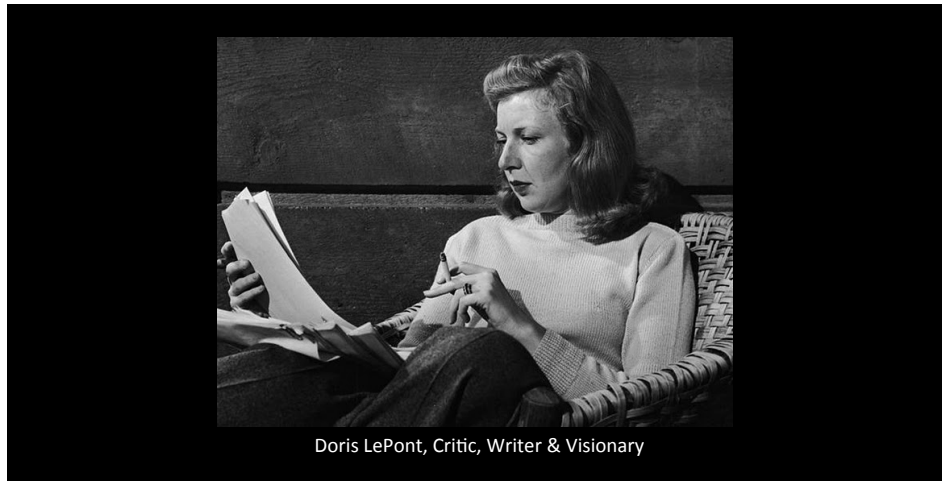


Cats, Criminals & Comedians: The Untold Herstory of Feminist Performance Art



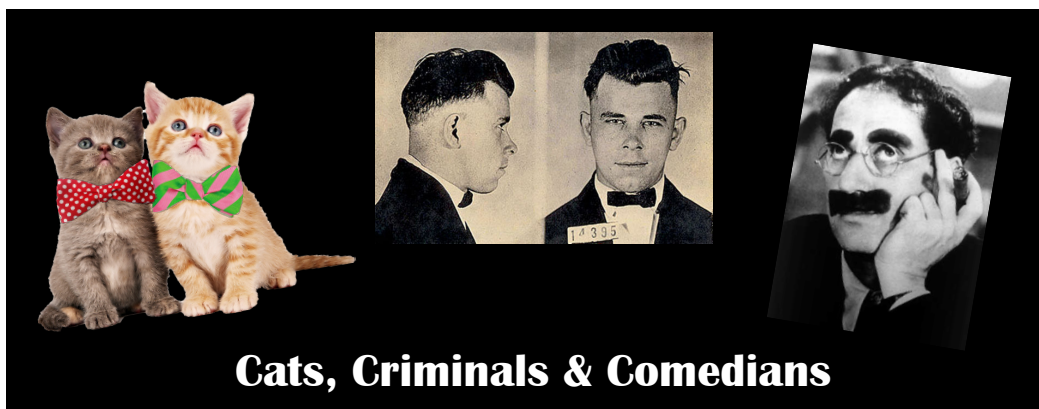
THE SCHOLAR: Feminist critic, writer and visionary, Doris LePont once said,

“We become our true selves in our art. This endeavor is risky. I can tell you, ‘My art does this, my art does that. My art investigates, interrogates, penetrates, agitates, probes, explores, examines, frisks...’ But my telling you does not make it so. As an artist, all one can do is share one’s vision, never sure of how one will be received. One must have trust. To make art is a gesture that is both hopeful and insane. It is peculiarly human.”

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): Austrian psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud claimed that Woman compensates for her lack of phallus by cultivating mystery and charm, in order to draw attention from men. Freud asserts,

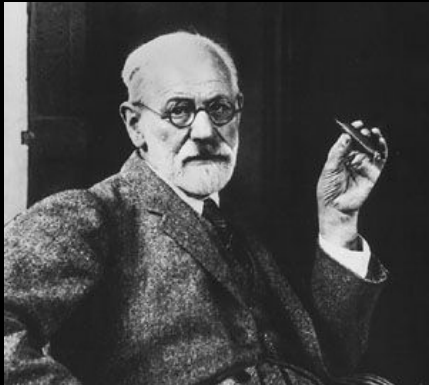
“...A state settles in, especially should beauty develop, in which the woman attains a self-sufficiency. Such women would love only themselves. They would do so just as intensely as a man would love them. Their need does not make them aspire to love *but to be loved*.”

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): According to Freud, certain women develop an extreme sense of narcissism evolving into aloof, self-absorbed beings. He likens these women to cats, criminals and comedians.



THE SCHOLAR: In our examination of feminist performance art, we will see that many artists were responding to accusations of female narcissism.

Freud vs. Cixous



Sigmund Freud, Austrian Psychoanalyst



Helene Cixous, French Feminist Philosopher & Poet

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): Helene Cixous scoffs at Freud's notion of female lack. She compares the feminine imagination to the possibilities of art itself; "inexhaustible." In, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous states,

"Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently they have led them to be their own worst enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves. They have made for women an anti-narcissism! But isn't this convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be that women are *NOT* castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing."

Cixous



"Feminism is a fart!!!"

THE SCHOLAR: Cixous' image of the Laughing Medusa illustrates that women possess an innate talent, *indeed*, a second nature for transcending and transgressing a symbolic order to which they belong but which is *not* theirs. She explains,

"...In this way, *ALL* women are feminists. To be a woman is to be an outsider. To be an artist is to go against culture. To be a performer is to be a radical. Thus, to be a feminist performance artist is to be in a constant state of discomfort. Like painfully trapped gas, FEMINISM IS A FART!"

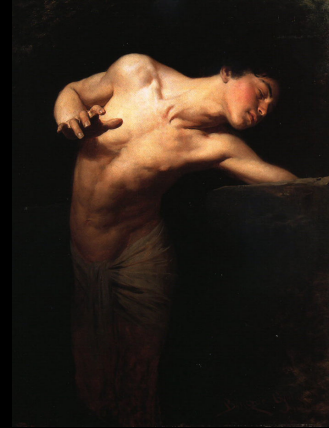
THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): "And," she added, "...it wasn't me."

THE SCHOLAR: Echo was a wood nymph so charming she could beguile even the most churlish of forest inhabitants, however, her power was taken away from her by a jealous and vengeful goddess. Echo was cursed by retaining only the ability to reproduce what others had first spoken. Along came Narcissus. Echo fell in love with him at first sight but she could never utter a word. She could only echo the accolades he showered upon himself as he gazed at his reflection in a pool. She died of unrequited love. Her body wasted away in despair but her voice remains in the Forest.



Echo

Voices & Mirrors



Narcissus

FAQs:

Is Art simply a conversation with oneself?

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): When I think of poor Echo, I think of someone imprisoned in her own mind, trapped in an endless feedback loop. Echo can never be seen or heard as her authentic self. She may as well not exist. The artists I will introduce you to today will break the binding silence imposed by a male-dominated society.

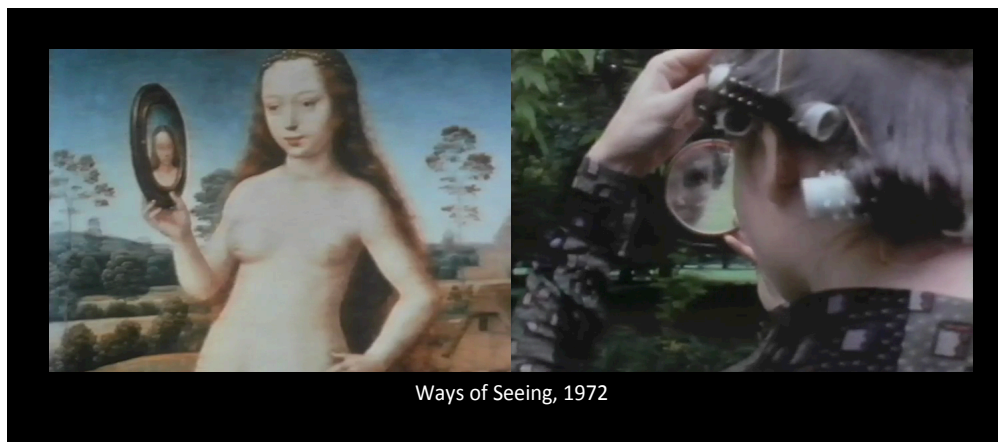
THE SCHOLAR: In his video essay *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger contends that a woman lives in a different state than a man, a state of being habitually watched.



THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): With uncanny insight, Berger observes,

“Men dream of women. Women dream of themselves being dreamt of. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. Women constantly meet glances, which act like mirrors, reminding them of how they look or how they *should* look. Behind every glance is a judgement. Sometimes, the glance they meet is their own, reflected back from a real mirror...

“From earliest childhood, she is taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others and, particularly, how she appears to men is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life.”



THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): Although the female body decorates much of art history, until recently only men were known as artists and authors to any significant degree. Women on the pedestal of display, even if admired, are alienated and mute. The feminist performance artists we will discuss have forged an identity for themselves OUTSIDE of the male gaze.

THE SCHOLAR: Often considered the “Grandmother of Performance Art,” Katrina Vorkapich, left the Soviet Union in the early-1950’s and moved to the mid-western United States to embark upon her most ambitious project and what art historians would come to consider the very first piece of endurance art.

KATRINA VORKAPICH



KATRINA VORKAPICH



MRS. AMERICA, 1952-1989

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): For the performance, *MRS. AMERICA*, Vorkapich married a man she was indifferent to, had four children she did not want and suppressed her intelligence for the duration of her life. Though the piece was originally thought to be a staggeringly realistic portrait of feminine passivity, the journals found after Vorkapich’s death, reveal small acts of rebellion. The artist recounts un-tuning the family piano in order to undermine the children’s practice sessions, purposely freeing several beloved pets, and on one occasion, overcooking an Easter ham much to the dismay of her husband, her children and the Judeo-Christian Patriarchy. Vorkapich’s journals state that without these subtle but meaningful gestures, she could not have completed her decades long work. In fact, she states,

“I probably would’ve stuck my head in the oven a long, long time ago.”

MARIA FRANZINI



MOTHER EARTH, 1964

THE SCHOLAR: The Sicilian-born artist Maria Franzini's, "Happenings" investigated physicality and pushed the boundaries of human strength. Daughter of a former Beige Shirt, the artist was raised in a militantly disciplined household. She was rarely allowed to play with other children and spent most of her formative years moving large piles of rocks from one side of her family's farm to the other – one extremely heavy rock at a time. This rigorous, solitary exercise would eventually inform most of her work. In one of her early toil pieces, *MOTHER EARTH*, Franzini yoked her mother to a plow and had her harvest field after field of wheat until she collapsed.

MARIA FRANZINI



WRESTLING WITH MYSELF, 1966

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In, *WRESTLING WITH MYSELF*, Franzini trained with martial arts masters in order to take on her own mother in an epic wrestling match.

MARIA FRANZINI



HIT AND RUN, 1969

THE SCHOLAR: But the artist is best known for, *HIT & RUN*, a paradigm-shifting piece, in which Franzini had her own mother run over by a car.

However, what the gallery-going public did not know was that the driver of the car was a trained professional and knew how to aim the station wagon just so, making fairly sure it would not fatally wound the artist's, then, 80-year old mother.

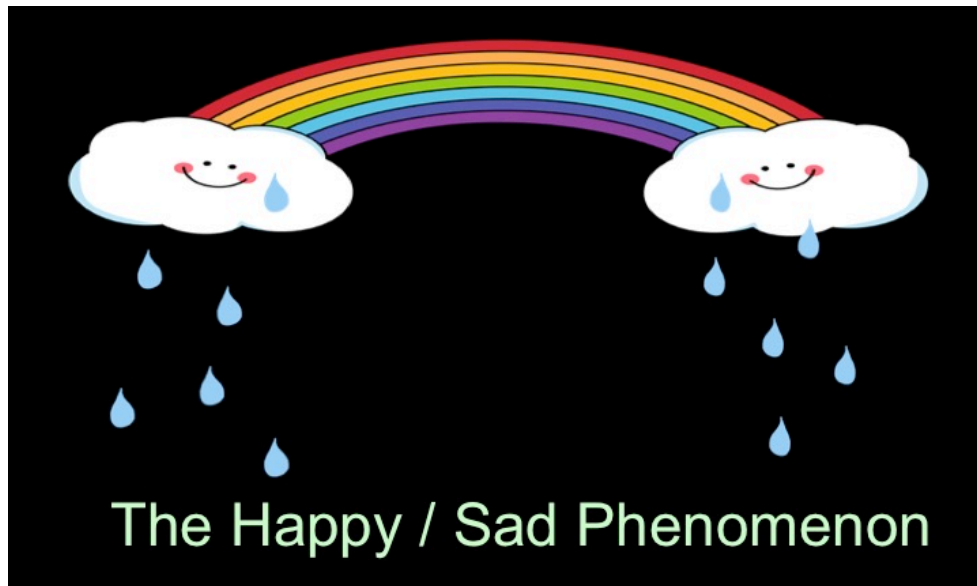
The 1970's!!!

Note: Do more research about the 1970's...

Google: Second-wave feminist theory and the lady who had her vagina frozen...

Don't forget to ask Roger to introduce you to his publisher when he gets back from sabbatical. Also, ask Roger to cat-sit during your Indiana research trip. Also, ask Roger if he knows how to turn off the 1970's font...

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): There actually wasn't that much art going on in the 1970's, at least, not much feminist performance art. So, we're going to skip that, for now.



THE SCHOLAR: In *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, Jo Anna Isaak cites Julia Kristeva's,

"...notions of laughter as libidinal license, the *JOUISSANCE* of the polymorphic, orgasmic body. This erotic body is the territory of the mother, or the *semiotic*, verbal play, not controlled by symbolic conventions; nonsense [that] makes nonsense abound with sense, makes one laugh."

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): The term *jouissance* denotes unbearable joy or the ambiguous threshold at which extreme pleasure becomes pain. Like, the confusing experience of laughing and crying deeply at the same time, it is almost like becoming aware of the precise location where your physical body and psyche connect. As in dreams, the moment you focus on it, it slips away...



THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In 1985, Congress passes the Boosler Act and women are finally allowed to be funny!! Feminist artists waste no time in using humor as a powerful tool to assert their disdain for the powers that be!

THE SCHOLAR: Throughout the 1980's, Los Angeles-based artist and inventor, Sam Frank, challenged the Patriarchy with a series of light-hearted pranks. In her site-specific piece, *WAR HEAD*, Frank transformed U.S. Military missile silos to resemble giant penises.

SAM FRANK



WAR HEAD, 1983

SAM FRANK



PENETRATING THE AIR, 1984

THE SCHOLAR: In 1984, Frank piloted a blimp shaped like a giant penis across the Atlantic.

SAM FRANK



NOT MY MONUMENT, 1986

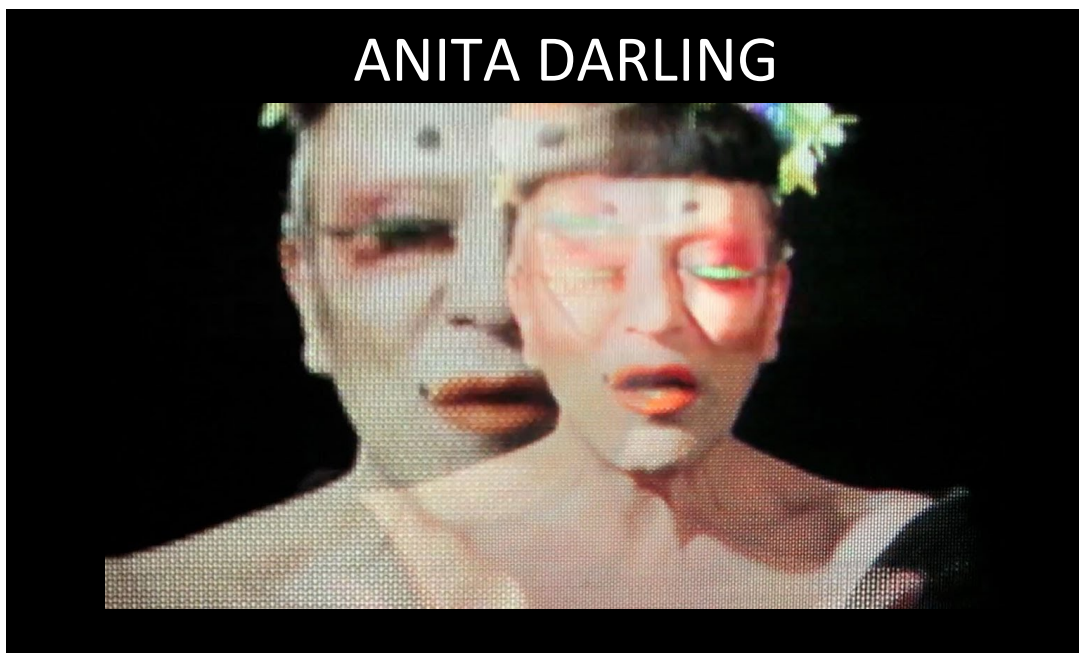
THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In 1986, Frank covered the Washington Monument with a giant condom.



THE SCHOLAR: Frank's final stunt earned her a 14-month stay in Federal Prison when she carjacked the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile, drove it down Wall Street and rammed it straight into a Bank of America. The wiener-shaped hole caused by the crash remains a symbol of defiance to this day. As the artist herself stated,

"Fuck you, Corporate America! ...I finally penetrated the gaping orifice of free-market capitalism!!!"

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): Radical sex-worker and sculptress, Anita Darling, enjoyed success in the 1990's with her interactive copulation series.



ANITA DARLING



THE VERTICALITY OF DESIRE, 1994

THE SCHOLAR: However, her career was cut tragically short when her abs were deemed “not tight enough” to perform her pole-dancing piece, *THE VERTICALITY OF DESIRE*, at the Whitney Biennial in 1994.

“Abs not tight enough”

-Whitney Museum Board of Directors

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): Darling seemed to virtually disappear from the Lower-eastside performance scene but her work was later included in the anthology, *THIGHS, THONGS & THOUGHT*, by Professor of Gender & Aging Studies at Yale University, Sandy Jackson. NYC’s The Kitchen performance space erected a bronze statue to memorialize Darling’s abs that was, luckily, cast while she was still in her early-30’s.

In honor of Anita Darling, I thought this would be a good time for us to celebrate the beauty and variety of our own bodies in all their unique splendor. Feel free to get up and dance or move around, at this time...

*** **DANCE BREAK** ***

FLÜNKE



Does This Jumbotron Make My Ass Look Big?, 2002

THE SCHOLAR: In the early-2000's, the enigmatic Dutch artist FLÜNKE, turned the Beauty Myth on its head when she wore an extremely unattractive pants-suit, occupied a store-front window and projected 24-hour video of herself onto a Jumbotron in Times Square. The footage was taken by surveillance cameras at angles SO unflattering that Art Critic, Wolffe Kunzelmann exclaimed,

"My GOD, she's brave! She simply has NO INHABITIONS whatsoever!! I would not be caught *DEAD* in that pants-suit!"

BITCH Collective



BE MY BITCH, 2005

THE SCHOLAR: In 2005, BITCH Collective took the art world by storm with their womanifesto, *BE MY BITCH*, demanding equal representation for women in museums, galleries and festivals internationally. They would crash major shows around the world with *no* apologies, daring museum patrons to look at their fully naked bodies but also chastising them for doing so. Conversely, when invited to these same shows, BITCH Collective had a habit of not showing up at all and not R.S.V.P.-ing.



THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In one of the group's most impressive stunts, they hacked into the database of the retail megalith, American Girl Doll, issuing millions of re-purposed dolls and causing the corporation's stock to plummet by over 17 points. By infiltrating "Big Plastic," BITCH Collective was able to disrupt the Princess Industrial Complex and subvert mainstream gender stereotypes.

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In 2007, BITCH Collective founded the C.U.N.T Lab in an empty, rat-infested warehouse in Upstate New York. The lab was used to train other Hacktivists in their highly effective techniques and to squabble over the accepted level of filth of the warehouse/living space and whose turn it was to do the dishes.

C.U.N.T. Lab
Center for
Upsetting
Normative
Technology

THE SCHOLAR: Around the same time, another art collective was deploying its own brand of activism. Using subtle, ethereal... *BARELY* perceptible micro-gestures, The Society for G.E.N.T.L.E. Interventions came on the scene with a whisper.

Gender-Enlightened Neo-TacticL Empowerment



The Society for G.E.N.T.L.E. Interventions

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): For one of their tiny but powerful actions over one thousand of the G.E.N.T.L.E.'s members showed up (inexplicably) in lab coats and surrounded the Super Bowl Stadium, playing "*FIGHT THE POWER*" on miniature kazoos and ukuleles. When asked, fans leaving the stadium responded to the piece by saying,

"Wuh? Huh? Was someone here? ...Aw, that sounds so adorable! But I think I must've missed it..." Missed it, indeed.



THE SCHOLAR: The 2008 Venice Biennale would, unfortunately, become the site for one of the ugliest incidents in Feminist Performance Art History. When BITCH Collective and The Society for G.E.N.T.L.E. Interventions were accidentally assigned the same gallery space at the Biennale, things took an ominous turn.

Venice Biennale 2008



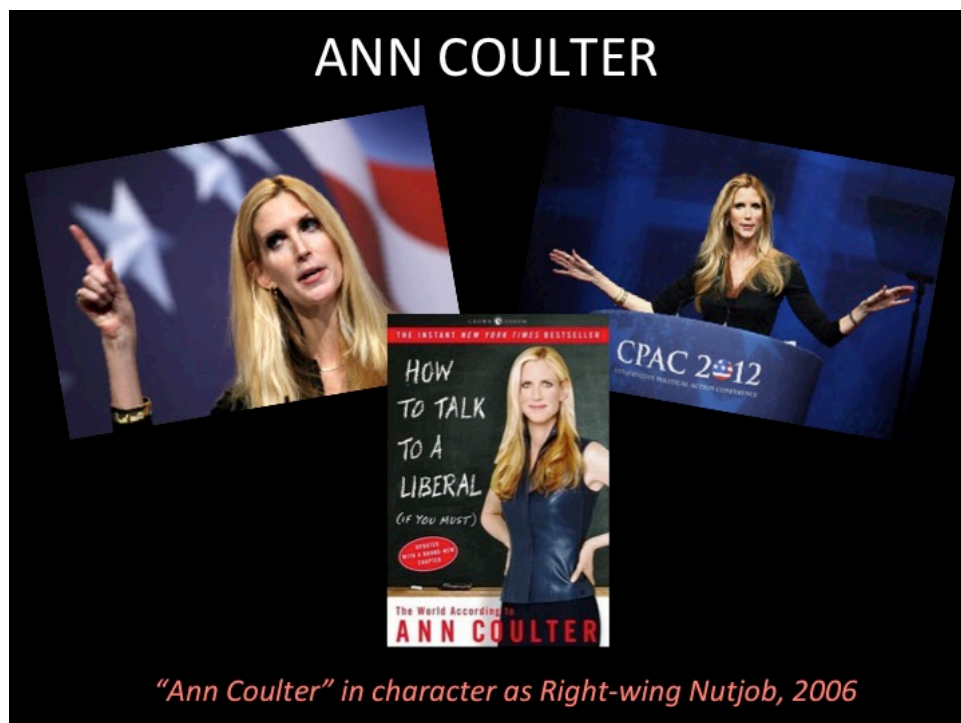
BITCH vs. G.E.N.T.L.E.

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): In an unprecedented war of passive-aggression, someone spilled a Lemon-lime Pellegrino on BITCH Collective's Mac Book Pro, destroying the mother-board, thus, completely dismantling the C.U.N.T Lab. This would effectively shut down BITCH's presence at the Biennale. It would also result in discord among BITCH's already *extremely* ill-tempered members and eventually lead to the break-up of the collective.



THE SCHOLAR: The Society for G.E.N.T.L.E. Interventions, on the other hand, would go on to represent the U.S. at festivals around the world, touring for the next several years and finally settling into tenure-track positions at prestigious universities teaching Art Collaboration and the Aesthetics of Inconspicuousness.

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): Nobody knows the real identity of the culture-jammer and political saboteur who portrays media personality, “Ann Coulter.” By creating an outlandish and grotesque caricature of a Right-wing ideologue, the artist calls attention to the misogynist, racist, classist, homophobic, and hate-filled beliefs, still widely held.



THE SCHOLAR: The risk-taking artist known as “Ann Coulter” redefined feminist satire in her performance, *WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS DINNER 2012*, in which she spoofs the recently re-elected President by saying on national television,

“Obama will rape all of your children!”



THE SCHOLAR: Coulter later lampooned the 1% by wryly quipping,

“If I had my way, poor people would be butchered, ground up and fed to themselves. There’s farm-to-table for you!” to which she added, “Bitch!”

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): In a hilarious send-up of Bleeding-heart Liberal Left-wing Democrats, Coulter remarked,

“I hope all you Bleeding-heart Liberal Left-wing Democrats perish in the Global Warming Apocalypse that I *DON’T* believe is real. Then, we can take our country back. And by ‘We’ I mean rich, white, hetero, conservative, hateful religious zealots!”





I CRY MYSELF TO SLEEP EACH AND EVERY SINGLE NIGHT, 2013

THE SCHOLAR: In a rare moment while not in character, the artist confided,
“Just because I am strong, just because I am powerful, does not mean that I don’t cry myself to sleep every night... because I do. I cry myself to sleep each and every single night.”

THE SCHOLAR (cont’d): The artist known as “Ann Coulter” was also a founding member of the irreverent songsters, *The Capitol Steps*.



THE CAPITOL STEPS

THE SCHOLAR: Perhaps, the art journalist, critic and outspoken champion of feminist performance art, Wolffe Kunzelmann, summed it up best when he said,



“The urge to destroy, is a creative impulse. These women have DESTROYED the Status Quo! Like cats, they are cunning. Like criminals, they live in exile. And like any comedian worth her salt, they have leveraged the dominant power structure against itself.... The future belongs to THEM! And I, for one, could not be happier...”

-Wolffe Kunzelmann, Art journalist, Critic, Sagittarius

THE SCHOLAR (cont'd): Neither could I, Wolffe, neither could I!

