

SAMSTAG / WINTER SEASON



Alex Martinis Roe: To Become Two

Care Labour and the Archive: radical intimacies in the work of Alex Martinis Roe

I have discussed recently the roots of care¹, picking up on its linguistic, philosophical and sociopolitical genealogy and its connection to ideas of collectivity. This connection of care to the collective—so eagerly discarded by patriarchy for many hundreds of years—has been finding its way into feminist and civil society practices in the last decades. The sixties marked a very important historical moment, where the concept of care was seen almost in terms of two parallel worlds: on the one hand, neoliberalism and its propagation of individualism linked to the Enlightenment's legacies of care as duty and as self-betterment, and on the other feminism and the civil rights movements, and their call for care as a radical collective political act.

For white conservative heteronormative patriarchy defined by neoliberalism, the sign of progress is to depart from any form of collectivity and interdependency. For the civil rights movement and second-wave feminism, there existed a different type of care against patriarchal systems (be it health care or domestic and reproductive care labor) that—as Silvia Federici, one of the main figures of the movement, argued—“by denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone.”² Today, the pandemic sheds a harsh light on the state of disarray care is in, both collective and individual. There never has been a more avid individualistic way of performing care and self-care, and a more rapid deterioration of collective care at the same time, with care industries being simply global revenue giants. If the pandemic made something extremely clear, it is that this type of individualistic translation of care and “self-care” has been extremely harmful for our existence and threatens our future. This is possibly why Alex Martinis Roe's artistic practice is as relevant to me now—and even more timely—as when I first encountered it in the Netherlands a few years back.³ Her work is a visual extension of the politics and ethics of care.

Martinis Roe's practice stems from a desire to engage in dialogue with the histories and genealogies of feminisms. This is done through a care-full research into their archives, practices and oral histories, through encounters and the forming of kinship between her and her films' subjects. It is a very meticulous and multi-faceted way of understanding but also confronting feminism's past, by in fact creating an archive anew: a reconstruction, a mélange and a repositioning of the brilliant work of various feminist groups, through the eyes and mind of the artist. The process in itself is an act of care—an act of radical care—primarily because it demands a diligent and committed relationship to reveal hidden herstories of feminisms: it is an act of unearthing the sidelined (by patriarchy) stories of collective endeavours—of politicisation and of kinship—that managed to metamorphose and affect their surrounding worlds and networks. This act of shining light onto these genealogies furthermore sets the ground for exchange with today's feminisms and their representatives.

Another reading that is clear in her practice is the act of repair. It is not through a scrutinizing, reframing or labelling of a past that the act occurs, but through rather an attempt to create synapses between what she identifies subtly as points of departure, towards an identification and a continuation of specific values that remain timeless and urgent today. It is, as such, a creation of an a-temporal lineage that probes for a discursive act between the past and the future life of feminisms. This is why, if viewed as an unorthodox, radical archive of the living feminist archive, the totality of the volume of Martinis Roe's works can be seen as diligent repair labour towards the idea of feminism itself.

ALEX MARTINIS ROE / TO BECOME TWO

Through her practice over the last decade, Martinis Roe has managed to create a constant flow of information, inspiration and reciprocation between feminist positions and political subjectivities of then and now, and it seems as if she aims to repair the severed lines of communication throughout time. Most importantly, the artistic practice of Martinis Roe is not just an act of repair against patriarchal injustices but also a generator of knowledge, even if this knowledge is created in fleeting moments of encounter with the work.

The radicality of this endeavour lies in how the works presented in this exhibition are successfully breaking the rigid epistemic tropes of patriarchy in search of a timeless storytelling that also shifts according to its audience. The work changes and is enriched through the connections that each of us makes with what we see and hear. Inevitably, new and very intimate forms of connection and care are created. It is a registry of interconnected lives that are lived together, and care-fully. Additionally, it is an intimate portrayal of all those wayward lives that have—to use the words of Saidiya Hartman⁴—liberated themselves from normalisation, oppression, sexism and violence. This intimacy in itself creates new knowledges, and certainly opens paths to understand other political dynamics unfolding through feminist living. And intimacy holds a potential for radical reform and transformation of oppression.⁵

Thus, the way to approach Martinis Roe's oeuvre would be as a lexicon of radical care through an unorthodox archiving that remains outside the formats and morphologies of patriarchy: there is no condemnation of past mistakes, there are no rigid categorizations, and there is no timeline to follow. It is rather a glimpse into living otherwise. And even this "otherwise" is fluid, since the readings into Martinis Roe's work will be different in every place that her work is shown. Every new person, in fact, immaterially adds to the work through the connections they form with it. When encountering the work of Martinis Roe, one is reminded of Lynne Segal's description of the cultural renaissance; in her book *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*, she describes the feminism offered to her and her peers as, "a polyphony of women, determined to portray female futures with lives that would offer fuller, richer possibilities than any of their creators had ever hitherto imagined for themselves".

I cannot speak on behalf of the artist's imagination, but through the act of care-fully collecting the sheer force of release from patriarchy that occurs through the work and lives of the feminist pasts presented here, there is certainly a future painted in my mind. It is one full of care, sisterhood and radical collectivity.

— iLiana Fokianaki

ILIANA FOKIANAKI is a curator, theorist and educator based in Athens and Rotterdam. Her research focuses on formations of power and how they manifest under the influence of geopolitics, national identity and cultural and anthropological histories.

1 iLiana Fokianaki, 'The Bureau of Care: Notes on the Care-less and Care-full', <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/359463/the-bureau-of-care-introductory-notes-on-the-care-less-and-care-full/>

2 Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*, Bristol, UK: Falling Wall, 1975

3 For her exhibition at Casco Art Institute (then Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory), Utrecht, *To Become Two*, please look at: <https://alexmartinisroe.com/To-Become-Two>

4 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2019

5 Robyn Wiegman, 'The intimacy of critique: Ruminations on Feminism as a Living Thing', *Feminist Theory*, issue 11, p.83



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Images: (L—R, top to bottom): *Our Future Network*, 2016, film still of the Proposition 10 Theory in More Formats, developed with Vasso Belia / *A story from Circolo della rosa*, 2014, film still of a photograph courtesy of the Milan Women's Bookstore co-operative archive / *For the joy of being together, they didn't have to agree*, 2016, film still of a photograph courtesy of Ca la dona, Barcelona / *Our Future Network*, 2016, film still of the proposition The Practice of (Public) Speaking, developed in collaboration with Cécile Bally / *To Become Two*, 2017, installation detail Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe / *Our Future Network*, 2016, film still of Proposition 3 Architectures for Encounter, developed with Fotini Lazaridou Hatzigoga

Cover: *Our Future Network*, 2016, cropped film still of the proposition Productive Refusals, developed in collaboration with Helena Reckitt

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Samstag wishes to express our gratitude to Alex Martinis Roe for her commitment to her singular practice of depth, quality, and insight. The carefully resolved nature of Alex's works belies the considerable research and aesthetic deliberation applied to each project; a quietly confident method of working that results in precise and thoughtful works. An exemplar of this approach is *To Become Two*. Our sincere thanks also go to the author of this catalogue iLiana Fokianaki who offers a timely reminder of the significance and impact of collective care during times of precarity and change.



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