

# This is OUR house!

*Life. Aesthetics as a fact of*

*Who allows themselves, affords themselves, the possibility of risk? Who puts themselves at stake? Who overcomes fear, acts on things without thinking, sees thinking as acting?*

Who speaks loudly into the microphone at the conference, takes her shirt off in the nightclub, takes off her panties on stage?

# Women with scars

Essentialism is like dynamite or a powerful drug

## Who is here, present and ready? We are, and we will turn the tide.

...we  
refuse to  
be dignified  
and  
rational.

We need art that can analyze the workings of capitalism and patriarchy in all their manifestations

# DRAG KINGS, PROMQUEENS, the Lumpenproletariat

*Making boundaries, crossing them is drama  
is politics,  
We need art that goes without saying.*

I'm surprised you're even alive,  
just look at this place,

## damn you're

# A PALE BUNCH!

Who wouldn't go to such a bar?

# We are the world's darkest past, we are giving shape to the future. We will open a new front.

Sweden is a racist country – this is how I want to begin my speech about feminism today. The racism in your country made me think hard and long about even coming here. My fellow speakers, Tiina Rosenberg, Diana Mulinari, Lawen Mohtadi are the reason I am here. I would like to thank you and applaud your perseverance and engagement; I humble and I blush before you. Thanks to all of us for creating this space in which we can imagine a different future than the one introduced to us by the present. Thanks to the fighting feminist movement for securing my safety while I'm here. Thanks for all the temporary political truths in the name of the revolution. Thanks to the artists for continuing the communication, for changing the world and making it a more interesting place. And thank you all for coming! It's so good to be in a room of queers, you make me feel all normal.

I am speaking to you this afternoon as one of the left-overs: one of the weirdoes, the ones who shave their heads, those who don't know how to dress, who worry that they stink. Those who have rotten teeth, the ugly ones; the old hags, the dykes, the frigid, the unfucked, the unfuckable, the neurotics, the psychos, the fat tarts, the skinny sluts. Those who have big bellies, who would rather be men, who behave as if they were men. The ones with big asses. Noisy women who destroy everything that comes their way, those whose shyness is due to their hang-ups, those who don't know how to say no, those who are locked up to be controlled. Women with scars, pitiful ones, women who don't turn men on, those with flabby skin and wrinkled faces. Those who dream of plastic surgery, of liposuction, of having their nose broken so it can be reset but can't afford it. Women who look like the back of a bus, those who can only rely on themselves for protection, who don't know how to comfort others, who could care less about their kids.

We often hear that the deconstruction of essentialized identities, which results from an acknowledgement of the contingency and ambiguity of identity itself, renders feminist political action impossible. Many feminists believe that, without the existence of 'woman' as a coherent category, we cannot imagine the possibility of a feminist political movement in which women could unite as women in order to formulate and pursue specific feminist aims. To the contrary, I argue, the deconstruction of essential identities is a necessary starting point for those feminists who are committed to a radical democratic politics, because it highlights the variety of social relations to which the principles of liberty and equality should apply. Let's demand that we locate our political identity between what we have inherited and what is not yet born, between what we can only imagine and the histories that constrain and shape that imagination. This is a notion of political identity quite at odds with an identity shaped by fixed social coordinates.

See, essentialism is like dynamite or a powerful drug. Judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive. That's why we need to use essentialism with care, we need to use it temporarily and, most importantly, we need to use it strategically. Strategic essentialism is like role-playing, briefly inhabiting the criminal mind in order to understand what makes it tick. The strategic essentialist should act as a good lawyer: when on defence, prod the prosecution's narrative until the cracks begin to appear and when prosecuting, piece together a case by understanding the criminal's motivation.

We need to be alert, decide quickly and without fear or guilt when we need to 'essentialize ourselves' and say yes to a group identity to reach a particular political goal in a particular situation in a particular place at a particular time.

We also need to learn when to say no. We need to distinguish when 'naming' works emancipatorily and leads to increased agency

and we need to learn when it doesn't.

And when we do name we shouldn't be content with naming just a few: lesbians, the lumpenproletariat, Southern Cameroonians, gay men, trashy chics, Papuans, bisexuals, Assyrians, transmen, Celts, class travelers, Bakassi People, transwomen, queers, fags, Ainu people, dykes, the under privileged, the muff divers, Inuits, refugees, the shabby chic, bull daggers, the leisure class, queens, men, Aymarás, drama queens, Han Chinese, flaming queens, trannies, Afro-Arabs, fairies, gym boys, Lakota Sioux, boxing boys, Romanis, boxing girls, the middle class, pitchers, catchers, Sami people, butches, dead ones, Kabylis, cosmopolitans, bois, FtOMs, MtoFs, the middle class to working class, the working class to under class, East Indians, old maids, Kurds, Miss Kittens, Dear Johns, subalterns, the upper middle class, Creoles, inverts, perverts, Pacific Islanders, the sans papiers, girlfriends, Rohingya people, drag kings, prom queens, women, Cherokees, happy people, nouveaux rich, alien sexualities, hipsters, Tamil people, small bourgeoisie, freaks, Caucasians, lower working class, the criminals, Faroe Islanders, suicidals, the arty trashy, Sahrawi Arabs, the lower middle class, Tutsi Rwandans, gender benders, slaves, the working class, loosers, Hutu, upper middle upper class, Dimasa people, Mestizos, the white trash, Tibetans, the aristocracy, the filthy rich, Sikhs, wiggers, clandestinos, other genders, Palestinians, the undocumented, Afro-Latinos, nouveaux pauvres, global workers, Uyghurs, seasonal workers, the privileged, the no class and the low class.

I mean, who wouldn't go to such a bar? Unfortunately this is but a fantasy in your somewhat underdeveloped part of the world. You know, some people on the left in the US have faith in you to provide a counter hegemony but I have always said no! Because turning to Europe in a time like this would be turning 'right', that is, the wrong way. Three worlds or four is always better than one, (first), that's what I've always said. I'm serious, everyone I have just called out – you Europeans need us all! Social, cultural and economical sectors, all parts of your union, need a more heterogeneous population. If you don't act and make allies transnationally, globally, you're going down. I'm surprised you're even alive. Just look at this place; damn you're a pale bunch! But hey, there are those of you who recognize this and who join us as we work collectively towards a more diverse and multiple world. And we will stick together; we'll find each other even in a place like this.

'Cause we are the people in the house and we refuse to be dignified and rational. Dreams, unhappiness and rage is all over this architecture. This building is nothing more than a parenthesis in the excitement called our lives.

Often when we get invited to speak at institutions with a big I, we get a bad taste in our mouths and tend to feel exhausted from the ambivalence that such an invitation brings. Does anybody recognize this feeling? Well, this time I kind of forced myself in.

We are the people in the house and this is our house, so – what do we do and what do we want? Let's scream too loud together and let our high pitched voices crack the fancy windows of this place. Let these walls turn into over cooked spaghetti, soggy and soft and easy to tear. Let the ceiling peel away like dry skin exposed to too much sun. Or we can take command over this space, organize meetings here, order pizza and stay the night. This is OUR house! We can decide if we want this to be the beginning or the end. We can decide if we want to try to change the conditions for who is included and who is excluded. For us, social injustice is a collective problem that requires a collective solution. We have feminism and we have places where we don't have to participate in capitalism. We are communists, we fight capitalism, we want a revolution.

Using words such as Communism, Class Struggle and Revolution will qualify you for a free consultation with a psychiatrist. Which actually is not so bad, in fact, one of our demands is a president that has been to therapy, has cross dressed and misbehaved. Someone who has been in love and been hurt, who respects sex, has made mistakes and learned from them. Someone who is bent just as much upon destruction as survival. We want a black woman as president. We want three presidents or none at all – whatever comes first.

Affirming non binary structures also entails living without conceits of foundations, origins, and progress, and especially without clear distinction between the real and the fictive, the ideal and the material, the past and the present.

See, gray was the new black, then black was the new black, then brown was the new black, then, if I remember the sequence correctly, navy entered the picture, but well before that dyke was the new feminist, making life – such is visibly my bias – fascinating. Meanwhile gay ditched lesbian, so queer had perforce to be the new gay and now old is the new queer.

Politics is always about nomination. It is about naming the political subjectivity and organizing politically around that name. The political task, then, is one of inventing a name around which a political subject can aggregate from the various social struggles through which we are living. This act of the aggregation of the political subject is a moment of counter hegemony. This act is precisely what I desire.

What is exhibited in this fantasy is the possibility of performing and articulating the movement among static choices of identity. It's the movement, all about the action of not quite specifically, all the time, one or the other, that I hope to articulate here. Making boundaries is politics, crossing them is drama. We need to focus on ambivalence rather than 'truth'. Rather than fight for a 'right' or 'true' politics, we might purposefully embrace their impossibility, with an understanding that we cannot determine the meaning of our own acts. It is a giving up of intentionality and the scientific method, a giving in to a politics motivated not by truth or morality but perhaps by love, desire, restlessness, humor, hope, inventiveness, impulse.

We need art that can analyze the workings of capitalism and patriarchy in all their manifestations – ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective.

We need art that will let us think in terms of diversities rather than unities.

We need art that will break the old concepts and traditions of Western art that have systematically construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities.

We need art that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about and acting upon gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them.

We need art that will be useful and relevant for political practice, because neither empowerment nor social justice is possible without some sense of what needs to change.

We need also to place greater emphasis on the connections among art, knowledge and power relations.

Aesthetics beyond disciplines.

Aesthetics as a fact of life.

We need art, that goes without saying.

We will reconnect discussions of aesthetics to the base.

We will step outside, hijack buses, abolish prisons, open our flats, lend our grandmother's scarf to a homeless person, use the trailer as a mobile library, turn the football field into a ballroom for the queens and in your uncles' shoes we will toast to the future.

We will do social research and exploration within a context shaped by the hard material

facts, fluctuating passions and affective instabilities that characterize our daily lives.

We will take power by using all available means: a mattress becomes a residency, the bedroom a cinema, the living room a meeting space, the police station a daycare center, the bus a class room, the prison an artist residence, the square a dance floor, the workroom an archive, the institution a daytime pizza parlor/night time art class, the military a coffee break, our lives a musical and our homes a university.

Because:

Pedagogy is providing alternatives to the way things are suppose to be.

Pedagogy is all about bodies. (It all happens in bodies.)

Pedagogy is about sociality.

Pedagogy is about the grime of history, and it happens in a panopticon.

Pedagogy is praxis.

Empowerment is gaining the critical consciousness to unpack hegemonic ideologies.

I have been thinking and talking with others about what it means to make public declarations, public declarations about social relations, about politics. Declarations through words or another language – actions, images, clothes, ways of behaving and reflecting on behavior. By opening our private spaces we turn them into public institutions. A collective phantom, hovering. Reclaiming public spaces makes them PUBLIC.

Let us make one thing clear:

Art does not necessarily have to reflect the hegemonic structures of society.

Art can be organized and based in and around the everyday knowledges and material struggles that structure people's lives.

Art can in fact counter hegemonic structures.

We are the world's darkest past, we are giving shape to the future. We will open a new front.

Who allows themselves, affords themselves, the possibility of risk? Who puts themselves at stake?

Who overcomes fear, acts on thinking without thinking, sees thinking as acting?

Who speaks loudly into the microphone at the conference, takes her shirt off in the nightclub, takes off her panties on stage?

Who goes to another place, stays in one place, who asks you to look after their child for 20 minutes, who goes out to film when it's minus 15 degrees centigrade, who survived a stomach virus?

Who fought for contraceptive rights, homosexuals and anarchism in the late 19th century?

Who cooks for many people without really planning it, fasts for 6 days?

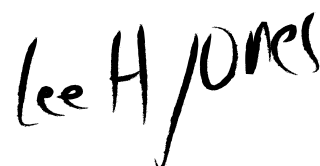
Who refuses to get out of bed, spend money, work, communicate, refuses to identify with any one group or ideology?

Who gets fisted in the toilet at a nightclub, bases their look on Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings, who is ready and willing to share the problematic reading of an image?

Who gets to read it, who refuses to look, refuses to leave, to pay, to leave without being paid?

Who is here, present and ready?

We are, and we will turn the tide.



Stockholm, October 2010