

# «our return to nature»

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After experiencing the performance «Hopeless» by Sergiu Matis on the 9th of December as part of Tanzfabrik's 2021 autumn program. Two writers in dialogue with one another, embark on the quest of writing the following text *Zu vier Händen*, systematically following through the structure of the performance. Two and a half hours long, «Hopeless» involves three performers, Sergiu Matis, Martin Hansen, and Manon Paren, and is divided in three parts, the Extinction Room, the Bunker and the Pastoral Song, each of which taking place at HeizHaus and Uferstudios. The terms «us» and «we» are used to refer to the two writers.

## EXTINCTION ROOM

The audience slowly ripples into the performance space, attentively scanning the situation: we are met with screeching cries of unidentified critters at times coming from the speakers, at times uttered by the dancing bodies. Three performers are moving in space, tracing patterns and crossing pathways. The room is drenched in a post apocalyptic gloom, an ochre fog, and a leery atmosphere.

They dance alone together, embodying movements that seem to belong to both the human and the non-human. Tongues sticking out of their wide-open mouths, arms spread out like wings, legs bent in hunting-gathering positions. This must be a rite of passage, «this is your return to nature», «welcome to your home»; they sing to us. With poised and seductive voices they tell us stories of extinction, of survival, of responsibility, of despair, of hope, embodying the phenomena of simultaneity of complex ecosystems.

Are these stories partly fictional or are we, as humankind, indeed hopeless in the face of climate disaster?

The geography of the soundscape evokes how constant sound is in the natural world. Do we listen? Do we unveil a hegemony in their thoughts? Their message is one but diverse and harmonious in its delivery.

Towards the end of this section, we are surrounded by an even stronger sense of apocalypse, which reminds us of the book «*Silent Spring*» by Rachel Carson. The book describes how humans subject themselves and the environment to a slow poisoning by misuse of pesticides that are silencing the countryside and agricultural areas. With the extermination of insects and with them their symbiotic partnerships, these places of sonorous ecological diversity are collapsing, inexorably affecting the sustenance of humans themselves. The soundscape of the Extinction Room might portray just a memory of the incessant non-human harmonies of the natural world, that are on the verge of becoming silenced.

## BUNKER

The performers put on their jackets, their plastic backpacks, and grab their metal walking sticks to guide us outside through the snowy pathways of the yard and into the Bunker room. Shouting and strained in movements, they instruct us not to step out of the path, and to follow them closely. We are entering dangerous grounds. We are embarking on an expedition – are we setting off to colonize unfamiliar territories?

As we enter, the sound is overwhelmingly loud, undecipherable, hectic, the light is cold. The audience forms a circle occupying the edges of the performance space,

reminding us of the tribal and folkloric origin (nature) of dance. The three performers vocalize inaudible instructions or screams of help and our own nervous system is at maximum alertness.

Their bodies are gradually warping between gestures, continuously deviating the previous vector with a new one, pushing the whole of their body structure to constantly rearrange on its axes. Surprising not only the viewers but also themselves with their ever-increasing speed, they seem possessed by an uncontrollable force. They are embracing the glitch.

## **PASTORAL SONG**

Amid the delirium, a blue large sheet of plastic is lowered to the ground uncovering three rows of chairs. All audience members, in silent agreement, re-appropriate the traditional seating of the theatre. Meanwhile the dancers keep on dancing, ever more frenetically, ever more, what seems from the outside, in a trance-like-state. They crawl down, jump up, stretch out and tense in. Sweat it out, for us all. Our mirror neurones are firing from the edge of our seat, conjoining with their bodies at a distance.

Then speech comes back, at first as song accompanied by two flutes. The chanted words «I turn into a tree, so you may sit in my shadow» transform into guttural sounds and the bleating of lambs. Thinking back to the start of the performance, it seems we have travelled from wildlife, through colonization, to domesticated life.

Finally, we find ourselves in the landscape and storytelling of the ancient Greek Idylls. Their alluring take on the chorus of Daphne lulls us, as they rhythmically fuse gestures and poses with words. We are seduced by the dancing bodies and yet overwhelmed by a feeling of sorrow.

## **AT LEAST THEY KEEP ON DANCING**

Upon embarking on the quest of writing, the writers reflect on the theme of the Idylls and interpret it as a take on the human tendency to imbed natural phenomena in human characters. As in the narrated story of Daphne, where the character of Daphne (a nymph, associated with purity) rejects the lustful advances of Apollo (the Sun God, associated with human rationality). She saves her virtue from the God's forceful approach through metamorphosis, by turning into a tree. This story opens up many avenues of interpretation, but we are particularly interested in the idea of sacrifice, asking ourselves: is it sacrifice to turn her human body into a non-human one?

Taken metaphorically: is it sacrifice to radically shift our understanding of being human? And of our relationship to nature?

In the face of the climate catastrophe, we must «return to nature», perhaps by reestablishing relationships of self-regulation, respect and sustenance, rather than exploitation, extraction and destruction.

To nurture such shift, we might resort to dance, and its meaning through times, when tribes and societies have used it to celebrate a spiritual connection to the natural world. And also, we might look at the dance rituals of the «Tristan Albatros», huge birds who form strong bonds through dancing. Despite their threat of extinction, they keep on dancing. Dance like nature is living and breathing. Perhaps to look at how we treat nature is to look at how we treat dance?



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**«HOPELESS»  
SERGIU MATIS**

**PERFORMATIVE SOUND  
INSTALLATION & DANCE  
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**DECEMBER 9 – 12  
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