

The Discourse of the Drinkers – The Laughing Body

By Annika Larsson

“The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation...”

Laughter, on the other hand, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations.”

Mikhail Bakhtin

The film installation and book *The Discourse of the Drinkers* are exploring the bar as a social and political space. The project serves as an initial part of the artistic research project *Non-knowledge, Laughter and the Moving Image* that is examining the Moving Image and the Laughing Body's capacity for new and alternative modes of thinking, acting and being, and their potential to overturn our habitual course and change the order of things. The three-year project began in January 2018, and is funded by the Swedish Research Council and hosted by the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm in collaboration with Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg.

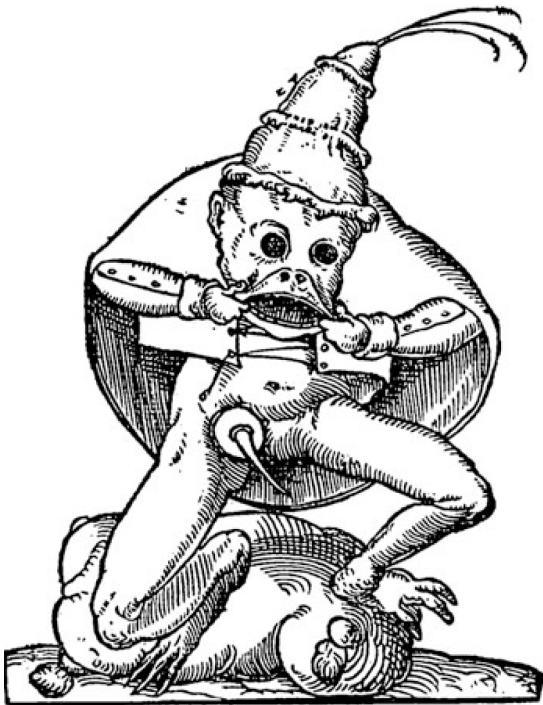
The title *The Discourse of the Drinkers* stems from a chapter in François Rabelais' s 16th Century comic novels on *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*, a pentalogy that also partly serves as a narrative framework for the project. Departing from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the “Carnavalesque” and “the Grotesque Body”, expressed in his analysis of François Rabelais works, the project embraces a mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of a dominant order, a temporary state where social hierarchies of everyday life are turned up side down. Equally interested in queer and collective bodies, the “Grotesque Body” here is a body in the act of becoming, manifested through the *open mouth* - that laughing, drinking, talking and singing opens up the body to the world.

The film installation, as well as the main part of the book, consists of material that was filmed in the queer bar *The Club* in Neukölln and the 24h open bar *Rote Rose* at Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg in Berlin during a six-month period in 2017. Moving between documentation, fiction, observation, performance and dialogue, the project makes use of the moving image's ability of opening up a virtual space, a place for unstable and unforeseen movements and meetings. Through montage the two bars are merged into one, creating a performative and relational space for moving and instable bodies, identities and stories. Scenes of conversation intercut with a stage performance by the trash drag ensemble the Real Housewives of Neukölln, whose collective voice acts like as a chorus for the film, commenting on the said and unsaid.

The book consists of transcribed bar conversations, song lyrics and stills from the filmed material in juxtaposition with modified passages from the stories of *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*. Together with a selection of historical bar and intoxicant imagery, lyrics, texts and poetry they form a multi voiced document, a collective drinking and laughing political body.

Annika Larsson

is an Artist, Professor in Time Based Media at Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg and Researcher at The Royal Institute of Arts, Stockholm. Her video-works and installations have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world in institutions such as Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Fundacion la Caixa, Barcelona, Le Magasin, Grenoble, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nürnberg, ICA-Institute of Contemporary Art, London, ZKM, Karlsruhe, S.M.A.K., Gent and Musac, Lyon. She has participated in biennials such as 49th Venice Biennial, 8th Istanbul Biennial and 6th Shanghai Biennial among others. She lives and works in Berlin.



Pg. 306–307 Illustrations from Les Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel, A Paris, Par Richard Breton, Desprez, François (1565).



CHERYL GIVES US ADVISE ON THE
SUBJECT OF BODY HAIR

Cheryl: I've got a hairy back
A physical feature that most people lack
It's something special what's behind my back
So I'll turn around and maybe switch the track

Let's snuggle babe
If warm and fuzzy's something that you crave
I'll be your perfect little love slave
There's just no way I would ever shave

Hairy back, loving it
I'm hairy, loving it

(repeat ad lib)

I've got a hairy back
And I use it like an aphrodisiac
My winter coat is always on my rack
'Cause I'm a mammal baby, that's a fact

Let's snuggle babe
If warm and fuzzy's something that you crave
I'll be your perfect little love slave
There's just no way I would ever shave

Hairy back, loving it
I'm hairy, lovin

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Pg. 232 Video-still from The Discourse of the Drinkers by Annika Larsson (2017).

Pg. 233–234 (Cheryl: I've got ...) Song "Hairy back", Lyrics by Jake Indianaperformed by Cheryl at The Real Housewives of Neukölln, Trash Drag Show 'Frriuity #2', at Rosis Bar, 27 May 2017.

To all you boys who don't know how to act
You motherfuckers can cut me some slack
I'm just a woman with a hairy back!

Hairy back, loving it
I'm hairy, loving it
Hairy back, loving it
I'm hairy, loving it
Hairy back, loving it
I'm hairy, loving it



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Pg. 234 (Cheryl: I've got ...) Song "Hairy back", Lyrics by Jake Indiana, performed by Cheryl at The Real Housewives of Neukölln, Trash Drag Show 'Frrruity #2', at Rosis Bar, 27 May 2017.

Pg. 235 Painting by Jan Havickszoon Steen, Zelfportret (1670).



A PROPHETIC RIDDLE

- M: Like yeah, your financial system is about to crash, and I am kind of like a native american, like the Tainos indian. So I have been going around the world to teach people how to live without money.
- E: So you advise people?
- M: Yes, I do workshops in earth-building and permaculture. You know. Alternate energy. Oh well. Yeah... What happens if all the lights go out?
- E: What happens? Should I buy a torch or candles?
- M: You, you... candles... I worked on Katrina, I worked on Sandy, Haiti earthquake... I do stuff like that. Because they don't know what to do.
- E: What do you need to stock up with? Candles, torch... ?
- M: You might want to start by everybody growing something.
- E: Like what?
- M: Tomatoes...
- E: But it doesn't grow in the house...
- M: Yes it does. Food grows everywhere. But some dirt...
- E: Tomatoes in the house?
- A: Yes, it does. I grew some beans.
- M: You get non-heirloom seeds. And you plant beans, and she plants potatoes. And he plants onions, and somebody grows fish. You will have to take those kind of solutions that are needed when western civilisation collapses. It is already collapsing.
- Ida Entity: You won't admit your dosage and so how am I ever to know, you only tell me Perhaps, collapse, perhaps

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Pg. 196 Painting by Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen, *Laughing Fool*, detail, possibly Netherlands, (circa 1500). Pg. 197 (Like yeah ...) Transcription of conversation at Rote Rose, 15 Jan 2017.

Pg. 197 (Ida Entity: You wont ...) Song "Perhaps, Collapse, Perhaps", Lyrics by Ida entity, performed by Ida entity at *The Real Housewives of Neukölln, Trash Drag Show 'Frrruity #2'*, at Rosis Bar, 27 May 2017

THE NEWS WHICH SHE BROUGHT FROM THE
DEVILS, AND OF THE DAMNED PEOPLE IN HELL

J: Humans are scum!
E: Tell me about the business people you were working with.
J: Oh, It is very interesting. Because this is like, to work in finance and all these businesses is a bit... I told you that when I was working for Bayer and all these businesses, I thought like I was in a pool with sharks, you know? Because what you try is like, to make yourself up you have to make others down. It is not like trying to make yourself to show how good your are, the easier way is to show ʹlook the others made something bad and I donʹtʹ. It is like, many times like this. But it is like, with competition in general, you know. In the end business is competition and competition is to try to make yourself better than others in whatever way you can.

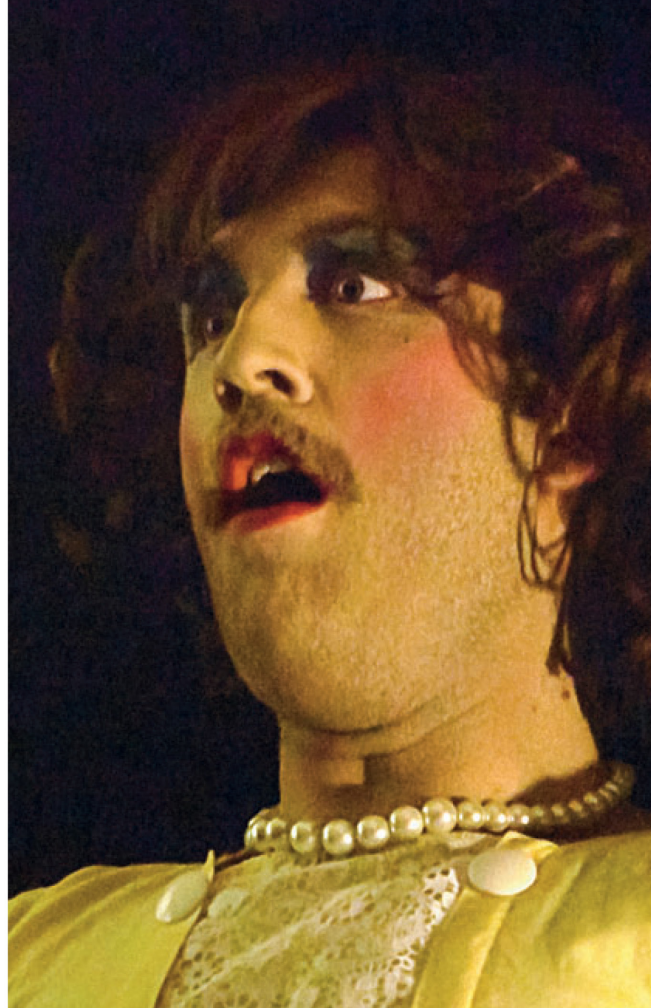
Suddenly another bar goer woke up from a short slumber. She began to breathe, then to open her eyes, then to sneeze, and then she blew her great household fart. Upon which we said: Now she certainly is “awake”, and gave her a glass of strong, rough white wine to drink, together with some sugared toast steeped in wine.

And now she began to speak, saying that she had seen the devils, and held intimate conversations with Lucifer, and feasted both in hell and in the Elysian Fields. She swore to us all that the devils were good fellows; and, as for the damned, she said that she was quite sorry that she woke up so promptly, “For, said she’ I was taking a singular pleasure in seeing them”

“What?” exclaimed we.

“They don’t treat them as baldy as you’d think” said

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Pg. 164 (*Humans ...*) Transcription of conversation, *Rote Rose*, Berlin, 29 Oct 2016

Pg. 165 Video-still (*Cheryl*), from *The Discourse of the Drinkers* by Annika Larsson (2017)