

Queer_Feminist Perspectives on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex_work as Culture Production.



Post / Porn / Politics

Ed: Tim Stüttgen

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Werner Hirsch is a horse whisperer who works occasionally as a performer and actor (Normal love, normal work, 2007, N.O. Body, 2008 and Charming for the Revolution, 2009, films by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz). He also works as a filmmaker (Kings & Disasters, 2004) and dancer (with Susanne Berggren in 2005, Petra Sabisch in 2006 and Vincent Dupont for INCANTUS). In October 2009, he was part of the festival JACK SMITH! LIVE FILM! at HAU and Arsenal Berlin. He sometimes appears as the Berlin-based choreographer Antonia Baehr (who premiered, a.o., Rire/Laugh/Lachen at the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in May 2008 and Over The Shoulder with Tamar Shelef at the Rencontres de Seine St Denis/SACD in May 2009). Werner Hirsch is represented by make up productions [<http://www.make-up-productions.net>]. Suggested publication: Rire Laugh Lachen, 2008, Baehr, Antonia; Editions: Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers/L'OEil d'Or/make up productions

Laughing is loud and dirty.

Werner and William, Post Porn Performance Symposium, Berlin, 2006.

Photography: Marietta Kesting.

fig. 01

Werner Hirsch

fig. 01



Tim Stüttgen Dear Werner, honestly, it took me a bit to find the right perspective for interviewing you about "Post/Porn/Politics," because you're not a typical or – even atypical – sex performer. Would you still like to say something about the sexuality of Werner Hirsch, a crossdresser, who occasionally also performs as his female alias Antonia Baehr?

Werner Hirsch My sexuality: I'm gay. I'm into drag queens and mares. My favorite mare is grey, she's called LADY. Yes, I like doing drag, I like to cross-dress as a woman-artist, as a choreographer – probably because I work as a dancer these days. As a dancer, I'm an autodidact. I got into working as an interpreter for choreographers because I needed a job that makes some money I can live of – and it's a pleasant job. There are not many male dancers around, much less than female ones, and much less virtuosity is required of them than of female dancers. We, the male dancers, don't have problems getting jobs. We just need to be cool. And we can be autodidacts, no problem.

TS Antonia Baehr is not the only pseudonym Werner Hirsch has taken up. Can you tell me a bit about your politics of naming?

WH Well, Antonia Baehr doesn't want to dance for straight male choreographers, because as a tittie dancing lady, you can't escape becoming the fantasy and projection screen of choreographer and audience. But I have no problems with that, because I'm not tittie.

TS But there is also Henry Wilt, and a guy named Fleur . . . So your artist identity is split up into many different characters. Are those very strictly constructed characters, or are they blurring over each other? Would you call your practice of naming a queer practice? And is it difficult for a single-identity-addicted cultural market to deal with that? I am curious how you would describe your characters.

WH Indeed there are many people, as I would say – or identities, if you prefer using that word – produced by "Make Up Productions." The production company and the webpage to it are the home, the "house of" all these people. Some share the same base of their make up, the same biological body; others don't. Some seem to have no body at all – but you never know. Yes, we are intreseted in blurring the borders that namings and identities establish in hope that it all will stay in constant becoming, never getting static or ready to go into a box. Indeed, we are trying to unsettle the fixity and power of name, gender, nationality and all that which is printed on the passport. But it's not easy to stay confused and confusing in this world. We hope we can continue having pleasure with it for some time longer, though.

TS Your biography says you grew up in West Germany and then moved to the United States, where you married the drag queen Agnes B. You still with her? I actually remember you mostly performing with the drag queen Bonnie

Laughing is loud and dirty.

Werner Hirsch

Guitar, who is one of the aliases of William Wheeler. . . . Can you say a bit about your working relation? . . .

WH They are both so beautiful. Bonnie has the most exquisite gestures. . . .

TS You got possibly some of the most intense reactions at the P/P/P event because at first glance, your performance was not pornographic at all. You did a laughing piece! I remember how much some (male) parts of the audience were really frustrated, that there was no undressing in a classical striptease sense or some other cliché like that.

Since three years at least, both as Werner Hirsch and Antonia Baehr, you investigate laughing as notated system as well as embodiment. Some parts are really funny; others even look scary – because long-term laughing has always something schizophrenic and hysterical in it, at least from my point of view. Can you tell me why laughing became such an important issue for you and how you developed your work on laughing?

WH I don't think that laughing has nothing to do with pornography. On the contrary: for me this performance was the only possible answer to your invitation (which was to create a post-pornographic performance for your festival). I asked myself, what's a pornographic performance? It has to display explicitly sexual organs or activity, and, more importantly, it has to stimulate erotic feelings rather than just aesthetic or emotional ones. So I started with myself, asking myself what imagery stimulates me. And I realized that it's not

images of dicks and pussys and clits and ass-holes sticking into each other that turn me on the most, but . . . certain animal films, or instruction films about how to clean a horse (with a lot of close-ups). Or the film I saw at the porn festival last year which combines bondage and laughter: many different people are tied up and tickled by gloved hands. It takes for ever. The film is one hour of screaming and laughing. I wiggled so much on my chair, I suffered because I was so turned on!

The mouth is a hole. The laughter ejaculates out of the mouth. There are spits and caughs coming out of the depths of the body. Laughing is not pretty. Laughing is loud and dirty. Smiling is pretty, and that has nothing to do with laughing. Why do girls laugh so much during puberty? How do you feel after a day of laughing? How do you feel after falling down and rolling on the floor in a laughing fit? Of course, there are other forms of laughter, the polite hihhi yes thank you very nicely. But that's not the one I'm talking about. Laughing . . . rubbing your pelvis on the back of a galloping horse . . . alright, I'm talking about masturbation. And imagination. And a bit uncanny, abnormal, rather perverse positions. Isn't the armpit arousable? And above all, aren't we a fetishist with a twist?

TS How much is every live performance of your piece influenced by the relationality to the audience? Sometimes, as in the P/P/P-symposium, the audience might react frustrated, other times burst out laughing themselves. How do you like – and deal – with the ambivalence of this situation?

WH I'm not trying to manipulate the audience. I mean, I don't design the moment when the audience is supposed to come. It's more like an experiment in which we all take part. We might feel: Yes, No, Yes, No, it hurts, it's good, it hurts, it's good. Or all kinds of things.

TS What made your performance even a bit **BDSM** though was a small screen, telling you what to do. It reminded me a lot about a top/bottom-situation. And when thinking about laughing, I actually think about the possibilities and limits of breathing – your body must work hard for the embodiment, I suppose. This reminded me even of **BDSM**-practices like gagging. . . . Furthermore, this is not the first work where you investigated the relation of a body submitting to an order. I remember a performance you developed called “un après-midi” which has been interpreted by different drag king-performers in different setups. The performers get orders through headphones about what they have to do on stage. . . . Can you talk about how the piece is constructed?

WH “Un après-midi” is based on contracts. The performers sign a contract with us before the show, stating that they have the desire to be told during 35 minutes of their life what to do, the desire to follow these instructions, and the desire to pass as a man. The performers get a letter of invitation beforehand. It's addressed to people who have lived as women for some time in their life. Our work has surely a lot to do with **BDSM**, more with its techniques and philosophy than with its aesthetics. And we love to work with and about the innuendo, the latent presence of sexual meaning before things get “explicit” and stamped.

TS Can you tell me about your interest in the tension between the idea of “non-liberated” or “submitted” body in a performance?

WH Maybe, since we grew up surrounded by anti-authoritarian ideology and practices, we developed a different relationship to the concepts of “Liberty” and “Freedom” than the one proclaimed in the 70s. Freedom, understood as a *tabula rasa*, is not sexy to us. One of us said in my anti-authoritarian kindergarten as a child, with a whiny voice: “Do we have to do what we want today again?” . . . Oh, but I didn't answer your question: you asked about “the non-liberated body in a performance.” Well, here is where performance and life can be used in a quite close way, the one serving as a laboratory to find out about the other and vice-versa, the motor for both being desire. The great thing about **BDSM** practices is also that they are so theatrical. You can say “playing” to both theater practice and **BDSM** practice.

TS Also, especially in the last two years, you have become a present actor in the work of queer_feminist visual artists Renate Lorenz and Pauline Boudry. Especially in the last years, you collaborated on pieces like “Normal Love” (2007) and “N.O. Body” (2008) – and about your experience performing in them? In “Normal Love” you interacted with the biography of Hannah Culwick, a working-class woman who had a fetishistic relationship with her upper-class master. And in “N.O. Body,” which was actually premiered in Berlin in an exhibition in honor of sexual scientist, Thomas Hirschfeld, you embodied the classic queer image of the bearded lady. . . .

WH I adore working with Pauline and Renate. We've just come from a new shooting: "Charming for the Revolution." It's going to premiere at the end of the month at "LIVE FILM! JACK SMITH! Five days in a rented world" in Berlin. On the one hand, Renate and Pauline are creating filmic responses to our work. They see what we do and who we are and this is how I enter in their work. For example, in "N.O. Body" I am interpreting scores written for Antonia Baehr's laughter that are part of our RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN project. One of these scores is by William Wheeler, the other one by Andrea Neumann. So complex inter-twinements of authorships take place. But at the same time, I'm at Pauline and Renate's "service." It's really their work and I'm the star in it :-)) which feels fantastic! I let myself be guided by them, and they are the most exquisite hosts, with glamour and oysters. . . .

TS A cross-dressed Antonia Baehr or a version of Werner Hirsch might not only appear "on stage," but also in everyday situations like in a bar or in a public bath. I think you said to me once that those performative and transgendered situations might be much more subversive than any theater production. Can you expand on that?

WH Well, as we said once, we research the fiction of everyday-life performance and the fiction of theater. There are situations in which the theater stage can be more productive for knowledge production and wonder than the street/bar/bath, or vice versa. There are also

interesting differences between the two: for example, I have to "dress down" if I want to have a say on the theater stage – wear jeans for instance, which I would never do on the street. On the street, I can deliciously cross-dress, or wear dandy clothes from the 20s and hats and smoke my pipe. But if I do that on the theater stage, the audience will take me merely for a "character" in a "costume." So in a way, I "disguise" myself when I go onstage, taking pleasure in dressing up as a normal man. But of course, it's different again if we perform a concert as supposed to a dance piece, if we walk on the street as supposed to lolling about in the family bar.

TS Werner, thanks again for a lovely performance and this interview.

WH Thanks to you too! (laughs)

fig. 04–06

Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz: N.O. Body, video, 15min., 2008.
Performer: Werner Hirsch. Still Photography: Andrea Thal.

fig. 02

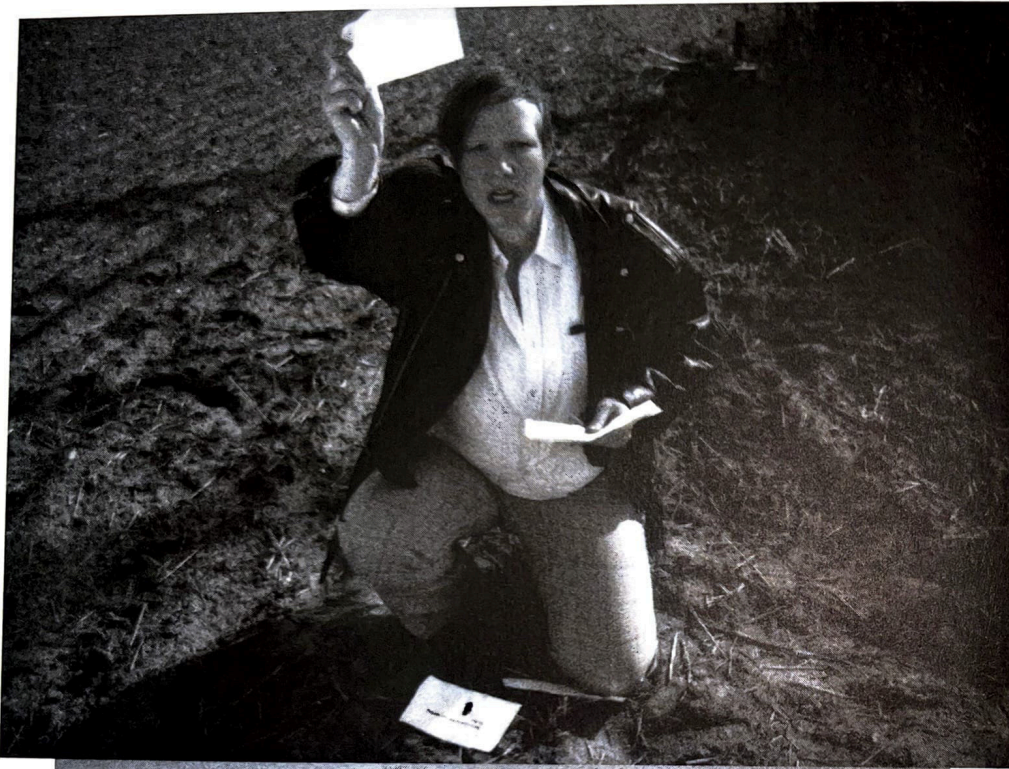


fig. 03

fig. 04

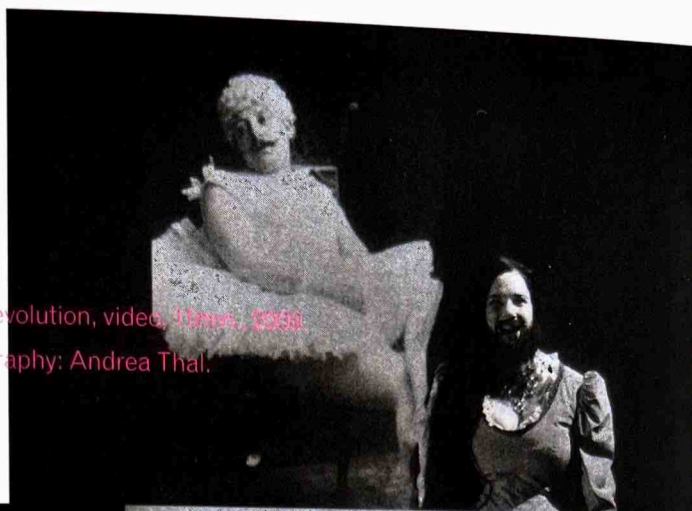


fig. 02–03

Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz: Charming the Revolution, video, 10 mins., 2019.
Performer: Werner Hirsch. Still Photography: Andrea Thal.



fig. 05



fig. 06