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Programme: MFA in Fine Art
Course: FRAKP4 (Artistic Practices 4)
Date: Spring 2023

Personal Space

First Iteration:

Two Room Installation,
Waiting Room, Bedroom,
2023

Enquiry Statement

The enquiry examines my subjective experience as an immigrant in Sweden struggling with mental health, through two experiments: a tutorial for screaming as a form of therapy and a series of self-therapy sessions carried out daily for three months.

The experiments operated separately, and thus generated two autonomous, yet interlinked enquiries, connected by their common interest in psychology and the performative.

As a strategy to share an observation and show my reactions to the various adjustments due to processes of immigration, the project seeks to question the structures, tensions, and contradictions of the notions of *the individual* and *the institutional*.

- How is it that the treatment of mental health, through online courses posit a problematic approach towards dealing with immigration?
- What are some methods of facilitating inner dialogue through repetition, which may yield positive behavioral changes?

Methods of Artistic Enquiry

The works were strategically assembled to engage with the public, to facilitate an engagement with the different enquiries through the following methods:

- An installation resembling the Waiting Room of a doctor's office, which is fully operational.
- A video-work which examines the aesthetics of GU's online courses to aid with mental health issues through irony and exaggeration.
- A common wall clock, set to the time-zone of Mexico City.
- Another installation, resembling a bedroom, composed of a bed encompassing a human form, a black light which interacts with two paintings and a projection of 70 looping self-guided cognitive behavioral therapy experiments.
- The second installation can only be accessed one-at a time, with the purpose of inducing feelings of discomfort and vulnerability.

Theoretical References

Interested in the Spinozist definition of *affect*, these enquires are looking at the structures of institutional value creation within an overarching late capitalist society, and thus, look to problematize how those structures operate as barriers preventing the individual from joining a community.

I see that structures affect the individual inasmuch as the individual affects those structures.

In the case of my enquiry process, I looked at the individual from the perspective –or role– of an immigrant; an outcast in Swedish society.

Following Manuel DeLanda's understanding of social ontology, I looked at the ecology of the Swedish University as a Social Ensemble held together by enforceable obligations (DeLanda, 2016) which I failed to abide to.

Relying on my subjective perspective, I looked to draw an auto ethnographical response.

For the better part of two years, I had been intrigued by what the action of a scream might symbolize. Screaming operated as a method which looked to explore the extent to which an act of individual expression, may provide an understanding of a systemic cycle of perpetual labor through failure.

Through that enquiry, I've engaged in several processes consisting in performing screams, inviting others to do the same, and ultimately mixing what I've learned from that.

The practical evolution of the enquiry, which I see overarches my individual posture, is generating something which transcends the initial subject of the research (screaming) by proposing to explore the structure which subjectivized it in the first place (the context which made me scream).

As an exploration, this process led me to understand that the initial enquiry was proposing my role as a screamer, performer, researcher, person, and an agent separately, as a strategy to facilitate the drawing of conclusions.

The methodology continues shaping itself through the blurring of my roles, and through that erasure, is distinguishing my agency as either a subject or an object of the enquiry.

Simultaneously, the methodology is heavily informed by states of isolation, where I had to take on many different roles and responsibilities, and this aspect is what I'm interested in exploring further, though hopefully in different circumstances.

The Public

Enquiring into a very personal matter, the project hints at the saying that what is most personal is most universal. Which is why the public of the enquiry is informed by the experiences which were experimented with and recorded, and the connections any person may find when encountering them. When remembering moments of isolation, migration and/or psychological instability, the public may be transported back somewhere where they can reflect on how they got from there to here.

Memory is thus an instrumental aspect of the enquiry, and in how it relates to a public, one who isn't necessarily built up of specific people, but of the ghosts which have influenced who they are.

Ethics

The reading of the map on the right, where the two spaces of enquiry are represented accordingly (green/blue for the waiting room, and pink/purple for the personal space), requires an ecological understanding. Meaning that each space, hosts 5 specific ethical processes –ethical gestures, ethical subjects, ethical affects, ethical objects and ethical enquiries– which operate through a relational framework.

These relations are represented with a yellow dotted line, as well as with a word which defines the nature of each relation. For example, the relation between ethical gestures in both spaces, is their shared use of repetition: a strategy to limit the methods operating within the project.



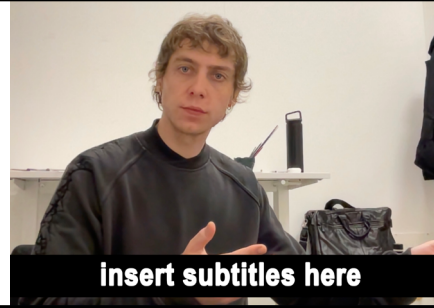
Process/ Documentation

Stages:

1. Early Development
 - Screaming
 - Delegated Screams



2. Learning how to Scream
 - Feelgood
 - Goodfeel



3. Isolation
 - Anxiety and self-guided therapy
 - Repetition, method



4. Representational Strategies
 - Documentation



5. Moving Forward ————>

1. Early Development - Screaming

The idea behind the first iteration of the project, was to perform a scream in the most convoluted space I could find in Trondheim, Norway, during the time leading up to the winter holidays.

The logic behind my decision making, led me to choose the most popular shopping center in the small town. What I wanted to do, was essentially disturb the people who were shopping for presents, and to express the frustration behind the different culture shocks I experienced after moving to Norway from Mexico City. The theoretical idea, perhaps an (un)ethical at that, was to denote frustration, in the midst of a society which doesn't seem to value things unless institutionally and commonly accepted. Looking back at this iteration of my enquiry, I can now problematize the whole premise behind the action.

The privilege entailed in being able to do this stunt, generates a negative affective dimension in the action because of how people evidently reacted to the scream: people were indifferent, or perhaps scared because of my stunt. Some were intrigued, like the security team after engaging with me in conversation, but this was essentially irrelevant. The stunt also validated the idea of the artist as an outcast, a "crazy" individual who is not conforming to society, something which I find toxic and irresponsible, not to mention superficial. After doing this, in many ways I needed to step back and to think about strategies of involving others in a more tacit and horizontal way into the project.



Scream Piece I,
(Still of Video Documentation)
3:30-minute Performance
Performed by Ricardo Diaque
2021

1. Early Development - Delegated Screams

After the first iteration in 2021 and leaving it behind for about six months, I went back home to metaphorically “recharge my batteries”. Living between Norway and Sweden, whilst doing an MFA in Fine Art with a focus on Artistic Research had definitely taken a toll on both myself and my practice. I was lost, depressed.

I don't want to romanticize Mexico, but I quickly regained my energy there, and oddly enough, also an interest in my screaming project. Perhaps because I remembered that I had invited one of my ongoing collaborators after receiving an email from him answering to my prompt to do his own interpretation of a Scream Piece.

After receiving Banquer's scream, he told me that one of his friends had also carried out the action and that though he found his friend's interpretation superficial and problematic, still sent me the documentation. Banquer's friend, similar to my initial scream, reeked of over-confidence, arrogance, and ultimately highlighted many of the problems the project was generating.



To Take Your Own Breath Away 1
(Still of Video Documentation)
2:22-Minute Delegated Performance
Performed by Banquer
2022



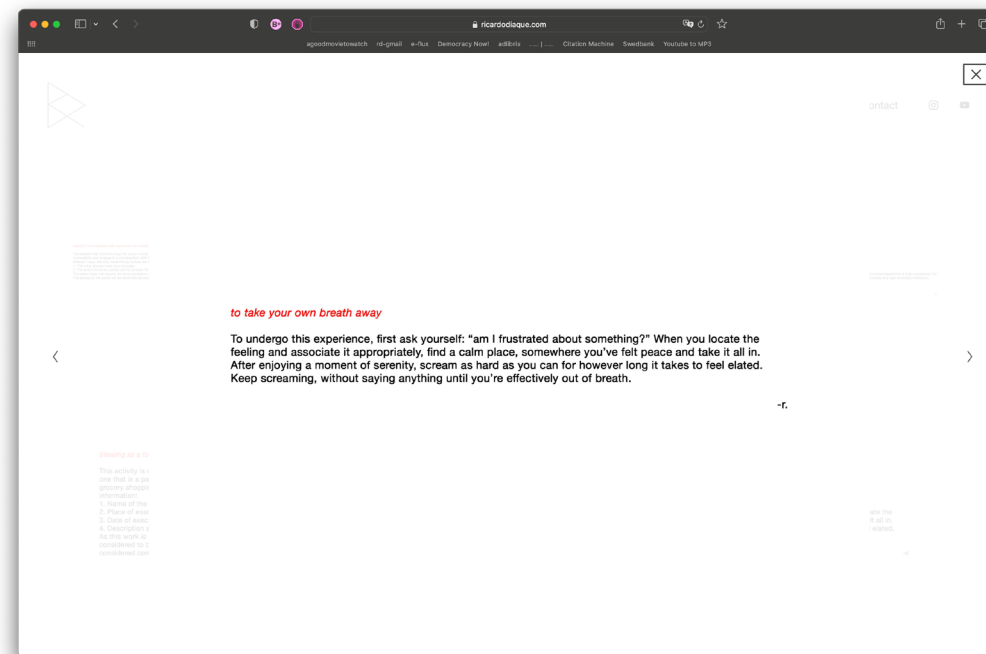
To Take Your Own Breath Away 2
(Still of Video Documentation)
1:20-Minute Delegated Performance
Performed by Hanbal
2022

1. Early Development - Delegated Screams

After exchanging letters and talking with Banquer about how performing this action “hacked his introverted personality”, I felt inspired to invite more people; convinced that perhaps sending out these invitations could be an interesting experiment and a challenge to “get people out of their comfort zones”.

So I sent out 10 invitations, and proceeded to put the instruction manual for the action in the Home Page of my website, along with 5 other Delegated Performances.

I sent personal letters to each potential participant, explaining how the carrying out of such action, which I titled To Take Your Own Breath Away, could benefit their subjective becomings. Though without realizing it, I was still stuck in quite a problematic endeavor, one that was looping in a “self-help” ideological structure: individual and insulated instead of collaborative and generative. Each scream would be locked in a square.



Screenshot of Website
(ricardodiaque.com)

2. Learning how to Scream - Feelgood - Goodfeel

After stepping back, yet again, I started to endeavor into farse and comedy as a critical output, meaning to question what originated my interest in screaming. Coming from a place of vulnerability, I also started to seek psychological therapy to mediate my own well-being.

At this stage, is when I discovered Feelgood, a company which the University of Gothenburg hires to provide different forms of therapy for the student body. Feelgood operates through different mediums, which work as sorts of barriers which one must penetrate to eventually get access to a personal therapist.

This first barrier, is a series of online courses, meant to inform students about what they can do individually to assess the urgency of their particular situations.

Grounded by my background in Film and television studies, seeing the online courses provided by Feelgood, made me question what the courses meant to be doing. What would someone suffering from mental illness take from them?

A simple semiotic deconstruction of Feelgood's online courses, further informed my interest in irony and exaggeration, as noticing their absurdities wasn't too difficult.

So utilizing my skillset with a camera and as a performer, I decided to mimic the aesthetic of the courses, and implement two simple twists: flipping the name from Feelgood, to Goodfeel (to avoid any legal conundrums) and to creating a short course which would teach the viewer *how to scream*.



Still from feelgood's
Online course on Stress



Still from
Screaming at the Problem

3. Isolation - Anxiety and self-guided therapy

Having the camera and the microphone, which I was using to test different things for my screaming course, came in handy for what I see to be the most interesting part of the enquiry: self-therapy.

The first experiment with this, came on the 21st of January of 2023, when suffering from an acute anxiety attack, while alone in my studio space. I intuitively engaged in an exercise to try and calm myself down, to manage a state of distress without having the chance to lean on anyone else. I started by setting up the camera, turning on a microphone and then proceeding to utter: “it’s Saturday the 21st of January and I’m recording this in an attempt to auto-therapize myself, I don’t know what’s gonna happen here, but I’m just going to get into it, I don’t know any other way to manage, or go with this, in any other way if that makes any sense, it might not, I don’t know what’s gonna be of this, I’ve been feeling completely alone... and I have no idea what and how to manage myself, today I woke up with this weird feeling, I didn’t feel extremely bad, but there was this lingering anger inside of my body, like in my heart or in my stomach, or somewhere where it’s really hard to explain.”

This session went on for approximately forty minutes, where I discussed, explored, and tried to cognitively assess my state of emotional vulnerability. After carrying that out, I observed what I had done on the computer screen and by simply changing the perspective, started to come-up with several answers, which now seemed simpler to grasp.



Still from first Self-therapy Session
Part of Private Archive

3. Isolation - Repetition - Method



Stills of the fifth self-therapy session
Part of Private Archive

The inherent prompt to conduct this first experiment, which came from a necessity to externalize my feelings, fostered a sense of urgency. That very urgency, in turn, finally turned the project's relationality into a tacitly nuanced one, successfully tearing down the subject/object distinction in the process. After performing this initial auto-therapy session and realizing that the issues which were putting my body and mind in difficult positions became more manageable, which is why I decided to continue the next day and try to establish a set of methods which would give each session a structure. These methods – which continue developing– consist of a set of questions, such as: “how am I feeling?”, “what’s been going on?” and “what happened after yesterday’s session?”, along with a set of repetitive utterances, such as finishing each session with the words “I love you” or starting them with a deep breath, a sigh, and a statement mentioning the date of the encounter.

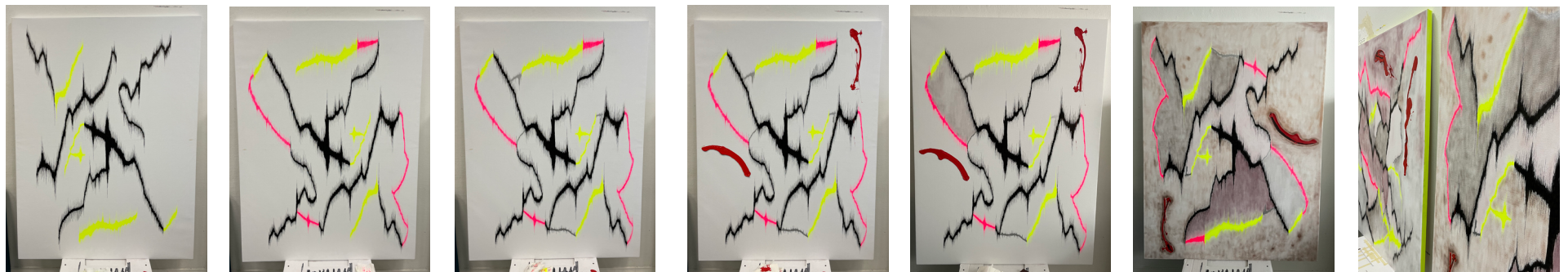
So, were the self-therapy sessions successful? Well, methodologically speaking, each session provided different sorts of grounding feelings, making my state of becoming healthier, by providing behavioral changes. I say methodologically, because the methods which gave each session structure were meant to provide me with practical tools to handle my emotions in the day-to-day. Determining then, if they were a success, might prove to over-limit the scope of the research and reduce the process to be linear and somewhat vertical. I see it more productive to consider the questions which continue to arise, which are making the project ethically conscious. If we're to understand ethics simply as the ability to affect and be affected, the methodology for self-therapy I've experimenting with, seeks to question how different states of self (or becoming) communicate with each other and multiply within a single body. Various sets of nuances are also playing with how the project resonates -within different structures, be it institutionally, publicly, privately, socially, or individually. While the questions which materialize, come to manifest themselves when navigating the spaces in-between, while figuring out how –and what it means– to access them through affective actions.

3. Isolation - Repetition - Method

Assessing my activities, whilst noticing how my isolation was affecting my mental health, helped determine that boredom was becoming quite influential in my decision making.

This led me to investigate how boredom could be combated through activities, by establishing a firm set of prompts to follow, based on repeatable methods. The prompts that are relevant to the enquires are the following, which were carried out daily, from January 22 to April 10:

1. Get to the studio at 10:30
2. Paint for at least 2 hours, taking a break halfway.
3. Go for lunch at 13:00
4. Write a delegated performance at 15:00
5. Carry out a self-therapy session,
6. Read for at least 1 hour.
7. Do 50 Push-ups at 19:00
8. Go home at 19:30



Process pictures of paintings for bedroom

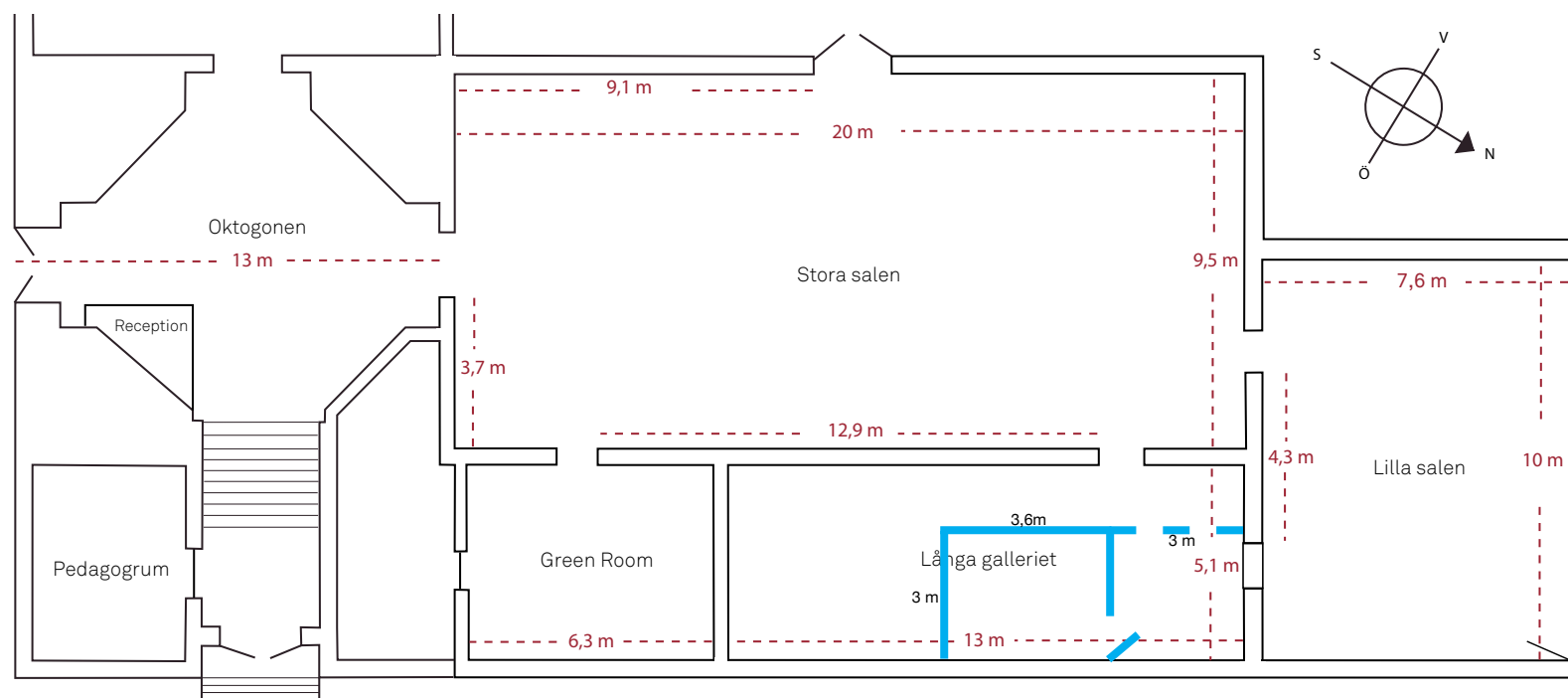
4. Representational strategies

When thinking about the show at Konsthall, a new set of questions arose because of the circumstance in approaching the gallery setting: What to communicate, how much am I willing to share?

The decision to create the two spaces previously addressed in the portfolio, came partly due to group critiques, and more importantly, from the negotiations with different technicians. I say more importantly, because the technicians took an interest in the project that I didn't expect, and essentially, gave me the agency to communicate what together, we saw as the cornerstones of the enquiries.

Without the technicians, making an actual room representing a personal space wouldn't have been possible. What was somewhat obvious for them, happened to be what informed the decisions that ended up materializing, which were: to represent a corporate "waiting room", along with a bedroom, or a "personal space".

I listened to the technicians, because addressing their comments was effectively the first interaction the enquiries were having with a public.



Floorplan of Gothenburg Konsthall

4. Representational strategies - Documentation

Together, the installation came to be called *Personal Space*, and housed glimpses into what the two enquiries had produced up to this point. The installations were made up of the following materials:

1. A waiting room composed of a table, two books and a clock displaying the time zone in Mexico City.
2. The video on how to scream, strategically placed in the waiting room.
3. A separate room, labeled "personal space" guarded by a door.
4. Inside the door of the personal space, two paintings, a bed with the resemblance of a body inside it, and a looping projection.
5. The projection contained 70 video recordings of the self-guided therapeutic experiments.
6. At the beginning of the work, there was an instruction manual to activate the piece, to make it easily accessible.

Technical Specs:

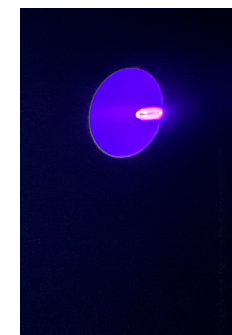
Waiting Room:

1. Vinyl on wall, 150 x 100 cm
2. Unbranded Clock, 30,5 cm circumference.
3. Chairs (x5), table (x1), variable dimensions.
4. 65" Flatscreen
5. One pair of "Saks Fifth Avenue leather boots", in maroon colorway, size EU 43
6. A3 Cotton paper with inkjet print labeled "Personal Space"
7. Bluets, by

Bedroom:

This space measures 3,6 x 3,0 M and has a wooden door with an incorporated lock.

1. 150 cm bed, with grey cotton sheets, filled with various clothing items
2. Speaker (x1)
3. Linen Canvas intervened with acrylic paint, inks and clay maskara (x2)
4. Lamp with "UV" lightbulb
5. 3,0 x 1,2 cm Projection



Waiting Room / Personal Space

1. Please take a seat and wait for your turn to enter the next room.
2. The room can only be accessed *one at a time*.
3. While you wait, feel free to interact with the items on the table and enjoy the video playing on the screen.
4. If there are others waiting, ask around, and figure out the order of the queue.
5. Once it's your turn, you may enter the room.
6. Please lock the door behind you.
7. There is no time limit for you once inside, take as long as you need.

Different Installation shots of *Personal Space* at Gothenburg Konsthall, 2023

5. Moving Forward

As the exhibit became active, it seemed that the people who encountered the work took note of the topics which were being addressed, though most of them also read the work (especially the personal space) as an attempt to victimize my experience of living here.

The interactions that ensued with people, thus turned into confrontative experiences where several members of the public seemed uncomfortable. During the vernissage, I learned that most Swedish publics would rather not engage with me after encountering the work, due to its ability to produce feelings of vulnerability.

At a surface level, the strategies which were implemented for the enquiries of the personal space to meet a public, seem to be successful. As one of my goals was to present the spectator with my own vulnerability, knowing that a vast majority of them would encounter a tense environment. On the other hand, the logic behind the assembly of the waiting room, was to present this same public with a functional setting, where they could take part in the action of waiting, which was also a success.

But from a political perspective, I consider the work to be the epitome of my personal failure to belong to the Swedish Public, which makes the piece very paradoxical. The initial ideas –as with many of the processes which led to my enquiries– was to approach the public, or common aspects of the Swedish context, through an attempt to facilitate a conversation, one which I would not only put forth, but also partake in, something which hardly took place.

Expectations and Professionalism

At the end of this cycle, it's tough to realize that the enquiries failed at facilitating generative conversations, partly due to my individual lack of adaptability. But also –and perhaps more poignantly– due to what has proven to be a local context which seems unable to cope with otherness.

The enquiries operated as mechanisms that reveal several of the difficulties that are presented for those of us that have migrated to Sweden, but aren't said difficulties obvious?

- Why is it that the processes, methods, and representations that are produced by the enquiries, merely point a finger at a problem, without offering any glimpses at possible alternatives?
- Many of us live in constant flux, due to the globalization and acceleration that late capitalism continues producing, so what are the strategies that can be implemented to bridge the cultural, and ideological barriers between *the locals* and *the outsiders*?
- Is sharing a moment of vulnerability with a stranger a way of creating kinship? If so, what are some methods to facilitate that?

These are some of the questions that I take with me after concluding the MFA, ones that have not only been produced by my enquiries, but which I will also continue to explore throughout my practice.

As a professional artist, I see the demands that institutions will make of me, are to be determined by the contexts which surround them. This is why I see my enquiries potentially operating through projects focusing on the social and political implications of immigration.