LINDA STUPART

She said you can’t make any new holes in the gallery walls, but you can use the holes that are already there.
On our first visit to the gallery she walked in wearing perfect heels and sensible skirt; Career Woman. She rattled off the rules of the space: no branding, no noise, no using our name, no switching off this button, ever.

She said you can’t make any new holes in the gallery walls, but you can use the holes that are already there.
Foreword
During the 1960’s, the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making characteristic of the last two decades have begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. As more and more work is designed in the studio but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen, as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object’s becoming wholly obsolete.

The two greatest mistakes of modern capitalism have been to confuse materialism with happiness, and growth with the need to produce an ever increasing number of physical goods.

These are the core ideas behind the work of artist Tino Sehgal, who is currently exhibiting at the Tate Modern’s turbine hall.

Sehgal seeks to highlight these fallacies by filling the cathedral-like space with experiences, rather than monumental sculptures or installations.

By eschewing traditional forms, he has come to represent the core narrative of the sustainability movement, which is seeking to move beyond consumer fetishism to a more meaningful way of living life, one that respects planetary boundaries.

As part of his project for the Tate, Sehgal trained several hundred participants, many of whom have professional jobs, to interact with visitors. Their training was based around questions such as: “When did you feel a sense of belonging?” and “When did you experience a sense of arrival?”

One young woman describes a love affair in Thailand, a teenager about how he conquered a maths problem that boosted his confidence and a retired man, who speaks movingly of how he moved beyond abusive relationships by learning the Buddhist practice of loving speech.

Like Sehgal’s other works, These Associations, will not be photographed and no documentation or reproduction is allowed. It happens in the moment and leaves no physical trace, but an experience gained.

The Anglo-German artist, who rarely gives interviews, agreed to meet me at the Tate’s outdoor cafe. By hosting These Associations, he says the Tate Modern has given official legitimacy to the move away from materialism.
“A place like the Tate is like a powerhouse, not in the sense of it having been a power station, but in the sense that politically whatever gets shown here is recognised as official Western culture,” he says.

“These are places of high, high legitimation in our culture. Even Lady Gaga, although she’s possibly the most visible person on the planet, the one thing she doesn’t have is this kind of official, almost quasi-stately legitimation.”

“A museum is like a valuing machine. Museums and the industrial society started at the same moment and they’re really tied into each other. They’ve been all about displaying objects and the kind of wealth that can be derived from objects and promoting that point. And to come into such a place and say, OK cool, we’ve done that, and now here’s the next step, like maybe what we can derive from objects is not the only mode, and maybe there are other modes which are actually more interesting.”

Sehgal’s interest in sustainability has been influenced by his study of political economy, as well as his education in Germany, from teachers deeply influenced by the Nazi era and the 1968 upheavals in Europe.

“We had a lot of teachers who came directly out of ‘68 and decided to become teachers as a political choice so just in a very straightforward way I was definitely influenced by them,” he says.

“And also I think this idea, especially of growing up in Germany, that you can fail historically and that has happened before and that can happen again and that a generation can be measured by the way it reacts to a historical problem.”

Sehgal is certainly no enemy of capitalism, pointing out that while there are fundamental problems with the techno-industrial complex, it has also been responsible for major advances in society such as a massive decline in child death rates.
He is also a fan of the market-based economy, arguing that it has been responsible for giving people the freedom to express themselves.

“On a very, very basic level I’m definitely pro market because with the market comes the idea of the individual and the idea of specialisation and I personally like being an individual and choosing my interactions,” he says.

- Jo Confino. *Tino Sehgal’s Tate Modern exhibition metaphor for dematerialisation* in the Guardian Professional. 5 October 2012.
The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted). In [some] cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.

If the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject’s own self in the ways we have been discussing.

I want you to bleed all over you
I want you to fuck me while I cut I
I touch
I want you to fuck me while I cut I
you cock and his separated only by the skin between
I light hot hangman’s noose strangling
want to stretch to fit you
I

two truths inside my almost everywhere
snakes skin shivers shot cum

identical twins fuckandfuck
Without You I’m Nothing
miss my heart a wormhole

a gash below my ribs already one less than yours
I want you to cut me while we fuck
You don’t have to be THE best looking guy on the outside, but if your heart is right then I’ll give you a chance. Being single as a teenager can really fuck you up some times, especially if you’re a girl. We all have a hole in a heart that’s reserved for love. I just wish someone would give me the chance to prove to them that I could be all you can ask for and more. What was your first thought when you saw me? Did you think I was pretty? Did you think I have pretty eyes? Or did you think my head was big? That I have curves. Honestly I just want one attractive, faithful, athletic guy who would love me for me, nothing less. A guy who will except me for my goofy moments, my bi-polar ones, my dumb ones. A guy who would let me just cry on his shoulder just because I feel THAT comfortable with him. A guy who would just show up to my house outta no where. A guy who excepts me with no make up & my hair in a messy bun & in sweats. But no these guys out here want a “bad bitch” I’m sorry but I’m actually good & I’m no bitch. But then again these are just my opinions & thoughts.

- d-d-d-raw. Just Thinking. Tumblr. #Teenage Love #Teenage Poetry #Poetry.
There are 554 holes in the gallery’s walls.
Valentines Day
On Valentines Day 2013 I exhibited a video, *Untitled (Footage Cuts)*, as part of a screening titled *Bodies of Silence: When Words are Made Flesh* in a gallery cum bar cum café space in London. The video features two pieces of found or, rather, sourced footage:

4:36 Minutes of a ‘community arts’ workshop in Grahamstown, South Africa. This footage was shot by Craig Groenewald in 2010 during the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. A large Dutch man is leading a group of black children in a singing and drumming exercise in a very small domestic room. We can see from everyone’s clothing and the Dutch man’s excessive sweating that this workshop takes place during a very hot summer and we assume from a combination of indicators that the participants are very poor.

0:09 Minutes of pixelated, shaky and unfocused footage of an unrecognisable domestic interior; a poor image. This footage was sourced from the Grahamstown Police Station where it was used as evidence in a case of violent robbery. This footage was also taken with Craig Groenewald’s camera. I do not know the name of the cameraman, who is one of the accused in the court case. We can see that his hand is shaking.

These two pieces of footage are cut up and reassembled, sometimes jarringly, to produce an 8:21 minute video. The audio for the video, which comprises mostly of the children’s drumming and singing, comes in at 06:17 with the sound of a deep inhalation from the Dutch man.

A textual narrative runs through *Untitled (Footage Cuts)*. The text is written in white Arial typeface and is positioned eclectically as the images unfold.
don't
This text is written in the first person and is a combination of three narratives:

1. The event

In 2010 I took a group of students to Grahamstown to run a community arts project during the South African National Arts Festival. We produced a number of interdisciplinary workshops and also assisted local existing community arts groups with facilitating their own events, even those which we believed to be problematic; modelled on what we considered to be patronizing or essentializing outreach methods.

This narrative introduces the community outreach program that I led in Grahamstown in 2010, but is mostly a partial account of the violent robbery that occurred while we were in Grahamstown to facilitate the program. It is made clear that throughout the event there is a constant threat of violence, particularly towards me;

he had a big knife held against my throat
he was shaking so much, he was so wired
tiny cuts

as well as a particular fear of sexual violence; rape:

‘teef’ they said, which means ‘bitch’
we’re going to take you into a room and teach you a lesson.

2. The Rupture
Last weekend I found myself crying softly in the arms of a boy I hardly know, just before we were fucking for the second time that week.

This text tells of a post traumatic interruption in the narrative of the present; a violent punctuation in, it is implied, a recent casual sexual encounter.

Here, it appears that some outside force attacks me, pauses me and extracts me unwillingly from this moment:

then everything stops
I disappear
and in the place of your skin and our sweat and my heat
there is just bile

now I cannot breathe and he is holding me
he is still hard because he is stuck before the glitch
but I am petrified inside that other ending

How can he know that he is stroking the still-growing hair of a corpse?

In the video this particular narrative is kept very short. Sentences from this account, which I wrote, but did not use in the video include:

He pauses and says: I wish I knew more about you.

I find this hard to believe.

Unless I am suddenly mysterious in my momentary disappearance

Leaping out of the magician’s box after she is miraculously rejoined, the beautiful assistant never thinks to ask why it is he cut off her legs in the first place.

Of course, my fear makes me feel closer to him.
3. The account

This third narrative speaks reflectively of the event, of tellings of the event and of the video (*Untitled (footage, cuts]*)’s making and distribution, including discussions post-event, the process of finding and editing the footage and reflections on exhibiting the work:

after we got our stuff back
we looked on Craig’s camera
we found the footage

I asked the police man
who had taken down one by one our statements

in every single version of the story I remain the main character
in all the stories except for mine
I am also a hero

in a studio in London I spoke to the policeman in Grahamstown
the line cut out again and again

every time I try to touch this text it burns me
every time I spoke to the police officer I heaved
after every edit
every cut

I don’t know how to tell the others I am making this work.
Maybe, hopefully, it will only be shown in Europe, and so I won’t have to.

There are some overlaps - texts that were written as part of a particular sub-plot, which leak into others through an ambiguous malevolent simultaneity:

my heart is beating so fast
I am screaming
usually, nothing scares me as I cannot imagine anything outside of an immediate absolute crushing intensity

It’s ok, he says
we are all animals
I can let you go if you want

and I say

please don’t
Having now shown this video to a public on Valentine’s Day, as well as at an artist’s talk in my studio and to close friends in various manifestations, I am dissatisfied and deeply confused by every single viewer’s inability to recognise me in the video. That is not to say that they do not recognise that this is an account of *my story*, or that I am not authoritatively, unavoidably present throughout my stubbornly first person narratives. Rather, after each viewing, I ask the question, ‘did you see me in the footage’ and each time they say, ‘no’.

I do appear, however, multiple times in the community arts footage since I was there in the very small room and thus unavoidably caught on camera. I am wearing a khaki green dress and have short brown hair. I am much more tanned there, than here, and in the video am sweating profusely.

On showing the video to friends in earlier manifestations, this inability to recognise my image concerned me. For how could they identify with me, the protagonist, if I remained invisible?

Thus, I introduced a reflexive and didactic extended frame in the video that, I was sure, would make this recognition inevitable:

I slowed down footage in which one can clearly see me wiping sweat from my brow. I placed this footage (of me) on the left hand side of a split screen and on the right side wrote a line of white on black text, which (also clearly) describes the image on the left hand side, though using the first person. In combination the screen equates the ‘I’ of the story with the image of me, and also with the object of *me*, I thought, in the video.

This segment is illustrated on the facing page.
(A moving image that captures) me in the corner (of a small domestic space), sweating.

(A text that reads) I was standing in the corner, sweating.
Still, they do not see me.

At first, of my friends in London, I think that they cannot recognise me because of a contextual shift, because of the way that they understand this type of footage of a community arts project in South Africa – recognisable, but never intimate. They, thus I, in the context in which we are familiar (that is the context of me living in London) could not possibly be in this representation; it is too obvious, too strange. Perhaps they do not recognise me because I have not yet, in my image in the video, developed that corpse-like pallor that now paints me with Englishness, erases my recent history as it reinstates a genealogical haunting; ghosts me through lack of sun and an absence of what we used to call nature. Because in the video I have a healthy tan.

However, now that I have included this screen, which points directly to me, I feel there must be something more at stake in their failure to see me in the footage. For surely this split screen as it is illustrated previously is purely demonstrative, didactic? Or, since it does not say, ‘this is me who is standing in the corner sweating’, it is at least completely illustrative; the most straightforward case of representation:

On the left hand side of the screen we observe the moving image of a person who is standing in the corner, sweating.

On the right hand side of the screen we read the text ‘I (this person who writes this text) was standing in the corner, sweating.’

However, it seems that any equivalence between the image of me on the left hand side and the I of the text that I have written on the right hand side somehow escapes observation.

Remembering reading Foucault, it occurs to me that I have accidentally produced a broken calligram, an imagetext whose totality negates the possibility of reading text and image discretely (simultaneously) and thus, instead of setting up an illustrative relationship between I and the image, I produce in the video a tautological negation that enables
a complete disappearance at the one moment in the work in which I attempt to perform an unequivocal emergence.

In Foucault’s essay for the inaugural issue of October magazine in 1976, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, the author establishes Magritte’s ‘Treachery of Images’ as consisting of ‘the fragments of a broken calligram.’

A calligram is a word, sentence, poem or any text written in the shape of that which its letters describe. ‘The calligram’, Foucault writes, ‘makes use of this double property of letters to function as linear elements which can be arranged in space and as signs which must be read according to a single chain of phonic substance. As sign, the letter permits us to establish words; as line, it permits us to figure objects. Hence the calligram playfully seeks to erase the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to figure and to speak; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look at and to read.’

It is impossible to simultaneously see the calligram and read it. The image of the bird takes flight as we apprehend its name and the reading of the name necessitates a new figure-ground relation that necessarily makes seeing its shape impossible; two faces disappear as Ruben’s vase apparatuses from the void between them.

‘The calligram which, without seeming to, introduces a negative relation between what it shows and what it says; for by drawing a bouquet, a bird, or a shower of rain by a sprinkling of letters, the calligram never says of this hypocritically spontaneous shape, “this is a dove, a flower, a shower of rain”; it avoids naming what the arrangement of graphic signs draws. To show what is happening through the words, in the half-silence of the letters; not to say what these lines are which, at the text’s edges, limit and frame it. [In *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)*] Magritte has cast the text outside the image, the sentence must repossess, for its own sake, this negative relation and make it, within its own syntax, a negation. The ‘not saying’ which internally and silently animated the calligram is now
spoken from outside, in the verbal form of “not.”

‘The “pipe” which was undivided between the statement which named it and the drawing which would figure it, that shadowy pipe which combined the lineaments of shape and the fibre of words, has fled for good. A disappearance which, on the other side of the gaping hole, the text sadly acknowledges: this is not a pipe.’

*Untitled (footage, cuts)* does not use Magritte’s ‘not’, however it somehow operates the very same disappearance of the object (the pipe, the subject/‘me’) as is performed in Magritte’s sorcery. Like the pipe, I have escaped through some empty space in the screen, or perhaps in the gap the split itself produces.

Unwittingly, I have produced a statement whose naïve belief in an equivalence of signs (as though a moving image that has caught my resemblance in 2010 and the mere letter ‘I’ that has been written by my hand two years later somehow maintain a magical connection through each object’s relation to the object that I consider as myself) fails through the reader’s more sophisticated and internalised understanding of the treachery of images.

I disappear.
Crime Scene
Just before I went to Grahamstown to run the community arts project at the National Arts Festival I had an exhibition in Cape Town at a gallery called YOUNGBLACKMAN, what the gallerists, Ed Young and Matthew Blackman, thought to be a clever take on the tradition of naming galleries for their patroncurators. The show was called *Who’s Abject Now Bitch?* and it opened at the end of 2009 and ran till the end of January 2010.

The press release was accompanied by a moodily-lit photograph of a bloodied hand print that I had made with fake blood on a window in our giant old-duvet-factory warehouse studio, with the sinister blood marks of fingers dragging downwards. It reads as follows:

‘WHO’S ABJECT NOW BITCH?
OR, CRIME SCENE CONSISTENT WITH A PARTICULAR DOUBLE HOMICIDE

Oh wow, you’re letting me show in your gallery? The gallery I pretty much conceptualized while I was in bed with you? That’s amazing! And you want me to do something slick, that doesn’t interrupt your white cube too much. Awesome! What a wonderful opportunity…

Courting, sex and love relationships all revolve around power relations. In heterosexual love relationships this equates to power relations between men and women – relations echoed not only in the personal but also the political, cultural and legal spheres in an essentially heteronormative and phallogocentric society. Does this mean that every time we (as woman) fall in love (swooning, pining and all) with a man that we are re-enforcing those power relations that allow for patriarchal hegemonies? In admitting the violence inherent in relationships and in sex with men, and yet still engaging in its practice, am I (as subject and artist) allowing sexual violence to happen elsewhere? If, as Andrea Dworkin suggests, ‘for a woman, love is defined as her willingness to submit to her own annihilation’, then is love felt by a woman always as masochistic as some male writers so charmingly insist? And then in love, but without sexual satisfaction, are we destined to be fearful,
chaotic and hysterical as our uteri strangle us in revolt?

Linda Stupart’s Who’s Abject Now Bitch? or, crime scene consistent with a particular double homicide, acknowledges and interrupts the artworld boys’ club that is in many ways embodied by YOUNGBLACKMAN, in an exhibition that addresses the difficulties in claiming agency as a young woman artist.’

YOUNGBLACKMAN was a small shop front styled gallery. For the exhibition I constructed a crime scene that was accurately reminiscent of what might be produced through the violent deaths of the two gallerists.
Critique
The work that Ed (Young) and Matthew (Blackman) had wanted me to show was *You do it to Yourself (and that’s what really hurts)* (2008), which I had produced for my MFA degree show at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town.

The work is an approximately 1.5m slit in a gallery wall that pumps fake blood from it continuously. The pump is attached to a timer set as if to mimic a heartbeat.

I made this work after my supervisor, Malcolm Payne, suggested that my individual practice should enact less of a personal glut and more of an institutional critique.

He had a penchant for Fontana, obviously.
Lying
My work used to be far more installation-based when I was in Cape Town, particularly while working on my MFA. This is simply because I had much more money at the time. This money came from winning the inaugural edition of the ‘Spier Contemporary Art Awards’ in 2008 with a work titled *The Wrong Side of the River Tour*, which I made with my collective *Doing it For Daddy*, which consists of myself, Renee Holleman and Bettina Malcomess.

This work stemmed from an uncomfortableness with the venue for this exhibition: The Spier Wine Estate in Stellenbosch, which is complete with cheetahs and faux African villages, and which had become Contemporary Arted through the erection of a set of large orange shipping containers cum gallery spaces and some Pan African super curators.

On our first visit to the estate, we started to walk away from the main proposed exhibition area and tourist picnic spots. After a while, we spotted what appeared to be a very small informal settlement, or township, on the horizon, but still well within the bounds of the wine estate.

Soon, we discovered that the township was, in fact, the abandoned set of *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, a 2005 operatic film adaptation of Bizet’s 1875 opera, *Carmen*, directed by Mark Dornford-May and shot only in Xhosa.

This site then proved the starting point for what became a massive-scale installation and performance intervention throughout the Spier estate.

We took trips to the abandoned film set to collect pieces of fake township and brought them back to build a hideous viewing platform next to the gallery-containers. Visitors could climb to the top of the platform and, with the help of opera glasses, look on to the township in the distance. At this point they were told by one of us, who were acting as tour guides, a history of how this township came to be abandoned. This story was based on the Carmen opera, but set in a township against
the background of 1980s Apartheid South Africa. This became the second stop on our historical tour, which progressed similarly through nine interventions throughout the estate. Each site was marked by an explanatory memorial plaque and number. Every weekend all summer we gave tours daily. We also produced a map of the tour to allow tourists to do the walk unaided.

Sometimes during the tour both casual tourists and art folk would get upset as they realised that our histories were not entirely factual.

It was an exciting summer and I got really good at lying.

After the Spier work, we didn’t work together for a while. We had ended up nearly ready to kill each other by the end of production, as is often inevitable. Also, I had broken my foot trying to carry the real Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk’s boat. After returning from the island with Man Friday, Selkirk’s first port of call was Cape Town. He and Friday both spent some time in Stellenbosch recovering. However, when Man Friday disappeared from the Spier estate, Selkirk became inconsolable, and would spend whole days sitting alone in his boat in the middle of the lake.

At this point I should add that I do not trust anyone who has never broken a limb or needed to be stitched up, repaired.
Photography
I have been meaning to write and reply to your last email for a while. At the same time, I thought it would be better to talk to you and tell you what I have to say out loud. Still, at least it will be written.

As you have noticed, I have not been quite right recently. As if I no longer recognised myself in my own existence. A terrible feeling of anxiety, which I cannot really fight, other than keeping on going to try and overtake it, as I have always done.

When we met you laid down one condition: not to become the “fourth”, I stood by that promise: it has been months now since I have seen the “others”, obviously because I could find no way of seeing them without you becoming one of them.

I thought that would be enough, I thought that loving you and your love would be enough so that this anxiety – which constantly drives me to look further afield and which means I will never feel quiet and at rest or probably even just happy or “generous” – would be calmed when I was with you, with the certainty that the love you have for me was the best for me, the best I’ve ever had, you know that. I thought that my writing would be a remedy, that my “disquiet” would dissolve into it so that I could find you. But no. In fact, it even became worse, I cannot tell you the sort of state I feel I am in. So I started calling the “others” again this week. And I know what that means to me and the cycle it will drag me into.

I have never lied to you and I do not intend to start lying now.

There was another rule that you laid down at the beginning of our affair: the day we stopped being lovers you would no longer be able to envisage seeing me. You know that this constraint can only ever strike me as disastrous, and unjust (when you still see B and R…) and understandable (obviously); so I can never become your friend. But now you can gauge how significant my decision is from the fact that I am prepared to bend to your will, even though there are so many things – not seeing you or talking to you or catching the way you look
at people and things, and your gentleness towards me – that I will miss terribly.

Whatever happens, remember that I will always love you in the same way, my own way, I have ever since I first met you; that it will carry on within me and, I am sure, will never die.

But it would be the worst kind of masquerade to prolong a situation now when, you know as well as I do, it has become irreparable by the standards of the very love I have for you and you have for me, a love which is now forcing me to be so frank with you, as final proof of what happened between us and will always be unique.

I would have liked things to have turned out differently.

Take care of yourself.

- For Sophie Calle’s Take Care of Yourself (2007), the artist asked one hundred women to interpret a breakup letter that she had received according to their profession or calling. This is that break up letter. It was available as a double-sided photocopied page, in French on one side and translated into English on the other, at Calle’s retrospective at the Louissiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, which is where I picked it up.
Although we had barely worked together since *The Wrong Side of the River Tour*, Renee, Bettina and I were invited by the curator, N’Gone Fall, to be in an exhibition entitled *Localities: Fact and Fiction* at the Roskilde Museum of Contemporary Art in Denmark in late 2010.

We spent a few very pleasant weeks in Denmark making the work, titled *Our Lovely Land*, and were there for the exhibition’s opening event.

The day before we left I went to see Sophie Calle’s *Take Care of Yourself* at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Louisiana.

Straight from the gallery I go to meet up with an artist at the station in Copenhagen’s meat-packing district. There, inside an artists’ studio in the old brewery complex he spends just over two hours tattooing me.

As we are finishing the tattoo, the Slavic Photographer comes to see us at the studio. Since meeting him (his work is installed in the room next to ours in *Localities*) I find everything about him incredibly sexy. The two of us go to exhibition openings in the city and then later to a Balkan party where he smiles much more than usual, and we dance.

We drink a lot and very late I go home with him. Already in the taxi, we are starting to undress.

In the morning I wake up and am violently ill. All over the floor and on the bed and myself there is blood. I do not have my period.

I shower and leave.
I do not wake him, but rather write a note.
I take photographs of the blood on his floor and his bed.
I take a test print of one of his photographs from a pile on the floor.

Later he phones me to see if I am alright. He asks if I will make it on to my plane in time.

I say I will, and I do.
This story is best illustrated by the two photographs in question:

The Slavic Photographer’s 10 x 10cm test print shows a dark forest, which I know, from conversation, is in Montenegro. It may be the forest that he had to walk through with his younger brother in his escape from the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

My photograph, taken with a cheap digital camera, shows the edge of a bed and a cheap blue linoleum floor. The top third of the image, which is landscape in orientation, is in shadow. There is a lot of blood – too much blood – on the floor. It sits in a thick pool on the poor surface. A little bit away from the main pool we see large drops, with thin comet tails denoting the trail of quick, short movements. There is enough blood that you can clearly see a partial hand print in the pool, the marks of fingers dragging downwards.

It looks like someone has been murdered
It looks like he has killed me fuck why
is it so easy to look look look at this fucking photograph
how did it end up like this
then
the one of my bra on the bed and the sheet also soaked with blood.
His room, the weed plant in the corner. A friend asks if I have any photographs of him. I have loads, but I haven’t looked at them in a while.
What I leave out of this neat story is the terrible horror of that morning. Waking up so sick, and the smell…meat, shit, already putrid somehow outside my body. Being too scared to wake him. Trying to work out how to turn on the shower in one of those tiny bathroom closets where the showerhead is directly above the toilet, where I am continually vomiting. I was too calm, too scared, there is too much to do for me to be crying (it was like that in Grahamstown too).

The horrible pain that, like photography, stands in for memory.
Leaving the apartment and finding myself in the immigrant district of Copenhagen, because Danish government institutes a Group Areas Act in the guise of Welfare. Lost, I walk in any direction. I spent the very last of my money on Clingfilm from the Somalian shop on a corner so as to cover my new tattoo, which also hurt.

When I eventually find a station I realise I have lost my train pass. I am absolutely terrified that I will miss the flight, that someone will catch me fare dodging, that my tattoo will never heal, that I have serious internal injuries, that I will almost definitely die, soon. That it was all my fault. When Renee and Bettina see the photographs, they are visibly upset. Renee asks me if he cut me while we were fucking. He didn’t, I don’t think.

Though this would somehow be better.

One of the strangest things about the blood photograph is the appearance, on the floor, ends sitting in blood, of light purple, yellow and red tassels from the edge of the makeshift red bread spread.

As many times as I look at this photograph, this is what arrests me, pricks me.
In ‘Camera Lucida’ Roland Barthes sets out a proposition for the photograph comprised of two elements:

‘It is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in studium) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions. The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument [...]. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call punctum; for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut,
little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).’

I wonder, did I take the photograph to produce a studium? To step into an image; impenetrable, blunt, flat. I’m always talking about collapsing critical distance, voiding disinterestedness, getting too fucking close.

But, how much further away from your own blood and sick can you get than looking at a photograph that evidences it?

I don’t remember those tassels at all. The punctum, after it has paused me, pricked me, opened me. The punctum reminds me that I absolutely do not remember, at all.

In a recent online conversation with the boy whose bed I was on, yesterday, writing this, we talk about language:
no, i’m just punctual in text, if not in actuality.

you’re fairly punctuated, I think in real life.

although

what’s the root

like punctum/punctuation/prick

?

I expect you definitely know this

yeah, that’s it.

punctum, a whole.

*hole

pricking holes in things.

So to punctuate actually does mean to pierce

puncture.
Participation
I very rarely talk about the night with the Slavic photographer for fairly obvious reasons, although I have been thinking about these photograph-objects for a while. (The test print sits in a plastic sleeve in my studio drawer. I brought it from Denmark to South Africa, and with me when I came to London a year ago.)

Basically, the only person I have talked to about this recently was out of a corrupt and strange compulsion to make this guy feel uncomfortable, to make him feel, since he was behaving like a bit of a dick, really. I framed the story as one in which I felt dissatisfied with myself for letting the Slavic photographer get away with something, for excusing violence, for never really accosting him, speaking this violence, and so on.

The person I was talking to was a complete stranger (his dickishness was very public). This was in the Tate Modern, and the particular framing of dissatisfaction was necessary as part of the rules of These Associations.

These Associations is a work by Tino Sehgal. The piece is the final in the Unilever series’ Turbine Hall Commissions. I worked, officially, as was written on my contract, as a ‘Participant’ in the piece from when it started in July and ended 28 October 2012. We got paid £8.33/hr (then known as ‘London living wage’) and worked either four or eight hour shifts.

The work requires us to perform a series of sequences (A – D) in which we are required to play a set of games with rules set out by the artist and the piece’s producer, Asad Raza:

The games are: DISTANCE GAME

In which you try to keep an equal distance from every individual participant

AVERAGE GAME or SWARMING
In which you try to run/walk/jog at the average speed and in the average direction of all of the participants

TRIANGLES:

In which you try at all times to form an equilateral triangle between any two other participants, each of whom is governed by their own any other two participants, and so on…

CELLS

In which participants gather in the ‘pink room’, at the back of the turbine hall and then shoot out the door in ‘cells’ – a basic cell consists of four people: 1, 2, 3 and four. One plays triangles with 2 and 3 and must always face 4. This game differs from all of the others in that the participants are aware of the relationships that they share with each other for the duration of the game.

EYE CONTACT or INTIMACY GAME

In which you choose any two participants, A and B. When A meets your eye, you freeze. Once frozen, B must meet your eye to enable you to move again.

This game happens only once, at the end of sequence B, just before we sing the second song:

Thus we ask now: *Even if the old rootedness is being lost in this age, may not a new ground be created out of which humans’ nature and all their works can flourish even in the technological age.*

This is a bastardized excerpt from Heidegger’s 1966 Memorial Address.

Each sequence, A through D, works on combinations of these basic principles, as well another song, this time adapted from a Hannah
Arend text. Around 1924, Hannah Arendt was seduced by her professor. He was 35 and married, she was 18 and single. Most disturbing to some scholars it is alleged, despite Heidegger’s Nazism and Arendt’s Judaism, Arendt and Heidegger resumed their friendship after the war.

As well as these games and songs, there is the slow walk accelerating to run and run decelerating to slow walk. In between these movements and also while we sing, we ‘configure’; at times only with other participants and at times with participants and visitors to be considered as compositional elements.

At any moment during the piece, as well as, now, at specific scheduled moments, any participant may break away from the piece and talk to any of the museum visitors.

Asad Raza, the producer of the piece, refers to this as ‘giving a conceit, or, just, ‘conceiting’. This terminology is also used by all of the participants, even when we are outside of the piece (I live with three other participants and the word features regularly in our everyday lexicon).

In literature, a conceit is an extended metaphor with a complex logic that governs a poetic passage or entire poem. By juxtaposing, usurping and manipulating images and ideas in surprising ways, apparently, a conceit should invite the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison.

The term is generally associated with the 17th century metaphysical poets, an extension of contemporary usage. In the metaphysical conceit, metaphors tend to have a tenuous relationship between the things being compared.

The conceits, or proposals, questions, themes that govern conversations are:

Arrival
Belonging
Satisfaction
Dissatisfaction
A quality in a person that you admire (the quality, not necessarily the person)
And, a recent addition, to be overwhelmed

The conceits should be tellings of true stories from your own life, to be told in the first person. They should elicit empathetic rapport and generate affect. In depth emotional conversation with visitors is encouraged as long as it remains on theme.

When I started working I used to often give conceits that began with a reference to a visible mark on my body so as to somehow evidence the legitimacy of my story:
People often ask me about this scar on my chest

Usually I will respond in one of two ways:

Well, you know that scene in Indiana Jones where the bad guy rips out that other guy’s heart from his chest? It’s just before he pushes him into the pit to sacrifice him and then holds the heart in his hand still beating…

This explication is necessarily accompanied by a demonstrative hand movement: Fingers bent at top and middle joint curl up from flattened hand and bend, pause, bend, pause; squeezing invisible meat.

Well, it was like that.

Or

So, I was dead for six hours. And now I’m not. Basically, I’m a zombie.

[Since the zombie seems to have become the dominant metaphor for the object-oriented subject of ‘Late Capitalism’ I tend to favour this explanation, particularly when speaking to Speculative Realist boys. I find that it excites them suitably, my animated corpse.]

I never talk about what actually happened though.
When I was five I had open heart surgery to repair the hole in my heart, in the wall between my atria. They stop your heart with the same kind of poison that those multi-coloured Amazonian frogs excrete, Poison Arrow Frogs; they kill you.

So, my heart was outside of my chest for six hours, while my blood was pumped around my body by a machine. When they put it back, when I woke up, I felt the most amazing sense of arrival…

* A version of this text People often ask me about this scar on my chest first appeared in Oh wicked flesh! Edited by Joseph Noonan -Ganley. 2013
I didn’t plan my first tattoo

After the first few weeks I scoured newspapers to see if any reporters had written about the no doubt life-changing conversations I had had with them.

At this stage I found only one: An article written by Gareth Harris for the Art Newspaper published on July 26th, two days after opening night. The article was titled:

‘Tragic event overshadows Tate Modern opening.’
With the subtitle, ‘Tino Sehgal’s storytelling takes centre stage in vast Turbine Hall’.

Harris writes: ‘Snorkelling off the Italian island of Elba; a mother’s tears as her son departs for university; the trauma behind erasing a tattoo: these are some of the tales told by participants in Tino Sehgal’s commission for Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall in London. These Associations, (until 28 October), the first “live” work in the vast space, consists solely of encounters between around 70 storytellers and visitors to the gallery

Chris Dercon, the director of Tate Modern, says that Sehgal has transformed the museum into a “biopolitical and anarchic experience”. Hans Ulrich Obrist, the co-director of London’s Serpentine Gallery and director of its international projects, calls it a complete work of art: “It’s a masterpiece; [Sehgal] brings all the elements of his previous works together in one piece, combining choreography conversations and music. It is a Gesamtkunstwerk.”

Harris continues:

‘The opening of These Associations on the evening of 24 July was
overshadowed by the death of a man who fell from an external balcony of Tate Modern late that afternoon.’

A later edit states: ‘UPDATE: According to The Times, the man who died after falling 100ft from a balcony at Tate Modern last week has been identified as Michael Foreman, a 48-year-old banking manager for HSBC.’

Harris was also the only journalist to link this suicide with the opening of These Associations. Although the Evening Standard and Daily Mail both featured the story of his death as their cover headlines, neither mentioned Sehgal’s piece. The Mail’s lead photograph includes Damien Hirst’s *Hymn* in the foreground.

Their headline reads: ‘Horror as man in suit plunges to his death from 100ft-high private members’ balcony at Tate Modern during busy summer season.’

I was working as a participant that night. Michael Foreman jumped off of the Tate Members balcony just before 6pm, nevertheless the opening went forward as planned. Neither artist nor producer told any of the participants of the event. I found out at 10pm when our shift ended. Many participants only heard the following morning, when we received an email from Asad Raza stating:

‘I wanted to acknowledge that a sad and tragic event occurred last night outside of Tate, a suicide. We were told there was an incident and to await word from Chris Dercon (Tate Modern’s director) as to whether the museum should close. While the event had no connection to our piece or to Tate at all, it did disturb some visitors on their way in to the museum, which may have affected you. For that I am very sorry.’

As the weeks progressed, I started to shift some of my conceits. I started to talk to visitors about what was happening in my everyday emotional life.
On one day last week I told the same conceit to six different visitors:

A week ago I met a man at a park. It was a kind of stupidly, filmic almost, clandestine meeting. The reason the meeting had to be like that, well, the short version of the story, is basically that about a month ago I met this guy, and, well, I slept with him. And it was amazing. And I really like him. But, he has a girlfriend. And now he’s back, he and his girlfriend. And we’re kind of working on this project together, so we have to see each other pretty often. Anyway, so after we first ran into each other, he suggested we meet.

This guy arrives at Burgess park (if the person seems to be English, I will then ask them if they know Burgess park).

The first thing he says to me is,

‘I’m just really good at incorporating the lost object into my melancholia.’

There are a number of elements that I cannot tell the visitors about this story, and all the other stories about Descha who has dominated my conceits since we slept together.

The rules of what you cannot do during conceits are as follows:

You may not say hallo
Or goodbye
You may not talk about art
You may not reference the piece in any way
Except to say ‘This is a piece called These Associations, by Tino Sehgal’

So I cannot tell these visitors that Descha and his girlfriend are in the piece, participants, sort of, but also middle management – both close associates of Tino’s who live in a house very near to the artist’s in
Berlin.

I cannot tell them that Descha and I had sex in Tino’s bed in London as Tino was in Kassel caring for his dOCUMENTA piece, or that Asad was in the same apartment, which has no doors.

I cannot tell the visitors how after falling asleep in Descha’s arms I am woken up in the morning by a call from Hans Ulrich Obrist to Asad, since Asad is ghost writing Obrist’s new book. How I leave quickly, walking past the Tate.

Sometimes I tell them of how shocked I am to see how happy they are, the couple. I cannot say that I see this happiness performed in the way they triangulate with each other up and down the Turbine Hall.

Sometimes, when I give an overwhelmed conceit, I talk about how we had dangerous, perfect, unprotected sex.

Very often, when I am stupid enough to have unprotected sex, I end up scared that I am pregnant – a reproductive anxiety. I remember asking one of my housemates for the exact date of the piece’s opening (since I fairly vividly remember getting my period on this evening). I end up being over a week late, however it turns out that this is not because of Descha’s penetration, but rather as I have synchronised with almost all of the other women who work in the piece.

Sometimes, I conceit about the email I sent him a week after he left London.

*I sent this email yesterday, that had been sitting in my outbox for exactly a week – usually I am never this careful*...

The header of this email was: *An Apology, and Negarestani*

It reads:
Dear Descha,

I just wanted to send a mail to apologise for all the mess of your last night in London - I was drunk and it was raining. And it is best forgotten.

I stand by what I said though - I do really like you, but I also know you have this girlfriend and this job and home and life, and I’m sorry if I seemed callous of this.

I (stupidly) miss you and hope you are well.

x Linda

PS I’ve attach the Negarestani text I told you about from Cyclonopedia. I think you might like it.

In this chapter, *A Good Meal, the Schizotragic Edge*, Negerastani proposes models for a radical openness.

He writes: ‘To become open or to experience the chemistry of openness is not possible through ‘opening yourself” (a desire associated with boundary, capacity and survival economy which covers both you and your environment); but it can be affirmed by entrapping yourself within a strategic alignment with the outside, becoming a lure for its exterior forces. Radical openness can be invoked by becoming more of a target for the outside. In order to be opened by the outside rather than being economically open to the system’s environment, one must seduce the exterior forces of the outside: You can erect yourself as a solid and molar volume, tightening boundaries around yourself, securing your horizon, sealing yourself off from any vulnerability

Openness is not suicide, for it lures survival into life itself where ‘to live’ is a systematic redundancy. Openness is not the anthropomorphic desire to be open, it is the being opened eventuated by the act of opening itself. To be butchered, lacerated, cracked and laid open – such
is the corporeal reaction of subjects to the radical act of opening.’

After Descha went back to Berlin (the last time I saw him he was walking away from me, head in his hands, at 4AM in the rain. You don’t understand, he said, this is my whole life) I started to look for images and videos of him, anything: his image.

I knew that he was coming back to work in the Tate, but I did not know when, and saw and looked for him everywhere.

It was only much later that I found this video:

In this video, we are playing the ‘Own Rule Game’ – in this game the participants are granted a discrete autonomy – we may choose our own rules. These may be absolute (as in I will jump up and down constantly) or relational (as in I will walk in this direction until A walks past me, B faces me, C meets my eye etc.) Relational rules are encouraged and theatricality, or excessive dramaturgy is frowned upon.

I watch this video many times, and each time am struck by an impossibility. Descha and I both appear, both inside the piece, inside the frame – the video evidences our proximity. But this was uploaded to Youtube on the 6th of August. I had not yet spoken to him, noticed him. We had not yet met, really. Not begun. He does not yet exist. I cannot believe this video, though each time that I recognise him I experience a bile rising rupture, a prick.

When I first shook Descha’s hand at the bar after work, he said: We’ve met before. He sounded angry. I assumed he meant in the piece, but he said yes, there too, but before at dOCUMENTA, briefly.

Later that night he told me that we had been introduced at dOCUMENTA, that he remembered me. He apologised for being offhand, not speaking to us. It was the first day of the press preview of the dOCUMENTA exhibition in which Descha, with his girlfriend, produced Tino Sehgal’s piece *This Variation*. Descha told me that
he had been anxious that day about the way that Asad and Tino were behaving, their playing to press, their presence, so he wandered off, disappeared. He did not address us, really, even though we were, again, in the same frame.

In the dOCUMENTA review I wrote for ‘Art South Africa’ I imagined a love story, an erotic fiction set at dOCUMENTA. The piece is called Entanglements, and was completed in late July for the Spring 2012 edition of the publication.

It begins by imagining the unrealised meteorite

She misses the meteorite. Its potential present (the one in which it is in this space, plinthed, being looked at, fingered, loved) apparates a specter of its mass.

The meteor is made of trauma; she imagines it would project it.

In it I write of Tino’s piece:

They walk past Tino Sehgal, who is sitting in the sun.

This Variation (2012)

I can’t see anything. Bodies are warm, damp; everywhere. X grabs my hand, whispers. We are heading to a corner through sweating, heaving forms. Towards the darkest corner of the darkest room.

“No one will see us here,” he says.

AND AND AND

Feet are beating and a woman is singing, but for us every second note is a rest. Slowly slowly they are touching – like helix strands, like water. Slowly slowly a button undone.
Dancers move past and I am sure that they see us.

Slowly slowly his mouth on mine – the kiss, the cut, the edit. We are brought together on the floor of his space, the exhibition’s mouth.

Quickly more buttons. His hand on my hip, skin sliding effortless over bone. Ripples through flesh, the drum of the others, a hurricane as their bodies engulf us; void us, as we penetrate the shadows.

AND AND AND

SKIP SKIP SKIP, she says

And faster faster she cannot help but scream as the

Together, we are dancing.

The review ends with the line … and her lover remains in the gallery, for 100 days.

On the last day of dOCUMENTA I phone him. Andrew, who is also in middle management and who also now lives with me, has told me (believing the fact to be incidental) that Descha has decided not to come back to London – claiming he needs to finish his PhD. I phone him in an attempt to force him to address me, acknowledge me. I am furious he would avoid this encounter.

Descha has not replied to my email, I have not spoken to him since he left. I talk about him every day to visitors at the Tate.

Most of our phone conversation consists of me being surprised that he answered his phone, and he being surprised that I called.

I’m sorry, he says, I didn’t recognise your voice.

When I tell him I am angry that he is not planning to return, he
reassures me that he has ‘been pressurised into it’ by Tino and Asad. That, in his words on that day at Burgess park, he is not a free agent.

He ends the call quickly, saying that he is running around trying to pack up the exhibition in Kassel; leaving the gallery.

He is coming back, he says.

The first time I see him when he returns is in the passage on the way to the Pink room: The room at the back of the hall, this door, the exhibition’s mouth, where once I kissed him while he was dimming the lights for the slow walk at the beginning of Sequence B.
Afterword
This text was produced for the exhibition *Happiness Now?* at Guest Projects, in March 2013.

For the exhibition I will have filled all 554 holes in the gallery’s walls, as well as writing this text and producing this booklet.
Notes:

- Jo Confino. Tino Sehgal’s Tate Modern exhibition metaphor for dematerialisation in the Guardian Professional. 5 October 2012.