

Close Reading: *Ein Gespräch mit Louise Bourgeois* (with attention to the work *The Blind Leading the Blind*), for Jakob Forster.

We were told we were too too loud, because we are the loudest in the group, the American and Brit. I find it hard to work quietly most of the time too, because if I'm excited about something it's hard for me to contain the excitement to low level noise. I always wonder if I'm culturally loud, or if I'm just clumsy with my volume.

But we've worked together in this way before, on Google Docs collaboratively writing, so we will carry on like this.

The book itself is softcover, but the nice type of softcover - almost hardcover. It's very well read, the spine is worn and it doesn't seem like Jakob minds just throwing it into a backpack or onto a pile or desk. The designer I think must have accounted for this - the colour pink is ripe for dog-eared corners and the stains it has acquired (a notable one is a dark streak near the edge - like from a pencil, you just suggested. What about if it was from a jean pocket? I can imagine Jakob having this in his pocket actually, it seems like the sort of thing he'd just carry around in case he needed to wait for a bus or something. Not that anyone waits for buses here anyway. Maybe this is a new smudge actually, he looks like he's wearing raw denim today. It's also on the back! I could never treat a book this way, I find it hard to lend people books because I like for them to look brand new always. I'm the opposite! I destroy books. I don't like lending them, because it means they have time and space away from my life with them, destroying them. It also means I don't particularly like borrowing books, because I can't treat them the way I treat my own. I like when pages go from paper to almost fabric. I hate borrowing books too and I thought it was just me who felt that way, but because I like to have my own new book forever and ever. My mum and dad just sent me a selfie.

We may be looking closely at the object because the book is in German, a language neither of us speak. Right now, we are not speaking at all, as an exercise, even though people are speaking around us. It's interesting because the book is in German and we don't understand it that we're looking at the colour, but also I think it's interesting because this book is definitely familiar to me, I'm sure I've seen an English copy or if not I've read interviews with Bourgeois so I feel like I must know the content in some way, but not understanding the text means it's an object and less of a book to me. It's almost lost its use?

Knowing the little (or maybe enough? Not sure) I do about Louise Bourgeois though, I think she'd approve of this relationship to this object that contains a conversation that we cannot access. What I'm thinking of now is the most memorable piece I've seen of hers, or really just the most prolific, which is a giant spider outside the National Museum in Ottawa, in Canada of all places. You can stand underneath her belly (the spider's belly), her eight legs surrounding you, which now that I am thinking of it is related to this multi-legged table. I didn't know this work before, but you did.

I like the way that all of her work I've either seen in museums, or in books has this definite feeling of being small or legged or having legs involved somehow. I remember being really young and going to see her exhibition in the Turbine hall in TATE Modern which had the big

spiders but also loads and loads of hospital style bunk beds. Part of that was maybe witnessing it as being really small, but maybe also because she wants you to be aware of your position in a space and not just about the legs you see in the work. This like title the blind leading the blind is interesting because the blind I feel must be very aware of how their legs move and interact with the space. I don't know though obviously.

Jakob introduced this object with a context he must have gotten from the interview we can't read, that the work is coming from a memory of Louise as a child crouching underneath her family table and seeing the bellows of some type of insinuated power structure. The blind leading the blind, like the way the hierarchy of the family is established by the status quo but how they are performed in arbitrary ways in each particular family. I'm actually thinking now of Kate's book launch, the last time I thought about what it was like being a child, because I haven't been around much children since I moved here (a big shift from my life pre-Rotterdam). These kids scrambling around made me think of my sister and I at openings, or adult parties, or dinner parties at our house - this literal lower level of sight, a different perspective of a social gathering and space that is filled with knees and ankles and socks and shoes, legs as something to dodge between and hide behind. No faces! Which is blindness in a way.

I'm really glad you brought that book launch/children thing into it actually, because I was scrambling under the table too that night and it's so funny what a different world you live in when you are kind of hidden but everyone knows you're there. Like the whole idea of children being blind to adult things, so by being under a table playing and eating all the crisps you can grab from the snack table and there's this important event happening around you that you're just oblivious to (*God I was so hungry that afternoon and so envious of the handfuls of peanuts those kids were permitting themselves to that I couldn't myself- I ate a lot of carrots that night but also I think I was hungover and trying to stop myself drinking too much beer again*). So back to the work- LB being under a table, and experiencing these family dynamics and seeing these legs and feeling so small and possibly also realising that adults didn't know what was going on anymore than children did.

I wonder now that we are talking about the view of the observant invisible child how this plays into Jakob's personal history - I'm thinking of the book he published of the diaristic entries of his grandmother. I'm also thinking about the method of the artist as the invisible observant as well. Bernd mentioned in a studio visit recently and also at Katharina's assessment the role of the Hausmeister, this position in the house that is utilitarian but grants full access to the space and the system of the space, often more so than the occupants themselves. I was also a housecleaner, and it is expected that my clients never noticed me, but would miss me when I was gone - that kind of thing.

Interesting too that he mentioned when he introduced it about his interest in personal histories in his own work. Bourgeois is known for the personal in her work and the autobiographical nature of her practice, but it's something I'm always quite scared of in my own work so I'm envious if Jakob is able to do this so explicitly. Being afraid of subjectivity is why I'm here I'd say. We can

also talk about the legacy that Bourgeois has left, now that she's passed - is her elevator pitch that she was an artist recognised (arguably) too late in life, with an abusive father? (It's important to add here that I've been picking up on the American spelling whenever you write and have now decided to start correcting to British English spelling- but who's right you know? Like we're both right in our own countries so is it ignorant for me to correct that when probably Jakob learnt American English spelling anyway?) (No, I absolutely am certain Jakob learned English spelling and grammar. But also living in Canada, I say colour instead of color now, and my American friends shame me for it over text, and now I'm here being shamed again, shame, shame).

Back to the work, again. The sculpture itself stands at attention, with a lot of tension. Attention with tension. I'm presuming it's painted wood, although I can't be confident in the translation of the material list, because again, it's in German. It's painted red and black. I've seen it in real life, in Edinburgh a few years ago, and it's smaller than I imagined it would be in photos. Looking at the dimensions listed. I rarely understand dimensions in books. Especially in cm, back to the shame shame shame of only being able to see in inches, the length of the almighty's toe :(.

Should we talk about feet and shoes? How the sculpture stands on (just counted) twelve legs? It's very precarious. Like it BALANCES. The legs taper like wedges, and stand on the very thin tip - on tip toes, certainly precarious but in the abundance of legs, almost like a tip-toed march. 12 legs- 6 people. True, two adults at least. Who are the other four? It looks like 3 pairs are painted black or is it the shadow? 3 adults? 14 legs not 12. 7 pairs. It's indistinguishable legs of furniture and legs of people sitting at the table. Maybe two pairs are the table's legs. Yes, table legs. Four are table legs, the red pairs, the three black pairs are people? Mother, father and Louise. But maybe we're unpacking it too much, maybe the table has no legs at all and the people around the table are what support the tabletop, the metaphor that they are all performing towards a communal surface.

I think we should move on.

Let's talk about the fact it's owned by Hauser and Wirth. I feel like that's significant in that she was recognised later in life and now all her work is owned by major collectors and museums. Books like this being produced all the time, probably bought every single day. But the work is SO personal. How would it feel to sell something that's a part of your soul?

Bourgeois was radically subjective in her presentation of her work, which I always found very refreshing - this story of the artist untethered from her making. She must have still been alive when this was published, she only died a couple years ago. Published 2011, when did she die? She died the year before. Did you ever see her insomnia drawings? Sketches and notes on scraps of paper she found lying around the house when she couldn't sleep. All framed and shown in the same way and with the same respect as she would have shown the Maman spiders. Her making was very immediate, and a reaction, a process and way of just going through life. Not about which part of the making was art, but that all of it was art, the way she

peeled oranges for example. There's a beautiful video of that. There's a story behind everything she made and everything she did.

I've been saving all my orange peels in the studio and recently vacuum-formed them unsuccessfully to a printed tablecloth, but intend to try again with more citrus, so watching that was so relevant.

How is this about the blind leading the blind?

Jakob giving us this book actually, like a gift, is a bit of the blind leading the blind. Us watching a video of Louise speak about her father's crude dinner joke with an orange is blind leading the blind. Reading this interview with Donald Kuspit and Bourgeois, for Jakob, is blind leading the blind too. So is the message we should trust the blind because we are too?

They say that if you lose one of your senses, the others are heightened. So if you were blind, maybe you would hear really well. I think the fact that we can't read the interview or any of this book means that we're heightened into reading into what we know, or what we think we know and the way the book came with this black and white photocopy in the same page it was copied from. Why did he bring both? He talked about it but I can't remember. It's strange to me, to see it here in this book, not glossy, but colour printed and then to see a grainy photocopy of the exact same page. It has a redundancy - he mentioned he preferred the colour photocopy to the photocopy, so why include the black and white at all? I think it's a bookmark, which is nice, a duplicate of the page we are directed to look at, like a pointing hand and a rough placemark of where we should look. But the black and white is very striking, I think it holds the same power as the colour.

This talk of the pointing hand, and the way that we're using a copy of the page we're on to mark the page, reminded me of this link we looked at in facetime last weekend:

<http://www.pointerpointer.com>

Ok, so back to this then.

Maybe we should look at the pages beyond this one. Wow, venturing, so adventurous, literally was not a possibility in my mind somehow. It seemed like madness to me to go beyond the cover and this page, but I think I'm ready now, after lunch. Sure, let's identify attitude and emotions by widening the frame a bit.

So this page I just opened has a photo of Bourgeois holding a poster style print with clear black lettering saying BE CALM on it. Her work is hugely emotional. But this seems so bold. Performative almost. Actually I can work out that on the pages opposite is a timeline of some life highlights between 1994-2010. It ends with her death in New York on May 31st. Maybe highlights was the wrong word there.

I've been thinking about writing PATIENCE on my studio wall in light pencil but super high up so that I can't access it ever again without a ladder, some kind of mantra to myself. Be Calm works in a similar way, both require such self-trust and confidence. Louise as a confident and centred artist, accepting chaos and messiness of life.

This has really gotten me thinking about when I lived in Boston and my friend Alicia used to take me out of the city to walk up mountains at the weekends and she had this bit of paper on her dashboard which spelt out breathe but upside down or backwards I can't remember so she could see it reflected in the glass of the windscreen and it calmed her down when she was driving or was stressed or had road rage. So she read it on a perpetually changing backdrop of the environment so it was always present and of the moment it was being received, that's really nice. Can we open another page?

I've always loved that print. You know so much of her work, so much more than I do. Funny, when thinking about that ladder in the ceiling freeshop thing Alex did? Yeah, the ladder I'll grab later today to write patience on my upper wall. The work is called He Disappeared into Complete Silence. Sounds like a feminist pipedream. I wonder if it was realized, in 1947. She's actually quite sarcastic, dark and funny, no? Yeah, I agree, but maybe that's because we're looking back on it at a time when feminism and feminist notions are more commonplace? I think her outspokenness on all these (still very present) issues was maybe a reason why she wasn't recognised earlier on in her career? Sure, like these ladders hitting a literal ceiling, a deadpan way to present symbols of direct utility in a purposeless way, metaphorical. Could have been useless to an art audience comprised mainly of men. I'm not sure how to talk about this work in this context, actually, if you couldn't tell...Shall I turn the page?

Oh tippy toes again! Legs are back. I hear noises with this one and thinking back on the table that started us on this, I think I hear noises with all the legs. Not a clomping of boots but some type of deviant sneaking, maybe a string being plucked at every step.

It's beautiful the way one of the legs I think touches the floor, where the other hangs just slightly above. In mid motion, and it looks as if they're not affixed to the wall but hanging from the ceiling, so maybe they even sway, a bit kinetic. At least the one foot lifted implies kineticism. Have you noticed the way the titles have been translated into German too? I didn't think that was something that got done very often, because of the very specific ways in which words are intended in the particular language the artist has chosen to title them in. I was wondering, that if she was French, why not in French? Unless she titled in English? Maman was in French, but I'm unsure of the others. I have to pee. I'll look into the titling while you're gone. She moved to America in her 20's, so I'm guessing from then on English was probably more widely spoken in her life than French? Ah, that makes sense.

Ok these limbs, these legs. Like socks, but I assume from wood or a solid material. I thought bronze, but in German it's listed as Gummi.

EPIPHANY - GUMMI IS RUBBER.