

A Document, On All Fours Prolonging A Problem

I tried to write a description of what I thought you wanted me to do, but I also felt like we could just talk.

Because it's hard with language, when I write in English, I feel like I need space around to sit and write, but it's so hard. I tried.

Do you think it's easier to write when you feel like you are writing to one person?

No. Maybe if. No



I think I have to take the step now, I have to describe the situation, I am ready, I think it's good that we talk about it from the beginning, I think I always write to somebody.

Do you want to try and describe the performance you made at The Contemporary Laboratory and I could ask you some questions, and we could write that out?

Yes, also when I was thinking, when I have been thinking about the performance, it also involved so many things about what I did in The Town Not Far From Here. It became so much that I couldn't really sort it out.

I was thinking the same thing, that when you told me about it first, you told me about the different experience you had in The Town Not Far From Here and at The Contemporary Laboratory.

When I did the performance in The Town Not Far From Here it was a different thing. Before I had done it two times in a performance context, you pay to go in and you know there are going to be performances. Everybody already agreed, so I could work with that. It was connected to the formats and what you can do within the concept of performance. When I did it in The Town Not Far From Here no-one else other than me actually knew. Even if it was part of a performance festival. Very few people in the town knew, and very few people knew after that it was a performance. It made the performance so different, I just became like a person from a psychiatric hospital, it became more about that. I think when I was doing it in the performance situation people didn't think of me as crazy or homeless or hungry, even if I did eat someone's food in the performance, they didn't think I was hungry. When I did the same in a fast food restaurant in The Town Not Far From Here one of the guys asked me are you hungry, shall I buy you food?

Without saying very specifically what you do yet, maybe it's good to know what you are thinking about and feeling when doing it?

I have done it four times now. The first time I was thinking, I wanted to be close to people, in different ways, I wanted to examine the limit between "you" and "me". I think I was trying myself in public. I was holding hands with people and feeding a man with a cake, I was also spitting in a man's face. I was sitting for a long time in front of him, and I don't know, I just needed to do that.

Was he upset?

Yes very, so he went away, he didn't know, I don't think he had seen me doing the other things before that. He did go away but I know he came back. I met him in the street some days later and he was waving and laughing. But at first he became so angry.

How long did you do it for?

One and half, two hours.

Do you go from one person to another?

I spent quite a lot of time with each person, or by myself.

How do you know?



I had the feeling I wanted to experience something, maybe fear in my body. So if I felt like I should let go then I would stay with it a bit longer, this was too much maybe. In The Town Not Far From Here I approached a father with his child and I did this on the pushchair (shows hand holding onto the pushchair) and I didn't let go. I stayed there for a very long time, he wanted his friends to carry me away and threatened me and tried pulling my fingers off the handle in a very rough way. He was really scared, but I also saw that when I first started this holding the child smiled at me and was enjoying it, so I felt it was OK for the child. He had two friends that were bigger than me, they could have easily pushed me over but they didn't. The father looked really scared. I understand that of course because there was a child involved, I think I pushed him.

And so eventually the friends came and took your hand off the pushchair?

No, the father tried very hard, but the friends didn't want to do anything. One thing that was different in The Town Not Far From Here, was that one person from the performance festival would talk to people after I had made my advances, if she thought she should. I don't know if she did

it or what she was saying to them, I don't know. I don't know if I liked what happened in The Town Not Far From Here, I don't know.

I think if you know after it is OK, although it still challenges your fears, still the sensation on your body is there, you experience something new.

I don't do things that don't happen.

Do you talk about what happens to you, and what's happening to the person?

I think as a starting point I was trying to get closer to people.

Why do you want to get closer to people?



I was interested in how I should react with my body, to take up space or.

Did you ever think you would get hurt?

No I was never thinking like that. I didn't want to think about what could happen and what I should do, or what it could mean, because I wanted to do it. When I did it in The Contemporary Laboratory it was so different also, because it wasn't a performance event, it was just an opening.

How did it work there?

It didn't, I don't know, because of everything that happened before the action or the situation that it was supposed to be in, the exhibition around political art since The Year When Everything Was Supposed To Change. How can you think about the future in connection to what was happening in The Year When Everything Was Supposed To Change? They asked if I could do something at the opening and I said yes. They said let us think about it, and then they emailed me and said yes, so I didn't think about it more. Then they called me the day before and said that maybe we shouldn't do it, we should wait with it or it would be too much. I couldn't understand, what is it to be too much? and I thought they meant it was too much for me, but no, and then I asked for a list of specific things that they didn't want me to do during the performance, and they said OK we will do that, and the next day I got an email with this in it.

I don't understand what they gave you, they emailed you the law?

I will show you (shows the email and reads it).

What is arbitrary behavior?



So they knew what you could do potentially?

Yes

How did they know that?

Because I told them I would infiltrate in the space. I think they asked me, can you hit someone? Is it possible that you will hit somebody? and I said yes.

What does the phrase 'legally support' mean? Does it mean that they cannot say that you have been invited by The Contemporary Laboratory to do this?

Yes, I think so, if I hit somebody there I will take the responsibility, I will not say, oh it's an art piece, it doesn't count. So it's strange how they think about it, it will be harassment if the other person thinks it's harassment, and all of this is subjective.

It makes very clear that The Contemporary Laboratory is a private space, that they own responsibility for all things that happen there. It is not public. It shows what are the limits. You have it in writing.

At first I wanted to make a placard with the restrictions on it, and just walk around in the space with it. But one thing I had been saying about the performance is that it isn't a piece about institutional critique. It hadn't been the focus. But when they sent me that email suddenly the piece became about an institutional critique. So then I just decided to go there as I was, to go there (without the placard) and make a decision when I arrived, am I going to do the performance or not?

So they didn't think you were going to do it?

I went there to do it, but I also decided if it doesn't feel right I shouldn't do it. When I heard that The Professor At The University College Of Arts, Crafts, Design And Art Education would talk about political art or revolutionary art, or art that can make a change in the society, I decided to do it. I approached him when he took up the microphone to give his speech and I stood very close to him.

Was that the first thing that you did?

Yes, when he finished we both left where the microphone was, the stage area, I went down to a woman, I think I should have stopped.

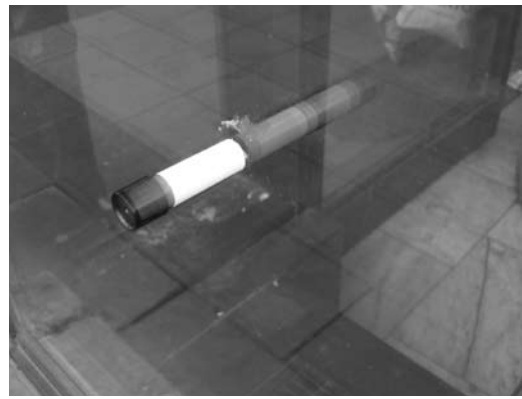
What happened? what did you do when he was talking?

I think for me, afterwards it's so funny because afterwards I realised that nobody actually heard him. He talked into the microphone in a way that almost no-one heard. I was standing next to The Professor At The University College Of Arts, Crafts, Design And Art Education, who said a lot of important things that nobody heard. All these 300 people were standing around and nobody interrupted or wanted to hear what he had to say.

Because he was not speaking into the microphone?

Yes but like this, urururghaur, like that. So maybe I was thinking that they could only stand it because I was standing so close to him. When I first came up to him he looked at me and moved away a bit and then I followed him and I was standing a little bit behind him or on him, and he was talking and even I couldn't hear what he said. But one thing I heard, I knew he started to say that the only artist that really made a change in this society was The Trendsetting Nazi Architect. After a while he started to say something about art that doesn't make a change, and he said there is an example here (points to herself as if she is him) but nobody heard that. Because nobody was even listening to him. That makes it all so absurd.

But people hadn't reacted to anything he said?



No. People didn't react or hear anything. It's a vacuous space

I didn't understand this straight away, because I was so into his body, I was feeling him more than listening to him. I didn't know that they didn't hear him. And then he did this (hand on head) when he gave an example of something, and I did the same thing, first one time and then I continued doing that very slowly until he finished his talk.



Could you see people watching you?

No, I had to focus beyond them, it is such a huge space you know. Last week we went to a nightclub and someone a guy just did like this (hand on head) and I was thinking, what's that? he remembered me. I asked A Friend, do you know him? and he said, no he's stupid. And then I remembered oh that's me.

So that was the first time you had any acknowledgement of anybody seeing what you had done?

Yes.

But nobody from The Contemporary Laboratory said anything?

Yes they did. But there is so much politeness around so I don't know. One of the curators mother was there and I was sitting on her knee when she was watching a video work and he said that she was amazed about having me on her lap, and that she would talk about it for weeks.

Does it feel significant that you haven't had any register of this happening?



No, I would rather hear something, to know some thoughts around it. This was a new situation, not being in a collaboration, as in The Famous Feminist Performance Group that I was once part of. We could always rework it, or talk about it until we got something out of it.

Would you think about trying to ask The Professor At The University College Of Arts, Crafts, Design And Art Education what he felt about it?

Maybe. I don't know.

You asked me to talk about my experience of The Group Exhibition that you curated, that you proposed. I understood that your proposal, or invitation was for a number of artists and activists, 30 I think, to make a work, or propose a situation that would take place during the week of the exhibition. I had felt that you wanted it to be a space for meeting and exchange and to work out how to do this, how to ask that of people or allow it? I had something I wanted to try, to try out. I did not have or make so much time to meet the other artists, which I regret. I had committed to working with A Friend on her performance.

How to begin to think about what to do, and to think about what you can do. Since it is not only what you would like to do that is a consideration, but how you could, why you should and who or what it will affect.

One signifier, or description of what the exhibition would be, was that all of those involved have some connection to a queer community. It feels important to be positioned in this way, that we declare something about ourselves in the beginning, although it remains quite ambiguous in terms of what that identification produces.

I have been learning from your way of thinking and acting, and I have appreciated our conversations about our experiences of working and being in the world. The way we have been talking made me feel confident that I could do something in this situation.

I decided that I would like to try to cover the two big windows in the exhibition space. I am often covering my windows in my apartment, I imagine a person seeing me, looking at me and what I do in the home, as well as in public. In the past weeks I have tried to challenge that. I have done things without curtains, or cloths on the window, and enjoyed the feeling. I have thought about how I am perpetuating the privatisation of desires, what happens when we don't try to make things public because we assume that they will not be accepted or that our identity will be affected somehow? I am thinking about producing things for a public, rather than just making things public, thinking about what it means to communicate to another, how to explain and be held accountable and responsible over time.

I wanted to cover the windows on the night of the opening. This would also serve as a practical solution to the problem of natural light from the window. It would help to be able to see the video projections and monitors better. I felt conscious that my idea would affect other works, and wanted to think about that, and not shy away from this gesture.

We took fabrics from your storage unit, fabrics that you had collected over the years. I usually have problems asking for things, so I had some guilt about taking your time and going to the storage that day, and borrowing these precious things of yours.

I didn't really want to plan too much or try things out, or think too much before about how I would cover the windows. It was hard to know who would be there and what the situation would be like. So we brought the fabrics and left them there in a pile, in preparation. On the night of the opening, I decided to start working with the curtain alone in the beginning and slowly ask people who were close by to help me. Initially two women, strangers helped a lot, and made a lot of decisions about how to go on with it, but they were not able to stay long. Slowly others came, friends, and still more strangers. The space was hot and grew hotter, and darker, slowly. Eventually the windows were covered, not solidly but for some time darkened at least.

The second part I wanted to perform was a text that I had started working on when I first came to The City. It is a text about people and situations that I met and was experiencing, but also a question about possibility and a call for support. It encounters people who I thought would be present on the night of the opening, and others who were absent. The text tries to acknowledge some actions that people have made that could be considered to be a risk or a challenge. I wanted to read this text in connection to making and constructing the curtain. I decided to read from the street after we had completed the curtain, using a microphone lowered down to street level, out of the window, but with the speakers still in the gallery. I went down to the street and pinned my text to the notice board of The Anarchist Cafe and read the text slowly into the microphone. There were others on the street with me, curious about what I was doing, but without asking me. After reading I went back to the gallery and experienced a feeling of alienation that comes when you have just done something in public that others haven't, you didn't share the same experience.

Some said they liked the text, one person held my hand, another asked if they could read it again. I left it on the notice board, and offered to email it to some.

We decided to meet four times for two hours each, and each time set a task for each other. The first task was for you to talk about a performance work that you made in a number of different situations recently. My task was to talk about the work I made for The Group Exhibition, curated by you. Our first meeting was at my studio, sitting on a sofa, recording the conversation with a computer.



For our second meeting we met in the city, and walked to a The Contemporary Art Museum. There was a Festival Of Culture happening all around, the streets were full of teenagers. We took our time walking and talking. When we arrived at The Contemporary Art Museum we noticed another exhibition in the building adjacent. Outside was a large blue paddling pool. You went inside and found out that we could take a dip in the pool. There was a small changing area, with the words 'I and I' on the curtain and two pairs of men's swimming shorts and towels. We both put on shorts and took towels, and went for a dip. You dived in and I took tentative steps. After we went to have coffee at The Museum Café, and talked. We discussed doing nothing, but how doing nothing is impossible. We discussed making this poster.

On our third meeting we met in the south of the city and walked to A Café. But the pigeons have taken over that place, and what was once a relaxing spot for humans is now bird territory. We sat inside and talked about The Symposium that you are working on in another city, and you showed me the programme. After we walked to a part of the city where you can look out over the water, and the cruise liners that are in the docks. On the way there we bumped into a friend of yours who had started art school with you, but is now training to be a doctor. As you were talking I watched the bridge rising. On the way back we talked about availability and our feeling that we are usually available.

For our fourth meeting we met at The Indian Restaurant to order take away food, so that we could come to the studio to work. We had to wait twenty minutes and in that time took a walk around the block. We came to the studio and ate, and discussed our ideas for the poster. I read some of the transcript of the conversation from the first meeting out loud and we laughed a lot. We drank some coffee and talked about how we understand what was happening in the conversation from the first meeting. The system that we had imagined in the beginning, somehow became inappropriate and we simply rambled all over it, but we are still thinking about some questions of time, and what we could do in this time.

For our second meeting we met in the city, and walked to a The Contemporary Art Museum. There was a Festival Of Culture happening all around, the streets were full of teenagers. We took our time walking and talking. When we arrived at The Contemporary Art Museum we noticed another exhibition in the building adjacent. Outside was a large blue paddling pool. You went inside and found out that we could take a dip in the pool. There was a small changing area, with the words 'I and I' on the curtain and two pairs of men's swimming shorts and towels. We both put on shorts and took towels, and went for a dip. You dived in and I took tentative steps. After we went to have coffee at The Museum Café, and talked. We discussed doing nothing, but how doing nothing is impossible. We discussed making this poster.

• The performance No Title. Too Many Questions is a visualisation (of) and a fight over the Normal. It is a compressed negotiation between the distance of ownership and the transience of closeness. It is a seizure of the vulnerability of agreements.

• The Contemporary Laboratory cannot legally support any actions that violates the country's law in aspects such as physical abuse, harassment, offensive behavior, hate speech, arbitrary conduct or vandalism of private property.

• I want to mention dancing at the club.

• I want to mention the talk at The Contemporary Laboratory.

Text by: Malin Arnell and Emma Hedditch
Photos by: Malin Arnell / Linda Arnell,
Emma Hedditch and Emily Roysdon
Design: Anna Gierzt
IASPIS, Stockholm 2008