1. Relevance
In light of the dramatic social, cultural, economic, political and intellectual changes that have taken place on the international arena since September 11, the ‘War on Terror’, the transformation wrought by globalization and the shifts in political and ethical values, we feel the need to rethink the dominant concepts and theories that define and legitimate the study of democratic citizenship, particularly with regard to the question of gender. It is our belief that the thinking that underpins social and political practices is in dire need of a more rigorous inquiry, one that takes into account the altered conditions of possibility for thought and action in a globalized world. The liberal-democratic paradigm that has dominated social and political thought is being challenged; it emerged within the historical horizon of the nation-state system, but seems to be withering away only to give rise to a new economic and political configuration: an economically divided world dominated by occidental trans-national confederates. In order to study this new global state of affairs we need new paradigms of thought, new concepts and theories when approaching the questions of gender, democracy and freedom.

2. Project proposal
2.1. Background
This research project has evolved out of a cross-disciplinary research group on feminist and gender theory that has worked together over a period of six years at the University of Bergen. Our shared interest in theoretical questioning has led us towards a more rigorous interrogation of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of some of the concepts that are currently being marshalled in the name of democracy and freedom, among them, “citizenship”, “human rights”, “subject”, “sexed bodies”, etc. But above all, we wish to explore the possibility of developing and discovering new modes of thinking that are compatible not only with the present, but that will allow us to think future configurations of gender, democracy and freedom.

2.2. Main problematic and research questions
We hold that thinking is a mode of action in itself. It is crucial to develop new modes of thought to more adequately deal with the rapidly changing social and cultural reality, able to address new kinds of social subject, new kinds of political questions and new social relations with more detailed and nuanced conceptual models than those previously available. Theoretical reflection is not a luxury that occurs after social and technological changes but must accompany them if they are to be adequately integrated into our daily lives. As stated in the title of our project, we contend that theoretical concepts not only reflect the complexity of reality, but also produce reality as complex. The project’s main problematic will focus on the question: Which theories and mode(s) of thought will allow for a thorough rethinking of the questions of gender, democracy and freedom in our global and technological era?

Freedom constitutes one of the overriding questions in our research project. However, serious reflection on the concept of freedom is scarce in gender research. As we see it, it is pivotal that the concept of freedom is being thought through in a philosophical manner while being reflected upon in conjunction with a gender problematic. The question of freedom
ought not to be reduced to the pragmatics of politics, be it liberal egalitarianism or communitarian measures of affirmative action, nor should it be restricted to notions of liberation or emancipation. There seems to be a tendency within gender research either to take the concept of freedom for granted (and thus leave it unquestioned), or to confuse different traditions of thinking on freedom. Such confusion happens, for instance, when the liberal tradition of negative freedom (the legacy of Wollstonecraft) is conflated with the existential tradition of freedom as transcendence (the legacy of de Beauvoir). In this project, we would like to throw new light on the nexus between different philosophical notions of freedom and different gender conceptions.

Within the parameters of the overall project, the individual researchers will explore three different research areas: i) citizenship ii) bodies and sexualities and iii) new technologies. Theoretically, the project will explore poststructuralist, deconstructive, post-colonial as well as queer perspectives. A common orientation for all the projects is an acknowledgment that they operate within a post-human(ist), post-ethical, post-nation-state, post-emancipatory horizon in which there is no overriding meta-theory that can serve as a universal, absolute law or value. The theories that will be called upon to answer to the new demands of inquiry are those that question traditional notions of identity (sexual, racial, ethnic, national, religious), that is, theories that challenge the borders and boundaries of identity constructions that have hitherto dominated thinking on these questions.

The three research areas – citizenship, bodies & sexualities, and new technologies – are closely intertwined, and will be elaborated upon through a web of thematic clusters, such as: gender, sexuality and the nations-state, sexual difference and sexuate rights, equality/egalitarianism and difference/hierarchy as philosophical concepts, freedom vs. emancipation, euro-centrism and the universal subject, bare life and naked bodies, bio-politics and governmentality in transnational contexts, sovereignty and sacredness, radical democracy, virtual citizenship, depersonalization and human rights, the aesthetics of body/gender/personhood, the politics of imperceptibility, planetarianism, (inhuman) force beyond the subject, etc.

The main corpus of the project’s research will be performed by two individual researchers to be funded within the project, one senior researcher (in a 2-year position) who will study the concept of citizenship through a critical reflection upon the gendered and sexualized symbolic and cultural assumptions of the modern nation-state (see project description 2.3.1.A), and one Ph.D project, to be defined within any of the three research areas.

In additions to these participants, the project will include a number of partners from our local institution as well as from other national and international institutions. All of the partners will contribute with self-funded research to the project. The selection of partners is done on the basis of research expertise in at least two of the defined research areas. This entails that each of the individual projects, even though it will mainly fall under one of the research areas, will intersect with at least one of the other areas. Each of the participants will contribute with research articles, and they will take active part in the discussions in our joint workshops, seminars and conferences.

2.3. Individual subprojects
2.3.1. A. Randi Gressgård, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Stavanger/Senior Researcher, SKOK, University of Bergen.
Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities
Project description: “Bondage and Boundaries: Gendered Citizenship and Radical Democracy”
Gressgård will pursue a 2-year research project within the theme “Rights and politics” in the Norwegian Research Council’s announcement. Her project will scrutinize the gendered historical and philosophical premises upon which the concepts of democracy, freedom, equality and rights rely, while focussing on the conditions of possibility for radical democratic citizenship in a globalized world. The study will result in a book manuscript in English.

The study will link up with a number of feminist studies that deal with the gendered dimensions of the modern nation-state over the last two decades, studies that have analyzed the connection between gender/sexuality, nation and concepts such as individual freedom, equality, egalitarianism, autonomy and sovereignty. Black feminists, deconstructionist feminists and queer theorists alike have pursued the question concerning how the modern, egalitarian nation-state – founded on the principle and notion of equality and freedom of individuals – implies and (re)produces a specific notion of gender and sexuality. In turn, this notion of gender and sexuality gives rise to specific approaches to gender equality and freedom. The starting premise of this study is thus that the modern nation-state and the liberal democracy characteristic of it are culturally and historically contingent upon, among other things, particular notions of femininity and masculinity.

And yet, one may ask, as does Saba Mahmood (2005: 13), whether or not the liberal presuppositions have become naturalized in Western scholarship on gender, even among scholars who endorse the basic premises of deconstruction, and thus implicitly question the naturalization of the modern, universal, transcendental and autonomous subject. According to Mahmood, the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion (14). For instance, Mahmood contends that Butler’s concept of agency is developed primarily in contexts where norms are thrown into question or are subject to resignification. Agency is thus a political praxis aimed at unsettling dominant discourses of gender and sexuality (21), inasmuch as Butler endeavours to create the possibility of a radical democratic politics. In this regard, Butler’s analysis of power remains, in Mahmood’s view, grounded in an agonistic framework characteristic of modern, liberal thought (22).

Mahmood’s post-Butler approach calls for a model that allows for dimensions of human action, whose ethical and political status do not fit with the binary logic of repression and resistance, in part because they are indebted to other reasons and histories. Whether or not Mahmood’s model is more compelling than Butler’s becomes a pressing question, given the premises of (de)constructionist philosophy upon which both models are based. However, the problem is not, as one might think, the (de)constructionist framework per se. Rather, the main problem seems to be the request for a “politically responsible scholarship” (38) within such a framework. The crux of the matter is the political ethics that seems to be constitutive of the feminist and liberal theoretical problem definition, which in turn conceptualizes freedom within the binary opposition of agency versus domination.

According to Vikki Bell, the political and ethical questions at stake have always been the primary issues for Butler, but in her recent works she has made the relationship between performativity and political ethics explicit (2007: 19, 20). Bell notes that both Precarious Life (2004a) and Undoing Gender (2004b) take up the task of showing the ethical implications of the (presumed) fact that “I am outside myself from the start”. Butler is concerned with the primary sociality of the subject and with the precarious nature of the social ties that sustain one’s subjectivity. Significantly, she connects the exposure to one’s own vulnerability with an accompanying sense of incomprehension. In this way, Butler makes an emphatic link between political ethics and knowledge (see also Butler 2005). She not only elucidates the political implications of her understanding of the subject and its coexistence with others, and the ethical issues arising from such a constructionist perspective; in fact she appears to have gone
in the opposite direction, as it were: from “theorizing the political” (cf. Butler and Scott 1992) to “politicizing the theoretical”.

Gressgård’s project affirms the constructionist understanding of social norms as constitutive of the subject, without thereby ascribing to the political ethics of Butler’s radical democracy. From a (de)constructionist point of view, it seems reasonable to subscribe to the supposition that constative claims to some degree are performative, without at the same time assuming that the theoretical always already involves political ethics. The inevitable relationship between power and knowledge is thus sustained, without thereby presupposing a neat correspondence between the realm of political ethics (accountability, responsibility) and theory (intelligibility, knowledge). On the contrary, Gressgård questions whether or not a deconstruction of the dominant social norms necessarily presupposes an “irresponsible” stance. In this context, irresponsibility is to be understood in accordance with George Bataille’s theoretical writings (1997). Likewise, one may ask whether or not politics qua project is counter-productive with regard to transgression of norms, and furthermore whether or not the concept of freedom to which the notion of gender equality alludes must presuppose subordination and hierarchy. These questions form the basis for a further investigation of the condition of possibility for radical democratic citizenship in a globalized world, and will be discussed in relation to, among others, Wendy Brown’s deconstructive perspective on politics, freedom and resistance (1995, 2006).

However, the most central authorships with regard to the problem for discussion will be those of Georgio Agamben and Georges Bataille. If we conceive of gender and sexuality in terms of eroticism, as does Bataille (1986), and if we incorporate Agamben’s (1998, 2005) concept of “the state of exception” into this framework, we may approach the modern state and society from a slightly different angle. This entails a different – although not completely different – perspective than the one Butler takes when calling for recognition of those who are silenced by dominant discourses. For Butler these are silenced by virtue of being included and yet excluded from the moral and political community of the nation-state. Informed by Bataille and Agamben, who each in their way deal with the modern concepts of sovereignty and freedom in relation to the concepts of state, society and community, Gressgård intends to push Butler’s deconstructionist understanding of radical democracy even further, rather than turning towards a political ethics (which is somehow a non-constructionist turn).

The project will also have an empirical focus, without being based on interviews or fieldwork. The empirical part of the project aims at examining the cornerstones of the nation-state and the concepts of liberal democracy and freedom through a deconstruction of the symbolic structure of sado-masochism (SM). Through a text-based analysis of SM, the project will explore the basic structure of the nation-state with regard to component concepts within modern political ideology and prevailing values and norms. Informed by both Agamben and Bataille, SM will be conceived of as simultaneously transgressive and preserving of the prevailing norms and symbolic boundaries of the modern nation-state. It is precisely the concurrent transgression and preservation of norms and cultural/symbolic boundaries that make SM an appropriate object of study, a cultural phenomenon through which one can reflect critically on the discursive pillars of the nation-state. A philosophical examination of SM will expose the tension between autonomy, dominance and control on the one hand, and dependency and submission on the other. These paradoxical workings of power pertain to the liberal state, and will be elaborated through corresponding oppositional concepts such as equality/difference, liberty/encumbrance, rights/needs, individual/family, self-interest/selflessness, public/private and contract/consent (see Brown 1995).

The study will seek to expose the gendered and sexualized dimensions of such component concepts in relation to SM. By virtue of being an exemplary area with respect to modern “eroticism” and at the same time, a mimicry or a mirror image of the constitutive
structure of the modern state – sovereignty and “homo sacer” (to use Agamben’s terms) – SM qua symbolic structure exposes the constitutive borders and boundaries that are at stake. In this respect, SM could be regarded as a catachresis, i.e. a kind of perverse reflection of the paradoxical boundaries that in the same gesture both include and exclude gendered and sexual practices of this kind. The salient question is whether or not one should search for a political-ethical or juridical solution to this “state of exception”, and call for moral and juridical recognition within the borders and boundaries of the nation-state, as some SM-organisations choose to do. Needless to say, from Gressgård’s point of view, there is a need for more rigorous questioning of the concepts of democracy, freedom and equality in regard to SM (and other marginalized practices) than the above perspective renders possible or intelligible. This is exactly what this study aims to do, based on existing textual material from SM-organisations on internet and theoretical material from studies on SM within the humanities and social sciences.

2.3.1. B. Ph.D fellow – to be advertised (100% position – a 3-year project to be funded within the project)

Project description: To be defined within any of the three research areas: OPEN TITLE

2.3.1. C. Research fellowships:
- 2 month research leave for the senior professors, professor Vigdis Broch-Due, professor Ellen Mortensen to be funded within the project during the last year of the project period.

2.3.2. Other projects (self-funded)
2.3.2. A. SKOK research group, University of Bergen
- Professor/Director Ellen Mortensen, SKOK.
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/citizenship
  Topic: “Sexing Nietzsche’s Will To Power: Freedom, Aesthetics and Sexed Being”
- Professor Vigdis Broch-Due, Social Anthropology, U of Bergen.
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/citizenship
- Postdoctoral fellow Kari Jegerstedt, Comparative Literature/SKOK.
  Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities
  Topic: “The African Connection: Reading as an Oppositional Force in a Globalized Area”
- Postdoctoral fellow Gaudencia Mutema, SKOK.
  Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities
  Topic: “Performing Gender: Gender Identity and School Performance among Immigrant African Children in Norway”
- Postdoctoral fellow Sissel Rosland, History, University of Bergen.
  Research areas: citizenship/new technologies
  Topic: “Between Security and Liberty: Gendering Right(s) and Freedom(s) in the War on Terror”
- Associate Professor Kristin Sampson, Philosophy/SKOK.
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/citizenship
  Topic: “The Freedom of the Other: Ethical Consequences of Irigaray’s Conception of Sexual Difference”
- Another research group located at SKOK comprises two young male scholars who form the editorial collective of *Trikster: Queer Nordic Journal*, a newly launched electronic journal: **Mathias Danbolt** (Art History/Photography) and **Fredrik Langeland** (Cultural Studies). Danbolt and Langeland, who both do research in queer studies and masculinities studies, have applied for Ph.D. fellowships at the University of Bergen. They will use this project as a support network for their individual research, and they will take part in the local activities in conjunction with the project.

### 2.3.2. B. National partners: (NB. Due to the 30 page limit, we are not able to enclose all confirmations from all our national partners, but these can be provided upon request)
- Associate Professor **Agnes Bolsø**, Sociology/Gender Studies, NTNU.  
  Research area: bodies and sexualities/citizenship  
  Topic: “Queer Critique of Gay Sexual Politics”
- Research leader **Cathrine Egeland**, Work Research Institute (AFI), Oslo.  
  Research area: new technologies/bodies and sexualities  
  Topic: “Feminism, Power and Critique”
- Associate Professor **Anne Britt Flemmen**, Sociology, University of Tromsø.  
  Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities  
  Topic: “Intimate Citizenship”
- Research Director **Ann Therese Lotherington**, Norut - Northern Research Institute Tromsø.  
  Research areas: citizenship/new technologies  
  Topic: “The Significance of Multiple Citizenship for Democratic Participation”
- Associate Professor/Director **Wenche Mülheisen**, Gender Studies, U of Stavanger.  
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/new technologies (mass media)  
  Topic: “Normative and Counter-Normative Performativity of Intimacies and Sexualities in Popular Culture and the Arts”

### 2.3.2. C. International partners
- Assistant Professor **Ulrika Dahl**, Gender Studies, Södertörn Högskola, Sweden.  
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/citizenship  
  Topic: “Femme as Figuration: Rethinking (Queer) Femininity”
- Professor **Nicole Fermon**, Political Science, Fordham University, New York, USA.  
  Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities  
  Topic: “Politics, Conversion, Assimilation”
- Professor **Elizabeth Grosz**, Women’s and Gender Studies, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA.  
  Research areas: bodies and sexualities/new technologies  
  Topic: “The Animal, the Human and the Inhuman: Thinking Life beyond the Subject”
- Professor/Director **Marianne Liljeström**, Women’s Studies, University of Turku, Finland.  
  Research areas: citizenship/bodies and sexualities  
  Topic: “Geopolitics and the Production of Feminist Knowledge”
- Assistant Professor **Jenny Sundén**, Media Technology at the School of Computer Science and Communication, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm, Sweden.  
  Research areas: new technologies/bodies and sexualities  
  Topic: “Queering Technology: Techno-Corporeality and Post-human Feminism”
- Assistant Professor **Jami Weinstein**, Gender Studies, Mount Holyoke College, Mass, USA.  
  Research areas: new technologies/bodies and sexualities  
2.3.3. Rutgers University: SKOK has formalized an exchange agreement with the Department for Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers University, State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, USA. We will encourage all funded researchers within the project to spend time at this institution during the project period. Moreover, we will seek active cooperation with different scholars at Rutgers, but these collaborations will not be formalized with individual scholars (with the exception of Elizabeth Grosz), but will be done within the framework of the consortium agreement.

3. Project plan
3.1. Plan for the funded projects
The two funded projects will be predominantly theoretical projects. Thus, it is difficult to provide a detailed plan that can account for different phases of these individual projects. Even if they might involve empirical work, it is premature to determine their actual course of development. We will, however, encourage each of the fellows spend a research term at Rutgers, as already mentioned (see 2.3.3.). The individual projects will, needless to say, result in separate publications of books or a doctoral thesis at the end of the project period. Funding within the project for research stays at Rutgers will be required for the funded researcher (Gressgård), as well as for the seniors, Broch-Due and Mortensen, while funding for research abroad is included in the doctoral fellowship. (See grant application form for the dates/years for the joint activities.)

3.2. Project leadership, organization, partners and consortium
Professor Ellen Mortensen will function as the project leader. The seniors, Broch-Due, Gressgård, Grosz and Mortensen, will be responsible for anchoring the joint research results. Part of the motivation for applying for this project is the firm belief that a solid network of scholars from different disciplines working with the same interest in theoretical and philosophical questioning will sharpen the intellectual exchange and will, in the last instance, produce new and vital knowledge for all parties involved. Accordingly, many of the joint activities planned during the project period will aim at creating common arenas for intellectual interrogation that will benefit the ongoing research. The most important events will center around yearly gatherings where all the participants will meet for 3-day workshops, one in Bergen (at SKOK), one in New Brunswick (at Rutgers) and one in Paris (at the Franco-Norwegian Research Center). Organizing a workshop in Paris will also enable us to involve some of our French and European connections that share some of our research interests. In addition, we will organize a series of research seminars in Bergen, in principle two local seminars per year directed towards the national/Nordic participants in the project as well as the research community at large. The seminars will focus on the most central research questions and give us an opportunity to prepare for the joint publications (see 5.2). At the end of the project period we will organize an international conference in Bergen with all the participants present.

Given the fact that most of the research within the project is self-funded, it is crucial that we create these joint arenas for intellectual exchange. Adequate funding for these meetings is therefore a priority. In addition, we will seek funding to buy research time (of 2 months each) for two of the senior researchers, Broch-Due and Mortensen, during the last year of the project period. This is a particularly vital measure in order to ensure that the project meets its goals for joint publications and other academic outputs.
4. Positioning, ethics, publication etc.

4.1. Strategic positioning
This project situates itself centrally in relation to the strategic plans of SKOK, of the University of Bergen and nationally in the sense that it highlights the question of gender, democracy and freedom. We believe that we will be able to contribute with new and vital knowledge for our research centre as well as for the university and society at large. We have gathered some of the most talented scholars in this field of research, both on a local, a national and an international level.

4.2. Relevance for society at large
We are convinced that our project will result in important studies that will be useful for policy makers and scholars alike, in Norway as well as abroad. We will publish our results both on a national arena as well as on an international one. Most research results will be published in English, but some will also appear in Norwegian.

4.3. Research ethics
All research done within the parameters of the project will attempt to attain the highest standards of research ethics in our individual as well as collective activities, even as we question the concept of ethics as it is commonly appropriated within gender research. This is especially relevant to the researchers doing empirical research, but applies likewise to all research activity.

4.4. Equality and gender perspective
Since this is a project that is gender related in its overall perspective, it will be most relevant for any institution or state interested in gender policies. Most researchers working in the field of gender studies are women, and consequently there are mostly women researchers participating in the project. We have, however, made a concerted effort in attaching to us talented, young male scholars, who we consider to be potential applicants and research fellows formally connected to SKOK in the future (see 2.3.2.A)

5. Communication of results
5.1. Communication with the public
We will in the course of the project open up our local seminars to the public at large as well as to scholars in Bergen and in Norway. All scholarly activity conducted abroad will also be open to any interested party. All partners will be encouraged to take part in public debates in their respective countries. Many of them are already in the habit of appearing publicly, be it on TV, on the radio, in the newspapers or in journals of interest to the general public.

5.2. Publication plan
The funded part of the project plans to produce one individual book manuscript (Gressgård) as well as one doctoral thesis. In addition, the project will result in the publication of three anthologies, or alternatively, special thematic issues of international research journals. Each of the research areas should be covered by one joint international publication and each of the participants must contribute to one or more of these publications. All along, the scholars will be expected to produce individual scholarly articles to be published in research journals and chapters in academic books as part of the project. Some participants in the consortium have already collaborated on two book projects, and given that all partners already have proved themselves to be productive researchers, we expect them to deliver results according to the publication plan.
6. References and select bibliography


