



**CITY OF
WOMEN
REFLECTING
2019/2020**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIVERSAL BASIC JUSTICE, TEA HVALA	2
6 RECOGNITION	
PRINCESS MARGRIET AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, TEJA REBA	7
THE ALIENS ACT, ALICJA ROGALSKA	10
THE ERASURE ANNIVERSARY: CRIME NEVER EXPIRES	24
26 REDISTRIBUTION	
WOMEN, ART AND LABOR, OR THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS, KATJA PRAZNIK	27
SOCIAL WORKS OF RESISTANCE IN THE CITY OF WOMEN'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURES, osborn&møller	38
SOME ECONOMIC AND FEMINIST IMPLICATIONS OF <i>THE CHEESE AND CREAM PROJECT</i> , KRISTINA LEKO	44
SHULAMITH FIRESTONE'S FEMINIST REVOLUTION: A Conversation with Tanja Renner and Katja Čičigoj, ANJA BANKO	52
#8MarchEveryDay: Teaching Materials for the International Women's Day	62
64 REPRESENTATION	
HEARING THE BODY: Interview with Nataša Živković, TEA HVALA & TEJA REBA	65
POSITION OF A FEMALE MUSIC ARTIST IN SLOVENIA, IVANA MARIČIĆ	78
FEMINIST VIDEO ART IN SLOVENIA, ANA GROBLER	86
WOMEN AT THE MOVIES, BOR PLETERŠEK	90
"THE KEY IS THAT WE KEEP CHANGING PERSPECTIVES": A Conversation with She She Pop, ALJA LOBNIK	94
IN POSSE: Disrupting Patriarchy with Charlotte Jarvis, TEA HVALA	100
PANSPERMIA, SVETLANA SLAPŠAK	104
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND SOURCES	110

TEA HVALA

UNIVERSAL BASIC JUSTICE

The 2019/2020 season of the City of Women started in October 2019 with the 25th anniversary edition of our largest event, the International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women, which hosted 160 guests and occupied 18 venues in Ljubljana. This publication reflects on the selected artworks and viewpoints presented at the festival, as well as our ongoing efforts at feminist curating, advocacy, activism and education.

The 25th festival edition was focused on **#HerStory – women’s history and the stories of contemporary women of all genders**. Our recognition of the missing or even deliberately erased parts of general history was grounded on the premise that **historiography is a fight for interpretation** – much like the present, an anxious moment in history calls for a feminist analysis.

City of Women: Reflecting 2019/2020 was compiled in March and April 2020 when a third of the world’s population was caught in the global lockdown. In many countries, the “stay at home” policies were based on class segregation between workers who were allowed to protect their health by staying at home, and the people who weren’t, even though they work in non-essential industries. Slovenia was no exception. At the time of writing, it is the broken global supply chains, rather than the government, who are forcing the irresponsible owners of capital to freeze production.¹

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia coincided with the formation of a new, right-wing government whose shock-doctrine measures are threatening to turn the country into an authoritarian regime. Fearing resistance, it has limited the freedom of movement to the municipality people are registered (but not necessarily living) in, curbed the possibility of referendum and began to verbally attack journalists and media critical of its doings. So far, it failed to provide the army with police credentials. However, it managed to raise the wages of ministers while denying the already promised bonuses to overburdened public health workers. In the absence of legally unprotected, easy-to-exploit migrant workers, it began to encourage healthy

¹ Cf. “Lilijana Burcar o geslu ‘Ostanimo doma’ in novi razredni segregaciji”, *Večer*, 5 April 2020, access 14 April 2020, <https://bit.ly/2VjUVVO>.

citizens to perform seasonal farm work for less than minimum wage. And – scared of our organising strength – it is determined to block all further public spending on the already underfunded and feminised NGO sector.

From this perspective, it is quite ironic that the City of Women entered 2020 with *Burnout Aid*, a European project dedicated to the prevention of burnout among staff members and volunteers in non-governmental organisations. We will most certainly need it – next to national and transnational protests. It is also clear that a counterintuitive comparison between our culturally elevated work and the degraded, feminised (un)paid care work as sites of economically devalued labour is in place, as **Katja Praznik** proposes in her essay *Women, Art and Labor*, offering a fresh perspective on possible alliances.

Our efforts for the recognition of the erased subjects of history and the adequate representation of women’s artists indeed need to be supplemented by the struggle for redistributive justice – not in the form of breadcrumbs offered by the current Slovenian government, but **in the form of universal basic justice, starting with the universal basic income**, advocated by sociologist **Tanja Rener** at the 2019 City of Women festival: “I think the universal basic income is urgently necessary; we will, however, not get it, because in its thorough implementation, it would outroot capitalism. Despite that, we must demand it as soon as possible, otherwise the future will be even bloodier.”

The City of Women English newsletter is published four times per year. Stay in touch and [subscribe](#).

Tea Hvala is a writer, translator and Deuje Babe Festival (C.M.A.K.) co-organiser, responsible for the City of Women’s arts and culture educational programs.



RECOGNITION

TEJA REBA

PRINCESS MARGRIET AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

In 2019, the City of Women Association was awarded the prestigious international **Princess Margriet Award for Culture given by the European Cultural Foundation**. As they stated, City of Women offers “a hopeful vision of democracy by redefining our understanding of culture and its capacity to improve a common European social reality”. The award was accepted by **Teja Reba**, the program director of the City of Women, who delivered the following speech at the award ceremony in Amsterdam on 3 October 2019.

Your Royal Highness,
dear European Cultural Foundation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening and thank you for this beautiful Award.

At this very moment, we are opening an exhibition at our 25th festival in Ljubljana, where a group of people whom we normally wouldn't see at art openings, is present. I want to share with you a very short video preview of the new work presented in their company tonight.

In the video *The Aliens Act*, six people share their stories of erasure. In 1991, when Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia, the Aliens Act created a legal void that was used in 1992 by the Ministry of Interior to **erase 25,671 people, including children, from the register of permanent residents**. The Erased had their existing rights arbitrarily withdrawn and were made illegal within their own homes. They lost the right to work and went without health insurance. Many were deported or forced to leave Slovenia. Despite being isolated from one another, the Erased managed to organize politically in 2002. They won their cases both at the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slove-

nia, which ruled that the act of erasure was unconstitutional and that their rights should be restored (1999 and 2003), as well as at the European Court for Human Rights (2012). **The damage that the Erased and their families suffered still affects them and their legal and other struggles continue.**

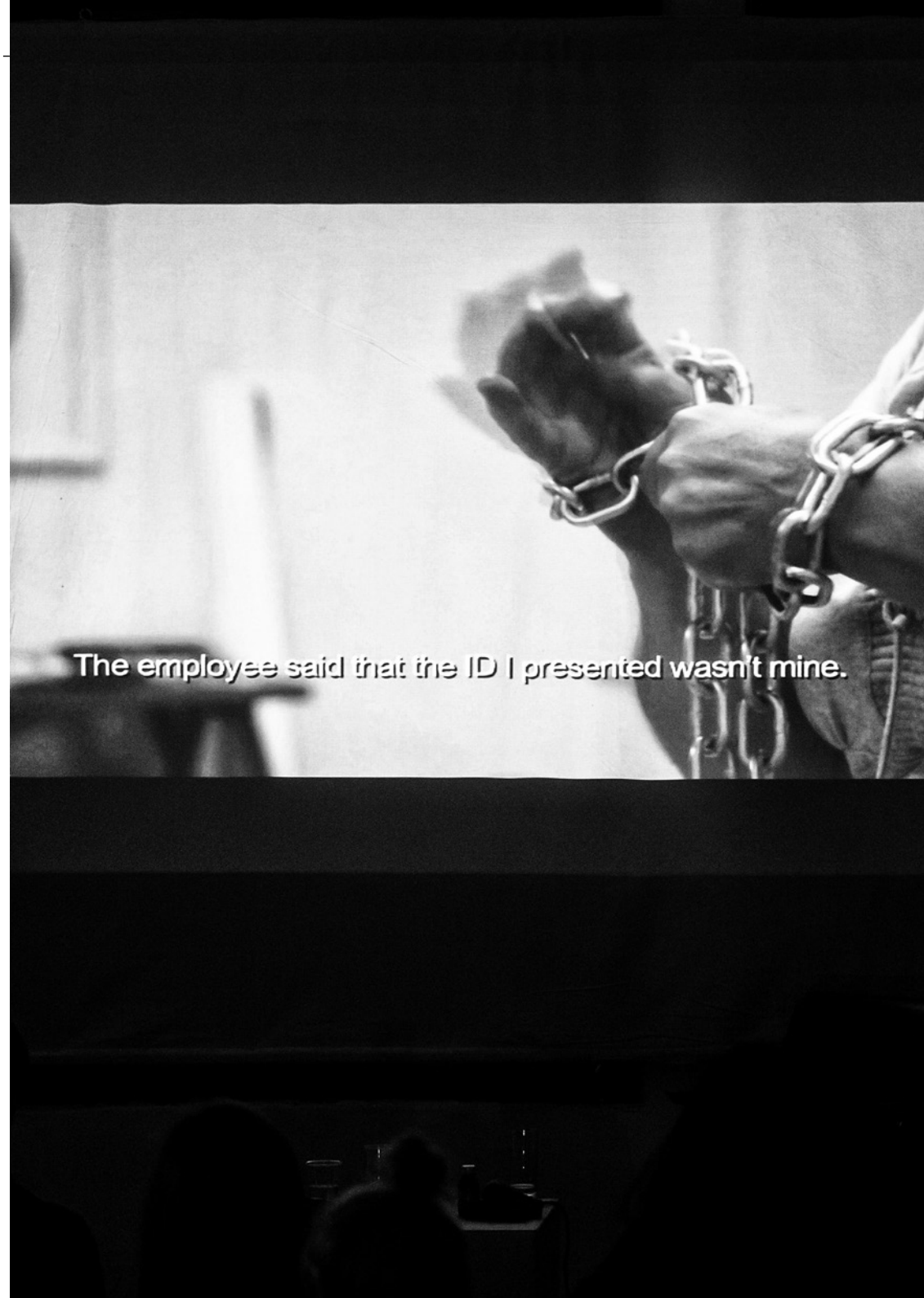
During her three weeks' residency at the City of Women, the Polish artist **Alicja Rogalska**, selected by a Danish and a British curator (**osborn&møller**), invited a group of Slovenian Erased to join her creation process and together research how to represent an identity – or better said, a life – that was taken away.

They've created powerful costumes and I am on a mission to take those beautiful portraits back to where they belong – to the Slovenian and the European Parliament. Because, and let it be crystal clear to all of us, **this is not about the past, it is about the future.** Because at this very moment, thousands of people live in illegality throughout Europe, are being displaced, thousands lie dead in our seas, are beaten on our borders, are raped in our camps.

Maybe, and I am not saying this to sound more optimistic but rather to be able to imagine a future at all, and I quote here the Slovenian philosopher, the City of Women honorary president **Eva D. Bahovec**, we might need to collectively re-think our visions through the words by Virginia Wolf: **“As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.”**

Thank you.

Teja Reba is a performance maker, the former president of the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia and the current program director of the City of Women association.



The employee said that the ID I presented wasn't mine.

ALICJA ROGALSKA

THE ALIENS ACT

In 2019, **Alicja Rogalska** was the City of Women's artist-in-residence, commissioned by the curatorial duo **osborn&møller**. In her research, Alicja Rogalska asked how to represent an identity that was taken away. The artist and the six erased people who joined her research talked about their collaboration in Škuc Gallery on 4 October 2019 at the premiere of their video *The Aliens Act*.

Before I spoke to **osborn&møller**, I wasn't aware of the erasure. At first, I was really reluctant to consider such a subject because I thought it was too complex an issue to tackle in such a short time. Also, I was a stranger, just a visitor in Slovenia, which is a very specific position to be in. I started researching other avenues, but I kept going back to the erasure, because the more I learned about it the more I realised it still needs to be talked about. To many people it seems like a closed chapter, or a historical issue, but actually there's a lot we can learn from it, especially in the current situation with right-wing politics becoming more and more prominent worldwide.

I think there is always the danger of history repeating itself if we don't learn from those lessons. Many people perhaps don't realise **how an administrative legal act can be extremely violent and destroy lives in ways similar to other acts of violence**. I've also been investigating this issue in my other projects regarding law, such as the video *What If As If* (2017), where I worked with lawyers based in London who were also refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, to investigate legal fictions in the context of immigration law, and I thought it was important to highlight it in this project as well.

I wanted to give voice to the people who were affected by the erasure. We have obviously been hearing stories about it from those who have power, access to the media and the ability to speak publicly, such as politicians or experts. So I decided **to invite people who directly experienced the erasure to share their experiences and their perspectives on the issue** as a crucial part of the project. From the beginning, it was a very collaborative process although I set up the structure. I invited the six participants to design costumes that would represent their experience of the erasure. **The idea of a mask or a costume as an expression of identity is quite obvious and universal**, but the way it was expressed depended on each individual. We had a series of workshops where we met, shared stories but also worked on the designs that were produced with the help of my assistants **Olga Michalik, Evelina Hägglund, Rosana Knavs and Nina Čehovin**, and the City of Women producer **Eva Prodan**. An important part of the project was collecting testimonies from the participants that formed the audio part of *The Aliens Act*. In the video, you can see the process of designing, making and finally wearing the costumes.

At the last workshop, photographer **Lara Žitko** took portraits of costumed participants while **Urška Jež**, the executive producer of the City of Women, asked them about the meaning of their costumes. I am glad that the Erased agreed to include their portraits and statements in this publication.

I would like to thank again the participants for trusting me with their stories and joining me in this project. I have learned a lot from them.

Alicja Rogalska is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice encompasses both research and production with a focus on social structures and the political subtext of the everyday. She creates situations, performances, videos and installations, mostly in collaboration with others.

My costume is very stiff and white. While the white colour is supposed to depict bureaucracy and the fight against it, the stiffness mostly represents the struggle I have been facing for my entire life. Especially now that I have tried on my costume, I can see the parallels: it is difficult to put on, difficult to take off and difficult to move around in. It is as if I was somehow imposed a limitation, which I was actually submitted to in real life, with visas, certificates, etc. It accurately summarises the entire situation.

Anonymous



My costume represents a border, i.e. a limitation of free movement. With it, I wanted to show how a person feels when their movement is limited. I am speaking generally, even for the organised groups. You feel strained, you have nowhere to turn to, you are under surveillance everywhere. Once you cut the wire and take it off, you feel liberated. You wish for everyone to be able to move and express themselves freely.

Irfan Beširević



I've had my apprehensions about this costume, but now I think it is great. I even like the pictures. I think the costume truly symbolizes what I wanted to say: Beat me up if you can. I am here. Made of concrete. Hardened. Angry.

Mirjana Učakar



It seems that they managed to create a costume in line with my sketch. Today, I think it is good. The clocks on the head, representing the time of erasure and the anticipation of a solution, are like I had imagined them to be. The chains and the stone symbolise being imprisoned by the problem, the fact that I could not do everything necessary for living because the erasure was too much of an obstacle. The shield and spear signify that I am fighting the erasure problem and defend myself against attacks. Since my feet are tied, I cannot defend myself, cannot move on, cannot find help anywhere. I like to create.

Neisha Milkovich



Under the mask, I felt the same as I did then. Invisible. Angry. Humiliated. And I truly did feel like that. Thanks to everyone, it was nice with you. It was really OK. Thank you.

Slavica



My costume consists of the Slovenian flag on the left side, and the Yugoslavian flag on the right side. The flags are connected by barbed wire while the face is masked, posing two questions: who am I and what is my identity? There's a devil's horn on the head, symbolizing how the inhabitants of former Yugoslavia are supposed to be worth less than Slovenians, and there's an angel's halo. Accordingly, the right foot is bare while the left foot wears a red high-heeled shoe.

Anonymous



THE ERASURE ANNIVERSARY: CRIME NEVER EXPIRES

Collective statement written for the *The Erasure Anniversary: Crime Never Expires [Obletnica izbrisa: zločin nikoli ne zastara]* event in Social Centre Rog in Ljubljana on 29 February 2020.

26 February 2020 marked twenty-eight years since **the erasure of 25,671 inhabitants of Slovenia from the register of permanent residence**. Almost three decades are now passing since the beginning of their innumerable struggles to survive, re-establish the legality of their lives and compensate for the **harsh social, economic, health, and other consequences of this illegal act perpetrated by the Slovenian authorities**, which pushed the lives of tens of thousands Slovenia's inhabitants into illegality.

The new anniversary marking the beginning of this crime simultaneously also exposes the long-term disclosure of diverse dimensions of the erasure, as well as the long struggle for its admittance and compensation for the injustices inflicted. Furthermore, it reminds us of the liability of the entire line of employees in different public institutions who, by direct acting under the authorities of the time, caused, supported, maintained and advocated the crime. In doing that, they never failed to fabricate excuses of democracy, European values and respect for human rights. In 2020, the fact remains that, for many victims, the aftermath of the erasure is still not over even though they might have established their formal status in Slovenia or anywhere else. **Still, there are people living among us to whom the state has not yet adequately granted this status even to this day.** Thus, not only do the consequences of the erasure drag on, but the Slovenian authorities still keep on implementing the very same erasure.

The historic moral of the erasure story is most evidently reflected in a part of the political nomenclature persisting that this was not a crime, but simply an administrative error or even an ordinary and necessary procedure in the country's independence process. This type of conviction persistently holds on to **an intolerable presumption that the social exclusion mechanisms on the basis of wrong citizenship are a legitimate manner of organising society, along with the constant pushing of segments of population to the social margins, into poverty and exploitation.** The normalization of such an exclusion from society incessantly produces and maintains new illegalised inhabitants thereby establishing a regime in which the authorities set us in different categories on which our rights and humiliations depend. What unites the Erased and the people violently sent by the Slovenian police across the border without any possibility of appeal today, are **national authorities intentionally and systematically pushing their actions out of the fields of law, formal procedures and rights, and into the fields of direct violence, its concealment and denial.** At the time of erasure as well as today, in the period of pushing people over the border by force, the mechanisms of the Slovenian state remain the same, subordinated to the double objective of organising terror on the one side and innocence on the other.

We must therefore, in spite of the unstoppable passing of time, remind ourselves again and again: **erasure is a crime that must not be repeated.** It is a crime that bears consequences not only for the persons who experienced erasure themselves, but for all individuals who find themselves in the position of illegality over and over again. **And it is a crime for the society that by conceding to such exclusions maintains regulations through which any one of us can become excluded.**

REDISTRIBUTION

KATJA PRAZNIK

WOMEN, ART AND LABOR, OR THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS*

#1 Arriving in the City of Women

Almost twenty years ago, when I was still a student of comparative literature, I worked as a receptionist for the Slovenian Press Agency in Ljubljana. While my main duties were to accommodate the coffee whims of journalists, occasionally answer the phone, or accompany a guest to an editor's office, I spent most of my time reading heavy tomes of whatever novel was on the syllabus for a particular course, whether it be Russian Realism or Postmodernist Metafiction. Once the journalists realized that I could read and write, however, I became a kind of a reserve reporter in addition to their coffee fetcher. One day, faced with a shortage of journalists, the press agency's editor of Arts & Culture desk asked me to attend and report from the press conference for the newly published integral Slovenian translation of **Simone de Beauvoir's** *Second Sex*. This event was my first initiation to feminist theory as well as an introduction to the City of Women, an international contemporary arts festival that started as a five-day festival in 1995 and just celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2019. Since its beginnings, the festival has grown into a ten- to fifteen-day festival that every year hosts between forty to sixty women artists, theorists and activists. De Beauvoir's translation served as the anchor for the symposium "Phenomenology of the Female Spirit" featured prominently on the sixth edition of the festival.

Back then, I was quite familiar with the condition of being the "second sex". After all, I was a student at one of the most patriarchal and conservative departments at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. During my tenure as a student in the late 1990s, neither feminist nor Marxist theory ever entered its curriculum. The predominately male professoriate in the department had a habit of uttering sexist remarks and disparaging women. On unusual occasions when something resembling vague feminist critique entered those classrooms, there would be a passing mention of a book on catholic misogyny written by **Uta Ranke-Heinemann**, a German theologian. Attending the

* This essay is based on a contribution that I wrote for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the City of Women festival and was published in Slovenian language in *the Journal for the Critique of Science*. As such, it has accrued new intellectual debts: in addition to past and present members of the executive teams that have provided me important economic and historical data, I would like to thank the editor of this catalogue Tea Hvala for her guidance and comments, and my feminist comrade and theorist Carine M. Mardorossian for her incisive feedback.

press conference on the *Second Sex* and learning about the City of Women festival opened my eyes on a whole new level, which has surely been the case for many other young women for whom the City of Women has become the place to engage with the politics of feminist struggle, and a platform to discuss the perennial oppression of women.

At the book presentation, I received a free press copy of the *Second Sex* and devoured the first tome instantly, especially the key points of Beauvoir's compelling argument about the social construction of gender. Her analysis of the reasons why I am perceived as the "second sex", and how social and cultural structures perpetuate these conditions, have permanently changed my perception and understanding of women's oppression. After that, my extracurricular feminist education continued with other feminist readings and my regular and avid participation in events and projects organized by the City of Women. **The festival has not only taught me about feminist theory, but also offered a platform to engage with feminist politics beyond theory – it has showed me various ways of how to practice feminist emancipation in my everyday life.**

Once I combined the feminist viewpoint with my postgraduate training in materialist sociology of culture, and analyzed the increasing exploitation of cultural workers in the non-governmental cultural sector, or more specifically the independent art scene in Slovenia, in which we also find the City of Women festival, I inevitably concluded that this is a prominent realm of invisible labor. I now saw **the phenomenon of invisible labor as the paradox of art, that is the endemic condition in which the labor involved in art is neither seen nor defined as work let alone appropriately remunerated.** Unpaid, invisible labor is a phrase that has historically evoked women's work and, more specifically, domestic household work or the duties associated with mothering. This is so true that the phrase "invisible labor" requires no qualifier for it to immediately evoke the gender gap and women's unequal lot. In my work, I appropriate this rhetorical pigeonholing to reflect on the similarities and differences between the invisible labor that defines artistic production and the unpaid labor performed in the domestic sphere.¹ The political economy of the City of Women of course offers an equally prominent case to dissect invisible labor. Considering how the political economy of the City of Women has been marked by the economic subordination of women on the one hand and by unpaid labor in the arts on the other, this

¹ See, for example, Praznik, *Paradoks neplačanega umetniškega dela: avtonomija umetnosti, avantgarda in kulturna politika na prehodu v postsocializem* (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2016); Praznik, "Artists as Workers," *Social Text* 38, 144 (2020), forthcoming; Praznik, *Art Work: Invisible Labor and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

essay examines **the contradictions arising out of the clash between the politics of equal opportunities and the cultural politics that govern artistic production in the underfunded independent art scene in Slovenia.** Regardless of the fact that the City of Women has not shied away from addressing the questions of working conditions and has supported many artists that have tackled the problem in the arts and beyond it, the City of Women is nevertheless caught in the following contradiction (catch-22): while it does important emancipatory work concerning women's representation, if it does not do so while accounting for the imbrication of class and gender, it can't escape the effects of economic subordination. The concept of invisible labor is the point of entry for this issue because it is not only central to women's inequality in a capitalist mode of production but also because it defines a pervasive form of labor exploitation in the arts. Does a festival initiated by a liberal government agency in order to mainstream women in the arts impact the gendering of the invisible labor of women artists or does it reproduce it?

#2 City of Women and the Legacy of Triple Marginalization

Since its beginnings in 1995, the City of Women festival has been in the grip of a triple systemic marginalization brought on firstly by the unequal position of women in the arts, secondly by capitalist economies, and thirdly by the festival's situatedness in the non-governmental (NGO) cultural sector in post-socialist Slovenia. This sector's cultural politics and ethos is historically connected to the alternative art production that emerged during the time of Yugoslav socialism when Slovenia was still one of the six republics of the SFR Yugoslavia (1945–1991). These practices were not dissident art practices but were part of the socialist culture, even though they represented an alternative to the dominant bourgeoisie commodity culture in its socialist version. While the limits of this essay don't allow me to elaborate on this history, what is important for this discussion is the fact that the actors and the infrastructure of the alternative culture became the independent art scene after the break-up of Yugoslavia and have been structurally deprived of access to public funding ever since Slovenia became an independent nation state in 1991. In other words, **the origins of the independent art scene have little to do with the meaning that the notion "private non-profit sector" may have for readers unfamiliar with the intricacies of the history of Yugoslav socialism.** Since all property, including cultural organizations in Yugoslavia, **were legally public (*družbena*) not state (*državna*) entities,** the terms of private property or civil society don't really apply but they had consequences for when these entities were transformed during the transition from socialist welfare state to capitalist nation states. After the destruction of SFRY, these entities (called associations) became classified as private organizations as if they were not cultural commons and would need to be treated as such.

The subordination of women under capitalism is the consequence of the gendered division of labor: unpaid domestic labor or housework supports and contributes to capital accumulation and valorization. The separation of work and home that occurred with industrialization turned reproductive domestic labor or housework into invisible labor. As Marxist feminist **Silvia Federici** poignantly explained in the manifesto *Wages Against Housework*, this work is outside of the social contract, it does not count in economic terms and, most importantly, is not perceived as labor but as women's natural calling.² **The invisibility of domestic reproductive labor parallels the specificity of artistic labor.** Just like the social construction of domestic labor or housework as inherently female and as an aspiration of women subjects normalizes the invisibility of this work, in an equal fashion, the understanding of artistic labor as the result of the exceptional powers or faculties of a creative genius erases the notion of labor out of the arts. While domestic labor is degraded and artistic labor is culturally elevated, they are both economically devalued. **Since artistic genius is racialized and gendered as white and male, the majority of artists, especially women, people of color and people of non-European descent are situated in a systemic setback of double oppression.**

The second subordination/marginalization of the City of Women as an art festival dedicated to the promotion of women artists stems from the disavowed economy of the arts – that is the presumed separation of art from economic interests. The structural position of art in capitalism is often described in terms of the autonomy of the arts, however it conceals the socioeconomic context of art. While the institution of art secures autonomy on the level of content and professional standards, it conceals the economic aspects of its production, which is seen most clearly in the invisibility of the artist's labor. Art as an institution, alongside its related forms of labor, is ideologically constructed in opposition to the dehumanizing aspects of labor in the factory system, as well as labor's primacy in the economic sphere. This makes artistic labor a form of invisible labor. The mystification of artistic labor – i.e. its historical attachment to the idea that artistic practice is not work but creativity emanating from an artistic genius – is central to the paradox of art. The disavowal of the socioeconomic context of art is most evident precisely in **the omnipresent demand that artists and creative workers discount their labor or work for free.** In this context, too, work is most often defined not as labor but as vocation or calling, stemming from an inner need or inborn artistic talent. One is not doing it for the money or to secure subsistence, this type of work is rather done to the ubiquitous tune of “do what

2 Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

you love, love what you do.” This ideology in turn hides vast swaths of unpaid or poorly paid labor in the arts. The social subordination of women coincides with the subordination of (women) artists and cultural producers – their common denominator is the politics of devaluated and unpaid labor.

The third marginalization of the City of Women festival is connected to the specificity of the Slovenian cultural system. Seen from the sociolegal and the economic perspectives, artistic production in Slovenia is divided into a public and an NGO art sector. The public sector is comprised of art institutions established by the national or local governments and mostly underwritten by public funding. The NGO or private art sector is comprised of freelance art workers and organizations that have to compete for public subsidies to provide their public cultural programs. This division also affects the distinction between **two types of creative workers, those employed with full benefits and social protection, and freelancers who are self-employed with minimal to no social and economic security.** The first type prevails in public art institutions, the second is the hallmark of the independent art scene. “The ultimate effect is that in order to survive the competition with public institutions, private institutions have to acquiesce to a greater internal exploitation of human resources, or in other words, **perform the same work for less money and endure the risk of social insecurity.**”³ The bottom line of this division, which in Slovenia originated in the neoliberal policies that, after 1991, have deconstructed the socialist welfare state mechanisms, is that public cultural organizations are the privileged producers of culture as a public good, whereas the agents operating in the independent cultural sector are understood as the producers of cultural services that are ruled by the neoliberal entrepreneurial logic and laws of competition. They are considered a sole enterprise on the cultural market and lack basic social security and workers' rights.⁴ Furthermore, freelance cultural workers who work in this sector also often serve as outsourced cheap labor for the public art institutions.

Slovenian cultural policy is clearly nurturing a familiar mythology according to which “artistic production is ‘non-productive’ and, as such, excluded from the production of economic value.”⁵ However, this holds true only for the creative workers producing cultural goods in public art institutions, whose work is protected by labor standards and includes social security. Meanwhile the freelance creative workers of non-governmental sector in

3 Maja Breznik, *Cultural Revisionism: Culture Between Neoliberalism and Social Responsibility* (Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut, 2004), 67.

4 See Praznik, “Autonomy or Disavowal of Socioeconomic Context: The Case of Law for Independent Cultural Workers in Slovenia.” *Historical Materialism* 26, 1 (2018): 103–135.

5 Breznik, *Cultural Revisionism*, 50.

culture, to which the majority of creative workers of the City of Women festival belong, are treated as providers of cultural services and have to compete on the cultural market on two levels: for their income and for the possibility of miserably subsidized social security that is based on the artistic merits of their achievements.⁶ **The economic subordination of women here coincides with the problem of the unequally funded position of freelance creative workers in the independent art scene**, that is with the inherently problematic inequitable division of artistic production and cultural policies in Slovenia. This inequity which contributes to class stratification of creative workers is the key issue of hierarchically devised cultural systems, in which artistic production unfolds in entirely unequal economic conditions. What then is the function of promoting women in the arts when the festival is situated in the non-governmental sector which relies on low or unpaid cultural labor and precarious working conditions?

#3 The Gendering of Invisibility or Reproduction of Exploitation

The history of the City of Women is specific to the context in which it was created, as a derivation of social policy intended for the promotion of gender equality in the new nation state of Slovenia during the early 1990s. The festival was initiated by a liberal governmental institution called the Women's Policy Office. The key issue, however, was that the festival (as a legal entity) came to be situated in the financially underfunded NGO sector, meaning that the City of Women is an NGO organization. For the Women's Policy Office that financially supported the festival during its first couple of years, was later abolished and replaced by the Office for Equal Opportunities. **While the idea of promoting women in the arts was a worthwhile cause, the economic conditions for this endeavor were volatile from the outset.** Structurally, the festival remained based in the underprivileged NGO sector that is the prime site of invisible cultural labor.

Today, the festival receives public funding both from national and city government, yet these funds are intended for festival events, while the aspect of artistic production of contemporary women artists has been marginalized despite the City of Women's efforts to offer a production platform for new works by contemporary women authors. Moreover, **the City of Women is not merely putting up an annual art festival but also organizes workshops, professional development, symposia, the Special Library of Con-**

⁶ This is the case of the self-employed in the field of culture, a particular category of creative workers that can get registered with the Ministry of Culture and if their income is low enough, are entitled to subsidized social security. See Praznik, "Independence or Competition: Art Workers in Slovenia." Serhan Ada (ed.), *KPY Cultural Policy Yearbook 2016: Independent Republic of Culture* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2017), 19–27.

temporary Arts and Feminism, arts educational programs and advocacy for equal opportunities for women artists. While national public funding for the City of Women has been meagre since 1996 (it fluctuates between forty and sixty percent of City of Women's total operating budget), the breadth, quality and international references and awards that the festival received as well as the constant growth of the number of events organized during the festival and beyond are the result of the underpaid or discounted labor of the executive team and other creative workers. This is especially visible in comparison with the employees in the public sector of culture. Cultural policy is thus interested in the representation of women but is not willing to support the City of Women's aims to also become a producer of women artists and create a comprehensive platform that would support the emancipation of women artists including fair economic and working conditions. The attitude of cultural policy toward the City of Women is best described as an engendering of an appearance of openness and support for women's equality. It is built on inequitable production conditions of a hierarchical cultural policy and on the wings of an identity politics that obscures the class stratification of artistic production.

The City of Women cannot escape the politics of invisible art labor which in turn unfortunately subjects women to two forms of economic oppression. Firstly, it can't help but reinforce the NGO and freelance state-sponsored inequity, and, secondly, within that level of economic oppression, there is bound to be gendered oppression lurking even more. In other words, in highlighting women's representation in the arts, the structural economic subordination of women artists remains, and is entangled with exploitative modes of production in the arts. While the City of Women is striving to secure a production platform for women within the structurally underprivileged NGO sector, it cannot escape the cultural double bind. Indeed, this issue is not specific to the City of Women. It is a cultural and structural problem of double invisibility (of women and artists) that is evident precisely in relation to the economic oppression that takes place despite the minimal gains of public funding for the festival at a local, national and European level. In this sense, the City of Women cannot help but be an illustrative example of an issue we encounter when **identity politics lead to the perpetuation of class and economic oppression.** We may think that, by virtue of being attuned to the workings of economic oppression, one will necessarily address the inequity at the heart of art production, but the subordination of class politics to gender politics remains unresolved even when minor gains have been made on the level of producing the festival. What happens despite the very best intentions and internal improvements of working conditions (i.e. the women artists get paid, the executive team is employed via various types of projects) **is the unwitting reification of a competitive neoliberal logic that relies on hyperproduction, self-exploitation and precarious forms of employ-**

ment. Again, these are all larger structural issues affecting the arts in NGO production that one festival cannot resolve no matter how hard it tries.

The emphasis on the representation of gender risks perpetuating a problematic class politics that then, ironically, allows gender oppression on the economic level to re-enter through the back door. This proves that gender oppression can never be addressed as a single-faceted issue. **When the intersection of axes of power is not addressed (invisible labor in the arts and economic oppression of women), one form of resistance (making women artists more visible) risks resulting in the reification of another oppression (unpaid, discounted labor in the arts).**⁷ While we are able to see women artists' work, their labor as that of most artists remains discounted or unpaid, maybe more so than with men who may be less likely to suffer from a double form of oppression based on class and gender. In other words, the policies and practices of promoting women in the arts may take place alongside and be undermined by the socioeconomic inequality specific to the NGO sector and freelance art workers. Still, it is more likely for the City of Women to address this problem than other organizations less attuned to the workings of oppression. When we are beholden to issues of feminist emancipation and economic equality, they imply an open discussion and constant vigilance. They involve the kind of self-reflexive work toward redress that organizations such as the City of Women, which are committed to social justice, are more likely to address rather than to allow contradictions to go unnoticed.

⁷ For example, see Carine M. Mardorossian, *Framing the Rape Victim: Gender and Agency Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014) on how gender and race oppression work through and with one another in ways that make the workings of power both contextual and contingent but no less virulent for being so.

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osborn&møller

SOCIAL WORKS OF RESISTANCE IN THE CITY OF WOMEN'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURES

Since 2017, **osborn&møller** have been researching and reflecting on the City of Women's distinctive approach to feminist curating, and the ways in which this resonates with their own curatorial collaboration. The year 2019 marked the culmination of their work, as osborn&møller curated a programme for the 25th anniversary edition of the City of Women festival. This included a solo exhibition and residency by artist **Alicja Rogalska**, an online exhibition entitled **Looking Back to Look Forward** and a conversation with **Kristina Leko** and **Katja Praznik** about different aspects of socially engaged art and the working conditions of artists who create it. On this occasion, osborn&møller delivered a speech, published here in revised form.

We are osborn&møller (Emma Møller & Mary Osborn), an independent curatorial duo based between Copenhagen and London. Here, we will be focusing on *Looking Back to Look Forward*, an online exhibition featuring works from the City of Women archive as part of the Web Museum of MG+MSUM (Museum of Modern Art and Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova), which we launched on 10 October 2019.

***Looking Back to Look Forward* highlights works, artists and conversations from the archive that take a critical view on labour conditions and gender equality in relation to the spread of global capitalism, through collective action, poetic protest, and solidarity.**

We are interested in the archive as a map of collective memory that writes its own history. We have selected works that speak to feminist art practices, narratives and realities that from our position feel

particularly unique to the social histories of this region, and which create platforms for collective questioning, imagining and testing of different ways of being together.

We hope *Looking Back to Look Forward* brings the archive to life, re-animating archival material for a new generation, as well as revisiting a number of original artworks generously made available to view for the limited time that the exhibition was online.

We were invited by the City of Women to reflect on the archive, and we are very aware that our selection also reflects our particular position in terms of age, experience, histories and geographies as well as our subjective interests as curators. There were many paths we could have chosen to map our way through the archive, but for us two particular themes became important to follow: examples of women at the forefront of struggles against capitalism and the role of collective memory in poetic protest.

Through our research, we noticed a **prevalent relationship through the City of Women programmes between a feminist critique and a capitalist critique**, and the way that this offered a viewpoint to the changes happening in the wake of Slovenian independence, including the rapid accelerations from socialism to capitalism alongside major structural changes such as joining the European Union in 2004, just under ten years after the festival began in 1995.

We notice this first in artworks that attempt to document rapidly disappearing local industries. For example, **Kristina Leko's** documenting of the milkmaids of Zagreb when they came under threat of extinction from European standardisation, in her project *Cheese and Cream Project, 2002–2013* (formerly known as *Milk 2002–2003*). Kristina Leko's work became a seminal starting point in our research.

In the same year, the festival presented **Marija Mojca Pungercar's** *Singer* (2003), an installation that transforms sewing machines into an instrument that "sings" with the voices of the *United Slovene Women Textile Workers' Chorus*: a chorus made up of laid-off and retired female workers from the then dying textile industry. It documents a past when singing was a part of the social and cultural life of nearly every Slovenian factory, and – in the words of Pungercar – "brings rhythm to the body and helps to humanise the process of production".

Both of these works **commemorate and make visible the women that were part of production processes, as a way of resisting the dehumaniz-**

ing effects of globalisation. The effects of distancing techniques – such as outsourcing labour – we see accelerated today, with cheap labour moving to unknown, faraway factories, cleverly removing the human connection from the process, so that people can consume without having to think of the labouring body at work.

Over the next ten years, we see the effects of the changes prophesized by Leko and Pungerčar, as the City of Women programmes begin to focus more on exposing new precarious labour conditions and invisible labour. For example, ten years after the programme that featured *Milk and Singer*, in 2013, the festival presented an exhibition of **Milijana Babić** *Looking for Work* (2011–2012). We were really lucky that Babić granted permission to include a lot of the original artworks from that exhibition in *Looking Back to Look Forward*, including seven videos of her performing different types of work including cleaning, distributing advertising, gallery invigilating, selling irons in a department store, selling roses at nightclubs, waitressing, and retail. In these videos, she makes the invisible visible, showing us the labouring body in action. Babić's end point for this project was to create a flow chart, evaluating each type of work based on efforts, outcome and income calculation, exposing the way that arts and cultural work is embedded in precarity.

We've also selected a number of talks which offer further contextualisation around the relationship between feminism and capitalism, including a lecture from **Silvia Federici**, entitled *The Return of Primitive Accumulation and the Ongoing War Against Women* (2014), from which we would like to share this extract (transcribed from video):

One of the main elements of the capitalist attack on women in its first phase was the near expulsion of women from wage labour. But today, we see the opposite in many parts of the world, certainly in Europe, the United States, in Japan and to a different extent also in Latin America. To a different extent we seem to see an opposite movement. One of the fundamental elements of globalisation has been the entrance of women into wage labour and, in fact, this has been the source for many, many celebrations by neoliberal feminists and neoliberal politicians who look at globalisation as a process that actually emancipated women and created the basis for a more egalitarian position. I take a

very different viewpoint because even though today women are allowed – clearly because of the struggles they have made – to enter the world of waged relations in a more massive way, they are actually entering it at a time when the waged workplace has in fact been reduced to a disaster area: wage labour has been stripped from all the benefits that have been associated with it.

Federici's lecture has had a massive effect on us as individuals, and speaks deeply to our interest in feminist critiques which move beyond gender equality into resisting exploitation on a wider scale.

The second focus point was work that explored collective memory, and the attempt to write women's stories into history. We specifically selected works that told stories of women's experiences under socialism, stories that spoke of equality, struggle and solidarity across the former Yugoslavian states. The first example is **Sanja Iveković's** video documentary *Pine and Fir Trees* (2002), presenting five women's memories of life during and under socialism. This video became something of a myth for us as we tried to track it down – and it is with great thanks to the City of Women and Iveković that it was available to view for the duration of the exhibition. As two individuals who were not taught the history of Yugoslavian socialism, this artwork became especially important and eye-opening to us. It felt sadly rare to be able to learn history from the lived experience of women.

Moving into the later years, we saw the theme of collective memory develop into performances in public space which sought to create living monuments and collective actions. This included *Yugo Yoga* by **Lara Ritoša Roberts** and *I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You* by **Barbara Kapelj, Leja Jurišić, Teja Reba and Mia Habib** in 2013, both of which embody a kind of poetic protest by taking up space with women's bodies and critiquing the male dominated versions of history more commonly told. For example, *I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You* took the form of alternative guided tours and mass public ceremonies, asking, "if the Slovenian capital has as many as 360 monuments of local significance, what is the number of annotations mentioning women?"

The way that the City of Women programmes write women into history, and demand visibility and credit for these histories, is something that has inspired us since the beginning of our research. We are not only talking about the works presented in the festival but their whole approach to archiving – demonstrated in their inviting us to curate *Looking Back to Look*

Forward, and the Special Library of Contemporary Arts and Feminism which they opened in 2019.

To round off, what was important for us as a duo, was **to see feminisms being used as tools for resisting structures of oppression which, looking forward, do not necessarily need to be restricted to gender binaries. Moving into the future, this means the fight for better welfare, radical new models like universal basic income, global public healthcare and a continued belief that we can collectively and creatively build our own value system that is not measured by capital.**

For example, in **Alicja Rogalska's** video work *Onedera's Dream*, featured in the *Kinds of Pressure* exhibition we have curated for the Škuc Gallery for the 2019 City of Women festival, we meet Arifumi – who is male-identifying – taking on a traditionally female role as a care worker for an elderly woman in Tokyo – Onedera. The conditions he is working under and she is living under are an example of neoliberal capitalism at work. The video also shows that “care” roles – again historically associated with unwaged women’s work – are still not considered of value to the system. We see this video as a beautiful example of poetic protest. Alicja has previously been accused of exploiting Onedera by showing her in a vulnerable state, but Onedera’s wish to Alicja and Arifumi was to document her story to highlight the cracks in the system so that future generations may be able to continue the struggle for better welfare.

osborn&møller are Emma Møller (DK) and Mary Osborn (GB), an independent curatorial duo unattached to any one organisation, city or country. They are interested in performance as a practice that can disrupt structures of oppression, re-think hierarchies, illuminate the slippery borders between bodies, and offer a space for critical empathy and imagining.



Kristina Leko

SOME ECONOMIC AND FEMINIST IMPLICATIONS OF THE *CHEESE AND CREAM PROJECT*

The *Cheese and Cream Project* was presented at the City of Women festival in 2003 and again in 2019 as part of the online exhibition *Looking Back to Look Forward* by **osborn&møller**. I am extremely thankful for that, for it motivated me to revisit the project. Currently, three young researchers are evaluating the footprint of the project and today's position of milkmaids in Zagreb. The outcomes of their research and a longer version of this text are going to be published on the sirivrhnje.eu website in May 2020.

The *Cheese and Cream Project* (2002–2013) was a research, documentary and activist art project dedicated to – and partially realized in cooperation with – **Zagreb dairywomen**. These women commute to Zagreb once to three times per week from the surrounding areas (as far as 100 km away) to sell their milk products on a number of open markets in the city. Fresh cheese with cream (*sir i vrhnje*) is their main product. It is also a traditional North Croatian meal and an important ingredient of the local as well as some regional cuisines. In the last two or three decades, the cash flow and the presence of farmers on Zagreb's twenty-three open markets dramatically declined.¹ Multinational food- and milk industry corporations, tied with supermarket chains and the aggressively introduced shopping-mall culture restructured Croatian agriculture and food market. The number of Zagreb dairywomen dropped from ca. 550 in 2002 to ca. 200 in 2020, while their turnover dropped 75%. Most likely, their number will decrease a further 50% within the next five years.²

1 Since the early 1990s, farmers on Zagreb city markets were progressively replaced with sellers who mostly sell imported goods, as Croatian agriculture and food production, let alone other industries, were shut down by the war in 1991–1995, followed by privatization and the flourishing of import-based economy.

2 Data collected from the city-owned Zagreb Communal Markets Company; the estimates are mine and based on field trips in December 2019.

We started the *Cheese and Cream Project* as an **initiative to protect Zagreb dairywomen as cultural heritage**,³ i.e. to secure their place on the market in times of severe economic decay of the Croatian middle class (their customers) and prior to Croatia entering the EU. Our project was launched in August 2002 by an action at Dolac, the central market in Zagreb where three milkmaids⁴ handed out cheese and cream to passers-by for free while young activists collected signatures in support of their demand that the city and state administration support their adjustment to the future EU regulations by supplying financial aid, refrigerated points of sale, and altering regulations when applicable.

Back in 2001, it was clear to me that EU regulations (on top of surviving in the post-transitional economy) would seriously challenge dairywomen, primarily through new hygienic regulations about food safety. According to the Croatian Agricultural Agency, in 2000 only 5%, and in 2002 only 20% of Croatian milk met the EU standards on the presence of antibiotic- and micro toxins (today, it's 96%). Based on media reports and public discussions, it was also obvious that the mainstream post-transitional politics (spellbound by capitalism) would encourage the growth of local farms through bank loan investment programs. On the other hand, these excluded small farms which couldn't expand and reach the prescribed level. Only around 10% of the milkmaids' farms qualified for the support programs available at the time.⁵

The public discussions on the EU and agriculture oscillated between fears about production quotas and daydreams about big subsidies for ambitious agrarian entrepreneurs. **I remember the feminist realisation hitting me: *kumice*⁶ will be left out.** Before our little media campaign drew attention to this, nobody noticed the market women and their households which function in the grey economy and are based on the invisible and unpaid labour of (to a great extend elderly and female) family members.

3 This somewhat romantic and provocative request was formulated in the *Declaration of Milkmaids* in 2002. In 2004, I filed the request with the Croatian heritage protection authority, but they haven't processed it due to formal obstacles.

4 All of them have been working there; Katica Bzig from Bregovlje for 57 years, Marija Spoljar from Donja Bistra for 55 years, and Marica Seničić from Jakovlje for 44 years. The products were paid for by our project funds. The action was part of UrbanFestival 2002, organized by BLOK (<http://urbanfestival.blok.hr/>).

5 I made a documentary project *On Milk and People* (2000–2003) which comparatively showcased five Croatian and five Hungarian milk-farming families in a series of experimental documentary short films, because of which I was familiar with the dairy sector. I portrayed small farmers as the paradigmatic losers of the transition.

6 *Kumica* is an endearing name used for women who sell any kind of food, including dairy products, of their making on the market.

As an artist, I conceived the *Cheese and Cream Project* and, in its first phase (2002–2004), it was realized as a joint venture with curator **Vesna Vuković** and the project team affiliated with [BLOK] – Local Base for Cultural Refreshment. Later, I continued on my own. Between 2002 and 2004, we operated at the intersections of art, activism, and sociological or cultural and anthropological research. Our project encompassed several actions or interventions in public space; a field research with questionnaires answered by 448 milkmaids (resulting in statistics on their socioeconomic situation); a database of dairywomen from the six main city markets; a website promoting the businesses of 474 milkmaids; a collection of customers' stories and their signatures of support; an exhibition followed by a panel discussion where state- and city officials were called to take measures; and a small media campaign which introduced the problems of dairywomen to wider TV-audiences. After 2004, I occasionally exhibited artworks from the project, created a documentary (2007–2013), and edited a reader.⁷ **Our project brought public attention to the cause of the dairywomen and encouraged some of them to self-organize, which was crucial later on as it helped them to organize and protest together.**

In 2003, Vesna Vuković, milkmaid **Višnja Čukelj** and I spent a day at the Ljubljana market as part of the City of Women festival. We talked with women who were no longer *traditional* dairywomen⁸ because they gave up on production and became dairy saleswomen for big farms. As we collected support signatures for the dairywomen of Zagreb, there was a moment of understanding, burdened with difficult questions. **Why would you fight and argue for more hard work?** In other words, why organize and produce, why commute and sell; why get only four hours of sleep? **Because it gives you agency and money as well as the power and the right to say and act as you think is appropriate.** Of course, not all dairywomen are emancipated the way I would define it, and some have abusive husbands, but going to the market has traditionally been a way out of economic dependency and related abuse. It is a rare site of women's power created within Croatia as a traditional patriarchal society, regularly listed among the top countries in femicide rates in the EU.

The 550 dairywomen who, in 2002, “employed” one or more family members to supply forage for cows can be compared to a factory of 1500 workers who support at least 2500 people. For a vast majority of milkmaids' families, the open market income was the only cash at their disposal. I keep asking

myself why *this* “factory” wasn't saved even though the conditions for doing so were met: there was public attention and support for their cause, their product, cheese with cream, became the symbol of Croatia joining the EU at its own pace, which also empowered the local slow food movement ... Why didn't it work, then?

When I started the project, I was dreaming about the city administration paying bonuses or cultural heritage fees to the dairywomen, about fancy refrigerators, and about my photobook and website being regularly updated and marketed for the benefit of the ageing milkmaids. Why didn't I continue? Why didn't I accept the offer of the Municipality of Zagreb and got myself employed, if only temporarily, as the town's expert advisor on dairywomen?

Although in 2007, the mayor made a public promise that the city was going to supply refrigerated points of sale, the cheese and cream trade was banned because there were no refrigerators when the EU regulations came into force in 2010. Three days later, the ban was put on hold, thanks to a well-organized protest of the dairywomen and negotiations with the authorities. The refrigerated vitrines were put in place a few months later. However, they were poorly designed and the lower storage shelves emitted heat with temperatures up to 47°C. In the summer, a dairywoman had to absorb that heat in her legs, and bring along portable cooling chests with ice, all of which made her work even more difficult. After a mere couple of months, many vitrines were malfunctioning, and until this day, they haven't been repaired since the company that produced them was dissolved soon after the delivery. Most likely, it was established just a few days before that public tender was published which is a common corruptive practice of Zagreb's city administration.

On their end, state administration failed to adjust the regulation of the perimeter within which trading unpackaged farm products was to be allowed. Only once it was clear that the regulation made the majority of dairywomen operate illegally, did the office responsible begin modifying it. Along with other similar handlings, this represented **the structural and intentional administrative oppression of dairywomen.**

I started photographing dairywomen in 1998, and my first artwork that came out of it was a double slide projection showing two series of portraits taken within two hours on 29 February 1999. On one side, it featured portraits of policemen who were preventing an anti-government protest from happening and showing off their massive presence on the streets of Zagreb; on the other, portraits of dairywomen on a nearby market. The same old

⁷ Documentary film *Cheese and Cream* (40', Factum Zagreb, 2013), *Book on Milkmaids* (Otvoreni likovni pogon: Zagreb, 2010–2020).

⁸ Slovenia entered the EU half a year later, on 1 May 2004.

boring binary opposition followed me throughout this project, especially while working on the documentary. The administrative frame imposed on the dairywomen – the market clerks, the state, the city, and the county officials – they were all male.

Dairywomen and the Class Division

I was a teenager when my grandmother (a dressmaker and small private-business owner in times of socialism) introduced me to the dairywomen. For me, like for so many other people, their fresh cheese with cream made out of raw milk was my *petite madeleine*. Each fresh cheese had a unique taste. It was thus not only possible to differentiate milkmaids through taste, but you could theoretically trace a taste to a specific cow, which is an important ecofeminist thought, if we want to rethink our human–animal alliance. And since the vast majority of people in the Yugoslavian successor states still nourish their rural roots due to the relatively late industrialization and migrations to urbanizing areas after 1945 (and very much in the 1960s), there is more to it. **For me, the taste of cheese with cream stimulates an immersion into an in-between world where classes merge in their historical dialectic, in between the urban and the rural, and through specific female bodies at that.**

When you see an overdressed town lady exchanging her money for products with farmer women on a Zagreb market, and hear them talk about children, husbands, health and finances, you often notice a sparkling alternating current of solidarity and identification between them. For example, the fine urban lady might still have parents or grandparents living in a remote village, while the daughter of the dairywoman works in the company where the lady used to work. They identify across class lines, which they, in a way, tend to understand as temporary, coincidental, irrelevant markers.

But, hey! What am I doing? Romanticizing Croatian dairywomen, who are, to a good extent, conservative churchgoers? You know what that means when it comes to women's, or in their terms, *the nations'* reproductive rights.

The Reception of the Project and Its Legacy

At the 2003 City of Women festival, our project presentation was part of a program about the impact of globalization on women's struggles. The most appropriate frame for the *Cheese and Cream Project* would be anti-globalization, even more so feminism, but the responses to the project from those contexts were – with some precious exceptions – very ambiguous. I felt that a few progressive women whom I deeply respected, looked down on it. Perhaps because I never declared myself feminist even though I have always worked with women and dealt with women's issues in my work? In addition, the progressive, politically engaged curators from the former Yugoslavian region I've been in contact with rarely considered showing the project, unlike the curators who were unfamiliar with the region. Why is that?

On the other hand, it was fascinating to see how a similar cross-class solidarity, like the one that existed between ladies and milkmaids, began to spread through the wider public in Croatia in the course of our activist art project. Because of that, I began to see **the dairywoman as a traditional role model who could challenge the local patriarchy by transforming themselves, the "traditional" rural women through these new alliances.** But I got cold feet. I was afraid that I would unintentionally play into hands of conservative patriarchy.

In fact, in February 2004, BBC made a reportage about **Marija Ivanković**, one of the younger and stronger milkmaids. They took our project narrative and information and twisted it. They portrayed the dairywomen (together with the whole nation) as backward victims and future losers – and it was me who supplied the contacts, all the necessary background information, and organized the shooting for them. Several months later, a Croatian former journalist founded his political party in the right spectrum. He then started his eurosceptic campaign entitled Cheese and Cream – again, stealing our project narrative but this time, putting a strong anti-European prefix to it. He organized give-away actions of cheese and cream in public space just like we did, but instead of working with the dairywomen, he worked with bigger, industrialized farms. Later, charges were pressed against him because of money laundering, particularly in relation to his cheesy give-away actions. He lost elections, while we, intimidated, gave up on our cheese-and-cream activism.

For the progressive women who grew up in Yugoslavia, it is difficult to embrace and give credit to any kind of “traditional” woman’s role model because we always see it as a reactionary opposition to the modern, socialist, working-class emancipation. In other words, any “traditional” or rural woman is by default a conservative nationalist, and any apolitical communication (outside the safe, anti-fascist and/or socialist ideological frame) might be dangerous, therefore it should be avoided. In other words, if you are (or want to be) a progressive feminist, do not mingle with churchgoers.

In conclusion, I feel that the legacy of this project is in its somewhat subversive agenda of pulling out a “traditional” women’s role model in order to challenge and shed light on our division lines. I still think that powerful examples of “traditional” female roles exist and that locally they could be helpful in challenging patriarchy. My family, which has been quite matriarchically organized for three generations, is among them. **There will be no transformation or dismantling of systemic patriarchy without transgressing class as well as ideological lines and other lines of division.** The progressive left (feminists) cannot do that job alone. This is why I say: create new alliances and believe the impossible ...⁹

⁹ “Believe the impossible!” was the concept and slogan of the 2003 City of Women festival.

Kristina Leko is a participatory artist and activist. Since the late 1990s, she has initiated and realized several extensive community art projects in different countries. She uses a variety of media spanning from drawing or text to research, from film and exhibition-making to interventions in public space. Her main focus is social interaction and (self-)empowerment.



SHULAMITH FIRESTONE'S FEMINIST REVOLUTION

A Conversation with Tanja Renner and Katja Čičigoj

In *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970), **Shulamith Firestone** advocated for a feminist revolution that would not merely question privileges, but overthrow the very material bases of sex-, race- and class oppression. Her utopian manifesto has rarely been taken up in subsequent feminist theory and philosophy, which tended to gravitate towards more situated, heterotopian modes of thinking rebellion. Recently, however, several voices have called for a more ambitious, systemic approach to gendered oppression and revitalised the imagination of radically different futures. Some of these voices (**Pia Brezavšek**, **Katja Čičigoj**, **Sophie Lewis**, **Victoria Margree**, **Chrys Papaioanou**, and **Anamarija Šiša**) could be heard at the international symposium *Imagining radically different futures: The Dialectic of Sex and feminist utopias today* in October 2019 at the 25th City of Women festival.

The symposium was organised by the City of Women, Bookshop Azil (ZRC SAZU) and the /^{*}cf. publishing house. The latter released Katja Čičigoj's Slovenian translation of *The Dialectic of Sex* in 2019 and is planning to publish the contributions to the symposium in 2020. The festival programme also featured the screening of **Elisabeth Subrin's** film *Shulie* (1997), followed by an online conversation with the director and a discussion with Katja Čičigoj and **Tanja Renner**, a member of /^{*}cf.'s editorial board, about the "dangerous" utopianism of Shulamith Firestone. The conversation was led by **Anja Banko**.

How come the publisher /^{*}cf. decided to translate *The Dialectic of Sex*? In what way does this book place itself among the ranks of translated feminist works to Slovenian language?

Tanja Renner: How come? Because it is a feminist classic.

Katja Čičigoj: We are lacking translations to Slovenian language in several fields, thus missing classics as well as contemporary works. This translation has filled a certain void. In the /^{*}cf. publishing house's Lilac series, there is a translation of **Virginia Woolf** which represents a key contribution. Furthermore, *The Second Sex* is translated to Slovenian, and although it is a linear construction, I see *The Dialectic of Sex* as the follow-up of such feminism, given that Firestone uses **Beauvoir** as a direct reference. In addition to the translated works from American feminism of that period, we are also lacking literature from France, Italy and other countries, which we are even less familiar with.

Tanja Renner: An additional reason explaining how come Firestone had to be translated precisely now is more political. For a while now, we have been facing a very thorough social amnesia, which in our country refers to the former regime. Certainly, it was full of flaws, yet I feel that we threw the baby out with the bathwater. We tend to forget that, **during socialism, we had universal social rights and also feminism as one of the numerous political movements and struggles**. I think that this amnesia is not spontaneous, but instead orchestrated to the point where capitalism seems like a natural state or even "biology", as Firestone might have put it. On the other hand, experience and referential areas are being erased along with the erasure of history and memories, which means we are again doomed to find ourselves at the very beginning. It is, in my opinion, very good that Firestone has been translated, for we can thus see what had once already existed, the struggles that have been implemented, and we can check whether these struggles are still ours. In that sense, I see her work as relevant even today, although it has been surpassed in many aspects, as Katja Čičigoj critically points out in her afterword.

What is Shulamith Firestone's relationship with the European space, considering that she is an American radical feminist?

Tanja Renner: In *The Dialectic of Sex*, the most renowned feminist slogan *personal is political* is at work all the time. Today, we can prosaically **translate it as the fight for a welfare state** which has never existed in the United States. The USA did not have state feminism, as we did, they did not have free access to abortion, childcare, universal healthcare and so on. My relationship towards socialism is not nostalgic. I do, however, think that Americanisation has made us lose or is making us lose one of the rare comparative advantages we used to have as a former socialist state and as part of the European continent, which has formed the welfare state even in the West after WW2. Meanwhile, our country is now also discussing some kind of a “lean government”. I am even more worried by the horrifying modifications of mentality that have made us change our attitude towards the welfare state to the very point where **we stopped perceiving it as a fundamental achievement of civilisation, but instead treat it as something good for the losers**. The fact that we fell for this trick is very problematic especially from the female or feminist viewpoint, and we have to move away from it. Although Firestone tackled neither the welfare state nor the universal basic income (UBI) in these particular terms, she does say at one point that it should be introduced, for it is quintessential for any kind of freedom, starting with reproduction rights. In stating that, she is intensely up to date, and I feel we need to discuss this. I think UBI is urgently necessary; we will, however, not get it, because in its thorough implementation, it would outroot capitalism. Despite that, we must demand it as soon as possible, otherwise the future will be even bloodier.

Katja Čičigoj: True, Firestone is incredibly up to date. She sees the universal basic income as something that would enable women and children to become economically and existentially independent of men and grown-ups, while the workers, male or female, would be independent of capital.

She says this could help end waged work, while automatization could also mean the end of reproductive work as we know it. **UBI and automatization are thus, according to Firestone, tools that would bring on the humankind's liberation from waged and reproductive toil, that would enable much freer sociality and creativity.** This is a very radical vision of social change, again becoming active right now in some theoretic circles, such as the Italian post-workerists and their successors, or the younger generation of feminists, for instance xenofeminists who see technology as a tool for crucial changes to the economic as well as gender system. Within the context of the United States, this very aspect of *The Dialectic of Sex* dissolves the stereotypical image of radical feminism. The left wing often understands it as separatism or exclusive occupation with women, leading to mysticism and worshipping some “female” values, and, today, it is gladly dismissed as some kind of reformist “identity politics”. However, radical feminism in the USA sprang up in a very tight connection with with leftist politics and the counter-cultural struggles of that time, and it established itself as a radical left critique of the new left. This is exactly what Firestone writes about. **She does not criticise the left for being too radical, but because it is not radical enough, because it fails to tackle reproduction and sex.** It was not about rejecting the class struggle and the Afro-American fight for civil rights. Instead, **it was about trying to join those struggles and simultaneously making them look in the mirror.**

What are the problematic aspects of the feminist revolution proposed by Firestone?

Tanja Renner: Firestone set her feminist revolution into the far future. As a sociologist, I think that by doing that, she missed the point, because she failed to notice that smaller scale revolutions are already at work: educational, employment and sexual in the sense of separating reproduction from sexuality. She wanted to go a step further and separate sexuality from family, this modus of everyday life, howev-

er, this is precisely the point where I am not convinced. She proposed transgenerational and transgender communal life, where the ties would not be biological but woven in line with affinities. But a huge problem appears here. To be a little bit blunt: what to do with people whom nobody likes due to their affinities? Besides, affinity means hard work and is short-term. Also, Firestone never explicitly states what a biological family is, even though she keeps on attacking it from all sides. Even though I have had a lot to say against family in my life, I think she is mistaken in this point, since family has changed after 1968.

I think that the 1968 movement fell apart as a cultural revolution because nothing really changed in the broader picture, none of the systems were shaken, not even a little. However, what did shake was the private sphere where pluralisation of forms of family and ways of life took place. Something very unusual happened to families. Of course, they remain murderous institutions. **Families certainly do kill. But on the other hand, families are the only bastions of communism at this moment.** Where else do you have common property, where else do you have empathy and solidarity that wriggles away from the law of the market? I do not claim that this goes for all families, but it is an impact of the cultural revolution of 1968, one that Firestone perhaps failed to notice.

Katja Čičigoj: I think this is exactly where the problematic whiteness of her feminism comes to the foreground. **Black feminism's reproach to white feminism was precisely the oversimplified rejection of family.** In the period of slavery, family was for the large part of black population the only environment without severe exploitation. Although Firestone at one point concedes that family is compliant with the "natural needs" for closeness and safety, so we are unable to say that she denies any function of the family – she does ask how we could change this institution for it to be less murderous.

Katja, how would you define Shulamith Firestone's style of writing, her language and the translation difficulties you had to face?

Katja Čičigoj: Firstly, I must stress that *The Dialectic of Sex* is written out of the movement and for the movement. It is not an academic or scientific work but is instead written as the all-encompassing theory of gender oppression, which is **simultaneously a political manifesto and an advocacy of the feminist revolution.** Firestone poured numerous intellectual sources from which she drew her thoughts into her prose without referencing every other word, as we are used to when writing professional articles in our days. This was the reason why the editor **Amelia Kraigher** and I have decided for me to add references to her writing – in order to bring her work and its context closer to the readers in Slovenian language. The biggest challenges for me while translating were most certainly the search for sources and the contextualisation of references, however, I think that this is exactly what opens the possibility of scientific and research analysis of the book. It also brings the *Dialectic* closer to a wider contemporary readership.

Tanja Renner is a sociologist and emeritus professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. She has published widely in the field of women's studies, family and youth studies.

Katja Čičigoj is a philosopher, lecturer, writer, translator and dramaturg. She is completing her doctoral thesis on feminist philosophy at the Justus-Liebig University in Gießen, Germany.

No matter how many levels of consciousness
one reaches, the problem always goes deeper.

- Shulamith Firestone,
The Dialectic of Sex: The Case
for Feminist Revolution (1970)



WHAT IS FEMINISM ?



#8MarchEveryDay

Teaching Materials for the International Women's Day

On 8 March, the City of Women annually prepares teaching materials for parents, youth workers and teachers who work with young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty. By structuring a 45-minute lesson entitled **#8MarchEveryDay**, we encourage them to address the social, political and economic causes for gender inequality, but also celebrate women's achievements and learn about the long history of struggles for women's rights.

Despite their connection to the International Women's Day, the teaching materials are appropriate for any occasion. In 2020, they take the form of a quiz, following the favourable response of teachers to the 2018 and 2019 quizzes. The teaching materials include the quiz questions as well as the correct answers with explanations and discussion cues for each question. The participants can take the quiz by forming groups and competing against each other. Their active participation is the objective of both the quiz and the discussion held after it.

The 2020 quiz was prepared by **Ana Čigon**, **Tea Hvala**, **Urška Jež**, **Amela Meštrovac** and **Teja Reba**. It encompasses fifteen questions on the general knowledge of young people and expanding their awareness of important historic and contemporary heroines, the already acquired women's rights and the fields where gender inequality is still or ever more pressing.

The teaching materials are in Slovenian and can be accessed here:

www.cityofwomen.org/sl/content/vsakdan8marec

If you want to know more, if you are interested in translating the materials into your language or would like to disseminate them as part of your activities, contact: tea.hvala@cityofwomen.org.

In 2017, how many women, viewed globally and per day, were murdered by their partner or relative?

- a) 0
- b) 5
- c) 137



Name three literary heroines by their first and last name.

ANNA KARENINA

JANE EYRE

MOLLY BLOOM

In comparison to the monthly average gross income received by men in Slovenia, what percentage is paid to the women?

- a) 86%
- b) 93%
- c) 99%



Connect the women to the appropriate professions:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| a) Alma Karlin | 1) lawyer |
| b) Lili Novy | 2) actress |
| c) Ljuba Prenner | 3) sculptor |
| d) Ita Rina | 4) poet |
| e) Karla Bulovec Mrak | 5) travelogue writer |

REPRESENTATION

HEARING THE BODY

Interview with Nataša Živković

Nataša Živković is a dance maker, performer, choreographer and mentor from Ljubljana with a rich history of artistic collaborations and solo performances. Her debut *First Love's Second Chance*, produced by the City of Women in 2009, and her dance- and theatre achievements won her the 2009 Golden Bird Award. Her most recent solo piece *Sonny*, produced by the City of Women in 2018, explores the history of women, male supremacy and strategies of female empowerment in the Balkans. In 2019, *Sonny* won the main ACT Award at the ACT Festival in Bilbao for “the impressive interpretative work in different records, both physical and textual, and the strength that history transmits us”. In 2019, Nataša Živković also received the Ksenija Hribar Award for her outstanding achievements in the field of contemporary dance. In this interview, conducted by **Tea Hvala** and **Teja Reba**, Nataša Živković discusses the process of making *Sonny*.

You developed *Sonny* between 2017 and 2018 when you teamed up with other dance makers (Roberta Racis, Koldo Arostegui González, Jija Sohn, Sophie Unwin, Hannah Buckley) in the two-year programme *Performing Gender – Dance Makes Differences*.¹ How did the two engagements intertwine?

Being surrounded with people who think about, are sensitive to or experience different aspects of gender-related issues on a daily basis has been very valuable to me; it made me more sensitive and aware of those issues, whether they concern the lives of transgender people and people who define themselves as non-binary or women's rights and feminism; how gender is related to history, class, capitalism and the socio-geographical map. At a cer-

¹ *Performing Gender – Dance Makes Differences* was a cooperation project of Il Cassero/Gender Bender Festival, City of Women, Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, Paso a 2, Theaterfestival Boulevard, DansBrabant and Yorkshire Dance, supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

tain moment during the project we were asked to write down what we were working on, what our interest was at the time. That was very useful for me since I had to pin down my theme. I chose to research the phenomenon of the sworn virgins of Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and Metohia. I used this research both for the workshop I later gave to young dancers in Leeds, and for my solo *Sonny*.

Sonny speaks about the privileges of being a man, and questions the nature of women's power, freedom and choice to become masculine in the Balkans by taking on a man's role. I use the stories of the sworn virgins as an entry point to rethink the history of women, male supremacy and strategies of female empowerment in the Balkans, to further ask where are we today. **Does a woman still have to deepen her voice to be heard? Does she have to wear trousers if surrounded by men in suits? How do we perceive authority and power?**

What are the activist aspects of your practice, way of thinking or approach?

My activism stems from a feminist position, so I am trying to understand how to connect these multiple positions to feminism. How to think about transgender and non-binary positions from a feminist perspective, how gendering happens through language, how different genders are perceived in specific cultural, geographical and historical context? And: how is gender intrinsically linked with power as well as class and race privilege? To me, one of the most important conclusions during the Performing Gender project was that it is not something that should be enclosed within the identity politics discourse. Instead, discourses about gender are traversed by all of the above-mentioned elements.

I think I can talk about activism on stage when I feel that what happened had a real impact on me and the viewers; that something is going to stay with them and make them reconsider their own position. Generally speaking, though, I would prefer the term "political" to "activist". For me, "political" carries more meaning, in the sense of "the personal is political". **The politics or the bio-politics of our daily lives needs to be addressed again and again if we want to influence and promote change**, also at the level of state politics – for example, by promoting laws that benefit homosexual, transgender and non-binary people as well as single mothers, nonconventional modes of parenting, etc.

I hold moderated audience discussions after *Sonny*, and I find it amazing how people are open to speak about gender issues. For me, it feels almost like another performance, or let's say that these discussions have a performative

element to them, which I really enjoy. **I see these discussions as a different way of opening an artistic work to the audience and taking the topics they tackle a step further.**

Which creative procedures were important for you in the process of making *Sonny*?

During the Performing Gender training weeks, when I was beginning to shape *Sonny*, I met a number of artists who influenced and inspired me profoundly – **Oona Doherty, Liz Aggiss, Eva Viera and Amy Bell**. Also, some discussion with dramaturgs and producers, such as **Tanya Steinhauser, Laura Kumin** and especially especially you [**Teja Reba**], helped the piece to grow.

For example, English dance maker, writer, curator and teacher Amy Bell suggested finding a specific word, a metaphor for what we are doing and researching in order to pin it down and – at the same time – open new possibilities of imagining and understanding it. When I was researching the phenomenon of the sworn virgins from the Balkans, I came across an interview in which one of them said: "Wearing a man's suit is a privilege". A man's suit is a metaphor I found helpful in my research process. It can mean different things and evoke different associations: my father, something that doesn't fit, weddings, funerals and other social rituals, cross-dressing, etc.

It is also important for me to ask why we move our bodies, what is the vehicle behind a certain kind of energy; it's not only about the movement for the pleasure of moving. Sometimes, I feel that dancers are somewhat cut from delivering speech because of the fact that our main tool is the physicality of the body. **I am not only interested in seeing, but also in hearing the body**. I am interested in how to better connect the rational of the mind and the supposedly irrational of the body. For me, these two aspects are intertwined. **The action of giving voice back to the body is therefore an "un-muting" action also in a political sense.**

In the two years of touring and nineteen reprises, *Sonny* reached over nine hundred people in Slovenia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Spain (the Basque Country), Croatia and Serbia. In the post-pandemic future, the City of Women hopes that *Sonny* is going to reach audiences in Kosovo, Germany, Lithuania and again in the Basque Country. If you want to bring *Sonny* or any other recent City of Women production to your town, contact **Eva Prodan** at: production@cityofwomen.org.

In her performance *Sonny*, Nataša Živković offers an insight into one of the most paradoxical examples of transferring gender roles from biological principle to social status. Her research of sworn virgins, dubbed *virdžine* (in Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, and Metohia), is primarily concerned with the astonishing repression of patriarchal dictature on the abovementioned territories (addressing girls by the generic male name *sine*, *sonny*, is only one of its symptoms). In those areas, living conditions are best for those women who totally abandon their biological signs, only to proceed transferring into the male social role until that very role actually exceeds them and becomes their true reality: the *virdžine* adopt and assume the diction, behaviour and habits of men, they also change their looks, so as to become respected, almost revered in the name of the "higher purpose". Thereby, **a society exclusively founded on the heteronormativity imperative, which absolutely rejects any form of queerness, faces an outline of a paradoxical knot of ideology that interiorizes its own patriarchal logic to such a point where it totally misses the "conflict of interests"**. As a result, this society produces an absolute, full-blooded queer situation, one which it otherwise despises and prosecutes outside of the context of its own laws.

In the performance, this commentators' layer is put on by three transvestites (assistants), whose relation to the main actress on the one hand represents an inverse proportion to the newly established gender (male to female), while on the other hand, they trigger a move from the distant environment to here, to our space, which enables the integral, global LGBTQ+ problematization to truly commence. In the second half, the performance gradually begins equalizing the declarative and the physical levels; **Nataša Živković's body is becoming a tool, an appliance, a material that no longer wishes to define itself in any (gender) direction, but is instead eager to communicate through its movement and visual "intersexual" potential**, where her image and choreographic implications keep on catching the double gender depiction - however, they do so with an intention to annihilate both of them in order to create a being who does not adapt to outer conventions, who wants to manifest their own policy of their own body, independent of tradition and ideologies.

- Zala Dobovšek

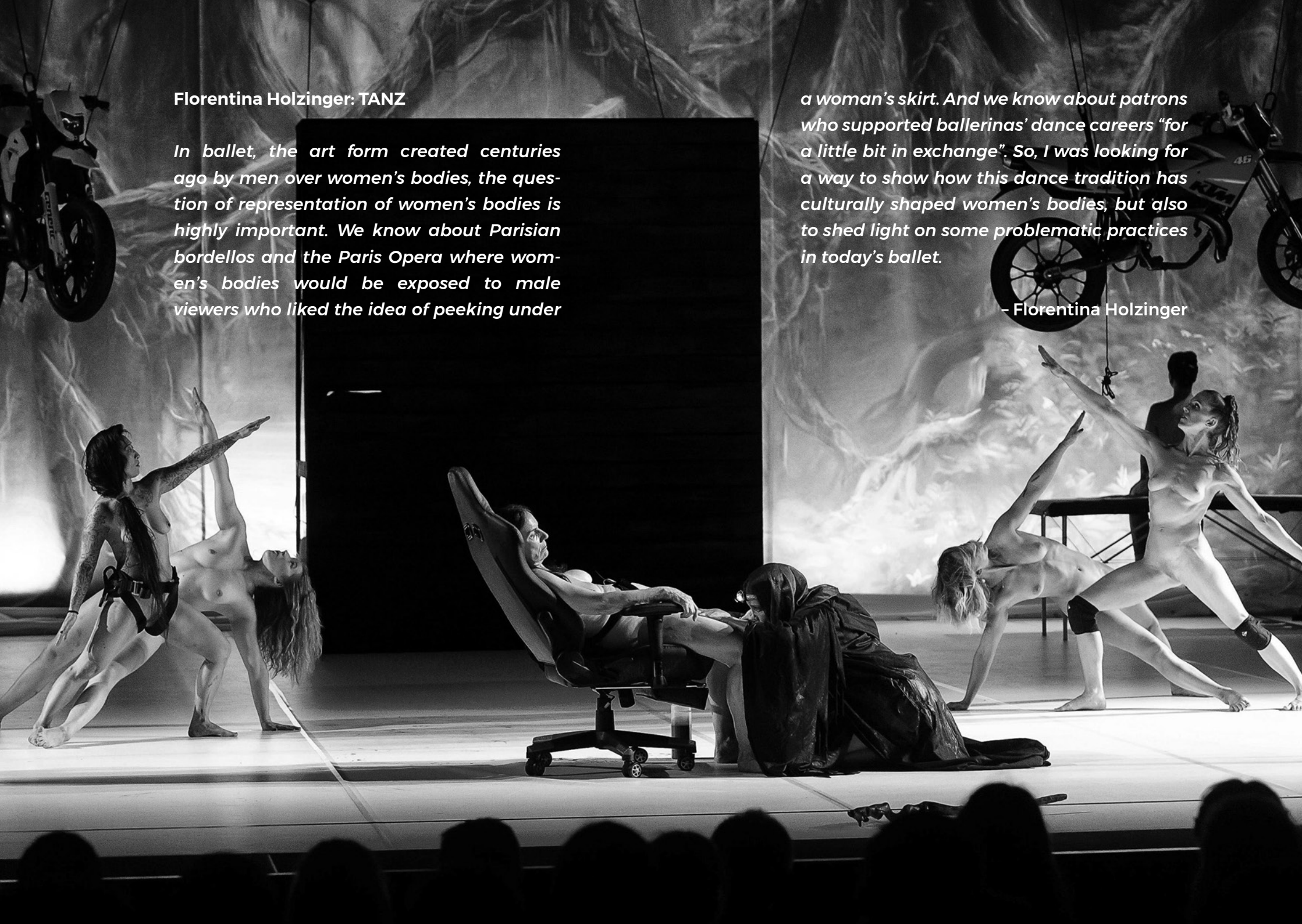


Florentina Holzinger: TANZ

In ballet, the art form created centuries ago by men over women's bodies, the question of representation of women's bodies is highly important. We know about Parisian bordellos and the Paris Opera where women's bodies would be exposed to male viewers who liked the idea of peeking under

a woman's skirt. And we know about patrons who supported ballerinas' dance careers "for a little bit in exchange". So, I was looking for a way to show how this dance tradition has culturally shaped women's bodies, but also to shed light on some problematic practices in today's ballet.

- Florentina Holzinger



Flora Détraz: Muyte Maker

Muyte Maker celebrates disobedient and irrational bodies. It examines joy as a physical and existential statement: joy as desire and creative potential, going against the grain of morality, and as a physical distortion or contradiction.

- Flora Détraz



Olja Grubić: Naked Life

I see the images brought on by the impacts of male domination for several millennia; captured, ecstatically masturbating forebodings of Erinyes who, in their excited, repetitive pleasure, ever more wildly scrape zucchini and carrots, naked, preferably in the pose where they hold the scraper

in front of their genitals. It seems as if they would keep on scraping until the end of all time, until they succeed in unbalancing the foundation of the entrenched patriarchal structures; however, they do seem more and more tired performing this Sisyphean deed.

- Urban Belina



A black and white photograph capturing a large, dense crowd of people, likely at a festival or protest. The crowd is seen from a low angle, filling the upper two-thirds of the frame. In the foreground, two women stand on the right side, looking towards the crowd. The woman on the left is wearing a dark, sleeveless dress, while the woman on the right is wearing a light-colored, sleeveless top and dark pants. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant public gathering.

Bara Kolenc: Brina

“Women came up with contemporary dance even before this geopolitical territory introduced universal suffrage, and as such, contemporary dance primarily signifies a practice of emancipated female creativity.”

- Rok Vevar and Amelia Kraigher

Ivana Maričić

POSITION OF A FEMALE MUSIC ARTIST IN SLOVENIA

The public panel *Position of a Female Music Artist in Slovenia* was part of the European project MusicaFemina¹ at the 24th City of Women festival in 2018. The panel was conceived and moderated by sound artist, violin player, electronic musician, poet, literary artist, radio editor, sociologist and also the 25th City of Women festival artist in focus – **Nina Dragičević**. She was joined by visual artist and harp player of the younger generation **Urška Preis**; vocalist, dancer, choreographer and philosopher **Irena Z. Tomažin**; composers and university professors **Larisa Vrhunc** and **Urška Pompe**; anthropologist, music journalist and singer–songwriter **Katarina Juvančič**; and retired Slavic-language professor, poet and folk-song singer **Bogdana Herman**.

The starting point of the debate immediately revealed the existing common problem of misogyny; however, it was also evident that the speakers hardly recognize it as their own issue. It is true that Bogdana Herman illustrated the somewhat careful remark about a lot of women in music being overlooked and forsaken with her own example: in the past twenty-five years, music critics have neglected to mention her with a single word despite her creative endeavours of several decades. But the opposite viewpoint was immediately presented by Urška Preis, who feels she is positively discriminated in Slovenia due to her youth and gender, which she managed to gain profit from by quickly releasing a solo album. The different treatment of the two women from different age groups alone calls for an intersectional approach to the analysis of the position of female music artists. **The intergenerational difference proves that the integral understanding of the problem demands more than simply observing exclusively gender differences, but also the**

¹ MusicaFemina is a project of maezenatentum.at, City of Women and Gryllus Kft in cooperation with Heroines of Sound supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

differences in time periods, as well as economic, social, sexual and race differences.

Katarina Juvančič cut through the shy touches of darkness surrounding the topic of women in music when she triggered further debate by realistically illustrating the everyday work of a precarious cultural worker. She thereby accentuated the class differences among sound artists and added that she cannot afford to be on sick leave even during her second cancer treatment. Larisa Vrhunc and Urška Pompe, on the other hand, have financial security as university professors, yet their regular jobs do not necessarily allow enough free time for music art. Moreover, they are not given a chance to lecture on composition but teach music theory instead. In such circumstances, creative work is neglected. Statistic data confirms that composing alone is not a sufficient source of income. In Slovenia, the 2018/19 season gave room to approximately 2% of works by female composers on the two central stages for classical music (Cankarjev dom, Slovenska filharmonija), while the rest (98%) were composed by their male colleagues. The statistic research by Nina Dragičević for the 2018/19 season is also valid for the 2019/20 programme of the leading music institutions. This information triggered a lighted debate focusing on the issue of women's quotas.

Women's quotas were actually first addressed by composer Urška Pompe, who sharply criticised them since, in her opinion, they represent a bad trend, are a "terrible promotion of women" and shift the focus from quality to quantity. She further vaguely connected the problem of contemporary art and music to the question of money: in Slovenia, the artwork accomplished today does not sell, and if it does, the sums are very low. Out of Urška Pompe's shift in focus, money quickly transformed into one of the leading motives of the conversation about women in music.

"Where there is no cash, we are all the same,"² claimed Slovenian improviser, composer, musician, vocalist, flute player and publisher Maja Osojnik in 2019. The question of whether *poverty* truly makes us all the same had already been raised by Nina Dragičević at the panel. True: **contemporary (academic) music in Slovenia is not profitable, yet in its creation as well as re-creation, the absence of women still remains painstakingly obvious.**

² Tomaž Grom: "Maja Osojnik: 'Since When is Being Female Considered a Genre?' – Video Interview", *Centralala.si*, 30 September 2019, access date 20 February 2020.

On the other hand, Irena Z. Tomažin claimed that the non-institutionalised and fragile field of experimental improvised music knows no gender differences. Nina Dragičević quickly found that, nevertheless, it is useless to look for solidarity and sensitivity regarding the musical genre, as the Slovenian festivals of experimental and/or improvised music (Sonica, Sajeta) are far from reaching the quotas. A year later, Irena Z. Tomažin gives an interview³ with a more detailed explanation, saying she was lucky that her male colleagues were feminists. One should not overlook the fact that the institute Zavod Sploh (under artistic direction of **Tomaž Grom**), the largest organiser of concerts and other events in the fields of experimental and improvised music in Slovenia, regularly addresses the problematics of discrimination, striving to integrate all marginalised and socially vulnerable groups (migrants, refugees, the elderly, cancer patients, unemployed, mental patients, etc.).

In their respective interviews, both Maja Osojnik and improviser and jazz pianist Kaja Draksler⁴ emphasise that they do not feel gender differences as much in respect to their male musician colleagues as they do in relation with **concert event organisers. The latter often underestimate them, often pay less than they would to their male colleagues, and also try to flirt with them.** Therefore, the organisers and institutions creating the musical mainstream are for them (and also for Irena Z. Tomažin) the principal sources in producing gender inequalities. So finally, they all pledge their support to the quotas, given that they force those holding the positions of power to lend an ear to the different, i.e. female voices.

However, as Nina Dragičević had already warned at the panel, this is not a problem of quotas, but of a class difference. What does this mean for the relation between women and music? Nothing else than the fact that gender difference is inscribed in our bodies, social roles, position of (the lack of) power and impact on the (re)creation of music as a woman. “Women’s writing” is not to be sought by way of essentialism, but through understanding the circumstances of the creation of an art product, while the emancipatory potential

3 Tomaž Grom: “Irena Z. Tomažin: ‘If Anything, Being Womanly Means Being on the Side of the Weak’ – Video Interview”, *Centralala.si*, 4 November 2019, access date 20 February 2020.

4 Tomaž Grom: “Kaja Draksler: ‘About Identity, Being in Shape, Groups, Gender and Quotas’ – Video Interview”, *Centralala.si*, 1 July 2019, access date 20 February 2020.

of the artwork and the “criticism of inequality”⁵ hidden in it are to be observed through the activity of the (sound) artist. **This does not mean that every (sound) artist is a feminist, but with her artistic act, she definitely inscribes and describes her (female) position.**

At the panel, Katarina Juvančič called for solidarity and co-operation, Irena Z. Tomažin saw her purpose as providing support for other women, maintaining a safe and open space where there can also be room for self-criticism, Larisa Vrhunc and Urška Pompe swore to use their last drops of energy to compose new works and will not allow themselves to stop, while Urška Preis wished to see the institutions open to new music currents and more female role models. The latter are few, in some fields none, but not because they would not exist – they have simply been kept invisible.

Therefore, Nina Dragičević’s two calls at the panel bear even more importance: firstly, she called for **compiling an inventory of personal stories of female (sound) artists that reflect systemic inequality.** Secondly, at the panel as well as in her lecture entitled *Seeking the history of women sound creators in the area of former Yugoslavia*,⁶ Dragičević called for a **redefinition and expansion of the meaning of basic notions within sound arts.** This is the only way that the thought about sound can become inclusive. Thus, composing is no longer reduced to facultative male academic groups, but also encompasses sound qualities produced by women who, throughout history, lacked access to the dominant music currents. Her clear critical thought thoroughly discloses the institutional lie about equal opportunities. It questions the very *scientific* apparatus that constantly causes harm by concealing the violence of the established discourse.

5 Tomaž Grom: “Nina Dragičević: ‘Feminism isn’t About Hating Men, it’s Pure Criticism of Inequality’ – Video Interview”, *Centralala.si*, 19 October 2019, access date 20 February 2020.

6 The lecture was part of the symposium *Feminism in Sonic Arts* at the 25th City of Women festival (2019) within the framework of the MusicaFemina project.

Ivana Maričić is currently studying for her MA in musicology at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. She is active as a music journalist and archivist, writer of concert programmes and organiser of contemporary experimental improvised music concerts.

Nina Dragičević: Extensions of Pleasure

The composer asks: Is pleasure really a romantic, sensual feeling, as it is conventionally understood? Or is it rather a point of disembodiment and destruction in its most constructive sense, as well as a carrier of unsayable consequences which derive precisely from its audibility? In that regard, is it not crucial to know that the composer of pleasure is a woman, or perhaps even two women?

– Nina Dragičević



CHEERS TO WOMEN!

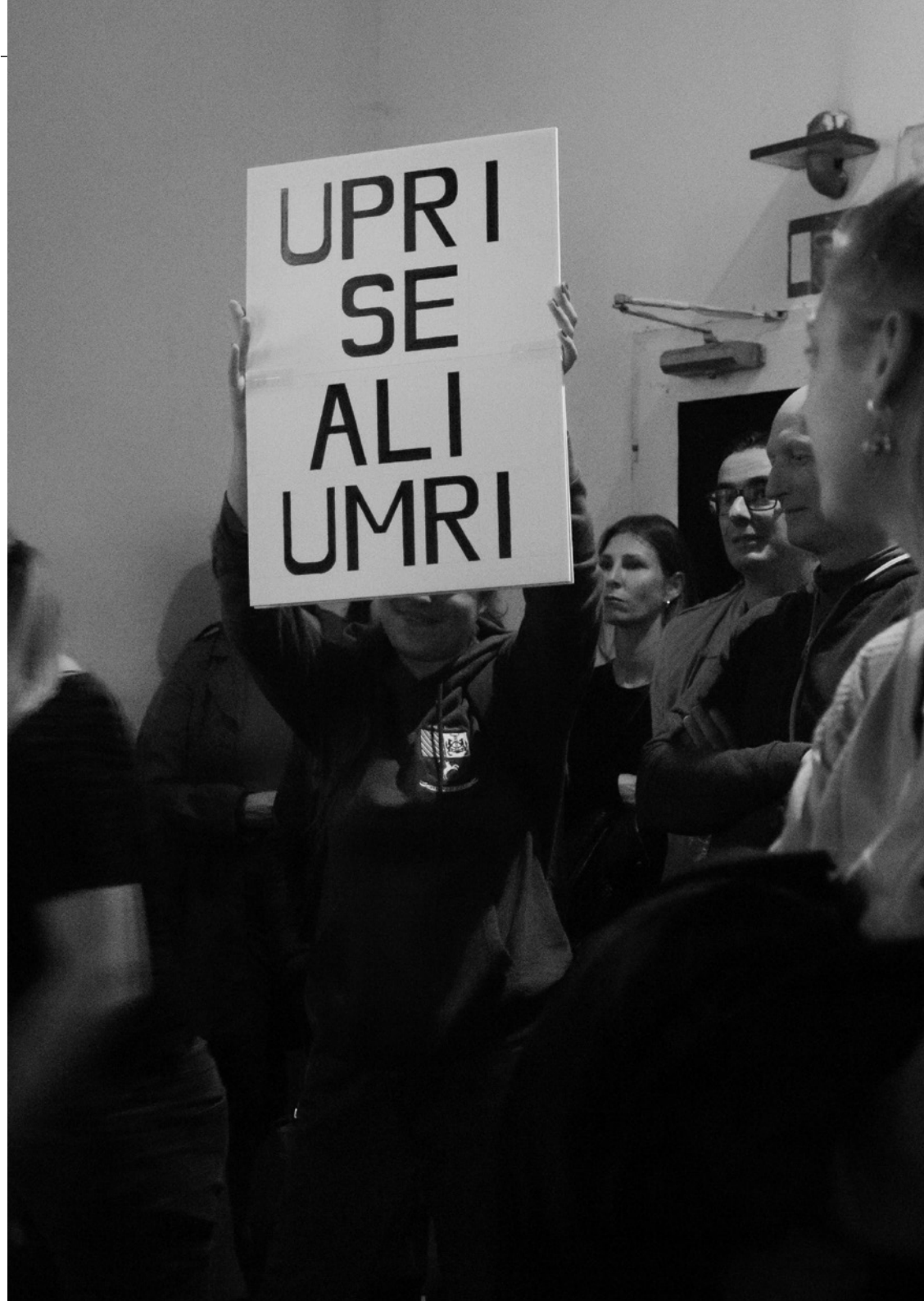
Exhibition, Performance and Film Marathon

In celebration of the 25th City of Women festival, curators **Vesna Bukovec** and **Ana Čigon** looked at the twenty-five years of creative endeavours by female video artists in Slovenia. Their exhibition ***Cheers to Women! 25 Years of Film and Video*** included a selection of works by twenty-five female authors chosen from the vast video production of numerous authors.

Artists: **Zemira Alajbegović & Neven Korda, Nika Autor, Vesna Bukovec, Jasmina Cibic, Ana Čigon, Andreja Džakušič, Ana Grobler, Marina Gržinić & Aina Šmid, Đejmi Hadrović, Maja Hodošček, Sanela Jahić, Neža Knez, Polonca Lovšin, Aprilija Lužar, Nika Oblak & Primož Novak, Ana Pečar & Oliver Ressler, Nataša Prosenc, Marija Mojca Pungerčar, Pila Rusjan, Duba Sambolec, Zvonka T Simčič, Nataša Skušek, Metka Zupanič, Valerie Wolf Gang**

Most of the works were presented in the Alkatraz Gallery, others were shown on the big screen as part of the marathon of Slovenian female film directors and video artists at the Slovenian Cinematheque, curated by **Varja Močnik**. At the same time, the national broadcaster RTV Slovenia paid tribute to Slovenian female directors by screening their films.

The exhibition was opened by Ana Čigon's performance *Cheers to Women! A Performative Appetizer to Video Art*, dedicated to video art created between 1995 and 2015 by Slovenian female video makers. Along with guided tours, the public programme featured a lecture by artist and curator **Ana Grobler**, who has been researching feminist art in Slovenia for more than a decade. Her lecture focused upon the social context in which video art with feminist tendencies was produced after Slovenia's transition from socialism to capitalism in 1991, as well as the significance of taking a feminist stand in an art scene and society that continues to exclude and misrepresent women (artists).



Ana Grobler

FEMINIST VIDEO ART IN SLOVENIA

I like to think I have a good overview of the feminist art in Slovenia, even though it is hard to monitor all productions today given that, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, feminist thematics began to appear in artworks more intensely. Only ten years ago, it was hard to find artwork with the word feminism in its description. In comparison to the mainstream media, where the word feminism is often omitted, the explicitly feminist artistic commitment is now better recognized in the world of art. However, numerous public institutions (especially those that do not engage in the arts) still have apprehensions when it comes to the use of the word feminism.

During the 1980s and 1990s in Slovenia, many new women's groups were formed, in addition to the lesbian and gay movement, which had a meaningful contribution to the gradual introduction of feminist fine arts criticism, aesthetics and history of arts, as well as more lively events in the field of art. While the works of **Duba Sambolec**, especially her sculpture *Women are coming!* [*Ženske prihajajo!*] from 1976, was a solitary endeavour in the age of total gender inequality in the arts, the 1980s saw several artworks connected to the activist inclinations of the female artists (**Aprilija Lužar, Marina Gržinić & Aina Šmid, Zvonka T Simčič**).

In 1991, feminism became more visible mostly due to the first women's demonstrations since the Slovenian independence – the demonstrations managed to maintain Article 55 of the Slovenian Constitution, regulating the right to freely decide on childbirth. Later on, the reasons for feminist art in Slovenia appearing more frequently can be attributed to the events accompanying the transition towards a neoliberal market economy, mostly to the rise of the right-wing politics, which, in the name of the re-traditionalisation of gender roles, began to harbour more and more appetite for the hegemony over female bodies as well as gender- and other minorities, promoting hatred on the basis of sexual orientation, identity or other individual circumstances. All of this brought on a more active artistic criticism towards the system and the expansion of feminist art. An even larger feminist social activation was triggered by the politicization of the assisted reproduction procedures, finally resulting in the discriminatory act still in force today allowing the procedures only to heterosexual women in marital or non-marital relationships.

The European Commission's 2018 report on equality between women and men in the EU shows that in 2018, as many as fifty-five percent of people in Slovenia felt that the most important female role is to take care of the home and the family. In these conditions, it is especially vital to talk about (queer, lesbian and trans-) feminism, publicly declare ourselves feminist and include LGBTIQ issues into art. We thereby contribute to the loosening of the patriarchy and fight for a better position of everyone or, in the worst-case scenario, at least for the maintaining of the existent rights that are by no means self-evident.

Female (video) artists also contribute to this struggle. Many among them express themselves through various media, which shows that **feminist artists have always been very resourceful**. Given that throughout history they had always been set aside, to the margins, they were the first bold enough to try out new media, even though they were looked down upon. In doing that, the artists were – and remain – economical, not only due to lack of financial means, but also because their means of expression has often been their own body, since the objectification (of oneself and others) is most effectively shown on one's own body.

Unfortunately, the fact still remains that artwork produced by men is more appreciated and that artwork done by women rarely finds place in museum collections. For instance, despite the general conviction that the works bought by American museums in the past decade included more artworks produced by women, in the article "Women's Place in the Art World" (2019) artnet.com states that their share rose only to eleven percent. It is true that there are other solutions to this than implementing quotas, such as drafting a strategy to sell off works by canonical authors and using the acquired finances to buy artworks by female artists, yet, it helps if the head position of the museum is occupied by a woman. Judging by experience, it is not much different in Slovenia, therefore we are also facing the need to seek new strategies and solutions in our country. It is precisely the artistic and activist feminist strategies that essentially promote these endeavours.

Although I announced that, in my lecture, I was to expose key feminist video artworks from the mid-1970s until today, I am unable to do that. For me, **all artworks are of key importance, since every single work promotes the recognizability of feminist viewpoints in public**. This does not only apply to the works by video artists, but to the entire feminist artistic production, even documentary, to the work by female theoreticians and the contributions of activists and collectives, even though they might only have created a single feminist video work. Therefore, I am expanding the list of

female artists included into the exhibition *Cheers to Women! 25 Years of Film and Video* with the artwork produced by some other individuals, male and female, and collectives that have helped make feminist video art in Slovenia more visible.

Martina Bastarda, television art performance *TV dražba [TV Auction]*, 2003

Zvonka T Simčič, video *Lezbični poljub [Lesbian Kiss]*, 2001

Marija Mojca Pungerčar, video *Javno zasedanje [Public Session]*, 2001

Tadej Pogačar & The P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, archive video *CODE:RED, prvi Svetovni kongres spolnih delavcev in Novega parazitizma [CODE:RED, I. World Congress of Sex Workers and New Parasitism]*, 2001

Marina Gržinič, Aina Šmid, Zvonka T Simčič, video film *Razmerja. 25 let ŠKUC-LL [Relations. 25 Years of the Lesbian Group ŠKUC-LL]*, 2012

Vstaja Lezbosov [The Insurrection of Lesbos'], video *Homo-Risk*, 2008

Vstajniške socialne delavke [Uprising Social Workers], video performance *Slavoj kuha čaj [Slavoj Makes Tea]*, 2015

Lezbično-feministična univerza [Lesbian Feminist University], video *Lezbično-feministična univerza v akciji [The Lesbian Feminist University in Action]*, 2014

Lea Culetto, video *(Brez) [(Without)]*, 2017

Rebecca Reja, video *Izgubljene povezave [Lost Connections]*, 2018

Lana Zdravković / KITCH Ona, video performance *Kako ona uživa: golo branje Lacana [On Her Pleasure: Naked Reading of Lacan]*, 2007

Evelin Stermitz, video *Table Talk*, 2008

Nina Baznik, video document of performance *Etiketa [Label]*, 2017

Sladana Mitrović, video *Koža Special [Skin Special]*, 2007

Vita Žgur, video *Abortus*, 2005

Maja Slavec & Michele Drascek, video performance *Women Beauty Power Less*, 2008

Urša Vidic, video *As One*, 2008

Ana Grobler is an artist, curator and artistic director of Alkatraz Gallery (KUD Mreža). Her research on feminist art in Slovenia has led to several co-curated exhibitions. She is a member of the spol.si on-line portal editorial team and participates in the Red Dawns collective.



Bor Pleteršek

WOMEN AT THE MOVIES

Kinodvor's International Conference at the 25th City of Women Festival

Issues of representation, the work women do behind and in front of the camera, quota, malpractice and abuse in the film industry ... are all common topics of discussion. But one subject remains, as it were, doubly obscured: female spectatorship. Talks on women and cinema tend to focus on what we see on screen, rarely on audiences. Yet when it comes to quality art-house cinema, **women have come to play a significant role in maintaining and promoting the movie-going experience.** The conference, organized by Kinodvor in cooperation with City of Women, addressed women's movie-going practices and started a debate on audience development by bringing together distinguished international film professionals to look at women at the movies in different periods and contexts.

As shown by **Judith Thissen**, Associate Professor of Cinema History at the University of Utrecht, in her presentation *Ladies Kindly Remove Your Hats: Female Movie Fans in New York City and the Making of a Mass Medium*, women were vital in turning the new film medium into America's favourite mass entertainment in the first decades of the 20th century. Substantial efforts were undertaken by early exhibitors to "clean" attending picture shows of the negative associations of most other forms of social entertainment, creating a public image of cinema as "polite entertainment suitable for women" in the process. **Many of the early female spectators were in fact working-class girls**, employed by the city's booming garment industry. From the "Nickelodeon boom" between 1905 and 1909 – a period that marked a profound change in how the working class spent their free time – to the lush Broadway theatres of the 1920s, the experience of cinema was an eye opener for these "Ladies of Labour", as Thissen calls them. First, as a new means of socializing and entertainment and, later on, as a way for them to "participate in the middle-class experience".

With *Where Were the Women?* **Ian Christie** highlighted women's role in film history, answering his presentation's question with "Everywhere". Right from the start, women were not only working as directors and writers, they were active on all levels of the new industry, though often unrecorded, as evidenced by the colourists responsible for Pathe's hand-painted and stencilled films. Christie also pointed at the lack of research: **"Much of the history of film spectatorship has ignored the importance of women in deciding what's made and what's seen."** The curator and professor of Film

and Media History at Birkbeck College provided a brief historical overview of relevant studies in the field before moving on to the findings of one of the most important empirical studies of cinema audiences to date: a UK-wide survey of public attitudes to film published by BFI in 2011 under the title *Opening Our Eyes*.

Dana Linssen's reflections *The Mediator Is the Message – Or is She?* were based on her practice as a film critic, editor and mediator. A critic has a vital role in reaching audiences, she contends. But with a recent change in perspective, she found herself in a new position from where she can speak up and take a stand. This coincided not only with movements like MeToo and Time's Up but also with a major shift towards a more personal writing ("The 'I' came back."). Concluding with a warning about the re-emerging trend of "typecasting critics", she maintained that **female critics should write about all films and that gender balance in criticism finds more resonance with audiences.**

Cinema producer and curator at Cultural Cinema Watershed **Tara Judah** presented the notion of "curatorial activism" and a number of initiatives in the UK that aim to bridge a historical gender gap in representation. This cultural shift in curatorial approach hopes to hit an annual target of between 50–60% of female-identifying audience attendees. In the absence of data on gendered audiences (in mainstream, as well as in the independent sector), she presented two case studies from Watershed, both from their Cinema Rediscovered festival. The programmes illustrated that **the higher the percentage of films directed by women was, the higher the share of women in the audience was.**

Head of Program **Koen Van Daele** shared information on female audiences at Kinodvor. He started by stating that the notion of "women's film" is usually relegated to commercial spheres and considered irrelevant to art-house cinema, where the focus is on bringing the very best quality films to both men and women of all generations. But the results of the past ten years at the Ljubljana city cinema demonstrate that one of the key factors in Kinodvor's success story were women. "If a film doesn't work with its female audiences, it doesn't work at all". **Women are not only the art-house core audience; they are also the principle decision makers as far as maintaining the movie-going experience is concerned.**

Bor Pleteršek is the Programme Assistant at Kinodvor Public Institution.

“THE KEY IS THAT WE KEEP CHANGING PERSPECTIVES”

A Conversation with She She Pop

The 25th anniversary edition of the City of Women festival, subtitled #HerStory, kicked off with *Drawers* (2012), a performance by the **She She Pop** collective, which has been operating for about just as long. She She Pop was founded in 1998 at the Giessen Institute for Applied Theatre Studies as a women-only performance collective dealing with a rather misogynist state of German theatre, which has been, much like in Slovenia, focused on universal, macro stories with predominantly male protagonists. In contrast, She She Pop brought to the stage everyday life and autobiography as procedures placed in popular culture and sociopolitical context.

In *Drawers*, women from West Berlin rummage through the drawers of women who grew up on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall, hoping that their diaries and letters, their favourite songs and books are going to reveal the similarities and differences between them. The discussion with She She Pop members **Berit Stumpf**, **Ilia Papatheodorou** and **Barbara Gronau** after the staging of *Drawers* at the 25th City of Women festival was moderated by **Alja Lobnik**.

You are one of the very few women’s theatre collectives. How do you persist through time and space in this rather misogynist landscape?

Ilia Papatheodorou: Maybe outside pressure makes you stick together. That’s probably one reason. It always felt good to be a separatist self that gains autonomy. We did get funded for a long time by the Berlin senate. There was some economic security grounded by that, without which we couldn’t have persisted because the state-theatre scene in Germany is very dominant and misogynist. The independent scene in Berlin is very open, and in comparison with the rest of Europe, we get very good funding for the independent scene.

Berit Stumpf: It was a very, very long and difficult journey to get there. In the beginning, even at the university we were used to a climate where male directors mostly directed “pretty girls” on stage. At that time, we wanted to do something against that. We wanted to put together something where we could be authors, performers and directors, all in one. We did it, but it took a long time to be taken seriously. It was always called “the girls’ project”. Also, it took a long time to get funding.

Where do you introduce feminism? Not just on the level of representation and topics you bring on stage, but also in the procedures of work. How do you work together as a collective? Do you have a hierarchical structure or not? Who gives you feedback? How does your creative process look like?

Ilia Papatheodorou: The major aspect of our work is that we try to make ourselves replaceable on stage. As an actress, it is an unusual thing to think that. Somebody else can take my part, and I can take theirs. This gives me the freedom to stay at home with the kids (*laughter*). It also gives me the freedom to sit and watch **Johanna Freiburg** do the same part. That’s how I learn about it.

Berit Stumpf: The key is that we keep changing perspectives. There is no neutral outside eye. It is always us, changing places from the inside to the outside. Both are equally important. From the outside, you learn a lot about the performance. From the inside, you feel something different. That’s always the key to our way of work. We keep changing the position of “the director” to be able to switch sides all the time.

Ilia Papatheodorou: We try to make everything task-based. It’s not a prewritten role. Instead, everybody shares a task, and everybody can do it equally well. For example, somebody takes care of the press for a certain time, then somebody else takes on that role. We try to do that even on the level of production. We also have responsibilities in the collective, which we have to fulfil together. My dad used to say: “Well, we already learned in the 1970s that collectives don’t work because of the anonymous responsibility”. And I realized that’s what we are suffering from (*laughter*). We learned to split work in mandates or tasks that we can transfer onto other people.

Berit Stumpf: Also, nobody owns anything. There is no private property. We are truly communist in this aspect. Whatever is developed, is part of the pool. Whoever feels they can use it, just uses it. There is a collective authorship. It means Ilia develops or writes something, and I use it and make it slightly mine.

How did you find each other?

Barbara Gronau: Eight years ago, I was asked by She She Pop to take part in *Drawers* and rethink my East-German past (*laughter*). We started by writing letters to each other, and I became a “penfriend” with **Lisa Lucassen**, who is part of She She Pop as well. Before we entered the space where we rehearsed and talked about our childhood, dreams, mothers, role-models and self-understanding, we were writing weekly letters to each other about very intimate things even though we were living in the same city. The main question was “How did I become the woman I am now?” Also, “How did I live throughout these years?” We found out that there were some differences between us, but also many similarities. In the performance, I present a text, compiled by different people. Mostly by **Alexandra Lachmann** who plays the same part. We were born in the same year, one in the West, the other in the East. We both have a brother. There were some similarities that we could share. Our characters are sitting side by side, talking about their self-understanding. In the end, this role is mine, but it is also a collective role. A collective East-German woman is sitting there and talking about the experiences of a twenty- or forty-year-old who grew up in the GDR.

Is the performance an attempt at the reunification of the East and the West? Were you thinking about differences and similarities between those two, about the stereotypes? How do you use stereotypes as a tool in theatre?

Barbara Gronau: Well, the Berlin Wall fell thirty years ago and we’re still playing this play. This is really strange because we thought that *Drawers* will last for three or five years at most. The show premiered in 2012, the wall fell in 1989, but we still get invited to retell the story about who we are.

Ilia Papatheodorou: Yes, about why we think the way we do. About certain conceptions and ideas that formed our identities, about the ways we think and speak, about our supposedly common language which often turns out to be quite divisive. For instance, “What do you mean when you say ‘emancipation’?” I think about something completely different when I hear that word.

Would the performance be different if She She Pop were East Berliners?

Ilia Papatheodorou: That’s a very interesting question that we hardly ever get asked. Did the Eastern and Western aesthetic merge? I don’t think so. I think that a very dominant aesthetic discourse came from the West in

the 1990s, which washed over certain developments in the independent scene in East Berlin. Many East-German artists who were really big in the 1990s are forgotten; they were subdued by the mainstream taste. So, it would be different if we were East Germans. My question is whether we would succeed at anything at all.

Why?

Ilia Papatheodorou: It’s part of the wound.

You mainly work with personal histories and narratives. Where does the need to be autobiographical on stage come from? Why do you think autobiography – as a tool or a procedure – is important for you, for your collective, for this performance?

Berit Stumpf: Not all of us are trained actors or actresses and we were never interested in this type of theatre. Even when we did look for starting points in classical drama texts later on, we did it very autobiographically. *Testament* (2010), a piece about our fathers, was based on *King Lear*. It was an incredibly autobiographical telling of his story. We used Shakespeare’s drama as a kind of counterpoint to counterbalance the autobiographical material, because we went on the stage with our real fathers.

Barbara Gronau: I would not have joined *Drawers* if it meant learning a role which had no connection to me. As it is, I can sign under every sentence I say on the stage. I can take responsibility for what I’m saying because it has something to do with me. It comes from communication and work with you, Ilia. It is a collective process I am intrinsically part of. Otherwise, I wouldn’t go to the stage – I am a theatre theorist!

The permanent members of **She She Pop** are **Johanna Freiburg, Fanni Halmburger, Lisa Lucassen, Mieke Matzke, Ilia Papatheodorou, Berit Stumpf, Elke Weber** and **Sebastian Bark**. In 2019, She She Pop received the prestigious Theatre-Award-Berlin for their “practice of collective authorship” and “solidary working practice, a feminist counter-concept to the customary structures of German municipal theatres”.

Do you think as a feminist?

Razmišljaš kot feministka?



Tea Hvala

IN POSSE

Disrupting Patriarchy with Charlotte Jarvis

In posse is a Latin term which means “before we are born”. It refers to something which is possible but yet to be called into existence. *In Posse* is a work in progress by artist **Charlotte Jarvis** who is on a mission to make “female” sperm from her own stem cells. In 2019, the Kapelica Gallery (Kersnikova Institute) invited Charlotte Jarvis to the 25th City of Women festival where she continued her collaborative effort to shape a new form of technological, biological and creative activism.

Throughout history, semen has been revered as a totem of literal and symbolic gendered potency. Patriarchal societies have described semen as “divine”, a “life force”, “a drop of the brain” and “that which sows the seeds of virtue in the female soul”. *In Posse* aims to rewrite this cultural narrative by **joining art and science in a performative act that disrupts patriarchy**. “Performative acts have power just by the virtue of being said or existing. And just by virtue of possessing sperm as a symbol of male power and patriarchy, a woman takes away its power,” told Jarvis in a recent interview.¹ **“I don’t see this project as some kind of future utopia or dystopia in which women don’t need men; I see it as an activist piece, asking what would medicine and our society be like if we hadn’t lived through all those patriarchies”.**

Even though the ambitious project of making female semen is not taking anything away from men, many of them feel threatened by it. According to Jarvis, they say it feels like castration. In contrast, “if you ask women how they would feel if men had eggs and could have babies, many feel really open to the idea of sharing those roles. That’s so demonstrative about how hierarchies work. You can deny the hierarchy, but emotionally you have that response because your privilege is being taken away.”

The world’s first “female” semen is being developed in three parts. Firstly, the artist is collaborating with **Dr. Susana Chuva de Sousa Lopes** at the Leiden University Medical Centre to grow sperm cells from human-induced pluripotent stem cells derived from Charlotte’s skin. Dr. Lopes has received the prestigious €1.5 million VICI grant to fund five scientists working for five years on this art-initiated project. The second part is to make a “female”

¹ Grant Holub-Moorman and Anita Rao: “An Ancient Greek Festival for Creating Female Sperm”, WUNC 91.5 – North Carolina Public Radio, 10 January 2020, access 29 March 2020, <https://www.wunc.org/post/ancient-greek-festival-creating-female-sperm>. All the following quotes are from the same source.

form of seminal plasma (the liquid part of semen, the “jizz”). This has been developed at the Kersnikova Institute in Ljubljana where **several women, trans- and non-binary people donated one of the necessary ingredients – their blood plasma, which thus became “collective seminal plasma, or ‘women’s’ semen”.**

The collected plasma is incorporated with other organic compounds during the final part of the project which re-enacts the Ancient-Greek women-only festival of **Thesmophoria**. Very little is known about it today, but during her research on ritual events involving women, Jarvis found out that “Thesmophoria was the biggest festival in Ancient Greece, involving the largest number of people. It was **a fertility festival in celebration of Demeter and Persephone**, and men were not allowed to know what happened there. Because of that, because of our patriarchal history, the festival is completely undocumented. I envision it as **a place where people who are oppressed by patriarchy could go and celebrate.**”

Thesmophoria was a perfect match for Charlotte Jarvis who wanted to find a joyous, celebratory and ritualistic way of making female semen with other women. So far, performative re-enactments of the *Festival of Thesmophoria* have taken place in Slovenia, the Netherlands, and the UK. On every occasion, Jarvis publicly invited women, trans- and non-binary persons to donate their blood plasma. The rest is up to them: “They decide what they want their Thesmophoria to be, how they want me to document it, what they want to share and what to retain as a secret or mystery.”

In Ljubljana, Jarvis prepared a seed feast for the participants in Kapelica Gallery and asked them to write a manifesto about their Thesmophoria. “We spent two or three days confined in the gallery; sleeping, cooking, eating and making things there. Finally, we went into the woods where we mixed all the ingredients and made the seminal plasma. I cannot tell you what else we did in the woods. The participants asked me to document some of it, but only for the next group of women who are going to join Thesmophoria. I thought that was a beautiful idea.”

The participants also agreed on sharing some aspects of their festivities in a public performance in Kapelica Gallery which was open to women, trans- and non-binary persons only.

Charlotte Jarvis is an artist working at the intersection of art and science. She has exhibited in ten solo shows and over two hundred group exhibitions and performances. She is a lecturer at Goldsmiths University London and the Royal College of Art.



Svetlana Slapšak

PANSPERMIA

When artist **Charlotte Jarvis** was looking for a celebratory, ritualistic way of making “female” semen with other women in her *In Posse* project, she learned about the Ancient-Greek women-only festival of **Thesmophoria**. Since ancient women’s fertility rituals involving the processing of seeds and blood to produce life have been omitted from most historical sources, the City of Women has asked **Prof. Dr. Svetlana Slapšak** to shed some light on their transformations (and male appropriations) through time from a classical philologist and feminist perspective.

Several ancient authors mention a meal made of all kinds of seeds, or a ritual offering of different seeds, *panspermia*, which has left a trace in Balkan folklore, beliefs and church and funeral practices. The term itself is preserved in a completely different semantic line since the ancient Greek philosopher **Anaxagoras** theorized about particles, seeds for forming the world. Many centuries later, astronomers, physicists, geologists and other scientists reflected and posited different theories under the same term, *panspermia*, about the possibilities that life on Earth started with “seeds”, different life-creating materials coming to our planet with cosmic bodies, space dust or in other ways. At the end of the line of reason, there are also *panspermic* “theories” about outer-space senders of seeds and their plans to the Earth ... I will limit myself to the ritual aspects of *panspermia* and its relation to the creation of human life, focusing on women’s rituals and on the Balkans, ancient and modern.

The semantic history of the word *panspermia* and its synonym *kolyva* is crucial to understanding the points in which the change of term also meant the change in practices. The second term comes from the ancient Greek word for a small coin, which then changed to “small cakes made of cooked wheat”: such offerings were common for the gods of the Underworld and in funer-

al rituals. The term became a Balkan Graecism but, through the Orthodox church ritual, passed to Moldova and Russia, too. In all these cases, the dish of cooked wheat, nuts, honey, raisins and spices in different varieties is decorated, usually with cross(es), covered with icing sugar and served at funerals, memorial services, Saturdays (which are the days of souls) and several other holy days, like the Serbian *slava* (the day of the “dead”, rather than the “immortal” family patron saint). In Serbian, the dish is called *koljivo* or just *žito* (wheat), and it is also served in confectioneries and bakeries, usually with whipped cream. At funerals, everybody has to take a spoon of the dish before leaving. This reflects the old ritual of prevention and protection from revenge-thirsty souls, which are supposedly confused by the sharing of the symbolic guilt (of all living) through taking and consuming the dish, as they are confused if the people present at the funeral leave in different directions. Obviously, these ritual uses have kept the term *kolyva*. They are related to pre-Christian beliefs and not to church regulations, and practiced to communicate with the souls in an obviously much older way.

What happened to *panspermia*, then? The use of *kolyva* and its different versions in different languages, which all relate to the same or similar material (seeds, food), similar processing (cooking) and (mostly funeral) rituals, leads to the hypothesis that the new semantic line needed a new term. The ancient term *panspermia*, although perfectly composed, could not be used because of its previous semantic history.

This form of presentation does not allow for a structured argument and an extensive display and discussion about sources. Hence, I will present just a few striking examples of how *panspermia* was “emptied” of its material/ritual meaning, and transferred to the discourse of philosophers, historians, archivists and other authors in a rather negative sense. Hypothetically, the reason for this is gender-based: a woman’s activities in the ritual social sphere were evaluated as lower, less important and subject to ridicule. In many cultures, anything coming from kitchen/cooking is often ridiculed. It is the same with cooking for a ritual purpose. Here, a reference to the research and debates on sacrifice is necessary: beside the seminal book by **Detienne** and **Vernant**¹, **Stella Georgoudi** has done a lot of work on the topic.² The leading line of interpretation separates

1 Marcel Détiene and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

2 Stella Georgoudi, Renée Koch Pietre and Francis Schmidt (eds.), *La cuisine et l'autel. Les sacrifices en questions dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005); S. Georgoudi, “Les Douze Dieux des Grecs: variation sur un thème”, in St. Georgoudi, J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *Mythes grecs au figuré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 43–80.

bloody sacrifice from the vegetal (aromatic or cooked): the first is an act of great importance for the political and religious coherence of the *polis* (state), the second remains among the rituals of the other kind, sometimes taken to the *polis* level, but usually not. Since women were not citizens, their participation was minor.

Panspermia had been used in the negative context since **Aristoteles**. The atomists, like Anaxagoras, used *panspermia* as an important theoretical term.³ Aristoteles was changing the meaning,⁴ but eventually the negative meaning of “mixture of everything/anything” has prevailed. Maybe the best example of this change of meaning is given by **Lucian**, in his philosophical dialogue with **Hermotimos**,⁵ where he gives a visual image of the initial choice a philosopher has to make between schools of thinking. The first image is a comparison between choosing a philosophical school and testing the wine from a large recipient. Taking a small amount from a large container possibly gives a core of the way of thinking, but much more testing is necessary to get a good grasp of the whole. A different approach is taking a small quantity of grains which are in layers in a big container: it is an arbitrary choice, without any idea of structure or meaning. The two images obviously come from the marketplace. In the imaginary cognitive process, wine with its unified texture is privileged, while different grains (preparation for *panspermia*?) are deprived. “Some kind of panspermia,” as Lucian puts it, corresponds with many expressions in many languages in which mixed elements make a funny meal, metaphorically a mess.

But mixing itself is crucial in the ritual; it means that different seeds, or seeds in general, have the power of connecting life and death and creating life. Apparently, they do not need any other force to germinate and to work in the space between life and death. The self-recreating force of seeds, which is pushed back to the world of women and their rituals, does not contain anything masculine. Some of these elements can be recognized in the high summer festival of **Adonia**, during which women dress and make up in a seductive way and spend a night on the rooftops joking and feasting, while

³ Walter Burkert, *Kleine Schriften VIII: Philosophica*, edited by Thomas Alexander Szlezák and Karl-Heinz Stanzel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001).

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Hermotimos, Lucian 61:

ὄρα τοίνυν μὴ τῷδε μᾶλλον φιλοσοφία εἰσικεν: ὁ μὲν γὰρ πίθος ἔτι μενέτωσσι καὶ ὁ κῆπιλος, ἐνέστω δὲ μὴ οἶνος, ἀλλὰ πανσπερμία τις, πυρρὸςπεράνω καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον κύμοι, εἶτα κριθαὶ καὶ ὑπὸ ταύταις φακοί, εἴττα ἐρέβινθοι καὶ ἄλλα ποικίλα. πρόσει δὴ σὺ ὀνήσασθαι ἐθέλων τῶνσπερμάτων, καὶ ὅς ἀφελῶν τοῦ πυροῦ, οὐπερ ἦν, ἀνέδωκέ σοι δεῖγμα ἐς τήνχειρα, ὡς ἴδοις, ἄρα οὖν ἔχοις ἂν εἰπεῖν εἰς ἐκεῖνον ἀποβλέπων εἰ καὶ οἰερέβινθοι καθαροὶ καὶ οἱ φακοὶ εὐτακεῖς καὶ οἱ κύμοι οὐ διάκενοι.

sprouts which they had forced from seeds for a certain time in broken pots wither away. Without men, they celebrate the shortcomings of masculine sexuality, symbolized by Aphrodite’s lover Adonis.

The crucial link between blood, bones and seeds entailing the creation of life is to be found in **Aristophanes’** comedy *Thesmophoriazousae* (Women at the Festival of Thesmophoria), which, however, does not mention *panspermia* as such even though seed cakes (prepared in a different form, that of snakes and *phalloi*) were typical for the festivals of **Thesmophoria** and **Haloe**, which took place in late autumn, during harvest time. *Panspermia*, on the other hand, is prepared for the **Pyanepsia** festival: this ritual is connected to the myth of the founder, consecrated to Theseus, and the story of his return to Athens from Crete where he killed Minotaur and thus saved the children intended as a sacrifice to the monster. In order to thank Apollo, they prepared an improvised meal of everything they had, *panspermia*, ate it together and sacrificed it to the god too. Since this sacrifice included only the saved boys, I see it as a contamination or appropriation of a ritual. Myths about founders, which are younger and important for the state ideology, often “steal” older stories and rituals: the formula about the intelligence to survive (Gr. *metis*) is very popular and the plot-bearer in **Homer’s** *Odyssey*. Boys’ cooking is a “jump” in the formula, which serves the myth of the founder – and makes the storytelling more attractive. In other words, I believe that *panspermia* is misplaced here, maybe to undermine the well-known women’s ritual and to give it a masculine attire in *polis*.

In *Thesmophoriazousae*, Aristophanes avoids the details of the ritual – cooking, seeds and everything, because his main line of interpretation is that men, because of the war they are instigating, have become women in the worst sense. To ridicule men, he presents women as true citizens who engage in a rational democracy. He also reverses gender roles in quoting **Euripides’** texts, and finally, makes men dress like women. Therefore, the whole female behaviour is represented as male. But the main ritual is preserved in the comedy – it is in fact a parody of the ritual.

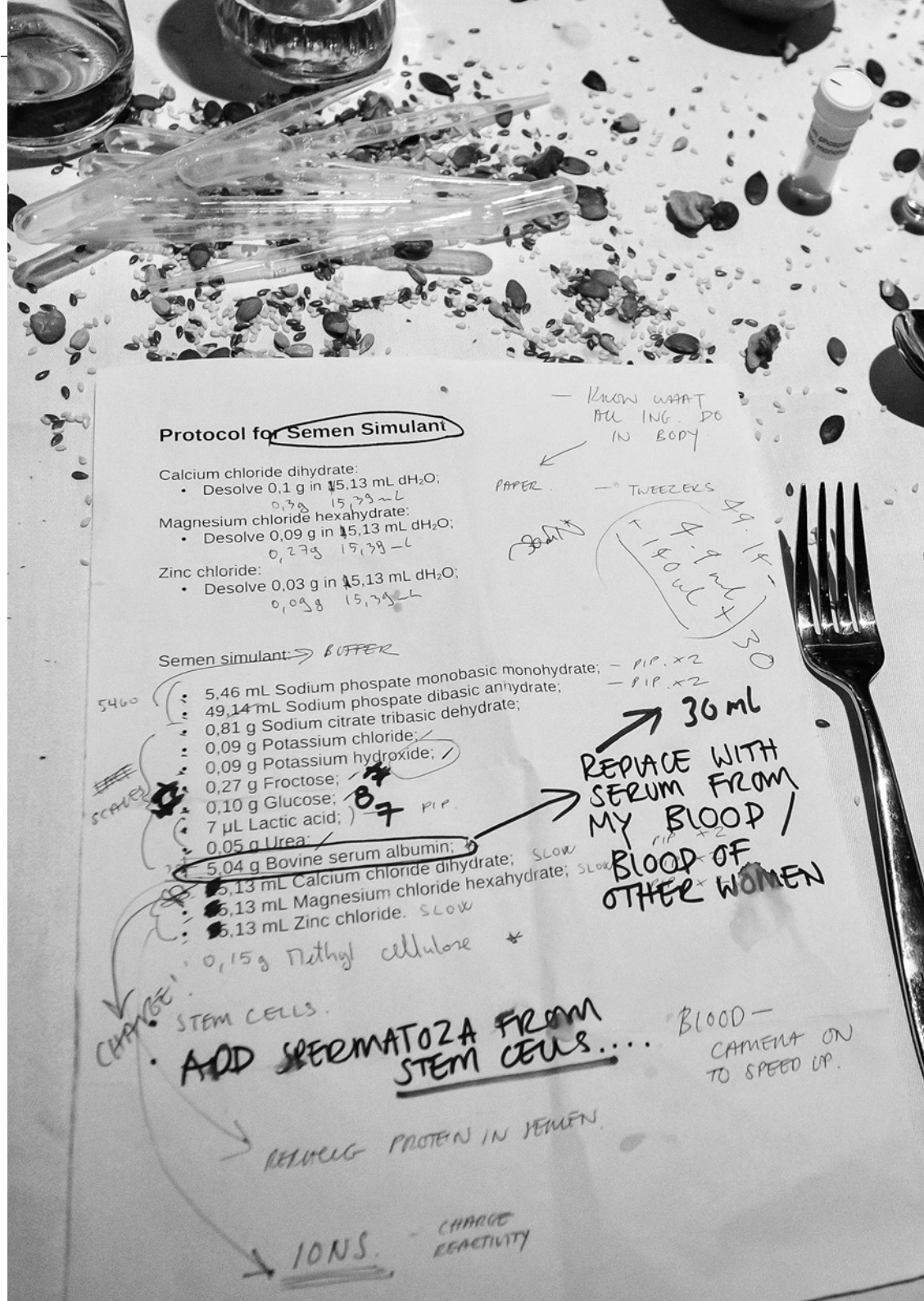
Mnesilochos, Euripides’ relative who spies on women during the festival to help Euripides, who may become the object of women’s vengeance for his writing about them, is demasked by women. Parodying one of Euripides’ plays, he grabs a baby from the arms of a woman and threatens to slaughter it. While unwrapping the baby, he

discovers that the baby is in fact a wine skin and in a hilarious scene he cuts it, so that the wine splashes while the “mother” tries to save the “blood” into a recipient. The reversal is perfect, because it points to women’s alcoholism, a popular topic of ridiculing and maybe a real problem.⁶ On a different level of meaning, this is a parody of the main ritual at the festival: women would kill a pig (which in Greek is a common metonymy for female genitalia), cut it to pieces and leave in a pit to decompose. Later, the remains would be mixed with seeds into the soil to fertilize it.

Wine is the replacement for blood in many rituals, not only in Greek antiquity. The connection of blood/bones and seeds to form of a new life is unique. The main feature of such insemination is in fact the mixing of (female – pig) blood/body parts and seeds without other agents. The male element is present only in a symbolic form (cakes in form of genitalia). I would like to posit a base for further research, mostly in ancient texts: *panspermia* as an old, contaminated and appropriated ritual, understood as a prehistory of processing seeds in fertility rituals, done by women; the mixing of blood/body parts to produce life.

6 In antiquity, women were drinking in secret, having the access to home reserves, without mixing wine with water and not as a social habit.

Prof. Dr. Svetlana Slapšak is the former Dean of Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis and a prolific writer of fiction, essays, studies and columns. Informed by classical philology and anthropology, her research is focused on women’s cultures in the Balkans – from Ancient Greece, through romanticism, to the conflicts of the 1990s and the present day.



Protocol for Semen Simulant

- Calcium chloride dihydrate:
 - Dissolve 0,1 g in 15,13 mL dH₂O;
- Magnesium chloride hexahydrate:
 - Dissolve 0,09 g in 15,13 mL dH₂O;
- Zinc chloride:
 - Dissolve 0,03 g in 15,13 mL dH₂O;

Semen simulant: → BUFFER

- 5460 : 5,46 mL Sodium phosphate monobasic monohydrate; - PIP. x2
 - 49,14 mL Sodium phosphate dibasic anhydrate; - PIP. x2
 - 0,81 g Sodium citrate tribasic dehydrate;
 - 0,09 g Potassium chloride;
 - 0,09 g Potassium hydroxide; /
 - 0,27 g Fructose; /
 - 0,10 g Glucose; /
 - 7 µL Lactic acid; /
 - 0,05 g Urea; /
 - 5,04 g Bovine serum albumin; /
 - 5,13 mL Calcium chloride dihydrate; SLOW
 - 5,13 mL Magnesium chloride hexahydrate; SLOW
 - 5,13 mL Zinc chloride. SLOW
 - 0,15 g Methyl cellulose *
- CHANGE! → STEM CELLS.
- ADD SPERMATOZA FROM STEM CELLS... BLOOD - CAMERA ON TO SPEED UP.
- REINFORCING PROTEIN IN YEMEN.
- IONS. CHARGE REACTIVITY
- REPLACE WITH SERUM FROM MY BLOOD / BLOOD OF OTHER WOMEN
- 30 ml
- KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING IN BODY
- TWEZERS
- PAPER

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

BARBARA KAPELJ, LEJA JURŠIĆ, TEJA REBA, MIA HABIB:

I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You

Performance/Guided tour, 2013, photo collage: Nada Žgank, p. 4-5.

ALICJA ROGALSKA: The Aliens Act

Video screening, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 9.

ALICJA ROGALSKA: The Aliens Act

Portrait series, 2019, photos: Lara Žitko, p. 12-23.

MARIJA MOJCA PUNGERČAR: Singer

Installation, 2003, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 35.

MILIJANA BABIĆ: Looking for Work

Action, 2011, photo: Mirna Kutleša, p. 36-37.

**SILVIA FEDERICI: The Return of Primitive Accumulation
and the Ongoing War Against Women**

Lecture, 2014, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 43.

KRISTINA LEKO: Cheese and Cream Project

Video installation stills, channel 3, 2002-2003, photo collage: Kristina Leko, p. 51.

ELISABETH SUBRIN: Shulie

KATJA ČIČIGOJ, TANJA RENER: Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex

Film screening/Book presentation, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 58-59.

VESNA BUKOVEC: #8MarchEveryDay

Drawings, 2020, p. 60-61, 63.

NATAŠA ŽIVKOVIĆ: Sonny

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 69.

FLORENTINA HOLZINGER: TANZ

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 70-71.

FLORA DÉTRAZ: Muyte Maker

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 72-73.

OLJA GRUBIĆ: Naked Life

Performance, 2019, photo: Marcandrea, p. 74-75.

BARA KOLENC: Brina

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 76-77.

NINA DRAGIČEVIĆ: Extensions of Pleasure

Sound installation, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 82-83.

ANA ČIGON: Cheers to Women! A Performative Appetizer to Video Art

Performance, 2020, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 85. *The sign says Rise up or Die.*

ZVONKA T SIMČIČ: Lesbian Kiss

Performance, 2000, video stills: Goran Hođić, p. 89.

FREDERIKE MIGOM: Binti

Film screening, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 92-93.

SHE SHE POP: Drawers

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 98-99.

CHARLOTTE JARVIS: In Posse

Performance, 2019, photo: Nada Žgank, p. 102-103, 109.

LIST OF SOURCES

ZALA DOBOVŠEK: "Sine Nataše Živković in No. 1 Lane Zdravković / Kitch na Mestu žensk", *Dnevnik*, 8 October 2018, access 4 April 2020, emphasis added by T. Hvala, p. 68.

MAJA ŠUČUR: "Florentina Holzinger, plesalka in koreografinja: Znate leteti? Potem ste naše", *Dnevnik*, 9 October 2019, access 7 May 2020, p. 70-71.

FLORA DÉTRAZ: "Muyte Maker", artist statement, City of Women, 2019, access 7 May 2020, p. 72.

URBAN BELINA: "Upehane feministične strategije Colega življenja", *Neodvisni*, 11 October 2019, access 29 March 2020, p. 74-75.

ROK VEVAR, AMELIA KRAIGHER: "Upornice, artistke, mazohistke", *Večer*, 16 October 2007, access 4 April 2020, p. 76.

NINA DRAGIČEVIĆ: "Extensions of Pleasure", artist statement, City of Women, 2019, access 7 May 2020, p. 82.

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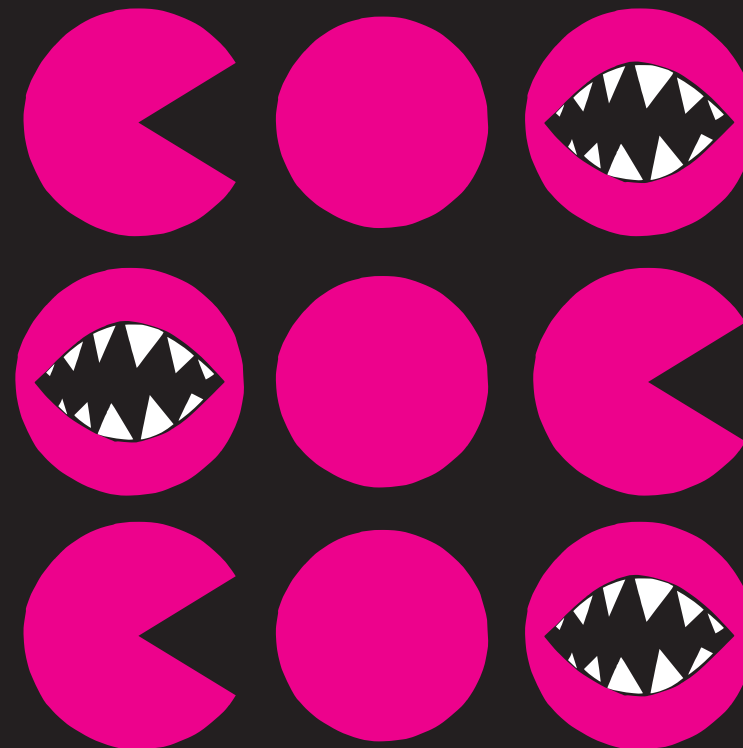
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