

Dear Hanna,

Thanks for your letter. Thank you for spending time on wording with me, in anticipation of a kind of public, but still, so far, only to me. It is something weird in spending time talking to someone who is not here. Someone I don't know so well but that I might. And that have written things to me, about me. Really, it is too flattering. And it fills me with stories I want to tell, connections I want to draw, writers I want to help me.

Yesterday I listened to a lecture by the sociologist Rolando Vázquez whilst walking through town. I had forgotten my computer at home when I went to work and had to walk back and get it. During my walk Rolando talked about the temporality of coloniality/modernity and how we are now approaching the end of contemporary time. The end of the time of coloniality and modernity. Imagine! It sounded promising to me. Then he talked about death.

The project of the west is a project that goes towards death, because it is based on the consumption of life. Whereas other cosmologies, other worlds, are striving to defend life. So today, the consumer society is a society that is based on the consumption of life, of the life of others and of the life of the planet.

(Rolando Vázquez)

When I came back with my computer I wrote a story about Ars Moriendi, the art of dying. It is somehow part of this letter. The beauty in death. The contingency of pain. The politics of listening. The truth in emotions. The magic of science. The bodies that disturb. The lines that divide. The sound of words. The fantasy of anatomy. These are the things I want to talk with you about.

A friend of mine recently talked about her desire to have private conversations in public. Is this one of those? And our c.along, could it actually work the other way around – as a kind of practising of public conversations in private. A safe(r) space for rehears-

ing the kind of panel talks, discussions, meetings and disagreements that we would like to have in public but that seldom takes place?

The writer Andrew Hewitt claims that choreography within the age of modernity functions as a medium for rehearsing a social order in the realm of the aesthetic, not only metaphorically but practically so. Choreography can physically and aesthetically rehearse society as we imagine it.

Choreography is not just another of the things we "do" to bodies, but also a reflection on, and enactment of, how bodies "do" things and on the work that the artwork performs.

(Andrew Hewitt)

I want to experiment with ways of creating the private situations in ways which we dream about the public situations to be. If we rehearse society, let's make sure we choreograph it well.

But since I can only see from the desk I'm currently sitting at, this is where I have to start before I can lose my chair and start dancing.

Right now, I am sitting at the short end of a long desk looking out through a window on a birch tree and a brick house. One in a series of brick houses that seem to be built in the eighties. In the background I see a high building, it looks like a hospital, and to my right a small fort is peaking out through a forest. I am in Gothenburg, in an arts residency. Behind me, in a smaller room, Sandra is still sleeping. In front of me, at the end of the long desk, is a menorah without candles. Small white pollens floats through the air outside of my window. This is Swedish spring and oh my god have I been looking forward to this. Right now, a squirrel passed by. It is almost like it did that in order for me to have it in this story. Things like that could make people less sceptic than me believe in destiny.

Now, let's talk about lines.

You write about lines. About the lines we move our bodies along with, about coming out of line as a queer moment and about the potential in refusing or enforcing guidelines.

Sara Ahmed writes about desire lines. About lines that direct us through the repetition of norms and conventions.

I write about walking the line of the neither/nor.

How am I supposed to walk this line of neither/
nor you write about? How 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?

(You)

I will try to explain. To walk the line of the neither/nor is probably impossible, but an action performed in order to always sidestep the line. When I say I attempt to walk the line of the neither/nor I mean I believe that there is a potential in not accepting the alternatives as they are presented for us. To answer questions in a way that asks the relevance of the question itself. To walk the line of the neither/nor is an attempt to not accepting the lines as they are currently drawn but to constantly fall off, creating a new crooked path where we can trail away.

Can the proposition that magic designates both
a craft of assemblages and their particular
transformative efficacy help us to reclaim it
from both the safety of the metaphoric and the
stigma of the supernatural? Can it help us to feel
instead that nothing in nature is "natural"? Can it
induce us to consider new transversal connec-
tions, resisting all reduction, unlike this sad term
"natural," which in fact means "no trespassing:
available for scientific explanation only," and
also unlike "the symbolic," which covers
wabout everything else?

(Isabelle Stengers)

The lines that directs us according to the habitual

repetition of norms, have also constructed the line between science and belief. It is a line that runs strongly through a history of modernity and coloniality, where some people "study" the "beliefs" of "others". To walk the line of the neither/nor is my strategy to acknowledge that I too am situated in this history, and can only think from where I am. I don't want to go and visit (go touring) on the other side, neither am I interested in building bridges, but nor can I ignore the divide completely. But departing from here, I can try to balance the line and make sure to fall off somewhere else.

You ask me how to find the line? For me, it's always been a question of trying to lose the line in order not to constantly have jump inbetween the sides.

You ask me how not to fall of the line, fall hard, and break every entire bone in your body? I know its hard to think, but maybe pain is not only a bad thing. Let's talk about ether.

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At the end of the 19th century ether was discovered as a forceful method of putting patients to sleep during operations, which during this time could be long and very painful. But it took over 50 years before ether started to get used as an anaesthesia during surgery. Why? The historian Karin Johansson gives a possible explanation when stating that for a long time, pain was not an acute medical problem. The important thing was to save the patient and not to stop the pain inflicted in the process. Because pain was a natural part of life. Maybe it was the realisation that pain is avoidable that made pain unbearable?

A few years ago I tried to work with emotions in my choreographic practice. I felt like emotions in the performing arts had been hijacked by physical theatre, by the hyper-aesthetized self-expression of emotions, and that my recourse so far had been not to deal with emotions in public performance at all. Echoing Athena Farrokzhad's statement about the general lack of emotions in political speech, I avoided emotions in order to be taken seriously. To be dry

is to believable. Anyway, I made this somatic practice in relation to emotions. I called it “Emotional Anatomy” and I started practising it. I made drawings and gave classes and made pieces. I also made that video that you watched the other day. But in hindsight, I never completely managed to work with emotions in an emotional way. Instead, I filed them into systems, made catalogue-like presentations of them, read about emotions and turned emotions into anatomical objects (organs). But feeling? I felt as much or as little as before.

It takes practice to dare to feel publicly. I'm trying, but allow me to be slow. Rationality is such a safe haven. I don't know how to find the truth in emotions, and don't even want to speak about truth.

Contrary to what we may have been taught to think, unnecessary and unchosen suffering wounds us but need not scar us for life. It does mark us. What we allow the mark of our suffering to become is in our own hands.

(bell hooks)

You write me that your bones break easily, and that it hurts. I am thinking about how broken bones can be something else than a problem.

It is normal to be sick. It is sick to be normal. Today, we behave as if being sick is an aberration. An exception to the normal state of being. For a long time, we rather saw sickness as a natural part of life. Then as modernity made its entrance, as a professionalization of medicine took place, the power to say what is well or not was handed over to the doctor. The ones seen unfit to the norm, the sick, the filthy, the poor, the crazy, the weak, the perverse, had to be corrected or removed. A healthy society needs a healthy population, and the doctor knows what healthy is. Through the metaphor of a healthy state functioning as a healthy body, the sick parts of the society had to be cut off. And so we cut, and keep on cutting. Remember, the last forced sterilizations in Sweden ended in 2013.

Last time when I met you you told me about how you sometimes use your scars as party tricks. I was fantasising about you as a living example of an anatomical theatre. A walking spectacle of the attraction of pleasure and disgust, whenever you would pull the curtains aside and perform. Maybe I'm a bit of a perverse.

It is normal to be sick. It is sick to be normal.

I'm writing this far too easy. Most parts of my body is trailing behind. Not only in the sense expressed by Sara Ahmed, but also in the sense of how it functions automatically for me. I use every finger to write, I watch the pollen floating in front of me, I change the position of my feet every now and then, I sit comfortably in the chair of the desk. I sit comfortably in the position of writing.

So, what do you say, should we pull away some chairs for at least some of the chair-holders in the panels?

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.

(You)

Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse.

This must be understood.

(Édouard Glissant)

The poet Édouard Glissant writes about utterances, about how orality is inseparable from the body in movement. Where the body is a prerequisite for movements, movements a prerequisite for sound, and sound a prerequisite for talking. If no one can translate the meaning of what sounds like a shout, then slave resistance is possible, and the dispossessed, those whose language is forbidden, can

weave communication into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise. What is just noise to me is language to others.

I am looking forward to leaving the movement of writing and get into into the movement of sound.

I am into practice, you know. Practice produce a know-how that cannot be separated from the particularity of the practice. A particularity that comes from its having a specific materiality: there is no idea without a material expression, as much as there is no knowledge unless it is practised. In order to create different choreographies for conversations we need to practice.

There is a thin line between interestingly different and pretentiously complicated, I know that. And this line bend in different directions for different people, the most norm-fitting individuals often being the least willing to experiment with an already comfortable position. The writer Jo Freeman describes how the women's liberation movement has been trying to use the idea of a "structureless group" in order to practise flat hierarchy, but failed to acknowledge the informal power structures unavoidably taking place. There is no such a thing as a structureless group, the structures are just more or less explicit, allowing some people to gain power over others.

A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society: the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others.

(Jo Freeman)

You have sent me a letter. This is my letter to you. Now, you and me, we are going to meet. And we will invite some more people that we want to meet. And then we will listen to each other. Following our short conversations I know that we share an interest in thinking about formats for meetings. In what rooms, with what methods, in which tone of voice, with what physical engagement do we communicate? I believe that in the meeting we set up, we can only propose one line. A line of invitation for others to think about whether they would be interested in

joining us in this conversation. Then, we need to make be prepared to and encourage to fall off that line. I will bring a first aid kit, wounds we heal together.

See you soon,
kiss
stina

Notes:

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Stengers, Isabelle 2012: Reclaiming Animism. E-flux 7/2012. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/reclaiming-animism/>

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Freeman, Jo, 1972: *The tyranny of structurelessness*. <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>

Johannesson, Karin, 1997: *Kroppens tunna skal*

Glissant, Édouard, 1992: *Caribbean discourse*