

—*Copy for Mes Meufs* in regards to the talk, Sunday 5th June 2016, Raum D, Museumsquartier, Vienna, Austria—on the show *Stafett*.

Note to editors/publishers: The aphoristic layout is intended – each paragraph is intended to open with a em-dash (e.g. —) and close with a colon (e.g. :). These syntactical signifiers act graphically and spatially as compositional performatives to *relaying*.

Title:

TOUCHING YOUTH: TIMES RELAY

By Maria O'Connor

—Thank you, Alex, Minda, Jennifer, Flavio (and the Mes Meufs crew: Sophie, Elisa and Michaella) for the invitation to speak today. This morning I have composed this invitational response *after* encountering the Opening of *Stafett* last night:

—An invitation to speak is both a *gift* sent out by another, and at the same moment this sending arrives as a demand for taking the speaker hostage. I mention this slight Derridean tick with respect to sendings and receivings; or as gifting —both pure and conditional: as hosting and playing hostage, as I enter into a contract of response in the experience to, for and how to speak *now*, with you today:

—When Minda and Alex, both in their separate ways, described the show's concept and title *Stafett*, as a kind of *relay*, I readily recalled sports' activities from childhood collaborations in acts of swimming and running races. These *relays* involved competitions that relied on other bodies to assist winning outcomes. At that time my body felt both fiercely independent (a sign of youth, perhaps) and complicit in being a team spirit for the purpose, it seemed to me then, of *winning*. This embodied condition of independence and collectivity still haunts me as I work through the pleasures of philosophical pondering on subjective realities, communities and an ethics for being-with. I'm still pondering *winning* as an existential condition—and, yet, let us just say it has not won me over—for its dominant discourses often echo, return or relay neoliberal mandates for driving economic reform. Reforms that appear to drive individuality into the heart of self-servings for being-away-from others; and, as I am still only arriving at some kind of understanding of how to emerge within these demands, today, winning is only that which defers genuine vitality:

—However, this image of childhood relay racing offers me an image-of-thought for starting something of a dialogue with *Stafett*. Let us just say that we are onto some kind of sending and receiving with respect to bodies that reach out for independence *touching* others lightly, or slightly in order to forge ahead via more genuine collective-partial-bodies. This thought might just make a mark barely legible for tracing the being-with others whereby independence can only emerge in the fog of other bodies. And, as I speak today, this all seems too much, too soon at an arrival at *relaying* —and, so in the vein of all good sporting competition, we shall ponder it as just one *false start* in my thinking of how to take this invitational baton; to move it forward in order to relay something today:

—I suggest a *false start* not because it does not ultimately lead us somewhere, but because its arrival at its destination is still opaque within a conditioning we construe as dark time. And, further, a naïve start might suggest that being part of a team sport demands precision, care and responsiveness in *timing*. *Here*, I felt my timing was *off* via a palpable sense of hesitation even to move off a start-line: A line still relatively buried and unknown—and yet, here I am, in this moment, speaking now:

—*Then, now*, without too much *delay*, given the necessity to dream up something to say, I take a step back as I recall the Opening—I cite dreaming seriously here especially given the conversation last night with Jennifer as a modality for seeding a conceptual frame for *her* suspended form—a cape perhaps: A bodily impression relying on its absented-other as other,

hovering still. Attempting to hit a mark, to say something, this concept *now* of *relay* suggests a *temporality*—a being in time out-of-time; a timing of both hesitation and action:

—This invitation today is fueled by *hesitation*—a kind of deferred-temporality, differing-spatiality (qui qui, Derridean ticks, clocking into *différance*) that enables my thoughts to emerge. How does one come to speak, to say anything? If as suggested before last night, earlier in that day (yesterday) in a conversation with a friend (Stephen): that the cryptic veil of language constructs a wall for evading, then what of these inauspicious moments when saying arrives at a destination (late?)? Evasion, for where is its destiny? This saying in evading is a designation not clearly designated, still opaque and dark-in-time. It arrives without knowing quite how, when or what it might say, and this would be the unrivalled arrival of a non-instrumental, non-mastered being-with. Would we not always, partially be uncertain in however we arrive, at whatever spot, mark, destining? So, today, I have arrived at something that most poignantly attributes *hesitation* as a way-finder within the process of preparing for making public a show—and event such as *Stafett*:

—I take a larger step now over a start line and into the milieu of last night's Opening event. Still in a modality of *hesitation*—not really a player and more an observer from the stadium seats—where I receive multiple sound-bytes that coalesce in codes making up the material for *saying something* now. Already, I have mentioned Jennifer's dream and an earlier conversation in the day leading up to the event; I recall also the detailing by another artist, whose work appeared in Alex's studio-apartment show prior, and who speaks of the contagion or superimposition of two figures in her photographic piece; artist portrait upon artist portrait upon folk personae and sexual difference; another story coalesces in the sound byte of a mapping project by Josh, that brings visible through digital means the veiled politics of Austrian restitution years on, too late, yet not so for futures to come; Elisa reveals an evocation of bodies touching lightly in the physical-digital borders of in-situ architectural figures: her site hosts (in my imagination) the fidelity of remembrance within time-based modalities as the betrayal or foreign, in how they might project their histories together: Benjaminian chips of messianic time in the historic materialism of collecting, archiving *only* witnessed by the juxtapositioning of times archaic and present at once. These superimpositions of bodies speak of that *in(ter)dependence* that can only arrive in a scene of interstitial touching out-of-joint: messianic fragments, bytes holding in their evading or screening, non-mastery, non-instrumental arrivals: *hesitation*. Sound-bytes contaminating my senses, invading my outside to bring me closer to the rhythm of desire in hesitation as though this hesitation were a holding, securing and secretive framework only held together by *youth* (*deep in time*):

—If a relay *formulates* any event it does so by the *relations* of an interstitial desire for coming together. In this event of my speaking—with and on—an event that goes by the name *Stafett*: A show, which lasts (relatively speaking) for only a short period (i.e., two-days), then these *relations* of sendings and receivings that my speaking has alluded to up until now as a *touching-lightly-upon-and-upon* and in *hesitation*, are very fleeting and yet yielding—a yielding construed as the contamination or contagion of collectivity. In listening to all that I heard and overheard, from those who gathered at last night's Opening, a future offering or sending was palpably felt: The desire for an infrastructural support that holds others lightly, without any mastery for consuming (others) for the sake of some neo-liberal independence. Rather, the contagion of how *this* relay works happens in how these works around us offer us *something* of a start ... perhaps, a practice in sympathy as in the art of sympathetic magic that speaks to concepts of healing and contagion—partial bodies standing in for sums way beyond any totalizing assembly of finishing—

Thank you,

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