Review of International Studies (2020), **46**: 3, 337–349
doi:10.1017/S0260210519000470

RIS

FORUM ARTICLE

Redressing international problems: North Korean nuclear politics

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(Received 26 March 2019; revised 13 November 2019; accepted 13 November 2019; first published online 14 January 2020)

Abstract

Marysia Zalewski's *Feminist International Relations: Exquisite Corpse* on feminism and global politics directly addresses matters of style, that is, questions of language and representation that foreground the invisible yet so palpable aspect of how meanings circulate. This article puts Zalewski's work in conversation with Trinh Minh-ha's *D-Passage: The Digital Way* and Lynda Barry's *What It Is* that similarly push the limits of how we craft feminist arguments. These feminists show how styles of writing and thinking, and how ideas gain shape to circulate matter in academic sites of knowledge as much as in art and culture. Building on these works, I put forward the thesis: to theorise is to feel out boundaries and question the questions we encounter that perennially relegate women as taint and malaise. I further explore this thesis by highlighting the visual dimensions of writing and thinking, in particular, what drawing, and drawing lines that shape ideas do. I focus on caricatures from the currently evolving North Korean nuclear crisis to loosen up the ways we go about thinking about war and politics wherein thinking is recognised not so much as a craft to be perfected but a democratic form of being in the world.

Keywords: Marysia Zalewski; Feminist Theorising; International Relations Theory; Visuality; Methodology; Drawing

Introduction

Marysia Zalewski is not convinced nuclear weapons are dangerous in the way that the world has come together to contain and eradicate under the then-US president Barack Obama. In his 2009 speech, Obama commits to 'seeking the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons' as the moral responsibility of America, the only power in history to have used them.[1] Zalewski explains:

> There seems to be something eminently reasonable, at least currently, underpinning the view that nuclear weapons are exceedingly dangerous given their increasing numbers since the end of the Second World War and the unreliability of the command and control technology upon which they rely; though the reasoned madness so excruciatingly and compellingly performed in the film *Dr Strangelove* suggests something else. Arguments about the dangers of nuclear weaponry have consistently been put forward by anti-nuclear campaigners, though clearly not accepted by many powerful governments until now. Is it simply that new facts have come to light? Or that the foundations of reason have altered? Or is something other/more going on, more/other than simple political expediency?[2]

[1]Remarks by President Barack Obama in Prague as delivered, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, 5 April 2009, The White House, available at: {https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered} accessed 1 March 2019.

[2]Marysia Zalewski, *Feminist International Relations: Exquisite Corpse* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 17

'Other/more', 'more/other' in the quote above are interesting play of words because while the slash '/' verges on being under-edited, in its reordering effect of the double appearances of 'other' and 'more' makes itself felt as something other and more. More than a hyphen, a slash is a taint of the hesitation in constructing a sentence and fixing and sticking to just one word, one sense. It is similar to a comma ',', and an 'and' but more visible because it is not a commonly used punctuation like a comma, or a word that blends into the row of alphabets that compose a sentence. '/' sticks out and is perhaps why we sometimes find uses for it when we write – it is easy to see its out-of-placeness as one edits. Zalewski's use of 'other/more', 'more/other' then registers a layered excess, the sense that one word or one combination of words does not quite capture one's idea as well as the hope that two similar-but-different versions would resonate and in their resonance better communicate one's thinking at the time. It registers the hope that when one returns to one's idea in that place you deposited it, the thinking would have shifted and one might come up with a better word, perhaps another combination of splits, or even retain what is there because it is other/more, more/other than one initially thought.

This hesitation is certainly missing ten years on, and seems even more misplaced under the Trump US administration. Now we have not only a changing cast of terrible Kims but West's own *enfant terrible* playing with thousands of people's lives with a push of a button. The play with people's lives does not just involve the physical death that a push of the button can inflict but the play is also on the thousands transfixed on this play with power of destruction, the small, invisible everyday deaths of imagination, possibility of change and joyfulness of being in the world. Zalewski's hesitation also seems misplaced in light of the Nobel Peace Prize recognition and succeeding celebration of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), an international coalition of non-governmental organisations behind the UN nuclear weapon ban treaty adopted in 2017. ICAN has become symbolic of the resounding consensus and momentum almost a decade after Obama's speech spanning from grassroots to elite political circles that a nuclear free world is not only good but achievable. So yes, the hesitation, the feminist wandering mind seems misplaced.

But Zalewski's point is that the idea that we expertly and effectively act upon global issues is a wrong starting point from which to ask questions about politics, power, and the international. In her book, *Feminist International Relations: Exquisite Corpse,* she wants to uncover questions that she perceives to precede the questions that feminists and IR scholars are asked all the time, 'What is the feminist solution to X?' 'What do you think about [insert: media headline at the time]?' And lately, 'What do you think about Trump?' And in the wake of the #MeToo Movement, where are all the women experts, and, often making the issue an individual's fault or choice, 'Why are *you* not in the media?' These innocent enough sounding questions assume a number of things about not only politics and the international but also knowledge and what feminist theorising on politics is for. From me, these questions never cease to elicit a sigh. Zalewski writes about these kinds of sigh when her colleague assumes that because she is writing about feminist IR, she must be writing about elite women policymakers, or when she sighs because her explanation that exquisite corpse *is* a methodology only brings a bemused look from her colleague.[3] Sometimes I make my best attempt at encouraging people to backtrack a little, but as Zalewski recounts of her conversations with US women policymakers, academic explanations are seen as convoluted and cause mostly bemusement and befuddlement even among feminist counterparts in policy.[4]

In this article, I ask questions about politics of knowledge that precede and structure these encounters, especially the assumptions about how theory and empirics line up, how women and gender travel across theory and practice, and what thinking is that all keep feminist theory and politics 'small', 'trivial', 'heckling for power', 'bickering', and 'an irritation', all terms that

[3]See the sighs, ibid., pp. 107, 126.
[4]Ibid., p. 113.

Zalewski archives in the book. Through a close reading of Marysia Zalewski's *Exquisite Corpse*, I argue that styles of building feminist argument tell us a lot about what feminist theorising is up to and also how feminist theorising is disciplined. I then put Zalewski's thinking in conversation with Trinh Minh-ha's in *D-Passage: The Digital Way* and Lynda Barry's in *What It Is* to amplify the point that styles of writing and thinking matter in how ideas gain form, and that forms and shapes of ideas matter in academic sites of knowledge as much as in art and culture. I explore this thesis by highlighting the visual dimensions of writing and thinking, in particular, what drawing, and drawing lines that shape ideas do. I use as examples two caricatures that emerged and circulated in the currently evolving third North Korean nuclear crisis. The aim of this article is to loosen up the ways we go about thinking about war and politics wherein thinking is recognised not so much as a craft to be perfected but a democratic form of being in the world.

The 'how' questions of knowing (in) international politics

Zalewski's questions about international politics and feminism begin from a position that we actually do not know and perhaps might not want to fix what the study of international politics and feminism is mainly about. In *Exquisite Corpse*, Zalewski is concerned that starting from the position that assumes we know what our studies are for and about forecloses our ability to perceive the violence and exclusions operating in the well-placed impulse to make knowledge serve social justice, peace, and democracy. She asks, 'Have institutionalized studies of international politics and feminism procured and nurtured new forms and new sites of violence?'[5] Institutionalised studies are suspect because 'institutionalisation of the production of knowledge about gender through feminism and about international politics through IR inhibits the possibilities of making a different, or rather, the kinds of difference that we assume are desired'.[6] In this formulation, there is a position outside institutions that allows a distinction between knowledge that is political, and knowledge about politics that primarily serves institutional ends.[7] Furthermore, Zalewski thinks the stakes in international politics for feminist IR scholars differ from non-feminist counterparts that stem from how feminism is primarily about production of knowledge about gender that interrupts and breaks from existing malestream institutional arrangements and trajectories. Feminism emerged because of the exclusion of certain gendered bodies from sites of power, representation, and agency; and thus, as a tradition of thinking, feminism is tied to struggles of making the marginalised and excluded perceivable and of revaluing them. Zalewski is asking, if so, how has feminism come to wield violence with institutions from the inside? 'Procured' in her question, 'Have institutionalized studies of international politics and feminism *procured* and nurtured new forms and new sites of violence?', is significant because it signals the need to pay attention to how we *go out of our way and create ways* to be complicit and how stasis is an active work of infliction, not just a passive form as 'complicity' or 'complacency' are often thought and used in conversations.

Exquisite Corpse is written in an 'unusual' experimental-experiential style that registers the procurement and nurturing of violence in the everyday ordinary practices of knowledge production. Conceived as a series of vignettes, the arguments develop layer over layer, circuitously returning to ideas, quotes, chitchats, conference proceedings and happenings, student questions, postcards, and movies in its movement towards the end of the book. Here not only are 'feminist concerns' and 'stuff of international politics' kept on the same plane and status, but also, trivial everyday concerns are kept on the same level and status as matters with high stakes. This is intentional – *Exquisite Corpse* is interested in what happens and what we learn when we try to keep

[5]Ibid., p. 12.
[6]Ibid.
[7]For more the parenthetical point, see Elisabeth Prügl's article in this forum on Marysia Zalewski.

feminism and IR, the nitty-gritty everyday and the big ideas, the trivial and the supposedly significant on the same plane and give them equal status. That we cannot tells us a lot.[8]

The vignettes hold together the arguments in the book in a layered way, but also in a disjointed way, opening up a more pluralistic understanding of what building an argument is about and what getting to the ending of a book is for. Zalewski draws out for her readers how there are assumptions operating in our rituals of knowing, thinking, and ways of writing that are so specifically masculine, Western, elitist, straightening, and violent. The book is in the tradition of feminist narrative/storytelling as well as 'theory speak' that tries to undo the boundary that exists between for instance, 'standpoint' and 'poststructural' feminist theorising. Or to be more precise, it is a book that writes theory to feel such distinctions in feminisms differently. It is an effort emerging from a critical position on categorising thinking into distinct categories, which Zalewski sees as part of the cold masculinist institutional form of knowledge. Such categorisations, she writes, 'enact a confirmation of, or consolidation of, particular ways of writing, thinking, doing and being. Ways that I think are too innocently violent.'[9] She refuses to re-enact separations of feminist and critical theoretical positions, and in the way she critiques, Zalewski wants to re-enter these debates in a way that 'betrays boundaries' and invites us in her journey.

But what is, as we like to ask of research, the value-added to this approach that takes creative license? What is the point of such writing that seems at best idiosyncratic and at worse self-indulgent? What is the point of doing this rather than writing about this mode? Should they count in the same way that traditionally researched publications count in academia, have the same status and occupy the same space? Implicit in this line of questioning is the assumption that the issue of style of research, that is, how research feels and how certain research writing styles draw attention to themselves, is somehow trivial, optional, that is, a personal choice. The beauty of *Exquisite Corpse* is that it is written to address these queries in its argumentation and in its style of constructing the argumentation that explicitly negotiates with these concerns about validity of knowledge. In this way, it is decidedly a methodology book. It shows how these questions about the validity of explicitly creative interventions arise in specific everyday contexts – in thesis committees, research design courses, in peer review processes, and in debates on methodology that seek to take stock of the discipline for the rest of us who are supposedly narrowly pursuing our research interests in path-dependent, unreflective ways.

The argument in *Exquisite Corpse* is also that these questions arise in particular tones and effects directed at specifically marginal approaches and bodies – feminist, raced, and non-norm conforming bodies, bodies here referring to both the scholarships and the researchers. In short, these questions and the attitude of disbelief do not exist or emerge in a vacuum; they become part of what shapes knowledge and knowing practices about feminism and international politics as well as feminism *as* international politics. Shaping of knowledge happens through specific rituals we have established in the university as a site of knowledge, theorising, reading, writing, and learning that have long seen certain bodies as intruders, second-class citizens, and unsophisticated thinkers. Universities as institutions are part of the critique in the book. Zalewski argues the university is a politicised and deeply personal space.[10] Institutions work personally, through the everyday and through people so, of course, the personal stories enter her feminist arguments about reworking and re-entering the methodology debate. The question, 'What is your method?', is a question that feminists will never have the right answers to. Just like the question, 'What is your feminist position on Bosnia or on North Korea?', this is a question that feminist theory seeking to avoid the violence of institutionalised form of feminism can never get right.

The point is, methodology-talk does not own the questions and answers we have about the 'how' of knowing. Zalewski writes, 'Methodology: it's such a cold word. It harbours an icy

[8]Zalewski, *Feminist International Relations*, p. 9.
[9]Ibid., p. 19.
[10]Ibid., p. 16.

labyrinth of blocked entrances, concealed exits, closed loops and uninviting deadends. The coldness is numbing, slowing thinking, stifling movement.'[11] Here she acutely feels the violence of white European masculinist heteronormative institutions that continually sustain itself by domesticating and colonising 'the rest'; as Trinh Minh-ha put it, 'authorized voices authorize themselves to be heard'.[12] If anything, exposing and reworking the lies of established start and end points of academic practices in IR and feminism is what we need to get right as much as the substance of international politics, feminism, Bosnia, or sexual violence. Exquisite corpse as a methodology is concerned with aspects of knowledge production that get relegated as secondary such as 'style' of argumentation, writing, presentations of papers, and the ways ideas enter the room, the page, the computer screen, people's imagination. Knowledge, which we have traditionally understood as less about expression (this is what artists do, not academics) are just as expressive. That knowledge's (self)-expression is invisible is part of how masculinity and whiteness work in, through, for institutions.[13]

In other words, methodology-talk's narrow set of questions on the 'how' aspects of research, and when those questions surface in or as debates that students and academics must learn to navigate are indicative of the way the mainstream is in us and is us. Unless we take detours to re-enter and rework the institutional modes of knowledge production from the 'beyonds' *even if, or perhaps precisely* because we do not know and cannot know what these are. *Exquisite Corpse* teaches us that what makes feminist insights, bodies, and politics different and revolutionary becomes contained when we work within established processes that shape up what is written and circulated publicly. Just as feminism and gender are becoming more mainstream/malestorm and thus 'bigger', the scope and impact of feminist thought/theorising/doing seems to be getting smaller. Marysia Zalewski sets out to figure out not only why but also to do something about it.

Moving towards what looks like nothing

Exquisite Corpse is different from Zalewski's other contributions in the feminist struggle to redefine what theory is and who gets to theorise. More specifically, the book is a sustained engagement with *how* the boundaries are set and work in these questions of 'what is' and 'who gets to'. Zalewski tells us that 'there simply isn't a boundary, or it's never what it seems'.[14] She wants to betray 'lines that are persistently drawn' *as if* a boundary exists, as if we know what this line does and means.[15] She adapts a mode of writing that moves towards what feels like nothing in one's inquiries. But she is also cautious: 'Moving towards *what looks to us like nothing* will surely require signposts to guide us through the inevitably circuitous routes and pathways which ensue from eclectic choices.'[16] She sounds cautious, but also willing to feel her way towards nothing. Part of this search for signposts is to feel out the boundaries rather than point at them from a distance. Trinh writes, '[T]heory is lived in the multiplicity of life experiences. Or more specifically, a site where the said or shown is one with the lived and where, as an empty (linguistic) ritual, the creating subject's "I"/eye appears only to disappear.'[17] In this explanation of how her work is not autobiographical but theories of 'boundary event', 'body-writing', and subject positioning ('the subject on trial'), Trinh stresses how boundary is lived, is an intimate reaching out to others and receiving of the world that requires the emptying out of 'I'. For Trinh, 'I' and 'eye' mutually benefit and constitute the other; thus, to empty out sovereign notions of the self is also a disappearance of the eye that seeks to ascertain and in

[11]Ibid., p. 21.
[12]Trinh, cited in ibid., p. 41.
[13]Ibid., pp. 117–26.
[14]Ibid., p. 4.
[15]Ibid., p. 6.
[16]Ibid., p. 6, emphasis in original.
[17]Trinh T. Minh-ha, *D-Passage: The Digital Way* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 66.

its act of ascertaining fails to live, breathe, fall in love, just be. It is 'the ability of letting the world come to oneself as music.'[18]

I read *Exquisite Corpse* in this context, as an effort to live out theory and boundary, and to feel out what disciplines and structures international politics. This process requires a shifting of not only what we look at but visibility as a sensation and in sense-making.

Feeling out and betraying boundaries in IR

In *Exquisite Corpse*, Zalewski tries to feel out boundaries in the specific site of IR. She begins with how IR has been asking questions that we already have answers to. What we are seeing of the discipline is 'how the answers got the questions' rather than question-asking as a mode of trying to make sense of politics.[19] Or to borrow Trinh's words, 'Everyone readily comes up with an answer and everyone is eager to fill in the blanks.'[20] The questions we are asking are answerable not in the sense they are 'easy', which is to assume they are reasonable solutions to pressing issues of our times. They are actually answerable because they are 'unreasonable': they are too reasonably aligned with existing arrangements of power and intelligibility but this is unreasoned – uncritical – position that authorises itself by sounding 'reasonable'. Firstly, reasonableness here is related to assumptions that there are clear, acceptable boundaries, and that the questions we ask or answers we give should be respectable of and intelligible within these established boundaries. Positions that can be cast as 'fringe', 'radical', or 'too much' are seen as, at best, marginal concerns of the discipline. Assumptions about where boundaries are and what they are, are achieving much in the questions we ask. Moreover, origin stories of IR as a study of 'the practices of international politics, and most especially the violence of war' perpetuate this unreasoned alignment.[21] What is reasonable then is partly a reflection of the stories we tell about how IR emerged that regulate what IR should be about rather than a reflection of rational independent processes that consider how political issues of our times are best studied and explored. How does this lining up with reasonableness occur, and what creates the homeliness of mainstream IR and feminism with elite structures and institutions? How have we become a discipline and knowing subjects that assume knowledge production is about answering questions in the first place that takes answering and asking moderate questions as ideal modes of operation?

Gender.

Zalewski reminds us masculinity sutures what is seen as the stuff of international politics. Why is diplomacy something that male-dominated professional diplomats do? Why do we assume nuclear politics is about freedom from fear of mass destruction? Why do we assume sexual violence in conflict is about excising 'bad' masculinity? How do we not see that solving domestic violence or wartime rape or nuclear problem can be a way of securing men? How do we not see that the stories we tell about climate change also reify gender order and heteronormativity? How do we not see that understanding issues of change in the language of transformation (analogous to the coldness of methodology) variously requires a masculinist way of reasoning, thinking, and being in the world?

How does it happen again and again wherein feminist narratives about gender is a secondary order of reality rather than the very thing that structures and glues together the international?

The 'how' is key because it is not explanations Zalewski is after but undoings of the mechanisms and processes, which is to say, we need to get down to the nitty-gritty of the everyday that

[18]Trinh, *D-Passage*, p. 68.
[19]Moniza Alvi, cited in Zalewski, *Feminist International Relations*, p. 16.
[20]Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Lovecidal: Walking With The Disappeared* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 1.
[21]Zalewski, *Feminist International Relations*, p. 18.

feeds theories and practices.[22] Women/gender as bodies that taint is a powerful *explainer* in *Exquisite Corpse*. Not only do failures to achieve appropriate masculine subject positions (to be a real man) regularly wreak havoc on women,[23] feminism itself is conceived as a body 'messily bleeding out her radical potential'.[24] Feminist explanations of gender and insistence we pay attention to women are 'received as violent in its doing violence to oppressive epistemological, ontological and social orders'.[25] But unlike masculine violence, there is no prestige in its confrontation of power whether in it is in IR theory or in practice. IR trivialises women's theorising and women as theoretical or practical focus. As Zalewski points out, 'Women, the State and War' simply does not have the same universalist ring of Waltz's *Man, the State and War*. Furthermore, gender as an explainer is taken as everyday 'light', unserious knowledge because we all supposedly know, by now, what gender difference is and its socially constructed nature. Feminised malaise is the only way feminism becomes visible in IR and elsewhere; feminism is sick and mad, and perhaps even already dead.[26]

Feminists *procure* and nurture violence when we accept this diagnosis of women, gender, and feminist differences as problems, and seek masculinist-inflected reinterpretation of girls' and women's 'more scattered thinking',[27] when we refuse 'women's jobs' and seek 'power jobs' in institutional settings,[28] when we opt for conceptually divvying up race, gender, and class in academic theorising-cum-ordering,[29] and when we partake in action and agency that are masculine-marked and heteronormative,[30] to name just a few. Zalewski's point is that it is illogical to look to men and masculinities for solution, change, and *newness*. Feminism can have many origin stories, the dominant one being that it has activist roots, but if anything, feminism is about hope that new entrants into the public sphere and other previously foreclosed domains of agency and action can reshape our oppressive ways of inhabiting the world. Surely, this means recognising that new entrants move around in myriads of seemingly illogical ways 'to beat the Master at his own game' and 'void' – which Trinh reminds us is not a deletion but creation by emptying – established forms of moving, doing, and being.[31] Surely, this requires reconceiving what is 'new' and politically agentic. Reperceiving what is not, the negated, has always been central in feminism. This disowning of what is 'women', 'feminine', and 'essentialised' needs to stop.

Zalewski reminds us screaming does not really work; quarrelling makes everyone unreasonable. All the while the violence of this – the ravaged body of feminism – remains invisible; instead, 'transmitting (feminist) arguments supported by (feminist) evidence through phallogocentric prisms of rationality and reason can readily transmute into irritation and bickering.'[32]

In this context of creating anew, it is important to *not* know what feminism is, what gender is, what women are. Trinh agrees. 'For me, being part of the feminist struggle is to continue, almost blindly and each time anew, to indicate the possibility of a different path of resistance, or simply of being-*with* – one engaged in the perpetual task of "gendering" and "queering" dominant forms of thinking and practices, including one's own.'[33] Here Trinh emphasises that entering anew each time is especially necessary in a time when we take for granted what constitutes feminist, queer, postcolonial, postcommunist, or transnational. Trinh also reminds us that labels such as the Third

[22]Ibid., p. 15.
[23]Ibid., p. 84.
[24]Ibid., p. 69.
[25]Ibid., p. 83.
[26]Ibid., p. 68.
[27]Ibid., p. 42.
[28]Ibid., p. 111.
[29]Ibid., p. 116.
[30]Ibid., p. 53.
[31]Trinh here is re-citing Audre Lorde's famous words. See Trinh, *D-Passage*, p. 138. Also see Shine Choi, *Re-imagining North Korea in International Politics: Problems and Alternatives* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 181–3, 202.
[32]Zalewski, *Feminist International Relations*, p. 110.
[33]Trinh, *D-Passage*, p. 134, emphasis in original.

World or the East are strategic and are departure points towards multiplicity, not destination. Feminist questions and research must feel out boundaries not fill in the blanks and gaps of knowledge, which is to accept boundedness and enclosure as a method of inquiry.

Betraying writing

Zalewski's reworking of this intimately entangled masculinist whiteness (or what Lily Ling calls HEW: Hypermasculine Eurocentric Whiteness)[34] involves reorienting the hope that is often (un) comfortably placed on masculinist mode of critique and theory that strips thinking of its messiness, its taint, its hue. Thus, feeling out and betraying boundaries also crucially involves betraying the kind of writing that is routine academic training. As in the context of boundaries, betraying writing is all about staying *at* writing, that is, it is a question of how to keep writing happening and to *live* writing as a boundary experience. So perhaps the question here is, how do you write after knowing the betrayals of writing, after writing has been found out?

Let me develop a response to the above question through caricatures that emerged from the currently evolving North Korean nuclear crisis, many of which can be unpacked in various ways for their enactment, reification, and reliance on gendered, racialised order that perhaps tells us something about what structures the international. An established order of critical thinking of HEW would explore how, for instance, the imagery of Kim Jong Un as *enfant terrible* in *The New Yorker* magazine, the epitome of American-brand sophistication in literari-intellectual matters, oozes racialised disdain, is a mockery of Kim Jong Un/North Korea, and is part of the long, tortured, perverse fascination of the West with North Korea.[35] The 2016 *New Yorker* cover image titled 'New Toys' portrays a childlike Kim sitting in a sandbox flying a toy plane marked USA in one hand and a missile in DPRK flag colour in the other. This is not a scene of childhood innocence but a portrait of infantilised Kim placated by new toys. The caricature captures the present American-led Western fascination with North Korea as a figuration of the 'cunning', 'shrewd', 'brutal' despot, which many scholars have pointed out is a figuration with history.[36] In short, with historic and larger structural knowledge, we may point out how we cannot divorce this racist history – racism as a practice that dehumanises through aesthetics of repulsion – from the ongoing Korean war. In a similar vein, the meme image in Figure 1 can be read as a recognition that the North Korean nuclear crisis, at least in 2017 onwards, is one propagated by not just Kim Jong Un, the *enfant terrible* but also his match, America's Donald Trump.[37] One may argue this photo(shopped?) collage is a popular form of knowledge that critiques societies and the global world that create men like Kim and Trump, and sovereign heads and institutional structures that allow men like them to create scenes that drag the rest of us to the brink of mutually assured destruction. The international problem that nuclear weapons poses for us then are the gendered and racialised sociopolitical structures, our shared culture, the international system, global politics, security regimes, and the list continues. This diagnosis would not be entirely wrong.

[34]L. H. M. Ling, 'Don't flatter yourself: World politics as we know it is changing and so must disciplinary IR', in Synne L. Dyvik, Jan Selby, and Rorden Wilkinson (eds), *What Is the Point of IR?* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 135–46.

[35]The image, drawn by Anita Kunz, can be found here: {http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/cover-story-anita-kunz-2016-01-18}.

[36]Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2010), p. 95; Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American–East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 127. As many have stressed, this figuration is riddled with bigotry that has long cast North and South Koreans alike as 'locusts', 'hauling asses', 'primitives', 'barbarians', 'thieves', 'Nazis', and 'gooks' (Cumings, *The Korean War*, pp. 14–16, 80). See also Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, pp. 180–91; Tarak Barkawi, 'Orientalism, "small wars", and big consequences in Korea and Iraq', *Arena* 29/30 (2008), pp. 59–80; Suzy Kim, '(Dis)orienting North Korea', *Critical Asian Studies*, 42:3 (2010), pp. 481–95; John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London: Faber, 1986).

[37]Little is known about this image, which circulated on Facebook mainly between 2017 and 2018.

Figure 1. Another iteration of North Korea as *enfant terrible* in the 2017 nuclear 'crisis' circulated mainly on Facebook. Here Trump and Kim are both infantilised.

But to stay at this level of visual analytical thinking, such a thought process would mean operating on the assumption that we can add more pictures to aid our thinking that represents a broader array of contextual factors and provide a more complex assemblage of actors and processes of international politics. As Saara Särmä's work on Iranian and North Korean nuclear politics captured via Western media show, a deconstructive focus on visual politics could serve as a potent entry into questioning established narratives about summit diplomacy and nuclear politics.[38] Pushing this line of inquiry to show the invisible work of not only gender but also race and imperialism can be productive, but such lines of inquiry also continue to invest us in East–West dynamics, Eurocentric world politics, male agency and actors, hypermasculine subject formation, etc. While noting Särmä's artistic approach does something more complex than a straightforward critical analysis, the rest of the world (for example, postcolonial international) that undergirds North Korea's foreign policy and shapes how a nuclear crisis emerges for Western audiences remains outside the frame.[39] More pointedly, what composes this 'rest of the world' beyond the interstate structures and masculinist notions of agency, anti-imperial international, and transformation also remain unimagined and therefore unimaginable. And finally and most crucially,

[38]Saara Särmä, 'Junk Feminism and Nuclear Wannabes: Collaging Parodies of Iran and North Korea' (PhD dissertation, University of Tampere, Finland, 2014).

[39]Useful preliminary texts for such exploration might include critical readings of, Kim Il Sung, *The Non-alignment Movement is a Mighty Anti-imperialist Revolutionary Force of Our Times* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976); Barry Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Lyong Choi and Il-yong Jeong, 'North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978–1982: From the strategic alliance to the symbolic comradeship between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe', *Cold War History*, 17:4 (2017), pp. 329–49. On postcolonial nuclear politics, see Shampa Biswas, *Nuclear Desire: Power and the Postcolonial Nuclear Order* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2014).

and my feminist hunch is that this is related to the subterranean realities in 'the rest', a visual analytical approach takes drawings and visual creations as objects that we look at from a distance, which people then can use to aid political change. Operating here, despite what critical and other poststructurally inflected theorists say, is a linear progression between ideas of looking at, and thinking, wherein a better grasp of the world through looking at is somehow taken as a good thing, as somehow useful in meaningful change. Hope is placed on 'better' caricatures we can discover or create to look at, which we hope provides a particular constellation of 'us' a clearer vision and focus that then can feed into helpful platform for us (or/and others) to take action. This understanding of visuality keeps our search and relation to representation a matter of creating more accurate pictures of the factors contributing to the nuclear crisis, which Jenny Edkins warns 'gentrifies' and turn us all into art critics.[40]

Democratising thinking

Exquisite corpse as a methodological muse reveals how the discipline's progress-oriented analytical approach is a violently procured and nurtured thinking that erases (through containment or exclusion) feminist evidence, feminist sources, and feminist theorising. Trinh Minh-ha's books, whether they are collections of interviews like *D-Passage* that I draw upon in this article or her 'experimental' essay collections that she is perhaps more widely known for, help further draw attention to how an analytical mode of critical understanding is particular, and only one kind and mode of many others. It is not only a particular mode of thinking and moving of arguments forward but also a specific mode of being and doing in the world. Trinh believes accumulative knowledge and stable grounds of advancing ideas impede not only newness and creative work but they foreclose the state of nothingness and receptivity as discussed earlier. The significance of emptying out and voiding – creativity – is not in a valuing of creative work or process for its own sake but more foundationally, it is a valuing of the everyday present, the transitioning moment of the now that is multiple and whose possibilities indefinite. To break free, Trinh calls for a 'research that questions its own form – the very instance of searching, or the materials, methods, and principles that go into research and its diverse manifestations'.[41] Form and content are not just complementary; they are 'inseparable: a single reality, like two sides of the same coin'.[42] An aspect of this thesis that I want to highlight by choosing to work with Trinh's interview collection book rather than her collection of essays or films is this: writing as authorship has an overhold over knowledge production and thinking that needs feminist debunking. In republishing her interviews for various popular and academic publication outlets as one of her authored books, Trinh 'authors' the book not only through editing (rather than writing) but also understands authoring as 'just' a conversation with, or as she puts it in the context of classroom teaching, a 'collective-theory-in-the-making'.[43] Writing in feminism is valuable for its utility in helping us think. Furthermore, thinking through acts of sentence construction and working with texts is a particular kind of thinking, a Master's tool, if you will, that needs voiding. *D-Passage* reminds us not only in its content but in its form that writing is only valuable for how it facilitates collective theory-making, in being-*with*. To adapt the words of the ex-president of Haiti, Aristide's call to 'democratise democracy', betraying writing is to democratise thinking.[44]

Rather than as visual materials to aid thinking by looking, caricatures such as in Figure 1 are more useful as entry points to *feel out* their world as caricatures. What matters is that they are images, they are created, and like writing and research teach us something about thinking as

[40]Jenny Edkins, 'Novel writing in international relations: Opening for a creative practice', *Security Dialogue*, 44 (2013), p. 284.
[41]Trinh, *D-Passage*, p. 74.
[42]Ibid., p. 76.
[43]Ibid., p. 80.
[44]Aristide, cited in in ibid., p. 123.

an activity, as a practice. Lynda Barry, a cartoonist and self-identifying, 'accidental professor', suggests that an image is 'a place. Not a picture of a place, but a place in and of itself, you can move in it. It seems not invented but there for you to find.'[45] Similar to how Trinh and Zalewski think of boundary theorising and research, Barry conceives of image as a lived experience that has a life of its own. The idea that images are not invented but found reminds us of the dissonance between the author and the image: things we create are unwieldy.

What is an image? is a question Barry poses in a series of curious questions – similar to the vignettes in *Exquisite Corpse* – What is thinking? What are thoughts made of? What is reflection? What is movement? Do thoughts move? What does the TV see? And so on. Having moved through variations of 'What is' questions, Barry writes by hand what she thinks an image is:

> It's the pull-toy that pulls you, takes you from one place to another. The capacity to roll seems to be what Marilyn's [Barry's former teacher] way of working brings back. The ability to stay in motion, to be pulled by something, to follow it, and stay behind it. I would remember and forget about this for the next 30 years.[46]

Images are 'what pulls you in', which allow a loosening, a capacity to roll, be in movement with. For Barry, to do anything by hand is to create an image. Handwriting, for instance, 'is an image LEFT BY A LIVING BEING IN MOTION / it cannot be duplicated IN TIME OR SPACE';[47] and, doodling is image making by adults who have given up drawing at a young age.[48] We variously leave marks of thinking when we etch, dig, vandalise, or doodle on surfaces. For Barry, thinking is nothing more than this sensate (re)location of staying put and in motion that creates a floating sensation. Contra prevailing notions in academic research, thinking in Barry's formulation is a wide array of strategic positionings and doings driven by a desire to set oneself aside, to empty out and lose control that encompasses blanking out and doodling (so disengage and 'not think') as well as thinking on our feet. It is a form of being present and engaged in the world and in worlds one creates.

Image making then is a mode of thinking, a mode that refuses prevalent hierarchies that discipline thinking and the world of ideas. More than Trinh and Zalewski, Barry is explicit about how anything goes in thinking if it is to be a form of betraying boundaries, of betraying writing. *What It Is*, similar to her other publications *Syllabus* and *Picture This*, is composed of drawings of episodes and messy collage of tear-ups, cut-ups, doodlings, and drawings that traverse storytelling, reflecting, and theorising. They are also on pages of common exercise notebooks, but instead of keeping writing within the lines of these lined sheets, Barry pastes, paints, doodles, draws, and sometimes writes in or out of the lines. Furthermore, for Barry, not only is doodling and drawing interchangeable, even copying images can be original if one copies images to feel carried away, when we follow a line not to make a beautiful image (reach a particular destination point) but to draw, to reach, what Barry calls unthinkables. There is no bad thinking or bad drawing – all drawings and etchings of thinking are traces that we can take turns playing with. Elsewhere she narrates and draws herself drawing over student exercises.[49] She carefully traces over the lines her students drew and is mesmerised by how people who think they cannot draw draw in surprising and magical ways. She also reprints student exercises in her publications not to make an illustrative point but as part of the books' imagistic textuality creating a citation practice that goes directly against what academic writing/thinking does – cite texts that make our

[45]Lynda Barry, *What It Is* (Quebec: Drawn and Quarterly, 2008), p. 88, underline in original.
[46]Ibid., p. 122.
[47]Ibid., p. 107, original handwriting translated in typeset.
[48]Ibid., p. 103.
[49]Lynda Barry, *Syllabus: Notes From An Accidental Professor* (Quebec: Drawn and Quarterly, 2014).

lucklustre ideas look better, clearer, more 'writerly'.[50] Barry shows us citations can be practices that bring in the not-quite-writerly worlds, processes that goes into writing, or myriad of location-specific contexts and traces rather than remain practices of bringing in texts that can authorise and legitimise one's ideas that reify a hierarchy of ideas and thinking as a practice.

For Barry, perspectives on a page are valuable not because they have been improved through a practice of better communication, thinking, or writing, but a perspective matters because it is a point that marks the labour that goes into facing what we find hard to face but have a vague inclination towards. Images that Barry draws, and encourages others to draw, are meetings of this vague internal world and a seemingly more concrete external world; they are acts of externalising, aestheticising, and caricaturing this meeting of internal-external.

To return specifically to images we began this section with, the genre of caricatures are images drawn by hand that work through distortion and exaggeration to make visible what should be obvious and visceral but in our normal everyday sensibilities, the insight is not quite there, and as a result of this not-quite (or our habitual attitudes towards such things), its thereness escapes us. Caricatures work by exaggerating boundary lines and these boundaries are drawn exactly along lines where no differences exist.[51] As Rey Chow explains through racial stereotyping in cartoons, what gets deemed essential about the other is exactly what is not, and the portraits we draw of the other according to the essences we identify are less about the other that is portrayed but the encounter between self and this other. They are works and meetings of exteriority against exteriority.[52] In short, drawing lines, shapes, exteriority of ideas, of persons by their features, of events by what can be communicated – that is, caricaturing – hones in on and seeks to give form to a reality that otherwise is not quite with us. Suspending judgement on these would be an aspect of boundary thinking.

So what about the ongoing North Korea nuclear problem in its third cycle? What do we do about these images we started this section with? Barry teaches us how there can be no bad images, but these caricatures problematically orient us to the Western debates about North Korea, nuclear politics, and also summit diplomacy that takes us further into masculinist, male-dominated spaces and ways of understanding diplomacy. Maybe this is why Saara Särmä's feminist art thinking is so powerful – make fun of them, add Hello Kitty cutouts and pink glitter, and then move on. But I remain immobilised because, while some feminist theorists are able to move onto other projects, other topics, other interventions more freely, I feel weighed down by history to places like North Korea, to inter-Asian conversations, to reckoning with how feminism gained its contours in complicity with empire. What kind of movement is possible when one cannot move on, when one is pinned down to a particular location and orientation in the global world? What does feminist collective theory in the making look like from here?

Conclusion

Styles in writing and thinking, as in fashion and design, have their politics. The 'idiosyncratic' ways different feminists and scholars develop their lines of argument, find and use sources, cite references, write and draw are not idiosyncratic after all. They are useful, telling moments of articulation and creation – of labour – and viewing these from the 'cold' evaluative gaze of methodology only contributes to keeping feminism small in IR and the world. Feminist work of discovery, entering reality anew each time, drawing the floating sensation all involve digging, creating, undoing, but not in purifying sense – more muddying than crystallising, and more a

[50]Zalewski explores this idea further in this work, Marysia Zalewski, *Trying Not to Write an Academic Book (While at the Same Time Trying to Write One) in Critical Methods in Studying World Politics: Creativity and Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming).

[51]Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 59.

[52]Trinh also discusses representation and exteriority. Trinh, *D-Passage*, pp. 72–8, 194–5.

matter of occupying space (form) than saying anything incontestable (content). Zalewski's *Exquisite Corpse* contributes to this feminist move that takes amplifying offending lines of vision and questioning as the main task at hand. 'To follow a wandering mind means having to get lost. Can you stand being lost?'[53]

Acknowledgements. Thanks to Laura Shepherd and Helen Kinsella for editing this forum, Marysia for her openness, and Maria-Adriana Deiana for reading an early version of this article – without our feminist sounding boards, I would truly be lost.

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[53]Barry, *What It Is*, p. 49.

Cite this article: Choi, S. 2020. Redressing international problems: North Korean nuclear politics. *Review of International Studies* **46**, 337–349. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210519000470