

# Mette Edvardsen and Juan Dominguez in Correspondance

Dear Juan,

I am writing you now with some thoughts I have for the new piece I am working on. As I mentioned to you, there are some crossing interests and I thought it would be great to exchange with you about your thoughts and experiences; me from the place of approaching these questions, you from a place of already having experience dealing with similar questions. Or this is how I imagine it.

Since we spoke about doing this kind of correspondence I keep having internal conversations with you. I am writing letters in my mind. Though in my mind I never write the beginning, I just write. And now that I sit down to actually write I don't know where to begin. The beginning is always the hardest, how to start, because I find it so determining. But then eventually I just start, I just did. And then I think it is in fact quite simple. To begin to write a letter. To begin a piece. To begin a day. I don't think about how a day begins, it just does. In reality things don't start and stop. Maybe it is more like a compositional problem, if what comes first determines what comes after, or maybe in a letter this doesn't matter. Here, finally, a first letter to you.

Today was my first day in the studio. Not the first day of the creation process, but the first day of placing myself with my thoughts and ideas in a studio. All of a sudden the premiere starts to feel very close. Right now that feels a bit like an end point, it is both exciting and frightening. I am in that moment of the process where it is not about drifting and imagining and opening. I need to make choices, to orient myself in the space. There is a limit, a horizon. There is also an inherent dynamic in that. I need to begin to place and to construct. I need to find myself. To begin the writing.

As it turns out, today is the first day for the studio as well. A first day for this space or room to be a studio or residency space. It used to be the office space of a dance company, and before that maybe people used to live here? Now it is like an empty space where someone has just moved out, and the dust from behind shelves and doors that have been here for decades are the only things left behind. It makes me think of the old school house in Berlin where we were working and could rent a classroom for 50 cents per hour or something like that, do you remember? I was bringing my objects to the corner of that classroom for every rehearsal, and I kept collecting these little dust balls. I still have them. They became part of the piece. The remains when objects are gone: dust. It's like I am visiting another era. I feel the need to operate with a new cosmology of studio time. In the beginning there was...heating, a table...and one chair would be good. There is no table. I don't know what to do with myself. I am not sure this will be a productive lack.

Time passed.

The new piece I am working on is called *oslo*. The title is both an anagram of solo and refers of course to my city, Oslo. The piece follows from the trilogy with the pieces *Black* (2011), *No Title* (2014) and *We to be* (2015). Many of my works are solo pieces, however I don't really think of them in that way, it just happens that I am alone. There are certain expectations of the solo as format I feel uneasy about, and in this piece I want to address some of these issues. But there is also, like in the other works, a more functional aspect to it, of what the piece needs. For this piece I would like to do as little as possible, just enough to sustain the situation. The audience will be seated frontally, classical. And I will be on stage. So the stage and auditorium set-up is intact. I am working with the theatre. But I will also have people in the audience that are part of the performance. They will look and behave as audience throughout the piece, except in the moments when they perform their part. But they never leave their seats and can disappear into being audience again once they have performed their part. I want to keep the frontal set-up in order to work with the tension between stage and auditorium. For me it is not about transgressing, but about extending the space, that the audience is not only looking in front and giving their attention to the performer on stage, but can also listen and feel what is going on around them in the space. I see it as something soft, something that opens the space, a total space where we are all inside. I want to work with a choir, for example. I think the voice is a strong physical presence that has the capacity to open the space and bring us close to it, the experience of it. After making *We to be* I had a strong feeling of the space of the audience, or the auditorium. In that piece I am seated together with the audience, the stage is empty, and I am reading the play out loud. When the performance is over and lights are back up, there is a real sense of having shared the space, been somewhere together. I want to follow this up. Also in *No Title* where I perform the entire piece with my eyes closed, there was something else that happened in the space between the stage and the audience, proximity – and, at the same time, distance – were intensified.

Another line could be traced like this: from *Black* – where objects are gone, to *No Title* – where space is gone, to *We to be* – where the performer is gone, and then in *oslo* – the audience is gone. This was at first a bit of a joke and a playful prediction. It is not that I could imagine doing a

piece in the absence of audience, but maybe more to reconsider the space of the audience. Conceptually, following this line of thought, the performer could already be gone. It could be only the audience and what takes place in the auditorium. I have also had fantasies of a piece in which the entire audience would be involved in the piece, so all performers, except one – one single audience member. But it is not about such a 'monumental' gesture. And also, the tension between the stage and the auditorium is important, I find, for this piece. I don't want to make a piece without a performer, at least not to start with. I need that minimum of a convention.

Even if very different, I am thinking of your work with the series *Clean Room*. You take the work with the audience much further. As audience we are all playing a part in the piece and, at the same time, experiencing it. Yet it is not just participatory, to me it is still in the poetic realm, in a space of fiction. As you put it, it is not what fiction, but how fiction comes about, how it is constructed. This is very interesting to think about. How can we access and work with fiction and imagination in another way.

I think this is a good place to end for now.

More soon!

Kisses x Mette

• • •

Dear mette, thanks for having the confidence to talk to me about your work and concerns.

I am super tired today, slept very little and now I have a Skype talk with students from La Paz in Bolivia to talk about how I understand spectatorship from my experience. So I hope this email will serve as a warm-up.

The matter you propose is huge and has been a kind of obsession for me since I started to make my work. Not so much when I was a dancer, then I was busier with what already takes a lot of space, concentration, attention and dedication. But once I became a maker, I always question the role of that agency in the work we do, spectatorship. I also question and reflect about my agency as maker and other agencies like the curator. I have been curating for 15 years, so no way to escape from that. But once you are critical, you have to be critical to everything, maybe not at the same time, but to everything.

Since my very first piece, and since I started to make my work, I have been trying to force that agency, the spectatorship, to be partly responsible for the experience produced in between everybody, within the piece, project or performance. I always look in different ways for the complicity of the spectator, to a point where I don't want spectators anymore. I only want accomplices. But that's extremely difficult to get, so I play with the tools I have in order to generate contexts and experiences that can become beneficial knowledge for all the agents involved.

I know that our field is considered leisure and that some people experience our work on that level. I am OK with that, but not particularly interested in having a relation to that kind of spectator, because yes, I want to have a relationship with spectators that are willing to work, to commit, to engage. That's why, the other day, I said jokingly that I will cast the spectators. Only taking the ones I am really interested in. It sounds as stupid as it is radical if I really do it. But in a way, I am very worried about the use assigned to our work. I cannot relax thinking that the spectator is smart enough to digest the experience and do something with it, our work is not so easy and most of the spectators don't have time to follow the processes of art creations. We are many artists creating constantly and our paths are not as open as they should be.

I go to the theatre to propose something, and others go to experience something and receive the proposal. So the relation is given. Then it is about what kind of contract we are signing. And this contract is extremely important to me. Maybe the contract is from where we have to begin. The contract has to be super clear in its intentions. I am not talking about that I cannot work with ambiguity if the matter treated needs it. I am talking about actualizing that contract. What is it to be a spectator? What is it to be a maker? What is it to be a curator? Which responsibilities do we acquire when we sign this contract? It cannot be the artist alone who is responsible for what is going to happen.

I am still fighting with these issues. For me, to make a piece and think I am affecting the spectators and giving them responsibility for what happens afterwards, is not enough. I want to be affected by them in a more radical way. Is this what they really can do?

Today I was talking about provocation, about accessibility, about commitment, about responsibility, the one we share and can pass from one to another.

In your work, when you are alone, I agree with you that being alone doesn't mean it is a solo piece. To me, in your work, I am part of the piece, maybe I am proactive and don't want to be submissive to what is happening in front of me.

I was talking yesterday about how fragile I am when I am emotional, but how much it is that state that generates more knowledge for me. I am extremely sensitive and vulnerable, but as a black hole eating everything. When this happens to me as spectator I am so happy, stupidly happy, but so happy.

In my work I have been doing pieces where our bodies disappear and let the ones of the spectators appear. We don't disappear completely, but we play our roles differently. This is something interesting to think about. What are the new roles?

And this is very important to what you are going to do. You will ask people to play the role consciously and differently, to become performer, protagonist. (Maybe your single performer can go from the tribune to the stage for the clapping at the end).

When I ask the spectators to change their role, they still keep that role, the one of the spectator. So I build a double line in which they are two things at the same time without forgetting they are both, performers and spectators.

Spectator...I thought artists are a species that will never disappear, but the true thing is that spectators are the ones that will never disappear, they are, we are, indestructible. So if they are, we are, indestructible, why don't we go further.

In whatever way you are going to provoke us, you have to bring us further, as far as possible, we have to feel the abyss you are putting us in and not only the intelligence.

I like, of course, that there are no performers. You eliminate a classic filter and go straight, no intermediaries, no subjectivities to decode, no body seduction, but spectators playing, performing, transforming. Jesus, how I would like to be completely transformed when going out of a theatre. What else can we be?

But for now, let's continue this talk.

Xxx

juan