

*I am nobody but I know.*  
(Litia Perta)

# Dear Frederick

The day I took you to have pasta with me at that Italian place I think we were both hung over. Or actually, it was a Tuesday or a Wednesday so we were not hung over but I remember we both giggled about the intensity of the weekend elongating far into that week. I don't remember what it was I had done but I do remember you telling me that you had visited Berlin; that you had been to Berghain, that you had hooked up with some guy; that you had spent Sunday morning by an indoor swimming pool, sharing a party that did not shun dawn.

*We look into each other's eyes, we look at the way we mope, and it is enough to know that we know. We take care of each other.*

(You)

I think this was the first time you and I ever shared a meal together, even had a conversation one on one, and it was a bit odd that it was pasta we ate considering the fact that I never eat pasta. At some point you had some pasta sauce in your big beard and I kept looking at it, feeling like I ought to say something, but refraining because I didn't really know how to say it since I actually did not really know you at all. Maybe this was also during a long, descriptive story about the corners or the midfields of Berghain – one that I would counter with one of mine, just as vivid. When we separated I sent you an email with the text *Some Notes on Ravishment*, written by my friend and professor Litia Perta. It is about 'the joys of having holes and fingers and filling them and fucking them'. I sent it to you partly because it is one of the best texts I have ever read and partly because just I felt like it would really speak to you and like it spoke about our meal of pasta.

Looking back at this moment, it might strike one as odd that what I consider to be odd in the situation is the choice of food.

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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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*Every new party is a new possibility. And feeling is the foundation of the party. Of the body. Of moving hips, and soft lips. I believe that when bodies move, minds do too. (Sanna Samuelsson)*

*We dance for hours to techno, we work it hard on the beat, we are topless, we sweat. (You)*

*The summer of 2007, my body was naked. The summer of 2007, my body was sweaty. The summer of 2007, my body was ecstatic. The summer of 2007, my body was*

*surrounded by hundreds of other bodies, each and every one as naked, as sweaty, as ecstatic.*

(Me)

*I am looking for the body, my body, which exists outside its patriarchal definitions. Of course that is not possible. But who is any longer interested in the possible? (Kathy Acker)*

2007 was my third year, out of six, of running a queer feminist dance party called *Idyll*; a collective fantasy of a visionary spatiality. We would, repeatedly, cram hundreds of bodies into way less than hundreds of square meters and drink and think and talk and present and be present. And then we would dance.

We shared that space over and over because of one shared desire: *desire*. Feeding off our separate and shared experiences – inhabiting bodies that resist and are resisted; persisting to believe that anything is possible while being impossible – we unfolded our dreams of other worlds, and about other ways of being in this world. We desired each other's bodies, as much as the space our bodies took up – what our embodied selves would become capable of inside that space. We desired the spatialities that arose when our bodies encountered the space and when the space shaped itself around our bodies. 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.

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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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*At the inflection point of crisis,  
where all tropes turn again, we  
need ecstatic speakers.*

(Donna Haraway)

*Closing my eyes, letting the vibrations of the beats infiltrate all of my cells and loose my mind in the dance. (You)*

*We indulge, accentuate, and celebrate all that is unreal, attempt the surreal, and turn our backs on the reality outside our realm. (Me)*

*Quiet awareness that you are part of something larger than you.*  
(Eileen Myles)

I have seen you perform a couple of times before that time we shared a meal of pasta. Euphoric, ecstatic, enraptured – accompanied with trash from the floors of Berghain, or with pink silk ribbons – you move as if you have no direction, no goal, no nothing besides your body and your sweat and your movement and that big beard. For hours and hours you move in and out of a space – the actual shared space we are in but also this other space; a spatiality constituted by that very moment, that very experience, that very there and then. There is no beginning, no end.

*no-where and now-here (Miss.Tic).*

*It is what it is. (Pavle Heidler)*

You write, un-write, write, un-write. And eventually, or sometimes immediately and occasionally not all, people start moving and writing and un-writing and moving, with or without you.

And then, it is over.

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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 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.

*But really it is a discipline of a different kind that interests me. What calls me to it now is that hovering-in-between discipline, the one belonging to the strange and shadowy space that extends somewhere between the old and the new, between the no and the yes, between the once was and what could be and that has, as its foundation, a Maybe. It may be at its core. (Litia Perta)*

*This dance is the thing I do in this space, no matter if someone is watching me or not. (You)*

*We do not know where it will lead us. All we know is that we will always be surprised by all we do not know. All we hope is that sometimes we will dance. (Me)*

*...like a constant transport that takes place in the exchange between one's body, the air, and the world. (Caroline Bergvall)*

In those rooms, with you and with others, I felt like I was part of a rehearsal. Not rehearsing your performance or mine, not even ours, but rehearsing a pulsating and growing interspace. A body one could even say; the body of work. Constant movement yet no destination; temporality, inconsistency; moments so real they feel unreal – unfolding space for experiencing the surreal. True and untrue collapsing into one another. And the feeling of wanting to leave yet never wanting to leave. Of hovering. Of ravishment.

*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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*Rhythm is a figured, embodied improvisation, not a measure.*

**(Lisa Robertson)**

*This would never happen in real life.* **(Malin Arnell)**

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.

Maybe we can talk about that guy you hooked up with in Berlin, or about the very hot guy dancing in one of the corners of the room, or about that other hot guy who every time you pass by, you can breath the arousing smell of his sweat, or about the girl who I am sex-bonding with in Los Angeles, or about bonding a little bit too much, or about letting weight sink through my bones, or about what sexuality becomes when you have so much sex for so many years and then for the first time really have sex at the age of 25 because sex before that was just a rehearsal but not the kind of rehearsal that you and I engage in on the dance floor but the kind of rehearsal teaching you, simply and only, *what desire is not*, or about clutching skins and about moving again, about the need to move more, always more. About hovering, constant hovering

*in between these two pulses of yes and no. it too is a discipline. And it can be learned.* (Litia Perta)

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

(Rebecca Solnit)

*But after two years I felt trapped there, as if what I brought into the work was becoming too restrained. I felt trapped in a role, maybe. Leaving this tribe felt a bit dramatic. I wonder if it isn't always to some extent a dramatic event to leave a tribe.* (You)

*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.* (Me)

*Where there is a wound, there is a subject... and the deeper the wound, at the body's center (at the heart), the more the subject becomes a subject: for the subject is intimacy. Such is love's wound: a radical chasm that cannot be closed...* (Roland Barthes)

You wanna know something? I rarely dance anymore. I keep telling myself (and others) that it is because I am old and tired. But I am not sure that is true. I think it might have more to do with suffocating. Maybe we can talk about this too.

Love,  
Hanna

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