

WHEN MAÏA RAPPED AT THE VILLA

WAGES FOR
WAGES FOR

WAGES FOR
WAGES FOR

LILI
REYNAUD-DEWAR



This text tells the story of a talk that I organized in spring 2019, at the Villa Medici, and the reactions that it elicited. The talk wasn't recorded, and few photos of it were taken. If there had been a video recording of the event, it would have been shot from the point of view of the audience, with the camera set up amongst the spectators, as is usually the case. But here, my story looks to tell things from my point of view, I sat on the podium with my guests, except for the moment when Maïa Izzo-Foulquier, or rather Zelda Weinen (her name as a performer) rapped at the Villa.

AT 7 P.M. ON 25TH APRIL

Lili Reynaud-Dewar, in residency at the Villa Medici, invites Ramaya Tegegne and Maïa Izzo-Foulquier for a talk on the theme of money, as part of the cultural programme *I giovedì della Villa* [Thursdays at the Villa], Rome, at 7 P.M. on 25th April. *Money and emancipation, money and equality, money and freedom, money and art, money and sex, money and feminism.*

Starting with these seemingly problematic and unnatural pairings, three artists—Maïa Izzo-Foulquier, Ramaya Tegegne and Lili Reynaud-Dewar—will present their artistic and activist practices, through which they seek to establish more egalitarian systems of pay, production and protection. Whether in relation to sex work, art work, or feminist publishing, at stake is an effort to define a concrete role for money that breaks with fantasies of speculation; they aim to shatter the myths through which artistic creation, sex, reproduction, and family-making are constructed as freely undertaken activities undeserving of compensation, and instead to envisage all these forms of production as work. Maïa Izzo-Foulquier is an artist and the spokesperson for Syndicat des Travailleur·se·s du Sexe (STRASS) [The Sex Workers' Syndicate]. Ramaya Tegegne is an artist and head of the Wages For Wages Against campaign for the remuneration of artists in Switzerland and beyond. Lili Reynaud-Dewar is an artist and resident at the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici, and co-founder of *Petunia*, a feminist journal of art and entertainment.¹

2ND MAY 2019

Action #71 Scandale à Rome: an open letter from Zéromacho to Franck Riester, Minister of Culture, with a copy sent to Stéphane Gaillard, interim director of the Villa Medici. A prestigious French institution uses public money to offer a platform to an opponent of the 2016 law against prostitution.

The Villa Medici in Rome is amongst the most prestigious of the many institutions that contribute to the promotion of French culture abroad. The programme of the Villa, both in print and online, announced at 7 P.M. on Thursday 25th April 2019 a talk entitled *Money and Emancipation, Money and Equality, Money and Freedom,*

Money and Art, Money and Sex, Money and Feminism that was attended by members of Zéromacho. Two artists were invited to participate in this talk: Maïa Izzo-Foulquier and Ramaya Tegegne. Maïa Izzo-Foulquier was also presented as “spokesperson of the Syndicat des Travailleu·se·s du Sexe (STRASS),” a role that she occupied for four years whilst prostituting herself. After having given a speech on “whore feminism” and “sex work,” Izzo-Foulquier went on to attack the law of 13th April 2016. According to her, “the monthly ‘pathway out’ allowance is the laughable sum of €350: the price of a trick!” This is what she asserted to the general disbelief of the audience, undoubtedly better informed than the speaker as to the going rates in prostitution. Need we recall that on 1st February 2019, the Constitutional Council backed the law “aiming to support the fight against prostitution and to support prostituted persons” in response to an appeal questioning the constitutionality of the legislation that was made by several bodies, including the STRASS? We are shocked that Izzo-Foulquier was invited, all expenses paid, to an institution of the French Republic, and that she was compensated using public funds to demand that prostitution—which since 2016 has been defined by French law as a form of violence, and more specifically as a form of violence against women—be recognized as a profession. We wish to denounce in the strongest possible terms the fact that the Villa Medici, an institution representing the State, offered a platform to a member of a group that opposes a law of our nation and that actively seeks to undermine efforts in favour of equality between men and women. We ask that the Minister of Culture provide explanations as to how such a situation was allowed to arise. We invite you to write in turn to the Minister of Culture, either by post (the most effective method), to Mr. Franck Riester, Minister of Culture, 3 rue de Valois, 75001, Paris, with a copy sent to Mr. Stéphane Gaillard, Interim Director of the

Villa Medici, Viale della Trinità dei Monti, 1, Rome, Italy, or online at <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Nous-contacter> using the subject line, for example: “Request for Explanations on an Unacceptable Situation at the Villa Medici.” As for the message, limited to 1000 characters, what follows is a condensed version of our request to copy and paste: “As a member of Zéromacho, a network of men committed to fighting the prostitution system, I am shocked that on 25th April 2019 Maïa Izzo-Foulquier was invited to the Villa Medici in Rome, and that she was compensated using public funds. There she demanded that prostitution, which is defined by French law since 2016 as a form of violence, and more specifically as a form of violence against women, be recognized as a profession. How could a prestigious national institution use public money to offer a platform to a person openly opposing a law of the Republic? I urgently request an explanation from the Minister of Culture on this matter.”²

18TH DECEMBER 2019

Thelma is Gone, a text by Thierry Schaffauser for the blog ‘Ma lumière rouge’, published on liberation.fr

Woman, whore, activist and artist

Thelma had several names. She also went by Zelda, but for the close circle of her “activist family,” she was Maïa. Maïa decided to leave us on the night before 17th December, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. We didn’t see it coming, and her final post on 1st December on this blog could, with hindsight, be seen as a last goodbye.

Maïa was multifaceted and had many qualities. She had done all kinds of jobs, practiced different art forms, was engaged in the cause as an activist, and was co-author of this blog. She was sensitive and intelligent, and understood everything very quickly. I met her for the first time at

the Festival Explicit in Montpellier. She was spokesperson for STRASS in Marseille, where earlier that year she and Marianne Chargois had organized a series of performance nights for *Les Putains de Rencontres*.

She was the author of the guide *Féminisme pute pour les nul·le·s* [Whore feminism for dummies] and was the first sex worker-rapper to be interviewed in *Madame Rap*.

Maïa was full of promise. She was one of only a handful of activists who spoke openly, since most can still only do so anonymously. She had a real political instinct and was not afraid to take risks or to confront the different forms of authority that stood in her way. To us she seemed strong and powerful, but for sex workers, visibility makes you a target. Maïa fought against all of the forms of discrimination with which she was faced in her professional and artistic circles.

Personalities like hers are so rare. Maïa's passing is a huge loss for the sex work community: all of her actions were so full of courage and determination. I can only describe the shock amongst us at yet another hammer blow. In so little time she gave us so much, and everything that she did will stay with us. We'll miss you, sister.³

SUNDAY 2ND MAY 2021

This text tells a story. It is as accurate a reconstruction as possible of an event that took place two years ago. It's an unsettling coincidence that I'm finishing it on the 2nd May, the date on which Zéromacho wrote the open letter that I have quoted above. A lot of details escaped my notice at the time, and since then my memory has erased even more. But as I wrote, I was able to understand and come to see a certain number of things that I hadn't been able to grasp at the time, or in the time since then. This is a subjective story, my own vision of the way in which things unfolded. The event was undoubtedly perceived differently by other

people who were present; Maïa Izzo-foulquier, the protagonist of the story that I'm going to tell, can no longer give her own account. This public event was not filmed, and in spite of the controversy which followed, very few images of it were captured: no one had the time to pick up their phone and take photos. This lacuna attests to the particular status enjoyed by certain artistic forms in art institutions: whereas exhibitions tend to give rise to a vast plethora of images, cultural programming—speeches, discussions, or as is the case here, activism—rarely seem to be considered worth documenting. Maïa's talk on "whore feminism," which she gave on a number of occasions, was never, to my knowledge, filmed or recorded. Writing this text was a challenge for me, not only because it reminded me of how much we all miss Maïa, but above all because it forced me to face up to my own casual and inconsequential attitude. I didn't protect Maïa because I didn't realize the extent to which she was putting herself in danger, exposing herself; I didn't realize just how radically different an activist practice such as hers was from my own practice, and since I believed that I was fully protected by the artistic institution, this led me to organize a talk where she was violently confronted by members of the audience. I failed to understand Maïa, and I failed to create a space where she could speak freely, with people who were directly concerned by what she was saying, and whose experiences would have made them able to listen to and talk to her. I failed to see the fatigue that can submerge activists—even those as courageous as she was. The kind of fatigue that you feel when you're forced to repeat the same arguments over and over to a milieu that believes itself to be cultivated and aware, that imagines it knows better than those who speak from a situated point of view, from their own experience and their own commitments. If what we refer to as the art world sometimes looks to engage with and integrate political and activist questions, it almost always does so in a superficial and reductive fashion, imagining

that there's no need to prepare, reflect, or work, or radically shift your language and your thought in order to do so.

THURSDAY 25TH APRIL 2019, MIDNIGHT

Maïa arrived in Rome overnight. She missed her plane and had to get another one, which arrived at Fiumicino just after midnight. A driver picked her up at the airport and drove her to the Villa Medici. Ramaya, who had arrived that morning and with whom Maïa was sharing the guest apartment, was there to welcome her. I was sleeping, I think.

THURSDAY 25TH APRIL 2019, MORNING

After getting up on the day of her talk, *Argent et émancipation, argent et égalité, argent et liberté, argent et art, argent et sexe, argent et féminisme*, Maïa wasn't happy: in the short presentation text I had written for the event, that she discovered upon her arrival, I had mentioned that she was a spokesperson for the STRASS, but that was no longer the case. I should have used the past tense, or not mentioned it at all. Not at all would have been better. 25th April is a national holiday in Italy, a day that everyone has off, and it's probably the most important one in the Italian calendar: it commemorates the proclamation in 1945 of a general insurrection across all the territories still under Nazi and fascist control by the Committee of National Liberation. It's also the day on which Mussolini was captured as he tried to flee across Lake Como. Most of the people who work at the Villa Medici leave for a long weekend, which is also traditionally the first one of the year when Italians return to the beaches near Rome and elsewhere. It was hot, very hot. The gardens of the Villa were silent and empty. A few weeks earlier the staff had warned me: it must have been a mistake, an oversight, or an error; there shouldn't be any

events organized on a day like that, when there was almost no one left in Rome, let alone at work at the Villa; it would be impossible to run a bar because no waiters or waitresses would want to work; no one would come to our talk on a day like that; we would have to finish exactly as scheduled because a freelance technician would have to be specially hired to replace Gianni Mastrocesare, the employee of the Villa who usually takes care of the audiovisual side of things and who, like everyone else, would be on holiday. OK. The mistake was made by someone who had since quit, and who went out of his way to write me an email apologizing and promising that he would come to the talk. To the rest of the staff, it was a huge mistake, a huge oversight, a huge fuck-up, basically. To me—I'm paranoid—organizing on a national holiday—a day when no one works—a talk on sex work, work and art, domestic work... seemed like a strange coincidence.

THURSDAY 25TH APRIL 2019, AFTERNOON

Camille Coschieri, the head of the *pensionnaires*—the *pensionnaires*, that's what they call the residents spending a year at the Villa, each of whom receives a monthly stipend of 3470 euros—anyway, Camille, the model of the invisible worker—rigorous, indispensable, available—and I, didn't know how many transparent plastic Kartell chairs to set out in the Grand Salon. The Grand Salon is the name of the prestigious reception room where the talk on work, sex, art, money, and love was going to take place. We thought there'd be very few people, so we set out two rows of chairs in front of the podium, which was made up of four units. Ramaya and Maïa joined us, we tested the mics, the sound, the projector, and pretty soon afterwards the technician left. The four of us found ourselves in the shadowy room amidst an unnerving silence. In the afternoon, the sun bears down on the façade that overlooks the Piazza di Spagna,

the Piazza del Popolo, and the swarms of tourists filling the city. We had to close the shutters. We gazed at the huge colonial tapestries that surrounded us. The website of the Villa Medici has the following to say about them: “These tapestries from Les Gobelins make up the *Tentures des Indes*. They were woven between 1724 and 1726, and show hunting scenes and scenes featuring exotic animals. They were based on drawings and graphic documents created in the 17th century in Brazil by Albert Eckhout. They are representative of the Ancien Régime’s taste for exoticism.” The previous year, artist Eric Baudelaire, then a *pensionnaire* at the Villa, had organized a talk about the tapestries with art historian Cécile Fromont in the same room (the Grand Salon) as part of the same programme (Thursdays at the Villa): “A hammock. Palm trees. Monkeys, birds, little mammals. It is easy to recognize in these tapestries woven at the Royal Workshops at Les Gobelins that today hang in the Grand Salon of the Villa Medici the mixture of scientific curiosity and a taste for the exotic that runs throughout the decorative arts of the 17th and 18th centuries. But what about the presence of men with black skin amongst this luxuriant tropical fauna and flora? Art historian Cécile Fromont brings her perspective as an expert on Africa to bear on the *Tentures des Indes* and retraces the origins of these compositions back to the diplomatic history of the Christian kingdom of the Congo in the 17th century. The trajectory of these portraits of African ambassadors that were painted in Brazil around 1640 and which, in the space of a few short decades, became simple exotic motifs invites us to reconsider the role of the image in relations between Europe and Africa in the modern period and today.” More recently, artists have called for them to be taken down.

I had warned Maïa about the tapestries, but a bit casually, in passing, almost as if I were kidding. While writing this text, I found my emails from 15th and 17th April 2019, where I also mentioned the bank holiday:

– Hi Maïa

How are you? I can't wait to see you in Roma!!!

Unfortunately, the Villa messed up the dates a bit: that evening is going to be a super intense bank holiday in Rome, and Italians don't play around with bank holidays, so there probably won't be many people there: I'm sorry. But let's do something great, anyway. Do you want to rap? What do you need? How long will your talk last? Let me know what I can get ready and how I can help you.

– Hey Lili,

I don't follow. I'm going through a really difficult and complicated period, my brain's working on a thousand things at once, so I need clear details. Which day is a bank holiday? The day of the talk? It should last 45 minutes. Rap—where? In what context?

– Dear Maïa,

I totally understand, I have the same thing going on in my head as you (with a few variations, obviously). And I can see you're really busy at the moment. So, about your 'proposition' at the Villa: Thursday 25th April, the day of your talk, is a bank holiday in Italy. The Villa made a mistake when they programmed your and Ramaya's talks on that day, but now it's too late to change the dates. I hope there'll be some people there all the same!

If you want, as well as your talk on where feminism, you could do a concert, like you did at the Plateau for *Désirs Liquides* at the Cosey Fanni Tutti exhibition. You could do that in the conference room (where you and Ramaya will give your talks, and I'll say a few words as well), a huge space with these massive tapestries with this kind of... colonial aesthetic (I'd rather warn you, personally I can't get used to them) or otherwise there's also the 'loggia,' an open but covered space: a kind of fancy veranda, that overlooks the gardens of the Villa Medici.



Maïa Izzo Foulquier and Ramaya Tegegne during the technical preparation of the conference

- If I do a concert, will it necessarily be on the same day as the talk?

- Yes! But don't feel obliged, OK? It's just that with the 'context' and all it could be fun and make for some amazing images.

THURSDAY 25TH APRIL 2019, THE TALK

Around 6:30, I met up with Ramaya and Maïa at the Loggia: there were already lots of people there. The washout scenario was completely off. I realized—suddenly feeling really anxious—that I wasn't at all prepared for this. I hadn't managed to concentrate enough to write a text to introduce my guests; I had written a few notes, but nothing solid, incisive. I had been busy taking care of the shooting of my film, which Ramaya and Maïa were meant to take part in the next day: the equipment and the car that needed to be picked up, the scripts that needed to be printed, the shopping for the film crew's meals, and a thousand other things. I had imagined an intimate situation, like a little research seminar with a working group made up mostly of close friends, where I would feel comfortable enough to speak openly about subjects that I knew well—or that I thought I knew well. I knew that Camille was going to come to the talk, of course, and Stéphane Gaillard, the interim director of the Villa, a high-grade civil servant from a working-class background, homosexual and with a degenerative eyesight condition; my friend Hélène Giannechini, a feminist writer, art school teacher, lesbian, and her partner Sasha J. Blondeau, a composer, the son of postal workers and an activist for the Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière party, who had begun his transition at the Villa just 4 months earlier; Victor Zébo, a director of photography who I had been working with for five years, queer, on PrEP, PoC, activist at the migrant support and advocacy group the Baam (Le Bureau d'Accueil et

d'Accompagnement des Migrant·e·x·s).⁴ I'm listing these details about the political and sexual orientations, disabilities, social and ethnic backgrounds of this circle of close friends who were at the Villa that day because I want to understand why they really listened to Maïa when so many others didn't. Was it because they were my friends? Or because their life experiences—that I have just listed very quickly, which determine their own culture and their own political practices—are tools for listening? Camille, Sasha and I brought out dozens more Kartell chairs and set out new rows of seating that filled the whole Grand Salon.

Stéphane Gaillard said a few words to introduce the talk and to discuss the Villa's latest 'news,' I think. When it was my turn to speak, I didn't do a good job of presenting Ramaya and Maïa to the audience: I wasn't clear as to the timeline of their activism, and I didn't contextualize it in terms of their artistic practices. I also did a bad job of explaining the idea behind the talk: I forgot lots of things. I didn't even mention Silvia Federici and her 1975 text that was published in French in the collective work *Le foyer de l'insurrection : Textes pour le salaire sur le travail ménager*, even though this was the basis for Ramaya and Maïa's thinking, and made it possible to draw a link between their work. I sat down with them: I had decided to stay on the stage while they gave their talks, so that whoever was speaking wouldn't be alone as they spoke, which would have been the case if I had decided to have Maïa and Ramaya speak one after the other, and so that whoever wasn't speaking wouldn't be alone as they listened, which would have been the case if I had sat in the audience to listen to them. I wanted to be with them.

I could see Sasha sitting right at the back of the room, very calm, amongst the hubbub of the crowded conference room, and Victor in the third row, who was laughing at the whole situation: three women, including two women of colour, sitting in a semi-circle on a little stage amongst these

colonial tapestries, in front of a large audience, in a huge room, to talk about sex work, art work, money and love, on a bank holiday. I could see Stéphane and Camille, their backs to the tapestries, standing off to one side in the aisle. And then my gaze caught that of two women with short hair, dark glasses and dark clothes sitting in the front row.

Maïa spoke first: she presented, without reading from it, the ideas of her book *Le Féminisme Pute pour les nul·le·s* [*Whore Feminism for Dummies*], speaking very calmly, almost nonchalantly, slowly, in a soft, low, voice and a pedagogical, explanatory tone. Maïa sometimes left long pauses between each of her words, emphasizing each punctuation mark, to such an extent that you could really hear the silence in the salon behind the shutters that closed out the heat of the still high sun. Maïa's short book addresses a large readership, using simple terms and examples, and memorable images and comparisons. Synthetic and explicit, it accompanies and guides the reader. It is a work of vulgarization that looks to speak to people who are not sex workers, not familiar with the "*luttés des putes*."⁵ In the characteristic style that can be found in all her texts—on her blog, when she raps, in her videos—a mix of raw, funny, pop literature and rigorous, lucid, sharp political theory—Maïa said "At the same time as whore resistance movements began to emerge in the 1970s, other feminist movements began to call for the recognition and compensation of domestic labour in order to counter the assumption that housework should be unwaged. Some of these feminists supported the demands of sex workers that their labour be recognized as such. They considered that sexual services within the couple belonged to the class of tasks that 'naturally' befell women and/or wives, and therefore—like housework—deserved recognition and compensation. By making sex work visible as work, prostitutes clearly had a place at the heart of feminist currents of the time, forming part of the resistance to the (universal)

injunction according to which women must satisfy, without compensation, masculine desires. Long before I began sex work, I experienced first-hand the world of the ‘straight couple’, in which my private life was punctuated by “Babe, give me a blowjob, please, I really need to relax, I’m under a lot of pressure at work in the moment, you know...,” by “Babe, can’t you make a bit of an effort? Would it kill you to wear g-strings more often? You know I hate those briefs,” by non-consensual sex acts, when I was asleep, for example. A series of violent acts and imperatives protected by the status of heteronormative Love.”⁶

Maïa concluded her talk as follows: “To fight against stigmatisation, we insist on the term ‘sex work’ because this notion has a number of advantages: it presents an active, autonomous subject (in contrast to the passive “*prostituée*”) and denaturalizes the provision of sexual services to make them visible as a form of labour. Above all, it accounts for women’s capacity for action and their desire to organize collectively to demand the rights and protections that have been obtained elsewhere by workers’ movements. Finally, it allows for the coming together of different categories of sex workers who otherwise tend to be isolated and divided according to the form that their work takes (street workers, escorts, strippers, camgirls, porn actresses, etc.). [...] If, today, we are whores—and proud of it—it is because we will never allow ourselves to be shamed into silence. We won’t give an inch, and we will continue to fight against whorephobia and the stigma of the whore, forces whose principal aim is to prevent us from revealing what we know about gender relations thanks to our daily confrontations with the injunctions of the patriarchy and with men.”

And then she fell silent. A hand—or a voice—was raised in the first row. Flustered, I said—I wasn’t entirely sure—that perhaps it would be better if we moved straight on to Ramaya’s presentation, because the two talks of the evening were intrinsically linked to one another, or at least

that's how I had imagined it. I didn't want them to be bracketed off from one another, but rather that the discussions could go on at the same time, after the two talks had been given. Ramaya encouraged me to take questions for Maïa straight away: I don't think she wanted to give her talk when there was a clear desire amongst the audience to speak, an apparently urgent need to react to Maïa's talk. Maybe Ramaya found my way of organizing the order in which people spoke, my chronology, a little authoritarian, too.

It was then that the two women in the front row—the two women with dark glasses—stood up and cried “Prostitution is rape!” After this point, I don't remember very well how things happened. Everything became quite chaotic. The two women—still shouting—introduced themselves as radical feminist lesbians, against all forms of penetration in heterosexual relationships and against prostitution. “Oh, abolitionists,” I thought to myself, as I also thought of Andrea Dworkin, with whom I profoundly disagree, and who fascinates me, and who I love reading, and who is so poetic and so violent, and who scares me a bit, too.⁷ I don't remember what Maïa replied. I don't think she was able to reply. I saw Victor in the third row, still giggling, and Stéphane, who had shyly approached the two women to ask that they respect the people invited to speak in the Grand Salon. They insulted Maïa, I think, they denounced her talk, denounced the platform that had been given to her, and then they left, still shouting. The sound of the door slamming behind them echoed through the room.

The audience stayed frozen for a moment or two, and then, on the other side from where the two women in dark glasses had been sitting, a woman of about sixty or seventy, in the front row again, stood up and spoke to Maïa in a soft, persuasive voice. Next to her, there was a man of about the same age, perhaps her husband, perhaps her friend, and I tried to fight against my prejudices, which suggested that they both looked a bit too Christian; I thought that it was

strange that Maïa, Ramaya and I could see the faces of the people we were speaking to in the front row whereas the audience members sitting behind them could only hear their voices. The woman began by talking about her own feminism in the 1970s—the period that Maïa had spoken about at the start of her conference, but in quite different terms—and about women’s liberation as she saw it, about equality between men and women. I thought about Marlène Schiappa, state secretary “for equality between men and women and the fight against discrimination” in Macron’s government. The woman said to Maïa that prostitution meant selling her body; Maïa very calmly explained that no, it didn’t mean selling her body. Then she asked Maïa, in a very concerned tone, full of compassion, if she knew that in France there was a programme to accompany women who wanted to leave prostitution (she didn’t use the term “sex work” because she refused to consider prostitution as work). Maïa, in a voice even lower than the one she had used for her presentation, and this time deadpan—tired, really—replied, softly, that she was aware of the programme but that the monthly allowance that it involved, 350 euros, was not enough to leave sex work behind, and that, furthermore, she thought that the policies of governmental feminists against sex workers and their clients contributed to their stigmatization, discrimination and precarization, and that she did understand the arguments about violence towards women and male domination, and that it should be possible to extend and reinforce women’s rights without denying them the right to freely dispose of their own bodies. The man sitting next to the soft and persuasive feminist replied to Maïa, but I don’t remember what he said, and Maïa replied in turn, but I don’t remember what. The audience began to get rowdy, several people wanted to speak to Maïa, people got up, went out to smoke cigarettes and came back. Camille and Stéphane from the Villa didn’t participate in these disparate and disorganized discussions.

I think that an institutional mediation would have made the subject even more tense, and that their standing back was a form of respect, a mark of trust in Maïa, Ramaya, and I. I, on the other hand, wasn't any good as a moderator. I was overwhelmed: at times I wanted to laugh, I was trying to catch my friends' eyes, and I think that I didn't realize either the violence of the attacks against Maïa. I only understood later on—and even now, as I'm writing all this, I realize I'm still coming to understand other things. I don't remember exactly how I managed to give Ramaya her turn to speak so that we could continue the discussion afterwards, drawing on her work as well.

When Ramaya began, only about a quarter of the original audience were left. Clearly most of them had felt that the subject of wages for art workers, that they undoubtedly imagined was less polemical than that of sex work, wasn't worth sticking around for. And clearly, part of the audience that had already left had come just to see a sex worker giving a talk on stage. Ramaya gave her whole talk standing up on the podium. Maïa had stayed seated the whole time, as she had done when I saw her speak at the Cosey Fanni Tutti exhibition at the Frac Île-de-France for *Désirs Liquides*, the day of talks and performances organized by Gina Fistamante the previous summer. This seated position and nonchalant attitude echoed the words that Maïa had spoken in her talk, and her actions, too: there was a stark contrast between the audience in the Grand Salon, some of whom were dressed up as if they were attending a cocktail party, and the ostentatious lack of attention that Maïa had paid to her outfit for the occasion. In her talk, she had explained that she wouldn't dress up specially for her sex work—unless she was specifically paid more to do so, since it was an extra service and therefore deserving of compensation—and more generally how to liberate ourselves from the male gaze and male imperatives as to how we ought to dress and behave. Ramaya, anyway, was standing up, facing out over



Concert of Zelda Weinen in the Grand salon of the Villa.

this Grand Salon, which all of a sudden seemed to me to be even more vast than before, and talking about the Wages For Wages Against campaign, whose objective is “to stimulate debate and awareness around questions linked to the non-remuneration of artistic work in Switzerland and beyond by shedding light upon the precarious working conditions and practices based on the abusive exploitation of others in the art world, as well as the underrepresentation of certain sections of the population in the art market and therefore in institutions.”⁸ She drew on work that she had produced in an institution in 2018 that took the form of a survey of the artists who had presented work there over the previous three years that asked questions about “their financial relationships surrounding their exhibition in this institution, but also the more general material situation of each form of artistic practice.” The survey was made up of simple questions such as “Did the institution cover all of your production, transport, and installation costs for your work on your exhibition? Did they cover your personal travel and accommodation costs?”, “Did you receive a fee or some other form of compensation for the work that you contributed to this exhibition? If so, how much? Did this sum correspond to the amount of work you provided? If you did not receive a fee, why not?” and, simply, “How do you earn a living?” Ramaya read out the artists’ responses, then said “Since we are talking about money and feminism this evening, I would like to mention that in the highly competitive art market, women—among those who have access to it—sell their work for much lower prices than men. And even when they do manage to ‘succeed’ in the art world, many of them face a huge amount of pressure in a milieu where the possibility of combining intermittent and precarious work, residencies, and a family life, is close to zero. Society imposes on these women a responsibility that should be shared by men, who are more inclined to accept precarity and risk in the early years of their careers.

The burden carried by women becomes more explicit when we look to case of maternity, which crystallizes the real inequalities that they are faced with, since the very possibility that they might have a child represents a disadvantage to their career. Studies have shown that even when a woman artist states that she doesn't have a child, she is nonetheless categorized as a 'potential mother.' And if she does enter the 'mother' category, she is simply out of the game. As far as I'm concerned, when we talk about feminism, we need to talk about intersectional feminism: we can't separate the struggles of women from other struggles. I would like to evoke in particular the question of institutional racism in the art world. In the institution in which I carried out my enquiry, in the previous three years, no artists of colour had been exhibited. I gave this presentation at the Kunsthalle Bern, a prestigious contemporary art institution in Switzerland; in the one hundred years of its existence, no black woman artist had ever been given a solo show there. This 'omission' says a lot."

Afterwards, there were a lot of questions, for both Ramaya and Maïa. I don't have many memories of exactly what was said: I remember the situation more than anything. It was quite chaotic, very noisy, sometimes brutal. People stood up to speak, sometimes they put their hands up, sometimes they spoke without raising their hands, sometimes they spoke amongst themselves in such a way that we couldn't hear what they were saying, sometimes Camille had the time to pass them a microphone, sometimes she didn't. Some left, because it was already late, others came and went, going off to smoke and talk under the Loggia at the entrance to the Grand Salon, before joining the discussion again. It was like a messy general assembly, with lots of first-timers, in a very bourgeois environment. Stéphane and Camille watched all this unfold, remaining calm and not saying a word. It was a situation that I had personally never seen before in the context of the Grand Salon: people talking.

It was at once exciting and revelatory of a systematic inequality: Ramaya and Maïa were very different from the kinds of people who were usually invited to speak at the Villa Medici. These people tend to be men (though not always); they tend to be white people; they are recognized in their fields, not necessarily leading authorities but certainly highly accomplished, people who have published, written, and talked extensively. In short, people who are unfailingly listened to and never contradicted. Because Maïa and Ramaya were two young women, probably unknown to the kind of audience that attends talks at a heritage institution such as at the Villa Medici, because the forms that they proposed didn't resemble the forms usually proposed by speakers at such institutions, because their research entailed making themselves visible and working from their intimate experiences, be they personal or collective, the audience felt authorized to address them in this very direct way, a way that was often disrespectful, sometimes condescending, and sometimes violent. Victor was still there in the third row. Right at the back, there were of course my friends Sasha and H el ene, and especially Sasha, who I find so kind and peaceful, and who had participated in more than a few general assemblies in his life. I was trying to catch their gazes. I was also looking for the other *pensionnaires*, all the people who I had just spent eight months with and who were also somewhere at the back of this gigantic room, I thought.

I found a couple of them outside. After two and a half hours, I took advantage of the comings and goings and the general state of agitation that had overtaken the room to get down off the stage and quickly smoke a cigarette. St ephane Villard, a designer, my 'neighbour' at the Villa, said to me in a bitter tone "So, pleased with yourself? Do you think you've made a big enough of mess?" Lola Gonzalez, an artist, who was visibly scandalized, said to me with cold fury "Come on Lili, it's not okay. Your guest, Maïa. Do you realize that there are twelve-year-old girls who get

fucked in the arse twenty times a day? You can't say things like that in public."

When I came back, things had settled down a little. Ramaya was replying to Malak Maatoug, Lola's boyfriend who had come to live with her while she was at the Villa that year, who was talking about his precarious situation as an exhibition installer and the way in which a status and a guaranteed salary for artists didn't, in his view, necessarily guarantee the overthrow of the existing hierarchies in the art world. Maïa was talking with the organizers of the Hacker Porn Film Festival, whose slogan was, I later learned, "No Gender, No Border". They invited us to their festival that was taking place over the next few days, but we couldn't go because we were shooting my film, *Rome, 1st and 2nd November 1975*. The room emptied out and we had to leave, evacuate the premises. I asked Maïa to rap all the same.

25TH APRIL 2019, MAÏA'S CONCERT AND THE DINNER

It's impossible for me to forget the image of Maïa—or rather of Zelda Weinen, to use her rap name—of her frail silhouette amongst all these colonial tapestries, in this immense room, in front of the fifteen or so people who were still there; impossible for me to forget her humor, her nonchalant rap, the sad cruelty of her words, of her soft voice, an exact echo of the one she used to address the public almost three hours earlier.

Then we left without her to have dinner at the Gran Sasso restaurant. Maïa said she would join us later on. On our way to the restaurant, my friend Hélène Giannchini said that Maïa hadn't made enough references to all those authors, like Virginie Despentes and Griseldis Real, who have written about sex work. As if the fact that she didn't reference them delegitimized her words, as if her experience as an activist and as a sex worker wasn't itself valid enough

to be expressed in so hierarchical and patrimonial a context as the Villa Medici, where above all, you have to acknowledge what came before. I thought to myself that this place made us think in weird ways, and that we needed to leave. Hélène also said to me that she didn't think that Maïa had been very polite to the woman in the first row who had tried to engage in conversation with her; she thought that Maïa had been too harsh with her, almost contemptuous, even though the woman seemed kind. It was then that I understood that there was a gulf between our place on the stage, just a few metres from this woman, and the very back of the room, from where Hélène and others had listened to Maïa speak. It was the immense gulf that exists between making oneself vulnerable, speaking out, being an activist, and remaining in a protected position of critical distance. And I understood that all that was also a question of perspective, of subjectivity—"where am I speaking from?"—and as I said at the start of this text, this is my story, and mine alone, the story of the events of that evening as I saw them, as I was seated on the stage between two people who made themselves very, very vulnerable that evening. At the dinner, not many people spoke to Maïa. We were all exhausted. I don't think she really wanted to speak, or even be there at all. And maybe she wasn't there: as Ramaya remembers it, Maïa never came to the dinner at the Gran Sasso. Eventually, I spoke to Victor, who told me that she did: he had spent the whole meal speaking to her.

2ND MAY 2019, THE END

A few days later—a Monday, I think—Stéphan Gaillard came to see me and showed me the letter that had been sent to the ministry of culture by Zéromacho, dated 2nd May 2019, of which he had just received a copy. I immediately sent it to Maïa—I thought it was ridiculous, abject, but quite funny really: it was so pathetic, so badly written,



Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Maïa Izzo Foulquier and Stéphane Gaillard
after the conference and the concert of Zelda Weinen

no more than paternalist, petty snitching. Maïa took it very badly. Stéphane told me that he didn't intend to reply to the letter. At the end of 2019, perhaps around the very time that Maïa killed herself, the Minister of Culture again asked Stéphane for an explanation following Zéromacho's letter. At the end of the year, the ministry apparently tries to ensure that certain 'cases' that are still open or unresolved can be closed. And this case was still open. Stéphane, who left the Villa a few months later, with the gratitude of the ministry, to return to his post at the Court of Audit, once again refused to respond to Zéromacho—for which I'd like to thank him. The ministry seems to have closed the case

NOTES

- 1 <https://www.villamedici.it/fr/les-jeudis-de-la-villa/25-avril-argent-et-emanicipation-argent-et-egalite-argent-et-liberte-argent-et-art-argent-et-sexe-argent-et-feminisme/> (consulted on 10/05/2021)
- 2 <https://zeromacho.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/19-scandale-c3a0-rome.pdf> (consulted on 10/05/2021)
- 3 https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2019/12/01/pourquoi-je-n-ecriis-plus-dans-ce-blog_1815351/ (consulted on 08/05/2021)
- 4 During the summer 2015, 900 people who ran away from war, massacres, dictatorships, economical and ecological disasters found refuge in a closed down high school in Paris. The high school Jean Quarré—renamed 'Refugees' House—was evacuated during the autumn and its residents were scattered all over France. BAAM was created in November 2015 by a group in solidarity with those women and men who are completely neglected by public authority. We are legal experts, teachers, students, social workers, artists, journalists, unemployed people, french or foreigners. We are moved by the same will to welcome, with dignity, all migrant people: asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented immigrants or workers. <https://baamasso.org/en/baam-en/> (consulted on 10/05/2021)
- 5 Les Luttes des putes [The struggles of whores], the title of a book by Thierry Schaffhauser published by La Fabrique in 2014
- 6 The text of the book *Le Féminisme Pute pour les nul·le·x·s* was presented as a talk by Maïa Izzo-Foulquier on 1st July 2018 as part of the event *Nos Désirs Liquides* at the FRACE Île-de-France, a day of screenings, discussions and performances bringing together artists, researchers and activists around pro-sex feminism, organized by Gina Fistamante's for the feminist collective *Les Vagues*. This followed the

text's first publication online on the blog "Ma Lumière Rouge," hosted on the site of the newspaper *Libération*. It was based on an initial study that was presented on International Women's Day at the Sorbonne. The STRASS was invited by a feminist student collective, Bloc Offensif Antisexiste, to answer the following question: How can women and gender minorities reappropriate their bodies in a capitalist and patriarchal society? It was after having seen Maïa give her talk there—I was also giving a performance on that day—that I wanted to invite her to speak myself.

- 7 Andrea Dworkin (1946-2002) was an American radical feminist writer and theorists. She is best known for her critique of pornography, which she likened to rape and other forms of violence against women. An anti-war activist close to various anarchist circles at the end of the 1960s, Dworkin wrote more than a dozen books on radical feminist theory and practice. Towards the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, she gained national attention as a spokeswoman for anti-porn feminists and for her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979) and *Intercourse* (1987), still her best known works. (source: Wikipedia)
- 8 This quote and those that follow are drawn from Ramaya's speaking notes, which she kindly shared with me.

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