

Dear Katie,

How do we return. Re turn the turning moved you once away from a starting place and the re places you back where you came from.

(You)

I am less than 10 days away from returning to the city. 'The city'. Not a city not someone's city a city not necessary to mention by name because of its overwhelming ability to strike you. In that city no other city exists. Time stops; *I. Ego. Self.* grows. Space appears and disappears; there is no vanishing point and the vanishing point is everywhere all the time. I hated that city, the city, when I left but not until after I had left. Yet I keep returning, *Re turn meaning twice, possibly multiple attempts otherwise we may not remember.*

I want that *Point of view.*

That *Vision prevailing as the primary sense by which humans establish here-ness. Now-ness. Thing-ness.*

I want the city to inhabit my body with its weight, to cause an *Increased heart rate. Activated sweat glands. Ache across the chest. an emotional response.*

Desire and fear sharing the same neurological pathway in the brain. Desire always haunted by it's inversion. The desire of something being in relation to the fear of living without. Yearning in a standstill with itself.

(You)

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Which color is the color of the word *yearn*, you think?

I think it is blue.

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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 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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Western definitions of gray define it as a color between white and black; an intermediary color being defined by what it is not.

(You)

Blue cannot be possessed, cannot be owned, cannot be captured. Perhaps it is, that blue cannot at all be, because blue is what is not.

(Me)

blue feels like home

(Inga Svensson)

You write about grey when I write about blue. But we both write about the color that is not. What is your desire that directs you towards this not-ness? Why do you pursue that *junction between times*; why are you drawn to the *vast vast*? And why is grey your choice of color?

Let me tell you about why I need the blues.

Blue is a fraudulent color. One of where you are not, one that speaks of depth and of edges, and always always about what can not be reached. The word *blue* derives from an old English word for melancholy, or for sadness, and as such it tracks back to 1555 in an etymological dictionary. But as a color it trails further, to the 12th century when it was carried over from Old French through the word *blo*, in its turn based on the root *bhel-*. And here, again, blue becomes fraudulent. It turns out that blue actually didn't mean blue at all, but rather spoke of something lightly colored, sometimes of something in-between grey and blue or green, and occasionally even meant yellow. The root of the word carried such strength that it dispersed into numerous languages, spread across the world; engendering a multitude of meanings. Today *belyi* is Russian for white, *blavo* is Spanish for yellowish-gray, and *blawr* is Welsh for gray. And in some languages, blue lacks an obvious boundary. In Korea, *pureau-da* is the word for both blue and green and in Thai *khiaw* represents green but is also the color of the sky and the ocean.

But really, I turned to blue out of an utterly different reason. I went looking for blue to find a way to speak about when there is no person no more, no thing, nothing. Blue became what I filled the gaps with, the breaks, the holes; what I used as guidance for the silence in-between words. With what I colored the whiteness around ink. Blue became all I had when all that I had had had gone distant; disappeared; lost.

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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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**Deserts do not bend they take,
they absorb.**

(You)

You speak of lines too. Of gray without g being ray, as in beam of light, spawning a line of sight. A narrow line that is, not necessarily straight but one I still assume cannot be queer because of its narrowness. On the other hand, you write, gray without r is gay. So I am not so sure those narrow lines are straight. Actually, I am pretty sure that they are not. That your lines just as your color are what is not; a landscape of not-ness. In the desert you speak of the dividing line of the horizon; the *line that marks a separation between earth and sky*. About the *Sky line arcing*. The *bounded line touching itself*. And in the desert, your what is not merges with my what is not. In the desert, *You see the atmosphere bringing it's blue*.

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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 rein-

force 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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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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If there is comfort found in disruption, deviation, breaking apart, and falling, then there is comfort here too: in the collapse of horizons, in the disorientation of free fall, in the bottomless abyss of the sea, and in the death of my mother.

(Jennifer Moon,
narrating Johanna Breiding)

When I write and read and read and write for this letter to you, I also start reading the catalogue for Johanna Breiding’s recent show at Human Resources in Los Angeles, *Epitaph for Family*. She speaks of the horizon too, as well as of other lines, including those of the refracting light. Her lines are definitely not straight, they are most certainly blue and they involve a lot of gray too, I would guess. Breiding’s

friend, Malene Dam, writes that in cancer the horizons keep changing, and it brings my thoughts to our C. Was it a good result, or a bad one. Cancer disrupts any notion of horizons, it's unknown, it's deceitful, its promise can change at any point, good or bad.
(Malene Dam)

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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 me might also gain.

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Maps are not about shapes but about energies flowing in and out of places. They are about directions and obstacles. The circulation of the blood. The blood of cities. The blood of a territory.

(Etel Adnan)

Landscape. A term for the human capacity for perspective.
Emotional landscape.

(You)

The lines I speak about are lines of yarn; spun thread used for knitting or weaving, but also a long rambling story, often implausible. At some point in history, the proto-Germanic word *garnan* scattered and wandered off in various directions. *Garn* arrived into Old Norse and Old High German, *gaern* appeared in Middle Dutch, and *gearn* emerged in Old English.

Bundles of fiber twisted together, forming strands; trailing through language like a drawn-out line on a map of deep time.

Eventually, sailors sailed the word off into a deviation: In 1812 the phrase *spin a yarn*; to tell a story, is first attested as a sailors' expression for the notion of telling a story while engaging in sedentary work such as yarn-twisting. There is something alluring to the fact that this meaning was brought to the word by sailors. Those at sea, those drifting, those in the big blue. Always far away, rarely at shore, enduring in distance. A subject of constant yearning.

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Without a stable paradigm of orientation, grounding becomes an illusion; relative positions of above and below, before and after, oneself and others no longer exists: boundaries collapse into free fall. And it is here, in falling, in liminal space, where perspectives twist and fold into one another, that I understand death and life to be the same.

(Jennifer Moon,
narrating Johanna Breiding)

But really, my lines are made of yarn because of an other story.

You see, the root of the word *yearn* cognates the Sanskrit word *hira*, meaning *vein*, as well as the

Latin word *hernia*, which means *rupture*. And when a human body has a stroke, it is the result of a clot preventing the blood in the territory of the brain to circulate. The brain stops breathing, and sometimes the vein ruptures and the brain starts bleeding.

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Waiting. Timing. Bridging neurological pathways for this practiced and learned dance with the headlights.

(You)

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. Reading through your lecture notes activated so many paths in my brain that I feel even more eager about my return. We should definitely speak of what is not, about the colors of yearning, about *emotional landscapes* and *political land shapes*, about the place of sadness in the body, about light and lightning and about the absurd fact that when writing this letter to you there is lightning and thunderstorms outside of my window, about *Light as a measurement system light as weight*, about *Light as the sensation of perceiving brightness*. About *Coming to light*.

Also, I wonder if maybe you can teach me that dance with headlights. I think I need that.

Love,
Hanna

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