

Do the Right Thing  
a manual from MFK

# RADICAL PEDAGOGY

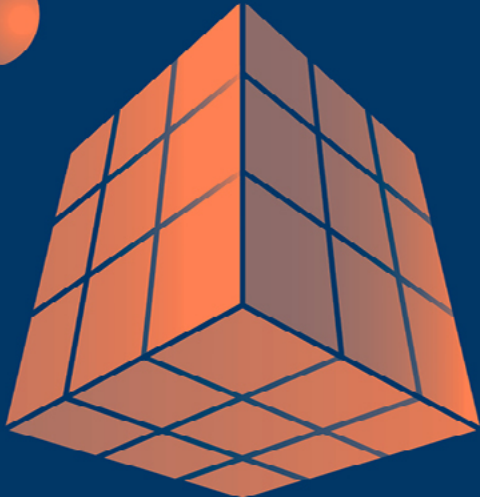
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STRATEGIC  
SEPARATISM

TRT



UTOPIA



Malmö Free University for Women (MFK) is an on-going participatory art project and a feminist organization for critical knowledge production. We aim to raise and discuss contemporary political issues by bringing together experience and knowledge from various fields. Through experimental, radical pedagogical methods we hope to bridge theory and practice and challenge dominating norms and power structures. Our work has taken the form of reading groups, workshops, lectures, manifestations, physical exercises, screenings, exhibitions etc. MFK was started in 2006 in Malmö but is now mobile. It is run by artists Lisa Nyberg, Johanna Gustavsson and more or less temporary collaborators from various backgrounds.

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# Do the Right Thing

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We have written a manual that tries to sum up the knowledge that we have acquired when working with MFK. Under the headings Start, Organization and Structure, Economy, Art, Strategic Separatism, Intersectionality, Radical Pedagogy and Utopia we have formulated our own definitions, clarified with concrete examples and experiences and collected practical tips. The book can be read front to back or by picking and choosing. We have written this book with the aim to activate and spread knowledge and we hope that as many as possible will find it useful. We wish that you will use, ponder and exploit the manual for your own purposes.

Towards a collective dependency!

Malmö Free University for Women  
Lisa Nyberg and Johanna Gustavsson

Stockholm / Malmö, March 3, 2011



**START**

## START

We started Malmö Free University for Women, MFK, based on a need and the lack of a place where we could use our artistic practices in correspondence with our political goals. We wanted art to mean more to more people; we wanted to politicize art by both asking questions and providing answers, by both making declarations and claiming the right to change our minds. As artists we were tired of being expected to passively reflect society. **We wanted to make art and we wanted to make political change.**

We located each other as artists and feminists and understood that we needed to collaborate. After just over a year of mutual wooing we found knowledge as a common interest and it all started.

**It was in 2006** and after TV programs like "Könskriget" (The Gender War) a feminist backlash followed which allowed people to use the word feminist as a word of abuse and the feminists had to dodge. In 2006, the feminist party Fi! was formed, which generated feminist motivation and a feeling of "maybe it is possible after all", there was a public smearing of active party members, among them Tiina Rosenberg who chose to leave politics because of the personal persecution. That same year the right-wing alliance took power in Sweden and more and more people in our region gave their vote to various racist parties. It had never been more important to get organized in a feminist and anti-racist struggle.

In Malmö we experienced the feminist movement as being fragmented. We wanted to work in collective processes with other feminists and strengthen the local community.

In order to do so, we needed a place where we could set the agenda and where we could merge art/culture, activism and academia and fight back against the neoliberal and racist development. We wanted to organize ourselves and make a difference with others. We took up the somewhat naïve notion that art could work as a sort of "neutral" starting point.

Inspired by, among other things, the Women's House in Copenhagen, we talked about how we could create such a place, a common space. How could we use our artistic freedom to claim the space we needed? How did we elevate our own movement, with us active in it, and all of our knowledge? When we tried to formulate how this place could come together, it became **a university**. That was exactly what we wanted to be, a place for knowledge exchange and knowledge production, for examinations and discoveries, conversations and statements, for deepening and research. A place which could redefine what knowledge is and could elevate the knowledge of women, and where we could together create room to act in a time when that room was effectively reduced. We chose a name that came with a promise and described precisely what we wanted to be — Malmö Free University for Women. Nobody should be able to interpret this as something other than what it was: a site specific, feminist creating of knowledge.

We started by talking to everyone we met and discussed over and over the idea about what this place could become and mean. We formulated our ideas and we applied for money. The first space we claimed was the public space. We launched a poster campaign with historic and contemporary women that we wanted to highlight, for example long-distance runner Uta Pippig, the racing driver Monica Öberg

as well as Rosa Bonheur, the first woman in France to get permission to wear trousers. Early mornings we strolled around Malmö, taping up black and white A4-copies while planning and dreaming about all that was about to come.

We promised each other **to go all in** with MFK.

To work with art usually means temporary assignments and exhibitions, it becomes fragmented and divided. We wanted to work more long-term and give our work a chance to develop over time. Therefore we promised each other then and there to focus primarily on MFK for two years, and during this period to not prioritize our individual careers or private lives over the common. Over the years we have regularly evaluated our collaboration and chosen to prolong our contract in turns.

To us, an important goal was to bring together feminists from various fields. The fragmentation of the feminist community served the neoliberalist agenda (divide and conquer). We were not primarily seeking to get everyone to agree, but rather we wanted to create a place for meetings and temporary collaborations between different groups where it was positive that different positions were represented. As a rule, we tried to invite people from **art/culture, activism and academia** to talk about the same topic (e.g. labour, sexuality). This way we not only got different views on the topic, but we also got an opportunity to gather these people in the same room. This often resulted in language clashes and uncomfortable moments, which we chose to regard as something positive, different worlds meeting and trying to understand each other. We wanted MFK to serve as a safe place where conflicts and contradictions were allowed. We also know that many important contacts were established



this way. One example was the seminar "Culture, Labour and Neoliberalism – how do we respond?" where cultural workers and union activists met to discuss working conditions in the neoliberal society. Here the clashes were obvious and the misunderstandings painfully uncomfortable, but it was helped by a genuine ambition and will to understand each other and find joint strategies.

On August 31st 2006 we held a **start-up meeting** for MFK in order to present our idea to the world. The meeting was gender separatist (read further in the section *Strategic Separatism*) and those invited were both organized and un-organized feminists from our various networks. We borrowed a room at Signal Gallery and used cotton candy and a performance by the action gymnastic team Girls with Balls as attractions. Using two headlines, *What would you like to learn?* and *What would you like to teach?*, we collected material to put together our first program. Among the suggestions were bike repairs, sexology, Emma Goldman and DJ training. Some requests and offers matched and we could arrange our first activities starting as quickly as the following week. The first months we had neither money nor a place, we just went with everyone's desire that this should become something important. With the help of those initially interested, we arranged activities in parks, living rooms, cafés and other places.

In November 2006 we received money and one week later we had **a space**. It wasn't until we got a place of our own that we realized how important it was to have a physical space. We rented a 50-sqm business premise with gigantic display windows in a residential area in Malmö, opposite an elementary school. The space was vital for community build-

ing and to give the participants a sense of "this is our room, a room where we can make things happen". We were not depending on the help of others anymore and we could get an idea one day and realize it the next. As a resource, it was important to us to make the space accessible, with opening hours and regular activities, and to lend the key to others on demand.

We encouraged all our visitors to donate books, journals and other material that we made accessible in a bookshelf that we called "The Archive". We borrowed technical equipment when needed. Otherwise it was modest: a green wall-to-wall carpet, a sofa, desks, some folding chairs and in the basement a kitchen and toilet. For a short while we were "watched" by neo-Nazis who came to put their stickers on our door at night time to demonstrate that they had their eyes on us.

The first year was a lot about making the space accessible. We worked with a yes-policy (read further in the section *Organization and Structure*) and arranged about two **activities** a week (see page 63 for a list of all activities). Some topics and people we looked up actively, while others found us. Everyone who contacted us in one way or another was invited for a coffee and often these meetings ended up with an activity being planned and arranged. We convinced people that their knowledge was worth conveying and much was about finding and testing pedagogical models together in order to be able to go through with it. It was obvious that a place like this was longed for and needed.

Throughout, new **participants** had visited our events each time, while we also had a core group who came often as well as several regular collaborators. It has been obvious

that the visitors have primarily come because of the topics we have dealt with and not to socialize or because of who we are. When we arranged a closure of the semester with pizza and movies, just to hang out, we had zero visitors for the first time. Retrospectively we have heard from participants what an important part MFK has played in their lives and in Malmö, both as a place and as an opportunity to do things.

- Learn by doing – act and react! Sometimes you have to do things first and think afterwards, otherwise it will be too late. Remember that you always have the right to change your mind.

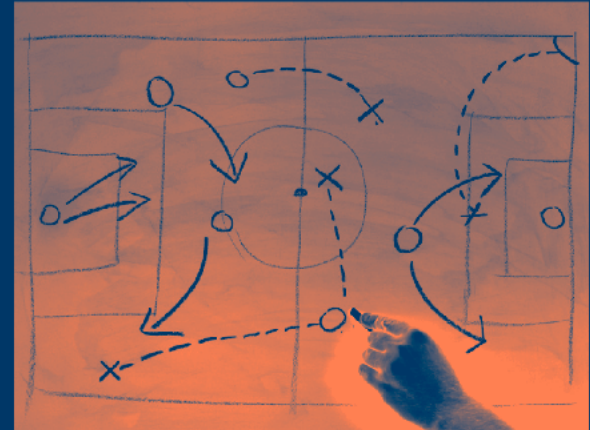
- Talk to others about your ideas. Don't believe the myth about competition and keeping the ideas to yourself, they will improve if you get help and tips from others.

- Make what you can of what you have. If you wait for the perfect occasion with full financing, the risk is that nothing gets done.

- Collaborate and be loyal, honest and generous to your comrades. Don't be afraid of conflict but try instead to make use of your different perspectives and give them room - it often leads things forward.

- Experiment and use different **meeting forms**: lecture, round table discussion, discussion meeting, reading group, rally, seminar, talk show, breakfast meeting, Open Space, studio visit, workshop, coffee, film screening, festival, reading marathon, writing course, interview, conversation, walk, excursion, craft group, public meeting, action, disco, manifestation.

## ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE





## ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

With MFK we use something we call a **yes-policy**. It has worked internally, in the collaboration between us, as well as externally towards temporary collaborators. The yes-policy means that we always say yes to submitted proposals. A yes is followed by a how? and that is where critical remarks are made, with the aim to find a way to carry out the proposal in a meaningful way. The method is a means to create a positive and encouraging environment where every whim is conceivable, where we build on each other's ideas instead of positioning ourselves. Between us the yes-policy has been essential to create a collaboration where we dare to put forward hasty, unexpected and radical ideas without risking to be shot down. To MFK this has been crucial in order to create an allowing atmosphere based on trust, where no question is too stupid and no answer is obvious.

### Two examples:

We, Johanna and Lisa, agree on many things, but when it comes to aesthetics our tastes differ. When we have designed posters for our events we have sometimes stared uncomprehendingly at each other: how can you possibly think that looks good/fun/nice/cool? Our solution, in the spirit of our yes-policy, is to say yes to both. Why choose either or when you can have both? Two willful posters are better than one that is compromised into nothing.

Sometimes one of us has been much more interested and involved in a specific topic or activity. Then we have chosen to let that person take the main responsibility and push things forward, while the other person is always there

to bounce ideas off and help out with the organization. We don't have to agree on everything, but have tried to give each other space and trust each other; if my colleague finds this important I will support her. This way we have tried to keep the collaboration and the common space active.

To MFK, the yes-policy meant that we ended up realizing many different activities during our first year. We often worked very fast and picked up and realized events at a very high speed, on average two a week (see page 63 for a list of all activities). The activities were mostly short, an evening, a day or a weekend. It was a lot of "try this" and "introduction to", and after a while we began to miss longer and **more in-depth discussions**. We started to discuss a few themes that might be suitable for closer examination. For MFK's second year, we submitted a program where several activities had a common theme that would be followed by thematic discussions on the topic every Sunday morning at a breakfast meeting. We encouraged the participants to come back for more activities in order to prolong and deepen the discussions. We felt that MFK needed to develop. Together we would be politically stronger and more dangerous with a deepened, practically applied knowledge.

Unfortunately it was around then that we began to sense a lack of interest. The number of visitors decreased and at the start-up meeting for the second year, none of our previous participants came. We didn't get the response we had hoped for and had to realize that most people preferred, and maybe also expected, the short, temporary kind of events. Maybe the honeymoon was over; there was nothing new about MFK any more. Perhaps we overestimated our participants' will to set aside more time and commit-

ment for MFK and maybe we didn't pay enough attention to our surroundings and their needs and therefore failed to be an important place in the long run.

During the second year our funding ran out and we had to make a decision about how to continue running MFK. Despite having presented our fine statistics of visitors and events to both the Municipality and the County Council, we were stuck. We fell between the cracks since we were not enough of a cultural organization, not minority oriented enough, youth oriented enough and not a formal adult educational association. Moreover we were not democratic (read further in the section *Strategic Separatism*). We started to get exhausted from trying to adapt to all the applications and reports. During the year we tried to include more people in the running of MFK, but we were probably not convincing enough. At one point we suggested that we, Johanna and Lisa, should withdraw in order to give new people the opportunity to continue running the University in the direction they wanted, but no one was interested. Looking back, we think that it was probably because many people wanted to start something new of their own, rather than become a part of or take over something existing. To us this was **frustrating**. When we couldn't find a way to share our place with other associations we chose to give it up. Once again the University was mobile. The place was taken over by other associations from the activist left and we are happy that it is still active. We stopped trying to include other people in the running of MFK and decided that from now on it would be the two of us, but that we had to find a way to organize ourselves so that it would be worthwhile for us to continue.

All the reflections upon how to run an organization long-term and keep the commitment of the participants resulted in a sort of tour where we met other groups to talk about **organization**. How did they manage to stick together? How did they start working together and how had their group transformed since the start?

In Malmö and Stockholm we held a discussion group based on the text "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (see below), in Skellefteå we worked with the staff at the Anna Norlander Museum and in Gothenburg we interviewed Agneta Wirén from Kvinnofolkhögskolan (a women's study centre). We also arranged courses in self-organization at the art academy in Århus, Denmark and Karleby, Finland.

We can't really say that we found any clear answers, but we realized that we were not the only ones struggling with problems concerning commitment and internal structures and that meant a lot to us at that point. To organize as activists seems to result in a frustrating feeling of always starting from scratch, but we think that the sustainability lies in working on several fronts simultaneously, and that the knowledge is transferred between the organizations and the people who are active in them, even if the groups are temporary. Target-oriented groups are more efficient and easier to keep together, as opposed to groups built on social relations. In target-oriented groups, the common goal is the focus for the work so that positioning within the group is avoided to a greater degree.

Working with MFK, we have discussed and worked a lot with **structures and transparency**. In the text "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" written in 1970, the American anarchist-feminist Jo Freeman criticizes the feminist movement of that

time for choosing to eliminate hierarchical structures without replacing them with others (read further in the section *Intersectionality*). The text has helped us realize that when we try to change oppressive power structures we also need to build new ones that are visible and functioning. Otherwise there's a risk that informal structures will take over, and these are much more difficult to detect, identify and change. The responsibility becomes invisible and no one can be held accountable.

In the art world, we have noticed a problem with the dominance of informal structures and hierarchies, where the codes surrounding e.g. openings and dinners is a culture in which you have to be initiated in order to understand who can participate or not, who is included or excluded. Unwritten rules create insecurity, which strengthens the informal hierarchy. In order to prevent this we have outlined some simple guidelines:

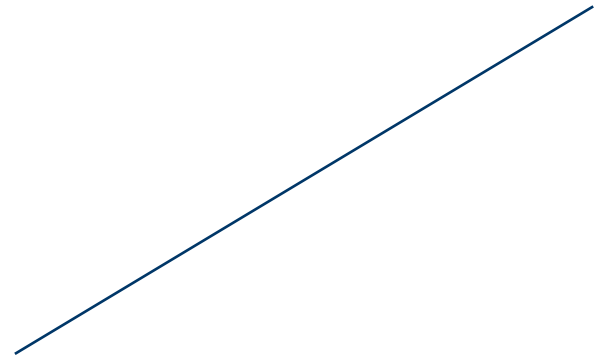
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- Clear information in invitations to activities: in addition to time and place it should be clear what is expected of the participant, if advance registration is required, if it's free or how much it costs, if there will be food, what language is spoken, how to get there and contact details in case of questions.
  - Clear boundaries: who can participate in the activity? Is it open to all or addressed to a certain group?
  - Signs at the event location: use posters, logos and an open door.
  - Name tags: all the organizers wear name tags so that people know whom to turn to when they arrive at an event. In a smaller workshop with advance registration every participant gets a name tag.
  - The organizers always arrive well before time and welcome early visitors.
  - The organizers start the meeting by welcoming everyone

and explaining what will happen throughout the day: when there's a break, if you can come and go or if you are expected to participate throughout the event, where the toilets are and other practicalities. They also present the ones who will speak, perform, mediate etc.

- When there's a smaller group of participants, everyone gets the opportunity to introduce themselves and why they are there.
- The organizers make sure to stick to the time frame, so that there is time for everything planned, and no one risks missing the end because the time is up.

■ The organizers stay until the end of the event in order to answer any questions, provide contacts and make a short summary.

■ Activities in smaller groups or based on conversation, begins and ends with a round so that everyone gets to speak. A round means that everyone gets to say what they want to say without interruption or remarks from others.



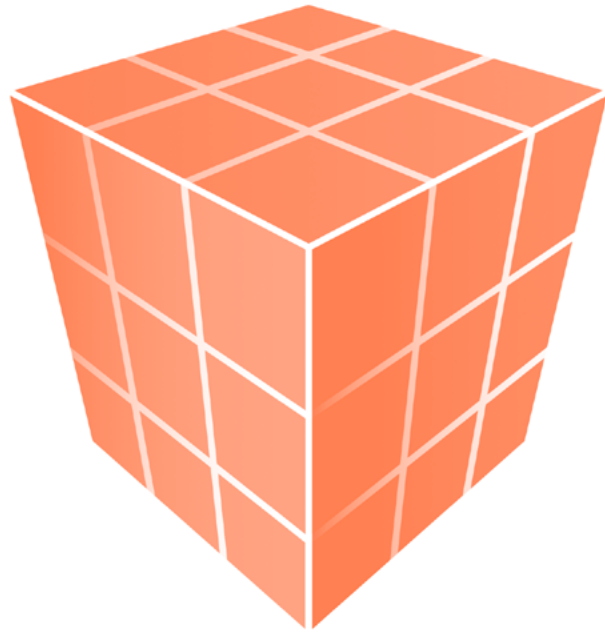
## ECONOMY

When we decided to start MFK we made **two plans: one with money and one without**. We also decided straight away that all activities organized by us should be for free.

When we got started it was without any money and we had to rely on our own and other people's commitment and will to create a place through MFK. For example we borrowed spaces like a gallery, a living room, a café, and we gathered in a park. We found practical solutions like copying flyers, more or less approved, at our workplaces. ABF (the Workers' Educational Association) became an important collaborator who let us borrow meeting room as well as colour printer, podium and other things.

MFK is organized as a non-profit association because that is the form closest to our actual activity. This enabled us to start a joint bank account in the name of MFK and apply for certain subsidies and grants where it is required that you apply as an association.

Deliberately and as a matter of principle, we have chosen not to form a sole proprietorship, but instead we have had to bitch to get a salary. We refuse to adapt to the right-wing alliance image of the artist as entrepreneur. It only leads to more private self-interest instead of collaborations and collective solutions. We want our labour to be recognized as labour, we want to pay tax and we want to have a pension. A few months after the start we got **a big grant** from Framtidens Kultur (The Foundation for the Culture of the Future, the former Employee Funds) and we were able to get a place of our own and pay ourselves a modest salary (5 192 SEK / month for six months), which allowed us to



ECONOMY

spend less time on our day jobs and more on MFK. We also chose to offer our collaborators a symbolic payment (999 SEK). It meant a lot to get a space of our own. We could now arrange as many activities as we wanted and we could do it at short notice. We could pay for travel expenses to get people who didn't live in Malmö to come and we could offer payments so that even those with small finances and little time could participate. It was important to us to pay the participants and ourselves for the work we did, to underline that our time and commitment were valuable. Those who already had a salary often declined payment and let the money stay within MFK for future work and most people understood our situation and appreciated the payment. It was only on one occasion that we couldn't go through with an activity for the reason that the persons concerned couldn't afford to participate. We chose as a principle to offer everyone the same payment and were not open for negotiation.

In the course of time, our funding ran out and we applied for other subsidies and grants. We were convinced that we would get some sort of continued funding since our activities had become so extensive and had so many visitors. Unfortunately, it didn't happen since we were not enough art/culture oriented, not democratic (we worked with different forms of separatism) and when it came to education, they referred to the adult educational associations. We realized that we would have to make too many compromises in order to get funding, so we chose not to adapt and stopped spending time writing applications. Instead we tried to find **other common sources of income** by writing teaching proposals. We thought it might be a good way for us to

continue developing MFK and our interests by teaching. That way we got temporary workplaces, as well as conversational partners and collaborators among the students. For two years we developed teaching around two topics that we were researching: self-organization and intersectionality. The money was paid into MFK's joint bank account and was used for organizing activities, travel expenses for us and others, purchase of literature etc.

Since we have never been able to earn our living only from MFK, our respective **personal finances** have affected how much we could work together. During the year when we had our funding and got our modest salary, both Johanna and Lisa had other jobs, Lisa worked at a cinema and Johanna was employed in a social action program for artists called Skiss (Contemporary Artists in Contemporary Society). During this period we both worked extensively together, each moment when we didn't have to be somewhere else we worked with MFK. It was financially feasible at that point.

When the funding ran out the situation changed and we had to get money elsewhere. Lisa continued to work at the cinema. Johanna's social action program ended and she chose to try to earn her living from grants and other temporary work related to her artistic practice. Lisa had the approach that she rather had a day job to get money and therefore didn't need to compromise on her artistic practice, even though this meant less time for it. Johanna did what she could to avoid having a day job and therefore got more dependent on the art world and work that she was not always interested in, but on the other hand she could spend more time on her art.

Our different financial situations and our individual choices meant that we sometimes fell out of balance. Our will to engage differed at various times and we placed varying importance on MFK. The important thing was that we tried to talk about it, which of course wasn't easy. Finances are a taboo topic and we didn't really have any tools to handle it, but we think that since we worked so close together we simply had to confront it. We also think that the discussions on class that we had within MFK helped raise our awareness and maybe our understanding of the issue to another level than the purely personal.

- 
- Don't let the realization of your ideas depend on money, find a way of doing it anyway.
  - Ask for support, advice and help from existing organizations.
  - If you are going to apply for funding, form an association. You will find information on the Tax Agency website. Preferably send your questions by email in order to have written answers to refer to should anything be questioned.
  - If it is financially feasible – pay everyone involved, albeit symbolically.
  - Don't let the formulations and demands of the grants control the activities, don't compromise without cause, sometimes other solutions are more efficient and useful.
  - Talk openly about money.
  - Talk openly about commitment and time.
  - Make room for economy and time planning already from the start. Ask each other how much time you are able to and want to invest in the joint project. This way the collaboration can function even though one person invests 10 % and the others 100 %. It is important to be prepared that someone might be less involved in periods, so it's good to have those discussions early on: *I'm able to prioritize this project this much right now, during October and November*  
*I will have to focus entirely on something else, over the summer I can't afford the money or time to work on the project or I dedicate one year to the project.*



## ART

To us, art is **a way to act politically**. Art is a tool, a method and in our practice as artists, it is what we use. We believe that art must be allowed to be direct forms of address, statements and questions with answers. Art must do more than merely reflect the society in which we live; it needs to be a part of it. Art is a process, an action, a meeting, an activity. In line with our feminist and anti-capitalist aims, we have chosen to work collectively and constantly refuse to produce objects. Art is an incredibly important field to operate within, and it provides possibility to act if handled in the right way.

MFK's relation towards art has been complex. On the one hand, our political commitment has directed us towards contexts where the audience usually hasn't been an art crowd. The political aims have been our first priority: change through community building, empowerment, feminism and radical pedagogy.

On the other hand, we have insisted to keep one foot in the art world and persistently claimed that what we do is art, and that our work is artistic no matter how it manifests itself. It was by engaging ourselves as activists that we came to love art again. The thousand and one possibilities that art as a form opens to us, if it only can take place outside the homogeneous environment of the art world. Proud examples of women who have written history and extended the framework of art to include both performance and video art. We wanted to be a part of that context. We wanted to go down in art history for expanding the concept of art.

Concerning our activities within the framework of MFK, the artists have been **the most sceptical**. Even when artists

or curators have lectured and co-organized the activities, the artists as visitors have been absent. We have understood that one reason for this is our openly political work. The art world is insecure and hierarchical and it is an incredibly delicate matter what, and who, you are associated with. The first years not many looked in our direction. On the other hand there was a general scepticism towards art in the activist crowds, who often imagined art as a painting in a rich person's home or abstractions hung in a museum. Their knowledge of contemporary art was often limited, but they were curious, open and less prestigious in relation to us.

In connection with an increased interest in art and education we started to receive **invitations from the art world**. We were invited to participate in seminars and exhibitions. When we have accepted invitations from the established institutions we have constantly considered how we would be able to use their resources without compromising too much on our "freedom". We saw the invitations as a means of using the resources available within the art world for political purposes and to make sure our work went down in art history. We were also hoping to activate and politicize the white cube and push the limits for what is expected to happen there and who is welcome or who is not.

Our participation in exhibitions etc has always been based on the premise *how can we use this situation?* Exhibitions never generate a large income, but there are other reasons to participate: a context, a space, an audience. We have tried to be precise in our demands and to make our intentions in participating clear. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that the institutions have turned to us knowing how we work, problems have often occurred when we have

been required to hang something on the wall. The artwork as object is still the norm.

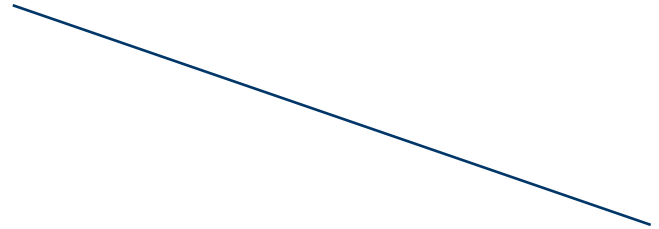
### An example:

Röda Sten (a centre for contemporary art and culture) in Gothenburg invited us to participate in the exhibition "Art After Education" in the summer of 2008. The art curators showed an understanding of and an interest in how we work and gave us a relevant context to participate in. Since we were interested in intersectionality at that point we chose to use the space to work on that topic. We invited gender researcher Anna Adeniji to lecture on the concept and we invited activist group ROSA and Queerinstitutet (the Queer Institute) to a workshop, along with some individuals working with different political practices and power perspectives. When we got closer to the exhibition we got a phone call from the director who asked us what we were going to hang on the walls. She soon made it clear that we were *obliged* to hang something on the walls in order to participate. The reason is that Röda Sten applies for exhibition compensation from Sveriges Konstföreningar (The Federation of Swedish Art Clubs) who base their payments on the fact that something is actually *hung* (like a cock). It was important to us that the discussion and the lecture actually took place and that we had finances to pay for travel expenses and other things. Our solution was to invite artist Anna Sandgren to show her work "The Game", an interactive installation that became an excellent starting point for a discussion on intersectionality.

Most of the time we have seen the invitations from the institutions as interesting challenges, but we have also, on

a number of occasions, chosen to say no. We have understood that this is extremely rare in the art world. Expressing your gratitude is the first thing to do and talking about money the last. We have chosen to make demands, and when these couldn't be fulfilled we have declined.

To encourage more artists to say no we have made **a proposal for a workshop:**



a proposal for a workshop:

IN THESE TIMES - MORE AND MORE OF THE ART WORLD IS BEING RULED BY THE NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY. IN THESE TIMES - LESS AND LESS OF THE ART WORLD STANDS UP TO THE IDEOLOGY OF CAPITALISM. A LOT OF US FULFILL CAPITAL OBLIGATIONS WITHOUT THINKING FURTHER OF ITS CONSEQUENCES, SETTLING FOR A TEMPORAL FIX TO A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM. WE FALL UNDER PRESSURE, ADAPTING TO PROTECT OUR CARRIERS INSTEAD OF COOPERATING WITH EACH OTHER. WE SEE OUR COLLEAGUES GET TAKEN DOWN. WE ASK OURSELVES: WHAT TO DO? WE BELIEVE IN FINDING COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONAL PROBLEMS. IF



MONEY IS THE ONLY LANGUAGE THEN WE HAVE NO VOICE. WE HAVE TO FIND OTHER STRATEGIES TO PUSH THROUGH AND MAKE OURSELVES HEARD. WE NEED TO REFUSE NEGOTIATION, AND LET OUR ACTIONS SPEAK.

**PROPOSAL FOR  
A WORKSHOP:**

DO YOU IDENTIFY AS A POLITICALLY INFORMED ARTIST? DO YOU WANT TO DO THE RIGHT THING BUT NOT BE ON THE RIGHT SIDE? ARE YOU TORN BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF YOUR GALLERY AND YOUR PRINCIPLES? DO YOU SPEND ENDLESS HOURS FORMULATING YOUR ART PRACTICE TO FIT THE STANDARDS OF A GRANT COMMITTEE? IS AVOIDING PAYING

TAX TO MAKE AN EXTRA BUCK STARTING TO COME NATURAL TO YOU? IF TAKING A TEST, ARE YOU AFRAID YOU WOULD FALL UNDER THE TITLE ENTREPRENEUR? HONESTLY, ARE YOU STARTING TO FEEL MORE AND MORE LIKE A CAPITALIST? ARE YOUR COMPROMISES LEAVING YOU SLEEPLESS? LONG WALKS TRYING TO SHAKE THE GUILT? RELAX, YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND THERE ARE SOLUTIONS. THIS IS THE WORKSHOP FOR YOU.

JUST SAY **NO** WITH MFK YOU ARE IN SAFE HANDS, WE HAVE PLENTY OF EXPERIENCE OF TURNING DOWN POOR INSTITUTIONAL SUGGESTIONS, KICKING NEOLIBERAL BUTT SINCE 2006 AND STILL REFUSING TO KNEEL TO INVISIBLE POWER. THROUGH

A STRICT PEDAGOGICAL FRAME AND WITH FIRM GUIDANCE WE WILL COLLECTIVELY LEARN TO SAY **NO!** TO THE NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY **NO!** TO UNPAID LABOR **NO!** TO BAD EXHIBITION DEALS **NO!** TO SUPERFICIAL CURATORIAL IDEAS **NO!** TO TRAGIC GALLERY CONTRACTS **NO!** TO MAKING THE WORLD A MORE INTERESTING PLACE WITHOUT BEING PAID **NO!** TO INVISIBLE POWER STRUCTURES **NO!** MORE MASTURBATING WHITE MALE EGOS **NO!** MORE GENIUSES ON OUR BLOCK. **NO.**

[a proposal for a workshop.](#)

STRATEGIC  
SEPARATISM

STRATEGIC  
SEPARATISM

## STRATEGIC SEPARATISM

Strategic separatism means to temporarily organize based on specific identity categories like e.g. gender and/or class identity. The aim is to break the consensus of equality, to generate dialogue and conflict around existing power structures, and to make room for in-depth conversations and action. It is a way of exposing the invisible borders that dictate our lives and thus politicize our everyday lives and activate our surroundings. The method is efficient and has an important purpose: to prove by means of **a simple line (inside or outside)** that everyone by their presence has a political impact. There is no neutral or nonpolitical position. This also means that we have an actual and direct starting point for change. Separatism is a way of broadening the discussion, of enabling both mixed-gender and separatist discussions, instead of mixed-gender being the only option.

Strategic separatism is a paradox that can be explained with this example: *to organize as women to jointly counter-act being defined as women by patriarchy*. Thus separatism is not about strengthening a group's common identity, but a political strategy for collective action. Separatism has to be self-defined; each person defines their own identity. By making our own borders and defining our own places and conditions, we create room to act. Together we set the agenda. To us the opportunity to meet in a separatist context and have an internal feminist discussion, has made it much easier to be open to conflicts and issues and keep an intersectional perspective (read further in the section *Intersectionality*), without having to battle the external enemies of feminism at the same time. The lowest common

denominator becomes a point of departure for broader and deeper discussions. The emphasis is thus on the fact that e.g. women are not all the same, but many and different.

When we started MFK in 2006, it was relatively common to have a gender separatist organization within the feminist movement in Malmö. Most people who were active were girls/women, so most of the time the gender separatism was already in place. Since one of the most important things to us concerning the organization was to be clear about the structure, gender separatism became an important way of showing that “everyone” is never welcome in every context. We needed to question the heavy consensus that Sweden is an equal country. There is a conflict between that statement and an unequal reality, which we wanted to highlight.

We made it a rule that our activities would be gender separatist and formulated ourselves *All women welcome*. Soon RFSL (Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights) contacted us and wondered how we defined “women”, e.g. were transgender persons welcome? So we reformulated ourselves and wrote *Open to anyone who identifies as woman* to emphasize that it wasn't about biological gender but about identity. Something we hadn't yet defined to ourselves at that point, but that became and still is important to emphasize, is how essential it is that people identify themselves, and that it is never done to us or by someone else. It was important to make the choice of working with gender separatism active. For each activity that we arranged, we discussed whether there was a reason to break our rule or not. For example we made an exception when the feminist parent group held their meetings,

as it was important that also the fathers could participate and take responsibility. Since we continuously had **active and ongoing discussions** about separatism, we once again got to change our formulation into *For and by persons who now or at some point identify as a woman*, to further stress that we wanted to avoid the definition male/female and include a queer-identified group. Even a person who was once born as and is still perceived as female, but doesn't want to identify as a woman, shouldn't have to do so just to be a part of our activities. It was simply to show that gender identity isn't something static, but can still be effective to organize around.

In our surroundings, some people found that a separatist context was "too political". One of our aims was **to re-politicize bodies and spaces**. The fact that one had to take a stand to participate, to own a privilege in relation to e.g. a friend or a partner, or on the contrary to suddenly not be able to participate because of one's gender identity (loosing ones privilege), was an experience that was easier for many to understand when it was physically experienced.

The criticism against our decision to work with gender separatism was often made behind our backs or by drunken men. It is difficult to have a dialogue behind ones back, so we tried to be as clear and open as possible. We asked the drunken men to get back to us when they were sober so that we could have a discussion. We were always open to suggestions concerning our activities from everyone, also male-identified persons, and offered to provide contacts to enable them to arrange meetings on their own. Not a single male-identified person made a suggestion. Nothing will happen without initiative and engagement.

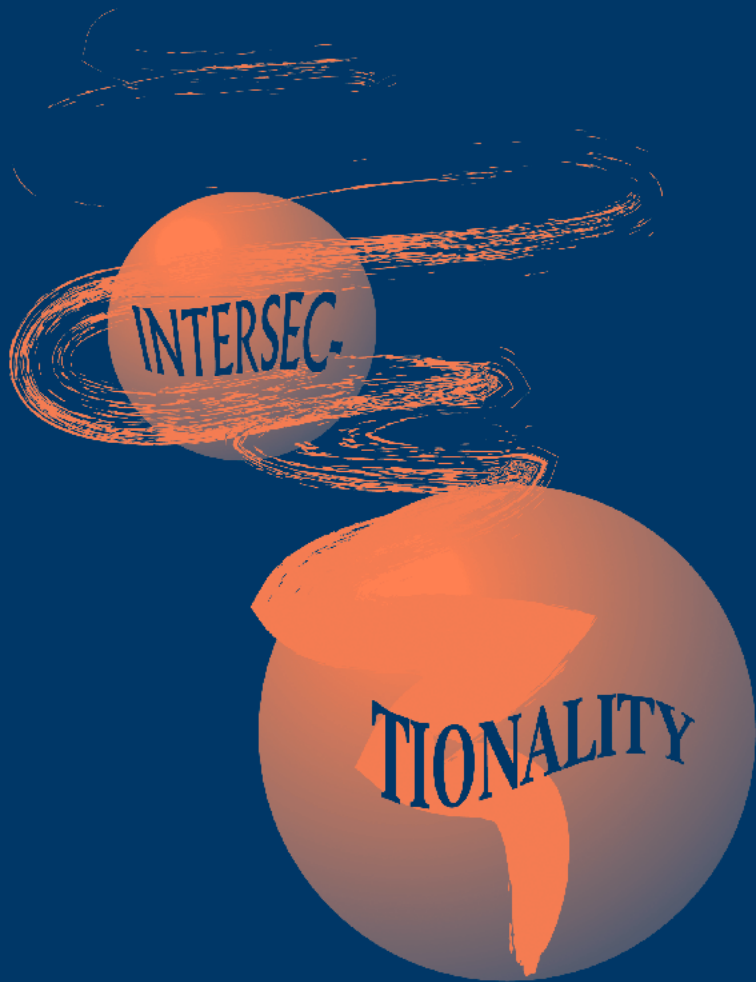
We have also worked with **other forms of separatism**, e.g. based on working-class identification. After a conversation about experiences of working-class background in an academic environment, the class group was formed. A gender separated working-class identified group of people who met during one year to discuss class experience from a variety of perspectives. At one meeting a rhetorical question was discussed: if a new person was to join the group, and we had to choose between a man with a working-class background and a woman from the middle-class, what would our choice be? It was an interesting question, evoked by the practical experiences of organizing through different forms of separatism.

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■ There are many different forms of separatism. Most people equate separatism with gender separatism, so make clear what kind of separatism you mean and the limits for it.

■ Let separatism be a temporary strategy and an active choice by having an ongoing discussion about the use, the definition and the limits.

■ Let people define their own identity.



## INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a tool and a perspective that can be used in order **to understand power**. Instead of talking about privilege and subordination as fixed positions the perspective is on simultaneous processes that create and maintain relations of power and oppression between individuals and between groups of individuals. The concept clarifies that categories like gender, class, ethnicity/"race" and sexuality are never isolated, but influenced and changed by one another. For example, women are never only women but always belong to a class, an ethnicity/"race" and a sexual orientation. Hence it is never enough to explain inequality only on the basis of gender. Instead of pointing out what deviates from the prevailing norm, the concept of intersectionality helps us to see privileges more clearly and to name the norm; that white is also a colour, that middle-class is also a class, that heterosexuality is also a sexuality and so forth.

Practically the concept has its origin in the specific situation of being a black woman and feminist in the U.S. in the 60's, active in the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement. The Civil Rights Movement didn't want to recognize women's specific situation as women, and the white feminist movement didn't want to recognize that it meant something specific to also be black. The experience of crossing these two identities is the basis for Black Feminism and **the starting point** for the theories that we today describe as intersectionality. Black Feminism was the first to criticize the emergence of a white hegemonic feminism. They felt that the dominating feminism was one-track minded with a norm-thinking that excluded many women

by presuming that all women are the same. At the same time they criticized the anti-racist movement that didn't want to regard sex/gender as a category similar to ethnicity/"race". When you choose to view the categories individually, one by one, you easily create a value hierarchy between the categories. The category or position that is prioritized risks rendering the others invisible.

Political thinker and activist Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggests that we replace the term sisterhood, which is gender-bound, with *transnational solidarity*. She implies that identity isn't bound to a fixed category but should rather be bound to a political conviction.

Political theorist Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak has formulated the concept *Unlearning one's privilege as one's loss*, which also highlights an intersectional perspective. As we understand her in this context, she clarifies that we own certain privileges due to for example gender, ethnicity/"race" or class, and that these **privileges** give us a specific perspective based on values defined by the prevailing norm. She implies that we have to understand how they also make us blind to other positions and perspectives. What she suggests we "unlearn" is thus learned norm-making and valuing behaviours.

Do you want to know more? Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw are two contemporary international intersectionality researchers, and in Sweden the concept was introduced by Paulina de los Reyes, Diana Mulinari and Nina Lykke among others. Theoretically the concept has its origins in e.g. Marxist feminism, anarcho-feminism and postcolonial feminism.

Above we mention the names of some researchers,

thinkers and activists who are role models to us because they put the emphasis on how we can use intersectionality as a tool to change society and focus on **the possibilities of the concept**. In a movement/act of resistance, we learn not to rate oppressions against each other and not to render some oppressions invisible in order to highlight others. With such a perspective we don't get stuck competing about who's worst off or which order of oppression is the most important. Instead we offer resistance by using each other's temporary power advantages and thus create room to act. The concept *highlights privileges and activates power positions*, which for example makes it possible as a white person to engage in the fight against racism, despite being in a position that is rewarded by a racist system. It dissolves static positions, so that women are not always, in every situation subordinate to men. Intersectionality also forces us to express, highlight and consider specific situations in time and space; that a specific place and a specific time generate both privilege and subordination.

The concept became known **to us** when we started MFK. In November 2006 we hosted two activities on intersectionality in theory and practice: Diana Mulinari and Kerstin Sandell, academics in gender studies, talked about the concept from their perspective and Ellen Nyman, activist and actress, discussed it on the basis of her art action project Spacecampaign.

It was difficult for us to understand the concept on a practical level. The concept seemed self-evident and simple on a theoretical level, but incredibly complex when we tried to practise it. We trusted our colleagues and understood that the concept was an important tool and that we needed

to work on understanding and using it. We tried to study and find theoretical approaches, but a lot was about trying to draw attention to the concept in conversations and practically try to think of and highlight more identity categories than just sex/gender. In 2008 we worked on the basis of the theme intersectionality focusing on how the concept might be used. Among other things we organized a series of workshops at art schools under the title "Intersectionality in Art Practice" (read further in the section *Radical Pedagogy*). We organized lectures and discussion groups with the practical use of the concept as a starting point.

To use separatism has helped us understand the concept. In May 2008 we participated as one of the key-note speakers at a symposium on art and education at the University of Gothenburg entitled "Essentially Experimental?" For this occasion we formulated an argument for strategic separatism as a way to practise intersectionality. Below are parts of that text.

## **Intersectionality as a theoretical tool to formulate critical knowledge production and strategic separatism as a way to practice intersectionality. An argument from Malmö Free University for Women.**

*If you want to be a subversive movement, you cannot assume the logic of the system.*

Mujeres Creando

*(Intro)*

### **Strategic Separatism**

When the Swedish minister of employment Sven Otto Littorin stated: "We don't go on strike in this country, its not in our tradition" he leaned on the norm binding Social Democratic rhetoric and consensus making. The resistance conducted in this country by the syndicalists, the sami, the ploughshares, the suburban youth and many others is explained as acts of unaware minds: de-politicised, silenced and effectively written out of history. It is our responsibility to break the silence and put words on the existing conflicts.

Within MFK we have tried strategic separatism, in our case based on gender, as one method to make visible a conflict that the norm refuse to recognize. Our activities are open

to all persons that now or at some point have identified as women. By drawing this line we not only create a space to act but we also politicise and activate those outside. We put the light on a border that is not supposed to exist. Through this we make space for disagreements and conflicts in everyday discussions.

We need to emphasize that we are talking about a partial and temporary separatism with no strive for a separatist society. We hope for a broad range of separatist organising: due to class, sexuality, gender, disabilities and so on. The importance of the separatist spaces is that they provide opportunities for self-definition: and self-definition is the first step to empowerment. If a group is not defining itself it will be defined by and for others. The aim for a separatist group is not primarily to discuss what one have in common, but creating a space where we can rest on a common ground and from that safe point go further and deeper into other subjects. The goal is diversity, not homogeneity. This demands of us to actively bring different perspectives into account and hopefully lead to the creation of new and unholy alliances based on an intersecting power analysis.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a perspective where gender, class, ethnicity/"race", sexuality etc never appear in a "pure" relation but affects and transforms through other forms of power relations. The term was used in the 1980's in the

antiracist discourse by for example, bell hooks and was utilized during the 1990's by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins who connects it closely to knowledge production and black feminist epistemology.

When working with MFK, we have been striving to combine theory and practice, academia, activism and art. This has forced us to intersect struggles of feminism, antiracism, class and sexuality. In our work we practice what theoretically is explained as intersectionality.

An example of this is the seminar we arranged together with artist, activist and researcher Kirsten Forkert entitled "Culture, Labour and Neoliberalism – how do we respond?". In the seminar, we actively stepped out of our comfort zone to invite speakers from different areas: academic researchers, artists and union activists. The result was a clash of perspectives where uncomfortable questions were raised and the answers had to be specific and complex in trying to understand each other. We believe that due to the common ground that separatism creates, the participants worked through their conflicts and new alliances were built. The focus of the seminar was not to find similarities but to try broaden our perspectives.

### **Structure and Organizing**

To realize and implement these methods of resistance we want to emphasize the importance of structure and organizing. As feminists we have learned from the experiences of

our movement. In 1970 feminist Jo Freeman wrote the text "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" as an internal critique of the women's movement of the 60ties. In an attempt to break patriarchal structures of power, they organized through leaderless, structureless groups. But in the groups new informal structures formed that were as norm binding and hierarchical as the old ones. The difference was that these could not be criticised or changed since they were invisible. The informal groups did however have an important role at the time but we have learned that in the long run it impeded the development and failed the resistance on a structural level.

Reading the text today, in an art context, it feels uncomfortably contemporary as the art world is structured much like the movement Freeman critiques, around informal structures and networks. We want to name a recent cynical example, where capital has appropriated rhetoric's of the left. It's the exhibition "Tell a friend" now showing in Stockholm at Bonniers Konsthall. It is constructed around the curators informal network: *The Konsthall asked interesting cultural personalities to name some of their favourites. Tell a friend lets the subjective, enjoyable selection be the guiding principle. The 'telling' and linking opens up for a temporary, non-hierarchical network were co-workers set the agenda.* This is not made as a critique of the informal structures and nepotism, but is introduced as an innovative curatorial concept.

## Formulating an alternative

All of us here today have in common a vision of a critical knowledge production to be conducted in the art world. But to keep it there, to maintain even a small space, we also need to be more aggressive in formulating an alternative. Within the – and we quote from the introduction to this conference - "new and experimental" format that we all engage in, we need to be upfront with our own privileges and be specific and precise on the position from which we speak. When we are clear on who we are and what we want it will also be clear to the public and participants.

An organisation is never structureless and it is never "open to all".

We will end with these words: When in political opposition, we cannot live in a constant relation to power but need to create our own discussion. The starting point can never be What are our limitations? What are we restricted to do? but must always be What do we want? and then How can we do it?





## RADICAL PEDAGOGY

Radical pedagogy is defined through a clear and transparent perspective on power and with a view on education that challenges the prevailing social order through a critical language and *an active construction of alternatives*. It is a pedagogy that strives to connect knowledge with social responsibility and collective struggle. The basis is that no knowledge, or we who communicate it, is neutral or free from values. Knowledge is always produced with a purpose and as part of a social order and it is one of the most important tools in the construction of the hegemony. The focus of a radical pedagogy is not to confirm the prevailing power structure, but **to activate critical thinking**. It is not principally what we learn, but *how* we learn, *how* we understand, *how* we use knowledge and *who* defines what is worth knowing. Thus education is not only generating knowledge, but also political subjects.

Knowledge is traditionally presented as facts, without tools to activate and use it with the aim to make change. For example, we don't believe that racism is primarily due to ignorance in a traditional sense; most people know and understand what racism is, but they don't see their own part in maintaining the systems that legitimate racism. Even if we don't see ourselves as racists or sexists we have to realize that we are marked by the advantages and disadvantages that are connected with our history and our geographical position. *We need to betray our nation, our thinking, ourselves.* (ref 1)

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire wrote "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" in 1970. In this book he develops a pedagogical

model based on his practice and experience of giving illiterates the ability to vote, by teaching them how to read and write in a short period of time. The pedagogy equalizes the power structure between teacher and student by assuming that all humans possess knowledge, it is just a matter of finding a way and a place to communicate it. The Italian communist and thinker Antonio Gramsci emphasizes the importance of personal and practical experiences in order to gain the ability to put the world into context. Much like Freire, he writes that all people are intellectuals but that it is one's social function that enables an intellectual position. He presents a model for an organic intellectual. The organic intellectual has experiences with and a relationship to the situation that she researches, in opposition to the solitary intellectual, who positions himself outside of the society he is analyzing. Through that definition, he puts focus on the power hierarchies that defines knowledge rather than on a "canon of knowledge".

In relation to this, political thinker and activist Chandra Talpade Mohanty talks about the concept **the personal is political** and writes:

*I believe that meanings of the "personal" are not static, but that they change through experience, and with knowledge. I am not talking about the personal as "immediate feelings expressed confessionally" but as something that is deeply historical and collective - as determined by our involvement in collectivities and communities and through political engagement. In fact it is this understanding of experience and of the personal that makes theory possible. So for me, theory is a deepening of the political, not a moving away from it: a distillation of experience, and an*

*intensification of the personal. The best theory makes personal experience and individual stories communicable. (ref 2)*

She chooses not to place **theory and practice** in opposition to each other, but demonstrates how they presuppose each other. We see the questioning of traditional divisions like theory/practice and personal/political as a part of radical pedagogy. Here feminist epistemology, which also centres on experience, has played a crucial role. It questions whether knowledge can be objective, since there is no objective reality to study and no scientist is free from values. Instead it puts the light on the subject behind every theory and query and states that who asks a question is crucial to *which* questions will be asked and *how* they will be answered. In relation to this, theorists like Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway can be mentioned.

When we started MFK, we didn't have a specific pedagogical idea or theoretical knowledge to start a "free university", but we were part of a community that needed a meeting place to be able to get together and exchange experiences and knowledge, to strengthen our political position. We knew that we wanted to combine theory and practice and a free university gave us the opportunity to do so. During the years we came across theory that was useful to our work and the more experience we gained, the more we understood the theory. Our working method has always been to start in practice and move (slowly) towards theory, to learn by doing. We move from action to reflection and from reflection to new action. This has become the basis of **our pedagogical philosophy**.

### Two examples:

**FAKTA – Feminism Aktivism Konst Till Alla** (FACTS – Feminism, Activism, Art for Everyone), a crash course on art as a political strategy, workshop in MFK's place in Malmö, initiated by artists Kristina Ask and Johanna Gustavsson. In October 2007, we arranged a theme around alternative pedagogy under the headline "School Without an End." One of the activities was FAKTA where the ambition was to use Paulo Freire's pedagogy that assumes that all humans possess knowledge, it is just a matter of creating a situation where that knowledge can be expressed. No one's knowledge is more important or "true" than the others; no one assumes a leading role. We chose to try to write a joint art history from a feminist perspective with the ones who wanted to participate. About 12 persons with various backgrounds and occupations participated.

We sat together around a big table. Step one was to let everybody introduce themselves with their name and what their expectations were for the evening. Then we asked everybody to write down two important events from the 20th century until today, one based on an artistic event or an artist and the other on an important political, historical event. Everybody presented their choice. We rolled out a large sheet of paper on the table and placed the events somewhere on the paper. When all the events lay on the table we started to discuss their significance, which ones could be linked and on what grounds. We soon agreed that we didn't want to build our history linearly but rather based on the significance the events had to us who were present. We used the knowledge of the group, what was said there was our point of departure and we didn't question each

other's knowledge or experiences but accepted them as "truths" then and there. When we had placed all events, they formed a map that we put on the wall. Based on the map we started to fill in the gaps that appeared between the events. We took the time to discuss our common world-view and what it meant.

The experience was as inspiring, fun and educational as it was frustrating. What was positive was the feeling of understanding that each person possesses relevant and important knowledge, and the joint experience that we, as a collective wrote history. At the same time there was a feeling of insufficiency, a lot of the knowledge was superficial. A longing appeared for someone to summarize or give a general picture or sort of "tell it like it is". What was important in this exercise was the understanding of how history is written and how knowledge is made, not to end up with a result that presents a "correct" art history.

**Intersectionality in art practice**, course at the School of Photography in Gothenburg (7,5 credits). In the fall semester of 2007, we were invited to give a course at the School of Photography in Gothenburg. Our focus at that time was intersectionality and how we could understand and use it practically, so that became our starting point for the course. We decided to organize the course so that it started in practice and ended with theory. We wanted to see what this would mean to the way the students approached and understood the concept. 18 students signed up to participate.

At the first day we started by making a short introduction of ourselves and the concept intersectionality, about 15 minutes, very basic but enough to give an idea of the

concept. In the morning we had invited Trifa Shakely who is a social worker and an immigration rights activist to give a workshop based on her practical work and how the concept of intersectionality manifested itself in the everyday situations she encountered. She chose to have a dialogue with us about power and we also worked practically with putting together images that described different power structures. The exercises were simple and a good way for us and the students to get to know each other, which also gave us a pleasant beginning of the coming work.

In a welcoming email we had asked everybody to bring and present an artwork which they interpreted from an intersectional perspective and that they wished they had made themselves. In the afternoon it was time for this. The presentations gave us a general idea of the group, who they were, how they interpreted the concept, their level of knowledge and what we ought to focus on in our future teaching. It was also a way for them to introduce themselves without talking about their own work. We ended the day by showing the movie "Privilege" by Yvonne Rainer, which we thought was yet another way of staging an intersectional perspective.

On the morning of day two we reflected each student based on their presentation. It was important that the students understood that their actions and way of expressing themselves meant something to others, that we acknowledged them and took them seriously. Based on the presentations and the interests and knowledge we could distinguish, we divided the students into groups that worked as base groups during the course. The task they got was to make an artwork with an intersectional perspective.

We organized the work so that they had regular talks with their base group or us and thereby many occasions during the course to explain and analyze what they did. They also had the possibility to try things out and transform the artwork.

In the afternoon we held a lecture to inspire them where we showed different artworks and how they could be interpreted intersectionally. We included some theoretical readings in the analysis of the artworks. They got loads of examples of how this concept can be read and practised and we think that the combination of choosing and analyzing works themselves and hearing others doing the same was educational.

After these intensive days they got time for individual work focused on making an intersectional artwork. The artwork was to be presented to the class but they also had to find another audience. The presentation of the artwork and the reactions on it were published in a common blog.

We met the students in their base groups, where everyone got to present their work process, bring up possible dilemmas and get feedback on their work. Putting them in base groups was also a method to teach them to use each other to discuss their work, which is not always obvious to all students; many rather turn to a teacher to learn what is right or wrong instead of using their colleagues to discuss. We wish that we had been encouraged to use each other during our studies, since our professional lives as artists entirely depend upon this dialogue.

When meeting the whole group we tried to pick up certain discussions that were common to the different groups. Among other things we used a TV talk show that discussed whiteness to bring additional voices into the

room. We also made an exercise where they were asked to present their project very shortly over and over again to each other in order to understand the essence of the project. They also got to try an exercise called "Privilege Walk" where the students face a number of statements about different privileges as a way of highlighting norms and differences within the group.

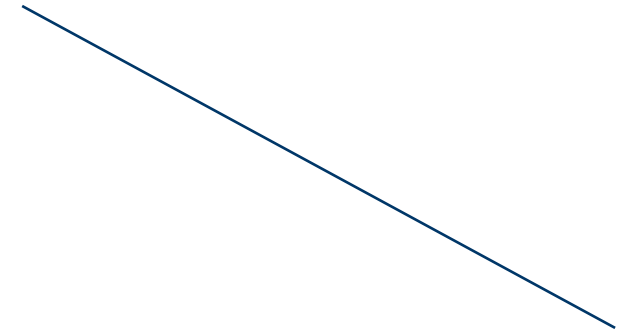
The reading list for the course was of a mixed character: an interview with a Bolivian anarcho-feminist collective, a fictional short story, a speech as well as a couple of more theoretical texts. At the end of the course we had scheduled a text seminar with art curator and art theoretician Tone O Nielsen. Nielsen gave a theoretical ground for the concept and the students were able to use their practical experiences as examples in order to understand.

Finally we had an evaluation where the students were able to express opinions on the course, which was instructive to us. We finished the course with a writing exercise. We asked them to put their pencils to paper, and without letting it leave the paper for 10 minutes, answer the question "This is how I perceive the concept intersectionality". We copied all the texts and put them together in a booklet entitled "This is Intersectionality". With this, we parted.

- 
- Every teaching situation is a dialogue.
  - Point to the power structures within the room and the tools to question them.
  - Work with and present the structure of the teaching so that

- it may be questioned.
- Explain the intentions of the exercises to the students.
- Try to always connect theory with practice and vice versa. Do not rate one higher than the other.

- Let the students take part in the responsibility for each other's learning and the atmosphere in the classroom.
- Formulate the teaching based on the students' situation.
- See the students and reflect them, they should feel that their contribution is important!
- Keep an eye on the time when you ask a question or ask for feedback, so that everyone gets a chance to speak.
- Do not presuppose knowledge and explain words and concepts in a comprehensible way. Make sure that everyone follows and understands.



### **Ref:**

1. *(Sk)riv – för en ny värld*, Hanna Hallgren, Aftonbladet 2007-04-25
2. *FEMINISM WITHOUT BORDERS. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Duke University Press 2003



# UTOPIA

## UTOPIA

Utopia is a description of an ideal society. By describing utopia, **an autonomous alternative** is presented that demonstrates the deficiencies of the prevailing society, without being in opposition. Utopia is a place that cannot be located – too fluid to be mapped out, but at the same time real enough to function. Above all it is a tool for change. To us art/culture is a possibility where fantasies and utopias can be developed and shape the non-existing, to think the impossible and make it real. But art needs a connection to the practical politics. Art and politics separated, one by one, often get stuck confirming or questioning the hegemony, but in dialogue they have the opportunity to act together here and now, as well as in an imagined future. To us the choice of utopia as method, and art and politics as a field for implementation, was a way of connecting theory with practice. We wanted to make room for ideological reflections and put them into words.

**What happens when we win?** A friend's simple and difficult question made us think – what would the world be like if we could decide? What were we fighting for? We wanted to think ahead and be relieved of the limitations of the present. In the public discourse nobody seemed to talk about ideology any more. The politicians avoided giving an idea about the future and let the present alone define politics. The artists who were interested in society seemed content to reflect on it without contributing alternatives.

To be in a political opposition kept us busy. We spent our time answering, arguing against and confronting the prevailing order, but we rarely had any time left to formulate

what was important to us. We needed to reclaim the privilege of formulation, be one step ahead and find ways of acting collectively. Based on that need we started to talk about utopia as an idea in 2009. We fantasized about staging a feminist utopia, to temporarily forget the here and now and visualize an intense, ecstatic future together with others!

In November 2009 we were in New York arranging **a workshop** entitled "We Won! A feminist utopia" at artist-run 16 Beaver Group. The invitation read:

*Malmö Free University for Women (MFK) hereby cordially invites you to take part in a collective staging of a feminist utopia! Let's treat ourselves to a temporary amnesia about the practical aspects of the here and now and try to visualize an INTENSE ECSTATIC FUTURE together.*

*We concentrate on the room we are occupying and within the surrounding walls we imagine no longer being in opposition - no more defences, no longer the feeling of being two steps behind. We imagine the world as it will be when we have won, the day after the revolution, when patriarchy, capitalism, racism, sexism and their brothers have fallen, and a new world rises from the ashes. We allow ourselves no compromises, going all the way, to the extreme. And from that glorious point in the future we recount our steps back to where we are today, mapping out our path to success.*

Eight people signed up for the workshop. They were asked to bring an item that represented something that they wanted to bring into the future. The workshop was comprised of the following steps:

- Warm-up: stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, look into each other's eyes, strain every muscle in your body for 10 seconds.
- MFK say hello and welcome, we are MFK, invitation, why we are here together today, a reminder about the situation. (about 10 min)
- Presentation round where everyone introduces themselves and their item. (about 15-20 min)
- Place your item in the room in relation to the others and their items. (about 5 min)
- Everyone gets the opportunity to make changes if they can motivate it. (about 15-20 min)
- Find groupings among the items and form groups around them.
- The groups get 3 minutes to come up with as many things as possible that they lack in their utopia. Read the list out loud to each other, the group with the most things wins. The reward is to invent and lead everyone in a victory dance. (about 15 min)
- Now you can choose groups as you like. Within this group, be concrete and develop what this area looks like in the future, be as specific as possible. Someone has

to take notes/document it! (about 40-45 min)

- 45 min potluck lunch
- Warm-up to get started after lunch, the yes-game, someone makes a statement and everyone answers by screaming YEEEEES. (about 5 min)
- The groups summarize to each other what they have arrived at. The groups must form a unity – find a way of bridging the different proposals! (about 40-45 min)
- Victory dance once more and coffee. (about 15 min)
- Writing exercise, "There is a retrospective at The New New Museum and you are invited as the main speaker, as a representative of the movement that made all these amazing feminist changes back in the day, write a speech (or at least an introduction to a speech). (about 10-15 min)
- Read some speeches/parts of speeches out loud. (about 15-20 min)
- Concluding round. (about 20 min)

In 2010 we picked up the utopia again. The meeting in New York had been intense and rewarding and we missed the kind of devotion that the workshop allowed for, but there never seemed to be enough time. Politics had turned into something that was discussed Thursdays between 7-9 pm and afterwards everybody went home to their own place and all fantastic ideas were put on hold. We wished for **a room of our own**. A room where we were bigger and more powerful and unrestricted by the musts of everyday life, where we had time and space to move and think, where we set the agenda for what was important, what ought to be done and how. A temporary room together with allies, where everyone had taken time from their regular lives and prioritized the community to create something together. What were we able to achieve with 44 hours of complete concentration? What could happen if we didn't answer our cell phones, check our emails or part in the evening to go home in separate directions?

We invited eight persons to lock themselves in with us on three occasions, in what we call a "lock-in", from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. At the time of writing, two of these lock-ins have been carried through. Together we discuss, eat and sleep. The contact with the surrounding world is broken and the cell and its community is our sole priority. There are no goals or demands that something must be produced or presented to the outside world. The basis for the idea is everybody's total participation and presence and it is important that the participants promised to go all in. MFK made an invitation to and organized the initial meeting and now all the decisions about what the group wants to do or achieve are on us as a collective. The method

that we try is based on what we call **(a) collective dependency** where commitment, intimacy and trust are crucial. In a time where all aspects of our lives are individualized in order to create market value, we suggest to go the opposite direction and instead aim at making ourselves as dependant on each other as possible.

Our work with the project *Insisting to be part of this moment/movement (övertygade om vår storhet)* (convinced of our greatness) April 1 – May 29 2011 at Konsthall C (a non-profit art organization and exhibition space) started under the working title "We Won! staging a feminist utopia". We discussed, analyzed, twisted and turned our own and other people's notions about both the utopia and the exhibition space. We thought about the ones who were going to visit Konsthall C hoping to be introduced to a feminist utopia... whatever we did we were going to disappoint them. One idea that we had concerning the exhibition space, was to build a perfect meeting place where many people could participate on equal terms, where everyone could communicate with each other and where room was made for different perspectives. The utopian building construction was translated into the idea of putting mirrors on the ceiling and that way double both the space and the collective and at the same time give an overview and the possibility to see oneself as a part of something bigger. Instead of staging the utopia as an exhibition, we realized that utopia is based on people's presence; **utopia is made** when people activate it. Therefore we chose to open up the space to different collaborations and activities.

When we initially took an interest in feminist utopias we had an idea that we would be able to produce a place,



an image – something concrete, but the more we tried the harder it got. Utopia cannot be defined as a static, perfect place; it is the ongoing attempts, the fiction, the theory and the striving for the perfect existence. Through our persistent work we started to discern a common thread. It was all those situations when we got together with others who had the same need and desire to shape the future, that we together made utopia. We claimed the space we needed and created temporary places where we set the agenda. To us utopia became a way of acting politically in our every day lives ●

■ Don't let the hegemony be the only one setting the agenda.

■ Seize art's possibility to create what is not already there.

## Don't get stuck in opposition

create collective  
visions of the future!

### ACTIVITIES 2006-2011

Start-up meeting at Signal Gallery.  
PicNicPoetry in Pildammsparken, with readings by Isabell Dahlberg and Petra Mölstrad.  
Förlaget presents the workshop: Do Your Own Electronic Music.  
Lecture with artist Katarina Nitsch.  
Stand Up and Shake! A feminist, anti-racist rally with Marita Castro, Karavan, Backspace, Sara Brolund Carvalho, Johanna Gustavson, Asylgruppen and Kajsa Viklund.  
Lecture on Emma Goldman, by Sonia Hedstrand.  
Experimental Radio, with Åsa Ståhl and Kristina Lindström.  
Reading Travel Narratives and Literature by Swedish Women: From the Perspective of the "Neutral Core", a reading group initiated and led by Jeuno JE Kim.

Lecture on Intersectionality, by Kerstin Sandell and Diana Mulinari.

How do We Practice Intersectionality? A discussion with Ellen Nyman.

Workshop: Anti-racism.

Lecture with artist Lisa Nyberg.

Anti-racist Christmas decoration workshop.

Part 1 in a series of non-heteronormative couples dancing: Lindy Hop, with Klara Karnerud and Molly Ränge.

Lecture by artist Johanna Gustavsson.

Part 2 in a series of non-heteronormative couples dancing: Cha-Cha, with Iasmina Munteanu.

Naughty Friday, with readings by Marianne Andersson (among others).

What are Furrries? Furry Fandom.

Lecture on Shere Hite, by Lisa Nyberg.

Let's talk about sex baby, let's talk about you and me, let's talk about all the good things and the bad things that may be, a workshop with Sofi Olsson and Sandra Lindgren.

Pegging, Linnea Wegerstad enlightens us.

Clean Dirty, Tanja Rätty talks about her project on equal sex.

Lecture with the Danish curatorial duo Kuratorisk Aktion.

Film screening: Preto contra Branco by Wagner Moraes.

A visit from Lawen Mohtadi, Slut magazine.

Cecilia Wendt arranges a film screening: Scuola Senza Fine (School without an end) by Adriana Monti.

Take Care of Yourself and Your

<p>Friends, led by massage therapists Klara Karnerud and Karin Holmberg.</p> <p>Nobody will Silence Us! A workshop on speech as a political strategy with Paula Mullinari and Johanna Gustavsson.</p> <p>Part 3 in a series of non-heteronormative couples dancing: Swedish folk dance, with Liv Hellström.</p> <p>Femmis – single mothers by choice through insemination/IVF, with Gumilla Gerland.</p> <p>Read-a-Thon, initiated by Jeuno JE Kim, with Marianne Andersson, Johanna Gustavsson, Petra Mølstad, Mirjana Westermark, Ellen Nyman, Paula Mullinari, Anna Sandgren, Tone O Nielsen, Ida Börjel, Malmö Feministkör and Jeuno JE Kim.</p> <p>Workshop: No to house maids.</p> <p>Vegan Festival with Lisa Gålmark, Tanja Råty and Ronnebygatans</p>	<p>ekolliv.</p> <p>First meeting about feminist parenting.</p> <p>Violence, Power and Gender, a discussion with the young women's support group in Malmö.</p> <p>Lecture with art action group the YES! Association.</p> <p>Boot camp with Girls With Balls.</p> <p>Lecture on Hannah Arendt, by Annika Rut Persson.</p> <p>Blood, Water and the Politics of Biology – on biology as a norm in Swedish family politics, lecture by Karin Lenke.</p> <p>Culture, Labour and Neoliberalism – how do we respond? A seminar initiated by Kirsten Forkert, with Kristina Ask, Tone O Nielsen, Dahlia Mukhtai-Landgren, Liv Marend and Emma Reichert.</p> <p>Bird-watching with Ylva Westerlund.</p>	<p>Male breast feeding, with Jenny Grönvall and Charlotte Eliasson (part of the feminist parenting group)</p> <p>Breaking the Lawn, in collaboration with Free Floating Faculty and Kirsten Forkert at Den Frie Udstillingsbygning, Copenhagen.</p> <p>Bike repair with Johanna Lidström.</p> <p>Taking Control Over the Story, with Moa Matsdotter.</p> <p>Collective parenting daycare or municipal daycare? (part of the feminist parenting group).</p> <p>Show More. The veil machine, with Lina Linde.</p> <p>Lecture and action with art group Megafån.</p> <p>Pussy Pants— a course in free movement and liberation, initiated by Åsa Ståhl, with Ingrid Ryberg and Jenny Nordberg.</p> <p>The New American Nightmare</p>	<p>course at Det Jyske Kunsthakademi in Århus, Denmark.</p> <p>Self-organizing as Artistic Strategy, course at the Nordic art school in Karleby, Finland.</p> <p>The Tyranny of Structurelessness a discussion, IASPIs, Stockholm.</p> <p>Essentially Experimental?</p> <p>Symposium at Valand, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Welcome to the Tyranny of Structurelessness, a discussion on the art of organizing, ABE, Malmö.</p> <p>Art after Education, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality as a Tool, lecture by Anna Adeniji, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality in Artistic Practice, Regnbågsfestivalen, Malmö.</p> <p>Lecture: Intersectionality from an Artistic Perspective, and a discussion group with the museum staff,</p>
<p>– a critical ideological study of American horror movies, with Kicki Fredriksson.</p> <p>Feminist Epistemology and Experimental Teaching in Higher Education, with Ylva Gislén.</p> <p>Start-up meeting: year 2.</p> <p>Who is Friends with Paulo Freire? with Jeuno JE Kim.</p> <p>Our Names are Monica and Johanna, an initial discussion on working-class experiences in the university world, with Monica Johansson and Johanna Gustavsson.</p> <p>Pedagogy in feminist self-defence training, with Camilla Safrankova.</p> <p>To Whom it May Concern – a collective letter action, at Skåne Social Forum.</p> <p>The MFK Report – Organizing Feminism in the Gap between Art and Politics, lecture at Bluestockings, New York.</p>	<p>FAKTA – Feminism Activism Art For Everyone, a crash course on art as political strategy, with Johanna Gustavsson and Kristina Ask.</p> <p>JAK Members Bank informs.</p> <p>Breakfast Club: Alternative Living from an Anarchist Perspective, with Kajsa Viklund.</p> <p>Survival: The Personal Perspective.</p> <p>Survival: Structures.</p> <p>Swop-projects, with Andrea Creutz and Lise Skou.</p> <p>Survival: In Practice.</p> <p>Feminist Perspectives, course at Örebro art school.</p> <p>Clap! Clap! Everything-is-free-Christmas-gift-exchange.</p> <p>Radical Software, exhibition at Den Frie Udstillingsbygning in Copenhagen.</p> <p>Self-organizing as Artistic Strategy</p>	<p>The Tyranny of Structurelessness a discussion, IASPIs, Stockholm.</p> <p>Essentially Experimental?</p> <p>Symposium at Valand, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Welcome to the Tyranny of Structurelessness, a discussion on the art of organizing, ABE, Malmö.</p> <p>Art after Education, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality as a Tool, lecture by Anna Adeniji, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality in Artistic Practice, Regnbågsfestivalen, Malmö.</p> <p>Lecture: Intersectionality from an Artistic Perspective, and a discussion group with the museum staff,</p>	<p>course at Det Jyske Kunsthakademi in Århus, Denmark.</p> <p>Self-organizing as Artistic Strategy, course at the Nordic art school in Karleby, Finland.</p> <p>The Tyranny of Structurelessness a discussion, IASPIs, Stockholm.</p> <p>Essentially Experimental?</p> <p>Symposium at Valand, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Welcome to the Tyranny of Structurelessness, a discussion on the art of organizing, ABE, Malmö.</p> <p>Art after Education, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality as a Tool, lecture by Anna Adeniji, Röda Sten, Gothenburg.</p> <p>Intersectionality in Artistic Practice, Regnbågsfestivalen, Malmö.</p> <p>Lecture: Intersectionality from an Artistic Perspective, and a discussion group with the museum staff,</p>

Museum Anna Norlander, Skellefteå.

Intersectionality in Art Practice, course at the School of Photography in Gothenburg.

Feminism and the Future, workshop at Signal – center for contemporary art, Malmö.

Manufacturing Today, workshop Vilnius.

Do The Right Thing, workshop at wip:konsthall, Stockholm, invitation by Filmklubben.

From Malmö with Love – a collective writing exercise, with Jeuno JE Kim.

Workshop: Correction, Malmö.

Confession as Manipulation and Excuse, with Ylva Westerlund and Cristine Sarrimo, Malmö.

Performance Mania, with Elin

Lundgren, Malmö.

Göran Person is a feminist, Fredrik Reinfeldt is the leader of the new labour party, with Malin Arvidsson, Malmö.

Manipulation School, with Malin Myrén and Liv Strand, Malmö.

Exhibition: Manipulation, at Signal – center for contemporary art, Malmö.

Rörelsen meets Girls With Balls, with Rani Nair, Malmö.

MFK @ Nobody Puts Baby In A Corner, with Katerina Llanes, New York.

We Won! A feminist utopia, I6 Beaver Group, New York.

Manufacturing Today, Trondheim art biennial.

We Are All Greek Workers, Almedalsveckan.

Choosing and Doubting – what do I vote for, I'm left and feminist?, with Lo Hillarp at Glassfabriken in Malmö.

Dare to Ask! Come on Lena, what else would we do? at Konsthall C, Stockholm.

After the Election: now what? At Glassfabriken i Malmö.

MFK @ Iaspi, house warming.

Lock-in part 1, at Konsthall C, Stockholm.

A Day on Intersectionality, workshop at Konstfack, Stockholm.

Lock-in part 2, Stockholm.

Just Say No, workshop at IASPI, Stockholm

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ACTIVITIES 2006-2011

Do the Right Thing  
en handbok från MFK

INTERSEK-

TIONALITET

EKONOMI

ORGANISERING  
och  
STRUKTUR



RT