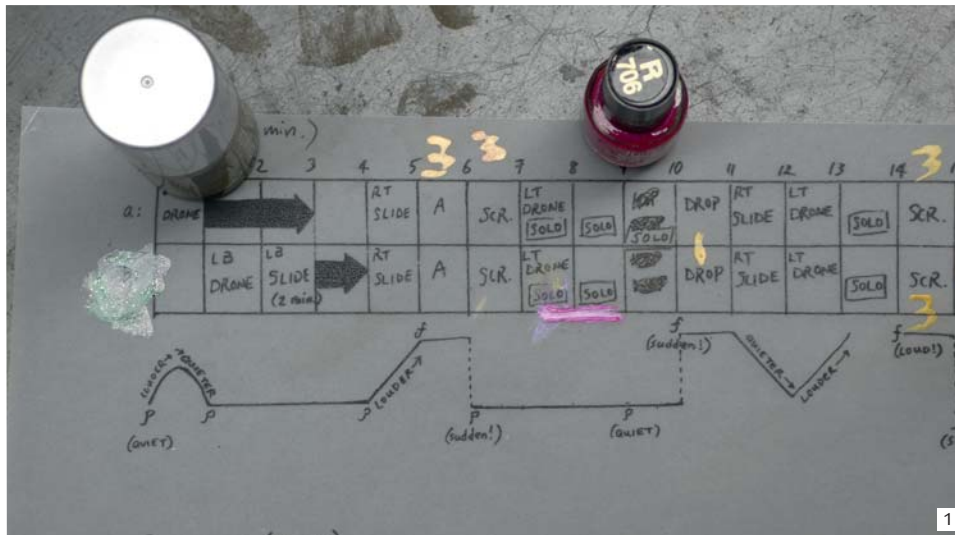


"We falter with feminist conviction".

Lina Džuverović and Irene Revell

Notes on Assumptions, Expectations, Confidence, and Doubt in the Feminist Art Organisation

To talk about our organisation, Electra, founded in 2003, we will first, briefly, turn the clock back to a moment in London thirty-five, or so, years earlier, when a group of women couldn't help but query and intervene into the problematic process in which art history was being constructed before their very eyes. This initiative led to the foundation of Circles, an artists-run distribution and production organisation focused on women's filmmaking. When seen from the perspective of Electra, this earlier moment foregrounds certain historical continuities and shared inter-generational concerns, which can either be seen as a source of strength for younger feminists, or (depending on one's point of view) frustration at how slowly structural change happens and how hardy its protagonists must therefore be. We would like to note that almost all of the references we make in this text, both historical and current, refer to the local situation in London, from within an immediate or extended community around the organisation(s).



A Crumpled Heap

Circles was founded in the late 1970s by some of the female members of the London Film Maker's Co-operative. There is an associated founding myth, an event that was by no means the only catalyst for the creation of Circles, but remains informative in seeking to understand what is at stake in the articulation of such a feminist organisation. This story begins with the withdrawal of a group of women filmmakers—Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Susan Stein—from the canonical 1979 Hayward Gallery, London exhibition *Film as Film*, which sought to map the entire history

Expectations / assumptions of a feminist art organisation

- that everyone cares about what they do
- that there is a certain shared sense of a 'common good', the building of a common resource for the good of the organisation and its community/ies
- that your work and social life will be connected and will enhance your life by being interesting and enriching
- that you will like the people you work with
- that you will become friends with artists you work with (get closer to your heroes/heroines)
- that those heroes/heroines will like you and respect you
- that you will like and respect them
- that people will credit and acknowledge each other accordingly
- that a community will be formed around the projects
- that such a community will last
- that people you work with will have a certain sense of loyalty, duty or responsibility or gratitude and that they will remain faithful to the organisation, continue to promote it, or express some form of solidarity
- that those you work with share a similar outlook/politics/vision
- that everyone will give more than they are paid for even though the organisation is trying to challenge free labour (conflictual at the very core)
- that it is commonly known that you have put in hundreds of unpaid hours/ gone out of your way to make things happen many times over
- that money is important but other things (solidarity, loyalty, belief in projects and people) are important too and not in conflict with survival
- that community and belief can protect you from living in the real world
- that a certain corporate language will be avoided (seen as inappropriate) yet its strategies appropriated when useful (brand, strategy, creative industries, profit, power, networking)
- that the business side is a 'put on' for the purpose of funding
- that alternative languages and approaches will be nurtured and cherished and not de-valued as inferior to the 'proper'
- that despite clear hierarchies the organisation will be non-hierarchical (conflictual and confusing from the outset)
- that the longitudinal will trump the latitudinal: that depth of interest and engagement will automatically be more highly validated
- that single individuals will not derive more value from the collaborative venture than is 'fair'
- that the 'group' or collaboration will be acknowledged in each future instance where its works / projects are referred to, not just those individuals who become more 'successful'
- that the work of the group will still be respected, and furthermore, understood as the precursor, when its primary discourses and aims are taken up by larger institutions
- that feminist curating is not only a numbers game (ie curating with more women artists) but a systematic and self-reflexive ongoing challenge
- that feminist curating will produce feminist art and feminist exhibitions
- that feminism is intended intersectionally with a host of other struggles: including but not limited to class war, anti-racist, queer, trans, crip activism inter alia
- that feminism is a radical anti-capitalist force-field that will dismantle the Master's House, not merely grease the career path of a few already-privileged women

of almost a century of artists' moving image. The story, then, underscores the "problems of history"¹, as Rhodes termed it.

Aware that the development of the exhibition had been hitherto heading towards producing a vastly male history of artists' film in the 20th century, the organising committee invited Lis Rhodes, an artist filmmaker, to contribute to the exhibition's curatorial research, in particular to research the history of women in film. It is worth noting that the invitation was to a single woman, presumably deemed of sufficient status to contribute to such 'important' work. Crucially, Rhodes chose to complicate this invitation, offering a diffractive² approach to multiply the question of representation at the very first turn. That is, she extended the invitation to a wider group of fellow women artists, already complicating the authorial grounds of curatorial knowledge-production. The group set about to research a number of hitherto completely obscure figures—Maya Deren, Germaine Dulac, Alice Guy, Lois Weber—searching for historical precedents for their own work. When it came to the exhibition itself, the group chose to withdraw this research, arguing that the rigidly canonical framework presented by *Film as Film* was counter to their feminist impulses. They explained this withdrawal in a text, *Women and the Formal Film*³, which was displayed in the exhibition space itself, and its catalogue. Instead, their research fed into the foundation of Circles, an organisation that literally took their own work, and their own sense of historical context, into their own hands—underscoring the crucial role of historical precedents in understanding one's own practice—especially in such uncharted feminist organisational work.

Published alongside this group-authored text there is a more personal account by Lis Rhodes entitled *Whose History*⁴. In her text Rhodes elegantly describes her painful alienation in the face of an art-historical canon:

It is as though a line could be drawn between the past and present, and pieces of a person's life and work pegged on to it; no exceptions, no change – theory looks nice – the similarity of the item reassuring – shirt to shirt – shoulder to shoulder – an inflexible chain, each part in place. The pattern is defined. Cut the line and chronology falls in a crumpled heap. I prefer a crumpled heap, history at my feet, not stretched above my head.

This statement, and the context behind its writing, speak of the ongoing problems of history and feminist organisation: the need to search for historical precedents to inform one's own work. There is a joyful exuberance to the realisation that this might 'merely' constitute a crumpled heap, a celebration of a crumpled heap as an end in itself.

Assumptions and Expectations

Thirty-five years later, it was some of the same concerns/questions that fuelled the foundation of another arts organisation, Electra. Whilst Circles emerged quite directly from the London Film Maker's Co-op, with many parallel members of both organisations, Electra was founded in close proximity to the Lux Centre, the organisation that had emerged from the merger of London Film Maker's Co-op and London Electronic Arts, together forming the Lux Centre, later to become LUX. Through conversations that emerged in relation to an ongoing programming strand "Interference"⁵ that took place at the Lux Centre, 1998–2001, the two curators of the series, Anne Hilde Neset and Lina Džuverović (Džuverović also a staff member of Lux Centre) perceived an overwhelmingly male bias in their own series, and rather than complicitly continuing such work, took matters into their own hands and began the curatorial/research project, *Her Noise*, which sought to

address the "historical blind spots" of women in the history of 20th-century sound practice(s), and their contemporary successors. Electra was founded in 2003 initially out of necessity and pragmatic need to enable this curatorial project to happen. The desire to seek out historical exclusions, and the need to foster new forms of organisation to do so clearly resonates across these two histories.

What does it mean, then, to run a feminist/collaborative/collective organisation that challenges dominant structures, methodologies, and goals? What acts of self-sacrifice may be embedded in such a claim? How can a feminist organisation/action exist in neoliberal precarious market conditions? How often are these questions articulated and outlined at the inception of such organisations—or can they be? What are the invisible assumptions in working in an arts environment with a certain ethical code?



'Feminist' seems to have become, in recent years, a hackneyed term for curators, a magic protective cloak that shields the curator, an adjective so consensually positive and useful beyond question that it can be applied at ever-increasing frequency to confer adherence to an ill-defined consortium of loosely liberal values. We're ever faithful to it, but how certain are we in what we mean when we use it, especially in this particular art/curating context? Does 'feminist curating' refer to curating feminist work, by feminist artists, work that embraces feminism(s) in its form and/or content? Is it a way of making feminist statements in the curatorial process, or does it involve incorporating feminist politics into the working process and infrastructure of the curatorial work itself? And in the case of the latter, how easy is it to define the feminist art organisation, its work and infrastructure, moreover perform this work?

Effective feminist curating might require clearing the decks of multiple meanings of both curating and feminism, and drawing upon one's own ethical vision. Alternatively, a meandering curatorial practice with an emphasis on difference and social justice, a desire to rethink histories, acts of fandom, all coupled with a sense of urgency, could equally amount to what could be termed 'feminist curating'. It was the combination of the latter that brought Electra into existence. By

using Electra as a central case study, an organisation in which we were both involved (and continue to be so), this text explores questions that arise in an attempt to undertake 'feminist curating', drawing on personal experience with some provisional theoretical suggestions. In what began as an exercise in seeking further definition towards an 'ethical code' for feminist curating, we would like to note that what follows is by no means a definitive history of the organisation, conspicuously lacking discussion of any individual project and rather focusing in this instance on the organisational framework, a series of points drawn from our own experiences.

In parallel with this discussion, we offer an index of 'expectations/assumptions' (see fig. 1) of a feminist organisation, that we share as a means to providing a general 'key' to the highly specific points that follow. These expectations frequently exist but are not articulated, or cannot be articulated, written into a contract, or even verbalised, nor may it be desirable to do so even if it were possible. Yet, they are essential in the running of such organisations, ambiguously and almost invisibly underpinning their work and decision-making, with little articulation. Of course, these are only our own assumptions, and by no means exhaustive, but we hope the list extends towards a useful articulation of what might foreground a feminist art organisation, at least in our experience of it.

Electra: a feminist organisation finding its feet in a neoliberal climate of overproduction

The arts organisation Electra⁶, founded in 2003, provides a personal insight for both of us into possible methodologies, and curatorial positions, as well as challenges and pitfalls, of an attempt to 'perform' (undertake) what might be termed 'feminist curating' in a particularly competitive, fast-moving, production and output-centred environment in London in the early 2000s through to the present.

In the space of less than six months Electra developed from a platform for delivery of one project, *Her Noise*, primarily driven by a curatorial desire (and vague ambitions and hopes of continuing beyond this one project), to a fully functioning arts organisation. The reasons behind this shift, and the sudden and rapid rethink, were, unsurprisingly, economic in nature. Realising that the organisation we had founded had the potential to become a long-lasting, potentially sustainable initiative, and provide not only our livelihoods but also a space for further action, meant that we quickly 'shifted gears' to meet the requirements imposed by our potential funders. Despite the fact that our desire for this work stemmed from curatorial interests, and the ethics of DIY grassroots artistic communities, we quickly learned to adapt, to speak the language of 'small business', rising to the challenge of having to appear to be a *bona fide* arts organisation. From thinking of Electra as a small project with a relatively modest purpose and infrastructure—a bank account, a desk in a shared office, and a rudimentary website—we quickly adapted to appear to be running a fully-fledged arts organisation.

By Spring 2005, Electra had rapidly, and to an extent artificially (by moving too fast), succeeded in becoming an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation⁷, with a business plan, financial and organisational commitments, an artistic programme scheduled for three years ahead, an Advisory Board, an Executive Board of Directors, an accountant, and soon, a host of freelance staff. This was by no means an unwelcome development. In fact, we were delighted that these opportunities arose, but it was sudden and we responded as best we could, frequently feeling we were committing to delivering a programme beyond our means

(in terms of time and resources) or wishes, but nevertheless eager to grab the chance that had unexpectedly arisen, to establish something long-lasting and full of potential, that we still hoped we could mould into a shape that captured some of our visions.

The way the organisation developed meant that its structure, its methodologies, its ethos and its running became a hybrid of the ethical, curatorial, and practical ideas we believed in and had brought with us from previous experiences, and on the other hand, the pragmatic, strategic decisions we needed to make in order to fulfil the criteria that would ensure our entry into the world of 'bigger players'—regularly publicly-funded arts organisations in London. As a result, what had started out as a grassroots initiative, tentatively initiated by two curators with a particular research question about feminist history and omission (the question behind *Her Noise*), grew into an arts organisation almost overnight, along with an immediate tension between a DIY anti-authoritarian impulse, and the professionalised rules of the output-driven mainstream 'art world'. To be regularly funded, it seemed, we needed to aspire to certain normalising features (needing to aspire to larger rather than smaller audience numbers, active audience development, diverse forms of income, with an increasing emphasis on private streams, et cetera), which we continued to attempt to resist, with varying levels of success. Our belief in fostering smaller communities through a depth of engagement proved to be generally at odds with the growth mindset of public funding. In what follows we discuss, through a series of points, this hybrid model that Electra inhabited, a model that sought to bridge our ethics with the pragmatic demands we were facing. Some points are more of a matter-of-fact, while others we unpack, sometimes making prescriptions and/or speculations about further areas of inquiry.



Labour/governance

Electra was initiated on the firm belief that we would only undertake projects in which everyone would be treated and paid fairly. This meant that there would be no unpaid work, artists would always receive *per diems*, have their transport and accommodation paid, and receive a fee. A project would not be taken on until it was clear that these conditions could be adequately met.

Electra was hierarchical. We had job descriptions and job titles, and our salaries reflected this. It was never a collective, in the 'traditional' egalitarian sense, and the hierarchies were evident in our day-to-day running, decision-making and 'perks' (for instance research travel). This structure was intended as a way of reflecting seniority in terms of experience and length of commitment. Nevertheless transparency and a horizontal dialogue were encouraged, with a desire to include all staff in key discussions and decision-making.

Electra was set up as a limited company, with three main shareholders, the two founders, Lina Džuverović and Anne Hilde Neset, as well as Irene Revell who joined the organisation in 2004. The ownership percentages reflected the amount of investment (unpaid time, paid time, 'risk', expertise) each of us had invested, at the point of its division, or an attempted version of this split. In addition, others who have made a significant contribution to the organisation over the years as freelance staff in a variety of curatorial and production roles, include Fatima Hellberg, Holly Ingleton, Sinead McCarthy, Ash Reid, Lisa Rosendahl, Dawn Scarfe, and Lucy Shanahan.

Each project would contribute 20% of its overall budget towards core costs of the organisation. Though in reality, especially in latter years of Electra's activity, this varied wildly (mostly downwards) in each situation, against a pervasive economic shift that saw many earlier sources of funding dry up in an economy that was shrinking overall at the same time as facing an increasing demand from ever-growing numbers of small-scale initiatives and new organisations.

Care

Our belief in fair payment was part of a wider ethos of taking a greater level of care and attention to detail at every level than we felt was customary in arts production at the time. This reflected our interest in fostering a community, rather than simply producing and staging some art. Through close, slow collaboration with artists and other partners with whom we worked, we sought to create a space in which practice could be speculative, take risks, take its time, without being entirely output-driven. These methods were a result of prior experience in larger institutions with an endemic culture of carelessness and, at times, exploitation. We still strive to reject the insidious over-production and exhaustion of the ego-obsessed mainstream art world. Yet, of course, given our own excitement and ambitions, coupled with a rather slender infrastructure (two to four freelance members of staff at any time), we often did 'punch above our weight' in ways that were both essential to the organisation's development and outward visibility, but ultimately personally exhausting and, at times, soul and health-destroying.

*Curatorial vision and the 'Inchoate'*⁸

The curatorial vision was not clearly articulated. This lack of articulation was initially due to the aforementioned speed with which opportunities had arisen, but also an effect of a desire to not be self-limiting, and a desire to resist the categorisations that we felt to be so problematic in canonical art history. In this sense, the organisational thinking went very much hand-in-glove with the ethos of the individual projects and research, which often sought to expose or undermine these rigid structures. Our projects all shared an inherent interest in historical 'blind spots' (both within, and beyond art history) twinned with inter-generational approaches to curating, those that consider the influences of particular histories on contemporary practice.



Even today, a precise definition of the curatorial vision of Electra may elude us, but we could say that its ethos lies at the intersection of the self-organisational ethos shared by Fluxus, No Wave, Punk, Riot Grrrl, and their contemporary legacies, although the wish to avoid precise taxonomies and categories altogether remains central to the organisation. Electra's curatorial vision was always more centred on the type of process and engagement we wished to be living, than the products of that engagement. Described at one stage as 'working with artists who work across sound, performance, moving image and text on questions of political and social urgency', provided an improvement on the earlier, even more wilfully vague, tagline which read 'Commissioning, Curating, Producing'.

Our approach to feminist politics, and practices, was discussed in detail in a text entitled "Twice erased: The Silencing of Feminisms of Her Noise"⁹, which explored the ways in which feminism was articulated (or rather not articulated, but implied) in Electra's methodologies, via the *Her Noise* project. It is worth noting that whilst a clear articulation of feminist, post-colonial, and other critical approaches to historicisation in what we might broadly term 'intermedia' might seem like a reasonable proposition in 2016, we struggled for a viable way to describe these impulses that was not instantly toxic (damaging due to the unpopularity of such a discourse in general terms) for the organisation in 2005, or even 2010. Whilst we would eschew the notion of 'waves' of feminism that obscure the continuous and ongoing developments of feminist practice(s), it is true to say that never in our working memory has there been a greater acceptance of these terms than in the present (and yet never has there been more ambiguity in the intentions of their use).



Curator as Fan, Curator as Friend

Many of Electra's projects emerged from a sense of 'fandom' towards certain protagonists or areas of work, or at times towards particular ways of articulating politics, rather than a more 'academic' position. We are indebted to art historian Catherine Grant's thinking in this regard in her paradigm-shifting 2011 essay "Fans of Feminism"¹⁰. Grant's text rethinks the model of intergenerational influence within feminist practices through the queer figure of the 'fan'; a joyous accounting for these desirous modes of identification that might take an informal, non-institutional, or even amateur route to knowledge-production, allowing for the fact that seeking out such obscured histories requires a level of ardent yet almost always innovative dedication.

In effect, the curatorial red-thread was more readily associated with our experiences of certain communities and subcultures than an academically acquired rationale, in line with this notion of the 'fan'. One point for further consideration of the 'curator fans of feminism' might be how this model operates for more than one such *fan*—for instance in a collective, group, or organisational setting. How much

must, or even can, fandom be shared, or at least overlapping? And how in turn does this operate amongst audiences?



A different, but not unrelated, model with equal relevance to Electra's *modus operandi* was articulated by curator Viktor Misiano in his 1998 text "The Institutionalization of Friendship"¹¹, in which he foregrounds links between disparate artistic communities in different cities, united by no other force but friendship. Turning to sociology, Misiano explains that, "The only type of a social link not determined by some regional or family relationship, professional cooperation, ideological solidarity, or erotic attraction is friendship". He goes on to qualify friendship as "a type of serial solidarity" different entirely to the lovers' need for togetherness, the familial bond, the repeated production-driven togetherness of those joined by work, or the shared ideological goals of political togetherness. Friendship is unregulated, self-initiated over and over again, and excludes personal gain.

But in DIY communities, it is precisely friendship, the "serial solidarity" that begins to give way to something more like work-joint, exciting, and inspiring work. Electra incorporated elements of what happens when friendship imperceptibly migrates into a different form of togetherness, because shared interests and ideas often lead to 'doing something together'.

Fidelity, or, 'The Ethical Slut'

Some firmly stated commitments from the outset were based around a belief in longer-term, often ongoing, relationships with artists. Accordingly a depth of engagement was prioritised in our fields of research that was in opposition to the time-scales imposed by the exhibition cycle of larger, mainstream institutions. Initially we even toyed with the idea of 'representing' artists whose work was too non-commercial or marginal for gallery representation, echoing the historical impulses of organisations such as Circles and the London Film Maker's Co-op, or the Women Artists' Slide Library. Electra's ongoing and often multi-annual research process, though no means unique, remains far from dominant models of 'fast' curating, today best exemplified by the widely adopted 'name-check' curatorial model of the Serpentine Gallery marathons (and their legacy, already proliferated

globally) which feature dozens of artists' and thinkers' contributions in a short time, and other ways of relaying content that seem to push for this inhumane scale. We felt disturbed by the dominant curatorial 'colonial' drive to 'claim' artists, the more obscure and unknown (exotic) the better, and as many as possible, without any clear commitment to a depth of engagement. This 'virgin' narrative seems an ugly remnant at the heart of mainstream curating, perpetuating its often-violent colonial histories. In a regime where success is so strongly predicated on volume and speed of production/output, one of the most radical gestures might be to adopt an understanding of 'fidelity', or in rejecting the heteronormative associations of such a term, at least giving some consideration to the question of how to be an 'ethical slut'¹².



Subsumed, Co-opted—Nice, But Not Essential

The enormous diversity of Electra's projects—each intended to find its own specific output, presented (ideally) in its own best-suited context(s), with its own time-scale and budget—makes it difficult to point to a 'typical' Electra project. This form of site-specificity and context-sensitivity, while curatorially ambitious, holds two distinct disadvantages for the organisation. Firstly, a small organisation that resists the idea of a 'signature output' and always works in partnership, is likely to struggle to attain visibility or even discernibility in a landscape increasingly dominated by branded entities (artists and arts organisations both adopting the corporate model of having 'signature', easily recognisable outputs, styles and visual identities), particularly when working with larger institutional partners (13). Secondly, a bigger, and perhaps more ethically rooted concern emerges out of a growing sense that Electra was increasingly offering well-packaged artistic *products* to large mainstream institutions, resulting in a sense, at its most extreme, of grassroots communities being co-opted and instrumentalised to serve momentary interests and trend-driven agendas of mainstream institutions seeking access to new audiences and 'emerging' practitioners without having to 'get their hands dirty' (fleeting engagements with, for instance, feminist discourses, sound-based practices, queer politics).

The relationship with the institution remains conflictual for us to this day, in particular with regard to the question of co-optation in curatorial practice. Whilst Electra's relatively marginal curatorial agendas were readily afforded a platform in larger institutions, providing the organisation with a certain amount of perceived mainstream success, the long-term benefits of these sporadic instances remain questionable to us. Our "curatorial and production services" (to use the output-driven language the organisation had adopted) rarely led to fundamental shifts or long-term engagement on the part of our partners, institutions that hosted Electra-produced and curated projects. The stakes could be wiped clean as soon as our collaboration would be over and as soon as the audiences would depart (but not before the event would be fully 'claimed' through documentation, marketing, and social media by the host institution). Particular 'niche' practices, questions, methods or politics—central to Electra's operation—became usefully appropriated by a host of mainstream agendas that had little to do with the communities and histories in which Electra was invested. This outsourcing model frequently served as a way of bringing in new audiences, reaching out to specific communities for the large institution—a key operational model in the insufficiently thought-through inclusion rhetoric of New Labour of the early to mid-2000s. The longevity of such initiatives was of little concern to the institution, as long as their reach and audiences could be documented and recorded for funding purposes. Where there has been deeper, more ongoing commitment from institutions, this, in fact, is usually tied to single individuals, rather than being more widely embedded: individuals who may leave their post for another institution, perhaps in another country or continent.

At the same time, the model of collaborating across a wide range of different exhibition partners does have an interesting effect in its heterogeneity: neither ruling out this liberal game of infiltration/high visibility (for all of its quandaries), nor the more radical/intimate alternatives.

Electra's intrinsically anti-patriarchal model of resisting dominant structures, fostering and nurturing marginal communities, and attempting the creation of a 'safe space' positioned on the sidelines of the whirlwind of action-packed London overproduction, eventually yielded an unsurprising conclusion on the part of our funders. The work of an organisation which deliberately strove to contribute to niche communities and small audiences, and its refusal to play the numbers game of working with more artists and seeking larger audiences, led to the conclusion that such an organisation was no longer necessary. "There are lots of larger institutions doing this work now" was part of the logic that may have contributed towards the ending of a ten-year-old regular funding contract with Arts Council England in 2014. Notions of care, long-term commitment, attention to detail, and slow, well developed outputs all stem from the socially undervalued realm of unpaid, traditionally female labour (the domestic) in which well-being emerges from process, not grand gestures and bombastic events.

Does this sound simple? / Fuck you!¹⁴

By way of conclusion, we return to what remains one of the most complex aspects of running a feminist, grassroots organisation—the process of articulation itself. This becomes explicit in the exercise of writing a text such as this one, an act of looking backwards: both in the sense of having to search for histories that "one was not told"¹⁵, but also in the act of back-projecting meaning onto what was difficult to describe, and continues to be so. The connections we make here are ones we have made through the process of working things out over thirteen years of Electra, not through some perfectly formed pre-emptive gesture.

In a recent essay on the theme of confidence, feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed argued that:

"The more a worldview is supported, the less confidence you need to uphold it. There is confidence in the system. If you are trying to challenge that system you might need even more confidence than you would otherwise have needed. You face resistance and ridicule. The walls you come up against don't even appear to others. The wall you speak of becomes a phantom wall. You have to hold on harder, be firmer in your conviction, because your conviction brings you up against a world"¹⁶.

She goes on to warn that "[t]here is no guarantee that in struggling for justice we ourselves will be just. We have to hesitate, to tamper the strength of our tendencies with doubt; to waver when we are sure, or even because we are sure. A feminist movement that proceeds with too much confidence has cost us too much already."

Ahmed's assessment of confidence—both the difficulty of its desperate lack in the face of doing this work, yet the continual need to challenge it as a currency in the first place—resonates with us throughout our work, and its articulation.

As much as an attempt to determine what might constitute a 'feminist art organisation' is desirable from the outset of such an endeavour, we also wish to emphasise that this must be an ongoing and self-reflexive process; that understandings, language, historical references might only emerge *through* this process. Sometimes the difficulty of articulating these notions is a matter of being "up against a world" that offers little more than a veiled cynicism or outright derision.

Put in other terms, it's questionable whether a feminist art organisation that we could have neatly packaged-up—for the consumption of funders, the funding system, wealthy collectors, et al.—would be an organisation worth faltering to create. We stand with Lis Rhodes in favouring the "crumpled heap", and as Ahmed concludes her text, "We falter with feminist conviction. As we must."

Captions

1 Marina Rosenfeld, *Sheer Frost Orchestra*, 2006 performance (part of the Cage Musicircus), Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, curated and produced by Electra. Image: Shirley O'Loughlin

2 Jutta Koether and Kim Gordon performance and talk, Tate Modern, 2005 (part of *Her Noise*). Image: Lina Džuverović

3 "I tried to tell them about Electra" (postcard from Lina to Irene, August, 2005)

4 'Perfect Partner' performance, commissioned by Electra, 2005, Barbican Centre, A film by Kim Gordon, Phil Morrison and Tony Oursler. Image: Tony Oursler

5 *Her Noise Map* (Anne Hilde Neset and Lina Džuverović), part of the *Her Noise* project (2005)

6 27 Senses residency, August 2006, Schwitters' Hytte, Hjertoya, Norway and surrounding area (l-r: Jutta Koether and Carl Michael von Hasswolff; Kenneth Goldsmith and Lina Džuverović). Image: Simon Wagsholm

7 Claire Hooper, *Eris: the path of ER*, 2012, film and live performance with Danielle-Marie Shillingford, MC Lioness and Beatrice Dillon (for LUX / ICA Biennial of Moving Image), live performance commissioned by Electra. Image: Christa Holka

8 Irene Revell in conversation with Pauline Oliveros, Artist Talk and Perfor-

mance: Pauline Oliveros, Tate Modern as part of Her Noise: Feminisms and the Sonic, 2012, curated by Electra in collaboration with CRiSAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice, University of the Arts London). Image: Katie Snooks

Notes

1 Lis Rhodes, "Whose History", *Film as Film: Formal experiment in film 1910-1975*, Arts Council England, London, 1979. Exhibition catalogue.

2 We use the term *diffraction* in light of post-humanist understandings. For discussion see Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs Gender and Science: New Issues* Vol. 28, No. 3, Spring 2003, pp. 801-831.

3 Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Susan Stein, "Women and the Formal Film," *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975*, Arts Council England, London, 1979. Exhibition catalogue.

4 Lis Rhodes, *ibid.*

5 The Interference series ran bi-monthly for three years at the LUX Centre for Film, Video & Digital Arts in London, and presented seventeen events between March 1998 and March 2001. The series was conceived by Lina Džuverović (then working as Education Co-ordinator at the Lux Centre) in collaboration with *The Wire* magazine (represented curatorially by Anne Hilde Neset, with substantial curatorial input from Rob Young) as a way of connecting discourses around moving image work and sound-based practices. The series of talks, performances, screenings, and panel discussions featured, among others: Brandon Labelle, Terre Thaemlitz, David Toop, Philip Jeck The Scratch Perverts, Erik Davies, Robin Rimbaud-Scanner, Kodwo Eshun, Thomas Koner, Jurgen Reble, Add n to X, Vicki Bennett - People Like Us, and Kaffe Matthews.

6 Electra was legally founded in May 2003 in London, by Lina Džuverović and Anne Hilde Neset as an organisational structure that would enable the production and delivery of the curatorial project *Her Noise*.

7 Electra had responded to an 'Invitation to Tender' from Arts Council England, who wished to take on three new 'media arts' agencies—at a time when the discourses of 'media arts' were still poorly understood within larger institutions, and in parallel a more general interest amongst funders in smaller models such as the 'agency', footloose, with low overheads and supposedly entrepreneurial potential.

8 We borrow this term from David Toop's description of certain research-led practices that do not seek determinate outcomes (he includes in this term artists Annabel Nicholson and Marie Yates).

9 Džuverović, Lina; 'Twice erased: The Silencing of Feminisms in Her Noise', *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, University of Nebraska Press, Issue 20, 2016, forthcoming

10 Catherine Grant, "Fans of feminism: Rewriting Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 34 (2), 2011, pp. 265-286.

11. Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt, *The Ethical Slut*, Greenery Press, San Francisco, 1997.

12. As in Vivan Zihel's eloquent discussion of "If I Can't Dance" in *Curating Research*, Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., Open Editions, London, 2015.

13 Hernoise.org, which was created in 2012 by *Her Noise* archivist Holly Ingleton.

14 Lyric by Kim Gordon, taken from 'The Sprawl', Sonic Youth, Daydream Nation, 1988.

15 Lis Rhodes, *ibid.*

16 Sara Ahmed. 2016. "Losing Confidence". Feminist Killjoys blog. Accessed 24.03.2016. <http://feministkilljoys.com/2016/03/01/losing-confidence/>

Lina Džuverović is a curator and Lecturer at the Department of Art at the University of Reading. Formerly she was Artistic Director at Calvert 22 Foundation (2011-2014) and Director of Electra, a London-based commissioning organisation, which she co-founded in 2003. She is also a PhD candidate at the Royal College of Art and Tate, researching Pop Art in the former Yugoslavia. Selected curatorial projects include Monuments Should Not Be Trusted (Nottingham Contemporary, 2016), Sanja Iveković - Unknown Heroine (South London Gallery and Calvert 22, 2013); IRWIN – Time For A New State & NSK Folk Art (Calvert 22, 2012); 27 Senses (Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2010), Favoured Nations, Momentum, 5th Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art (2009), Her Noise (South London Gallery, 2005).

Irene Revell is a curator and writer who has been working across professional and 'DIY' registers over the past sixteen years. Her work seeks out new contexts and connections for practices with challenging social and political implications. She is Director of Electra; a member of the Cinenova Working Group; and Visiting Curator on the MA Sound Arts, UAL. Recent collaborative projects include Cinenova series Now Showing (2015-); The Multi-versal Score, Wysing Arts Centre (2015); Someone Else Can Clean Up This Mess, Flat Time House (2014). Recent writing includes a forthcoming contribution to Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image (ed. Lucy Reynolds, I.B.Tauris, 2016), Caesura/ Accesso (forthcoming), Camera Austria (with Kerstin Schroedinger), NOIT, Psykick Dancehall, and The Wire magazine. She was associate editor of Aftershow: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz (Sternberg, 2014).