



Collecting Thoughts on Collectivity ÖFA, Stockholm #4

By: Ida-Elisabeth Larsen

Months back, I think it was during the winter of 2013, Fanclub approached me upon receiving confirmation that a Nordic tour of their latest production DEATH would be possible to schedule. They explained to me that they were concerned about the current culture of touring, which to them felt somewhat depleted – presenting work, but not having time to establish an understanding of the different contexts and cities visited under such circumstances. Fanclub was interested in doing something different – something that would in one way or another engage, or at least to some extent make conversation, with the local communities of makers and audiences. So, with this in mind we worked together to develop a little side project called Collecting Thoughts on Collectivity.

We imagined it manifesting itself through three different initiatives; a series of talks, a series of interviews and a subsequent article. Firstly, the series of moderated talks – between Fanclub, myself, and whomever else would be interested in participating – would discuss openly the way Fanclub functioned as a collective and how they organised themselves in periods of producing stage works. Secondly, the series of interviews with local artist collectives discussing their works, methods, etc. And lastly, the formulation of a small article, which would further expand upon some of the ideas about collectivity discovered along the way.

This is an interview done with the Swedish feminist collective ÖFA. I had initially planned to meet with three members of ÖFA, while Fanclub was performing at MDT (the place to be) in Stockholm, but due to my own confusion of dates I missed that perfect opportunity. Thankfully ÖFA found the time to conduct the interview via email instead. I've been really excited to get to know ÖFA better as it is the biggest collective I've met so far. Its 23 members are: Amanda Apetrea, Anna Ehrlemark, Anna Persson, Anna Wallgren, Britta Persson, Caroline Åberg, Elin Skär, Elize Arvefjord, Emilie Garmén, Emma Tolander, Ewa Wikström, Hanna Karlsson, Irma Ortega, Johanna Lindquist, Kajsa-Lisa Larsson, Katarina Winter, Linnéa Engström, Lisen Rosell, Märta Thisner, Nadja Hjorton, Siri Hjorton Wagner, Sofi Nyman and Stina Michelson.

IE: How did ÖFA begin? What were the motivation and ambitions then and what are your ambitions and motivation to keep collaborating now?

ÖFA: We needed a safe space, a women's land, a haven, a well of inspiration and unconditional support, a place of thought and understanding, a connection, a place not connected to manliness necessarily, a work place, a womb, a future. And, 10 years later, we still need those things.

ÖFA started in 2004 (yes, we celebrated our 10th anniversary with an epic party last year!), initiated by a few of us who were frustrated with being women in our society. An invitation to a support- and discussion group on feministic issues was spread through a vast and random network of friends, and the first meeting was held in a basement apartment in Skärmabrink, Stockholm. We shared an urgency to understand our feelings of injustice, to identify the power structures behind it and to develop strategies on how we could deal with them. We started meeting up once a month to discuss, share and support each other. We talked about high and low, close and far, building a bigger analysis of the system with pieces of private experiences, believing that the personal is political and that our responsibility to society is to be political in the personal. When sharing details of our inner thoughts; situations at work, school, while having sex, being in love, in different relationships we strengthened each other and our knowledge of the kind of system we live in. We read feministic literature and celebrated the feminists that fought before us.

IE: ÖFA is so far the biggest collective I've come across. Were you 23 people from the very beginning or did the collective gradually grow? And, what is the connection between the members of ÖFA?

ÖFA: Friends, colleagues, lovers, family, home-sharers, allies. We have a closed web-group, we know a lot of each others heaviest secrets, we inherit each others clothes, watch each others babies, make plans for the future together, ask each other for advice. Sometimes a lot of us work together. Almost all of the time some of us are working together. We make art together. We were many more in the beginning when we were an open discussion- and support group, but as the intimacy of trust and the demand for commitment grew, the group became smaller until we were 23.

IE: How do you organise yourselves internally?

ÖFA: Like a blob of initiative and support. There's always someone with a high urgency towards doing something and with genius ideas and someone with a need to be carried a long. In processes we talk and talk and talk, and play a lot. In general we have email-threads with hundreds of mails. We aim for as much transparency as possible.

IE: As far as I understand ÖFA is both a collective and a platform for it's respective members, which I see as two different ways of collaborating. What is the collective practise in ÖFA and how does it function? And what is the platform-aspect and how does that function?

ÖFA: ÖFA through our soon 11 years of making art and discussion, have earned a name and some fame, as well as created an organisation that can invoice and pay salaries etc. So if a member wants to make a project of some kind, she can use both the name, organisation number and the organisation for administrative work. Although, no one works full time for ÖFA. All depends on projects and gigs.

From time to time the urge to spend time together with as many of us as possible is so big that we invent work reasons to do so, and so big ÖFA-projects happen. Examples are the performance-parties we've been doing since 2008, or the performances 'ÖFA: DANCE' (2011) or 'ÖFA: MONSTER' (2015). Through all the projects that have been specifically ÖFA, different flavours and methods have developed. We find that it is easier to think crazy and be brave as well as being sharp, complex and updated when we're many.

For sure Danceoke is a collective practice of ÖFA. We do 'ÖFA: DANCEOKE' and 'ÖFA: DANCEOKE for kidz' as interactive performances, but it is also an activity we've been doing together at parties and in processes since at least 2008 (maybe earlier). There are many other collective practices of ÖFA. Since we're so many no one decides or is in a position to fully conceptualise our practices to one neat package, it changes like an amoeba, morphing, swallowing new stuff, dividing into new practices etc.

For more info on ÖFA see: www.ofakollektivet.se

For more info on Fanclub see: www.fanclubdance.com

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