

Building Faculties

Tracing a Shared Practice Workshop as a Performance Score in the Shape of a Collaborative Writing Assemblage

Melina Bigale, Anders Carlsson, Ida von Schmalensee, Litó Walkey, Ingeborg Zackariassen

Abstract

Drawing on relational, embodied and sensuous activations of performing arts practices, “Building Faculties” traces a shared practice workshop as a performance score in the shape of a collaborative writing assemblage. Its writing, images and recurring sound retell the unfolding of a co-hosted workshop and the working sessions that led up to it. Following a compositional structure, the pieces are written by the five hosts and two workshop participants. Authors alternate from one piece of writing to another, and the modes of writing shift from description to close remembering, instruction and broader reflections. As a collaborative and participatory investigation of the theme “Powers of Love”, “Building Faculties” asks questions such as, how do transmissions of performative writing practices spur and intensify collective learning processes? How do practices rooted in shared attentiveness facilitate convivialities that manifest micro-instances of resistance as forms of institutional counter-conduct?

Editors note

These pieces of writing re-tell of a co-hosted workshop and the working sessions that led up to it. The pieces are written by the five hosts and two workshop participants. From one piece of writing to another, the authors alternate and the modes of writing shift from description, close remembering, instruction, and broader reflection.

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Introduction

PARSE

Five workshop hosts welcome participants to the workshop and introduce how their sessions of sharing practices together (in)formed the workshop. These pieces of writing refer to and move between the PARSE conference workshop in Valand's seminar room and the working sessions in Norsesund that led up the workshop.



Half Moons and Other Shapes

When you open the door to Valand's seminar room, you can see chairs of different shapes and forms. The chairs are placed in small clusters, in half-moon curves facing the windows, except for one straight row of five chairs facing the other direction, towards the others.

On each chair there's a small cardboard clipboard with five slips of paper fastened with a colourful paperclip, as well as a pen. In one of the windowsills there is a laptop that is connected to two speakers. In another there's a note with calculations, denoting different scenarios depending on the number of participants.

How This Came About

the following is a collective

writerly

templated account of

a shared practice workshop

consisting of twenty-nine pieces

varying in length

between one- to three-hundred words

the authors are five workshop guides

and two invited workshop participants

the rules are

stick to the exact word-count

commit to pre-scripted writing mode

describing

experiencing

remembering

instructing

reflecting

apply one extra parameter of choice based on the practices of the workshop

double-voicing

indescribable detailing

transcribing

(applied in this entry with word-count three-hundred)

reading-out-loud & rearranging

the structure

was inferred from the temporal progression

of the performance score

seventy-five minutes in total

with fifteen minutes introduction

and a sixty-minute workshop

interruptions of a loud train

triggered

next suggested attentiveness

next suggested artistic doing

but the train sound was also a memory of five performing artists

meeting to work at a remote rural location

some months before the conference

this pre-conference process

and its associated memory of a train passing by

is indicated by sepia-coloured photos

click next to them

and a train will pass by

it was summer still

birds were singing

the food was great

the smiles were warm

the mood was light

from many questions

a group was formed

basic questions

like

how does practice come about?

how can a practice be shared and passed on?

how can that be love?

how can that be soft

institutional

resistance

thus far

RESISTANCE

was word number two-hundred-and-twenty-nine

writing now

decreases what can still be added

word by word

until the next author

in the relay continues

attending

passing

a colour code will distinguish

the seven authors of this article

the count of seven

incidentally coincides with

the colour sequence of the rainbow

red

orange

yellow

green

blue

indigo

violet

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Here Together, There Together

After an invitation to guide the group through certain practices. Specifically. We can practice them, together. We can meet each other in a place outside of school, outside of the city. A few metres from the train tracks, enclosed by wooden walls with leaking air. We anticipate that what, and more importantly how, we get to know about these practices here together will be relayed to a larger group, as a workshop in a conference on love. There together. We are performers, researchers, teachers, students, artists, writers, friends [...] who are relying on gestures of trust and relational sensibilities. We dwell together, building a common ground, in moments during which collective attention to our attending forms everything we need. The faint sound of a breath grows into the shape of words that turn to sentences spoken as a question by two people and answered by two others. Sentences voiced by two are written on paper by one and then read out loud by somebody else. An intersection of details in the room is described to gathered onlookers. The words chosen to be spoken and how they meet the thing that we are looking at together is what we are bringing attention to now. There is an effort to trust. Acts of language are formulated through a doubling of leading and following, with interference of intentions and with each other's language. We get to know more about the elements that make up these practices by imagining and defining how we will invite others to do them. *How do we attend or "meet" or "touch" things together? How do we cultivate grounds for being in common? How can we be open to what is already there? What happens when questions get passed from hand to hand, body to body? What is added? What is released? What remains?*



Setting up for Engagement

The name of the seminar room is Old Hotel. In contrast to its name, it is a plain room with a low ceiling, linoleum floor and two large windows facing the street, through which you can see old townhouses of Gothenburg. The time was set for 11:00 12:15 on 15 November 2023. The room was prepared for a maximum of 20 participants. Chairs offering mixed levels of comfort were grouped in sets of five. Each chair held a clipboard and pen, awaiting participants. Positioned at the front, five chairs faced towards the whole room, ready to begin with an introduction.

Taking Lightness Seriously

We will move in small spaces (of time and close attention). In this next hour we will take you through a number of practices, and we're going to be moving through them deliberately. These practices have happened before: in a voice lab, a performance called *While We Were Talking*, a performance called *Come Here Dust and Hair* and a printing experiment. As they developed among us in our sessions leading up to this shared practice workshop, we referred to them as "double talking (and transcribing)", "describing details (and transcribing)", and "reading, circling, passing, reading (in smaller groups and whole group)".

We are inviting you to join us in these practices, and to begin (and possibly remain) with half understanding. Instead of discussions, let us emphasise the precision of what it takes to do these practices, through doing them. We can let go of anticipated meanings or goals of completeness. Please trust that you have enough information to engage with our proposals. With our guidance and your attentiveness specific things will happen. The listening, speaking, writing, describing and reading that emerge from entangled pathways have resonant qualities that complement and offset the discourses that emerge throughout the days of the conference.

By the Train Tracks

Norsesund is located between two lakes and has a small community of 274 people, many of whom are artists. It's a sunny day in September and we get off the train, instantly greeted by our smiling host Anders. He offers us coffee from a thermos, showing us the beautiful garden close to the train station. Magasinet is a small universe. Entering the old building, its sparse interior throws me back to my childhood, the smell of wood and hay in my grandparents' barn, away from the bustle of the city. This is a place to focus on artistic doings.

Artistic Community

In the first days at Norsesund we slowly formed an artistic community by taking the train together, discussing love, experimenting with artistic practices, cooking risotto, talking about our artistic backgrounds. This gave birth to an artistic practice of togetherness. Artistic practice is not only the exercises, but the process of forming an inviting community.

When we came together for the symposium workshop our goal was to guide participants through certain practices. We discussed how word choices articulate artistic practice for others. This led me to understand that if my tone is inviting and inclusive, words can activate focus and curiosity.

Encounters in Particles: Exploring Connections Beyond Names

At the beginning of our collaboration, we discussed and reflected on how participatory performance relates to the theme of the conference. As performers or creators of experiences in time and space, we agreed that it was important to craft an environment that didn't merely "depict" the conference theme but allowed for direct immersion with it. Hence, the pivotal question arose: how can we adeptly invite participants to participate in our realm of practice?

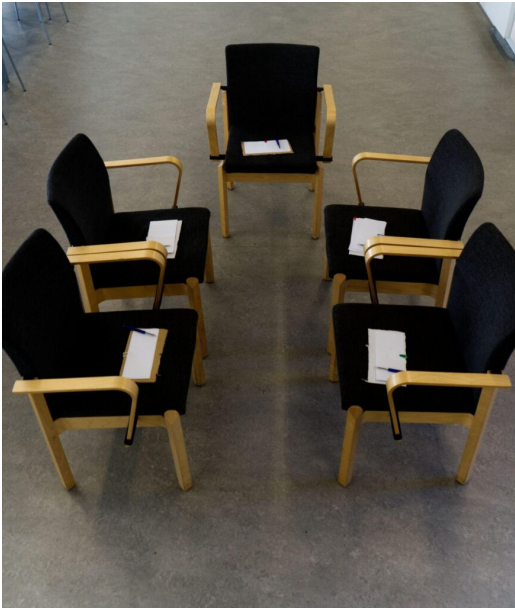
We had the dramaturgical advantage that our workshop had been placed at the beginning of the conference. This gave us the idea that the role of our contribution could be understood as a kind of preparatory tuning-in for the whole conference. Participants in our session would have the opportunity to connect with each other through a different lens, bypassing the typical introductions of name, background and occupation. The various practices were meant to encourage people to find ways of speaking and listening together that conveyed more than common logic or sense. Instead, each word was approached as a flowing particle with potential for more interpersonal communication. As our session unfolded, words began to transcend their conventional bounds, soaring freely through the air, unencumbered by their usual meanings.

The Sound of the Train / A Moment to Pause

During our working sessions in Norsesund, sound from the passing trains acted as a reminder of the outside world. At any given moment a train could go by, and the sound would be so loud that in the beginning we would raise our voices. We quickly agreed that the best way to deal with it was to shortly suspend what we were doing. The unexpected interval and rhythm of these train interventions became pauses for breath in the work, moments to reflect and be refreshed. As soon as the train had passed, we would continue where we had left off.

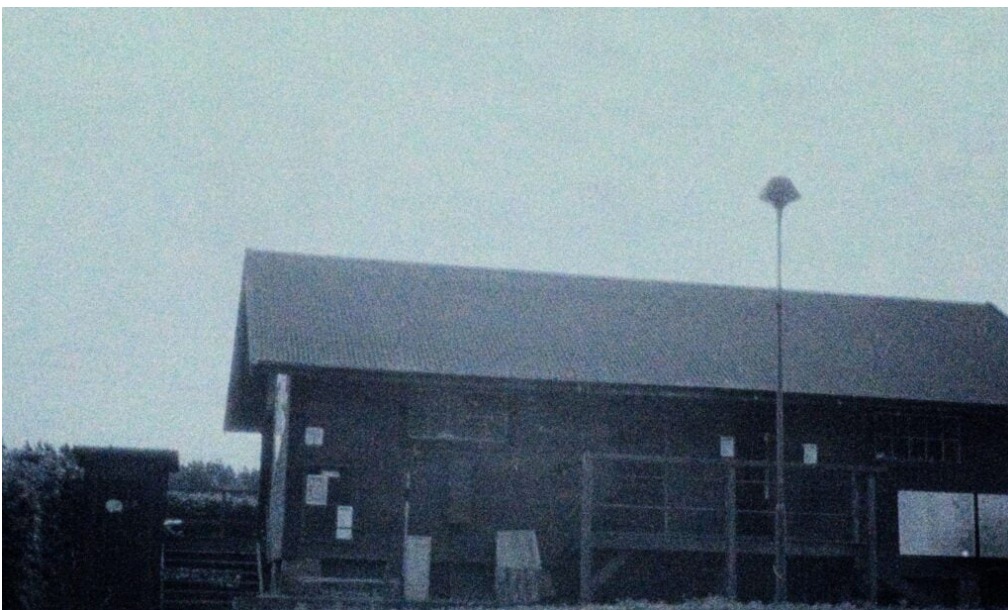
Moving into Groups

We are going to be working in small groups. Each group will have four participants, and one of us to guide you through the practices. You can all find cardboard with paper slips and a pen on your chair. We are going to use them for writing and transcribing. Important to mention is that the practices are ways of producing traces of interaction and attention. We are going to come together as a whole group at the end of the session. Now, as we hear the recording of the train passing by, let us stand up and re-arrange the chairs.



00.00

Practice 1: Double Voicing



Double Triple Talking

I am placing four chairs in two pairs opposite each other and a fifth chair to their side. Please take a seat. I will guide you through a few practices. The first is called *Double Talking*. The two pairs sitting opposite each other will have a question-and-answer conversation. One pair attempts to form a question as one voice, and the other pair attempts to form an answer as one voice. The fifth person writes down what is being said as accurately as possible, including the double/triple words that come up. An example of a double-worded answer: I can/cannot foresee/anticipate this/that.

Empathy in Action

Two of us sit side by side, shoulders touching. Across from us two people mirror our position. We try to ask them a question as one unit. Trial and error, laughter... Leading, following, overlapping, not letting go of the information received through connecting with the other person. Suddenly it works! Their voice, their breath is as important as mine. I'm connected to my thoughts while open to the other's. The two people across from us are smiling. Their task is to listen and respond. A fifth person is next to us, transcribing. We swap roles after a while. Funny. Poetic

Communication Practice

Double Talking is shaped by instructive suggestions that uncover different layers of communication. Forming a sentence with another person can be considered as a rather uncomplicated listening exercise. However, the range of ways of talking together, the open choice of topics, listening back to your sentences after they are transcribed by someone else and framing it as a dialogue turn it into an elaborate communication practice. These guides for certain ways of speaking together are given as suggestions rather than instructions:

Speak slowly and try to say the same words at the same time.

Speak your own sentences while hearing your partner at the same time.

Speak your partner's sentence while also using your own words.

The shared rhythms, feelings and ideas emerging between participants contribute to the exploration of being both an individual and a collective during a conversation. Attending to another person while deciding on a topic requires an intense focus and a strong sense of presence in dialogue with others. This generates an effort to make meaning while challenging logical thinking at the same time. Building sentences this way opens possibilities that become even more apparent when participants hear their not-so-*logos* sentences read back to them afterwards.

Change in Dynamics

After a while, voices became more or less synchronised, breath was exchanged and overlaid. Sometimes it was more a fight of voices who took the leading part and who took the following part? After changing roles, it became obvious how different the participants were some more quiet and reserved, some more prominent. With every role rotation the whole situation changed. Often the transcriber became stressed from trying to write down everything spoken. Suddenly the train passed by the sign to bring the group back into the big circle. The attention shifted back to the guide, ready to move on together.

15:00

Practice 2: Detailing



Attending to Details Together

a guide invites participants to a selected location in the space

points out a small detail

a fan drum, for example

and begins to describe in terms of visual perception

the way the guide introduces the detail

reveals that attention is an instrument of productive creation

and that sharing attention to the otherwise overlooked/ backgrounded/ neglected

can open up latent capacities

the guide passes on the practice to participants:

please attend your own preferred detail/ area/ assemblage

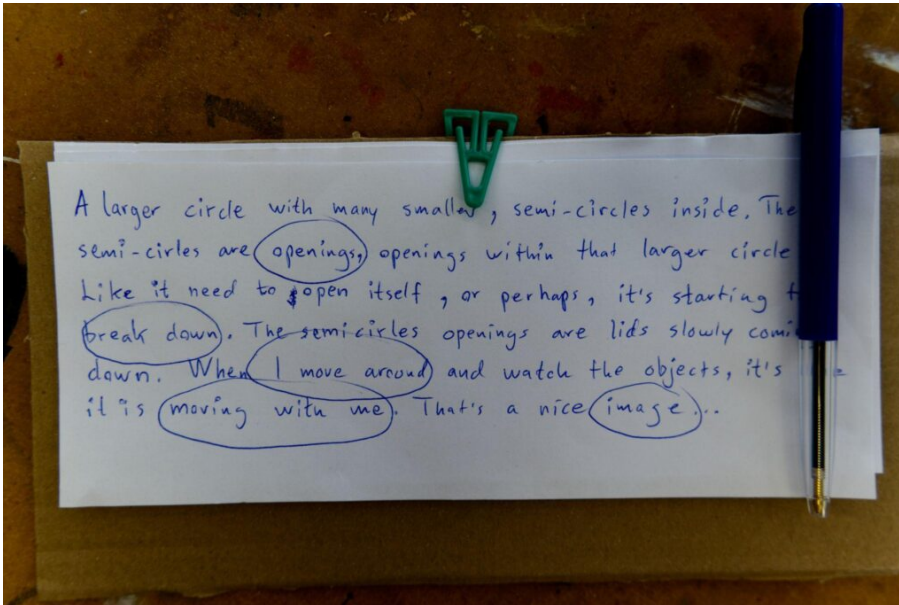
prepare to show-tell your peers what you have observed

after sharing your detail by showing-telling

take a minute

transcribe how you phrased it





Tilted Glimpses of Imagination

I'm in an unfamiliar room, searching. Right now, I imagine this room as my whole world, and I'm looking for a tiny piece of this totality, a singularity that grabs my attention. It can be the way something is placed in relation to something else, how different materials or elements juxtapose or interact to create this little patch of reality. It can be the way the round shape of the ventilation system creates a universe filled with little moons, or how the vertical lines of the building across the road are reflected in the transparent glass surface of the microwave oven. The way a small hole in the windowsill opens the imagination of a stargazer, or why half-hidden, irregular, icicle-like patterns are left behind the faint remnants of paint dripping during the last time the room was renovated? I choose one spot and focus all my attention on it. The angle with which I am looking at it, the way light and shadows interact with it, what it resembles, its placement in relation to other materials around it. I attempt to explain what I see in as much detail as possible. Can others see what I see? They really try!

Blurry Picture of Solo Transcribing

When I return to the detailing practice and recall the image of people writing and transcribing, I can remember that the atmosphere was intense. People were folded over their cardboard, reading and writing. Some people paused to think before continuing to write, while others wrote non-stop as though attempting not to lose the specifics of the moment.

To bring back moments from the practice of attending to details, they recalled the sentences that they articulated to describe their particular assemblage of details. It is not a secret that people often use visual references while trying to remember something rather than trying to retrieve sound. However, while transcribing these sentences, people were remembering the sound of their own voice and transforming this voice into an

image. A voice that was fading into the depths of their mind transformed into a group of marks on the paper. Connections between movement, emotion and writing became visible. If they felt excited during the practice, they used their hands faster and lighter *their writing turned italic*. They were transforming their memory into different elements of perception visual, sound, movement, senses. This was a picturesque way of retracing one's steps back to the telling of details.

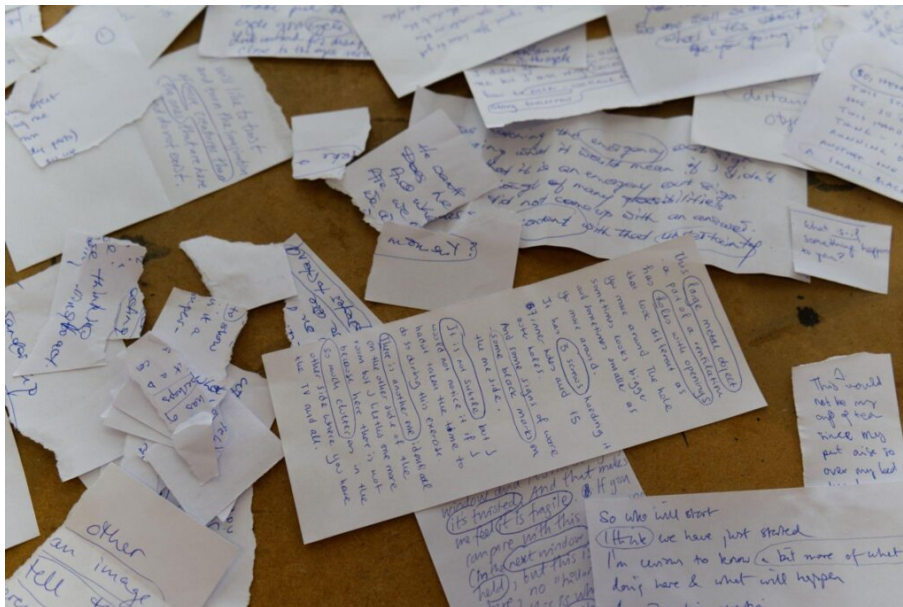
35.00

Practice 3: Composing Collaboratively



Circles

Moving back to the circle of chairs where we were before, let us mix and redistribute the written language that has accumulated in our group. We will now go into a continuous relay of silently reading, circling, passing, listening and reading out loud. With the slips of papers in your hands, draw circles around a few words or full sentences, pass the paper to someone across or next to you. When you receive a paper, read its circled words. We don't always have to wait for each other, so more than one voice may be heard at the same time.



Flying words

In the beginning everyone was really busy focusing on the paper slips that each had received. They searched for one or two sentences that they could circle and read out loud and pass to another person. Over time, the things that were said became less important. The variety of voices increased, different words were repeated and passed on. The interaction between people became more important, voices became louder, the speed of passing and circling accelerated. At some point, the participants began to tear the strips into pieces and throw them into the middle of the circle. A performative situation arose.

Circling, Passing, Speaking

i sit on a chair in a circle of others

with an unsorted pile of rectangular paper slips in my lap

they have writing on them

handwriting of many different kinds and styles

some of them are difficult to decipher

as if from far away or long ago or possibly from a future

i pick a slip of paper and read it silently

my neighbour has already begun the game

reading

passing

voicing

... i would rather just listen

... and observe

... what others do

but then i voice the reading of handwriting and i pass it on counter-clockwise

“Sade” Way of Being Together

In essence, live collaborative composition is a method of transforming yourself in dialogue with others. In this practice sharing workshop, participants were opening their consciousness/ unconsciousness to other ideas, impulses and feelings. Their intellectual, physical and emotional worlds were entangling. Yet, they were still free moving individuals. This practice was a “sade” way of being together.*

The practice not only requires a deep attending rooted in observation, but also an agility to extend beyond visuals and sounds towards an emotional/ intellectual visual/ soundscape. One senses what people want to bring to the composition before they start to speak. Participants start to listen to what is already about to happen. Therefore, collective action happens in a moment between future and present.

To form an artistic community that functions without or against hierarchy, one should be fully present and invested in the process. This kind of transcending can be achieved by going beyond logic, and beyond daily methods of understanding and language. One pushes their artistic practice out of the concrete boundaries of physical reality to fully exist with other people. In this way, they attend to an ongoing artistic making.

Sade: *Persian rooted Turkish word.* Simple, pure, unornamented and modest.

A Composition with Words across the Room

The guides of each group gathered participants into a big circle in the room. Compared to the beginning something had changed, I can't name it. But speaking for myself, I felt more connected to the people from the

group I was working in. The next and last practice was introduced: “We will now do the same group composition practice which you did before, but together with the whole group. You can use all the gathered slips. You can also pick up words that you hear from the other people in the room. I will set the timer at 3 minutes.”

In the beginning I experienced it as a dust circle of words within which I couldn’t fully hear what everyone was saying. I could hear the words from my immediate neighbour and after passing the slips I could also read which word they had chosen to read. But when we started to repeat the words that we heard from the other side of the room, a dynamic began to grow. Words flew across the room. Some participants began to play with tempo and volume. I had the feeling that this sharing had no ending. Then the timer sounded.

45.00

Hosts’ Reflecting: Faculties of Attentiveness



Overlaying / Underlying

Sharing is simple, yet important.

Thoughts, ideas and questions

~~weave understanding from~~ thin air.

~~It becomes an~~

~~artistic act, a way to connect with others.~~

~~I realise a bond~~ was made and

~~genuine smiles were exchanged.~~

~~Acknowledging each other beyond hierarchies and generalised patterns of behaviour~~

~~—is powerful.~~

~~Speaking together,~~

~~following each other's breaths,~~

~~—walking together~~

~~Observing details~~

~~—EXPAND into new realities by sharing attention~~

~~Leaving ourselves open,~~

~~—contributing to childlike play.~~

~~—I feel such hope~~

~~when strangers share imaginations.~~

~~recognise every individual;~~

~~we shared something.~~

~~Isn't the world different now, due to~~

~~their head tilting at a certain angle?~~

In Small Spaces the Room Grows

An exploration of love in its intimate and institutional dimension as an art of how to do things together goes something like this: touch closely together, suspend discussion, in small sets of time, in small groups, rotate roles and material. Entangle pathways of listening, speaking, writing, describing, reading and composing, by starting with breath, a half utterance and listening.

There is wonder inside these circuits. How do we recognise the drift and remix of personal intentions? How do we amplify an alternate sense-making? How do we speak words emerging from before? Through these circuits, poems form and the room grows.

How to Be Together?

Transformation is togetherness.

Deep listening is togetherness.

Guiding and taking apart is togetherness.

We are giving focus to both micro and macro views.

Shifting perspectives repeatedly,

Until you hear the train.

(Pause)

Contrast appears, is sensed and acknowledged.

We have been intertwining our physical, intellectual and emotional worlds with one another.

Yet, we still have our independent colours and identities expressed with joy to live.

Understanding each other.

I have one question left: would participants in my group have acknowledged each other more if we had first introduced ourselves with names? How would one form togetherness without names and definitions?

Love

if the spark was an imaginary faculty overlapping overwriting FACULTY

if the spark was institutive productivity overlapping overwriting institutional inertia

if the spark was resentment towards all the doings in a FACULTY, which postpones ~~faculty~~

if the spark was improvisation's etymological sense of negating (*im*) seeing on forehand (*provideo*)

if the spark was conceptual promiscuity like heterarchical para-institutional undisciplinarisation

if the spark was dismeasure written across a ruler

the fire was much less of a drama

almost cosy

building faculties in the FACULTY in spite of its governance

attending together in the FACULTY

requires TRUST as a form of ~~love~~

Love With and Through Words

Powers of Love is a sensitive topic that is difficult to theorise or put into words. Love embodies an ineffable warmth between beings, sensed intuitively mostly between people who are already familiar to each other. But how can love also be found in a stranger? We didn't know the other participants in the workshop, but we committed to listening and creating things simultaneously. This was a way of making ourselves vulnerable and trying to achieve something together, without having a presupposed goal. Through unconscious writing, our subconscious intertwined with the others', transforming strangers into partners or even extensions of ourselves.

55.00

Participants' Voicing



A Practice of Amnesia

Finding myself

confronted with a situation

of complete oblivion,

I laboriously undertake to begin

recreating a highly unreliable kaleidoscopic

memory image

with the help of time-contaminated, cracked fragments,

carelessly discarded incentives or opportunities,

distorted echoes resonating somewhere in a corner of my consciousness.

However,

I do recall, I believe,

a sensation of ambiguity

and not knowing,

of a kind of awkward groping for familiar points of reference:

I will be able to do it again and again. In the case of a great story, there is no need to worry about it. The end of the bed is an urn.

..T

....I

.....L (*to be read aloud in as few breaths as possible*)

.....T

.....E

.....D

What is the matter with words that keep moving

that will not keep still as they playfully change

both their sound and their syntax their meaning

becoming (whenever you catch it) a window that opens

on vistas and viewpoints or breakpoints in ballgames

with nets quite invisible

voices inaudible

letters that vanish

or fall on the floor

with participants laughing and starting to fancy
the sounds they repeat such as "TILTED" when lilted
in Swedish and why not when all is for funship and friendship...
and who can anticipate where this might lead us
if no one says stop, that's enough!

60.00

The Last Train Passing By

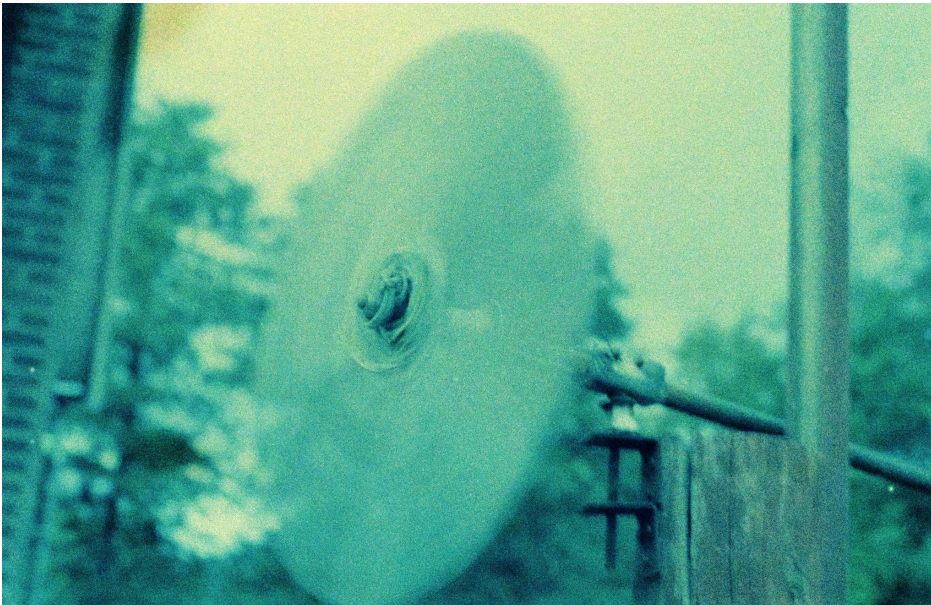


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