

Transmitting Feminisms

Why do you think reading and research groups like these are needed?

LD It is important to open up non-hierarchical, egalitarian, non-networky situations in this cut-throat environment in which competition and exclusivity are seen as default and have been normalised. I appreciate the multiplicity of feminist voices and perspectives in the Feminist Duration Reading Group, the intergenerational aspect, and the acceptance of people's diverse entry points into feminisms. I also value the decolonial mission, the drive to offer horizontal feminist narratives and destabilise the dominant ones by inserting many under-represented geographies and voices. It is through creating and fostering initiatives where people can come together in an environment in which they can be vulnerable

and not have to prove themselves that we encourage solidarity and support each other.

HR Vulnerability is really important. That is why we emphasise staying with the text, so that we look at something that we have in common—during the space of our encounter—rather than rely too much on knowledge brought in from outside the group context. We have developed a practice of reading out loud, one person at a time, paragraph-by-paragraph, as we make our way round the room.

IR It is a large, shifting group, diffuse enough to never feel like a clique, and with enough momentum that it never feels like an obligation, almost a life of its own (with lots of responsibility for that life shouldered by HR and since earlier this year the Working Group). A lot of what we do takes so much energy and demands so much attention from us: it's a privilege to feel part of something that, as LD says, does not demand a high-functioning normative set of behaviours, just being together, reading aloud, mostly listening, and contributing at times.

FK It is probably the only group/gathering/community where I feel like there is a horizontal sense of sharing. When we all gather, the cultural capital, the academic background, the education, and Miss Mrs Mx or Dr, none of that really matters when we are reading and exchanging. Due to the diversity of cultures in the group, it has been inspiring to hear “on the ground” experiences, from other countries and backgrounds,

and to get direct translations of texts and contexts, without filters.

GD I value the generous environment which the group has created, its nomadic focus, and the openness to everyone's contribution beyond our individual backgrounds and stages of life. The diversity of participants' experiences highlights the commonalities and differences among different generations and geopolitical locations. I often feel that texts are not only a chance to explore crucial thinking that has been neglected, they also became a medium through which to get to know each other and to challenge one another's positions.

SP I like the fact that one evening a month I am crossing the city to meet a group of feminists interested in exploring under-represented texts collectively. When I started attending in Autumn 2015 my son was five so I valued this regular meet-up because there I could be myself as a woman separated from my role as a mother. I like the fact that I meet people of different ages and experiences. While it is not specifically a consciousness-raising group it has transformed some of my thought processes around feminist issues and politics. I find it meaningful to read aloud while people listen. It seems like a little thing, but it is rare that women's voices are heard so attentively and with care.

ET It is worthwhile to slow down a text, hear it read aloud and engage with something here and now in the company of others. The group acts as a

counterpoint to digital communication, which often occurs in isolated silos or echo chambers.

RG Not needing to prepare in advance means that this group feels accessible and open. It is such a pleasure to take the time to listen, to attend to a text with care, and a contrast to so much else in life that is fast and fleeting.

GD Reading out loud together has been a great way for me to achieve a deeper understanding of the sources we dip into. Many times I realise how sentences whose meaning I took for granted suddenly could transform through someone's voice and perspective.

DBS Re-entering a text and reconsidering its relevance in the moment makes the experience contemporary, in that the group enters into a kind of spatio-temporal relationship. Through this "space of encounter" the various and diverse voices (both in the room and in the texts) are able to enter into a generative dialogue about contemporary feminism/s.

LF This is a key mode of collective transmission which contrasts the capitalist mode of production and distribution, but also a form of learning (and unlearning) which is open to experimentation and risk – processes that institutions normally do not like!

LG LF's point is so important. Reading and self-education have been central to collective struggle. The feminist reading groups in Scotland I am involved

in connect to a history of collective reading in the context of the Women's Liberation Movement and, to a lesser extent, Gay Liberation in the late 1960s and 1970s. Partly, this is because these groups often revisit texts from this period. These groups are one way of visualising present feminist activity in the UK. Perhaps more importantly, they enable you to feel connected to an extended network when you are in a room, reading and talking together. These contemporary groups, on the one hand, inhabit a model and history of collective practice (with all the promise described here, but also problems that one often encounters in organising, such as feelings of unease or discomfort and experiences of/with power within non-hierarchical spaces). On the other, they belong to a moment when it has been, and continues to feel, important to return to recent histories of feminist and queer politics in order to excavate unrealised possibilities and interrogate dominant genealogies. Of course, the two are connected. The practice of feminist community is the site from which theory emerges.

GM I want to print LG's phrase, "in order to excavate unrealised possibilities," on Feminist Duration Reading Group t-shirts. My participation (often from afar) in this group and in organising reading groups and workshops in Toronto with the feminist collective EMILIA-AMALIA¹ is driven by similar impulses and

1. EMILIA-AMALIA is an exploratory working group that employs practices of citation, annotation and autobiography as modes of

activating feminist art, writing and research practices. Initiated in 2016, the group investigates historical and intergenerational feminisms,

concerns. Above all, I am motivated by a desire to increase intergenerational knowledge transmission between feminist practitioners, opening up space to learn about histories that were overlooked in the conventional narrative of feminist “waves” of activity, and to learn directly from both older and younger women’s life experiences.

FK When it comes to theories that end in “-ism,” there is always a struggle, a barrier to understanding. They are not accessible to everyone and that is a pity. However, exploring the diverse applications and the concrete manifestations of feminism, going beyond the epistemological debates, reading out loud and sharing experiences, allows feminism to pursue its aim: constantly questioning the status quo, by offering a more sustainable/democratic/inclusive alternative. Gatherings such as the reading group are a step towards an utopia that, maybe one day, will (I hope), become reality.

AT This generative way of being, thinking and speaking together feels urgent, during a long period of austerity in the UK. It counters the individuation and alienation that structure so much contemporary life-work, and which counter-intuitively curb the possibility of following interests and non-productive

commitments. Perhaps the “necessity” of these groups is that they are free, and non-productive, at a moment when higher education is expensive and compromised by marketisation.

PSB It is important to encourage the reading of non-Anglo-Saxon (English-written) feminisms, both in form (the methods we use) and in content. The Feminist Duration Reading Group is aligned with a kind of anti-assimilationist radical feminism different from liberal feminism, which is currently so present.

SP While I agree that it is important that under-represented feminist traditions and cultures are known in the “first world,” they should not be instrumentalised. Their importance lies in how they impact our consciousness as feminists and make a concrete change in the way we think and feel about ourselves, our bodies, the capitalist and colonialist world we live in, and patriarchy. If they remain intellectual or aesthetic exercises, they lose their potential.

AT Maybe this kind of group work, sitting within legacies of political research and writing, is the only way we keep certain histories in view, as well as how we change the blind spots that damaged other moments of political activism. This is what duration means for me and I think we could be more careful about the rhetoric of rescue, especially when some histories are life stories being lived and remembered. These theories and ideas should not simply be content rediscovered, but should become ways of working and thinking differently.

1. (cont.) as well as relationships of mentorship, collaboration and indebtedness between artists, writers, thinkers, curators and practitioners. EMILIA-AMALIA

meets on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishnabe and the Huron-Wendat, in Canada.

What does embodied citation as a feminist practice mean to you?

HR I see the group's monthly commitment to gathering as feminists to explore feminisms as a form of embodied citation, which entails who and what we reference and acknowledge, and where we put our energy and attention, time and care.

ET Embodied citation means asking *who* and stating *who* in order to share and trace the lineage of thought. It is an expression of inheritance and an invitation to think collectively, rather than the individualist approach of shaping ideas on the backs of others. In her PhD thesis,² Céline Condorelli identifies that we befriend issues as well as ideas, which resonates strongly with me. I grew up experiencing this as "associations," a term I used to describe my attachment to not only knowledge, but where, why, how, and from whom I obtained it.

SF Yes! That is absolutely crucial, and has always been a feminist principle. Listening to our own and other women's experience to generate theory and practice, rather than listening to the "experts." In those terms, embodied citation manifests for me above all in "the practice of doing" —in collective working.

2. Condorelli, Céline. *In Support: A Theoretical and Practical Investigation into Forms of Display*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London, 2014.

It has become an explicit guiding principle for me in how I work, how I practise, and how I regularly reference—verbally and in my writing—the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective³ as my source for this "way of being." Although my commitment to these goes back to the 1970s and 1980s, I am now much more structured in my understanding of these principles and practices.

CC I understand embodied citation as a form of "being there" in a simple way that has consequences beyond the moment. Reading the words of others and discussing them together materialises practices and voices from the past and from elsewhere, refreshing them in our own bodies. By being there, we also add to a growing chain of embodied citations, for example by writing together and re-circulating our shared reflections. Some simple shared moments stand out for me—accepting a slice of homemade cake, arranging the chairs, and buying wine resonates with the convivial moments in the *150 Hours School* film by Adriana Monti about feminist pedagogy in Italy for women without high school education. For me, those simple moments of taking care cement and extend the trust, growth, and dialogue. Extending

3. Established in 1975, the Milan women's bookshop is a cooperative of sixty-four women, run through weekly voluntary turns. Besides the magazine *Via Dogana* and the series *Quaderni di Via Dogana*, the bookshop publishes documents, meeting recordings and other texts

dealing with political theory and practice. The collective's group-authored book, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, 1990, has become a regular touchstone for the Feminist Duration Reading Group.

the invitation to contribute to this document continues this process.

GD In my understanding this is both a consciousness and an “unconsciousness” raising activity. It is a consciousness raising activity because it shows the way that through our references and citations we risk repeating a generalised notion of feminism and of womanhood, specifically a western one. In this way embodied citation is a consideration of the diversity of our sources, on the bodies we bring back into being through our texts. It is also deeply connected to forms of re-enactment and re-staging of the past in the present for future appropriation. In this sense I like to see it as an “unconsciousness” activity, one through which we allow ourselves to be “possessed” by other voices, gestures, and by other women, to unlearn the boundaries of our personal positions. These processes have been relevant to the Feminist Duration Reading Group sessions, which combine reflections on the sources and the opportunity to be playful.

LF I am fascinated by the concept of embodied citation both in relation to this group and more generally as a feminist strategy that puts affect and care at its core. I see the practice of embodied citation in the tradition of performative utterance, body to body transmission, and what ultimately has been theorised in terms of performative and affective archive. Although we use written texts as a point of reference, the act of reading these texts aloud, to perform and re-perform the words of other women through our mouths and breaths, is a practice of returning text

into speech and speech into action. This practice of reading together, giving voice to the text, creates a strong impact on the listener. In Latin “citation” means both to project the voice, to call and put into action. So embodied citation can be seen an action *per se*, which values voice as much as relationality.

GM Alex Martinis Roe, whose workshop *Our Future Network*⁴ some of us contributing to this text participated in, gives the example of how some Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective members emulated the routines and daily lives of their heroes or symbolic mothers as a form of embodied citation: to live in a material and quite everyday way that is a “performative utterance,” as LF says. The activities that have invited participants to bring in texts that are meaningful to them to read aloud from, or rework and translate, seem an example of embodied citation. How can the re-reading of a memoir or a manifesto from the past reactivate the unrealised potential of that story or experience in the present?

4. Alex Martinis Roe is a Berlin and Canberra-based artist whose work stems from her ongoing engagement with the political practices of international feminist communities. Her current projects focus on feminist genealogies and seek to foster specific and productive relations between different generations as a way of participating in the construction of feminist histories and futures. In December 2015 she organised

a workshop, *Our Future Network*, at The Showroom, London, as part of the Now You Can Go programme, organised by seven members of the Feminist Duration Reading Group. In 2017 she made a feature length film of the same name, using knowledge gathered and produced since 2014, which stemmed from a four-day meeting with contributors from throughout Europe who enacted twenty “propositions for feminist collective practice.”

AT The way we read in the group, what here is being linked to embodied citation, is something more temporary and autonomous than consciousness raising, and valuable for it. There is an attempt to be together in the room, and to leave behind other pressures, and anxieties, although this may not always be successful. Without suggesting there is a definitive break between the life of the mind and embodied existence, for me the reading group's practice is more intertextual, about looking again at a text and enacting a shared reading. It is a way of reading that is entirely different from my own independent readings of the same texts, almost anonymous and liberating for it. Perhaps embodied citation is a kind of temporary ownership, where you can articulate something on your own terms, a piece of choreography which you can learn and transmit through the specificity of your own voice/gesture?

HR An early session organised by LG where we read Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *The Politics of Translation*⁵ resonates with a recent meeting around Hazel C. Carby's *White Woman Listen: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*.⁶ Both authors argue powerfully against the western feminist tendency to universalise womanhood according to their own values, histories, and perspectives, and to erase or

deny other experiences and legacies—which is itself a form of violence.

SF That de-centring from Anglo-American feminism I have found really illuminating and liberating. The first meeting I came to in 2016 was around Spanish Transfeminisms. It was mad, but very exciting. We have really worked against universalisation and explored difference.

ET *White Woman Listen!* is a great example of the politics of embodied citation. Carby unpacks various herstories relating to the structures of labour, family, sexuality, body violations and colonialism through which she presents thought that is complex, networked, and polyphonic. With passionate clarity, Carby articulates the triple oppression of gender, race, and class that BAME women⁷ experience and calls out white feminists for emphasising patriarchy alone. It feels like it was written today, although it was published in 1982.

LF Retrospectively, we can see that a limit of many consciousness raising groups, including the Italian collectives explored in the reading group, was their inability to address issues of class and ethnicity. While “the practice of doing” and the philosophy of entrustment pursued by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective offered ways out from the

5. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “The politics of translation.” *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 178–200.

6. Carby, Hazel. “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood.” *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain*. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. London: Hutchinson, 1982, pp. 212–35.

7. Acronym used in the UK standing for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic women.

impasse of consciousness raising, I don't think those issues have been completely resolved within the bookstore's framework. Context is the other element we must take into consideration!

SP That is why I led a meeting around Lea Melandri's work this year, as it complements that of the Milan Bookstore by considering relationships of power between the sexes. It does not idealise women, which some feminists tend to do. In fact, Melandri focuses on the violence involved in women when they care for their children and the violence in relationships between women and men. Love is interlinked with violence, Melandri says,⁸ and we need to admit that in order to break the link to violence.

IR The act of reading a text aloud together is an interesting way of attending to difference within a group that is not about explicit declaration (as in consciousness raising), but rather learning to listen to others and with hope becoming more attuned to the situation, more present. In the most straightforward sense, we hear immediately each other's vulnerabilities, pleasures, dislikes and so on; who might struggle more with English as a second or third language, with reading itself, with being weary, excited, bored, confused, each body inevitably produces difference in the text. And most crucially, the option to pass over reading altogether (refusal).

8. Melandri, Lea. *Love and Violence: The Vexatious Factors of Civilization*, Antonio Calcagno (trans.). New York: SUNY Press, 2019.

RG Unlike mainstream political discourse, which operates on the basis of voices dominating each other and personalities vying for power, for me, feminism—or any feminism worthy of the name—prioritises listening over talking and takes time to lift up the quiet voices that are often side-lined. Taking time and listening are what make this group so exciting.

LD I find the methods used in the group, for instance reading together (but also this collaborative writing session) inspiring for my academic and curatorial work. They have taught me how to relax about applying different approaches to the material, to allow for collective learning in the moment, and to not “freak out” if parts of texts are difficult or nobody in the room has anything to say. I have always tried to use participatory, non-hierarchical methods in my curating, but the question of publicness is problematic—the division between the makers (curators, artists) and audiences. This group almost erases any such divisions as it is completely self-selected and public.

CC Since I started attending meetings I have taken feminist methodologies and reflections more directly into my international teaching practice in the UK and China. Now I find that it is not enough to teach feminism as an approach and I work more directly with students' mindsets as they learn and analyse any practice or theory. I extend this work into convivial moments and help students to put ideas into practice.

GM The practice of *affidamento* (entrustment) has become central to how I work as a curator and

collective member, in actively reaching out to younger and older generations of feminists to see how we can support and learn from one another.

RG The need not just to study radical practices but to attempt to apply them feels urgent. Participating in the group helped me think about where civic participation begins and what kind of forums bring people together in positive ways. This led me to start a community organisation in the East London housing estate where I live which aims to bring people together and to gain autonomy over its surroundings in the form of a community garden. Seeing the women in the 1983 film *Scuola Senza Fine* dancing and eating together, reminded me of the importance of small things. Gardening has led to other community activities, with different age groups within the estate.

HR The group has become more collaborative since a Working Group formed earlier this year to take more responsibility for planning.

SF It is what LF refers to above: the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective's "practice of doing." If we do things together we get to know each other and trust each other, becoming part of a feminist community. I've been much happier since we started the Working Group—feeling involved and useful.

HR I have felt happier, too. The regularity of sessions helps me to stay in touch with my feminist values. I appreciate being able to reach out to other regulars if I want someone to go with to a political demo,

for instance. There is a sense that other people in the group have got your back.

ET I identify with this strongly! I truly feel like we've been co-authoring values, that are expansive, embedded, and never static. One value is perhaps looking back to look forward—reading texts from recent history that some of the people in the sessions have lived through or have personal experience with, while others are listening to the past. As we do this collectively, we're thinking about our present and possible futures.

CC I really like this expression of co-authoring values. We all need to feel legitimised to co-create values that emerge from lived experience and specific contexts. So many young people state "I'm not a feminist," mostly because they feel that they have to fit into a defined shape. Feeling allowed and encouraged to co-author values with one's peers and across generations and locations can create a sense of ownership of feminism in younger generations.

DBS "Co-authoring" seems to refer back to the idea of embodied citation too. By collectively being with the text, slowing down, and reciting the work of others, we not only acknowledge the "text," we co-author new ideas, new values, and new ways of thinking through the conversations that take place. This kind of process creates a sense of agency and encourages critical and creative thinking about the way we might individually and collectively find our voice within feminist theory and practice.

What else do we need to talk about?

LG One thing that has come up for me in organising and participating in reading groups is their relationship to the host organisations, for example, this group at SPACE or the Social Reproduction Reading Group at the Collective Gallery in Edinburgh. I stepped away from one reading group because it was forging a closer relationship to gallery programming. I feel conscious of the labour that goes into organising these groups and the way that they might provide content for institutions. In-kind support through the use of space or help with publicity is helpful, necessary perhaps. But I worry about the ways that the sometimes-unspoken hierarchies that are already part of feminist spaces, for example issues of access and privilege, become amplified when those groups work within cultural institutions, with their own unexamined hierarchies, and structural inequalities. Many arts institutions participate in exploitative employment practices, while presenting feminist programming. These programmes can function to obscure inequalities or even to insulate an institution from critique. How might reading groups operate in this relation and how this might complicate ideas about access, and inclusivity in the spaces we use?

GM Maiko Tanaka wrote a great text about the problematic function of reading groups in galleries and museums.⁹ Like the Feminist Duration Reading

Group, EMILIA-AMALIA has been invited to host sessions in institutional venues. We have had to carefully assess when we are being asked in to essentially “fix” an institution’s gender discrepancy or programming biases, and when it is a generous and collaborative invitation to do something different.

IR Surely, in as much as a reading group like this provides two hours of monthly public programming one must question the economics? In another iteration, we might demand a programming fee that we could share out or use for other activities. Personally, I much prefer the home meetings that started this year, where we combine reading and talking with cooking and eating. They feel more leisurely, richer, on a Saturday afternoon. It is also nice to just be outside of (art) institutions, although that does not necessarily need to be in private homes.

AT Feminism is clearly a big pull right now for many institutions. There is support to speak about women and women artists, to organise exhibitions, and to programme feminist events. We invite one another and share the resources we are given, responsibly representing the collectives which support us, and provide us space in which to refine our thoughts. But we still lack resources. Collectives and groups are often under-resourced because they run counter to expected ways of working. As such they are powerful. Nonetheless this power can be deflected or evacuated. The advantages of being temporary and autonomous come with the disadvantages of precariousness. Institutions often offer an individual

9. Tanaka, Maiko. “Did You Do the Reading?” *Fuse Magazine* 36, no. 4, 2013.

fee to a collective, which when shared divides into very little. These are the conditions under which we are contributing to this text. Does this not feed into, rather than disrupt, the current organisation of culture and society? More considerations must be given: longer lead times, more resources, more equitable distribution of tasks, and support for archiving. We need to demand this kind of concerted support if we are to be truly present as collectives in institutions, and if we want to sustain our collectives and keep contributing to transmitting and building feminist cultures.

Michael Marder

This Dump that is the Anthropocene...

Every day, scientific studies, media reports, and visceral experiences of the rapidly deteriorating state of the environment hit us with a growing and disconcerting force. In drinking water, microplastics abound, and, by 2050, the total mass of synthetic, human-made materials in the oceans is predicted to surpass that of fish biomass. Megalopolises on different continents languish under a stew of airborne toxins during the intensifying and protracted periods of extreme smog. Forest fires consume large swathes of wooded land, due to a combination of rising global temperatures, droughts, monoculture plantations, and meagre investments into (as well as the unwillingness to rely on local knowledges for) fire prevention. Topsoil degradation, threatening the health and fertility of the earth, entails acidification, sharp increases in salinity, and toxicity, coupled with

The authors contributed to a shared online document over the course of several days, from London, Glasgow, Sydney, and Toronto, which was edited by Helena Reckitt. Each has participated in the Feminist Duration Reading Group, by leading or hosting a meeting and/or attending regularly. Their current jobs and roles encompass artist, carer, community organiser, lecturer, mother, researcher, translator, writer, and MA

and PhD student. Their initials stand for Diana Baker Smith (DBS), Cinzia Cremona (CC), Giulia Damiani (GD), Lina Džuverović (LD), Lucia Farinati (LF), Sabrina Fuller (SF), Rose Gibbs (RG), Laura Guy (LG), Felicie Kertudo (FK), Gabby Moser (GM), Sara Paiola (SP), Helena Reckitt (HR), Irene Revell (IR), Patricia Sequeira Bras (PSB), Amy Tobin (AT), and Ehryn Torrell (ET).