



G E N D E R I S N O T R E A L

THE SOAP BOX SESSIONS: GENDER

WITH KRIS GREY, AMBER HAWK SWANSON & HUGH O'DONNELL

BENJAMIN SEBASTIAN

Gender is not real, it does not exist.

It is a constructed mechanism of control policing the action of bodies beneath the reign of religion, conservatism and capitalism.

Gender is a construct in favour of patriarchy.

Gender is a construct in favour of (re)production.

Gender is hypocrisy.

Gender is not real, it does not exist.

To proclaim the mythology of gender does not in any way suggest that humans inhabit a post-gendered sociality. We are not post anything. We live amidst history, it's lineages continue.

Movement in all directions is always possible.

Do

Not

Forget the past.

Such a proclamation as the myth of gender is of course ideological, provocative and strategic.

As are the bodies that pulse at the brackish margins of gender(ed) (non)identification.

How do *you* exist?

Just because something is not real, does not mean that one is free from suffering its materiality through, in and against one's body.

Just because one suffers the materiality of something does not mean it is ultimately real.

For years as a small child I could not sleep without the light on for fear of the creatures that would manifest if it were to be extinguished. That fear was felt physically, it affected in me pain and torment.

Fear...

I think we are all scared of losing something; security, love, control - Life. Thinking about such loss causes a specific kind of grief and one natural response to that (of numerous) can be rage.

I recently listened to a lecture with Judith Butler speaking of rage and grief. A supposition was levelled.

Suppose we allow rage to collapse into vulnerability...

Pause.

Suppose we allow rage to collapse into vulnerability... Movement in all directions is always possible.

What would it take for us all individually, as part of a global collective of humans, to allow ourselves to become vulnerable? To fear without rage? What would it take to assist the collapse of rage entirely and accept fear, allowing it to diminish? How do we all become vulnerable?

What happens when a soccer boot attempts to pulverize a heart? Can that heart be cured, preserved by salt, through ritual? Should one be fearful or vulnerable? Should one feel rage? (Ask Hugh) - *Just because something is not real, does not mean that one is free from suffering its materiality through, in and against one's body.*

What happens through practice, language & surgical and/or hormonal intervention, when a body answers; no, to the question; are you a boy or a girl? Woman or man? (Ask Kris) - *Are you at ease with not knowing? Or do you need the light left on? - Just because one suffers the materiality of something does not mean it is ultimately real.*

What happens ontologically when a woman re-appropriates herself as a sex doll that is reconstructed into the likeness of a bull orca named Tilikum; a captive wild animal responsible for the death of at least three humans? (Ask Amber) - *How vulnerable must one become to injustice before rage is enacted/unavoidable?*

Movement in ALL directions is *always* possible.

Is

V I O L E N C E

ever an option? It is an energy. It does exist. When do/should queers bash back?

Resistance

is

possible.

In September 2014 Hugh O'Donnell, Kris Grey and Amber Hawk Swanson presented their work at [performance space], inaugurating the Performance Art Faction programme of events.

Under the thematic of Gender: A Soapbox Session, the artists were invited to platform elements of their live practices that interrogated the concept of Gender, while discussing each other's work and why they were making it.

From aestheticised & cathartic blood-letting at the site of surgical intervention (Grey), to an alchemical & ritual exploration of domestic symbolism (O'Donnell) and the reappropriation of the pornographic body as a feminist critique (Hawk Swanson); a trajectory of experimentation, agency and reclamation was charted amidst the artists' work.

A nuanced current of aggression quivered throughout the works presented. However it was never entirely clear as to whether this aggression was to be read as occurring to the body (in the frame of the text) or rather, emitting from it, with Hugh beating his(?) heart with a soccer boot, Kris 'reopening' breast removal scars and Amber cutting apart a sex doll in her likeness. Any directional flow of violence was interrupted here, it went in all directions, spilling out between self, other and another other. Does violence even have a directional flow? Or does violence itself harm the perpetrator, target and everyone around it simultaneously?

The myth that is Gender is violence. Gender creates oppositions and competition, therefore always presupposing a battle and loser. This is the fundamental problem with all forms of binary logic. You're either in or out, good or bad, right or wrong. Allowed or not. Through such battling, bodies on all sides again become fearful of losing something/someone (security, love, control - Life) and so again, through fear of grief, act in rage.

The cycle continues, with all sides guilty.

Suppose we allow rage to collapse into vulnerability...

Suppose we allow rage to collapse into vulnerability...

Movement in all directions is always possible.

To return to Butler's lecture, she states; "Perhaps non-violence is the difficult practice of letting rage collapse... Since then we stand the chance of knowing that we are bound up in other..."

Enough violence, enough rage, enough competition, enough hierarchies. We all already have more than enough grief in our lives. We are all alone, together. Difference is our similarity.

Let us *all* allow our rage to collapse into vulnerability. Let's be ideological, provocative and strategic.

Gender is not real, it does not exist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxyabzopQi8>