

# HAMLET

2 Broken Hearts

Mara Wohnhaas

*The fly on a speaker's nose*

3 March 2023 at 23:24  
antonia.truninger@gmail.com  
Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

Julia,  
do you have time?

I hope that e-mailing will make it easier to continue my thoughts (I imagine a conversation between us that I am actually having with myself - somewhere between diary writing and correspondence. Writing without an addressee is difficult for me, so I sometimes write e-mails to imaginary addresses, a self-deception, so to speak. The fact that we are keeping the possibility open to use our e-mail correspondence as actual material for an exhibition text actually makes writing uncomfortable - I might not only be writing to you here, but to all exhibition visitors (I can feel the reader behind me, looking over my shoulder, watching my nervous typing and the words that form sentences on my screen). If I had been allowed to write this now, this and all the following messages as planned, written with a motive (not only an end in itself), showing the intimacy or immediacy, the almost 'documentary' as posed. (...) Are moments of 'authentic' exchange even possible? And also: what does the disclosure of communication or the suggestive documentation of this exchange of ideas set in the context of an exhibition text even mean?

So  
To Mara

A reflection on an exhibition that we can at most imagine. The works are stuck in Düsseldorf.  
Skimming over my notes of our three-way conversation from about 2 months ago, this one phrase of 'controlled failure' sticks. (...) I stumble: Isn't 'failure' necessarily uncontrolled? If 'control' also means or grasps 'intention', and 'to fail' is to resist the intention 'to fail', then a failure that is controlled would, after all, no longer be a failure. Is Mara speaking of an oxymoron here that I only now recognize as such, or am I just confusing strands of thought (it's late, I'm tired)? The collapse of the table is controlled in that it is only staged. The staging is identified as such by the illustrative breaking point.  
What do you think?

Sleep well, a

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4 March 2023 at 13:56  
juliaghegi@gmail.com  
RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: antonia.truninger@gmail.com

Hey Antonia

I couldn't find a beginning yesterday. I'll try again. I agree with you. I think writing to a (fictional) person is an attempt to explain something to yourself that couldn't be put into words before. My iPhone notes are full of messages that I will probably never send. (...) But, I think it's difficult to detach yourself from the idea of a reader when the purpose of the exchange is so imposing. I feel your gaze on my hands even now. (...) Perhaps one possible purpose of this interaction could be that we establish a common language and basis of understanding first, which can be crucial for writing an exhibition text together.

To Mara

I like the humorous, almost comic situations in her work so much. (...) A repeated disintegration that I also feel very distinctly in myself. For a brief moment I think I might have grasped it, that which I see, then I fail again, and everything becomes absurd somehow. I have to be honest, I don't quite get it yet. Your notion that the answers keep negating themselves seems to get to the heart of this feeling. Is this an attempt at a summarized infinity? The attempt to bring the individual and the whole into a dynamic system? What do you think?

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4 March 2023 at 17:51  
antonia.truninger@gmail.com  
RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

I was so happy to read your reply, was as excited as if a declaration of love was awaiting me in it. I feel entangled in a dance of words and thoughts. Why didn't we start emailing earlier?

Hi

I hope my gaze on your hands doesn't keep you from thinking freely. Today - after receiving your message - the reader has almost completely disappeared from the room. Instead, there's you and your words that I'm soaking up.

I'm curious what such a language or voice might sound like, and wonder how that voice will connect with Mara's. And also what our voice wants. (...) Perhaps by revealing our doubts, our unawareness, we can preserve the very openness that seems so important with regard to the ambivalences in Mara's work.

I love how you describe your own repeated failure. I can relate to that quite well. Is infinity synonymous with absurdity, contradiction, negation?

I want to reread this text by Batailles, because I haven't quite understood the distinction between the two forms of seductiveness. Do you? By the way, Boiffard hangs up his career as a photographer at the age of only 33 to resume his medical studies after the death of his father. Kind of absurd, too. Failure or not? I'd like to ask him.

Until then

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5 March 2023 at 00:06  
juliaghegi@gmail.com  
RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: antonia.truninger@gmail.com

Oh. Now I'm getting all nervous too. Maybe I'm getting a little carried away right now. Should we continue emailing like this even after this show? I imagine an eternally long email thread as an archive of our shared practice. Your gaze on my hands feels kind of good now. I feel secure in the knowledge that we are evolving this exchange together. (...)

Is it weird that I'm developing a guilty conscience at this moment? Should this conversation take place between the three of us? (...)

I am so excited that Mara is coming to Zurich.

With 'infinity' I mean precisely this paradoxical constellation: the eternal oscillation between contradictions, which people try so tensely to unite into a whole. I think it is this that attracts me so strongly to Mara's work. The intelligence and precision that her performances display, without becoming rigid or taking itself too seriously. Perhaps also this self-irony? I find the ability to skilfully poke fun at oneself extremely attractive.

Is that what Georges Bataille means in his text „The Big Toe“? He speaks of the „burlesque“ desire, which is often reminiscent of the grotesque or of parody - a pleasure found in something that deviates from the ideals of beauty and is condemned by superficial people. Or at least that's how I understood it.

I'm thinking of contradictory forms of attraction as well as contradictions within attraction - or contradictions that make up attraction and become something desirable themselves? Perhaps I am digressing now. (...)

Can we meet tomorrow?

xx J

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5 March 2023 at 15:05  
antonia.truninger@gmail.com  
RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

good morning

How are you feeling today? I lay in bed for a long time thinking about a lot of things, not really because I wanted to stay lying down, it was more like my head was so full and therefore too heavy to sit upright on my neck. (...) I don't think Sarah Kane can be a fruitful reference for Mara's work. But my thoughts are circling, Sarah Kane is point zero of my coordinate system this morning. I talked with Lea, Wilf and Paula about laughing during the play. (...) When Mara's work makes me laugh, I smile at the absurdity of her failure, which is often much more reminiscent of intentional self-sabotage. It is in this very intention that the seriousness is hidden. And again, the ambivalence, an incessant circling or swinging back and forth.

I like the idea of your fingers flying over the keys - as an expression of an urgency I feel as well.

To Boiffard and Bataille: are we talking about the entanglement of attraction and disgust? I'm just thinking about when a contradiction becomes something desirable. People shy away from contradictions, try to eradicate them all if possible. (...)

So

I wrote without really believing that any of it could be relevant. And the belief in my own susceptibility exhausts me.

One more thing, but perhaps more food for thought: in most of the texts circulating in the www about Mara's work, the term 'autobiography' appears. Do we want to find out in the next few emails how Mara (born 1997 in Karlsruhe, studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the class of Rita McBride) plays with her own biography? I noted: Everything relates to itself, people begin to interpret everything that surrounds them, everything is related to their own subject.

Haha, good morning, more like mid-afternoon.

xa

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3 June 2023 at 00:35  
juliaghegi@gmail.com  
RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt  
To: antonia.truninger@gmail.com

Hey

I hope you're feeling better?

I'm resuming the thread. It's been so long since our last email. Weird.

The breaks in the implementation of the exhibition made us almost superstitiously doubtful. If we had abandoned the exhibition, only this feeling of failure would have remained. Also our fear that the transport person would ghost us... maybe an exhibition with only the one work that Mara brought by train would have been pretty good too. Oh well. A failed first attempt, fear of further failure, and now here we are. Mara and I printed her collages today, talking about Magic cards and ill-fated teenage love. I'm so happy that she's here now.

My head is buzzing with images from today, but none of it wants to materialize in this email. Paralysis by analysis? Maybe. I wait for the appropriate narrative.

I think of the title of the exhibition.

I think of Emily Dickinson's I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - . The fly not only interrupts the silence.

I think of an episode of Too Hot to Handle where a cockroach flies into a guy's face in the middle of a cheesy romantic moment.

What do you think of?

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3 June 2023 at 01:22

juliaghegi@gmail.com

RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt

To: antonia.truninger@gmail.com

My Uber driver just asked me about the content of our exhibition.

I answered: comic ruptures and distortions of the real / being thrown back on oneself / revelation / uncovering / the moment in which language fails us

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3 June 2023 at 02:03

antonia.truninger@gmail.com

RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt

To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

Hi

I feel numb - from the shimmering heat of the afternoon, from crippling decision-making difficulties, from dozing on the living room couch. I can barely keep my eyes open. I was torn from sleep by Noa's call - hey, are you still awake? Want a good night call? Her voice echoes in my ear. It seems Noa is lying next to me - hey, are you still awake - her voice nests, ear worm, sneaking in between sleep and wakefulness - There interposed a Fly - Noa snaps me out of sleep. Then you finally wrote.

Great. I had to laugh so loud, hopefully no one woke up. I am awake, at the latest now. too-hot-to-handle-bug-on-face.jpg

Yes - holes, fractures and distortions that throw me back to my own perception, reveal something, uncover. But Mara meticulously plans the breaks - precise constructions of distorted gestures.

Mara talks to us, becomes a fly that settles on our noses. The fly - the disturbing factor - a bait.

And the installations, objects, images constantly expose themselves - fly eggs, larvae hatch from them, the larvae expose the larvae as flies. Flying, aimlessly flying bait. Or so.

It's 01:59. More tomorrow.

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3 June 2023 at 10:51

antonia.truninger@gmail.com

RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt

To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

gumo

OK, a short attempt in the morning, after that I have to go, must not lose track of time, get speakers and fresh clothes:

In the dawning half-sleep our conversations on failure, on the productive potential of ruptures, on the freedom of error buzzed through my head. Failure as a performance of refusal. When failure leads to breaking free, subverting common structures. Jack Halberstam speaks of the utility of getting lost over finding our way and emphasizes the socio-political significance of the concepts of failure and success: my basic point with failure is that in a world where success is counted in relation to profit... or relayed through heteronormative marriage, failure is not a bad place to start for a critique of both capitalism and heteronormativity. Again, interesting for the analysis of Mara's work: failure as a performance of refusal. The performative failure - an appropriation of failure - the illustration of a table break, shipwreck, a failed lecture. culater

3 June 2023 at 16:45

antonia.truninger@gmail.com

RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt

To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

Hello again,

The exhibition turned out quite nicely. An absurd scenario. But only just absurd enough that the absurdity doesn't impose itself on us. A long table broken in two, 15cm stilettos embedded in the tabletop - supposed witnesses of a scene, a speech act, a lecture: lecture of what? The fracture abstract, the Zig Zag's only pretend to be in positive-negative relation to each other. The halves of the table don't fit, you can see that! A liana grows out of the ceiling, its fruit a headset. Actual witness of a reading. The speaker - Mara - talks about the speaker, the speaking, the failure of it. Her act of speaking as an „uncanny mirror held up to the speaker (listener), one that concretizes a desire in the process of becoming“ (Moyra Davey)? Alienated bodies - there she is again, the artist herself - collaged extremities, absurd beings. So simple, Mara makes no secret of how the collages came about. There is also the fly, the bait fly, sitting on an object that reminds us of some device, context unknown. A FLY CAN SAVE A SHITTY PAINTING. The oversized wine glass speaks the same language of misappropriation. The event is coherent in its absurdity. The absurdity is in the coherence.

From Mara's notes, the following quote seemed most catchy to me (source unknown):

«Entscheidend ist eine Art Störfaktor, wie eine Fliege auf der Nase eines Redners. Die Fliege ist das Kontingente, das das System aus dem Konzept bringt und die Eigenmacht des Diskurses bricht. (...) Eine minimale Veränderung an der «figure humaine» und aus dem Menschen, der Krone der Schöpfung wird ein lächerlicher Held. «O ridiculoussime Heroe» Die narzisstische Kränkung ist ebenso gross wie die Fliege klein.»

The heat forces me to surrender. There's spackling, sanding, painting walls, hanging collages waiting. I hope people will come.

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3 June 2023 at 16:51

antonia.truninger@gmail.com

RE: Mara W : An approach and doubt

To: juliaghegi@gmail.com

Annotation:

What if we give Mara the material to read and she tells us herself which passages seem most fitting to her?