

# Playing with my luck

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Keywords: Art, Feminism, Religion, Christianity, Patriarchy, Misogyny, Video, Performance, Digital art, Human rights

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***To all the women who chase their desires and refuse to settle down.***

## **ABSTRACT**

Playing with my luck is a performance which comments on feminine expectations and satirizes the oppressive social structures that women must follow in order to be accepted by patriarchal societies. *The 10 Commandments* short film borrows religious recognizable elements and displays some of Orthodox Christianity's conservative beliefs to parody the patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies that religion often promotes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Chair of my committee Rachel Weaver. Her continuous motivation, guidance, and offered opportunities played a significant role in my academic success. For me, she was an exemplar for her academic ethos, advising skills, immense knowledge, and kindness. Additionally, I would like to deeply thank the two other members of my committee Les Duffield and Michael Borowski for their continuous support and help. Their guidance was fruitful, impactful, and influential in shaping my artistic practice and developing my critical skills. I am grateful for their encouragement and insightful comments throughout the years since they helped me to strengthen my creative approach.

My gratitude extends to the rest of the Virginia Tech's Art faculty for giving me the opportunity to freely express myself throughout their courses and for the funding opportunity without which I could not be able to follow my dreams. Furthermore, I was lucky enough to collaborate and become good friends with Tacie Jones, Caleb Flood, Carter Eggleston, and David Franusich. These brilliant friends and colleagues not only have inspired me throughout the years, but they were by my side through both hard and cheerful times.

There are no proper words to convey my deep gratitude for my extended family Eleni Theodoropoulou, Irini Vourlioti, Stela Kaloudi, Nancy Treviño, and Eric Schoenborn. Their unfailing emotional support and unconditional trust and encouragement helped me overcome difficulties and celebrate life. Special thanks to the fierce tigers of my life Eleni, Irini, and Stela for so many things that words cannot say.

I am deeply grateful for my family Traikos Abatzis, Marianna Abatzi, and Antonis Abatzis who have always been on my side. Having my heart and soul full by their unlimited love and empathy I was able to concentrate my efforts on accomplishing my goals.

Finally, I would like to thank my other whole George Kontoudis (a.k.a. Γκομενάκι) for his unwavering support and encouragement. George, thank you for always believing in me and reminding me that women are going to change the world that we all live in. You continuously support me to chase my dreams, find my voice, and become the better version of myself. Thank you for being the light of my life.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Society usually is not on the side of women. Throughout history, women have been treated as objects of desire, while it has been also communicated that they have been designed to be submissive in the domination game. Oppressive cultures have forced women to play multiple roles in order to satisfy the oppressors' social standards. In other words, the submission of themselves to male dominance is the price that women need to pay for redemption.

For example, Orthodox Christianity's New and Old Testaments are two religious documents that promote masculine dominance over female nature. Additionally, when women are encouraged to follow patriarchal norms, they are unable to discover their identities since they do not have the chance to shape themselves based on their own desires. Is there any way to hack conservative theology by tricking our inherited luck?

Preliminary research on the short film *The 10 Commandments* drove me to concentrate my efforts on posing questions regarding the well-established societal standards of my country –Greece. As a result, I investigate the possibility of transformation of human behaviors and beliefs by making artworks that are rooted in narrative. Although the short film follows the journey of feminine inherited luck and predetermined destiny, the humoristic and sarcastic performance: i) attempts to push the limits of comfort; and ii) questions the deliberated doctrine of the good and well-trained housewife.

## 2. INVESTIGATION OF MISOGYNY: THE PLAN TO DETHRONE DESTINY

We are used to living under organized communities and following rules. We live in an anthropocentric world where we constantly try to find answers by turning either to science or religious documents. One reason for that could be that human beings are raised by being exposed to different aspects of control. People are constantly trying to take control of their lives by making simple decisions such as the food that they will make, to more serious ones like the individuals that they will consider as family.

From my point of view, that persistent search results in our need to know how much authority we have in our lives. When we fail to estimate the outcome of an action or a decision, we are seeking ways to justify that weakness, even more when we are not the only ones responsible for those events. Luck is like an indirect mechanism that we all secretly share to handle events that we were not prepared for. In Greece, we refer to the word *moira* (*μοίρα*) to talk about a higher power which might control our lives and includes the meaning of destiny and luck and the answers regarding our life span and death. Especially in ancient times in Greece, people believed in *moira* so much that they considered it beyond the will of gods (Raphals 19).

Destiny is a system which includes all the factors that cannot be changed. In other words, is the belief in an unchangeable set of rules which has been set by a moral source such as a God (Raphals 2). In ancient years Greeks believed that destiny controlled both the world and the lives of people. Greek philosophers did not accept the existence of chance or luck as factors that can influence events, so people were presented as powerless. However, Aristotle believed that even in situations where the reasons behind an action can be named, yet there are some actions that take place by chance and others that cannot (Raphals 25).

Furthermore, in recent history luck has been characterized as the absolute lack of control (Greco 3; Zimmerman 4; Levy 43). Levy stated that it is not fair to blame people for activities that they were lucky to accomplish since they cannot control their luck; it is an attack against fairness (3). In opposition to that, Rescher describes luck as the most helpful tool of self-exculpation (5). He says that when people experience an unfortunate event, it is easier to avoid taking responsibility for their mistakes by blaming their bad luck (5).

In Greece, when people experience a bad event, especially those who believe in God, they claim that it was God's will for that to happen to them. Moreover, if people overcome a difficulty, they say that God saved them. In contrast, younger generations are not as close to Christianity –the most popular religion of Greece. When something happens to them, they blame their luck.

Rescher, further explains his claim that luck is just an excuse, that people are fortunate for the abilities and strengths in which they come to this world, but they cannot be considered lucky. Since people cannot decide the circumstances under which they are born, we need to perceive life as a matter of opportunities and not luck. What happens to people is based not only on their actions, but also on others' decisions too. Even nature can play a significant role in an event's outcome. As a result, since the unfortunate events that might happen are out of individuals' control and awareness, the only thing that can be based on luck is the success of individuals' efforts (15).

However, how much control do we have in our lives? I have been raised in a culture which asks you to follow a specific path and make particular decisions in order to fit in while at the same time, in the same culture, there are numerous superstitions which can shape your luck and, as a result, your life.

## **2.1. CAN LUCK BE INHERITED?**

In 2008 a study was conducted to find an association between age, luck, and inheritance in the collection of capital (Benhabib & Shenghao 3). The findings showed that inheritance and luck played a role in the biased distribution of capital. With that being said, since in the situation of capital, inheritance and luck influence each other, maybe we could extend that relationship to other situations like freedom, equality, racism, etc.

Another study about luck and the decisions that might influence it was conducted at Harvard Business School in 2012 with 152 participants (Mollerstrom et al. 3). The researchers created an experiment with three possible scenarios, which were taking place in risky environments. Their aim was to examine how choices and fairness are influenced when incidents of unfortunate "option luck" and unfortunate "brute luck" were taking place. Option luck is when people can measure and think of possible risks before they make their decisions. In contrast, brute luck is when the outcome is not associated with the choices that have been made (Dworkin 73; Mollerstrom et.al 1).

Each scenario was offering specific earnings to the participants. Based on the researchers' findings, on the scenarios where the outcome seemed to be influenced by luck, participants had the tendency to consider equality and fairness. As a result, there were more possibilities for the participants to balance the earnings between them when they were experiencing difficulties due to their brute luck.

Those findings can be easily associated with many of the ideologies that exist in patriarchal communities. For example, being female, trans, or gay would be considered brute luck, but a person's decision to walk alone during evening hours is perceived as option luck. If a rape, harassment, robbery, or other unfortunate event takes place, sexists tend to blame the victim. They base their argument on the fact that the victims did not consider their "brute luck" before they risked their option luck, and they also usually emphasize irrelevant aspects such as the victims' clothes or social background.

When third agents like religion, social norms or family decide the path you must take, the challenges and the dangers you must face, and the choices you must make, how much control do you have of your luck? Do you have the opportunity to take a risk and gamble with your option luck or does your brute luck already control your destiny? And then when you do not have the option to risk, how can you equally face life?

For example, when women are born in patriarchal communities, they inherit an ideology which makes them feel inferior to men. Since they cannot control their luck, they must follow norms and adapt a way of living based on fear, subordination, and disrespect. As a result, in patriarchal communities there is one big problem that I am trying to highlight in *The 10 Commandments* short film. Society usually is not on the side of women. As Trinh mentioned in the "Notes of Feminism,"

*"The way society defines and governs a woman's place can easily be recognized through the ever-refined techniques of power it develops and normalizes in controlling and administering the everyday life of politics and sexuality" (6).*

The English language uses the phrases "test your luck" or "push your luck" when someone is referring to possible actions that might influence luck. In contrast, in Greece we use the phrase "play with your luck." Patriarchy is a game of oppression and women need to play in accordance with its rules in order to be accepted by Greek society. For example, I have grown up by taking warnings that I was constantly playing with my luck. From my earliest memories, I had the tendency to question the ideologies of patriarchal culture such as by wanting to stay out more time than my younger brother, by having many male friends, by wearing whatever I wanted when I was going out, or by getting into arguments when I was hearing opinions which were promoting oppressive behaviors. Based on Greek culture, I am used to playing with my (female) luck.

I am also used to perceiving everything as a game since that way it is easier for me to realize whether I have control of a situation or if I am being controlled. Maybe this happens because society uses games to communicate the roles of each gender. For instance, the

assumed perfect toy for a girls is a doll or kitchen supplies, while for boys it is soldiers or cars. Girls are indirectly taught to be givers, and boys to be strong. To extend this idea, in Greece when a man tries to capture a woman's attention, society perceives him as a hunter. In other words, the game of the hunter and the prey takes place. Even if a man becomes very persistent to a level that he is harassing the woman, the majority of older Greeks would think of him as a guy who does not accept "no" as an answer since he is a "big" hunter. And yes, that is considered a compliment for Greek culture.

Throughout history women have been treated as objects of desire while it has also been promoted that women are designed to have a submissive role in the domination game. They should always be sexually obtainable and minimally educated. What options do women have when society does not want them to have the control of their bodies, their decisions, their actions, and their lives? They become nothing but game pieces. In general, when people join a game, their playing is based on actions that benefit them. In the same way, women are used to developing rational behaviors, well-modified in the given circumstances, that also help ensure their survival.

From my angle, oppressive cultures have forced women to play multiple roles to satisfy the oppressors' social standards. Since women have inherited a life of play and are used to becoming characters, I believe it is inevitable that they will keep playing the same game forever. The problematic situation of being unable to tell fact from fiction has pushed women to emancipate their thoughts and to start shaping their lives based on their own needs and desires. Women, by exercising their own capabilities for themselves, further their survival, reclaim their identities, and start controlling their luck.

## **2.2. THE IMPACT OF CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY**

*The 10 Commandments* manifest some of the conservative ideologies that Orthodox Christianity promotes. Through the short film, I play with the meaning of rules and deride societal norms under which I was raised. My aim is to start a dialogue regarding women's coping mechanisms, the repossession of control, the oppression of female eroticism and the promotion of patriarchy by conservative theology.

In Greek culture, patriarchy is a structure and not an event. The Greek nation has been shaped by and has survived all the wars that they have been involved in because of simply promoting three principles: nation, religion, and family. As a result, religion has played a significant role in connecting people and passing traditions throughout the generations, especially when Greece was under the Turkish monarchy for 400 years (until 1821).

During these years of uncertainty, Orthodox Christianity was the only stable source of courage that Greeks had. Their need to escape from an unfortunate reality made them believe in this religion without gainsaying what was promoted in the Old and New Testaments. Christianity is a religion which encourages deeply oppressive, patriarchal, sexist, and slave systems (Ruether 2).

For example, based on the New Testament, women are presented as inferiors who must tolerate their husbands' rules since they brought sin in this world. For example:

“1 Timothy 2:13-14: For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner”.

The submission of herself to male dominance is the price that she needs to pay for her redemption. That behavior will secure her husband's love and affection. By serving his needs and playing her assigned role, she becomes trustworthy and morally reliable. Usually in patriarchal communities, women are raised to be givers and to please. They are taught to be selfless and to feel grateful that they can offer satisfaction as well as their services. In other words, women are used to forming their identity based on the indirect compulsion of patriarchal standards and expectations, i.e., to respect, approve, admire, love, care, and appreciate the male (Manne xxi, 19).



Figure 1. The 5th Commandment "Do your makeup"/ Vasia Abatzi



Figure 2. The 7th Commandment "Smile at beating" / Vasia Abatzi

The short film's 5th and 7th commandments "Do your makeup" and "Smile at beating" accordingly, comment on women's assigned role to prioritize male desires and accept their objectification due to societal standards. The work also refers to the pernicious beauty standards that women and girls are exposed to from a young age, and which they need to chase to be appreciated by the patriarchal society.



Figure 1. Untitled / Ana Mendieta  
Source: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/ana-mendieta-untitled-glass-on-body-imprints-7>

The artist Ana Mendieta in her work *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints—face)* (1972), takes pictures of her face while she presses against a pane of glass. Her intention is to criticize how people see her and how they get into conclusions based on her appearance.

Likewise, the artist Fenia Kotsopoulou with her video performance “*Domestic Catwoman (2)*” (2015) plays with beauty industry standards and expectations. Additionally, her ironic video performance “*Mirror mirror on the wall...*” (2015) comments on the beauty stereotypes that fairy-tales like the *Queen and the Huntsman* promote, and as a result influence gender stereotypes.

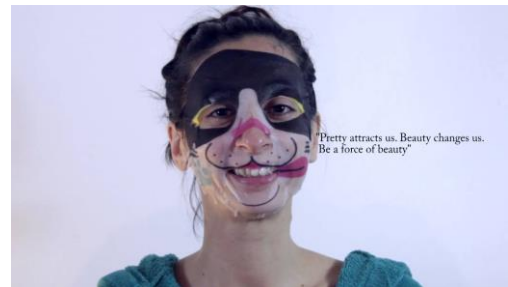


Figure 2. Domestic Catwoman (2) / Fenia Kotsopoulou  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBaJ3xCf9K8>

Unfortunately, the fact that women have adapted to oppressive societal standards for so many years has made them objectify other women too. Self-objectification exists when women are not satisfied with their body image (Strelan & Duane, 2005). The vicious circle of objectification exists because when women are forced to objectify themselves, they often feel incapable of making intentional decisions (Baldissarri et al. 2019). As a result, they feel unable to rebel against that subordination system.



Figure 3. Mirror mirror on the wall / Fenia Kotsopoulou  
Source: <https://vimeo.com/150189490>

When Christianity asks women to consent to their subordination due to predetermined social order and to renounce any domination since they are positioned under it (Ruether 5, 10) the issue of equality has been abolished. For example, in Greece, especially in the past, if a woman was beaten in her marriage, there could be many possible reasons for that abuse. The reasoning behind this behavior could be that the wife misbehaved or that the husband simply has the right to do so, based on his male nature.

When I was younger, my grandmother used to tell me stories from the Bible. The one that I have heard the most is Magdalene's. She was a prostitute who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. After that, Jesus let her get rid of all her sins since, according to him, she had believed in him.



Figure 4. The Structure / Vasia Abatzi

My previous artwork “The Structure” was influenced by this story. I shot a video of that scene by inverting the roles to show the ridiculous role models that religions often promote. Additionally, I placed the letters of the word equality in a way that they shaped a cross to show the antithesis between what religion claims to state and what it promotes. Lastly, a unique phrase from the Bible was written multiple times inside each of the 3D letters. The eight quotes had to do with men’s superiority to women, as well as the presentation of people with different sexual orientations as parasites.

The song of the 3rd commandment “Enjoy household” addresses the most common expectations of people when the subject of discussion is the woman’s and/or wife’s role in

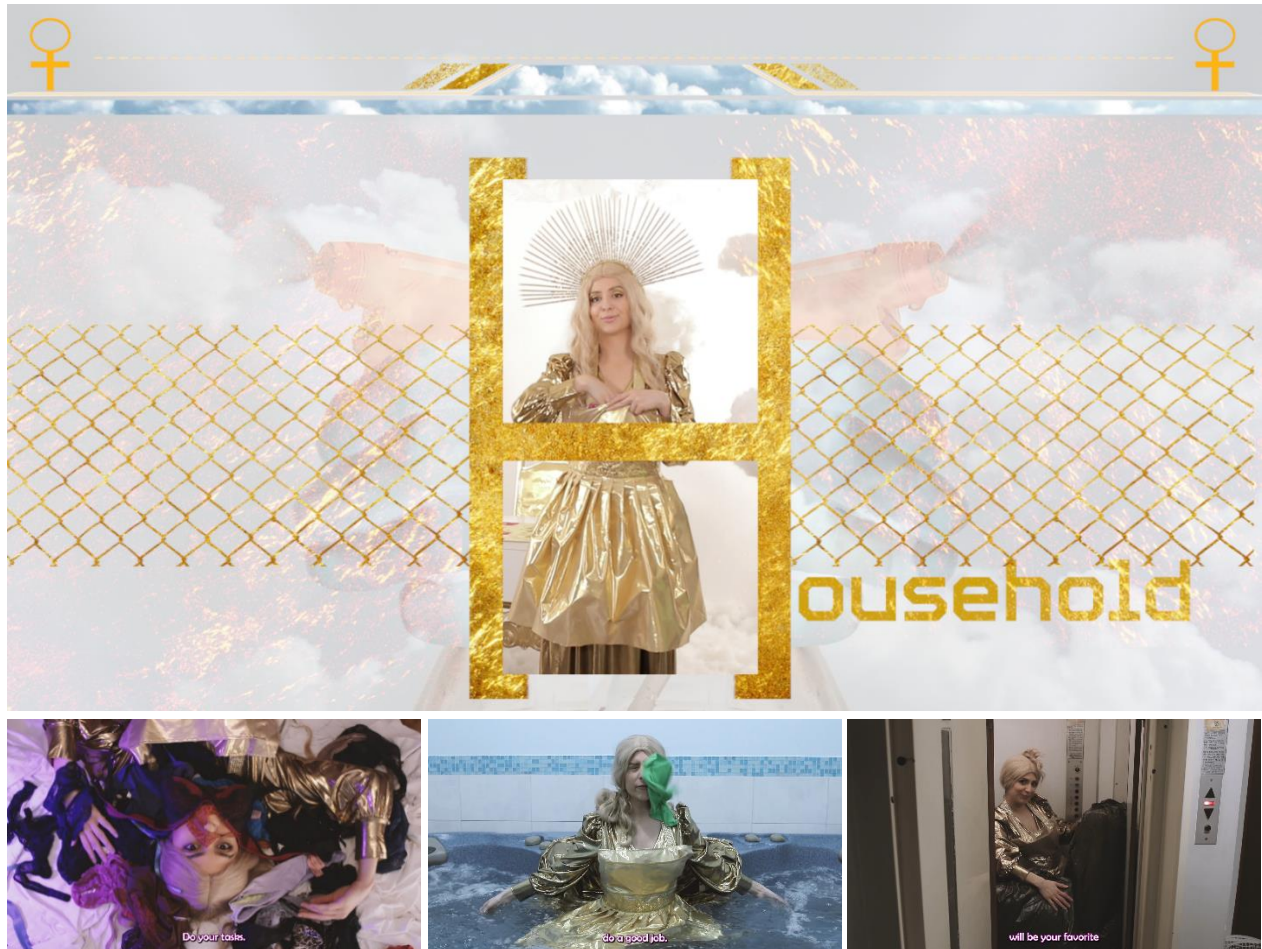


Figure 5. The 3rd Commandment "Enjoy Household" / Vasia Abatzi

the Greek family. On top of that, the videoclip deliberately presents those duties with a more provocative and sexual angle as a reference to women's subconscious dollification<sup>1</sup>.



Throughout the years, women have inherited submissive roles in the household. Martha Rosler is an American artist who also uses video as a medium and questions patriarchal norms by commenting on women's domestication. With her piece "Semiotics of the Kitchen" in 1975, she used

Figure 6. Semiotics of the Kitchen / Martha Rosler  
Source: <https://publicdelivery.org/martha-rosler-kitchen-semiotics/>

<sup>1</sup> "Dollification is about the process of a woman evolving mentally and physically into a 'living doll' and the partners enjoying the process of objectification and transformation. The nature of this interest means it is very much based on a Master/slave/ or Dom/sub relationship. The man is known as the Owner or Dollmaster, as he directs the way the woman transforms into a doll... The role also requires the woman to have no ability to speak and no free will in how she moves or positions her body, so the Dollmaster acts somewhat like a puppet master" (Lewis, 2011).

parody to critique the television programs that promoted the idea that women exist in the kitchen.

When women are encouraged to follow patriarchal norms, they are unable to discover their identities since they never actually had the chance to shape themselves based on their own desires. As Kezban Batibeki notes, when a woman loses her identity, she turns into an object, and she becomes a dollification of herself (Banks 78).

The short film *I am You* was my first attempt to experiment with the idea that in some relationships the reason for one's existence is turning into an experiment of submission.

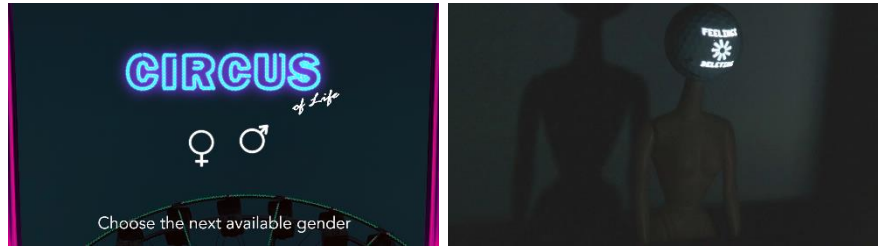
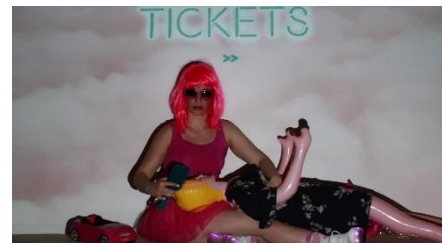


Figure 7. *I am You* / Vasia Abatzi

The short film displays the expectations of men who have adapted the patriarchal mentality in accordance with the appropriate performance of women since they consider them subordinates. In those situations, women are continuously reminded that their existence has no value while they are also obligated to undertake specific kinds of emotional, sexual, residential, social, and reproductive labor (Manne 46).



Patriarchy appears when a woman starts questioning her monopolistic role of giving and the male starts to feel betrayal, believing that the female is morally suspect. Additionally, when the male starts seeking revenge and punishment to impose and reinforce those patriarchal norms and expectations, and the social roles they control, according to Manne, is misogyny (47).



Based on the Bible, if believers betray or question God's rules, God has the authority to punish. And, since God has been perceived as physically a male, men can take that role too over women (Ruether 6, 10). That is to say, women have to follow patriarchal norms, and if they decide to go against those, men have the right to seek revenge and punish them in order to restore that structure (Manne xxi). This is how misogyny is closely related to Christianity.

Another scenario that has played a significant role in the subordination of women by conservative theologians is the belief that since females are second in nature (1 Tim. 2:13-14), they have no authority in church (Ruether 4). Additionally, in the New Testament, Aquinas notes that Jesus had to be a man to act for all of humanity and as a result, only men can represent Jesus in the priesthood. For example, in Greece, not only is it forbidden for women to become priests, but it is also prohibited for women to enter the altar. Therefore, Christianity fails one more time to promote equality since it repeatedly leads to the discrimination of women.



Figure 8. The 8th Commandment "Visit Church Properly" / Vasia Abatzi

The short film's 8th Commandment "Visit Church Properly" displays the most widespread unwritten rules of Orthodox Christianity. Even if menstruation is one of the necessary aspects for a new life to be created, religion has established a set of rules that communicate this normal experience as something sinful, dirty, and embarrassing. For example,

"Leviticus 15:19: And if a woman has an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever touch her shall be unclean until the evening" (Bible).

These statements continue by explaining the steps that a man should take if he gets in contact with a woman during her menstrual cycle. Additionally, if there is intercourse during the menstrual days, the man would be considered dirty for seven days as well as every bed where he would recline (Leviticus 15:24; Bible). As long as menstruation continues being a taboo issue, women will be excluded from positions of authority in Christianity.

Aristotle, who influenced early Christianity ideologies, supported that females are incapable of having independent logic, and for that reason, they would be dependent on and subordinate to males forever (Ruether 3). The 1st, 2nd, and 9th short film commandments “Drive Responsibly,” “Quit Male How-To,” and “Avoid Independence” accordingly, present three very popular beliefs in Greece regarding women’s incapability regarding tasks originally performed by men.

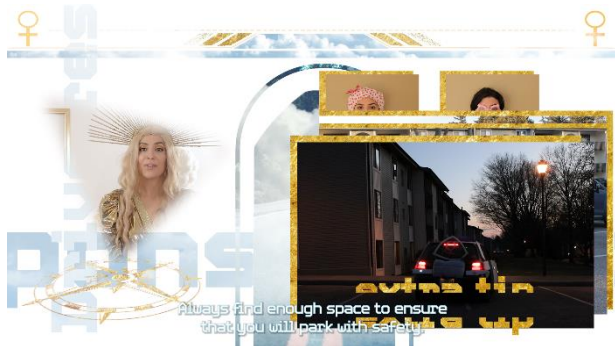


Figure 9. The 1st Commandment “Drive Responsibly” / Vasia Abatzi



Figure 10. The 2nd Commandment “Quit Male How-To” / Vasia Abatzi



Figure 11. The 9th Commandment “Avoid Independence” / Vasia Abatzi



Figure 12. Turbulent / Shirin Neshat  
 Source: <https://www.thecollector.com/shirin-neshat-videos-and-films/>

Although my analysis is based on Orthodox Christianity, I would like to mention the work of some female Islamic artists who highlight the inequality between men and women which is promoted by their religion too. To begin with, Shirin Neshat with her video “Turbulent” (1998) comments on the tyranny, oppression, and political injustice that women face in her culture. The parallel screen communicates the two worlds that simultaneously exist in patriarchal communities. When the woman starts singing, her emotional outburst is riveting. As the artist said, her work is “an expression of protest, a cry for humanity.”

Additionally, Aidan Salakhova a Moscow-born artist, believes that both Christianity and Islam since they are word-based religions are urgently in need of change due to the oppressive systems that they promote. With her work “QAB’ AH, The eyes of freedom” (2002) she tries to start a dialogue and challenge patriarchal order since according to her, “dialogue and violence are mutually exclusive terms” (Kurt Steinhausen, 2015).



Figure 13. QAB’ AH, The eyes of freedom / Aidan Salakhova  
 Source: <https://ocula.com/artists/aidan-salakhova/>



Figure 14. The Dinner Party / Judy Chicago  
 Source: <https://www.frieze.com/article/judy-chicago-hits-back-dinner-party-criticism>

It has never been easy for women to get recognized for their achievements by the public. Judy Chicago with her work “The Dinner Party” (1974 - 79) honored 1,038 women who played an important role in history. The short film’s 4th Commandment “Be Clever in Interviews” displays the underlying meanings of the questions that women are asked during interviews. The purpose of that commandment is to criticize

the inequalities of the working sector in Greece. Usually in my country, for the same positions women will be paid less than men. Also, it is becoming more difficult to get hired if you are a woman above 30 years old since employees often believe that women want children, so family might become an obstacle for their career and as a result impact their performance at work.



Figure 15. The 4th Commandment Be Clever in Interviews / Vasia Abatzi

In addition, it has never been simple for women to exercise technical skills and obtain positions of authority without receiving public harassment too. In Greece, which is a male-controlled society, it is common for people to constantly question and degrade women's capabilities by refusing to eradicate the old, prejudiced, hatred, and monstrous socio-political beliefs which have been passed down through generations. Often, the role of stereotypes is to elicit fear towards control. Similarly, Hartman claims that the plan for her downfall starts with man's domination and that is an event which has existed for centuries. Although the plan started with the theorists' ideas, today it appears through many ways such as by a large picture on a wall which minimizes the value of her life into one word - condemned (Hartman 1).

Women usually have been established as the givers in the relationship based on the emotional and social labor that they are assigned to execute. Besides, patriarchal dynamics have been shaped based on the dominant relations of human reproduction. Those relations classify the subordination of females since women hold distinct class positions (Kuhn et al. 11). For example, based on Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth-century Italian catholic priest and Doctor of the Church, who was influenced by Aristotle's perception regarding women's value, men are responsible for procreation while women contribute only the material formed by men's seed (Ruether 5). That is an example that highlights the dominant relations of human reproduction.

Usually, men’s desire for dominance over women is followed by women’s objectification as well. More specifically, when a woman is objectified, she is perceived as a person incapable of critical thinking who does not deserve to be treated respectfully (Heflick et al.,2011). Based on the objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) women are seen as an assortment of sexual pieces and/or sexual functions. As a result, women are deprived of their right to develop and communicate their original personalities since they are perceived essentially as bodies.



Figure 16. Head / Cheryl Donegan  
Source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/88832>

For example, Cheryl Donegan’s video “Head” (1993) comments on voyeurism and objectification of women by pop culture. By placing herself as both the subject and object she plays with the ideal of women’s dollification.

An objectified body is subordinated and controlled. Women usually adopt other people’s perspectives regarding how their bodies should be in order to be desirable, and this also impacts what they should wear. In Greece when an event

such as gynocide, catcalling, rape etc. takes place, the media and the majority of people comment on what the woman was wearing, the location’s safety, and the possible reasons behind the action such as the abuser’s and/or killer’s jealousy or his uncontrolled love for the victim. For patriarchal communities those kinds of excuses are more important than the actual actions.

Since patriarchal ideology has the tendency to promote that more or less it is always women’s fault if something bad happens to them, the 6th Commandment “Dress Respectfully” satirizes that phenomenon. Especially in previous generations, women in Greece

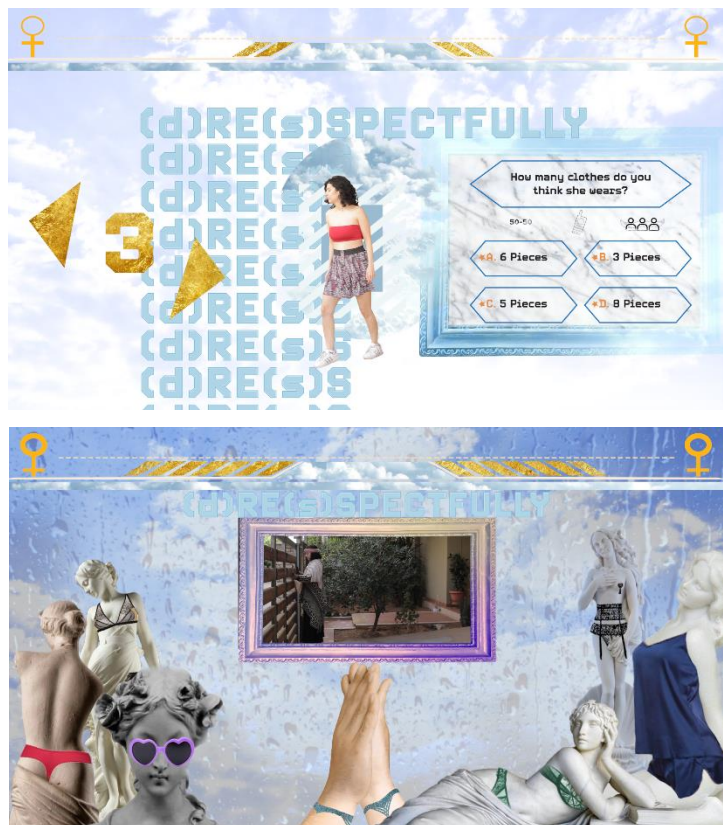
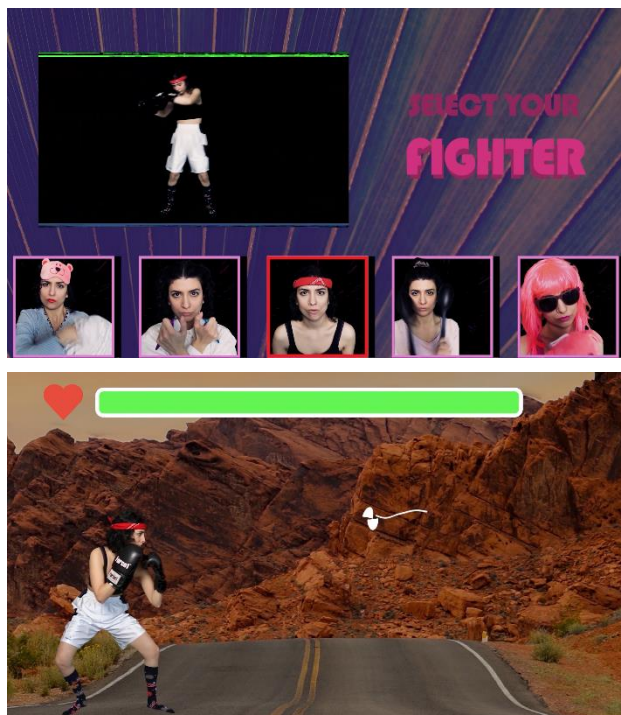


Figure 17. The 6th Commandment “Dress Respectfully” / Vasia Abatzi

dressed in order to not “play” with their luck by provoking men with their clothing, often at the expense of their desires or pleasure. The set of appropriate rules regarding clothing choices falls under patriarchy’s plan to have the last word on decisions regarding women’s bodies.

Religions have played a significant role in invalidating women’s right to control the use of their own bodies. For example, when women refuse to exercise feminine-code forms by wanting to have an abortion, misogyny takes action to control other women that might want to follow the “rebel’s” actions (Manne 111). For instance, women are threatened with social disapproval by receiving attacks about their ethics. Often religious people in Greece perceive abortions as peculiar and selfish actions. They experience moral panic if a woman rejects her expected subordinate nature and caregiving labor and becomes the reason that a fetus will not be able to join the afterlife (Manne 120).

For centuries, political systems have tried to dominate and control women's bodies. That effort can be easily seen in the number of countries where the prohibition of abortions is promoted: Andorra, Egypt, Haiti, Iraq, Malta, Nicaragua, Philippines, Poland etc. The access to safe and legal abortions is considered as a human right by the minority of legislators. Therefore, there is a lack of proper regulation, health services, and political will. By avoiding setting legislation which will allow women to make independent decisions regarding their reproduction, many countries find an opportunity to make women stop exercising the right of abortion since they are driven by conservative religious ideologies.



My first attempt to start a dialogue for the dominant patriarchal expectations of human reproduction was with the short film *Our Bodies, Our Rules*. The video commented on the male-dominant and often deeply religious world that many women navigate by including quotes from American Republican politicians who fight abortion laws even in the case of rape. Furthermore, the short film displayed archival videos from TV shows spanning the 1970s - 1990s, and interviews by deep supporters of religion who perceived abortion as a sin.

The video was projected on an outdoor public wall downtown Blacksburg in Virginia as an intervention project. The performance



which took place after the end of the video, ended with a dancer writing on a white board the phrase “Our bodies, Our rules.” She wrote that phrase with pink liquid that flowed out from her bra when she opened the caps which were attached in the front part of her underwear.



Figure 18. Our bodies, Our rules / Vasia Abatzi

Keeping that board in our shared MFA studio, after a couple of weeks, I found a threat written on it: “Wait till a man gets a hold of you.” That is written proof of the ideology behind the misogynistic attacks that occur when women refuse to stay subordinated under patriarchal norms and male will. It is also written proof that it is essential for women to fight for their rights by opposing the male superiority and dominance.



Figure 19. Our bodies, Our rules - Threat / Vasia Abatzi

On the other hand, it is known that Christianity promotes forgiveness as one of the ways that a believer can reach paradise. In other words, letting go is the only path to success

(Plate 13). The Bible and church have tried to present women as passive, powerless, helpless, and a “piece of property.” By perceiving women as something that can be bought, sold, and owned, women have been refused equal rights as well as their freedom of thought and consciousness (Manne 154). They are viewed as mentally and physically inferior to men.

Feminist disability theory has concluded that sickness is considered “womanly” since both females and people with disabilities have been presented as mentally irregular (Garland-Thomson 5). Those kinds of ideologies and norms have survived for thousands of years and have structured people’s values, moral codes, ethics, and relationships. Likewise, Trinh has stated in the “Notes of Feminism,” that what is perceived as cliché, expected, and typical tends to be unnoticed (2). Throughout the years, people have accepted the Bible’s discrimination regarding the sexes as well as women’s physical and mental subordination. As a result, weakness has been related to feminine and since that mentality is not communicated as abnormal but regular, its consequences have been ignored.

The 10th Commandment “Accept the Grumbling” presents the results of three research works regarding the similarities and differences of female and male brains. When women express their desires, demand their rights, and communicate their disagreement they are perceived as annoying. If an expressed point of view is not in accordance with patriarchal norms, then it is translated as grumbling. The huge terms of use guide which is presented on that commandment broaches the matter of the already structured communities that women have to fit in by following rules that strip them from their right of free will.



Figure 20. The 10th Commandment "Accept the Grumbling" / Vasia Abatzi

Greek society operates under a misogynistic system which communicates to women that they will have to face moral dilemmas if they decide to resist the patriarchal structure of their communities. In Greece when women decide to fight for equality and critique gendered systems of power, they question both the nation’s culture and its religion since those two are related to each other.

### **3. THE PROCESS OF HACKING CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY**

Personally, I believe that religions act as a game of suppression and fear. Instead of focusing their efforts on promoting love, empathy, acceptance, and equality, certain religious ideology refuses to adjust to the evolution of the world by continually promoting patriarchal norms, sexism, and misogyny. Sexism is the ideology which validates men's superiority over women to prove right patriarchal social arrangements. In other words, sexism presents binary sexes (male and female) as significantly different as a means to display patriarchal norms as reasonable (Manne 79, 80). My personal experience with religion is within Orthodox Christianity and in the Orthodox church. I will be focusing on these experiences in this specific religious sect.

For instance, there are numerous cases in the Bible which promotes such ideologies:

“Timothy 2:12: But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

“Proverbs 21:9: Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.”

“Genesis 3:16: In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

In the first two examples, sexism appears in the clear distinction between the superiority of men over women. The patriarchal norm is the fact that women must be silent while not opposing men's actions and beliefs. To go even further, the third excerpt refers to the punishment that women must have due to Eve's choice to eat the forbidden fruit. In other words, misogyny takes action by seeking revenge in order to enforce the patriarchal norm and to restore the masculine pride, reputation, and respect. Misogyny is a game of oppression which has been inherited from generation to generation while patriarchy maintains and develops the rules and/or instructions of play.

#### **3.1. RELIGION AND GAMES**

I find a deep connection between video games and religion. In both cases, when you decide to enter one of those worlds, you obey rules that dominate your decision-making process and, as a result, they influence your behavioral characteristics. In other words, when you start playing a game, you participate in a world which has already been ordained and where you need to leave yourself by adapting to new cosmos of rules and processes (Wagner 1). Additionally, religions have been developed with ethical and moral standards that individuals need to follow in order to enter paradise. Either way, you follow rules to survive

and if you stand up against those predetermined structures of rules, you automatically fall by the wayside of the community to which you previously belonged.

Since games and religion are based on predetermined choices, they shape experiences. According to McGonigal, who based her argument on Herodotus' review of Greek games, games can be perceived as a meaningful run away which grants a sense of authority in a helpless situation, a sense of order in an unstructured environment (McGonigal 5). Similarly, religions promote God's rules that people need to follow. If they comply with those ethical and moral codes, they will be rewarded not only in this life but in an everlasting afterlife too. The Bible presents the woman as responsible for man's forfeiting the right to a serene life in paradise. And what happens to the woman who dares to not follow God's rule? She is punished for her failure not only to control the legibility of her way of thinking but also for her inability to keep her promise. This is how misogyny operates as well (Manne 118).

In her analysis, Wagner, regarding the association of video games and religion, states that games arouse emotions such as domination, satisfaction, and authority by pulling us out of modern-life problems and providing environments where taboo activities can take place (10). What if that window of unapologetic actions has been promoted in modern life through religion? Wagner also mentioned that when people decide to join a game, they accept the constraints, and satisfaction is achieved by giving ourselves over to this system (3). Since religion promotes a vision of reality which takes place after death, are victims and abusers more willing to accept and adapt to misogynistic ideologies because of the limited control that they have in their own lives? Do victims find hope in an imaginary, possible reality that might appear in their future, as a desperate try to find satisfaction and logic in the oppressive systems that religion makes them obey?

Certainly, games and religions promote escapism and reward. By following and adapting to the prestructured rules and norms, people ensure their survival even if that is translated into finishing the game without losing all their lives or joining the paradise in the afterlife. In both cases, people share a common experience. They live in a reality which recreates itself and displays itself back to them. Both worlds influence each other since their consequences on the players' behaviors can be seen in the original and then the re-made version of the reality, respectively.

According to Huizinga, people are players of games (Plate 2). The play offers a lively, unsettled, and transgressive energy while the game offers order and creates structured environments where play exists (Plate 2). Both games and religions provide alternative realities which we experience since we put our energies into them. Additionally, games and religions have the tendency to question reality and what it is to be human. They set their own rules and they support specific behaviors by building communal cohesion.

Moreover, in both cases a distinct space of engagement can be seen. By entering a game, it means that you took the time to login, to make your character, to select the settings, to set up your device in a way that can run the game etc. You can adjust your options and brute luck based on your desires. On the other hand, when you enter the church, you form the sign of the cross, you kiss the pictures, you pay to light a candle, you might ask for confession, and also, we need to take into account the time that you spend to reach the church. There is a significant repetitive process which influences the engagement and dedication of the players. People need to hold ceremonies in which they will create a sacred act and at the center of the play there is the body which breathes, can feel, and be displaced (Plate 10).

Games offer the satisfaction of stepping out of reality. In real life people are constantly making decisions that influence their lives in both long-term and short-term contexts. When individuals start playing a game by following a prestructured system they automatically get rid of their responsibilities. By giving control to someone or something else you automatically stop being accountable for the outcome and the events that are going to take place. By growing up in a deeply religious family I have witnessed how people lighten up by making someone else responsible —in our case that is God.

On the other hand, the main difference between these two are that games are constantly updated while religion is not so often reformed. Life can be chaotic and since human beings are born and raised by learning to follow rules, they are subconsciously raised to seek order and certainty. Religion and games not only satisfy both of those needs but from the very beginning participants and/or believers are fully aware of the outcome if they are fully submit to the rules. In other words, both religion and games offer a predictable and guaranteed outcome. All human beings have an equal potential to follow the path of victory. Under both circumstances people accept the existence and intentionality of someone else who has shaped their experience (Wagner).

Play can take different forms. Life itself can be considered a game where individuals play roles and adapt behaviors based on the relationships that they develop with each other. People are used to following rules, but they also have a tendency to question enacted laws and societal acceptable norms. The aim of *The 10 Commandments* is to play with oppressive beliefs and norms which have survived through generations. Religions are well-structured environments, with their own rules and a distinctive recompense.

### 3.2. THEORIES OF PLAY

Games can be both structured and unstructured and based on their form, the meaning of play changes. If we decide to consider religion a game, then it must be categorized as a structured game since believers, in order to be accepted by religious communities, need to follow a set of rules and adopt specific ethical and moral ideologies. On the other hand, unstructured game play offers boundless options available to the participants.

According to Alexander (1958,) play has a significant importance to society's structure since when people play, they present humanity based on their own perspective. As a result, the understanding of play has been an intriguing topic of research for decades. More specifically, based on research which was conducted during the 1990s by diverse scientists and philosophers, a set of play characteristics was discovered.

Firstly, play provides a sense of security, and most of the time it is enjoyable and erratic. Secondly, since the player is responsible for the play's administration, play is driven more by the player's desires than the external environment. Furthermore, because of play's unpredictable nature and its unforced active engagement, it not only represents reality, but it also exceeds it. Finally, play requires more attention to its development than its result (Stagnitti, 2004; Stewart et al. 1991; Bracegirdle, 1992; Goodman, 1994; Bundy, 1997; Parham & Primeau, 1997).

Theories of play can be broken down into two categories the classical (Surplus energy theory, Recreation or Relaxation theory, Practice or Pre-exercise theory, and Recapitulation theory); and modern (Psychoanalytic theory, Arousal Modulation theory, Bateson's Metacommunicative theory, and Cognitive theories) (Mellou, 1994):

#### Classical Theories of Play:

##### **1. Surplus Energy Theory**

Surplus Energy Theory first appears in the Aristotelian philosophy of catharsis<sup>2</sup> and later it was developed as a distinct theory of play by Friedrich von Schiller who clarified it as a non-productive activity and "aimless expenditure of exuberant energy" (Saracho and Spodek, 1995). Additionally, philosophers of the nineteenth century have mentioned play as the "expression of mental and physical exuberance"

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<sup>2</sup> "Catharsis is the redemption of the feelings (specifically hatred and fear) mainly through art. In criticism, Aristotle used the word catharsis in the Poetics to explain the consequences of true tragedy on the witnesses. The word catharsis has a Greek origin and it means purification. Aristotle declared that the goal of tragedy is to arouse "hatred and fear" and in that way to result in the catharsis of these feelings" (Britannica, 2018).

(Jean Paul), “the expression of superfluous energy” (Herbert Spencer), and that play is driven by heredity (Karl Groos) (Franz, 1958).

Furthermore, French (1941) stated that energy which is not used for survival reasons is surplus energy, while Franz (1958) characterized energy as the origin of all sexual activity. He strengthened his argument by explaining that the energy which is left after all the needed actions to maintain life occur, needs to be released too, and that it happens through erotic activities.

## **2. Recreation or Relaxation theory**

On the other hand, Moritz Lazarus (Mellou, 1994) explained that the purpose of play is to restore energy that the individual has lost in work. That theory took its name from the perception that play is a recreational exercise, and it is conducted for relaxation reasons.

## **3. Practice or Pre-exercise theory**

According to Karl Groos (1901), the goal of play is to learn. Based on that premise, he believed that when children were playing, they were practicing parenting skills. Additionally, he based his theory on the argument that play helps children develop the instincts and skills that they would need for the future.

## **4. Recapitulation theory**

Based on Stanley Hall, play represents human evolution since children follow the same set roles in their play: animal savage, tribal member, and so on (Mellou, 1994). The outcome of play is for children to express and leave behind primitive instincts which are no longer used nowadays. Because of that, the nature of the recapitulation theory is based on the idea of catharsis.

### Modern Theories of Play:

#### **1. Psychoanalytic theory**

Sigmund Freud (1961) stated that play is a significant aspect of children’s emotional development since it gives them the opportunity to leave behind negative emotions that are linked to traumatic experiences. He shared the belief with Stanley Hall that play has a fundamentally cathartic purpose. Lili Peller (1962) tried to extend Freud’s theory by adding that young people’s role play is influenced by emotions of love, admiration, fear, and aggression. Also, Erikson believed that play consisted of three parts of life: the past, the present, and the future (Mellou, 1994).

## 2. Arousal Modulation theory

Arousal theorists explained play as an action which is influenced by the need for exploration. For example, the founder of the Arousal Modulation theory, Daniel Berlyne, said that when there is a substantial rise in stimulation, the elevated levels of arousal make people pursue actions that will minimize the stimulation. Such activities would be either symbolic or problem solving (Hutt, 1979; Mallou 1994).

## 3. Bateson's Metacommunicative theory

Contrastingly, Gregory Bateson perceived play as paradoxical. He believed that children develop their play based on the idea that their scenarios are not going to happen in reality even if they act like they are going to be. Since their games do not reflect their reality, play can be considered a metacommunicative context since the child mirrors its personal and cultural thoughts of reality.

## 4. Cognitive theories

Sutton Smith (1967) stated that through role play, children learn how to escape from established ideologies and structures since through their play they reclaim their freedom. Additionally, Vygotsky noted play is significant for children's abstract thought because play helps them to consider meanings independently of the items they use (Mallou, 1994). That is why in role play the prototypicality of the items that children use is significantly important in their early development.

### 3.3. START THE GAME

There is a plethora of artists who have inspired me because of the playful aspects that they implement in their artworks. For example, the artist Chara Kolaiti has created the persona Anna Goula which in Greek means "nausea" or "the urge to vomit". Her work went viral when she published her own CD and directed her videos. Throughout her work she criticizes the pop and trash culture to uncover Greek patriarchal culture and highlight the ways that media promotes stereotypes of femininity and sexuality (Cuntemporany, 2016). The artist also explores how those stereotypes strengthen nationalism and sexism.



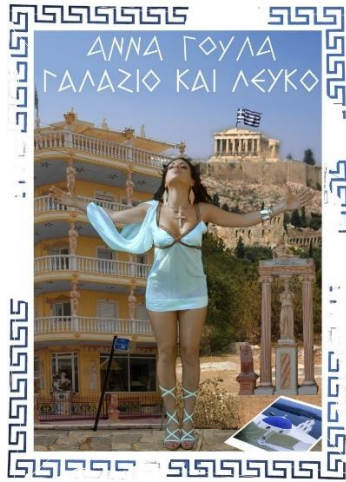


Figure 21. Anna Goula  
Source: <https://avmag.gr/65322/annagoula/>



Figure 23. Yorgos Lanthimos entertaining themselves with endurance games. Additionally, Alexander Voulgaris with Threat (2016) and his hard-to-watch scenes play with the hierarchies of power through memory, violence, and hope.

Yorgos Lanthimos and Alexander Voulgaris are two directors who play with alternative realities to reveal oppressive social structures. For example, Yorgos Lanthimos' film *Dogtooth* (2009) shows a manipulative father taking control of his family by deciding to lock away and keep his three adult children prisoners, and how they end up

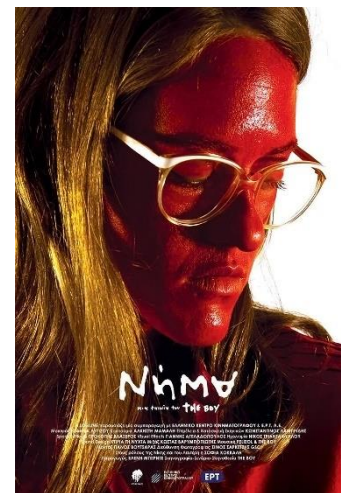


Figure 22. Alexander Voulgaris (The Boy)

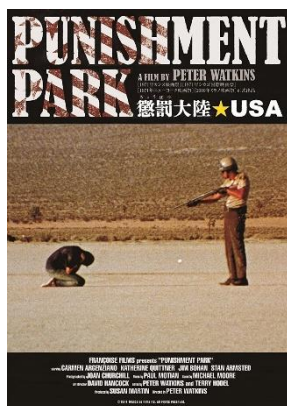


Figure 25. Punishment Park / Peter Watkins



Figure 24. Black Mirror / Charlie Brooker

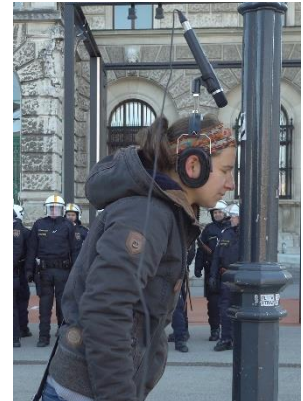
Other examples are the *Punishment Park* (1971) film by Peter Watkins and the *Black Mirror* TV series by Charlie Brooker. The first one using the ideology of play tries to begin a dialogue about numerous topics regarding revolution, humanity, and political power. It serves as a manual for the consequences of what happens when power is given to corrupt and mentally unstable people. *Black Mirror* meanwhile borrows video game aesthetics and creates

surreal realities to pose questions about the world's development, people's humanity, and dignity, as well as technology's evolution.

Anna Vasof is an artist who experiments with the mechanisms of motion and time. All her performances are distinguished for their playful character. Sometimes she employs actual games and gives them alternative usages, while other times



Figure 26. Anna Vasof



she creates games in order to communicate her messages. She often uses everyday objects to comment on social contradictions and let the audience see the world from a different angle.

Eva and Franco Mattes are a duet who play with the internet's usage to expose social utopias. Most of their works push the limits of comfort since they are concentrated on voyeurism and surveillance. Also, they often use actual games or install their work in a way that you need to play with it, for example by laying on the ground, to talk about serious issues such as the dark web's disturbing content.

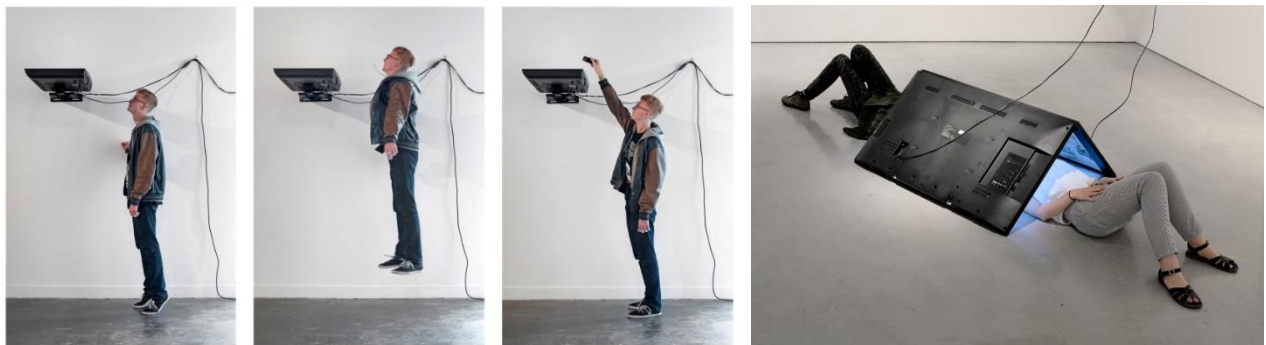


Figure 27. Eva and Franco Mattes

I have come to the conclusion that playing or ridiculing predetermined social norms and structures is my mechanism to deal with and eliminate difficult situations in my life. In my recent work, I explore patriarchal ideology mainly through parody and play. It has been liberating for me to use play to experiment and to communicate an alternative reality. From my personal experience, I have realized that yelling is not a successful process to start a dialogue. My goal is to weaken oppressive systems by playing with patriarchal norms that

have been accepted and exercised by numerous generations. That is why I use humor, irony, satire, and parody in my work as an attempt to censure without being aggressive.

In my practice, and especially in *The 10 Commandments*, I use two types of irony. The first is Socratic irony where the protagonist knows the solutions, but she behaves as if she does not (Roger and Roberts, 1993). By questioning established beliefs, my aim is to make the viewers consider whether there is something paradoxical in the structures that they are used to living in. In addition to that, when the viewers realize that they hold information that the protagonist does not have access to, a tension is created since a dramatic irony takes place (Beckson and Ganz, 1989). The dramatic irony becomes more intense with the duality of having the same person play two different characters, since the viewers witness an internal battle that takes place throughout the short film.

*The 10 Commandments* uses mixed play theories by having the protagonist take contradicted positions. The goal behind this approach is to leave the short film open to alternative interpretations based on the viewers' personal experiences. My intention behind the decision to create a layered video was to help viewers surpass the narrative and think about issues that they face outside of the story. In other words, I include satire in my process to leave my works open for subjective readings.

Beckson and Ganz (1989) mentioned that satire is the process of ridiculing a subject to highlight its mistakes. Moreover, through satire I want to give the audience an opportunity to realize on their own the dysfunctional structure of the society that religion promotes. Additionally, the narrative is communicated via a sarcastic monologue since I wanted the concept to be better remembered (Gibbs, 1986a, 1986b; Kreuz, Long, & Church, 1991; Roger et al., 1993).

Besides the use of satire, *The 10 Commandments* is actually a parody that criticizes the world that women are forced to live in. The narrative is based on challenges that most of the female population has been forced to deal with. That way, I wanted to make it easier for viewers to form numerous cognitive links and representations since that is the main characteristic of successful parodies (Roger et al., 1993). Additionally, parody has a specific target, and in my work that target is religion. The selection of colors and aesthetics that reference church, Orthodox Christianity, and paradise are parodied and viewers do not have to surpass the limits of the initial film to understand the meaning of the work, as with satire (Roger et al., 1993). Parody offers me the flexibility to exaggerate any religious recognizable element, such as the Bible through the terms and use guide that appears at the end of the video.

Since the aim of my work is to create doubt regarding patriarchal and misogynistic ideology, I decided to mainly use video as my medium. From my point of view, video gives me the best opportunity to communicate with the audience because I have time to express my humor and my thoughts. I believe that play and video share a very important characteristic with each other. They both need the audience's attention and engagement in order to take place. Also, the duration of both is dependent on the audience's preference since they can stop participating any time.

In my practice, I use different techniques to evoke a union of sensations. Video is a tool that offers me unlimited options regarding how I can layer my work in order to narrate parallel stories. From my point of view, video is a rich medium that helps me communicate my messages quickly. I can experiment with different techniques and alternative approaches such as animation, collage, and audio effects. I use video to rebel, protest, and express my beliefs.

There are many feminist artists who use the same medium (video) or methods (irony, humor, sarcasm, or parody) to comment on controversial issues. For example, Fenia Kotsopoulou with her video "Shower identities" (2016) rebels in order to get shed stereotypical expectations that the Greek nation has placed upon its people. On the other hand, Evi Stefani uses observational documentary and video to deal with her own difficulties and ambivalences without any restrictions. For example, her video "The Kiss" (2007) makes connections between desire and trauma. Furthermore, the Guerilla Girls who are well-known for their protest work against sexism and racism, often use humor to communicate their serious messages to engage the audience (Tate). Additionally, Pipilotti Rist uses spatial video to demolish clichés and prejudices.

To conclude, conservative theology and church have played a significant role in the discrimination between sexes due to their effort to normalize oppression, patriarchal norms, misogynistic practices, abuse, and by maintaining obsolete ideologies and social hierarchies. Religions should stop being considered as archetypes of life so long as they promise an unfair, alternative reality by asking women to sacrifice their dignity, dreams, strength, and sometimes even themselves. *The 10 Commandments* short film plays around with the old-fashioned beliefs that women are called to follow in order to fit in with their communities. Concomitant, by performing those tasks under parodic situations, there is an underlying message that the character denies facilitating under that system of domination.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Throughout generations women have grown up with limited autonomy over their lives since they have been educated to value themselves based on external perceptions. In other words, women are used to forming their identity based on the indirect compulsions of patriarchal standards and expectations, e.g., to respect, approve, admire, love, care, and appreciate the male (Manne xxi, 19).

Orthodox Christianity has supported the idea of subordinated female nature by promoting oppressive structures and masculine dominance over women. Religions have played a significant role in invalidating women's right to control the use of their own bodies. As a result, masculinity is used to influence female identity. Moreover, there are systems reliant on the fluid definition of what constitutes luck in order to communicate oppressive ideologies, silence victims, control behavioral characteristics, and strengthen social hierarchies.

Religion can be associated with video games since they share a plethora of common characteristics and rules, while luck is the willingness to adapt to or refuse those sets of rules. When something is determined by set rules it is easier to question due to its clear and settled structure. With the passage of years and as more young people disconnect from the oppressive ideologies of the Greek Orthodox church, people have started also questioning the socio-political systems that older generations used to promote. For instance, there is an increase of young Greeks who do not have a close relationship with church and religion. Since Christianity refuses to change and adapt to new moral ethics regarding equality and human rights, Christianity itself is getting weaker and more questionable.

Overall, with the passage of years more and more women are refusing to play the objectification game of their bodies as they gain access to education, enter positions of power, and stop internalizing desires that are not their own. *The 10 Commandments* attempts to highlight that change. The short film plays with the emotional phase that women enter when they start questioning the societal structures under which they have been subjected. The internal battle that takes place is the first step to control their luck, to regain their power, and to decide for themselves.

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