

## Editorial: Feminist Practices in Visual Arts / Art Practices in Feminism

**Olivia NİTİŞ**

[nitis.olivia@gmail.com](mailto:nitis.olivia@gmail.com)

The theme of this issue of AnaLize-Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies proposed upon the invitation received from Laura Grünberg, came following my observations regarding the connections and disconnections between feminism in the field of socio-politics and its representations in contemporary art.

It is especially relevant how socio-politics have been influencing and shaping the feminist art tools, but also how various feminist visual representations have been reconfiguring the feminist socio-politic discourses especially in post-communist contexts. The impact of feminism in western territories since 1970s configured differently in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless our focus is the provoking intersection between art and feminist practices due to the fact that it comes with gaps and limitations mainly considering the different tools of communication: word in one case and image in the other (even if in art's case word itself is image). Without a cultural background that includes art (especially contemporary art) socio-political activists, theoreticians find themselves often in debate or in conflict with visual representations, although sharing a common agenda with art professionals. Feminist liberal socio-politics had its confrontations with feminist art from the 1970's in the West, proving to become two areas of practice that were not necessarily analogue. Women artists found themselves in a parallel world without the support of feminists working in the socio-political environment. The divisions also took place within the practice of feminist art and theory. The editors of the well-known American journal *Artforum* reacted aggressively towards the work of Linda Benglis, *Untitled*, a photograph that was inserted as an ad in the 1974 November issue. The work represented a naked woman proudly holding a double dildo on her pubis. As striking as it might have appeared, the work was actually following feminist criticism towards the roles and lack of power and access of women in the art world and public space in general through a visual choice familiar to the male gaze and male art production: a long history of female nudes. Nevertheless the work was considered "an object of extreme vulgarity" that challenges norms for what we might call conservative feminism.



It is relevant to assert that feminist art iconography has changed norms of representation and reception, in time determining a visual shift (the process is still ongoing) in relation to its message and its construction altogether. We are dealing with two separate domains belonging to humanities studies: one of them, visual arts, has the advantage of working with and being fueled by the socio-political context, while the other, socio-politics, doesn't necessarily use, work, or depend on art.

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe has opened a virgin terrain for starting the processes of building a common feminist agenda within the new specific socio-political contexts: new actors and institutions, transfer of knowledge from the West, theoretical reactions, counter spaces and creations, including immaterial productions in feminist visual representation. A socialist theoretical apparatus in post-communist countries breaking from the neo-liberal paradigm has increasingly come closer to a transition from the theory-visibility gaps of feminism to their cooperation.

Therefore this issue is built around aspects of the dynamics of art-feminism divisions, inferences, mutual influences and collaborations. Within the diversity of feminist art practices and their connections with socio-politics an important opening section of this issue is dedicated to feminist art and women's labor.

The topic addressed by Maria-Alina ASAVEI and Jiří KOCIAN in their paper entitled *Gendered Histories/Memories of Labour in (Post-) Communist Romania and Former Czechoslovakia Illuminated through Artistic Production* has valuable references to women's labor and feminist art practice in Romania and former Czechoslovakia. The authors introduce the concept of *feminist art* as a both female and male practice dealing in this particular case with women's work struggles in socialist regimes. Considered an overlooked chapter in post-communism, women's work in feminized industries and other labor markets calls for a counter-narrative able to infuse political imagination which in Amy Mullin's terms is not only based on utopic projection but also on the mental capacity of envisioning the future and the unfamiliar past. Feminist art represents such a tool being able to combine fact and fiction with artistic and political relevance. Artworks dealing with precarity and labor market and various aspects of labor significantly point out the necessity of understanding the memory gaps in our recent his(hers)tory and the constant fight with historical mechanisms of overlooked chapters. This contribution states the relevance of socially engaged art through the works of artists such as Liliana Basarab, Matei

Bejenaru, Sonja Hornung and Larisa Crunțeanu, Aurora Kiraly, Marilena Preda Sânc (for Romania), and from former Czechoslovakia, Anna Daučíková, Anetta Mona Chișa and Lucia Tkáčová.

Also discussed in the previous article, the following text is dedicated to the idea of success in the gendered and geo-cultural frame of Bucharest, Cluj and London art practice. Delia Popa and Giles Eldridge propose from their artistic perspective a theory that is meant to confront possible gender discrepancies between a male art centered environment and a feminine one. They reflect upon this issue introducing their project from 2016 that took place at Fabrica de Pensule in Cluj (Paintbrush Factory) and ODD in Bucharest, followed by a publication „Girls with Ideas (Boys and Painting)”.

An important section is dedicated to self-representation in terms of art discourses presented by women artists themselves. Flavia Lupu presents her own experience as a young Romanian artist influenced by her relationship with the political world considering her father being a politician (depute in the Romanian Parliament).

Furthermore the Austrian artist Ana Hoffner works with queer and feminist perspectives on sexualized violence in times of war. By using images from the contemporary fashion industry Hoffner creates links with the works by Croatian artist Sanja Ivekovic through her attempts of restaging representations of sexual violence distributed in mass-media and also with Steven Meisel’s iconography of images of war in fashion photography enhancing their atmosphere of futurism and introducing a multi-layered approach that combines gaze politics, queer look and ethical response.

Fashion industry and its social and ideological implications is analysed by Gabriela Panu. She traces the influences of political propaganda on Timișoara academic women’s dressing in the communist era and on the identity of urban women between 1965-1989. Although a certain aesthetic was developed the same process of aesthetic evaluation should be done with care. On the one hand these ideological influences can and should also reflect men’s clothes in the same era and on the other what is considered to be „dull but comfortable...practical and simple” (Panu: p. 83) or women adopting a „masculine style” (Panu: p.88) are remarks based on a reference to the normative ideal of esthetic beauty, westernised by definition. Concepts such as *elegance* or *beauty* kept as they are, as a norm will normally create a contrast between western and non-western (communist) outfits. Also the lack of alternative in the local fashion industry must also take into

account the development and questioning of taste within a cultural background. Defining and redefining what is feminine and masculine from post-modern theory could also reveal new aspects of communication through clothing. The author discusses the mixture of austerity and luxury through the lens of privileged versus unprivileged class. Beyond this argument, as Djurdja Bartlett states in her book *FashionEast. The Spectre that Haunted Socialism* (MIT PRESS: 2010) was in constant conflict between fear of change and control, thus allowing various influences from the postrevolutionary utopian dress, to official fashion and DIY. Although based on the West/East paradigm and almost describing communist outfits as unfashionable, with disregard towards the actual belief of some communist women in deconstructing beauty as a bourgeois concept, and without discussing the previous impact of fashion industry (1920s) through the work by constructivist artists as Varvara Stepanova, Liubov Popova, Vladimir Tatlin on creating functional clothes, or the influence of annual fashion congresses between communist countries that took place throughout the regime period, Panu's analysis mirrors the ideological power over society's behaviour overall, including the control over public appearance.

Moving forward, yet keeping the focus on gendered environments the essay written by Mihaela Michailov – *Narratives of Emancipation*, scans the theatrical stage in Romania criticizing the gender inequities in role distributions between men and women, taking into consideration concepts such as emancipation and intersectionality. Michailov briefly mentions the current contributions by Ioana Păun (*Domestic Products*), Catinca Drăgănescu (*Rovegan*), Bezna Theatre (*Cunthate*), Bogdan Georgescu (*Without Support*), and reflects longer on *Habemus bebe* written by Elena Vlădăreanu and directed by Robert Bălan, the Roma theatre company Giuvlipen with Mihaela Drăgan's one woman show *Del Duma* and *Who Has Killed Szomna Gransca*, and the queer show *Paralell* directed by Leta Popescu and Ferenc Sinkó.

This issue includes two book presentations and one book review. The first book written by Mircea Valeriu Deaca, *A Cinematic Kitchen. The Scenotope of Kitchen Scenes in the New Romanian Cinema*, is dedicated to kitchen decoration in Romanian films.

*Your Name and Other Heresies* by Ilinca Bernea represents a fictional first person narrative about the West and the Middle East, the roots of fear towards Islam, the political crisis in Turkey and last but not least about women's sexuality at the border between Western and Oriental sexual practices.

Last but not least the book review of Mihaela Miroiu's recent contribution *Cu mintea mea de femeie* (With My Woman's Mind) written by Diana Neaga underlines the context created by the author herself to elaborate a feminist autobiographic discourse. After introducing the reader to the details of Miroiu's activity and personality strongly linked with the development of academic feminism and civil society in Romania, Diana Neaga comments on the reflexive quality on which the writer basis her feminist self-criticism. It is perhaps not by chance to receive this review and place it at the end of our current issue as Mihaela Miroiu herself wrote about the feminist practice of artist Marilena Preda Sânc, a long-time friend from her generation. With even more interest for the tools of contemporary art and for challenging the gaps of understanding between feminist art and feminist socio-politics and academia a new generation needs to evolve to overcome boundaries and limitations and to expand perspectives beyond their own specialization. This generation is a cultural one, informed and open to inter and transdisciplinarity.

With real hope that this issue will make a difference for both disciplines, sociology and the visual arts, opening in fact doors towards theater, fashion design and more, I would like to express my gratitude to all authors, journal's team, and peer-reviewers for their time and comments.