



Feminist Activism in Transition (FAT) - Launch Seminar

February 20th 2020, 10.00-15.00.

Venue: Byens Hus: Den Gamle Byrådssal, Stændertorvet 1, Roskilde.

This seminar is the launch of a research project at Roskilde University, which examines fat activist and more broadly body activism as a new form of feminist activism. Two invited speakers: Feminist fat studies scholar **Hannele Harjunen** and fat activist and cultural historian **Dina Amlund** will speak to questions concerning gender, body norms, and the social construction of what is considered a “normal” (female) body.

The seminar is open for anyone interested in these issues either from a research perspective or from an activist perspective. There will be an opportunity to discuss and share ideas across the normal academic vs. activist ‘divide’ – hopefully forming new interconnections. Participation is free, but participants need to sign up in order to attend. Please note: The venue is in Roskilde town, not at RUC campus.

Program:

10.00: Welcome and introduction – Lene Bull Christiansen, Roskilde University

10.30: Fatphobia in Western Cultural History – Dina Amlund, fatactivist and cultural historian

11.30: Group-session (questions, experiences and analyses)

12.30: Lunch

13.30: Neoliberal Bodies and the Gendered Fat Body: Hannele Harjunen, University of Jyväskylä

14.45: Summing up

Talks:

Fatphobia in Western Cultural History

Dina Amlund, fatactivist and cultural historian

We often hear that fatness was perfectly OK and even ideal in “the old days” in the West. At times when food was scarce and most people worked very hard in the fields, being fat was the ideal way to have a body. Fat women were considered beautiful and it gave status when men were fat. The constant repetition of this myth is mostly used to show how developed society is today compared to times of less knowledge when they were so uninformed, they even liked fatness. That is highly fatphobic. We will also come across repetitions of this myth in a romanticizing context supposed to show us that before the world went astray, fatness was endured and even celebrated. This gives a false notion of fatphobia being a new phenomenon and it understates the strength of the grasp that fatphobic structures hold in Western Culture. Fatphobia is ever present in Western Culture from the Antiquities till today, no time period excluded. The intensity of fatphobia may rise and fall in certain time periods, but it was never ideal or even allowed to be fat during the 5000 years of Western history. This study shows that through out Western history, literature, art and fashion as well as science have propagated a slender ideal with ever so slightly changing variations of bodies regarding thinness and muscularity - but never actual fatness.

Neoliberal Bodies and the Gendered Fat Body

Dr. Hannele Harjunen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The ethos of neoliberalism does not only shape economic policy or structures, its influence extends to culture and bodies. Efficiency, productivity, and marketization are core values in neoliberal culture, and the socially acceptable and preferred body today, is expected to reflect these values. It can be claimed that a neoliberal way of thinking has entered even the most intimate parts of life such as eating, exercising, and taking care of the body. It informs and steers our understanding of bodies, how we live in them, and the relationship we are supposed to enjoy with them. Self-discipline, constant self-monitoring, and thinking of one's body as a marketable commodity are some of the qualities of a "neoliberal body". Health and wellness are central fields in which neoliberal bodies are produced. By constantly "doing health" one can perform the required self-discipline and responsibility. At the same time what is considered as health or healthy behavior is defined by the market. In this kind of culture, fatness is constructed as social, political, economic, and moral problem. Fat bodies are interpreted as ineffective and unproductive bodies and as a sign of an individual's irresponsibility, immorality and lack of control. Combined gendered expectations of sexism and neoliberal capitalism put pressure on women in particular. Specifically, fat female bodies are stigmatized and demonized.



The seminar is organised by the research project Feminist Activism in Transition (FAT) at Roskilde University, with support from the Independent Research Fund Denmark.