. He writes that queerness entails "insisting on the potentiality or the concrete possibility of a different world". In a way, feminism cannot politically give up looking beyond the present, even if the present has enormous problems which exhaust us, which sometimes appear to be insoluble and which affect the bodies of minoritarian subjects, oppression, violence and poverty... But simultanously we need to think about the potentials of the new, even if this is an ever-harder thing to do since the material conditions of work channel time into a fragmented present (fragmented into small projects, micro fights which we do not even want to pursue, seeking surviving strategies etc.). I don't know if I have an answer yet, except from trying to build my own community (kin), including with the Dolphinians, where we try to think these things through together.

Katja: In the performance *Ideal (M)other* you and your colleagues critically scrutinize the bonds of the dictate of motherly care, both in ideology and in its material practice; furthermore, the consequences of reducing women to the reproduction of the workforce in different historical and cultural contexts are exposed by Paola Tabet in the article read at the workshop. On the other hand, through the specific dynamics of The Sisterhood of the Proud Dolphin's reading group, we have attempted to estab-

lish an alternative form of care in solidarity among the "sisters" (and others who took part); Firestone and the Xenofeminists – apart from the tradition of Marxist and materialist feminism – also emphasize the necessity of rethinking care work and reproduction to revolutionary ends. What is your take on the relation between the critical and the utopian (negation and affirmation) in relation to the problem of care and reproductive labour, and more broadly within feminism (i.e. in relation to topics and problems which have traditionally been taken to be exclusively "feminine" domains, such as maternity)?

Pia: Hardest in feminist theory and practice, I believe, is to find the proper measure between both poles – the critical (negation) and the utopian (affirmation), for this entails on one hand recognizing and pointing out the phenomena, as well as theories, harmful to women and feminism, and on the other hand offering a creative moment, which is of utmost importance – to think something up, to prepare something (different), to do, to change. This inertia perhaps also gave rise to my collaboration in conceptualizing and carrying out the reading group, even if it is but a tiny, seemingly unimportant activity. The Foucauldian understanding of critique might already be at the crossroads of these two poles, for his notion of critique already entails the transformation of the subject who undertakes it and thus comprises this affirmative, creative moment. I feel close to the kind of feminism which understands (self)transformation, activity and activism as its necessary component. Which also entails, I believe, that we need to rethink all possible meanings activism might have today.

With the performance *Ideal M(other)*, we deemed it urgent to react to the rise of conservatism in relation to the topic of maternity; a conservatism which mostly emphasizes an idealized picture of it – not only in advertisements for products related to "the care of mother and child", but also and foremost when coming from mothers themselves, as is particularly obvious on social networks. There is little honest discussion about the afflictions of motherhood, which are an integral part of it, so pushing them out of visibility or even pathologizing them is very harmful. Instead of this, from how I currently experience the situation, I would wish for more structural support. Both formal and material on a state level, and of course better possibilities for organizing mutual help in solidarity – which is prevented also by our precarious, work-centric lives.

I do not therefore understand the performance as being merely critical. In terms of content it does not offer any concrete way out, as it cannot, but it is not only a question of the creative moment in terms of content. Theatre is perhaps, after all, a kind of material practice, a communitarian model which can at least expose the fact that we are not alone in a certain experience, that this is not only an intimate experience but one which always has a wider

social formation behind it and has causes which are anything but personal. Recognizing the latter appears to me as the precondition for mutual connection. Of course, theatre is also a utopian space, or at least a heterotopia, a big step away from real life. It would be great, I think, if we could perform the show, for instance, in so-called parenting classes or similar places with a more immediate connection to people in situations we are addressing. And of course, this is not only a performance for mothers and perhaps also fathers. As a key part of the family dispositive, motherhood is all of society's business.

These issues are too quickly pushed away as being part of conservative life styles, without talking about this aspect, about whether and how we should transform this institution and the possibilities for doing it; we therefore end up reproducing it precisely in its existing, obviously problematic form. We have got so trapped, it seems to me, that even imagining a society capable of discussing its own imperfections, its own non-ideality, errors and afflictions without some kind of guilt, represents a utopian projection, a first affirmative step, also in relation to motherhood.

This is why it appeared to me really valuable to raise these aspects of women's reproductive work in a safe and yet open circle at the *No Reading. No Eating.* workshop and to be, from an anthropological perspective, reminded, with the aid of Paola Tabet, about the aim of the institution of marriage, whose (originary) purpose was to exploit women's limited fertility as economically as possible. But finally, and perhaps even more importantly, to revise the rare utopian projections, called "radically feminist" today, which knew how and dared to conceive of relations outside the familial framework. And last but not least, to point to the strong debt owed them by those feminist endeavours which favour contemporary technology, such as xenofeminism. I find it wonderful that programs in the form of manifestos are being written again. I find this utopian dimension to be somehow liberating, it enables us to think beyond mere rational argumentation – it is more impulsive, it sets itself impossible goals, it simply reacts to something perceived as non-functional, it opens up horizons. In this sense it is undoubtedly far from the critical project, but I think that the latter often ends up entangling itself in details and rules of logic, and thus blocks a wilder, more creative form of thinking and action.

As it concerns us all one way or another, I believe that the question of reproduction is an excellent platform for the elaboration of feminism's critical aspect; the latter should be ceaselessly exercised on this topic, particularly because this is so difficult – we are very sensitive when it comes to reproduction, for it is so fundamentally connected to who we are. This topic also makes for a good, albeit difficult exercise for training the utopian aspect. Not many attempts in this direction are to be found, even within feminist thought. For it is very difficult to imagine something without precedent, it

is hard to step out of everything which so strongly defines us, and it is quite daring to attempt to leave this all behind, since the outcome is never certain – perhaps it will be even worse, and at the moment it is not that bad after all, motherhood and reproduction do offer a certain kind of satisfaction even in their present form, to some women, the only kind of satisfaction. In fact, I do not consider these questions to be exclusively women's issues, but of course the way "the great critical thinkers" keep silent about them is an obvious strategy for maintaining the status quo.

Jasmina: In your article for *ŠUM* magazine you mention that the experience of women (and mothers) can be considered a privileged one for entering the affective field, which runs against the alleged neutrality of affect in Deleuzian philosophy, even though I always understood this mantra of the body which affects and is affected as forming a certain (greater) alliance with bodies which could never escape their physicality (including women, mothers, queer bodies...). I wonder what could be done with these bodies, with affect and the relationality pertaining to it – we are always affected in a relation –; do you maybe recognize the political implications of this privileged position for feminism or for thinking about feminism and motherhood specifically, since affect ought not to be understood as an apolitical force, but is (at least I understand it this way) exceptionally political – not only the concept, but also the experience, which can often hardly be grasped "intellectually", yet is visceral.

To put it differently, more concretely and in a more located manner (with your own words): "What should I do with my 'experience' as a (white Western) pregnant woman in the Anthropocene, when the global population increased by 50%, i.e. by 3 billion, since the revolutionary year of '68 when Shulamith Firestone problematized the quick growth of the population?" What does this experience bring? Some feminists would say everything – an alternative to phallogocentrism – others would say nothing, to the contrary: it encloses women in phallogocentrism's structures. Where do you stand?

Pia: From a purely Deleuzian perspective it might seem problematic to favour an identitarian knot, a certain molar formation such as "woman". But Deleuze was not a feminist and even though the breaking up of bodies to the point of non-recognizability, of imperceptibility, of pure (asexual) intensities allows for a radically different, productive line of thought in his philosophy, it also comes dangerously close to postfeminism. True, he does place woman on the side of the minority and his becomings are always directed towards minoritarian positions – gravitating in this direction, according to him, offers more intensity. Feminists, however, critiqued him precisely on this point,

claiming that he merely exploited their struggles for (male) becomings, neutralizing them as a result. It is only right for feminism not to allow woman (her experience) to simply melt down in this generality. By strictly Foucauldian principles of critique we have no grounds today for abandoning feminism just like that. What, then, to make of specifically female experiences, such as sexual violence, the alienation of one's body (e.g. during childbirth), the ambivalence of giving oneself away in breastfeeding, in care work etc.?

I claim that we are historically and factually subjected to a specific kind of anti-women violence, as Catherine Malabou makes it clear, and this allows for privileged access to the experience and consideration of the Spinozist question of what a body can do. If any, these bodies know that how they are made, what they can connect with and what they cannot, is not arbitrary. To come to the Deleuzian singularity at all, to "a life", we first need to make a synthesis or two of concrete relations, of these particular kinds of bodies, relations and joints. These are not then privileged problems of particular bodies which would empower only women and celebrate them as goddesses, setting up some kind of matriarchy as opposed to the patriarchy. I believe it is possible (at the theoretical level) to tackle relations and flows as specific as breastfeeding, for example, and yet this analysis remains relevant to all people, not just breastfeeding women, regardless of whether they will ever breastfeed or not.

I would say that I am interested in experience precisely because of my feminist position – but by no means in experience exclusively as the phenomenological experience of women "as women"; I think something like this would be a harmful essentialization. I am interested in the implications of an experience which does not remain at the phenomenological level, since the latter is still grounded in fixed subjects and identities which are falsely universal because modelled upon the "neutral" male sex. We can learn a lot about experience itself, about the body itself, about relation itself by dissecting the most intense experiences of those bodies which are most subjected to them. I therefore believe that the road to "universality" is indirect and starts from a minoritarian position. This is, in fact, my opinion and my interest, which is also why I have great problems with the academic world, for which these arguments of mine are often not "scientific" enough. But this too is a particular open front which also has a lot to do with feminism.

The temporary manifesto of The Sisterhood of the Proud Dolphin can be found in: Jasmina Založnik and Katja Čičigoj (ed.): *Zakaj feminizem danes? Dialogi, revija za kulturo in družbo*, 11–12 (2017), Maribor: Aristej.

City of Women 2017: a reflection

The next day, we speak about archives, history and the potent power of erasure. We talk about archiving as a luxury - a process that needs time and resources not available to the independent sector, and we reflect that this in itself is the first oppressive step in removing marginalised histories from the books, by ensuring history is only for those who can afford to write it. This goes beyond the question of contemporary art histories, to local contexts such as the divisive 'Skopje 2014' architectural project that aimed to draw in more tourists and try to reclaim aspects of Macedonian history (and patriotism) from neighbouring Greece. Costing somewhere between €200–€500m, it has resulted in a completely new city centre made up of new building fronts stuck on the existing city-scape. **Kristina Lelovac (Tiiiit! Inc.)** explains that creating archives has an added urgency in a country that re-writes and covers up history with every change of government.

We find hope in the different ways that the **Cultural Gender Practices Network** members (a network of feminists and LGBT organisations and art festivals in the region of former Yugoslavia) have actioned against this, for example, by forming online archives that make visible women of the past and the use of Facebook and other free online resources to make a permanent imprint. This thread is echoed in the festival programme: Eszter Salamon's remounting the life and works of the forgotten German 1920s avant-garde artist Valeska Gert, and Laia Abril's artist-anthropologist practice seeking to unbury female histories and take on shame. The programme conducts a kind of digging. And as we dig our own way through the preserved catalogues of 23 years of festival history in the days following the conference, we find City of Women asks us to think not just of the work that we do in the moment of the festival, but the legacy that it will leave.

VI

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THE ARCHIVE AS A PROCESS. HOW TO ARCHIVE CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS AND KEEP THEM ALIVE?

LANA ZDRAVKOVIĆ

INTRODUCTION

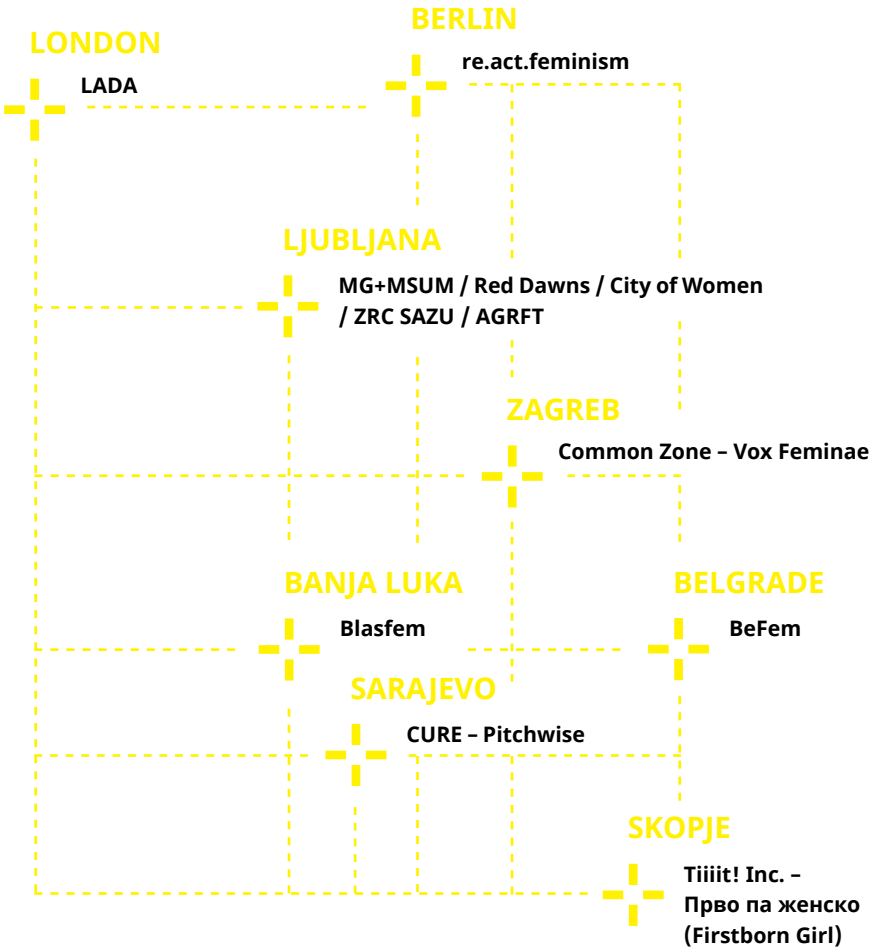
The idea of focusing City of Women on archiving processes of the performing arts became stronger in past years as a consequence of a systematic rethinking of self-positioning in (art) history. The International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women, organized since 1995 every October at different venues in Ljubljana, has over the past 23 years (including this year's edition) hosted extraordinary artists from various fields: performing arts, fine arts, cinema, music, intermedia, etc. The festival is organized by the Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture – City of Women, which is active throughout the year with artistic production, education, publishing and raising awareness of the necessity of gender equality.

The conference contributions aim to rethink issues linked to the archiving of performing arts on at least three levels: ideology, politics and the methodology of archives.

The conference was moderated by **Lana Zdravković**, PhD, researcher, publicist, political activist, producer and performer. Lana Zdravković actively cooperates with the City of Women festival since 2005 and is a member of the Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture – City of Women (since 2012).

The following texts are excerpts, while full texts of conference participants and their short bios are available on the City of Women website:

http://bit.ly/CoWArchiveProcess



The contributors were feminist and LGBT festivals from the ex-Yu region, themselves members of gender.net[1], a network of cultural organizations dealing with gender issues. Additionally, examples of good practice were presented by the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, by the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana, as well as by organisations such as Live Art Development Agency (LADA, UK) and projects such as re.act.feminism[2].

[1] See: http://www.gendernet.info/en/about-us/.

[2] See: http://www.reactfeminism.org/.

1 IDEOLOGY OF THE ARCHIVE

How should we archive so as to preserve both the life of artistic works (performances, productions, happenings, installations, etc.), as well as their specific context, background, positions on the margin/alternative? The practices we focus on are generally outside the mainstream regarding genre (performance, live art, contemporary art), gender/subject (women, LGBTIQ, discriminated and disadvantaged groups), geography (SEE, the so called Global East or Global South), so the question is: how are we to set the research process, the processes of selection, classification and contextualization so that we avoid closing them into a "museum", a canon, a drawer, into History: i.e. making them mainstream. On the other hand, the care we put into archiving influences art history, as those (people/artists, art works) who are not mentioned in it actually don't exist. Is building parallel (art) histories, parallel archive logics, parallel art scenes, as a process of self-contextualization within the margin, a good possible solution?

TANJA PETROVIĆ,
excerpts from *Toward a Self-Reflexive Archive*

"In the archive, the possibility of meaning is 'liberated' from actual contingencies of the use," writes Allan Sekula, "but, this liberation is also a loss, an abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context" (2003: 444). An archive's ambition of ordering and classification is in stark contrast with the messiness and complexity of life. Ties between objects are broken when they become part of an archive, and tensions between them become neutralized. Archival material, Sekula points out, is atomized, isolated in one way and homogenized in another (ibid., 446)."

> "Archives are also shaped by forces of the subjective, experienced, and affective. These reside in the archived material, in the impulses that drive archivists in their work, in the gaze of those who engage with the archive. In her study of minoritarian gay and lesbian archives in the US, Ann Cvetkovich points to the importance of an archive's emotional effects and capability to store emotions. She calls for a broader understanding of the archive, for an archive which "must preserve not past knowledge, but feeling" (2003: 241)."

"Be it official and state, or grassroots, rogue and activist – any archive presupposes selection, valorization and interpretation. Even the archives that are made in order to intervene in the hegemonic historical narratives by bringing in the histories that are marginalized, excluded and forgotten, struggle with the inevitability of selectiveness and the normativity of the history they articulate. As Allan Sekula writes, in any process of archiving, historical and social memory "is preserved, transformed, restricted and obliterated"; in the archives "some futures are promised, some are forgotten" (Sekula 2003: 444). Archives are contradictory in character; they are not neutral, although they claim authority and neutrality; they embody the power inherent in the accumulation, collection and hoarding (ibid., 446)."

"Responding to the questions, challenges, tensions and ambiguities mentioned above is by no means an easy task; on the contrary, it is rather an impossible one. These difficult questions, however, should not be avoided, but should be taken as a productive site for reflection and engagement with archives and archiving. Archives need to be envisioned, and also embraced, as imperfect, contentious, open-ended, and should be made open to all sorts of affects, dilemmas, ambiguities and contradictions. This would make the archive closer to life. To avoid romanticizing on the one hand, and complacency on the other, archivists should think of the possibilities of making their archive self-reflective. One of the possible strategies for this would be a reflection on the process of archive making – documenting its different stages and including this documentation in the archive itself."

Tanja Petrović works at the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana. Her research interests lie at the intersection of linguistic, social and cultural phenomena in socialist Yugoslavia and its successor states.

BARBARA OREL,
excerpts from *Reconsidering the Processes of Shaping Theatre History*

"To follow Auslander's thought and take it a bit further, we can conclude with the following radical statement: the history of the performing arts is shaped through the performativity of its documentation. This especially applies to the experimental theatre practices that paved the way to performance art. The experimental theatre practices of the second half of the 20th century in Slovenia (which used to be part of Yugoslavia) were treated as an art of provocation, for which an upper tolerance limit needed to be set (Toporišič 2008: 140-141). The socialist authorities in Yugoslavia opposed the experimental art practices and neo-avantgarde movements, since their principles digressed from the traditionalist art views held by the communist regime. This was also the case in other socialist countries. Another reason for experimental theatre practices being largely excluded from the processes of research, evaluation and the making of theatre histories was their "in-between" position: they took place in-between diverse artistic fields and disciplines. For this reason, the traditional methodological tools of individual artistic fields could not be applied and practices deviating from them were sentenced to oblivion."

"A decade ago, a trend of reconstructions was observed in the Slovenian performing arts: a series of performances based on the reconstruction of neo-avantgarde and experimental theatre performances. Although few in number, they constituted a noticeable trend. This trend is worthy of special mention because it was directly connected to the processes of re-writing and re-shaping the history of Slovenian theatre."

> "The performances were not historical reconstructions of the 'original' experimental theatre pieces, but autonomous performances based on the former's documentation as well as on live tradition – the transmission of knowledge, data and performance skills by living witnesses of the 'original' pieces. In other words, the actors, directors and other collaborators of the original events helped or even participated in the reconstruction process."

"This is not an advocacy of reconstructions as perspectives for the future of performance practice, but an advocacy of the twofold, reciprocal processes characterizing creation and research within the performing arts. It is an advocacy of the play surrounding the performativity of performance documentation and of all the players engaged in the archiving of the performing arts and the shaping of a more coherent narrative of the history of the performing arts."

Barbara Orel is an associate professor of Performing Arts as well as the head of the research group at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana. Her main areas of research are experimental theatre, avant-garde movements and performance across disciplines.

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2 POLITICS OF ARCHIVE

We cannot overlook the position of Slovenia in post-socialist, post-Yugoslav, post-transition political space. It used to be a country with a rich alternative scene, interesting because it was somehow at the crossroads between socialism and capitalism, communism and (neo) liberalism, collectivism and individualism or privatization. City of Women was born in these circumstances and is probably the only festival with such a profile in the South Eastern Europe (SEE) region with a developed archiving process. What we were interested in is how other similar festivals and organizations from our common cultural, political and geographical space think about archiving, in their approach, their ambitions and the obstacles they are facing. And also in how the political climate (regression, patriarchy, post-transition, post-capitalism) influences this process.

TIHANA BERTEK,
excerpts from text about Common Zone – Vox Feminae Zagreb, Croatia

"The issue of space is one of the biggest problems related not only to archiving, but to the work of NGOs in Croatia in general. In the last six years, Common Zone has moved four times. Luckily, this year we got two spaces from the City of Zagreb in the neighbourhood of Trešnjevka for the period of five years, for which we pay a symbolic rent, and which give us at least some stability and ability to plan ahead. However, these spaces were not in good condition when we moved in (leaking ceiling, broken windows, etc.), so initially we were unable to keep our archival materials there so as not to damage them."

"On the other hand, the web magazine Vox Feminae is, in a way, an archive of itself. The previous version of the website, called Cunterview (2006–2010), is still available online. But the problem is that the magazine is not searchable (by keywords or otherwise), so it's not that easy to find specific texts from the past. We introduced tags a few years ago, so it's easier to browse newer texts, but organizing the entire magazine, which consists of thousands of different types of articles, would be an extremely demanding feat."

"However, there are some positive developments which I'd like to mention. In our magazine we have a section called Fierce Women *(Strašne žene)*, which consists of biographies of women who made some contribution to society (activists, philosophers, scientists, theorists…). This is by far our most popular section and we have more than 200 texts, so we decided to (re)use this vast material and produce a card game called Fierce Women. We invited several Croatian women artists to collaborate on this project and they created a total of 56 illustrations. At the moment, the card game is in its prototype phase[1], but in the future, we plan to expand this project (for example, create extension packs, merchandise, etc.) and produce more educational and unique materials based on our existing content, which is a way of keeping our archive alive and transforming it into something new."

[1] In March 2018, Vox Feminae started an online campaing for financial support in producing 1000 decks of card game and reached their goal in a couple of weeks.

"Another positive development in the field of archiving in Croatia has been the founding of the Center for Documenting Independent Culture in 2011. The Center functions as an open archive of materials produced in independent culture from the 1990s to today – from printed materials (magazines, fanzines, newspapers, flyers, brochures, books, etc.) to audio and video materials, photographs, promo materials, etc. The Center collects, processes, catalogues, digitalizes and presents these materials and offers them for use to interested stakeholders free of charge. The Center also runs the project *The Alphabet of Independent Culture*, which consists of audio interviews with the actors and actresses of the independent cultural scene in Croatia. The interviews are broadcast on Radio Student and available on the website Kulturpunkt.hr. The Common Zone has not yet submitted their materials to the Center since these are still rather disorganized. But it would appear that the awareness of the importance of documenting and archiving the work of NGOs – which are under constant threat of destruction – is growing, and hopefully there will be more support and funding sources in the near future."

Tihana Bertek works as a journalist, translator and activist in Zagreb, Croatia. Currently, she works as editor at the Vox Feminae online magazine.

JELENA VIŠNJIĆ,
excerpts from text about BeFem, Belgrade, Serbia

"A key part of our work is building community among feminist activists on a local and international level and creating spaces for (feminist) knowledge building and sharing in order to devise a joint agenda that would respond to the emerging issues in our shifting realities. For this reason the space that BeFem opens is crucial for the cross-movement and intergenerational collaborations that would keep feminist movements more connected and responsive to these constant shifts."

"The other important strategy of our work is archiving feminist knowledge and history through media production and developing a new communication strategy. A new methodology and framework are required during this process because of the time we are living in and the technology we are using. Our audience is changing, their demands are different, and therefore we have focused on building our own media sphere as a weapon of political influence."

"The world of media and new technologies could still be observed as a gender binary and heteronormative space or as a field of male power and domination, full of misogynist and sexist messages; as a space still brimming with degrading, humiliating and pornographic contents and images related to women."

"We are transforming the media sphere and public space by archiving feminists' presence."

"Identities and voices of women from minority groups are completely marginalized within media discourse. Contemporary media and new media readings show multi-layered, deeper insights into the issue of gender and sexuality, but a deconstruction of the media image of the LGBT population shows that this minority group is still not visible enough within the media content. Roma women are totally excluded from the media. This is why we need strong feminist reaction and action."

Jelena Višnjić, PhD, is the executive director and co-founder of the BeFem feminist cultural centre, a lecturer and associate of the Women's Studies Centre in Belgrade, Serbia and an activist of the feminist movement.

KRISTINA LELOVAC,
excerpts from text about Прво па женско (Firstborn Girl), Skopje, Macedonia

"The festival **(Прво па женско or Firstborn Girl, Skopje, Macedonia)** was initiated in 2013 when the right-wing government was starting to rule in a totalitarian and even violent manner. Their notion of national and family values was being thrust in our faces through their flagrant control of the media. Reproduction was being presented as a national duty. This was followed by a substitution of Gender studies at university with Family Studies, repressive changes of the law on the termination of pregnancy, breakings into the LGBTI center and frequent attacks on LGBTI individuals, which until today have not had an appropriate legal resolution."

"In 2015, Macedonia, as a transit state, faced the challenges of the refuge crisis, but also its own political crisis, the biggest one since the beginning of independence: a scandal involving scam, which was followed by the so-called Colourful Revolution. The part played by women in this civil uprising was essential – from facing the heavily armed police in the first rows in street protests to the establishment of a special prosecutor body of three women prosecutors to deal with the criminal acts of the government. Finally, this spring, we had a change of government. Macedonia, having our state kidnapped for more than a decade, has much to deal with now, but one can say that there is at least hope for positive change."

"The initial notion of the festival, which originated in this context, was to question the dominant narratives, to challenge stereotypes, to encourage different representations of the feminine and of gender, to set on stage different, unruly women."

"Archiving is an imperative and complex process, a political one. Like art itself, the process of archiving may be linear or cyclical, it may or sometimes may not make sense. It takes time, efficient methodology, trained staff, money, so it can be a colossal challenge for groups like ours – struggling with human, financial, and technical resources. How can we, always overworked, understaffed, underfunded and with no resident offices or even a website, save and share the materials that document not only the development of the independent creative and intellectual production of women that we support and present on the festival, but also the festival itself? How can we preserve our own legacy?"

"We live in a country with a short memory and without awareness of continuity, so there is hardly any former archiving tradition in our field of interest to relate to."

Kristina Lelovac is a professional actress and lecturer at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Skopje, Macedonia, where she is also enrolled in doctoral studies in Theatrology. She represents Tiiit! Inc., Skopje, an organization active in the field of female rights and the independent cultural scene in Macedonia.

VIDEO DOCUMENTS @

vimeo.com/cityofwomen

3 METHODOLOGY OF ARCHIVE

One thing is of course the technical part (digitalization of all the materials: photo, video, texts), another is how to make that material accessible to the wider population. So, how do we operate with the material once we have it in some acceptable form, how do we deal with it, how do we share it with audiences? What are the ways to bring the material closer to the people, and keep it alive? Also important is the issue of funding, as in the “East”, support from state funds, programmes or initiatives is almost nonexistent, while in the “West”, support is available mostly from the side of private capital, patrons and sponsors. How does this affect the processes of archiving?

ANA ČIGON,
excerpts from text about the Red Dawns Festival, Ljubljana, Slovenia

"Financially, the festival is in large part not supported by any institution or state, except for some events that are financed by the Ljubljana City Council and the Ministry of Culture. Its organization is based on voluntary work and we raise funds for the festival through benefit events, where we collect voluntary contributions. Like everything else, the documentation of the events of the festival is based on volunteer-work. Our documentation consists of the information on the programme and artists that can be found on our internet page. There have been two print publications about the festival until now."

"Alongside the webpage and the abovementioned publications, Red Dawns has also been collecting festival posters, photos and video material of the festival events. Festival posters are one way of symbolically contributing to festival finances, since we sometimes sell poster designs on t-shirts and bags during benefits and other events. A collection of these posters was presented in an exhibition at the club Menza pri koritu in 2014, for the 15th anniversary of the festival. Photographs of the festival events have been taken sporadically since its beginning by many different photographers, mostly volunteers from the organizational collective."

"Since I was asked to elaborate on the topic also as an artist, I would like to present two of my works that deal with archiving. The first one is *Feminist WikiMarathon*[2], a project that was part of both the Red Dawns festival and the City of Women festival. This project was produced by RampaLab (at the time Multimedia Centre) and was first organized in 2013.[3] *Feminist WikiMarathon* is an event where a group of people meet (physically or virtually) for a few hours and/or days to contribute names of female or female-identified artists or generally historically relevant personalities, or feminist articles, to the Slovene Wikipedia. A similar version of the event has been produced in several other countries, so the project is not my invention, but rather a version of a more widespread tactic of trying to fill in the gaps that Wikipedia definitely has."

"The second project was *Ana at the Station*[4], which was produced by SCCA-Ljubljana and myself. This was a performance in which I contextualize my artistic work through a performance with videos of other artists. I understood this intervention as a way of producing a creative contextualization of my work while at the same time giving recognition to other artists, too. An artist or artistic work is always contextualized – put into a kind of historical line with other artists or artistic works that have preceded their own. This is why archives and the contextualization of archives are so important."

Ana Čigon is an artist working in the fields of video, film, performance and new media. Over recent years, she has been interested in documentaries; she produces videos for theatre and participates in co-authored collective projects. She was awarded the OHO Award and was a finalist for the Slovenia Henkel Award and the VordembergeGildewart Foundation Award.

2 Link to the project: http://bit.ly/CoWWiki.

3 I would like to thank Ana Grobler, Danaja Grešak and producer Maja Zorman, that helped me with the organisation and execution of the event.

4 More on the event: http://anacigon.si/projects_DIVA.html.

BETTINA KNAUP,
excerpts from text about re.act.feminism, Berlin, Germany

"Against the backdrop of the current trend of institutionalizing and historicizing performance art, the goal of this project was to explore feminist, gender-critical and queer positions that have played a key role in the development of this art form. We aimed to look beyond the (primarily Western) canon by focusing on less established artists and stressing the diversity of performance strategies and practices internationally. Our objective has been to make documentation and archive materials which are scattered internationally and often difficult to access, available to a broader audience, even if only for a short time. It was essential to us not to pinpoint feminist and queer performance art in the past but rather to reflect its cross-generational and transnational dimensions, encouraging dialogue, communication and referencing across time and space. Finally, the project reflected the complex relationship between live performances, their traces/documents and their reception, as well as the more general issue of archiving ephemeral and subversive artistic practices."

"*re.act.feminism* was not an archive in a strict sense but rather a temporary, growing collection of documentary materials. We have appropriated the term *archive* as a kind of aspiration and a claim, especially in the context of performance art. We referred to the extensive discussion about the relationship between ephemeral performance art and archives – a discussion of which Peggy Phelan's oft-cited description of performance as a medium of disappearance is a part (Phelan 1996: 146), as is Rebecca Schneider's or Adrian Heathfield's insistence of performance to remain (Schneider 2001 and Heathfield 2012)."

"In this context we do not see the document as the "other" of live performance. Rather, it is produced deliberately for a future audience – for an anticipated future "encounter". It continues to stir the imagination, to call for action and to invite people to create their own reproductions or re-performances. *re.act.feminism* was interested in these encounters – the use, recycling, appropriation and reinterpretation of documents – in embodied moments of reception. In short, we were invested in the "productivity" of the document. What does the document do? What does it achieve in the moment of its reception? What relationship does it create between past and future, between author and recipient? What multiplicity of references and interpretations are offered by the archive?"

"In this sense, *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* stressed the vitality and liveness of the archive. First of all, the archive was exhibited – in some venues it was even literally put on stage – turning its users and attendants into performers performing the archive. In doing so, we reproduced, on the one hand, elements of a traditional archive, including restricted viewing that was limited to each particular location of the presentation, the ordering and cataloguing of the objects, and their attendance by "archivists". On the other hand, some aspects of archives were subverted – for example, through the archive's playful character of a mobile, makeshift architecture, consisting of increasingly battered looking freight boxes, and the activation of performance documents in workshops, activity rooms and in all kinds of curated and self-organized events. Secondly, the archive was on the road for almost two years, and our partner institutions were not only the hosts of this travelling exhibition, but they essentially became co-curators. They chose how to present the exhibition at their institutions, and they contributed materials to the archive. Thus, within this collaborative network, the archive grew to include works by more than 180 artists and continued to invite countless visitors and users to be touched, affected and inspired by queer and feminist gestures."

"Instead of developing a chronological, geographical or historical narration of origin, development and influence, we instead applied the concept of thematic cartography, as used by Marsha Meskimmon. The exhibitions curated for the project and the project's website have been organized according to thematic fields and keywords which we considered relevant in the context of the feminist avant-gardes of the 1960s to the '80s as well as today, and which highlight the connections, references and diversities across time and space."

"*re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive* was designed as a temporary exhibition archive. As such, it has been primarily an experimental, temporary space for research and encounters. At the same time, it also represented an aspiration, a desire and a potential both for further research and for a permanent archive – a home to feminist and queer performance in all its diversity and "de-normalizing", subversive rebelliousness. While this may still be a utopia today, we hope that the tension between feminism, the archive and performance will continue to keep things in motion and continue to be exposed to further re-performances."

Bettina E. Knaup works internationally as a curator with a focus on performance and gender. She was programme coordinator of the International Women's University, Hanover, Germany, co-curator of the International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women, Ljubljana, Slovenia, and contributed to the In Transit Festival at the House of World Cultures Berlin, Germany.

IDA HIRŠENFELDER,
excerpts from text about The Web Museum project, Ljubljana, Slovenia

"The Web Museum offers systemic assistance to non-governmental organizations. It creates a common open source online interface for multiple users. Organizations such as City of Women become users of the Web Museum at the invitation of The Museum of Modern Art, which provides technical and content support to digitize, systematize and publish the materials online, while the materials on physical carriers are continuously stored at locations within individual organizations. The publishing of some materials is limited by copyright laws, in accordance with which the Web Museum provides several levels of accessibility and the possibility of offline viewing of the digitized materials not accessible online. The Web Museum may support any organization that keeps physical AV materials with research value. The aim is to make an inventory of the major AV materials, which will provide a common point of intersection and a broad and concrete insight into artistic production. In this respect, the archive of City of Women is one of the most valuable sources, especially in the fields of performing arts and live-art. The Web Museum is also a tool for the self-inventarization of organizations. Organizatons may use the Web Museum's interface as a tool for its own inventory, without the public publishing of materials, when so required. Organizations in cooperation with The Museum of Modern Art publish the materials according to their importance and fragility. Depending on the inventory of materials, we estimate that there are approximately 2,500 units of diverse materials (video performance, live-art performances, lectures, round tables, exhibitions of archival footage, photographic documentation, theatre and dance performances) to be digitized in the upcoming years."

"The Web Museum also serves as a tool for expanding the documentation and archival activities at the museum. Archival and documentary materials in the Web Museum are complementary to the professional processing of indexed cultural objects included in the documentation systems for collections and archives of The Museum of Modern Art (Kronos and Raz_Ume). The Web Museum harvests a list of over thirty thousand persons of the Raz_Ume database and will potentially provide the Kronos repository with video materials."

"Archiving is always a selective process which either hinders or makes visible the power-relations and ideologies that are intrinsic to its structure. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to make conscious decisions and to produce criteria which keep an archive transparent, open and, ultimately, alive. In relation to feminist archives presented at the conference, the Web Museum is framed as an institutional archive covering a variety of art fields, topics and temporalities. This presents a risk of flattening the existing materials in their sameness, not allowing for differences. Any rigorous archival approach may pose the legitimate question of "how it is supposed to facilitate a feminist archive" if it is constructed as a hierarchical meta-structure. To prevent such flattening, it was crucial in the case of the Web Museum to conduct a thorough research of the existing codebooks of the museum's archives even before the architecture for its interface was conceived. The codebooks of persons, artworks, art events, documentations, publications, artistic movements, carriers/materials, techniques which are listed in the Web Museum Glossary, are all based on existing taxonomies (The Museum of Modern Art, Dublin Core, Getty) and are added when certain materials do not fit the proposed criterion."

"As archives of contemporary arts, we are more often than not communicating with living artists. We all face questions of the negotiation between cultural heritage, research accessibility, and the protection of the artists' intellectual property. The usage of materials solely for study purposes is usually quite uncomplicated, but things get very complex when we try to extend the accessibility and publish digitized versions of materials online. A classic example of this would be the question of whether we can, as producers (museum, festival, producer), put documentation of a performance online, since artists usually wish to have contextual and aesthetic control over their work. When I started to work on the Web Museum in 2014, it was my wish to make all the materials available for viewing online, quite literally "at the tips of your fingers". Consequently, I was frustrated at the fact that over 80% of our materials would only be accessible for viewing at the MG+MSUM and at the locations of the collaborating organizations. It was very valuable to me that this point was picked up by Phoebe Patey-Ferguson during the conference. She presented this situation not as a deficit but as a quality since such conditions enable each institution to attract constituencies and create communities of researchers."

"This brings us to a final question, which is how research should be stimulated or commissioned. This is paramount to an archive since materials without context have very little value. This also brings us to note that there exists, in connection to archives, an economic struggle, which we all inevitably addressed at some point of the conference. At The Museum of Modern Art, we are funded by the national public fund, which has facilitated technical and infrastructural support, but the Ministry of Culture as our funder has little sensitivity to long term sustainable investment in archives. This means that we can digitize the materials, but there are not enough researchers to put it in context, let alone enough funds for screenings or other methods of dissemination which keep the archive alive. So the question remains: "How to keep the archive alive in the long run?"

Ida Hiršenfelder works at the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (MG+MSUM) on projects related to digital archives. Together with media artist Saša Spačal, she is a co-founder of ČIPke, Initiative for Women with a Sense for Technology, Science and Art at RAMPA Lab – Kersnikova Institute.

ONLINE ARCHIVE @

cityofwomen.org/en/content/festival-archive

City of Women 2017: a reflection

On one of our last days in Ljubljana we visit Rog (factory). Accompanied by Tanja Završki (from City of Women and activist), we visit some of the different collectives, activist groups and spaces that breathe life into the squat. Apart from its aesthetic impression, and tales of its precarious longevity, the stories of the people stay with us. The day that we visit Rog coincides with a collective cleaning action, which means that a lot of the occupants and inhabitants are present. One of the spaces we visit is Ambasada Rog, a community centre run by refugees, asylum seekers and activists, a safe space carved out in the centre of the city. We meet a hairdresser who runs a weekly pop-up salon and whose asylum case is one of Slovenia's highest profiled, but has been suspended in limbo for several years. For him, Rog has become a place of refuge. Similarly, in Rog Social Centre we share a beer with one of the original Rog settlers, whom we learn has faced years of legal battles with the state and loss of rights as one of the 25,000 people whose citizenship was "erased" after the Slovenian declaration of independence. We think again about erasure as a mechanism of state power.

Despite the municipality working towards Rog's own erasure by demolition, it has not affected the action of new spaces being born. We learn that the Anarcho - Queer Feminist collective that Tanja is a part of, has just renovated a space, which they are in the process of building when we visit. At Rog, we see exemplified bottom-up action and compassion.

VII

Hope for an alternative. Hope that fuels action. Hope that dares navigate through conflict and uncertainty. A kind of hope that we find at the very foundations on which City of Women was built 23 years ago, and at the heart of what prevails. It is therefore of little surprise to us, that the people who help build City of Women are people of resistance, a small *'republic of unconquered spirit'* (Solnit). We also find care and compassion: a small but huge team of unstoppable women who pick you up from airports, make sure you are fed, clothe you in clitoris's and take time out of a busy festival programme to show you why City of Women can only have been born in Ljubljana. They take us to sites of art and politics, beer and conversation, introduce us to people who build communities out of art and activism, and fill us to the brim with the astounding beauty of hope and resistance that can be found in this city.

> "Hope just means another world might be possible, not promise, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope."
> **— Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark**

Until next year, thank you City of Women.
Mary & Emma

Photo: osborn & møller

THERE
IS A NECESSITY
NOW
TO BELIEVE
IN THE
POTENTIAL OF
HOPE.

osborn & møller

LIST OF PHOTOS

CITY OF WOMEN
Immersive Reflection 2017/2018

Published by: Mesto žensk – Društvo za promocijo žensk v kulturi / City of Women – Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture
Editors: Teja Reba, Rok Avbar
Translation and language editing: Marko Marek
Graphic design: Vesna Bukovec
Print: Collegium Graphicum
Edition of: 500
Published: 2018, Ljubljana, Slovenia

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

7(100)-055.2(083.82)
7.091(497.4Ljubljana)"2017/18"

CITY of women : immersive reflection 2017/2018 / [editors Teja Reba, Rok Avbar ; translation Marko Marek]. - Ljubljana : Mesto žensk - društvo za promocijo žensk v kulturi = City of Women - Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture, 2018

ISBN 978-961-93888-2-2
1. Reba, Teja
294383104

save the date
october 4th – 8th, 2018

MESTO ŽENSK
CITY OF WOMEN

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS