

**InterGender, Consortium and Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies**  
[www.Intergender.net](http://www.Intergender.net)

organized in cooperation with the Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies (NOG) and the Graduate Gender Programme, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

For this course PhD students are eligible to apply.  
Please consult the Information on Admission at the end of this document.

**Title of the Course:**  
**Politics of Vulnerability**  
7.5 + 7.5 ECTS

**Time:**  
February 20 – 22, 2018

**Location:**  
Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

**Deadline for applications:**  
January 7, 2018

**Applications should be sent to:**  
InterGender Consortium Coordinator Edyta Just (edyta.just[at]liu.se)

**Maximum number of participants:**  
20 participants

**Organized by:**  
InterGender, Consortium and Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies  
The Graduate Gender Programme/ The Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies (NOG), Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

**Course coordinators:**  
Local InterGender Course Coordinators Kathrin Thiele (k.thiele[at]uu.nl) and Magdalena Górska (m.a.gorska[at]uu.nl).  
InterGender Consortium Coordinator Edyta Just (edyta.just[at]liu.se)

**Teachers:**  
Layal Ftouni, Utrecht University, NL  
Magdalena Górska, Utrecht University, NL  
Kathrin Thiele (UU), Utrecht University, NL  
Eva Hayward, University of Arizona, US

**Course description:**

The course will focus on vulnerability as a political matter. In contemporary Western contexts, vulnerability is situated within the realm of individual responsibility and neoliberal conceptualization of productivity where it occupies a place of undesired failure or error. This course will offer possibilities to re-conceptualize vulnerability beyond these existing normative and devaluing frameworks. It will ask how it is possible to engage vulnerability beyond such neoliberal logics and without falling into a trap of either celebration of vulnerability or its understanding as a state that is to be necessarily 'overcome'. The course will, hence, focus on an approach to the political question of vulnerability as both individual, psychical, and structural phenomenon and as one that is situated within specific local and global power relations.

With the course we aim to address vulnerability as a process of living that materializes social individual and structural power relations while simultaneously opening possibilities for their reconfigurations. Thus, by providing an alternative approach to and a practical engagement with vulnerability – an approach that focuses on ambivalences, tensions, and spaces of in-between-ness – the course will offer the re-conceptualization of conditions of being as situated practices of living where the personal is political and the political is personal.

**Lecture Overview:****Day 1: Lecture by Magdalena Górska (Utrecht University)*****Ambivalences: Vulnerable Politics of Un/breathable Living***

As Frantz Fanon argues, suffocating operations of power relations are not only matters of territories and ideologies but also of daily, embodied practices of living. Dynamics of cultural, societal, geopolitical, individual, and material relations constantly delimitate whose lives (do not) matter, and what lives are un/breathable. This lecture will address practices of un/breathable living in order to explore possibilities of vulnerable politics. By focusing on corpo-affective agency of breathing enacted in living with anxieties, the lecture will discuss how quotidian bodily and affective actions can be understood as (individually and structurally) political. Such politics are, however, not simply joyful and embracing of anxious living. Imagining lives otherwise requires engaging with ambivalences that anxious living enacts – ambivalences of simultaneous immobility and potentiality, of pain and empowerment, of suffocation, desire for breath or its end. The lecture will, thus, discuss how such ambivalence can enact ruptures, transformations, and negotiations of hegemonic norms of subjectivity, embodiment, and contemporary Western normative concepts of "proper human subjectivity." It will also consider how fighting for breath and for breathable lives is a matter of not only acts of and aspirations for change but also a matter of development of differential forms of political practices.

**Day 1: Lecture Layal Ftouni (Utrecht University)*****Vulnerability, Resilience and the Processing of Trauma in Art***

In this lecture, I explore the interplay between dynamics of vulnerability and resilience as they are played out in contemporary art practices that attend to subjective and collective experiences of trauma. Whilst our perpetual ever-present experience of trauma produces us as vulnerable subjects, the lecture seeks to query the relationship between

vulnerability as an ontological condition of our being and becoming in the world, and vulnerability as an effect of lived or historical trauma. In doing so, the lecture seeks to intervene in debates on the ethics of positive affect (*potentia*) as a way of overturning pain and suffering (Braidotti 2006) inflicted by the violent event. The lecture raises questions about the potentiality of this ethical stance when confronted with the insurmountability of trauma, both as an unknowable and inaccessible condition, but also as a permeant condition of life in ongoing conflict zones or settler colonial states. The lecture thus introduces resilience as a strategy of survivability that combines a politics of resistance enacted in the desire to live against all odds, and a reparative ethics of living enacted in the (im)possible forgetting/overcoming of trauma. With reference to artistic practices, the lecture seeks to investigate the ways art confronts the 'wounding' through strategies of resilience to traumas that paradoxically continue to possess and inhabit us (Pollock 2013)

**Day 2: Lecture by Kathrin Thiele (Utrecht University)**

***Vulnerability and/as Initial Condition: Returning (to) the question 'But who, we?'***

A socio-political approach to vulnerability conceives of it usually as a secondary state of being: Vulnerability as always already the lack of something that every-body should (primarily) possess, something that has provided first a wholeness that now is subtracted from. Yet, as Christina Sharpe writes in her recent book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*: "To be in the wake is also to recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not *only* known to ourselves and to each other *by* that force." (Sharpe 2016, 16). Things are thus more complicated. Continuing our discussion from day 1, my lecture aims to engage specifically with the precariously entangled ethico-onto-epistemological (Barad 2007) conditions of agency and/as vulnerability. In the lecture, I want to bring into conversation different accounts of agency, vulnerability and a collective 'we' that can be found in contemporary critical feminist debates. But instead of presenting different approaches as opposed to each other or as different 'turns', in an affirmative critical manner I want to read them together, diffract them with each other, to work toward possible (new) groundings for a 'we' in the Wynterian sense of 'being human as praxis' and/as becoming 'ecumenically human' (Wynter 2015). Thus, the question of a politics of vulnerability will not only be the analytical focus of our discussion, but we also aim to practice vulnerability in the exposure itself to the question 'But who, we?' (Derrida/Wynter).

**Day 2: Lecture by Eva Hayward (University of Arizona, US)**

***Medusa Effect: Colonial Racism, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Afterwardness of the World.***

Attending to psychic life, and the notion that vulnerability is a condition of "threat," this lecture proposes: vulnerability cannot be overcome, but when disavowed, produces the conditions for ongoing vulnerability as an act of aggression (violence). Studying ecological violence as an effect of vulnerability (psychical of threat), this lecture looks at the case study of coral bleaching, the expelling of photosynthetic zooxanthellae (plant-based parts of coral) that results in the death of corals. Even slight changes in water temperature, seawater salinity, and overexposure of toxicity increase bleaching. In

January 5, 2017, the United Nations Environment Program reported the probable extinction of corals within 50 years. This lecture turns to Ranjana Khanna's provocation that Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic figure of Medusa describes not only the threat of sexual difference but also racial difference (*Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, 2003). Freud's conflation of "primitivism" with women reveals not just the racial unconscious of psychoanalysis, but also how the colonial scene served as both "the threat of castration by the terrifying Medusa that is Africa" and its disavowal through racial violence. The effort to overcome threat (the vulnerability) is disavowal (the violent negation of vulnerability). Working with Khanna, Franz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, and Homi Bhabha, this lecture asks: How might we conceptualize coral bleaching, and more general ecological destruction, as an effect of colonial racism (vulnerability negated through violence) that is "World" building (Worlding)? In other words, what is the position of racial/sexual difference in Worlding, and how is ecological catastrophic not simply a symptom of World making, but a crisis necessary to ensure the World even through destruction? How might ecological vulnerability be both a position against disavowal (such a "climate denial"), while also an operation of Worlding that ensures ongoing violence?

**Course readings:**

*The course readings will be announced in due time*

**Schedule:**

Day 1:

09:00-13:00 Lecture 1 and 2 (with Q&A)

15:00-17:00 PhD project groups

Day 2:

09:00-13:00 Lecture 3 and 4 (with Q&A)

15:00-17:00 PhD project groups

Day 3:

09:00-11:00 Small groups (preparations for presentations)

11:00-13:00 Group presentations and final discussion (plenary session)

15:30-17:00 Doing Gender Public Lecture Event (Eva Hayward)

**Preparation (after the acceptance to the course):**

- **Course readings:** Upcoming soon
- **Paper** (2–5 pages describing research problem related to the participant's PhD thesis project) to be sent to the Local InterGender Course Coordinators Kathrin Thiele (k.thiele[at]uu.nl) and Magdalena Górska (m.a.gorska[at]uu.nl) and the InterGender Consortium Coordinator Edyta Just (edyta.just[at]liu.se). Remember to mark it with your name and the course name.

- All participants are expected to read the paper of their fellow group members before the course and be prepared to offer constructive comments in the group sessions and workshops. The papers will be made available online.

**Essay:**

- 10-15 pages to be handed in no later than 3 months after the course. One copy should be sent to the teacher, who chaired the group in which the student presented their paper at the course and who is going to evaluate it, and one to the InterGender Consortium Coordinator Edyta Just (edyta.just[at]liu.se). The teacher has 3 months to evaluate the essay.
- The essay should strike a balance between addressing a theme that has been part of course (lectures, discussions, reading material), and be relevant for participant's own research.
- The essay should, moreover, be considered as an exercise in doing a written presentation aimed at an academic readership not familiar with the author's PhD research. The essay should constitute a whole and explain relevant contexts.

**Accreditation and examination:**

1. 7,5 ECTS credits are given for active participation and a short paper, 2-5 pages (graded pass/fail) for 3 days course.
2. 15 ECTS credits are given for active participation plus an essay, to write an essay is optional, (graded pass/fail) for 3 days course.
3. The essay should be 10-15 pages. The selected topic shall be related to the course content and readings, and relate to the student's own research area. The essay is to be sent to the teacher as well as to the InterGender Consortium Coordinator no later than 3 months after the final day of the course. The teacher has 3 months to evaluate the essay.

**Course Certificate:**

In order to request the certificate, please send an e-mail to Edyta Just(edyta.just[at]liu.se).

The Consortium Coordinator issues, upon request, a certificate indicating to how many ECTS credits course participation is considered equal. It is the students' own responsibility to ask their institution about its accreditation rules and get the credit points registered at their respective higher education establishment.

**Applications should be written in English and include:**

- \* name, affiliation, full address, e-mail, phone, fax
- \* name and affiliation of PhD supervisor
- \* brief CV
- \* description of PhD project (1-2 pages)
- \* motivation: why do you want to participate in the course (1-2 pages)
- \* please, indicate if you are in the first/middle/last phase of your PhD research

**Information on Admission:**

1. Participants have to be registered as PhD students.
2. PhD students from all disciplines and countries are eligible.
3. Participants will be selected on the basis of an evaluation of their **CV, project description and a letter of motivation.**
4. If there are more applicants who qualify for participation, than there are places, the places will be distributed along the following criteria:
  - a) Students registered as PhD students at Partner Units will be prioritized for a maximum 80% of places. When the places are distributed among the Partner Unites, a good spread between these units will also be ensured.
  - b) Students registered as PhD students in other units at the Partner Higher Education Establishments will be prioritized for 20 % of the places. When the places are distributed among the Partner Higher Education Establishments, a good spread between these establishments will also be ensured. If places remain of the 80 % prioritized for PhD students registered at the Partner Units, these places will instead be prioritized for PhD students registered at the Partner Higher Education Establishments.
  - c) If the students according to a) and b) do not fill all the places, remaining places will be open for competition between all eligible and qualifying applicants from any higher education establishment.
5. If there are more eligible and qualified applicants for the a selection process will take place, which, in addition to academic quality and motivation/relevance, will use non-discriminatory selection criteria, which will ensure a spread of nationalities, regions, institutions and disciplines.
6. An additional lot drawing procedure will be used, if several eligible and in all respects equally qualified applicants are competing for the limited number of places in the different categories
7. In case of too many eligible and qualifying applicants, a waiting list will also be organized, and places will be offered to applicants on this list, should some of the selected participants have to cancel.
8. The consortium coordinator selects participants under the auspice of the board, and is required to report to the board how selection is distributed between the consortium partners. If the board finds that the distribution is uneven, the consortium coordinator shall compensate for this in future selections.

There is no tuition fee for the course.

Travel and accommodation expenses are to be covered by students or, if applicable, by their respective home institutions.

**IMPORTANT**

**For fully self-funded and/or non-EU PhD candidates, there is a limited fund available for support with travel/accommodation. Please specify in your application if you want to be considered for this and on what grounds.**