

TANZFABRIK  
BERLIN

SPIELZEIT-  
PUBLIKATION



# *Fall* 2021

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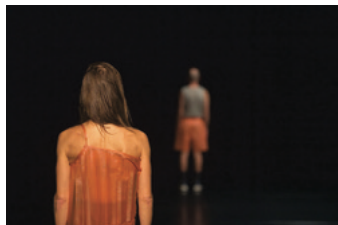


*Memories  
and  
Reflections*

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# Editorial

With the autumn season 'Fall 2021', for the first time we presented our stage programme as a theatre season instead of in the usual format of the OPEN SPACES festival: 'Fall 2021' went on throughout all the autumn months of 2021 with premieres, reruns, guest shows, audiowalks and works-in-progress. Writers who are part of the collective *STREAM. Live Art Writing*, or who are loosely associated with it, wrote texts about the autumn performances, which are collected in this publication.

The writers from *STREAM* understand writing as movement, as forming their own artistic relationship to live art. The texts about 'Fall 2021' bring the shows to life in written remembering, they take us back to the dance walks and lead us through imaginary (art) landscapes. The texts are memories and collages, they are conversations and correspondences, often created in a joint writing process. The writers reflect on the performances in their own artistic writing and also take a look at their own positioning as spectators and writers in order to find links to their own identity. In this way, these texts demonstrate once again that the reception and understanding of live art cannot be separated from our own specific biographies, our own experiences and vulnerabilities, but rather are connected to our personal backgrounds and legacies, and thus continue to write our own stories.

In their work – both in the performances and the texts – the choreographers and the writers share their diasporic life stories, displacements and heritages with us. In these narratives, the performances and the texts about them come together to form a tightly interwoven structure of references and stories, whereby the shared experiences never remain on the superficial level of the accidental or purely private, but form links to historical contexts, to the political, the collective. Because history and histories are contained with the personal, the autobiographical implies the political; private spaces are haunted by history, as Homi K. Bhabha wrote in 1994 in his *The Location of Culture*: “the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” – the personal *is* the political.

The in-between spaces, gaps and discontinuities that Bhabha focuses on in his book run through these texts like a common thread. The performances in the autumn programme and the reflections on them in the articles ask about precisely these positionings, about the spaces in between and the 'beyond', by addressing displacements, literally tracing colonial inscriptions in urban space and activating remembering in the practice of walking. Some works focus on bodily movement as such, drawing attention to the individual paths, steps, impulses of movement that allow us to navigate the city. On our paths, monuments reveal historical visions, urban space, with its arrangements and architectures, creates collectivity and isolation, forms identities and conveys colonial history. Those histories, patterns and senses of belonging (or not belonging) are embedded in the bodies that navigate through these material and ideal monuments.

The question of locating oneself can also be found in the autumn performances in the form of an ironic positioning of the self within the culture industry and in the literal deconstruction of theatres as well as the deconstruction of an essentialist understanding of bodies or their “originary identity”. Other pieces deliberately break with our habitual patterns and thereby disrupt our ways of perceiving; they question our chronological organisation of time: tennis is not being played on the tennis court, we hear audio recordings of dead people and the voices of bird species that have gone extinct. If the

present is revealed, in Bhabha's sense, by “its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities”, this is shown here in decaying monuments into which visions of the future have been inscribed, in stories of migration that are stored in bodies for generations or in pastoral poetry from Greek and Roman antiquity, projected into dystopian images of the future.

In the preface to the German-language edition of *The Location of Culture*, Elisabeth Bronfen points out that our 'master narratives' of home and kinship are to be understood merely as a protective seal that serves to spare us the traumatic knowledge that we all have no solid ground beneath our feet. This is to be understood as an appeal to recognise that our identity is constituted in a 'third place', an in-between space that can no longer be covered over by homogeneous histories, but which is composed of intersubjective narratives, personal biographies. We must say goodbye to the illusion of a 'safe ground' under our feet. Instead, we can only move carefully and step by step on organic tissue that exists in a delicate balance.

That which the performances and the texts span together has the effect of this 'organic tissue', a hybrid web of ruptures and discontinuities. To this web, finely woven of the performances and the texts, a third component will be added: In the practice of reading, we add another layer, we augment the fabric with our own understandings, and we connect (or disconnect) with our histories and legacies. Thus, we temporarily move in a common reference, spanning together an in-between space, an interstice that we can tread carefully, in delicate balance.

Felicitas Zeeden

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All quotes from: *The Location of Culture* by Homi K. Bhabha (1994, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London & New York).

The 'Fall 2021' programme was largely planned and put together by Ludger Orlok, who has since withdrawn from the operational business of the Tanzfabrik Berlin. We would like to thank Ludger here once again for the many years he worked for the Tanzfabrik, for his warmth, his commitment and especially for laying down the groundwork for us to implement our autumn season.

Full disclosure: The writer of the editorial is herself a founding member of the collective *STREAM. Live Art Writing*. She invited other writers from *STREAM* to write texts about Tanzfabrik's autumn programme for the present publication.

# «Washed ashore on self- made stages»

LEA PISCHKE

island  
isle  
islet  
peninsula  
archipelago  
enclave  
reef  
atoll  
bar  
cay  
haven  
key  
refuge  
retreat  
sanctuary  
shelter

There are many of them!  
They are not in a sea or marked on a map.  
They only exist here.  
They have been built by human hands.  
I also have mine, I have to share it with several people.

The biggest is to my left. It is inhabited by someone who makes sounds with electronic devices and some who are sitting nearby. It is made of tall scaffolding. I have to look up and I can see one of them tripping over a cable.  
Will he fall off? Can he swim?

Then others appear. And disappear. One is particularly ephemeral:

tiny-wheelie-bin-rubbish-theatre-of-my-dreams

Put together by several delighted, very excited beings.

"It needs a CAAAR-PET!!" (the double of a primary school child puts a red plastic bag in front of two toilet rolls marking the entrance).

"No-no, the proscenium! HERE!" (placing a snack wrapper on top of another snack wrapper)

They pop up everywhere, these all-my-wishes-are-being-heard-buildings, sprouting from an abundance of left-overs, carefully put together, to be instantly kicked to pieces by another excited being.

Where? In the sea, the void, in the inbetween.

The inbetween of what?

Of the many

Islas Bonitas

Julian Weber, together with Juan Pablo Cámara, Judith Förster, Liina Magnea, Lyllie Rouvière, Karol Tymiąski, Rachell Bo Clark, Thomas Proksch, Roy Amotz and Annegret Schalke, is on a mission: as a team, they are building, destroying, and re-building playful constructs created out of usual and unusual materials.

A neverending recycling - and more often than not - upcycling loop of what a happy island can look like. Is a theatre a happy island? Is a happy island a theatre?

Solid bricks are being thrown in the air like a toddler by its parent.

The group is chasing each other. They jump, they run, then rest and dart off again.

Fun, thrill and action thicken the air. A constant whirling around in an opulence of potentials, in a shape-shifting building-site made of objects which could serve as a foundation for another happy island at any given moment.

Concentrated arm swings, angular torso shifts, restrained forward-movement, dubbed by electronic beats. The group is constructing its own locomotion with serious dedication. They are standing, staggered, to the far left, eyes fixated to the far right. Several metres separate them from their target. Then, they run.

With full impact against the wall.

Nothing is excluded, nothing is safe. The wall is part of the game. It represents another construction element, that of the ultimate hyper-Isla Bonita: Uferstudio 13, the performance venue itself.

Because:

All objects, including humans, can be slotted.

They can be put.

They can be stuffed.

Can be arranged in line.

Screwed in place.

Assembled.

Rigged.

Lifted.

Rods, platforms, joints, bricks, cardboard, plastic bags, cling-film, glasses, wrappers, fog.

The materials can be soft, squishy, translucent, ethereal, hardly graspable with your hands.

Or on the contrary: hard, solid, reliable, sturdy, tried-and-trusted, cold and heavy to the touch.

Or inbetween: hard, solid, yet see-through and fragile if not handled with care.

A wooden transverse flutist plays an étude, the notes are floating in the air like instantly arranged sonic dots. Shimmering constructs hanging above the rods and rigs and heads, intangible, yet so present. Like a timeline full of 3D-events.

The flutist is traversing the scenes, chirpily commenting and accompanying the building of the many pop-up sites. Their breath is undulating through the instrument's tube, a sensual act of activated air.



The islas bonitas are surrounded by a lot of activated air: speech, breath, vibrations, sung harmonies, resonant objects.

- 1 uuuuuhhhhh
- 2 phewwww
- 3 [an étude]
- 4 scrap-scrap-traaap-cratt
- 5 This is a THE-A-T-RRRE!
- 6 bbbrrr-bbbrrr
- 7 hmmm-hmmm [unisono]
- 8 thud-thud-thud
- 9 yuhhuuuuid
- 10 «Hey»
- 11 «I love you!», «Me, too!», «You will always be in my heart» [from behind the window]
- 12 plop, plop [gushes of champagne]
- 13 daannng\_\_\_\_\_daaanng\_\_\_\_\_daaanng

The islas are inhabited.  
One isla is the largest. The one I am on. It consists of three longitudinal platforms and many chairs, occupied by people. I am at the very front and let my feet dangle into the “water”. The debris of all the mini-wheelie-bin-rubbish-theatre-of-my-dreams is brushed under our isla, washed ashore. Our isla is the receptacle of other isla’s building units. Rubbish? Is our isla being soiled?

But that is not everything.  
In this cornucopia of sounds and objects, another island erupts: isla aesthetica.  
The fog that dries the air, the slow motion of a performer with Pre-Raphaelite features, her gentle touching and raising of thin-walled champagne glasses counterpointing the other performers’ hectic agitations and heavy bricks in full flight.  
The clanging of lengthy steel rods, the showering of light gels, the communal lifting of a huge square rig flooded in bright light, with a flutist wriggling right beneath.  
Objects that can be both hit and caressed. Objects with colour, smell, shape, and sound. Objects which could be manhandled, while others can only be caressed, let alone be transported.

A lot of sensations are invading my isla. I pull back my feet. I am offered champagne. Am I on a christened ship? Am I mistaken? The bottles are being emptied, one by one. Once melted, they could serve as raw material for....and....and also....actually, my own isla needs an entrance made of stained glass. With different green shades. The bottles would be perfect for that.

«Washed ashore on self-made stages»



© DIETER HARTWIG



© JOANA LUCAS

«LA ISLA BONITA»  
JULIAN WEBER

PREMIERE  
PERFORMANCE

SEPTEMBER 6 – 9  
UFERSTUDIO 14



© JOANA LUCAS

# «Double Blick»

SASHA AMAYA & SO YOUNG H. KIM

SY Non-EU citizen, artist, woman with black eyes.  
Identification card in my wallet,  
...but do I feel like I've arrived [here]?  
Someone once said to me that moving to another country is like being re-born. You learn everything from the beginning: language, culture, system. Indeed, it took me quite a while to solve the Möbius Band of apartment, bank account, and visa – each of which a pre-requisite of the other. But an important difference is that this time I was not thrown into this world but chose to exist in this state of being a foreign body. In other words, this body is not of baby, but the full-fledged one, with a knowledge of her own and the flexibility to digest the other side of the story. The perk of being an immigrant. Exposing yourself to a foreign condition grants oneself access to a sphere of otherness, a chance to examine your previous history from your privilege, as a citizen of your mother land.

When the white cis German man stands in the middle of the stage with crumbled papers in his hand, sharing his own experience of linguistic and cultural difference can occur as a domestic immigrant, I ask myself if his experience has ever turned into fertile soil for his artistic creation, or stayed traumatic as it was. A ball made of paper thrown across the stage. It made a crumbling sound, brings back memories from my very first day in Berlin. My hands were full with heavy two luggages, from airport to rent flat, while I was standing at escalator. All of sudden, there was a foreign hand, rummaging in my jacket pocket, making a crumbling sound.

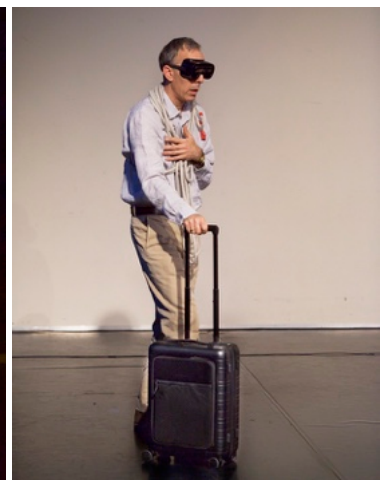
A piece of bread left from the flight, wrapped in plastic. A stranger's and my eyes are locked. As time passed, the level of fear to be or to see the "fremd-ness" faded away. So did the sheer curiosity, that has motivated me to leave the motherland.

Throughout the piece, my gaze often attached to Jasna's face. While Clément divided and reconnected lines and spaces on the screen, I felt the strong urge

To pick up the ball of crumbled paper  
From the stage and put it in her pocket.

To look into her eyes and goes -

"So. Do you finally feel like you've arrived here?"



©



«ICH BIN TSCHEUD»  
CLÉMENT LAYES &  
JASNA L. VINOVRŠKI

PERFORMANCE  
PREMIERE

SEPTEMBER 6 – 9  
UFERSTUDIO 14

SA Clement draws a spiral. On the outside cusp of the spiral we are gathered, like little peas in a curved pod, from all over the world. As the spiral tightens, he and Jasna appear, two little bright dots from Europe, vibrating and humming back and forth, finding their place. And at the centre of the spiral, tucked in a little arc of ink, is our narrator, standing at the centre of Germany. Volkswagen! he incants, his arms bridging into a V as he looks up to the Himmel. His pale button-down shirt and light-rimmed glasses the stage set for a melody that sings of what makes Germany German. At least on the outside. But outsides and insides are always more complicated than one thinks, and it is therefore we outsiders who sit on the rim as the insider turns himself inside out. It is from the south, we are told, that he comes, and when his parents relocate him, it is a difference of not just culture and everyday habits, but of language, too, a true inability to understand those around him; first in his new home, and later back "at home". For those of us who have travelled so far and been so lost in the ocean of a totally new language, nay sometimes even scripts, to hear a story of different dialects upheld as difference is piercing. And yet, and yet... The dismantling of the idea of Germanness qua Siemens, qua Bosch, qua button-down shirts and light-rimmed glasses, splinters our concept of Deutsch. Not one thing, but a puzzle to be refashioned, variously, incompletely, diversely. Not just for us, but even for those at the inside of the inside – maybe. We put the pieces back together, t-s-c-h-e-u-d, our urushi the mash of bright and broken experiences we make on this journey to make a home.



# «Skipping Stones to the Other Shore»

PARVATHI RAMANATHAN

Two beings, drenched wet,  
squeeze water out their bones  
purge it out of their hair.  
The water in their swollen mouths  
pursed like blowfish  
passed for generations  
from one mouth  
to another.

«Here, open your mouth,  
carry this water.  
This is water from that pale river,  
swallowed at our first crossing.  
With all its nectar, with all its silt  
You must pass it on.»  
The two beings do pass it on.  
They drip a few drops into each of our ears,  
and now we cannot un-see.

Bracketed by prominent roads and parks in Wedding district of Berlin, Transvaalstraße runs unremarkably for my uninitiated eye. With a shisha bar and Späti at its head, a Kita down the road, and the omnipresent physiotherapy clinic across from it, Transvaalstraße looks like any other Berlin neighbourhood. What about this street draws them? What about it makes them stop, look, shudder,

ponder and wonder? The artists Coila-Leah Enderstein and Nicola van Straaten walk ahead. Their comfortable gait next to one another tells me: here are two people who have taken many long walks together.

For the next hour, I and others gathered for the audio-walk performance are privy to their reflections from past walks down this very path – whose name holds an indelible place in their stories. I plug in my earphones and harmonise my body to their voices as we walk along Transvaalstraße.

The voice draws my attention to the signboard ahead of me – where the name of the street is scratched out. Luderitzstraße, named after the colonialist who established Imperial Germany's first colony in what today is Namibia. As I glean the force behind the scratches on the metal surface, we hear another voice declare a single statement on how power was wielded in another land. "138 years ago, lines were drawn in the sand, and a man forced another man's hand." The artists tell me later that this statement was recorded on Independence Avenue in Windhoek, Namibia.

Here in Berlin, the performers mirror the voice in alluding to the colonialist legacy of the street under our feet. I see Enderstein lying across the road, obstructing vehicular traffic on Luderitzstraße as van Straaten keeps watch. In a quiet minute of solidarity through their bodies, they bring attention to the raw tension on this street. I see already: a street name can hold huge significance.

We forge ahead along the street as the artists' voices unspool the story of colonial legacies in South Africa, and specifically of Transvaal, an erstwhile province across the Vaal river. We hear about the Dutch-origin Boers and the British colonisers that settled on these lands over the centuries, dispossessing Bantu-speaking and other indigenous peoples. With detailed historical references, we hear about the way map-making became an integral means to establish power and legitimacy as a settler nation-state. Here in Berlin, on the WWWstraße, I get a taste of this experience.

Twenty adults with no children in tow, we enter a children's park and are invited to choose any spot in the sandy lot. The audio-guide then asks us to make a slow rotation – as if our body were a periscope – observing and absorbing what lies in front of our eyes. On my spot underneath a tree, I make a slow turn. As I survey the buildings and encroach the cars with my gaze, I sense my body expand and my feet settle in further. Merely looking closely without being looked back at, became a way of gaining knowledge and perhaps, a kind of power. I am aware, however, that I will never know the lives behind each window on this street. Much like the Boers who did not know the names of the trees they encountered or the river they crossed.

While following the artists' conversation about other lands, our bodies continue to follow the rules of Berlin. We walk single file on a very narrow pavement, being sure to avoid the empty bicycle path.

We are now led to a grass-covered field. The artists come in contact with one another. They lean on and push against each other's bodies, playing with weight and gravity. Meanwhile we hear them mull over themes that also demand trust and vulnerability. As descendants of European settlers in South Africa, van Straaten and Enderstein tread with sensitivity and critical awareness to coloniality. They engage with the topics of their own family legacies that came as a gift and a burden, the struggle between Afrikaans and British identities therein, and the effacement of certain identities and languages. Now living in Europe, they assuage varied feelings of affinity and difference in this ecosystem. They speak in sighs, often taking refuge in patches of soil and grass along Transvaalstraße. Keeping an active relationship with the actual land and geography of this site seems to carry them through this self-excitation.

*Crossing the Pale River* is a personal introspection and criticism of coloniality. It is more complex than anger or protest. The performance doesn't ask to remove the name of Transvaalstraße from the Berlin map. It doesn't ask us to celebrate it by any means. It offers us to hold new knowledge about our city and notice the stirring it causes. It demands us to take note of the complex river of history.

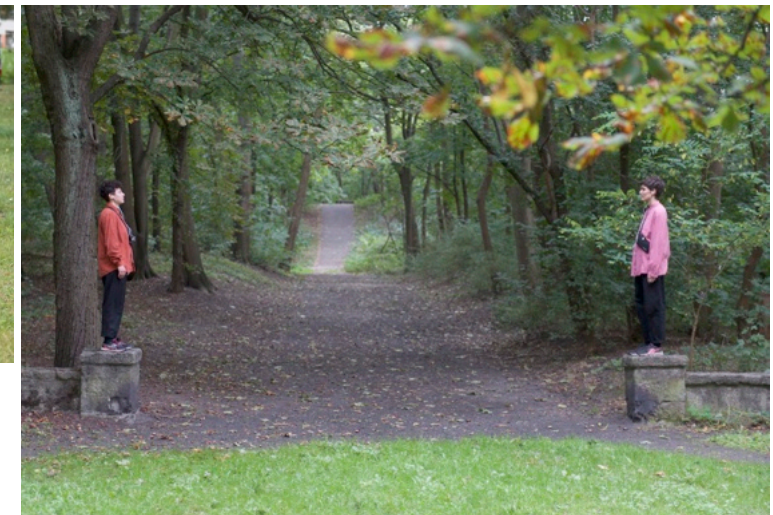
The river demands several crossings. Sometimes we may merely go and look at our reflection. Sometimes we may skip stones over the water, and perhaps they will reach the other shore.



© DIETER HARTMANN

«CROSSING THE PALE RIVER»  
NICOLA VAN STRAATEN &  
COILA-LEAH ENDERSETIN

AUDIOWALK



SEPTEMBER 17 – 18 + 24 – 25  
TRANSSVAALSTRASSE IN  
BERLIN WEDDING



# «Triangulations»

## SASCHA AMAYA

*A game of tennis is choreographically reimagined. Three players take up their game through a transformation of physical codes. The court becomes a stage on which to challenge expectations of place and the assumption of the binary.*

My eyes tumble down rows of concrete and moss, a rectangular splendor hidden amongst tall evergreens. A secret site discovered, a site kept hidden, guarded. The gaze of eyes that play upon the space is plural: with light in the sky, I sit alone at a table, the men next to me in post-game banter, adding a drink to the luxury of the view. As the blue darkens, a second set arrive, dangerous haircuts and white trousers, sliding in the friction of this forceful beauty and the practice of critique. Yelps of recognition sparkle in the air: there is a multiplicity of surprise meetings between these two apparently distinct and distinctively coiffed groups, united by a habit of that which we call culture. The cushions are spread out upon each row. Black black black black. Now red. Now beige. Now light blue. I want to rectify this splattering of shades in such a place, and hope the swarm of black jackets will conceal it for me, and indeed they do, as our limbs assemble their spectatorial position on the cold stone. It's growing dark and I am struck by an immense chill, confused in my body by the orange light dusting the court. The chatter is the buzz of flies in the late sweet summer when one lone figure begins to rake. Begins to trace. Begins to care for the space.

Quiet.

The players arrive. We know it is not sport but art because we are silent. Figure two. Figure three. Sportive figures removing and refashioning sports bras. Moving into position on court, two bodies that respond to one another with an atheletic collection of postures, the sweat of a different kind of competition.

Net.

Sacred net. Definite yet flexible, modest yet decisive. A barrier and a bridge. Without net there could be no competition elliding into passion, no refractive mirror of desire lancing through the space, no agreement on rules to be broken. The third of eye of the carer wanders across the space, sage, interrupter, observer, rule-maker-breaker. They flash in and out of view, as we spectators coolly orbit this uneven triangulation.

Break.

Lifted by the power of a surging bass, the body skims over the white of the net, invading, plunging, rupturing, disturbing, risking, offering, creating. Six hands pass the ball amongst them, their bodies converging, echoes of their abstract poses of desire and triumph melting into the clay. An agreement forms between them, something between safety and risk, comfort and adventure.



© FMZ



«WILSON»  
SOPHIE GUISET

PERFORMANCE  
PREMIERE

SEPTEMBER 22 – 25  
TENNIS-CLUB TIERGARTEN

She leads the way. One. Another. The bush buzzes with the unknown. They slip away. One. Then the next. Away together. With each other.

Our eyes fix themselves on the swaying bush her arm last grazed. Our ears tip upward on high alert. The sensation of suspense lifts us all. We watch the evergreens sway darkly against the setting sun.





©

# «City Cues»

BEATRIX JOYCE

Viktoria-Park, Kreuzberg, Berlin. I came here once on a date in early spring. Flowers were peeping out at me as I wandered by with this new, unfamiliar person. The winter before I took part in a residency at Tanzfabrik, and I trudged across the paths caked in snow, keeping to the sides so as not to be run over by kids on sledges. I have come to this park at various times of day and night, and it has connected me in many ways to other people and other places. But this was the first time, with Katja Munker's "Invitation to Walk", I felt completely immersed in the experience of being there.

"When you look behind you, you will see the memorial on which you will find the name Leipzig, 18.10.1813," said a calm female voice, in my ears. I looked behind me, and as if on cue, the text appeared before me in shiny, golden letters engraved in the dark stone of the memorial. I had never noticed it before. I listened to the voice, wondering to myself what else hadn't I observed that may be waiting for me, just around the corner.

At the top of the hill, I looked out over the city towards Kreuzberg. I learned from the voice that this would be the direction of my journey: I was to head down Großbeerenstraße, across the river where the street meets Ida-Wolff-Platz at a slanted angle. I began my descent down the slope. At the waterfall, the voice invited me to look around. I turned around my axis in a slow circle. I noticed a white envelope, sitting unopened by the fence; a QR code stuck to the railing. I thought of those who had left them there and why, and how we tend to get too involved in our pocket-sized screens to receive the hidden messages of the city.



KATJA MÜNKER: HÖR-  
SPIEL-SPAZIERGÄNGE

KOLLEKTIVER WALK  
& PODCAST-RELEASE



SEPTEMBER 26

The voice encouraged me to observe my surroundings with my body. To listen with my eyes. To see with my ears. As I walked on, I felt my senses mix and I expanded my arms to test the reach of my kinesphere. My feet set the pace and I found myself slipping into an easy rhythm. The orange and red leaves blinked at me, bright against the grey sky. The voice asked me whether I could still see the memorial, reminding me of where I had come from. I felt present. I felt a closeness to myself, a sensation of time stretching out in front of me, a feeling so rare and yet so familiar, like running into an old friend I haven't seen in a while.

I arrived at Ida-Wolff-Platz and I felt like I was in a completely new place, not even in Berlin. I watched the square as if I were watching a film. A family walked by. A cyclist followed. The voice announced I had reached the end of the walk and thanked me for my participation. I lingered on the square for a little while longer. I rotated around my axis, the rubber soles of my boots meeting the pavement, their sound blocked out by my headphones. Slightly dazed, I turned to where I had come from and walked back down Großbeerenstraße, the city revealing itself to me from the other side.

Katja Munker's podcast series "Invitation to Walk" brings listeners on guided walks through the city, accompanied by body-perception exercises and local urban history. Aside from Viktoria-Park/Kreuzberg, she has designed walks for Mitte, Friedrichshain and Strausberger Platz, all available via the Tanzfabrik website.



# «52°55'N, 13°37'E TO 43°55'N, 20°30'E»

SO YOUNG H. KIM

Starting Port: Uferstudios (52° 55' N, 13° 37' E), the familiar spot for the majority of the group. Thirteen bodies mostly stranger to each other but destined to share two hours of their lives. The headset, connected to GPS, was placed tight on my ears and soon poured unfamiliar machinery sounds along with a description of Spomenik, a man-made object commemorating the resistance against fascism in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the brutality and struggles during the People's Liberation War. As we strolled down a path located only 5 minutes from Uferstudios and yet hidden enough that I have never set foot in it in 4 years of my Berlin life, I couldn't help but wonder if the sounds that were landing on my ears came from the headset or from the actual surroundings. Is the sound coming from a space that holds Spomenik since 1960-80, or from the space across which my body is currently moving? That was how Christina Ciupke and Darko Dragičević's choreography of moving space hooked onto me. We were walking for two hours, destination unknown. The scenery was made of two distinct layers: a tangible place in which my body was moving, and an auditory landscape which has been traversed by the artists themselves. The two landscapes formed an elastic distance that shifts constantly during the performance. The audio files of the first two Spomenik sites focused mainly on exterior descriptions of the monuments, their historical value, and their surroundings. As the 'given data' accumulated in my body, the group had reached a basketball court, no different from the kind that can be found on every corner of a building complex. There, a few teenagers were bouncing the ball in radiant sunlight. Their sweaty voices merged in the background of Christina's voice which dominated my senses, explaining the history of the concentration camp around the monuments. As my brain organically illustrated the ruins from the camp site from audio files, my eyes were witnessing the kids with basketballs chasing one another. This ironical superimposition eliminated the thin line between the spaces. Before I had the chance to savor this sensation of discordance, the group was already set back in motion, succumbing to the pace of urban reality; straight forward, turn left, cross a traffic signal. Soon I realized that thirteen bodies started to tread in a certain shared rhythm - not too fast nor too slow, occasionally glancing over the shoulder. I silently giggled at the thought of how human we are. By merely walking alongside one another, a group dynamic was being created. Each body bouncing ever so slightly as it steps on the ground, it already created a rhythm very different from that of other pedestrians passing us by. The third audio file started, signaling an expansion. It depicted not only the physical characteristics of the monuments and their surroundings, but also the physical posture of the speakers - Christina and Darko. The tone of their voices immediately made me imagine the space that

holds their bodies as they recorded the files - lying near the water where the sun hits, just as it did the basketball court a while ago. The intangible yet special intimacy between the two artists was transmitted into my body, piercing the thick layer of reality. There, the two sceneries were coexisting, expanding the tactile and visual territory of my body. I noticed Darko walking ahead of the group. He had his hands crossed behind his relaxed back, headset over his ears and was moving forward in a constant rhythm. His body was walking with me, breathing the same Berlin air. But at the same time, I could witness him re-entering that other space, the space of Spomenik, Serbia, (43° 55' N, 20° 30' E), surrounded by water and sun. I walked on the scenery, where I've never been. At that moment, I felt like that I could see the gaze of Darko from his back. The piece was designed to allow two different spaces to co-exist in time through the synesthesia. The auditory experience created a space for the imagination to enhance and recharge the available sensorial elements. For our bodies are wired to imagine the unknown. For our bodies are designed to empathize. Two weeks after the Audio Walk, I could barely remember the people's faces who walked along side of me during these two hours. However, when I cross a random street corner in Berlin, sceneries from former Yugoslavia, where I have never visited, and the walking rhythm of that day, reappear as if out of the blue. This makes me giggle silently. How human we are.



«SILENT TRIO, CHAPTER#3:  
SPOMENIK»  
CHRISTINA CIUPKE/  
DARKO DRAGIČEVIĆ:

AUDIOWALK



OCTOBER 2 + 3



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

NICOLA VAN STRAATEN

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



© ALIX BOILLOT

«FORCES OF NATURE  
IVANA MÜLLER»

PERFORMANCE  
BERLINPREMIERE

sometimes absurd script. they talked for over an hour: they 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  
UFERSTUDIO 14

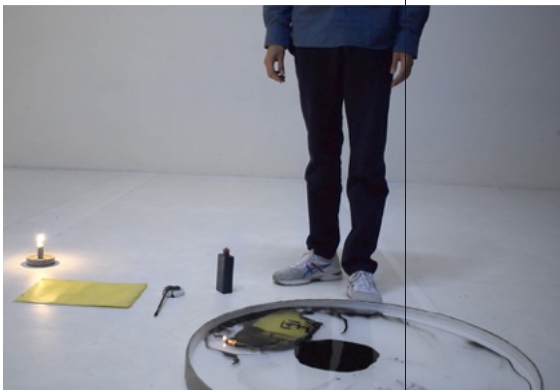
«HARBOR»  
JEE CHAN

WORK IN PROGRESS

OCTOBER 21 + 22  
UFERSTUDIO 1



© JEE CHAN



The performance opens in a slow and subdued atmosphere. Chan moves slowly with a round double-sided mirror that has a diameter about the size of their torso, along with the sound of a muffled voice speaking in a soft volume. Through the mirror, I see the architecture of the theatre, other audience members, and Chan. “Mirror raises the question of looking by opening ways and possibilities of looking. For example, to look at, in, through, past...”, says Chan during the artist talk. As they leave the mirror on the floor and kneel by a projector, the sound shifts to a clear voice speaking in Chinese, introducing the focal point of Chan’s looking. It is the voice of Chan’s grandmother that we hear. We see the English translation of her speaking on the projection, as Chan changes the slides.

Horror	Japanese soldiers	took the girls	My mom was heartless
	Chinese don’t care about girls		she left me
took a boat from Guangzhou to Hong Kong to Singapore			very poor

# «Looking into the muffled voices»

INKY LEE

‘How does one process grief?’ I ask myself after watching *Harbor*, a work in progress by Jee Chan. As everyone’s memory is “singular and adjusted”, as Chan says in the artist talk after the performance, each person’s process of grief can also take a unique form. Grief, as other emotions, is not a clearly shaped singularity, but rather is a sophisticated mixture of ambiguities that can move one’s body in multiple directions in unexpected moments. Witnessing *Harbor* to me feels as though I am invited into Chan’s process of grief of losing their grandmother in 2018, refined by time and the courage of facing and expressing the coiled memories around it.

These are the voices recorded between 2016 and 2017 while Chan practiced calligraphy with their grandmother, who they were very close with. The voices speak about Chan’s grandmother’s childhood of experiencing WWII, being sold by her mother to *yi po* (her grandmother’s sister), and fleeing her hometown to run away from the invasion of the Japanese.

Emotions, such as sorrow, pain, and anger are embodied knowledge that can be passed on through bodies from one generation to the next. Emotions can be transmitted in a similar way to a small cup of black ink that Chan empties into a bigger pool of clear water on stage. The black ink spreads and becomes a part of the water, though diluted in its intensity of colour. This can perhaps relate to what Chan points to as the “diasporic knowledge we hold in our bodies”. Grieving over the loss of a loved one can include the process of looking at these marks of memories that became a part of one’s body. And when this process is shared, in this case in the form of a performance, it can be absorbed in each viewer’s body in individual ways.

In the program note, Chan writes that their grandmother’s passing in 2018 guided them to shift their choreographic position “from one of dancing to being danced”. I witness Chan’s “being danced” in the movement solo that is “not set or structured at all”, but rather has been evoked in them during the period of transcribing and translating their grandmother’s stories. To the layers of sounds, consisting of people’s voices and white noise (which I am later told by Hilà Lahav, the sound designer, that these were the noise in between the video recordings of Chan’s grandmother), Chan moves in contrasting fluctuations between delicately controlled motions slowly rippling through their body and energetic torrents gushing out.

Watching this solo, I remember Chan’s grandmother saying, “Your generation has an easy life.” But perhaps the lives of our previous generations continue to flow in our bodies to be contemplated and reconciled.



# Multiple (dis) harmonies: a textual collage featuring selec- tions of corre- spondence between the authors, with a poem.

NICOLA VAN STRAATEN & PARVATHI RAMANATHAN

dear;

*here's a short letter with nothing much, but if I don't send it, i won't.*

*i'm still thinking about Ixchel's use of such a singular aesthetic to discuss topics of multiplicity. to my eyes, her movement vocabulary seemed very coherent, evoking a sort of techno-robo-humanoid-AI-creature moving through different coding programs. she stood in one place the whole time yet moved through so many images. somehow, such a compact vision was utilized to discuss something so amorphous. in the artist talk after the performance, she mentioned: "It was also about not being defined but being there."*

*we also spoke about perception. Ixchel opening the work with the words, "What do you see? What do you hear?"*

I'm glad you started this correspondence, because if you hadn't, I couldn't.

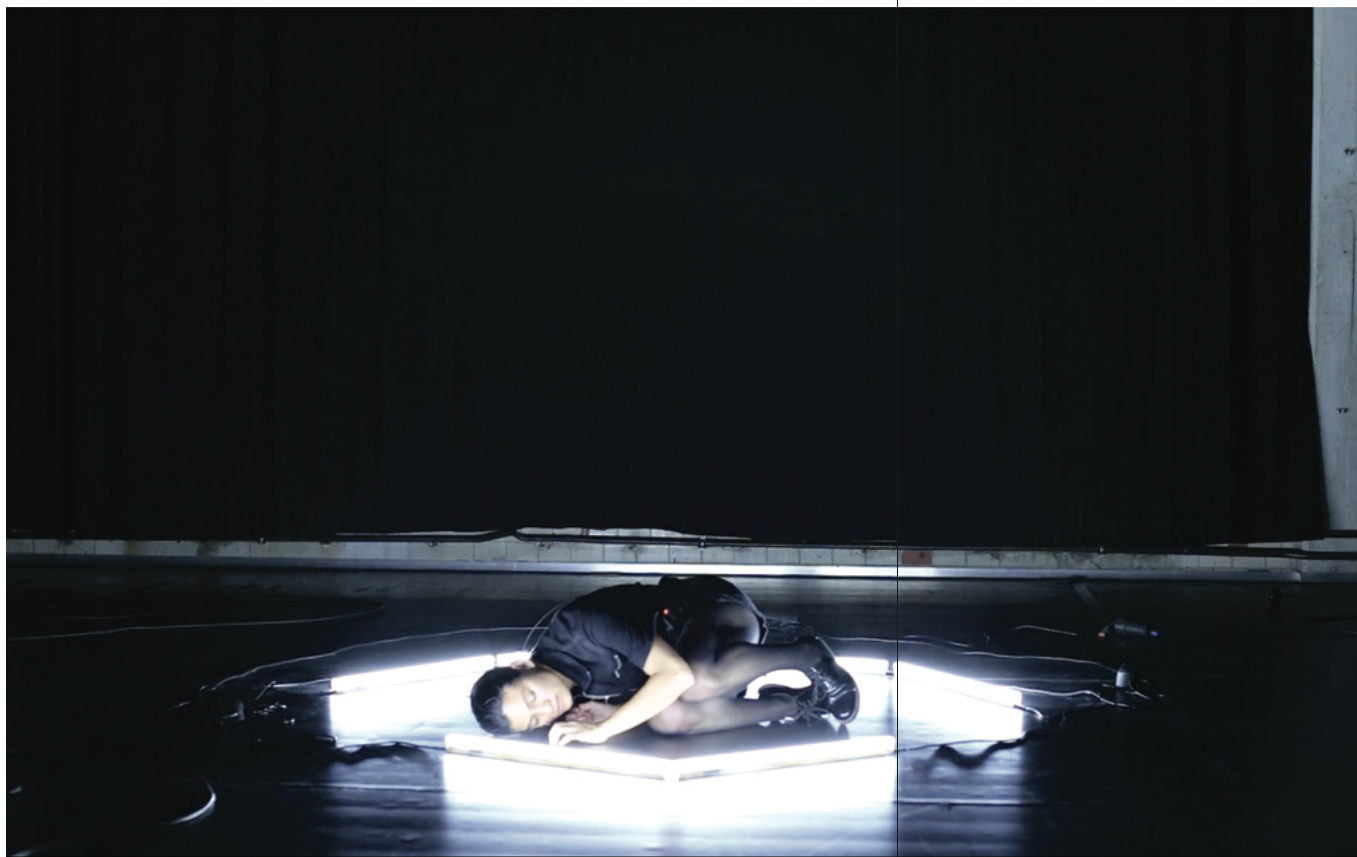
Entering the dark room, I was struck by the meandering mess of wires, the tubed lights strategically placed around the space, hanging above our heads and the high ceiling above it. With our chairs spaced apart in rows and arcs, it felt like we were in outer space, everything around us on an orbit, but free floating.

I took a moment to close my eyes and think of the impressions that were milestones in my memory of the work. These milestone moments seem to expose the systemized workings of my own mind. I wrote down some words. They were seeking to be amorphous, but here I am trying to pin them with notations. They were just being there, but here I am trying to define un/dis/mis/order.

I suppose it may have been good to understand what meaning the word 'multiplicity' holds for Ixchel.

A creeping mine of worms  
forms fluid, ending in angular gaps.  
The charge of electricity within those  
wires  
zipping back and forth, as if with no  
purpose,  
no destination, just being - on.  
The waves between her body and my eye,  
her voice and my ear,  
the lights and my body. the gap makes  
itself.  
Two pentagonal frames. one on the - floor.  
The other floating above, mirroring  
html code #ffa5a5. on off on off so quick  
Her body held in between these flashes  
floating, frozen, twitching, riveted - face  
focusing us  
Like a future creature, ancient relic,  
she is arrested in motion as if in  
a jar of chemical formaldehyde  
Sometimes  
when the framing lights are turned off,  
it feels as if the jar were opened.  
phhlloossssh  
I wait for her to tumble out.  
But she stays contained,  
denial.  
flickering as if stuck  
an excited consonant of morse-code,  
known codes.

Its ceaseless zzzrrrk of dots- and dashes.  
so loud, so loud I cannot look at them  
directly  
And then without warning  
a solitary vertical shaft of light by the exit  
door.  
Plip!  
Facing away, eyes  
hooked to the morphing creature who is  
skin-shedding,  
I can't see it  
and yet,  
I am blinded by it.  
The moment, awaited yet uneventful,  
the becoming-being casually leaves.  
Steps out of frame stage right  
all eyes pursue her into the darkness:  
tell us what happened  
Khat! Another pentagonal frame of light  
yanks  
our necks in unison stage left.  
all gazes fly to the light,  
moth-eyes to a flame.



*i found Ixchel's email address on her website so we don't have to ask Tanzfabrik. what about we send her the following message:*

*Dear Ixchel,*

*We hope this email finds you well. We are Nicola and Parvathi, we attended your performance of Multiplicity of the Other last Sunday. We were wondering if you could answer the following question in 50 words or less: What does multiplicity mean to you?*

Nicola and Parvathi,

I hope you are well. I also wanted to clarify again that the showing was of a work in progress / research. So the work is not finished. The answers of course are in context with this specific research.

*What does multiplicity mean to you?*

Existing as a manifold, being many in singularity. Complex. Not being fixed. Transforming constantly, and because of this nature being sometimes "ungraspable" to "fixed" ideas. And all these aspects (qualities) exist at the same time not only in a singular but the multiple.

Warm hugs,  
Ixchel

«THE MULTIPLICITY OF  
THE OTHER» IXCHEL  
MENDOZA HERNÁNDEZ

WORK IN PROGRESS



OKTOBER 31  
UFERSTUDIO 4

*i found what Ixchel wrote helpful to read. "existing as manifold" reminds me of what you said about "multiplicity" making you think of "multiplication" - a unit growing and bursting and blooming into more units. but also fractions. a unit fractioned and splintered into countless complex pieces (but still connected). again returning to the quality of her movement, there was something fractal about it.*

Perhaps it's too tremendous for the human mind to be able to witness the universe in subsets of rolling fractions – flowing "ungraspable" like molten lava. And yet, there is a "fixed" calculation where everything occurs, leading to further occurrences. Perhaps it doesn't matter if we ever understand the magnitude of this multiplicity in singularity.



# «One by One by One»

**QUESTIONS BY SANDRA MAN.  
ANSWERS BY INKY LEE.**

*What happened on stage during the piece?*

Motions, memories, sensations happened during the piece.

*How did you see this happening on stage?*

I saw a body moving.

A body and the way it moves...

*What happened in the audience during the piece?*

The audience seemed quietly focused.

*How did you feel while watching?*

I felt sentimental for a moment in the beginning, then absorbed and curious, contemplative of certain images I was seeing at times. At the end, I felt some joy.

*How did the performer feel while being watched?*

The performer seemed internally focused, precise, collected, revealed and not revealed at the same time.

*Was the performer alone on stage?*

The performer's body was a single body on stage with moving sounds and lights.

*What changed during the performance?*

The performer's body started undergoing a slow transformation.

*Can you describe the transformation?*

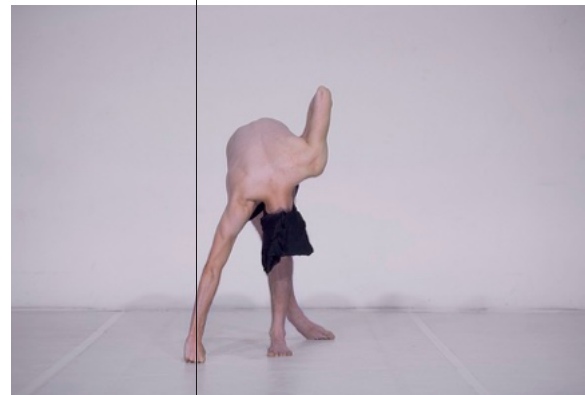
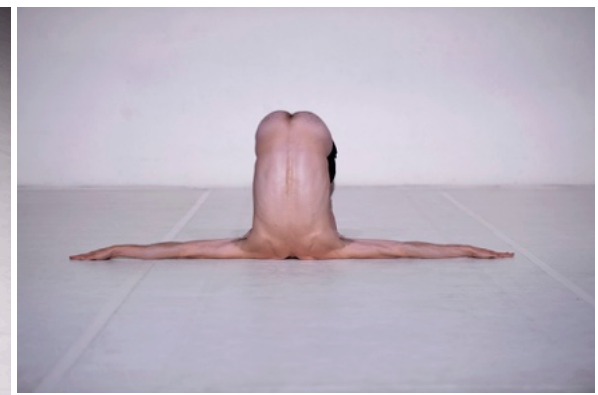
It was as though a magnifying glass had been fixated on various parts of the performer's body, revealing it obsessively, in alien ways. Some movements—of muscles, bones, joints—were emphasised. Every contraction and release became visible, and each shape or transition seemed to have been carried out in rigor and precision. The black t-shirt and the trainer shorts that the performer was wearing in the beginning were gradually moved away to reveal more flesh, but still cover the “private” parts - the t-shirt covered the performer's whole head, hiding their face, and the shorts were pulled down low enough to see the buttocks, but high enough to cover the penis.

Morphing in bizarre and refreshing ways, the body transformed into something else, a specimen under examination and dissection.

*What stayed the same during the performance?*

The quiet focus in the audience remained the same.

The research focus of the performer seemed to stay unwavering and deepened throughout the performance.



**«ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS»  
NIR VIDAN**

**PERFORMANCE  
PREMIERE**

**NOVEMBER 3 – 6  
UFERSTUDIO 1**

*In what space – imaginary or real – did the performance take place?*

It started at Studio 1 at Uferstudios in Wedding. Then, it went to the desert for a moment, and back to Studio 1. At one short moment though, it opened up to the world news.

*In what time – past, present, future; concrete or abstract – did the performance take place?*

For me, it took place in the past and the present.

*Is the piece contemporary? If so, in what sense?*

I would say the piece is contemporary in that it speaks to a contemporary audience.

It dealt with the theme, “normative body”. The concept and the expectation of a “normative body” changes through different times, and the performance was made in line with the current concept of a “normative body”, which contributes to it being a contemporary piece.

*Is the piece timeless? If so, in what sense?*

I think it is timeless because we all have a body as a human, and the piece researched about the body, which will continue to be the shared basis of our lives as humans.

*Did the performance remind you of something?*

In the beginning, I was reminded of a close friend who would often shake vigorously as part of their creative process, much like the performer on stage. My friend was tall, lean, fair-skinned with no tattoos, a queer and a dancer.

The other moment came when the performer suddenly faced the audience (which was somewhat shocking, since prior to this moment, the performer had not once faced us directly) and sat on the floor with legs bent, black t-shirt covering their face. The light turned red and moved across the stage as the performer flexed their muscles to rise slightly on their knees as they raised their arms. At this moment, I found myself confronted with vague images of violence that I've encountered in the news.

*Did you connect with the body on stage? If so, how?*

I didn't. The body onstage was being moved in such calculated ways that it started to feel more like a foreign object than a human body. The performer explored various possibilities of presenting their specific body parts and their body as a whole, without ever revealing their face. This facelessness had an alienating effect, turning the body into something even more inhuman, and therefore difficult to relate to.

*How did the piece end?*

The piece ended on a consciously straying note.

It became more “human” in glimpses, because, for the first time, pop-song like sound came in, and the performer moved in more smooth and circular ways, which was contrasting from the edgy and precise movements and shapes that had been explored in the rest of the performance.

*How did the piece begin?*

The piece began with a person with a “nice” (tall, lean, fit, fair skin, etc.) and “normative” body standing on stage with their back to us. This body, however, contained so many stories that I did not know about, and these stories made the performer (who was also the creator of the piece) want to dismantle the expectations of how their body should move and be. They began to shake violently with their eyes closed, and the meticulous dismantling began to slowly unfold in front of my eyes.

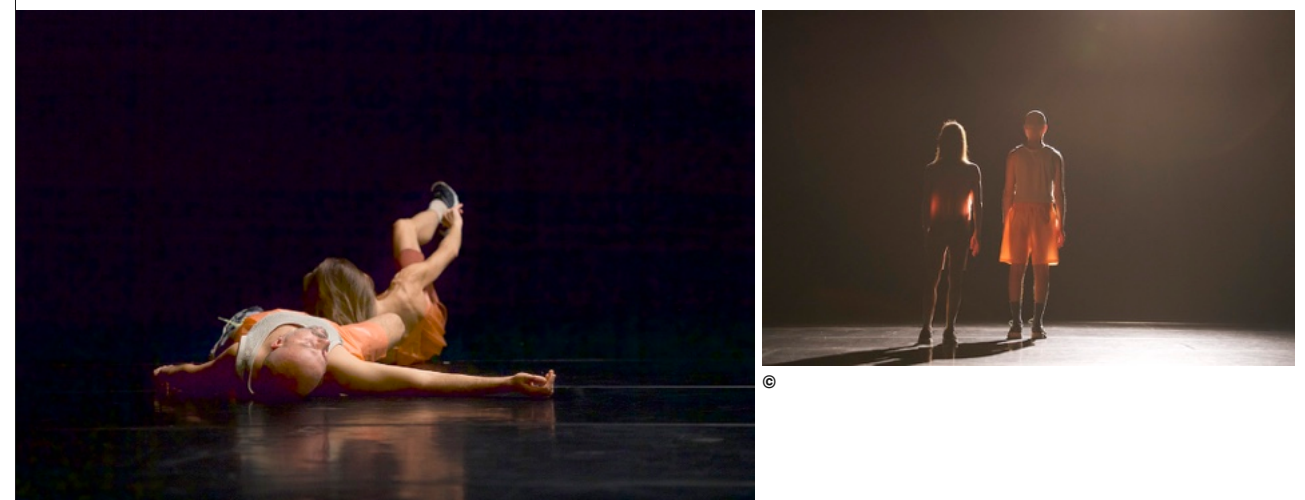
# «to be real, an object»

SUSANNA YILOSKI

*Silent Trio, Epilogue* is the final work in a series, in which artists Christina Ciupke and Darko Dragičević engaged with the heritage of Spomenik monuments spread across the former Yugoslavia and explored the urban, once politically charged ruins of Berlin while participating in the life cycle of trees. I witnessed the work on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November when it premiered at Tanzfabrik's Berlin autumn program. My experience of the work is that of tension, balance, the effect of time on the phenomena of how meaning takes form, and a deep sense of coherence. Now, upon starting to write, I am immediately confronted with the incoherent nature of thought. Despite this, I hope that my utterances will transmit the richness of the work. For this reason, I have deliberately left the description of the performance in the dark and utilized a play on the present and past tense.

*Before entering the performance space, each member of the audience receives a cup of warm juice, courtesy of a new café opening, and a headset:*

*How does meaning take form?* The performance of Christina Ciupke and Darko Dragičević invites my attention to fall onto the experience of time; the time needed to allow something to come into existence. The simplicity and repetitiveness of the actions performed on the vast stage, with each image concretely existing for an extended period, allows me to enter a process in which meaning gradually takes form and transforms over time. Curiously, the headset highlights this overbearing sense of transitivity; the fluid nature of who we are at each moment. More curiously, I feel no isolation.



CHRISTINA CIUPKE & DARKO  
DRAGIČEVIĆ: SILENT TRIO,  
EPILOGUE

PERFORMANCE  
PREMIERE

NOVEMBER 3 – 6  
UFERSTUDIO 1



Instead, I feel invited to become conscious of my own perception of sound, a deeply private process. An act of connecting to my own sensorial body bridges a tacit connection between me and the performance, bringing my attention on how experience forms, through memories, my self-identity. My body and the memorial monument become alike.

A Spomenik monument is projected. I see a seemingly huge and dark stone. The shape reminds me of a wide bowl or a strange antenna, as if it was either holding the sky or transmitting information between the sky and the earth. I am reminded of a story a friend once told me, about how human cultures understood spiritual communication as a movement of ascending and descending; and how fire signals, through the ascending smoke, were born out of the desire to communicate with the spirits and then, over time, with other humans.

For the Hopi Native North American tribe, the “universe has two basic aspects: that which is manifest and thus more ‘objective’, and that which is beginning to manifest and is more ‘subjective’”. (Franz, Von Marie-Louise) In other words, concrete objects are manifest and belong to the past, whereas inner images, representations and feelings are subjective and leaning towards the future. If so, do meaning and self-identity form in the meeting of the concrete past and the subjective future? The verb ‘to form’ is derived from the Middle English ‘*formen*’, meaning ‘to create, give life to’. Something takes form when given an intention: a will to imagination, to exist in the physical realm. This way, meaning must take on a physical form yet it is in a constant dynamic transformation through the interaction that we have with one another.

On stage, the two bodies appear to be inseparable both from each other and from their shared environment. I experience the rootedness of the monument, and that of the performance. I am brought forth the quality of things, of mattering. I find myself connecting to something that is tacitly subdued, perhaps arising from the abstract nature of the performance and of monuments wherever. In literature, an abstract informs an idea, hinting to the multiplicity, potentiality, and the possibility for something to exist. Seeing that an abstraction excludes information by stripping the object down to what is “essential”, the very core of things, the way we encounter abstraction and what it can possibly mean to us depends heavily on our past experiences. Fittingly, the word *monument* is constructed by the PIE *moneie*, meaning ‘to remind’, and the suffix *men* ‘to think’, literally so, ‘something that reminds’. A *tomb* in Old French.

This hidden multiplicity in meaning aids me to notice the elements of *balancing*: between movement and stillness, the light and the dark, the sound and the silence, the subtle and the gross, the inhale and the exhale, the contraction and the release. Does being in-between mean being in balance? Physiologically, when we stand (in balance), all possibilities of movement exist. The standing figure of the monument evokes the question of how its limit to movement creates a condition to exist in potentiality. The nature of monuments is to be in a constant *tension* between motion (erosion) and the in-ability to move (to shift in location). This brings forth the erosion of thought: not only are our bodies affected by the lived environment - so are our minds. This immense impermanence and logic are made tangible in the performance. By its simple beauty: how attentive the two performers are in their acts and being, and the allowed space and time in every moment, confronts me with a sudden fear of forgetting.

Despite there being no physical touch in the performance, I feel profoundly touched. The concreteness of the two performative bodies reminds me of something I wrote in my diary in the summer 2020: “be real. be an object.” After the performance I *perform* the act of remembering a monument that stands for a personal memory: the Sibelius monument, built by Eila Hiltunen (Passio Musicae, Helsinki, 1967). This monument, too, hangs between the tension of ascension and descension. But most prominently, it invites me to touch it, perhaps because it touches me first.



@ AINO LEHTONEN: IN THE IMAGE THE AUTHOR AND THE SIBELIUS MONUMENT.

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# «The Spirit of Shebeen comes to Berlin»

A REFLECTION BY  
AYANDA NTOMBELA

## THE SHEBEEN

Hate them or love them, there are many ways to describe a Shebeen. You could say it’s a peri-urban establishment often found in improvised dwellings at the periphery of cities and suburbs, often against a backdrop of overpopulation, crime, poverty, lawlessness, and underserved communities in stark contrast to the neighboring suburbs and city centers. In his book *Shebeen Tales*, Zimbabwe’s leading author Chenjerai Hove writes “Shebeens are where jokes are born, news is embellished and exchanged... unique vantage points where men go after a day’s work, both to escape from the troubled world around them and to observe and comment on it; where ordinary person who, with the help of dry wit and illegal beer, pokes fun at the rich and mighty”. I would further add, where one goes to relish local food (*Skoppo, Mqushu, Malumqodi, Magwinya, Dombolo, Morogo, Mawutwa, Liver*), sing and dance unashamedly without fear of judgement, scorn or prejudice, and all at little to no costs. Dare I not forget the role Shebeens played as covert political hangouts when political gathering were banned by the Apartheid regime, and as the launching pad for global heavy weights such as *Miriam Makeba, Bra Hugh Masikela* and many more.

## THE PITCH

A few days before the event, the venerated curator and artist, Thabo Thindi, came to see me in Wedding, Berlin, to inform me about the concept of bringing the Shebeen to Berlin and asked me to document the experience. As someone born in South Africa and bred in Soweto, where my grandmother once owned a Shebeen, I was enthralled to be part of this experience.

## THE SHOW

Staged in a huge open field at Tempelhofer Feld, a former Berlin Airport now housing circus tents in one of its many sections, is the new pop-up home of *ko-Shebeen* for the day.

Inside a circus tent, 12 artists are assembled at center stage amid scattered musical instruments and minimal décor, including 3 visible street signs dangling on a constructed street pole. On them, the newly proposed Berlin street names to commemorate and acknowledge the Herero massacre of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reich are embossed. The lighting is very dim, almost eerie, and the seating arrangement—benches and chairs on either side of the stage—is reminiscent of a bull horn formation. Opposite the stage, behind the seating, a projector is displaying a collection of classic historical images from South



Africa’s musical Jive, Marimba and Mbaqanga era in *Sofia Town*, as well as theater artefacts from renowned South African theater pieces such as *King Kong*, *Jim comes to Johannesburg & Iphi Ntombi*.

I arrive 30 minutes late, it is 4:30 pm and the venue is packed, people of all ages and colors, toddlers, youngsters, adolescents and elders, all quietly fixated on the performance. I perch myself right at the back, against the wall, standing, just managing to evade the piercing gleaming light of the projector.

On stage, the lead protagonist Thabo Thindi exemplifies an impoverished black man in South Africa in the early 90’s who, like so many others since the Gold and Diamond rushes of the 1800s, left the rural areas and homestead with his tattered belongings heading to Johannesburg City - Egoli, the place of Gold - in search of riches and fame. Reminiscent of the storyline of *Jim comes to Joburg*, the play centers on the “American dream” trope, and Thabo, through a series of skits and monologues, takes me and the audience through the troughs and crests along the journey of upward socio-economic mobility. We watch as he grows in confidence and stature, his lot and material belongings gradually accumulate. Colloquially speaking, in South Africa they would say *uyaSwenka*, *uyaZizwa*, which translates roughly as “feeling himself”. Thabo impersonates these metamorphoses through his monologue with the non-existing Sis Rosie, a close companion seemingly accompanying Thabo throughout the performance, who gives us, the audience, another window through which to follow the progression of the plot. He achieves this through proudly showcasing newly acquired accessories and conversations with us, often switching from English to Zulu and Setswana (South African languages), he occasionally lures the band into participation. The occasional impromptu solo performance by the artist named Excosé, mesmerizes me with his contortionist individuality, adding that special touch of the “odd character”, so often prevalent in the Shebeen context.

Thabo interlaces his performance throughout with the makeshift band comprising an all-Black cast of 3 vocalists, a drummer, a trombone player, a pianist, an actress and singer, as well as a graffiti artist, who seamlessly accentuate the scenes through song, adding a pleasant harmony and flow to the plot. They perform popular South African songs from all across the musical spectrum that fit intuitively to the theme of the scenes, from Marimba, Mbaqanga to Jazz, Gospel, and Ischathamiya. The songs such as the likes of *Nkosikelkia iAfrika* from Enoch Sontonga, to *Phatha Phatha* from Miriam Makheba, *Ntshilo Ntshilo* from Johnny Dyani, *We are Growing*, by Margaret Singana and many more, bellowed by the vocalists, are met with uproar as the audience and I rise to our feet, dancing and ululating in a homely familiar fashion. The little circus tent reverberates at times, and it takes a few moments for the energy to settle back down, at which point Thabo reappears to resume the ensuing scene.

At one point, an impromptu speech by *Professor Mnyaka Sururu Mboro* about Germany’s role in the Namibian genocide adds the all too familiar “Madala-Prof in the corner moment”, a common occurrence in many Shebeens, momentarily defusing the excitement with a profound and somber moment of honest reflection. Madala is term of endearment bestowed on the wise and elderly.

The performance closes triumphantly with a cynical gesture, when Thabo, now dressed in a full 3-piece suit and holding onto his shiny belongings, for he is a partially “made man” now, impersonates former *President of the Republic Thabo Mbeki’s* renowned speech “*I’m an African*”, to loud applause from the crowd. It is nearly 7pm (3,5 hours later) and the live music continues uninterrupted for another 30 minutes, roughly, as the audience gathers and dances together, finishing off with the proverbial South African “*Step Dance*”, so popular at weddings and most festivities. Thabo thanks all and sundry.

THE REFLECTION

As I travel back home to Wedding on the subway, reflecting on this joyous occasion, the words that spring to mind are “We Want More”!

Add local South African food to the mix (*Masala*), more performing artists, authentic Shebeen paraphernalia, South African expat participation in hosting and impromptu performances, on a monthly or quarterly rotation, and a new Jerusalema Dance and Song competitor will be invented in Berlin! Watch my words, as we say in South Africa!



«KO SHEBEEN  
– COUNTERING  
THE OBVIOUS»  
THABO THINDI

PERFORMANCE



NOVEMBER 13  
CABUWAZI ZELT /  
TEMPELHOFFER FELD /  
COLUMBIADAMM



# «*our return to nature*»

**MICHELA FILZI & SUSANNA YLIKOSKI**

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?



«HOPELESS»  
SERGIU MATIS

PERFORMATIVE SOUND  
INSTALLATION

DECEMBER 9 – 12  
HEIZHAUS UND UFERSTUDIO 5

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