



Introduction

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Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.

Hélène Cixous (1976: 875)

The idea to submit a proposal for an *EJES* special journal issue on ‘Feminist Interventions in Intermedial Studies’ came from an inspiring academic event, an ESSE conference seminar entitled ‘Intermedial Body Politics: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Image/Text Dynamics’, which the editors co-organised at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia in September 2014. The impressive variety of papers presented by established and emerging international scholars on intermedial interactions between literary and visual representations of the female body offered a broad range of symptomatic readings. They included analyses of eighteenth-century illustrated medical textbooks, corporeal and textual metamorphosis in Victorian picture books, aesthetic self-fashioning in modernist novels, traumatised and super-heroic embodiments in comics (Szép, 2016), lookist fat-shaming in postfeminist advertisements, and lactation narratives in postmillennial performance arts (McAra, 2016), amongst other topics.

We performed an interdisciplinary wedding of semiotics to ‘corporeal feminism’ (Grosz, 1994), of literary theory to readings in visual arts, and of iconography to revisionary interpretations of literature; wishing to unveil how the ‘semioticisation’ of women’s bodies affects the ‘somatisation of texts’ (Brooks, 1993: 8; Kérchy, 2008) and images: how the representation of corporeality composes or decomposes the verbal/visual narrative. We were driven by the aim of offering a more gender-sensitive analysis of topics such as the textual value of illustrations, pictures collaged inside literary texts, the figurativeness of lyrical language, the rhetorics of visual culture, challenges caused by new digital mediatisation, or the ideological implications of woman-as-image. The papers illustrated how the feminist project has radicalised text/image relationships in myriad ways, disrupting the contours of discipline and medium. The multifaceted recyclings of a transdisciplinary methodology reminded us that although in the past decades text/image studies has become an established academic research field, its subversive potential to challenge cultural hegemonies has not diminished. On the contrary, intermedial fusions remain loaded with political and ethical issues that are in search of sites of resistance for marginalised, othered social subjects and meanings.

Developing out of our conference seminar, this special issue on the theme of Feminist Interventions in Intermedial Studies is motivated by the principle that the conceptual shift implied in the dialectical, dialogic trope of word and image entails a challenge to the hegemonic ideology governing the exclusionary logic of hierarchically arranged, binary oppositions.



Figure 1. Samantha Sweeting. *The Whiteness of the Whale*, 2012. Photograph. *The Moby Dick Big Read*, curated by Philip Hoare and Angela Cockayne. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

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Figure 2. Andrea Zittlau. No 12 from Postcard Project series, 2016. Poem by Andrea Zittlau. Photography by Emiliano Leonardi. <https://www.emilianoleonardi.com/postcardproject2016>. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

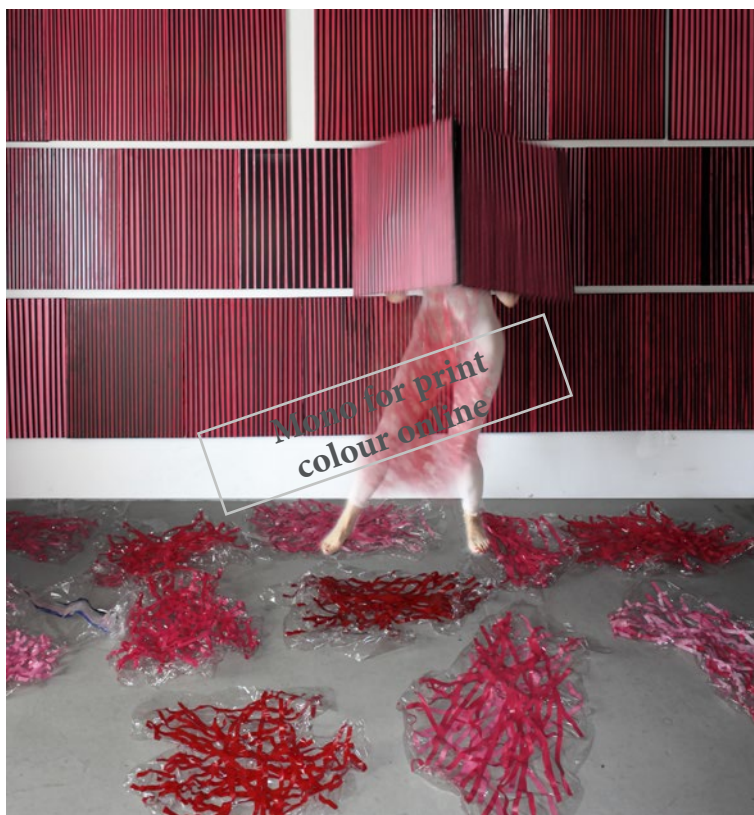


Figure 3. Orshi Drozdik. *Csíkok II. Stripes II* (2014–2016). Self-portrait from a painting-performance appropriation art event dedicated to Olga Rozanova and Sol LeWitt. Music from Krisztina Megyeri's *Hohes Ufer II*. Drozdik's poem 'Stripes and Time' recited by singer Báborka Bocskor. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

Our project is deeply rooted in the need to revisit the art historical analogy of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, which has permeated patriarchal master narratives for many centuries with the idea of the mutual exclusivity of image and text. By placing body politics at the very centre of this endeavour, we wish to question Plato's systematic contrasting of painting and poetry as incommensurable, false simulations that are devoid of philosophical potential. We contest Lessing's neat aesthetic separation of painting as the 'art of space' and poetry as the 'art of the time', 'two equitable neighbors' trying to avoid each other for fear of dangerous transgressions (Lessing, 1984: 91). We also aim to challenge the limits of the Lacanian psychoanalytical assumption that the mirror stage that is formative of the development of the human subject is grounded in an iconoclastic passage from the immediate presence of images generated by the preverbal, corporeal, maternal realm (the semiotic chora) to the realm of symbolic representation ruled by the law of the Father and the power of language (Gilman in Louvel, 2010: 29).

Tracing the pioneering footsteps of feminist iconographers, we reiterate the need to refuse women's debilitating reduction to the status of eroticised spectacles as objectified by the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1999: 837) and instead seek new forms of imagining femininity in and outside art, without rehearsing stories of dominance, victimisation and false

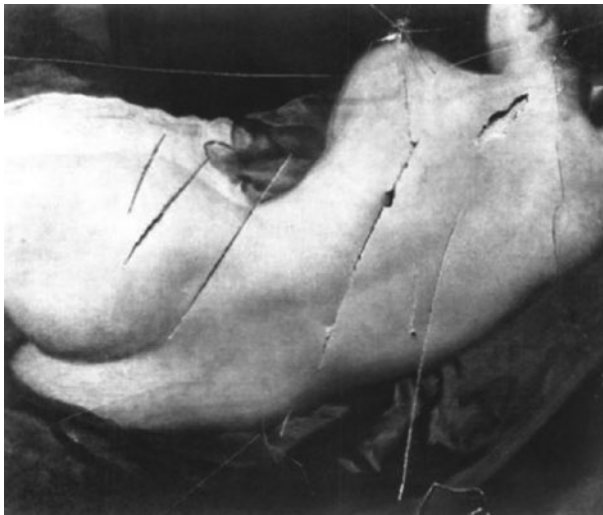


Figure 4. Detail of a photo of the damage done to the *Rokeby Venus* by Mary Richardson's attack. The canvas was later fully restored. The National Gallery, London. (The photo was released to the press and published on 11 March 1914).

consciousness. With Wendy Steiner (2001) we urge negotiating the criteria of beauty and greatness by looking beyond the normative aesthetic ideals which have come to predetermine 'the fairer sex'. We search beyond the genre of vanity pictures and *Playboy* cover girls; beyond the Kantian celebration of the magnificent masculine sublime that transcends fragile, ephemeral, effeminate charms; and beyond Pygmalion's myth about the male artist infatuated with a phantasmatic femininity frozen within an artwork of his own making.

It was a strategic decision to devote this journal issue to immediately contemporary historical case studies, including feminist intermedial analysis of press photographs, sports biographies, trend blogs and feature films from the past five years. The pragmatic reason for this temporal limitation of an extremely rich research area was the recognition that the intermedial study of more distant material, like medieval manuscripts, comes with its own set of disciplinary challenges which we cannot cover here. Another reason for the focus on today's verbal-visual dynamics lies in the current political climate in the Western hemisphere, particularly the troubling ways in which populist views have been rapidly disseminated in the press and online media platforms. Internet memes have been incorporated for ideological propaganda purposes like Pepe the frog, retweeted by Donald Trump, then used in the 2016 US presidential election campaign, turned into an icon of misogynist ethnonationalism, and more recently transmediatised by fans both as Google Play app and a deity of a mock religious worship. Ours is a crisis period in which image/texts have become the primary instruments of political manipulation and ideology-critical protests alike. An intermedial iconographical literacy is applied in the symbolism of revolutionary performances like those of women's rights activists who have been wearing worldwide, in street demonstrations against gender discrimination and the infringement of reproductive and civil rights, the crimson robes and white bonnets based on the visual imagery of Hulu's 2017 television series adaptation of Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The handmaids' iconic outfits with their sight-impeding caps and sacrificial gowns, and their silently

bowed heads, have become emblems of repressive patriarchy as well as of solidarity between women deprived of rights of bodily ownership. A silent *tableau vivant* of the blinded subject (restaging a moving image based on a literary text) tells a political narrative about voices not being heard. The ability to read pictures and picture texts allows us to hear this silence and enable the muted and the marginalised to vocalise their experience.

Griselda Pollock was among the first to recognise how visual and narrative representations take part in political struggles between classes, races and genders to exercise an influence on the reproduction or undoing of social systems of differentiation in her 'feminist interventions' (1988). Pollock's semiotics, informed by cultural materialist feminism, offered tools for a systematic study of how 'images, languages and other sign systems (fashion, eating, travel, etc.)' (10) produce cultural meanings, as well as subject positions for consumption of meanings and areas of knowledge divided into segregated compartments. Her canonical revision was based on the assumption that reclaiming visibility and audibility for women's heterogeneous creative practices in the histories of art challenges the discipline, politically because their exclusion resulted from a structural sexism operating alongside classism and racism to maintain the ideological status quo. As Linda Nochlin pointed out in her seminal article 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971), the long phallogocentric history of the masculine word's predomination over the feminised image is interconnected with the rhetorics of colonialism and imperialism. Hence, to recognise gender oppression surfacing in the seemingly innocent representational conventions to which we have been (unconsciously) trained to grow accustomed, and to initiate transgressions of fossilised medial boundaries 'may protect us from the harms of political blindness or indifference' (Jacobs, 2011: 10).

Motivated by the desire to find out how women and the identity politics of other subjugated minorities can be represented in cultures that identify the feminine as the silenced other, feminist iconographers have teased textual limits, thereby inducing media transitions and transformations in search of conceptual means to avoid pitfalls of dualistic thinking. Julia Kristeva's poststructuralist literary criticism revisioned textuality in the plural as a 'mosaic of quotations' (Moi, 1986: 37), absorbing and transforming other texts. Her notion of 'intertextuality' – fuelled by echoes of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and Saussure's semiotics – foregrounded the significance of intersubjectivity: the psychological relationality between meaning-making subjects attempting to apprehend aspects of 'language which belong not with the social contract but with play, pleasure or desire' (26). The Kristevian 'semanalysis' – a neologism derived from semiology and psychoanalysis – embarked on a self-reflective study of trans-verbal registers of representation with the aim to simultaneously explore how the macro-dynamics of ideological gestures and the micro-dynamics of bodily drives permeate all signifying practices. Although she never identified herself as a feminist (Oliver, 1993: 53), Kristeva's most important contribution to women's transmedial empowerment was the reintroduction of the body into the realm of language. In her view, the logic of signification is already present in corporeal materiality, and most specifically the pregnant maternal body that can be identified with poetic disruptions of meaning stretching across medial boundaries: subject–object distinctions are blurred like the sense–nonsense divide, foregrounding the semiotic alterity inside the subject and binding the other 'with love, not law' (Moi, 1986: 160).

Kristeva's repositioning of the female body as a key signifier of meaning production is as much a 'strategically essentialist' (Spivak, 1988) as a metaphorical gesture. It is akin to

the symbolic resignification of the navel – a knotted originary wound common to both genders and reminiscent of our being of women born. This is a pivotal concept of one of our two interviewees in this issue. Dutch narratologist and cultural analyst Mieke Bal locates at the kernel of cognition a feminist Barthesian punctum (1980) that ‘hits the reader, is processed by her or him, and textualises the image on its own terms’ while keeping us aware of the bodiliness of looking and the ‘indispensable collaboration between the work and its socially and historically positioned viewers’ (Bal, 2001: 83–84). In Elisabeth Bronfen’s cultural history on the engendering of hysteria as a female malady, the knot of the navel is associated with the consolatory fantasies of artistic practices: shielding the originary wound, it covers the traumatic knowledge of mortality, as a signifier both disclosing and hiding the vulnerability inhabiting the subject (Bronfen, 1997: 17). This idea is echoed in French intermediality theoretician Liliane Louvel’s conceptualisations of iconotexts in which the mythical circular form is doubled ekphrastically: Achilles’ and Perseus’ shields, ‘mirrors laden with ancient knowledge’, are compared to representation itself emblematised by an apotropaic shield protecting both artist and reader-viewer against death (2011: 15). The plot twist that after the end of Perseus’ quest Athena takes back the shield and decorates it with Medusa’s head and then turns it into mythology’s most fearful weapon that petrifies all who dare to look at it, provides another exciting commentary on women’s empowerment in the regime of visibility, spectatorship and counter-narratorial agency.

Louvel is the second of our two interviewees in this special issue. Her theoretical endeavours to ‘read images’ and ‘picture texts’ have crystallised in a web of transgressive concepts which facilitate the comprehension of ‘intermedial interartistic transpositions’ (2013: 13) that hover in the liminal creative space so often associated with women’s artistic productions. In her gendered reading, the ‘maternal images’ gestation’ self-reflexively poses questions about its own falsehood, represents the suspense of interpretation and opens up gateways to the imaginary, embracing tautological, antithetical, transgressive counter-narratives – to transcend the ‘paternal model of image-generation’ that triggers referentiality to establish a space of real authorising a documentary character (2011: 118). ‘Voyeur’ is a portmanteau conjoining the readerly and spectatorial event (*lecture, voyeurisme*) throughout the phenomenological experience of artistically negotiated intermedial transactions. Louvel describes this as transmediatised in terms of musicological and spatio-kinetic metaphors: ‘syncopation of the verbal/visual’ in an ‘oscillating mode’ (2010: 37, 2016: 19, 22). The ‘pictorial third’ denotes how intermedial composites affect readers’ corporeality, shaping the scripture of transitory impressions, ‘rayures’ (scratches) formed on the internal screen of the individual and collective mind’s eye (2010: 9). The ‘poetics of iconotext’ traces a typology of pluriform, oxymoronic fusions (of words and images): it conveys a desire to converge two irreducibly separate entities into one new, ambiguous, aporetic, open union, while allowing each term to maintain its difference in the ‘text’s pictorial subconscious’ vibrated by a fruitful tension (2011: 15). The modus operandi of these new hybrid iconotextual **artefacts** contains ethical potentials as it reveals strategies for how to accept the formerly marginalised other within the self-same.

Many of Louvel’s case studies illuminate intermedial manoeuvres of women’s writing explaining, for example, how the mental image of a dolphin’s fin cutting through the surface of the ocean inspires the experimental narrative structure of Virginia Woolf’s mystic playpoem *The Waves* (1931), or how aquarelle paint and colours, like the verbose silence of white in

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Karen Blixen's 'The Blank Page' (1956), traditionally evoke female bodily fluids contrasted with the 'dryness of drawing and the virility of the pen' (Louvel, 2012: 244). The Louvelien analytical agenda helps us to explore the affinity of sign and text beyond the scope of pictorial literary writing. It sheds new light on ground-breaking feminist intermedial interventions in the field of visual arts, like Hanna Höch's Dada photomontages or Su Blackwell's paper engineering in 3D movable book sculptures, which celebrate the visual quality of written words. Similarly, Harriet Russell's postmodern reinvented picture books filled with visual puns, or Lynda Barry's part-memoir, part-collage, part-workbook graphic novels, instruct readers in methods to open up their own creativity and see how 'pictures can help us find words to help us find images' (2008). These feminist works make us feel thoughts beyond language.

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As Karen Jacobs points out in her introduction to *Poetics of the Iconotext*, Louvel is best read next to Bal (Jacobs, 2011: 4). Bal abundantly nurtured further research on a larger spectrum of textual/pictorial relations. Her recycling of the narratological agenda to make sense of visual arts initiated the re-examination of a key concept in the humanities, of 'travelling' (2002) between disciplines, historical periods and cultural contexts. Interdisciplinary engagement emerged as a political necessity that could lead to the realisation of connections instead of separations by foregrounding how images and languages 'jointly participate' in a 'mixed' cultural life, allowing 'people to communicate with one other, with the past, with others' (1999a: 169). Bal explored the political potential of contemporary women artists' creative experiments across a variety of media, devoting book-length studies to Colombian Doris Salcedo's sculpture (2010), Finnish Eija-Liisa Ahtila's video installations (2013), Belgian Ann Veronica Janssens' abstract spatial interventions (2013) and Indian Nalini Malani's shadow-plays (2016), which replace the Anglo-American hegemony of images with a transnational diversity.

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The title of the first volume of this quadrilogy on feminist interventions into intermediality, *Of What One Cannot Speak*, emphatically recalls how aesthetic innovativeness is coupled with a bold questioning of the representability of cultural trauma. This includes a recognition of the inevitability of forgetting and the compulsion to commemorate via artworks turned into 'theoretical objects' which demand that historical cataclysms be revisited to explore 'the silent spaces' between violence, trauma and identity (Bal, 2010: 13). The philosophical, political testing of the limits of knowability, visibility/readability and embodied perceptibility focuses on conflict zones of the Unimag(in)able and the Unspeakable. The feminist counter-tradition of the therapeutical use of ekphrasis as a means to come to terms with trauma through the iconotextual narrativisation of the wounded self has surfaced on memorable occasions, like the self-anatomising strip-tease show performed to the 'peanut-crunching crowd' by 'Lady Lazarus' rising from the ashes like a Holocaust victim, an ECTed madwoman, or a mythical phoenix bird in Sylvia Plath's classic poem by the same name (1965). In contemporary examples, bruises of domestic abuse are compared to the lilacs and oranges of a kitschy sunset landscape painting in Kelly Sundberg's non-fiction short prose entitled 'It Will Look Like a Sunset' (2014); 'the damp voice' of home 'in your ear saying leave, run now, i don't know what i've become' in Somali-British Warsan Shire's powerful poem 'Home' about the horrors and hopes of the current refugee crisis (2015); or transgenerational verbal/visual spaces of remembrance in autobiographical graphic novels about girlhoods troubled by armed conflicts in comics, like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2004), Miriam Katin's *We Are On Our Own* (2006) and Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows* (2012). All of these works illustrate

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how intermediality allows for the communication of women's experiences of the unspeakable and unimaginable.

Bal's trademark interdisciplinary transmedial methodology was arguably at its height in the catalogue of an exhibition she curated for the Munch Museum in Oslo in the spring of 2017. In a radical reinterpretation of Munch's oeuvre, the fictional figure of the painter Edvard was placed in dialogue with Flaubert's heroine Emma Bovary. This was juxtaposed by a video installation and a feature film that Bal co-produced with Michelle Williams Gamaker. The novel was updated as a 'theoretical fiction' and co-investigative re-reading of 'emotional capitalism' (Bal and Gamaker, 2012) for a postmillennial era. The cinematic illusion of movement got extended to the literary and painterly realms, and the sideways look surfaced as a way of avoiding visual engagement and inciting spectatorial/readerly contemplation.

As the above samples of feminist theoretisations of intermediality suggest, the complex crossover between medial forms can provide sites for the self-reflective expression of heterogeneously embodied, polyphonically voiced, kaleidoscopically envisioned feminine 'subject-in-process' (Kristeva, 1984). Mutable identity performances – which simultaneously embrace spectator and spectacle, speaking and spoken, touching and touched subject positionalities – resonate particularly well with the diversity of structural schemas conjoining words and images while they at the same time undo medial boundaries. Flexible media – 'nested' inside one another as complementary contents (Mitchell, 2005: 262), sensory channels or semiotic media 'braided' seamlessly zigzagging through an overlapping mass of others (Mitchell, 2004: 262), or the linguistic and the visual 'woven' together 'interlacing at right angles to produce a fabric' (Fjellestad, 2015: 198) – model the complexity of interpersonal relationalities of 'malleably embodied' postmodern subjects (Bordo, 2004: 38). They also offer metamedial commentaries on the relativity of proliferating meanings and the need for consensual understanding. Louvel invokes Ariadne in this regard:

When a novel is punctuated at intervals by the presence of a painting, a mirror, or one of their substitutes, it transforms itself into a picture gallery which constructs a reader, weaving and thinking the thread between the various scenes, inscribing a temporality in-between the fixity of paintings, and reconstructing a plot, in his own rhythm, that of his body, his pace, his gaze. In the actual painting gallery, the reader, surrounded by spatial images, unrolls an Ariadne's thread between them... (Louvel, 2011: 172)

The theoretical use of the textile metaphor to describe how 'intermediality challenges and transforms our notion of art, our reception of experience' and the role of the reader/spectator (Eilitta, 2012: ix) leads back to the etymological root of textuality: 'textere', meaning 'to weave', identifies the written verbal narrative's production in terms of applied visual fine arts. It also evokes all the mythological master narratives about metafictional threads that represent the limits and potentials of representational strategies which orchestrate the multilayered process of interpretive agency. Again, Ariadne's red thread shows us the way out of Minotaur's labyrinth, as does the self-deconstructing fabric of Penelope's dress woven by day and unwoven each night, or the thread of human life untangled at the Moirai's mercy. As a divider and connecting agent that is similar to the original maternal bond of the umbilical cord, and as a memento of repressed vulnerability, the thread is a remarkably frequent symbol in contemporary feminist art. Casey Jenkins's vaginal knitting debunks the myth of the vagina dentate (2013), Alketa Xhafa-Mripa's 'airing dirty laundry' in a football stadium addresses silence surrounding wartime rape (2015), Chiharu Shiota's webs of yarn interlaced between objects link inherent narratives of haunted memoirs and create a visual plane reminiscent

of painting in mid-air (2016). In a related work, Helene Vosters (2016) invited participants to deconstruct, seam-by-seam, thread-by-thread, a US flag – during a part-mourning ritual, part-meditation performance that explored the ‘queer labour of unproduction’ and ‘unbecoming nationalism’ as vehicles for embodied critical engagement. Via a transmedial transnational bond, Andrea Zittlau’s postcard art (2016) featuring a self-portrait in a surgical mask and eyes reflecting the US flag in the photo installation on the front and a poem on the back, coupled with a pinch of threads from Vosters’s performance, invited the recipients of this multidimensional composite mail art to send on the poem postcard to someone in order to learn to master the art of letting go, of weaving by unweaving.

Like unweaving, the puncturing of textural surfaces is another strategy that has been adopted by feminist artists. An often-quoted emblematic gesture of women’s rage against representational confines and the desire to undo culturally prescribed narrative threads is suffragette Mary Richardson’s attack on Velásquez’s *Rokeby Venus* (c.1647–1651), a ‘creative iconoclastic’ (Kérchy, 2014: 1) gesture that she meant to be an outcry against the artistic, moral and political hypocrisy that idolatrises the *picture* of the most beautiful woman in mythological history but willingly denigrates all *living* women who happen to look beyond the hegemonic male gaze’s ideological control. Richardson called her slashes on Venus’s body ‘hieroglyphics’ of a counter-writing that was indecipherable for her contemporaries but ‘express[ed] much to the generations of the future’ (Richardson, 1914). She was eventually proven right because many gained inspiration from her controversial performance. New York-based Hungarian feminist concept artist Orshi Drozdik’s lipstick paintings and fractured Venus montages use a technique of cutting or mutilating the artwork – deconstructively appropriating Fontana’s piquage – with the aim to explore blind spots in conventional representations through a process of defamiliarising visibility via abstraction, and the tactile feel of wounded canvases’ torn surfaces and depths, associated with violated femininity, and scopophilic desires to see beyond/beneath the gaps. In Chloe Aridjis’s novel *Asunder* (2013), a female museum invigilator deciphers the physical history of paintings from the network of cracks, forming spirals, grids and nets, running across the canvases’ surface. Her obsession with ‘craquelure’ dwells on the ekphrastic surfaces of famous paintings, particularly the *Rokeby Venus* and its damage by real-life Mary Richardson, with whom her guard great-grandfather crossed paths. This is just one example of what Louvel might term ‘embossed stamping’ (2011: 60–61) and what Bal might refer to as ‘the glamor of historical reference, the historical “reality effect”’ (1999b: 15). This special issue emerges from and is addressed to the politically significant network of feminist researchers that we believe we share ties with on account of putting the study of intermediality in the service of ‘constructing a radically new understanding of our world in all its horror and hope’ (Pollock, 1988: 22). Like Aridjis’s narrator Marie, we are spiritual heirs to Richardson’s slashes, and are on intimate terms with both a motivational dissident fury and the self-disciplinary control guarding against them.

The convergence of medial boundaries is politically productive and methodologically inevitable in our transmediatised postmillennial era, in which the most efficient adaptations are strategically related across a variety of media as ‘integral elements of fiction dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated [transmedial storytelling] experience’, with each medium contributing in unique ways to the unfolding of an unprecedented, elaborate storyworld (Jenkins, 2007: 1, Kérchy, 2016). With new interactive entertainment technologies like virtual reality gaming, audiences

are constantly reminded that, from the standpoint of sensory modality, all media qualify as 'mixed media' that involve tactile, auditory, even olfactory impressions in the predominant visual/verbal representations' perceptions (Mitchell, 2005: 257).

5 Even iconic body artists like Marina Abramović find new modes of affirming individual and collective selves and of redefining presence and representation through transitioning from the physical art world to new online digital art spaces. Yugoslavian-born Abramović, grande dame of performance arts, earned her reputation throughout more than four decades of her career by exploring the intimate relationship between artist and audience, while challenging carnal limits, mental possibilities and traditional ways of seeing/reading. Mutual
10 viewing was an important part of her 2010 MoMA event, 'The Artist is Present', where she spent seven hours a day, six days a week for three months paying silent attention to individual visitors who came to sit down across her and look at her looking back at them. Abramović's latest work, 'Rising', calls viewers to political action concerning the climate crisis by inviting them into the VR space to be face to face with her avatar floating in a glass tank that is slowly
15 filling with water. The audience's commitment to stop the melting of icecaps could reduce the water level, while disinterest makes her drown. Throughout these multiple border crossings, the digital medium accommodated analogue physicality: the artist's simulated risking of her corporeal integrity necessarily elicited in spectators an 'ethics of care' (Gilligan, 1982), a recognition of the connectedness of all living beings and things. Besides restaging the
20 classic feminist equation of the personal with the political, conventionally disembodied technology became reincarnated on accounts of raising social awareness and empathy by 'transferring energy from body to body' (Cafolla, 2017: 11). However, while digital technology may enhance the audience's intimacy with the artwork, it also risks turning the subversive 'politics of wonder' into a hegemonically contained, 'commercialised poetics of magic' (Bacchilega, 2013: 5).

This special issue seeks to locate feminist politics in international intermedial discourse. M. Katharina Wiedlack's essay 'Gays vs. Russia: Media Representations, Vulnerable Bodies and the Construction of a (Post)modern West' investigates Anglophone media coverage of
30 Russian human rights violations between 2012 and 2014, with the aim of uncovering the ideologically invested visual politics implied in the foregrounding of shocking images of victimised, vulnerable, LGBTIQ+ bodies. Her article proves that the photographic medium – which is often mistaken for a documentary guarantee of truth based on the maxim 'seeing is believing' – fails to function by means of a transparent representation of reality; and instead generates complex layers of meanings through a mediation process determined by added
35 text, editorial arrangements and news agents' selections manipulating viewers' understanding of visual significations. Wiedlack critiques the Anglophone popular press for misappropriating images to maintain the North/West hegemony rather than promoting Russian LGBTIQ agency. Her close reading of iconic photographs uncovers how othered subjects become
40 reduced to their vulnerability in order to confirm the moral superiority and satisfy the narcissistic sentimentalism of empathic enlightened audiences.

Erzsébet Barát's "Luminous Spaces of Attention" – Methodological Challenges When Analysing Postfeminist Advertisements' offers a metacritical commentary on the slipperiness of the concept of the image in feminist scholarship. Barát advocates for non-hegemonic
45 academic narratives which may conceptualise 'woman-as-image' instead of speaking about the 'image/representation of women' versus the 'real women' distinction. She engages with Sue Thornham to demonstrate that what we encounter in the various media institutions is

not some transparent image of actual female bodies but multiple articulations of Woman that are structured by social practices of visibility and appearance. The required move in the trajectory of critical reflection is grounded in the recognition that, as of the 1990s, visibility has increasingly become the dominant structuring principle of femininity in consumer cultures; this has supplanted women either as mindlessly seductive simulacra or as over-embodied, objectified spectacularities. A case study from the online blogosphere illustrates problematic postfeminist attempts at representing 'real female bodies' in the name of a dramatic 'language makeover' of women's body-bashing perpetuated by social media.

Nicholas Chare's 'Transcribing the Corporeal: Physical Feminism, Autobiography and the Intermedial' analyses the autobiographies of two contemporary British women athletes: heptathlete Jessica Ennis and keirin track cyclist Victoria Pendleton, focusing on how the intermedial interplay between memoir narrative, illustration and paratext allows the sports-women to negotiate their gendered representations and communicate their vital physicality through life writing. Chare traces the autobiographers' fight against sexist identification with the erotic fantasy of the Olympic poster girl or the disembodied emblem of the nation, and identifies the potentials and limits of their counter-spectacular counter-narratives. They are fuelled by physical feminism, which is a third-wave feminist instrument for contesting patriarchal ideology's authority. Stories of containment are coupled by flashes of 'fleshy gender activism' that conceive of the physically empowered, agile, muscular, female body as a declaration of independence from feminine frailty that is realised through the subversive, performative repetition of athletic practices.

Andrea Virginás's essay 'Gendered Transmediation of the Digital from *S1m0ne* to *Ex Machina*: "Visual Pleasure" Reloaded?' uncovers a recurrent audiovisual narrative pattern that organises the postmillennial science fiction fantasies of masculinist Euro-American authorial cinema. She examines the heterosexual melodramas unfolding between analogue male and digitalised female characters (with women identified with artificial intelligence, computer software or digital devices), in claustrophobically confined spaces with enhanced perceptual stimuli. She argues that these films reiterate the gendered power dynamics that were identified in Laura Mulvey's theorisation of the male gaze's visual satisfaction in the feminised spectacle, introduced to describe classic Hollywood narrative cinema. Through analyses of 'transmedial remediations' of the digital base within diegetic coordinates that are calibrated for analogue, celluloid-based motion pictures, Virginás recycles Mulvey's mythological metaphors. She explains how masculine Pygmalions continuously animate digital beauties to satisfy the patriarchal hunger for fame, escapism, or spiritual, emotional, existential redemption, regardless of Galatea's discomfort with her digital colonisation, or Pandora's desperate attempts at introspection.

Carmen Pérez Ríu's 'Constructing Filmic Intersubjectivity through Haptic Visuality and Poetic Language in Sally Potter's *Yes* (2004)' focuses on one single filmic case study to explore how the intermedial amalgamation of cinematic techniques and literary resources fulfils a third-wave, intersectional feminist project. Swaying camera movements and tactile spectacles resonate with iambic pentameters, voice-over inner monologues and rhyming intertextual asides to communicate vulnerable subjectivities that transcend the perceptual planes of the male gaze and patriarchal discourse. The analysis explores how ocular experience's association with organs of touch and transverbal lyrical registers construct aesthetic, ideological narrative positions. They induce spectators' corporeal participation in meaning

production and allow for touching, mutually enriching intersubjectivities. Pérez Riu tackles the semiotics of moving image and poetry and the corporeal sense of the filmic body by elaborating on Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytical semiotics, Vivian Sobchack's feminist phenomenology of cinematic experience and Julia Kristeva's politics of lyrical language.

5 By way of conclusion, Samantha Sweeting's *The Whiteness of the Whale* performance photograph (2012) has offered us something of a talisman throughout the editorial process. 'Rewriting' Herman Melville's nineteenth-century novel *Moby-Dick* (1851), the artist strives to embody key imagery by covering the mound of her breast in a lactic substance which one might read as an example of the 'white ink' so championed by Cixous (1976: 881). The
10 textual remnants of the tiny origami boat are not engulfed but teeter on the brink – ultimately the female bodily topography balances the text/image dynamics. The essays published in this special journal issue tackle the political stakes of troubling medial boundaries in search of the most efficient feminist epistemological tactics. Each one embraces the heritage of second-wave feminist knowledge production, by demanding that empirical
15 inquiry be intent on overturning systemic gender disparities, by validating minorities' experience and rejecting hierarchies between the researcher and the researched (the onlooker/writer and the spectacle/the textualised) and by aiming for social-cultural equality. Yet, in agreement with Yasmin Gunaratnam and Carrie Hamilton's insight, we also realise that while doing contemporary research, 'methodology is always an *in media res* wandering, if not a
20 bewildering getting lost, as well as a retrospective retelling' (2017: 1). The most one can strive for is an honest, responsible sketch of 'the happening of the social world': the 'ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness' (Lury and Wakeford, 2012: 2) of its visual/verbal stimuli.

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