

# Liberal Discomfort Zone

## **WORKSHOP INFO: With MYSTI, Lisa Jeschke 21 November 2021, 3–5pm Conference Room 1, HKW Berlin Workshop held as part of the Illiberal Arts exhibition**

"In this workshop, we will re-enact the workshop as the ultimate liberal – in corporate and nonprofit work sectors, neoliberal – educational model and comfort zone whose mundane conclusion (that of chin up figure it out yourself) can be perceived before even beginning. We will sit in a circle of chairs. The two moderators, MYSTI and Lisa, will sit separately from one another.

3-4pm

Part 1: Artist Q & A

Lisa and MYSTI will each read from their work, and ask each other pre-prepared questions on self-publishing/small-press publishing. Discussion is opened to the audience.

4-5 pm

Part 2: Unity in Separation

We will begin the second part of the workshop by going round in a circle and speaking up on the question 'What's wrong with liberalism (for me)????!?!?!?!'. Subsequently, all participants (audience + MYSTI + Lisa) will create their own conspiratorial, private one-page A4 mini-publication 'What's wrong with liberalism (for me)????!?!?!?!'. No one will be asked to share their work: everyone is FREE to write/draw as badly as they can. Everyone is invited to take their own work back home with them. :-)

HKW will serve free coffee and donuts."

**MYSTI:** Self-published titles include I AM NOT SULKING  
I AM HONORING YOUR LIMITATIONS, Heterosexual  
Panic, and EVERYONE'S PERSONAL BECAME  
POLITICAL & LANGUAGE MEANT NOTHING.  
MYSTI recently abandoned  
[www.holdmyhairback.wordpress.com](http://www.holdmyhairback.wordpress.com) for  
[www.foullows.substack.com](http://www.foullows.substack.com), a distant past for judging can  
be found at [www.fuckmewhileimgorgeous.blogspot.com](http://www.fuckmewhileimgorgeous.blogspot.com)

**Lisa Jeschke** lives in Munich and is a poet and performer.  
In 2019, hochroth München published their poetry collection  
DIE ANTHOLOGIE DER GEDICHTE BETRUNKENER  
FRAUEN. Lisa is co-editor of the chapbook series Materials/  
Materialien (London/Munich).

## WORKSHOP – SCRIPT

3-4 pm

### INTRO

MYSTI

In this workshop, we will re-enact the workshop as the ultimate liberal – in corporate and nonprofit work sectors, neoliberal – education model and comfort zone frame. Everything in a workshop is hypothetical, accomplishing little beyond its roleplay.

LISA

For the first hour we'll present our work via a reading ... and in the second part, there will be room for discussion and we'll be giving you some participatory space to come up with your own A4 DIY self-publishing sheet on liberalism ...

MYSTI

... while we start with a reading ... throughout, feel free to get up and take coffee and donuts when you feel like it, also to go to the toilet whenever it suits you best ... this workshop eagerly surrenders these freedoms to you.

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### READINGS:

Reading by MYSTI

Reading by LISA

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### CONVERSATION:

MYSTI

I want my questions to be also answers. Let me know if you get lost in what follows or feel that this has nothing to do with much of anything important. I am not feeling sacred about any of it.

I started printing because I was sick of google analytics attempting to sell me insights into my Wordpress views, and repostings on social media never really felt like having been read. I wanted not to see where the work went, or how it got shared. I never felt right on social media, so the digital notebook experiment ended for me around 2019. While I have not been committing things to print long enough to learn all the downsides, I like not having algorithm advertisements inserting themselves into my pages... But of course I bring my web woes with me in these first two projects writing like a Twitter feed, the way one logs on to look at disparate things as a highly individualized, some might even say curated, means to greater connection. With years of social media as the primary form of activism now, I have not observed a single substantive change that felt like the sum of all those clicks and likes and RTs. There are everywhere impostor protesters marching with Greta, weeks later posting pictures of Easyjet beach vacations when all unnecessary travel was supposed to be avoided. One short feed scroll reveals a fraud, or maybe

this is just how people feel the political as only a case for liberal self-exemption. I guess I print because I like the quiet and I prefer the physical trans-action of book for money over social media shares offering me whatever I am supposed to get out of that.

But Lisa, you also print the work of other poets and writers via Materials, no? I might also be completely misunderstanding, but would it make sense for you to talk about your involvement in printing others? Can you perhaps also identify with or against my rambling beginning here? Are those printing just arborcide enthusiasts?

LISA

Materials, which you've mentioned, is a poetry chapbook series David Grundy and I founded in the UK in 2011. We started out with four A4 magazines, MATERIALS #1-#4, which were the most unprofessional of our publications but also almost the ones I liked most: huge A4 compilations of our own work and that of friends and writers, "laid out" (if that word is appropriate) on Microsoft Word, hand-stapled in a both intentionally and unintentionally ugly way. We weren't really publishers in the patronising sense of the word, rather, these felt almost like little manifestos coming from a group. Having said these were among my favourite among our publications, I'm also glad they've mostly faded away. The internet is always celebrated for everything being only a click away, which usually means a focus entirely on the consumer or recipient, and of course many things should be much more accessible than they are. But inversely the idea of it being almost an obligation to put everything online – or into a bookshop – somehow nearly the same thing and both always disappointing, or to save yourself, in all senses of the word, also seems wrong, as if not having a profile made you an anti-democratic recluse monarch, or not wanting to be touched always by everyone, i.e. not offering immediate access to your body for that any way imaginary entity that is "the world". Instead, maybe someone is an anti-monarch and needs some conspiratorial secrecy!!!! Maybe they're just starting to write and need some time. Maybe they're shy and just want to whisper softly and need vast planes of offline space for that.

This is not necessarily an argument against putting things online in general, more just a reminder that it shouldn't have to be a law for everything to happen online. But: while it shouldn't be the law to be the law to have to put everything online, it also shouldn't be the law to never do that. In a different case, in 2016 with Materials we made an anti-Brexit magazine called BREXIT – BORDERS KILL which I will now hold up [hold up], of which we made maybe 20 printed copies and which is otherwise and mainly still available for anyone to download for free from our blog, again in A4 format. At that point, the immediacy of making it available for download and/or printing felt almost necessary because it was quickest. And the origin of this magazine was anyway online exchange: it came about because we noticed shortly after the referendum that poets in the UK scene were emailing each other poems or posting them on facebook and so on, everyone reacting immediately because it was such a life-changing event. The collection of these poems felt like a collective demonstration – but also importantly, nothing official, i.e. we weren't trying to be reps, again it was just a quickly assembled Word

document. I loooooove A4 by the way, it's such a bad format! :-)  
A third type of work I want to show is some broadside sheets and flyers we've printed. I will place these in the middle of the room without saying anything about them.

*[Goes to the middle of the room to place them there.]*

In the best of ways there's something anarchist and comradely about the small-press and self-publishing scene; in the worst of ways, there's also a lot of self-exploitation involved for both the authors and the publishers, I mean, all of this happens in a sphere of giving, but also expenditure and loss, and I'm not sure I feel like celebrating this in a Bataille-kind of way anymore – you've got to be able to afford loss, not just financially, but also mentally and physically. What do you think about that, how do you handle that, I mean finding time and energy for making stuff? Sometimes I feel like I might just stop, maybe there's an element of depression in that, but anyway, how do you deal with – energy? Art-making as a life-practice in the way proposed by this exhibition?

## MYSTI

If I have a life practice at all, it is that of a depressive and if I am going to open the flood gates of honesty, I started art because it was a job that could be done drunk. Thus the title of your beloved Anthology of Poems by Drunk Women stole my heart instantly. Yes I struggle constantly with the feeling that I should just stop. There is a lot of avoidance in art to reconcile with its inherently political spine, that of one who proposes their work should always exist... that of art histories taught and exhibited within a national frame here in our post-national living future where even dark art is supposed to elevate. Artists get rent free residencies, KSK, subsidized studio space and free flowing Covid cash here in Berlin—if they arrange their practice as a business. They must perform toil. I have ambivalently gone through various gestures to maintain legibility with the State, and I would rather not disclose the levels of pathetic anguish I experience while filling out forms and pitching ideas for future work of cultural value, because I still feel that in this frame one can only ever produce a National product. This is not a sustainable life practice for me personally. I don't like bending ears. I am not a convincing liar and I am terrible at extemporaneous speech (so I am really grateful that you are willing to go with me in this form of a premade dialogue). In writing I give up on my lines before they're even finished with plenty of blank space gaps that could certainly be disposed of, and I leave these unordered interruptions as the embodiment of reading now. There is also the need in art to be the conduit of everything which I believe poetry better avoids in allowing the existence of fragments. When I was in highschool only thumbing through art history books Feminist Art of the 70s and 80s was the only art that excited me... similarly all philosophy or theory was a joke compared to Radical Feminism.

I love that you sent me bell hooks as the first meditation for whatever it is we are coming together to do... those lines about losing the body that "even the flesh falls away." When I commit a day or some hours to writing, time gets lost for sure alongside the body. And I think that losing time now more than ever is healthy. Johann Hari mentions writing as his

flow state and how it is necessary to find yourself lost like that whether it is sports, gaming, or painting, that the flow state allows the break from pressures of organizational life after which one is better equipped to feel connection which he says is the opposite of addiction. But I don't always work in health because sometimes I think health should render negative, and its politics an unloving hole.

I sent you Camille Roy's abandonment of the body in *Rosy Medallions*: "If you think you look like yourself, look for the hole you make in air." My writing is often only a negative inventory, I get stuck for sure. Like Roy's refusal of academic interventions, I am cheering the end of educational regimes which seem to produce lines of people incapable of work, and here in Germany especially, without these ostensibly meaningless certifications movement becomes impossible. The presumptive values of these degrees needs to be surrendered and recognized for its utility because a student body refers not to some specialized individual but rather a mass as a form. I never want my work on Jstor, better in a box wrapped in a garbage bag for waterproofing in my damp basement. I feel like this might be an unconvincing defense of my need for negative inventory and undemocratic distribution given how few copies I have actually sold, but again my artworking is extracurricular not a business plan. The work is as much a case against myself as it is against anyone else. How do you manage your business of writing in this age of artists as entrepreneurs? Does poetry avoid better strictures of fame by being less reachable? (Aside from poets who read poems at presidential inaugurations of course—optics providing...)

## LISA

I confess I always defend the reading at the presidential inauguration because the German media were such artistic autonomy snobs about it, as if there wasn't a lot of literature written here that is the daily reinauguration of the FDP as King. I mean, that's basically what the idea of artistic autonomy and making non-political work is integrally about, confirming liberalism, confirming freedom, confirming *Querdenker-quer-thinking* even where that is denounced. The entrepreneurship you mention is exactly part of that too – though maybe you're right and in poetry it's two millimetres plus a cent less developed than in art-making because there's less money in it. But that's a lie, maybe the difference is just that the literature scene is slightly less neoliberal, and instead, for better or for worse (question mark), more old-school conservative, so you get to send your author photo and bio for every little and huge reading you do, and I'm sure there are all sorts of justifications for this, giving the audience a sense of who you are, where you come from and all that, but of course there's also something about identification and control in that. It's literally a reenactment of facebook before facebook even came to exist.

This relates to a question I have for you. I almost feel stupid coming here as "Lisa Jeschke", as the juxtaposition "MYSTI and Lisa Jeschke" exposes something very earnest and good-pupil-like in me, as in, "of course, dear cultural institutions, I'm happy to show you my ID card, since you assume I have one, which I do, and so of course I'm happy to consent for you to be the police and, worse, for you to render your own audiences the police, whether they want that or not, by passing on my data to them, whether they want that or not. Please go ahead! Best

wishes, Lisa." Then again, that kind of earnest well-meaningness is perhaps perfect for someone born in the 80s and called "Lisa". When Lucy Beynon and I make performance work, we're always giggling about being called Lisa Jeschke and Lucy Beynon, or Lisa and Lucy, it's just these perfect German and English suburban L & L girls' names, and there we've mustered a lot of energy from being locked into that as a black box. I say locked into it because the idea that Lisa and Lucy sound culturally harmless is a misogynist presumption: it's exactly the place from where you can start making harmful work. So, especially as a duo, "Lisa and Lucy" are these perfect real life artists' personas, maybe not so far then from MYSTI.

So now my question, which is several questions: is your persona as MYSTI a resistance against the entrepreneurial element of the art world? We had to give a bio for this event, too, how did you feel about that? And maybe as a final question for now, in the text by bell hooks I sent, she talked a lot about refusing an absolute opposition between critical and creative writing. Would you say your work is sitting in exactly that space of refusal? Maybe you already said that when talking about your writing as a negative inventory. Would you say the approach is launching destructive responses and critiques again the artworld from within the artworld – but not so much in an institutional critique kind of way, more in bell hooks' sense of your work becoming creative via being critical? It could seem destructive when it is actually the opposite of that, because it knows the way the art world is operating right now is the thing that actually kills people in and beyond art.

## MYSTI

Artist bios are for name dropping and network exposure for sure... I love that you align that with Facebook, which was initially started to rate women on campus according to their attractiveness. I am against both, always.

In terms of the name MYSTI, I could get into complicated family politics, but I prefer to say instead that my mother worked hard enough in her life, she doesn't need to try to figure out whatever it is I am doing in art. I am not above her or capable of protecting her, but compartmentalization is the only way I can reason any of this mess ongoing in our Contemporary Art. Though I too have a generic 80s name that is not so easy to google given its absolute commonality, I kept the drag moniker I had from when I was doing less art and more party nights. I had oscillated a lot refusing to call it drag by insisting that it was art, hating art enough to reduce it all to low drag. MYSTI is baggage, certainly not anything I can spin into a narrative of artistic strategy. Social media has a lot to say against drag, I know, so rather than scrub this origin from view like any proper Post/Modern subject, I drag it along with me. I prefer to be reduced to an object pronoun actually, because so much of artistic process is about placing the biography and labor and social sphere all together so that the whole life becomes a totem (for the inspired), or a function (for the realistic). Art might bring some closer to the divine, but I think it mostly makes commodity. I suppose that is why I like that we are doing a workshop now, here I am outside the need to perform, I can just talk about these elements without having to insist that they work well together.

A lot of money is to be made biting the hand that feeds you in art. Mine isn't criticism from the inside, because in my experience, no one really feels inside of art. Art is the neurotic cage one only tries to climb into... I feel I am finding art exactly where it is, in the bin. Surely all art now is future garbage. I think my writing is more that of a sign holder who cannot bother to speak anymore: THE END IS HERE. Heterosexual Panic was a small block of writing about the horror of amerikan liberal life under orange alert, the convenient way New Yorkers attempted to blame the Midwest for Trump who is New York in its most absolute form. I included in that piece the introduction I wrote for the launch of another print piece I AM NOT SULKING I AM HONORING YOUR LIMITATIONS. I like having the introduction be out of time dragging one piece into another. The Sulk is structured as a novena—a prayer prayed for 9 days—designed to look like a devotional. It is almost unbearably personal. My newest not-yet-launched meditation on politics as a space of non-action is titled: Everyone's Personal Became Political & Language Meant Nothing. Though I began this workshop reading bits of it, I haven't got a good thing to say about it, a purge project. Lines that kept me awake at night that never fit alongside anything else.

I have only read your Anthology, which I had to read all over again after reading Danny Hayward's review of it because I had missed so much. I am in awe of that density. Many art folk grieve the political in art, not me, I don't think there is anything apolitical about time spent like that. Why work from the political in poetry? Is that dedication to the unsightly? Poetry is best for funerals, no? My bit here got way too long I know, can you please eclipse me now?

LISA

Maybe one answer to that is that "the political" is a strange abstraction. This becomes more and more obvious now, when even refusals of the State have been hijacked by the new Right, so it's increasingly necessary to specify "the political" in art – there are as many different ways of describing a tree or a flower politically as there are of describing a tree or a flower non-politically. So, "political" as part of what political alignment, given that there's less and less non Corona- or Diesel-rotten breathing space in the air to not align in some way? I mean, to tease autonomous artists including myself, I want to say – which party? Wouldn't it be lovely if it could be imaginable the Illiberal Arts Catalogue would be reissued as the annual SPD party magazine, with a donut as a gift gimmick? I am suggesting that only in the sense that if that could be imaginable, it would mean the SPD couldn't exist – as it is as it was – nor the Federal Republic of Germany, and ordinary men and women and stars would have bitten through the sickly-sweet circular infinity shape of the nation state eternal.

What I really mean via this detour is, everyone always says "the private is political", everyone knows that now, but what about "the political is private"? Not in that the political is concealed or cut off from us, which is something only the Württembergian Cavalry would moan about, but the other way round, the political is private in that it seeps into our pores. So my poems are just deeply personal, like you say, they're funeral poems, for occasions like today, and I'm glad we've gathered here together, till we've died ENOUGH!



**MYSTI**

I suggest that if we have time, we open discussion to the audience at this point for the remainder of the first hour, but if that first hour has already passed completely, we say there is unfortunately not enough time for audience questions. Either option would make sense as a reenactment of liberalism, because all options, always, make sense under liberalism.

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**Q & A (if enough time)**

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4-5 pm

**DISCUSSION:**

**LISA:**

For this second part, we'd like to discuss together the question of, quote: "What's wrong with liberalism (for me)?????!?!?!?!?", first of all, because the Germans of this world might be confused why anyone would take offense with liberalism (given that liberalism allows you to take offense, and what more could a member of the Cavalry want), and secondly because it is actually difficult to pinpoint what's wrong with liberalism.

**MYSTI**

This might be, partly, because it seems much easier to talk about the wrongness of capitalism or neoliberalism, and partly, because liberalism affects everyone individually, so we're all stood here at this funeral like a tree in a forest experiencing their very own arborcide (1) either as the death of another, elsewhere, to be protected by you, (2) as forced Sunday evening TV entertainment whereby you look at your own mangled tree body and can't remember this was you in your current life.

**LISA**

So we thought going round in a circle might be helpful either as a first chance to develop ideas about what is wrong with liberalism, or if you're already taking this wrongness for granted, to un-take it for granted.

**MYSTI**

But, as a circle can be scary, maybe before we start you could get together in groups of two for five minutes to brainstorm the question and take some notes, before we go round and ask you as pairs of identical twins:

What's wrong with liberalism (for me)?????!?!?!?!?

*[After they've discussed this for 5 mins, get back to the group as a whole, with each pair sharing what they've talked about.]*

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**PAMPHLET-MAKING:**

**LISA**

Today was mostly about self-publishing and small-press publishing, and so as the final part of this workshop we'd now like to invite you to create your own conspiratorial-private one-page A4 mini-publication "What's wrong with liberalism (for me)?????!?!?!?!".

**MYSTI**

You're welcome to fill your A4 sheet on one side or both sides as you like; no one will be asked to share their work; we won't give any feedback: everyone is FREE to write/draw as badly as they can, and then to take their own work back home with them.

**LISA & MYSTI**

Whether this is a retreat into the privacy of your own creativity or a subversive beginning to new sets of unhackable illiberal underground pamphlets, we leave to you! Maybe they will be both, synthetically!