

# ON “CONTINUING” AND CONTAINING

It is another muggy evening this summer and I am heading to Dock11; from Zionskirchstraße I continue on Kastanienallee. I dreamingly observe the surrounding, the busy street, the many people bathing in the hot air. I feel slightly dazed by the impulses that reach my senses.

My eyes meet those of Raz Mantell, we smile to each other and continue our own pathways. Together with her collaborator Susanna Ylikoski, they are walking on the pavement; as their audience is approaching the theatre, at different paces, in different states and moods, they are walking away from it. They are “continuing with what already started, without knowing it has”, continuing their journey of taking walks.

As I continue walking to the venue, I remember one of our previous encounters. A week before the performance I joined them on one of these walks, where they shared their process with me at Volkspark Friedrichshain. Raz, Susanna and I walked in silent contemplation through the park, absorbing the atmosphere through our senses. The plants, the trees, the light, the breeze, the people, the dogs, the squirrels; presenting themselves to us, awakening our sensations.

As I reach the entrance of the theatre, it amazes me how memories can hijack perception. Sometimes walking can be such an automatism, allowing the mind to wonder off and bring us to other times and places, embedded in our memory.

I sit on the tribune, positioned all around the periphery of the space. I observe the feet of the audience walking in, first the heel hits the floor then the arch rolls forward till the toes give the final push up in the air, one step after the other.

At last Raz and Susanna walk in, returning from their walk, following our footsteps in space. They lean shoulder to shoulder, and together their weight is rooting down onto the ground. Leaning as a form of positive codependency, as the way in which our bodies are bound to earth. They continue leaning further into each other, challenging their strengths in a constant play with gravity. Their bodies seem very familiar to each other, the boundaries between them thin, almost blurring, as they roll their faces together. Intimate and playful, their bodies glide on each other like sweat drops on the skin.

As they undress, their bare chests open space for vulnerability, but their dance counterpoints my initial assumption. Their naked female bodies<sup>1</sup> exude strength.

What does it mean to own your body?

Their movement transforms into a rough play fight, pushing and pulling, balancing on each other, playfully and powerfully. Laughs from the audience release the tension that has been stirring the hot air, laughing as a liberating form of participation in the dance.

In the sound score their walking steps are resonating steadily and rhythmically on the surface of what I imagine to be gravel. Scratchy sounds tickling my ears, I hear birds, traffic, train. It seems as if we could be simultaneously inside and outside of the theatre. But mostly I feel contained in this intimate space.

The audience is glancing at their naked bodies, they are gazing back, owning their naked bodies. I can see their bellies inhaling and exhaling, expanding and contracting rhythmically.

I am reminded of the quote by Eula Biss<sup>2</sup>: "I point to my belly button and tell him that all of us were once contained within an other".

I look back at the booklet where I read this quote, which contains materials the two artists collected from their walking and exchanged during their research. The photograph of a clothed woman hugging a naked body curled into a ball, perched on a kitchen counter, reminds me that in metaphorical terms, we keep on containing each other also after being born.

They have come to stillness, the agitation has subsided to a posed standing posture, their effort reverberates in their pounding bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> The two artists identify as female, and their research deals with questions of ownership of their female bodies in Western society.

<sup>2</sup> Eula Biss, *On Immunity*



Foto Credits, Miria-Sabina Maciagiewucz x Maximilian Thümler, "Countertop Self-Portrait with Miria. Exhibition 'Corona Culture', at Alte Munze, Berlin.