

—David?

—Yes. I'm driving.

—If you're driving you shouldn't be taking this call.

—Well, I'm in a rest area off the motorway.

—So technically you're not driving.

—Technically I'm not driving, so I can talk.

—Well then, technically you were lying when you answered the phone.

—Technically I was lying. I wanted you to think I was driving, but actually I'm not. In fact, I'm technically walking and talking on the phone.

—Well, I don't want to take any more of your time, since you're either driving or lying. You can be either driving or not driving, but not both at the same time. Listen, there's a call for proposals to curate the programme at Fabra i Coats. It's been a while since we worked together and we've been on parallel paths exploring similar things. I think we've got a shared interest in literature and art forms and maybe we could design a programme together.

—The answer's yes. It's that easy. You can't drive and lie at the same time about something like that.

—Great! Get back on the road and we'll talk later, but we're definitely going for it.

—Done! Hey, thanks for asking me.

—If you're in a rest area, then you're not driving. I swear you're not driving now, though you will be in a bit. People don't hang around long in those places.

—I don't think I'll be here much longer. It's true, I'm not driving now, but I was not long ago and with a bit of luck I'll be behind the wheel again in a few minutes.

—So technically you're not driving.

—True, technically I'm not driving.

A few days after that conversation, we started preparing the dossier for our application. We had lots to think about and not much time. We were clear about where we were starting from, which helped us map out some of the contents and also sketch out some structures, both spatial (coverage of architecture) and temporal (the kind of activities and events we envisaged). The project would centre on the text, understood as being the backbone of a possible way of understanding art work: narrating an experience—an approach shared by the artists we were beginning to slot in. The text as a first notion, a note, a first existence, the seed of something that would eventually become something else. And the text as a finding, a complete, independent, literal chronicle, a proposal for reading the exhibits. The text: first notions and findings. Conceptually, in the dossier, the exhibition space would be a text, the walls would be pages, the exhibits would be written, the users would be readers and the activities would be times and moments of reading.

Once we had settled on the tone of the discourse we wanted to present (though without yet defining what we actually wanted to present), we needed to arrange

the contents (shows and activities) in a coherent and effective way: what sort of shows, what type of activities, what kind of rhythms and uses the art centre could create. We thought it would be a good idea to structure the programme by following the logic of the contents page in a typical book. A guide to give readers an idea of what they could expect to find in a book. A way of managing the time they plan to spend on it, setting a faster or slower pace. *The Text: First Notions and Findings* would have a prologue, three central chapters and an epilogue.

In the same way that a book's author might ask another writer or likeminded acquaintance to write a foreword to their book, we saw the prologue to the programme as a third-person presentation, an exercise in short writing by someone other than us who was close to our way of thinking, who could help shape an initial outline. Ideally, this outline would whet readers' appetite for more. We decided that the prologue would be the only solo show in the programme. It would be an exhibition of recent work by Finnish artist Pilvi Takala,⁶ who had never exhibited work in Barcelona before. Time constraints required the first exhibition in the programme to feature work that had already been produced. There was no room in our tight schedule to launch processes to create new work.

⁶ In early 2013, Martí had seen Pilvi Takala's exhibition at Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm, and he knew the show's curator, Theodor Ringborg. We both liked Pilvi's work. If we were selected, we thought it would be a good idea to ask them to produce the prologue to the programme. In addition, again with regard to time constraints, a video-based show would save us any complicated transport issues at the start of the project. If it went ahead, we would focus on increasing the number of pieces on display—her work was better known in Stockholm than in Barcelona—and adapting it to the space at Fabra i Coats (which is what we finally did).

We saw, and still see, many of our own interests in narrative reflected in Pilvi Takala's work: building a character, action or scene, as well as her real-life interventions and her artistic commitment to her possible functions or malfunctions in her social, political and economic milieu. In her work we saw, and still see, aspects of chronicles, fiction and manifesto, the sequence of concepts that would underpin the programme.

The three central chapters would be group shows, with international artists and key local artists, with consolidated artists and emerging artists, with new work and recent work, with up-to-the-minute pieces and more historical exhibits. The three central chapters would explore three possible ways of understanding writing in art: chronicle, fiction and manifesto. Narrating reality, escaping from it, committing to it. The trilogy would perform a twofold function: it would define our approach to the text and it would shape the list of the participating artists.

Chronicle, fiction and manifesto. Three autonomous and complementary ways of approaching literature that would lead to a stable format for each show: between eight and ten artists per chapter, plus a regular programme of activities aimed at a wide range of audiences: narrated tours, workshops, talks with specialists in the world of literature and art, screenings and debates, performances, meetings with the exhibition artists, an educational programme and a website as a publishing space. Some thirty or so artists, a dozen or so activities for each exhibition. Artists, writers, different kinds of users, different forms of time for an art centre. All highly thrilling and very intense. An art centre defined by specific forms of time.

And now, in the dossier, all we needed was to come up with an ending, an epilogue following the logic of a book. A farewell to the programme that would effectively close what would have been a year spent exploring the relationships between art and literature from within an art centre. A separate yet connected end to the chapters. An ending that would look back over what we had offered. We were familiar with *The Book Lovers* project by artist David Maroto and curator Joanna Zielinska: a systematic attempt to study the phenomenon of novels written by artists, an analysis of the literary world through textual or expanded narratives by artists from different backgrounds and moments. We thought *The Book Lovers* would be an excellent epilogue to *The Text: First Notions and Findings* and the perfect way to end the season. Bringing the programme to a close with the exhibition space full of books. A direct, literal way of understanding the art centre as a place for reading. That would be the ending.

And then we got a call saying *The Text: First Notions and Findings* had been chosen as the programme for the 2013–2014 season at Fabra i Coats – Barcelona Contemporary Art Centre. The dream of inventing an art centre was going to come true.

All beginnings are sensitive times. Starting with Pilvi Takala meant stating our intentions. A recognised artist on the international scene, when we spoke to her she was preparing a specific project for Frieze in London. Her tough yet engaging work encouraged emotional proximity and empathy through its urge to forge a narrative. The prologue was taking shape, along with the idea of the character and possible places for action. A beginning, first notions, a starting point.