

Angela Dimitrakaki

# Feminism, Art, Contradictions

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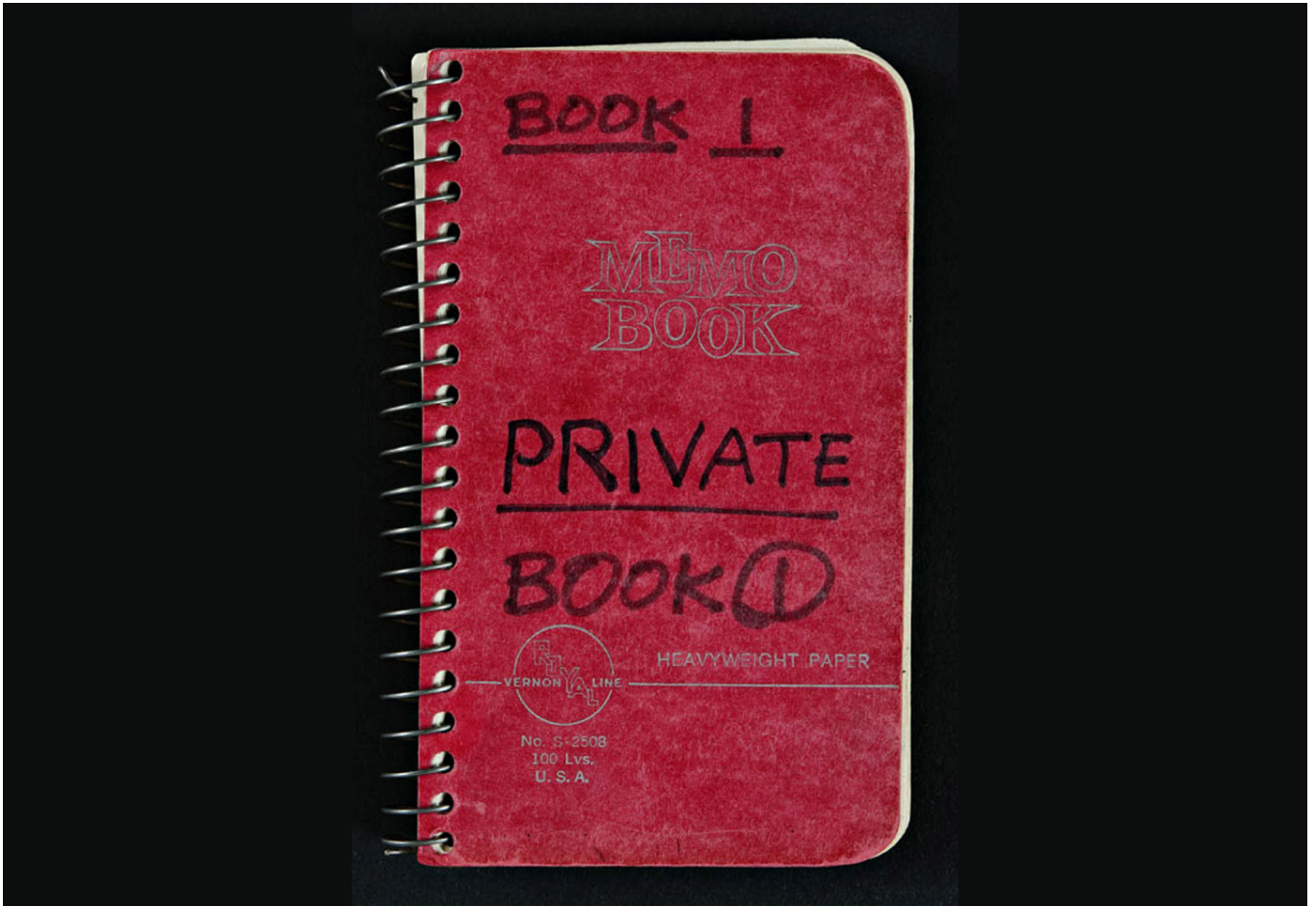
e-flux journal #92 — June 2018  
Angela Dimitrakaki  
Feminism, Art, Contradictions

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

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

The above applies to the output of curatorial or theoretical work as well, yet historically the artist has been a privileged subject for getting the heat. The reclamation of the “avant-garde”<sup>3</sup> as a critical concept connecting artistic labor with praxis as well as the emphasis on art and activism in, and for, the twenty-first century are symptomatic of upheld expectations with regard to artistic practice – expectations that feminism as, precisely, a politics is affiliated to: questioning, challenging, exposing, rupturing, rejecting the consensus that reproduces society as we know it. Because of such expectations, a

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

show called “The Feminist Avant Garde of the 1970s” that is also the display, circulation, and valorization of a corporate collection can appear to be a contradiction in terms – even as it is presently a platitude to remind that any other “avant-garde” has far from avoided its incorporation (*sic*) in capitalist art institutions, having indeed been largely discredited or, more mildly, “domesticated” as a result of such incorporation.<sup>4</sup> As regards activism, Boris Groys has offered a perceptive analysis of the contradictions facing its articulation with, and as, art, finally admonishing us to “*not differentiate between victory and failure.*”<sup>5</sup> Acknowledging the recurring problem of “aestheticization” (an inescapable concern for feminist work, even if feminist activism is not discussed), Groys contends that “one can aestheticize the world – and at the same time act within it. In fact, total aestheticization does not block political action; it enhances it. Total aestheticization means that we see the current status quo as already dead, already abolished.”<sup>6</sup> Groys then addresses the issue of contradictions by proposing the suspension not of aesthetic but of *political* judgment (given that the temporality of political action is always the contemporary). This, however, goes a step further towards art’s political disempowerment: not just accept art as negativity, not just embrace it as radical failure (well-known positions), but accept that *you fail to distinguish between failing and succeeding in your political objectives* as an artist, curator, theorist, and even (art) activist.

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

Such debates marked the emergence and

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

### Contradiction 1: Autonomy and Dependency

Being an artist (also a curator or a writer) means having a professional identity. Professional identities are associated with remuneration for labor. The neoliberal higher education regime, where education is seen as an investment (irrespective of whether students are actually asked to pay fees), has built on this professionalization of the artist. There is an assumed equivalence of the degrees on offer: you choose to study art, physics, or law according to the career you want to have. The currently popular term “art workers” indicates the need for artists to sell something in the private or public sector in order to make a living (it is instructive, in this regard, that the term “worker” is being widely deployed rather than, say, “civil servant”).<sup>11</sup> Some (extremely few) artists become successful entrepreneurs, achieving profits – implying the possibility of upward social mobility. More often, artists secure wages in higher education or art institutions while others are forced to chase whatever irregular income they can by providing various kinds of service in the sector.<sup>12</sup> It is also

possible that artists (and curators) make a living outside the art field, thus subsidizing their creative labor, but the potential of finally making a living through the latter does not disappear. Especially as regards the difficult conditions of art-field labor in post-Fordism, the situation is well known, addressed in myriad conferences and a voluminous literature.<sup>13</sup> As the feminist Danish collective Kuratorisk Aktion said back in 2010:

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

The precarious economic and labor conditions remain the same eight years later. Happily in the case of this collective, they founded and are now running CAMP, a nonprofit art center focused on migration "realised with support from private sponsors" and a long list of state and related institutions.<sup>15</sup> This, as we know, is not how things typically go. Yet, the case is that women and feminists in the art field are, just like everyone else, dependent on the institutions that control the flow of cash and even credit. We are therefore dependent on the capitalist system of production for our reproduction. It is impossible to understand women artists' emphatic attachment to the art institution without grasping their financial dependency upon it; and it is a mistake to suggest that in the 1970s, empowered by feminism, women sought to enter the art institution *exclusively* in order to achieve visibility as creative subjects and challenge the male canon: these two political objectives constitute pure idealism if disconnected from the economic imperative that underpins them, unless one were to assume that class privilege uniformly freed women and feminist artists from financial pressures. Today, which feminist would accept to study while incurring debt merely in order to advance her political cause (through gaining feminist knowledge)? Like everyone else, students who identify as feminists study to obtain qualifications that will allow them to compete in the labor market – as regards artists and curators, preferably the art market, which

comprises *both* a goods market and a labor market.

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

In a 1973 essay in the *Feminist Art Journal*, Irene Moss and Lila Katzen rejected separatism both because of the accepted universality of art's aesthetic criteria but also because separatism would exclude women from *competition* in the art world – accepting thus capital's organization of labor as an unalterable reality.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the fact that separatism survives in contemporary feminist consciousness in art is indicative of the exacerbation of capitalist relations of production. In Sweden after 2000, the feminist art collective *Malmö Fria Kvinnouniversitet*, or *Malmö Free University for Women* (henceforth MFK), defended "strategic separatism" in terms of claiming space for the open discussion of contradictions faced by the art world's female workforce.<sup>19</sup> MFK argued that "the importance of feminist spaces is that they provide opportunities for self-definition" while importantly jettisoning a biological definition of femaleness and including "all persons that now or at some point have identified as women." [footnote *Do the Right Thing!*, 42.] Yet when it comes to economic relations, this expanded version of being-a-woman faces the very same (economic) dependency. In the case of MFK, separatism became a feasible, limited-time experiment because there were no expectations for the latter to function as a lasting alternative economic model for its participants. "Self-definition," a key concept of second-wave feminism and the goal MFK sought to explore through strategic separatism, had to

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be claimed, perhaps inadvertently, as a position in *discourse* rather than in the material conditions associated with social reproduction – when it came to that, participants could not, of course, achieve self-definition. To the extent then that contemporary feminism in art redeploys second-wave concepts, political judgment on these concepts’ contextual potential – but also, crucially, their *limits* – must be constantly renewed.

The feminist art movement of the 1970s and '80s, launched in Western art scenes, made its claims as neoliberalism was acquiring the contours of a national and transnational project, while contemporary feminism operates within this project’s consummation, the impact of which is currently apparent on a global scale. It is now commonplace to point out that neoliberalism has deepened divides among women, further entrenching woman’s exploitation of woman. Global supranational institutions dedicated to the reproduction of capital as a social relation explicitly link women’s emancipation (connected to concrete action such as girls’ access to education) to women’s deployment in for-profit production as “human capital.”<sup>20</sup> Is the discourse of self-definition compatible with women’s deployment as human

capital? Leaving aside valid questions and charges about feminism’s contribution to the hegemony of neoliberalism (notably, not so far raised specifically about the art world), the increased professionalization of artistic identity is at the core of the autonomy-dependency contradiction facing art at present.<sup>21</sup> I am referring to the autonomy of each woman as a creative individual versus women’s dependency on capital’s institutions for introducing this creativity into the exchange economy as the bedrock of public visibility. Clearly, this predicament is not only relevant to women. Yet having been excluded from it for too long, women in art tend to be more attached to this professional identity. It is hard to imagine that even those who do not identify as feminists in the 2010s are somehow unaware of the feminist struggles in the art world in the 1970s and since – struggles that overwhelmingly (and understandably) focused on achieving inclusion and recognition within an already defined field of “art.” If in the 1970s there were hopes for this field’s large-scale transformation through women’s participation, it is hard to entertain such hopes today: what has changed is the artwork’s content and form while the structural elements of the art field (or rather, of the art

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



pyramid) remain intact. For many women, being recognized as a professional artist (or indeed a professional anything) is a hard-won gain achieved through generations of feminist effort to place women in the public sphere – the sphere where production is located as opposed to the sphere of the private dedicated to reproduction, with the privatization of both spheres receiving much less attention outside Marxist feminist analysis (after the 1970s and until recently, marginalized in art history and theory much like Marxism overall).<sup>22</sup> Women may thus be less prepared to undermine this gain by questioning the feminist goal of access to wages and “entrepreneurial” income in relation to the competition principle (the implications of the wage relation and how it shapes subjectivity) – less prepared, that is, to theorize and practice refusal. As a political stance, refusal can only be practiced collectively and with a loud bang. If not, it becomes a *Drop Out Piece* (begun c. 1970) by an individual artist – Lee Lozano – more likely to be recuperated and neutralized as an “original artistic vision” by the institution rather than having an impact on the latter’s function;<sup>23</sup> or it dilutes into disparate micro-events of women’s withdrawal from the art economy without leaving any trace, affirming the myth of female weakness in the harsh conditions of the “jungle” outside the home. The politicization of women’s withdrawal in terms of feminist refusal is therefore indispensable to the analysis of autonomy-dependency contradiction.

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### **Contradiction 2: Reform and Revolution**

The struggles of the 1970s demonstrated that making women artists “visible” would require lifelong commitment. Success so far has been limited, and the visibility project should best be seen as trans-generational.<sup>24</sup> This is despite the fact that the *gender composition* of the art field at present differs from the years of feminism’s second wave.<sup>25</sup> Yet a rejection of the art institution is hardly imaginable today, as neoliberalism’s investment in precarity has increased our dependency: the art internship culture is symptomatic of this. And as regards instances of resistance to the culture of “employability,” Silvia Federici has stated that as a feminist she recognizes “many of these tools from past and contemporary practices of consciousness raising.”<sup>26</sup> Yet such instances of resistance (drawing on feminist strategies) remain few and far between, and overall feminists continue to focus their efforts on women entering the art institution on the terms set by the latter. This is not unrelated to concerted efforts to present the art institution as a progressive friend rather than a reactionary enemy of feminism. The numerous exhibitions

(including blockbuster ones) focusing on feminism since 2000 have served to normalize the presence of the art institution in feminist culture, presupposing feminists’ acceptance of its role as the showcase for feminist artworks and a celebrated archive of feminist impact.<sup>27</sup>

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

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coincided with the explosive headlines about how the Sacklers made their fortunes: through the mass misery generated by Oxycontin addiction. In March 2018, only a hundred demonstrators, including artist Nan Goldin, gathered to protest at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the recipient of a donation from the “philanthropic” Sackler family.<sup>34</sup> Unsurprisingly, the liberal establishment sought to extricate the *individual* Elizabeth Sackler from the mess of *unethical* capitalism (implying another kind is the norm), while admitting that “implicating Elizabeth via her father jeopardizes both of their legacies, and could make it more difficult for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art to continue to bring art, diverse audiences, education, and activism under one roof.”<sup>35</sup> What is, however, the political meaning of placing *radical* women, activism, and capital under one roof? If artist Artur Żmijewski, curator of the 7th Berlin Biennale, could be criticized merely for “the attempt to frame political movements [Occupy and the Indignados] within an art exhibition,” what happens to feminist radicalism when framed within the big-money agendas of self-legitimization by means of championing social causes?<sup>36</sup> In an age when Facebook executives dare sell the fable of “lean-in” feminism, it should be obvious that feminism is *not* uniformly attached to anti-status-quo radicalism. Then again, feminism has already had to exist upon the rifts of material divides and ideological divisions. If, however, it were true that “the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is *the only institution in the world* dedicated to

presenting and educating the public about feminist art,”<sup>37</sup> it would mean that the public is educated about something called “feminist art” in terms of an imaginary unity that conceals divides and divisions, fails to distinguish between radicalism and leaning in, and is saturated with the hegemony of capital as a social relation (rather than a mere economic one). When, for all their differences, dead radical women are made to return to contexts that represent the status quo that they sought to leave behind, feminism as a critique of extant social relations should be hearing the alarm bells. Living women, however, who see themselves as radicals and feminists are in a position to ask themselves *what might constitute practices of “leaning in” specifically in art* – practices that would leave us with an instrumentalized feminism as “individual choice” that may or may not provide a slice of the pie to the “deserving” few (this used to be called token inclusion). Such cynical incorporation is the logical outcome of feminist struggles seeking mere reform.

Struggles for reform tend to prioritize participation and representation, and they have a much better chance at “succeeding” – if with a lot of effort. And the effort that this requires is such that when the objectives are met, with whatever embarrassing and even politically humiliating compromises, there is hardly any energy left for carrying out a political anatomy of the “achievement” of inclusion – when inclusion of the few in terms set by capital’s *competition* principle presupposes and propagates the

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



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

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

By offering suggestions for actually effecting a change rather than simply describing and analysing what was wrong, these cooperators [the cooperative movement] and

early socialists discovered a new potentiality for feminism. They transformed it [feminism] from aspiration and ideas and integrated the liberation of women with a social movement which could envisage alternatives to the suffering and waste of early capitalism. From this point *the conflict was explicit between the two feminisms, one seeking acceptance from the bourgeois world, the other seeking another world altogether*.<sup>40</sup>

Rowbotham detects a schism between a reformist/liberal and a revolutionary/anti-capitalist feminism at the very point of emergence of modern feminism. In the early 1980s, Griselda Pollock also wrote "there are several feminisms," but what followed this statement referred to "distinct political definitions" of key concepts feminists use (her example is "patriarchy") and not to the delineations of plural feminisms.<sup>41</sup> Pollock, however, concluded her essay (on feminist art histories and Marxism) by admitting that "the bourgeois revolution was in many ways a historic defeat for women and it created the special configuration of power and domination with which we as women now have to contend."<sup>42</sup> Why then are not all feminists aligning their politics against this historic defeat? Should we accept, following Rowbotham, that there have been two incompatible feminisms from the outset, and that feminism in the singular can be an aspiration but has never been a reality? Or, that a pluralization (even a mere duality) of feminism is a *concession* made to the contradictions that the cause of "ending women's oppression and exploitation" faced from the start? If this would be a concession, it would be motivated by the same spirit (of overcoming an obstacle) as Groys's admonition to stop distinguishing between failure and success in activist art: it would be the easy way out of having to form political judgment, evaluate progress in relation to a common political cause, and assume collective responsibility for any outcomes. If, however, the schism were accepted as inherent and generating two feminisms, it would mean that *women* cannot ultimately be considered a group (despite divides) to which a political cause can be attached. It would mean that the level of racially inflected class divides is so high as to make "women" a nonsubject. And this would mean accepting that the very reality (the society of divides where women's oppression and exploitation intersect) that feminism is attempting to change is the *limit* to feminism's political imaginary.

Historically, the situation in the 1970s, when Rowbotham was writing, was quite complex in the art world. Feminist art workers were not necessarily formally placed into

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

Nonetheless, in earlier and more radical social moments, such as in the first half of the 1970s, the strategies concerning the making of radical artworks had clearly to do with the intended public for feminist art practices. The very notion of "strategies" contested, in (political) principle, the idea of the artwork as the playground of an individual imaginary and complete self-realization. The renowned debates in Anglophone feminist art history around an "accessible" and a "difficult" feminist art need not be reiterated here;<sup>46</sup> yet it is worth stressing that the feminist conflicts echoed well-known Marxist debates on aesthetics and politics over whether art (here meaning artworks) should be realist (associated with accessibility or, worse, populism) or distancing and disruptive of art's normative form of gratification (demanding or, worse, elitist). This dilemma typically arises in relation to artistic practice engaged with emancipatory politics because, in the material

divides that sustain capital's rule, access to or exclusion from critical knowledge becomes a biopolitical tool: an instrument, distributed across gate-keeping institutions, for managing populations and social antagonisms. If, in the twenty-first century, this dilemma no longer arises *collectively* for feminists in art, we need to ask what this means for feminist politics in the art field. It may, for example, mean that art practice committed to feminism in our times is unable to posit with sufficient clarity an addressee for its political imagination. Whose emancipation then does such practice seek to facilitate? Is there an expectation that there will be a cumulative (political) effect of individual artistic visions? Or is the feminist curator expected to be the organizer and communicator of such a cumulative effect? If so, what does this transference of political responsibility mean for feminism in art, for the historical constitution of the art field as set of practices that seem to follow closely the capitalist (re)organization of creativity into professionalized slots?

If today the stakes of feminist politics, in the art world and beyond, differ to those of feminism in the 1970s, this is because we (feminists) know how far pushing for reforms can go: racialized patriarchy holds strong, remaining essential to the division of labor and the establishment and management of dispossession (precarity is a form of such dispossession) that capital requires as its founding act.<sup>47</sup> So long as these reforms do not challenge the core of the economic status quo – that is, a program of exploitation of most people and certainly most women – they are potentially realizable with the right amount of pressure and when certain parameters concur: the system can allow for a few "successful" women artists so long as they don't shun art fairs. At the same time, however, we need to safeguard the right to reform, now explicitly threatened by the rise of white male supremacy (and authoritarian masculinity at large). Despite this development, the question is whether feminist politics can be just reformist or whether any reforms need to be relentlessly assessed by a revolutionary, transformative consciousness – one that does not foresee, through unfounded projections, the corpse of the status quo in a coffin as a future *fait accompli* but that recognizes its engagement in a larger-than-life struggle devoid of a messianic belief in ultimate success. This would mean renewing political judgment on art at any moment, which can only happen within the context of a feminist *art* movement: the idea of "politics" implies contestation in the semblances of the "polis" we have. Reforms realized without the intensity of struggle generated by a social movement are just that (reforms), and to the

extent that they placate the spirits, they undermine the very possibility of a feminist revolutionary consciousness.

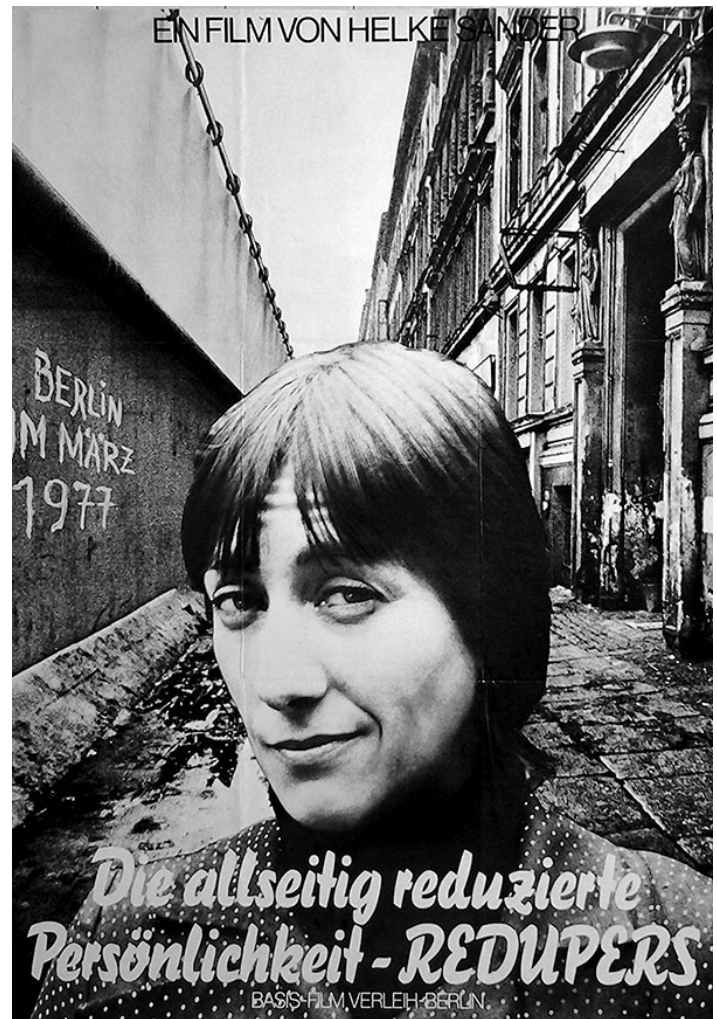
Abandoning reforms is politically unthinkable for feminism, its gains being so far a history of reforms. But what must be accommodated is, first, that reforms are not secure and, second, that reforms that dominant forces allow for do not, by way of accumulation, lead to social transformation: more female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

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

In the art field, there is much need for a serious feminist debate of the reform/revolution contradiction, and a collective elaboration and rethinking of these very terms in all their interconnectedness. In short, we need a feminist dialectic on reformist pragmatism and revolutionary consciousness. Initiated in Argentina in 2017 but of global purview, and following upon revelations on the art world’s endemic sexism, the text of *We Propose – Declaration of Commitment to Feminist Practices in Art – Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers* includes a spectrum of demands, some of which contradict each other in essence: the call for more women in power positions within actually existing, capitalist institutions, reflective of a lean-in agenda, jars with the call to work towards the anti-capitalist International

Women’s Strike.<sup>50</sup> An effort to understand the origins, propagation mechanisms, and political impact of such contradictions is becoming increasingly urgent in the face of a reinvigorated, transnational, patriarchal political discourse mutating into authoritarian leader cults. The art field is not unconnected to these developments, and Hito Steyerl remarked already in 2010: “The traditional conception of the artist’s role corresponds all too well with the self-image of wannabe autocrats, who see government potentially – and dangerously – as an art form. Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior.”<sup>51</sup> Given that feminism in art sought to undermine the male genius doxa already in the 1970s, it should be evident that its continuous manifestation all the way to the 2010s raises questions about the efficacy of reforms aiming at its eradication.

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

### Contradiction 3: Work and Nonwork

If we take seriously the gender division of labor, production and reproduction, art’s entanglement with the economy emerges as

fundamental to art's realization in modernity – the socioeconomic and cultural reality fashioned by capital and resistance to it, as shaped in the nineteenth century, the century of the Industrial Revolution, and extending to the twenty-first century with capitalism morphing into technology-led globalization.<sup>52</sup> Despite technology (from the factory to the internet) being the salient mark of modernity, women's "unskilled," unpaid work at home continues being ubiquitous and necessary today (unless delegated to low-paid and mostly female substitutes) while the gender pay gap persists everywhere.<sup>53</sup> Marxist feminists engaging social reproduction theory argue about the racialized gender composition of a reconceptualized working class, which would expand the remit of class struggle, seeing it as "essential to recognize that workers have an existence beyond the workplace."<sup>54</sup> At the same time, modernity in the twenty-first century needs to be recognized as a "work society," as put by Kathi Weeks, in which work is far more than an economic practice but connects instead with (persistently racialized and gendered) practices of unfreedom and imaginaries of freedom.<sup>55</sup> Under the guiding principle of fewer workers but greater productivity, the lengthening of the working day applies both to industrial production and office and service work, and Weeks stresses that work "is widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation."<sup>56</sup>

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

is not only photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions, a subject who has pulled away from wage labor and its regulatory apparatus in the factory or in the office, as the Autonomia Operaia called for. At the same time, she is a *Reduper* (an all-around REDUCed PERson) – a figure who

cannot be located biographically, and instead requires a new form of subjectivity to be realized in the *contradictions* of capitalist socialization.<sup>58</sup>

There are many "contradictions of capitalist socialization" but for women and feminists (who tend to be women) in art the relationship between work and nonwork remains a central one. Numerous artworks in the 1970s make it apparent that women claimed access to the identity "artist" (active in the public domain) as the very antithesis of that of the housewife and mother (confined to the private domain).<sup>59</sup> The dividing line between public and private corresponded to the one between work and nonwork, mapped onto a series of related binaries: "work" was culture, social recognition and visibility, creativity; "nonwork" was nature, social obscurity and invisibility, (domestic) drudgery. Yet, as is often repeated, art is now a field of engagement where work and nonwork are significantly blurred, which is why Hito Steyerl sought to interpret art today as a field favoring "occupation" over labor.<sup>60</sup> Current projects, such as *Manual Labors* (initiated in 2013) by Jenny Richards and Sophie Hope, openly pose the question "where does work start and end?" as much as they blur, through their complex structure, the boundaries of the artwork and social research focused on the politics of (gendered) labor.<sup>61</sup> Overall, being involved in art politically only intensifies one's inability to distinguish between work and nonwork, as von Osten's observations imply. What is crucial (what von Osten's analysis and projects such as *Manual Labors* point to) is that the overlapping or even fusion of work and nonwork does not constitute liberation from the private-public antagonism around which a key axis of feminist politics was structured. Within a system of relations ruled by capital, such overlap and fusion do not bring forth a unified subject. Perhaps this goal could be achieved by a society where the categories of work and nonwork were abolished and where human beings' survival and flourishing would not depend on earning money, let alone earning money in, and through, competition. Feminists in art must therefore address the work/nonwork relationship in capitalism – that is, in a society both permeated by the work imperative and organized upon the substratum of unpaid "women's work." In this society, the woman "photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions" becomes a decentralized subject, but only in a negative sense. Rather than discover that she had always been such a subject and see in this discovery the potential of reassembling herself, she realizes that, in the inescapable materiality of her life, she is unable

to align her internal multiplicity with her political direction of de-compartmentalizing herself. (And is her multiplicity genuinely internal, in the sense of belonging inherently to her psyche since the moment of its emergence? Or is it, in fact, the internalized multiplicity of demands and impositions that have piled up in the course of her life?) Her strong sense of fragmentation is not a rite of passage, arising in the course of extricating herself from an oppressive identity (constituted, for example, in patriarchy), but the end of the road, stemming from the depressing realization that she's all dressed up with nowhere to go. She is permanently locked – locked *individually*, in the solitary confinement effected through the division of labor *among women*<sup>62</sup> – in a social complex where her ultimately *personal* revolt can never be completed (despite capitalism promising exactly this: individually realized freedom). In the clash between the need to work for a living and taking up an alternative life as (hard) work, the best she can hope for is to “find herself” (*sic*) in an alternative work environment – a promise made by the art field.

The prominence of terms such as “art worker” and “artist-entrepreneur,” clearly pointing to art work in terms of productive labor in capitalist terms, have not defeated the idealization of art as a field of non- or at least *semi*-alienated work: that is, some aspects of this work constitute an alienating subjugation to capital while other aspects deliver creative freedom, self-fulfilment, self-realization and – to remember second-wave feminism again – self-definition. These aspects are not necessarily connected with the autonomy that income and/or wages brought to the post-domestic female subject in the 1970s. It is worth noting though that in the nineteenth century feminists (for example, in Greece) advocated strongly for women's access to art, as being an artist was deemed an acceptable profession for middle-class women potentially threatened with *déclassement*. In the twenty-first century, given the inklings that art's invisible “dark matter” may include more women than men and while (as stated in Contradiction 1) feminists continue to battle for women's access to the institutions of art, women's flocking to art schools and entry to the art field raises critical issues.<sup>63</sup> First, it suggests that women, much like men, are motivated by the possibility of securing work that is seen to minimize alienation and which sustains the “creative” industries. Second, it further corroborates the argument that women differentiate between the kinds of “labor of love” on offer and may choose one over another (art-making over home-making) or seek to combine them. In both cases, women are called to act as

individuals – either to compete (art world) or make “personal” choices (real world) – which speaks volumes about feminism's failure to subvert the structural atomization of the production-reproduction circuit. Such failure bears heavily on how feminism is perceived by women entering the art field (as a subjectively adopted discourse rather than a politics premised on collective action) and on the actual terms of women's work.

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

Effected in the second wave, this “refusal to procreate” was possibly the most radical break from social norms that feminism ever realized: its consequences in advanced economies, as Mariarosa Dalla Costa explains, have been profound and reverberate today, when in the rise of ultra-conservative social values women in childbearing years are seen at least as a potential liability to employers.<sup>67</sup> And this gives



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

The issue however of free choice in having children has been contentious for feminism: in

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

### On Reflection

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

function as concrete limits to our involvement being realized through art.

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e-flux journal #92 — June 2018 Angela Dimitrakaki  
Feminism, Art, Contradictions

1

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

2

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

3

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

4

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

5

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

6

Groys, "On Art Activism."

7

Groys, "On Art Activism."

8

These debates included, for example, if and how the figurative sign "woman" should be featured in artworks; whether femininity was to be recuperated as an essence suppressed in patriarchy or whether it was wholly constructed in the latter (and so could not be "decolonized"); if feminists should be engaged with painting at all as the flagship practice of patriarchal art or if newer practices and media such as performance and video should be prioritized. Indicatively, see *Framing Feminism: Art and the*

*Women's Movement 1970–1985*, eds. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (Pandora Press, 1987); and *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Blackwell, 2001).

9

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

10

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

11

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

12

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

13

Indicatively, see the special issue of *Open!* on the theme "A Precarious Existence" (no. 17, 2009); *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*, eds. Julieta

Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Sternberg Press, 2011); *The Art Factory*, eds. Michał Kozłowski, Jan Sowa, and Kuba Szreder, Free/Slow University, Warsaw, 2014.

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

15  
See CAMP's website  
<http://campcph.org/about-cam p/>.

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

17  
See Angela Dimitrakaki, "What Is It That Feminism Is up against? Preliminary Notes on Separatism," paper presented at a panel discussion among Catherine Elwes, Margaret Harrison, Johanna Gustavsson, and the author as part of *Women Working Collectively, What Is Your Value?*, organized by The Temporary Separatists at ICA London, July 9, 2015. The paper can be accessed at [https://www.academia.edu/23425509/What\\_is\\_it\\_that\\_femini sm\\_is\\_up\\_against\\_Preliminary \\_notes\\_on\\_separatism](https://www.academia.edu/23425509/What_is_it_that_femini sm_is_up_against_Preliminary _notes_on_separatism).

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

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

20  
Studies and projects on women as human capital abound. Indicatively, see "Countries commit to strong action on

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

21  
On feminism's relationship to capitalism in the late twentieth century, see indicatively Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Paradigm, 2009); Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March–April 2009): 97–117; and, largely focused on "the institutionalization of the US women's movement" but also the neoliberal ties of "global feminism," Susan Watkins, "Which Feminisms?" *New Left Review* 108 (January–February 2018): 5–76.

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

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

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

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

ok-at-the-numbers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

32  
BP features frequently on the Multinational Monitor website, often as the target of anti-Apartheid activists. A search on the site brings up 119 mentions

of BP, all of them negative. See <http://www.multinationalmonitor.org/>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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was first published in *Block 6* (1982).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

49  
"The question of how art is recognized as feminist – and the potential of misrecognizing feminism – requires acknowledging the multiples axes of transnational and queer feminism today, as such feminist projects intersect issues of war, law, immigration, human rights, antiracist, economic, urban and rural justice projects, propelled towards uncoercive rearrangements of masculinity and femininity beyond the limits of woman, as a project of decolonizing feminism." See Jeannine Tang, "The Problem of Equality, or Translating 'Woman' in the Age of Global Exhibitions," in Dimitrakaki and Perry (eds.), *Politics in a Glass Case*, 253.

50  
The declaration started on November 7, 2017 as a petition (now closed) here  
<https://www.change.org/p/asa>

mablea-permanente-de-trabaja doras-del-arte-nosotros-prop onemos-we-propose-n%C3%B3s-p ropomos. The full text can now be accessed at <http://nosotrasproponemos.org/we-propose/>. I have consulted the English translation (by Jane Brodie) available at the site, which includes thirty-eight propositions, divided into five sections: Concerning the Structure of the Art World, Concerning Behaviors in the Art World, Concerning the Artistic Career and Creativity, Concerning Artistic Feminism and Feminist Art History, Concerning the Inclusive Nature of This Statement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

58  
Marion von Osten, "Irene ist Viele! Or What We Call 'Productive' Forces," *e-flux journal* 8 (September 2009)  
<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/08/61381/irene-ist-viele-oder-was-wir-produktive-kr%C3%A4fte-nennen/>. Emphasis added.

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

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

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

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

63  
See Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (Pluto, 2010). See also Farah Joan Fard, "Women Outnumber Men At Art Schools – So Why Isn't Their Work Being Shown In Galleries

Once They Graduate?" *Bustle*, May 18, 2017  
<https://www.bustle.com/p/women-outnumber-men-at-art-schools-so-why-isnt-their-work-being-shown-in-galleries-once-they-graduate-55299>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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