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First European
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*This Time
We Talk About
Gender*

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French National
Network of Contemporary
Art Centres

First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres

Mapping Material Conditions & Ideological Background of Gender Inequalities

Summary of the meeting on 8 March

This document produced by DCA – French national network of contemporary art centres, is a summary of the discussions held during an online roundtable on 8 March, 2022, in the framework of the First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

The video recording of these discussions is available on:
<https://europeanartassembly.org/en/programme/1>



Discussion 1

Angela Dimitrakaki & Elke Krasny
Chairwoman: Julia Morandeira

The Historical and Socio-Political Conditions of Gender Inequality and Exclusion

Julia Morandeira: The genealogies of gendered labour in the artistic and cultural field are fuelled by rampant neoliberalism and lurking precarity. Cultural and artistic work practices and its institutions uphold this gendered unequal divide of labour, as can be seen not only in the gender inequality present in directing positions and economical retribution, but also in the important amount of invisibilised and enthusiasm-driven overworking that it feeds on, which is traditionally perceived as feminized work and largely undertaken by precarious bodies. This underlying reality still stands in stark contrast with the glorification of a few successful individuals, the proliferation of exhibitions of women artists or feminist thematics, or the widespread and mainstream endorsement of feminism and social justice by art institutions. This is a general picture that the pandemic has violently exposed and, in many aspects, worsened, though it has also opened some cracks for feminist intervention, transformation, and speculation. What are the urgent questions regarding gender and labour in the artistic field that we should be tackling? What are the masculinist grammars haunting this field? What are the wounds that need to be addressed and repaired?

Angela Dimitrakaki: There is a need to rethink and understand the history of art institutions in relation to feminist politics. It is difficult to maintain clarity in an age of accelerated political change. Feminism's first task is to interpret the political juncture so that strategies concerning the advance of feminist values, which have been attacked for many years now, continue as a realistic possibility. Susan Watkins' exemplary research article "Which Feminisms?"¹, which looks at the development of global feminism, demonstrates that the observation of Audre Lorde that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"² needs to be taken very seriously in examining the "integration project" for feminism that pushed for or accepted an institutionalisation and a pacification of its oppositional militant side. This had a significant impact on how feminist art developed under American hegemony and the star of postmodernism: labour ceased being of interest and sexuality dominated.

1. *New Left Review*, #109, Jan/Feb 2018

<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii109/articles/susan-watkins-which-feminisms>

2. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, pp 110-114, (1984) 2007.

Labour was only revived as a key point after capitalism's crisis began being felt in advanced economies.

We need to resist the values that sustain the contemporary capitalist system, and specifically competition. Funding policies pit women or institutions against each other. In recent years, the art field has witnessed outrageous precarity, only exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and remilitarisation. Yet this level of precarity was concomitant with the democratisation of the art field, which was simultaneously a feminisation. For many parts of the West, the growing numbers of art graduates meant that more women entered the field. Growing numbers were essential, as observed by Gregory Sholette, for the great "dark mass" of invisible arts producers to exist so that the few stars get shown.³ We need to rethink the definition of an art worker. Meritocracy, as a capitalist value, sustains competition.

The main wounds to be repaired relate to the internal fractures of feminism. The pluralisation of feminism into feminisms is a legacy of the alliance between postmodernism and feminism, which eventually locked feminism into so called identity politics, and has been used as the system's chief strategy of "divide and conquer". This has led to the use of antithetical phrases such as "imperialist feminism", "neoliberal feminism" or "white feminism". Can we then imagine or accept a "fascist feminism"? If we are to think about feminism as the end of women's oppression and exploitation, we must mend the fractures, de-diversify. We should discuss what feminism is, and where it is that we are moving. We need a feminist realism that looks dialectically at women's role in production and social reproduction.

Elke Krasny: It is important to act against the neoliberalisation of minds and bodies that has been so entrenched and normalised. This invisible poison needs to be called out, and we must be wary of how it erodes the possibility of imagining life differently. Competition is its most important factor, and the result is individuals in total isolation. We need a lot of realism, which can become a source of optimism that is not utopian, but one that understands that we can't take anything for granted. Continuation is not guaranteed.

Contemporary art centres are being confronted with the implications of what it means that "art" was split from life by modern epistemic and cultural structures such as disciplinary art history and museums. This stems from the belief that art is not considered labour. This split is of a deeply gendered and masculinist nature. The marginalised majority, most of whom are women, were excluded from the very idea of what art is, and who makes it. While this has been challenged for centuries, the idea that art is autonomous and separate from the toils and burdens of everyday life has largely remained intact. How will contemporary art centres work differently so art becomes part of life?

3. Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Books, 2006

It is important to establish a list of both feminist and gendered issues. Gender, which concerns not only women but genders in plural, is a feminist issue. Infrastructure is a feminist issue. Cleaning is a feminist issue. Leadership is a feminist issue. When we think about curating and art centres, programming is a feminist issue. Funding is a feminist issue. Resources are a feminist issue. Representation is a feminist issue. Publics, audiences, and communities are feminist issues. What will it take so that all those who are producing and reproducing the institutions of contemporary art centres understand these issues as feminist? How will this change art centres? Everyday labour needs to change in the form of long-term dedicated transformation that works towards real healing, not simply as an intervention which refers to a militarized masculinist term related to a short-term action.

Climate change is gendered. What does this mean for contemporary art centres? It raises questions on how they allocate resources and their carbon footprint. Covid-19 is gendered. War is gendered. Austerity is gendered in its relation to capitalism and fascism. How will contemporary art centres respond in a long-term and sustained way- to historic junctures, to the “now-time”, to futurity, to the “not-yet”?

Julia Morandeira: What are the different temporalities of feminist work and change, beyond immediacy and urgency? Regarding the need for the “long-term”, what practices of duration need to be instituted and recognized? The “not-yet” is a temporal vector that engages both with the past, the production of potential and desirable futurities from a situated position in the present. What are the chronic, somatic practices that react to forms of care but also violence? There is a need for new vocabulary that reflects on this.

Elke Krasny: We should think about these notions in the everyday practicalities of people that work in contemporary art centres. What is the temporality of “no longer”, and what do we need to get rid of in order to make these places human-friendly or nature-friendly? A lot of the working conditions are precarious, based on short-term contracts or labour conditions that reflect the project-based economy of the art field in general. Art centres find themselves operating under conditions of a project-based funding logic that make it impossible to have long term employees. That we cannot trust that we have a job forever is part of the art field. This system relies on exhausting people, making them work very fast, very hard, and making them work more, to complete projects - and to produce *other* projects. This is a sustained but very unsustainable mode of working. One needs to understand what one doesn't want anymore in order to get rid of certain temporalities.

Angela Dimitrakaki: The prevalence of the “project” as a framework of production in the artworld relates to the issue of competition. A lot of things have been stressed about the archive. I am critical of any lineage that focuses on

individualism. There are histories of displacement that we will have to deal with at an amplified level that we have not seen before in art institutions. These should not be dealt with on an individual level.

But the principal struggle is to decolonise the concept of temporality that we use in feminism from that of a modernity of lateness and of development. Most people will talk about the “third world”, about a modernity that hasn’t come and one that is at risk from those who are coming to undermine it: migrants from the wrong places. This division is fictional in that it misrepresents, distorts, or conceals both history and how capitalism works. It is our task to ask why development in one part of the world is actually underdevelopment elsewhere. By doing that, we move art away from the realm of leisure.

We should be sceptical of the notion of cyclical time brought forward in today’s postmodern idealist revival. Death from war or the pandemic is a tragedy that is classed, that is racialised, that can be blamed on specific material conditions. Linearity has been forgotten about and has received a bad name. Yet, within the framework of feminist realism is the question of generations. The goals of feminism won’t be met within our lifetime: it is an inter-generational struggle. This is where the art institution comes in: it is where choices are made about civilizational inheritance and the question of preservation.

Elke Krasny: Here we are speaking not so much about contemporary art centres but about museums. They invest in the prolongation of the lifetime of artworks via strategies such as conservation and restoration. They invest in making sure that the climate for the artworks is good even if humans are suffering. Prioritisation has to do with temporality: what is being restored first, how are these decisions made based on ethical, political, and moral criteria? Will we no longer restore fascist or sexist works? Taking away time is also a way of healing wounds. While acquisition is important, so is finding out what is actually already there. Most museums don’t even know what they have. This deep storage has a chrono-political dimension. While we are creating conditions for ecocide and a sixth mass extinction, some of the species that are already extinct survive in the collections of natural history museums. All of this is food for feminist realism.

Discussion 2:

Xabier Arakistain & Elisabeth Lebovici

Chairwoman: Julia Morandeira

How to Exhibit as a Feminist?

Julia Morandeira: This conversation moves to discussing feminist methodologies, gestures, policies, positions and also forms of disobedience that can provide concrete and situated examples that go beyond the dominant issue of representation towards an understanding but also an undertaking of feminism as a practice, while sharing specific strategies and examples in writing, curating, organizing and educating, that help us overcome this topic of representation. How might we curate feminist exhibitions and affront sex, gender, sexual identity and race inequality, in a manner that surpasses mere representation in institutional programmes?

In her answer, Elisabeth Lebovici refers in particular to the exhibition *Defiant Muses: Delphine Seyrig and the Feminists Video Collectives in France in the 1970s and 1980s* curated by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Giovanna Zapperi, which worked together with the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris that was founded in 1982, took place at LaM (Lille, France, 5 June – 22 September, 2019), and the Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid, Spain, 25 September, 2019 – 27 July, 2020).⁴

Xabier Arakistain: It is important to realize that gender is rarely quoted as an analytical category. It seems that if you are talking about gender you are talking about women, and if you talk about feminism, you are also talking about women. Rather, feminism is about denouncing social sexual relations that produce the discrimination the oppression and exploitation of women by men. We should have clear concepts to politicize well. Intersectionality is one of the characteristics of contemporary feminism. The French materialist feminists were aware that all these categories, of sex, gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, class and age are intertwined and operate at the same time. They do not exist in a vacuum.

Women in Abstraction which took place at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (*Elles font l'abstraction*, 19 May – 23 August, 2021) and the Guggenheim Bilbao (22 October, 2021 – 27 February, 2022) and *The EY Exhibition: The World Goes Pop* (17 September, 2015 – 24 January, 2016) curated by Jessica Morgan at the Tate Modern in London, are two opposite ways of doing shows about women and feminism. *The World Goes Pop* didn't exclude women as a category like *Women in Abstraction*, which was an only women's show. It was an exercise in rethinking

4. <https://www.musee-lam.fr/fr/les-muses-insoumises>
<https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/defiant-muses>

what Pop Art is, and was good example of what it can mean to do a feminist show. Simultaneously, for an artist such as Mari Chordà to be included, who received little to no attention in her home country, was an embarrassment for institutions in Spain, which is uplifting to see. It is problematic to put women artists apart because they always end up being a subcategory: operating between the canon and the subcategories. By reducing feminism to things done by women, you are depoliticising feminism.

The exhibition as a telephone listing does not communicate anything or create a discourse, but rather an emptier space. This manner of creating exhibitions worked in the early 80s, because it was important to visualize the work of women artists. We must think not only about exhibition making but about art in a feminist perspective. We are going through a new period of essentialization. We should disclaim the notion that to be a feminist you have to be a woman, and the transmission of feminist knowledge should always be considered.

Julia Morandeira: It is not the same to organize an exhibition on women artists, and to install and organise an exhibition as a feminist. How should a contemporary art institution be, perform, structure, or speak?

Xabier Arakistain: Françoise Collin reflected on relating art and feminism through two effects. The Duchamp effect shows that in order to decide what is or isn't art, you must have authority. Women have historically not had this power. We must develop strategies that permeate the art world.



Q&A with the audience:

Antonio Cataldo: I wanted to go back to Elke Krasny and ask about the “marginalised majority”. Isn’t it dangerous to speak about the marginalised majority? We recently closed an exhibition curated by *Queer World* here in Oslo, an organisation working for queer minorities. Although one may understand the concept of a marginalised majority, there are minorities in need of recognition and gaining a voice that the majority of society is still not recognizing. Doesn’t that concept risk create problematic non-recognition?

Elke Krasny: These terms are not in contradiction with each other. When we talk about people being “marginalised”, they are not marginal in numbers. The “marginalised”, in economic and material terms, make up the majority of people inhabiting the planet.

Griselda Pollock: The radical challenge of feminist theory cannot be digested by the institutions and hence we arrive at this contradiction. I feel this process of silencing feminist theory constantly even all your speakers and myself included have put this eloquently into the world in many volumes, articles, exhibitions. This is a real war against all forms of radical theory and the practices such theory inspires.

Angela Dimitrakaki: Though there is today a need to depart from exhibitions of women artists, and these cannot be repeated forever, there is a certain historicity that demanded the construction of “women artists” as a political category. We should evaluate how the concepts of feminism, of gender, function “out there” in the world. There have been very sophisticated exhibitions that were not about putting women artists into history, but that showed a construction of a different temporality, chronology, or lineage of modernity.

Angela Dimitrakaki: In a time that is marked by climate destruction and nuclear threats, there is a finitude on the basis of which we act: Feminism is a project that surpasses our singular lifetimes, one that is of humanity and beyond. This is not in contrast with linear time, which is associated with a certain reading of modernity and the idea of progress. Transmission is a central mechanism in feminism and Gen Xers have a particular mediating historical position. We can talk about “generations” as people who live under similar threats at the same time.

Julia Morandeira: An important contribution by decolonial feminist thinkers is the notion that multiple temporalities coexist, though one has been hegemonically imposed.

Elke Krasny: While there has been much written about the social production of space, there is no book on the social, or the very anti-social, production of *time* and the way in which the enormous number of uncounted hours, the hours that do not count in terms of money, the care hours, make possible that there is time left – the time we call future. If we stop caring, then we are not contributing

to any kind of continuation. The right question to ask is how can we become beings that have time and resources to care so that we can become free to care, instead of being forced to care. If we no longer just assume that one gender is assigned the labour of care by birth then we can think differently about how making futures might take place. We do things to change the world, but we may not be here to actually benefit from them: we do this for others. We could start thinking, or even make an exhibition about the things people have been doing for those others that they don't even know because they are in the future. This is a very materialist concern. The things we do with beings and things in mind that we don't know go beyond the kinds of connections that only exist because we feel we are similar.

Summary written by Eleni Pantelaras for DCA, 2022

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DCA

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of Contemporary Art Centres
This Time, We Talk About Gender

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Mapping Material Conditions & Ideological Background of Gender Inequalities

Summary of the meeting on **12 April**

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DCA

Discussion 1:

Sepake Angiama & Vanessa Desclaux

Chairwoman: Émilie Renard

Art Education and Social Reproduction

Émilie Renard: In the field of art, in relation to art and art schools, mediation and educational actions create interstitial spaces that act as social interfaces. We will question how these intermediate spaces propose other ways of sharing collective experiences than those allowed by the usual exhibition spaces. What margins to specific and new forms of creation can be opened in the institutional space by educational programs? Do these programs allow institutions to establish themselves locally and durably, and thus to resonate with their own context? In what way does mediation allow artistic institutions to work differently and to weave links locally with the audience, but also with artists and partners? Could these embodied and discursive practices of unlearning, anchored in collective processes, influence the very nature of institutions? How do these practices propose methodologies that allow or even require the institution, in turn, to unlearn its own instituted practices to anchor itself in intersectionality?

Because we presume that the notions of arts education and pedagogy are not undertaken in the same way in different European contexts and countries, we will begin by defining certain terms. These questions of terminology are important because they allow us to invent ways of saying and describing actions that often deviate from established uses. It is important to create ways of talking about “support”, “access”, and “equity”.

We will also use concrete examples to illustrate pedagogical experiences that allow us to address these issues of education and emancipation, in art centres and art schools.

Sepake Angiama: We should question the terminology that we use: what do we mean when we say the word “education”? Do we use the word education? And in what context? How does it differ from our use of “pedagogy” or “mediation”? There is a shift in understanding how the curatorial might operate and that it can benefit from using pedagogical tools, methodologies, and processes. How can institutions reflect that knowledge of producing knowledge collectively? Could we understand the role of the curator and mediator as something that could be occupied within the same body?

Vanessa Desclaux: What is a feminist practice and pedagogy? How do we embody and carry out such practices and transform our institutions in concrete ways? I

would like to return to bell hooks' "Engaged pedagogy".¹ We all perform labour in an educational project. How do we manage within our institutions to diffuse hierarchy and support community and collective practices? How do we create the conditions to shift from knowledge reproduction to knowledge production? How do we explore embodied experiences and forms of engagement that involve our bodies as much as our minds? Excellence and talent are terms to disrupt.


At the FRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine, in Bordeaux (France), we use practices such as what we call "easy to read and write": a simple way of writing sentences to address a diverse audience. It is a way of working with a group to explore how text can be an effective, imaginative, fictional response to an artwork. The bigger challenge now is how this production of text can be introduced in the scientific archive of the museum.

Sepake Angiama: We should think about the ways in which the responses to artworks are gathered within the archive or maintained or seen as valuable. Known forms of engaging with exhibitions include critical writing or critical reviews which are in established magazines, but the response of a 5-year old is not given the same weight. Feminist practices and pedagogies relate to solidarities, care, related to circulatory, shared, or distributed notions of how narratives can be told. Maybe we can move away from an authoritative way of how an artwork can be read or understood. Maybe there is a way to hold multiple narratives.

Vanessa Desclaux: When you welcome an audience of all ages, especially those that don't have a particular interest in art, the objective is not for them to come and learn about artworks. It is a much broader experience. For most audiences coming through the museum is not just encountering a work of art, you come through a building, encountering a specific way of talking, reading, language and sometimes overwhelming a lot of writing. If the museum is engaged in pedagogy and mediation, it should take care of its audiences, in creating a holistic experience in a hospitable and convivial environment.

Sepake Angiama: When we privilege the eyes, we forget about the rest of the body. Even sitting down on the gallery floor can feel like a disruption. The language of the gallery is really one that keeps you moving, on your feet. That also speaks to ableist ways of thinking about space. The role of mediation can be one of slowing down and spending time with work and others, which allows for other perspectives to arise. This is difficult in a very busy museum, so there is something to be said for the ways in which the museum has a different kind of life during different times of day, and how those might be utilized by different audiences. While the early morning might be suited for children, in the night-time, there is an opportunity for more social ways of interacting that could include dancing or music.

1. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, 1994



Vanessa Desclaux: Teaching in an art school in Dijon (ENSA Dijon, France) for 8 years, thanks to people like Géraldine Gourbe and Isabelle Alfonsi who I invited to share research projects, allowed for different experiences than in a museum context. The first workshop as a feminist research project was to create a “Lecturium”, for which we found a space outside of the art school that was transformed for three days. They made some furniture from recycled material. We could sleep and eat in the space, read to each other and ourselves, and stretch the normal education time in which the atmosphere changed and liberated. Moments where time extends are precious, it allows us to reflect on what it means to spend time as a collective outside the normal times of education.

Sepake Angiama: The museum is designed to regulate the body, to view works, and to be quiet. Intentional creation of reverence. What does it mean to say that you have spaces that are open to all and what are the barriers to access? How do we embody these notions that we think about often in education such as equality? How to create a democratic space, how to break hierarchies in terms of dialogue and conversation?

For the School of Equals workshop at the LUCA School of Arts in Brussels, we wrote a text on which students jotted notes: “In this module we speculate on the spectrum of possibility and examine what is required to make change possible within art institutions; in order to support a transformation of a possible future, in which access to knowledge and education is understood as a social or collective pedagogy of self-determination; to ‘draw out’ knowledge which is embodied and not only transforms the self but also by extension - to ‘lead forth’, for others and for the environment in which these bodies come together”. We built geodesic domes with the students that became the space in which we spoke or thought together. It was reminiscent of the ignorant schoolmaster as a methodology and approach, it shows the ways in which we self-organize.

Vanessa Desclaux: What kind of practices do we encounter from outside of our field of work? In Dijon I was introduced to activist practices that could include working in groups in non-mixity. Most importantly, what has continued to structure my work has come from sharing competences by inviting someone from outside our work field to share their tools, i.e from popular education or yoga. Within the workplace, we should continue to experiment with those moments where we can learn together on a day-to-day basis.

Sepake Angiama: I would like to think about education as creating a shift: maybe a bodily experience but also the perception and understanding that can be produced collectively and creates different effects in every person’s body. I hope to build an understanding of one-another within communities, to open the conversation of art so that it is not navel-gazing. It becomes interesting where we can create a context for meaning through dialogue, collaboration and through action.

Discussion 2:

Marthe Ramm Fortun & Dora García

Chairwoman: Émilie Renard

Experimenting Opacity within a need for Transparency

Émilie Renard: Do we still have transparent and honest discussions about working conditions in an art world that we know is not strictly regulated? Transparency in institutions should guarantee more balanced power relations between artists, students, audiences, teams, boards, partners. Transparency is a factor of social justice. We can even affirm that this requirement of transparency is a fundamental condition for the development of creative work. Feminist approaches allow us to ask these material questions and to identify the parts of unpaid work, an invisible daily work.

Conversely, can a principle of transparency become a tool of control when one would need a certain intimacy to initiate safe spaces, preserve margins of experimentation and avoid any form of censorship? What about trust, a shadowy side and the margins of opacity within institutions?

Dora García: A fair equal art world will only exist in a fair equal world. There should be transparency regarding budgets, contracts and fees for artists, and clarity in the relation between the artist and the institution. The only positive sense that opacity takes is the need for an artist to have a private space and to not be constantly demanded to justify their activities. We should understand artistic freedom as something that has the right to be useless and opaque, not only for artists but for everyone. Artistic practices are attacked from all sides as to not be deserving of support with public money because what is produced is “hermetic” or “not understandable”.

Marthe Ramm Fortun: The idea that fiscal transparency and accountability and the fight for artists workers rights is at odds with artistic freedom is completely in line with split and divide tactics historically that affects emancipatory battles. To me, from a feminist perspective, the discussions on artistic freedom and the post me-too debate are deeply interlinked. In creating false opposites to the benefit of a dominant neoliberal and neo moralistic discourse, it reanimates bodies identifying as female as battlegrounds. The overarching question which is: freedom to whom and at what cost, if we don't have basic rights in place? We are in a Cartesian landscape where illogical arguments and emotions are

placed in the studio and arguments of reason are placed in the institution, omitting many voices. This links to Sepake Angiama's description of a solidarity of care, a shared distribution of how narratives can be told, moving away from authoritarianism into plurality.

Dora García: Many museums, art schools and institutions advertise with notions of care but not many take these to have real consequences in the way they treat their staff. There is a need for a healthy work environment in how artists relate to institutions, but also institutions relate to their own workers. Many people still go by Leo Castelli's motto, art is a business based on trust among gentlemen. The ugly truth is that the tradition of the art market has always been based on privilege, opacity, classism, sexism, and not rarely, on abuse, money laundering and tax-dodging. And many artists have participated in it gladly, blinded by notions of success, genius, and stardom. To dismantle this will take more than art institutions declaring a politics of care, it is a daily struggle.

Marthe Ramm Fortun: In efforts towards intersectionality is this problem of tokenism in which the institutions are not well-prepared to take care of- and be fully responsible for the consequences that the artists suffer when they carry out projects that aren't at the explicit advantage of the institution. This creates very vulnerable and isolating experiences for the artist. We should ask: who is hired? Who is curating? Who is proposing the historical lines? What is the potential violence that is executed in these paradigm shifts?

Dora García: One of the tricks of the boss to not only possess your time and product of your time, but also your subjectivity, is to work on affection: this produces an abusive relationship of dependency. There is this fairy-tale of the "successful artists". You have to be very much aware that they have an interest in your production and that you have to construct this solidarity with other artists, fellow workers, and defend not only your work but also your right to independence from this abuse of affection. I have often referred to art institutions as shelters, some work as such, but it is important that they do not remain isolated. Some may speak of the notion of the situated museum, and the porous institution. You cannot fight abusive relationships in isolated castles, they have to be open to the world. *The ART for UBI (Manifesto)*,² put forward by the Institute of Radical Imagination as an answer to the pandemic, is worth looking at for everyone. Most artists didn't have any kind of safety net. It has to be enough to guarantee your freedom.

Marthe Ramm Fortun: Regarding the idea of the artist as an entrepreneur, this abusive relationship is especially poignant for being at risk for executing

2. <https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/2021/01/16/art-for-ubi-manifesto-launching-campaign/>

unpaid care work. “Erotic exchanges” happen in facilitating life as a single mother, not in terms of sexual relations or fiscal exchange, but relating to the use of the informal realm in terms of maintaining a practice and being a social entrepreneur in this neoliberal language that is imposed on the artist. Mutual dependency in Scandinavia means there are very few projects around. If you have been subjected to an incident in your life, there is no way to recover. When you are a freelance worker, you can’t participate in society on an equal level. The opportunity to show a project in a well-run institution as a form of protection is handed to few, creating an asymmetrical relationship for the artist that is precarious.

We must think about the longevity of artworks: artists are leaving their occupation because it is not sustainable for them to keep on working. Only a handful manage within the current frameworks, although the intentions might be the best. This is under-communicated because there is a lot of shame to not be able to be representative and “carry the face”. We need to encourage projects that are aggravating, uncomfortable, painful, alienating to some, now more than ever. Sometimes it has to be about sitting in pain, enduring that trauma together instead of trying to rid ourselves of it. That is safety, you can do that if you can go home and feed your kids.



Q&A with the audience:

Vanessa Desclaux: I would like to return to bell hooks' notion of "who's in the classroom": can this be related to who's in the group in the context of mediation in the art centre? In the context of education, where you are among adults, you interact with and get to know them over a long period of time. How can this be applied to a moment of mediation that is much shorter? We can borrow tools from popular education, by for example sharing anecdotes of our first names.

Sepake Angiama: It is important to recognise our conditioning in terms of who finds it easy to speak. There is often a disparity, for example between how male and female students experience and perceive situations. Male students seem conditioned to believe that if they find something easy, everyone else should also find it easy. The patriarchy is upheld by all of us, and we must think about how to dismantle it because I think it is killing everyone. These small acknowledgements that we also all have a voice, and we can use it is something that might seem small but is one that takes a long time to learn.

Vanessa Desclaux: Unfortunately, a problem specific to art institutions is a lack of culture of ethics, of supporting people in the institutions that want to grow in their management. With Émilie Renard we experimented with diffusing the hierarchy by involving the artists and teams, yet they are difficult to disrupt.

Émilie Renard: In France art schools, museums and FRAC are the result of public cultural policy, but art centres are built from individual initiatives that have been recognized and have become part of it. There is a large commitment to rethink the institution itself and there is a long tradition of institutional critique which helps these relationships to be addressed in places such as the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, which as a shared space allows for experimentation with different ways of working.

Marthe Ramm Fortun: The programming at the Fotogalleriet in Oslo, Norway, has reflected a desire to go back into the archives to look critically at aspects of its founding history. How has this place been made vulnerable as an institution that has invited in ruptures at its own expense?

Antonio Cataldo: It is about redistribution of power but also transparency on all levels. It is important to say that if we define ourselves as a public institution and we demand public funding, we need to constantly be held accountable in this sphere of representation that we claim and create. There needs to be space for both critique, discussion, and self-critique at all times. The big freedom of institutions which are publicly funded should come with an openness to questions about what kind of space this is.

Summary written by Eleni Pantelaras for DCA, 2022
Coordination: Marie Chênél

First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres

Experimental Tools for Ungendering Institutional Practices

Summary of the meeting on **10 May**

This document produced by DCA – French national network of contemporary art centres, is a summary of the discussions held during an online roundtable on 10 May, 2022 in the framework of the First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

The video recording of these discussions is available on:
<https://europeanartassembly.org/en/programme/3>



DCA

Discussion 1:
Julie Pellegrin & Helena Reckitt
Chairwoman: Céline Kopp

Taking Care: Revaluation of Practices and Ethics of Care

Céline Kopp: How can we talk in a non-judgmental environment amongst peers as a constructive step towards unlearning unsustainable work habits? How can we imagine ourselves operating as part of a caring alliance? How can we push back against exploitative working conditions? How can we develop propositions for new habits and structures in which care would be more equitably valued, remunerated, and distributed? How can we care *with* others? How can we develop more reciprocal forms of care, based on the redistribution of resources, between curators and the artists, institutions, communities and publics?

Julie Pellegrin:¹ In 2016, DCA organized professional days bringing together teams from contemporary art centres and external workers, over the course of which the constatation that there was a shared and growing suffering at work was made. We did not yet use the term “care” at that point - a term that French social scientists such as Sandra Laugier, Pascale Molinier and Patricia Paperman introduced in France in the 2000’s. They decided not to translate in order to not depoliticise it: they do not use French terms such as “sollicitude” or “bienveillance” to highlight that care is not an essentializing feminine notion but a complex and demanding task of attention.

In 2018, DCA organized another professional day. We invited psychologist Pascale Molinier to discuss the complex relationship between management and care, born from the state of extreme fatigue and burn-out of many female directors. She told us: “you do not do care jobs, you do art jobs!”, but at the same time encouraged us to work collectively, to meet more often and in smaller groups to rethink our modes of working. The problem is that to take and be in charge of care has become an additional skill to acquire and task to perform. We realized that we had to take care of our institutions due to plummeting public funding, of our audiences because there was a demand for accessibility which required the implementation of artistic and cultural education, and of our teams who are becoming increasingly precarious - all with skill sets that we didn’t necessarily have, having studied art or exhibition history! How can care become a real work of (self)critique, without adding more need for polyvalence, new skill for a higher productivity?

1. From 2007 to 2020, Julie Pellegrin directed the contemporary art centre La Ferme du Buisson (Noisiel, France), member of the DCA network.

At La Ferme du Buisson, I invited Christine Shaw in 2019 to curate an exhibition called *Take Care*² because of her long-term project at Blackwood Gallery in Toronto. She proposed a workshop on the links between curating and care with Helena Reckitt, that opened many avenues of reflection and lasting action, and led us to understand that complaint and refusal can go hand in hand with a great deal of joy when it is part of collective sharing and healing.

Helena Reckitt: The different aspects of care, put forward by Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, in the form of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and plurality, communication, trust and respect, very much resonate within the cultural sector. Despite us talking about our work in terms of passion, love and vocation, we create toxic environments because of over-identification. Care is needed but undervalued and invisibilized, it is often background labor, carried out by those who are feminized, classed and racialized as well as having migrant backgrounds. The danger is that it's naturalized as inherent quality of women, who are assumed to be naturally more caring or maternal than me. Seen as a labor of love, their labour doesn't need to be recognized or remunerated properly. A lot of the invisible caring labor that takes place should really be carried out by the state and it is to lesser and greater extents in contemporary societies. There is a temporal element to such work: it's durational, ongoing and often tedious. As Mierle Laderman Ukeles put it in her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*: "Maintenance is a drag. It takes all the fucking time."

Three years ago, we did the workshop *Taking (back) Care*³ in Paris with about 14 people, mainly working in the contemporary arts sector and education, and with activist backgrounds. We put a lot of energy into thinking through the idea of how refusal could become an important act, particularly in our cultural sector, where workers are often posited as endless sources of work care and love, to the detriment of themselves and the needs of those they work with. We collectively wrote some propositions for what we thought would be important aspirations to work towards in the contemporary art field, that grew from a frustration that it is easy to diagnose the problems, but challenging to overcome the sense of not having agency:

- Our proposition is that we create structures that find a place for every individuality. This recognises that everyone has their own skills, which can be shared with others in more productive ways than if you work individually. This creation of an environment of reciprocity – rather than a strict economic exchange – increases our collective capacity to do.
- Our proposition is we trust the intelligence of the group rather than only push our own ideas, and find structures for supporting this collective process.

2. <https://www.lafermedubuisson.com/programme/take-care>

3. https://www.lafermedubuisson.com/programme/archives_programme_2018-2019/helena-reckitt-christine-shaw

- Our proposition is that we understand care as a finite resource, and value (price) it – and redistribute it (taking back care) – accordingly. Bearing in mind that the Global South is the region most expropriated for its caring resources, as well as so much else.
- Our proposition is instead of agreeing to provide what is demanded, we turn the conversation around to work on what is really needed.
- Our proposition is to understand care as a good that increases when you apply it. It multiplies itself.
- Our proposition is that we allow space for people to speak out, learn to listen to people who do so, and recognise and appreciate that their response is a form of emotional labor. In so doing we recognise that the curatorial gesture is not complete, but is itself a work-in-process.
- Our proposition is that we understand care as not only representing critique – and gaining cultural capital in the process – but applying care to the structures in which we work, ideally in ways that cannot be easily rolled back. E.g: Christine's example of securing funds for gallery staff, who are unionized and whose jobs cannot be easily dissolved.
- Our proposition is that we promote practices of working together, and rethink care as a collective project, among students (and others) above those of the domineering author ego.
- Our proposition is that we attempt to acknowledge those whose work contributes to a project, whose labor might be invisible or under-valued, and to explore ways of doing so that go beyond being a token gesture (perhaps by questioning the logic of authorship and/or intellectual copyright).
- Our proposition is to envision our projects as assemblage in more-than-human worlds, and that we make those assemblages visible, instead of foregrounding individual actors and agents.
- We propose a system by which representatives of a group present managers with grievances that are anonymously leveled, rather than identifying individuals.
- We propose to develop contracts that stipulate we will not work under conditions of under-payment, to which all signatories would adhere.

Three years ago, we hadn't had a pandemic, and we hadn't had this war in Ukraine. What did we miss and what changed in that time?

Julie Pellegrin: I would like to rethink the title of the exhibition and workshop: *Taking Care and Taking (back) Care*, that can sound like an injunction imposed on us and that we impose on ourselves. How could we have problematised this

“injunction” of when an institution declares itself to be ethical or caring, when it is oftentimes with the goal to increase the productivity of the teams in a neoliberal sense. There is an effect of “non-performativity”, as Sara Ahmed describes. Committees and programmes are set up to prove that institutions are socially and environmentally responsible, feminists, antiracists, but this mostly acts as an excuse to not do the work. Care needs to be more than a subject to treat; it should not be represented by art but implemented through concrete and demanding institutional work, as well as dedicated financial means.

In *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*, Maggie Nelson⁴ treats issues of censorship in relation to art and explains that we have to care about art but art doesn't have to care about us. I left my position at the Ferme du Buisson after I refused to do a very lucrative project. It was the refusal of the artist, Mathis Collins, that led me to dare to formulate my own. He pointed to working methods that we don't question enough. After the 2015 terrorist attacks in France, a large police force was sent to “difficult” neighborhoods to contain “radicalisation” and delinquency (sic). After this failed, the police headquarters attempted to link with artistic establishments to substitute the police with artists, with the same goal in mind! Here, art or the artist cannot take care of us.

However, I think like Maria Puig de la Bellacasa that the link between the function of art and care could be understood as that “which can hold us together”. Without instrumentalizing art, institutions can be inspired by the artistic imagination to invent new ways of being and being together in this world.

Helena Reckitt: It is very difficult to prevent institutional harm, because the people that are doing the harm are protected by the management and hired by the board. One of the few ways toxic managers are removed is through accusations of sexual harassment and while it is good that there is a climate in which sexual harassment can lead to consequences, that is not the only form of abuse that occurs.

For the most part in the UK, the energy around care comes from people outside organizations like artists such as Johanna Hedva, who published a disability rider⁵ that she presents to organisations, or Jamila Prowse, who argues for programming that is flexible and attentive to the needs of artists and workers. It is exciting that these requirements sometimes get adopted inside the institutions, following external demands. In turn, taking care of the organization is often used as a justification for uncaring work practices; it is mostly the lowest-paid workers that are doing the work. It is almost like art workers have to internalize the threats and behave in ways that are self-sacrificial and detrimental to their own and others' wellbeing. Oftentimes there is a hierarchy in arts organizations that those considered to have the most authority are those who work the closest with the artists and revered, market-validated works of art, while those working with the public are not consulted and their wisdom is not sought out or valued.

4. Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*, Graywolf Press, 2021

5. <https://sickwomantheory.tumblr.com/post/187188672521/hedvas-disability-access-rider>


Discussion 2:
Nanne Buurman & Iris Dressler
Chairwoman: Céline Kopp

Hospitality and Diversity Politics, the Ambivalences of Access

Céline Kopp: We have discussed a lot about today's discussion during our preparatory meetings, especially with Nanne Buurman who has raised several questions about its topics. Who hosts whom and to what ends? How can we be inclusive without reproducing given power structures? How can we create safer spaces without depoliticizing art institutions? How can we enable participation without paternalism? How can we avoid stabilizing given epistemologies by simply expanding canons and broadening audiences? How to deal with the risk of inclusion as a means of regulation and normalization? How do we avoid a moralizing self-purification of curatorial practices? How can we acknowledge art's and our complicity with capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy?

Iris Dressler: To talk about hospitality, I went back to Derrida's separation between the juridical social agreements when it comes to the stranger who still has a name and social status, and the absolute other who does not. This is relevant today if we compare the European care, behavior and hospitality regarding Ukrainian refugees and the experience of the people from Africa or Arabic countries, even on a legal level. Our art institutions are not very accessible when it comes to non-normative bodies or people of color. The notion of the audience, to the neoliberal museum that is under pressure of commercialism, is in turn tied to these contexts. While we know that diversity is important, it is also close to the neoliberal ideas of "reaching a diverse public". Talk of sustainability is being used and abused in capitalist terms, which has created a lot of distrust. How do we deal with this? What does hospitality mean in terms of different guests? Firstly, the "invited guests" include the artists, the audience, the staff, my colleagues, collaborators, partners, those that we are aware of and know. What came even more clear during Covid is that the art system is based on precarious work and that care, hospitality and responsibility mean a lot. We in the institutions are the ones responsible to care for the money that we can give to the people that we are working with, our invited guests, especially if we are publicly funded. There is the complex issue of censorship and self-censorship, in which institutions don't take the responsibility to address conflict but simply take out the artwork or the speaker. In terms of hospitality and ethics, we need to think about how we work with the "invited guests": conflict.

Everyone is scared of being accused of being racist, sexist, ableist, excluding, and hierarchical, everyone tries to position themselves as being the opposite of this.



We then lose the space for going into the deep problems of these mechanisms. We need to find ways not to embrace conflict but to give space and moderation for any sort of conflict. I think that unexpected and unwanted guests are related to a loss of control regarding collective processes, modes of sharing, and informal and uncurated formats. We tend as institutions to over-curate, while we should de-curate many things. The most complex and frightening challenge for the institution's internal structures is giving up and losing privileges. We also need to deconstruct our successes: in 2018 we held an exhibition⁶ revisiting our successful Bauhaus exhibition 50 years earlier where we looked critically at the entanglement with the heroes of the Bauhaus and the Nazi's which has been well-known since the 90s but isn't talked about enough. Since 2012 at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, we are exploring the idea of shared, uncontrolled spaces that can be used by different publics that are completely uncurated by us. In other places in the city center, you have to pay rent and to consume. For this, we use the foyer, where all furniture is on wheels and can be moved around, and during Covid, our open-air platform. These have been inhabited by students, local artists, and political groups, for example. What are their problems and what kind of protocols would these spaces need? If you make everything open, how can you for some moments still create safe spaces and who is using these and who is not? This is a question of trust. Because the open-air space is directly connected to a park, this shared space also becomes an important political space to discuss the question of who owns it. We are working with different groups on the problem of racial profiling and control by the police of that park.

Nanne Buurman: It is very important to acknowledge the precarious working conditions of curators or caretakers, but also to check our own privileges in how they are enabled by the curatorial unconscious of racialised, gendered and classed divisions of labor. While most of us tend to work under precarious conditions, many people in the art world still have relatively privileged middle- or upper-class backgrounds. To be able to enter the field, we have to have the necessary cultural capital and be able to financially afford to work for little or no pay. This aspect tends to remain a blind spot when feminism in the arts operates as a kind of identity politics most of the time. Canon revisions, all-women's shows, and quotas for equal representation of "male" and "female" artists have been introduced as means of affirmative action. These are complemented by thematic exhibitions dedicated to feminist, gender, or LGBTQI* issues, dedicated to the deconstruction of (essentializing) binary gender concepts. Nevertheless, feminist curating is most often concerned with the artists' gender or with the reflections of gender and sexuality in artworks, the focus largely remaining on norm-conforming or subversive visualizations of personhood or tokenistic counts of participants while leaving structural or economic inequalities and exclusions unaddressed.⁷ Therefore, my research looks at the socially re/productive functions

6. <https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2019/exhibitions/50-years-after-50-years-of-the-bauhaus-1968/>

7. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/esse/2017-n90-esse03065/85597ac/>

of curating. Starting from heuristic homologies between exhibitions and households, I analyze the gendered divisions of labor and distributions of power in curating.⁸ These often imply biopolitical deployments of “femininity”, a “female” habitus of restraint, or the responsabilization of certain “feminized” subjects as providers of care, who are expected to perform their “labor of love” for free, due to their love of art.⁹ In the field of curating, this “feminization of labor” has led to a fetishization, or even commodification of the notion of care, in which the soft powers and governmentalities involved in care and hospitality often remain the unacknowledged curatorial unconscious in rituals of ethical self-legitimization.¹⁰ Moral codes of conduct result in self-stagings of curators as altruistic and angelic carers for others, which these self-purifications tend to deny curatorial powers, complicities and the ways in which hospitality may also contribute to the accumulate social capital.¹¹

This year’s Venice Biennale may serve as an example of such contradictions of care.¹² While it was an important feminist gesture by the curator (Cecilia Alemani) to include a huge number of women artists in the main show “Milk of Dreams”, the strong emphasis on maternity and body aesthetics had a certain anachronistic feel of re-essentialization, of reducing “women” to their bodies. While Black “women artists” were prominent and won the golden lions (Simone Leigh, Sonia Boyce), on a structural level, there were still many “women” of color laboring behind the scenes of the Giardini, for instance, taking care of cleaning the bathrooms. Remarkably, the toilets were still organized into “ladies” and “gentlemen”, thus not only upholding an essentializing gender binary but also discriminating “women”, who had to stand in line much longer waiting for their turn. Natascha Sadr Haghghian and Maria Eichhorn, the artists represented in the German pavilion in 2019 and 2022 respectively, have worked with this infrastructural dimension of the art by bringing the “backstage on stage”, decentering the attention to anonymous migrant laborers and addressing the ambivalent history of the pavilion. Their positions demonstrate that there is a hauntological dimension to hospitality, to hosting, and “ghosting” as practices of social re/production.¹³ In the German context, racist, antisemitic fascist

8. <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-52-reader/from-prison-guard-to-healer-curatorial-authorships-in-the-context-of-gendered-economie.html#.YulTRpDP3ly>

9. Pierre Bourdieu/Alain Darbel: *Love of Art. European Art Museums and their Public*, Polity Press, 1997.

10. Buurman: “Wages for Networking? Curating as a Labour of Love, or: Canonization, Capitalization and Care”, in: *Networks of Care. Politiken des (Er)haltens und (Ent)sorgens*, ed. with Anna Schäffler & Friderike Schäfer, nGbK Berlin 2022.

11. <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/angels-in-the-white-cube-rhetorics-of-curatorial-innocence-at-documenta-13.html#.YulOtZDP3lw>;

<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/ccb-with-displaying-curatorial-relationality-in-documenta-13s-the-logbook.html#.YulTGJDP3ly>

12. <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022>

13. “Hospitality” and “Hauntology” are both concepts adopted from Jacques Derrida, see Buurman “Hosting Significant Others. Autobiographies as Exhibitions of Co-Authority”, in *Hospitality. Hosting Relations in Exhibitions*, 3rd Vol of the *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. by Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, Berlin: Sternberg, 2016.

and patriarchal ghosts still haunt art institutions, both on an economic and epistemological level. And because, as those working in the arts, we are inhabiting of these inherited infrastructures, it is important to address our own complicities, the ways we reproduce the problematic inheritance in our habits (often involuntarily), rather than externalizing problems, or pointing fingers to others. As part of my research on Nazi-continuities at documenta, together with my colleagues from the “dis_continuities research group” and students from Kunsthochschule Kassel, last year I curated a show titled “wir alle sind gespenster: haunting infrastructure”¹⁴ that tried to acknowledge the way “we are all ghosts”, which bears the potential that “together we can haunt the future” by inhabiting infrastructures differently.¹⁵ Even though Nazi continuities in the early history of documenta have become undeniable,¹⁶ a lot of people still try to uphold the historical myth of documenta in quite problematic ways. As this experience has shown, it is surprisingly difficult to address our problematic histories and to get out of inherited logics, to denazify and decolonize cultural infrastructures. Such denials testify to the continuous reenactment of moral (self-)purification and the desire to be on the right side of history that seems to prevent us to see that it is much more complicated and messier.

14. <https://www.kasselerkunstverein.de/ausstellung/kkvexh/detail/kkv/wir-alle-sind-gespenster>

15. https://documenta-studien.de/media/1/documenta_studies__11_nanne_buurman.pdf

16. Buurman: “The Exhibition as a Washing Maschine? Notes on Historiography, Contemporaneity, and (Self-)Purification in documenta’s Early Edition”, in *Stasis. Taking a Stance*, Catalogue of the Thessaloniki Biennale 2019, Summer 2020.

Q&A with the audience:

Iris Dressler: In January, documenta 15 was accused of supporting anti-semitic positions.¹⁷ This is a complex topic in Germany that is very taboo in public discourse and in the media. Documenta set up an event to discuss this more broadly, after which the Zentralrat der Juden complained that the panel and event was not diverse enough. Documenta canceled the programme and to treat the issue through the programming itself, followed by an open letter,¹⁸ where they position themselves in this discussion.¹⁹

Céline Kopp: This goes back to the issue of mistrust: how do you invite the unwanted guest? How do we deal with these situations in general, practically speaking?

Helena Reckitt: There is the radical feminist trans-phobic problem: how do trans feminists and their allies deal with the fact that many feminists don't recognize trans women in women's spaces? Not closing the door to these TERFS can be seen as an act of violence against trans women. But despite disagreeing with TERFS profoundly, I still want everyone to keep talking to each other.

Iris Dressler: It is not about inviting conflict, but rather not avoiding it and pretending that it is not there. Building trust is not only about inviting but also visiting, and it is a long process which requires us to think about unusual formats. Sometimes we must give up our privilege and spaces, these are small gestures and ways of dealing with each other.

Helena Reckitt: I don't think it is true that safe spaces are easier to create separate from institutions. We see just as much hurt, volatility and outrage in independent or autonomous spaces. They are not necessarily more conducive to accepting difference or overcoming the difficulty of deep conflict. If you are running an autonomous feminist or Black space, for example, you are really putting yourself on the line.

Julie Pellegrin: I am in residence at the Villa Médicis, and in the principal space that is open to the public, in which activities and events take place, the tapestries and wall pieces represent solely images of slavery. This was a surprise to all of us upon arrival, and we refused to work and exhibit in the space, though we continued to work with the institution when the request to remove the images was not heard. I would have liked to have implemented this productive refusal, as Helena calls it, to have the impression of agency in my work environment.

Helena Reckitt: For the most part this is a middle- or upper-class profession even though we can become precarious by working in it. In the art field we must challenge ourselves to seek out and give power and space to people whose backgrounds exceed traditional academic or professional CVs. What have they

17. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/172993/open-letter-on-the-future-of-documenta/>

18. <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/open-letter-to-we-need-to-talk/>

19. At the time of the discussion, on May 10th, it was only the beginning of the "antisemitism problematic" at documenta 15.

done as activists, in their communities, outside mainstream institutions? What forms of creativity, skill and verve have they demonstrated that don't fit a narrow European middle-class logic?

Summary written by Eleni Pantelaras for DCA, 2022
Coordination: Marie Chênél



First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres

Experimental Tools for Ungendering Institutional Practices

Summary of the meeting on **7 June**

This document produced by DCA – French national network of contemporary art centres, is a summary of the discussions held during an online roundtable on 7 June, 2022, in the framework of the First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

The video recording of these discussions is available on:
<https://europeanartassembly.org/en/programme/4>

DCA

Discussion 1

Mercedes Azpilicueta & Quinn Latimer
Chairwoman: Géraldine Gourbe

Political Practices and Performances of Language

Géraldine Gourbe: How can we make art differently, without the usual tools or formats? How can art education, social art actions, the relationship to the audience and all the daily work practices of the teams involved in art centers become relevant in creating safe spaces for experimentation? How can our use of language as a performative process help us generate a continuity with radical utopian narratives, or generate disruptive tales in our hypercapitalistic, patriarchal and anthropocene world?

Quinn Latimer: Through an early photograph of my mom and her girlfriend, who were lesbian housepainters, I transferred the image of a toolbox that we want to use today into a paintbox. The paintbrushes I always use as a poet, an art and literary critic, teacher, performer, and occasionally an editor, come through questions of gender and feminism as well as language and the performance of language. I'm often trying to trace what I think about as an ethics and activism of that language. Institutions and people working within them are often very well versed in the language of justice, equity, the anti-colonial and the non-racist, but their actions work exactly against this. In terms of my personal writing and my work within institutions, I try to find a language that is authentic to lived experience. The language of the contemporary art world can be exhausting in its specificity and its lack of connection to how we really live. My recent projects speak to a desire for the kind of relations and communities that we sometimes live in, and that we would also like to see in the institutions in which we work. *Like a Woman: Essays, Readings, Poems* is, as its title states, a collection of essays, poems and more hybrid texts that consider the mutable boundaries and borders between visual and literary production, that is, art and writing, as well as various forms and histories of feminism, women's work, protest, performance, and complicity. It indirectly became a memoir of my relationships and relationships with artists, whose work I engaged with as a means to explore their voices, conditions and ideas. This book is a personal piece of writing, but it also traces a geography, community and a movement between different forms of labor, power relations and aesthetics.

It is worth commenting on the name change of the *Institut Kunst to Institute Art Gender Nature*¹, which came from Chus Martínez, who is its director. She is

1. <https://www.fhnw.ch/en/about-fhnw/schools/academy-of-art-and-design/institute-art-gender-nature>

interested in peeling away the silence and shame of talking about these issues of gender, inequity, economic violence, racism, issues of culture and nature and so forth, by naming them specifically. Within the framework of this change we are doing a bi-annual symposia series in which we are inviting artists, thinkers, writers, filmmakers, poets and curators from around the world. The presentations take hybrid forms of performance, screenings, conversations or dance, in which the commonality is an almost utopian belief against all the odds of our worsening political and economic situations everywhere, that there is something else possible than the conditions in which we find ourselves now.

Mercedes Azpilicueta: I grew up in Argentina and live in the Netherlands now. Being a white woman in Latin America gave me a lot of privileges but there were many constraints. The *Ni una menos* movement against gender-based violence was launched in June of 2015. We have femicides daily. Shifting continents has been significant in my practice. While the writing scene is important in Argentina, I had the impression that there was a general fear in the Netherlands to speak from oneself. My works and projects always contain a piece of language, a script, or a song. I now work at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie as the head of the TXT department². When it comes to making, collaboration is crucial. There is a question of methodologies that continuously informs what we do. It is how we make things, rather than what we are saying, that is important.

Recently I had a child, I am an old mum, and that changed my way of seeing how institutions are approaching exhibitions with mothers. I recently had an unpleasant situation at a museum here in Amsterdam, where I was part of a prize, an exhibition and I gave a talk to its patrons about domestic and invisible labor, feminist labour, and wetnurses in the early 20th century. Right after that conversation I had to breastfeed my child, and I was kicked out of the museum because I was apparently obscene and making the visitors uncomfortable. That is a very clear example of how the discourse doesn't match what we see in reality. We need to talk about what our needs are, and whether they are met or not. I try to bring that to any project or even to the university where I teach.

Quinn Latimer: I'm thinking about the word "exhaustion", that comes with the fact that the same subjects and complaints have to be gone over for decades or centuries. Through practices that are based on relationships and building the world we want to be in, how can we craft a radical new artistic language so that exhaustion can be replaced by something energizing? It is amazing how little institutions move forward and how little power relations change. By building communities in which there is a reciprocity of care, we might be able to move beyond this.

Mercedes Azpilicueta: When reading, especially poetry, it is as if you are meditating through those words: it makes you slow down and use the senses

2. <https://rietveldacademie.nl/en/page/384/txt-textile>

differently. This state of full attention is missing in spheres of work at art institutions or at universities. The speed at which we are supposed to organize, create and work is outdated. The arts can feed off practices that can be intimate, solitary, unspectacular and boring, but require that you are fully present with your body.

Quinn Latimer: For years now, in every class I teach, I have spent an afternoon reading Etel Adnan's book length poem *The Arab Apocalypse* out loud in a circle with my students. This experience of an incredible poet, painter and thinker's words requires long-term endurance, and gets them paying attention, listening, practicing patience and moving through fluctuations of boredom. It creates a different register in the institutional room of the art school that makes it a space of intimacy, virtuosity and appreciation, which is refreshing and rejuvenating.

Mercedes Azpilicueta: My art is informed by my experience as an educator and vice versa. I teach methodologies and that is crucial in my practice: *how* are we making things and what are the ethics behind that? When putting up an exhibition, creating a long-term project or partnering with an institution, I find it important to create workshops, to bring educational institutions into the exhibition spaces and vice-versa, to stimulate a collective way of creating. Working with different generations is very inspiring. Having studied art twenty years ago at a traditional art school in Buenos Aires, the experimental pedagogies that I encounter at Rietveld mean that I learn from my younger students and that I am un-learning or transforming my ways of doing.

Quinn Latimer: You want to model a political, ethical, virtuosic practice for your students, yet it is often their work that leaves me inspired. Students have the ability to surprise you because they are not yet engulfed in the visual languages of the contemporary art world that calcify quickly and that we, in turn, discard quickly. The pedagogical or hierarchical distance between me and my MA student dissipates very quickly as they become friends and artists I work with.

Géraldine Gourbe: When we talk about language we like to talk about its political notion of performativity. This becomes abstract and theoretical, yet in reading texts aloud, we can experiment with questions of flesh, with putting our own or others' words in our mouth. It is something that is very transgressive for me to share with an audience or with students.

Quinn Latimer: As a poet I'm interested in tropes and clichés, such as the "O!" in English romantic poetry. This capital "O" often becomes a gendered mouth. Poet and classicist Anne Carson talks about a notation in Greek in the form of a series of vowels that represent the sounds that women make women that can't be read aloud: exclamations of grief and violence that become a contaminating force. While much has been written about women's language and mouths, this doesn't lose its power.

Mercedes Azpilicueta: I started reading poetry behind a piece of paper as a practice of declamation and later moved into performance, which involved my own body and that of others, as well as the institution as a space. I started making objects that I consider to be bodies in themselves. The vocality of poetry and language took me further into my own flesh, the flesh that surrounds me, that I make and that I take from the space and context where I work.

Quinn Latimer: As I started performing my texts, I modulated my rhythm and my voice so that it felt like I was breathing in unison with the audience. There is an awareness that you are taking in and releasing breath at the same time as they are; we're reading together even if I'm the only one uttering the words. When you perform language in a room, you are trying to do something through the medium of your voice: you can calm down or speed up the audience, put them in a trance or under a spell.



Discussion 2: Tominga O'Donnell & Marnie Slater Chairwoman: Géraldine Gourbe

Queer Tools: Incentives and Transformative Action

Marnie Slater: I want to focus on two feminist and queer collaborations that have been central to a research project that I'm doing at Sint Lucas Antwerpen. It is focussed on process and on how we can activate queer and feminist aims within our relations with each other.

*Buenos Tiempos, Int.*³ is a collaboration between myself and Alberto García del Castillo, a Spanish curator and writer, that started in 2013 as an online exhibition space out of an urgent need for a conversation about queer and feminist making in the Brussels art scene, that developed into us producing work and events together. We're currently experimenting with sub-granting: we apply for money within the French-speaking community in Belgium, and in turn do an open call for queer and feminist artist projects. We also use transvestism as a tool of celebration and of experimentation within the spheres of power within the art world. I transvestited as Beatrix Ruf to reproduce iconic images of her, and we performed a reproduction of Federico García Lorca's *The Public*, in which we transvestited as Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé.

*Mothers & Daughters*⁴ is an ephemeral lesbian and trans bar that exists within Brussels for a limited period of time on an annual basis since 2017. Brussels had not had an out lesbian bar in around 15 years, it was simply the kind of space that my collaborators from *Girls Like Us* magazine⁵ desired to hang out in. Instead of programming an event for an institution's *Future is Feminist* season in Brussels, we negotiated to take over their bar for three nights. We use the bar menu as a tool. There is Menu A and Menu B which are exactly the same on each side, except the prices are different. Menu A is a serving price and Menu B is increased by the gender gap in Belgium, which, on top of the gender pay gap, includes elements like access to political representation or permanent job opportunities. In 2018 it was 24%, so Menu B was 24% more expensive. We invite people who engage with the menu to reflect on privilege in a broad sense which includes the intersection of gender, race, class, ableism, etc.

In 2019, within *Mothers & Daughters*, we started "doing the weather" at our meetings: we dedicate 10 to 15 minutes to everyone in the room to share how they are feeling on that day. This put the notion of productivity to the side, and

3. <http://buenostiemposinternational.com/productions/>

4. <https://www.mothersanddaughters.be/about>

5. <https://www.girlslikeusmagazine.com/>

brought emotionality and relationality into the space. It changed the sensitivity that we brought to each other in a meeting context.

Tominga O'Donnell: I ran the *Munchmuseet on the Move*⁶ project for 5 years, which took as its point of departure the move from where the old museum was situated when it opened in 1963, down to the waterfront where the new museum opened in October of 2021. There were 16 main art projects that highlighted marginalized or ignored aspects of the various neighborhoods it traversed in what I described as a queer curatorial approach. I used a very loose definition of queer: I invited artists who identified as queer in their personal lives, who had a queer approach to their project, but also those whose projects could only be seen as queer in a very expansive sense in order to open up to more things that had been othered by the dominant social order.

I had originally received funding for the inaugural project by Sam Hultin called *I'm Every Lesbian – Oslo*⁷ as a freelancer. When I joined the Munchmuseet – a museum dedicated to the work of Edvard Munch (1863–1944) it seemed quite important to find a way to critique the institution from the inside and to provide a space to circumvent this very male narrative that was being perpetuated by their programmes at the time in the so-called +Munch series. Hultin's project related to the notions of remembering and reclaiming. It gathered various personal and societal narratives which became different points on the map which were then retold in the form of a city walk. It allowed us to take up space in the city and move through it as a collective body, rendering queer histories physical and honoring the pioneers from the 1950s and 60s who had run illicit clubs and cafés from their homes.

The float for the Oslo Pride parade for *Trollkrem Import*⁸, programmed by Tor Erik Bøe, represents the concepts of celebration and joy. Though one can talk about Pride being commercialized, it is important to see it as an original expression of celebration. The parade float was just one iteration of a performance art tour that ran along the main street in Grønland in downtown Oslo and used buildings that were not typically art spaces, such as Ivars Kro, the old pub where Seth Bogart, Vaginal Davis and Dynasty Handbag performed.

The 16th and last project was a film cabaret by Danish duo Kirsten Astrup and Maria Bordorff⁹ called *Summer Night by the Beach*¹⁰, a title which was taken from a painting by Edward Munch. It departs from an historical cabaret stage that was active in Oslo in the early 1900s and reimagines it sometime in the future. A lot of the projects were anchored in a local context through some kind of historical connection, which then used speculation as a tool.

6. <https://www.munchmuseet.no/en/munchmuseet-on-the-move/>

7. <https://www.munchmuseet.no/en/exhibitions/archive/2016/im-every-lesbian---oslo/>

8. <https://www.munchmuseet.no/en/exhibitions/archive/2018/trollkrem-import/>

9. <https://www.astrup-bordorff.com/>

10. <https://www.munchmuseet.no/en/exhibitions/archive/2019/summer-night-by-the-beach/>

Géraldine Gourbe: How does belonging to the queer community give you endurance, vision and the confidence to keep going inside the mainstream art institution?

Tominga O'Donnell: In Norway for the “Year of Queer Culture” in 2022, institutions that have not engaged with queerness before are now frantically trying to queer their programme in order to receive funding. I feel that in some sense I am in a privileged position to be embedded in some of the different queer communities because it enables me, in a very concrete way, to have a network to set up these conversations. At the same time, it is important to not become over-confident and to not lose sight of the shift in responsibility that occurs from being a curator on a short-term contract to becoming a representative of a big institution.

Rachel Anderson, one of the advisers at *Munchmuseet on the Move* who used to work at *Artangel*¹¹ and now runs her own project called *Idle Women*¹², pointed out that enthusiasm in the face of a conservative institution is a queer strategy. This is the expansive sense of “queer”. Having fun is regenerative and restorative, it is at least something we can do in this world of excess and exhaustion. You can't feel enthusiasm and joy all the time, but you can celebrate it when you do, and it can be contagious. You can get people on board by communicating “this is fun and you should be supporting it”.

Géraldine Gourbe: There is a difference between enthusiasm as a process and as a value. It can also be understood as a capitalist injunction that you have to be enthusiastic or happy.

Marnie Slater: SEHAQ is a collective for LGBTQIA+ refugees in Amsterdam, particularly focussed on lesbian and trans refugees. One of their main practices is to organize parties: it is a political imperative for them to create spaces of celebration and of joy for the refugee community. To say “we need resources in order to celebrate” is important. Within so-called minority positions there is almost an expectation that resources will be given if you're sad. We should also remember that pride itself is a celebration of resistance against police violence.

Géraldine Gourbe: Marnie, you used a definition of queer that I enjoyed: “queer for me is more a process and less about the question of representation”.

Marnie Slater: Part of the frustration with representation as an end goal within an institutional context is the assumption that institutions only have faces, whereas it has flesh, muscles, bones, people, architectures, processes, and money behind it. A queer feminist and anti-racist position is to demand a commitment to transformation beyond representation.

11. <https://www.artangel.org.uk/>

12. <https://www.idlewomen.org/>

Géraldine Gourbe: I get the impression that considering the creation of documentation or an archive before an event is important to both of you.

Tominga O'Donnell: I made a small book for every project in *Munchmuseet on the Move* and gathered them all in a box which became a sort of portable mini monument over the programme in its totality. You can't create an indexical relationship or equivalent experience to being present for a performance, but a more traditional image archive that exists separate from it allows you to put it in a referential frame.

Marnie Slater: In 2018, *Mothers & Daughters* had a sisterspace which was an exhibition on lesbian history in Belgium that focussed on ephemera. This year we're working on an exhibition on trans and non-binary history, which the archives that are supposed to be representative of our communities are often blind to. A refusal of documentation puts the imperative on oral storytelling which is powerful in intergenerational exchange. In the context of this 2018 exhibition, we organised *Herstory Sunday* which gathered some of the older lesbian generation in Brussels to share stories with each other and with a younger or other community. Within *Buenos Tiempos* and my own practice we use orality as a form of distribution of texts that we don't have the legal right to publish: we can think about the voice as a publishing medium.

Tominga O'Donnell: For Sam Hultin's project, stories were gathered, written down, printed, spoken and recorded in Swedish, Norwegian and English, and finally geolocated to the respective sites. Technology offers a possibility of rethinking how stories can be retold in order to reach wider audiences or to become more accessible. If we don't do the work of recording these important personal histories a lot of these voices will disappear. You have to fight people's resistance to seeing themselves as important to history at large.



Conclusion: Elvira Dyangani Ose

I want to revisit some of the moments in the different presentations and my responses to them, starting with the question raised by Mercedes Azpilicueta and Quinn Latimer on how art-making can be used in the formulation of an institution. Premesh Lalu, with whom I worked at the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2015 (GIBCA), argues in his book *The Deaths of Hintsa* for a postcolonial critique of Apartheid and for new models of writing and narrating history. Through conversations with artists, we could apply this by thinking about the craft of an artwork in both history-writing and the making of institutions. Art and the strategies of artists such as Kerry James Marshall or Carlos Motta have marked my way of institution-making. Their work not only expands the notion of queerness but also demands a commitment to transformation of the establishment. Yet, as became clear throughout the sessions, it should be noted feminism and gender have been established both as a space of possibility and transformation as much as a space of burden. The notion of enthusiasm, however, is one tool that offers such transformative possibilities, and simultaneously speaks to a sense of collective agency.

The notion of the face as well as the privileging of the eyes and the gaze within institutions has a lot to do with representation. Sepake Angiama and Vanessa Desclaux discussed the possibilities of feminist institution-making by creating embodied institutions that offer spaces for mediation and slowing down in a manner that goes beyond the eyes, and involves our entire bodies. We can imagine a diverse institution that allows for all bodies to appropriate it, to feel like they belong, beyond ableist and heteronormative criteria.

The conversation between Émilie Renard, Dora García and Marthe Ramm Fortun called for honest discussions about working conditions in the art world and a need for transparency. While institutions advertise with notions of affection and care, they are not truly implemented. Questions on subjects such as funding, as raised by both Antonio Cataldo and Tominga O'Donnell, force us to consider our own complicity in neoliberalism for the sake of the survival of the institution.

Xabier Arakistain's and Elisabeth Lebovici's discussion showed that there is still a lot that can be done to create a feminist exhibition, let alone a feminist institution. One of my issues now is that perhaps I feel more African than I feel feminist. Sometimes it is very difficult to connect certain notions of feminism that are still charged by a lack of diversity or a lack of a narrative with which I can identify.

Nanne Buurman's account of the Venice Biennial brought forward that you cannot talk about beauty or joy without addressing the effort that precarious, marginalized positions bring to it: notions of pain and challenge, invisibilized communities, anonymous labor, the curatorial unconscious and the question of infrastructure. The harsher aspects that were treated, such as madness, are not necessarily about what is painful or challenging. While I come from an animist

culture, this cannot be addressed in Western terms, because Western parents educate their children to not have fear. There is a component in animism around fear that is crucial.

Building on the definitions of the notion of care proposed by Helena Reckitt and Julie Pellegrin, the creation of institutional spaces of care can be linked back to the “situated museum”. Within both frames of possibility and frames of restriction, we must be very conscious of the space that we occupy within socio-political, cultural, economic and pedagogical fields. We are hosted by society and a tool for cultural reproduction.

Recalling bell hooks’s notion of “*who’s in the classroom?*”, we must observe who is in the institutions and what conversations are needed. Gaining a sense of all the contributions of different actors in the scene is crucial. It is critical in the making of a feminist institution to have people come together to talk about the issues that matter to them in the communities that they live in, because what we are looking for in the end is something that perhaps hasn’t yet been defined.

As Elke Krasny posited, we are engaging in a production of time, beyond the production of normative space. While I admire *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre, I think he lost sight of what was happening in the French countryside and its former colonies. The pandemic has enabled us to recover a sense of time, and create spaces of care through these online conversations with people around the world.

Q&A with the audience

Tominga O'Donnell: Elvira, you seem to have assumed the responsibility that comes with the power and potential for change associated with of a directorial position, but maybe not its conventional expectations? How are things different when you're in the director's chair?

Elvira Dyangani Ose: We take the role of dissidents. All my life I have been responding to something. Every exhibition I would make would be an intervention into an institution or scene in order to create a platform for the unheard and unnamed. The fact of being in the position of director in an institution like MACBA is a shift in its structure, first because I am a woman, and second because I am black. But I still have all the work to do: I don't want to be tokenistic, I want to really change the institution, to set up the space, create a platform, and plant the seed, even if this transformation will not happen within the time I am here. Regarding temporality, I don't feel the anxiety of having to leave my mark. Through the *Possible Museum*¹³ project at MACBA, we try to understand what might have gotten lost in moving rapidly to the next season or next director. I want to help junior colleagues find their voices within their departments, because 95% of women working in MACBA have been invisibilized behind the position of the director. I do not want to be the face of the institution, I want it to be my entire team. I don't want to replicate a model in which I am the author of ideas that inform internal strategies. It must be said however that despite my position there are things I cannot do, but I will give a platform to those who have been invisibilized or are in precarious situations. Part of the project is to review the labor conditions of, and agreements with the artists that we work with, so that we can talk with much softer and gentler language about production within those relationships. We need to engage in co-production. In a project that we want to do with our neighbors we want them to tell us what they want from us so that institution-making can become a conversation.

Géraldine Gourbe: In all of the speakers' projects, something that is crucial is the resistance to the personal authority of the signature, whether you are in the position of museum or art center director, teacher or performer, and I think this is profoundly feminist.

Summary written by Eleni Pantelaras for DCA, 2022
Coordination: Marie Chênél

13. <https://www.macba.cat/en/about-macba/programme-2022/a-possible-museum>

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