

F E E



L I N G

B A D

THIS FANZINE
WAS MADE IN CONNECTION WITH THE FILM "WORKING ON IT"

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN SABINA BAUMANN & KARIN MICHALSKI & MANY ARTISTS,
ACTIVISTS & THEORISTS.

WWW.WORKINGONIT.DE

THE TITLE REFERS TO ANN CVETKOVICH'S TERM „FEELING BAD“ IN: AN ARCHIVE OF FEELINGS,
TRAUMA, SEXUALITY, AND LESBIAN PUBLIC CULTURES, DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2003.

EDITOR: KARIN MICHALSKI

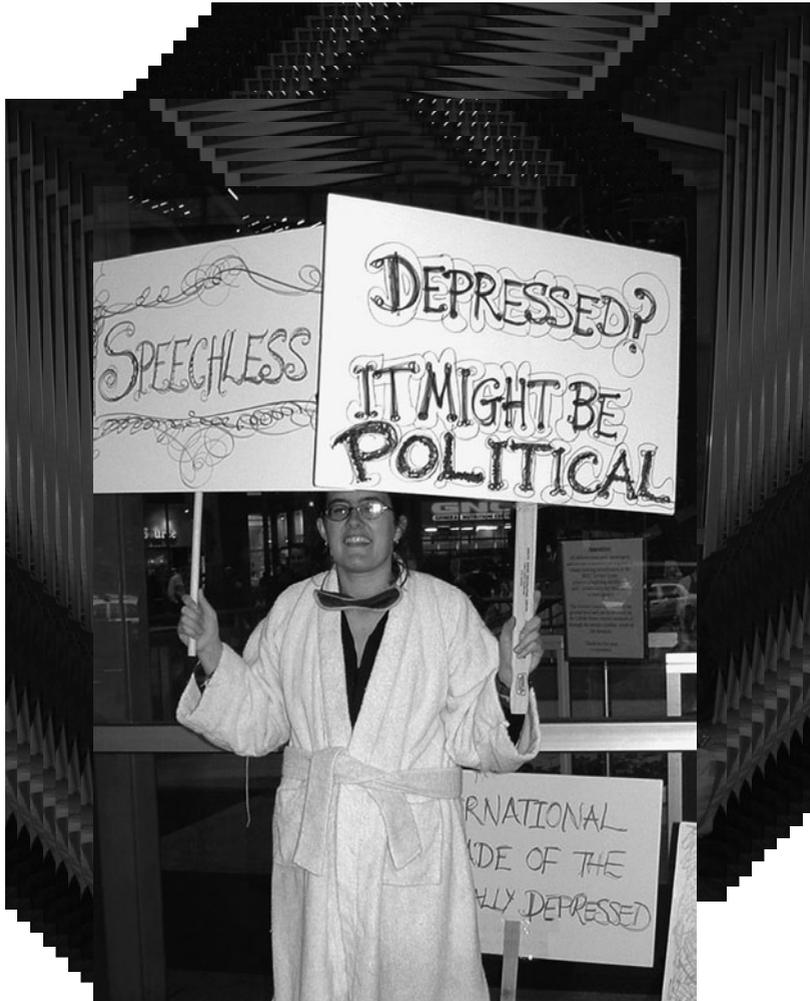
A CONVERSATION WITH ANN CVETKOVICH BY KARIN MICHALSKI & RENATE LORENZ

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SPECIAL THANKS TO: SABINA BAUMANN, RENATE LORENZ, WASSAN ALI,
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ESPECIALLY ANN CVETKOVICH, K8 HARDY & TEKTEK

QUEERING IDOLS POSTER BY SABINA BAUMANN

ART WORK PAGE 9 & 10 BY K8 HARDY: „TOALLTHEG*%ISI"VELOVEDBEFORE". 2009, INSTALLATION
VIEW, PHOTO: FARZADOWRANG / COURTESY REENASPAILINGSFINEART, NEW YORK



FEELING BAD

- FEEL TANK CHICAGO -
from the First International Parade of the Politically Depressed
Chicago, May 1, 2003

FEELING BAD

a conversation with Ann Cvetkovich

ANN CVETKOVICH is a writer and activist. She is Associate Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Texas at Austin and she is the author of several publications, including *An Archive of Feelings, Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Duke University Press, 2003. Together with Janet Staiger and Ann Reynolds she is the editor of *Political Emotions*, Routledge, 2010.

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- FEELINGS -

- The film 'working on it' was produced as a collaboration between artists, theorists, and activists over a period of two years and we started with 15 interviews that tried to figure out where and how the interviewees are confronted with norms of sexuality and gender in their everyday life. Through your work – especially the Public Feelings project and your book An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures – it became clear to me that by featuring the interviews, the film in fact is based on a collection of experiences of 'feeling bad': reflecting feeling bad at work places (this includes also being 'at work' in self-organized art and activist circles), in social situations, with friends.

A.C.: As I see it, your film begins from lived experience and asks how it can form the basis for more structural or systemic forms of analysis. That work can happen when individual experience is rendered collective by bringing people together in a public space, as you have done, or by putting their statements together through the use of the documentary form, where editing allows for the juxtaposition of statements to make new meanings. The process can also include a Benjaminian attention to the lyrical detail that gives rise to new social meanings. By that I mean that the process of articulating one's experience in a collective and oral format can give rise to phrases, images, keywords, or moments of experience that are resonant with larger meanings. Rather than taking the form of abstract concepts or theories, new ways of



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thinking can emerge from and be embedded in the texture and details of interviews and descriptive accounts of experience.

- Yes, our film tracks how some of the protagonists fight against notions of feeling bad by developing terms such as 'sexual labor' – a term that addresses the constant expenditures of dealing with interpellations and self-technologies in the field of sexuality, gender and labor – or they work on means, such as language analysis – showing how the two-gender system is based on language and looking for ways to invent more space for gender-queers in language. Even though it seemed important to us not to stay with a denomination of feeling bad, but to more or less leave bad feelings behind, I was blown away when I saw the slogan: 'Depressed? It Might Be Political,' an activist slogan you quoted in one of your articles. Your aim seems to be to stay with feelings, especially with 'feeling bad,' to deal with them, instead of leaving them behind as quickly as possible for a more distanced and intellectual access. This seems somehow crosswise to feminist or anti-racist approaches that criticize being positioned as someone who feels instead as someone who thinks.

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A.C.: You're right that we consider feeling to be a kind of thinking rather than to be that which thinking must transcend or distance itself from. Although this might be the thrust of some critiques of experience within feminism, the use of experience as a basis for theory also has a long tradition within feminism, as my invocation of consciousness-raising suggests. The Public Feelings project makes a return to the history of feminist consciousness raising. Despite the many critiques of this method or the idea that the personal is political, I am curious about a return to old-school feminist ideas that have been repudiated, and I continue to find it valuable to begin the process of collective thinking and discovery by asking each person at an event, whether in the classroom, at a conference, or at a meeting, to make a statement that includes both their thoughts and their feelings about the topic at hand.

The slogan 'Depressed? It Might be Political' was formulated by Feel Tank Chicago and used in conjunction with their 'International Parade

of the Politically Depressed' events in which demonstrators showed up in their pajamas and bathrobes. Lauren Berlant, one of the members of Feel Tank Chicago, has written about how feeling bad or depressed is connected to being stuck or at an impasse, and she suggests that being at an impasse does not have to mean failure – it's important to be patient with impasse, to move around in it in order to see what it might have to offer. It's important to develop accounts of the feeling of being stuck, of not knowing what to do. And this might be one of the values of 'working on it' – that it articulates the places where people are experiencing difficulties in the workplace and where their ability to think or act on it breaks down.

- When one first hears the slogan 'Depressed? It Might Be Political,' being depressed seems not too bad and even funny, it seems to offer a kind of disidentification with depression: neither to identify with the feeling, nor to avoid it, but to find a way to deal with it that seems like a tactical misunderstanding of feelings that only pretend to be your own feelings. How is it possible to represent bad feelings at all, without recalling stereotypes and conventional narrations such as pity? How can feelings become 'public feelings,' sites of publicity and community formation, as you argue in your article?

A.C.: I am working on these ideas in my new book, *Depression: A Public Feelings Project*, which was partly inspired by a conference that Feel Tank Chicago organized in 2004 called "Depression: What is It Good For?" The book emerges from the collective discussions generated by taking a key word like 'depression' and kicking it around. I am grappling with the medicalization of depression, which often seems to suppress and manage capitalist and neoliberal cultures that systematically make people feel bad about themselves in ways that they think of as personal rather than social. But the book is also about the forms of depression that afflict activists, academics, and artists who are committed to social change and so often find themselves feeling discouraged or frustrated or inadequate. I'd like to create more space for discussion of those feelings and how we negotiate them; as your film suggests, even after





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multiple generations of feminism, the workplace remains a location of trouble, including emotional trouble. The Public Feelings project tries to reframe our understandings of politics and focus on the complexity of the stories we might need to tell about ordinary life, including the workplace. We need different ways of telling stories.²



- ACTIVISM -

- You are part of a 'Public Feelings' group in Texas. Could you please tell us about the work that you did with this group?

A.C.: The Public Feelings group in Austin started in the wake of September 11, 2001 and national meetings in Chicago and New York that were organized by Lauren Berlant and Janet Jakobsen.³ We were interested in exploring the role of feelings in public life, including our own emotional response to the current political scene, especially the Bush administration, neoliberalisms, and the complex affective states generated by media and religion. Under neoliberalism, the family is asked to do a lot of caring work, including taking care of emotions, which is one reason why it's important to take a look at the workplace as the scene of feelings and relationships and collectivity. Neoliberalism's emphasis on cultivating a self who is efficient and productive in the workplace gives rise to what gets called depression when those processes fail.

We were also looking for new ways to generate intellectual life, inspired by activism, salons, cells, and other kinds of collectives, with an eye to their utopian possibilities. I've led a group in Austin for over a decade now. It has waxed and waned because in order to make the group work for me both intellectually and emotionally, I have given myself the luxury to organize it as I have time, which means that during some semesters, we hardly meet at all. We have organized public events⁴; and we have also met in a small group in order to generate the energy to work on other projects. Although it is useful to share our reading and writing, it is also sustaining to know

that we have connections to our colleagues – I consider it to be a form of workplace activism that combats feelings of isolation! It has sometimes been important to meet without a precise goal in mind and simply to see what comes out of the energy of gathering together. The utopian can lie in the anticipation of what's to come, in having the space to dream rather than the pressure to produce.



- INTERVIEWS -

- When we decided to base the film 'working on it' on interviews, there was a lot of ambivalence connected to this decision, which we tried to make productive. Interviews seem to be a means to individualize/privatize rather than to politicize; in documentaries they are often used to render research authentic and unquestionable. So, for the film we decided not to show the interviewees at home, in a private surrounding. Rather we asked them to bring their 'personal' references (images, posters or objects which refer to people or political actions that have been important to them) to the common film space, which thus became a kind of exhibition site. Also, one year after we filmed the interviews, we asked all interviewees to gather at this space. We tried to create a distance from the interviews in watching them together with the interviewees who seemed to be experts on their experience – very able to reflect on it and also all being cultural producers themselves, who presented parts of their productions at the studio – such as performances, books, t-shirts, music.

A.C.: I'm interested in interviews but from a critical perspective that resembles the one that you describe. I'm interested in how the interview can be made to represent affective and emotional life, in part by approaching it as a performance or an intimate encounter. Like performance, it's a live event informed by the environment in which it occurs, and the exchange between interviewer and interviewee includes gestures, pauses, and emotional valences that aren't always captured in a tape or a transcript. Because it is a way of trying to get at material



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that might not be articulated in the mainstream public sphere, the challenges of archiving the ephemeral occasion of the interview and making decisions about how to go public with it, whether in print, on film or online, are also very significant. The slow temporality of the interview is often one of its powers; new ideas and narratives emerge when the listener's attention enables the interviewee to take time. And it's often not practical to include an entire interview, whether in print, film, or public exhibition, in which case the editing and selection process can benefit from attention to feelings and ephemeral moments, not just content.

- But if we agree that neoliberal economy and culture is built on self-technologies (making oneself fit in, making oneself feel better) – how can we 'trust' an interview?

A.C.: In part because it has multiple uses and popular appeal, I find the interview to be a fascinating genre. I'm interested in ways that it can be made more experimental, more open to feelings and traces of feelings. Paying attention to its performative qualities can be a start, as well as building intimacy between the interviewer and the interviewee. The collective interview of 'working on it' is also an important way to use the interview process to create new ideas and feelings not just extract or document them. We don't have to 'trust' the interview as a conventional documentary form for it to be useful.

One of my side projects is an ongoing series of interviews with queer and lesbian artists that I hope will become a website. The goal is to create an alternative to more superficial interview formats and to provide an insider's perspective on queer lives and artistic production. I'm interviewing friends whose lives and work I know well (such as Toronto-based feminist artist Allyson Mitchell whose work I write about in my depression project. The interviews are more like conversations and they seek to explore the material foundations of art practices and the ways that everyday life and creativity intersect. I'm especially interested in how friendships and social networks that might not be publicly visible form the basis for what might be called scenes, movements, undergrounds, salons, coteries, although another goal is to invent

new vocabularies for these utopian art worlds. Your use of the interview format with me is another example of how the form can be used to document emergent worlds and practices.



- QUEER POLITICS -

- You quote Joan Nestle, who wrote about the 'power of vulnerability.' Judith Butler addresses bodies as 'vulnerable,' as 'precarious,' as 'beside oneself.' It seems that vulnerability is a condition or a notion that is close to 'queer' in so far as being vulnerable seems to be the precondition of strangeness, of denormalization.

A.C.: I'm glad you see the connection between Joan Nestle on vulnerability and Judith Butler on vulnerability! I think that people don't always read for the queer dimensions of Butler's recent work on the politics of emotion⁵, but I like to think that her work is informed by what can be learned about intimacy and vulnerability from queer and lesbian relationships. Queer studies has recently been debating the notion of the 'anti-social' as it emerges in work by Leo Bersani, Tim Dean, Lee Edelman, and others. Some of this work on the 'anti-social' is based on the notion of sexual contact, especially anal penetration between men, including barebacking, as forms of self-shattering that undo the social.⁶ But as I suggested in '[An Archive of Feelings](#)'; there is a lot to learn about penetration, receptivity, and vulnerability from the vantage point of butch-femme sexualities, and I would point people in the direction of Joan Nestle's anthology, *The Persistent Desire*, and related writings by Amber Hollibaugh, Cherrie Moraga, Leslie Feinberg, and others for accounts of sexual intimacy, including getting fucked, as a form of vulnerability that gives expression to histories of pain, shame, and trauma. These queer/dyke perspectives present vulnerability as a state that trafficks in the negative and in the anti-social, but shame and humiliation, like depression, are not endpoints but feelings that can give rise to something other than violence against self or other. I maintain that the underdescription of sex is connected to a more

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general underdescription of affective life overall, and that a wider vocabulary and a more nuanced understanding of terms such as feeling bad or vulnerability could be useful for public life.

- So is 'feeling bad' in opposition to political agendas of inclusion, of gay marriage and equal rights? Is 'feeling bad' an equivalent to queer? Can 'feeling bad' replace identity categories and offer connections between people that refuse normalcy, exclusion, and social norms since everyone being constrained by racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism can gather under this agenda? And do you think that art works or cultural productions – such as our film 'working on it' – are able to render feelings queer?

A.C.: I also appreciate that you noted my use of the term 'feeling bad'! I wanted to find a vocabulary that was not marked by medical diagnosis, as depression and trauma are, and I wanted to create a blank space that could be filled by other vocabularies and modes of description. Feeling bad might be resonant with being queer, in so far as queer studies draws our attention to feelings that are off, such as feelings of failure. Many of my favorite queer scholars are looking at forms of feeling bad – Heather Love on feeling backwards, Kathryn Bond Stockton on the queer child and sideways development, Judith Halberstam on failure.⁷ – I think queers are good at imagining the ways that feeling bad could be a resource. And we are also good at finding ways to make bad feelings a source of creativity and fun.



1 - See Lauren Berlant, 'Starved' in *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Republished in *After Sex?: Writing Since Queer Theory* (Duke, forthcoming).

2 - See Kathleen Stewart: *Ordinary Affects* (2007)

3 - See Ann Cvetkovich, 'Public Feelings' *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Republished in *After Sex?: Writing Since Queer Theory* (Duke, forthcoming).

4 - The Public Feelings Group Austin held a conference in October 2008 that has been published as a book (*Political Emotions*, Routledge, 2010 eds. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, Ann Reynolds).

5 - in *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2006) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009).

6 - See forum on the anti-social thesis in PMLA, as well as Leo Bersani "Is the Rectum a Grave?" and *Intimacies*, Lee Edelman, *No Future*, and Tim Dean, *Unlimited Desire*. Bersani, for instance, in his book *Homo* (1995) argues that gay desire redefines sociality so radically that it may require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself, and he sees the inaptitude for sociality as a potential revolutionary resistance to normalizing methodologies.

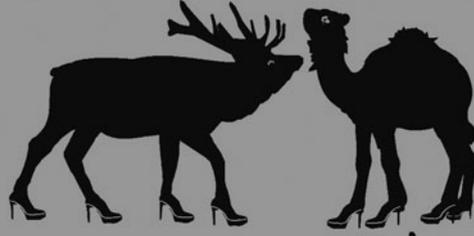
7 - Heather Love *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), Judith Jack Halberstam, *Notes on Failure* (forthcoming).



DU BIST NICHT ALLEIN...

HEP BERABER

**GEGEN HOMOPHOBIE - GEGEN RASSISMUS -
GEGEN SEXISMUS - GEGEN FASCHOS**



YALNIZ DEĞİLSİN...

ZUSAMMEN

**- HOMOFÖBİYE KARŞI - İRKCİLİĞA KARŞI -
CİNSİYETCİLİĞE KARŞI - FAŞİSTLERE KARŞI**

FEELING BAD

WKRH news
'pregnant with information'

FEELING BAD



NEW REPORT

Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy video, color, 12 minutes, USA (2005)

A newscast from the feminist TV news station "WKRH - Pregnant with Information."
with Henry Irigaray (Hardy) and Henry Stein-Acker-Hill (Greenwood)

-- ON THE NEXT PAGE --

K8 Hardy, To All The G*\$%ls I've Loved Before, 2009, installation view. Photo: Farzad Owrang.
Courtesy Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.



HENRY IRIGARAY REPORTING

Henry Irigaray (in the studio):

“TONIGHT WE BRING YOU A REAL INSIDE STORY. HENRY STEIN-ACKER-HILL, LIVE IN THE BEDROOM OF LISA’S HOME, SHE BRINGS YOU AN EMOTIONAL INVESTIGATION. HENRY?”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“HI, THIS IS HENRY STEIN-ACKER-HILL REPORTING TO YOU FROM A BEDROOM. I AM HERE WITH MY FRIEND LISA WHO JUST HAD A REALLY WEIRD DAY. LISA, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?”

Lisa:

“I FEEL REALLY TIRED, I WANT TO RELAX ACTUALLY.”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“WHY DO YOU FEEL SO TIRED?”

Lisa:

“IT’S PROBABLY BECAUSE I HAVE A HARD TIME SLEEPING EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“AND WHY IS THAT?”

Lisa:

“I TEND TO OFTEN HAVE ANXIETY...”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“INTERESTING. I ALSO HAVE ANXIETY QUITE OFTEN.”

(Henry Irigaray in the studio)

“ANXIETY HAS A LONG PSYCHOLOGICAL HISTORY WITH WOMEN DATING BACK TO FREUDIAN HYSTERIA. IT’S INTERESTING THAT IT STILL MANIFESTS ITSELF TODAY. WHAT DOES LISA DO TO COMBAT OR TO HANDLE HER ANXIETY, HENRY?”









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Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“WHAT DO YOU DO TO MAKE YOUR ANXIETY GO AWAY?”

Lisa:

“WELL, SOMETIMES I JUST DO NOTHING. SOMETIMES I DO A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT THINGS: SUCH AS WATCHING TV, SMOKING CIGARETTES, TAKING XANAX OR SONATA OR AMBIEN OR SOMINEX.... WHAT ELSE CAN YOU TAKE? I TOOK THE TEA OCCASSIONALLY SOMETIMES CALLED BEDTIME TEA. AND I ALSO TAKE VALERIAN SOMETIMES. SOMETIMES I DO A COMBINATION OF THE TEA WITH SOME VALERIAN IN IT WITH A NIGHT CAP OF NYQUIL AFTERWARDS. I ACTUALLY TRIED A NUMBER OF THINGS.”

Henry Irigaray (in the studio):

“I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO.”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE YOUR ANXIETY STEMS FROM?”

Lisa:

“I DON'T KNOW, I MIGHT HAVE A FEW IDEAS. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS WHERE YOURS STEMS FROM?”

Henry Stein-Acker-Hill:

“I DO ACTUALLY, I FEEL LIKE MY ANXIETY MOSTLY STEMS FROM A FEELING OF POWERLESSNESS? THANKS LISA FOR LETTING ME INTO YOUR ROOM AND FOR TALKING WITH ME ABOUT SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT. – THIS IS HENRY STEIN-ACKER-HILL SIGNING OFF BACK TO YOU.”

Henry Irigaray (in the studio):

“THANK YOU HENRY FOR THIS INSIGHTFUL STORY. IT REMINDS ME THAT WHEN I GO HOME I NEED TO CALL A FEW FRIENDS OF MY OWN. THIS IS HENRY IRIGARAY AND YOU'RE WATCHING WKRH NEWS.”





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WORKING ON IT

conversations.performances.queer electronics

FEELING BAD



In collaboration with:

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Brigitta Kuster, Tünya Özdemir, Sam Sherlock, Andriana/Andrew, Jasco Viefhues, Annekäthi Wehrli, Beatrice Michaelis, Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Jannik Franzen, Steffen Kitty Hermann, Doro Wiese, Elfe Brandenburger, Ins A Kromminga

WORKING ON IT is a film about gender and sexuality. In interviews the question is raised how these are constructed at workplaces, in the movies, on TV and in relationships at home. How is it possible to interfere in public images of whiteness, to invent a new language for more than only two genders, or to reverse devaluations referring to desires and sexual

practices? One year after the initial interviews the 15 protagonists meet again in a former supermarket in Berlin, where they construct thematical settings and discuss extracts of the interviews.

The protagonists show images, produce T-shirts, present performances and stagings, play queer electronics and negotiate queer strategies in the field of sexual politics.

The protagonists: Artists, theorists, activists and musicians. The place: The market place of a supermarket.

Supported by: Lesbians on Ecstasy, Scream Club, Heidi Mortenson and Rhythm King and her friends.



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B.K.:

With the notion of 'sexual labour' we wanted to show that the working place not only produces products and services but also forms subjects. Through sexual labour there is always a double productivity at work. Namely, sexual identity and subjectivity are constituted along with other products ...

P.B.:

Is that be understandable?

B.K.:

No, it's not understandable.

R.L.:

Sure it is!

*

J.F.:

When I find myself in a conference and have to deal with the so-called experts – in medicine, psychology or whatever – it happens very easily that I get labelled as the object of expertise. Even though I myself have a Degree in psychology, and have been working for the last five or six years on various topics related to gender and trans-, giving lectures and organizing presentations, even though I co-edited a book, it's all of no use. This dividing line between experts and persons concerned is drawn very quickly and I find that very problematic.

The distribution of conflicting roles has in my opinion a lot to do with gender and identity.

*

E.B.:

... when you try to raise money for a project, you suddenly are in contact with people who promote a certain normativity: be it art or film that you would like to make, be it gender categories that you're supposed to comply with or not. This implies being confronted with a multiplicity of expectations and projections. I can choose to respond to some and tear down others, or tear down all, to leave, or to play a role. I find such situations very stressful, especially knowing that all the people I'm working with have no money and are thus forced to play their part. My strategy is then to say that everyone must have a share in the cake and I seek to invert the projection. I don't waste time thinking about being discriminated against but rather try to turn the tables. Sometimes it works and sometimes not, but I still try to unexpectedly throw back the expectations put onto me and to invert the donor/recipient relationship.

*

B.M.:

There are also moments when I feel alienated from





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myself through the perception of others. Every now-and-then I think about my career, in particular with my Ph.D.-Dad and the Research Group. Where I'm always indecisive: should I say something? Should I make it explicit that I'm in fact into women? But I don't do that: because on one hand, they also don't out themselves as heterosexuals, I guess; and on the other hand, it might lead to consequences I wouldn't want. That's sometimes wearing, but I just try and get on with things.

*

S.S.:

Why do I have to be the other every time? Why is it that I always have to deal with things I don't want to deal with? Like having to explain to the majority that we exist, that we gladly work in successful positions, and that we also have the right to success. And every day, every morning, before I get up there is this huge question mark on my face. Because it doesn't only happen at work: it happens when you go shopping, it occurs when you simply stand in the street having a conversation, you're confronted with it in the subway: in fact, everyday you receive the same signal: "not you!" I'm sorry to say that I don't have an instant solution but if any of you finds something please pass on...

J.V.:

Right, when we find the solution, we'll print it on T-shirts!

S.S.:

Exactly, for everyone!

T.Ö.:

Of course there is this whole discrimination package with hundreds of things immediately coming to my mind. You may happen to be left-handed, at the same time fat, and also non-German, "oh my god, you poor, poor thing!" But on the other hand, you could also easily turn it around! For me, there is nothing greater than being born into this wonderful Germany without having to be either white or skinny – and simply knowing that I'm not compelled to indulge in this heterosexual run. Frankly, when I'm doing fine, nothing makes me happier than not being a part of it all. Going into a German redneck joint, looking at them and thinking...

J.V.:

Man, you were really lucky!

T.Ö.:

"I'm not one and there is no danger of becoming one" – this is very liberating! If I'm not doing

so great or have to cope with shit, I sometimes get miserable and think: "Why this on top of everything else?" but on the whole, I can say from the bottom of my heart: "Nothing is more beautiful!"

*

A./A.:

I say, "I live with 28 women inside me." They're all me: my identities. It's not always that easy – but I guess it's even more complicated for those outside.

*

A.W.:

"I am very happy to present Frank Gallo and The Monster Eyelashes. I hope you enjoy the show."

*

I hadn't really given much thought in advance to how I wanted to have the hair, so I said, "just do something." Because I think it's nice when people just do things. However, I insisted on not wanting to look like the three musketeers – that was my only request. Anyway, by the time they were finished with my make-up, I was shocked to realise that I did look exactly like the three musketeers. And they kept saying: Yes, you look exactly like one of those guys who hang out in bookshops and play sad songs on their guitars, like one of those Newromantics – whatever that might be. That really hit me. I said in the beginning I wanted to learn to speak loudly, so this was really depressing. There was nothing I could do about it: this phenomenon simply shut me down. Then we had to imagine who this person was, what kinds of hobbies they had, or where they lived. And as a matter of fact I could only picture this person as someone without interests, without hobbies, incapable of practically everything – or practically incapable, showing no desire whatsoever for sex – thus never having had sex ever, and future plans: none... So, for me, it felt like being transformed into my own worst nightmare. It was genuinely horrible.

*

J.F.:

At some point I have noticed how much things changed and what an accomplishment it was, to without much effort perceive people roughly the way they wanted – regardless of their bodily features. This may sound rather abstract and theoretical but it does work in practice and I think that's very exciting. No matter how someone is dressed or what I get to see of this person's body,



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I have no problem addressing people as they prefer. Even, I don't know, somebody is wearing a T-shirt and I can see that this person has breasts, referring to this person with "he" for me no longer represents a mental effort. This experience makes me very enthusiastic because it might also be feasible for others.

*

R.L.:

Distinct from lesbian-gay-transgender politics, 'Queer' was introduced as a means to invert the gaze and to look at heterosexual normalisation and to make heterosexuality an issue, to thematize normalisation of sexuality in society. This is something I find very useful: instead of marking those who are conceived as deviant, the change of perspective allows the norm itself to be seen as a form of deviation.

*

E.H.Y.:

Queer perspective is, for me, worth considering. If I refer to feminist theory only some issues are in the field of view. Looking at post-colonial research one finds that men are often taken as the only focus of research. Or one is confronted with an approach based on an initial heterosexist paradigm. It seems to be necessary to reflect along these different axes and their intersections to understand that they are not simply crossing, but rather represent an entangled compound.

*

K.H.:

German language only knows two clearly separated genders. They are referred to with the pronouns "er" (he) and "sie" (she) and the nouns usually end with "-er" and "-in". Everything lying outside of this conceptual horizon cannot be linguistically expressed. In response, the language politics of gender seek to establish new places by working on two levels. On one hand, there are a whole range of other pronouns appearing next to the traditional "he" and "she". Some come from English but numerous others represent the slang of the local scene where people use them to redefine their identities in a new and positive way – like: "sni", "per", "sne", "lem", "sem", etc. – and they no longer fit into the boys-and-girls categorisation but seem to transcend this order, at the same time creating a certain tension. The use of underscore, on the other hand, wants to introduce an in-between space, initially marked by the gesture of refusal: I

am neither a man nor a woman. It doesn't have any positive content in the sense of desired gender identity – it simply says: I don't want to be either one of those.

Considering ways in which discourse forms gender, I have noticed a paradox: Language is widely considered as essential for making bodies intelligible or visible, and yet the authors are compelled to use a language which allows only two genders and makes it impossible to write differently. But then the feminist science-fiction literature surprisingly provided numerous examples of writing without gender, introducing new pronouns, or new genders.

*

I.A.K.:

The most important point of critique is that society still says to operate on intersex babies, claiming this "normalisation" will allow them to grow up as females and males. On the contrary, those concerned have always experienced this procedure as torture and an extreme act of aggression against their bodily integrity. People born as clear-cut boys or girls, but who don't behave accordingly, suffer similarly from psychological pathologisation.

*

J.F.:

Speaking about creative or subversive ways of coping with questions like: - Are you taking hormones? - What exactly are you? - Did you get an operation? - Whom do you go to bed with? and so on – it is of course nice to quickly figure out a smart response but I'm still upset for the next 3 hours or 3 days, depending on how dreadful the situation was.

J.V.:

For each question of this sort, one should have to pay € 5. Or maybe € 10 for "Where do you come from?" and € 50 for "Are you a man or a woman?" No, establishing a hierarchy wouldn't make any sense!

R.L.:

It could be a process of negotiation, couldn't it?

J.V.:

Yes, with a box for donations, for a change! To provide active training for all the people you know and somehow like, but who nevertheless keep asking. And if they fail to learn, you could just say: next time you ask a question, you'll have to pay a €5 donation into the donation box!

FEELING BAD



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