

Dear Stina,

At first, I felt like I was failing.
The year of magic was not more
magic than any other year. (You)

It is Sunday evening, pretty late I think. We are in the far end of May, so what is late and what is not becomes blurry due to that sun that never seems to set. Every year it takes me by surprise, the light, the feeling of a new sort of beginning. A sort of magic. And then, in contrast, that very blue feeling of spring. That sort of beginning; always at the risk of overturning into a sort of end. A feeling of failing at the magic that summer is about to bring.

We will spend some time
together, and then we won't. (You)

I just finished watching 22 minutes of you. You were located in a basement studio, and by the sound of police sirens I could tell it was located in New York. You taught me a 'fake somatic practice', and guided me through my emotional anatomy. Locating, describing, and physically processing an emotion. Letting it take shape, texture, color, voice, movement. Finally, letting go of it.

You began by saying I should choose an emotion, and a song. I chose sadness and "Elastic Heart" by Sia. You chose happiness, and a song by the Cure. I didn't do any of the things you told me, but somehow just watching you jump around, obsessively processing the happiness in your body, prepared me to let go of my sadness. And when you let go of your happiness, I was smiling.

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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.

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If this was the truth,
would you believe it? (You)

Your bones are bones of a skeptic, you tell me. Is that why they appear so strong, so long; why your body seems to unfold in a seamless way into the worlds it enters and leaves? And is it because of this strength that you're drawn to breaking them?

I think my bones are bones of a believer, maybe even of a utopian. There is no portion of rationality in my system, and whatever one wants to do one can do as long as one just wants it enough. My motto since childhood. It has taken me to heights unheard of, but it has also made me fall over, and over, and fall hard. I think it makes my bones appear strong and long as well, I hear my body seems to unfold in seamless ways just like yours. Don't tell anyone, but it is not true. My bones are fragile as fuck. One simple attempt, and you'll break them.

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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?

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Honestly, if someone asks me
to go for my gut feeling I don't
know what to do. What do you
mean, gut feeling? And if some-
one tells me to listen inwards,
open my heart, feel the energy
I tend to take it literally. How am
I supposed to open my heart?
Where is the energy they
talk about? (You)

"I don't want to be that person." You write me this.
I don't want to be that person. I write you this.
I don't want to be the person you are either. I write
you this.

You don't write me that you don't want to be the per-
son I am, but I think that's safe to assume.

"The basic concept here is the attempt to walk the
line of the neither/nor. To neither be on one side point-
ing to the lack of spirituality or magic, nor on the other
side pointing to the hypocrisy on the first side."

Ok Stina, now I am the skeptical one; the one taking
it too literally. How am I supposed to walk this line of
neither/nor you write about? How I am I supposed to even
know where to find that line? And lines are pretty thin, how
am I supposed to not fall of it, fall hard, and break every
entire bone in my body?

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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 cramped 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?

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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.

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I got interested in magic as a suggestion for a way out of a rational world view. A practice suggesting another system, one that includes inexplicables, wonders and actual potential to change the world through will power; a practice that makes wonders come true through the practice of illusions. (You)

I have been dwelling in this topic of mine, the way we gather bodies in space when we gather to talk, for quite some time now. It is one I just can't let go of. You are one of my very final collaborators I am inviting to this communal dwelling. I am not sure if I have learned anything at all during this year, if any of my thoughts or attempts to push our conceptions concerning this have

made any sense at all, or just confused others and myself even more. And in the end, I am not even sure if my intension is to make sense or to confuse. I just know I want out too, as far as possible outside of this system.

When the poet and critic Athena Farrokhzad was interviewed last summer – after doing that summer speech in radio where she upset the bourgeois so tremendously that one right wing politician threw his TV out of his window as a protest to her voice being allowed in state funded radio – she was asked about the general lack of emotions in political speech; about the necessity of appearing unemotional and objective if to be taken seriously. Her answer was that the white heterosexual men ruling this world has made us believe that dryness equals truth, but that her conviction is that truth can be found in sorrow and in hate. Thus, our fight to get out should be one containing every emotion available.

In sorrow and in hate. With every emotion available.

Do you think magic can be our tool to get us there?

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**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?

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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.

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Spirituality can have a capacity to bring people together and

can allow us to experience profound feelings... The practice of doing rituals was a proposal for a way of spending time together. (You)

I am not quite sure what we should talk about, on the occasion of talking that I am inviting you to, but I am guessing you might have suggestions. I think I need you to explain this thing of walking the line of neither/nor, and I need to see if your bones are as strong as they appear or if, actually, they are just as fragile as mine. But mostly, I just want to spend time together with you, and experience profound feelings as a way out. Out; as far as possible.

Love,
Hanna

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