

- Course Title:** **Theory in More Formats**  
An *Our Future Network* course on adapting and extending existing feminist theory-practices
- Teacher:** Dr. Alex Martinis Roe and Vasso Belia, MA
- Organized by:** The Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies and Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory

### Summary

This course takes as its starting point a practice which the Women's Studies community at Utrecht University undertook over many years. This practice could be described as a ceremony or rite of passage, where the Women's Studies community would dramatize the PhD thesis of a graduating colleague. After the formal defence and reception at the university, the new PhD graduate would be taken to another space elsewhere in the city, and would, along with the whole Women's Studies community, watch a (usually comic) play based on her research, performed by her colleagues. This practice exemplifies 'the double track' approach to institutional politics that the Women's Studies (and now the Gender Program) community has used as a method of maintaining its autonomy, whilst also participating in the broader university structure and academic discourse. Working with this existing, local theory-practice will open up a conversation about the genealogies of the methods the students are already using in their projects and their relationship to feminist collective practices.

The aim of this course is to engage students in practical experimentation with this practice of dramatizing PhD theses, through activating archival traces of it, and then collaboratively designing new formats for their own thesis projects. Opening up the format of this practice to other possibilities - i.e. the students won't necessarily *dramatise* each of their theses, but could instead, for example, write public policy, or broadcast a radio programme - enables the students to incorporate this practical politics into their thesis methodology, by choosing formats that are appropriate to their research.

### Part One **Activation of the archive and proposals for new formats for their research**

The first part of the course will include a discussion of the double-track approach to institutional politics and the history of the Women's Studies/Gender Program at Utrecht University, in combination with an examination of the material traces of the practice of dramatising theses. The students will then select short extracts from three plays to re-enact, using provisional readymade props and costumes. The group will then select, organise and annotate material from the archive, putting ideas from the discussion into practice in the collective design for a repository and mode of display for the archival material.

In addition to this group work, each student will consider the challenge of (re)formatting their research and discuss possibilities with the group. Ways of working on these proposed formats over the coming six-week period (the time

they have to work on these (re)formatting projects) will then be established. For example, if some of the proposals require group work (like a play would) then working space and times will be arranged.

### **Part Two      Group editing of draft projects**

The second part of the course will involve group editing of the formats for their research, which the students will have developed in the intervening period between the first and this second block. This will involve presentations on the work done on each of the (re)formatting projects, and creative feedback discussions as well as practical alterations.

### **Part Three      Activations of archive and presentation of student projects at Casco**

In this last and final part of the course, the students will undertake live activations of the archive of the practice of dramatizing theses within the *To Become Two* exhibition at Casco, and also present their own research projects in the new formats they have developed during the course.

### **Information about the *To Become Two* project**

To Become Two is a series of films, presented within interior architectural installations; courses, workshops, performances and public events; and an artist's book. This body of work is a history project, tracing the genealogy of feminist new materialist philosophy to the concepts and practices of a number of activist communities in Europe and Australia and explores the currency of their historical political practices through practical experimentation with a network of women I established through my research. Each of the films explores the history and organisation of a particular group and its connections to the other groups explored in the series: the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, Psychanalyse et Politique (Paris), Women's Studies at Utrecht University, a network of people who were part of the Sydney Women's Film Group and General Philosophy at Sydney University in the 70s and 80s and a milieu around Duoda in Barcelona in the 90s. For my primary historical research, I undertook the ethnographic methodology of participant observation, as well as oral history interviews and archival research with these communities, which has enabled me to tell these collective histories through personal stories.

My focus on transgenerational feminist politics is explored in this project in both form and content. I engaged a younger generation in different formats for narration in each film, which performatively extends the content of those narrations. The different participants in each of these storytelling projects forms a new network of those who have engaged with these different activist communities through the project. This new feminist network is the focus of the final film in the series, *Our Future Network*, which interfaces with the courses, workshops and public events that activate each exhibition of the project as a space in which to continue the research. The central question addressed to this network that has been established through the project is: what can we learn from the political, theoretical and aesthetic practices developed within and among these historical feminist milieux, and how can we adapt these practices to our own needs, desires and contexts? The *Our Future Network* film and event series presents the outcomes of this collective research, which takes the form of a series of new and adapted relational political practices.

### **Time Commitment and Proposed Dates:**

Six full days in three two-day blocks, plus two half-day presentations, plus preparation time.

25-26 October: Part One: Activation of the archive and proposals for new formats for their research

11-12 November: Part Two: Group editing of draft projects

21/22 November: Part Three: Rehearsals for presentations during the exhibition

23/24/25 Nov/11 Dec: Activations of archive and presentation of student projects at Casco (Exact dates TBA)

<b>Student profile:</b>	Research Masters and PhD candidates
<b>Number of places:</b>	10 maximum
<b>ECTS:</b>	5 ECTS
<b>Output:</b>	A translation of the thesis project of each student into another format, and the incorporation of this format into the thesis project itself. These theories in other formats will then be presented publicly as performance-based presentations within the exhibition of To Become Two at Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory.
<b>Requirements:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A letter of motivation</li><li>- An interest in the place of theory in feminist activism</li><li>- An interest in an affirmative approach to feminist historiography</li><li>- An interest in the genealogy of feminist new materialism and theories of sexual difference</li><li>- Full attendance</li><li>- Willingness to take part in the other students' projects in the classroom and publicly</li><li>- Preparatory reading including one existing short text written by each participant on the thesis project</li></ul>
<b>Registration:</b>	Friday September 9, 2016 by email: <a href="mailto:nog@uu.nl">nog@uu.nl</a>