



## View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

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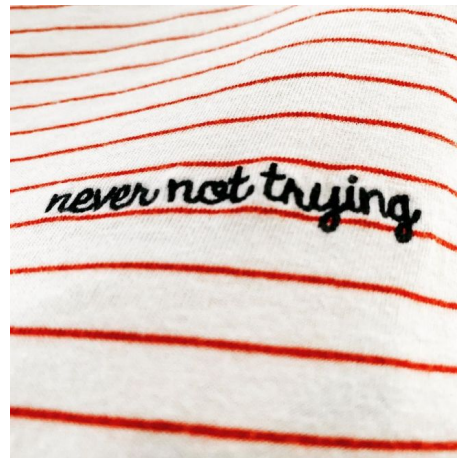
Introduction to no. 23

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## The Force of Women

The first thesis of *Feminism for the 99%*, a manifesto written by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, is on the reinvention of the strike by a new feminist wave. And it is very specifically located:

The recent feminist strike movement began in Poland in October of 2016, when more than 100,000 women staged walkouts and marches to oppose the country's ban on abortion. By the end of the month, an upwelling of radical refusal had already crossed the ocean to Argentina, where striking women met the heinous murder of Lucia Pérez with the militant cry: "Ni una menos." Soon it spread to Italy, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Peru, the United States, Mexico, Chile, and dozens of other countries. From its origins in the streets, the movement then surged through workplaces and schools, eventually engulfing the high-flying worlds of show business, media, and politics.



This issue of *View* thus comes out at a very specific time and is also born of these sentiments. It is not devoted to the feminist visual sphere and does not include solely feminist readings, yet it is devoted to women and their various creative activities – to women artists and women academics working on women artists. Which is not to say that every woman's activity is feminist, or that feminism is only for and about women. Having said that, this issue grows out of feminist dreams and feminist frustrations. And of the conviction that if one is to practice feminist theory, it is only by means of locating it in a particular experience, context, and body. The politics of location, just like the strike of 2016, begins with the body (in its sexual, medical, as well as social

aspects) – the task being to locate oneself in a body, and one’s body in the surrounding world (including the world of images).

This issue of *View* is devoted to the force of women. Why “force” rather than “power”? As the natural sciences have it, “force is the fundamental result of an interaction between two objects,” and it can only appear when objects are interacting: pushing or pulling one another, directly or indirectly. Thus force is to us a fundamental expression of being among other beings: it is horizontal rather than vertical; it is about positioning oneself in relation to others rather than over others. It is not an object of struggle, but rather a fact of that kind of being, and a sign of interactivity and interaction.

There are two aspects here: one is the realization of one’s position as a woman (not an abstract femininity, but an actual and material being), and the other is the question of how to (also intellectually and artistically) work as a woman. We look at various ways that the force of women in the visual arts translates into new subjectivities and forms of engagement with reality (both intimate and social), as well as into new historical narratives, archival and anachival practices, and affective organizations.

As Rosi Braidotti convincingly showed in the context of the so-called “crisis of Western subjectivity” in poststructuralist thought, “woman” serves as a (rhetorical) figure to channel hope for the possibility of a new subjectivity for all, as a redemptive (rhetorical) figure – an abstract construct detached from actual girls and women:

The celebration of femininity reduced to metaphors of the void, lack, non-being, the valorization of woman as textual body, rather than female-sexed body, hides one of the most formidable types of discrimination exercised against women in recent years. What is missing from these ‘becomings’ are women, not only as a revolutionary political movement, but also as flesh-and-blood human beings, engaged

for personal reasons in a collective process of subversion of  
the images and status of women.<sup>2</sup>

This issue is a joint venture of women and men, academics and artists, looking at how artistic practice might help to shape alternative epistemologies, ethics, and politics (not limited to the politics of representation) in times of crisis – crisis understood less as an impasse and more as an awakening. We look at different artistic “modes of constitution and transformation”<sup>3</sup> of the female subject – feminine forms of accumulating experience and knowledge and turning it into self-reflective and self-critical practice while speaking on one’s own behalf and in one’s own voice. Radical epistemologies often require very singular forms and means; they might involve failures and resignations, intensities difficult to bear and yet necessary to acknowledge.

The idea for this issue emerged from a symposium devoted to a female artist, Maria Lassnig, which was held in Warsaw a year after the Black Protest, in October 2017. The *Close-Up* is a conversation on various aspects of Lassnig’s oeuvre, and at the same time all three essays – by Joanne Morra, Karina Kupczyńska, and Katarzyna Bojarska – are testimony to how academic thinking and writing is inspired and shaped by real-life encounters, both with works of art and with others’ work on art, both critical and theoretical: in exchange. We are grateful to our hospitable host, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, and to the Maria Lassnig Foundation for their generosity in sharing the images. Another fruit of this meeting is a record of the conversation among the artists Anka Baumgart, Pola Dwurnik, Honorata Martin, and *View* editor Magda Szcześniak on Lassnig’s legacy, but more importantly on the role of women artists in the world of images, in the art world, and in the politics of self-representation. The conversation is published in *Perspectives* and is accompanied by an excerpt from Joanna Krakowska’s forthcoming book *Odmieńcza rewolucja. Performans na cudzej ziemi*

[Queer Revolution: A Performance on a Foreign Land].

In *Panorama* we invited women engaged in work on women artists to share their reflections on the intricacies of biographies and images, on self-inspection and self-fantasy, on reflecting reality through a woman-mirror or reflecting on the realities of women. Thus you can find Agata Jakubowska's essay on Zofia Kulik, Anna Chromik on Bracha Ettinger, Timea Andrea Lelik on Marlene Dumas, Daria KołECKA on Ewa Kuryluk, and finally Paulina Kwiatkowska on Agnès Varda. It is an exchange among various media and genres, different artistic idioms and different forms of academic writing, different struggles in life and art, different points of looking and different ways of showing. This selection of original texts is accompanied by a translation into Polish of Mignon Nixon's powerful essay *Crazy*, which talks about anxious groups, mad leaders/baby kings, the manic negation of reality, the lack of responsibility to mourn, along with mass melancholia and the need to confront it and transform it into creative resistance.

As we all know – or should know – by now, it is no longer safe or sane to operate within the given regimes of academic knowledge production and transmission; it is time to give way to other producers, hence the reason why in *Viewpoint* we would like you to become acquainted with two fascinating art projects: Anka Baumgart's *Sprawa kobiet w Polsce* [*The Women's Cause in Poland*] (2018) and Katarzyna Kalwat's (in collaboration with Aneta Grzeszykowska) *Maria Klassenberg* (2019), both ongoing and processual attempts at creatively overwriting, rewriting, and imagining the history of women. Both projects are insightfully framed by Iwona Kurz's essay.

Among this issue's *Snapshots* you will find critical readings of Joanne Morra's *Inside the Freud Museums* (London, 2017) by

Agnieszka Więckiewicz, Justyna Jaworska's *Piękne widoki, panowie, stąd macie. O kinie polskiego sockonsumpcjonizmu*

[Great Views You Have from Here, Gentlemen: On Polish Soc-Consumerist Cinema] (Warsaw, 2019) by Sebastian Jagielski, as well as Renata Lis's review of Olga Chajdas's film *Nina* (2018).

With this modest contribution our task has been no more and no less than to face and modify the "cognitive affective habits"<sup>4</sup> that limit or discriminate against women in their desire for self-knowledge and affirmation, and to participate in constructing reality rather than merely describing or analyzing it; as Miranda July put it, "never not trying."

Enjoy the *Force of Women*.

### **Editorial Team**

- 1 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%* (London: Verso, 2019), 6.
- 2 Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women and Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Polity Press, 1991), 134.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.

