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Let's FAIL!
an Introduction...

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Let's FAIL!

AN INTRODUCTION...

FAIL! FAIL! FAIL!

What is a failure in heteronormative societies and what is a success? Taking examples from ordinary life situations we can identify that we are obviously recognizing success and failure. The acknowledgment of the above could be observed even when we want to express our admiration for someone who achieved to “get over” her/his ordinary social status or condition.

Some examples are: our positive feelings and reactions when a person with disabilities manage to lead a normal life, when a woman or anyone who’s not white, male and heterosexual enters a higher position in a system of hierarchies or even when an overweight person loses weight. Roughly we can assume that the struggle is not to destroy the norm of success but to compromise and try to be a part of it.

After Obama got elected as President of the States there have been many voices claiming that this was a victory against racial discriminations and that we are moving in to the postrace era. Despite in the last 4 years we are observing that this big change towards the postrace era is not even a small change compared to what is happening. I wouldn’t like to argue here that President Obama has failed his mission, instead I would like to contend that there is no real space for “the others” into the whitened societies that we are living in. Right wing politics, conservatism and religious extremism is growing everywhere. This includes: Trump won the elections by quoting nationalist racist and sexist slogans, Putin is reigning Russia for over one decade by establishing imperialist politics and discriminatory laws, antimuslim activism is gaining more ground in Europe etc. On the other hand, the success stories are failing with the European economies collapsing due to the economic crisis and the heteronormative dreams getting ruined by the high rate of divorces and abortions (Halberstam 2011). It seems like failing is our only choice to resist.

Since there is no appetite for big ideas of change or maybe big ideas are maybe the main reason for the aforementioned absolutistic tendencies, praising failure is coming up as an alternative. Of course I have to define here that by failure I mean those actions that are not applying to heteronormative standards.

First of all, failure is much easier in the long run because there is not the fear of punishment as it appears on the norms of success which include disciplined behavior of human development, from the unruly and uncanny childhood to the normal adulthood (Halberstam 2011). When you choose to succeed you are taking you own risks also you are putting in hard effort, time and maybe money so if you fail, failure is the punishment for not being a dedicated discipline. But choosing to fail liberates you from all the martyrdom of success.

Choosing to be a failure may also have its difficulties such as despair and depression but this is another form of resistance against the normative lifestyle of “positive thinking” which is blaming the individual for its failures. The idea that success belongs to the one’s positive attitude is much preferable for societies that don’t want to be perceived as discriminatory (Halberstam 2011). From campaigns against cancer to massive books of psychotherapy we can witness that there is always the blame is always on you! “It’s you that you were smoking”, “it’s you that you were eating junk”, “it’s you that chose an unhealthy life”, it’s you that you didn’t get the job or you are unemployed” and of course “it’s you and your misery that you are getting discriminated everyday”.

-If you don’t smile you will fail.

-No I will not smile! I will Fail! Fail! Fail!

Failing is a radical action against the success of becoming part of the patriarchal norm. Failing is a force that any system, even the most violent ones, cannot really get over with. Failure is a process that blocks the reproduction of standards. Failing is a business that obstructs any other business as long as we can keep it loud negative and not normative. In the next chapter I am going to share my personal experience from the alternative scenes that seemed to be outsiders and failures but in the end they are reproducing stereotypes of masculinity, misogyny, sexism, racism and of course homophobia.

FAILURE IS NOT ALWAYS A FAILURE

From my teens I have been involved in many “alternative” political scenes and music movements in order to search or even to play with my identity. punks, crust punks, anarchists, metalheads of all kinds, western style vegan Rastafari, ravers, goths etc. have been characterized or self-presented as the alternatives, most of the times as losers which were unable to assimilate into the norms of society, in a few words failures. One conclusion that easily drew was that most of those scenes are impregnated with phallogocentric stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors or attitudes. In the following chapter I am going to use the great example of greek anarchist and punk movement, known and dignified, among others, as one of the most extreme and radical. This is a brief report of what I have witnessed from anarcho-autonomous squats, protests, hardcore punk live shows etc. Another reason that I have chosen to present the anarchist/punk scene because they are supposed to support and fight for the individuals or groups that have been excluded from the “bad” capitalism but in the end they fail at failing. Furthermore, they are shouting out loud that they are fighting for a world without any form of power and discrimination. Let’s take a small tour into the alternative conservatism

Anarchism or MANarchism?

To begin with me. Hanging out for at least 10 years in the greek anarchist haunts or areas I was known by the nick name Mr. GAGA due to my condition (ocular albinism) and my love for the color pink.

From my experience, the anarchist spaces in Europe and more specifically in Greece, are mostly male dominated. Even if there is no specific hierarchy, in anarchist assemblies/meetings, the most respected individuals are white male figures, talking most of the times for major topics. Sometimes when the discussion came to gender politics and the position of women in the group or the collective there had been voices complaining about the banality of the topic.

Anarchist actions have already been characterized as violent and extremely masculine but they are always using the excuse that “they are defending themselves from the violence of the system”. But what is actually happening in the protests and the barricades? Once again the sexist and homophobic phraseology are the main vocabulary of the riots. At least in Greece and Spain the riots are usually using sexist/homophobe phrases against police, in order to humiliate them, those phrases are “I am gonna fuck your pussy”, “hey you stupid cunt”, “I will put this (molotov cocktail) into your butt” and more.

In the Greek Anarchist paradigm there is no place for outsiders, queers or people who differ from their masculine standards. Over the last years, there have been reported hundreds of homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic and sexist attacks in the lungs of the anarchist stamping grounds like the Exarchia neighborhood.

Punk is not dead! Because it is “conserved”.

I can’t really forget a gig in a greek queer friendly squat in Thessaloniki where there was a ska-punk band playing on stage. While the band was performing, a team of punks were shouting to the female saxophonist the following buffooneries “Common slut! Suck the trombone”. The same scene with the same band has been repeated during a vegan/punk festival (Arm Your Desires) in Tirnavos, Greece.

Things didn’t get much better in Berlin. During a punk concert I was sitting in front of the stage in order to have a better sight position due to my paled eye condition while, at the same time, the pongo dance was taking place behind me. When I turned back and asked someone to calm down a little bit because I wanted to see the concert he responded: “why don’t you go back with the ladies”. After long discussions that I have had

with friends, we assume that my personal experiences were no isolated incidents rather something that is happening really often.

Punk scenes, at least the ones that I already know, have been famous for their radical and revolutionary statements against the system and its stereotypes. Despite the fact that there are plenty of neo-Nazi punk bands, the majority of punk music is expressing anarchy or at least left wing ideas of “change”.

Visiting a punk concert, we can feel or even smell the plethoric masculinity. By watching the audience of a concert we are witnessing male macho bullies dancing violently, punching and kicking each other in front of the stage, performing a dance which is called “pongo”. Of course females, children and non-masculine people are sitting aside or at the back of the stage. Sometimes, people who are not joining the pongo circle or are complaining about the violent behavior are called pussies, fagots etc. Isn't this another reproduction of a heteronormative behavior? Doesn't this phenomenon constitute another separation between the outsiders and the heroes of the scene?

Last but not least, I would like to mention the sexist and homophobic phraseology that has been used countless times in their lyrics, interviews and concerts. Some examples are Cro-Mags, Anti-Cimex, Dropkick Murphys, NOFX, Madball, Fear and the list goes on

KEEP IT UNCLEAR KEEP IT LOUD I AM A FAILURE AND I AM LOUD!

Unbecoming a man or becoming a failure

“...The male, is the main referent for thinking subjectivity, the standard-barrier of the Norm, the Law, the Logos. Woman is dualistically i.e., oppositionally positioned as his “other” the consequence is that there is no possible becoming-minority of man and that the becoming woman is a privileged position for the minority consciousness of all...”

(Braidotti, 2011:36)

In queer theory, from Judith Butler to Jack Halberstam, it is common sense that phallogocentric societies are based on practices of becoming; becoming a gender, a success but first of all becoming a human (Butler, 2005). According to Rosi Braidotti the notion of human that has been developed in Europe, from ancient Greek philosophers to humanism, has been represented as white, male, masculine, heterosexual and healthy. This image of human has never been an objective statistical average. Furthermore, human itself is a convention of normative standards that will never let “the others” (non white, non male non heterosexual and non healthy) be a part of what they call human but only “the others” have to be regulated and conformed (Braidotti, 2015). By regulation I mean those actions that are forcing minorities to conform themselves according to the western male-based standards: From immigrants' naturalization, which is a process of whitening different cultures, to homosexual marriage, which is another way of establishing monogamy and heterosexual binaries upon different sexualities.

Unbecoming a man is one of the basic targets, to deterritorialize the mentioned above notion of what we call human, to get rid and deconstruct stereotypes of masculinity. Getting done with man is like getting done with the normal because man has been perceived as a majoritarian standard and woman as his “other” (Braidotti, 2011). On the other hand, becoming the other is becoming a failure because the norm of success is already established by male dominated standards (Halberstam, 2011).

Unbecoming is not unbeing. On the contrary, it is about celebrating the feeling of pain as it proves that we can affect and be affected. It is the acceptance of death, when every human individualism that wants the human to live forever, fails to exist and life (*zoe*) continues. Moreover, unbecoming is against nostalgia of the “good old days” when we were pure humans. But it is also against the melancholic dream of a globalized world where every human will be happy under the dominance of the sameness/whiteness (Braidotti, 2011) otherwise, white man's wet dreams. Unbecoming is forgetting to act or reproduce masculine based identities

and established practices, to stop the repetition of phallogocentric stereotypes that have been impregnated into social structures (Butler, 2005). It is also to let go of the dualistic notions such as self/others, male/female, good/evil, nature/culture, natural/supernatural, human/animal, man/machine etc. (Haraway 1996). Because those binaries work as the starting point of discrimination, separating the self from the “others” while the point of failing is to become the “other”

To forget and to be stupid

“Forget allows for a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future”

(Halberstam 2011:85)

From a system which has been established thousands of years by male dominance there is no easy way out. A big idea of change is something that doesn't seem possible or, even if it does, there will be once again oppressed minorities suffering. How about blocking the whole process of becoming by adopting forgetfulness and stupidity?

Forgetfulness, as Jack Halberstam has noted in her book *“The Queer Art of Failure”*, is a great tool to jam the smoothed normative reproduction of society. It sabotages the passing of patriarchal values from one generation to another, from father to son. The clue is forgetting to transmit patriarchal values to the children or we as children to forget how to perform them. Forgetting how to make a normal family or to perform traditions that reproduce standards (Halberstam, 2011) to confuse and get confused with identities and the life “purposes”. Furthermore, forgetting gives us the opportunity to forget the big narratives and create new and more fresh narratives and cosmogonies. A further and more blasphemous act could be to reclaim the already existed narratives and forgetting their main idea e.g. reinventing Christianity by translating it in a queer perspective.

By mentioning stupidity, I am not talking about the male stupidity, which is dude-ish and charming like the one that has been presented in the Hollywood film *“Dude where is my car”*. This film is a Hollywood comedy showing two “dudes”, after a long night party, trying to remember where they left their car. In their attempt to remember they are repeating step by step all the happenings of the night before. During this repetition they are acting extremely stupid and forgetful reproducing all the stereotypes of male stupidity by reproducing racist, sexist, transphobic and homophobic jokes (Halberstam, 2011).

The stupidity that I am suggesting has to do with the not understanding of the norm, to not taking it seriously and play with it with no borders, like a child who ridicules its parents when it performs an action that doesn't fit to their standards or their status quo. Of course I am not arguing that children are stupid contrariwise, I am arguing to look closer to the queer character of being a child which is learning everything from the beginning. We could be taught from those actions which have been characterized as stupid from the serious world of adulthood (Halberstam, 2011).

F for failure and for fabulous

In this section, I would like to present an almost improvised “revolutionary” text on how failure could sneak into the pop culture or how failures in pop culture could be an inspiration for failures. If we cannot really get out of this system, why don't we try to fail it? The “project” of failing is not for perceiving failures as normal but to end once and for all with the normal. Moreover, it is not about establishing the already existed identities but to create more and more and more multilayered more complicated. To fail is to play with our identities like children who are discovering everything from the beginning but without the supervision of their/our parents or, otherwise, without carrying. Let's the queer character of a child appear. Let's start an uncanny or an unruly game of unbecoming or becoming minoritarian.

Let's become insects, as Rosi Braidotti said, adopt their way of communication, their sexualities and

sounds, not to mimic them but just to liberate ourselves from the hetero-romantic sex and habits. Hiring all kinds of insect sexualities hermaphrodite, incest, homosexual or other kind of anomalies, we could easily mock the natural order of god. And why don't we create a new god or a goddess or goddie or a lot of goddies or even goofies? Why don't we make an insect music scene to play out loud all the weird sounds of our bodies, of our voices and of our liquids.

Let's get inspired by Niki Minaj's song "Stupid Hoe" not from the lyrics but from its insane samples and drum machines. To be characterized as annoying and clownie as she has been criticized by the IGN, a global company/website for gaming promotion. We are not going to be their entertaining clowns, not the funny ones, not the eccentric caricatures but those clowns who annoy, disturb scare mess up and destroy the boring aesthetics of hetero-romance, not to cause laughter but "cries" for the loss of the patriarchal values. Let's shout out loud like Lady GAGA, adapting her way of making costumes passing the message for the end of normality even with our dress code. "Don't be a drag just be a queen" she says. Shall we become "queerns"?

New vocabularies, transmutating traditions, welcoming the new but not like the old people who're giving space to the young. Becoming the new ourselves by forgetting the pain of the past, still not the neoliberal new that comes from the development of human history and science. Becoming the new that comes out from the "perversion of symbiosis". Let me steal a little bit from Haraway's new book "*staying with the trouble*", sort of to speak about the symbiosis in a damaged world, living together with our contradictions which are our resistance to the capitalist monistic development of the individual man, who wants the others to complete his existence. Don't let him be completed.

Getting inspired by the examples of failure in pop culture we can establish more complex practices. They enable us to create new narratives, cosmogonies, conspiracy theories and religions. Moreover, to compose blasphemous and uncanny songs and spread the word against normality. The opportunities are open for us to degenerate every single norm. Failing is always a choice, it might be a hard one at the begging but it has much more open doors than succeeding. Success has only one way but failure has many and they are more interesting, more playful, more fun but the most important is that it's much easier in the long run. Concluding not to mention that failure needs company but success is a lonely path and no one can ensure you that you will make it.

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