

Dear Laida,

**My
re-
search is
devoted to the
domain of intimacy.**

(Gaston Bachelard)

There isn't a story to tell, because a relationship is a story you construct together and take up residence in, a story as sheltering as a house.

(Rebecca Solnit)

This is my last letter to be written within this project, after a year full of utterings, articulations, disorientations; leaflets, longings, loss. As it was you who got me writing letters in the first place, and you who have activated so many of my writings this year, it somehow seems suitable that you are my final recipient.

I shall have to make it understood that this relation is not, properly speaking, a *causal* one.

(Gaston Bachelard)

In our very first letters to each other we both repeatedly quoted Litia Perta's *Some Notes On Ravishment*. You called her Professor Perv and said she was the most romantic pervert you had ever read, I wrote my love for her words was endless. Your favorite quote was 'she looked at me thickly', mine was 'a Maybe. A may be at its core'.

Full circle, as you say.

Full on, as I say.

*

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 ex-

cute
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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For the present, we shall consider the images that attract.

(Gaston Bachelard)

The house was a small place inside a larger one; or a small story inside a larger one.

(Rebecca Solnit)

The first time you told me about your visual research project STO__CK, you said it was one of fetishism. It took me some time to get it, and then I think I really got it. I became one of those 4600 and counting instagram group-

ies;
visiting
your collection of
material-objects over and
over; wanting to touch, taste, lie on
top of, be covered by, melt into.

‘Complex manifestations of the beauty that lies within each element that make up architecture’, you phrased the images in a written conversation we once had.

The relationship of the fragment to the whole. Your desire to remain in the fragment. A story within the story.

I came to wonder if this architecture you spoke of was not only one of space, but also one of poetics. If, when you shape your constructions it is the composition of what is intimate rather than of what is functional. And then one day you suggested I should read Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* and it all made sense; that you’re an architect trying to make sense of things while I’m a writer trying to make poetry of things, but really we are both just seeking for space.

Space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love.

(Gaston Bachelard)

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Why did we not prolong those fleeting hours? In that reality something more than reality was lacking. We did not dream enough in that house”

(Gaston Bachelard)

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.**

(Rebecca Solnit)

Gaston Bachelard writes about the house as a space where we want to curl up comfortably, and tells the phenomenological tale of ‘curling up’ as one that belongs to the verb ‘to inhabit’. And only those who have learned to curl up can inhabit with intensity. Maybe it is a good thing, he writes, to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later.

Rebecca Solnit, on the other hand, writes about the house as a relationship. I purchased one of her books the day before I met you; read it the first few weeks after, and I think I have been badgering you about reading it ever since. The final chapter of that book is called ‘One-Story House’, and sitting here now – writing this final letter to you – I cannot evade to think about the irony of it all. We see someone and make up a story about who they are, she writes, and sometimes we get ourselves in a lot of trouble with the stories we make up as we weave our world.

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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?

*

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?

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First of all, as is proper in a study of images of intimacy, we shall pose the problem of the poetics of the house. The question abound: how can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past?

(Gaston Bachelard)

**love,
in the
way it charges
everything with a kind
of incandescence.**

(Rebecca Solnit)

The word *romance* arrives in English from Old French in the 1300’s, carrying the meaning of a written or recited story – often an adventurous one; mysterious and questioning.

So many stories in this story.

Later, in the 1600’s the word is noted to mean ‘to invent fictitious stories’, and during the early 1800’s it is recorded to mean ‘adventurous quality’. The meaning I think I like the most is the one that romance carry when being an adverb; deriving from Vulgar Latin *romanice scriber* – to write in a Romance language.

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In one letter from you, reflecting upon one of my works I had just asked you to read, I find a sentence from you stating ‘I am a tough audience for writings with feelings... because as you know I avoid these like the plague’. I remember laughing out loud when I read it, since all I write about are emotions. When I replied, quickly as always, I questioned it. I remain questioning; sincerely doubting you avoid feelings like the plague. I don’t believe that logics are your playground. I think you are, rather, a story of emotional fragments. A one-story body; full of unknown stories ready to be unraveled just like you unravel those material-objects in STO_CK. But you are stubbornly standing by the door, refusing to open it up.

“Stories shatter”, Rebecca Solnit writes. Or you wear them out or leave them behind. Apparently, time is supposed to untwine the power of the story and the memory. Seemingly, over time you are supposed to become someone else. Presumably, time is supposed to be the destroyer of every affection.

*

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.

Heartbreak is a little like falling in

**The
body is
'habitual' not
only in the sense that
it performs actions repeat-
edly, but in the sense that when it
performs such actions, it does not
command attention...**

**In other words, the body is habit-
ual 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 knowl-
edge 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 or-
ganized 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 choreog-
raphy 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, cho-
reography 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.

*

**Among birds, need I recall, love
is a strictly extra-curricular affair,
and the nest is not built until later,
when the mad love-chase across
the fields is over.**

(Gaston Bachelard)

In Swedish the term 'bygga bo'; 'to nest'; carries the mean-
ing of birds nestling but also of lovers building a house
together. Gaston Bachelard devotes an entire chapter in his
The Poetics of Space to the intimacy of nests. With nests,
he writes, we find a whole series of images that he charac-
terizes as primal images; images that bring out the prim-
itiveness in us. The nest provides the human being the
possibility to 'withdraw into his corner', an act that gives
him physical pleasure to do.

**A nest-house is never young.
Indeed, speaking as a pedant, we
might say that it is the natural
habitat of the function of inhabit-
ing. For not only do we come back
to it, but we dream of coming
back to it, the way a bird comes
back to its nest, or a lamb to
the fold.**

(Gaston Bachelard)

Now, thinking, reading and writing about the meanings of
nest(ing), and the rest, it seems a bit ironic that I have in-
vited you to enter my space; to inhabit it and deconstruct,
extract fragments from, analyze, and reconstruct a resi-

den-
cy within
it. Quoting Jules Mi-
chelet, Gaston Bachelard writes
that the bird that constructs the nest is a
worker without tools. “A bird’s tool is its own body, that
is, its breast, with which it presses and tightens its materi-
al until they have become absolutely pliant, well-bended
and adapted to the general plan”. Therefore, Bachelard
continues in dialogue with Michelet; “the house is a bird’s
very person; is its form and its most immediate effort, I
shall even say, its suffering.”

I am unsure if it is you or I who is the bird in this
metaphor.

*

**If we began instead with disori-
entation, 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 for-
mations; 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 ex-
plicitly 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 docu-
mentation can only
be based upon ones memory; if
the outcome of the event must be described
before the occasion itself has taken place; if documen-
tation 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 cho-
reographed to such skew lines? Would we become disori-
ented, and if so what directions would we take?

*

**The hermit crab: grabbing on one
side and clinging on the other.**

(Rebecca Solnit)

**Everything about a creature that
comes out of a shell is dialectical.
And since it does not come out
entirely, the part that comes out
contradicts the part that remains
inside. The creature’s rear parts
remain imprisoned in the solid
geometrical forms.**

(Gaston Bachelard)

In contradiction to birds, crabs don’t take residence in
nests, but in their own shells. Most of them arrive to the
world complete with their own shell, but hermit crabs
are the exceptions. They lack their own shell, and instead
they take up residence in shells of others: snails, whelks,
periwinkles, and other creatures with more hard shells to
offer than themselves. The body of a hermit crab is asym-
metrical, soft and uttermost vulnerable. And thus, when
they find a new home, their body easily curves into the
protection of the other creature.

But the paradox of the hermit crab is that it always -
always - outgrows its current shell. And thus, it changes
when it feels cramped for space. This is the crucial, and
reoccurring, moment of the hermit crab’s life called *the
molt* – the moment when being in-between shells. Some-
times the crab go investigating a new shell before it molts,
sometimes the crab finds the new shell not being as fitting

as
the last one
and therefore it slips back
into to the old one, before giving the chase
of a new home a shot again.

*

**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 in-
volve 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 me might also gain.

*

**Sometimes the house of the fu-
ture is better built, lighter and
larger than all the houses of the
past. Late in life, with indomitable
courage, we continue to say we**

**are
going to
do what we have
not yet done: we are going to
build a house.**

(Gaston Bachelard)

**We navigate by stories, but some-
times we only escape by aban-
doning them.**

(Rebecca Solnit)

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. After all, you traveled all the way here just to talk to me. You once told me that STO_CK might be your artist alter ego. I think you might be right, and I think we should devote at least some talking to this matter:

The term ‘alter ego’ derives from the 1500’s and carry the meaning of ‘the other I’; a second self distinct from a person’s ordinary character. During the 1700’s the German physician Anton Mesmer used hypnosis to unravel the alter ego; disentangling other characters through activating altered consciousness – while remaining in the same body. It happens to be so, that this German physician’s last name, *Mesmer*, also came to give name to the term mesmerize: *To spellbind; to enthral.*

This all seems to be a bit too good to be true. But it’s not.

Love,
Hanna

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