

## **Exclusion/inclusion in health care meetings**

Installation at Galleri Monitor, Valand *PARSE*  
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Text by Helena Dahlberg presented at the  
installation:

- There is this activity going on around me, "over my head", "beyond my horizon", "beyond my comprehension". Something incomprehensible, or at least very hard to understand. *It is professional*. This activity, or the meaning of the activity, is inaccessible to me. I am being excluded. But *at the very same time*; I am deeply involved in this activity. This activity involves me, or at least my body.

Something is going on that is beyond me, but it is going on *with me*. With me, but without me. Does this mean that I am excluded from myself?

I turn to my body from the outside, with an outsider's look. I experience it, not as the silent partner always cooperating in achieving my goals, but as something unfamiliar that is out of my control and that can no longer be trusted. It is a frightening experience. That which now comes to me as alien is that which normally is mostly *me* – my own body. My body is a home, a home that is no longer present.

An injury or illness experience in itself renders the body alien. The body then comes to me as something that has stopped working the way it used to, or the way it was supposed to, like a broken tool. It therefore also comes to me as other than me, as alien. What happens when these feelings of alienation when I, as an ill person seeking professional care, enter the hospital building or the primary care center? It seems that the alienation of the body in these situations risks being intensified.

When I am examined by the physician, for example, the body is at the center of our attention, but as a malfunctioning biological thing. Something is going on with me, but at the same time I am on the outside. It seems that the split between me and my body is getting wider. Even if someone talks to me (the patient), explains to me the condition I am suffering from and what I must do to get better, this diagnosis – this foreign medical language – is not mine. And still it is *about me*. When I am diagnosed by the physician, he or she is giving me *the truth about myself*. A truth which I do not have access to, in a language I do not know, but which nevertheless concerns the center of my being. Of my existence.

Now; if health care – that is, the meeting between patient and carer - has the power to shut the patient out from herself, does it also have the power to help the patient get back in touch with herself? Is it possible for the patient to imagine herself anew, with the help of another? To phrase the question differently: If the medical meeting involves (sometimes necessary, or for good reasons) a stripping away of personal identity, a reducing down to the physical body – how can we bring this (personal identity habitual surroundings, activities, life) back into play? *Caring for a person* means to go both ways – not only the isolation of a disease as in diagnostics, but also to put the fact of disease back into context. What does it mean for this particular person? How can she live life to the fullest with or without her illness? How can she understand her world anew with illness as a part? How can she understand herself?

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