

# «on tensions, tangles and the nature of forces»

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Ivana Müller's piece *Forces of Nature*, which had its Berlin premiere at Uferstudios on the 12th of October 2021, left me feeling critical and a little frustrated. i was not sure how to go about responding to the work, since i've always struggled with writing critique. but after the show, i listened to Ivana Müller discuss her practice and quickly became intrigued by her creative processes, as well as her open and frank nature. i found the choreographer so interesting and approachable, that i thought to write her a letter with my thoughts and questions. however, this idea gently backfired into a mildly embarrassing learning curve.

the whole experience made me realise something: tension is a type of intimacy, re-invoking difference and distance in multiple songs and articulations. tension is a practice of co-habitation and co-existence across different contexts, but also across similarities and what we have in common. strangely, the ripples of tension in my letter resonated with certain aspects of the performance itself.

in *Forces of Nature*, i witnessed five performers navigate themselves across a landscape that they were simultaneously constructing. the performers were connected to each other by climbing ropes and gear, and they kept these ropes taut by maintaining distance and pulling against each other. in this way, they appeared to rely on each other through sustained tension, an embodiment that powerfully illustrates our current global moment.

visually, the proximity and distance-keeping between performers created a striking sculpture-in-flux through the makeshift architecture of the ropes. this sculpture also functioned as a choreographic mechanism, since the performers' bodies worked as moving anchors, creating criss-crossing lines across the stage. in this constellation, the ropes served both as an extension of and connection to each body. as the performers moved through their sculptural landscape, they began to create another structure with more ropes, busy with the task of tying a grid of ropes together.

shortly into the piece, the performers began to converse amongst themselves. with their voices amplified by tiny, invisible microphones, i listened closely as they drifted through a poetic, philosophical and sometimes absurd script. they talked for over an hour. they



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«FORCES OF NATURE»  
IVANA MÜLLER

PERFORMANCE  
BERLIN PREMIERE

recalled dreams, told jokes, asked questions, they sometimes disagreed. it feels taboo to say it, but as the piece progressed i felt the very subtle residues of a kind of colonial thinking. i squirmed at the language in a story about reaching a famous and imaginary point on a map, the centre of the world. i bristled when they referred ambiguously to a Native American practice of orientating oneself using the cardinal points.

in the unfolding of this dialogue, i began to pull against the work. as a white south african person of settler descent, i received a eurocentric education but i was still born and raised in the so-called «global south», which provides both a referential yet peripheral perspective on european stage practices, one of which i recognize to be a type of musing-while-moving, which i feel embodies a practice of saying what you're doing, instead of doing what you're doing.

the piece itself hinted at some sort of politic but never arrived at a point, which perhaps was precisely the point. but during this global moment of urgency, to witness five white bodies musing on stage and never arriving at a point felt too unbearably on the nose. they spoke so much and yet said so little, and this seems to me to be reoccurring practice of whiteness. a practice that i feel daily in my own body and work, as well as one that i've often seen on stage.

and in my pulling away from the dialogue, i also felt my proximity to such language, coming into sharp contact with my own colonial residue. this tension gave form to the multiple ways in which i am entangled in such a work and such conversations. the interconnectedness continues through the sensation of my person, my context and concerns, pressing against Ivana Müller's piece. perhaps the sensing of myself in this tension is what caused me to reach out to her with a letter. in any case, the rope stretches across the stage, forcing me to feel both recognition and resistance in my own body.



OCTOBER 12 + 13  
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