

Editorial

Putting together this volume of n.paradoxa, I was struck by how difficult those I spoke to found it to put the two terms “*citizen*” together with feminism(s) and “*art*”. Feminism has certainly been evacuated, minimised or rendered entirely absent from many of the boy’s club-type discussions exploring radical alternatives to democracy in art exhibitions and political forums, and this is in spite of the voices of Chantal Mouffe, Nancy Fraser, Rosi Braidotti, Joan Wallach Scott, Seyla Benhabib or the numerous citations of Hannah Arendt’s work, and occasional mentions of Simone de Beauvoir or Olympe de Gouge. The focus of attention in rethinking democracy has been on those who have no rights but now live in democracies and on prioritising art works which have examined or explored the lives of immigrants, migrant workers, trafficking in human labour and the sex trade or on those working in the most marginalised sectors of the capitalist economy. Women have clearly been subject(ed) to all these processes in contemporary life, but it is as subjects – as the embodiment of precarious labour – that they appear far more frequently than as the creative producers making work at the forefront of these debates. n.paradoxa has published many articles to date which look at artworks by women artists who have explored these subjects and will continue to do so. The specifics of women artists looking at women’s lives, their working or living conditions, the gendered and asymmetric relationships with other people around them nevertheless continue to be marginalised in mainstream discourses about citizenship.

In the most arrogant terms, artists like to think of themselves as “*citizens of the world*”. This particular male arrogance about intellectual freedom seems to have returned with a vengeance. But what does this mean for women as artists when they explore their artistic freedom of expression. Against this universal idea of the artist as a “*free*” spirit, women may recognise themselves as strongly identified with a home, a location or a geographical region even when they critique the dominant values around them or the discourse about “*citizenship*” there. Too often this appears as a typical replaying of the old male as Universal and Woman as particular bind again – where men speak from the position of free unfettered privilege about the demos, the state, economy or politics and women are seen as only having a limited voice on particular issues about the body politic, sexuality or the

domestic? Surely we should be working to avoid these kinds of limits on where and what women can speak about?

Having rights as a “*citizen*” of a country is central to any conception of democracy or democratic politics and central to these is the right to vote. Conditions of voting rights have limited this right to a certain age, a place of birth, where a person lives, nationality (and sometimes ethnicity) or whether they pay taxation in different parts of the world. However, wasn’t the fight to abolish gender as a condition of this right to vote where women’s emancipation began? And then when this right was won, taking part in law-making, in civil society, in education, in professions, in political and social change then became possible as women (and sometimes for and on behalf of women) as women citizens became a “*represented*” or “*identifiable*” group with interests in the electorate. The question of this extension of social and civil democratic rights was central to second wave feminism in their actions to avoid their status as “*second-class citizens*”: whether this was a liberal, a socialist or more radical alternative perspectives on participation in social democracy. The resulting campaigns were diverse and various from childcare to nuclear disarmament, but what united them was women’s active participation together as a group to make social and political changes in their own and other women’s lives. The relative privilege of women in most democratic states related to the possession of the right to vote has not stopped their long campaigns for women’s civil and social rights to and in education, around housing, in the job market, in health care and social services. Activism is the name of many citizen’s campaigns for social change and the popularity of this term “*activism*” within feminism has not diminished. Democracy is more than putting your “*x*” on a ballot paper every few years, it requires active citizenship – participation! Given that 15 million people in the world are regarded as being stateless, can women afford to be complacent about what it means to “*be a citizen*”; consider the limits of “*citizenship*”, in terms of their political or social’ rights – including the right to protest. This is not just a question for “*Others*” or of the asymmetry between privileged “*first-world women*” working on problems in “*developing countries*”. It affects us all. Questions of social justice and representation are closely tied to political protest and when this takes the form of “*Art*” how effective can Art be as an instrument, not reducible to propaganda, in these expressions of protest and resistance? Women continue to experiment with how to manifest their protests, to make clear their identity both as women and as artists. This volume carries just a few examples of women artists’ creative attempts internationally to protest from Russia, Hungary, Austria, Argentina, Georgia, China, Australia, UK and USA.