

# Present 01-03



Chora (2019), Moritz Majce + Sandra Man, Installation Shot, with the performers Assi Pakkanen, Laura Siegmund, Florencia Martina, Maya Weinberg, Charlie Fouchier (Open Spaces Festival Tanzfabrik Berlin)

## 01 We Come Unarmed

“We come unarmed” – I said this two years ago when rehearsing *Chora*. Together with Zoé Alibert, Eli Cohen, Judith Förster, Charlie Fouchier, Assi Pakkanen, Florencia Martina, Gian Mellone, Sonia Noya, Stephan B. Quinci, Laura Siegmund, Maya Weinberg, Natalia Wilk – the group of twelve performers doing the piece – we were speaking about our relationship to the audience.

*Chora* is a performance dedicated to finding a way of being together; of becoming a chorus that does not presuppose its community but allows it to happen, leaving it open.

I remember that when I said “we come unarmed” it didn’t feel like “my” sentence. It corresponded to what I wished to express, but at the same time it was something that came rather to me than from me.

After *Chora* I did not think about this claim anymore. It reoccurred to me only recently. It has stayed with me and now keeps repeating itself. As if it were insisting on being heard.

While it is still clear to me what I wanted to evoke by saying “we come unarmed” – gentleness and softness, acknowledgment of vulnerability, a certain nakedness – I wonder why it came out this way. Why do we need to remind ourselves to “come unarmed”? Why did I use a military expression to talk about the way we perform? Why would we have to unarm ourselves? Why would we be armed in the first place?

We are armed when we expect a fight. When we need to protect ourselves from being attacked. When we are prepared to face opponents, enemies. We are armed because we do not want to get hurt by them. We are armed because we do not want to get killed. We do not want to die. We want to survive.

“We come unarmed.” We come with peaceful intentions.

But why is it that we “come”? Where do we come to? Do we come to a place where there is someone? Are we the ones coming after others? Are we entering a place that is already populated? Is it empty where we go to? Are we the first to come? Are we intruding, exploring, conquering? Are we expecting to be attacked? Are we the ones attacking?

The sentence came up when talking about the relationship between the performers and the audience. It is about an encounter. What is the character of this meeting? Where does it happen? Who comes first? Who owns the space? What kind of space is a stage, an auditorium? Why had they been separated?

There is something confrontational in the relationship to the public. The audience is the opposite, the other side of the performance. They pay, they demand, they expect something. We should give it to them. We should not give it to them. They are to be made aware, to be provoked, to be irritated, to be entertained, to be touched, to be integrated. We might not manage. They might not like us. We want them to like us. We don't want them to like us. We don't care if they like us.

The opponent is someone we know; the unknown is our opponent.

We should know the ones who come before they come. We should meet their expectations, disappoint and subvert them or play with them. When we give a skilled performance technically, we appeal to the admirer. When we are funny, we get the laughing crowd. The persona brings out the fan.

When we provoke the audience, we fight authority, when we touch them, we bet on humanity. Addressing is productive; the way we relate to the audience generates a specific public. An idea of what we have in common is being expressed. We cannot separate the attitude and the tools that serve it from the audience that is being expected, envisaged and at the same time produced.

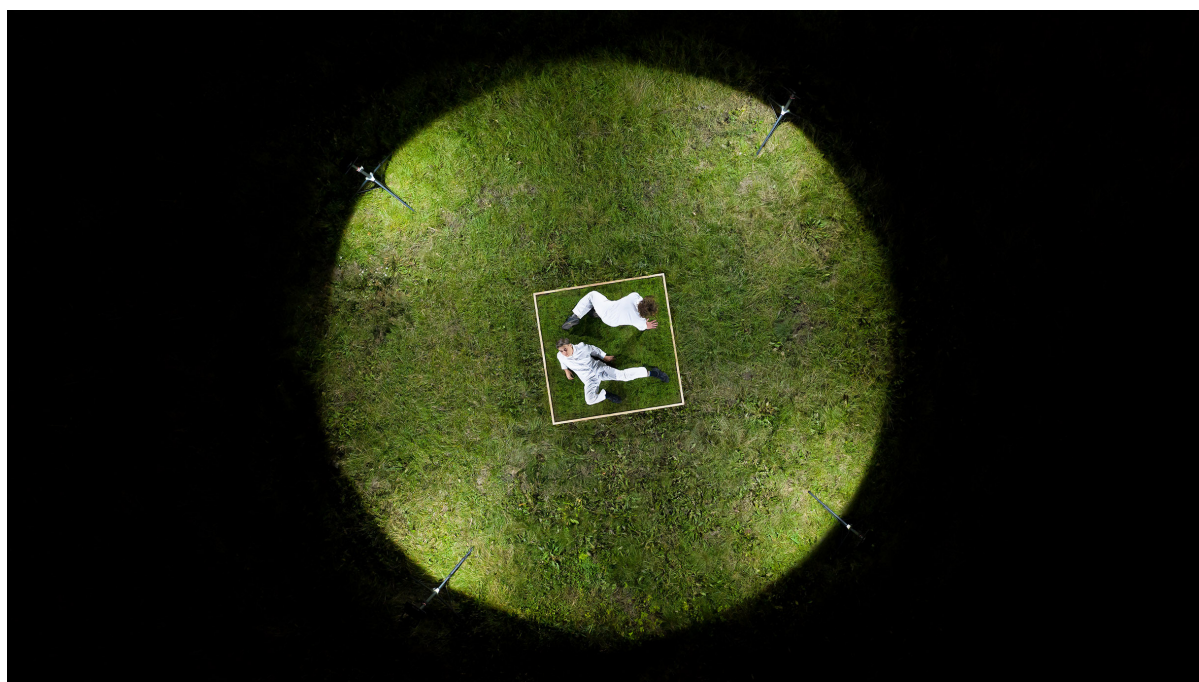
The arms evoked in "we come unarmed" might be the tools that serve to work on the expectations of the ones we imagine. We are armed when we expect. To project and to be armed is the same.

Arms protect me where I am vulnerable. I am vulnerable most where I am open. Where I sense and relate to what is here and now. To be armed is to protect oneself from what is happening.

"We come unarmed" is a preference for a certain way of performing: being present, connecting to what is here and now. What is now, what is actually happening between us, can never be known beforehand. The present is infinitely other than expected.

"We come unarmed" is an offer. It is offering oneself to the present. Most probably it all comes down to the question of what it gives: to offer. Will the offer let a new/other emerge?

Will we address the ones who we do not know and have not been expecting? Can we let ourselves be called by them? Are we helping a response to emerge that was not given before it expresses itself through us? Are we open for an answer that comes from listening to our nakedness – the flesh, the breath, the skin, the bones, the nerves, the mind/spirit that is all of us without us knowing what it is that we all are?



Rising Cycles (2019), Moritz Majce + Sandra Man, Video  
Still, with Maya Weinberg and Charlie Fouchier

## 02 Public Elsewhere

You are elsewhere. When you read this you are elsewhere. In different places, in different times. Infinitely different, anywhere on the planet and maybe in a distant future. You are all elsewhere.

Writing this feels like speaking into the void.

It is very present. The void is around me, it envelops me. I am part of the void. It enters me. I feel it in my head, my chest. Under the skull, in the rib cage. In the cavities of my body. The void is part of me.

While I am here, sitting and writing, I am addressing you. You are elsewhere.

You are inside of me. Residing in a place I do not own.

Wherever you are and whoever you are, you are here and now, with me.

It is an unfamiliar presence that makes me write. It is the void, its darkness and its strange lights that attracts and repels at the same time.

There is something of the sensitivity of the long range space observatories in awaiting the sound of the void. There is something of the weightlessness of astronauts in sending out the words.

The one who writes is probably not an I, but someone. The presence of the unfamiliar inside and beyond everyone. Maybe to write is to answer to and to address the void that is all of us. To speak from somewhere and to someone one does not know and never will. It starts from the alien inside. It is an answer, already the very first sentence, the first word, is an answer to the call from the void full of you.

Public Elsewhere is the title of a series of works dedicated to the audience, it began in 2020. A short description can be found here: [https://www.flutgrabenperformances.org/?page\\_id=436](https://www.flutgrabenperformances.org/?page_id=436)

For a philosophical reading of a we that has become the stranger, I refer to a conversation with Marita Tatari: [https://tanzfabrik-relaunch2020.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/252/stream.-.what\\_forms\\_the\\_present.-.sandra\\_man.pdf?1603459143](https://tanzfabrik-relaunch2020.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/252/stream.-.what_forms_the_present.-.sandra_man.pdf?1603459143)



Telos (to be released in 2022), Sandra Man, Video Still, with Assi Pakkanen

### 03 The Earth Is Another Planet

I have been going outdoors since 2017 with partners, friends and collaborators – Moritz Majce, Christine Börsch-Supan, Lisa Densem, Joséphine Evrard, Assi Pakkanen, Laura Siegmund and others – to make videos and live performances. So far I've worked where there is no one, in the mountains or on very large wastelands. Places where nature and technology meet attract me: reservoir lakes built into mountain plateaus, coal mining areas turned into nature reserves, landfills being transformed into recreational areas.

I think that the need to go out and be outside has to do with a changing perception of space, with a different relationship between people and environments. Bodies in the landscape give way to seeing and feeling not only themselves, but the space they are in; the human figure embedded in an area decentres itself and connects as a body to a living environment. At the same time, however, the human never merges with its surrounding. It stands out of it, resists it, changes it, intervenes in it, modifies it. The human moving outside has an active and a passive, an exposed and an autonomous side; in nature it shows them more clearly or indeed, this relation can only to the fore there.

For me, working outdoors is about being moved by space. The impulses come from the environment, its materiality, its own rhythm: temperature, weather, ground, sounds. It already starts with the way; sometimes, for example in the mountains, you have to walk for some hours until you are at the place where you feel ready to work. You arrive there with a different body and in a different state.

With every step you are meeting the earth, you touch it, it attracts you, you are shaken by it; with every breath you let the whole atmosphere into and pass through you; the sun makes your skin warm, rain makes it wet, clouds cool it, very bright light falls into your eyes, sounds of birds and winds enter your ears; outdoors you are touching and you are being touched by the earth as a body, a living presence that moves you.

Outside is the name for an intensity. It is the gift of simultaneity, of simultaneous presents giving birth to a reality always still to be sensed. Outdoors is the place where you come into something else. Always, there is already something there. You are not the first; you have to find a way to place yourself, to connect to your surroundings. You listen.

When I am working outdoors I feel a certain access to questions of belonging, belonging to a space called earth, to the manifold multiplicity of what there is.

The more I pay attention, the more I start seeing things for the first time and in a different light. The closer I look, the nearer I come, the more I feel like being somewhere strangely new. Out there, belonging feels very close to being unfamiliar.