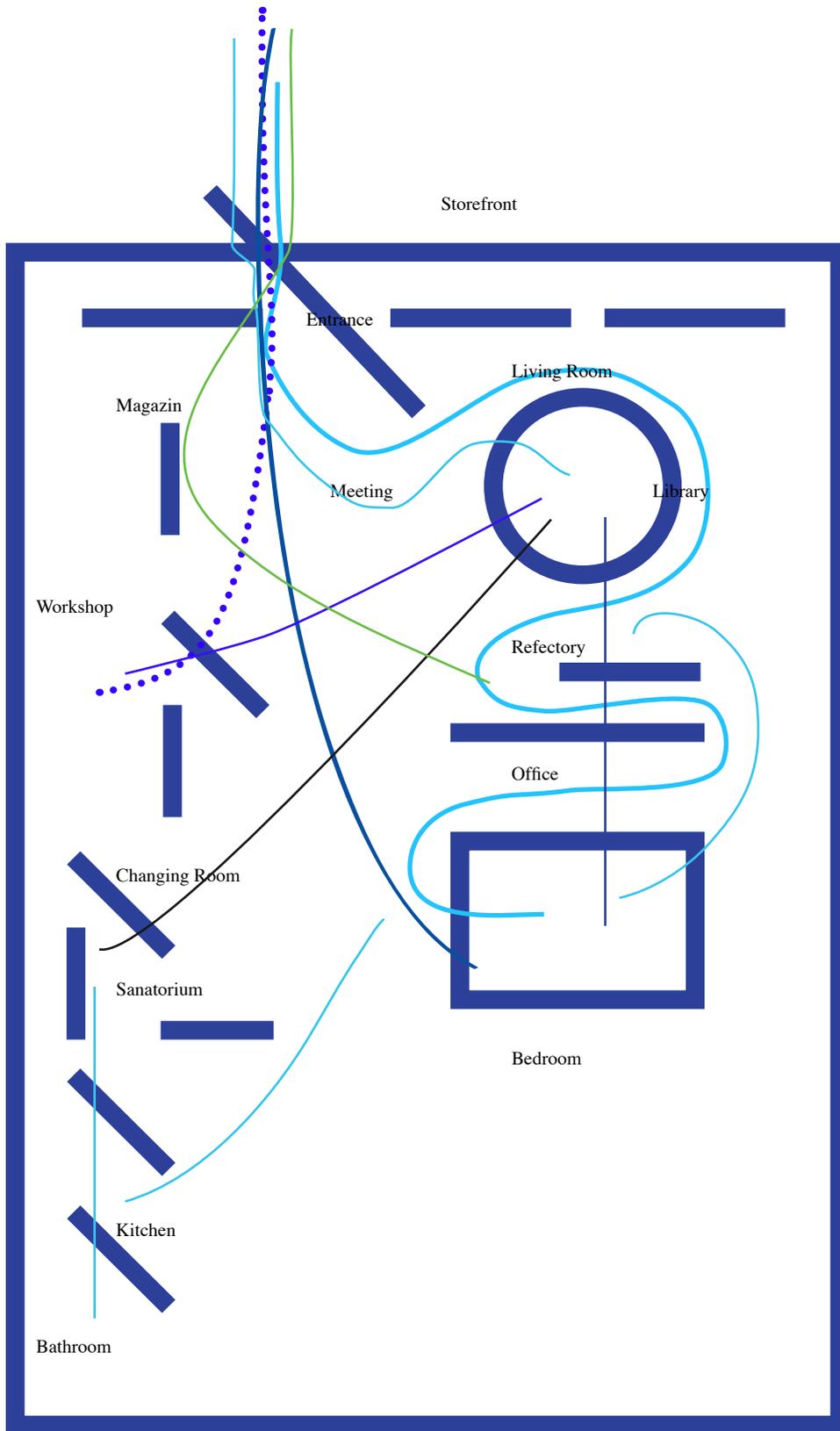


Getting Closer: Practices of Departures

Reflections on London and Stockholm Assemblies
Practice International



Christian Nyampeta





*Ecole de Sable,
Senegal, 2013*



*Practice International
Stockholm Assembly
Iaspis, Stockholm, 2013*

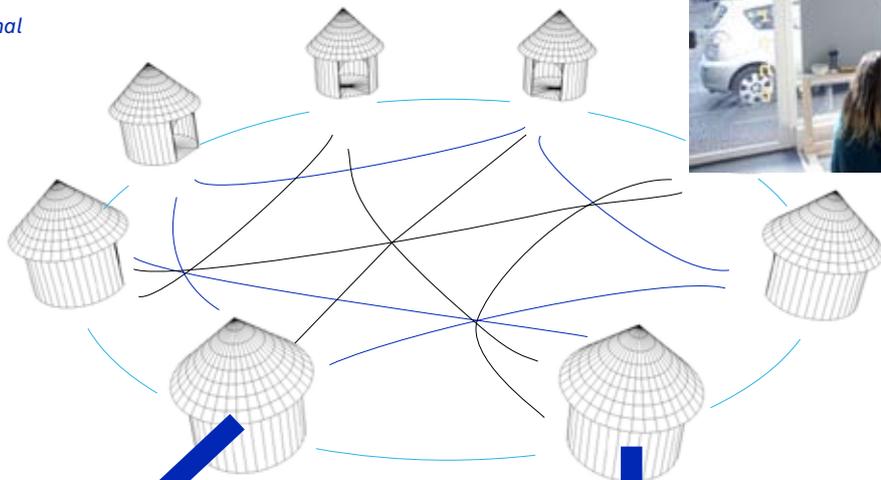


*Practice International
London Assembly
Otolith Group,
London, 2013*



*How To Live Together
Casco, Utrecht
2013*

Visits, 2013



*Laboratoire Agit Art
with Issa Samb
Dakar, 2013*



Dakar, 2013



Introduction

The imperative of events, of relationships, of co-dependence – contrasts with sleep, with quietness and rest.. Here, the ideal is to avoid any event.

Can we think of a way of living that leaves room and distance, while remaining engaged and related? At once placed and displaced? Perhaps a visit cuts a little bit across the two modes of the event and the silences.

All things considered, an assembly is one such visit. So is a wedding, and so is a birthday party. When the roles of hosts and visitors interchange, perhaps relations to the world - that is, to politics - also change. To channel these changes, passages are gone through: a variety of scenes, sceneries, and scenarios, front rooms, back stages, corridors, etc. These passages are arranged through visas, marked by visions, negotiations, movements and so forth. Bodily, physically and mentally.

Getting Closer: Practices of Departures

These marking and bracketing; we call ceremonies, decorations, commemorations, celebrations, exhibitions - institutional or otherwise. During these assemblies, languages alter, and these filter across one another, influencing each other. A visit is an intensity, measured primarily by the arrival and the departure. It is a conditional suspension too. And a mirroring of sorts: an inspection. We prepare, arrange and re-arrange ourself for the occasion. A visit is a compacted time: an agreement, a pact, an act of peace. And yet, during a visit it is not easy to know what is going to happen. During a visit, or an assembly, everything is active. Unlike in settlements and colonies, which we can consider here as images and representations. You can tell how these fixtures are violations of visits. The denial to access, also, which is the denial to visit, is another thorny thing. Invasion results, to say the least.

In reference to the London and Stockholm Assemblies of *Practice International*, the following are thoughts on how to relate to the world. This relation can be described as visiting. Or, tentatively, as a process of departures.

Reflections on London and Stockholm Assemblies Practice International

Christian Nyampeta
2013

Trajectories

The everyday is made up of spoken and unspeakable promises. When an agreement is put into words or made visible, we speak of a contract. When arrangements are reached intuitively and left unannounced, we call them expectations. An agreement is the casting of volatile conditions into stabilised codes. A dispute already lurks under said and unsaid constructions. A confrontation arises when expectations are not lived up. When appointments are not met, then trouble comes. The discomfort brought about by a conflict is accompanied by an embarrassment of coming short in understanding, delivering, presence; disregard, inattention, or omission. This shortcoming is experienced as either negligence, refusal, rejection or an excess of sorts.

Friendship is one of these pacts. Friendship relies on unsayable agreements and promises. Friendship can fall into bizarrely delicate matters precisely because it is founded on mutual but inherently divergent outlooks. Here, one is expected to know without hearing. And one expects to be understood without announcing. Intimacy does not imply that everything is spoken about. This contradictory willingness is not mere assumption. Friendship is the roof under which the involved companions stand. Once here, the members of this emotive congregation anticipate the needs, wishes and desires of each other.

Strangely, a struggle is grounded in the search for reparation. That is to say, one quarrels in order to re-pair and to remake a whole. Even when separation or breaking up seem to be the aim. Discord, not unlike creation, stems from a sense that something is not completed or no longer complete. The wholeness of this something can be perturbed by stepping out of bounds. This overflow – or underflow – can be the transgression of a social role, or the time of appearance at someone's wedding, or the supposed insufficiency of the attention paid to some demand or other; or the delays in the delivery of a commission, and so on.

Retribution is then the source of contestation. Or, is retribution perhaps the consequence of shortcomings? Or is retribution an integral part of relationships? Does retribution sit on the side of amendment, correction and punishment? Is an affect a result of a defect? Who can tell? Meanwhile affective communities are mediated through a mixture of visible and invisible signs, actions, signals, motions, indications, etc. Here, one re-attributes something that does not yet exist! Perhaps then, retribution actually creates? Are these relationships a product of knowledge; or are they instead the products of wishing, in search of consolation?

How and when does friendship *happen*? What sets friendship in motion? Is friendship discovered, or invented? Is a relationship discerned, or made up¹? Once a relationship has been established, one struggles to stay the same. One attempts to remain the character encountered at the moment of the mutual agreement. Here, discontent comes from the will to possess. One exerts muscular energy against the material forces of the inevitable, and possibly unaccountable changes. Dissatisfaction results from holding on to existing images of particular moments set in the past or the future: a lived experience or a

1.
Artist Angie Keefe asks the nature of order, in relation to the art object. Could the same questions be applied to relationships of our concern in this account?
<http://yaleunion.org/angie-keefe/>

promised condition. Arguments are proportional to the terms and conditions of an ideal. The capturing of this ideal into memory and history can sit in the way of deviations. A friendship is an unavowable contract for mutual behaviours. Naturally, under contract, unforeseen elements are much unwelcome. This constraint is the more remarkable since friendships are sparked by the protrusions encountered on the otherwise uneventful path of the ordinary. It has been said that the word “struggle” is related to “struikelen”, the Dutch verb for stumble!

2.
A figure permits to step out of bounds. A figure is blurred, and it functions through hinting at, insinuating and even obscuring, as well as ornamenting.
See *A Visit To Visit*,
The author's review of Anna Bogui-guian, *A Play To Play*, 2013

3.
On Thursday 17 Jan 2013, Monica Grady, Professor of Planetary and Space Sciences at the Open University; Paul Murdin, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Astronomy at the University of Cambridge; Don Pollacco, Professor of Astronomy at the University of Warwick discussed comets with Melvyn Bragg.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pw38n>

4.
See Roland Barthes - *How To Live Together*, Session of January 12, 1977. Barthes, following Charles Fourier points that utopia is rooted in a certain day-to-day existence

The ties that hold a community together are often put in place by a shared past. These bounds could be rooted in communal experiences, political groundings or military exploits, kinships, lineage, and so forth. Such communities are further consolidated by monuments, memorials, commemoration etc. In contrast, friendship is an event to come. Friendship is prospective. It is a project. Friendships result not so much from choices, or the maintenance of a past, like in the case of a family or a community. Relationships, friendships, are moving events that resonate with the powers of attraction and repulsion. These forces are orbital, atomic, bodily. They characterise gravities, weight and light, positions and movements. Friendship is a condition, an entity in motion, like a celestial body with magnetic trajectories. A friend is a figure², and friendship is an instance. The appearance of this instance recalls the apparition of a comet. Comets are regarded by scientists as frozen time capsules that contain materials from the period when the solar system was formed. It is believed that comets have a potential to reveal information about the early history of planet Earth and other planets. These rogue bodies appear as bright objects, like stars, with a long tail. Sporadically, flying randomly and free to collide with anything in their way, they appear in the Earth's skies, in their unpredictable, non-circular and eccentric orbit around the sun. Comets are believed to come from afar, at the edge of the solar system. Comets are essentially snowballs made of dirt, rock, gas and water ice. Allegedly, a few crash landings on earth could have provided all the water on planet Earth³.

The precise trajectories of these realities are, of course, a little more nuanced than the sketch above. But let us not argue quite yet!

What about *utopian* communities, I hear you ask? Are these not looking forward to the future? The distinguishing mark of utopia is the imagination and painstakingly working out of details. The more it becomes possible to persist on details, the more a utopia is stronger and intricate⁴. In order to immerse oneself into details however, a certain departure is needed. One moves away from the generic, from the panoramic everyday. Communities engaged in a utopian future are somehow in isolation.

One such communities are to be found in *Affective Communities*, a book by postcolonial theorist Leela Gandhi. Here, Gandhi identifies particular artistic, individual and collective gestures of late-Victorian Radicalism as agents capable of instituting affiliations with territories beyond the geopolitical insulation

Poses

5
Leela Gandhi -
Affective Communities, pg. ?

6
During the London Assembly of Practice International on August 28th, 2013, Kodwo Eshun introduces Gandhi's *Affective Communities*

of the concerned practitioners. Leela Gandhi defines a politics of friendship as “a series of invisible affective gestures that refuses alignment along the secure axis of affiliation, to seek expression outside, if not against possessive communities of belonging”⁵. In contrast to, for instance, praxis, which conveys the notion of a long scale project, a plan, and also a repetition, “a gesture seems ephemeral”⁶. According to Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group, a gesture appears to possess dimensions of the performative, of bodily enactment, of a habit, of an eccentric orbit. A politics of friendship is introduced by Leela Gandhi as a series of minor dealings which are very close to everyday life. These gestures are capable of revoking major politics; “the kind of a privileged politics which happens in a conference or in a congress”.

Assemblies

An institutionalised assembly suggests hierarchical formations. The spatial arrangements that instantiate speakers and listeners, the stage and the audiences, the choreography of presentation, the tone of the speech, the imperative of listening and watching, the allotment of time of posing questions; these formalities echo larger structures of belonging to cultures, societies and capital.

At the same time, an assembly compares to a social gathering. An assembly seems to respond to urgencies, or to the whims of a calendar. An assembly looks like a festival, whereby something not yet known or no longer known is sought after, evoked, commemorated or celebrated. On these occasions, relationships emerge, relations that elude the apparent hierarchies. An assembly is a system of transformation that looks like a visit. It is a setting for the cultivation of convergent differences. Unlike a coalition, an assembly cannot pretend to achieve a collectivisation and a unification of those assembled. This refinement of differences contrasts with the contemporary equivalents of colonial forces. The postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes colonialism as a “hierarchically aligned system of division or binary opposition designed [...] to sequester the West from the psychic connotation of nonwestern alterity”⁷.

7.
Leela Gandhi -
Affective Communities, pg.?

8.
Idem

To address the question of how to live within, around or aside the tensions of the “secure psychic quarantine” remains a critical imperative of this epoch. Here, the contemplation about *how to live* in the face of these transformations compels a supplement: how to live *together*. Thankfully, Homi Bhabha points out the incapability of imperialism to fulfil its fantasy of underhand binarisation⁸. Where roles of host and guests oscillate, the “psychic quarantine” becomes disrupted by the permeability of embodiments. A visit baffles and outplays sequestration and conflicts. These conditions are characterised by the opposition of two terms, from which, in speech, silence or action or inaction, one term is actualised to produce meaning⁹.

9.
Roland Barthes -
The Neutral,
Session of February 18, 1978
Author's translation

As a visitor, one pays attention to the reception, to the guidance, to the accommodation, to the host. And vice versa. To visit implies to comfort, to come to the benefit of the visited, to go to see; to behold the host, the place, or the time. The gestures of a good visitor are characterised by observing and taking

notice. A visitor inspects. Which is to say, a visitor is a compliment, an addition, as well as an agitator. What else would justify the changes, the catering, the preparations, the decoration, the out-of-ordinary arrangements of hosting? A visit institutes and instantiates. Visiting confirms and sets new directions in motion. Hence the imperative to also consider the powerful in the inclusion of the visit.

Hospitality, practical and theoretical, faces up the martial forces exerted by the global market. By playing with etiquettes, salutations and valedictory formalities, a visit traverses epochs and a variety of horizons. The attendance runs across the past and the future of events and ideas. In these passages, a friendship of thoughts occurs. And so does the adoption of words, and the branching and the reuse of thoughts.

An assembly is composed of the numerous points of contact during and around the actual presentations. The obvious setting is the ritualised form of the assembly with chairs, a front and a back, a screen, speakers and microphones. This is “the hub of attention”¹⁰. There is also the coffee room, which functions as an interval. The assembly continues through the hallways: the taxi rides, the walks to the restaurant, the table, at breakfast and before retiring. For Kodwo Eshun, an assembly is all of these places and times. The functioning of the assembly is on the condition that those concentric rings outside of the hub of attention should not count directly as part of the assembly. This relational separation marks and refutes the distinction between minor and major language. Each of the conversations en route to restaurant, at the hotel or in the cab, occupies a slightly different status. In varying retinues and entourages outside, there is a relative degree of informality and freedom. In contrast, during the formal presentations, there is a relative degree of taking a certain kind of pain over how you say things¹¹, what you say, the protocol, and the behaviour of how you address people. An assembly is composed of a shifting number of times and spaces of inadmissible conversations and speech articulated in brackets.

The attendance to an assembly requires a suspension of other activities. The scene of an assembly is itself a bracket in time. *Monosis* is a chapter presented by literary critic Roland Barthes at the College de France in the session of March 23, 1977. According to Barthes, monosis is described as “Adam’s solitude”, as a “movement whereby the subject mimics Adam’s condition prior to being divided into two”. For Barthes, *monachos*, the early Greek name for monk, does not necessarily define an unmarried person, but one with a sole purpose in life. Such a person invests in a single goal. This division between the ascetic who has no ties and the husband who is torn, is at the basis of the paradigmatic notions of theory and practice. According to Barthes, Aristotle speaks of *bios praktikos* as a practical life, such as political and social activity and duties. For the Stoics, the *bios praktikos* meant correct moral conduct, namely askesis. This is the exercise of virtues, the struggle to control the passions.

10.
Artist Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group, summarising The Stockholm Assembly of Practice International, 14th November 2013

11.
idem

12.
Roland Barthes -
How To Live Together,
session of March 23, 1977
Author’s translation

Stories

13
Notes and remarks spoken by artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh, The Stockholm Assembly, Practice International, November 14th, 2013

14.
In her presentation during The Stockholm Assembly of Practice International, Artist Michelle Dizon evokes Maurice Blanchot's relation between poetry and prose as being two slopes of the same mountain.

15.
Here, Kodwo Eshun speaks to David Medalla. During a walk from the hotel to the taxi, David Medalla told us that "cultural history is an oscillation between gossip and polemic".

16.
Artist Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group, summarising The Stockholm Assembly of Practice International, November 18, 2013

Summaries

17.
Roland Barthes - *The Neutral*, Session of February 18, 1978

Bios theoretikos, on the other hand, is a contemplative and unified life, one with no conflicts, no struggles. It is an existence of someone who has achieved simplicity, rectitude, experience of the composite, after a period of life in practice¹².

Artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh drew attention to the urgency of figuring out how and where to gain a personal experience of a political reality. What forms can we give this reality? Wendelien asks¹³. What form should our practice take? What forms can we give emergent reality in order to step out of the self again? Wendelien proposes narratives as one such form.

A combination of actions and contemplation is perhaps what an assembly aspires. An assembly is preceded by a multitude of arrangements, work, rehearsal, travels, and availability in order to behold and to listen, to speak and to encounter. This contemplation is arrived at through the wavering between prose and poetry¹⁴, or between small talk and debate¹⁵. These shifts account for the porosity of the conference "beyond its official remit". There is what a conference announces itself to be, what gets written about it, and there is what the conference actually was¹⁶.

So then, which other moments of the Stockholm Assembly will reach this anecdote? An assembly behaves like a visit. Some moments of the assembly may become stories and fictions, narrated by the attender to the attention other horizons.

The totality of spaces, places and times that constituted the Assembly brought about a compendium of artistic propositions to contemporary urgencies. Visually, aurally and gesturally, distant geographies and practices were evoked. *People To Be Resembling* (2012), the title of the presented film by The Otolith Group epitomises this affective communality: an active stance toward practice, across the past and the future.

By way of finishing this account, let us single out some instances of the presentations. These instances are manners to be looking for their own style of being present to the struggle of our time¹⁷. In chronological order from the last presentation to the first one, let's recall the artists Alice Creischer & Andreas Siekmann. Using cartograms, animation, performance and diagrams, Creischer & Siekmann's, they propose compelling embodiments and visualisation of complexities of global logistics. Alice Creischer & Andreas Siekmann are working out strategies and techniques of informational gathering about the relationship between global and industrial militarism.

In the film *People To Be Resembling* (2012), a singularly mercurial imaging is achieved through projecting footage of capoeira dancers on the moving sticks of a drummer. This image slicing produces an echograph, a forecasting, or a divination. The film explores the contemporary relevance of the musical band Codona. This exploration probes into the world set in a future which is no longer networked by electrical circuits, such as in the aftermath of a global nuclear radiation.

Artist Chan-Kyong Park invited the visitors to contemplate the sublime. Art historian Christian Kravgana presented an encourages to develop a scepticism towards historical claims.

Wendelien van Oldenburg works put forward ways of seeing, creating and relating to the world, through the engagement with the setting. With particular attention what it means to be in movement, to be near to or far from the subject, the visual focus is achieved by the position of the body or the structure that carries the camera.

Lisa Nyberg and Johanna Gustavsson of Radical Pedagogy propose a way of active criticism through reflection on manners, education. This is activism is mediated by hosting, rearing and visiting.

Artist David Medalla shared fragments of his life. Medalla practice could be said to consist the in crossing of the changing landscapes of the global metropolis. His presentation juxtaposed humorous anecdotes with baffling historical accounts of his existence as an artist-traveller.

Michele Dizon put forward her engagement with feminism. On this occasion using film and performance, Dizon's engagement is translation and is in translation. In translation, feminism shuttles between other relevant disciplines in order to respond to urgent issues.

Leela Gandhi's lecture was particularly grounding. Equally, Gandhi's presence at the Assembly gave gravitas to her writing, to the questions of correspondence, to issues of responding to the world, against or with it, in search of ways of making sense of our changing surroundings. Through theory a careful reading of history, Gandhi managed to propose ways of shaping alternative and self-supportive worlds that establish new relationships with distant and near realities.

What did you hear? Ultra Red asked. The answer to this question is an invitation. The listener revisits his or her own recent memory. Listening is an agreement or an approximation. Listening is a process of filtering, of departing of clearing, of retaining, of remembering, of assembling, of making friends...



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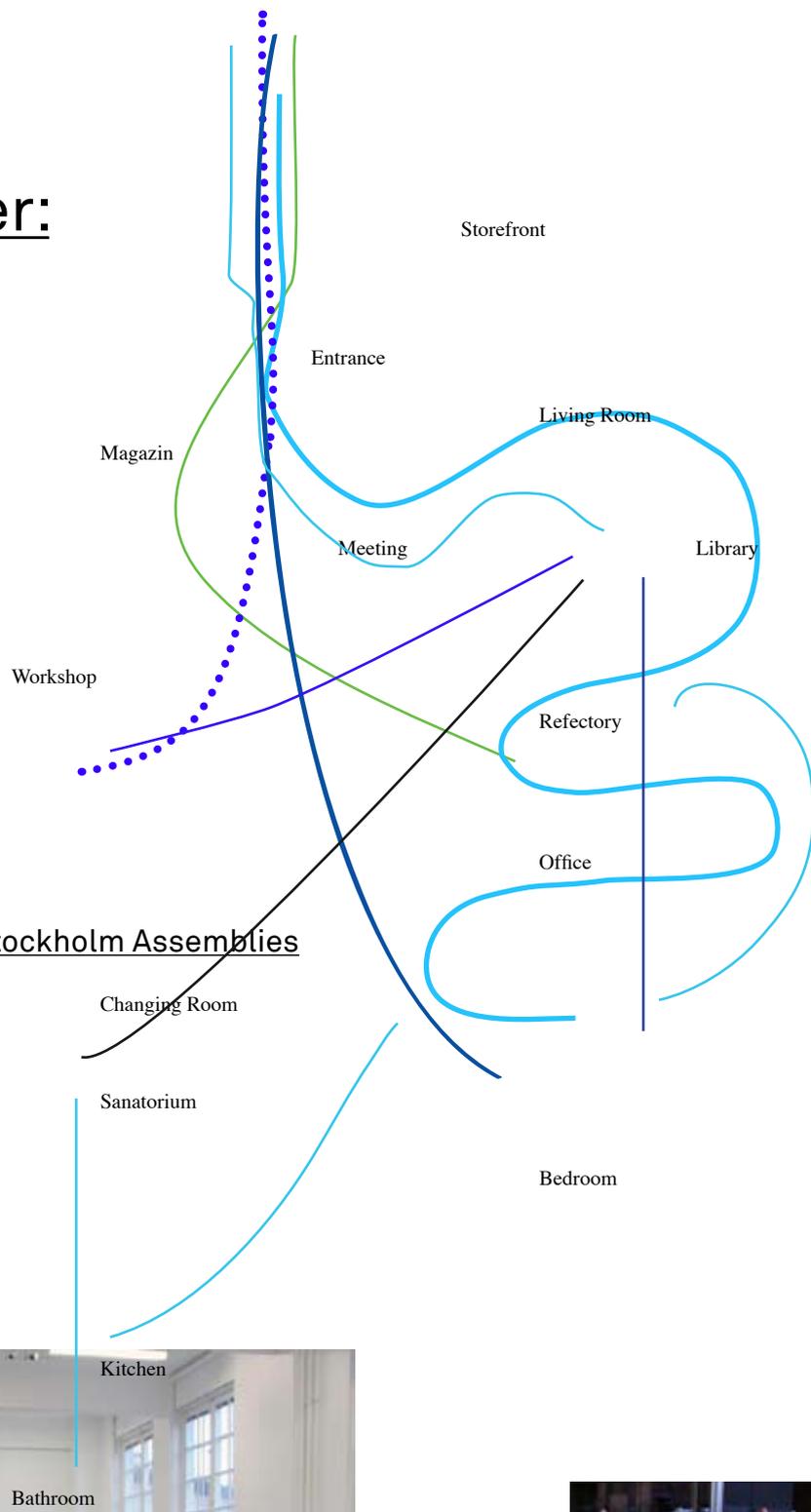
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Practice International,
Stockholm Assembly
Closing session, 16 November 2013

<http://www.practiceinternational.org/>

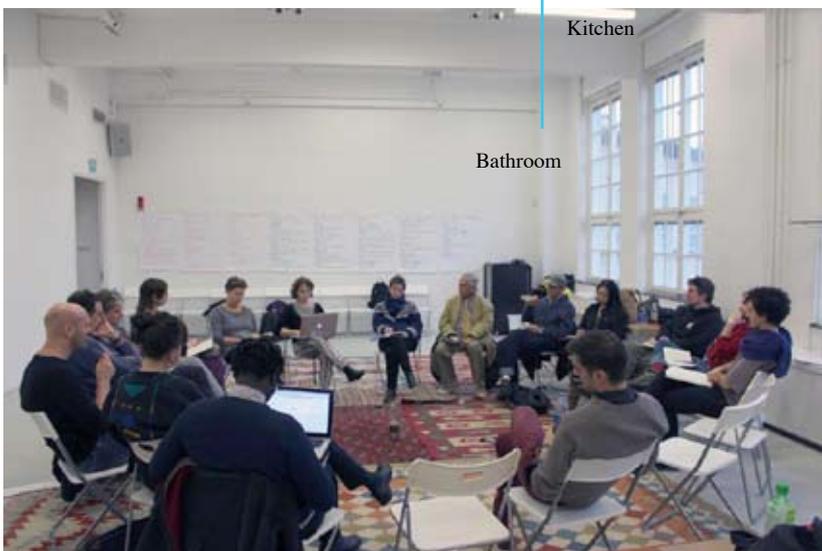
Trick or Treat
In-Situ performance with David Medalla & Adam Nankervis
Stockholm, November 2013

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