

**FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVES
IN ARTISTIC PRODUCTIONS
AND THEORIES OF ART**

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**DE-/GENDERING (SPACE) AS ARTISTIC
AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE**



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In the 21st Century, the label “Women’s Liberation Movement” is no longer sufficient to describe the complexity and multitude of diverse theories, discourses, initiatives and projects, which are connected to, what meanwhile is called, women, gender, queer and transgender issues. All over the world in almost every country, single activists, various groups, initiatives, NGO’s etc. are working and fighting on issues and topics connected to questions of women’s rights and gender democracy.

Furthermore and starting from the 1950s in the US, a gay, transsexual and lesbian movement began to develop and made headlines with the Stonewall Riots in New York’s Greenwich Village in 1969, when gays, lesbians and drag queens struck back at excessive police checks and institutionalized intimidation. Subsequently, many metropolises and cities not just in the US, Europe and Australia, but also in Latin America, Asia and some African countries, have seen the establishment of so-called lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) cultures, more or less openly and visible. Additionally to activism feminist and queer theories find their way into the academical and in the artistic fields. Not only at universities and academies in the US and Europe but as well in a lot of other countries including some African countries feminist, gender, gay, lesbian and queer studies have been more or less established.¹

The development of feminist theories since the 1968s began with the so called radical feminism criticizing Western societies as patriarchal, sexist, racist and exploitative. In the following years the early radical feminist critic became more diverse and was followed by the ‘differential feminism’ trying to abolish the marginalization of ‘femininity’ by autonomy and trying to inscribe the „ontological nonentity“ of the female position as the German philosopher and art historian Eva Meyer once named it. The more practical result of such an approach was the funding of a wide spectrum of women’s projects focusing on the needs and interests of women because as the French philosopher Henri Lefèbvre already noted in the 1970s: “Groups, classes or fractions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space”²

Concerning the theoretical impacts of differential feminism focusing on women only, essentialism was the consequence of the theoretical and literary descriptions of even new ways of femininity. Because at the end of the day it has to be defined precisely what is meant by ‘the female’ and ‘femininity’. This essentialism was criticized as it produces new forms of exclusion: who is a woman and what are the criteria’s of ‘being’ a woman?

And more questions were raising as the Women’s Liberation Movement was criticized by coloured feminists to be a movement focusing on the middle-class white women only as well as excluding lesbian women. When 1980 the lesbian writer Monique Wittig wrote the essay , “One Is Not Born A Woman”³ she wanted to make clear that women are not a natural group, a racial group of a special kind and that lesbianism is an autonomous position going beyond “natural” heterosexual femininity. This critic was one starting point for other theoretical developments of feminism resulting from the critic of feminist essentialism and today summarized by the term ‘deconstructivist and poststructuralist’ feminist theories. One of the main representatives of feminist deconstructivism is the US-American philosopher Judith Butler. In her famous book “Gender Trouble”⁴ she argued that not only ‘gender’ as the social construction of difference but even the biological difference between women and men — in the English language summarized by the word ‘sex’ - is the result of discourses and discursive practices.⁵ Therefore the biological difference as a category can be questioned and the naturalization of gender can be deconstructed. During the time it became clear that not only women have to be focused on but the whole set of gender relations and as well the notions of masculinity. Feminist theories extended to the questioning of a gendered society and of the intersections of gender

¹ Meanwhile and especially in the US and in Europe the production of gender theories almost only takes place in the academic field. Some researchers criticize this development and the recessing gap between activism and academia as in the very beginning a demand of the feminist movement was to close the gap between theory and practice. And it is an interesting point as well that in these early times feminists already analyzed Western societies as sexist, racist and exploitative. Today we can find a more moderated version of this critic in social sciences when scholars speak about the interdependencies of categories like race, class and gender.

² Lefèbvre, H. (1997). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 416 – 417. (Orig. *La production de l'espace*. Paris 1974)

³ Wittig, M. (1992). *The straight mind and other essays*. Boston/Massachusetts: Beacon Press, p. 9-20.

⁴ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble*. London/New York: Routledge

⁵ In the English language exist the terms “sex“ and “gender“ – gender means the social constructions of difference and sex the biological differences.

with other societal categories like race, class, sexual identity, age and so on.

This is a very shorten and simple abstract of the development of over 40 years of feminist theory and practice. Today and in almost all societies sex and gender differences are still very strong categories affecting the social, economical and cultural life situations on various levels and almost all areas of society. Even simple demands like same wages for women — a demand the First Women's Liberation Movement already claimed - are still on the agenda as for example the German Federal Ministry of Statistics proves every year. In Germany women earn up to 28% lesser than men even if they do the same job. Furthermore the question of gender is not only a question of power but as well a question of space if the term space is understood as societal space. This question enfolds first in the individual body and mind — think of all the internalizations and incorporations connected to gender - and in the everyday lives and practices as we can find them in the spheres of production and reproduction — think of the ongoing responsibility of women for childcare and housework -, second in the gender relations within social, political, economical and medial spaces with their institutionalized and normative orders — think of all the stereotypical media images and narratives about “women” and “men” - and finally in the spaces of imagination as expressed in spaces of counter public like the women's or queer projects or as expressed in arts. From the very beginning of the Second Women's Liberation Movement not less artists already had been active as the US-American art critic Laura Cottingham indicated for the US. In her publication “Seeing through the Seventies. Essays on Feminism and Art” she remarked: "As an eruption against the prevailing aesthetics of late modernism, the feminist art movement introduced radical antimodernist concepts such as a refusal of pure formalism, a championing of content, an embracement of autobiography, a denial of the fine art/craft hierarchy, and, perhaps most radical of all, the acknowledgement of female experience as both a viable and necessary subject of the transformation of art."⁶

By this radical feminist break-up a lot of today's well-known female artists have been influenced. Crucial was that by the feminist art movement the hegemony of the dominant „masculine imperative“ within the art field was broken for the first time. Especially the lacking representation and ignorance of the work of female artists in the institutions of the art world and in art history were (and partly still are) central issues as Linda Nochlin stated in her often cited essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?": “The question Why have there been no great women artists?“ has led us to the conclusion, so far, that art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, "influenced" by previous artists, and more vaguely and superficially, by "social forces," but, rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.“⁷ And even today this feminist critic is not been solved if one look as the relations in society and in the artistic field itself although the situation for female artists varies between the different countries and regions. Today indeed one can find much more female artists, gallery owners, curators and even museum directors than in the late 1960s and 1970s. But at a certain point one has the impression that this development is not only the result of more openness but as well the result of the fact that less money is circulating in the art field (not the art market) — compared for example to sports as the curator Ute Meta Bauer once stated — because national and local governments cut the funding of arts and culture constantly. As one can observe in other professional areas like for example the police, women are very welcome when there is not much money to be earned or when with less money a lot of work has to be accomplished. Also in terms of curatorial and artistic practices today the examination of gender and gender relations is less taking for granted as one could assume as well in the light of the theoretical-academical gender theories. And with this assumption I do not mean women-only exhibitions occasionally shown like for example the exhibition about female impressionist painters in the Kunsthalle Schirn in Frankfurt in 2008 motivated to close the gap in art history concerning the contributions of female artists. But such exhibitions always run the risk of a consolidation of the nimbus of female artists as a minority.

From my perspective it might be even more important to criticize that in a lot of exhibitions a gender perspective still is excluded. And

⁶ Cottingham, L. (2000), *Seeing through the Seventies. Essays on Feminism and Art*, New York/Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, p. 55.

⁷ Nochlin, L., *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*. En Jones, Amelia (ed.) (2010), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (p. 266), London/New York: Routledge



this non-reflection of gender issues is not only expressed in the numbers and quotes of the participating female artists — although this is an important first step towards gender democracy - but furthermore by the question of the inclusion of critical artistic positions focusing on gender and gender relations, sexuality and sexual identity, body and desire as well as of strategies of the appropriation of societal spaces. Finally it has to be ascertained that the inclusion of a critical gender perspective is a task being necessary and possible in almost all areas and issues along which exhibitions are curated. For example an exhibition focusing on urban issues and artistic interventions in urban spaces has to include works dealing not only with public spaces but as well with so called private or reproductive spaces as these spaces can not be separated from the city and urban lives. This does not mean to just follow the traditional notion and stereotype that private spaces are a women's sphere and reproductive work like housework and childcare are 'naturally' done by women. In fact it means to reflect these strategies of the naturalization of gender stereotypes critically. From my perspective this is even a demand for the art works themselves.⁸

In general and by understanding contemporary art as a possibility to reflect society in a critical way I follow the 1970s German philosopher Herbert Marcuse who once stated that art can revolutionize the experience of the individual and can become a "political factor" (9) by its subjectivity, sensuality and esthetic. Especially in art Marcuse sees the potential to fight against social alienation and political domination. Here Marcuse refers to a radicalization of esthetical freedom, to the "esthetical power of imagination" as a propulsive power for the real liberation of people. On the other side, so Marcuse, art can legitimize dominance by producing a "beautiful appearance" veiling the reality.⁹

By "real appearance" Marcuse understood the capacity of art to remind the bourgeois society of the non-fulfillment of its promises like equality, democracy and humanity. Or to say it in more contemporary words: art as an imaginative and analytical practice can open up new spaces of possibility and develop new strategies going beyond the existing conditions and restrictions. In this sense art can be subversive.

But especially this kind of art is absorbed and disarmed noticeably by more and more perfect cultural industries and by the power of the media to mainstream information worldwide. And especially in the media the production of gender stereotypes and of misogyny are an ongoing issue. On the other hand one can find a lot of examples of successful artistic interventions and works interlacing artistic practice with social and political impact — reaching from early and more subtle works like the performance piece "Triangle" by Sanja Ivekovic in 1979 to recent examples like the actions and performances of the feminist group Pussy Riot in Russia. Art is always part of society and can take over a double function by mirroring society critically and by reflecting it's own field as it is itself in turn a representation of societal relations. To fulfill such a demand is not very easy.

Nevertheless and at this point I want to remark that from my perspective the art field partly is still much more open to political debates and critical discourses as the academic field especially at the universities. The academization of feminist, queer and gender theory production has it's price as it has to follow the specific demands and structures of the scientific fields. One effect is a depolitization of social, political and cultural theory production and research effecting as well gender issues. Today very few scientists like for example the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who died in 2002 or the US-American philosopher Judith Butler take a political stance in public. Besides of the specific structures ruling scientific knowledge production concerning as well the production of feminist and gender theories, the gradual economization of the universities and academies as a result of neoliberal politics are dictating what and how is being researched. This development goes so far that one can refer to what the French philosopher Michel Foucault once described as "technologies of the self" — in this case unfolding as a kind of inner censorship and anticipatory obedience. The days of the liberty of scientific knowledge

⁸ As can be seen for example in the works of the Indian filmmaker Amar Kanwar because his work is very sensitive concerning gender issues and women's living situations like in his film about the border situation between India and Pakistan *A Season Outside* from 2002 (shown in documenta 11) or in his film *The Lightning Testimonies* from 2007 (shown in documenta 12).

⁹ This analysis of the ambivalent double character of art on one hand was influenced by the up-coming cultural industries and mass cultures and on the other hand by the 1968s student's and women's liberation movements. Marcuse, H., *Kunst in der eindimensionalen Gesellschaft*, En Jansen, P.E.(ed.), Nachgelassene Schriften (p. 83), Kunst und Befreiung, Lüneburg: Zu Klampen



production are almost over as well as the days of the former feminist demand that theory and practice have to be brought together with the focus on general and political changes of society. Therefore institutions and protagonists in the artistic and cultural fields focusing on critical reflection and criticism of society become more and more important as they are the last refuge of the possibility to create other methods and practices of a critical knowledge production - understanding knowledge in a wider and more experimental as well as artistic sense.

Meanwhile we can look back to a long row of contemporary art works and exhibitions dealing with women's, queer and gender issues and critically reflecting the non-fulfillment of gender democracy of contemporary societies. In the following, I want to discuss a few examples of exhibitions and art works in the context of a possible theoretical framing and critical contribution to the question of the appropriation of societal spaces. As I already argued space must be understood as societal space with its three dimensions – the spheres of the everyday, the institutional spaces and the imaginative spaces – and following this tentative structure gender issues can be discussed as a question of spatial-societal appropriation. It would go overboard to discuss every aspect here but the following examples might give some idea about the wider frame of the relations between gender issues, curatorial and artistic practices and the question of the appropriation of societal spaces.

The exhibition project “First Story - Women Building / New narratives for the 21st Century” took place in the frame of Cultural Capital Porto 2001 and was developed by the German curator Ute Meta Bauer on behalf of Miguel von Hafe Pérez, director of the section “Visual Arts and Architecture” of the Cultural Capital.¹⁰

By focusing on women's issues it can be read in the frame of a series of exhibition projects starting from the project “Womanhouse” by the Feminist Art Program founded by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago in 1971 to finally “WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution” curated by Connie Butler at MOCA Los Angeles in 2007.

The exhibition project First Story... included 12 single projects, 3 workshops, an opening concert, a symposia and 7 contributions to the weekly edition of the national newspaper *MilFolhas* developed by the artist Regina Möller and a publication with the title “Case 2: First Story - Women Building/New Narratives for the 21st Century”.¹¹ The original idea of the project was to install a permanent women's building in Porto but this idea could not be realized for financial reasons.

The title already mentions the background of the project as the first floor is the starting ground possibly followed by other floors, here metaphorically spoken. So the idea was that the project could function as a starting point for the women initiatives in Porto. The term “women building” has a double notion – a building but as well the act of building – here new narratives about the role of women in society were in the focus. Background of the curatorial philosophy was a transdisciplinary linkage of different artistic, scientific and cultural practices against the backdrop of lived social spaces and their reflection and communicative distribution. Starting points had been the thematic fields “Women in Education”, “Women at Work”, “Women in History”, “Women in Society” and “Women in Culture”. The project participants came from different theoretical and artistic areas, not only artists but as well scientists, architects, activists, cultural producers, musicians and film makers had been invited. The international well-known Japanese architect Itsuko Hasegawa and the South African architect Nina Cohen had been invited to develop the exhibition display. Nina Cohen developed a display system in reference to a former system realized for the Nelson Mandela Museum in Umtata. This display system functioned as a guiding system and offered information for each of the projects. The design of Itsuko Hasegawa consisted of 5 platforms, 35 cm high and between 7.5 m and 10 m long, covered with shiny aluminum boards. In Japanese language “harappa” means an open, accessible space or field. On her harappa she put on a “teahouse” as an expression of an oppositional and strictly regulated space and a projection of her architectural works. The exhibition space had around 1.100 sqm. and was part of a new building built on the occasion of the Cultural Capital and as the first public library in Porto. On the front wall of the exhibition hall after an idea of Ute Meta Bauer and researched by Ruth Becker and myself, different

¹⁰ I was part of the team as project manager and with the project “Womenspacework”, an online platform.

¹¹ Bauer, U.M. (ed.) (2001). *Case 2. First story-women building/new narratives for the 21st century*. Cologne: Walther König



floor plans of various women's building through history — or better to say “herstory” — had been appliquéd.

One of the projects, to mention only some of them, was the project of “Women on Waves”, a NGO from the Netherlands. In the frame of First Story... “Women on Waves” distributed information material and organized meetings and talks with local women about autonomy over their own bodies as well as about abortion rights. Abortion was forbidden in Portugal and until the year 2006 doctors and nurses who offered abortions had been prosecuted and been put into prison. To offer health care as well as a possibility to arrange abortions, “Women on Waves” together with the well-known design office van Lieshout developed a mobile unit, the “A-Portable”, as a medical advice and examination station for women. This unit can be load to a boat and “Women on Waves” made various campaigns by inviting women on the boat and traveling over the 12 miles border in the sea where the law of the boat counts so that women could have an abortion if they want to have one. In October 2008 “Women on Waves” visited Spain by boat on the invitation of 33 Spanish organizations concerned with a better abortion law.

Another project was developed by the group F0/G0 Lab from Austria, a group of female art students, who offered an international video program with films about women's organizations and women's liberation movements from different countries and a reference library. And the Spanish/French artist group LSD, to mention another example, developed a presentation and documentation of women's work within the system of capitalist production/reproduction and within the specific socio-geographical context of southern Europe particularly promoting the cultural and national contexts of Spain and Portugal.

First Story ... was an exhibition project considering women not only as passive victims of societal conditions but as productive protagonists appropriating societal and political spaces, willing to change society and to create another future.

By the inclusion of not only traditionally educated artists like Maria Eichhorn or Regina Möller but likewise of producers from other disciplines and organizations the project could dislocate and expand the classical notion of artistic authorship. If this exhibition project should be classified from a theoretical perspective it could be read as ‘differential feminist’ by making the productivity of women in the frame of another possible future of society visible. But this differential feminist approach goes further than the one developed in exhibitions like the already mentioned Female Impressionists or so called women's only art exhibitions. This project put the classical exhibition format to the test, it supported other ways of artistic production and collaboration and expanded the notion of an exhibition project and it's aesthetics by social and societal dimensions.

Critically one can remark that disputes about questions of body, sexuality and sexual identity, queerness and ethnicity mostly kept excluded. Only one project dealt with colonialism and respectively post colonialism, the project „Contact“ by the Portuguese artist group Asterisk focusing on the colonial past of Portugal and women's activism in Angola. By concentrating on the genus group ‘women’ the exhibition project followed only one line of possible and existing differences. Also the question of differences between women was not an issue. Despite of this critic this exhibition project was outstanding because it made the heterogeneous productivity of women visible and furthermore could realize a linkage between artistic and non-artistic work. Unfortunately the project First Story - Women Building / New Narratives for the 21st Century had been ignored by the traditional art scene except of the Austrian art magazine springerin. The reason for this could be that Porto was in a peripheral location in these times but as well that the curator developed a transgression of conventional artistic exhibition formats and last but not least that it was an exhibition project dealing with a feminist approach. Even today feminism is a field not everybody wants to poke one's nose in. In this case it was definitely a mistake.

Six years later, in 2006 the exhibition The Eight Square. Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960 curated by Frank Wagner and Julia Friedrich was shown in the Museum Ludwig in Cologne still under the aegis of the famous director Kaspar König. Finally it looked like that even the edge of desire had reached the museum's center and that the heterosexual dominated gender relations had been suspended because with the reference to a chess rule — a peasant can be switched in any other figure if it is on the eight field - and with over 250 works by more that 80 artists — mainly photography and painting — almost all ways of desire normally excluded from the mainstream like trans- and homosexuality, transgender and travesty could be visited in the Museum Ludwig. But for a voyeuristic view this exhibition was made a little bit too solid and almost too well-behaved. As a colleague mentioned one could visit this exhibition with one's own parents



without getting any trouble. Instead of protesting distress on trash chic the visitor found mainly traditional art works in front of German oak veneer — may be supposed as a serious or ironical reference.

Even the homosexual practices shown in works like for example the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe from 1977 or the installation „Seven Figures“ by Bruce Naumann from 1985 in times of pornographic liberality were no surprise for average heterosexuals. But this exhibition with it's a little bit bashful title was not only overdue but it could be read as well in the context of a neoliberal modernization of the German society. On one hand such a modernization not any longer demonizes homosexual and cross-gender practices, Christopher Street Day parades and gay-marriages but of course seems to tolerate them. On the other hand this modernization is based on an expansion of identity choices of which — not at least with the help of arts and culture — capitalism can generate profit.

With their curatorial approach the curators were on the safe side of exhibition making. This concerns the selection of well-known artists like for example David Hockney, Andy Warhol, Nan Golding or Cindy Sherman as well as the exhibition design developed by the artist Eran Schaerf. This design operated with a kind of cabinet architecture may be as a reference to the difficulties of „to come out of the closet“ in earlier times. The exhibition was structured in various sections as for example to „Misfits, discrimination, aids“ or „Portrait and identity“ or „Locations of desire“. In the entrance hall Eran Schaerf's handling of the staircase was especially successful by installing a half open cinema hall. Besides of the famous artists the curators selected less known artistic positions too as for example works by the artists Kerstin Drechsel, Gitte Villesen or Piotr Nathan. Furthermore it was positive that the exhibition included works about lesbian and queer desire although in my view the exhibition was still too gay-male dominated and curatorial made relations between single works often seemed to be too formal and arbitrary. For example the Austrian artist Valie Export developed a lot of her work along her theory and practice of what she called „feminist actionism“. But such an approach is quiet different to Andy Warhol's „Double Elvis“ from 1963 (one version in his series recently was sold for 37 million US-dollars) hanged directly beside of the work of Valie Export titled „Identitätstransfer“ (identity transfer) from 1968. Also the narrative photo documentation „Myself Mona Ahmed, 1989 - 2000“ by the Indian artist Dayanita Singh is a reflection of a completely different societal background and approach as the photographs of the „part-time gender terrorist“ and „gender abolitionist“ Del LaGrace Volcano. Here a more deeper going intermediation would have been necessary from my perspective. A reference to contemporary deconstructivist theory especially could be seen in the works by Zoe Leonard („The Fae Richards Photo Archive“), a fictional biography about a black actress and singer breaking with gender norms and conventional heterosexuality based on a character conceived by the filmmaker Cheryl Dunye. Also the photographs by Daniela Comani („Eine glückliche Ehe, Selbstinszenierung, 2003 - 2005“) showed what Judith Butler calls „undoing gender“ by subversive acts of deconstructing the naturalization of sex and gender. The catalogue unfortunately did not offer an overview of the development of feminist, homosexual and queer theories so a lot of visitors might be left alone with what they could see. In general the solidity of the exhibition did not mediate the revolutionary impact of the uprising of gay, lesbian, transvestite and queer movements deeper although in the entrance hall a „model“ of the Stonewall bar situation designed by Peter Knoch was displayed, nor did it problematize the mainstreamification of homosexual scenes as we can observe it today. Only a few works highlighted the impact of the appropriation of societal spaces by these movements as for example the work of the Berlin based artist Piotr Nathan who showed some doors of public toilets used for cottaging and after the fall of the wall and with Berlin's modernization being destroyed and closed.

Besides of this critic this exhibition was an important step as it was the first exhibition in Germany showing such a great and diverse collection of art works and artists dealing with sexual identity, homosexual, transgender and queer issues. And in terms of the apparently so modern and liberal German society affording even a homosexual foreign minister the story of the attempt by Kaspar König to allow to stand the sculpture by Peter Feldman — a pink Dionysus — after the exhibition's closing showed how far this modernity reaches in reality. Although especially Cologne is a stronghold of gay and queer life in Germany the neo white-bread community of Cologne broke out a shitstorm so that Kaspar König finally had to remove the sculpture.

After discussing these two examples of exhibitions I want to respond to two artists as examples in a long row of artists referring to gender issues in their works. First I want to mention the well-known Italian born artist Monica Bonvicini. Monica Bonvicini often grapples with power, gender and labor relations, with architecture and public spaces. In 2010 she had a huge solo show at the Fridericianum in Kassel with the title Both Ends. In her work „These Days Only a Few Men Know What Work Really Means“ from 1999 Monica Bonvicini placed not



the architect but the building worker in the center, although two architects — Peter Eisenman and Michael Graves — could be found in small size in this installation. And she even went a step further by using images from gay porn magazines to illustrate the building workers. By focusing on the building workers only she turned the traditional hierarchy in architecture and building construction upside down and furthermore she puts the male connoted paid labor in a supposed other context of homosexuality and sex work. This can be read as a reference to what social scientists call homosociality. The term homosociality means all kinds of male “gemeinschaften” (communities) and male alliances in which homosexuality and homoerotic can be part of but not necessarily must be part of.

The installation can be interpreted as a link to the historical dimension of homosociality as a central moment of occidental-Christian patriarchy and as a questioning of the role of male homosexuality within a heteronormative society where heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality is a deviance. Furthermore the selection of stereotype representations of male homosexuals can be read as a critical reflection of the discussions about identity politics taken place in the last years. Because the criticism about normative constructions of identity addresses not any longer only heterosexual but as well homosexual normativity because also homosexual identity politics are exclusive by producing other differences.

‘Being’ homosexual does not automatically mean to include so called other minorities resulting from other differential categories like race and class. (This was the reason why the US-American philosopher Judith Butler refused the price for civil courage at the Christopher Street Day in Berlin in 2010. She criticized that this event is not only too commercial but as well does not oppose double discrimination and racism enough.) Additionally one can state that female sexuality or even lesbian sexuality still is discriminated by becoming visible mostly through a male gaze only. Monica Bonvicini showed this male gaze and the relation between male homosociality and the female „other“ in her work „Nude in the Workshop“ from 2009. Monica Bonvicini made snapshots of different work places and labor situations without any protagonists but photographing pin-up images she found there. With her work she calls attention to the everydayness of a medial appropriation of the mostly naked female body, to the use of this body as an object of male heterosexual desire and it’s replaceability reaching until irrelevance. Such kind of media representation of the female body is almost global and generalized in the Western and Westernized worlds, it functions as an ongoing model and modus operandi in media and especially in advertisement. We have adopted to such insulting representations and although these images are terrible banal they apprehend in our subconsciousness. In these images women appear not as subjects and female sexuality is always kept in the frame of male heterosexuality and dominance finally. But Monica Bonvicini did not stay on the representative level alone but became active by using a questionnaire asking unknown building workers in their languages very simple questions like: “Do you understand your labor as creative?”, “From your opinion why are building workers almost always men?”, “What does your girlfriend/wife think about your hard and dry hands?. Or even more provocative: “How do you get along with your gay colleagues?”

Here not only the answers of the workers are quiet interesting but for example a remark by the president of a construction company who wrote in a letter to Ms. Bonvicini: „Your questions lack a true understanding and appreciation for what we do and who we are. Most of my employees found the questionnaire either racist, sexist and/or irrelevant to what they do.“

The work „Both Ends“ from 2010, to mention another work by Monica Bonvicini, can be read in the frame of the dispositive of sexuality (Michel Foucault) as this installation consists of safety harnesses used in building construction sites.

Here these tools are enriched by a shining latex cover, fixed in regular distances on a circle made of round steel tube hanging and slightly balancing on three steel cables from the ceiling. This installation refers to the interlinkage of sexuality and disciplinarity but as well to the lust attended by the view on perversion and deviance. Something — as the title says — has two ends but has at the end no ends — may be a reference of Monica Bonvicini to the fact that there is no possibility to be outside of power relations. The black and shining latex borrowed from practices of sadomasochism refers to fetishism and sexual desire but from my point of view it might be understood not only in a sexual and psychoanalytical but as well in an economical sense as a reference and inclusion of such economies unfolding along sexual and reproductive realities and „orders“. Part of these sexual or may be better to say sexualized economies are violence and incest as Monica Bonvicini refers to in her work „Kill your Father“ from 2001. This work makes clear that the private and reproductional space still is a space not only of unpaid labor but a sexualized space hidden under the narratives about the harmonious nuclear family as the



basic of society.

From gender theoretical perspective Monica Bonvicini follows a more differential feminist than a deconstructivist approach as her aim is not a transgression of dominating gender relations, a de-gendering but a critical and sometimes even humorous reflection and analysis of a gendered and still male-dominated society with artistic methods and means. A transgression one can find especially in her work „Chainsaw in the Stone“ from 2009 by a paradoxical adjustment of the chainsaw forcing through a photo from the series „Nude in the workshop“, by a seemingly failed proportion of chainsaw and pedestal built out of thin perforated wood fiberboard and inside illuminated. Hereby the traditional stable order of the sculpture is thwarted so that the hidden instability of gender and gendered orders becomes visible.

Such contemporary actualization of feminism but in connection with lesbian queer strategies can be found in the works of the German performance artist Katrina Baschner who lives and works in Vienna and who consistently develops her works by taking a feminist and at the same time a lesbian queer position. In her early works she performed as queer-male belly dancer in the streets or double ganger of herself addressing her lesbian life but as well issues like sexualized violence, sexism and racism. In her work „Dolores“ shown as a series of video installations in a solo exhibition in the Kunsthalle Krems Factory in 2005, she reinterpreted the story of Lolita according to the famous novel by Vladimir Nabokov and its film adaption by Stanley Kubrick. In contrary to the original version Baschner told another, a lesbian story of a relation between a very young girl – Dolores (played by Edwarda Gurrola) - and an older woman – Humbert (played by Elisabeth Romero) - traveling aimlessly through Mexico. In her story Humbert is an attractive female artist and Dolores a young dyke who loses her mother, an alcohol addicted psychologist, in a car accident. Finally Dolores ended up not as a traditional and pregnant housewife like in the version of Nabokov but became active finding her own and autonomous sexuality and a new young lover. And in contrast Humbert did not end up in prison but in an ongoing position as an observer of the act of liberation by Dolores and insofar constantly being confronted with herself.

Katrina Baschner operated as well in an activist way by organizing performative evening series like the Salon Lady Chutney or the CLUB BURLESQUE BRUTALE for the lesbian and queer scenes in Vienna and by co-founding the women only and feminist-queer artist band SV Damenkraft. Already with her evening series she created a self-determined space sustaining what I once called a women's and lesbian project culture which unfolded as an urban culture in the context of the Women's and queer liberation movements especially in the German spoken countries by appropriating as well as creating societal spaces.¹² In her newer work - a trilogy of performances with „Hafenperlen“ (Harbour Pearls) in 2008, Aria de Mustang in 2009 and „Flaming Flamings“ in 2011 - she picked up the format of the burlesque show as it arose from the context of the 19th century US-American vaudeville and its revival as New Burlesque in the 1990s. Again she reinterpreted this format in another way to create a performative space of queer-lesbian identity and sexuality not without friendly irony. And instead of a single performance as it is usual in heterosexual burlesque shows she introduced and integrated a chorus like in the Greek theatre. This can be read as a reference to the importance of community building especially for lesbians and what Judith Butler calls a network of voluntary or nonnormative kinship. What is special as well in the work of Baschner is that she is focusing on the female position often overseen in contemporary scenes of pro-sex feminism and post-pornography as well as in queer-lesbian scenes focusing on drag king culture only and lacking or even refusing what might be called a „Mae West“ factor. Not only in the artistic field but against this background Katrina Baschners work is an exception because in her work „The femme is thus simultaneously »bio-lady« and drag-queen, a genuine F-2-F-performer who delights both herself and others with her self-organized femininity. Or as the post-porn performer Judy Minx once put it: »A femme is a drag queen with a vagina«¹³ as the art critic Tim Stüttgen wrote in a text about her trilogy. But with her work Katrina Baschner does not only create a space of self-determined and collectively shared queer-lesbian-femininity as well as another cinematic performative space disrupting and deconstructing the traditional performer-spectator construction by integrating a chorus and performing in a lesbian-queer public only. From my perspective Baschner's work reveals that even in modern and modernized societies, in public,

¹² Doderer, Y.P. (2008). From Yesterday to Tomorrow. The Production of Women's and Lesbians Urban Public in Germany. In Grzanic, M. Reitsamer, R. (ed.), *New Feminism: Worlds of Feminism, Queer and Networking Conditions*, Vienna and Doderer, Y.P.(2003), *Urbane Praktiken. Strategien und Raumproduktionen feministischer Frauenöffentlichkeit*, Münster: Monenstein & Vannerdat

¹³ Baschner, K., Benzer, C., Stüttgen, T (2012), *Nouvelle Burlesque Brutal. A Trilogy*, Fotohof, p. 58



media and politics, an autonomous female (sexual) potency that operates independent from a male and/or heterosexual dominated system still has no adequate and sustainable position and space in society.

This lack is one reason why feminism is not outdated even in the 21st century although it has to be constantly reviewed and rewritten in the face of an ongoing »modernization« of gender relations on one hand and an ongoing perpetuation of boundaries resulting from gender differences, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism on the other hand. In any case - and as the works I mentioned hopefully showed - art can be very constructive to develop other ideas and images of practices and spaces undoing or even going beyond gender.

