

Foreword

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Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (24)

In 1919, women in the Netherlands first gained full voting rights. Women in the United Kingdom followed some nine years later, an occasion marked by Virginia Woolf's feminist landmark essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The essay deals in the broadest sense with women and fiction; which

might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them, or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together [...] (1)

Woolf wonders at the lack of female authors—especially compared to the number of books written about women—and of a female writing tradition for them to base themselves on. She comes to the conclusion that it is not necessarily the right to vote that will change women’s lives; rather, it would be the right to own property: “a woman must have money and a room of her own,” she states, “if she is to write fiction” (2). While the right to vote is important, she argues that it means little as long as women’s livelihoods are still controlled by their male next of kin, and as long as “[e]very penny [they] earn [...] will be taken from [them] and disposed of to [their] husband’s wisdom” (20).

Woolf is addressing a much larger issue here than rooms, money, or votes; she is addressing a structure that goes beyond financial or political power. From her own, admittedly privileged and limited perspective, she addresses the patriarchal systems that have historically kept women—the exemplary cases being Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister and the mysterious Anon—from achieving their full potential. But rather than having women act and write like men, rather than having a female author “[alter] her values in deference to the opinion of others” (73), she advocates for a more androgynous style of writing, one that she experimented with throughout her writing career and which reaches its zenith around this same time, in *Orlando* (1928): “He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman” (67).

Those four little words make the difference; but, as Woolf continues, “in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (67). The change of sex brings with it major changes in Orlando’s behaviour, centred on the gender which they must perform. She can no longer curse, fight, parade, or wear medals on her chest; she even realises with regret that she will have to cover up her legs, which “were among her chiefest beauties [...] lest a sailor may fall from a mast-head” (77). The androgynous, in-between persona of Orlando allows Woolf to explore all the relative penalties and privileges of the sexes in interwar Britain, and especially the ways in which female

bodies were caught in all-too-familiar gender roles. The female bodies in *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* joined the growing current of feminist bodies that tore at the fabric of the patriarchal social system of interwar Britain, but the fact that Orlando's legs still resonate so strongly today tells us that the fight is far from over.

Many have followed in Woolf's footsteps in the attempt to move away from phallogocentrism and find what Hélène Cixous eventually termed *écriture féminine*, or *féministe*. For this issue of *FRAME*, in honour of one hundred years of general women's suffrage in the Netherlands, we invited authors to consider the female, feminine, but especially feminist bodies of today. Feminist bodies come in many shapes and sizes: this issue's title can refer to a body of literature; a body politic; or quite simply, powerfully, a movement of individual feminist bodies. The reason for focusing not only on feminism or embodiment, but rather bringing them together, lies in the fact that politics and bodies are so extraordinarily intertwined in the case of feminism, both historically and today. As Lauren Berlant rightly points out, when politics gets involved with such intimate issues as abortion, marriage, and family values, the political and the personal collapse "into a world of public intimacy" (1). The existence of movements such as #MeToo, #HeforShe, and the Women's Marches attests to the continued need for a feminist body to speak out against inequality, sexism, and violence. Therefore, this issue sets out to explore and contribute to the understanding of the entanglement of the personal and the public, of bodies physical and political, and the reality of being (considered) female, feminine, and/or feminist today.

This issue opens with Eva-Lynn Jagoe's "Delusional Girl: Genre and the Representation of Feminized and Feminist Subjectivity." In this article, she explores contemporary neoliberal feminism using Lena Dunham's memoir *Not That Kind of Girl* and the HBO series *Girls*, arguing that "Dunham's disruptive persona embodies a neoliberal feminist message of self-fulfilment that constantly stumbles over the contradictions inherent in performing and inhabiting a young female self today." Jagoe exposes the disconnect between Dunham's autobiographical self-presentation and her more ambiguous on-screen representation of a contemporary female coming-of-age story. She ultimately argues

that “[i]n fiction, a version of a more capacious feminism emerges, one that represents embodied feminized subjects who struggle with—and resist—the pressures that shape Dunham’s increasingly problematic self-presentation.”

From the contradictory experience of living as a neoliberal feminist, we move on to consider creative and theoretical feminist bodies of work with Emma Bond and Eleanor Crabtree in “From Snap to Selfcare: Reading Feminism through Sara Ahmed and Phoebe Boswell.” Bond and Crabtree use the concept of autotheory to explore how theory can be ‘in touch’ with the world, and show “the creative and embodied aspects of [their] own practice as feminist researchers,” thus bringing together theory, art, and personal experience. Through their article and their practice of connective reading, they rethink the boundaries between the academic, the personal, and the political, arguing that “[l]iving our academic lives overlaps with living our feminist lives when we try to take care of that community through our work.”

Timothy C. Baker then brings us from this multitude of feminist bodies to consider the imposition of narratives onto a singular female body in his “Fear and Pity, Pity and Fear: Rereading Muriel Spark’s *The Driver’s Seat* in the Age of #MeToo.” Baker demonstrates how contemporary feminist discourse questions the representationalist framework that treats women’s bodies in literature as symbols or ciphers detached from themselves. Rereading Spark in the age of #MeToo, Baker finds that “the novel’s critics have often elided the body at the centre of the tale.” He demonstrates how both in literature and in life, “the story of women’s bodies is always already framed by a pre-existing narrative structure that cannot simply be denied or repudiated,” arguing that “it becomes essential to use such structures against themselves.”

In “Words Matter: Friendship, Grief, and Maggie Nelson’s *Reckoning with Loss*,” Christina Crosby poetically connects the question of representing the ongoing loss in disability studies with that of femicide. Reading Maggie Nelson’s *Jane: A Murder*, Crosby shows how literary language brings back the ghost with its “whole complicated sociality” (Gordon, qtd. in Crosby) and the murdered body that, instead of being removed, “must be returned to bleed all over.” Relating to the

catastrophic spinal cord injury that has transformed her life, and her friendship with Nelson that has sustained her in reckoning with the loss, Crosby offers a reading of the work that shows “the energetic liveliness of life, the ways loss and grief perturbate relational networks, and the fact that some losses open gaps that cannot be closed and baffle the need to know.”

In our masterclass section, Laureanne Willems provides a thoughtful critique of feminist interpretations of anorexia through her analysis of Emma Woolf’s memoir *An Apple a Day*. She argues that the linear accounts of anorexia, in which “a patriarchal society [...] submits women to a set of strongly gendered (and discriminatory) norms and a female subject that is susceptible to that,” fail to account for the lived experience of anorexia. Through her reading of Woolf, Willems shows how it is nonetheless possible to be both feminist and anorexic; “it just takes a deep commitment to battle stigma and the status quo.” Finally, in our second masterclass article, Anneloek Scholten and Max Casey analyse the concept of queer female identity in Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, demonstrating how the novel both adheres to and undercuts the Freudian understanding through which queerness was often read in the early twentieth century. They conclude that “*Nightwood* teaches us how to read the gendered body cautiously by subverting expectations, treating gender and sexuality as cultural and discursive constructs instead of natural facts, and asking us to be wary of imposing categories on others.”

All articles in *FRAME* 32.2 address the topic of “Feminist Bodies” through a diverse array of case studies, focusing on the intersections, connections, and disconnections between feminist theory and the (female) body, the roles of female bodies in literature, and feminist practices within and beyond academia, offering an impressive account of what it means to be (considered) female, feminine, and/or feminist today. On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank our authors for their contributions and express the hope that our readers will enjoy the current issue.

Works Cited

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