

Dear



M Y C K E T

Collective



Dear

Katarina,



Mariana

and Thérèse

For the lover the letter has no tactical value: it is purely expressive—at most, flattering; what I engage in with the other is a relation, not a correspondence: the relation brings together two images.
(ROLAND BARTHES)

When we met for lunch recently, with leftovers from the Christmas Party at Architecture and Design Center in Stockholm, you had me smitten with your smiles and your giggles and your affirmativeness. I remember Mariana was tired from a long night with little sleep, and we all complained about that past November which granted us as little as three hours of sunshine in an entire month. It was grey and cold outside and I forgot to heat my food so it tasted kind of dry and I had cramps and I think one of you had a headache. And things kind of felt just—perfect—loving, calm, safe, supportive, like they always do around your collective. So, I remember asking you: “Is this real?”

I write to you this time to ask if you would like to talk to me.

I have been thinking lately on what it means to talk to one another, to utter words, to articulate thoughts in a shared space. On what bodily acts we perform when we participate in dialogue, and how rooms in which we execute them are organized, directed, choreographed.

The writer Sara Ahmed, who I know you to be as drawn to as I am, says that bodies acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others. She states that gatherings – whether a family assembling around a dinner table or a group of people congregating in space to engage in a shared political matter – are not neutral, but directive. When gathering, we are required to follow specific lines.

Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion [...] depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.
(SARAH AHMED)

As we know, lines can take many forms. Vertical, horizontal, circular, straight, bent. If we follow them; if we line up, we most often know where we are. We find our way when we turn both this way and that, we know what to do in order to get to that place or this. We are oriented; resided in space.

Actually, I just realized you were the ones to write me first. It must have been more than two years ago now, that I found a letter from you on my doormat. It was an invitation to something I was unsure of what it was, something that later on turned out to be an evening hard to grasp—difficult to translate from that space of experience into ones mind of memory—an evening so rich in its now-here/nowhere that it might have been one of the most inspirational nights of my life. When I sat down to write to you now, a reply to that letter one might even say, I tried to find your correspondence from back then, but I couldn't. Yet I remember one sentence clearly; one about how the use of fiction can rephrase the world of habits; one I stole to reuse and one that has followed me around in my work since. I cannot recall your exact phrasing, but my rephrasing and theft of it since then has been: My assumption is: if one repeatedly and persistently visits the imaginary, if one places oneself in the imaginary and the imaginary in our realities, the imaginations can, step by step, become reality.

An idyll like that wasn't meant to last. For a while it was forever, and then things started to fall apart.

(REBECCA SOLNIT)

“Yes”, you answered me, regarding the realness of your kindness not only to others such as me, but to each other. “But”, I tried impeaching, “you

work together, you spend all your free time together, you travel together—don't you ever just fight and hate on one another?"

The American writer Rebecca Solnit writes about the relationship as a house. It is something you construct together, something you take up residence in, something as sheltering as one's house. You adjust to great views in one direction and no view in the other, a doorway you need to duck in order to enter and a window that is jammed. "It's a shock to find yourself outdoors and alone again, hard to imagine that you could ever live in another house, big where this one was small, small where it was big, hard where your body has learned all the twists and turns of the staircase so that you could walk it in your sleep, hard when you have built it from scratch and called it home, hard to imagine building again".

I also built a house once. A headquarter for queer and feminist arts. Högkvarteret it was called, collectively it was built, we were—just like you—friends and lovers and friends, and as passionate for each other as we were for the cause of that headquarter. It was idyllic, it was my everything, it was something I took up residence in and something so sheltering. In it, forbidden desires and impossible bodies performed choreographies of resistance, whether or not they were dancing. Embodied practices were explored and performed, spaces were claimed, things shifted, impossibilities turned possible. Nothing was real, really all was unreal.

For a while it was forever and then things started to fall apart. For two years we presented innumerable performances, events, shows, exhibitions, artist conversations, and panels all while existing as a meeting place, open six evenings a week. We were multiple awarded, critically-acclaimed, and most of the time we were depressed. Sometimes we would still dance, but the choreography no longer felt like resistance. Now, several years and a severe roller coaster later, if I were to speak of that era in one word only, the word I would choose would be: desire.

Desire is constituted in the space between bodies. (RUTVICA ANDRIJASEVIC)

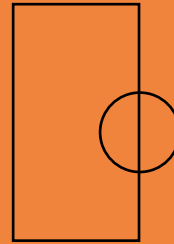
The heart is the organ of desire.
(ROLAND BARTHES)



Sara Ahmed teaches me that in landscape architecture unofficial paths are described with the term desire lines. Those are imprints on the

ground, where people have deviated from the paths they are supposed to follow. Leaving their marks, hollows in the ground, alternative and unexpected lines appear. "Such lines are indeed traces of desire, where people have taken different routes to get to this point or that point." Ahmed calls the accumulation of those lines 'queer landscapes', shaped by paths we follow when deviating from the straight line.

Then, the question could be; what difference does it make what we are oriented toward? And what has all of this to do with my desire to talk to you?



Once I spoke on a panel on the topic of a 'feminist language'. The room was small and crammed with people, lined up on rows of chairs facing the front of the room where two other speakers, two moderators and I were placed. We, invited speakers and moderators, talked vividly for fifty-five minutes. I do not recall very much of our conversation, but what I do remember was the last five minutes of that hour. One of the moderators asked if there were any questions amongst the audience. A woman raised her arm. The moderator made a gesture, declaring her right to speak out. The woman was furious. Her point: When we had gathered to talk about something called a 'feminist language', we had done nothing but to reinforce a hierarchy in-between those worthy of talking and those only of listening. For fifty-five minutes, five of us had possessed every space of articulation available in that crammed room, in order to provide five poor minutes for the rest of the sixty or so present. Her anger brought an uncomfortable energy to the room. Some grinned, some wriggled, some sighed. The moderator, quick in mouth and talented in argument, smiled to the woman and simply declared: This is a panel. If you would like to participate more interactively, I would recommend you to attend one of the workshops later this afternoon.

This moment stuck with me. It posed a question, still ringing in my head: Why do we so rarely break away from norms and conventions concerning how we talk about breaking norms and conventions?



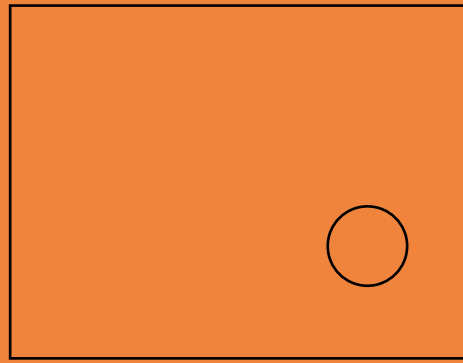
Sara Ahmed asks us to think about the ‘habit’ that can be found in the ‘in-habit’, when she states that public spaces take shape through habitual actions of bodies.

The body is ‘habitual’ not only in the sense that it performs actions repeatedly, but in the sense that when it performs such actions, it does not command attention... In other words, the body is habitual insofar as it ‘trails behind’ in the performing of action, insofar as it does not pose ‘a problem’ or an obstacle to the action, or is not ‘stressed’ by ‘what’ the action encounters. (SARA AHMED)

For Ahmed, it is not so much the bodies that acquire the shape of habits, but spaces that acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them, which makes some people feel in place, or at home, and not others. Hence, orientations affect what bodies can do—they are straightening devices. Phrased differently: spaces are oriented around the normative body, such as the straight body, the white body, the male body, which allows that very body to extend into space. This is the starting point, the point from which the world unfolds.

If we return to the room of the panel, a room of knowledge production and reflection, such lines, orientations, and habits become most noticeable. When we enter such a room; designated for artistic and political dialogue and termed as a ‘panel’ or a ‘seminar’ or a ‘lecture’, we know exactly which and what to ‘trail behind’. The room is organized according to linguistic acts, such as to speak or as to listen, and depending on which of these acts you have been assigned—prior to entering the room—you know what lines to move your body along with; what choreography to follow. Where to walk, how to sit, when to speak, how to be silent. When talking, you are expected to be clear and concise, to stick to the subject, to not be too personal or too explicit, to wait on your turn, to be engaged but not to be too emotional. Rules are rigid, choreography strictly hierarchical.

That woman, in the end of our panel on the topic of a ‘feminist language’, performed her body in a way that posed a problem. When questioning the format of our dialogue, a panel, her body did not only deviate from lines familiar in such a room, but also it commanded attention. It did not ‘trail behind’. And when things came out of line, the effect was uncomfortable, awkward, queer. In order for things to line up, the queer moment had to be corrected.



If it is deeper than rock it is because failure is deeper than success. Failure is what we learn from. (REBECCA SOLNIT)

“We all have collaborations behind us; experiences that has taught us how we don’t want things to be and episodes that clarified what we do want”. You told me this when I had a hard time believing you and it left me thinking. Time passes and feet take their paths. One house burns down and weather you were the one to lit the fire or not, you can still choose to imagine new houses. Big where that one was small, small where that one was big. As long as you keep imagining, placing yourself in the imaginary and the imaginary in your reality, the new house can, step by step, become reality.



If we began instead with disorientation, with the body that loses its chair, then the descriptions we offer will be quite different. (SARA AHMED)

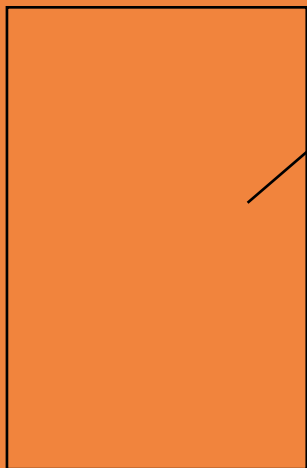
For the occasion to which I am inviting you to talk to me, I would like to talk about all and none of this, and especially about how one—we—can talk in other ways, when we talk to one another. Can we, and if we can how can we, take other directions when gathering for artistic and political dialogue? If we intentionally choose not to ‘trail behind’ modes of conversations oriented around the normative body, the ‘here’ from which the world unfolds, then what spaces can we generate?

What happens if the room is organized differently? If points for seating or standing are shaped in deviant formations; if bodies are choreographed not to sit or to stand but to walk or to lie down or to dance; if we are to discuss while eating or while cooking or while playing a game; if the dialogue lacks a moderator or if every one is asked to moderate; if lines are refused through proposing a room without

guidelines or if lines are emphasized through explicitly rigid rules; if we must interrupt one another when we talk or if we are prohibited to talk at all?

Can we, and if we can how can we, document such an event, again in ways unfamiliar? What would happen if everyone present would document the event while it takes place; if documentation can only be based upon ones memory; if the outcome of the event must be described before the occasion itself has taken place; if documentation must only be analogue, if hearsay can be the only source; if documentation can neither be text nor images but only audio?

How would we move, perform our bodies, in a room choreographed to such skew lines? Would we become disoriented, and if so what directions would we take?



Like ruins, the social can become a wilderness in which the soul too becomes wild, seeking beyond itself, beyond its imagination. (REBECCA SOLNIT)

The hope of changing directions is always that we do not know where some paths may take us: risking departure from the straight and narrow, makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer. (SARA AHMED)

My purpose of posing all these questions is not to find a path to answers. Rather, I long for the simple act of how to go looking for it; of how to travel according to a map with the desire to get lost; of how to explore possible and impossible modes for artistic and political dialogue. In the company of you

—and a communion of likeminded—I would like to stage a collective attempt to translate these questions into an unfamiliar mode for how a room, bodies and linguistic acts can be organized, designed and choreographed. The effects of disturbing the order of things are uneven; things might even get quite uncomfortable. Yet discomfort allows things and bodies to move. When talking we might fail, and when doing so we might also gain.



Space is a pressing matter and it matters which bodies where and how press up against it. Most important of all are who these bodies are with. (ELSBET PROBYN)

Like desire, the love letter waits for an answer. (ROLAND BARTHES)

I am not quite sure what we would talk about, on the occasion of talking that I am inviting you to, but I am guessing you might have suggestions. You say that body politics and body actions shape our cultures, and that night clubs have been – and still are – crucial for people who haven't had the possibilities to act with their bodies in the ways they desire. In your practice, you examine and test utopic and futuristic ways to organize, create and reuse the built and social environment. As I think you know, I feel close to these ideas. But also, I have been wondering, what happens when the utopic visions fail? When the house collapses? What if the love letter never receives its answer?

Yours,
Hanna

