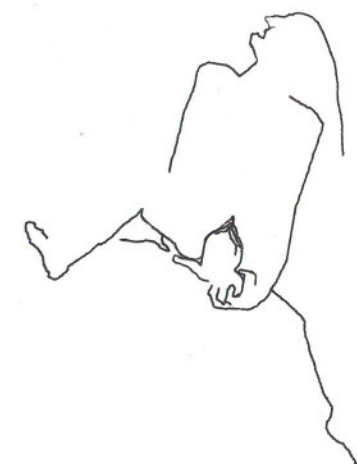


# HOW TO

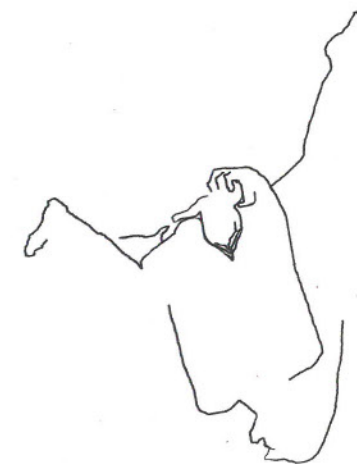
BECOME A LESBIAN







**UNE REVUE BILINGUE**  
*FOR FORK TONGUED FOLK*



**DQ**

Collection Dear Queer

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# GIVE A WAY TO HELL

sabrina soyer

I guess I wanted to write this introduction in English because it reminds me of a moment in my life where realizing I was a deep dyke coincided with the fact that I became an English addict. Not that I stopped having sex with guys and quit speaking French at the same time — I'm still such a heavy smoker ; not that I realized I was a friendly-petite misandrous, a spider, a spider, is that how I eventually want to see myself? Maybe. When I was a teen, and since that teen-time, I have been struggling with a thought that never left me. It is more like a mental image : a big black spider has found a way, somehow, to weave its web in the hole of the toilet bowl and it is just waiting for me to sit and pee in order to look at my sex eight times at once, to catch it — *schping* — and give me the kiss of death — *schpeeck* ! I often had this dream during the day, can we say I was having a nightmare?

In fact this magazine I am introducing coincides with my will to ask artist and writer friends to tell me about their careers. While I was asking them to tell me about their careers, they ended up speaking about their works. And what they do like to do and what they don't like to do and what do they expect from their doings. But what often came out is that artists don't like to speak about their careers. Or maybe, they just don't like this word. Maybe they would prefer to speak about their works? Maybe they would prefer to speak about desire? However when did my friends, my *colleagues*, decide to take their works seriously as work? When did they decide to give themselves value through their lifestyles? Do they think their sexuality is somehow a practice linked to their practices, their knowledges, their values? Did they ever contemplate, metaphorically or literally speaking, being prostitutes?

I remember what Eileen Myles said in one of her poems For Jordana: « I think writing is desire, not a form of it », and it reminds me about how some of my works had started with love letters I would eventually never send to the someone I initially addressed the writing to. Someone like Geoff Lowe said that the most interesting thing he is interested in as an artist is desire. What do we desire? Do we and can we? And Geoff also said that art might be more interesting if it could be like a space where we could share our unfinished desires, like those types of desires that are not related to the power of commodification. And here it also reminds me, it makes me think about one of my teachers in artschool who was really helpful. He said to students who were wondering about their doings that they do what they do because they are perverts. To be poetic is to be perverse. And

it is maybe why we are known now, for our secular lubricity (I said our, imagine what a school of perverts have learned and can teach). But as I said, to speak about desire at a table where the becoming of artists and poets has been discussed created less discomfort than to invite the word *career in the conversation*. The career's etymology refers to a full speed running or the track where horses are galloping. And maybe artists and poets, and especially French ones I would say, are neither slow people paddling in limbo nor careerists. The idea of this magazine also emerges within a stimulating political protest : some of us were lately taking part in demonstrations in France, in response of the new labour law El Khomri and its vision of work in a neoliberal context. If our intentions in those demonstrations were not homogeneous and were sometimes hard to formulate regarding the way we embody our work in our life, it allowed conversations about how the artistic journey and the life of an artist can embody a critic of a work-centered society. Since the vocabulary, aesthetics and forms usually connected to professions (curriculum vitae, career narrative, portfolio) also became a norm for surfing as an artist in the art world, the question of the artist background has found some efficiently layouted answers. The thing here is less to express an opinion about being for or against those forms of writing or design linked to the presentation of the artist, than to question the possibility of those forms being embodied by the words of poets, the language of artists.

Later on, I had a conversation with François Lancien-Guilberteau during which he talked about schizophrenia. He was speaking about the bewilderment created by the day jobs some of us have to perform in order to live. I think François used the term schizophrenia not only to describe the performance of swapping shoes & assignments several times a week, but more specifically to describe the trouble of maintaining a hierarchical duality between work and work in our vocabulary, as if there was a part of our life that we could just white wash. Did you ever feel this sensation of being half a person?

David Frayne in his book The refusal of work pointed out this trivial way to start a conversation with a stranger : What are you doing? An abbreviation to cover the less sympathetic question : What job do you perform? And, on some other level, Who are you? Remember, a person who asks for your ID cannot love you.

Beside the ambiguity involved in this question concerning our possible *doings*, there is also this



strange expression in English *performing a job* as, if the job had something to do with (horses again) the making of an opera or a dramatic masquerade.

I've never read *The Capital* because I think at the time I was supposed to buy it, during my 27th year I guess, one of my friend offered me Kafka's *Amerika* so I forgot about *The Capital*. I let Marx become a ghost that some of my artschool's teachers had often invoqued. But I think I'm aware that, or more honestly, I am feeling that work has something to do with the creation of value and the production of identity in the western society, among other meanings to which we decide to give more or less value, work might mean something like that. Most of my friends including myself are often complaining about the feeling that now there are more occasions than before to make zero money making art. But still, money is everywhere. Today is money, we are stunned by its multiplication, its liquidity — we are liquifying too, and we are dubious about grant-application-forms and their forms. Because actually, we want to make forms. We all want to fulfill forms. Does the kind of work that those applications require correspond in our field to what we experience as a sweating work? Do we feel smelly about it?

I recently discovered *inferno* and it was heaven. I've never read Dante but instead of *Inferno* — I mean *Inferno*, A poet's novel written by Eileen Myles is the book I read. By the way, I would like to take this opportunity, writing here to be read, not to thank her but to say I love you. Eileen Myles wrote *Inferno* making herself the main character of this story where she narrates her coming out both as a poet and as a lesbian at the same time. The section entitled *Drop* is a text she submitted to the Ferdinand Foundation that asked for a career narrative in their grant-application. She used this formality as a literary genre to create a story based on her own questions and feelings about what would be the career of the poet (a.k.a. The purgatory for E. Myles). I assume that when she wrote this text she must have had in mind to publish it, that she basically wrote it to both feed her desire to write and find a way to continue writing, to make a living as a poet. The interesting thing in *Inferno* is also its subtitle «A Poet's Novel». It makes it clear that she doesn't want to give credibility to oppositions such as poem versus novel or fiction versus non-fiction as a writer. And she also uses the genre of the coming of age story (which is mostly known as a form used by male novelists) in her own queer way, digging tunnels inside the narration towards the poem, its making. I took on translating in my own french an extract of *Inferno*, Heaven section (which is basically where I picked up the title of this magazine) as my task for this publication.

From *Drops* and some other extracts of *Inferno* I gave a class entitled *How to become a lesbian* for the participants of *The Cheapest University* which took place in *Treignac Project*, Limousin, France. This class, *The Cheapest University* and all that what-you-call-it you will find in this publication would have never been possible without the help and the endless generosity of Sam Basu, gentleman and founder of *Treignac Project*. During this class we questioned each other about how our artistic practice could become a career. How does sexuality as a practice, a fantasy and as a philosophy

brings us to move towards specific groups of people, specific work environments, specific kinds of career. I myself experienced the impression that E. Myles describes in the first line of *Inferno*: « My English professor's ass was so beautiful », but at this time I was really bad at English, really, poor rating, and it took me a while to understand why. I was failing to use good French too. Later on my French professor told me « you can't write sentences from both sides ». She said my problem was actually my tendency to make sentences where no one can tell *what* possesses *who*. Since I suffer from a both-sides-failure with my tongue I decided to move to the U.S., the country of free speech, you know. And that is where I learned how to speak, maybe because I didn't have to learn American, I kind of tamed it. The fieldwork, maybe, it was all about that.

Among other issues, reading *Inferno* helped me figure out how the poem can in itself involve a critic of language, beside what has already been done in more theoretical approaches and intentions, how the poem is a critic («critic is what the poem does» said the voice, I can't remember which one). In the case of *Inferno* I was very stimulated by the way this text can embody epistemological and teaching issues using practical and personal experiences such as love encounters, friendships, travels, parties, financial issues or part-time day jobs in a *career narrative*. I guess Eileen Myles's workshops or master classes have nothing to do with Claudine Tiercelin's metaphysical classes «The Practical Knowledge» at Collège de France, in Paris. Though I like to imagine they could give a talk at the same panel or actually, they could swap their classes with each other, I don't know how this could happen but I think it should. In her classes Claudine Tiercelin intended to expose how, in the western society, the means of *knowing how* (to put one foot in front of another) became more and more a hierarchical opposition of the fact of *knowing that* (the earth is round). She also historically analysed how the western culture had come to assign the practical knowledge (knowing how) to the slaves, the women, the ethnic minorities, all the ones who, we would say, keep their feet on the ground.

I think it is an exciting time and weather to contemplate how we learn things. And how oppositions and hierarchies between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge have invaded our life and our experiences in our - skills era. What does it mean to know how to drive? To dance? To fuck? To raise a child? To understand your computer? To be single? To write a poem? To become a poet, an artist, a lesbian? What is your career narrative? This publication is an attempt to bring together questions and forms that surround our careers.



Christopher Wool Untitled (Riot) via Sotheby's  
<http://installator.tumblr.com>



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