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CRITICAL PRACTICE

(Made in Yugoslavia) #4

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CRITICAL PRACTICE (MADE IN YU)

The programme, which was initiated in 2013, aims at strengthening critical practice as an activity, an object of study, but first and foremost, as a politics in itself that requires nurturing of the transnational dialogue and exchange within performing arts. During each cycle the small group of participants selected through an open call is invited to reflect and work with notions such as critical theory, cultural policies, and artistic practices and they are provided with the generous mentoring and companionship of the programme's facilitators – Ana Vujanović, Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski, and Marijana Cvetković. Apart from the few pre-planned group activities, online sessions, and live gatherings, each group is invited to determine and develop their own ways of exchanging and working together. As such, Critical Practice (Made in Yu) provides a platform for the collective and individual learning outside of the fixed institutional frameworks and curricula.

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This publication is part of the apap – Feminist Futures project which is supported by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

WeLcome!

[1]

In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* Ursula K. Le Guin writes: "We've heard it, we've all heard all about all the sticks, spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news."

[2]

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "The Sweetness of Salt: Toni Cade Bambara and the Practice of Pleasure (in Five Tributes)," in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, ed. a. m. brown (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), e-book, 58.

We are happy that you are here with us! We invite you to take time and dive into this continuously changing and permeable universe of our **systeming** thoughts. The space that we composed together is open for all who want to engage with unorthodox practices of reflecting, debating and re-imagining not only the modes in which the performing arts are narrated and produced, but also how the correlations of solidarity, sisterhood and comradeship are generated and put to work.

In here sometimes it rumbles, sometimes it rages, sometimes it expresses care and affection. At times it complains of discomfort, at times of anger, sometimes it loves tenderly, and at times it is silent and withdraws respectfully. This book is based on the desire and wish to pursue the discomforts, as well as pleasures, that we experience and share in the course of our activities as freelance dancers, writers, artists, dramaturgs and choreographers working mainly in the Central, South and East European dance and performance scene. It's based on our wish to connect them, to stir them up, to let them mingle so that they would give rise to a conversation that would become *a new story, that is news*¹.

"What is sistering? When is it happening? What is the freedom and accountability that accrues when 'sister' is not just a static identity that you have but is something that you do or don't do, with consequences. What happens when I apply that to all of my relationships? What happens if we replace the roles patriarchy has scripted us into with actions guided by what we want to create instead?"²

This book is both resonating with and resisting the conflicting and troubled times we live and work in, as it is the result of affection and friendship, of writing in solidarity and learning with and from each other. Coming from and working in diverse geopolitical zones we bring different yet often complementary experiences when it comes to historical contexts, working conditions, institutional support, as well as validation and recognition of the work we engage in. Writing became for us a tool of reflecting and contextualizing our her-their-histories and perspectives – while being aware that this differentiation between personal and interpersonal socio-political experiences is not any longer applicable, let alone helpful.

Over the course of the Critical Practice (Made in Yu) programme, during which our *systeming* collective was formed, we traveled between diverse encounters and contexts. All along we participated in manifold exchanges between our group and other peers where we articulated and shed light on questions and concerns about the perceptions and resonances of socialist experiments and regimes, the (inter) national development of performing arts scenes, as well as the various interests of the actors playing roles in those fields. Our own biases and preconceptions needed to be deconstructed while our struggles and doubts found spaces of allyship that crossed the boundaries of nation states and generations. It doesn't mean, however, that within e.g. EU-supported cultural production we all are equal or equally heard. Many hierarchies, unfounded romanticism or structural biases remain to be addressed and critically examined. Our common intention is to observe, record, and speculate on how our own positions could be activated to realign what is there, what needs to be omitted, and what needs to be fostered. To write in an active gesture of emancipatory transformation of gaps, failures, and future social imaginaries.

The web of texts that constitutes our collectively written book is the result of a sisterly affiliation with each others' practices and stories. Most of the texts are written by more than one author and respond and influence each other in one way or another. Through interweaving our threads and the stories they carry we desired to enter a mode of **caring comradeship** where one thought would nourish and

give rise to another, softening the idea of authorship and ownership. Imagining “comradeship as a mode of political belonging,” as Jodi Dean describes it, served us as a guiding thought throughout the writing of this book:

[4]

Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (New York: Verso, 2019), 10.

“As a form of address, figure of political relation, and carrier of expectations, comrade disrupts capitalist society’s hierarchical identifications of sex, race, and class. It insists on the equalizing sameness of those on the same side of a political struggle and renders that equalizing sameness productive of new modes of work and belonging.”⁴

According to Dean, comradeship as a mode of socio-political belonging is not based on unanimity, but rather on a shared commitment to a political struggle, collective action or common goals. As such it becomes a way to challenge or even transcend individualism.

We find ourselves inhabiting a complex ecosystem in which our historical, socio-political, identitarian conditioning is set in relation with divergent ways in which contemporary capitalism (and art economies) exploits or abuses any soft spots of our shared learning and transforming together. In that emerging space, the boundaries are blurred, questions plentiful, while anxieties, fears, joys, small victories, and revelations unfold in the caring arms of a systerly commune. The landscape of our systering universe is shaped by several mountainous topics: the imaginary/fictional/constructed ridge between the East and the West, North and South, the animated and diverse relief of pleasure-ability, the sharp peaks of feminism and massifs of care.

We start with “Dance on Mars,” a grove of old trees with tangled roots. They whisper stories about past and present socialisms and dance histories often ignored by the winners of the recent ideological battles and new/old imperial powers. On the boundaries of the wood we find “Luna Park,” a mangrove-forest-letter between the worlds of wood and water we are about to enter. Emerging from the bog of personal and collective memories is a rocky road-letter called “Yeah, I hope you’re living right!” which imprints in our footsteps the rhythms of emancipatory politics and an update on the current situation in Athens.

Then ahead of us, the floating tangle of fronds hides yet another shadowy swamp of “Landmarks of (Dis)orientation,” full of smelly personal stories and tangled discourses concerning the center and the periphery – be careful not to get lost, it can be quite treacherous. Ready for some leaps and sways in that geopolitical jungle? Arising out of there we can dip our feet into the vast ocean or small pond of “Sister Erotika,” the reflections of our slutty friends and lovers joining us for a swim in the political potential of erotic and collective dreaming. Our wanderings take us up the slopes of “Curatious & Caring – Questions of Feminist Curatorial Practices,” our own feminist-curator-manifesto-mountain-peak. From that vantage point we dive down into the wild moorlands of “Desire and Doubt,” blossoming with flowering gorse, purple thistle and of course the labor of the dramaturg.

Before taking a short nap in the gentle sun we can lie on our front, swinging our legs behind us and filling out the “Which critical practitioner are you?” test to find out which critical practitioners we are.

Once our discursive feet and hearts are rested, we can descend even further into the rainy landscapes of “Another Kind of Love,” a place of ghosts, mothers and revolution. Tired but revitalized, we can flop down onto the letter-shores of “danse macabre” for a well earned rest and quick communication with our future-ancestors for an update about how we saved the planet. Oh blissful futures!

And as the map is sketched, we now gently withdraw to make some space for you, dear Readers. We hope for this book to bring you some excitement, surprise, some tension and release, that you will find your ways through it and that they will lead you further beyond the edges of our writing. It was born out of a process of getting to know each other, growing together and imagining ways in which our mutual caring rapport can last and inspire us in our future endeavors, both individual and collective. We wish for it to empower you, hold your hand, strengthen or maybe question your beliefs. Thank you for being here with us.

“Discipline and joy are
same coin, two aspects
a mode of political be-
of address, figure of
carrier of expectation
capitalist society’s hier-
cations of sex, race, and
the equalizing sameness
same side of a political
orders that equalizing
of new modes of world

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belonging. As a form
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and class. It insists on
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al struggle and ren-
ameness productive
x and belonging.”

DANCE ON MARS

Jette Büchsenschütz

12:52 PM, Mar 11

i actually dont get the title – i only know its a David bowie song right? maybe I am missing something here?

Kasia Wolińska

4:45 PM, Mar 11

Yes, it is a Bowie's song, i started from there but then actually thought about two different planets as 2 camps in the cold war (im reading dispossessed by le guin now :)) but also mars as a red planet and mars as god of war felt both adequate for writing about stories that happened 'elsewhere' according to official narratives, or might have not happen at all.. does it make sense? In the song bowie is actually asking – is there life on mars, so i wanted to ask the same question about dance in the communist countries :)

Jette Büchsenschütz

9:46 PM, Mar 11

love it!

anka herbut

11:45 AM, Mar 30

I get the whole beauty that stretches out behind this title but I am also afraid it may be difficult to decode it. I wouldn't get all of what you have just explained here without your clarification and that would be a pity. Kasia, do you think maybe to add some gentle tip(s) in the body of this text which would make it possible to grasp? I think we can't assume that everyone knows Bowie's song or Ursula K. Le Guin's book.

Kasia Wolińska

11:48 AM, Mar 30

i wonder since we talked once about leaving some comments unresolved if that would be the way? so to leave this thread of comments as it is, unedited as an insight into our process. i would find it best as explaining the title throughout the text would feel a bit strange :))

KASIA WOLIŃSKA

Dear Comrade,

It's been a while since our last contact. I am writing to you from a muddy place, from the *future anterior*. I am crossing the ruins of a better world that did not happen, I am salvaging others' memories, I commune in their past dreams and high hopes. I wish to eventually arrive at a place where the monuments of historical truths and imperial impulses lay flat, where the flora and fauna rejoice at the walls and borders opening, and the skies becoming peaceful and clear.

[1]

Dancing (Pl. *densing*) – a social occasion in which dancing, eating and drinking was collectively performed to live music. It was taking place in Gdańsk Wrzeszcz (and many other places around the Warsaw Pact) at Klub Garnizonowy (former officers' casino) which my grandparents Teresa and Rysiek were attending together with many others – people of various social standings and occupations – every Saturday evening. Bringing one's own food was allowed, the soldiers from the next door barracks, incl. my grandpa, were attending in civil clothes to not provoke the civilians, though, as my grandpa recalled, every dancing was inevitably ending with a *bitka* (a punch-up). Excessive alcohol consumption played a role in some (most) of the cases.

“Okay, so my last question is very different from the previous ones – I want to ask about dancings¹. Did you attend?”

“Ah, yes, it was very common, it was marvelous. Everyone was going. It was the only good thing (about communism).”

(from the interview I conducted with my grandfather Rysiek / December 2022 / the living room of his house in Gdańsk Wrzeszcz)

My grandpa Rysiek loves cats and us – his family. He does that truly and generously and I love him deeply, for he has accompanied me since the moment I was born – in a caring, playful and inspiring way. His life, as many would say, could become a movie script and I have been lucky to listen to his stories weaving fiction and reality in a colorful and adventurous manner. From him I learnt about the dancing-s of memory and the ambiguity of ways in which communism is remembered and re-lived. We also share a passion for history books. But above all, ever since I was a kid, we danced, played and talked.



In the photo I am attaching to this letter, my grandpa and I are dancing in the living room of his house. I am around one year old. The room is now his ever-growing memory container where we sometimes sit and talk about his life (the tea is served in the finger-burning communist glasses with dancing devils). There I spent joyful days of family celebrations, ordinary visits and numerous movie Fridays when I would sleep over and watch *X Files* on TV with my grandma Terenia. One dark night, when I was 13, my beloved grandma passed away in that room. Though it has gone through several transformations since then, for me it always smells of love and loss. In 2021 I asked my grandpa if we could reconstruct the dances we danced when I was a kid and he agreed. It was easy, as if we had never stopped practicing them. My feet on his feet and slowly we turned in a strange waltzing manner, the moment we started I bursted into laughter and so did he. There is no other joy like that of dancing with my grandfather. I felt that only then when we repeated our little phrases the room lit up, our dancing elevated death, the history turned with us. And here I am – writing to you about the cause that concerns both me and you, and all of us really: **the joy and the importance of dancing.**

I hope we can agree when it comes to stating the relevance of dance in our shared struggle for equality and emancipation of all lives on the planet. At present, when the politicality of dance is either largely trivialized or instrumentalized for the sake of capital's accumulation and advancement of personal careers and institutional self-affirmation, I am continuously called to the histories of dancers and dancing bodies that remain unpopular, complicated and often rather unknown. I am looking for past-present-future comrades who tested the limits of dancing and often paid a high price for their visions and choreographic courage. I am excavating the voices, trying to break up the silent consensus about the legitimacy of (only) Western dance and its democratic spirit, in that I continuously attempt to construct new lineages and paradoxical genealogies, forming a company of those dead and alive where the case of dance's revolutionary power and socialist agenda can be tested once again and opened towards the future.

“We felt that our appearance at the mass funeral was a sort of test of our fidelity to our group and manifestation of our willingness to enter the ranks of the working class revolutionary movement.”

(New Dance Group: First Annual Recital brochure)

During the workers protests in Kentucky in 1932, a teenage communist organizer, Harry Simms, was shot dead by an off duty law official. The ongoing protests had been responding to the growing poverty and unemployment at times following the 1929 Wall Street crash. The Great Depression dispossessed many, hitting hard the most vulnerable actors of society. While the socio-economic situation of the 1930s stressed the importance of the socialist policies, the radical decade would eventually become a stage for the swansong of the Communist Party of the USA.

The death of Simms became a symbol of the working class struggle, with the *Daily Worker* and the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) pronouncing him a martyr who died a revolutionary death². His body was transported by train to New York where the funeral procession took place. There, in the aftermath of the funeral and in resonance with Simms’ prematurely and tragically interrupted revolutionary work, the **New Dance Group** (NDG) (1932-2009) was formed by Nadia Chilkovsky, Miriam Blecher, Edith Lambert, Edna Ocko, Rebecca Rosenberg, Pauline Schrifman, Grace Wylie and Fanya Geltman, all students of **Hanya Holm**’s dance studio in NYC. Their vision of dance’s role in the struggle for social justice combined the revolutionary form of modern dance with a socialist³ rhetoric addressed largely to the working class people, and against the bourgeois and apolitical attitudes of their own teachers. **By employing modern dance for a political cause, the young generation of left-leaning dancers attempted to simultaneously drift away from the expressivism of Isadora Duncan and modernist essentialism of Martha Graham, and move closer to socialist realism, in which dance would (yet again) partake in the articulation and overcoming of the social struggles.** A year after the founding of the group in their anniversary bulletin the NDG proclaimed dance as a weapon and proposed it

[2]

Victoria Phillips
Geduld, “Performing
Communism in the
American Dance:
Culture, Politics
and the New Dance
Group,” *American
Communist History*,
vol. 7, no. 1 (2008):
48. [https://core.
ac.uk/download/
pdf/161452507.pdf](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/161452507.pdf),
(accessed April 26,
2023).

A short note on socialism and communism and the way I want to propose the usage of those terms in my letter: *socialism/socialist* refers to a historical passage of ideas, reforms and processes, *communism* would be where and when those ideas finally would be realized to arrive at the classless and emancipated (global or local) human, or even better – planetary community. In my home country, the word *communism* was/is used to refer to the period between the end of WW2 and the end of the rule of the Communist Party in 1989. It carries both an oppressive and nostalgic character. Politically, the word still can be used to defame or offend someone, while some radical few would choose the word intentionally to mark their political belonging. For me, *communism* as an ideal has never been realized and the utopian aspect of it is overshadowed by the crimes of the regimes who claimed allegiance to a communist cause. It feels complicated to bring up those terms and in the text I attempt to negotiate some of those complexities.

as one of the most important tools of the class struggle, carrying a power to cultivate class consciousness and prepare the ground (and bodies) for a socialist future.

The politics of the NDG aligned well with the agenda of the CPUSA and received party support for a while. At the same time, dance radicalism of the 1930s saw the growing nationalization of the narratives about modern dance which mirrored the rising international tensions – with Hitlers' and Mussolinis' ascents to power in the Europe's West as well as the yet to be uncovered intensification of the stalinist terror in the Soviet Russia. At home, the aforementioned Great Depression put the US economy and politics into question, all this happening against the backdrop of the ongoing rivalry with the USSR and the accelerating competition between capitalism and communism, which would find its culmination in the Long Long Cold War and the building of an ugly wall. Already by the end of the decade dancers of the NDG and their fellow travelers would be seen as a threat to the national order, with their work and ideologies classified as *Un-American*. The dancers and their allies would not openly align themselves with the communist agendas, most probably due to the sensed (experienced?) prejudice against the *Reds* incited by the local and national political functionaries and widespread in society. Yet while the dancers and choreographers of the radical era would still to some extent enjoy the transnational contacts and exchanges, the narratives were shifting significantly to express the growing chauvinism of the US (cultural) politics.

“That the American modern dance has shot way past the Central European may be partly imputed to America's escape from war's effects on its own territory. More is it ascribable to the bright land of its birth – a land where freedom and democracy are ideals at least; where traditions of human decency (in spite of arrant violations), of good will if not always of good manners, prevail; a land where all races (again in promissory note) are learning to work out their destiny together a land of great spaces and mighty projects that still leave room for the need of compensatory values in art.”

(Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*)

The bloody spectacle of World War 2 would change dancing forever, as it would come to exist in societies entangled in the recent memories of horrific violence and loss, with millions of people dead, wounded or displaced, with crimes committed on a scale that will never be fully comprehended or repaired. Furthermore, on territories such as Poland, most of the modern dance legacy would be erased through the dispossession of the artists as well as destruction of infrastructures, archives and communities that were creating dance scenes prior to the war. I believe, dear Comrade, that, regardless of the contemporary fatigue in remembering the war, it is important to further historicize its global resonances as they laid ground for many still unresolved ethno-national conflicts, and even more importantly for our cause, they prepared the ground for the cold period in the ongoing wars. After WW2 during what was called McCarthyism, the whole historiographical trends would be revised to erase the communist underlayers of the radical era of the US-American modern dance, and some of the NDG dancers would be interrogated due to their alleged communist ties. When in the 1990s US-American culture would announce its victory over the communist project and globally promote its democratic, diverse social and political landscape of the Anglo-Saxon world in general, it would mystify and obscure the actual state agendas, which throughout the 20th century were based on the accumulation and hyperbolization of racialized and capitalist prejudices – starting from the Yellow Peril and following in the various stages of the Red Scare and the manic machine of the Cold War Era's politics and propaganda.

The dance artists I would like to visit with you, Comrade, worked within the paradoxical state regimes and their struggles unfolded at the intersections of (new) national, decolonial, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist projects, many of which were violently overrun or came to an end as a result of their own corruption. But first, the re-articulation of dancers' tasks in the newly built societies and of the very conditions of dance's production and radiation were necessary for the realization of the post-World War 2 utopias.

The search for a unique dance identity of the modern socialist nations was taking place across the globe and

accelerated after WW2 in response to the world getting cut into two competing political and ideological camps. The Cold War period would bring much innovation in regards to modern dance, and contrary to the official narratives of the impenetrable Iron Curtain, dance forms and practitioners would still find their ways to travel, circulate and cross-contaminate. Modern dance – once a significantly transnational phenomena – was changing its direction to lose some of the avantgardist charm amongst the US-American white bourgeoisie but would greatly influence the development of the American Dance Theatre (e.g. [Alvin Ailey](#)). The legacies of the red choreographers such as [Isadora Duncan](#) or [Jane Dudley](#) would become uncomfortable or unfitting to the Cold War US rhetoric and agenda. At the same time, the forms and ideas contained within the frame of modern dance would find the continuation of their revolutionary life in the new socialist states seeking their own emancipations through dancing.

BETTER DEAD THAN RED!⁴

[4]

Anticommunist slogan used in the US during the Cold War.

In 1988, shortly before the death of the USSR, Boris Groys, a Russian art theorist, wrote about the communist total art doctrine. In his book *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* he described the revolutionary project which was initiated by the October Revolution (1917) as aiming at creation of a harmonious, organized world based on the *unitary artistic plan*. Such an artistic vision was focused not only on the mechanics of worldly production but it aspired to create a beautiful system, in which the grand ideology and ordinary lives of people would be entangled and inseparable, in which art would become total(itarian).

However, in the USSR of the 1930s the post-revolutionary hopes and enthusiasm were gradually replaced by the authoritarian terror virtuously incited by the Communist Party Leaders and cultural production would not be spared. What had been possible in the early post-revolutionary Soviet state as experiments with modernist form of dancing would soon be replaced by the return to ballet (once closely tied to the Tsarist period in Russia), which, especially in

the direct aftermath of the WW2, did not carry a stigma of the Nazi-collaboration (see: Mary Wigman, Gret Palucca or Rudolf von Laban). Though Stalin would admire and even mimic Hitler's political tactics like e.g. purges amongst the party members or exterminations of the undesired populations of the Soviet Empire, he would play a game that would convince many Soviet people and so called world leaders of his radical anti-fascist stance. The antifascist battle that was eventually won by capitalists and communists united briefly against a common enemy, would provide a fertile soil for the unsustainable growth of Stalin's superpower. With the introduction of the [socialist realist](#) doctrine in 1932, the role of art would be dictated by the state (the Party) and it would serve nothing else but the strengthening of the state's authority and control over its people. Art was envisioned as close to life, offered as a medium that affects across class divisions, being available not only as a professional occupation but as a space for various forms of amateur creativity and collectivizing experiences.

In the USSR not only was ballet back but [\(new\) folk dancing](#) was to constitute one of the pillars of Cold War cultural diplomacy. Already in the 1930s the new form of dancing was emerging from combining ballet with folk forms. The [Igor Moiseyev Ballet](#) (or Moiseyev State Academic Ensemble of Popular Dance) was founded in 1937 to realize the promise of the uniquely Soviet dance language, and Stalin liked it a lot. After Stalin's death, the company would tour the world to promote Soviet doctrine in both allied and rival countries. Similar companies would emerge across the states under the Soviet influence to propagate the form of [folk-inspired choreographies](#) in which the source movements were removed from their traditional settings, enhanced, and transformed into stage spectacles for the mass audiences.

The Soviet ballet tradition was influential also in one of the biggest *frenemies* of the USSR – the People's Republic of China. As a part of cultural and ideological exchange, many Soviet teachers would be working in China and disseminating the language and method of the Russian ballet. However, already in the 1940s, the artistic experiments had been conceived under the Japanese occupation of the country's mainland. What is known as the [War of](#)

[5]

German choreographers Joos and Leeder developed a movement method named after them in the Folkwangschule Essen, where they both taught. The method was based on the work of Rudolf von Laban (choreutics and eukinetics), one of the most important German modern dance choreographers and movement theorists of the 20th century. However, unlike Laban, who collaborated with the Nazi regime in the 1930s, Joos and Leeder emigrated to the UK before the start of WW2 and founded a school there.

[6]

Yao people constitute a minority ethnic group inhabiting mostly the mountain regions of southern China (provinces of Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan). Amongst the Yao there are several languages differentiating particular groups, while the main religious orientation across various Yao communities is dictated by Taoism. The members of the community still today uphold practices of traditional craft, architecture, agriculture and social rituals concerning e.g. marriage or hair cutting.

Resistance was a military conflict between the Republic of China and the Japanese Empire, the latter exercising its imperial policies in the Pacific region and attempting to control Chinese territory and economy. The intensification of aggressive nationalism on the Japanese side came in the aftermath of the aforementioned Great Depression, whose effects had been felt around the globe and opened a way to the rise of fascist organizations and states – from Germany and Spain all the way to Japan. Against the background of the international conflict brewing for more than a decade and the atrocities of WW2, a new dance form was developed, which, according to the scholar Emily Wilcox, *symbolized the emerging Chinese socialist culture*. *New Yangge* was the first artistic genre formed according to Mao Zedong's principles of socialist art production formulated already in 1935. The new form of dance was a hybrid of Western styles of modern dancing with the folk tradition of the Chinese people – yangge being an already established folk practice.

Amongst many choreographers who contributed to the development of the *New Yangge*, I would like to stay for a moment with Dai Ailian – a dancer and choreographer born in Trinidad (a British colony at the time) to Chinese parents, who after her dance studies in London, moved to China in 1941. Under the influence of Central European modern dance taught by Kurt Joos and Sigurd Leeder⁵ in their school in Dartington, UK, Dai took up the task of merging those dance traditions with the search for her own national (dance) identity in the land of her parents.

Yao Drum is a solo dance, Dai's modern choreographic take on a ceremonial dance of the Yao⁶ community. The simple form of the dance is based on steps and jumping patterns and accompanied by the drumming also performed by a dancer. Similarly to the other comrade-choreographers of her time, Dai Ailian centered her practice on the search for a new movement language that would root itself in what she would see as a distinct Chinese cultural legacy and, at the same time, find its way to communicate the struggles and aspirations of the modern era in the country's history. Dai's work resonates not only with the transformation of China throughout the War of Resistance, Japanese Occupation and the Communist Revolution, but it also speaks to the

choreographer's own experiences of migration, facing the colonial abuses and racial biases, looking for an identity and a sense of belonging – both politically and culturally. In her book *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy*, the aforementioned Emily Wilcox characterized Dai's work as emblematic for a whole generation of Chinese artists:

“Ultimately, Dai's vision of Chinese dance found audiences and collaborators in China because both were facing a similar conundrum at the time: how to find a form of cultural expression that neither assimilated into Eurocentric norms nor reproduced orientalist and racist conceptions of China, while also recognizing the internal variation and multiplicity that defined China as a modern nation.”

A similar strategy based on employing stories and practices well rooted within the local/national communities of the newly emerging socialist nation-states characterized the work of [Patricio Bunster](#) – a Chilean communist⁷ choreographer. In Catralla Desciende (1969) a 17th century heroine, who had gone down in history as a [murderess](#) of dozens of men, became an inspiration for the choreography. In Bunster's take on the story, a female protagonist danced with three male dancers representing a priest, a slave and a nobleman. The choreography served as a social commentary and pointed to the inequalities present in Chilean society at the time. [The employment of the local tale was to grant to a wide range of audiences access to the contemporary choreographic work.](#) Following the method of Joos-Leeder, Bunster focused his dance research not on particular style or technique but included pedestrian and labor movements to develop dance idioms that would be most appropriate for the particular choreographies. Such non-dance movements would be combined with Ausdrucksstanz, Graham technique, Flamenco and Afro-Brazilian dance traditions as well as Chilean folk forms. Through such an expanded approach to dance vocabulary, Bunster affirmed dancing as close to life, as expressing the full potential of the human body and responding to a variety of human dreams and struggles.

[7]

Using the description after Jens Giersdorf and his writing about Bunster's legacy.

“Dance is permeable to all influences, from high culture or low, without any social prejudice.”

(Ramiro Guerra, *La Danza Amenazas y Resistencias*)

Meanwhile in Cuba, after some years of the guerilla war against Fulgencio Batista's regime, in 1959 the communist (el) comandante Fidel Castro became the prime minister. The process of transforming an island into a socialist, one-party state had begun and could not be interrupted by numerous assassination attempts, counter-revolutions, and embargos. At its wake, the new country needed a new dance form which would express the spirit and unique identity of the Cuban people. Suki John in her study of Cuban contemporary dance, *Contemporary Dance in Cuba: Técnica Cubana as Revolutionary Movement*, proposed a beautiful description of the dancing culture of the island:

“In Cuba everyone dances, even the truck drivers, and they dance well. (...) Maybe it's because everyone's grandmother taught him or her to dance guaguanco, danzon, mambo and salsa (except Fidel, apparently, who is notorious for NOT dancing... among other things). Professional dance training is free and excellent, an investment the country makes in its talent. Dancers are respected, not trivialised.”

In the aftermath of the Revolution, dancer and choreographer [Ramiro Guerra](#) was appointed as the director of the Department of Modern Dance at Teatro Nacional in Havana. Governmental support (in ideological and financial terms) was then offered to create a new revolutionary movement language – *técnica cubana*, which was born out of a [synthesis of modern and indigenous dance vocabularies](#). The building of the technique, training method, and choreographic repertoire worthy of the new socialist state was founded in a desire for the form that would allow both individual and national belonging to be expressed in a virtuous manner. The formation of the New Wo(Man) through the work in/of the Conjunto Nacional de Danza Moderna and the revolutionary premises of the new technique were described by Guerra, who led the company since its foundation in 1957:

“It was necessary to create new dancers who would see modern dance not as a frivolous game, but instead a responsible **work that serves a social function**. We had to make them understand that the dancer isn’t just an individual who dances, but also someone who thinks while dancing. In this way I think we have arrived at a nationalistic approach to the arts, in which we **take folklore and elevate it to a universal category**.”

In *técnica cubana* the contemporary techniques of dance are interwoven with Afro-Cuban dance traditions, which is reflected not only in how the dancers move, but what themes are proposed through the choreographies, how *narratives* are constructed and how audiences are addressed. And above all, *técnica* is built on a deep conviction about the significance of dancing both for the individual growth and the development of society. Thanks to the received state support, the dancers and choreographers committed to the cause could dedicate themselves entirely to dance practice and research as their work. Over the decades, *técnica* was developed and disseminated and it survived the fall of communism and the so-called **Special Period** in modern Cuban history. It seems to have succeeded in expressing the cultural legacy of the people attuned to dance as something that is both done and watched, dance that realizes its potential in abolishing class divisions and intersecting individual existence with the lives of the generations. And now...

A short pause for the words of Fredric Jameson from his book *The Political Unconscious*:

“All class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collective.”

Such a utopian unity seemed to have been at stake in many of the dance developments that we are visiting. At the time of the new world order being constituted after WW2, not only were the socialist agendas supporting the formation of the new collective identities, but also the decolonial struggles across continents were bringing to the foreground the question of belonging and collectivity that rooted themselves in the traditions eradicated by the

colonizers. The aspiration of early modern dance to propose a transnational language of human expression was revised and reinvented in places such as Cuba or Chile, but also in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), seeking its new cultural identity under the shadow of the Berlin Wall. As dance historian and dancer Mark Franko wrote when elaborating on the legacy of the New Dance Group, what was recognized by the socialist dancers and choreographers as crucial for creation of the utopian possibility, was the *felt politics* – the ability to live through states and emotions that would eventually bridge the individual experience with the life of a community. Such a future-oriented readiness bound with the discipline and joy of working towards a shared goal was to be trained and nurtured through dancing. In the *Report of the Conference that Organized the Workers Cultural Federation of the New York District* from 1932 we can read the words of leftist journalist Mike Gold:

“You must enter the emotions of the worker, you must bind him to the movement through every part of his fiber.”

The *unity and collective awakening* which I imagine was at work on the socialist dancefloors, was a realization of self-transgression and commoning of experience that could be offered by a mass dance, watching a dance performance or creating one, by dancing with others – either dead or living. Let’s not forget that dancing has been a vital part of ceremonies and rituals serving the renewal and reproduction of human communities. By proposing rhythm, movement patterns and group formations, it played an important role in either affirming or overturning social relations and hierarchies. In 1978 Irena Turska, Polish dance historian, wrote about *Krxesany* by Conrad Drzewiecki in the following way:

“(A)nd like in the primitive ritual, in which dance works to unite a group toward a common goal, it is so in the choreography – the base of which is dance filled with the collective spirit and power of a mass emotional excitement. The other inspiration taken from the ceremonial tradition is an organisation (of the choreography) in a circle which itself carries a magical significance.”

In 1977 in the People's Republic of Poland, Conrad Drzewiecki, the choreographer and leader of the recently funded (with state support) Polish Dance Theatre, created his most seminal work *Krxesany* and ritual was at the center of the choreographic experiment. The group choreography composed to the *contemporary music by Wojciech Kilar* (inspired by the folk traditions from the Polish mountains) was based on only six steps constituting a traditional folk dance related to the coming of spring and striking of the new fire. The choreography is best known thanks to its film documentation and re-edition done for public TV in 1979, in which the dance is set against the background of the Tatra Mountains. I must say, dear Comrade, that I am a big fan of *Krxesany*, I find its simple form and the folk spirit simultaneously very contemporary and yet carrying something of a deep time within it. Unlike the folk dance companies that were also emerging in Poland throughout the Cold War, Drzewiecki's proposal drifted away from the notion of grand spectacle and the generic *cepelia*⁸ aesthetics and it proposed a rather modest yet powerful *form of a collective and affective reunion*. In the 1974 interview, Conrad Drzewiecki painted his artistic agenda as bridging the pasts and futures:

"We want to go out into the world with something entirely new. The old things would find their place too, but under different principles. (...) Dance Theatre must express so much and with such power that it can replace everything – old and new, give the spectator maximum amount of the artistic and aesthetic experiences, which, when expressed through dance, would give the spectators a full satisfaction."

The desire to arrive at the *junction of the old and new, hybridization and deborderization of the dance practice* were expressed through the turn towards locality and folklorism elevated to the plane of universal, transnational *communication* and they seemed very much aligned with the traditions of modern dance. When in 1956 Patricio Bunster took over the position of the director of the Ballet Nacional Chileno, he too would soon shift the focus of the company's repertoire towards indigenous traditions, strengthening what he described as *ballet americano* understood as

[8]

Cepelia (CPLiA) stands for the communist central association of artisans and folk crafts(wo)men, which existed in the People's Republic of Poland between 1949 and 1990. Its main task was to sell the crafts produced through the associated manufacturers. After the end of communism, the shops remained operating and the name became a signifier for the generalized folkloric aesthetics. Today to refer to *cepelia aesthetics* means mostly the generic folk-inspired objects that are sold as souvenirs from Poland or to describe e.g. restaurants stylized on the folk huts where different regional influences are randomly mixed.

the Latin American way of doing contemporary dance that rejected the cultural hegemonies of the western/northern hemispheres and looked towards the indigenous, vernacular legacies of dance. Bunster's dedication to reaching broad audiences found its perhaps most spectacular expression in the touring of the Ballet Nacional Chileno, who presented the works often on ad hoc open air stages in even the most remote rural areas of the country. It is said that some of the performances were watched by up to 2000 people. Introductions as well as after talks were offered to the public. The influence of the Joos-Leeder school would be present not only in the politically resonant choreographies of Bunster, but later in his career in the mass dance choreographies which mobilized up to one hundred thousand amateur dancers.

During the reign of the socialist president Salvador Allende in the early 1970s, Bunster and his peers would work in direct collaboration with the government, exploring the potential of dance as a soft weapon and advocating for its increased public presence and state support for dance. When in 1973 Allende was assassinated in the military putsch, Bunster fled to East Germany where he would spend the following 12 years in exile.

And, perhaps there is no better place to observe the Cold War paradoxes and separation anxieties than the Germany divided by the Wall for a few decades. The division was often imagined/narrated as having power to split the world into two irreconcilable timelines of historical (un)development. When it comes to dance, before WW2 Germany was home to a rich modern dance tradition (*Ausdruckstanz*) and hosted artists that would become surprisingly influential in the postwar era. I already mentioned before how the Joos-Leeder school in the UK continued to teach and develop the artistic practices and approaches that were initiated by choreographers who had been confronted with the Nazi instrumentalisation of art for propagandistic purposes. Rudolf von Laban or Mary Wigman proved to be useful for the regime for the time being, and the decisions they made would not necessarily overshadow their work or legacy after the end of WW2. In the aftermath of the war, modern dance thrived in a sort of diaspora, resonating both as a transnational phenomena and a tool in redefining national

identities. Jens Giersdorf, an East German dance historian, in his unique study *The Body of the People: East German Dance since 1945* described the postwar condition of dance:

“East German choreographers reinvented a tradition after World War II by tapping into selected areas of German dance, such as movement choirs, folk vocabulary, and Soviet and German mass movements. These invented traditions were meant to validate East Germany as a progressive successor of German Culture and to create a socialist national identification distinct from the West by updating movement traditions in relation to socialist corporeal ideals.”

We can see, dear Comrade, that many choreographic strategies once used by the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda, would find their second life under the communist rule. Yet what is well known and documented is that postwar German dance production concerns almost entirely West German artists, which should not surprise us if we agree that the labor of historicizing dance is a political act and it serves purposes dictated by the interests of the winners in any historical battle. Leaving all Pina Bausches and Kurt Jooses behind, let's look at something that theoretically had no right to exist (according to the Western narration of the cultural superiority over the Eastern bloc) – East German Tanztheater.

East Germany under Soviet influence continued investing in balletic forms but also encouraged the development of new artistic idioms that would emphasize the autonomy of its cultural production, as well as an autonomy of dance itself being one of the most valuable of the socialist art disciplines. In 1965, choreographer and modern dancer Tom Schilling moved to East Berlin to take over the leadership of the newly formed dance company in Komische Oper Berlin. With socialist realism being the official doctrine concerning art production, the question of dance's relationship to socialist life, its representational and educational qualities, as well as its capacity to convey an essential truth about human nature would be at work for the decades to come. Dilemmas and aspirations that accompanied the work of Schilling would be emblematic for the general development of dance in socialist countries and they would unfold

[9]

I am thinking here about e.g. the Judson Church's legacy and related occurrences that were, and still are, an impactful export product to the belated countries (such as my home country) and which became an object of some fixation in many European curatorial and educational programmes, with works of Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer or Deborah Hay being reenacted, reconstructed, revised again and again as pinnacles of the compositional thought in (contemporary) dance production. Not only reliance on chance or improvisational experiments are a part of this legacy but also a certain formalism of choreographies which would differentiate them historically from the emotional/spiritual/folkloric dance practices of the communist or Afro-American choreographers, and set them apart from the modern dance expressivism and narratives.

against the background of a long debate about modernism, national identity, and vision of the common future. According to socialist realism, the performing arts should be able to not only represent but also critique the life of socialist societies and inspire the audience (while providing a space for self-identification with what is presented on stage) to work toward communism as the ultimate realization of socialist politics. Such simultaneously utopian and utilitarian goals would not mean that the art produced was crude or offensively didactic.

Schilling himself would employ a variety of strategies that we could have seen with other choreographers described above, which would lead to the creation of unique artistic qualities that often challenged the square logic of the party's culture commanders. In his 1971 *Rhythmus*, he proposed a mixture of jazz, pedestrian, folk, ballet and modern dance vocabulary while leaving some space to improvisation, which has been historically ascribed to US-American (post-modern) dance⁹. By allowing the audience to enter the ambiguous space of witnessing improvised, made in a moment choreographies, the liveness of the performative event awoke the presence of the watchers. In such a gesture the labor of dance was emphasized and unconstrained by ideologically correct dance routines, and as such the humanness of dancing could be uncovered as a unifying, commoning tool. Not to mention the joy that was crucial to many performances staged in Komische Oper, where the *high* art and *low* entertainment would intermingle and produce space for art to be experienced by the audience without any initiation or education.

Improvisation and multidisciplinary artistic collaboration in dance practice/production that were present in the works of socialist choreographers supported by the state and having access to stable infrastructure, were also features of the underground dance work-ings of the era. The unofficial artistic production granted more space for disobedience in relation to the artistic directions imposed by the communist doctrines, but it was at the same time harder to establish those within highly controlled societies. Artists such as Fine Kwiatkowski managed to subvert the official art production schemes and used some of the established

performing art stages to present works standing in tension with the state agendas or demands. As Jens Giersdorf wrote in his book on East German dance, Kwiatkowski's approach to dance was very postmodernist in the way she played with improvisation, montage and demontage. A lack of technical and narrative consistency marked her work as dissident, never entering the institutional realm of GDR cultural production. What characterized Kwiatkowski and her generation of artists working in the 1980s was a refusal to conform to the state-opposition rhetoric, while a certain artistic disengagement with socialist ideals expressed the mood of the late phase in the Cold War when the collapse of communism was maybe still unimaginable and yet very much in the air.

And, as we are slowly approaching the end, dear Comrade, I want to bring back a consideration of the unique power of dancing – **body to body communication**. It was recognized by socialist states and dancing was rendered an important tool in preparing the ground for the revolutionary future. The felt politics so fundamental to the proletarian revolution would be incited, enabled, and trained through dancing available as a stage form and form of leisure, entertainment, and physical training. All the choreographers and dancers we have visited seemed to have understood that and dedicated themselves to transforming their societies through the art of dance. Such a powerful position of dance within socialist societies has been gradually weakened in the period of transformation, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The capitalist progress which was sold to the countries of the communist bloc in its already decaying neoliberal form was one of the crucial factors leading to the disembodiment of social relations, cultures, and politics. Many ideas and dreams of the socialist choreographers were erased by the coming of the art market having only one sovereign – capital. Currently it is perhaps difficult to imagine the paradoxes, dilemmas and opportunities that informed our ancestral choreographers in experimenting, failing, and dreaming the dance paradigms which would eventually cross boundaries of social divisions and contest art historical lineages. I wonder where we are now? What has been forgotten? What needs to be reinvented and reimaged?

THE END

☞ “Take me to the magic of the moment
On a glory night
Where the children of tomorrow dream away
(dream away)
In the wind of change”

The change that was introduced after the fall of the wall did not quite correspond to the dreams of the generations fighting against the authoritarian, colonial, and capitalist powers. After decades of isolation and subsequent political humiliation of the postcommunist nations, I would like to propose some critical distance as a healthy response to the hegemonic narratives of the winners. The change that was promised turned out to be another unfreedom that we are yet to overcome. The generations of my parents and grandparents came to live through not only the fall of communism but also of democracy.

The period of so-called transformation or transition meant both enrichment and dispossession, new doors were opened while some ideals, memories and cultural experiences faded away. I guess, dear Comrade, it is a natural flow of events when the empire takes over the land of the conquered peoples. Though we were not conquered, we broke down those doors, we pushed the wall, we sent our corrupted leaders away. If socialist dancing were to train people in the radical readiness for transformation and enabling of yet another future, its teachings and resonances were present at the moment of history being overturned. So, how were these past and future lost? How did we get stuck in the non-contemporaneity and belatedness?

“What still divides Europe today, what cuts it in two different parts in spite of the ongoing unification, namely its communist past, cannot be remembered by Europe itself.”

(Boris Buden, *Transition to Nowhere: Art in History After 1989*)

Buden claims that not only is there a misunderstanding (a historic manipulation?) when it comes to the political agency of the communist nations. The big difficulty lies in Europe's (and so called West's) inability to remember communism at all, to remember it as our shared history and for what it was beyond the regime it produced – a concept of universal emancipation. The infantilization of the postcommunist people served the reification of capitalist self-righteousness and it allowed the world to forget about the grabbings, unfreedoms and transgressions enacted by the capitalist countries throughout and beyond the Cold War. That is precisely why we must remember, we must continuously invoke and reinvent those pasts that once were enabling the radical future dreams. As I am writing this letter to you, dear Comrade, another war is ongoing in Europe, postcommunist nations are struggling for self-determination and inclusion in the European democratic horizon, their histories float to the surface of historic oblivion, they demand to be heard and acknowledged. It makes me hopeful that not only weapons are used in those confrontations but there is also dancing occurring on the streets, dancing that announces the fall of the empire, the new beginning that we will one day celebrate in common.

Until then it is our job to continue the work of the past generations, to walk with our ancestors and descendants, to learn from the past and do better. To say it again and again: to do a labor of historicizing is to perform a political act, to do a labor of historicizing dance is to perform a political act, to do a labor of historicizing dance of the postcommunist nations is to perform a political act. Dancing is our comrade on the way towards the future, dance brings us back from the loneliness of disembodied monads floating in the pool of contemporary exhaustion and hopelessness. Dance is a way in which a free spirit comes to inhabit a freed body (Duncan). See you on the dancefloor.



P.S. I am including a photograph of Patricio Bunster from the family album, which was sent to me by his niece Paula Ortiz Bunster. The contact and permission for publication was possible thanks to Madeleine Jo Hurtado whom I was lucky to have met in Chile, and who turned out to have been a friend of Mr. Bunster and his family. Cheers to the transnational arts community and to the artists' families.

LUNA PARK

**JETTE
BÜCHSENSCHÜTZ**

Dear Comrade, dear Granddaughter,

I move towards the imprints of my ancestors with hesitant and stumbling steps. With my fingertips, I carefully draw their fragmented traces and memories in the soil that has refused to accept their full and complex imprint. And yet here I am writing to you returning to this provisional index of loss and misplaced past futures and future pasts, from a place that has not yet decided which direction to take, which utopia to favor, which revolution to articulate – or if any at all. I am not optimistic, I might add.

I am sitting here in this former part of East Berlin where traces of history, herstories and theirstories have been fully erased from public sight and collective memory, looking at a picture I am sharing with you here, dear Comrade, in order for you to get a sense of all the places, memories and ashes that were left behind and eventually vanished when in 1989 the final big wave of neoliberal capitalism hit the last standing shores of socialism, burying any last sparkle of hope for a socialist and eventually communist alternative.

My dear mother took this picture in the year of 2012 and it shows the ruins of the house in the rural area of Thuringia where she was born in the early 1950s, in a country

that doesn't exist anymore, in a community that was about to be created in the hope for a new socialist society, in which prosperity and equality would finally come hand in hand. She would have to leave this country because her father protested too openly against the collectivization of private companies – and it is an ironic twist of history that the place you see here in this picture

↓

Luna Park, 2012, side view: on the second floor and extending over the whole belle étage was the dance salon. Photo from private family archive.

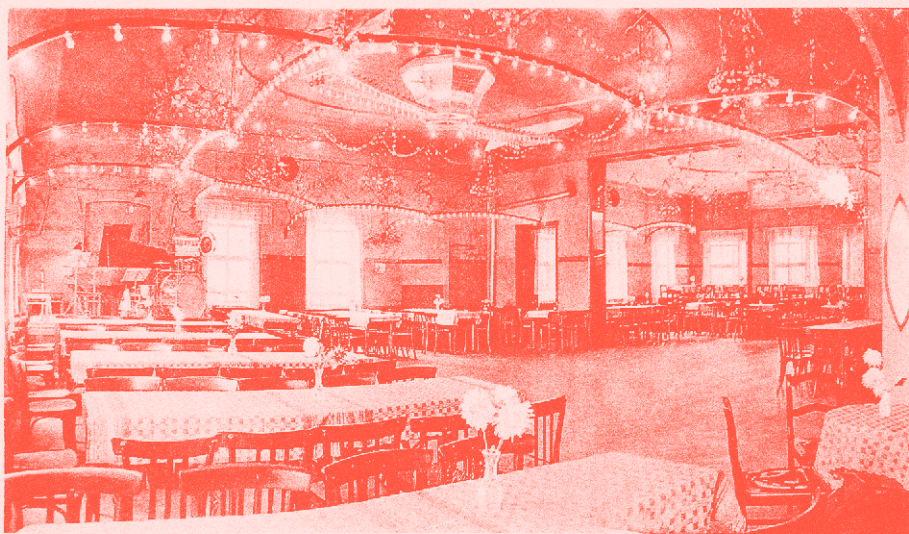


used to be a so-called Luna Park. A place for drinking, dancing and celebrating, a local amusement park in the tradition – but obviously on a way smaller scale – of the Luna Park on Coney Island in New York City that first opened around 1900 in the atmosphere of modern age's enthusiasm for technology and its faith in unlimited progress – marking the beginning of grand scale privatization and commodification of pleasure, leisure, and desire.



Photo of a postcard from a private family archive. Source unknown.

So let me share another story with you about moving bodies from the realm of sociality, well aware of all the ambivalences that come with it. But first, a second picture that gives you an idea of the sparkling light that used to fill up the now wholly demolished ruin.



Teilansicht des Großen Saales

Here in this illuminated *Tanxsaal* where my great grandfather would play the piano and my teenage grandmother would sing heartily, as my mother told me, people from all classes – but wait, it was socialism so all classes were one class 😊 – would come together and celebrate life. Heavy drinking was obviously involved (my mother's mother's mother died young because of extensive alcohol abuse) and so was dancing. The act of moving together formed the

daily ritual of a society that was yet to be built – and yet to experience its full scale of joy and its tremendous failures.

The socialist cultural policy direction of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) required the involvement of the working class in cultural life. On March 23rd and 24th in 1953, the “Theoretische Konferenz über die Tanzkunst” (Eng. “Theoretical Conference on the Art of Dance”) of the State Commission for Art Affairs took place in Berlin, which marked the turn toward the Soviet model of socialist realism also for dance.

While large festivals – especially the Rudolstadt Festival in Thuringia, which took place between 1955 and 1989 – followed the example of the Soviet mass festivals and were committed to the representative functions of dance and the socialist body, the practice of folk dancing continued in more private and rural areas, such as family celebrations, weddings, etc... Here, dancing could serve as a means of a rather private community building, which was not necessarily congruent with the dance events planned and executed on the state level – even though to professionally play music as a DJ or as a “Schallplattenunterhalter” (SPU) as it was called in the GDR, one had to undergo a specific training. Only those who had the necessary certificate, commonly referred to as a “Pappe,” were allowed to play music in public.

Sorry for this bureaucratic passage. I try to sum up: dancing was respected and valued in the context of socialist community building, but its inherent collective ecstasy at the same time was suspicious and under political control.

In *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* the cultural anthropologist Barbara Ehrenreich considers dancing together as an anthropological constant that enables people to join together in larger groups giving each of its individuality a rest for a while. “[A]nthropologists tend to agree that the evolutionary function of dance was to enable – or encourage – humans to live in groups larger than small bands of closely related individuals.”¹ Dancing, following that thought, is one of the most emphatic forms of collective synchronization:

“The capacity for collective joy is encoded into us almost as deeply as the capacity for the erotic love of one human for

[1]

Barbara Ehrenreich,
*Dancing in the
Streets: A History
of Collective Joy*
(London: Granta
Books, 2007), 66.

[2]

Barbara Ehrenreich,
*Dancing in the
Streets*, 76.

another. We can live without it, as most of us do, but only at the risk of succumbing to the solidarity nightmare of depression. Why not reclaim our distinctively human heritage as creatures who can generate their own ecstatic pleasures out of music, colour, feasting, and dance?"²

[3]

Barbara Ehrenreich,
*Dancing in the
Streets*, 75.

The desire for collective ecstasy has not disappeared or become obsolete, it is simply no longer intended and welcomed. "[E]cstatic rituals still build group cohesion, but when they build it among subordinates – peasants, slaves, women, colonized people – the elite calls out its troops,"³ we continue to read in Barbara Ehrenreich's book. Instead of pursuing communal experiences of collective pleasure, individual consumption, spectacle, and commercial entertainment have taken its place – and US-American inventions of amusement parks like the Luna Park, where pleasure would irreversibly be turned into private recreation came along with a technophile industrial capitalism, with its division of work and leisure, and paved the way to the appropriation of societal experiences under the heading of an upgraded individualism celebrating autonomy, authenticity and self-realization. In other words: consumption became a means of identity formation. Political themes transmitted into amusing content for public bourgeoisie consumption. We learned to rely on the emotional templates offered by the pleasure- and psycho- and – yes, I am also addressing me myself and you dear sisters working in the sphere of dance & performance – entertainment industry; by all the cooperations that support blurring the lines between communal intimacy and self-improvement and eventually self-release. It seems as if there is no perspective beyond, no subversive a priori. What remains is only an immanent path: we live our subjectivity as self-fulfillment, ignoring that our authenticity is market-mediated.

I hope you could follow me on my detour. Let us come back to the dancing body of the realm of sociality and its longing for collectivizing individual experiences beyond capitalist commercialization with its basic principles: the genius artist and the autonomy of art.

I share in that feeling that our present reality lacks the idea of any common social experience typical of early

[4]

Bini Adamczak,
*Communism
for Kids*, trans.
J. Blumenfeld,
S. Lewis (Cambridge:
MIT Press, 2017), 73.

[5]

Bini Adamczak,
*Yesterday's
Tomorrow: On
the Loneliness
of Communist
Specters and
the Reconstruc-
tion of the Future*
(Cambridge: MIT
Press, 2021), 73.

modernism and it is quite obvious that the promise of the so-called democratic freedom and economic prosperity has by no means compensated for this epochal loss. With the year 1989, it was not just a system that was diminished, but even more importantly any form of social hope – communism was no longer a realistic option. Instead it drifted into the realm of dreams and imaginative universes stored in many notebooks and discussed in theoretical pamphlets. But the philosopher Bini Adamczak reminds us “to turn the language of communism back toward the banality of everyday life, toward what’s tangible.”⁴ And continues with a practical trajectory I would like to share with you here at the end of my letter: “If communist criticism aspires to move beyond its habit of bitter negation, then it needs to add a blueprint of desire to its toolbox of analytic scalpels and rhetorical dynamite. It needs to generate desire – communist desire.”⁵ Let us for a moment indulge in this idea – and imagine dancing infused by this *communist desire*...

**YEAH, I HOPE
YOU'RE LIVING
RIGHT!**

**ELENA
NOVAKOVITS**

Dear Comrades, Granddaughters, Syssters,

I was reading (*and thinking about*) your letters and I want to express my gratitude. All these references to your past and present have empowered me to trace where you have been and where you might want to go. All the photos became a vehicle to come closer to you. I do share your thoughts on your ancestors, memories and hopes. I do share that there are common desires and obstacles for all of us, or at least I can connect with most of them.

However, being in the **HERE and NOW** and writing these lines from the city of Athens, another dimension of the way I perceive **memory** reveals itself. I am currently in a turbulent socio-political context where every day there are more and more manifestations of a region that cannot move toward consolidation. The sheer problematic identity of a government that has neoliberal practices (or even harsher practices) at its core makes me (us) NUMB.

(and if I always put forward the question of how to define “we,” in the current situation I find a stronger potential “we,” which, although it is not inclusive of all subjects, I fortunately do feel that at this certain temporality it is broadly a strong pronoun)

And then I remembered that some years ago, while I was studying in the Netherlands, it was the first time I made my personal attempt to write about the Greek dance field. Back then, I used the title *Moving Political: The*

→

Graffiti at Exarchia,
Athens (GR)

[1]

Elena Novakovits,
"Moving Political:
The Contemporary
Dance Scene in
Greece in the Era
of Economic Crisis"
(Masters Essay,
Utrecht University,
2015).

[2]

Giorgio Agamben,
"Thought is the
courage of
hopelessness,"
interview by Jordan
Skinner, *Verso*,
2014, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>
(accessed April 2,
2023).

[3]

Bad Religion.
"New Dark Ages."
New Maps of Hell.
Epitaph, 2008.

Contemporary Dance Scene in Greece in the Era of Economic Crisis for that essay and suddenly I remembered the photo that I used as the intro (*the one you can see below*). And on

this particular occasion that I'm writing now, I've gone back to what I was thinking at that time. Focusing, then, on performance analysis (*though now I position myself a bit far from analyzing performative contents while I am feeling closer to focusing on contexts and methods*) as the main way of articulating my line of thinking, I wrote that the chosen choreographic works "had as fundamental source and basically as starting point the col-

lapsing society into a volatile framework of historical and social changes"¹... and then I was drawing on Agamben's words that "to be contemporary is to respond to the appeal that the darkness of the epoch makes to us."²

And diving into this text, some lyrics from the track "New Dark Ages" from the punk-rock band Bad Religion came as a junction with the present. I find myself repeating the main part...

"Welcome to the new dark ages
Yeah, I hope you're living right
These are the new dark ages
And the world might end tonight"³

SO, WELCOME TO THE NEW (or repeating ANEW) THE
DARK DARK DARK AGES!

Being in the here and now, I am in a sphere where
a collective area of memory is being formed. Starting with



the implementation of Decree 85/2022 which downgrades the status of studies related to the broader field of the performing arts, which caused a domino effect towards multiple manifestations for the claim of the obvious and timeless demands for the strengthening of the local cultural sector (...*but reclaiming our lives too...*). Several occupations in theater institutions by artists and cultural workers; massive protests; assemblies around urgent issues of our locality that spanned the whole current socio-political framework; writings on solidarity and resistance; and simultaneously the intransigence of state violence and the police force. The stereotypes of a country that has sunshine 365 days a year, gorgeous beaches, delicious food, and plenty of summer destination options are being played upon us.

I read in one of your letters that it's weird to talk about dancing. Taking just this sentence, I am lately thinking that I do find myself uneasy to talk about dance as a form of art but find it easier to talk about **dance-ing** as a practice/action for building a community and/or new communities. My temporality evaluates how I perceive these notions or how I desire to engage with them in a different mode.

From this entire resistance movement, I recall and need to share with you this magic moment when a large group of students and workers in the field of dance dared to occupy a central theater in the heart of the city one night after the applause of a dance performance. This enchanting moment displayed how an invisible field of art can, through willing and persistent subjects, attain a higher potential under the key motto "Give Space To Dance." A dynamic response and critique against the established structures. A collective drive and resistance towards: a conservative educational system that emphasizes the technical skills of a body and curtails the tools of critical thinking; a complete absence of a contemporary academic structure; meager state support that debilitates healthy working conditions; an unexplainable lack of infrastructure and limited space to host the field and its actors, but certainly a gesture of reacting to an implosive regime that leaves no room for future hopes. How could these gaps be reconfigured through a shared vision that conceives life otherwise?

And bearing in mind the current context, I looked for relevant writings from different time periods of the same geographical location and I stumbled upon the text of the theorist and curator Gigi Argiropoulou where she states that:

[4]

Gigi Argiropoulou,
"Public Failures:
Moments of
disorder and the
constant attempt
to make things
'work'," *TkH, Journal
for Performing
Arts Theory*, no. 23
(2016): 23-24. [http://
www.tkh-generator.
net/wp-content/
uploads/2016/07/
EN-tkh-23-single-
WEB.pdf](http://www.tkh-generator.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/EN-tkh-23-single-WEB.pdf), (accessed
March 18, 2023).

"As we travel through different spaces, lecture rooms, government conferences and occupied theatres, such 'workings' of power and our failings to make things 'work' perhaps bear the potential to constitute an ephemeral method: a practice of negotiation situated between constraints and desires, expectations and impotential means."⁴

Bringing this to now, I can figure out only commonalities. We are still traveling through different spaces (...) occupied theaters. We are still investing in ephemeral methods of coexistence and for raising collective voices. We are still fighting for desires, hopes, expectations, and WHY NOT, positive failures. We are moved by these moments of crisis (especially when they seem to repeat themselves). Although there are moments of futility followed by immobility. And the common places of encounter produce a sense of utopia within a profound, established dystopia **[emotionalism over]**.

→

On Friday
24.02.2023 the
Olympia Municipal
Music Theatre Maria
Callas in Athens
(GR) was occupied
by a group of work-
ers and students in
the field of dance.



And thus, HOW CAN YOU LIVE RIGHT??? I acknowledge that I cannot determine what right means, but on the other hand, I do imagine and envision the traces that could accompany us in a later recording of this HERE and NOW.

In one of your letters, you mentioned the phrase “the imprints of my ancestors” and I will add: **let’s merge the imprints of our ancestors with the imprints of our contemporaneity.** Our traces of collective action can and urge to build common speculations. Trying to sell Greece as a product with the achievements of the promoted ancestors that were supposed to have created this *great nation* of democracy and philosophy (.....) **is a non-promising utopia/it is more our current dystopia for social transformation.** To end this letter to you: the well-known commercial – LIVE YOUR MYTH IN GREECE – for attracting more and more tourists every summer as an ideal product is not the slogan that WE need for our HERE and NOW.

P.S. And meanwhile, in the process of writing these lines and taking more time to articulate my standpoint through observations and testimonies about this HERE and NOW, all of a sudden this *present temporality* became a new sort of recent past. Turning my gaze again onto the dance field after 41 days of occupation, where an invisible local dance sector (from the so-called South periphery) achieved to make itself heard through a series of actions that had an enormous echo, not only on the ordinary group of folks who follow it as a field of art; where the individual became a collective; where a new community flourished, forging new horizons for what could be conceived as (micro)politics, and asserting its rights, suddenly the forces of the right-wing regime(!) invaded and violently interrupted this unprecedented coexistence of people under a communal roof of cohabitation. And then, again and again, how can we live right?

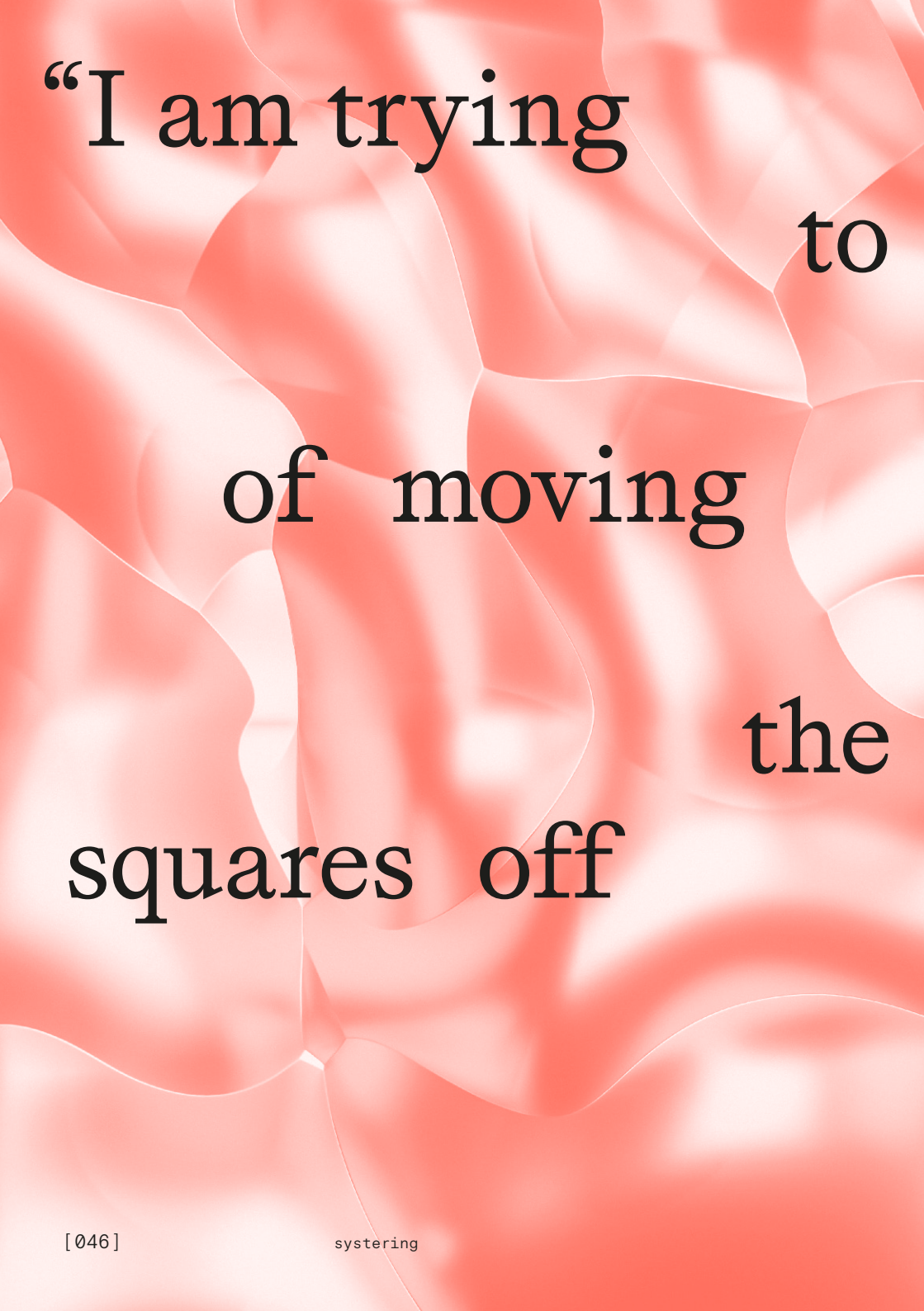
While running through some words by Micah White (which one of your dear friends suggested to me) about his reflections on Occupy Wall Street, I was struck by the words that he was saying about these kind of movements:

[5]

Micah White,
"The Thing About
a Revolution Is It
Always Comes As
a Surprise," inter-
view by Shawn Katz,
Hazlitt, 2016,
[https://hazlitt.net/
feature/thing-
-about-revolution-
-it-always-comes-
-surprise-interview-
-micah-white,](https://hazlitt.net/feature/thing-about-revolution-it-always-comes-surprise-interview-micah-white)
(accessed April 22,
2023).

"(...) what people are craving is a kind of loss of fear, a collective awakening, a kind of mood of what it feels like to be among this group of people, and to fully believe that you're in the midst of this revolutionary moment."⁵

Certainly, this recent past of our context has laid the groundwork for a common craving and has awakened a social upheaval. The dilemma of fear seems distant, where common desires collide and are turning into the prevailing tools of our own present. Let us continue to follow and activate all these traces. How can we leave behind these footprints of memories? The world did not end that night. The future has not yet come and we cannot predict it and we can still look for space(s) for the dance and for ourselves.



“I am trying
to
of moving
the
squares off

invent

a new way

under my dress:

room

against it.”

LANDMARKS OF (DIS) ORIENTATION

ELENA

NOVAKOVITS,

JETTE

BÜCHSENSCHÜTZ,

MAEVE

JOHNSON,

MAŠA RADI BUH

YOU ARE HERE



hi :) is this the de-centered?

The concepts of periphery and center are composed of multiple entangled layers and dimensions and encompass a wide range of volatile variables which in turn invoke a variety of experiences, stories and memories. Periphery/center categories could be a modus of an individual positioning, either at the level of locality or of our professional route. At the crossroads of both, a rich compilation of various aspects of one's identity unfolds. Yet, we could also say that the periphery is often *in the eye of the beholder*. Geopolitical and cultural boundaries are not the only benchmark for whether a person is located on the periphery and/or in the center, let alone at these times when a juncture of class, gender, sexual orientation, financial background, education, working status, mental health – among others – could situate us in multiple spots and points territorially and temporally. In the unstable times of continuous social and political transformation our standing is a shiver, a wobble, a split. Taking a position requires a dance-ing.

“There was a wall. (...) Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.”¹



hi :) is this the de-centered?

Let's imagine a photograph: euphoric masses are running away from the torn down Berlin Wall – *like grain from a burst sack* (in the German original: "wie Getreide aus einem aufgeplatzten Sack"²) – but we cannot see what the masses see. Their perspective is not included. We only see them running towards... well, what exactly? What they are running towards and for is not part of the picture. Is their revolutionary vision missing from the image or is there maybe something more important than this particular revolutionary moment?

[1]

Ursula K. Le Guin,
*The Dispossessed:
An Ambiguous
Utopia* (New York:
PerfectBound, 2002),
e-book, 1.

We can only imagine this photograph as it is not included in Boris Buden's book *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Eng. *The Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-communism*). This imaginary picture that was taken during the events of the fall of the Berlin Wall serves as a starting point to describe what he calls "the infantilization of Eastern Europeans." Those who had brought about the revolutionary upheavals, the revolutionary *winners* you might call them, had been deprived of their historical agency, turned into losers, incapacitated and infantilized: political children who are yet to learn how to practice democracy and how to navigate through a free market economy.

[3]

Boris Buden,
*Transition to
Nowhere – Art in
History After 1989*
(Berlin: Archive
Books, 2000), 76.

[2]

Boris Buden, *Zone
des Übergangs: Vom
Ende des Postkom-
munismus* (Frankfurt
a. M: Suhrkamp,
2009), 17.

Those degraded children who need guidance, patronage, and re-education, became thus the "almost perfect subject of a democratic restart"³. Innocent, naive, and immature but willing to strive towards an optimistic future guided by the experienced hands of the capitalist patrons and catching up with Western modernity – what a fairytale.

The narration of the utterly failed socialism had an essential function in solidifying the capitalist system – a system supposedly without alternatives. A narrative that presupposes two opposites constituting each other: on the one hand, a culture claiming to be universal, on the other, a culture that is immature and inferior. Buden describes it as an inherent

[4]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 19.

[5]

Jürgen Habermas,
*Die nachholende
Revolution, Kleine
Politische Schriften
VII* (Frankfurt a.M.:
Suhrkamp, 1990).

[6]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 17.

[7]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 37.

[8]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 53.

[9]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 18.

contradiction within the process of inclusion: to erase differences, they first need to be constructed.

With the definition of the “catching-up revolution”⁴ (in the German original: “nachholende Revolution”), a term proposed by Jürgen Habermas in 1990⁵, the revolutionary motivation was “degraded (...) to an opportunistic catch-up move along an already determined path long since made by others and reduced to a miserably belated imitation of a life already existing and brought to perfection somewhere else.”⁶ And Buden continues: “This, however, degraded all the sublime ideals in whose name people in the East revolted against their oppressors. Freedom, justice and equality have turned into a set of culturally particular ‘western’ values.”⁷ Thus they were “deprived of any historical originality,”⁸ as the moment of upheaval was declared a process of transition in which the former socialist societies would transform and eventually integrated into a capitalist and democratic structure. The events of 1989/1990 and the preceding upheavals were thus not even considered as autonomous historical occurrences but as embedded in the *natural* transition to the universal path to democracy, with those who prepared the fall of the wall becoming not part of the picture: “The peoples of Eastern Europe, who brought down the communist regimes without any help from outside, have made neither their own history, nor history as such. Instead, they were just cloning the West.”⁹ Societies that are predestined and doomed to catch up, to assimilate and to integrate.

So what about you? **Are you willing to integrate?** Are you ready to join the center? Ready for submission to *our* values and visions? Or are you maybe rather reluctant towards integrating?

Let us borrow a term from the writer and curator Max Czollek. Writing from a Jewish perspective against the paradigm of *integration*, he exposes the idea of integration as a testament to pursuing ethnic homogeneity and cultural dominance. Instead he proposes to recognize (German) society as a place of radical diversity, **a place without a center**, without the idea of identitarian belonging to a single group, where each of us can become aware of our own inner fragmentation – in such a way he calls for “desintegration”!¹⁰

[10]

Cf. Max Czollek,
Desintegriert euch!
(München: Hanser
Verlag, 2018).



hi :) is this the
de-centered?

**I don't think I knew what the periphery
was until I was in the center...**

I certainly know what the center is. A place where everything is better, more advanced, more proper, it is a place to reach for, to travel to or towards – both metaphorically as well as physically. Only when I moved to the center did I realize that being from not *right here* (a rich colonial country) but from *over there* means submission... to a language not mine, to language structures so short and bare, to an understanding of art in a way so far away from mine... It's funny, I always wanted to leave home with its faults, but the center, in many ways less flawed, made me want to go back even more. **But until I was away, I didn't know I wanted to remain at my periphery...**

... where practices sometimes feel so quiet and gentle and unassuming, where my favorite practices are not really touring material and so are not really easy to commodify.

Among these are location-based pieces deeply rooted in the weaving together of geographical and sociopolitical fabric. Made up by choreography that contains seemingly universal elements, which perhaps, on the first glance, are only one more manifestation of contemporary postmodernist qualities – a minimalist set of steps and gestures – yet are inseparable from the context and location. Other examples of such forms are dance works which evade commodificatory modes of production either by being snippets of longtime artistic research or by operating under porous conditions.

These choreographies practice situations of collectivity, potentially described as moments of “landscape dramaturgy.” The term, coined by Ana Vujanović, which analyzes principles such as dispersed attention and multiplicity of perspectives, connects these performance strategies with broader questions of social organization. My peripheral encounters include these moments to offer collective

co-existences which slide between the individual, the collective and the common in a seamlessly fluid manner, resembling ecosystems of various organisms which are finely tuned but unconsciously responsive and adaptive to each other. These dance works, small time capsules of social exploration and ambience, can hardly be captured on camera and sold abroad since their affects rely on presence.

That's what it is, this being from the South-East (or perhaps the edge of the center in this complex discourse of European geography), a constant wish and act to successfully present yourself as equal to the Western world, as good enough to hide where I'm coming from (or rather it was, until shame turned into anger at ignorance of other localities under the guise of being universal). There's a moment or two that have stayed with me, a sudden shame of not getting a certain performance in Berlin or Lisbon or Brussels or Amsterdam, of having my analytical apparatus completely erased, of having all the hidden knowledge suddenly nonexistent, when I encountered a performance I was not prepared to grasp, a sudden crystallization of constant tension into a single moment. The ground shifted from underneath me, a metaphorical earthquake, as the roots or the gravity keeping me amidst the landscape disappeared and I was left scrambling for associations or even a game of hiding/posing. In parallel to an analytical approach to performing strategies, I distinctly remember the underlying panic of trying to find something like a missing x in the equation – what I am not understanding, what I am not reading right in order to find these pieces good – as if everything in the frame of such institutions is automatically good, as if in the center problematic or inadequate or bad pieces don't have the ability to exist. Growing up within the discourse of an in-between, always living in a territory that is both Eastern and Western, one would perhaps say the most successful integration of European values after transition with a wish to distance ourselves

Kasia Wolińska

4:43 PM, May 2

just a remark as i was reading Ivan Krastew this week and his book on the sources on antiliberalism in former communist countries – such a self perception he sees as not really true or not entirely true.. and i wonder also how the dissidents e.g. Havel or Michnik saw themselves, if they actually didn't feel worthy of being a part of the West and essentially equal... I mention it because i wonder how what Buden describes is actually more nuanced at times as Krastew shows, and what are the consequences of that, meaning of trusting in that self-depreciation of the citizens of the former communist countries – e.g. reactionary politics in Poland and Hungary

Kasia Wolińska

4:46 PM, May 2

i guess what I am trying to say is also a need to articulate all those affects that you name but to also articulate sources of empowerment coming from the transformation becoming real for the people living behind the iron curtain. and also that part of the memory where people articulate positive aspects of communist lives for example.

from the common histories shared with our previous comrade co-republics and with a quick entrance into the European and monetary union, a membership in NATO and Schengen, and a fast adoption of capitalist practices such as denationalization and free market – a task well done (isn't it ironic?).

But until I was away, I didn't know I wanted to remain at my periphery...

... not wanting to stay in this idealized part of Europe, counting down the days until my return. Since these generations of children of postcommunism, among them my parents, who had fought for a new societal order, were swayed by stories of the ideal West, leaving and living abroad became our generation's winning move, the golden child card, the perfect postsocialist dream. There is another shade of shame, one which is a gentle stab from the outside, a soft condescending or disappointing look, a word of judgmental pity. The shame that accompanies me back to the periphery is one of *failure*, since the process of disillusionment sometimes cannot be believed until it is experienced first hand, thus I *failed* at seizing the golden ticket of opportunity offered to me.

Kasia Wolińska

4:47 PM, May 2

because look at us – peripheral kids of peripheral parents writing a book to question those things, to debate, to re-write history :))

Perhaps I am a child of the periphery, of the post-socialist regime, similar to the children of post-communism described by Buden, although with a certain nuance. While Buden uses this word to describe inhabitants of lands and nation states of Central and Eastern Europe after the year 1989 who are perceived by the West, as well as **themselves**,

“neither as subjects nor as authors of a democracy that they actually won through struggle and created by themselves,”¹¹

“immature people unable to organise their lives democratically without guidance from another,”¹² my terrifying and inwardly humiliating experiences abroad are connected to assumptions and references, to a belief in the superiority of center(s). In these moments, I am a child not yet Western enough to appreciate or recognise the supposed quality, settled in the gap between reality and the norm. I often/still feel like a dot on the linear timeline moving forward into the “living right” [sic!].

[11][12]

Boris Buden,
*Transition
to Nowhere*, 87.



hi :) is this the de-centered?

WHERE AM I? While I was searching for synonymous terms for how else to describe the notion of the periphery, I came across words like: perimeter/border/fringe/skirt/verge/end margin/outskirts/frame/bound/borderline. Some of these terms act as trigger points for me, some I can relate to, some of them sound familiar. Being of mixed identity in terms of my origins – coming from regions *broken* due to harsh politics, where all my family members live in different geographical locations – I grew up in the South and have lived in different European (southern/western) cities which makes it more difficult either to settle on a specific location or to pinpoint where I really do belong. The turbulent socio-political context in which I have been raised has, at many moments of my life, been intertwined with the *privileges* of the more developed countries in which I have also passed a great part of my adult lifetime (but I still wonder if I had access to those privileges?). And then the notions of periphery and center, though seemingly antithetical, seem to complement and shape each other in my identity. At times this entire confluence seems to cause a personal ambiguity as to where I situate myself, or where I actually feel safer to position myself. **WHERE AM I?**

This constant need (or easiness) to carry dreams and ambitions produces chaos. The illusion of the Western neoliberal framework that can be successful there, flourishing, and accomplished

is a permanent distraction. **WHERE AM I?**

Sara Ahmed gives a fruitful insight to this feeling of disorientation by claiming that:

[13]

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 1.

“We have our bearings. We know what to do to get to this place or to that place. To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way. These are the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing. They might be landmarks or other familiar signs that give us our anchoring points. They gather on the ground, and they create a ground upon which we can gather. And yet, objects gather quite differently, creating different grounds. What difference does it make ‘what’ we are oriented toward?”¹³

Hence, I am questioning if a place can be the periphery and margin for somebody while being a space for resilience and safety for another body. Ahmed’s perspective on our “anchoring points” acts as a transformative tool for my thoughts. I have the intuition that they enable me to escape from the periphery-center dichotomy. I rather stand in-between spaces, moments, situations and sensations. And the traces of the complexity of our identity are in constant movement, shifting and becoming.

For the last few years, I have identified myself as a (cultural) worker within the dance field (the use of brackets in the word “cultural” is intentional as I have done several side jobs to support myself financially). But, anyway, the selected term of identification as (cultural) worker seems to me the most adequate to embrace the multiplicity of positions I had and still have throughout my professional trajectory. And then, thinking about all these roles, a question always comes up: what are the commonalities between all these? Responding to myself without a thorough analysis, I can easily state that all of them stand on the periphery – in and beyond – the creative process where their labor is mostly invisible. **Hey Institution, am I in the periphery or in the center?**

Kasia Wolińska

12:31 12 Mar

from berlin perspective:
funding for selected few,
non-transparency, fund-
ing institutions becoming
in fact curatorial powers
as they determine largely
what is being produced and
developed further, precar-
ity and performed glamour
with a slight arrogance of
the centre, relative com-
fort and focus of individ-
ual career makes it hard
for any broad peer-to-peer
solidarity or political
mobilisation to occur,
money is largely shaping
the relations within the
dance field (though that is
not acknowledged or said
out loud), in result the
art critical potential is
weakened and undesired
(unless can be framed as
identity politics that
thematized on stage are
often toothless and in
themselves antithetical
to building of commoning
experiences)

Maeve Johnson

00:18 29 Mar

adding from berlin
- i often feel berlin as
a center stops me getting
work here... i don't feel
connected to the scene in
many ways and don't feel
visible enough... so end
up getting most of my work
outside of berlin...

On the one hand, speaking about the geopolitical context where I am mostly professionally active, the lack of funding, the non-transparency, and the constant systemic failures keep me in an unstable status. On the other hand, though I have lived in cities where the cultural field and the whole systemic structure is well-developed, obstacles such as – among others – language, networking, and competition have provoked in me another kind of feeling of instability and have put me on the sidelines of an apparent privileged periphery. Hey Institution, am I in the periphery or in the center?

How does this terrain map these notions into the performing arts field and activate them in its spectrum? A field that recently has come even closer to the periphery/center through curatorial and programming choices. There is an ever-increasing tendency that in multiple ways it can possibly embody, use, and misuse them. While browsing the catalogs of events, attending festivals, after having many times looked at the descriptions of the curatorial statements or reading the open calls for submitting new projects, following the activities of major cultural institutions, as well as through articles on the importance of the visibility of the periphery and so on, I wonder how this concept(s) have more and more penetrated the artistic scene.

This standpoint sounds relevant as another way of reflecting on positioning, doesn't it? Peripheral voices and/or peripheral territories as a presentation or a representation of divergent identity politics in Western contexts? Gurur Ertem refers to the pseudo-politicality within curatorial practices by observing that:

“Another problem with this approach, which I think is the most important one, is that it risks falling prey to identity politics that are not necessarily emancipatory but affirmative of the neoliberal status quo. Furthermore, they risk insinuating a forced performance of identity where unique,

heterogeneous creative trajectories of artists get buried under identity categories and labels. In most artistic programming today, it's as though there is a checklist of identity categories curators are compelled to include. Often, this entails presenting artists from, for instance, migrant backgrounds, indigenous groups, feminist and queer perspectives, voices from the so-called Global South – as though the Global South is a monolithic entity and as if pockets of wealth and privilege do not exist there as well.”¹⁴

Well, the Global South cannot be a monolithic entity! This could be taken as a generalization but it certainly increasingly emerges more as a current trend either in terms of the inclusion of actors belonging to certain communities, or to specific geographical locations. It can be interpreted even as a broader concept which pretends to embrace these subjects with corresponding lived experiences as a strategy to take distance from the canon and to go beyond established forms. **Is this checklist a gesture of empowerment of these groups or an act of exoticization and appropriation?**

Some time ago, I was reading a post on social media from a choreographer that belongs to the southern part of Europe about how attractive the periphery is for the western side of the continent. Among other things he wrote that “our scenic ‘voices’ are now welcome internationally and the pluralism is phenomenal. For some reason, the South (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece) seems to be thriving and it would be interesting for someone to examine which factors have played a role in this shift in the past decades.” Indeed, it is super intriguing to deeply reflect upon this welcoming act of involvement and to re-evaluate which kind of pluralism someone refers to. Again, I ponder on how these southern regions can be conceived as a homogeneous mass when multiple historical incidents, socio-economic factors, and divergent connections with the West side make up distinct and discernible amplitudes of difference. I try to keep in mind that this pluralism is not the norm for every actor from these peripheral regions or identities where not everyone can enter this luxurious system of being present and visible far away from their peripheries.

Programming patterns on the part of institutions/programmers have adopted and enforced name-dropping of hype artists to demonstrate their knowledge of who should be promoted at this moment in time, but a broader shift is underway. So, while the dance field goes through this transition from programming to curation, it simultaneously navigates from choreographers' names to identity labels. Are we shifting from hype names to hype identities? Betina Panagiotara from her Greek periphery proposes that "we need a co-curation between centre and periphery that will undo this power/knowledge relation and will bring forth locality and specificity, with respect and inclusivity towards the differences within and between the communities that all go under the name of Europe."¹⁵ Europe cannot be perceived as a monolithic entity, it's more like a complex constellation of intermingling features and power structures where exchanges of information, aesthetics, and specificities are displayed as an open umbrella where there is plenty of space to inform each other and to provide new dimensions towards unexplored directions.

[15]

Betina Panagiotara, "What are these peripheral practices?", *Springback Magazine*, 2023, https://springbackmagazine.com/read/edn-limerick-peripheral-practices/?fbclid=IwAR3LyV758x-YKIrhpX1DNO651cu2iklBVSkEnXW8sScY3o5_b61TSKmt3Ko (accessed April 18, 2023).

[16]

Elke Van Campenhout, "Strange Love: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Institute," in *Turn, Turtle! Reenacting the Institute*, ed. E. Van Campenhout and L. Mestre (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2016), 142.

Diving into the curatorial statements illustrating facts, factors, logics, and strategies behind this (polished?) integration yields more musings and questions. No, I don't want to believe that a curator can go so simply to compose their writings, notes, and manifestations. I dread to think of the institution as a playground at different seasons giving space to other types to play. Elke Van Campenhout in her text *Strange Love: How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Institute* points out that an institution:

"(is) ultimately a place of encounter. It is a place where subjects come to become undone. Much like an elephant cemetery, their arrival at this place is fuelled by intuition rather than instrumental violation (...) as people who momentarily escape their carefully constructed identity cocoons to engage in the transindividual endeavour of confronting what it is that creates our togetherness."¹⁶

I do not know if I have stopped worrying about the institution but indeed I can re-imagine (by continuing the ongoing discourse on how to institutionalize otherwise) it as a realm where there is a sincere political and social potential; where periphery-center dichotomy reveals no evidence of exploitation and appropriation; an ideal space that does not instrumentalize *peripheral* localities or *marginalized* identities for their sake; a place where more, or ideally all subjects can find room to belong, to act, and to perform without becoming aestheticized spectacles.

At times I worry that those of us who belong to something/somewhere peripheral could also employ it as a tool for personal exoticization. A mechanism to establish a locus in the political and economic structure in which we function. A mode to enter the competitive system, to join the institutional regime, a way of affirming that we are in line with some of the points on the checklist, a modality of getting close to the Other. Namely, to try to get closer to the Western model; to imitate successful recipes; to characterize this turn beyond someone's locality as an achievement without further reflection; to enact modalities which are far away from the specificities of the local context; to refuse their identities; and, thus, to want to be like someone else.

Talking about this institutional regime, sometimes I feel that we are talking about buildings, or ghosts that we do not know who is behind them. A contemporary institution can actually turn into (if it is not yet there) a dynamic pool of active agents who can spread awareness, generate new ecologies, prove their responsibilities, and raise their voices toward more solid models of action. Thus, how about a profound shift towards a new paradigm of decolonized logic that sincerely and heartily celebrates these so-called *differences* and endeavors to dismantle neoliberal practices that focus on profit and market logic?



hi :) is this the

Hi, I whisper to you telepathically. We could be in a studio or a conference or even just passing each other in the street. We are moving through the world propelled by the momentum of biography and origin; then for a second our trajectories intersect – a change of acceleration, maybe a look, a gaze, a heartbeat, an intake of breath. A mutual attraction, desire-as-gravity.

I am on my way to a demo called *Rache am Patriarchat* (Revenge Against Patriarchy). The protest is a FLINTA* (femme, lesbian, intersex, nonbinary, transgender, agender, queer, other) demonstration protesting and making visible some of the sexist violence that (also) occurs in the leftwing scene in Germany. I identify as a nonbinary trans* femme but I am sadly all too aware that I can be read as male. I am going to the protest on my own and I feel apprehensive, nervous, maybe even shameful. Who am I with my stubble and supraorbital ridge to show my face here?

My landmarks of trans*ness as a landscape are foreign features, invasive species, imported objects. Stolen gender markers demarcating a narrow path through the wilderness. *Fake it till you make it*. This is a peripheral space between the electromagnetic poles of fe/male. A place far away from the centers of gender, always being *outofplace in-thewrongspace*. This is the weird industrial part of town, the rural outback, the end of the fucking



de-centered?

line. And yet to pass, one has to perform gender as cohesive, complete, convincing. Passing is the gender equivalent of the main square in a large city: everyone *can* see you but no-one can *see* you.

So maybe non-binary is an undefined wilderness or perhaps even another planet completely. This is a place that does not resist the pull of those binary poles but rather escapes from their field entirely. But look a little closer, *see me*, make visible what is hidden in plain sight. I perform a song of gender that when listened to tells a story. It's a queer system of reverse echolocation, make the right sounds and you will hear a whole landscape – butch attitude, fairy flair, a girly pout, twink shyness, faggy flamboyance, even a little bit of cisboy gallantry and feminine mystique – all these objects arranged into a field, a cohesive whole.

Doesn't everyone do this? Surely every cisperson also gives off a thousand small hints at their gender. Isn't this after all exactly what Ahmed calls straightening devices, the adjustments one makes in order to fit into the cishet line? I feel the attraction and repulsion of the fe/male poles and yet choose my own position and orientation. Indeed, I allow myself to be moved towards and away from these centers, yet retain (or at least hope I retain) my own agency and autonomy.

Gender as a space within a space, a bubble of self with its own polarities, peripheries and peculiarities. I orientate gender towards me. I perform my gender how a star performs gravity. I just am, and in being, I warp the gendered space-time around me with the conviction of the centrality and realness of my own experience. No longer does gender pull on me, but I pull away at it: causing trouble, making a mess. Fe/male become anchor points I can orientate towards through my desire – what becomes important is not where they lie in relation to me, but where I want to go.

So, where do I wanna go? I catch your eye again. Are we flirting? Or just sending each other strength, lending each other willpower to stick to our convictions, to keep on keeping on. We recognise each other from that same space – the periphery

that is our own bodies. The bubble of sovereign self we manage to keep spinning on its own axis despite the overbearing never-ending oppressive weight of cishet patriarchal bullshit. From this margin we have found a place of resilience and safety for each other's bodies. We recognise each other. This is the look, the gaze, the change of trajectory. *I see you.*

Like me, you would rather stand in-between spaces, moments, situations and sensations. And the traces of the complexity of our identity are in constant movement, shifting and becoming. Maybe to think about space on a metaphorical level is to begin to think about mass, weight, attraction – in a way, desire. We both want the same things, don't we? Safety, pleasure, joy, the end of patriarchy and capitalism, a cute new top, the collapse of the hegemonic systems of power, some trashy jewelry, a cuddle. This shared wanting disrupts our isolation, our certainty. *I want* is a moving-towards. Desire is gravity. **It's dangerous to want**, it takes us out of our own gyroscopic autonomous stasis. It's too easy once in motion to get trapped by the tractor beam of the straightening devices. Capitalism is a great red dwarf and we are just little asteroids who, if we are not careful, can get caught up in a nasty cosmic game of bumper cars.

Those of us who belong to something peripheral – a queer gender identity or otherwise – can become fetishised by the dominant model, our conviction and autonomy just another resource to be extracted and exploited. This commodification can also act through the same channels that we move in. Desire is also a survival technique: **I want safety so I move towards shelter**. Self-commodification can be a mechanism for surviving a life devalued by the dominant order. *Look at me*. A mode to enter the competitive system, to join the institutional regime, a way of affirming that we are in line with some of the points on the checklist; a tool to establish a locus in the political and economic structure in which we function.

Likewise, desire can drag us towards a center we think we are rejecting, one seductive step at a time. I see this in my own transition. It is so tempting

to imagine *what if*, indeed this mode of dreaming is one of the most fecund regions of the planet I embody. I live, breathe and dance fantasy, imagining myself as so many different genders, so many gorgeous possibilities beyond the binary, beyond the patriarchy, beyond capitalism. And of course, *I want* these fantasies. Some of these fantasies are at least partially manifestable through material means: clothes, hormones, surgeries and so on. These materials and processes are guarded by various gatekeeping structures – financial, bureaucratic, ideological. To access them I need to perform for them. *Look at me*. I self-commodify. *Want me*. I integrate. *Pay me*. I am included. And so... and so, I become entangled in a transactional relationship of dependency and obligation.

So what remains when we self-commodify and what becomes subsumed by the center? The aspects of queerness the dominant model feels are valuable – the consumer demographic, the aesthetic, the cultural material and so on – are appropriated, exploited and sold. It is the same tired story we have come to know and hate. More painful still, these resources are used to reproduce the center: rainbow logos for corporations stealing the added value from our labor, propping up nation-states that kill, imprison and institutionalize us. Queer choreographies legitimizing tired institutions resisting any sort of lasting radical change.

So what remains? To be blunt, us. Despite my cynicism, that's why I applaud each time I see a queer choreographer showing work at a festival, or an androgynous dancer performing in an otherwise tedious piece; to be honest that's why I still somehow celebrate trashy Netflix shows depicting (weirdly normative) queer relationships or why I am ever so slightly giddy whenever my insta algorithm decides to bombard me with gender-confused ads. *I am being seen*. More than anything that's why I don't tell people they are not queer enough, or that they don't deserve the moniker, or that they owe something to the queer community. **You don't owe me anything, babes**, I'm just proud you survived.

And yet... The gaze is still male. My being-seen-ness is an objectification from the outside. This being-seen, this survival-as-inclusion inevitably involves turning a blind eye to the continuous exclusions that are occurring around me. It is a transactional game of success and failure. I can play the game only as long as I agree to the rules in the first place, namely competition. I cannot bring others with me to the top table. *This is the logic of the dominant system.* The old rules still apply. Divide and conquer. There is a politics of scarcity, they give us crumbs when we...

Demand the whole fucking bakery. The periphery has its own magic, a way of pulling apart and disrupting the center. I think about queerness as contagious. So often as queer people we are accused of infecting those around us – with diseases, ideologies, aesthetics or depraved sexual desires. I wonder what power lies in affirming this? Yes, my queerness is so terrible and dangerous, so cool and yet also so dripping hot, that it disrupts straight institutions, tastes, bedrooms. Oh yes babes, we are fierce.

I feel like my own queerness has come about through encounters with queer people, with queer spaces, queer moments. Queerness is just an orientation – it's a desire, a moving-towards. But it is **a desire that recognises the subjectivity and autonomy of the object of desire.** Our eyes cross, *look at me* and *I see you* but more importantly, *we recognise each other.* I think about how happy I am when a friend comes out to me as queer, I want to hold them close, invite them in, celebrate with them. It's like welcoming someone home.

It's funny because I spent a long time feeling lost whenever I had to introduce myself professionally. I experience(d) imposter-syndrome; my professional life is also a story of transitioning between different fields and positions and I often feel insecure because much of my work has not occurred in the center of things but rather on the fringes – DIY projects, alternative educations, experimental formats. These days, my queerness has become an anchor point not just for my identity but also for my working situation and I often

use the terms *queer artist, queerfeminist artist, trans* artist.*

I have come home and this feeling of dwelling permeates not only my identity – the things I am – but also my relations – the things I do.

[17]

Sarah Ahmed,
“Orientations:
Toward a Queer
Phenomenology,”
in *GLQ: A Journal
of Lesbian and Gay
Studies* vol. 12,
no. 4 (2006): 570.

“A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way to inhabit the world that gives ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place.”¹⁷

The monikers I use are offerings of solidarity, friendship, collaboration. *I see you.* But they are also discourses, collective identities, they exist beyond each of our small sovereign bubbles of self; they are poles, places of origin. Together, we can share gravity, we can co-orbit a common center of mass. Our trajectories change. Together we can ignore *the* center and find our common positionality. Or even, complicit in our common ground, we can allow ourselves to be invited in – not to stay but to visit, cause trouble and make a mess. We’ve got each other’s back and we keep each other accountable.

And so, the signaling of FLINTA* for the demo was not only a boundary demarcating who could and could not participate in the protest but also a call to action. *Hi comrade*, we whisper to each other telepathically. Here in the demo, we share a simple position: we are not cis-men. We co-orbit this shared place... Yet I still feel anxious that I will be excluded – a male gravity poured into my being, a black hole of my birth from which I cannot escape. Just as my conviction dissolves cis space and re-centers my center, my insecurity others me from queer spaces and creates a margin, a periphery that I hide in, scared of exclusion and excluded by my fear.

And so I wear a mask to hide more of my face as I march in solidarity with you. *Don’t look at me.* Now I need more than a look, I need a hand to hold. I need something to grasp at. My orbit is off kilter, I have lost balance, I am falling falling falling and the dreadful gravity of cis-heteronormativity draaaaaaags at me. I walk through the crowd and approach the middle of the protest. In this mass of people an object rises into my field of vision, the *Lauti* (Lautsprecherwagen, a car or truck with

a loudspeaker on top to broadcast speeches, messages and music during the protest). Your amplified voice resonates through the crowd and enters my body:

This is a FLINTA only demo. FLINTA* stands for femme, lesbian, intersex, nonbinary, transgender, agender, queer, other. The asterix is intended to include people who do not fit into any of these categories but still feel addressed. Please remember that gender is not always externally visible, trust the person next to you to know their own gender identity and support them by acknowledging it.*

My breathing calms, I self-regulate, my orbit settles into the weight of this definition. My trans*ness has been made so visible it has become transparent, invisible, permeable. This definition holds us and yet we can slip through it. It does not normalize but rather opens up the field. Not a center but rather something that permeates the entire environment. A possibility, an unknown, a question, a potential, an orientation, a co-orbit, a membrane, a space between. A landscape of queer we dwell in as well as constitute.

Then something even more wonderful happens. Together, the first song we play from the Lauti to march to is *Trans Agenda Dynastie* by Kerosin95, a rap song celebrating trans*ness and positioning it as something euphoric, powerful, desirable. **I feel this gesture in my entire body as a welcome-home,** a feasting-together, a collective yes. This is the culture we have created together that we are now broadcasting through our space. This is more than a signaling or orientating towards each other, this is a *being-with*. We have become a *we*. For once, we can extend our tiny little bubbles outwards and let them pop on the sparkling surface of the Other to be subsumed not into something exploitative but rather into a wild and joyful collectivity. Our co-orbits have become a cosmic dance. No longer are we asteroids but instead we are a whole shimmering galaxy.

So, maybe center-periphery is a paradigm of borders and walls. Maybe center-periphery is a spatial metaphor of power and control. Monolithic, hegemonic, exclusive, othering. **Instead, let's turn towards desire** – as a call to action, an invitation, a seduction or a solidarity. Not the politics of scarcity but rather abundance. A gravity that holds and supports rather than pulls and subsumes. Maybe let's call it dark matter; without it I hear the universe would implode. Our eyes cross and we whisper telepathically. *Hi sisters*, let's dive together into a dispersed landscape, let's dive into desire. I want an ocean or an evening spent dancing. I want an environment where we sit at a wonky table and squabble playfully about who sits where as equals, comrades, friends. I want a place to hold our collectivity instead of separate our otherness. *I want us to see each other.*

SISTER EROTIKA

Practicing slutting as care
and collective resistance

MAEVE JOHNSON

[Hey / hope it's ok I text you?]
[Our conversation last night kinda inspired me and
I couldn't sleep so I wrote an erotic poem for a lover...]
[Maybe it's super weird but I had the feeling to share it
with you / after all we were talking about sharing erotic
practices / and anyway I was only inspired to write this
because of our chat and hearing your thoughts]
[A no is always welcome]
[I wouldn't find it weird or reject-y / just clear and gener-
ous / yay! boundaries / let me know]
[<3]

[Hey hunni]
[Hey kitty]
[Hey babes]
[Hey darling how are you / you were in my dreams last
night / I think we were moving some furniture from
a roof in Budapest to an apartment / then we hung out and
cuddled]
[Cute]
[<3]

[How are you?]
[Kinda shitty to be honest]

[How come?]
[How can we be tender when the world is burning?]
[Oh babes / I love you]
[Sorry, just feeling blue]
[Why don't you come over and I can show you exactly how]
[<3]

We are lying together in a room. It could be my room or your room. It could be a public space or an intimate one. Maybe we were fucking, maybe we were talking or maybe we were just sitting together in silence, reading. Occasionally sharing a fragment of text we find inspiring. I want you.

[Is that too much? Tell me, if you can / A no is always welcome / and if you can't say, if patriarchy has got your tongue, then I will sit here with you and wait]
[I don't want to hear about patriarchy right now / It doesn't belong here, it belongs with the sharp, hard objects Ursula K. Le Guin once wrote about in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*]
[How else can we talk about the oppressive regime of those hard objects and imaginariums / how can we forget its name]
[Should we?]

[Can this order be already inscribed into the past as the old world that was once there before the intersectional feminist worlds were built globally and for all / are we there yet?]

You text me while I am listening to Kae Tempest,

“So let's spend the afternoon in bed
with three bottles of wine
Let's just take off all our clothes
And watch the sunset on the city
And smoke through open windows
And pretend we're not too busy”¹

[1]
letthemusicplay
feat. Kae Tempest.
“Our Town.”
Our Town – EP.
Greco-Roman, 2014.

Or maybe we are in a cafe talking and you read a Pilar Reyes quote to me,

[2]

Kristen J. Sollée,
*Witches, Sluts,
Feminists: Conjuring
the Sex Positive*
(Berkeley, California:
Threel Media, 2017),
e-book, 119.

“‘Slut’ is opening yourself up to the possibility of pleasure and love and touch in myriad incarnations, be it fleeting and drunken, sudden and intense, or slow building and long lasting. Slut is sex for the sake of sex. Pleasure because it feels good. Seeking out lovers and finding your orgasm because, fuck it, you can, so why waste time with all that other bullshit when you can experience the sensation of your skin on someone else’s skin instead? Slut is the realization of your sexual freedom and doing whatever the fuck you want with it.”²

Or maybe it’s... Late night, in bed, almost dreaming of you. A feeling of being overcast. I remember the rituals we made in the summer. I dissolve into memory and magic. We came back from Portugal and I drew the devil ready to un-make myself, stepping through five portals. I wove desire around me like a net or carrier bag. First focus was spells of opening. We went to a festival together and the magic was simple: dancing, taking drugs, celebrating. I was a crescent waning moon in Libra and a sun in Leo. You were all shadows. We were two bodies melting together as we came up on extasy to Albertine Sarges.

[Hey slut / All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is, in women, insatiable]

[Hey witch / are you quoting the *Malleus Maleficum* at me again?]

[I’ve been reading this book by Kristen J. Sollée / what do you think of this?]

[“Both pornography and witchcraft thrive in the liminal space between fantasy and reality”³]

[I dunno... I’m not sure how pornography and witchcraft speak to each other]

[Fair enough]

[I want pornography to be liberated and given back to the bodies which desire beautifully and generously, who invent their own desires, who are nurtured by the methods and language of the erotic stimulation / I want sex to be liberated from violence and the controlling eyes of the patriarchal masters / I want pornography to be a way in which

[3]

Kristen J. Sollée,
*Witches, Sluts,
Feminists*, 148.

we learn to talk sex and desire in a way that is not violent nor exploitative / **I want the erotic to become an art of liberation**, I want the wild imagination to return to our erotic lives, I want everyone to have a choice and agenda, I want more sex, more cuddles, more sloppy intimacy acrobatics and laughter, zero shame, no humiliation]

[Hey comrade / what do you think of this? / it's Kristen J. Sollée again]

["Today's 'sluts' seeking birth control and basic reproductive freedoms are hardly any different from Satanic witch midwives of yesteryear"⁴]

[I think you should come over and fuck me]

Later, you leave my room and I feel a slight grief. Charlotte Day Wilson is still playing.

[I think this could work⁵]

[We are grown up enough to have boundaries and allow our lives to keep unfurling even as we stop time together / this shared addiction to each other would have kept us up all night / but I still kinda wish you had stayed over]

[I think this could work]

[I wrote a poem / wanna read a few lines?]

[Sure]

[My room is a mess, scattered to the four winds by our fucking / two dildos resting side by side on the low white trunk tucked against the wall / flakes of wax and crumbs of cake littering my bedsheets and the floor / an endless heap of condoms filling the bin / my clothes crumpled in a pile, rope we used for tying tangled and abandoned]

[I think this could work]

We are in the studio giving feedback but I can't concentrate so I keep texting you when the choreographer isn't looking,

[I don't want to be here / I want you]

We are lying in bed together digesting these words from Chanelle Gallant,

[4]

Kristen J. Sollée,
*Witches, Sluts,
Feminists*, 58.

[5]

Charlotte Day
Wilson. "Work." *CDW*
– EP. Self-released,
2016.

[6]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me:
The Pleasures of Sex
Work," in *Pleasure
Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*,
ed. a. m. brown
(Chico, California:
AK Press, 2019),
e-book, 259.

"At any time, we can be turned into someone's sex object. We are sexualized as early as infancy, when girls are told to close their legs and be 'decent' and some start experiencing sexual abuse. We are sexualized when our employers require that we look good at work so they can sell a product to customers (but not pay us for the extra time, money, and work we put into beauty). Trans femmes are sexualized constantly, shut out of every single employment sector except for the sex industry. At home, at work, at school, just walking down the street: all women and femmes can get turned into sexual entertainment for men with or without our consent."⁶

[7]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me,"
262.

"In a sense, women and femmes are all forced to be sexual labourers – to please men and masculine people with our bodies."⁷

[Hey hunni / I'm listening to Charlotte Day Wilson again
/ can't stop thinking about last night / can't stop thinking
about you]

"It's gonna take a bit of work
Oh oh work
Now that you're here
Whoa oh work

[8]

Charlotte Day
Wilson. "Work."

Cause people come and go
But I think you should know
That I
I think this will work

It's gonna take a little time
But with you by my side
I won't let go
Till I got what's mine"⁸

[How was last night?]
[It was gorgeous and also... / sometimes during sex I feel
like a boy / I feel like a fucking boy babes, it's awful /
and if you start to analyse when that happens... it's even
worse]
[Like honestly... honestly, I think I'm more likely to feel

dysphoric when I'm topping, more likely to feel trans*
when I've got a cock in my ass...]

[I mean fuck, isn't that tragic / but then on the other hand
I also feel most queer when I'm being kinky as hell / like
most connected but also most political]

[Like I genuinely believe I'm doing something subversive /
genuinely feel like I am eating away at something sacred]

[I mean sacred like cishet, religious, conservative, colonial,
fucking disgusting sacred]

[Sacred in a bloodstained hands kinda way]

[I think sex, like dancing, can be a labor practice, a ritual,
a way of relating]

[I don't want something simple / I don't want a blueprint /
I want queer sex]

[I want sex that has the political potential for illuminating,
eroding and subverting the structures of patriarchy]

*We take workshops together. A pentagram of composing, cre-
ating, dancing. All you touch you change, all you change
changes you⁹; our body is enough, it's just a stupid dance.¹⁰*

*You propose something again, staggering through the words,
foggy but connected to me by the thin thread of our night.
You say to me, "let's take more keta and go deeper into this
shared madness. Let's take keta and be nothing but mouths.*

*Let's take keta and I will eat your cunt like a metronome. We
will lose all sense of time and our bodies will become portals
to that other place. We will be a cosmos together or maybe
just one body. We will be nothing. We will un-know." We are
fucking in the bathroom of a bar. I don't know how we got
here. We were drinking mexcal and red wine and talking, then
suddenly fucking.*

[How is your crush? / I miss you / have fun / <3]

[I'm kissing you]

[When can I see you? / how is work? / how is yoga? / how
is your heart?]

[Maybe I would check in / how are you feeling about us
and sex and emotion / cuz last night we were talking and
then getting drunk and then fucking so I just wanted to
ask / I feel good btw / <3]

[9]

Octavia E. Butler,
Parable of the Sower
(NYC: Four Walls
Eight Windows,
1993), 3.

[10]

Jonathan Burrows,
*A Choreographer's
Handbook* (London:
Routledge, 2010),
29.

[I feel good / overall it was beautiful / and thank you for talking yesterday / I'm not sure exactly how I feel / but I'm listening to Dounia so all good]

“Teach me how to talk less
Let's fuck around in this tie-dye sundress
Speak in me till I got like a world unspoken
Let's hurry up, fall in love 'fore the world end

[11]

Dounia. “Lavender.”
Lavender – Single.
Self-released, 2021.

Teach me how to talk less
Let's fuck around in this tie-dye sundress
Show a girl just how much you're devoted
Let's hurry up, fall in love 'fore the world end”¹¹

I'm alone sitting in a park, reading and thinking about you,

[12]

adrienne maree brown, “From #me-too to #weconsent,” in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, ed. a. m. brown (Chico, California: AK Press, 2019), e-book, 285.

“Consent can cover a lot of ground. It isn't just about the consent of a certain touch or sexual act. Consent can cover the ground of boundaries and communication: Can we flirt? Are you actually available for us to build an intimate connection? Can I send you pictures? Can I take pictures of you? Can I share our connection with others, in public, on social media? Can we fuck? Are you open to ass play? Disclosing sexual history and risk is a part of a consent conversation. For some people, disclosing relationship and parental status can be part of a consent conversation. As I have gotten more in touch with my shifting abilities, I also bring into consent conversations things like Can you be careful with my knees? I tore my meniscus a while back, so don't just throw me around.”¹²

[13]

adrienne maree brown, “It's bloody fantastic,” in *Pleasure Activism*, 192.

“The only way I can even write this is to imagine I'm talking to one friend. Yes, you. Just us talking about all this weird stuff we're not supposed to discuss in polite company. Otherwise it's impossible to share things like what I'm about to tell you. So I'm only telling you.”¹³

[I feel so fucking depressed]
[Send me a song / any song / cheer me up]
[I don't want to live in dystopia anymore]
[I want liberation]

I come back to Chanelle Gallant:

[14]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me,"
262.

"We use the term 'whore' to refer to the feminine sin of demanding too much. 'Attention whore', 'fame whore', 'money whore': a whore commits the sin of wanting – whether it's money, sex, or attention."¹⁴

[Hey bby / I'm horny as fuck / tell me I'm a good girl]

You are also reading her apparently,

[15]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me,"
270.

"A good girl stays grateful with crumbs. She may be broke, but damn she's a good girl! Fuck that. Gold-digging whores hack the system and ask for too much – all the money, pleasure, and attention they damn well want."¹⁵

[Fuck you]

[If you're a good girl maybe I will]

[Fuck that / I want more / I don't want a piece of the cake
I want the whole fucking bakery]

[Good girl]

[<3]

[Hey darling / I'm good / this time I am healing / and it
will let the other people heal as well / it's the most beautiful
thing in the world]

[Darling I have to tell you / my crush is absolutely crushing
me / and performing its very own kind of magic]

*We are underwater, raving in a flooded city. I want to tell
you about meeting a lover last night. We meet outside the
venue but it is too crowded so we leave and find a bar. Like
I said, we always catch up first, before fucking. There is
a storm and a burning tower. Later, time stops and we are
just a pattern of in and out, we are just the suck and squeeze
of vaginal walls on cock. We wander together through a desolate
landscape of heartbeat, skin, breath, flesh, keta and
fucking. I see stars in black and white. I hold hair, a shoulder,
a side. I see a back imprinted on my retinas like a scratch.*

[16]

Broken Social
Scene. "Lover's Spit."
You Forgot it in People – Album. Arts &
Crafts Productions,
2003.

[Late night can't sleep / I would wish for an ocean /
to fall into]
[Maybe / a soft conversation / bitches witches switches]
[Drinking lover's spit¹⁶ / slow circles opening / orifices
dripping wisdom]
[Sex magic / open channel holding / darkness]
[We are goddesses / snake skin as we slip / into deep water
/ fingers trace lips wet divine]
[Tongue tip teasing / more words and less words /
we would fuck and call it worship]
[A boundary, a cavity, a heart / touch like sleep /
dreams of coral reefs and starfish]

[Kae was on my playlist today / tell me, did Kae look into
your eyes / and told you what?]
[Kae told me that I am beautiful]
[You are gorgeous, hun]
[I think this could work]

[Heya / I heard you had a long night / how was it?]
[Do you think you guys will fuck again / or was it more
a one time thing?]
[Yeah we did all the things / conflict deep talks communi-
cation gossiping and then fucking]
[It was super gorgeous / but also I'm still pissed with her]

[Oh babe / even with the fight this time / thank you
so much]

*Lying together, we read late into the night. It becomes dark
and soft. I want you. I want your body but also I want this
closeness. I want this feeling that there is hope and that we
are doing something radical, just by caring, just by holding
each other. You look up and read to me:*

"We are sexualized our entire lives: assessed for our desirability according to men and masculine people's shitty (racist, ableist, classist, fatphobic, sexist) standards, then penalized when we fall short. And we have so little control over how and when nonconsensual sexualization will happen: at work, while meeting our kid's teacher, or walking down the street

[17]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me,"
259.

to the corner store. At any time, we can be turned into someone's sex object."¹⁷

[18]

Chanelle Gallant,
"Fuck You, Pay Me,"
263.

"Under capitalism, all of us 'sell our bodies' in one way or another but the deeper question is: who really gets to choose to work? What about the force and exploitation of regular, everyday capitalism? Unless you have a trust fund or make all your money in the stock exchange, you are also forced to work."¹⁸

[Is work really a choice? / I'm afraid not / sometimes it feels like a roller coaster that some of us have to ride and kill the joy, our dreams and our beliefs / **to forget where we actually are and where we actually wish to go** / work, work, work otherwise you get lost / but lost from where? / perhaps from the stimulus points of an unequal context where someone is struggling while at the same time, someone else is having fun]

I can't help myself, I leaf through my book to find the fragments I read to you right in this moment, right in this intimacy between us. I tell you that

[19]

adrienne maree brown, "Wherein I write about sex (Five Tangible Tools of a Pleasure Activist)," in *Pleasure Activism*, 175.

"I think it is important that we hold space for each other to feel good, to be touched in whatever ways bring us pleasure. I notice the impact it has on people I care about when erotic healing, self-love, and the tender touch of a lover, or a few lovers, is needed."¹⁹

[20]

adrienne maree brown, "Wherein I write about sex," 176.

"I deeply believe we were not placed on this gorgeous, sensational planet to suffer. It is not the point."²⁰

[21]

adrienne maree brown, "The legacy of 'Uses of the erotic': a conversation with Cara Page," in *Pleasure Activism*, 56.

"So we could say on the spectrum of pleasure, yes, I like to get touched, I like to get fucked, but also, what about for my community, for my people? What is pleasurable in finding a place of grace and well-being and transcending oppression? If we're not imagining where we're going, then it will constantly just be pushing back outside from inside of cages, as opposed to imagining what's happening outside of cages."²¹

Remember the summer, five swords spread around us and seven spells. We were bodies on a boat, covered in war paint, drinking sekt together for the last time in a while. We lamented then laughed also. We spoke about careers and swam naked. We became a snail and stepped through the bad-tooth portal. Reading tarot, the Star is in Star, we stand on the threshold between prophecy and healing. I shift weight and roll my body to another spot on the floor of your room. Later you take my pussy in your mouth as we fade from the non-space to something more concrete. I feel like one prolonged fragmented almost-orgasm. I presume I am too far gone to cum but then you ask me if I have and I say I don't know and you laugh and say I have covered myself in cum and it seems like I have.

[I am thinking about consumption and capitalism / you talk about witchcraft, astrology, drugs, sex, yoga and then I wonder how those are continuously devoured by the ruling system and made into techniques of an easily accessible spirituality and self-care that is (only?) about self-reproduction and bourgeoisie dreams]

[It's more of a political question, because I sense you are practicing resistance to those but at the same time I am still sometimes at a critical distance / I am not sure where you (we) stand with the question of capitalism and its relation to those practices, meaning how do we acknowledge their entanglements]

[How to be a witch that cannot be appropriated by the market logic, would that mean we have to burn?]

[Can our fire destroy the oppressive regime of endless appropriation of resistance? / how do we set ourselves free?]

"It's gonna take a bit of work
Oh oh work
Now that you're here
Whoa oh work
Cause people come and go
But I think you should know
That I think this will work"²²

[22]

Charlotte Day
Wilson. "Work."

This text draws on the intimacies and co-slutting lust of Ana Fazekaš, Anka, Azzie McCutcheon, Elena, Irina Skrobanek, Jette, Joni Barnard, Kasia, Maeve, Maša, Shaya Zarrin, Violetta Lupis and Zuzana Žabková.

CURATIOUS & CARING — QUESTIONS OF FEMINIST CURATORIAL PRACTICES

ANA VUJANOVIĆ,
ANKA HERBUT,
BILJANA
TANUROVSKA –
– KJULAVKOVSKI,
ELENA
NOVAKOVITS,
JETTE
BÜCHSENSCHÜTZ,
KASIA WOLIŃSKA,
MAEVE JOHNSON,
MARIJANA
CVETKOVIĆ,
MAŠA RADI BUH

“Simply look at what it does – not what it shows.”

Hito Steyerl

This text stems from the desire to re-open a discussion that hovers in the institutional air and to create a shared polyphonic vision of what **feminist curatorial practices** in the field of dance and performing arts could be.

Our discussion had its starting point during two editions of the Feminist Futures Festival (FFF) in Amiens (FR) and Lisbon (PT) that were initiated by the apap – advancing performing arts project – as part of the larger EU-funded program apap – FEMINIST FUTURES.¹ It’s important to stress that together as a collective body we only visited one of five twin festival editions happening between 2021 and 2024 at the 11 apap institutions in total. Yet engaging in those discussions about the idea of feminist ways of curating and organizing dance and performing arts already raised several questions about **what it means to be(come) a feminist curator and to work with feminist curatorial principles:**

How “to strengthen the performing art communities based on intersectional feminism”²?

How to be(come) a counterpoint to the curator-star system and create curatorial agency rooted in self-organized structures or institutions that apply other than vertical governance?

How might a feminist curatorial practice respond to, confront or even hack the relentless state of neoliberal exhaustion?

How can it be understood as a practice that takes into account and respects diverse needs, contexts, doubts and desires?

How feminist curatorial practices could become transformative alternatives to mainstream curating that operates through designation and exclusion?

Breathe in... breathe out...

[1]

apap (advancing performing arts project) is an international network of 11 cultural organizations from all over Europe that has existed since 2000. Funded by different EU cultural programmes, apap has managed to collaborate continuously on supporting a high number of artists as well as developing new formats according to changing artistic practices and needs throughout the years. See: <https://apapnet.eu> (accessed April 18, 2023).

[2]

The quotation from the *Feminist Futures Festival's Strategic Vision Overview* internal document.

[3]

Cf. Irit Rogoff, Beatrice von Bismarck "Curating/Curatorial", in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. J. Schaffaff, T. Weski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 23-24.

[4]

Jean-Paul Martinon, Irit Rogoff, "Preface," in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), ix.

While historically the notion of *curation* emerged from the visual arts field and gave a name to a wide range of (mainly professionalized and institutionalized) exhibition organizing practices, it later diffused into the performing arts field as a way of framing broader forms of artistic presentation. Moving from *curating* as a limited function of arranging, preserving and exhibiting objects, there is also a noticeable shift from *curating* to the *curatorial* as an expanded practice which deals with the variety of visible and invisible processes and relations that occur when an artwork, practice or event is being set up. As Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck have already stated, the *curatorial* is more about connections and dynamic constellations in which different kinds of knowledge and various practices of making art public are rooted.³ It is also rather a multidimensional function or method, a way of being in between or beyond the roles that the craft of *curating* has historically established.

Curating oftentimes means choosing the artists and ascribing value to particular artistic projects, aesthetics, and methods while leaving others behind and without support, especially taking into consideration that visibility is one of the biggest currencies within contemporary art. Therefore, *curating* is very much bound to choosing, separating, evaluating, and then contextualizing those choices through a particular curatorial vision, personal taste, and ideology. In turn, *the curatorial* disturbs what *the curating* tries to stabilize and reify by its operational cultural frames and modes of composing the stage-ing: "it breaks up this stage, yet produces a narrative which comes into being in the very moment in which an utterance takes place."⁴ However, *the curatorial* might further mystify a practice that accumulates a lot of social capital within the art networks that we know and experience and it can make it even more vague and inaccessible to those who do not articulate themselves through *the accurate* discursive frames. Or, maybe on the contrary, it defies the figure of the (professional) curator and gives power to individuals and groups who organize and take care of the cultural lives of their communities?

Does then feminist curating mean unlearning curating and recreating the curatorial?

And is the curatorial a mechanism to unfold new tools, forms, and logics?

C A R E

One is not born, but rather becomes
a feminist – among other feminists.
Political solidarity is a matter of
commitment and action.

Rhetorics of care were already in high demand before the Covid-19 pandemic and have now become a key term when talking about making, curating, and presenting art. Nevertheless, a sort of uncanny contradiction and a bitter aftertaste creeps in when vulnerability becomes trendy: when inclusion is put on the banners but is not practiced, when intersectional feminism becomes an add-on to institutional organizations but their key positions stay white and male, when solidarity and collaboration are claimed while institutionalization remains deeply embedded in the logic of capital(ism). Curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung describes it as a “delusion of care” when care is practiced by institutions as a mere performative act⁵ yet without a genuine interest in sustainable change. The same goes with thematizing the notion of care in recent theoretical discourse of art and culture, which doesn’t always correspond to the ways of making and practicing that discourse by the academics and theoreticians, and the institutions with which they are affiliated.

Namely, the **discourse of care** hasn’t brought a **practice of care** that would be tangible, affecting, and/or transforming relations in the shared territories of cultural activity. Moreover, an ongoing competition over the ideas, notions, and space in highly ranked journals – university’s business as usual – is present in this field as well. At the same time, there are academic contexts in which care has been taken care of more in recent times. One way to distinguish between these two responses is to look into how a certain

[5]

Bonaventure Soh
Bejeng Ndikung, *The
Delusions of Care*
(Berlin: Archive
Books, 2021).

theorist, cultural worker, or institution operates and which modes of work they activate. A comparative analysis seems to be a logical and necessary exam(ination). The work environment which is both reproduced and transformed by those laboring subjects requires some scrutiny and institutional critique which is a powerful tool for re-evaluating methods and practices of cultural institutions operating within nation-state and transnational economies. Institutional critique can be done in multiple ways, but in our collective coexistence, the medium of writing seems best suited for mapping critical conversations and sharing them with others.

And so, we wonder...

How to respond to the exploitation of caring activism which turns it into cultural capital ready for commodification and spectacularization?

A caring curation is a political curation. And practicing curation in a feminist and careful way means taking into account the political realm, the specificities of each context, the social and economic conditions of all participating actors (artists, producers, audiences...), as well as critically examining their working methodologies in relation to the values and ideologies that are supported by the curatorial agendas. It means creating an environment that is in every aspect critical towards the dominant production model and orientated towards the collective needs arising from the specific context. Such an environment means that all participating actors accept solidarity and equity as the connective tissue in a given moment at a given space and, if necessary, scale down their own standards (in less financially supported contexts, precarious dance scenes, peripheral localities and identities). Without understanding and accepting this, the substance of the practice of feminism, care and solidarity will remain superficial and fake and will indeed be instrumentalized by the dominant production model.

We probably first have to advocate for unlearning the stream of curating which promotes the curator-star (often promoting artists-stars) and to advocate for their refraction into feminist curatorial practices that would include:

- ◆ the deconstruction of long-prevailing power hierarchies
- ◆ supporting the processes of navigation, observation, tracking back and forward the struggles within the art field understood as the work field
- ◆ critically examining working conditions and structures of access
- ◆ insisting on shared/collective authorship and collaborative processes
- ◆ a reshaping of centralized decision-making into a rhizomatic one
- ◆ rejecting the usage of appropriation and commodification of others' struggles as ways of achieving a more marketable presence within the art field

We must remember that the cultural market is already internalized by many artists, cultural workers, and structures – very often its mechanisms are camouflaged by workers' rights and working conditions. Questioning, criticizing, and disclosing the (internalized) market hierarchies should be one of the tasks of a feminist curator:

- ◆ offering different relations, taking potentials and challenges of solidarity, feminism, queerness, environmentalism and sisterhood seriously and accepting the ideological and practical consequences thereof
- ◆ opening and establishing direct communication instead of the numerous intermediaries, agents, producers and assistants...
- ◆ looking for alternative strategies, researching and reaching out to colleagues from more peripheral cultural scenes and being ready to learn from them, bringing them to the shared debate and granting space to their struggles and experiences
- ◆ striving to emancipate the art work, the artists, as well as the related working processes from the limitations of the capitalist production frameworks: if direct intervention is not possible – tricking the systems, hacking, subverting, re-distributing resources and granting them to people who have no access to funding and institutions

- ◆ drifting away from reproducing the curatorial programs and visions of others that elevate only a few chosen individuals
- ◆ questioning notions of coolness, genius, prestige and acknowledging the structures of access within the art fields where the initial economic and social capital is required to enter
- ◆ revising art historical narratives and discourses that originated in the capitalist centers and looking for politics that challenge their domination
- ◆ taking interest in what is happening in the production/ rehearsal processes to make sure that the programmes framed as feminist, queer, decolonial, etc. are not showcasing artists who abuse their collaborators
- ◆ talking to various artists and members of the crew and not only the ones that receive the credit for an art product (e.g. choreographers)
- ◆ finding ways to integrate collected feedback into future programming decisions

C O L L E C T I V I T Y

“Everywhere we leave constant traces of our existence, of our struggle against vacuity. And the greater the vacuity, the more violent our struggle.”⁶

[6]

Dubravka Ugrešić,
Fox, trans. Ellen
Elias-Busać and
David Williams
(NYC: Open Letter,
2018), e-book, 36.

The radical curatorial turn that we want to invoke is a turn towards collective work, towards **the curatorial practiced as collective** discussions, playing and working together, as mutual learning, experimentations, radical inclusion and platform-giving, an anti-market orientation of cultural productions that could eventually reshape the value systems and aspirations expressed through the art making. We should join in a common effort to introduce and eventually spread collective artistic directorship and curating teams in institutions. There should be a strong permeation and interdependence between program curating, production, and communication models. That’s a political stance in the form of program-making!

Yes to collectivization!
No to competitiveness!
No to rivalry!
No to jealousy!
No to judging!
Yes to fair payment!

However, such an emancipatory process takes time, so we need to take time (in spite of the pressure of institutions, funding bodies, procedures, deadlines) and to find ways to secure this time. Self-exploitation is contradictory to such a process, it is a capitalist mode of abusing human potentials through extracting maximum value regardless of the cost to health or happiness. Feminist curators work with others taking time to talk, discuss, experiment, fight, rethink, try, observe, learn, discover, read, enjoy, have fun, laugh, and support. Feminist curation creates an ecology of relations that are based on solidarity and mutual support so that self-exploitation becomes a shared concern. Practicing solidarity within our curation(s) would then mean:

- ◆ giving up or dispersing structural power positions
- ◆ practicing solidarity on micro-levels, every day
- ◆ giving the platform to those who need to be heard and seen
- ◆ respecting contexts and specificities, recognizing and respecting the needs, limits and potentials of various actors of the performing arts field
- ◆ fighting (self)exploitation
- ◆ offering emotional and affective support when possible, while at the same time articulating boundaries and needs (to avoid yet another form of burnout)
- ◆ sharing material resources
- ◆ sharing knowledge and skills
- ◆ listening carefully
- ◆ creating safer spaces through a comradeship of affect and reflection

Since we are mostly active in the field of dance, let's reflect further how the practice of curation can be displayed within this specific artistic universe. Although as art form

embedded within the contemporary art market relations of funding, buying and selling, as well as often opportunistic, dance can potentially make space for both integration and release of these forms of resistance. Curating dance by emphasizing structural elements such as an embodied constellation of relations, the revealing and recomposition of those, and situating dance as an autonomous art form, could lead to transformation of socio-political practices. This would require, however, a radical redefinition of the very purpose and motivation of dance making from the side of all involved actors – the shift in how it is mediated and how it is made available and accessible to broader audiences who might differ in terms of political belonging, aesthetic and moral conditioning as well as economic standing. In the light of the growing normalization and thematization of artistic production, dance seems to be weakened as a socializing and emancipating practice. This consideration comes perhaps from a very utopian desire not so much for the return of any old forms of dancing, but rather for rediscovering dance that can facilitate feeling and mobilizing spaces available across socio-economic divisions and differences.

And so, we wonder...

What is there to learn from marginalized socio-political her-their-histories (and contemporaneities) in regard to feminist organization and struggle?

How to learn to identify places of oppression and places of privilege in each of, and in between, us? How to reinforce solidarity by recognizing differences and giving them a voice?

Intersectionality doesn't operate in only one register, the register of oppression. **How to acknowledge a compound (intersectional) structure of our socially shaped selves**, often combining the predator and the victim (having in mind Yugoslav, white, feminist, immigrant, middle-class, and queer selves for instance)? How to learn to speak with them? How to help them hear each other? How to not dismiss their conflicts and dialectic, but persist in the tension, thus leaving space for others' tensions as well?

How to think of curatorial practices around gatherings and embodiments of the audience as enabling alternative social relations and expressions?

Can an art institution or curatorial context offer a place where everyone can feel welcome? Probably not yet. *Everyone* is a myth and a shadow, a utopian promise of art for all. But – as an emancipatory and collectivizing promise – it shall also not be completely dismissed, for it provides a horizon for our future and present endeavors. To see beyond what we were told is possible, to see beyond the mere facades of justice and community that were given to us by our masters, we must dismantle their house. For that we must find our own tools, as Audre Lorde wrote – and we must persist until we arrive where we belong together:

[7]

Audre Lorde,
“The Master’s Tools
Will Never Dismantle the Master’s
House,” in *Sister
Outsider: Essays and
Speeches* (Berkeley,
CA: Crossing Press,
2007), 178-179.

“Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”⁷

Practicing feminist curation is a struggle and commitment, it is a position in which failure is part of the actions through which the feminist curator is becoming (a feminist curator).

And so again, we wonder...

What does it mean to be(come) a feminist curator?

Jette Büchsenschütz

2:24 PM Apr 29

Reminded me of a frieze interview with curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (who was recently appointed as the new director of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin) where he said: "When we were curating Documenta 14, the artistic director Adam Szymczyk would ask: 'To whom does Documenta belong?' That is something I took with me. To whom do art institutions cater? Why do we see only certain kinds of people coming into museums and galleries? Yet, despite these institutions not catering to everybody, everybody pays taxes to enable them to function. The idea then becomes: how do we craft institutions that care for everyone and their histories? In recent years, there's been a rush towards what institutions call 'outreach'. That in itself is a failure because it stays within the realm of the symbolic. The institution doesn't really care for you - it isn't doing anything for you - but it functions within an extractive economy whereby it gets you to fulfil its own purpose. That is why we need to create institutions that think differently about the people around them."

<https://www.frieze.com/article/bonaventure-soh-bejeng-ndikung-interview>

We can start sharing local references, emancipate local knowledge and knowledge resources that don't circulate in the mainstream theoretical and artistic circuits. We can start quoting our friends, sisters, comrades, mothers, witches, all those sources of knowledge, experience, collective intelligence that have had so far a subaltern status. We need to learn how to learn from each other (how to face each other) beyond the internalized and institutionalized frames of exchange (projects, mobility, festivals, conferences, lectures...).

[8]

Kae Tempest.
"Europe is lost." *Let Them Eat Chaos*.
Fiction / Lex, 2016.

"[Our] very language is tainted / With all that we stole to replace it with this / I am quiet, feeling the onset of riot / But riots are tiny though, systems are huge"⁸

And still, we can hunger for something juicy, something transformative...

[9]

Kate Bush. "The Sensual World."
The Sensual World.
Columbia Records, 1989.

"Our arrows of desire rewrite the speech, mmh, yes."⁹

Maybe we need to make visible and center the tension between our desire for change and our (hopefully unconscious) desire for maintaining the status quo of the cultural cosmos we dwell in. Because, powerless as we may feel, we still derive our power from the oppressive system surrounding us:

[10]

Florian Malzacher,
A Job With Unclear Profile, Goal and Future, November 21, 2012, Impulse Theatre Festival 2017, <https://archiv.im-pulsefestival.de/2017/en/news/103/florian-malzacher-ueber-die-rolle-des-kuratoren-in-der-freien-internationalen-theaterszene.html> (accessed April 29, 2023).

"We drink the Starbucks coffee of art and we are happy that a part of our money protects the rainforest (for example: conceptual dance, young artists, research). It is a pseudo-proper action, since eventually it primarily protects the system whose spikes we believe to be filing down. It is the same system in which we first produce the defects and then we try to alleviate them. We want power that should not be recognizable as such."¹⁰

Maybe individually we are too entangled, our livelihoods too much at stake, our egos too proud to dismantle the world we have spent our lives fighting for... but collec-

tively we can listen to each other and find solidarity, a will for change and a concrete call to action that has the potential for radical transformation.

Being as complicit as we are, and yet also dispossessed, how can we pour the power that we do have into processes of activation and revolution? Or maybe, said otherwise, **how can we (can we?) let go of power all together and instead give birth to something else entirely?** Do we maybe need to take it slow, unlearn and relearn together how to work, and how to be together, to start observing and slowly building something different entirely?

In his lecture series *How To Live Together* Roland Barthes fantasized of “idiorrhhythmic life”: idiorrhythmic communities, which Barthes found in monasteries (of Atos and elsewhere), are built on **coordinating individual rhythms, never synchronizing them by law**, but by the power of dysrhythmia, where everyone runs, falls, plods, staggers in order to keep the right pace of walking. Opening up this fantasy and letting idiorrhythmia leak out could be a feminist grand gesture.

Coordinating individual rhythms doesn't look like a revolution we know from the past. But maybe feminism inherently cannot lead to a revolution as we know it – one that is historicized as an often violent act of total and arbitrary transformation (that demands a sacrifice on behalf of many – either willing or not). Maybe it's a slow process of prefiguration, which leads to nurturing life in its everydayness of commoners, who take care of one another. It would be a life without Revolution or other big Event, a life in a *nest* or *carrier bag* (fantasies of Elisabeth Fisher and Ursula K. Le Guin). There are no heroes there.

Only people who pick berries.

And save some for those who sleep.

[11]

Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 1.

“Feminism is a political project about what could be. It's always looking forward, invested in futures we can't quite grasp yet. It's a way of wishing, hoping, aiming at everything that has been deemed impossible. It's a task that has to be approached seriously – we must think about the limits of this world and the possibilities contained in the ones we could craft together.”¹¹

WISHING, HOPING, AIMING
FOR COURAGEOUS CURATING



DESIRE AND DOUBT

ANKA HERBUT,
ELENA
NOVAKOVITS,
JETTE
BÜCHSENSCHÜTZ

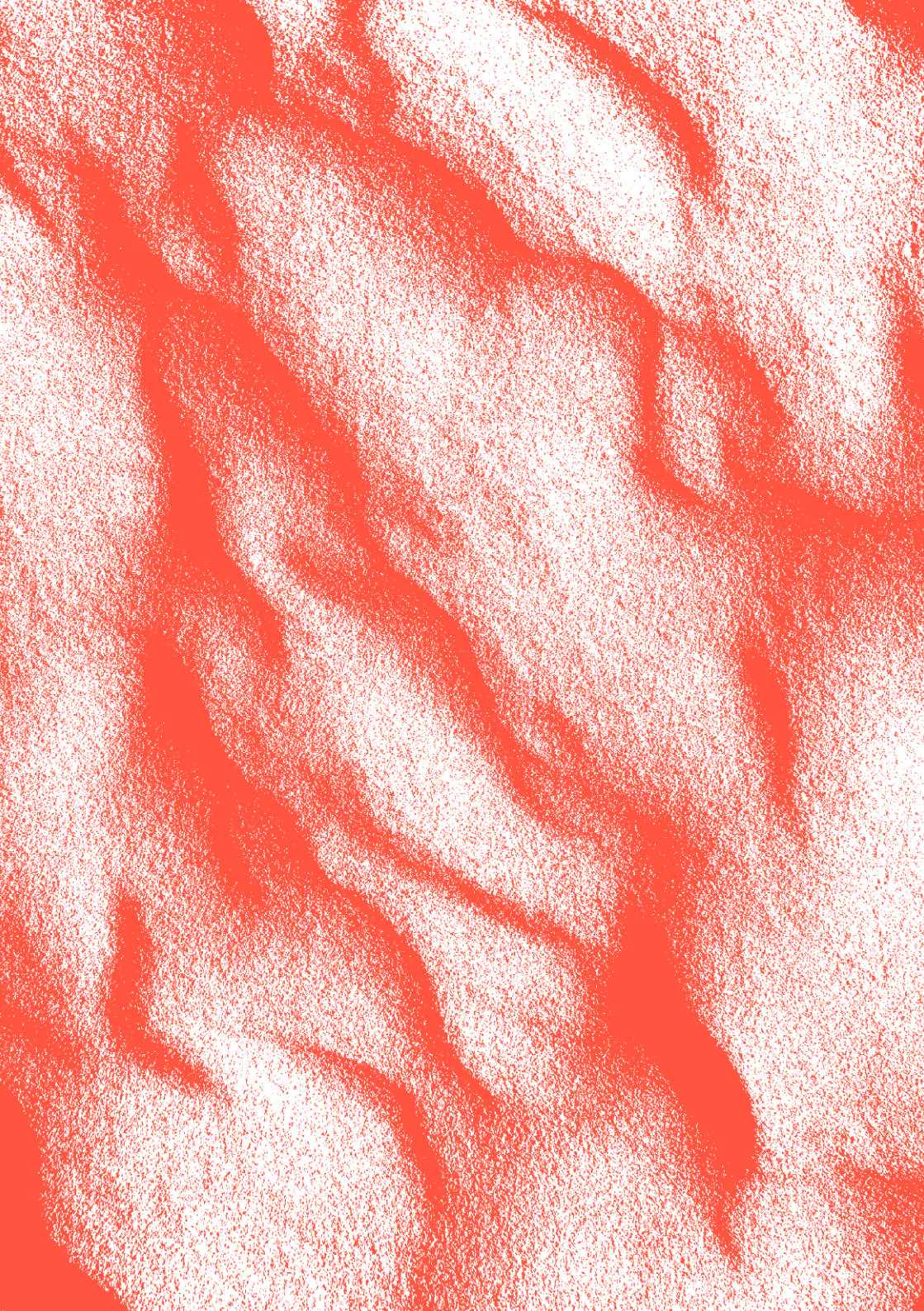
Dear future and former Collaborators, dear Choreographers,
dear Friends at work,

[1]

Marianne Van Kerkhoven, "Looking without pencil in the hand," *Theaterschrift: On Dramaturgy* no. 5-6 (1994): 140-148. See: <http://sarma.be/docs/2858> (accessed February 24, 2023). Although Marianne Van Kerkhoven was called by another dramaturg, Guy Cools, a *godmother of dramaturgy*, calling her in this text a *mother of dramaturgy* is a deliberate decision.

Am I your friend? Your caretaker to filter moods and tensions? Your part-time-mum? Your last-minute problem-solver? Your contextualizing answer or worst nightmare of critique? Your psychologist? Your personalized *good question* generator? Your private researcher? Your toolbox of theoretical knowledge? Your assistant? Maybe a sounding board, as the *mother* of dramaturgy Marianne Van Kerkhoven saw it?¹ A semantic safety belt? An airbag and an insurance provider two-in-one? An invisible mind you can extract from, a bodiless entity providing thinking and writing to serve your artistic vision?

But wait, I am far away from claiming to be all of it and to know it all, and from knowing it better – though I have the need to position myself within the performing arts field that I am operating in and to reposition my space and my time.



APPROACH 1: FEELING SEEING

→

A racoon trying to fit the whole existing and emerging theory of dramaturgy into one meme.

Source: social media.

[2]

Marianne Van Kerkhoven, "Looking without pencil". Actually, Van Kerkhoven mostly uses the "him/his" form in her text while referring to a dramaturg, yet in this article I decided to use a feminine form. At the same time I want to stress that I am far away from any essentialization of this job – rather through this gesture I want to emphasize the feminization of dramaturgical practice, its interrelations and similarities to reproductive work and care work. I also want to renounce the patriarchal model of collaboration, where a dramaturg becomes a servant not even of a process, but of a choreographer himself.



WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS

A dance-dramaturg, according to the most widespread assumption, observes the process from a distance, from the in-between perspective. Not here, not yet there. Not fully in the center and yet not just on the periphery. Neither active nor passive, the status of the dance dramaturg and caretaker stems from mediating between the private, inner logic of the piece and the public eye, staying in the shadows. As Van Kerkhoven once wrote: "*she* has no fixed abode, *she* does not belong anywhere. The work *she* does dissolves into the production, becomes *invisible*."² Yes, **INVISIBLE!** Even if you could write a job description for what I am doing in *your* process, always hidden tasks, non-computable working hours, unpredictable needs, and unspoken difficulties stand around. And my own practice is there somewhere too, as it is obvious

(*isn't it?*) that each of us who contributes to the collective process of developing a piece enters their own process at the same time. Right? I see the efforts of others – maybe they are easier to notice from where I'm standing, on the periphery, where there is no guarantee of recognition nor visibility; I focus on my own process as well – none of these less important than the collective one. They permeate each other, they intermingle – even if hardly noticeable when something bigger is at stake – weaving a dense, delicate net on which the more tangible elements of the emerging performance may appear.

No doubt, “dramaturgy is essentially the labor of weaving together.”³ And then, another question arises as to how we can have a mutual understanding of our working together as a form of weaving and “as a shared practice of encounter.”⁴ How to avoid “weaving of the threads of trauma”⁵ that, even if seen as a broader and complex metaphor, used to build the foundation of what was taken for granted? How to reshape once-upon-a-time-in-force rules like “the dramaturg voices only when asked?”⁶ How to embrace the feeling of emptiness left by rejected ideas or materials and not cherish the supposed trauma as a feature of the dramaturgical practice of weaving? How to politicize weaving... I mean dramaturgy... as an issue of feminized invisible labor? Is it a mutual weave, an equal, a competitive, a hierarchical, or a visible one? But wait a second... can any weaving be internally competitive or have some fixed-for-good hierarchy at all? You know I'm nerdy sometimes so... So if it comes to weaving... let's keep it this way if you don't mind – as an active verb, always in relation, ever-shifting... So if it comes to weaving, the warp and weft are quite interdependent, they make no sense without one another (*don't they?*). And we can go even further to get away from this binary vision of collaboration – the weft and warp are active collaborators of the weaver and weaving shapes the weaver as they shape the thread; it goes beyond divisions and offers a polynary way of thinking and acting. A playground of possibilities, where recognition, agency, and visibility should be given to each participant of the action. Otherwise it's not a weave.

Indeed, the relationship with the choreographer is at the heart of a compositional process – but what about the

[3]

Cindy Brizzell, André Lepecki, “Introduction: The labor of the question is the (feminist) question of dramaturgy,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2003): 15.

[4]

Sandra Noeth, “Protocols of Encounter: On Dance Dramaturgy,” in *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*, ed. Sandra Noeth and Gabriele Klein (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011), 253.

[5] [6]

Cindy Brizzell, André Lepecki, “Introduction,” 15.

other collaborators? Especially with the increasing involvement of the dancers in the creation process; how does this change my dramaturgical practice and the politics of our collaboration? Whose best friend do I become then? In “Correspondence and Ekphrasis”, Guy Cools claims that in being a dramaturg he is mainly at the choreographer’s service in the artistic process:

[7]

Guy Cools,
“Correspondence
and Ekphrasis,”
in *The Practice of
Dramaturgy: Work-
ing on Actions in
Performance*, eds.
K. Georgelou, E. Pro-
topapa, D. Theo-
doridou (Amsterdam:
Valiz, 2017), 101.

“I am therefore mainly there for her and I only engage with the other collaborators when invited to do so in order to moderate between them and the choreographer. This is also a strategy to avoid the risk of turning a productive polyphonic conversation into a cacophony of voices that overlap, distract, or confuse.”⁷

I understand this view as a sort of declaration of loyalty to the choreographer who, as allegedly the only one, has a *true* and unmediated connection and access to the work-to-come. But this assumption overlooks the work-to-come itself and distributes the cards between the creators, giving the best and most to the choreographer and sharing out some remaining ones to the rest. It also takes away agency from the creative process that can actually sometimes drive us to places that we would never even think about. So I would say that **the friendship I cultivate is the one with the compositional process as a whole, rather than with anyone in particular.** Such a stance gives the opportunity to emancipate the process and to project a different dynamic among the collaborators. If we assume that the work-to-come has its own body-mind (even if still in flux and ever shapeshifting), we may *all* want to be its friends and know it better. André Lepecki raised this topic already:

[8]

André Lepecki,
“Errancy as Work:
Seven Strewn Notes
for Dance Drama-
turgy,” in *Dance
Dramaturgy: Modes
of Agency, Aware-
ness and Engage-
ment*, eds. P. Hansen,
D. Callison (New
York: palgrave mcmil-
lan, 2015), 52, 60.

“Who actually knows what the work-to-come truly is, what the work-to-come wants, and therefore what the work-to-come needs? (...) Dramaturgy as practice occasions the discovery that ‘it is the work itself’ that has its own sovereignty, its own performative desires, wishes and commands.”⁸

My role then would involve **navigating** these politics of collaboration – while being an intrinsically interwoven particle in it.

I fully accept that any form of cooperation is subject to different agreements. But here goes a clear intention on my side to preserve a few common principles. I'm flexible, I know it! The final choices in the process are often the choreographer's. *It's ok*. Nevertheless, they should be liaised with the rest of the body-minds involved in the process. Each of us should be able to take the floor, to speak up in case of violations or situations when artistic pursuits do not reflect our labor. I want to benefit from my freedom of speech – I don't think that a studio is a unique space where this rule does not apply. As Rudi Laermans writes in his text "On the Authority of the Choreographer":

[9]

Rudi Laermans,
*Moving Together:
Theorizing and Making
Contemporary
Dance* (Amsterdam:
Valiz, 2015), 352.

"Talking is really crucial; people must be able to discuss what they really think, how they see the material or ideas... – otherwise it isn't collaboration."⁹

I can be – and I usually am – a carrier and a transmitter of a more soft and flat decision-making process (*A step behind sometimes, I ponder on the rights to authorship. I recall those moments when I get a phone call from you wanting to communicate your idea with me before you have even written the application to support it financially, then we both go through this painstaking process of writing a "successful" application that meets the criteria for where it is intended and then, unfortunately, to be honest I am puzzled as to how I could assert peacefully without tension my right to claim a kind of co-authorship.*). A partnership model of relation, the elements and/or mechanisms of which may be implemented to different extents and at different levels of cooperation. Laermans adds that "dialogical authority co-founds the personal authority"¹⁰. Maybe dialogue and collaboration, collective thinking and acting can make up a new model of genius that can supplant the old artistic heroism and curse of infallibility that is responsible for arbitrary decision-making. I want to be included in a serene environment, to be properly remunerated for my hours of contribution, and I want the team of collaborators to recognize each of our roles and the relationship between us.

[10]

Rudi Laermans,
Moving Together,
354.

For you, dear choreographer, *your* work (if it keeps up with the terms and preferences of the market) travels, visits different theaters and international festivals and receives constant visibility through reviews and texts. *I stay safe at home*. Yes, you deserve it all! But, what about my effort? What are its limitations? What about the rights of my working intellectual properties? I keep wondering what are the stages of my work, when it begins and when it ends. Does the dramaturgy of the performance become fixed on the day of the premiere and all the dramaturgical shifts and re-centering endeavors die up that day? Does the premiere wrap up the transformation of the fragile tissue of the performance, its affects and relations that were so crucial before? Or does only the work of a dramaturg end? Only the need for her presence is wearing off?

I am aware that you and the producers are constantly struggling to reshape the budget and allow the project to be displayed beyond its local boundaries. This project-based economy is insane and the circulation of a choreographic work as a cultural product is hard. I acknowledge the constraints of the institutions; I am fully aware of the power structures; I appreciate your attempts to comply with the curator's demands and to retain a smiley and promising face in front of them; I respect your time to email your portfolios and to be a good promoter of yourself and the productions signed with your name; I can well understand how you have difficulty making adjustments and continual changes to the technical specifications and the size of your tour crew in each context. I hope that ideally, you would be willing to have your collaborators paid fairly; I appreciate moments when you have also valued my input during the phases when I was actively involved. We are within a freelance economy where sometimes, no matter your intentions to consolidate established forms, it is not possible due to the incessant and repetitive systemic faults... But, I cannot afford to still question all these. So I am wondering whether my work should continue while your presence is being processed? Why not weave together still when a performance-as-a-product is created and put on the market so the privileges associated with

its exploitation arise? Why did I disappear from the photo in the end? Solveig Gade highlights this absence of a dramaturg's figure by mentioning that:

[11]

Solveig Gade,
"In-Between Figure
Working in a Pre-
carious Field:
Re-Engaging with
Notions of the
Dramaturg," *Nordic
Theatre Studies*,
vol. 30, no. 73 (2018),
[https://tidsskrift.dk/
nts/article/download/
112952/161735/231842](https://tidsskrift.dk/nts/article/download/112952/161735/231842)
(accessed February
28, 2023).

"Dramaturgs, in other words, find themselves in a somewhat paradoxical position: on the one hand they serve as role models for the kind of flexible and adaptable employee requested by today's post-Fordist, neoliberal societies. On the other, their work efforts and contributions to the artistic works in which they are involved are often downplayed due to perceived ways of hypothesizing the artist. Which is why the dramaturg does not appear on the photo."¹¹

Neither on the photo nor even always on the stage when an after-talk is held. After-talks are modes of expansion of the universe we have cooperatively put together and a room to be heard for a plurality of approaches. (*Surely this assumption is not compatible in every context, and perhaps such an approach is more relevant in geographical localities where the figure of the dramaturg is not yet established. But shouldn't we be the whole group of actors on stage and be able to articulate our perspective on how we have experienced the process? Doesn't it seem more fertile?*)

This kind of immaterial affair could perhaps be re-configured and we might be able to figure out how to claim **my presence** – or the moments of **my absence**. In other words, in the here and now I am actually referring to the politics of our collaboration. Through their re-evaluation, I find it urgent to reposition my role in *your* creative process (outside and inside the studio, before and after rehearsals, before and after the realization of the project).

And with the politics of collaboration, another thought comes up regarding micro-political practices. Maybe it will be easier to have this as a starting point as micro-politics entails an active process of rebuilding modalities of looking at, noting, negotiating, and respecting the particularities of the subjects involved. Moving beyond the vast manifestations of how the broader term of "politics" can be defined and theorized, Ana Vujanović very aptly points out that "modes of dance production acquire form."¹² Having been involved in projects where the theme has political

[12]

Ana Vujanović,
"Notes on the
Politicality of Con-
temporary Dance,"
in *Dance, Politics
& Co-Immunity*,
eds. S. Hölscher,
G. Siegmund
(Zurich and Berlin:
Diaphanes, 2013),
181-191.

Jette Büchsenschütz

8:14 AM Mar 28

I share your thought and your concern, Anka. Usually, I am also always invited to join the after-talks – at least from the side of the production, everyone is usually invited from my experience. But I guess it is usually the institution that would only invite the choreographer and maybe also the dancers to share their thoughts in an after-talk – and not the dramaturges or other participants of a production, no?

anka herbut

4:44 PM Mar 27

here I have to share sth – working in Pl I am usually invited to the after-talks, the dancers as well and other collaborators – only if they want – they are welcomed too. So my context is different from the one you describe. I wonder how in the body of our text these different perspectives could co-exist. How to deal with paragraphs that are describing experiences which one of us feels urge to express, but which in the same time can be uncomfortable to another co-author? How to formulate this issue in a way that u feel fair to urself but I don't feel unfair to myself and to the choreographers I work with?

Elena Novakovits

8:52 AM Mar 28

maybe, because I talk from my context. sometimes the dramaturgs become the moderators of these encounters, sometimes they are not even there. neither the dramaturgs nor the dancers or the other collaborators. I fully accept your different experiences, maybe because this role is pretty new here in Greece and I want to suppose that they don't know how to deal with it and/or the fact that after-talks are most of the time more traditional. But to be honest, rarely do I see the whole team on stage. maybe because the 'center' of the dance scene is the figure of the choreographer i made an addition to claim that this is not in every context.

anka herbut

4:58 PM, Apr 8

I also have some issues with this part about coming to the stage as I chose dramaturgy and not sth else because i didn't want to go to the stage :) which doesn't mean i don't want to appear on the photo.

[13]

Ana Dubljević, *The Feminist Pornscapes: On Feminist Dramaturgical Thinking in Dance and Performance Practice* (Belgrade: Station service for contemporary dance, 2021), 94, <https://apapnet.eu/publications/the-feminist-pornscapes-on-feminist-dramaturgical-thinking-in-dance-and-performance-practice> (accessed April 14, 2023).

[14]

In "Looking without pencil in the hand" Van Kerkhoven states that "dramaturgy is also the passion of looking".

[15]

The differentiation between *male gaze* and *female gaze* comes here after the iconic article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" written in the 1970s by Laura Mulvey. My purpose is not to essentialize nor to assume that the *male gaze* is reserved for men and the *female gaze* is at the disposition of women as those two types of gaze work across gender boundaries. When using the *female gaze* category I have in mind what could be also defined after the feminist film journal *Another Gaze* precisely as *another gaze*, yet for the purport of this text I decided to keep the female form. Cf. Erika Balsom, "In Search of the Female Gaze," *Cinemascope*, no. 83 (Summer 2020), https://cinema-scope.com/features/in-search-of-the-female-gaze/?fbclid=IwAR0xQP_w38xg_AMKQH1KEVJq90JXIJkexmxFjCB-KuYnINmkp2YifsG6ke_Mk (accessed April 11, 2023).

orientation in terms of content, I wonder if this is enough to be considered political where other more urgent aspects are missing or forgotten.

In her book *The Feminist Pornscapes: On Feminist Dramaturgical Thinking in Dance and Performance Practice* Ana Dubljević attempts to grasp the micro-politics of **feminist dramaturgical thinking** and detects its symptoms and traces in such collaborations where each and everyone endeavors to analyze and dismantle power relations. She even calls this *style* of working an "imaginary institution"¹³ operating in the frame of (an)other institution(s) that hold(s) a project the group is working on. Thanks to this double bill, an imaginary institution can reshape the wider contextual frame through bottom-up micro-actions. And exactly this space of micro-actions – developed and executed during all the phases of the project – could become a common request for and by all of us who share this artistic universe.

FROM AN EYE TO THE WHOLE BODY

Part of such micro-politics could be the shift in the perception of a dramaturg as the one who is possessed by the passion of looking¹⁴. The term "external eye" was once often used for my position. But why this tendency to reduce the dramaturgical abilities to their visual capacities? What's more, doesn't this assumption locate dramaturgical practice within the distribution of sensuality somewhere in the power position where the *male gaze* lies with its eyes sliding through the image for visual pleasure? How else could we understand dramaturgy? How, rather than looking at things, I could be more in the feeling? What to do not to forget about personal taste when faced with focusing on sight and searching for the objectivity of a dramaturg? When floating among streams of various definitions and practices, dramaturgy can take on different shades – already through this denial of a top-down, arbitrary and one-track concept, dramaturgy bears the hallmarks of the *female gaze*¹⁵, but what would the *female gaze* in dramaturgical practice mean?

Would it presume the dramaturg's body-mind that perceives and absorbs the performance through multiple senses; that is empathetic and open to doubts; that is always ready to give the floor to others and is far, far, far away from recognizing its own universalism? When approaching the *female gaze*, feminist movie director and writer Joey Soloway speaks about *feeling seeing*¹⁶ and in my view that could set a path to reclaiming the dramaturg's body and to inviting her corporeality, sensing, feeling, intuition and taste to work. Ana Dubljević acknowledges that this way of thinking creates a world that *feelingsees* and *is feelingseen*¹⁷ – a world that, functioning at the intersection of the imagination, collaboration and institutional practices, values more the conditions under which the work is created than what the work communicates that it values.

[16]

Joey Soloway,
"Joey Soloway on
The Female Gaze |
MASTER CLASS |
TIFF 2016", Tiff
Talks, September
11, 2011, Youtube
Video, 57'48, [https://
www.youtube.com/
watch?v=pnBvppooD9I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnBvppooD9I).
(accessed April 11,
2023).

[17]

Ana Dubljević,
*The Feminist
Pornscapes*, 34.

[18]

Meg Stuart,
"The Big Ear," in *Are
We Here Yet?*, ed.
J. Peeters (Dijon:
Les presses du réel,
2019), 134.

Also worth mentioning is that at some point the idea of limiting the dramaturgical practice to its audial aspects – as equally tempting as the "external eye" – which was rooted in the recognition of the dialogical side of dramaturgical work, occurred. It was proposed by choreographer and dancer Meg Stuart for whom a dramaturg was/is "a big ear with whom she shares her initial questions and later her doubts."¹⁸ But again, this perspective brings the dramaturgical activity down to bare witnessing and receiving (even if often they really make up a dramaturgical practice) rather than actively interfering, sharing, exchanging, speaking. Why then, in this case too, reduce my dramaturgical abilities to the reception and cognitive function of my brain? **Where are the other parts of my body?**

The term "external body" also often used for my position brought back other parts of my body, yet at the same time it brought my whole body out(side the process) again. Yet from where I stand right now, I gently but firmly refuse to be relegated to the sidelines – too many breaths, too many heartbeats, drops of sweat (*or was it maybe a tear?*) were allowed to seep into the works-to-come.

So instead of aligning and calibrating my visual lenses and hearing organs from a distance – and let me add, I am highly shortsighted – I wish for an integration of my whole body with all its limbs, fluids and rhythms bringing the knowledge and experience informed by previous

collaborations, shaped by my engagement in social textures and hormonal cycle phases, no matter whether I visit the rehearsal process once a week or am present every single day; no matter if I participate in the body warm up together with the dancers. This asks for modes of engagement that include more than my eyes or ears but are embedded in my personal-that-is-always-collective body of experience. It is not a form of intellectualism that remains on the outside, maintaining a critical distance, unaltered by the composition engaged in. Conceptual and critical awareness remain necessary, nevertheless, to detect normative, ideological, and political suggestions that some images, practices and processes might produce. But altering the perspective could also mean to simply lie down on the marley floor or “to turn the fucking head” as postmodern dancer and choreographer Deborah Hay would say.

Once I was called a *third eye*. The idea came from a slippage of the tongue and within a working environment that I would call nothing less than tender and caring. This intuitive, speculative eye, that empowers our perception beyond ordinary vision and is strongly connected with emotional intelligence, which “emerge from the space in between the perspectives,” to borrow the words from the choreographer. **A body that is open to and thinks in various directions.** I can work with that.

SPIT, BLOOD AND SWEAT

I really do enjoy imagining and eventually helping create different universes and landscapes, shaping their texture and consistencies, their stratospheres and debaucheries, to meander together through alternative imaginations – to collaboratively dive into a process of world-making. To nurture one thought and gently give up a misleading trajectory. And at no point am I ignorant of the fact that this multifunctionality and multipositionality is exactly what attracts me to this position.

But let us not fall for the superstition that this *in-betweenness* is a critical practice per se. Considering the precarious living and working conditions to which freelance dramaturgs in particular are exposed, its required flexibility

[19]

Bojana Cvejić, "Dramaturgy: A Friendship of Problems," *Tkh Dance/Theories – Reloaded*, no. 18 (2010): 46, <http://www.tkh-generator.net/portfolio/tkh-18-dance-theories-reloaded/> (accessed April 14, 2023).

[20]

Bojana Cvejić, "Dramaturgy: A Friendship of Problems," 46.

[21]

Katherine Profeta and Thomas F. DeFrantz, "Field Notes: In the Studio with Ralph Lemon and Donald Byrd," in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, eds. P. Hansen, D. Callison (New York: palgrave mcmillan, 2015), 148.

[22]

Jan Joris Lamers, "A continuing dialogue," interview by Marianne Van Kerkhoven and Elske van de Hulst, *Theaterschrift: On Drama-turgy* no. 5-6 (1994): 284.

[23]

Katya MONTAGNAC, "Paradoxes of the Dance Dramaturg," *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 155 (2013): 10.

[24]

Sandra Noeth, "Protocols of Encounters," in *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*, ed. Gabriele Klein, Sandra Noeth (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011), 255.

[25]

See: Christel Stalpaert, "A Dramaturgy of the Body," *Performance Research*, vol 14, no. 3 (2009): 121-125.

[26]

Guy Cools, "On Dance Drama-turgy," *cena*, no. 29, Porto Alegre (December 2019): 44.

and mobility and therefore lack of permanent employment, protection against dismissal, and only rarely or non sick-, vacation-, or unemployment benefits (depending on where you pay your taxes) – not even to mention the lack of paid maternity leave – it sometimes feels bitter to understand my living and working arrangements as deviance and dissidence from the *normal* working conditions of postmodern, liberal society.

The position of a dance-dramaturg in the specific project-based, freelance working conditions (in Western-Middle-Eastern-Europe) is in constant flux. The dramaturg represents in some ways a refracted figure who can jump in and out, changing how she might be credited in a program, seizing every opportunity to be on hand. Usually, I smoothly move between different tasks and occupations – curation, cultural journalism, essay writing, creating concepts – and thus there are many notions and ways of describing this manifold function. Let's range together into this forest of terminology, where quite a number of metaphors grow:

"constitutive supplement in a method of experimental creation"¹⁹

"co-creator of a problem"²⁰

"the collected memory of the process"²¹

"liaison officer with contacts everywhere, including the secret services."²²

"chameleonlike figure"²³

"monster phantasmal"²⁴

"twilight zone"²⁵

"kitchen help"²⁶

[27]

Guy Cools, "On
Dance Dramaturgy,"
45.

[28]

Guy Cools, "On
Dance Dramaturgy,"
47.

[29]

Bojana Kunst,
"The Economy of
Proximity: Drama-
turgical Work in
Contemporary
Dance," *Perfor-
mance Research*,
vol. 14, no. 3 (2009):
81-88.

Well... I mean... these metaphors sound a bit like a bitter de-
scription of precarious reproductive labor of caregivers. And
maybe it's the question of perspective – a question of not
talking from the center – but when I think about "kitchen
help" I don't see a person privileged to "work in the kitch-
ens of great chiefs" whose "main contribution has often
been to pass on recipes from one to another,"²⁷ as Cools sees
it. I rather recall all these stories and confidences in which
the kitchen help appeared literally as a servant who works
hard but whose work is never recognized and whose name
remains unknown or forgotten. Ok, but let's go further into
the forest...

"a somatic witness"²⁸

"strongly characterized by flexibility"²⁹

"a midwife"³⁰

[30]

Peter Hay,
"American Drama-
turgy: A Critical
Re-Appraisal,"
in *What is
Dramaturgy?*,
ed. B. Cardullo
(New York: Peter
Lang Publishing,
1995), 76.

...hang on a second – a midwife? I mean...

...Would it mean that she is not involved in carrying the baby,
neither in being in labor, nor being involved in parenting?
That the **dramaturg's spit, blood, sweat and body fluids are
not part of the project?**

APPROACH 2: SHARING DESIRES, LOVING DOUBTS

→

See Red Women's Workshop, "Capitalism also Depends on Domestic Labour" (1983).

Poster highlighting feminized work as a vital part of the industrial mode of production.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE...

Unfortunately Peter Hay, who coined the midwife metaphor in the 1990s, was not the only one to exploit this feminized moniker of a dramaturg – 24 years later Cools still pushes a dramaturg into the shadows. Let alone the midwife:

[31]

Guy Cools, "On
Dance Dramaturgy,"
44.

"A dramaturg is like a midwife. You support the process that will happen anyway, even without your presence. You use your experience from previous, similar processes to guide the 'parents/artists' and ninety percent of the time you just reassure them that everything is happening as it should be. And even during the ten percent of time when you do interfere, you learn to be patient and to hold back because you know that the more natural the birth, the more joy there will be."³¹

I have to confess that to me these are unfair and harmful words, stemming probably from the fact that the author

clearly has no experience of going into labor or carrying it out. Medicine has always been a part of the heritage of women and women's history, even if healthcare has been appropriated by the male experience up until now. Downplaying the role of a midwife and obscuring her enormous responsibility and contribution to childbirth seems instrumental in this context. Moreover, the romanticized assumption of the author that the more natural birth equals more joy can be dangerous and is simply untrue. First of all, on the level of the biological processes. Secondly, as a dramaturgical rule. The analogy of a midwife to my profession devalues the importance and difficulties of a key service role, while on the other hand spoils the privileged part of what I do.

Let's put it this way: I am also very curious about the dramaturgical practice consisting mainly of reassuring the choreographer and dissolving into the shadowy abyss not to distract anyone with their breathing and outside-eye-blinking. I have never experienced it before and hopefully never will. But I would like to see it as a historical object covered with a layer of dust and analyzed from a more equal and less servile perspective. I also can't stop thinking about what this subservient mode of working implies for the next generations of dramaturgs.

I wonder how the next generation – or better yet our generation – of dramaturgs could be positioned in other modes and terms in the actual turmoil landscape. By claiming the self-evident (e.g. my labor, moral and so on rights), I do not claim the power element. I have already acknowledged that whenever I am around you / next to you / on your screen as a collaborator, I am mostly concerned to steer away from any identification with any sort of intellectual authority. I now rethink and re-rethink how my aforementioned colleagues have articulated their thoughts (*yes, I would position myself as doing the same work as them*) and I continue to be questioned as to which principles I am putting in front of me. In this respect, I refrain from addressing the generation gap; it is more urgent for a repositioning in the turbulent universes (*or in the universe from where I speak*); to unfold my own practices away from any patriarchal identification; to deconstruct elements that are not in

line with my work and personal mindset; but also to track, keep, and record the tools I can find in others' writings and embrace them in my needs and reflections. I continue to read how my colleagues have contributed to the discourse of how my position could be defined, but I consciously choose to find modes of expanding how I want to work or how I articulate what I am doing. However, at the same time and above all, I also try to think about how it can change for the better the current working and collaboration conditions of other dramaturgs and the future of the dramaturgs-to-come. And I am not doing this alone as I am already a collective subject of this text.

BACK TO THE PAST...

Let's not forget that Hay and Cools didn't come up with this comparison between midwife and dramaturg all by themselves, but that it is said to be Socrates who established the metaphor of a philosopher as a midwife to explain his particular approach to philosophy as a dialogical practice. Socrates, whose mother Phaenarete was a midwife, considers himself in that sense as carrying on his mother's profession: only he does not help women and bodies with uterus to give birth, but his conversational partners in the elaboration and realization of ideas. He explains his conversational technique based on asking and answering questions as midwifery in Plato's *Theaetetus*:

[32]

Plato, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The 'Theaetetus' and the 'Sophist' of Plato*, trans. with running comments F. Macdonald Cornford (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 26.

"My art of midwifery is in general like theirs [real midwives]; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth. I am so far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom, and the common reproach is true, that, though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me."³²

In other words: Socrates considers himself infertile. He himself is not able to create wisdom and knowledge but

instead supports others in giving birth to their own ideas. What a great metaphor and reference to our dramaturgical practice! We might agree that the most basic understanding of any dramaturgical practice is asking questions, but what highly irritates me is the degradation of his own position in relation to his counterpart.

Yet here we are. Holding back and swallowing silently urgent but maybe controversial or agitating thoughts to not cause any irritation or disrupting interference in order to navigate through the constantly shape shifting landscapes or desires and to smooth over meltdowns, anxieties, overturned rehearsal schedules. Here we are thinking about all the questions not answered because of this embodied feeling that now is not the right moment. Thinking not only about the silent work but about invisible work as well. *And here we are.*

LABOR OF LOVE

So let us dive a bit further into this trope of midwifing as dramaturgy, the notion of invisible labor characterized by a condition of servitude and the connotation of feminization – and therefore, its close link to the disregarded work of reproduction – that easily comes along with providing nurturing service and caring support. In her book *They Call It Love: The Politics of Emotional Life*, Alva Gotby describes how emotional labor is often less visible when done well:

“Emotional labour is difficult to think about since the better it is done, the more it appears as non-work, both for the labourer and for the recipient of emotional care. All labour may involve effort on the side of the labourer, yet such exertion might appear as merely a natural expression of the labouring subject. In emotional labour processes in particular, the result of the work is often invisible as a product and comes to appear as an aspect of the personality of the worker. As Sophie Lewis argues, in these forms of labour, ‘a feminized person’s body is typically being further feminized: **it is working very, very hard at having the appearance of not working at all**.’”³³

[33]

Alva Gotby,
They Call It Love: The Politics of Emotional Life
(London: Verso, 2023), Apple Books, 25.

In other words: *She is working very hard, but rarely appears in the picture...*

[34]

Lara Khaldi,
“Ramallah, September to December 2018,” in *Why Call It Labor? On Motherhood and Art Work*, ed. Mai Abu ElDahab (Brussels-Berlin: Mophradat-Archive Books, 2020), 16, 22.

“I’m missing from all the pictures of him [her son]! Sometimes some of my body parts are in the picture, a nipple here, an arm there... (...) Even to take pictures of him, we need to prop the baby up, carry him, support him, and every effort is made to hide the hands. While taking a photo, I make an effort to delete myself.”³⁴ – that’s Lara Khaldi, a newly minted mom back then and the author of one of the texts published in a collective book, *Why Call It Labour? On Motherhood and Art Work*.

What Khaldi actually describes in this passage is the experience of fragmentary visibility and recognition. She claims the demand for her presence in the child’s everyday life and erasure from the official version of events. Fragments of her body, if in the picture, are completely incidental and related to the labor they perform. The mother’s hands are for support, the nipples – to feed, the mouth – to sing lullabies and to soothe. Because that is their role in this relationship. Because in this relationship, they are not constituted themselves – let alone outside of it. Hence, the *whole* mother is not appearing in the picture – some parts of the *mothering body of labor* are.

But why call it labor – it is love, right? Because what you get in return when prioritizing your emotional labor above your own individual desires and needs, is endless love – and that’s something you cannot pay for, right? However, exactly here, at this intersection of emotions, power, and politics, this gendered division of emotional labor is being used to maintain power imbalances in both personal relationships and larger social structures, devaluing emotional and feminized work in general.



This gendered division of emotional labor serves not just as a gateway to exploitation, but it has always formed a crucial part of the political and economic realm of Western modernity, as it is necessary for the reproduction of labor power: it keeps the system up and running. It is taken for granted while remaining invisible in the private sphere of our homes. Both capital and labor depend on the sphere

[35]

Silvia Federici,
*Revolution at Point
Zero: Housework,
Reproduction, and
Feminist Struggle*
(Oakland, CA: PM
Press, 2012), 15.

of reproduction: the family and home as a private resource that can be drawn from to maintain and strengthen the outside world of representation and individual self-fulfillment. “They say it is love, we say it is unwaged work,”³⁵ the Marxist feminist writer and activist Silvia Federici wrote in her 1975 pamphlet *Wages Against Housework*. But this work is not just a gift of love, as it is often romanticized, but is instead a form of unwaged work that is essential to the functioning of our system.

The gender-hierarchical division between public and private is reflected in welfare state social policy, whose responsibilities often end where the private sphere of caring reproduction begins. Thus the sphere of emotional and care labor in general finds itself in a paradoxical situation – highly idealized by the neo-capitalist system, yet lacking in any social-economical value. At the same time, it is remarkable that the very services that involve emotional labor such as elderly and child care, therapy, sex work and customer service are mostly performed by highly underpaid women. Moving from the domestic sphere to the sphere of paid work, emotional labor becomes a commodity – but still less valued and less paid. But again: it is crucial for maintaining the system.

That’s the picture: she performs the household chores so well that they have blended into the housing landscape. Her work as well. The work is *somehow* being done, yet no one knows when, how and by whom. And only loads of  love  floating in the air. Isn’t it a bit like with dramaturgs dealing with dramaturgy?

Let’s detach from this previously invoked metaphor of a midwife allegedly not being able to be creative herself, but only serving creation – and let’s continue to imagine how this dramaturgical practice could be addressed otherwise...

MOTHERING AS A PRACTICE

...Could we imagine *mothering* in a way that challenges us to rethink common assumptions about motherhood and recognize the potential for agency and power to shape their and our own experiences and challenge dominant (gender) norms and the expectations that come with it? To distract it from

the allegedly private sphere and move it further into a public aka communal space? Could we think of mothering as a verb, as an action, as an empowering tool, as a social act of giving birth to any unknown creature, whose desires and needs should be respected and satisfied, but neither in a subduing nor manipulating way, as my mother would add?

American author Angela Garbes, a mother and a daughter of professional caregivers, who in her writings focuses on the care work field writes in her narrative manifesto *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change*:

[36]

Angela Garbes, *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change* (New York: Harper Wave-HarperCollins Publishers, 2022), 9. In this citation the author quotes Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams' book *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Line*.

"Rather than viewing care work as characteristic of the noun 'motherhood', I now see it as the **action of mothering**, which includes anyone who is engaged in '**the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming and supporting life**.'"³⁶

Instead of sticking to traditional assumptions – and still dominant experiences – about motherhood as a private and individual decision as well as responsibility, with mothers as proverbial angels, primarily responsible for the care and nurturing of their *own* children and elderly, at the expense of their *own* desires, needs, careers and personal fulfillment, highly invisible and undervalued yet overvalued by idealization, mothering as a social practice challenges this understanding by emphasizing its social and political dimensions. It recognizes and proclaims that caregiving is, as Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes, "a technology of transformation."³⁷

[37]

Eds. A. P. Gumbs, Ch. Martens and M. Williams, *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Line* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 23.

"Mothering is a queer practice of transforming the world through our desire for each other and another way to be."³⁸ Whereas, according to the poet Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, published already in 1976, the word "motherhood" refers to a patriarchal institution, the idea of "mothering" hints towards a potentially liberatory, collaborative social force – an antidote to neo-capitalism and its hyper-individualism.

[38]

Eds. A. P. Gumbs, Ch. Martens and M. Williams, *Revolutionary Mothering*, 116.

Reframing mothering as a social practice may allow us to recognize our need for a communal space where everyone can and is allowed to take care of everyone else, beyond the exclusively sealed oedipal family structure with its understanding of affection and love as property. A family where everyone could be a mother to everyone else – the exact

conditions always negotiable: “The comradeliest mother-ers already seek to deprivatize care,”³⁹ Sophie Lewis writes in her book *Abolish the Family*. And let’s hold on for a moment, take a deep breath and enjoy this magical pairing of words:

...comradesses and mother-ers...

Sophie Lewis is a feminist writer and theorist who argues for the abolition of family as most of us were brought up to know it. In her book *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*, she calls for the creation of new forms of social organization that would enable the production and care of children to be collectively organized rather than individually. Maybe similar to the before mentioned Alva Gotby, she locates the main issue in the understanding of love and affection as private property and commodity. In the context of the small world of a nuclear – and biological – family that would mean considering your child, partner, goldfish and car as something you own. This sense of ownership is neatly reinforced by legal frameworks such as inheritance, marriage, and of course by the tax system – and just to remember what this text is actually about let’s briefly add an analog example from the world of dance-dramaturgy: in the understanding of creating a work of art, a choreography as a singular genius endeavor of self-realization with great support and encouragement from our beloved funding system. According to Sophie Lewis, this system of ownership obviously creates a range of social problems, including domestic violence, child abuse, and emotional neglect (*I feel we can imagine enough comparisons to the world of art in relation to abuse and emotional neglect...*). It also perpetuates inequalities based on race, gender, and sexuality, as certain groups are systematically excluded from the benefits of family structures. When calling for the abolishing of the family she imagines new social structures that prioritize collective care and mutual support and that do not rely on the idea of ownership and property but on considering love, care and solidarity – yes finally the word solidarity comes in! – as a collective and shared responsibility: bringing each other into the world (in German original: “sich einander zur Welt bringen”) as the philosopher Eva von Redecker brings it to the point.⁴⁰

Could this imagination move us further and away from the binary division of production and reproduction devaluing one part in order to revalue the other one which got us into trouble in the first place?

AN ENCOURAGING GAZE

It's very much an intimate urge out of these lines to relate in a deeper and closer way, both to you and to my field of operation. André Lepecki wrote more than a decade ago that we are not ready for the dramaturg⁴¹. Being in here and now, instead, I feel that **we are ready for the dramaturg** as an active figure, as an indispensable agent of the choreographic process. But **we are even more ready to communicate experiences, worries, concerns, principles**. A series of principles that I envisage to be the basis for our mutual collaboration and co-presence. I strongly resonate with the sense in which Ana Dubljević equates the artistic and working dimensions, while as such she embraces a great part of my own assumptions as well. She writes that:

[41]

See: André Lepecki,
"We're Not Ready
For the Dramaturge:
Some notes for
dance dramaturgy."

[42]

Ana Dubljević,
*The Feminist
Pornscapes*, 95.

"Work ethics is equally important as artistic work development (they are considered two sides of the same coin) and it is based on practices of the politics of care, it supports shared responsibility, nurtures solidarity, advocates pleasure and need, as well as respecting healthy personal boundaries, opposes overworking, exploitation and self-exploitation."⁴²

I fully have faith that we could not separate the working and artistic universes. What I have come to the conclusion of, considering all of the above and remembering all of my experiences so far in my journey of projects, rehearsals, sharings, is that I get the deep sense that one universe informs and affects the other. When my effort is valued and acknowledged, I can also, as an intrinsic subject in your process, position myself more effectively in what I need to do. And when that is so, then from my side, I am there to be connected and to engage more meaningfully with your vision.

I feel this detour now allows me to finally get back to the original desire of this text: to reconsider and re-imagine the practice of (dance) dramaturgy in the context

of invisible labor and care, and lift it away from the darkness and out of the shadows of the 1990s. Instead, let's establish a practice that includes our bodies, doubts and desires, and longing.

It is true that I can often get stress and anxiety in the incessant chasing of projects and the fact that I have to prove in the imposed productivity of this mad economy that I am present, active, and accepted (*isn't it the same with you?*). I am well conscious that all the agents in the field in their singular way (regardless of the spatial and temporal context) operate within a regime of dysfunctions, inequalities, and institutional failures.

I have consciously opted for the sphere of my activity and I still want to move between concepts, artists, performers, studios, theaters, writings and collaborators. It's very tempting to have the pleasure of reflecting on your insights and elaborating on them together. And that is why I do share all my doubts and desires. I could stay with the trouble, but I would rather carry on imagining and advocating how some (or ideally all) aspects could be transformed through micro-actions and eventually through shifting the macro-politics. Are you here with me?

[43]

Ana Dubljević,
*The Feminist
Pornscapes*, 89-91.

Ana Dubljević coined in her aforementioned book the term “**tantric dramaturgy**”⁴³ that seems to be so very close to what I am actually longing for – or better to say: what I'm actually trying to reclaim – with our text. In this soft and dispersed feminist dramaturgical landscape, proposed by the dancer-dramaturg-choreographer three-in-one, the outcome – the performance itself – is only one of the things at stake. So it makes no sense to subjugate everything to it, especially at the expense of building a safe and brave space. The performance as an end-product may be like an orgasm, but what about the whole pleasure that can take place before? Why not use this opportunity for taking our time in being together, in friendship, in love, in mothering, in developing, discovering, being present with and for each other? *Tantric dramaturgy*, as we understand it after Dubljević, refers to the whole creative process on all the production levels and it requires at least a fair amount of respect, recognition, mutual appreciation, curiosity about each other, partnership, support, and trust. In trust we trust, as the saying

goes (*I just coined it a minute ago but let's make it iconic, please*). Dramaturgy is a practice and its broad horizon can hold many potentialities – desires, wantings, fears, vulnerabilities... Losing a path, finding a path, losing it again, and maybe choosing the small lane that was not visible before, but now is... Then wandering around. Then tensions, release, fragility, empowerment, and many others that you can add on your own here... To benefit from them all in this way or another I need to go with the flow. And to go with the flow I need to feel seen and secure. I need to appear in the photo together with all the collaborators. The abovementioned fusion of dramaturgical practice's possible steps works best when cushioned with recognition, trust, and friendship that can give an outstanding supporting structure. To you, to me, to us, and to the creative process itself.





Which



critical

practitioner

are



YOU?

TRANSINDIVIDUAL - SELF - TEST

Anka
Herbut

Hands up who hasn't had an academic crush... You know, that person whose texts you want to read for the rest of your life and you cite them in everything you write. Maybe you blushed at the very thought of their syntax. Maybe you suddenly became speechless when seeing a footnote relating to their newest article that you hadn't yet heard about... Maybe your heart beats faster when you read the program of the festival they curated... Maybe with flushed cheeks you analyzed how they deal with institutional structures and share knowledge production practices... Maybe you held your breath for a moment while mentioning them in your dear diary... You may even have thought for a moment: when I grow up, I want to be them.

In the following test we grant you some space for becoming who you adore or discovering new heroines and inspirational authors. All the content is based on factual knowledge, as well as fantasies and speculations, and was developed with caring and respectful intentions.

Ok, so now it's your turn! You can discover which of the acclaimed critical practitioners you are! Read the following questions and let your answers flow from the bottom of your sweet and nerdy heart... In order to get there you will be asked to use your imagination, speculate a little and project a wide horizon of critical practice before your very eyes. Let's get started...

1

♦ Imagine you are one of the Care Bears living in the Kingdom of Caring – maybe in Care-a-Lot Castle or somewhere in the Forest of Feelings... You are:

- ♦ a Tenderheart Bear
- ♦ b Love-a-Lot Bear
- ♦ c Share Bear
- ♦ d Funshine Bear
- ♦ e Wonderheart Bear
- ♦ f Cheer Bear

2

♦ Choose the words that best describe your superpowers...

- ♦ a Melancholic socialist
& tender feminist
- ♦ b Soft & sweet comradess
- ♦ c Togetherness magician
- ♦ d Caring partisan
- ♦ e Bountiful warrioress
- ♦ f Worldmaking sorceress

3

✦ Now you can choose a karaoke song and sing it like there's no tomorrow. You go for:

- ◆ *a* *What a Feeling* from a *Flashdance* movie.
It goes like this: *What a feeling...
Being's believing... I can have it all...
Now I'm dancing for my life...*
- ◆ *b* *Dancing Queen* by Abba ofc
- ◆ *c* I choose Boulez and I hum...
- ◆ *d* *Bandiera Rossa*. Do you know it?
You should know it: *Bandiera rossa
la trionferà... Evviva il comunismo
e la libertà...*
- ◆ *e* *God Save the Queen* by the Sex Pistols
- ◆ *f* *Borders* by M.I.A.

✦ Once upon a time there was another song: *I want it long, straight, curly, fuxxy... Snaggy, shaggy, ratty, mat-ty... Oily, greasy, fleecy... Shining, gleaming, streaming... Flaxen, waxen...* How do you want it? What is your favorite hairstyle?

- ◆ *a* Non-aligned curls
- ◆ *b* Classic bob touched by the wind
of change
- ◆ *c* Non-aligned curls
- ◆ *d* Anything smooth and practical
- ◆ *e* Non-aligned curls
- ◆ *f* Open to improvisation, free flow,
shapeshifting

4

♦ So now you are in a liminal space of your interests. This in-betweenness extends between two extremities. Let's say somewhere...

- ♦ a ...between the bodies of the proletariat and the bodies of the precariat.
- ♦ b ...between utopianism and (in)dependence.
- ♦ c ...between collectivity and collaboration.
- ♦ d ...between precarization and participation.
- ♦ e ...between self-organisation and state-negotiation.
- ♦ f ...between biopolitics and radical self-empowerment.

♦ And now imagine that you can study any field – something totally new or from anew. No matter what you choose, it will bring you joy, fulfillment, a decent wage and other unimaginable benefits. You go for:

- ♦ a Social dramaturgy, Film Studies, Critical Theory, Gender Studies, Landscape Architecture... Can I choose all of them?
- ♦ b Ballet school and International Relations. As one major.
- ♦ c I guess I would study Cage, Fluxus, Zorn and Stockhausen. Again for the first time.
- ♦ d Kunst.
- ♦ e Art history and Festival Studies (a field yet to come!).
- ♦ f Humanitarian law.

7

♦ Now it should already be easier to imagine that you are totally into dance theory, yet you like doing other things concurrently. What are you doing while theorizing?

- ♦ a I'm walking the theory.
- ♦ b Constantly solidifying collective forces in the independent scene.
- ♦ c Choreographing problems.
- ♦ d Applying theater studies.
- ♦ e Challenging the idea of institutions.
- ♦ f Dissecting slow violence.

♦ They say that the daily routine or weekly routine may organize our lives better. Just think how organized your life could be! You only need to find your routine. You search and you find...

- ♦ a ...going to a movie theater to see some slow cinema and relax. Once per week.
- ♦ b ...getting calls from the Ministry of Culture. Regularly.
- ♦ c ...doing the route Oslo-Brussels-Oslo. On the map it looks a bit like a boomerang.
- ♦ d ...gardening. As frequently as possible.
- ♦ e ...calling the Ministry of Culture once per week. Not always reaching them, but still.
- ♦ f ...cooking a delicious meal for others.

8

♦ Imagine being lazy. Imagine a right place, right time, close your eyes and here you are...

- ♦ ^a And here I am looking at the bucolic landscape while being a part of it at the same time...
- ♦ ^b I take a locomotiva and go to the deepest, oldest Ohrid Lake – staring at the neverending horizon.
- ♦ ^c And here I am at some semi-utopian island where people praise collective individuation...
- ♦ ^d I'm hanging in the Gardens of Babylon.
- ♦ ^e Everywhere and nowhere at the same time. I'm a Nomad.
- ♦ ^f Maybe Tanger or Dakar? Beirut?

♦ There's this proverb that you often say...

- ♦ ^a When stuck, try to move your collective body.
- ♦ ^b Zoom no more! (It is always better to walk the dog!)
- ♦ ^c How open are you open?
- ♦ ^d The artist is at work or dies trying.
- ♦ ^e Occupy will never die. Evict us – we multiply.
- ♦ ^f Complicating is (better) understanding.

You can now check which answers you have the most and discover who you are as a result. If you have the most **a** answers, you are **Ana Vujanović ♥**; if you answered **b** to most of the questions, you are **Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski ♥**. If you answered **c** – you are **Bojana Cvejić ♥**; **d** – it seems you are **Bojana Kunst ♥**. Yet if the most answers you provided were **e** you are **Marijana Cvetković ♥**. If you mostly gave the **f** answer, then you are **Sandra Noeth ♥**. Note that if you have the same number of answers from two and more categories, you are all these critical practitioners at once. Lucky you!

Now... when you already know... you can dive with pleasure into the rich space of writings, actions and initiatives of *your* critical practitioner. Please feel encouraged to get closer to each and all of them through their works. You will still find contributions of some of them in this book – references to texts of the rest of the critical practitioners you may have already found in the footnotes to the texts we have written for this publication. Enjoy your journey!

“I could not chatter away
taking it all for granted
must be as slow, as new
tentative as the steps I
the path away from the
dark-branched, tall d
against the winter shi

ay as I used to do,
ed. My words now
w, as single, as
I took going down
e house, between the
ancers motionless
ning.”

ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE

ANKA,
THE DAUGHTER
OF CRAŻYNA,
GRANDDAUGHTER
OF GABRIELA
AND JANINA;
KASIA,
THE DAUGHTER
OF EWA,
GRANDDAUGHTER
OF TERESA
AND JÓZEFA

MENTORING:

ANA,

THE DAUGHTER

OF DUŠANKA,

GRANDDAUGHTER

OF DANICA

AND VIDA

Dear Sisters,

This text was born out of dialogue – between those writing it and the authors who inspired our conversations, as well as all those who resist daily oppression, transform reality and incite the common future for all. For the sake of the text's performativity, all of them, regardless of gender or



species, become our sisters. This includes you who read our text. Their struggles become ours, their dreams are the orientation points on our way to the future. We sense sisterhood as a form of radical solidarity and interspecies love that sustains all of us in a condition of dignified living, while at the same time it makes space for differences of opinions, misunderstandings and disparity of desires. The only condition for inclusion is making a choice and engaging with the shared struggle, the rest we leave up to negotiation and tuning in. The very process of becoming sisters we see as the beginning of transformation of the oppressive reality of the heteropatriarchy. Are you with us?

FULL OF GRACE

It was 2013, my first winter in Berlin. I was coming back from the university to where I lived back then, in Wedding. It was dark and

cold and then the Holy Mary appeared in the form of a vision. She was floating in a white cube hanging up shiny white laundry, surrounded by some blinding lights and springtime flowers. At first I felt guilty for not having been in church for a few years already. But then came the question – how the hell would she get pregnant if she was a virgin? I decided to look for an answer. And by that I mean



Devils Claws
(<https://www.instagram.com/devilsclaws/>)

– look for Mary. While I was waiting for her to come back (she was “taken” to heaven) I kept myself busy with some performance art making and tried to lure her into cosy spaces I had prepared for the *occasions*.

Her continuous absence brought my attention to the struggles of **my mother(s) and grandmothers**. I joined their fatigue in carrying groceries and pots, repeating the cooking procedures they taught me, in cleaning up when everyone ate and left, in creating, upholding, shapeshifting and home-making. I learnt that something there needs to be acknowledged, given back, repaired. I guess I became a feminist.

[1]

Ursula K. Le Guin,
*Always Coming
Home* (London:
Gollancz, 1986), 404.

“Let the arch of your feet be the mountains.
Let the paths of your fingertips be your maps
and the ways you go be the lines on your palms.
Let there be deep snow in your inbreathing
and your outbreath be the shining of ice.

(...) Walk carefully, well loved one,
walk mindfully, well loved one,
walk fearlessly, well loved one,
(...) be always coming home.”¹

Where in this landscape made of mountains and maps, homes and bodies, are our feminisms rooted today? At what length, at what geographical, bodily, political latitude, do our experiences, emotions, actions extend? How far or how close are they to yours? Where in this landscape is your feminism rooted today? At what length, at what latitude can we find you?

OTHER CARTOGRAPHIES

**What does this landscape conceal?
Can we feel it?**

Here are the questions for the bodyminds that we want to engage with on a daily basis – what if we begin to think of ourselves as always in context, and if, when thinking of ourselves, we subsequently think of the planet, and when

thinking of our own well-being and of our sorrows, we also commune in the desire for the liveability and autonomy of the humans and more-than-humans? Can we then relate to those who walked and crawled these paths before us and will come after us? Can we feel the world as something that we create together and individually at the same time and that wraps us in our threesome togetherness? Our sister in struggle, an Argentinian activist and writer, **Verónica Gago**, wrote in her book *Feminist International: How to Change Everything* about “body-territory”² as a category that permanently fuses the individual embodiment with the collective body, and the somatic perspective with the (*natural*) landscape, which we are a part of and in whose making-of we participate. The term itself and its spelling that merges the two originally separate categories, pushes aside the neo-liberal drive to own one’s body, proposing instead a more holistic vision: no body is a solitary island, but each is a part of a larger whole – each enters continuous and contingent relationships with the surroundings, with other bodies of other humans, and of more-than-human nature. All this brings about one crucial shift in the perception of our relationship with the world, which renders it **impossible to own a body-territory**. You can be one, when rejecting the temptation to exploit it and engaging with nurturing the principle of radical corporal interdependence. According to Verónica, we experience bodies as territories, and territories are experienced by us as bodies³. We defend the sovereignty of both, we ensure the impermeability of our borders when needed, and allow them to be open when we want them to or can gain something out of it; we align, we cuddle with some, move away from others. As bodies of this world we remain porous and cannot truly separate. Therefore, to analyze how politics seeps into our bodies, how tensions and conflicts strain our muscles, and how deeply the borders that mark the extremities of countries, coalitions, unions, and continents cross them, would be to engage with the intersection of geopolitics and psychosomatics.

[2]

Verónica Gago,
Feminist International: How to Change Everything, trans.
L. Mason-Deese
(London and New
York: Verso, 2020),
92-106.

[3]

Verónica Gago,
Feminist International, 83.

[4]

Merry Clayton, Mick
Jagger. “Gimme
Shelter.” *Let It Bleed*.
Decca ABKCO, 1969.

“Rape, murder, it’s just a shot away
It’s just a shot away”⁴

War has been in the air and on the ground for a very long time, since the moment we had committed the first murder we just had to keep going to build a morality around the ferocity of our actions. Wars have been waged against people, non-people, and planetary bodies, over-fabricated identities and territories. Politics-as-war had resulted in the continuous production of scarred bodies, in the intergenerational passages of fear, the invention of both historical “truths” and forgetfulness. However, **the repressed keep coming back, with feminisms continuously renewing and rejuvenating themselves** against the heteropatriarchal claims about their alleged ahistoricity and obsolescence. In their transversal perspectives and politics they provide a major counter-force to the procession of global necropolitics.⁵ When describing the contemporary state of capitalist *nation-markets* (especially when it comes to border territories) feminist philosopher **Valencia Sayak** uses the term “gore” which indicates the dramatic shift in the condition and futurability of bodies. On the one hand, the last centuries have seen significant advancements when it comes to recognition and international protection of the *persons-bodies*, at the same time the development of the *nation-market* has led to the commodification of the process of living and dying. According to Valencia, what is commonly referred to as *globalization* and often seen as a progressive project, has always been, in fact, a way of inciting unequal and undemocratic growth based on the excessive exploitation of earthly resources and the production of surplus populations. The latter, while mobilized to participation in global capitalism through consumption, are at the same time continuously deprived of rights, resources and dignity. This can produce only the acceleration of violence and hostility which causes a disappearance of societies as subjects capable of rebellion. All processes described above grant some of us access to the *whole-world* yet they demotivate us from feeling with others and for them.

[5]

Necropolitics was first proposed by philosopher Achille Mbembe to describe social and political power to distribute and administer death, deciding who is there to live and who must die. The term's interpretation by Valencia Sayak denotes the authority to disempower. It is a form of death management which emerges from the capitalist commodification of life itself.

“It’s important to emphasize that the marriage of economics, politics and globalisation popularizes the use of new technologies, under the guise of eliminating borders and shortening distances, even if only virtually. But the

[6]

Valencia Sayak,
Gore Capitalism,
trans. J. Pluecker
(South Pasadena and London:
Semiotext(e), 2018),
26-27.

goal of this marriage is the creation of an uncritical and hyperconsumerist social consciousness that rolls out the red carpet for overt systems of control and surveillance. (...) The contemporary idea of the social can be understood as a conglomeration of autonomous individuals who share a determined space and time and who participate actively or passively (and to varying degrees) in a culture of hyperconsumption.”⁶

[7]

Ordo Iuris is a fundamentalist, ultra-conservative Polish Catholic legal organization acting in an alleged pro-life spirit and is said to be tied to the Kremlin through financial interdependencies. A Polish author and activist Klementyna Suchanow traces their interdependencies and anti-choice politics with great scrutiny in her book *This Is War: Fundamentalists and the New Middle Ages* (Warszawa: Agora, 2020). Cf. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/this-is-war-the-story-behind-polands-bid-to-ban-abortion-today/> (accessed October 20, 2022).

We find it useful to think of our contemporary realities in terms of *gore* for two reasons: firstly, it situates us in a relation of solidarity and political responsibility beyond our most immediate communities. It does so by bringing our attention to the deprivations that must be administered in some parts of the globe to generate profits and power in its other parts. Secondly, the term describes well the lived reality of women and subalterns that are not only suffering from transgression of their bodily and mental territories, but that are terrorized into obedience with a threat of further violation and punishment. One example of how *gore* mentality shapes our public spaces and discourses could be the displays of severed fetuses that are put on billboards often driven around on the sides of infamous vans to “give a voice” to the unborn in the abortion debate. Such campaigns are a part of the international, reactionary and anti-women movement represented in Poland – the country where we were born – by organizations such as Ordo Iuris⁷. Our motherland is one of many (too many) places around the globe where ours and our sisters’ attempts to gain autonomy and agency are perceived as a threat, and where they are being continuously suppressed through backward and inhuman legislation. Regardless of the official pro-life narratives, what is actually exercised here is not a right to live but the power to deprive, to torture, to force subjects into submission through institutionalised violence, and this has been going on for a very long time.

BRIEF REPORT FROM THE CHURCHSTATE POLAND

Once upon a time, in a very far-off (Eastern European) country, there lived a merchant who had been so fortunate in all

*his undertakings that he was enormously rich.*⁸ Around the year 997 he, known as Mieszko the First, got baptized (one of his wives, Dobrawa, was pious and convincing) and that's how Poland happened for the first time... Then, one century Poland was a kingdom, the next it was gone from the maps. People were breaking chains and then putting them back on, more and more churches were built, and people had unwedded sex (often), the land owners were killing and enslaving their "landworkers," yet they all stayed truthful to the religion and many of them wanted to live and die as nothing else but Poles. And then after going through an indescribable amount of suffering, Poland happened again as a result of WWI and the Treaty of Versaille... Soon, women armed with black umbrellas were fighting for voting rights and got them, lesbians and trans people were co-building Polish feminism, and Poland existed for a bit, but then the Nazis came, and then the Communists. The latter did some good for women, then Pope JP2 descended onto Polish mountains and rivers, then onto the Vatican; then gifts from *Ameryka* were sent to Polish churches so aid could inspire equality and democracy, while all along so-called Father Jankowski, and many of his brothers, were sexually abusing children in the name of God, while bathing in gold and wine, enjoying the untaxed wealth of the Holy Church. The holy JP2 was looking at it, but didn't want to see it. And then at the moment of choosing a collective future, a group of men inspired by him decided that women should not have the right to abortion or proper support, or even respect...

Those wise men have been debating about abortion for 30 long years. Some of them still do so in their kingdom of toxic masculinity with the seal depicting the historic and continuous alliances between state, church (or other religious organizations), and capital. This rich and omnipresent network of monstrous patriarchal tentacles took our agency and bodily-autonomy captive. 1993 marked the utopia of democracy towards which our motherland has been moving ever since the fall of the People's Republic of Poland. Suddenly that year, our sisters felt an unexpected bitter undertaste on their tongues and in their guts – it was a wry prophecy. A mass petition to preserve the more liberal law which had been in power since 1956, signed by millions of

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Cinzia Arruzza, "Feminist Move-ments in a Pandem-ic World Towards a New Class Politics," in *Class and Redistribu-tion*, eds. F. Aksoy, M. Down, C. Oprea (L'Internationale Online, 2021), 26, https://d2tv32fq-po1xal.cloudfront.net/files/interna-tionaleonline_class-and-redistribution.pdf.pdf, (accessed April 14, 2023).

[10]

Przemysław Czaplński, "Większość wyobrażona," in *Języki rewolucji*, ed. P. Kosiewski (Warszawa: Fundacja Stefana Batorego, 2021), 13.

[11]

And not for the first time. And obviously not for the last. Only in 1861 after one of the bloodily sup-pressed demonstra-tions during the partition period of Polish history, women in Warsaw began wearing black dresses and black jewelry as an act of rebellion and mourning for free-dom – although they could have been imprisoned, the record holder, Emilia Sczaniecka, has been wearing black for 66 years!

Poles, was ignored by the government. This crushing dis-regard became foundational for the new system, which is operating to this day.

But when in the autumn of 2016 the government struck society with attempts to tighten the abortion law for the first time since 1993, The Black Protest erupted. And we all dressed in black. In fact here and there,⁹ one can read that this is how the feminist strike movement in Poland (as well as in Argentina!) was born. And over the past seven years, it has grown up, matured, and gained more agency. On October 22, 2020, when the unconstitutionally established (Un)Con-stitutional Tribunal radically exacerbated anti-abortion laws, again not listening to the people's needs, hundreds of thou-sands of women and our allies took to the streets constitut-ing the biggest mass uprising since the fall of communism. It was "a shortcut from angers going deep into the past"¹⁰ and to the future. Then we arrived in 2020...

"Wypierdalać!" ("get the fuck out!") – shout women, non-women, rainbow youth and non-youth. Grandmothers are shouting, cab drivers are blocking the roads, chaos and the police are churning in various places in the capital (and far beyond). We shout in the streets and dance the Polonaise stolen back from the court, which had stolen it from the peasants, which we then reclaimed, embodying and perform-ing different kinds of Polishness. Some of us cross-dressed, or with our own scenography functioning as blockades and carnivalesque fancy. Some in black (again) as Death Her-self, in despair and fury.¹¹ We run, we crowd, we walk and jump. We attack monuments with rainbow flags. We enter churches and stand in silence. We make heavily trafficked maps of church pedophilia. We throw eggs at the churches' gates and rejoice at the arrival of the Civilization (of Death) from the West. This Is the End. No children will ever be born in Poland again.

We remember this hot atmosphere and vivid conta-giousness very well. But we also remember the heavy sad-ness of the protests in 2021, after the first woman (Iza from Pszczyna, a small town in the south of Poland) died after not being provided abortion in a hospital. These protests were dark, mournful, and were more like a vigil driven by the ur-gency to be together, to give each other warmth and soothing

[144]

co-presence. When during the march on November 6, 2021 “The Sound of Silence” was played at the Castle Square in Warsaw, the crowd was crying and gaining acoustic power through the weeping togetherness. Leaving traces behind – the number to a legal abortion in Poland (+48 22 29 22 597) can still be found on the walls of frequented churches and historical buildings in the old town because conservation politics prevents it from being washed away, allowing it to be inscribed in herstory – and not only visually.

BECOMING A HORIZON

Amidst the 2020 protests and shortly after the signing of the Geneva Consensus Declaration¹² by 32 states (!!!) our sister **Paul B. Preciado** wrote a manifesto in which he stated that the authoritarian-patriarchal countries treat ours and our sisters’ bodies as lands to be conquered, occupied, and annexed. He called it “a declaration of war (...) against the free wombs of this planet.”¹³ And added that:

“It is a mistake (...) to imagine that the political notion of national territory, and the protection and extension of borders, concerns land alone. The sovereignty of the patriarchal and capitalist state is defined by its will to push the boundaries of the skin, infiltrate the interiority of the body, and designate certain organs as its ‘vital space’.”¹⁴

What Paul was critically pointing to stands at the opposite extreme of the concept of the *body-territory*, which Verónica described as something that cannot be owned, neither ruled nor subjected to oppression from any outside, because there is no outside. Yet the authoritarian-neoliberal governments continue to colonize women’s bodies and relegate them to the realm of subaltern without ever being held accountable for it.

One of the characteristics of the heteropatriarchal capitalist system that underpins *our* governments is its ability to adapt to changing currents, sabotaging any chance for actual change to happen. If we wish for such a change though, we should examine not only the macro-historical scales and structures of global politics, but primarily look

[12]

A document taking the anti-abortion stance in the guise of defending women’s rights, which has been introduced by the Trump-Pence administration and claims that each state has the right to make their own laws concerning abortion which can’t be suppressed by any external or international law.

[13]

Paul. B. Preciado, “The Hot War,” *e-flux journal*, no. 114 (December 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/114/367059/the-hot-war/> (accessed October 11, 2022).

[14]

Paul. B. Preciado, “The Hot War”.

into the details and nuances of our ordinary gestures and interactions, namely **how we speak, think and dream.**

[15]

Ursula K. Le Guin,
Always Coming Home, 404.

“May your soul be at home where there are no houses.”¹⁵

We can think of a landscape as a form of enclosure, something offered to us as a space of opportunities, our given reality, our sense of horizon, our standing. Historically, such a landscape has not changed much for many women over centuries. (Nation) State – and/or Church and/or heteropatriarchy – have inflicted violations and body-grabbing, lack of access to healthcare, education, fair judicial institutions, lack of economic, social and personal security are still the lived realities for too many of our sisters. What all of us need is life, all of it, and in such wholeness we are finally together. **How can we then radicalize our thinking about the landscapes of our experiences, works, bodies, and loves where we could live our lives fully?** What must be done and in what way?

[16]

Kae Tempest,
“More Pressure.”
The Line is a Curve.
American Recordings, 2022.

“More desire
Less deceit
Less complex
More complete
Less Push
More Flow
Please –
Let Me Let Go”¹⁶

Standing amongst the women’s historical and daily experiences of oppression we are confronted with some conflictual visions of the world that have been exercised throughout centuries. Here we are thinking about the prevailing imaginarium of the extractivist, repressive, and narcissistic gazing that sees bodies of peoples, of all living creatures, of the planet and the interplanetary space as resources to control and exploit. Such onlookers must presuppose a form of ownership and the possibility of removing themselves from the world they attempt to use up. The other vision has more sensibility to personhood rather than numbers or arbitrary borders marked on paper, it sees depth and

vastness of being, the intermingling of creatures, the world making, and it inspires to transgress the boundaries that separate us from becoming a feeling part of an intelligent earthly ecosystem (for we have always been a part). This is much better than the world of no alternative, no society, neoliberal nature, and exhausted landscape.

FROM NO SOCIETY TO NO-FOURTH-WALL

Our recently deceased sister-anthropologist **Barbara Ehrenreich** in one of her most famous works *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* analyzes what is often described as a dissolution of society and puts it in direct relation with the cultural loss of ability for self-transgression and collective ecstasy. The gradual disappearance of ritual dancing and festivities as a form of *communitas*¹⁷ has its roots in the civilisational patterns (at work since ancient times) founded in the rise of social hierarchies and subsequent development of militarism and war.¹⁸ Ability to join-in and become a stranger to oneself – by transgressing what we can identify as Western glorification of the individualized tamed self, became dangerous to such forms of control exactly because they dissolved ranks and social differences. Centuries later, according to Barbara, the militaristic mindset and the Western European *civilized* fetishes would bring about new cultural inventions characterized by a fundamental shift in how we practice e.g. dancing – new forms of virtuous spectacles such as ballet would be developed as something to be looked at but not done, especially not in the community of equals. And even though ballet seems rather *passé* today, many of the contemporary forms of performing arts still rely on rigidly divided spaces of watching and doing, and on the removal of the moving body from the realm of sociality, which seem to lack potency in generating transgressions that once used to be essential to the act of moving (together).

If we want to exercise such transgressions hoping that one day those rehearsals will lead us into future-together, we might turn in many directions to cultivate practices which dance scholar **André Lepecki** described as:

[17]

When using the term *communitas*, Barbara refers to the work of the anthropologist Victor Turner who has seen it as “the spontaneous love and solidarity that can arise within a community of equals.” See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (NYC: New York Books, 2006), 27.

[18]

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 91.

André Lepecki,
 "Choreopolice and
 Choreopolitics: or,
 the task of the dancer," *Communauté
 des Chercheurs sur
 la Communauté*,
[https://communaut-
 edeschercheurssur-
 lacommunauté.
 wordpress.com/
 choreopolice-and-
 choreopolitics-
 by-andre-lepecki/](https://communaut-

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 wordpress.com/

 choreopolice-and-

 choreopolitics-

 by-andre-lepecki/)
 (accessed April 14,
 2023).

"The choreopolitical as the formation of collective plans emerging at the edges between open creativity, daring initiative, and a persistent – even stubborn – iteration of the desire to live away from policed conformity."¹⁹

New ways of being together can be given a try, through dance performance in particular and performative arts in general, before they are intercepted and woven into the socio-political tissues. Of course, it doesn't mean that a linear causality is at work here, and the civic performance follows politely the artistic one. Rather both realms inform and affect one another, interconnecting, contagion-ing, overlapping, and intermingling. The performative arts set bodies in motion (be it locomotion or stillness), starting from gathering them in space, and giving them the opportunity to establish new relations with the world and themselves. Articulating and/or contesting what's dictated by hegemonic powers and discourses, they propose the world anew, building concrete dramaturgical setups and rapport with audiences, subjects and objects, bodies, institutions, and contexts, they carry an intrinsic power to produce (social) change. The performing arts can dare to develop unprecedented scores for commoning and mobilizing thoughts, affects, wantings. The collective ones in particular, trying to contest the decorum of the neoliberal discourses and slippery meanders of individualism. In order to achieve that, the choreographing subjects, performance artists and facilitators must learn about the limitations of their own proposals and the roles they play in the circulation of capital, so they can set their artistic propositions in an honest dialogue with audiences that goes beyond mere appreciation and pleasant self-reproduction. As we see the proliferation of more horizontal ways of staging performances, and their increased presence within gallery and museum spaces, we must be aware of the historical provenance of those spaces that have served mostly as protective zones of cultural imperialisms and "good taste." When we enter them, we often consent by default to operating within power structures, forms of gazing, bodily conditioning and moving that are dictated by the Western paradigm of art's production and function. If our conformity is manifested in the ways of moving (along) within the systems of

multifaceted and omnipresent surveillance, to move politically could mean making visible the preordained flows of movement and the spheres of circulation, bending, twisting, redirecting, opposing and recomposing them. Being where we “should not” be, doing what we were told not to, we resist, and we testify that we are alive and won’t be silenced.

[20]

A definition of relief given by Stina Nyberg in her article shaped as a subjective dictionary in which she unpacks the notion of live gathering, its terms and practices. See: Stina Nyberg, “A live gathering dictionary,” in *A Live Gathering: Performance and Politics in Contemporary Europe*, ed. A. Vujanović (Berlin: b-books, 2019), 83.

“A live gathering is a space for relief from being individual.”²⁰

If art performances can function as rehearsal spaces for testing strategies of socio-political recovery and ways of being together, then what kind of structures and perspectives would allow us to move beyond the already tired, and still tiring, models of reality built on confrontation – even if not antagonistic, then agonistic at least (as Chantal Mouffe understands it). Can the dramaturgical dissolution of tension and dissipation of stimuli relax our bodies? Are compositional decentralization, dilution, and stretching of the stage actions’ time, capable of comforting our nervous systems? Those systems, including our sensory apparatus, guide us through the world that we feel as a part of ourselves. We are able to tune in, to recognise changes of tension and volumes, we continuously respond to our surroundings on our way to becoming autonomous agents. Such a disposition of bodily systems is well researched and being used in various forms of therapies, dancing and protesting – by joining in, we seek relief, a sense of rootedness in reality, and the joy that comes from experiences of collectivity. Without being anchored in a community, without a sense of belonging and agency, we can only turn to technocratic dystopias of self-sufficient monadic subjects, removed from the landscape, who don’t need anyone but also whom nobody needs.

Such an alienation is well exemplified in a documentary movie *A.K.A. Serial Killer* (1969) – one of the iconic examples of the *landscape cinema* wave – through the figure of the 19-year-old boy Norio Nagayama, who had killed four people in four Japanese cities. However, the main protagonist of the movie is not Norio, but the city painted as a battlefield of various socio-political and economic forces, which condition the alienation of its inhabitants. Masao Adachi’s camera – and, by extension our gaze, too – follows

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Ana Vujanović, "Landscape Dramaturgy: Space After Perspective," in *Thinking Alongside*, ed. I.M. Fiksdal (Oslo: The Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2018). Cf. https://www.academia.edu/37812064/Landscape_dramaturgy_Space_after_perspective (accessed October 12, 2022); Ana Vujanović, "Zusammen mäandern: Neue Tendenzen in der Landschaftsdramaturgie", in *Postdramaturgien*, eds. S. Umahum, J. Deck (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2019). For the English version of the text see Ana Vujanović, "Meandering Together: New Problems in Landscape Dramaturgy", https://www.academia.edu/34879796/Meandering_together_New_problems_in_landscape_dramaturgy_2017 (accessed October 12, 2022).

[22]

Ewa Majewska, "Feminism will not be televised.", *e-flux journal*, no. 92, June 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/206022/feminism-will-not-be-televised/> (accessed October 12, 2022).

what Norio was looking at: man-made, entrapping, and crude urban landscapes, a right to which is not for everyone. Even though they can become spaces of emancipation (through protests f.ex.), they can also marginalize and exclude. Our perspective meets Norio's perspective here – the trajectory of our gaze runs along the same line and hovers over the same images. When sister-researcher **Ana Vujanović** established the concept of "landscape dramaturgy" in her texts,²¹ one of the strategies she detailed was "sharing the view." This is a particularly interesting strategy as, according to Ana, it is basically absent in the performing arts. But in Masao Adachi's case, it stands for a fundamental principle of creation of the cinematic image, which in turn allows us to temporarily assume the perspective of its protagonist. The concept, or rather theoretical intuition of *landscape dramaturgy*, is a fascinating metaphor that opens a space for exploring together the politics of looking, models of being together, and potential alternatives to the relational status quo, which are at work in the performing arts. By analyzing such techniques as dispersion, horizontality, sharing common experience, slowing down, wandering, or spending time together beyond the division into *looking at* and *being-looked-at*, Ana attempts to capture the phenomenon of performances that in recent years have offered a different, more democratic kind of contact and communication with the audiences.

***I DON'T WANT TO BE INCLUDED. I WANT TO BELONG*²²**

The performances and strategies described by Ana should be seen as rooted in a particular socio-political landscape, for they emerged in the aftermath of the multidimensional economic crisis and in response to increasing poverty and unemployment, the collapse of the banking system and general mistrust of the governments, which all shook the neoliberal self-esteem. Ever since 2007, the financial elites had been blamed for such a bleak state of global affairs, which in 2011 led to a few-weeks-long occupation of the Zuccotti Park situated in the neighborhood of the financial district of Lower Manhattan, NYC. The main demands posed by the **Occupancy Movement** were the improvement of the living conditions and separation of politics from business. Occupy was

a turning point in the latest history of social movements, activism and protest forms, and it, once and for all, changed our understanding of the necessity of intersectional solidarity and civil agency. The Occupy Movement used a peaceful protest strategy known as *acampadas* which relies on the collective, often durational occupation of the public space (and as a consequence – the development of new social choreographies) which quickly spread all over the globe – soon there were parks, streets and squares occupied across 951 cities in 82 countries. A year before, protests had been organized in Greece when the aftershocks of the Great Recession led to a major economic crisis and subsequent general strike which mobilized one third of the Greek population. All-night mass protests started to erupt in Tunisia and Egypt, and then, amongst many, in Algeria, Jordan and Yemen and led to the vital expression of discontent caused by the worsening of living conditions and political repressions. Those events which took place between 2010 and 2012 were later described as the Arab Spring or *karama* (*dignity*). Around the same time, Spain saw mass protests of the *Indignados* (*The Indignant*) which responded to the austerity politics and mass evictions. Many bodyminds and voices came together to resist the inequalities and exclusion while building intersectional alliances. Contrary to the speculation by Gayatri Spivak,²³ the *subaltern* could speak. One of the slogans of Occupy was “We are the 99%,” which articulated not only the sheer opposition to the governmental, corporate and financial sector (the missing 1%), but also expressed the transversality by blending various class, racial and political interests.

[23]

Cf. Gayatri
Chaquavorty
Spivak, *A Critique
of Postcolonial
Reason: Toward
a History of the
Vanishing Present*
(Harvard: Harvard
University Press,
1999).

Occupy was therefore an open, amorphous and decentralized movement, which, by taking over public space, attempted to generate a new democratic platform that could function outside of representation, and yet it presented an alternative vision of society based on inclusion, horizontality, teamwork and rotational decision-making assemblies. Furthermore, it served as an example of what our sister-researcher Ewa Majewska described, when writing in the following years about the women’s movement, as expansion of the meaning of the *common*. She pointed to the shift from describing what is collectively shared to

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Ewa Majewska,
"Feminism will not be
televised".

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The term was coined
by Carl Boggs and
has been used
among others by
David Graeber, who
interpreted WTO
protests in Seattle
in 1999 through its
lens, writing that
"the diversity was
a function of the
decentralized form
of organization, and
this organization
was the movement's
ideology," Cf. David
Graeber, *Fragments
of an Anarchist
Ideology* (Chicago:
Prickly Paradigm
Press, 2004), 84.

[26]

Ana Vujanović,
"Landscape Drama-
turgy: Space After
Perspective," 4.

[27]

Nira Yuval-Davis,
"What is 'transversal
politics'?", *Sound-
ings*, no. 12 (Summer,
1999): 157-167.

what is ordinary, mundane, and what can be done here and now.²⁴ During the occupation in Manhattan, field kitchens and co-cooking were organized, medical stations were facilitated by professional medic-volunteers, while feminists from Safer Spaces were organizing workshops about consent and racial inclusivity. Such forms of social mobilization and world-construction in relation to Occupy were described as a "prefigurative politics" by Heather McKee Hurtwitz.²⁵ It was driven by intersectional consciousness – abolition of economic inequalities was seen as inseparable from fighting against class, racial, gender and sexual discrimination. The movement was supposed to express the will of the 99% of the population with their needs and aspirations, *everyone was to be included in such a protest landscape, everyone was to be active as much as they could or wanted to be, everyone was to belong.*

Such a possibility of participation might be claimed by performance art practitioners and curators, yet it is often a delusion both in terms of the current potentiality of art within our late capitalist societies, as well as the alleged "freedom" that can be granted to the participants of the performative art event. Inclusion, diversity, participation are circulating as proclaimed politics and aesthetics while the limits imposed by the mechanism of art production and distribution remain unchallenged. According to Ana, "multiplying personal views"²⁶ assumes the simultaneity of occurrences and their appearance in multiple locations, lack of access to a total view of the events, as well as co-presence and mobility of the performers and audiences that in effect leads to continuous testing of perspectives and composing of the world anew. We interpret it through the two-stage protocol of the Bolonian feminists²⁷ consisting of "rooting" and "shifting" as operational concepts of transversal politics. This allows us to think of each participant of the performance (be it artistic or social) as conscious of their own situatedness while simultaneously able to shift perspective and acquire some understanding of the subaltern's positioning. As we were trying to search for examples of such performative occurrences, we found ourselves unable to say we ever fully experienced it outside of being a part of protests or social movements. We do, however, think of

artists such as **Sonia Khurana**²⁸ and her *Logic of birds* as a manifestation of what we speculate about. In that performance series Sonia engages with the seemingly banal act of lying down in public space, amongst the pigeons, at the heart of the urban landscape of bodies and happenings. She inserts a rupture into the flow of the ordinary and places her female-identifying body against the stream and at the center of it, inviting the passers-by to be surprised, moved, irritated, confused or sympathetic. Horizontality plays a central role in such interventions, famously enacted also by **William L. Pope**'s crawling projects, as such a flip produces a cognitive estrangement, a mixture of feelings, fears and longing that we may often turn away from. By being included in the landscape of such interventions, each move we make, matters – if we want it to. The *rooting* and *shifting* lens leads to activation of the participants and production of the multiple yet equal versions of the perceived reality. Within the landscape dramaturgy framework applied onto social choreographies, the methodological shift would imply the organization of a protest that works without a particular leader holding the power to determine the (ideological) direction of movement and its activities, and instead it would rely on a dispersed, horizontal mobilization, enabling the structure of protests to remain (ideologically) mobile. Being radical or progressive, both in political or artistic practice, must start from the emancipatory method (how we do?) and from there, call for emancipatory results (what we do?). Social media and access to knowledge, although not equally distributed, allow us to attempt forms of international connections that exceed the space of the arts and enter the realm of politics. Many of us are moved by the recent femicide of **Mahsa Amini** in Iran and even more by the fearless response of our Iranian sisters and their allies, who take off their head scarves and cut their hair in protest and inspire women all around the world to cut off a strand of their hair in a gesture of solidarity. Such gestures, however, should not let us settle with the abuse of women around the world while we learn from those women how to resist and dream.

“Radical agency is not about the sharing of boundaries. It is about deborderization. It is simply not true that unless I have

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Achille Mbembe, "Thoughts on the planetary," interview by Sindre Bangstad, Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen, *New Frame*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.newframe.com/thoughts-on-the-planetary-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/> (accessed October 9, 2022).

[30]

When in 2011 the mass protests in Egypt led to ousting of the autocratic president Hosni Mubarak, there was hope for an end of repression and epochal change. Two years later, however, the military coup brought to power Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who holds the presidency still today. Under his rule, Egypt has experienced an unprecedented attack on human rights with great numbers of political dissidents imprisoned and tortured, while the economic gap between rich and poor widens.

[31]

Micah White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2016), 27.

undergone the exact same experience as the other, I know nothing about his or her [or their] pain and should simply shut up. Insofar as to be human is to open oneself up to the possibility always already there of becoming (an)other, such a conception of self and identity is by definition antihuman. The political in our time must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common.”²⁹

The abovementioned social movements and practices brought a significant disruption to the preordained flows of global powers. In their aftermath, however, we could observe in many places the advance of brutality and repression, followed by the ascent to power of the new (yet old) political figures, with Donald Trump being perhaps the most dystopian example³⁰. We could call them, after our sister **Micah White**, “constructive failures” – they established a critical horizon that, even if for a brief moment, led us to believe that change is possible, yet it:

“[w]on’t happen through the old models of activism. Western democracies will not be swayed by public spectacles and mass media frenzy. Protests have become an accepted, and therefore ignored, by-product of politics-as-usual.”³¹

The impossibility of change is one of the facets of what Valencia Sayak describes as “spectralization,” which stands for a strategy of concealing the actual politics of governments, corporations and entire systems that take part in the construction of *gore capitalism*. Helplessness is being fabricated precisely by presenting the system of oppression as unstoppable, as beyond anyone’s control. **To take control, to claim responsibility is to testify that another world is possible.** Perhaps that is precisely why the historically developed international movements of women and their all-gendered sisters pose the greatest threat to heteropatriarchal and colonial rule – they are persistent not only in revealing the forces and structures of reproduction within our societies but they also refuse to move along. Furthermore, by claiming the right to autonomy, history and *whole life* they undermine the very foundation of the system which is based on the exploitation of women and subaltern, their unpaid

or underpaid work, as well as their (fabricated) historical and political absence. In this context, the practice of resistance often takes the form of daily routines that subvert the roles that were imposed on us. We dare to say that the very fact of being a woman is an act of dissent, for our gendered existence puts us under constant threat of heteropatriarchal violence and domination. We want to examine some discreet ways in which women build relations of solidarity and sisterhood. We are thinking here about the *kitchens of our mothers and grandmothers which existed between the spaces of nurture and conformity to assigned roles, often being stages for magic tricks and survival technologies, and spaces of articulation of oppression and finding a voice*. We first learnt about what it is to be a woman through listening to the women who gathered in the kitchen and discussed their daily struggles without men ever suspecting anything. There we learnt about *mothering as a relationality that is founded in gender, but, if practiced and embodied beyond such artificial frames, can change the world for real*. We understand mothering as a form of love and empowerment, as a deep connection to the sustaining of the living, as a way of listening to the world. And what's essential, we propose *mothering as a choice, a stance, a plan*.

We would like to read the *Kenyan Green Belt Movement* as an example of such planning and activism that responds to slow processes of environmental degradation, and as such it envisions and enacts resistance practice of a long-durée and truly feminist imagination. Initiated as a collective women's movement in 1977, the GBM started with the planting of seven trees and since then it has created over 6,000 tree nurseries, given employment to more than 100,000 women, and inspired many other reforestation projects around the world. The basic premises of the GBM oppose militaristic definitions of national security and development. *Wangari Maathai*, a cofounder of the movement, believed that bringing people out of poverty and securing economic growth is not possible in the face of environmental collapse. Therefore, the rejuvenation of the environment – of the forests and soil, are prerequisites of the improvement of the human condition. It must be stressed that the efforts to enable environmental recovery were challenged by Daniel



arap Moi's dictatorship which was the main beneficiary and driving force behind deforestation in Kenya. What seems especially noteworthy is the redefinition of security as conceived by the GBM and its direct binding to the lived realities of women and their communities in the rural areas, for whom the gradual soil erosion and the losing of the topsoil "should be considered analogous to losing territory to an invading enemy."³²

IF WE STOP, WE STOP THE WORLD

If the de-subjectivising and neutralizing of women and subaltern within public discourses is analogous to an attack on our body-territories, then can we read such gestures as acts of political violence?³³ How then, in this context, can we think of radical, efficient, and long-lasting change? Where

should the horizon of our actions be drawn? If from among choreopolitical practices as described by Lepecki, the performing arts provide space for the development of the feminist organization of the social, then maybe the feminist strike is the answer to the need of changing the *whole world*?

We understand strike not as an event but a complex and dispersed process constituted by the memories of past struggles and the anticipation of those that are yet to come. After Verónica and her analysis of the feminist strike in Argentina (2017), we claim the strike as an unfolding of the space where body-territories connect not only horizontally, but also vertically – bridging generations, genealogies and cultural contexts. Therefore, would the All-Poland Women's Strike and Black Monday, caused by attempts to tighten the abortion law, be possible at all if not for the Long Friday – the 1975 women's

[32]

Wangari Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience* (New York: Lantern Books, 2003), 38.

[33]

Cf. Verónica Gago, *Feminist International*, 29. She writes: "The feminist strike, (...) expresses the need to mourn those bodies that only come into sight as a series of cadavers surrounded by horror, always in anonymity, that recur in every femicide in Latin America, the rates of which have multiplied over the last decade."

[34]

Cf. Zhanna Popova, 2020,

"The invisible woman: Żyrardów strike of 1883," *Zarah*, <https://zarah-ceu.org/the-invisible-women-zyrardow-strike-of-1883/> (accessed October 9, 2022).

strike in Iceland, when women stopped both productive and reproductive work for a day? Or if the bobbin fillers from Żyrardów had not initiated the first ever strike on the Polish territory in 1883?³⁴ Would we be screaming "Wypierdalać!" ("get the fuck out!") on the streets of Polish cities and villages in 2020 if not for the quiet protests of women, who since 1993 (when the so called "abortion compromise" was reached by the Polish government and the Church) have been striking in silence in their homes, debating the issue in their kitchens, teaching their daughters about the value of autonomy and liberty of thought? If it was not for the pro-abortion demonstration of the MP **Henryka Bochniarz** who was silenced as she was addressing the parliament? Switching off the microphone of Henryka happened in the same parliament where in 2022 our sister **Justyna Wydrzyńska** from the **Abortion Dream Team** gave the abortion testimony. Both events should be considered part of the lineage of the historic struggles of Polish women and they let us believe that the future belongs (also) to us. But could we nurture such conviction at all if it was not for the general strike in Argentina, the recent legalization of abortion in Chile, or all previous waves of feminisms, suffrage, abolitionists and each, even the tiniest expression of the feminist consciousness? Micah, who was one of the initiators of Occupy Wall Street (*constructive failures!*) speculated that:

[35]

Micah White, *The End of Protest*, 186.

"The future of protest is fast and the future of protest is slow. The next generation of activists will occupy fast and slow temporalities simultaneously. The fast protest is embodied in the event. The slow protest is the multi-generational storyline of our movement."³⁵

The feminist strike is flooding the streets, houses, and hospitals, it penetrates church walls and lines at the stores, it decorates monuments and apartment windows with rainbow flags of various kinds. The feminist strike curses the misogynists, dances as it pleases, uses social media, cooks soup for those freezing at the borders and sends emails to the Border Patrol, it joins the solidarity protests and talks to neighbors. It is spreading across time and space, it takes place across histories, in many places at once, in millions of



ways, and in that it reveals the inadequacy of the ingrained divisions and categories. In 2017, when fighting against femicide, Argentinian women chanted “**Ni una menos!**” (“Not one [woman] less!”). Two years later during the Hong Kong Protests the “**Not one less!**” slogan could be heard, too. In Poland during the mass protests against the tightening of

the abortion law in the autumn of 2021 and in response to many women dying or suffering as a result of being denied abortion, women scream(ed) the similar phrase: “*Ani jednej więcej!*.” The landscape that stretches between the urgency of mobilization amongst women and subaltern, grassroots social choreographing, and building of transversal alliances, comprises more and more *body-territories*.

Verónica writes that the feminist strike is a “new form of practical cartography of the feminist politics,”³⁶ which has the power to suspend production understood as sustaining the status quo in social relations and processes of labor valorisation. As a form of dissent taken over from the workers movement (masculinized, class-based and paid!), the feminist strike undermines the historical class divisions and constructs new coalitions across divisions while making visible temporalities and scales of the invisible reproductive labor as well as spheres of the so-called pink economies, which are often marginalized within *serious* discourses. In Poland, all kinds of women joined the protests – housewives, students, teachers (including preschool teachers), the unemployed, artists, journalists, shopkeepers, mothers and childless people, and our ally sisters of various genders. The sisterly critical mass transformed the passive model of staring at reality into civil activism. The strike could not be limited to the stoppage of production, not coming to work or staying at home, as both homes and workplaces became sites of the strike. *Our struggle annulled the borders. The personal, once again, became public.*

WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

It was October 2021. Warsaw. I had a big, red lightning thunderbolt sewn onto the back of my jacket, one for the whole back – the symbol of the All-Poland Women’s Strike. In my pocket I had some stickers saying “No one will tell me what to give birth to.” Going to the kindergarten to pick up my son, I was always gluing them somewhere along the way. At the kindergarten I told **Ms. Marta**, who was our sister as well, that my child would not come the next day so the teacher-bodies could go on strike. But it turned out that despite their full solidarity with the cause, that body had

[36]

Verónica Gago,
Feminist International, 23.

←

The second day of protests after the publication of the bill about a near total abortion ban by the politicized (Un) Constitutional Court. Warsaw, Poland. 28.01.2021
© Rafal Milach / The Archive of Public Protests (APP) / <https://archiwumprotestow.pl/en/>.

[37]

Polish company
grouping corpora-
tions from the
energy sector.

to work, because other children would come to be looked after. Then I thought that if the teacher-bodies didn't come to work, other bodies and other mothers wouldn't go to work either, and if mothers went on strike at home, refusing to do reproductive labor, fathers would stop production and start doing the invisible, unpaid feminized care work. Businesses, stores, schools, pubs would also go on strike. And maybe the buses, and the subway too. And maybe even our sisters at Tauron³⁷ would go on strike, and there would be no electricity, and the Internet would disappear, and the phones would discharge, and the cash registers wouldn't open, and the elevators wouldn't run, the mailwomen wouldn't deliver any letters. Office buildings wouldn't light up, in banks the electric doors wouldn't open. The real end of the world. And the new beginning.

The text was written in collaboration between the "Dialog" magazine of contemporary dramaturgy and the Critical Practice (Made in Yu) Programme. The Polish version of this text was published in the 10/2022 issue of the "Dialog," which you can find in its printed version as well as here: <https://www.dialog-pismo.pl/w-numerach/inny-rodzaj-milosci>.



DANSE MACABRE

MAEVE JOHNSON

a muddy place, future anterior
gazing 01h 44m 05.13, -15° 56' 22.4
fourth cycle, waning crescent

dear comrades, dear granddaughters,

it feels strange to communicate with you across all these years. i guess i never expected things to turn out so well... i feel sorry for you back there in 2023 before the revolution. but also i feel younger, more angry, ready for what is to come. it's weird to talk about dancing in a way. so many headlines happened. so much politics. so much infrastructure and research and resource allocation and policy and work. is dancing work?

i feel i owe it to you to recount some of the events you will help shape, but also to tell you of their texture, to remind you how one can move through a radical transformation. when we talk of dancing, i think about the score we followed. first the educational programs, the discussions, the learning. the ecofeminist syllabus and the fanonist, the animal liberation and the environmentalist. right from the beginning we knew we couldn't imagine a new world without reshaping our dreams first. but our body did not only dream, it moved too.

so we moved mountains. or rather, the mountains moved us. we re-wilded nature. we banned outdoor cats, we placed restrictions on meat consumption, we returned lands to our indigenous folx. we stopped the trade of exotic animals. we abolished zoos and that in turn led us to abolish prisons. how strange, how tragic, that we freed other animals before we freed our own species. slowly we shifted the weight of our energy consumption like a fugue – tripping through the transition from fossil fuels to biofuels to blue and gray hydrogen to green hydrogen; we went from hydroelectric and terrestrial wind power to fields of solar panels and floating offshore turbines. you should have seen them bob and sway in the storms, like mermaids at a rave.

nature returned. the distinction between urban site and landscape became blurred: still apparent but hazy. we extended upwards, we planted gardens vertically through our streets and squares until the roofs turned green.

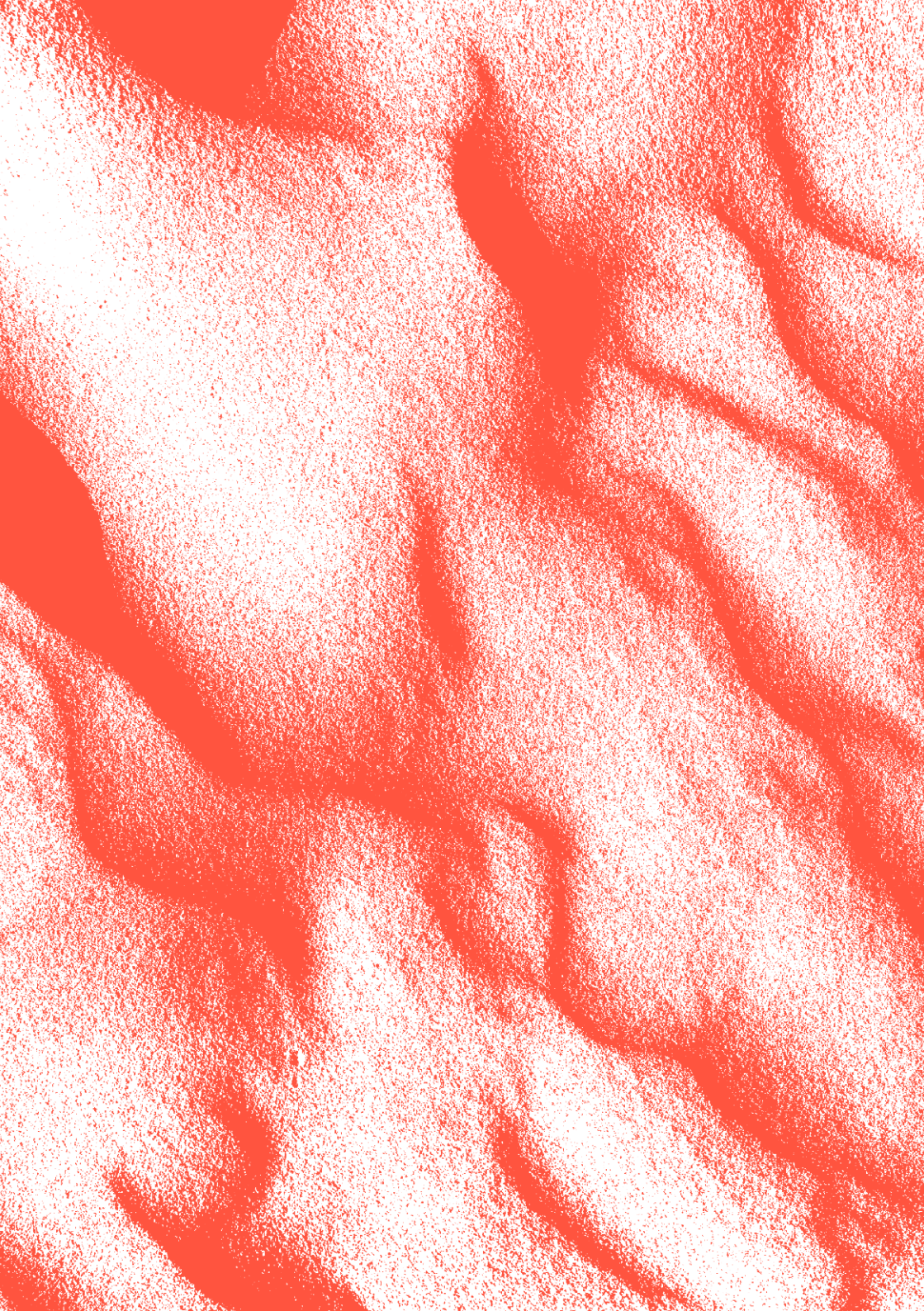
the belch and roar of traffic and petrol faded into a quieter hum of widespread electrification. commercial fishing was phased out. we started to use wood again to build our new skyscrapers. long-extinct animals were brought back from the dead. i'll never forget the first time i saw an auroch towering above the brush in the woods near our old family home. granddaughters, let me tell you – you will dance for joy when you see these things.

cars became outlawed. air travel was very rare. we learnt to be content with less. we worked less. we danced more. we ate according to what could grow locally. deserts receded and became green. we lightened the clouds to reflect the sun's energy back into space. we dreamed of other planets just as we finally learned to tend to our own. and we mourned. the danse macabre had claimed so many of us over so many years. so many times, granddaughters, we had lifted our fists in anger and hate. so many times greedy mouths devoured all they could while hungry bellies grumbled and groaned. we learnt to demilitarize. we learned to care. we learn to dance again. we learned to share weight and battle each other with quick feet, not quick tempers.

it feels strange to tell you all this granddaughters, when you will be the wise ones who can see far enough ahead to make the place a better land for all. it feels strange to tell you this grandmothers, when i look out over the growing lands and feel your heartbeat, long stopped, yet still hammering out the beat of revolution for all our dancing to come. it feels strange to tell you all this comrades, when you and i together struggled through this heavy space to embrace each other and dream a world worth dancing in.

with love,
your future-ancestor

p.s. this letter was written as part of a class project we had to do in school, researching our ancestors and the time before the revolution. we played the amazing video game, *half-earth* (<https://play.half.earth/>) based on the book *half-earth socialism* by drew pendergrass and troy vettese and then wrote a letter to you – our children-ancestors – in relation to our experience of playing it.



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systering

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NOMAD
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The *systering* book is both a response and a resistance to the troubled times we live and work in, as it is the result of a sisterly affiliation with each others' practices and stories. Coming from and working in diverse geopolitical zones we bring different experiences when it comes to historical contexts, working conditions, access to institutional support, as well as validation and recognition of the work we engage in. Most of the texts were written by more than one author and all grew thanks to being accompanied by others in the writing process in a variety of ways. As a recently founded collective of systers, we are well aware that a differentiation between personal and interpersonal socio-political experiences is not any longer applicable let alone helpful, and the complex contemporaneity calls for a multitude of voices to be interwoven and heard as a critical choir. Through interweaving our textual threads and stories, the book expresses our desire for a mode of caring comradeship where one thought nourishes and gives rise to the other, and as a consequence the idea of author and ownership can be softened and examined from a critical perspective.

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for
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dance*