**'Guerilla' Publishing on Feminism Today: *MAI Feminism & Visual Culture***

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*MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture* ([maifeminism.com](https://maifeminism.com/)) is a popular, peer-reviewed, global journal that is always available for free. It is dedicated to celebrating a myriad of feminist voices in any form, from traditional scholarly articles to creative visual expressions. It thrives on presenting the work of scholars and creatives who wish to contribute to the global community of those interested in original, innovative, gender-focused research. It is widely cited and praised for its unique and inclusive view of feminist work across many visual culture fields, high publication standards, and attractive, unique interface. Since its inception in 2018, *MAI* has published fourteen themed, book-size, bi-annual issues, each contributing to the journal's reputation, which has been sealed by its listing in the esteemed Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series, and Publishers.

MAI stands out in the academic world as an anomaly, with its founding and managing editors boldly rejecting patriarchal, capitalist hierarchies. This radical stance, coupled with its independence from dominant academic publishers, sets *MAI* apart. Free of institutional ties, apart from a small subsidy for web development and online maintenance from the University of Gothenburg, MAI takes pride in its 'guerilla' existence, empowering and representing diverse feminist voices. Its unique position adds nuance to the scholarly publishing market.

**The Backstory**

A few troubling conditions plague the academic publishing market. Scholarly outputs are either hidden behind a paywall, or the corporate publishing houses drain institutional or individual budgets by charging writers sky-high fees for open access. As much as it seems morally problematic from the writers' perspective, it also closes feminist research and its educational potential from the larger public to whose benefit all the research should be devised in the first place. Adding to that, in disciplines related to visual culture, many Western universities invest in trendy practice-based research. Ironically enough, their results and outputs are only published in a textual form, because most scholarly journals lack frameworks or technical capacities to showcase more intricate visuals besides a few images inserted in the written text. These observations drove us to conceive *MAI.* Among other things, our idealistic project was a call to action for change in the academic publishing landscape.

To resist the academic paywall and find a remedy for the competitive ruthlessness of the publication process in specialised peer-review journals, we conceived an online project anchored in the ethics of feminist care and inclusivity. When I first met Anna Backman Rogers at the Visible Evidence Conference in Buenos Aires in 2017—different as we were in our academic interests, personal backgrounds, upbringings and lived experiences—we felt an instant connection as we shared a similar professional dream.

Our first casual conversation quickly slipped into a common vision of running a kind, free-to-access, collectively produced journal that embraces all types of women scholars, creators and writers. We wanted to publish those whom Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément once classified as followers of the patriarchal 'master narrative' (1986)—or writers adhering to traditional academic logic and structure—alongside those who opted for more free-style forms of creative and critical expression; to whom language is of as much value as visual and video materials. In other words, we envisioned an independent, free-to-publish and accessible global online space that would bring together traditional feminist scholarship, practice-based research, and creative responses to visual culture.

**Feminism at *MAI***

In 2017, the fourth wave of feminism was already a reality. Feminism was gaining in popularity across the globe due to social media, where many day-to-day feminist concerns were openly expressed and tackled. After all, the #metoo campaign became yet another proof that feminist discourse was on the rise as a hugely effective tool to expose concealed patriarchal abuse. Many feminists agreed that the de-politicised post-feminist ideologies of the two previous decades lulled women activists' vigilance and unexpectedly gave some educated men permission to indulge in what Susan Douglas saw as the growing social acceptance of 'enlightened sexism' (2010a; 2010b)—now seen as a significant factor contributing to the oppression and suppression of women across the social ladder in the western cultures and beyond. And so, hopes for feminism were high. In January of that year, The Women's March, a global protest advocating for women's rights, brought a timely and symbolic affirmation of the need to once again mobilise women's voices worldwide. As Angela Davis shouted in Washington DC that 'feminism is for everybody' (cited in Matthews 2017), we nodded. That moment looked like the beginning of the 'feminist renaissance,’ as I later wrote in the first issue of *MAI* (Misiak 2018).

This diagnosis of the zeitgeist further enthused us to believe there was a need for an open, intersectional, multivalent space to promote new and original feminist work and creativity. Powered by the energy of 2017, once we both returned home—Anna to Sweden, where she works at the University of Gothenburg, and I to the UK—we assembled all our contacts to turn our cross-national feminist fantasy into reality. With the invaluable help of our creative friends and the collective effort of all who shared our vision, we started designing the architecture and the user interface for our dream online platform. This was a collaborative effort, and we were thrilled to see our collective vision taking shape.

We named the journal after a Swedish feminist actor, Mai Zetterling (1925-1994). She was our strong inspiration from the past, known for her irreverence when standing up against patriarchal oppression and for her vocal refusal to shut up. Zetterling is often cited as saying, 'The future can be better, and it starts with us learning to listen' (Larsson 2018). As much as she was brave and outspoken, our new patron also encouraged kindness, patience and learning from others. With that in mind, we started looking for our project collaborators and supporters who could help us take it off the ground and improve in the coming years.

Social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) was instrumental in our journey, helping us connect with scholars who shared our vision of a feminist initiative. Together, we were able to promote and run the journal, demonstrating the power of collective action in achieving our goals. With the support of a group of esteemed artists and academics who believed in our vision, we found strength in unity. The interest in our project was growing, when we started receiving submissions for the first issue. In *MAI* [Manifesto](https://maifeminism.com/manifesto/), we emphasised our commitment to collective effort, intersectionality, independent thinking, fairness, kindness, and our unwavering dedication to changing the norms of promoting and judging academic work. Yet, amid today's complex ideological and political landscape, I recognise the importance of explaining the meaning of feminism which we embrace in the contemporary social and political context of 2024.

Our take on feminism at *MAI* closely aligns with the teachings of the late bell hooks (MAI 2022), who spent her life campaigning for equality and raising awareness of systemic injustices. Like her, we tend not to engage in internal feminist arguments and conflicts over definitions. Instead, we see our contributors and editors investing their energy in positive, future-oriented work. Therefore, we favour what hooks calls 'strategic essentialism' (2009). While recognising differences between individual experiences as determined by social, political, and geographical factors or imposed and internalised gender expectations, we believe in bringing together all women's voices. That's why we wholeheartedly support diverse critical and creative reflections on gender to criticise patriarchy from across the globe, be it from the historical or contemporary perspective. We cherish all efforts to stand against gender-based oppression and radically oppose 'the backlash culture' (Faludi 1992; Silva & Mendes 2015), dismissal or lack of acknowledgement that is based on gender.

As we vouch for solidarity with women in need, publishing more analytical texts next to confessional and creative research, we anchor our editorial policy in the ethics of feminist sisterhood: the support for women's work to overcome the marginalisation of their voices (hooks 2000). Taking articles from initial submission to publication, unlike many other journals, we cooperate with authors, offering edits and constructive feedback, should their work require revisions or improvements. We also encourage our peer reviewers, who are selected based on their expertise and commitment to our values, to focus on positive advice rather than dismissive criticism and rejection. In doing so, we aim to create a more sensitive and supportive scholarly environment, where emerging scholars, artists and journalists can publish next to more established, high-calibre names, feeling supported and encouraged in their work.

***MAI* Now**

In the beginning, the objectives of embracing kindness in servicing academia proved to be quite demanding for just the two of us. Operating from the margins of the publishing market and determined for *MAI* to stay independent, for the first two years Anna Backman Rogers and I carried the journal’s day-to-day, working for free after hours. Soon, with the growing interest from authors and readers, our workloads became unsustainable. Thankfully, we encountered reliable, highly qualified professionals who believed in our project. They helped streamline the publication process and took over some of our time-consuming tasks. All this effort culminated when we invited Houman Sadri, a seasoned, experienced academic from the University of South-Eastern Norway, as our new managing editor. He is now in charge of communicating with authors, peer reviewers and contributing editors, ensuring the smooth operation and continued success of *MAI.* Anna Backman Rogers has since stepped away from handling the journal on a day-to-day basis. She now focuses on the development of [*MAI Press*](https://punctumbooks.com/imprints/mai-feminism-and-culture/)*,* our sister publishing label we run in collaboration with Punctum Press. It is worth noting that two new editors now supervise the creative response section and the book reviews. The journal also relies on the support and advice of a collective of scholars and critics who serve as *MAI* contributing editors. They are essential for peer review, commissioning work, and promoting the journal.

As we invited new people to manage *MAI,* we also started working with guest editors, who picked up some of our responsibilities when preparing individual journal editions. They now take responsibility for focus issues, prepare calls for papers, commission work, and gather the main theme content. However, not to be exclusive, we are always ready to include additional quality articles in each issue, even if they do not follow the central theme. We still encourage diverse submissions, including miscellaneous texts, creative responses, and book reviews, which are added to each issue to stay true to our initial promise of inclusivity and respect for those who, just like us, may not always fit within the established structures.

**Publishing with MAI**

At MAI, we are open to considering innovative feminist research and creative work focused on gender or, more specifically, women's experiences in and with visual culture. To embrace diverse methodologies and forms of expression, we give our contributors the freedom to choose a presentation format most suitable for their work. Therefore, next to traditional academic articles, which we class as 'Critical Reflection,’ we accept texts in the following categories: Interview, Conversation, Video Essay, Film, Creative Practice, Creative Response, Book Review and Report. To be published, no matter how niche or personal, submissions must be prepared for the general audience, which we define as individuals with a basic understanding of feminist studies and visual culture or an interest in exploring new perspectives and ideas. We always help our authors to make their work accessible. In the editorial process, we focus on readability, as we advise our contributors to remove academic jargon, ensuring that their work is engaging for all readers.

In the particular area of screen research, we focus on more than just traditional film studies and textual analysis. Across our fourteen issues to date, we presented work using various methodologies, from production and distribution studies through analyses of representations and pedagogies of teaching film and television to more personal responses to specific directors, narratives or characters. While some of our issues are dedicated explicitly to screen research, for instance, [Focus Issue Seven: Female Detectives in TV](https://maifeminism.com/issues/mai-issue-7-female-detectives/) or [Focus Issue Twelve: Reframing Varda](https://maifeminism.com/issues/focus-issue-twelve-reframing-varda/), elsewhere, we include insightful essays on individual films or TV programmes as the mentioned miscellaneous articles. Over the past seven years, we have also published many interviews with women film and TV practitioners who assume a range of roles in global screen industries.

We are always open to working with new collaborators and authors who share our vision of feminism and our belief in opening research to new methodologies and innovative ways of presenting results. Please review our [submission](https://maifeminism.com/submissions/) and [guest editors' guidelines](https://maifeminism.com/guest-editors-guildelines/) if you want to contribute to MAI as an author or editor. You'll be offered constructive feedback and editing assistance while being valued and respected for service to the feminist cause by sharing your work with two million of our site visitors for free. Feminist publishing is not just about sharing knowledge; it's about challenging patriarchy in any form or shape. Feminism's work is not done, and we are committed to continuing our mission. Please get in touch at [contact@maifeminism.com](mailto:contact@maifeminism.com).

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