

2nd Hannah Arendt Workshop 2021
The Future of Feminism
Tilburg University, November 24th 2021

Workshop Location: Room DZ 4, Dante Building, Warandelaan 2, 5037 AB Tilburg

<i>Workshop</i>	
11.00 – 11.15	<i>Welcome, Coffee & Tea, and Opening</i>
11.15 – 12.00	The (lost) Futures of Techno-Feminism <i>Camilla Pitton MA, Warwick University</i>
12.00 – 13.00	<i>Lunch Break: Screening of video lecture: Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism</i>
13.00 – 13.45	Children as Commodity and Changeling: Gender Disappointments and Gender Disappointment <i>Dr. Matthew J. Cull, University of Leeds</i>
13.45 – 14.30	Misogyny Through an Intersectional Lens: Revisiting Brahmanical Patriarchy <i>Urna Chakrabarty</i>
14.30 – 14.45	<i>Coffee/ Tea Break</i>
14.45 – 15.30	Gender Injustice and Digital Distraction <i>Dr. Kaisa Kärki, University of Helsinki</i>
15.30 – 16.15	Infrastructures of Activism: Building Feminist Futures <i>Catherine Koekoek MSC MA, Erasmus University Rotterdam</i>
16.15 – 17.00	<i>Reception</i>

Workshop Zoom link:

<https://tilburguniversity.zoom.us/j/91048660977?pwd=aXpKT1BvYkQyY2R1UVQ1L3hjM0EyZz09>

Meeting ID: 910 4866 0977

Passcode: 1977216596

2nd Hannah Arendt Lecture 2021
Kate Manne, 'What is Gaslighting?'
Tilburg University, November 24th 2021

Lecture Location: Room DZ 2, Dante Building, Warandelaan 2, 5037 AB Tilburg

<i>Lecture</i>	
17.00 – 17.45	What is Gaslighting? <i>Dr. Kate Manne, Cornell University</i>
17.45 – 18.00	Responses <i>Dr. Roos Slegers, Tilburg University</i> <i>MA Natascha Rietdijk, Tilburg University</i>
18.00 – 18.45	Q&A

Lecture Zoom link:

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Camilla Pitton, The (lost) Futures of Techno-Feminism

This paper proposes to interrogate the notion of the lost futures of feminist theory: quasi utopian imageries that were central to certain traditions and which now appear unattainable. The focus of this presentation will concern, specifically, the current of techno-feminism that became particularly popular between the late 20th century and the early 21st century among feminist theorists in Europe and the United States. In an effort to articulate whether the technological utopias that emerged from this diverse tradition can find any place in present feminist theorising, I take as paradigmatic two quite different texts: Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) and Sadie Plant's "On the Matrix" (2000). Although these texts concern themselves with different technologies as their object of analysis—respectively, informational language and computational realities taken more generally—putting the two works in conversation will serve to highlight the more profound disagreements that lie at the heart of their theorisation of the technological.

This comparative work will facilitate the articulation of the different conditions that Haraway and Plant deem as necessary for the 'techno-feminine'. On the one hand, Haraway will be argued to identify the gestation of a feminine collective with the only possible (and normatively necessary) escape from the universality of informational language—and, importantly, to frame this escape as the simultaneous operationalisation and subversion of coding. On the other hand, Plant will be advanced to posit the 'computational' as already intrinsically feminine, and to condition the full undermining of "the world-view and the material reality of two thousand years of patriarchal control" (Plant 2000, 325) upon the expansion of this techno-feminine logic. Glossing over the disparate criticisms that could be moved against either account, I will eventually draw speculative and comparative conclusions regarding the future, or lack thereof, that these imageries have with respect to our present. This will be achieved both by highlighting the ways in which those accounts appear to negate each other, and by showing how Haraway's account, precisely in its implicit articulation of problematics inherent in Plant's view, still presents potentials for our less promising technological presents.

Matthew J. Cull, Children as Commodity and Changeling: Gender Disappointments and Gender Disappointment

The phenomenon of 'gender disappointment' is regularly reported by those whose child's sex does not match up to the one that was desired. With symptoms ranging from mere fleeting sadness to documented cases of serious depression, alienation from one's child, and emotional suffering, it is clear that so-called 'gender disappointment' is a serious issue, that has, as yet, seen little philosophical attention (though see Hendl and Browne 2020).

In this paper I explore gender disappointment, not from the perspective of a parent who ended up with the child of the wrong sex at birth, but rather, from the perspective of a different kind of gender disappointment: the transgender person who grew up and only then disappointed their parents by turning out to be the 'wrong' gender.

This perspective, I argue, reveals a great deal about the shared gender essentialism at the heart of patriarchal and cissexist ideology. Moreover, I will argue that it reveals the underlying proprietarian relationship of parents to their children under contemporary capitalism – a troubling relationship that legitimates the treatment of children as objects to be designed and controlled as commodities at the whims of parents. Here I connect my work with the work of contemporary family abolitionist feminists (see, e.g., Lewis 2019, O'Brien 2020) in order to tie my critique of a particular form of parenting to a broader critique of this particular mode of intimate life.

In this way I disagree with Whyman when he writes that "a preference for having a child of one sex over the other should be considered one of those irrational things of which some sense can nevertheless be made – like aesthetic taste" (Whyman 2021, 113-114). I argue, to the contrary, that the desire for a child of one particular gender is not akin to a mere unproblematic aesthetic preference. Instead, and following the rich feminist tradition of thinking about the patriarchal origins of sexual desire (see, e.g., Srinivasan 2021, Mackinnon 1979), I argue that we must see these desires as troubling reflections of dominant patriarchal and cissexist ideology, underwritten by a particular neoliberal capitalist mode of production.

Urna Chakrabarty, Misogyny Through an Intersectional Lens: Revisiting Brahmanical Patriarchy

Seeking to understand the intersectional foundations of misogyny in the Indian context, I analyze 'Brahmanical patriarchy' in terms of its significance as a proto-intersectional feminist theory of caste and gender. Coined by historian Uma Chakravarti (1993), 'Brahmanical patriarchy' captures anti-caste philosopher and activist Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's (1891-1956) revolutionary explanation of the hierarchical cultural topography of India (Ambedkar 1916). The term refers to a theory of caste that supposes caste to be fully sedimented with gender, in a way that misogyny and caste stratification (pioneered by the brahmins, or the highest caste in the Hindu order) reciprocally influence each other, through an intricate set of rules and institutions. Accordingly, this is a graded patriarchy, which ranks women's bodies and sexualities on the basis of their place in the caste hierarchy, thus making dalit (lit. downtrodden, of untouchable castes) women the most vulnerable targets of caste-mediated misogyny.

The argument I advance is that Brahmanical patriarchy must be appreciated as a classic example of proto-intersectional theorizing. Ambedkar's development of the theory predates Kimberle Crenshaw's 1989 coinage of 'intersectionality', but to argue that caste and gender cannot be separated from one another in terms of their origin and operation in the Indian context is an act that not only presupposes, but also enacts a self-consciously intersectional analytic framework. In addition to holistically addressing multiple axes of oppression, Brahmanical patriarchy does the important analytical work of putting into crisis the traditional view of hegemonies (specifically, caste and patriarchy) as discrete, monolithic social structures, by illuminating the interlocking mechanism of caste and gender oppression. I hold that this is a significant line of inquiry because it rescues intersectionality from being a mere buzzword in feminist circles (especially in academia), by bringing out what it means to proceed with a dyed-in-the-wool intersectional understanding of misogyny--which Brahmanical patriarchy is, I argue, a paradigmatic example of.

This project is in the interest of enhancing the reception of Brahmanical patriarchy as a conceptual stronghold within the feminist study of misogyny particularly, and more generally within liberatory, counter-hegemonic scholarship that is committed to building feminist futures.

Kaisa Kärki, Gender Injustice and Digital Distraction

The so-called 'attention economy' has been criticized for commercializing the attention of agents. The cost of attention grabbing, sustaining, and immersing medias has been talked about as if it touched all people equally. But are we really on the same line in relating to the rapid changes in our stimulus environments? This paper argues that we are not. It brings up novel forms of gender injustice that are being formed through digital media-based distractions in connection to gender-based normative structures. The injustices I focus on are modulated by maintaining different attention norms for different people.

Attention norms regulate what is being ignored, what is being focused on, and who needs to be attentive to stimuli of different kinds. Being attentive to other people's needs is central in norms that regulate care. Duties to care have usually been ascribed to women, sometimes backed up by essentialist assumptions about women as essentially caring.

Always on Call is an agent whose attention is always available to others. She has little autonomy over her attention because her attention is constantly grabbed by other people, mediated by the ubiquitous digital medias that aim to grab and sustain her attention for commercial purposes.

Cases like *Always on Call* show that even if one holds only an implicit assumption that women should be attentive to other people's needs, when attention-grabbing medias are ubiquitous and prepared to utilize these kinds of biases, several problems can follow for women. Not only is their ability to fulfill their own goals threatened, but the time and space to even find out what those goals are can be jeopardized by constant disruptions.

Norms according to which women have a duty to be attentive to their husbands, friends and children are less damaging in environments where social distractions are not present at all times. Future of feminism requires noticing gender injustices in changing digital environments. Commercialization of attention is one of the large trends that changes societies, and we need to be sensitive to who is vulnerable to the changes and collectively negotiate such attention norms that are equal to all people, regardless of gender.

Catherine Koekoek, Infrastructures of Activism: Building Feminist Futures

In the 1970s and 80s, tens of women's bookstores opened their doors in cities throughout the Netherlands. They were part of extensive networks of feminist thought and action that constituted what Nancy Fraser famously called a "subaltern counterpublic." These alternative public spheres, that developed in countries throughout the world at the end of the 20th century, existed alongside and against the mainstream democratic public sphere and included bookshops, community centres, conferences, journals, publishers, etc. In the Netherlands, however, only one feminist bookshop remains today – the Utrecht-based Savannah Bay. As the austere wind of neoliberalism became stronger from the 1990s on, the counterpublics from the previous generation of feminism seem to have largely disappeared. What are the infrastructures of contemporary feminism? And what role do online spaces and social media play in constituting alternative counterpublics?

In her 2017 book *Public Things*, Bonnie Honig points to the importance of public things for maintaining and repairing "democracy in disrepair." Building upon Arendt, she focuses on the material work required to (re)build the democratic world. She argues that democracy is sustained by concrete things and material infrastructures. I argue that the same counts for activism: feminism requires networks of places and people where and with whom you can imagine a better world, it requires infrastructure to collectively build feminist futures. Attention for these infrastructures of activism has two consequences for discussing the future of feminism. First, we need to acknowledge what we have lost. Although many of the questions discussed by feminists and anti-racists in the 1980s and 90s are still painfully relevant, the disappearance of feminist infrastructures in neoliberal times has made it more difficult to recognize the continuities between these feminist 'waves', and has obstructed sharing intergenerational knowledge. Second, it orients us towards the material and institutional conditions for feminism.

Although online activism is influential and empowering, it can also be fleeting and isolated from a larger, sustained struggle and movement. In what ways can the often unmediated experiences, emotions and concerns shared on social media be meaningfully connected to systemic critique and institutional change? What are the contexts, both on- and offline, where intersectional feminism can be practiced? In other words: How do we build a place to dream of feminist futures?

ABSTRACT 2nd HANNAH ARENDT LECTURE 2021

Kate Manne, What is Gaslighting?

Gaslighting is often glossed as an interpersonal practice involving manipulating the victim into feeling "crazy." In this talk, I moot various desiderata for an adequate account of gaslighting, and argue for a broader account of the phenomenon—and, ultimately, a definition of gaslighting which allows that it can (a) be a political and cultural practice rather than an interpersonal one, (b) proceed by making victims feel negative moral emotions (such as guilty or ashamed) for deviating from the gaslighter's prescribed narrative, and (c) be defined functionally as a process which, roughly, makes the target feel defective for so doing. I close by considering practices that encourage fruitful disagreement as an antidote to gaslighting.