I Will Not Bury My Romantic Soul

*Letters to Lygia Clark, Adrian Howells & Claude Cahun*

MFA Performing Arts

Ellen Vanderstraeten

August 2018 - August 2019
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Abstract

A few months ago I started to write one letter everyday to three different artists. They accompanied me along my way in the development of my artistic practice as well as personal struggles in my life. Lygia Clark, Adrian Howells and Claude Cahun may come from very different backgrounds and different times but to me their practices are significantly intertwined. Their practice intersects in their immediate way of connecting art making, therapy and life, their approach to total theater and one-to-one performances, always with the greatest attention to the tiniest detail and sensorial qualities of carefully chosen materials. In this book you can find several of those handwritten letters written by me to either Lygia, Claude or Adrian.
A few months ago I started to write one letter everyday to three different artists. They accompanied me along my way in the development of my artistic practice as well as personal struggles in my life. Lygia Clark, Adrian Howells and Claude Cahun may come from very different backgrounds and different times but to me their practices are significantly intertwined. Their practice intersects in their immediate way of connecting art making, therapy and life, their approach to total theater and one-to-one performances, always with the greatest attention to the tiniest detail and sensorial qualities of carefully chosen materials. In this book you can find several of those handwritten letters written by me to either Lygia, Claude or Adrian.

Ellen Vanderstraeten is an object explorer who works with performing arts in diverse spaces including but not only the stage, her own home as well as the homes of others, abandoned places and shop windows. Her cross disciplinary performances explore a mix of media from objects, print, costume, music, dance, documentary, storytelling and video. Her work implicates the spectator in a playful and immersive experience in order to connect art, therapy and life. She investigates themes such as the relationship between fiction and truth, body and object, the self and the other. Her work often involves a set up of intimate one-to-one encounters, one-to-one encounters that can be spectator and collective actions. Ellen Vanderstraeten is from Belgium and is based in Brussels.
Lygia

I hold a plastic bag filled with water in my hands. I squeeze a plastic bag filled with air between my hands on top a stone going up and down.

Exactly one year ago I caressed the back of my hand back and forth, for half an hour, touching the lips of a person I never met before.

Yesterday somebody asked me so carelessly what my relation is like with my mother.

Today I understand the arising of pulsation of sensations in the empty-full space and time.

"Is this the nostalgia of being a wet stone, a stone-being under the shade of a tree, outside time?" - LC

I could never have imagined somebody would feel like a mother to me.

Ellen
I need to spill my guts out to you! Claude!

It's about more than spending too much time with souls that cannot reply. I'm still afraid of you seeing me. With my silly struggles and silly questions. Why always the need to confess the ugly in beautiful ways?

Editing previous letters on a terrace in the sun, making them disposable. I'm a cheap childish artist.

"Above all else I despised the way I despise myself." - CC

Today I felt dressing like Buddha but didn't think the energy is do so.
I feel like the boat drove right though me when it left to the Faroe Islands. It damaged the organs from between my legs towards my arse. My intestines are stretching out polluting with vibrant yellow green pulp the sea every time it bends towards itself, leaving behind my womb dark red brown blue black everything is up side down and the neck of my uterus is tightened up with a sailor's knot. Let me live without all these dysfunctional organs, they aren't good to, my lips are ejaculating watery white liquids smelling like seaweed that's drying on a stone in the sun outside time, an unbearable pain is pulsating on the rhythm of the waves in my right upper arm Ooooh I want to squirt my bulimia with the force of a volcano all over these freshly white snowed, canvas what a poor portrait gobble gobble gobble explode! so I can scrape some lovely colors with a sailor's knot. I will gather all together, I will gather all together, I promise just let me feel the water I will gather all together, I will gather all together, I promise just let me feel the water. I want to force myself to eat a chicken. I will clean the bones. I will gather them in a plastic bag. I will shake the bones in this envelope contouring a body. They will deorganize and organize on a repetitive rhythm. Let the organs sink into the bones. Let my soul dissolve in the in betweens of the execution of an action, let it be an event. Let my body become a house I can live in, again.
CLAUDE,...

yesterday night I fried the chicken in the pan, skin light glazing brown we ate dinner and made love in silence. I died inside wishing myself into the abyss between fields of clammy sheets and skin. I found myself in the strong smell of seaweed and rotten fish on my tongue arisen from between my legs. I excused myself by biting my tongue and shame away.

"What I cannot chew is precisely what I like to bite off." - CC

He fell asleep.

I cried in the absence of speech when I finally went out the bed to smoke a cigarette. When I got up again I held the bones in my hands, how could I have mistaken their size for a chick. Tomorrow I will carve them into smaller pieces before I commit a murder again.

"Don't go learning over others, guard yourself against the call for the abyss ... I might squash someone while falling." - CC