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SOCIAL REPRODUCTION STRUGGLES AND ART HISTORY: AN INTRODUCTION

Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd

THE PRESENT, THE CRISIS, THE STRUGGLE

This special issue explores approaches to social reproduction in art history. These approaches are relevant to debates that engage feminist critique and that cross into art practice and theory. While ‘social reproduction’ has historically referred to processes attending to the replenishment of labour-power as well as the maintenance of human life traditionally performed by women for free in the home, recent theorisations have offered a more expansive account to stress the concept’s value in elaborating non-reductionist accounts of capitalist production more broadly.¹ Here, we seek to explicitly connect the concept of social reproduction with that of struggle; the ongoing struggle of feminism. We use feminism in the singular, challenging the fragmenting plural ‘feminisms’ that surfaced at a particular moment to address and ‘tidy up’ the multiple perspectives circulating on the object and subjects of this struggle.² This splintering was not a random outcome carried out of theoretical debates. Rather, as the feminist struggle’s complexity grew, so did socio-economic divides that cut so deep as to invite some sort of compromise, some sort of accommodation of the diversity of

¹ See Kate Bexanson and Meg Luxton, eds, *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism*, Montreal & Kingston, London and Ithaca, 2006 and Cinzia Arruzza, ‘Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and its Critics’, *Science & Society*, vol 80, no 1, January 2016, pp 9–30. Marina Vishmidt offers a careful and illuminating account of the histories of the debates on social reproduction in her essay included here. Beth Capper then expands on her account, attending to the racialised division of labour specifically in relation to the perspective of Black Women for Wages for Housework.

² Indicatively, see Robyn R. Warhol, Diane Price Herndl, eds, *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ, 1991 and its updated edition in 2009; Jenny Coleman, ‘An Introduction to Feminisms in a Post-feminist Age’, *Women’s Studies Journal*, vol 23, no 2, November 2009, pp 3-13; Malin Hedlin Heyden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, eds, *Feminisms Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Cambridge Scholars Publishers, Newcastle, 2010

positions in order to forge inclusivity. But, to us, the pluralisation of feminism into feminisms has not signalled, or achieved, inclusivity but rather an opting for parallel (as in never meeting) discourses and trajectories that threaten to hold feminism hostage to a divided field of micro-politics and relativist perspectives inherited from postmodernism. In opposing this trend – which appeared in the early 1990s, right when ‘post-feminism’ was about to be dropped as an extinguishing blanket on the intellectual and political fire feminism had lit – social reproduction is deployed here as a complex framework of potential references and directions in which the diverse concerns of the feminist struggle can hopefully enter a dialogue.

We see this dialogue as central to feminism’s intersections with art history in the twenty-first century - that is, in how feminism can move forward at a time that has been defined in terms of a ‘crisis’. Some have identified the crisis society is faced with as a social reproduction crisis. As George Kaffentzis notes, the perception that capitalism was evolving into a social reproduction crisis goes back at least to the early 1990s, when his own understanding developed in proximate relation to the ‘Zapatista revolution’ in Mexico.³ We consider this association between social reproduction and revolution important, and see in social reproduction feminism an essential question: if feminism can be revolutionary, what is its revolution about? If this apprehension of a social reproduction crisis was gaining traction at the time among a relatively small circle of intellectuals and activists connected with Autonomist Marxism, the exacerbated conditions of misery, anger, disillusionment, and division defining global capitalism – plain for all to see in 2017 – have contributed to the increased popularity of this idea today. Indeed, the recent revival of social reproduction debates suggests that a crisis needs to be addressed, or at least discussed. The urgency of this task cannot be underestimated, as capitalism has stopped working even where it used to – that is, in the ‘advanced’ economies or what used to be ‘the West’.⁴

³ George Kaffentzis, ‘On the Notion of a Crisis of Social Reproduction: A Theoretical Review’, *The Commoner* 5, Autumn 2002, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/caffentzis05.pdf>, accessed 10 March 2017

⁴ Here we do not invoke arguments about capitalism stalling or the alleged advent of post-capitalism. Rather, we allude to liberal arguments such as that pursued in Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, Basic Books, New York, 2003, which appear far less plausible after the austerity turn. On the ambivalence and ‘formerisation’ of the term ‘the West’, see Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, eds, *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, BAK, Utrecht and Cambridge MA, The MIT Press, 2016

There are many ways in which we can proceed from here in describing the nature of the disaster – by which we mean both that something is being destroyed and that this process constitutes a disaster for the societies that experience it. What is being destroyed is the ‘welfare state’, the very thing that kept together western, liberal democracies and for which an earlier workforce exchanged its prospect of rebellion. It is being destroyed at a time when two processes are under way: first, while globalisation expressed both as arms trade and as extension and reconfiguration of colonialism (note the move of China to Africa, note the Syrian civil war and its origins) generate millions of dispossessed; secondly, as capital is undoing the workforce into a ‘precariat’ generating unemployment, underemployment and greater poverty and debt-bondage extending from students to sovereign states. Combined, these two processes institute an updated regime of scarcity, regulated and managed by the political decision to up the antagonism. European states frantically closing their borders not just to ‘economic immigrants’ but also to refugees is principally driven by right-wing populism inveighing against the grab of welfare services by the ‘new arrivals’. But when we read that in the UK those hit by ‘austerity’ are expected to be mainly women – a devastating 86% by 2020 – we understand that gender inequality is at the heart of capital’s unsocial work; its commitment to dissolving anything that stands in the way of its own reproduction.⁵ While the social reproduction crisis is disproportionately lived through by women, it is interesting to note that, at the same time, the *crisis of labour*, reported to accompany capitalist globalisation, has been identified with a crisis of masculinity, thanks to the humiliation and redundancy of the so called white male industrial proletariat.⁶

These two differently named ‘crises’ seem then to have a specifically gendered subject at their core – an observation that we find alarming since they implicitly accede to the over-familiar division: labour is publicly performed and belongs to men while something-else-than-labour is privately performed and belongs to women. In some social and intellectual contexts, we may have moved from a biologically based to a socially based construction of ‘men’ and ‘women’ as complex collective subjects, but subverting the binary introduced

⁵ Heather Stewart, ‘Women Bearing 86% of Austerity Burden, Commons Figures Reveal’, *The Guardian*, 9 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/women-bearing-86-of-austerity-burden-labour-research-reveals>, accessed 10 March 2017

⁶ See Norbert Trenkle, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Working Man: Towards a Critique of Modern Masculinity’ (2008) in Neil Larsen *et al*, eds, *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, MCM’, Chicago, 2014

through (rather than by) labour has somehow been harder to achieve. As if proof of this binary was missing, when in 2016, the *pater familias* billionaire Donald Trump was elected president of the US, ‘rust belt workers’ were seen as an important constituency whose years of labour-related humiliation led to this outcome.⁷ Yet, what comes under the designation ‘labour’ is precisely what social-reproduction feminism strives to re-script today. And there are at least two ways to interpret the previous sentence: on the one hand, it points to a re-scripting that re-opens the file ‘productive and unproductive’ labour, asking whether the distinction should exist at all; on the other hand, it points to a re-scripting of what constitutes labour and whether it is still essential for the valorisation of capital in the always specific, yet changing, conditions of capitalism as an economy that is not just the economy.

Since the 1980s (yet much later in art theory), we have been accustomed to critical appraisals of capital’s re-organisation of production under the umbrella term ‘post-Fordism’.⁸ Despite its definition, scope, and the periodisation these introduce being still debated, post-Fordism is seen to display certain signal traits: computerisation-management and obsolescence of unskilled or even sectors of skilled labour,⁹ flexibilisation and a consequently notable imbrication of ‘work’ and ‘life’ (the entry of private life into the formal economy), fragmentation and dispersal of the production process (from manufacture to the service industry), and a general weakening of the position of the individualised labouring subject that finds herself/himself often isolated in the transactions with capital as the economy.¹⁰ The dissolution of the welfare state is not unrelated to this loss of power – if we are to follow the argument that regarded ‘the welfare state as the Fordist state’.¹¹ But then,

⁷ Perry Anderson, ‘Why the System Will Still Win’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2017, <https://mondediplo.com/2017/03/02brexit>, accessed 25 March 2017

⁸ In relation to art, see Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2010 and Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle, eds, *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2011

⁹ Indicatively, see Damien Gayle, ‘Robots ‘Could Replace 250,000 Public Sector Workers’’, *The Guardian*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/06/robots-could-replace-250000-uk-public-sector-workers>, accessed 29 March 2017

¹⁰ On the gendering of post-Fordism see Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*, Cambridge, Polity Press 2015

¹¹ G. Frederick Thompson, ‘Fordism, Post-Fordism, and the Flexible System of Production’, undated, Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon,

the paradigmatic affliction suffered by women under austerity capitalism is very closely connected with the question of the crisis of labour – which is, thus, *not* the sad prerogative of men. A number of recent feminist studies, among which we would highlight Nancy Fraser’s and Hester Eisenstein’s (both from 2009), have suggested that capital successfully (ab)used women’s struggles for mass access to waged, productive labour (that is, for exiting the home) to push forth structural changes in production detrimental to the lives and work of most people, as experienced today.¹² The return to social reproduction is occurring in this dismal context, and it entails a rethinking of the *composition of a global working class*, such as that by Tithi Bhattacharya.¹³ As feminism in the art field fought for women’s recognition as creative subjects in a way that would also place them as productive subjects, initiating a dialogue on how social reproduction underpins practices and processes, as well as the articulation and reproduction of the art field as we know it, is topical and even urgent. Our aim in putting together this special issue is not then to merely align feminist art and visual culture theory with the concerns that presently define a broader, interdisciplinary feminist thought (though admittedly, this was a motive), or to bring together scattered instances of the subject’s address that have considerably delayed social-reproduction research in art, but to review and expand an apparatus of critique and strategic resistance to how capitalism uses the racialised gender divide that it relentlessly brings forth.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN THE EXPANDED (ART) FIELD

In her contribution to this special issue, Marina Vishmidt, whose work in connecting art and social reproduction has been foundational, calls attention to distinct paths by which ‘social

http://www.willamette.edu/~fthompson/MgmtCon/Fordism_&_Postfordism.html, accessed 10 March 2017

¹² Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, *New Left Review*, 56, 2009; Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit Women*, Paradigm, Boulder CO, 2009

¹³ See Tithi Bhattacharya, ‘How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labour and the Global Working Class’, *Viewpoint Magazine*, 5, 31 October 2015, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/how-not-to-skip-class-social-reproduction-of-labor-and-the-global-working-class/>, accessed 24 March 2017. See especially the section headed ‘Social Reproduction Framework as Strategy’.

reproduction’ becomes relevant to an analysis of the art field overall.¹⁴ Discussing both the thematisation of reproductive labour in art *and* the institution of art as a form of reproduction, she points to the contemporary re-invigoration of debates that originate in the early 1970s.¹⁵ We wish, however, to clarify a point that Vishmidt does not stress; that at its crucial point of formation, its genesis in the 1970s, feminist art history and theory does *not* engage ‘social reproduction’, despite the partial grounding of some of its key texts in Marxist theory.¹⁶ Our contention here is that bringing a social reproduction perspective to the art field prizes open alternative lineages, reuniting us with the 1970s in quite a different way than as ‘fans’ of a concluded struggle.¹⁷ In what can be described as a *first current*, Silvia Federici, one of the figureheads of social reproduction feminism, described the ‘labour of love’ that capital expects for free and with a smile. From an ‘ideological’ perspective this labour’s non-remuneration or low pay ensures its successful presentation as non-work, or its irrelevance to the economy split between finance and the high street. That a more integrative and expansive account of ‘social reproduction’ has been in demand of late – one capable of passing *beyond* the household and the domestic to incorporate public services such as healthcare and the (re)production of social values – is indicative of a pressing requirement for access to a bigger picture which is nevertheless capable of rendering visible the nuanced dimensions of capitalist social relations (indeed, of capital as a social relation). This demand finds resonance with current developments in Marxist and decolonial interventions in art history where similar calls are made. And so, while Vishmidt’s enquiry implicitly calls attention to the notable lack of traction that discussions on social reproduction have secured in the field of art

¹⁴ Vishmidt’s previous publications on this topic include Marina Vishmidt, ‘Counter (Re-)Productive Labour’, *Auto Italia South East*, 4 April 2012, <http://autoitaliasoutheast.org/news/counter-re-productive-labour/>, accessed 21 June 2017

¹⁵ Indicatively, see the publication of Silvia Federici’s anthology of essays tracing four decades of her work in this area, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, PM Press, Oakland, CA, 2012, and the ‘Special Issue on Social Reproduction’, *Historical Materialism*, 24, 2, 2016

¹⁶ See Griselda Pollock, ‘Whither Art History?’, *Art Bulletin* 96/1 (2014), pp 9-23 where on p10 Pollock notes that she was introduced to the work of Federici in May 2012 ‘by a younger feminist art historian, Jaleh Mansoor’.

¹⁷ On the proposition to approach feminism as fans, see Catherine Grant, ‘Fans of Feminism: Re-writing Histories of Second Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art’, *Oxford Art Journal* vol 34, no 2, 2011, pp 265-286

history and art theory, this special issue begins to address this absence in asking first, whether such a perspective can, and should, instigate *a rethinking of art history in terms of a history of labour* and second, what methodologies would be required for such a paradigm shift.¹⁸

What insights can then be gained from embedding the concept of social reproduction in art's critical lexicon for the twenty-first century? The short answer to this is: more than we could accommodate in a journal issue, especially one that happened to coincide (though maybe there is no such thing as coincidence) with a new intensity in the clash of racialised patriarchal capitalism and feminist consciousness. We write these lines shortly after the International Women's Strike on March 8, 2017 voiced the demand for, and invoked the possibility of, a transnational, if not global, counter-offensive in defence of feminism – indeed, a 'feminism of the 99%'.¹⁹ Inspired by Poland's Black Monday (October 3, 2016) where women went on strike against a threatened total ban to abortion, the March 8, 2017 strike also sought to connect women's power in production with women's power over reproduction. Women were to strike from paid work and from 'emotional labour'. Predictably, the issue of strike has been salient in recent debates on artistic labour, which revisit a relatively obscure(d) past of art militancy as conditions of labour in the art field are deteriorating.²⁰ But although this special issue concludes with a conversation on labour in the art field among a curator, a theorist, and an artist (Helena Reckitt, Dani Childs, Jenny Richardson), we were unable to include an article-length interrogation of the strike in the gendered field of cultural work, despite social reproduction feminists having questioned the efficacy of a transposition of an industrial method of militancy to a field where lives are dependent on the unbroken continuation of labour. We were also unable to include a

¹⁸ It is notable that art did not feature in either *Historical Materialism's* or *Viewpoint's* special issue on social reproduction, from 2016 and 2015 respectively.

¹⁹ See Angela Davis *et al*, 'Beyond Lean-In: For a Feminism of the 99% and a Militant International Strike on March 8', *Viewpoint Magazine*, 3 February 2017, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/02/03/beyond-lean-in-for-a-feminism-of-the-99-and-a-militant-international-strike-on-march-8/>, accessed 24 March 2017

²⁰ Indicatively, see Coco Fusco, 'Why an Art Strike? Why Now?', *Hyperallergic*, 10 January 2017, <http://hyperallergic.com/350529/why-an-art-strike-why-now/>, accessed 24 March 2017; Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, Verso, London, 2016; the panel 'Artistic Strike' (16 January 2015) at the Radical Philosophy Conference 2015 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, available at <https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/audio/38263>, accessed 24 March 2017

contribution on the social reproduction of LGBTQ lives, which, as Nat Raha observes, remain neglected in the literature; or, an analysis tackling practices that address the environmental catastrophe perpetrated by capital, despite the fact that this concern – exemplified by the dispute over whether ‘anthropocene’ or ‘capitalocene’ is the apt name of the catastrophe-in-progress – has been central to social reproduction feminism for years now.²¹ Other gaps include work that addresses the political principle of the common in relation to institutional critique and the flourishing of an informal art economy as a troubled commons sustaining the social reproduction of the art field today – though we do touch on this later in this introduction. Yet if we feel compelled to name some notable omissions, we see this collection of texts as a first step in research to come. The thematics traced in this special issue – the artist’s home as the hub of social networking; the intimacy tales woven into the division of labour in radical moments of filmic representation; takes on, and protest over, social reproduction in urban space; practices of collecting the remains of appropriated life; questions on the difficulty of refusal in the art field; readings of social reproduction in the artwork or in the instituent practices of ‘useful art’- certainly testify to a possibility of a radical re-scripting and re-mapping.

That said, it should by now be obvious that Vishmidt is right to caution in her article here against the infinite expansion of social reproduction to encompass the (in)conceivable range of practices that construe the gendered social field, the art field, and their dynamic inter-connection, which does not of course arise in theory but is experienced as a material fact. This material fact, and its gendered history, is not a new feature of capitalist modernity, as shaped in the nineteenth century. But as Lara Perry’s article in this special issue suggests, the strong connection of the social field and the art field enabled by the gendered ‘spheres’ can illuminate in surprising ways the differentiated positions of ‘women artists’ as a crucial

²¹ Nat Raha, ‘Queering Marxist [Trans]Feminism: Queer and Trans Social Reproduction’, paper presented at the *First Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca Queer Conference*, L’Aquila, Italy, 1 April 2017; on the Anthropocene debate, see, indicatively, Donna Haraway, ‘Tentacular Thinking: Antropocene, Capitalocene, Chtulocene’, *eflux journal* 75, September 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>, accessed 24 March 2017. Numerous studies connect social reproduction and the environment. Indicatively, see Wendy Harcourt and Ingrid L. Nelson, eds, *Practising Feminist Political Ecologies: Moving beyond the ‘Green Economy’*, Zed Books, London, 2015 as well as the landmark Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, Zed Books, London, 1998 [1986]

category of feminist art history. Given that social reproduction has mainly been connected with the contemporary art field, Perry's analysis is an opening towards a much needed, in our opinion, re-conceptualising of art history as a history of labour that stretches 'from industrialisation to globalisation', as put by the title of the 2016 Association of Art Historians annual conference strand on which this special issue has drawn. Perry's most notable finding for anyone working on the contemporary (where social networking and free labour are key) would be the amount of social labour (if we can call it that), straddling the 'affective' and the 'material', that London-based artists' careers required in the nineteenth century and the exemplary role that rigid combinations of class and gender played in the realisation of such labour as the invisible art-world infrastructure located in the artist's home. Here, we are returned to Lise Vogel's earlier identification of a need for historical work to be undertaken from a social reproduction perspective on the precise character of women's complex and differentiated oppression in class-societies.²² Reading Perry's account made us wonder how, upon the loss of that human infrastructure, women (especially with children) in the contemporary art field can achieve at least partial visibility. The domestic technology revolutions in the second half of the twentieth century have been unable to replace the labour of care and sociality provided in the nineteenth-century artist's home. Rather, they have been used to help women forget earlier radical calls for the collectivisation of housework.²³ Greg Sholette's oft-mentioned 'dark matter' of invisible art labour or 'participation' sustaining the contemporary art world must, at some point, be connected with the history of a long artistic modernity as a terrain of hierarchised labour that exceeds even what 'dark matter' (referring to labour and participation *in* the art field) can encompass.²⁴

Elisa Adami and Alex Fletcher's take on Anne-Marie Mieville and Jean-Luc Godard's *Numero Deux* (1975) testifies however on the significance of technological imagination for radicalising the analysis of the home as the faux-comfort-zone of the private/public divide on which industrial capitalism thrived – or used to. In the West, the

²² Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, Pluto Press, London, 1983, p 177

²³ On these suppressed calls see Binna Choi, 'Introduction – Reproducing Revolution' in Binna Choi and Maiko Tanaka, eds, *Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*, Casco, Utrecht and Valiz, Amsterdam 2014

²⁴ Greg Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011

1970s is the moment not only of feminism but also of the popularisation of the ‘social factory’, a key term we inherit from Operaismo (Workerism).²⁵ In *Numero Deux*, we are no longer in the artist’s home but in the working-class home located in social housing in some European city edge. Today, a father coming and going to the apartment and a stay-at-home mother most likely connote the lost ideal of the ‘family wage’ – of which the film, treating the home as a depressing yet inevitable extension of the factory, offers a most powerful subversion. The home as part of an encroaching social factory economy figures both in the film’s logic of production (the home-movie) and the representation of working-class life as a gendered everyday. *Numero Deux* revels in dualisms and dualities – all, predictably, in need of ‘deconstruction’, to recall a buzzword of 1970s feminist critique both in film theory and art history. Yet the film’s investment in the everyday of a ‘white’ working-class family places a wedge between the possibility of deconstruction in representational spaces and in ‘real life’ where doing the washing is – as the father explains to his daughter – the mother’s ‘factory’ while for him it is the opposite: the ‘home’. Acknowledging the spread of factory logic to relations and interacting subjects of intimacy (the couple, parents and children, the ‘nuclear family’) does not lead to this logic’s abolition but just to conceding to the existence of different/gendered ‘automated’ subjectivities. These persist.

The requirements of a nineteenth-century art world, where women’s *immaterial and material* labour in the home provided the invisible infrastructure to careers and the marketing of artworks (and which sustained the ‘family wage’ dream even in the 1970s), find their antithesis in the twenty-first-century ‘useful art’ – that is, useful artistic (and not least curatorial) labour, which now enters the art institution as the latter attempts to become a *visible* infrastructure. Usefulness, in this case, is not about the valorisation of capital but about sustaining the fabric of ‘life’, and so, with Arte Util (Useful Art) we are properly in the territory of a truly expanded art field. Useful Art brings forth ‘use value as an indisputably moral good’, to quote Larne Abse Gogarty in this special issue, who also notes the *political* stakes in art drawing society’s attention to use value against the hegemony of exchange value in historical and contemporary capitalism. Gogarty’s critique focuses on art institutions as

²⁵ The term is almost always connected with Mario Tronti’s book *Operai e Capitale* (1966) though as Federici notes the term is not actually mentioned in this work. See George Souvlis and Ankica Čakardić, ‘Feminism and Social Reproduction: An Interview with Silvia Federici’, *Salvage*, 19 October 2016, <http://salvage.zone/online-exclusive/feminism-and-social-reproduction-an-interview-with-silvia-federici/>, accessed 24 March 2017

sites where the conflict between utopianism and utilitarianism is played out in, and as, social reproduction. It is not so much that the art field becomes the outsourced site of social-reproduction duties on which the state has given up, but that, in its experimentation with the avant-garde's wish for 'art as life', the art institution 'confronts' the state and its limitations. However, Gogarty also identifies limitations in Useful Art, guided by this question: how can the political-ethical intentions of practicing the alternative avoid becoming useful to the 'enemy' - a word encountered in the opening of her analysis and betraying the sense of urgency that permeates overall the post-2000 revival of social reproduction debates. One of the most engaging issues Gogarty raises is the art institution's experimental appeal to the military as a context of useful tools and tactics. Yet three years after Nato Thomson discussed the intersections between 'military methodology' and art in *e-flux journal*, Fredric Jameson proposed the army as a viable candidate to manage the transition out of capitalism.²⁶ Published in 2016, his landmark manifesto *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* provides the core to a book where a number of critical Marxist and radical left theorists address the prospect of society organised as a military. As Kathi Weeks notes in the volume, the army is brought forth to address the need to collectivise social reproduction in order to reduce social reproduction labour to a minimum.²⁷ We can surmise that in utopia there will be no other labour than social reproduction labour – indeed, utopia is a post-work society (Weeks herself epitomises this position in her feminist theoretical project overall)²⁸ where the only labour left is social reproduction. But the *means to an end* narrative is what catches our attention in this turn to the army, for this is where the military and its connotation of violence come in. The de-coupling of social reproduction from a discourse of (feminist or other) pacifism is worth stressing.

THE VIOLENCE OF REPRODUCTION

²⁶ Nato Thomson, 'The Insurgents, Part I: Community-based Practice as Military Methodology', *e-flux journal* 47, September 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/47/60048/the-insurgents-part-i-community-based-practice-as-military-methodology/>, accessed 29 March 2017

²⁷ Kathi Weeks, 'The Seeds of Imagination' in Slavoj Žižek, ed, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, Verso, London, 2016

²⁸ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxist, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011

Deeply imbricated with reproduction, the concept of care (and its associated activities) has historically been drained of political relevance and import in the long modernity. In its recent rise to prominence, attention has been focused on the potential of care to counter the extractive, individualising pressures wrought by capitalist globalisation's processes of accumulation through new forms of 'care communities', 'reproductive commons' or, in the art field, instituting through strategies of taking 'care to power'.²⁹ While continuing to affirm the primacy of reproduction, others have pressed more prosaic survival strategies to the fore, a perspective encapsulated in what, for Malcolm Bull, remains the defining question of the times, namely 'how to extract from the global economy the means to stay alive' when globalisation is articulated in relation to biopolitics.³⁰

For many women, this increasingly necessitates dislocation and migration from the global south to take up caring positions in the north – poorly remunerated work that Rosemary Hennessy refers to in terms of 'abjection'.³¹ Analysing the cycling of the female labour force, this time in factories across Mexico and China, Melissa Wright has challenged the myth of the disposable third-world woman. Predicated on the worker's capacity to generate value and facilitate the *reproduction of capital* through her own *devaluation* towards worthlessness, such 'flexible' production conditions radically diminish the prospect of effective struggles over workers' capacity for regeneration. The undergirding narrative that Wright questions yokes apparently necessary – or even natural – destruction to capitalist development and modern progress.³² Though her subject is women, the connection she makes is a familiar one found in justifications of ecological decimation to colonialism, as seen in Manon Gaudet's contribution here. Connecting Indigenous dispossession through the systematic disruption and forced reformulation of traditions of social reproduction (both daily and generational) to settler-colonial collecting practices, Gaudet attends to contradictions of care, reproduction and violence in early twentieth-century Canada. Hers is one of two texts that engage these contradictions through 'the domestic' that is hardly contained as a small-

²⁹ Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Verso, London, 2015; Federici op cit; 'Instituting for the Contemporary', BAK Public Editorial Meeting, Utrecht, 11 April 2016

³⁰ Malcolm Bull, 'Introduction, Special Issue on Biopolitics', *New Left Review*, 45, May-June 2007, p 1

³¹ Rosemary Hennessy, *Fires on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2013

³² Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Routledge, New York and London, 2006, p 6

scale event cut off from the metanarrative of colonial dispossession. What kind of solidarity can ameliorate this metanarrative as women's lived reality - of friendship? of guilt? of hierarchy? - remains a question that far exceeds the framework of 'cultural heritage'. Approaching Lizzie Borden's cult film *Born in Flames* (1983) from the standpoint of social reproduction, Beth Capper discusses its multiple portrayals as a site of both labour and struggle. On the one hand, the film underscores the structural exclusion of women of colour and black women from specific (hegemonic) domestic and familial imaginaries while also stressing the dependency of these very imaginaries on their maintenance labour. On the other, household interiors in the film play host to the Women's Army as the women plan for insurgency, and Capper foregrounds the connection drawn by the film between militancy and care-orientated social reproduction.

A key point stands out for us with respect to Borden's vision of struggle in the analysis offered by Capper. First, its implicit framing as a mechanism not only of social transformation but of self-defence – a perspective powerfully captured in a scene depicting a gang of whistle-blowing feminist vigilantes amassing on their bicycles to thwart street harassment and sexual assault. The urgency of this requirement to 'fight back' finds contemporary relevance in increasing rejections of a liberal feminist commitment to non-violence – or, in the words of Dilar Dirik, 'passive-ism' – that insist upon the class and racial privilege of such positions and instead advocate self-protection as an indispensable modality of resistance.³³ Dirik draws on the experience of Kurdish women fighters in Rojava in Northern Syria, maintaining that, first, nothing less than a social revolution structured around the position of women is required to defeat the deep patriarchy represented by ISIS; and, second, that the conscious move to seize the means of reproduction and to experiment with alternatives must be at the core of this social revolution. Although a focused analysis of Rojava as a social revolution is regrettably absent from this special issue, the major issue it introduces – the question of insurgent violence – is structural to Capper's reading of *Born in Flames*. In this sense, Capper can be seen to reflect on a largely forgotten – and indeed delegitimised in liberal feminism – thread of the feminist imaginary, thought and, ultimately, struggle: that which has sought to spell out the violence that inheres in women's servitude as well as revolutionary counter-violence as a proposition that negates the parochial illustration

³³ Dilar Dirik, 'Feminist Pacifism or Passive-ism?,' *Open Democracy*, 7 March 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/dilar-dirik/feminist-pacifism-or-passive-ism>, accessed 21 March 2017

of the apparatus of care as a non-site for materially articulated insurgency. But whether, and how, this recognition of this double connection to violence through social reproduction will inform subsequent research remains to be seen.

At the same time, through this route we are allowed to ask whether challenging the naturalised connection of care culture with peace and comfort can be an opening towards understanding more broadly the connection of the social division of labour and violence. But this is just one debate; there are more, including on the thin line that may divide consent to maternal and parental subjectivity and coercion to reproduction. Ideology is not free from violence. The question of care labour alone in relation to a perceived sanctity of reproduction fuels major debates on queer parenthood that, as Maggie Nelson (citing Susan Freeman) notes, ‘places femininity, reproduction, and normativity on one side and masculinity, sexuality, and queer resistance on the other’. But does the ‘succinct slogan: Don’t produce and don’t reproduce’, attributed by Nelson to a ‘queer artist friend’ belong exclusively to queer politics?³⁴ No, is the short answer. And apparently, queer politics is not necessarily and always emancipated from gendering as ideology. Confronted with the mutation of patriarchal traditionalism into both neo-fascism and strands of seemingly emancipatory polemics, the feminism of the early twenty-first century cannot afford the accommodation and perpetuation of ‘taboo’ issues, and in so far as its struggles cross through art history (as a history of the division of labour), neither can the latter.

We imagine that Sheila Rowbotham’s *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, first published in 1972 and available in a new edition in 2013, can be infinitely expanded, but stress that in this imagined struggle without end, we pay greater heed to her words from 1971 ‘we walk and think and talk in living contradiction’ reiterating them as a question:³⁵ why, and for how long? A number of works associated with a loose feminist counter-canon engage or allude to individualised women’s violence – Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), Pipilotti Rist’s *Ever Is Overall* (2005), not to mention Orlan’s and Gina Pane’s undoing of their own corporeal space. The image of Ene-Liis Semper having her open mouth filled with

³⁴ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, Melville House, London, 2015, pp 93-94

³⁵ Rowbotham cited in Vinaj Bahl, ‘Reflections on the Recent Work of Sheila Rowbotham: Women’s Movements and Building Bridges’, *Monthly Review*, vol 48, no 6, November 1996, <https://monthlyreview.org/1996/11/01/reflections-on-the-recent-work-of-sheila-rowbotham/>, accessed 25 March 2017. See Sheila Rowbotham, *Women’s Liberation and New Politics*, Pamphlet n. 17, May Day Manifesto Group, London, 1971, p 10

soil and a flower planted in it (*Oasis*, 1999) is an image that lingers from the annals of post-Soviet, Estonian art – one that may or may not be read politically, that is, in terms of a public discourse on power and its enforcing silence and suffocation as the price that women must pay for ‘life’ to go on. But connecting the realm of private disarticulation of the gendered self, no matter how historically grounded, with feminist solidarity as insurgent violence is, for now, a ‘forgotten relation’, to borrow Helena Reckitt’s phrase from another context yet which also contributes to a history of memorial excisions that feminism has lived through.³⁶

THE FEMINIST COMMONS/THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION COMMONS

It is indeed of major interest that Dirik talks also about the self-management of cooperatives, communes and centres as a form of self-defence. The focus on the potential of feminist collectivity and – implicitly or explicitly – the possibility of a feminist commons are not new but their prospects remain severely marginalised in a society where social housing signifies (demonised) poverty rather than a social movement against capital and where mortgages signify upward social mobility as the petite bourgeoisie’s ideal. Worse, so far there is much unclarity as to whether, in collectivising the domestic, women would still continue to carry the burden of that sphere or whether, and how, such a reconfiguration of the everyday would be tied to the end of the gender division of labour. Perhaps worse still, we are nowhere near re-configuring the *feminist desire* for such a future into the political articulation of a *social need* that should be seen as merely identified by feminism but of pressing relevance to all.

The problem is hardly new. In her article for this issue, tellingly titled ‘Losing Ground?’, Victoria Horne discusses the activism of the Hackney Flashers in 1970s London, opening her examination by pointing to the collective ‘concentrating on the structural difficulties of organising childcare in an exploitative urban environment where the necessary reproduction of life was coming into increasing conflict with the productivity demands of capitalism.’ We can compare this assessment with Brian Holmes’s statement from 2016: ‘For the people, a crisis is measured by the lack of social welfare and civil liberties. For capital, a

³⁶ Helena Reckitt, ‘Forgotten Relations’ in Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, eds, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013

crisis is measured by the inability to manage a liberal free-trade regime.³⁷ How can we approach instances of '70s feminist art activism tackling the urgency of rethinking social reproduction from its future as our present? The struggle does go on but what are the questions to be asked that might allow us (us feminists) to not speak of a defeat that must be overcome without converting feminism into a gradual loss of ground, into a social form of progressive compromise? What about art? Horne goes on to stress the importance of holding on to the Hackney Flashers' commitment to agitprop. Their determined opposition to an 'art' frame resonates with current tensions aroused through 'artwashing', which has seen artists taking advantage of low-cost space accused of complicity with speculative developers now well-versed in the 'fine art of gentrification'.³⁸ When communities organise against the incursions of artists and galleries in order to maintain and protect their own capacities for home- and place-making, how can we grasp the complex intersections between different social practices of reproduction, with art as one among many? What kind of 'social' is being reproduced, and what is being erased? We ask these questions while we note that at least of two of the contributors to this special issue - Horne and Elke Krasny who discusses VALIE EXPORT's *Transparent Space* (Vienna, 2001) – have orientated their critique on practices that may address care but directly address public space. In the case of Krasny, the artwork-cum-exhibition space of EXPORT's room-size glass cube named *Transparent Space* is found to be dependent on a hidden care infrastructure that threatens to reveal the work's title as a misnomer. The work's function as a public artwork and exhibition space intended to increase the public visibility of women artists' work is also a testing ground of what actually enters the public as a space still associated with state funding and subsidies and what is left out – in this case, to be managed by the loose collectivism of what we might call a feminist commons: the women whose informal labour in looking after the glass cube complements formal (public) care provision. The debates on the triangulation of care at present – split between private/capital enterprise, public/state provision and (an implicitly independent from both)

³⁷ Brian Holmes, 'Live Your Models: Self-Orientation and Social Form', in Hlavajova and Sheikh, op cit, p 695

³⁸ Magally Miranda and Kyle Lane-McKinley, 'Artwashing, or, between Social Practice and Social Reproduction', *A Blade of Grass, Fertile Ground*, 1 February 2017, http://www.abladeofgrass.org/fertile-ground/artwashing-social-practice-social-reproduction/?utm_content=bufferdff48&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer#_ftn3, accessed 14 February 2017

care as commons – are proliferating to an extent that makes any meaningful summary impossible to undertake here.³⁹ But the problem of disentangling the radical potential of the commons from their fate as a ‘commons fix’ within the increasingly conservative and oppressive alliance of capital and the state remains.⁴⁰ It also remains a problem for feminism. How ‘women’s work’ – never meant to be ‘done’ – might *avoid being* approached as a commons only to be liberally transformed into a resource appropriated by racialised patriarchal capitalism would be one way of expressing the problem. Something worries us when we read that today in the emergent ‘commons studies’ there is a prevalent tendency towards ‘the articulation less of a physically existent ‘commons’ and more of a performative claiming of the common.’⁴¹ We hope that the case studies drawn from the art field and examined in this special issue might provide a degree of insight towards addressing the real-time practicalities of a feminist praxis rather than looping feminist efforts into such performative claims. Finally, although we understand the symbolic value of ‘political *commoning*’, we remain skeptical about whether this symbolic operation is in fact, as we are told, ‘enacting ‘another world’ within the neoliberal landscape, and in so doing altering subjectivities, relations, and spaces’.⁴² Both Krasny’s and Horne’s analyses suggest that the women’s role in care (and its private enclaves) is also a complex role in urban struggles where capital and the state enact their untiring appropriation of commoning and the commons, and that these vectors of alienation operate also through art.

CONCLUDING: THE FEMINIST STRUGGLE IN ‘THE TRAGEDY OF THE TOTALITY’

³⁹ Indicatively, see the 73 essays in David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, eds, *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State*, Levellers Press, MA, Amherst and Florence, 2012

⁴⁰ See Massimo de Angelis, ‘Economy, Capital and the Commons’, in Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, eds, *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2015, pp 198-213. In an earlier iteration de Angelis considers the issue as a question. See Massimo De Angelis, ‘Does Capital Need a Commons Fix?’, *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization*, vol 13, no 3 (2013), pp 603–15

⁴¹ Leila Downey, Samuel Kirwan and Julian Brigstocke, ‘Introduction: The Promise of the Commons’ in their *Space, Power, and the Commons: The Struggle for Alternative Futures*, Routledge, New York, 2015, p 4

⁴² *Ibid*

‘The kainos of labor in the twenty-first century is labor as intra-action, entanglement, the tragedy of the totality’, writes McKenzie Wark in commenting on the importance of naming, and we surmise, of concepts.⁴³ We see the concept of social reproduction as crucial in grasping the parameters of capital as a totalising social relation, as also noted by Vogel.⁴⁴ In 2017 we have learned not only that you can’t have socialism in one country, as Stalin imagined, but that you can’t have capitalism in one country either, as imperialism and globalisation have demonstrated. We have also learned from the containment of feminist separatisms that a critical mass, relative to the scale of forces opposing women’s and feminised subjects’ emancipation, is required for any meaningful strategies and tactics of refusal. We have learned already from Marion von Osten’s revisiting of Helke Sander’s exemplary 1978 film *Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit* a few things about the predicament of the activist working single mother:

The protagonist is not only photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions, a subject who has pulled away from wage labor and its regulatory apparatus in the factory or in the office, as the *Autonomia Operaia* called for. At the same time, she is a *Reduper* (an all-around REDUced PERson)—a figure who cannot be located biographically, and instead requires a new form of subjectivity to be realized in the contradictions of capitalist socialization. In this way, *Redupers* marks the post-Fordist convergence of work relationships, subjectivity, desires, and political demands that has consequently brought about a multitude of all-around reduced personalities.⁴⁵

Have we learned that! We have learned that gender is ‘a real abstraction’ made operative and concrete in the question of value for capital: ‘There must be an exterior to value in order for value to exist’, say Endnotes, continuing: ‘Similarly, for labour to exist and serve as the

⁴³ McKenzie Wark, ‘Chtulocene, Capitalocene, Antropocene’, *Public Seminar*, New School, 8 September 2016, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/09/chthulu/#.WNVPRI6kKCQ>, accessed 24 March 2017

⁴⁴ Vogel, op cit

⁴⁵ Marion von Osten, ‘Irene ist Viele! Or What We Call “Productive” Forces’, *eflux journal* 8, September 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/08/61381/irene-ist-viele-or-what-we-call-productive-forces/>, accessed 29 March 2017

measure of value, there must be an exterior to labour'.⁴⁶ And as all historians know, there is only one time for the actuality of struggle: now. What we, as feminist art historians need to learn, however, is which narrativisation of production and reproduction can reveal excisions (or, for that matter, inclusions) that remain central to the perpetuation of gendering as exploitative oppression and how the actually existing art field participates in *this* reproduction. In this special issue, we have striven to indicate the possibility of a feminist art history that departs from the monocausal endeavor of putting more women into capitalist art institutions where workers' rights are undermined and where even the wage relation is come to be perceived as a 'right' under threat by the internship culture.⁴⁷ Rather, the broader, underlying question here is: to the extent this has been successful (the art market tells another story),⁴⁸ on what terms has this 'success' been achieved? In short, you can't have a successful feminism in just one sector either, and the art field is a 'sector' within the totality constituted out of capital as a social relation. The feminist struggle that now crosses through the art field cannot but be expansive, especially as the activist impulse sweeping the art field necessitates a re-thinking of how 'doing' traverses both working (for need) and participating (for love). The question is hardly one of aesthetics, given the latter term's perennial return to some 'sphere' of its own, no matter its appropriation by commodity fetishism and the 'packaging' of our discontent. Rather, the question is one of radical feminist praxis. To what extent can we undertake this without reproducing the totalising capital relation as we reproduce ourselves and our resistance?

⁴⁶ Endnotes, 'The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection', *Endnotes 3 – Gender, Race, Class, and Other Misfortunes*, September 2013, <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-the-logic-of-gender>, accessed 29 March 2017

⁴⁷ See Precarious Workers Brigade, *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education*, The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, Los Angeles, 2017

⁴⁸ Maura Reilly, 'Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes', *Artnews*, 26 May 2015, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>, accessed 27 March 2017