

Jenny Moore

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date: Fri, Apr 18, 2014 at 3:20 PM
subject: about writing about Talking

Hi Jenny,

I'm just writing to say I really enjoyed your performance of *Talking* last night.

Except that's a lie, because your performance was a few months ago, and sadly I missed it because I had tickets for a screening of *Nightcleaners Part 1* with a talk afterwards with Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey... It's a great film (I think you can watch it online) and fantastic to see Mary Kelly (awesome hair), but it was just a shame that your performances were on the same night. There's just too much going on in this city of TimeOut TopTen kulchural experiences, hmm?

And, while we're talking about lies, I'll just admit that this whole 'email' schtick is total bullshit, but let's just run with it for now.

So the truth is, I know your performance from the script you sent me. You were going to send me the video too, but I suppose you forgot (things are busy busy busy). But I found a scrap on a showreel of yours¹ – “some small snippets of things if you are in a rush”, you say (when things are busy busy busy) – where you're spot-lit in the gallery, right in the middle of the performance. Actually it might be the beginning or the end, I don't know. There's darkness outside the spot-light and your body casts a sharp shadow against the white-washed paint, your horizontal striped top alongside the vertical plumbing and the upright legs, in wood and shadow, of this prop, this curious prop, that I heard you trying to describe on Soundhub on Resonance FM.² The interviewer (Elo Masing) described it as a daunting and dangerous contraption, and this is a transcription of the words you said:

I would call it, I mean, I'm calling it now, I would call it an instrument. That I've made this instrument, or a prop, in a way, to do this performance on. And the prop came first. So the idea for making this kind of contraption on which to talk, was, was in a way the first idea...

So I made this contraption. I'm gonna try and describe what it is. Or what it looks like...

¹ <http://vimeo.com/84081559>

² Full conversation available courtesy of Resonance FM at <https://soundcloud.com/resonance-fm/21-30-00-soundhub-320kbps>

I wanted to make something that would allow me to hover above the ground horizontally, while talking, like, live. But, go from standing to horizontal. Ok, so not something that had to be set up beforehand so I was kind of hanging there, flying. Something that was immediate, that was kind of honest, so people could see how I was moving from this position, of standing upright, as you do, in life, to a horizontal position where I'm kind of, I don't know, four feet off the ground.

Ok, so, I was using the idea of when you're a small child and you have your father, or something, lying on the floor with his feet in the air and you kind of balance on your stomach or on your hips or something, and hold onto his arms and become an aeroplane. Do you know this thing? I mean, everyone's become an aeroplane, right? Obviously.

So I wanted to become an aeroplane, in order to, I guess to deliver a story, but I'm gonna talk about how that works because it's not really a narrative – I also see it as a kind of musical composition, or a rhythmic thing, which builds up. (...) The breath, and when you pause, and when you start again and the way that things are phrased, and this kind of thing.

So, what the object looks like. See if you can follow me. There's a round base. So it's like a half sphere. It's made of rubber silicon, half sphere, like a half of a massive rubber bouncy ball. It's a half sphere. It's quite big. I can hold, I can hug it, like a large black labrador dog. It's quite, it's, y'know, big. And inside is rigid polyurethane foam. So it's a hard surface on the inside and rubber on the outside. And stuck into the polyurethane foam is four pieces of wood which come up, out of the sphere – half sphere, sorry – and they sit about, again, yeah, four-and-a-half feet off the floor. And there's a small platform, it's about 2 feet, no, 2 feet by 1 foot, big. A really really small table – that's good. With very long legs. In a half-sphere of half-rubber and half very hard candyfloss, it looks like.

You can imagine now, hopefully, that this is a round bottom, a round base. It doesn't stand up on its own, you have to lean it against a wall. It's like a Weeble – is that what you call it? – a Weeble, where you punch it and it falls over, but it comes back up. This doesn't come back up, but it has the same round base, so you need to hold it in place if you want it to balance, yeah?

So, so the way that it works is that I tilt it towards me, it's kind of arm's length away from me, then I can tilt it towards me, balance my hips on the small small table top, and use the wall behind me, put my foot against the wall, and push off the wall, so that I'm essentially walking up the wall, and the sculpture is moving, so that it becomes vertical. So it's tilted towards me, it's moving slowly away from the wall, bringing me with it. (...)

As soon as it's over I just think, ok, come on, who's gonna try it. Because it's... I was very surprised making this very strange thing, which was in mind for a long time, I was really surprised first of all how it worked on the first try, that really I had some sense of the balance of it, and how it needed to be constructed in order to hold me and in order to move in this certain way, in order to allow me to move in a certain

way. And then also that you can learn it, you can learn your own sense of gravity, with it. So at first it feels incredibly precarious, it feels like a ridiculous object that of course you're gonna fly forward, smash your head in and... y'know, cause there's nothing stopping you on any side, you can go sideways, you can go forward, if you push, you're gone. But at the same time, it made me become really aware of what it's like to just stand up this way, y'know, obviously I know what it's like to stand, on the ground, so surely, quickly enough I can learn how to stand on the wall. If I have enough apparatus there to, you know, help me with the gravity thing. (...)

It makes people feel very nervous for you. There's a kind of element of really being aware of what I'm doing, or I imagine, cause I'm doing it so I don't know, but I imagine, to watch it, what I've seen back is, it's not a kind of instrument to be played... [Elo Massing says here: It's an instrument that plays you.] Yeah, exactly. It's a different relationship. And I think that that, maybe, is where I could talk a little bit, conceptually, about the talking, about actually what I'm talking about, in the work.

So, the work, or the script? If you wanna call it that. There is kind of a script, yeah. The script stems a bit from gossip. So, from the idea of talking in a conversation, or a conversation maybe that goes around and around and around and around and around. A kind of he said, she said inability to actually have the conversation which one thinks that they are in, if you know what I mean. So, two people basically exchanging the same phrase backwards and forwards over and over and over again. (...) I was thinking about imagination being this thing which is full of possibilities, of course that's the nature of how we think of imagination, and yet it's also like a huge point of discrepancy between people, it's like, you can disagree so much about... everything, that is possible. If you know what I mean.

So, in a sense, in this work, I play both sides though. So I play both characters in the conversation.

He's walking backwards and she's walking forwards.

That's it.

2, 3, 4...

I saw *Cramming*, the show, the exhibition, you know the 'real' art, the stuff you left hanging out in the gallery. I remember a huge drawing of patch-worked sheets of paper, stretched between two poles, like a banner. It's funny because I'd found myself staring at it when we were having a conversation in your studio some months previously, so it was completely knotted together in my mind with tea, activism, human rights, James' perfect little notebook, the search for a corkscrew, wine, and feminism for humans. In the gallery it was propped precariously (it seemed) against a beam near the roof. All these propped-up props. And four TV screens of shuffling, dancing feet, mesmerising in their oddness and familiarity. (I think you borrowed our DVD player actually – did you ever return that? It's no problem, we haven't missed it.) Your launchpad-object-prop-tool-contraption-sculpture-instrument-something was propped up against the bricks in one corner. At your invitation, the braver amongst your friends and visitors were trying it out. Turns out you made it look easy. There

was definitely the air of an empty stage about the show... the remains of the event. Something happened here.

I've dug out the gallery hand-out from your show which I've kept in a blue plastic basket of other such things under my desk. Just in case you're interested, it was between the hand-out for Beatriz Santiago Muñoz's show *The Black Cave* at Gasworks in 2013, and some rather nice neon pink post-it notes that I'm quite pleased to have salvaged.

I've just noticed that there's a Susan Sontag quote on your hand-out blurb, and I was planning on mentioning Susan Sontag later, so this is all going to look terribly contrived, or maybe it's all just worked out perfectly, like it was 'meant to be' or something.

Anyway, here's the handout from *Cramming*:

Almanac

Jenny Moore

Cramming

Almanac is pleased to present *Cramming*, a performative exhibition by Jenny Moore. In a large warehouse space behind the gallery, the artist has created an installation out of a number of formal and informal gestures. Pop problems, in short.

The works themselves play with the notion of the platform, as a physical object that can guide movement, provide a point of visual focus, but also take up space in specific ways. A series of large-scale works on paper punctuates the visitors' navigation through the space and operate in between the parameters of sculpture, painting and theatre, as well as the aesthetics of social movements.

With a series of works in moving image, the stage is set for an uncomfortable object, which all the same is precisely where it should be. Subverting a sense of fixed distance, the audience is invited not only to navigation through the space, but is also confronted with different wavelengths of the personal that combine voyeurism, fan culture and activism.

Investigating the performativity of everyday social interactions, the artist uses assumed modes of speech and unconscious gestures as material for generative production. Treating the labour of misunderstandings, expectations, choices and implicit meanings with an equal sincerity, a space is mapped out where the formation of fragile manifestoes for new and rediscovered commonalities can take place.

As an accompaniment (in the musical sense and that of speech) to the exhibition, the artist has conceived a performance event around the practice of *Talking*. On the 29th of November, Kate Hawkins, Sian Robinson Davies, Fay Nicolson with Rose O'Gallivan and Holly Antrum and Jenny Moore will perform in the space of the exhibition.

Jenny Moore is a Canadian artist and musician, and performs frequently with artist Simon Clark and the collective Gandt.

"Ladies & Gentlemen, this is one of your favourite songs," Joan Armatrading, 1979.

"Nothing in this book is true. Live by the *foma** (*harmless untruths*) that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy" *The Book of Bokonon* 1:5

"It's a matter of adjectives. Its where the stress falls." Susan Sontag, 2002.

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I mentioned before that I asked you for your script – not only because I was trying to construct the performance from what documentation remained, but also because, in putting together this response, it seemed valuable to show something that bears the history of being worked on.

*I talk about a fan club for a magazine that we really ♥'d in the 90's
I talk about a magazine
then I call it a publication, but then a magazine*

And yes, I suppose we could fetishise that nice crease that runs down the middle of the A4 page, and treasure the artist's original handwriting, with genuinely dog-eared corners and, oh! yellow paper, how psychologically revelatory (Roald Dahl was also a fan, you know – less intimidatingly blank, or something). Michael Taussig wrote this great essay for Documenta 13 which simultaneously revels in and warns against fetishising the notebook, or the diary – he talks about Walter Benjamin's little black notebooks full of everyday 'pearls' and 'coral', and Le Corbusier's 73 sketchbooks (all published). Insights into these great (men's) minds. But he also talks about Roland Barthes' idea of 'interstices of notation' – the greater whole that the jots evoke, the atmosphere and sensations recalled through rereading the most basic of facts.

I talk about having an argument, and I mean a fight

So here's the script (or the score)

2, 3, 4...

- I talk about being in a band
- I talk about someone else talking about "being in a band"
- I talk about a workshop
- I talk about tenants rights
- I talk about a fan club for a magazine that we really ^{loved} in the 90's
- I talk about a magazine
then I call it a publication, but then a magazine.
- I talk about a makeover
which could also be called a renovation
but I definitely choose MAKEOVER
- I talk about a slow walk down the cat, in single file,
in trainers, with open faces.
- I talk about just doing things in the world
- I talk about a discussion group + very large animals
- I talk about asking you to text me back when I write to you.
- I talk about
Abilities, Expectations, Choices and Misunderstandings
- talk about having an argument, and I mean a fight
Fists pumping in the air, no posting on FB or tagging
Just the fight. and a slow walk ^{afterwards}
down the cat in single file in trainers with open faces
- talk about what he said
- talk about what she said
He's walking backwards, she's walking forwards
- funny. It's funny you should say that because how do
you really know?

I feel a little thrill when I read those words

I talk about being in a band

I talk about someone else talking about "being in a band"

Because really I'm thinking, is this about me? Is this about us? Are you talking to me? I'm happy to listen. There's something about the soft elongation of vowel sounds in the Canadian accent that I like. Sometimes I get distracted, enjoying some bird-nest effect your hair's doing, the odd strand of grey, textures of your clothes, a frill or a turn-up. They're not really distractions though; all part of talking, or listening.

I'm starting to wonder what you'll make of this, and I'm thinking of you now, reading this in your room, probably in some stylishly faded-elegance dressing gown with a small but delicious something, a coffee maybe, in a clay cup, with a little chip on the bottom edge. I wonder if I'm writing this for you.

But then I have that line from that song in my head – is it Carly Simon? – *I bet you think this song is about you, you're so vaaaiin!* But, then who *are* you talking to? Who is listening to all this talking?

I'm struck by all those Is in the script, that run like a decorative border down the left-hand side, overflowing from the page at times, disappearing off-margin. It reminds me of a diary, but that is the ultimate indulgence: from I to me; Dear I, Love Me. I tried writing a diary once, when I was about 11, but it felt incredibly self-conscious; like I was trying to write *Adrian Mole* or something. Mostly I just wrote about what I had for dinner.

There's an entry in one of Susan Sontag's diaries (told you), from 1965, when she ~~says~~ writes:

What sex is the "I"? Does one have to believe that God is a Woman to say "I" as a woman and be writing about the human condition.

Who has the right to say "I"? Is that a right that has to be earned?

On the page opposite (in my copy of her edited diaries) it says:

What if everything were the same, but no one talked.

So, what if everything were the same, but no one talked?

I write about being in a band
I write about someone else
"being in a band"
I write about a workshop
I write about tenants rights
I write about a fan club for a
magazine that we really ♥'d in
the 90's
I write about a magazine
then I call it a publication, but
then a magazine.
I write about a makeover
which could also be called a
renovation
But I definitely choose
MAKEOVER
I write about a slow walk
down the cut, in single file,
in trainers, with open faces.
I write about just doing things
in the world
I write about a discussion
group + very large animals
I write about asking you to
text me back when I write to
you.
I write about
Abilities, Expectations, Choices
and Misunderstandings
I write about having an
argument, and I mean a fight
Fists pumping in the air, no
posting on FB or tagging
afterwards
Just the fight. and a slow walk
down the cut in single file in
trainers with open faces
I write about what he wrote
I write about what she wrote
He's walking backwards, she's
walking forwards
funny. It's funny you should
write that because how do
you really know?

I sing about being in a band
I sing about someone else
"being in a band"
I sing about a workshop
I sing about tenants rights
I sing about a fan club for a
magazine that we really ♥'d in
the 90's
I sing about a magazine
then I call it a publication, but
then a magazine.
I sing about a makeover
which could also be called a
renovation
But I definitely choose
MAKEOVER
I sing about a slow walk
down the cut, in single file,
in trainers, with open faces.
I sing about just doing things
in the world
I sing about a discussion
group + very large animals
I sing about asking you to
text me back when I sing to
you.
I sing about
Abilities, Expectations, Choices
and Misunderstandings
I sing about having an
argument, and I mean a fight
Fists pumping in the air, no
posting on FB or tagging
afterwards
Just the fight. and a slow walk
down the cut in single file in
trainers with open faces
I sing about what he sang
I sing about what she sang
He's walking backwards, she's
walking forwards
funny. It's funny you should
sing that because how do you
really know?

I hear about being in a band
I hear about someone else
"being in a band"
I hear about a workshop
I hear about tenants rights
I hear about a fan club for a
magazine that we really ♥'d in
the 90's
I hear about a magazine
then I call it a publication, but
then a magazine.
I hear about a makeover
which could also be called a
renovation
But I definitely choose
MAKEOVER
I hear about a slow walk
down the cut, in single file,
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I hear about just doing things
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I hear about a discussion
group + very large animals
I hear about asking you to
text me back when I listen to
you.
I hear about
Abilities, Expectations, Choices
and Misunderstandings
I hear about having an
argument, and I mean a fight
Fists pumping in the air, no
posting on FB or tagging
afterwards
Just the fight. and a slow walk
down the cut in single file in
trainers with open faces
I hear about what he heard
I hear about what she heard
He's walking backwards, she's
walking forwards
funny. It's funny you should
hear that because how do you
really know?