

# **O N AEON**

## Traces of Eternity

### I. Now: images of the present / Uferstudios

From the large concrete steps in Uferstudio1, I'm looking at the wall opposite where a short film is being projected: from a bird's eye view, the camera calmly captures six people dressed in white, carrying a large square piece of wood through a barren landscape together. The surroundings filmed from above – withered plants, sandy ground, a straight path – hardly change and the sextet, walking in two symmetrical lines, also moves at an even pace, individual steps only

deviating in slight variation. The performers walk through the wasteland in this delicate rhythm.

For me, the image at this moment is a recognition, a reference, a trace that leads back to immediate past experiences and at the same time lets me see a spatial and temporal continuum: the aeon, the world age, and the outdoor live installation of the same name by the artists Sandra Man and Moritz Majce, which has just taken place on two other pieces of derelict land in the city – and in the gaps between them.

## II. Before: traces of the future / Derelict land in Berlin

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## II. Before: traces of the future / Derelict land in Berlin

A coach takes the audience to the derelict site where the first part of Aeon will take place. I enter the site and see a large area in front of me, the ground paved, a few bushes and shrubs. Open spaces have become rare in this city, even on the outskirts. So this large undeveloped terrain seems idiosyncratic, almost surreal, like a forgotten space. The area is bordered by sections of fence and a crumbling wall, and there's a row of portable toilets locked with wooden planks on the right-hand side. Around the derelict site: shrubs and trees, further away the typical elements of an industrial estate: construction cranes, an office building in decay, a few apartment blocks. All this seems as if the 'archaic' – people interacting; plants defying external influences such as the weather and construction – has had a postmodern backdrop added to it: the stage set of the Anthropocene

A humming sound can be heard from above, quiet but constant: a drone hovering far above us. Perhaps it's only to document the performance, but it seems to me to mark the space above, another point of reference in the nexus of relations. Above it the bright cloudless sky – it too becomes an endless backdrop for the concentration of the here and now

Space walkers in white overalls move across the stony surface far apart from one another, dry shrubs between them. At first they walk across the area in isolation, but over time subtle interrelations become visible and perceptible. For a while, I walk across the wasteland with a space walker, find myself in an energetic field with her for a short period of time and together we open up the performative space around us. Then I turn off and crawl into the shade of some bushes, happy to escape for a while from the blazing heat that shows no signs of abating this late afternoon in September. From there I see two performers approaching each other, relating to each other more and more and then finally dancing together very delicately and quietly. They pick up on each other's directions of movement: the movement of an arm, turning the upper body in a certain direction. For a short span of time, a mesh of bodies, space and energetic interdependencies emerges.

On the south side of the site, two construction fences run towards each other and border the site at a wide angle, marking its outermost point. Here I sit down on a stone and survey the derelict site in a kind of wide-angle perspective. My gaze wanders over the site, I see the space walkers moving towards and away from each other in ever-changing formations. Aeon takes place over several hours in total, it takes time and is not technically ambitious or spectacular in the narrow sense. The places it invites us to are inhospitable, Aeon is not tangible or recyclable, it does not lead towards a goal and in this way contrasts neoliberal logics of action.

Finally, a moment arises – without my being able to read it as a concrete movement or even an explicit gesture of request – in which there is a sign of withdrawal: less movement, a retreat, a temporary end. I slowly walk back to the opposite side of the site, where by now the other spectators have gathered and the gate to the street is located, to the noisy, urban industrial environment and right now: to the world in its old order.

The engine of the big coach, the wheels half as big as I am, hums into the early summer evening; I get on, drop into my soft seat, and the bus starts moving. Leaning my forehead against the window, company signs, advertisements for car repair shops and large empty car parks pass me by – a Saturday evening in the industrial area of Lichtenberg. After a period of time I can't estimate, the bus stops and releases us onto another derelict site

Through a wide path on the south side, I enter the wasteland, large and almost square in front of me. I cross the site in a northerly direction, where the six lanes of Landsberger Allee run directly behind the property. On the right, the area is flanked by the windowless side wall of a giant furniture store, while on the left, a little further away and behind rows of trees and bushes, the skyline of the outer city district can be seen: the upper floors of large brutalist-style apartment blocks, a multi-storey car park, street lamps and billboards.

I walk over asphalt that is cracked in many places. The fractures expose deeper layers, plants sprout from them. The area was formerly used as a car park; the fading ground markings are inscribed on the surface as traces. Far away at the back of this

large area, I focus on a dancing body: a woman in a white overall kneels on the cracked surface, slowly stands up, then very slowly rotates around herself, reaching her arms up in the air. Her bare feet glide across the asphalt.

The woman, the performer Laura Siegmund, begins to speak hesitantly. She seems to be struggling for words and forms them slowly and laboriously, as if their meaning is only being generated the moment she utters them: “It will not be sparse and not be barren. No sea and no mountain. The naked earth will be drier than the desert and wider than the ocean. The naked earth will be open.” The words seem quasi-religious; in the interplay between the dancer’s intonation and her way of speaking, which seems to be amazed at itself, they seem almost prophetic.

Laura doesn’t speak loudly, but she defies the noise from Landsberger Allee in the background, gathers tension and concentration on herself. The constant noise of the busy street generates noise in an aesthetic sense, no longer perceived as noise, nor merely as background noise, but as a noise that is conspicuous in its specificity. It resounds in connection with the moving bodies, resonates there and echoes. Laura dances between parking space markings – and thus in a place semantically connected to the street – moves, not ignoring the noise, not turning away from it, but in relation to it. The moment seems to reveal that this man-made noise is also transient, that it will not inscribe itself in the continuum of the world age – the aeon: “On the street it will be quiet.”, Joséphine Evrard later announces, another dancer who performs on the south side of the wasteland.

My eye falls on the old car-park markings on the ground, inscribed with fragments of text: "Its surface is bare. No grass, no stones, no concrete, no water, no sand, no plants, no clay, no ground covers it." Only slowly can I release myself from the nexus of bodies, urban landscape, spoken word, warm evening light and sound of the street. I finally turn away, the words echo and the sun sets with an intensity unusual for urban space, enveloping the asphalted terrain in surreal light.

On the south side of the terrain a wide hill of piled-up sand rises up, dotted with stones and rubble. Between bushes and shrubs, a small path leads up to a plateau. Ignoring the rest of the scenario for a few moments, the broad hill of coarse sand and pebbles resembles an urban dune whose upper contour offers a view of a cloudless sky this early evening. As I linger there, the structure does indeed appear to me as a dune or a natural (sand) formation near the coast, indicating the sea in the immediate vicinity. A voice pulls me back from the illusion, bringing my attention to the presence of another body and the oceanic fantasy evaporates. It is Joséphine Evrard, standing in front of me and speaking: "I hear this voice every day. The voice says we will go to the street. The street, says the voice, is a straight line under the open sky.

Then she moves away, but you can follow her, up the dune along well-trodden paths. She walks slowly and then stops, kneels down, her hands resting on the ground as she continues, "To the left and right of us, the buildings will be far away. The street will be empty." As Joséphine kneels on the ground, her fingers dig ever so slightly into the dry sandy-earthly soil. It almost seems as if her visions are growing out of this literal contact with the earth. The image she

sketches oscillates between dystopian and utopian imaginings of a terrestrial future.

Aeon thus becomes a kaleidoscope of temporal states, a present in which the past has inscribed itself and the future is revealed; it detaches itself from historically, chronologically limited here and now, extends beyond it spatially and temporally. The momentum becomes a state of “permanent passing”, as Martin Seel once put it. Perception detaches itself from habitual attributions, reality shows itself not in its socially and culturally coded form and without the meaning associated with it. In this way, Seel continues, an “encounter with the limits of the world’s formability, comprehensibility and accessibility” can be experienced. What happens on the wastelands appears to have no intention, it is not presented to the audience and is not available to them, but exists unconditionally – it seems – without the condition of the viewer, without the theatrical dispositif. The formations have no beginning and no end and in this sense bear witness to the aeon, the unlimited future, the age of the world, eternity as a timeless continuum.

### III. In all times / In other places

The video is still playing in Uferstudio 1, in which the figures in white suits are carrying a wooden pallet through a barren area. The dry landscape – an overgrown rubbish dump, as I read in the programme – and the white-clad figures in their slow, rhythmic way of moving do not correspond vaguely or indeterminately with the



formations on the wasteland, they seem to pick them up and continue them tirelessly, endlessly. As if the white-clad carriers, space walkers and dancers were walking on in a remote place, tirelessly, without a definable end. The video thus seems like a telescopic view into another space, through which the white-clad figures move in the eternal rhythm of repetition and variation, in the continuum of the world age, of aeon.

I place my hands beside me and let them brush over the steps I'm sitting on. They glide over cool concrete.

★★

*Aeon*, by Moritz Majce and Sandra Man, premiered as part of Tanznacht Berlin in September 2020, presented by Tanzfabrik Berlin. The audience was taken by bus from the Tanzfabrik Berlin / Uferstudios to the two derelict sites on Bürknersfelder Straße (Part 1) and Landsberger Allee (Part 2). Afterwards, the audience was able to visit the spatial installation in the Uferstudios as the third part of the four-hour work.

The excerpts from Martin Seel are both quoted from: Seel, Martin: *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, Hanser, 2000. pp. 233-236.