

# Feminist Philosophy

Time, history and the  
transformation of thought

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The Nordic Summer University

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## Configuring Feminist Philosophy in the Context of the Nordic Summer University

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While feminist philosophy has had a place at Western universities for several decades, the question of how to understand the relationship between feminism and philosophy is still a disputed territory. Moreover, the concept of “feminist philosophy” is contested in several camps.<sup>1</sup> From the perspective of philosophy, feminist philosophy might seem compromised from its commitment to political change, thereby opening up for the charge of being dogmatic; from the perspective of feminism, the practice of philosophy might seem too far removed from the pressing concerns of injustice in ordinary life. Thus, when outlining the themes and activities of the study circle *Feminist Philosophy: time, history, and the transformation of thought*, our project description was oriented around exploring these tensions. Having backgrounds both in philosophy and the discipline of the history of ideas, we wanted to discuss the bearings of these concerns within the frames of history. Among the circle’s aims was to organize a transdisciplinary space to reflect on feminist philosophy while also discussing the abovementioned tensions on their own terms. Initially, however, starting this circle within the framework of the Nordic Summer University (hereafter NSU), we had little knowledge of the institutional history of NSU and its connection to the emergence of women’s studies.

This chapter briefly introduces NSU as an institution that has generated both personal and scholarly values for decades and constituted the organizational home for *Feminist Philosophy: Time, History and the Transformation of Thought*. Taking our point of departure from what we perceived as the marginalization of feminist philosophy within the institution of philosophy, on the one hand, and the growth of feminist philoso-

phizing in several fields of research, on the other, we place the scholarly interests of this study circle against the background of previous scholarly engagements with feminist issues at NSU. Lastly, we describe and analyze some significant experiences from the Feminist Philosophy Circle, with the purpose of discerning the forms of knowledge that emanated from our work during these years of relational and educational tours.<sup>1</sup>

### The Nordic Summer University – A Democratic Space for Thought and Practice

NSU is an independent, migratory network for cultivation and research founded in 1950 by a group of scientists and scholars from the Nordic region. The initiative was formed in the image of the *Internationale Hochschulwochen*, which had been active in Austria from the end of the second world war onward, and had close connections to the Vienna circle.<sup>2</sup> Thus, NSU is part of

<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 2015, we initiated the sketch for a new study circle within the Nordic Summer University (NSU), which then received support to organize an ad-hoc conference to attract future participants. Thus, what would become the circle *Feminist Philosophy: Time, History, and the Transformation of Thought*, had its first winter symposium in Umeå in Sweden in March 2016. Invited keynote speakers were Kristina Fjelkestam and Claudia Lindén from Stockholm, Sara Edenheim from Umeå, and Tuija Pulkkinen from Helsinki. The same year at NSU's summer session in Orivesi, Finland, the circle was accepted for a three-year program within the framework of NSU's activities. Since then, the circle has attracted more than 200 scholars from more than 20 countries. Invited keynote speakers at the circle's symposiums during the time of its activities (four years) were Kristie Dotson (U.S.), Nancy Bauer (U.S.), Alison Jaggar (U.S./U.K.), Willow Ververk (CA/U.K.), Jorunn Økland (NO), Line Cecilie Engh (NO), Cecilia Rosengren (SWE), Sigríður Thorgeirsdóttir (IS), Naomi Scheman (U.S.), Fanny Söderbäck (SWE/U.S.), Cecilia Sjöholm (SWE) and Ingvild Torsen (NO). In addition to the collaboration with Umeå University, the circle has held a large international conference in collaboration with the University of Iceland and the network *Feminist Philosophy: Transforming Philosophy* based there in 2017; and symposiums in collaboration with Oslo University in 2018 and lastly with Södertörn University in 2019. After the circle's program had come to an end, a new feminist philosophy circle was formed by members of the former circle and accepted into the study program of the NSU for the following three years. Hence, the work that started in 2015 continues along new paths, and the network prevails, expands and continues to expand.

<sup>2</sup> Karolina Enquist Källgren, "Fristående akademiskt nätverk som har haft stort inflytande," *Respons* (no. 5, 2020) available online at <http://tidskriftenrespons.se/artikel/fristaende-akademiskt-natverk-som-har-haft-stort-inflytande/>

a European tradition of academically independent, international forums for scholars and researchers that started in the interwar and post-war era and aimed at creating academic and intellectual arenas to contribute to the development of international cooperation within the sciences and promote peace. An additional aim was to give researchers and students the possibilities to understand and exchange ideas with actors from civil society and the cultural sector.<sup>3</sup>

The context for the establishment of NSU was, among other things, a felt crisis of the Universities and the sciences in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>4</sup> As explained by Troels Degn Johansson, former chair of NSU, the organization was initially established as an elite “task force” to promote much-needed cooperation between various academic disciplines and different countries. The aim was to increase understanding between the theoretical and applied sciences and to discuss pressing social issues that needed perspectives from various research fields. A democratic organizational form has been a trademark of NSU from the beginning. It is based on several study circles that are active for some time, three years at a minimum – accepted through a democratic process informed by scholarly reviews. Today, each circle organizes one symposium or a workshop during the winter, and then all circles gather for a summer session for at least one week, where each circle has its own program open for all. NSU’s activities are held in different places in the Nordic and the Baltic region, often in collaboration with some local academic or artistic institutions or networks. Around 200 people annually gather at the summer sessions to discuss, study and socialize. The summer university facilitates scholarly advancement for researchers and students with children, since even children are invited, with the Children’s Circle arranging activities during the daily study program.

<sup>3</sup> Poul Hermansen, “NSU – et kort historisk tilbageblik”, *Kritik og Krise*, (NSU Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Troels Degn Johansen, “Af Nordisk Sommaruniversitets nyeste historie”, *Kritik og Krise*, (NSU Press, 2000).

The summer session's time frame of one week, where participants interact across study circles and seminars with topics that are followed up during the winter, facilitates unexpected meetings, critical discussions, and a rare opportunity to expand horizons of thought. NSU strives to create a room free of competition, where the formulation of problems are foregrounded and where performance and reflection meet. It has been a source of innovative intellectual interchange for several decades, resulting in many publications and cross-border collaboration between academics and actors in practical and artistic activities. NSU offers a place to present issues and ideas and to work across theoretical and practical experiences, academic disciplines, and hierarchies. These boundary transgressions constitute a very valuable – yet often underrated – aspect of research. The themes dealt with within the different study circles are formulated based on issues presented by the participants. Lecturers from all over the world also provide a basis for the conversation as invited keynote speakers. The freedom of innovative research and collaboration that NSU facilitates have, among other things, created opportunities for the development of research fields in the Nordic and Baltic countries, such as human ecology, peace and conflict research, gender studies, and research into artistic practice.

Participating in NSU is a democratic experience rarely accommodated within today's academic institutional structures. Degn Johansson wrote in 2000 that NSU is, "despite its age as a research organization within the framework of Nordic cooperation, still characterized as an ongoing project and experiment: a dream of an organization [...] in which the work is driven by desire and idealism."<sup>5</sup> As we are writing this chapter twenty years later, Degn Johansson's description seems to be as relevant as ever. The organization proved to be a fitting platform for a transdisciplinary exploration of feminist philosophy. Sadly, as we write this in 2022, NSU now stands at a crossroads and might have reached the end of its history in the form that has

<sup>5</sup> Troels Degn Johansson, "Förord," *Kritik og Krise* (NSU Press, 2000), p. 1.

characterized it over the last 70 years since the main sponsor, The Nordic Council of Ministers, has decided to withdraw its funding. Nevertheless, we hope that the organization finds a way to survive. As we will discuss further in this chapter, the organizational structures and the egalitarian ethos of NSU enabled fruitful intellectual exchanges and lasting networks that continue within traditional universities and expand outside academic contexts.

### The history of feminist scholarship within NSU

NSU was greatly affected by the expansion of higher education and the accompanying student uproar in the late sixties that, among other things, resulted in more egalitarian organizational structures and the entrance of Marxist perspectives in many circles.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, in the 1970s, the organization became a prominent forum for critical studies, and a number of new interdisciplinary subjects and research fields in the Nordic region had an early start in NSU.<sup>7</sup> It was in this context that the circle “Kvindesituationens specifikke karakter under kapitalismen” [The specific character of women’s situation under capitalism] – with close connections to the new radical women’s movements in the Nordic countries – was established in 1971 and accepted in NSU’s program in 1973.<sup>8</sup> As the circle’s name indicates, the analytical perspectives were Marxist feminist. This circle, which soon came to be referred to simply as the ‘women’s

<sup>6</sup> Arne Overrein, “Vitenskap, kritikk og krise. Om Nordisk Sommeruniversitetets utvikling og idegrunnlag i et vitenskaps- og utdanningshistorisk perspektiv” in Johansen, Overrein & Rendtorff (Eds.), *Kritik og Krise – Nordisk Sommeruniversitet i 50 år* (Århus: NSU Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Ekelund, *Kampen om vetenskapen: Politisk och vetenskaplig formering under den svenska vänsterradikaliseringens era* (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Signe Arnfred & Karen Syberg, *Kvindesituation & kvindebevægelse under kapitalismen* (København: Nordisk Sommaruniversitets skriftserie 1974).

circle,<sup>9</sup> marked the beginning of a strong and longstanding presence of feminist scholarly work within NSU.<sup>10</sup>

In historiographical accounts of gender- and feminist research in the Nordic region, international cooperation is typically highlighted and described as essential for the development of the field. In that context, NSU is frequently mentioned as an important context for the early development of Nordic academic feminism.<sup>11</sup> Hence, when the circle *Feminist Philosophy: Time, History and the Transformation of Thought* applied for its first ad-hoc symposia in 2016 in the aspiration to become a study circle within NSU's program, it connected with a tradition where feminist activism was entangled with scholarship and intellectual curiosity.

<sup>9</sup> Signe Arnfred, "Fortrinsvis historisk beretning om 'Kvindekredsen's udvikling i NSU, og herunder om sammenhæng og manglende sammenhæng mellem kvindebevægelse, fagkritisk arbejde og ventrefløjpolitik", *Nordisk Forum: Tidskrift för universitets- och forskningspolitik*, Vol. 4, No. 12 (Nordisk Sommaruniversitet: Roskilde Universitetsforlag: 1976.)

<sup>10</sup> Subsequent 'women's circles' include "Familjen som institution för social reproduktion" [The family as an institution for social reproduction] (1975–1977), "Kvinnorörelse och kvinnoforskning" [Women's movement and women's research] (1979–1891); "Kvinnokultur och kvinnokamp" [Women's culture and women's struggle] (1982–1983), "Æstetik, køn og kultur" [Aesthetics, gender, and culture] (1987–1989) and "Feminism och kunskapsutveckling" [Feminism and knowledge development] (1991–1993). Feminist perspectives were also highly present in other circles such as and "Socialisationsteori" [Socialization theory] (1978–1981); "Mellan män och maskuliniteter" [Between men and masculinities] (1995–1997); "Køn i Norden" [Gender and Sex in the Nordic countries] (2010–2012); "Exploring Affect" (2013–2015). See Valgerður Palmadóttir and Johanna Sjöstedt, "Nordic Feminism Reconsidered: Activism, scholarly endeavours, and women's research networks at the Nordic Summer University 1971–1990" (*Nora: Nordic Journal on Feminist and Gender research*, 30 (1) 2022).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Nina Lykke, "Rethinking socialist and Marxist legacies in feminist imaginaries of protest from postsocialist perspectives," *Social Identities*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2017, pp. 173–188; Britt-Marie Thurén, *Genusforskning – Frågor, villkor och utmaningar* (Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet, 2003); Bente Rosenbeck, "Nordic women's studies and gender research," in von de Fehr et al. (Eds.), *Is there a Nordic Feminism?* (UCL Press, 1998); Drude Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne. Den danske Rødstrømpebevægelses udvikling, nytænkning og gennemslag 1970–1985*, Lindhardt og Ringhof, 1998; Ulla Manns, "En ros är en ros är en ros. Konstruktionen av Nordisk kvinno- och genusforskning," (*Lychnos*, 2009).

An important document from the early engagements with feminist questions within NSU is *Kvindesituation & kvindebevægelse under kapitalismen* [Women's Situation and Women's Movement under Capitalism], a collection of essays reflecting the activities of the first 'women's circle' edited by the coordinators Karen Syberg and Signe Arnfred and published in 1974. In the introduction to the anthology, Syberg and Arnfred write about the potential risks involved when feminist activities and initiatives take shape in academic settings:

The pitfalls with the connections to the university is [...] that the need for theoretical insights does not spring from political problems but on the contrary from that which is socially sanctioned in a narrow university environment.<sup>12</sup>

The risk with this, the authors further write, is that "the theory that is not created in an attempt to understand and further develop a practice" will lead to "depoliticization as an effect in the final instance."<sup>13</sup> What is suggested, and which also reappears in today's feminist discussions, is whether a theoretical academization tends to be alienated from the everyday life that takes place in homes and workplaces, where higher education is no exception. Rather than underlining arbitrary gaps between practice and theory, the circle Feminist Philosophy has strived to understand the implications of theory as practice and practice as theory.

Regarding the practices demanded by the authors of the anthology from 1974, there is reason to ask whether this still constitutes an underdeveloped and neglected area of higher education. Much indicates that current academic structures and cultures do not mirror the vast knowledge produced by feminist

<sup>12</sup> "Det farlige ved universitetsanknytningen er [...] at behovet for teoretisk indsigt ikke udspringer af politiske problemstillinger, men at det derimod bliver hvad der er socialt sanctioneret i et snævert universitetsmiljø der kommer til at styre arbejdet." Arnfred & Syberg, *Kvindesituation & kvindebevægelse under kapitalismen*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Arnfred & Syberg, *Kvindesituation & kvindebevægelse under kapitalismen* (København: Nordisk Sommaruniversitets skriftserie 1974).

scholarly work in the last decades. Instead, at times it seems that the academic world has developed more in accordance with the last words of the anthology's title, "Women's Situation and Women's Movements under Capitalism", i.e., along with market rationality. For instance, the current meritocratic apparatus does not acknowledge so-called 'academic housework' that is more often in the hands of women, resulting, e.g., in unequal possibilities for employment, which is based on publications and citations. An early study of the effects of pandemics also showed that women's research production internationally decreased radically compared to their male colleagues when schools closed and children were made to stay at home.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, sexism thrives within universities, just as within other social institutions. Signs of that are found in the countless examples of sexual violation, harassment, belittlement, and exclusion based on gender expressed in stories that were publicly voiced during #metoo.<sup>15</sup> Intertwined with this pervasive inequality are the racist and ableist structures maintained through educational institutions' hierarchization of knowledge and bodies.

At the same time as discriminating structures prevail, new conservatives claim that the rise of feminism has meant a politicization of universities.<sup>16</sup> In countries governed by nationalist and conservative parties, this claim is advanced at the same that governments seek to ban knowledge on sexuality and gender. Hence, if the interest in feminist theory was described as a danger of depoliticization half a century ago, this is now turned

<sup>14</sup> Eunji Kim and Shawn Patterson, "The Pandemic and Gender Inequality in Academia," (July 20, 2020) Available at SSRN: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3666587](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3666587)

<sup>15</sup> Tamar Melanie Heijstra, Finnborg Salome Steinhorsdóttir, & Thorgerdur Einarisdóttir, "Academic career making and the double-edged role of academic housework", *Gender and Education*, (Vol 29, No 6, 2017), pp. 764–780; "Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies, Danica Svavonick & Cathy N. Davidson, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/08/gender-bias-in-academe-an-annotated-bibliography/#new>

<sup>16</sup> Ivar Arpi & Anna-Karin Wyndhamn, *Genusdoktrinen* (Stockholm: Fri tanke, 2020); Mikko Lagerspetz, "The Grievance studies affair" Project: Reconstructing and Assessing the Experimental Design", *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, (Vol. 46, No 2, 2021), 402–424.

upside down. Feminist theory, in the understanding of theory as practice – as different ways of reading, writing, speaking, and perceiving the world, is indeed political in the understanding that it strives to dissolve oppressive structures.

During the early 1970s, when the aforementioned anthology *Kvindesituation & kvinnbevægelse* was published, far fewer people could pursue academic education than today. Furthermore, the women who wrote and read the anthology in reading circles in Iceland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden were part of the first generation to combine caretaking of young children with higher education, i.e., family life and academic life. Today, questions on who gets access to and influence higher education are still pressing, and feminist networks engage internationally in multiple ways to gather and transform higher education into more democratic institutions. Despite the differences in scope and scholarly interests between the initial feminist study early circles of feminists at NSU and our circle on feminist philosophy, our shared goal is to try to understand and further develop a practice. Yet, putting emphasis on historical analysis, the circle Feminist Philosophy wanted to restrain from moralizing in favor of a broader and contextual understanding of contemporary practice.

### Outlining the Circle

In the aptly named text “Is feminist philosophy a contradiction in terms?” the philosopher Nancy Bauer discusses the relationship between the two enterprises in detail and notes the “curious lack of serious work on the question of how philosophy and feminism are supposed to go together.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than assembling arguments “in favor” of feminist philosophy – however that notion is defined – Bauer wants to open up a space for doing scholarly work regarding the possible tensions in the project of combining feminism and philosophy. Such a project does not subscribe to the patriarchal notion that feminism and philo-

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 20–21.

sophy mix as oil and water; instead, it is the starting point for serious work on thinking about these tensions. However, Bauer does not discuss questions about the institutional norms of philosophy or the role of history in conceptualizing the relationship between feminism and philosophy.

As a matter of fact, women compose a smaller portion of the student body and faculty in philosophy compared to other disciplines.<sup>18</sup> This lack of women (including trans and non-binary people) in philosophy can be viewed from a larger historical perspective: Already in the early 15th century, Christine de Pizan noted that the path for women to philosophize was through literature.<sup>19</sup> There seems to be much truth in Pizan's remarks. According to Mary Ellen Waithe, a precursor for research on women philosophers, women's philosophical works throughout history have been classified as belonging to disciplines other than philosophy, and they have thus been omitted from what we understand as the Western philosophical tradition, i.e., the philosophical canon.<sup>20</sup> Hence, as literary scholar Claudia Lindén has argued, philosophers have discussed gender since the birth of philosophy, but the modern construction of philosophy does not allow for the inclusion of questions of gender and/or feminism.<sup>21</sup> In this analysis, feminist philosophy would appear to be a contradiction in terms because gender and feminism do not count as subjects of philosophy.<sup>22</sup> This exclu-

<sup>18</sup> Inga Bostad & Tove Pettersen, "Kjønn og feminisme i norsk filosofi – Noen betraktninger", *Norsk filosofisk tidsskrift*, No. 03–04 / 2015; Martina Reuter, "Varför så få kvinnor? Könsfördelningen inom den akademiska filosofin", *Tidskrift för politisk filosofi*, No. 3, 2015; Thompson, Morgan et al. "Why Do Women Leave Philosophy? Surveying Students at the Introductory Level", Vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 1–36.

<sup>19</sup> Christine de Pisan, *The book of the city of ladies* (New York: Persea Books, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Mary Ellen Waithe, "Sex, Lies, and Bigotry: The Canon of Philosophy" in Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir & Ruth E. Hagengruber (eds.), *Methodological Reflections on Women's Contribution and Influence in the History of Philosophy* (Springer, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Lindén, "Mary Wollstonecraft och filosofin som feminisme", *Glänta* 2001, (Vol. 9, No. 1–2), pp. 130–140.

<sup>22</sup> Lindén, 2001: Mary Wollstonecraft and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are cases in point. While Rousseau, with his *Emile, or on education*, is counted among the philosophers, Wollstonecraft's critique of his treatment of Sophie in the same text is classified as literature.

sion highlights how the genre is a gendered practice and how certain topics are excluded from philosophy proper.

It's important to stress that the processes of definition that have eliminated women philosophers from the history of philosophy, either by relegating them to other disciplines or by forgetting about them altogether, still operate today. In the past two decades, several prominent feminist philosophers have reflected on the relationship between philosophy, feminism, and their position as women in philosophy.<sup>23</sup> In the essay "Can the other of philosophy speak?", Judith Butler tells the story of her way into philosophy and how she, propelled by her writing on feminist philosophy, came to occupy a place outside the institutions of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> She also notes how she shares this destiny with several feminist philosophers in the United States. Her discussion of the place of philosophy on the border of social critique is both institutional and methodological. Describing the work of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, Butler writes: "This work cannot be read without philosophy, for that is its text, and yet including it in the canon is not possible for most philosophy departments".<sup>25</sup>

Butler's remark also has implications for how to read feminist theory. As noted in the introduction, feminist theory has a somewhat paradoxical relationship to time and history. While, on the one hand, emphasizing the situatedness of both the knowing subject and of the claims of knowledge, there has been less interest in the historicity of the philosophical concepts used to make these claims. Hence, Ingeborg Owesen argues that

<sup>23</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *La philosophie là où on ne l'attend pas* (Paris: Larousse, 2009); Michèle le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An essay concerning women, philosophy*, trans. Trista Selous, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Catherine Malabou, *Changing difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. Carolyn Shread, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Naomi Scheman, "Vad är en kvinna? Från fakta till erkännande", trans. Ellen Söderblom Saarela, in (eds.) Evelina Johansson Wilén & Johanna Sjöstedt, *Vad är en kvinna Språk, materialitet, situation*, (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Judith Butler, "Can the other of philosophy speak", *Undoing gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Butler, 2004, p. 245.

“contemporary feminist theory is largely oriented towards the present” and that the philosophical history of modern feminism has received insufficient scholarly attention.<sup>26</sup> This is noticeable not least in gender studies as a discipline, which increasingly has turned toward the social sciences. Intertwined with the epistemological and ontological framework of social sciences, the philosophical knowledge of diverse peoples is marginalized and thus withdrawn from both philosophy and the social sciences. Currently, the practice of such pervasive epistemological violence is one of the central concerns within higher education. In her article “How is this Paper Philosophy”, Kristie Dotson recounts her younger sister Alexis’ conversation with her Guidance Counselor when she was a college student:

Counselor: Why don’t you major in Social Work?

Alexis: Social Work sounds good, but I am interested in Philosophy.

Counselor: (Snorts) Philosophy is not for black women. That’s a white man’s game.

Alexis: My older sister is a philosophy professor.

Counselor: Well, she’s probably the only one, and that should tell you something. (2009)<sup>27</sup>

Dotson’s article does not only point to the practices of injustice but also to the need for philosophical work that can transgress a moralizing demand for homogeneity. Furthermore, Dotson suggests engaging in a culture of practice that values “contribution, multiple canons, and multiple forms of disciplinary validation”.<sup>28</sup> This definition of a curious and inclusive culture of practices is aligned with the scrutiny of epistemological and peda-

<sup>26</sup> Owesen, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Kristie Dotson, “How is this Paper Philosophy?”, *Comparative Philosophy* (Vol. 3, No. 1, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Dotson, “How is this Paper Philosophy?”, p. 26.

gical norms within higher education that have been important for the community of Feminist Philosophy.

### Reading Together – Or: Philosophy Embodied

Starting the interdisciplinary feminist philosophy circle, we did not know who would apply. Over the years, the circle has gathered over 200 scholars from more than 20 countries and five continents. Many participants have chosen to return year after year, and we have been able to follow each other's work and interests. Although the circle has had a historical-philosophical focus, it has been an interdisciplinary meeting place. The participants have been students, artists, doctoral students, and senior academics from philosophy, history of ideas, literary studies, gender studies, sociology, law, and the educational sciences. This heterogeneity in age, career, and academic culture has placed great demands on the individual participants and the pedagogical approaches adopted. A question that arose quite quickly was what it would mean also to explore feminist philosophy in pedagogical practice, that is, in a relational learning context of which we were all part. Although pedagogical practice was not manifestly a part of our focus when we started the circle, it proved to be highly important at our individual meetings and during the entire period the circle ran. Four aspects of our experience that could, with advantage, be developed as an asset to higher education pedagogy, and gender equality issues in higher education will here be exposed. We call the four aspects *time*, *history*, *dissonance*, and *voice*. Together, these aspects point to a practice of embodied philosophy.

#### Time

We enter the pedagogical space in time, but also with different expectations and experiences of time. This became clear at our very first seminar in Orivesi, Finland. On a beautiful but very hot day in July, we gathered in one of the smaller seminar rooms. The topic for the seminar was "Empowerment and vulner-

ability”.<sup>29</sup> What became apparent during the seminar was how the theme itself went beyond the texts read and could also be registered in our own practice. The participants’ respective pre-understandings of the overarching project of Feminist Philosophy were clearly asymmetrical. Some of us had earlier experience and knowledge of feminist activism where questions of space for speech were highly important. Others were trained in philosophy but were new to feminist thought. For some, the historical perspective was elemental, while for others, it was something to be left behind. Hence, setting out on a collective journey of thought is inevitably also a vulnerable practice. The pedagogical challenge is thus to navigate between different orientations in the unknown territories with a direction of individual and common empowerment in sight.<sup>30</sup>

### History

As mentioned in the introduction to this anthology, feminist history can be translated in different ways: as lamenting the violence and suppression in the past, as a women’s history that presents the neglected voices, or as a critical re-writing of a canon of white-male-supremacy. The circle “Feminist Philosophy” has engaged with all these perspectives. The most prominent pedagogical challenge has been the translation of ideas, where so-called canonical texts have been read next to feminist philosophy and theory. Rather than an orientation toward injustice, our pursuit has been to open history as a poetic practice. Philosophy understood as the love of wisdom, cannot be

<sup>29</sup> The texts we discussed in this seminar were Claire Colebrook, “Norm Wars” in *Revisiting Normativity with Deleuze*, Braidotti and Patricia Pisters (eds.) (Bloomsbury, 2012) Rosi Braidotti “The ethics of becoming imperceptible” in Constantin Boundas (ed.), *Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh university press 2006); Carolyn Culbertson, “The ethics of relationality: Judith Butler and social critique” (Continental Philosophy Review 2013); Judith Butler and William E. Connolly, “Politics, Power and Ethics: A Discussion Between Judith Butler and William Connolly”, *Theory & Event* (Vol. 4, no. 2, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Throughout her academic work, Sarah Ahmed has conceptualized feminist practice in academic settings: Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sara Ahmed, *Living a feminist life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

reduced to the institutional practice of a few in modern European universities. As Claudia Lindén emphasizes in her chapter in this anthology, literature is not only the path intellectual women have chosen or assigned throughout history. What feminist critique has exposed is also how the disciplines of History and Philosophy are inevitably gendered narratives. Reading history and philosophy as literary narratives, and literary narratives as history and philosophy, became a central consideration for understanding the temporal rhythms constituted by and through the circle. Besides reading canonized texts by Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche in dialogue with now more recognized texts by women philosophers like Arendt, Butler, Cavarero, Irigaray, and Lorde, the participants have presented their own work.

### Dissonance

Driven by passions to transform thought and practice, feminist philosophy is inevitably political and thereby also pluralistic. In contrast to feminist theory as a way of seeing, feminist philosophy can be understood as questions of what we see, including what is not immediately visible. In a seminar with participants from different academic cultures, our ways of seeing, reading, and sensing are not the same. When reading the same texts, the asymmetry mentioned above results in dissonances. Conceptions we take for granted are suddenly put at risk in a seminar room where the participants' voices are equal but different. Although this dissonance might be one of the core conditions for critical work, it is not without friction. Nevertheless, we have appreciated the space for disagreement upheld by the study circle. A prominent example of this dissonance was a seminar announced as

How do we read concepts in context? Departing from our reading of Aristophanes *Lysistrata*, Aristotle, Irigaray, and

Burke, we will discuss how ideas on sex, passivity, and activity can be read and formulated.<sup>31</sup>

The sore point of the seminar turned out to be Irigaray's text "When our Lips Speak Together".<sup>32</sup> From the ensuing discussion, the difficulties recognizable as central to feminist work were unveiled. For some of the participants, Irigaray's philosophy of difference had been a game-changer in their academic life, giving them access to philosophy. For others, her purported essentialism symbolized the threat of alienation from a common ground that has been central for post-colonial theory to overcome. A challenge for everyone, and in particular for us as moderators, was to draw out and embrace these tensions.

From this experience, several questions can be discerned that put philosophy to the test: are we supposed to keep up a supposedly rational and disinterested attitude when conflicting emotions play out in the room, i.e., reject emotional and bodily engagement as misplaced and alienated from rationality? How can we discern the difference between text and bodies, between theories and the persons theorizing (what is there to be seen and how is this affected by the persons seeing)? And what are the implications of exposing vulnerability – what does it mean for how voices are distributed and heard? The reflection to which many women and persons identifying themselves within LGBT+ return is whether experiences from life are welcome within institutional philosophy. However, a relevant concern is also where the limits and restrictions begin and end for personal and bodily experiences. For what is the moral and epistemological position of oppressed groups? What is the role – ethically and epistemologically – of the intellectual who wants to produce critical knowledge? The precarious balancing act is to maintain a space for bodily and emotional engagement and presence to

<sup>31</sup> From the invitation sent out to the participants before the summer session at Fårö, Sweden, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Luce Irigaray & Carolyn Burke, "When Our Lips Speak Together" *Signs* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1980), pp. 69–79.

the texts we read while at the same time keeping an awareness of the tipping point of emotional stickiness and vacuity. Obviously, no general didactics can be drawn from this experience except for the fact that every time a seminar room gathers, mood and atmosphere will play an important role. Without reaching a final conclusion about the specific difficulties that appeared during this seminar (among others), the risk of being together on unstable ground can also be seen as important food for thought for those who are in love with wisdom.

### Voice

The interaction and shared interest, understood as *inter-est* – being together – has been possible only through the patience and hard work of the participants. With feminist philosophical texts at our disposal, we have had the possibility to discuss important feminist philosophers who, throughout history, have sought to make the unspeakable speak and the absent present. Just to mention a few, Judith Butler has described the common experience of alienation with the concept of disidentification: “this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong”.<sup>33</sup> Drawing on Lauren Berlant she writes that “indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized”.<sup>34</sup> However, the politics mobilized can also generate new regulatory norms. Thus, another approach to the phenomenon of disidentification can be found in a philosophical gesture that resigns from identifications and seizes the nonidentical as “an open existence”.<sup>35</sup> Joan Scott and Joan Copjec have both written about how

<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Abingdon: Routledge, Oxon, 2011[1993]), p. 219.

<sup>34</sup> Butler, *Bodies that matter*, p. 4 and Lauren Berlant, “The Female Complaint,” *Social Text* (No. 19 Vol. 20, Fall, 1988), pp. 237–59.

<sup>35</sup> Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, “Exilens språk”, *Exilens språk. Texter*. (Gothenburg: GFFP, 2016), p. 48. Bracha Ettinger, *The matrixial borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

the non-sense or nonknowledge has been a condition for western epistemology and philosophy.<sup>36</sup> Further, Adriana Cavarero has emphasized how inclinations have been regarded as a pervasive threat to a philosophical and political tradition that has been characterized by desires for rectitude.<sup>37</sup> The feminine voice has thus been regarded as a threat to the progress of rationality.<sup>38</sup> This politics of interpretation has facilitated the male-coded philosophy to maintain its sovereignty by ignoring the voice in the understanding of logos: “from the perspective of language as a system [...] what is not heard is, paradoxically, the uniqueness of the sound”, Cavarero writes.<sup>39</sup> Against this background, Feminist Philosophy has created a space for philosophical polyphony. In this spirit, we have read classical plays together. During our four years, Plato’s *Symposium*, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and Euripides’ *Hippolytos*, were all discussed. These sessions were opportunities to converse at night in the company with other circles of the Nordic Summer University. The seminar room was also exchanged for the beach with wine, snacks, and blankets. Passing the text between participants, we read aloud the whole plays as the sun set. This way of sharing voices has also been important for thinking about the practice of feminist philosophy, and thereby actualizing the poetic tradition of philosophy, subordinate to the 19th century historiographical construction of institutional philosophy. In the end, as we pose the question on how to understand feminist philosophy, what appears is first and foremost what can be characterized as philosophy’s Other.

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<sup>36</sup> Joan Copjec, *Read my desire – Lacan Against the Historicists* (Verso Books, 2015), p. 17; Joan Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013); Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translation Paul Kottman Stanford (California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, p. 9.

If the discipline of philosophy has been greatly influenced by the analytical tradition after WWII, both internationally and in Sweden, the history of ideas in Sweden has come to occupy a disciplinary space where the history of philosophy has been scrutinized from critical perspectives, for example, feminism and postcolonial theory. In starting the project “Feminist Philosophy: Time, history, and the transformation of thought,” we wanted to create a platform where philosophy and feminism appear dialogically, both in historical as well as contemporary perspectives, and where tensions between the different terms are interrogated and used as a starting point for productive academic work.

As already mentioned, working with feminist history of philosophy requires a move toward literature. Our point of departure and our way of approaching philosophy thus arises in a situation where philosophy is already and historically outside itself. Still, we wanted to maintain a relationship with the word “philosophy,” since the love of wisdom does not fit unproblematically with any disciplinary borders. In retrospect, this also turned out to be important in terms of the response to our call for papers. We discovered that the word philosophy bore a special attraction not only for philosophers in a narrow sense but also for scholars outside of philosophy departments.

The relevance of the discourse of philosophy and the history of ideas for feminist interdisciplinary work should not be underestimated. What was exposed throughout the work of “Feminist Philosophy: Time, History, and the Transformation of Thought”, was an international and transdisciplinary desire to be given a space for thought, wonder, and discussion that transgress feminism as theory and practice. Our hope is that feminist philosophy as a productive culture of practice can carve out further spaces within more academic institutions and thus contribute to critical inquiry and transgression of the contemporary logic of profit, self-assertion, and competition.