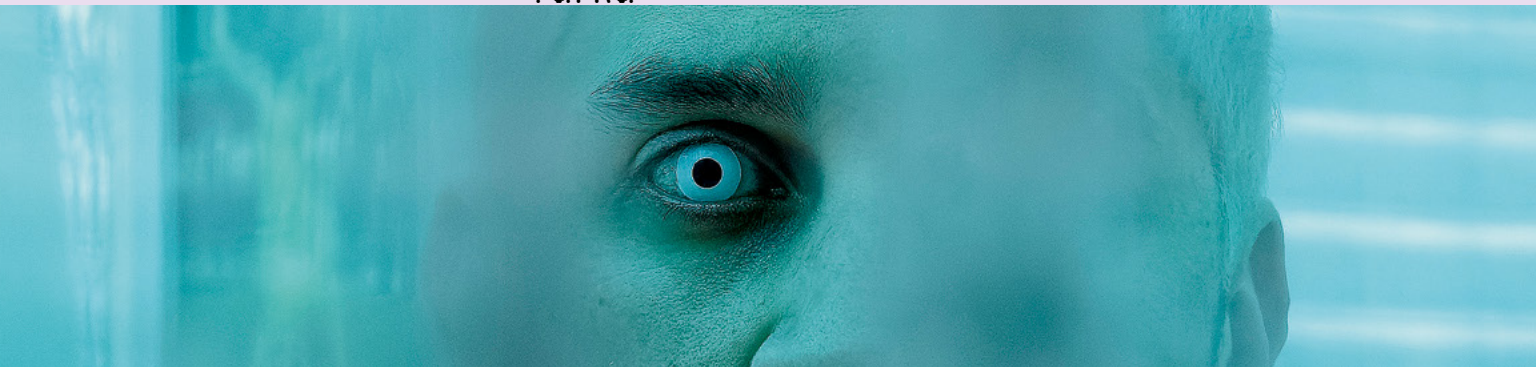




Brussels

RELIVING

Turku



Athens



TIME

Ljubljana

Minutes from a Time of Live Art

RELIVING TIME

TIME FOR LIVE ART
TIME FOR LIVE ART
TIME FOR LIVE ART
TIME FOR LIVE ART

RELIVING

TIME

Minutes from a Time of Live Art

This publication documents and elaborates on parts of the project “Time For Live Art” which took place across 2023 and 2024—thanks to the support of the European Union Creative Europe programme. It doesn’t offer the full picture: that can be found on the website dedicated to the project (timeforliveart.eu), or those websites of those contributing festivals/presenters, as well as in a podcast, *chrono/logos*, made by the sound artist thor colonna, available on Mixcloud and on the web channel *Radio Fractale*. What this publication does bring, however, is another perspective on the project.

First things first: What is the project all about? Our official description for “Time For Live Art” states: four small-scale live art festivals in Brussels, Turku, Athens, and Ljubljana join forces in a bid to underline the live art sector’s resilience amidst a contemporary world suffering from an imminent ecological disaster and the ongoing impact on our health due to the recent pandemic. The festival organisers believe that coming together at a live event has never been so critical and necessary, but our current societal conditions demand that we approach such live events differently. With this in mind, these four partners have been addressing the question of *time* in the creation, presentation, and dissemination of live artworks: the *time* allotted to relate the creation to a given context; the *time* to experience the artwork; the *time* to consider how to optimally present it; the *time* for the artist to travel, and the *time* needed to develop the audience’s memory. In doing so, they want to research, develop and implement innovative ecologies and a fresh economic framework for live art.

In this publication we are focussing on only three key elements of this multi-layered and all-embracing project.

The first key component is the “slow travelling project” *What Time Is It?* in which four artists travel at a leisurely pace (by train, bus, ship, with stops along the way...) from one of the countries associated

with the project to another. Availing of this travelling time, they drew inspiration for a performance that takes place shortly after their arrival in their destination city. Theano Metaxa travelled from Athens to Brussels; Mark Požlep journeyed from Gent to Turku; Dash Che from Helsinki to Athens; while Gaëtan Rusquet made the journey from Brussels to Ljubljana. Their performances were all inspired by and conceived thanks to their travels, at times they were made in collaboration with local residents. Here, we share with you their individual travelogues in words and images, using a design adapted to the singularity of each traveller. The artists' travels were not only symbolically and ecologically significant, they also produced a highly unusual artistic matter, quite different from what each of the participating artists would have otherwise done in their studios back home. This slow-paced journey transformed their approach to art—and perhaps to themselves as well.

The second component of this publication is the programme of the festivals where most of the project took place. These festivals offer an intensive programme of live performances, with a different curatorial angle in each city, but where similar concerns and issues were addressed. We were fortunate to be able to welcome as a visitor to the first festival in the timeline the writer, academic, critic and eminent specialist on Performance Art and Live Art, Jennie Klein, who came all the way from Ohio. We persuaded her to attend the following festivals as well: she subsequently wrote this suite of four essays that represents more than half of this publication. She looked at each festival through a specific lens. Trouble, in Brussels, with its embrace of *queering time* by the way it interrogated the very notion of time itself. New Performance Turku Biennale, where Klein saw how by *coming together* the Finnish festival could open a *Time of Politics*. At Athens' MIRfestival she took a closer look at how the relation that festival had with specific sites created *a space for tenderness*. Finally, for Infinite Present in Ljubljana, Klein focussed on how, amid trauma, duration, ritual, and care, live art can question

what it is to live. She could freely choose what to write about, a choice which enabled her to delve deeper into the discussion regarding certain works instead of trying to be exhaustive in scope—and end up being superficial in her analysis. We are truly grateful that Jennie Klein took the necessary time for this in-depth travel into the European Live Art scene.

The final component of this publication echoes a special moment which took place at each festival: the “Rest as Resistance” workshops. The curators of the four festivals had proposed to create a space for reflection, a “quality time moment” during their respective festivals, which soon was devoted to this burning question. The four texts which recall this experience are not necessarily linked to one of these workshops. Rather, they represent more the shared vision of one of the four protagonists on the entire process. When reading what the four curators had written, their order of appearance seemed obvious, as though they unfolded at a different phase in the thinking—starting with the theoretical basis (Christiana Galanopoulou) to the problematization (Mara Anjoli Vujić), then from the experience learning (Antoine Pickels) to the prospective vision (Leena Kela). These four memories are collected in a tiny “book within a book” which concludes this publication.

Taken together, these elements are but a partial take on the entire project. Undeniably, a highly subjective take, yet one embracing at least nine subjectivities. Or ten, for the shape of this publication as designed by Nicolas Rome certainly guides the way we look at the project from another subjectivity. Or eleven, given that you, as the reader, are now going to read it and interpret it in yet another way.

One last recommendation before reading this: take your time.

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DEADLINES

- Theano Metaxa

09.04.2023 > 17.04.2023 - ATHENS > BRUSSELS



At the rear entrance of the European Commission, Brussels,
17.04.2024 © Jacques André.

Feeling completely lost and desperate,
I find myself swimming through existential
dead ends and experiencing personal
and artistic blockages.
I am overwhelmed by several pressing
issues, including comparisons between
World War II concentration camps and
today's refugee camps, and I am exploring
possible actions.
I am looking for someone to accompany
me on this journey and help me process
and reflect on these concerns.



Wall in my living room

Artists at the First Cemetery of Athens

I'm looking for one person to accompany me on the trip.

A list of people who may be interested to join this trip:

~~Manos Hatzidakis~~ → he smokes a lot and this is very difficult for me

~~Melina Merkouri~~ → too busy

~~Chalepa's Sleeping girl~~ → Miss Afentaki doesn't like to be called Chalepa's sleeping girl anymore, however she just decided to study in the medical domain and return back to island of Kimolos.

Socrates, Plato, Aeschylus, Byron, my great-grandmother, Dionisios Solomos, poet Tasos Leivaditis and Eftichia Papagiannopoulou.

Sophia Vembo was a well-known singer and actress in Greece before the Second World War. During the war against the Italians and the Germans, she became very popular because she sang some wonderful songs that inspired the Greek people and humiliated the dictators of Germany and Italy.

She suggested that I go to Cape Sounion where thousands of Italian soldiers are still there.

Time doesn't exist in the cemetery, they'll be dead forever.

I'm going to the cemetery in search of light, to bring light from the dead because I've been unable to bring light from the living.



Philosopher Plato



At the First Cemetery



At the First Cemetery



At the First Cemetery

When you are running and speeding up, you are not feeling calm
I need to feel safe and of course with a skeleton next to me no one will harm me.
The issue of acceleration-competition concerns me very much internally.
To talk about time, I get stressed out.
I choose people, alive or dead who don't run like me.
Acceleration has sth to do with competition.

Oria shipwreck, 12.02.1944, Cape Sounion. The unknown *Titanic*. One of the biggest shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. In the documentary by George Iatrou, interviews with Italians who are still searching for their relatives. Soldiers who were on the shipwrecked *Oria*, were destined for Nazi concentration camps. There are the testimonies of survivors, such as that of artillery sergeant Giuseppe



Here is an authentic military food container.

Guarisco, who, on 27 October 1946, wrote a lucid account of the shipwreck in his own handwriting for the Ministry's Directorate-General:

After the ship struck the reef, I was thrown to the ground and when I was able to get up again a very strong wave pushed me into a small room in the bow of the ship, on the same level as the deck, the door of which closed. In that room the light was still on, and I saw that there were six other soldiers. After a while the light went out and the water began to enter more violently. We climbed into a sort of wardrobe to stay dry, from time to time I put my foot down to test the water level. We spent the night praying, in terror that everything would sink to the bottom of the sea [...]

One of his companions who drowned off Cape Sounion may have been called Paolo. He'll probably want to travel with me, since I'll be passing through Italy. We need an ID.



ID of Paolo



At home, before we start the trip

09.04.2024
Athens › Patra
Bus

09.04.2024
Patra › Bari
Boat

10.04.2024
 Port › Soldiers Cemetery, Bari
 Taxi



200 of Paolo's 4000 companions have been taken to the cemetery in Bari. Our first stop.

After the era of acceleration begun, the diseases of western society started coming
 My response and opposition to this acceleration is
 My proposal for the European Parliament, for a slowdown.
 Also, the perception of time in the preparation of my performance
 (My surroundings, society, the project, urge me to run faster)
 Seeking what I want, I get stressed
 Let me try to treat myself with kindness.

10.04
 Bari › Pompei
 Train

We will travel with Trenitalia, the same train company with which in Greece a few months ago, one hundred people were killed in a train collision. I get scared whenever I think about it.
 My partner has no fear of death because it's already happened to him.



I need a title for the project
 "Εκτοτε / since then"?
 "Slow Performance"?
 "Flesh and Bones"?
 "Deadlines"?

Questions to the people we meet:

What would you ask a loved one and someone close who is no longer alive?
 What do you think that person would tell you? What might that person advise you?

A mine would be an ideal choice of location for the performance.
 Or any place above ground that could have a mental connection to mass deaths, recalling memories from the underground. Also in places like these, there is a connection with the sea.
 Are there such places in Brussels?

There is a generalization that anything undesirable in a living organism is called an invader or a germ. We don't want any germs, let's say, and we apply the same idea to politics
 Anyone who is dissident, anyone who is an outcast, anyone who is a fugitive, anyone who has a different color or shape, they are society's enemy, they are germs.
 So that's how I understand it. We are trying to take this theory and although it comes

from the domain of medicine, suddenly it is politics.
 But I have the same question myself. How do we distinguish what is foreign from what is friendly to the body, because very often there is confusion.
 Even the body itself is confused. Some things that belong to it are seen as foreign and then you have other categories, for instance autoimmune diseases, and therefore the body is not an infallible machine.

I'm suffering from something that's very likely to be in that category, an autoimmune disease, and it has a strange and somewhat long name called ankylosing spondylitis. The rheumatologist said "you have to keep moving. With this disease, if you get a crisis, you are frozen."

I feel pain, but since I have a spine in front of me every day, I can understand this pain better.



Primo Levi is a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps.
 In this poem [*The Little Girl of Pompeii*], he compares the young girl who died in Pompeii with victims of the Holocaust.
 This is Paolo's favorite poem.

La Bambina di Pompei

*Since everyone's anguish is our own,
 We live ours over again, thin child,
 Clutching your mother convulsively
 As though, when the noon sky turned black,
 You wanted to re-enter her.
 To no avail, because the air, turned poison,
 Filtered to find you through the closed windows
 Of your quiet, thick-walled house,
 Once happy with your song, your timid laugh.
 Centuries have passed, the ash has petrified
 To imprison those delicate limbs forever.
 In this way you stay with us, a twisted plaster cast,
 Agony without end, terrible witness to how much
 Our proud seed matters to the gods.
 Nothing is left of your far-removed sister,
 The Dutch girl imprisoned by four walls
 Who wrote of her youth without tomorrows.
 Her silent ash was scattered by the wind,
 Her brief life shut in a crumpled notebook.
 Nothing remains of the Hiroshima schoolgirl,
 A shadow printed on a wall by the light of
 a thousand suns,
 Victim sacrificed on the altar of fear.
 Powerful of the earth, masters of new poisons,
 Sad secret guardians of final thunder,
 The torments heaven sends us are enough.
 Before your finger presses down, stop and consider*



Is this girl La Bambina di Pompei?



(Pompeii, in the big amphitheater for comedies and Greek Roman tragedies seating 5000 spectators, the more "important" you were, the closer you sat to the stage.)

Paolo wants to find this mosaic.
I have a present for him.
I'm planning to recite his favorite poem in the ancient amphitheater.



Reciting the poem (Brussels performance, 21.04.2023)

12.04.2024
Pompei › Roma
Train

Primo Levi said it perfectly:
One single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way; if we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live.



13.04.2024
Roma › Foligno
Train

European Coal and Steel Community, launched as an industry association for the benefit of coal and steel.
The history of the Mediterranean is written by the sovereign European Union.
The victims of wars, and those on the borders who are being murdered, have no voice.
Greece entered the European Union on 1 January 1981! That is the year I was born!

A philosopher once said, I think it was Agamben, that a state of exception is consolidated.
So a government says: as an exception we build concentration camps and isolate the germs-dissidents, and then make the exception permanent. Also that our language is full of commands and submissions and has a terrible effect on our bodies. That our language is not innocent at all and only poetry can save us because it manages to deconstruct language.¹

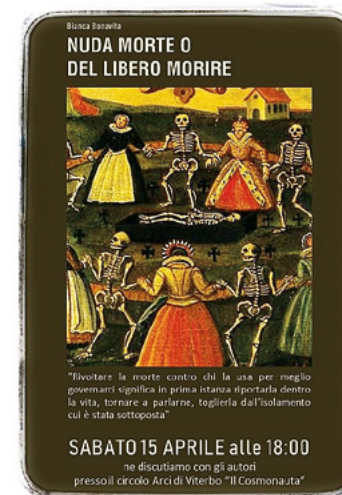
¹ Excerpt from the performance text.

Agamben on Biopolitics

To rethink the way that borders are defined.
EU immigration policies taking both the refugees crisis and the increased number of deaths in the Mediterranean, as an opportunity to regard concentration camps as an exception, as an emergency, that can only be addressed through the adoptions of exceptional measures.

Question to Agamben: What would he propose to the European Union? Would it be a poetic text?

Giorgio Agamben is going to this book launch tomorrow. It can't be a coincidence, such a cover! It's a very good sign that we will meet!



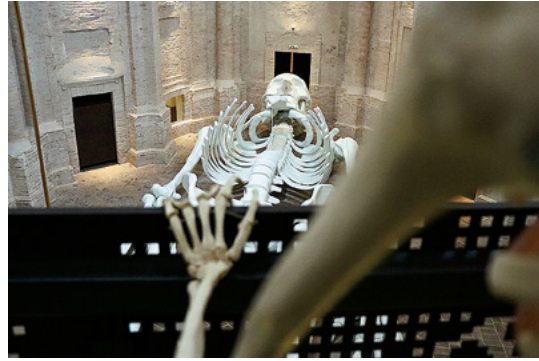
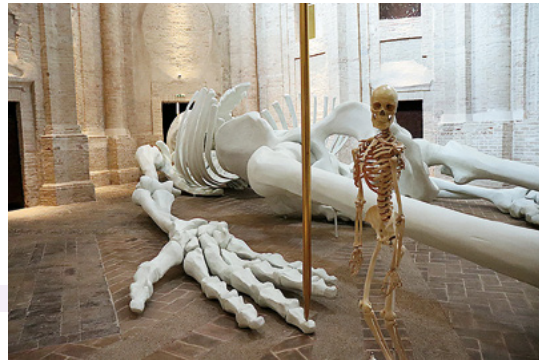
15.04.2024
Foligno › Milano Centrale
Train

What has happened so far on the trip seems like a reversal of the necropolitical narrative.
Those lives that are not worth experiencing, and are regarded merely as numbers, lots of numbers and statistics.
They are now taking their revenge.
Where the identification of a dead creature is a standard, scientific practice that deposits a person into oblivion. Here the journey to find identity becomes an adventure where information, historical facts, human relationships, real emotions, emerge.
Call it an organized prank. A farce about dehumanization, inhuman modernity and its organized domination.
If modern man is being led blindly from life to death, we are now attempting to reverse both its course and its content.
From death to life, filling the path with what modern civilization deprives us of.
If modern man is being led from life to death in a void, we may now reverse both its course and its content.
From death to life, filling the path with what modern civilization deprives us of.

15.04.2024
Milano › Bern
Train



— Mr. Einstein, what is time?
— The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.



Paolo comes across a Gino Dominicis' artwork called *Calamita Cosmica*, the overcoming of the catastrophe. In Italian calamita means magnet, whereas calamità means catastrophe

16.04.2024
Bern › Paris
Train

De Dominicis thought that we are the ancients, because, according to him, the ancient Mesopotamian Sumerian civilizations was younger than us. This work is a tribute to the great king Gilgamesh who during his lifetime sought immortality. Gilgamesh's epic journey is dedicated to the quest for immortality and this quest was one of the elements that always characterized Gino De Dominicis' artistic philosophy. The immortality he tries to achieve is not metaphorical but through the body. And this immortality through this work which stops time and through a magnet, the golden pole, which attracts cosmic forces from Heaven to Earth, therefore Heaven sprinkles his artwork with cosmic energy and at the same time makes it immortal.

17.04.2024
Paris › Bruxelles
Train



Arrival in Brussels, Antoine's warm welcome.



At the rear entrance of the European Commission building, Brussels, 17.04.2023.



Performance *Arrival*, Brussels-Schuman train station, 17.04.2023.

Paolo's letter to the European Parliament

The Mediterranean Sea, which we are trying so hard to give this name: The European Sea, with so many multinational corporations in its waters, digging, mining to give life to the minefield of our civilization, A sea that for centuries has been a massive cemetery of nameless and graveless people, we should acknowledge this sea as an immense monument to a civilization that rapidly produces violence and death. And let us declare it, a calm and quiet sea.



The European Union Parliament.





Trouble Festival: It's About Time!

April 17-23, 2023
Brussels, Belgium

Queering Time

Jennie Klein

Delay, we will see, is tremendously tricky as a conception, as is growth. Both more appropriately call us into notions of the horizontal—what spreads sideways—or sideways and backwards— more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time.

Kathryn Bond Stockton

The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century (Durham, Duke University Press, 2009), 4.

The most recent iteration of the Trouble Festival, curated by Antoine Pickels and hosted by Studio Thor, was, as suggested by its title, about time, or more accurately, different kinds of time, including historical time, stolen time, out-of-time, time loops, generational differences, durational time, and brief moments of time. The idea of time has always been and continues to be at the centre of discussions of live art, which is seen as an antidote to clock time, modern industry, and the work week.

Live art festivals literally take the audience and the artist out of time (although the events do follow the schedule that is published in advance) by asking them to suspect the obligations and duties of real life and spend time with art work that is premised on human presence. Durational performance, for example, in which time is simultaneously compressed and attenuated, requires a great deal of physical and psychic labour on the part of the performer and the audience as time is suspended while the artist engages in a Herculean task and the audience slows down to witness these actions.

Much of the time in festivals such as Trouble is about delay, which, as Bond Stockton suggests above, calls us into the notion of spreading sideways and backwards, rather than moving up and forward. Delay is time that moves the wrong way. Delay inhibits progress: reaching a destination, achieving developmental milestones, becoming an adult, entering the corporate world. Delay is a word that even today strikes fear in the heart of parents—what does it mean for the parent and child if the child is delayed? Can the child catch up? Will the child want to catch up? Delay, as Bond Stockton suggests, forces us to suspend meaning. To delay, to grow sideways and backwards, can be read as queer time.

The Trouble Festival included work that went sideways and backwards, work that pulled deep time into current clock time, work that existed in suspended time, and work that looped and compressed history. The Trouble Festival is not the first live art event to invoke time, but it is unique in the way in which the curatorial and scheduling decisions resulted in a festival in which time was so queer.

What does it mean when something is about time? What is time?



FIG. I



FIG. II

KADUKIOSK – Emilio López-Menchero

Trouble #12 opened with the artist Emilio López-Menchero pulling up the shutters on a kiosk on Place Saint-Josse. The kiosk more or less blended in with the surrounding cityscape, in spite of the large red Ks on the exterior that were complimented by López-Menchero's bright red coat and hat. Sited on the corner of the intersection opposite a zebra crossing (whose black and white stripes made a nice contrast with the red kiosk), the kiosk looked like it had been there forever. It was so convincing as a real kiosk that it was difficult to locate as a performance, in spite of the zebra crossing and the red accents. According to López-Menchero, the Kiosk had originally been intended for a man named Jean-Pierre that never used it. López-Menchero repurposed the kiosk for his performance *KADUKIOSK* (FIG. I-II), selling magazines, newspapers, periodicals and books that dated from the previous week to at least 60 years ago. The news was not new, and the yellowed appearance of the merchandise suggested that it was not of much value. What made this particular kiosk different was the realisation that the detritus of the past had been repurposed as art, with each item costing only €2. The material might originally have been free for the taking, but it still required quite a bit of labour on the part of López-Menchero, who provided customers, many of them unaware that this was a performance, with a good selection of news and gossip in different languages that were originally published in different countries and decades. The affable López-Menchero, who was aware of everything that he had put out on display, was able to assist his customers in finding just the right publication based on their interests and ability to read it.

Based on the video documentation of the performance, most customers left happy, clutching a publication or publications that had become art instead of junk, or, as one customer suggested,

material that would be good for insulating a house.¹ The genius of this deceptively simple performance could be found in the way that López-Menchero manipulated time and history. *KADUKIOSK* was an anachronism, and likely unrecognisable to anyone born after 1996, whose experience of the news is filtered through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Google. But for those people born before 1996 who recognized the kiosk for what it was and were excited by any news, even if it was old news that they couldn't read or remember, *KADUKIOSK* brought back the memory of the pleasure, or even jouissance, of walking past a newsstand and purchasing, along with a candy bar or a cup of coffee, a magazine or newspaper with an article that you really wanted to read, because the only way that you could read the article was to own the magazine or newspaper in which it appeared.

APOLOGIZE TO THE FUTURE and A THIN LAYER OF OILY ROCK – Chris Korda

Two days after *KADUKIOSK* opened, Chris Korda performed *Apologize to the Future* (FIG. III-IV), a verbal recitation of the lyrics for her album of the same title. Due to their careless actions, humans are hurtling towards extinction.

Your life is built on convenient lies
And the time has come to apologize
Corporations lie; that's what they do
But you lie to yourself and that's on you
The climate disasters on your TV
Just couldn't happen to your family
Drowning cities are so unnerving
But the victims must be less deserving

¹ Studio Thor. "KADUKIOSK: Emilio López-Menchero." Vimeo, February 9, 2024. 04:15. <https://vimeo.com/839708368?share=copy>.



FIG. III



FIG. IV

Than you and yours, because you're the best
At working hard to enslave the rest
Of course it had nothing to do with luck
Or a sperm and egg lottery won by a fuck
...

Apologize
For the dying seas
Apologize
For the clear-cut trees
Apologize
For needless birth
Apologize
To what's left of earth
Apologize
For overpopulation
Apologize
For mass migration
Apologize
To the United Nations
Apologize
To future generations²

Korda's message was simple: science doesn't lie, the world is going to die, and stop procreating immediately. Earlier that day, Korda had told radio host King Baxter that civilisations become extinct due to stupidity. And now the entire human civilisation, with its exponential growth, is well on its way to extinction because humans were acting like there was no future, a concept that is inherent to capitalist ideology.³ Not surprisingly, this message was not well received by everyone in attendance, possibly because the audience were hardline Marxists as had been the case when Korda presented *A Thin Layer of Oily Rock*

² Chris Korda, "Apologize to the Future," track 3 on *Apologize to the Future*, Chris Korda, October 16, 2020, digital release.

³ Chris Korda and King Baxter, "L'Heure de Pointe," RADIOPANIK, Brussels, Radio Panik, April 19, 2023. Available on the radio website.

at Gallery Spektrum in Berlin, or possibly because they didn't like the idea of not having the option to procreate.

Korda is aware that she offends a lot of people. She began her lecture performance, *A Thin Layer of Oily Rock*, which, incidentally, is also the first track on her 2020 Album *Apologize to the Future*, with a tongue-in-cheek apology to the audience. Korda was sorry that she had to be right. Thirty years ago, when Korda first realised that humans were hurtling towards extinction, she founded the Church of Euthanasia, as a result of a dream that she had in which she was confronted by an alien creature known as "The Being." "The Being" warned Korda that our ecosystem was dying, that our leaders lie, and that people believe these lies despite mounting evidence to the contrary. In response, Korda founded COE. All members are required to obey COE's sole commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Procreate." The four pillars of COE are suicide, abortion, sodomy, and cannibalism.⁴ COE supports these pillars as voluntary and sodomy is define loosely as any sexual act that does not result in procreation. COE is most famous for its original slogan Save the Planet Kill Yourself, which is also a song on Korda's 2020 album *Eight Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong*.⁵ Save the Planet Kill Yourself, Thank You For Not Breeding, and the Four Pillars of COE are sold as T-shirts that are currently sold out.

Korda's relationship to time is elastic and expansive in her music, lectures, performances and art work. She moves between the deep time of prehistory, the current time of homosapiens, the always present time

⁴ Goswell Road, *Chris Korda, The Church of Euthanasia Archives*, 11-27 April, 2019, <https://goswellroad.com/program/the-church-of-euthanasia-archives-1.html>

⁵ Chris Korda & The Church of Euthanasia, "Save the Planet Kill Yourself!" Track B1, *Eight Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong*, Metal Groove Records, 2020, First issued in 1999 by DJ Hell's International Gigolo Records under the title *Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong*.



FIG. V



FIG. VI



FIG. VII



FIG. VIII



FIG. IX



FIG. X

of capitalism, and a future time in which she probably will no longer exist, since all that will remain on earth is a thin layer of oily rock. In 1991, just before founding the COE, Korda began identifying as a woman.⁶

I believe, personally, that cross-dressing is the balancing of male and female aspects within a person, within a person's psyche, within their soul, if you will.

And everyone has these male and female aspects. I mean, in most cases, they are grossly out of balance due to the extreme gender socialisation that we're exposed to as children. Men are forced into extreme male gender roles, women are forced into extreme female gender roles.⁷

Korda's incorporation of the female aspect into her persona in order to undo extreme gender socialisation is both spiritual (in the sense of the ideas of the Church of Euthanasia) and queer, but not along the lines of current LGBTQI politics around trans identities. Instead, her embrace of the yin/yang male/female binary recalls First Nation and Hindu deities that incorporate male and female characteristics into one deity. Born in 1962, Korda is a product of the 1980s, a decade that is sandwiched between ecofeminism and poststructuralism. A fan of neither movement, Korda nevertheless has incorporated parts of both ideologies: the save-the-planet, pro-woman/lesbian ideologies of the ecofeminists, and the techno club scene relativism of poststructuralism. Korda's ecological politics are ironic and combative. Her self-presentation in a fitted sheath dress that she probably made and a sleek pageboy haircut that is blue or red and might be a wig suggests the quintessential presentation of non-binary gender that appeared on the nineties in Madonna videos and Jenny Livingston's 1990 film *Paris is Burning*. At 60 plus years, Korda does the construction of the white

⁶ Korda identifies as an antinatalist crossdresser, pro-civilization globalist, existentialist scientific pragmatist, and transhumanist. She is definitely not a Marxist, anarchist, neo-primitivist, gender activist, or hippie.

⁷ Chris Korda, quoted by Goswell Road, *Chris Korda, The Church of Euthanasia Archives*.

femme in late capitalist culture really well, which might be why her bleak, argumentative message to humans has remained so controversial. As an anti-natalist crossdresser, pro-civilization globalist, existential scientific pragmatist, and transhumanist, Korda does not fit comfortably into any of the current ideological camps that are present in contemporary culture. Her take on environmentalism is particularly appalling, largely because, as she suggested in her lecture *A Thin Layer of Oily Rock*, she is absolutely right.

THE NARCOSEXUALS – Dries Verhoeven

Dries Verhoeven has a knack for conceptualising immersive theatrical installations that are uncomfortable for both the viewer and the performers.⁸

The Narcosexuals (FIG. V, X) is no exception, combining the display of so-called undesirable people (gay men having sex orgies while on drugs as though AIDS never happened) and either very public spaces or very shady places with an interrogation of voyeurism and the balance of power. *The Narcosexuals* took place at Digue du Canal, Anderlecht, situated in a slightly seedy area of Brussels that could not be reached easily from Studio Thor, the festival hub. Upon arriving and disembarking from their chartered bus, Uber, or taxi, the audience members were required to sign an affidavit indicating that no pictures would be taken. After a sticker was placed over the phone's camera and a headset had been handed out, the audience members, some of whom had arrived from adjacent countries, were permitted to walk back to the makeshift structure that looked like a really cheap motel assembled from shipping containers. Inside, there was one bathroom, one bedroom, a hallway, a living room, and a kitchen. The ceilings were too low, the bed was unmade, the dishes were unwashed, and there were pillows, confetti, balloons, and discarded clothing strewn around the house. A very old Macintosh, almost unrecognisable as a computer, played some sort of sex video. There were windows everywhere,

⁸ Dries Verhoeven, "About," *Dries Verhoeven*, website, accessed 11.02.2024.

some covered by cheap curtains or blinds that were often drawn or closed strategically so that the audience could or could not peer inside. The actors were either dancing, twerking, making sexual gestures, or lolling around on any available surface, all wearing special contacts that made their pupils look like pinpricks, along with masks, jewellery, body piercings, high heels and nothing else. Although they seemed to be speaking in unison, they spoke with only one voice—that of a young man with an educated and slight British accent—that could be heard through the headsets worn by the audience. Overt voyeurism was encouraged with at least one sturdy ladder placed outside so that spectators could climb up and see further into the house. At a certain point, an ambulance, siren blaring, drove up to the house and rang the doorbell. Two emergency workers entered the house with a stretcher and left with a body covered by a white sheet. None of this had any effect on the remaining narcosexuals, who continued what they were doing.

In the run-up to the premier of *The Narcosexuals* in 2022, Verhoeven wrote an essay "Such a Longing for Intimacy," about his own experience with Chemsex, the relationship between drugs and sex, and the journey from Gay Liberation in the seventies to Chemsex in the post-Covid twenties. "Let's dispel a myth," Verhoeven writes. "Homosexuals use no more drugs than heterosexuals. They do, however, use them more often in a sexual context. I have had some groundbreaking experiences with it myself."⁹ Driven into houses and apartments as a result of the Covid-closure of clubs and baths, these men have become invisible, gathering in private homes at the end of the work week in order to indulge in endless ecstasy, courtesy of G (GHB/GBL). Prophylactic barriers such as condoms, dental dams, and latex gloves are things of the past. As all/one of the men chant "I take PrEP... no condoms, no bullshit, no strings attached. I'm a fucking perfect catch."¹⁰ HIV/AIDS, which killed

⁹ Dries Verhoeven, "Such a Longing for Intimacy," *Dries Verhoeven*, website, accessed 13.02.2024. The essay, available in a publication of Studio Dries Verhoeven after the performance, is also available on their website <https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/the-narcosexuals/>

¹⁰ Dries Verhoeven, "Narcosexuals: Performance

everyone who contracted the virus, and Covid, which killed some people, are in the rearview mirror and rapidly disappearing in the hedonistic world of the present. No one gets sick anymore, and no one dies, other than the one person who is unlucky enough to overdose. "If someone feels bad, they have ice cream," the actors chant. "You want some?"¹¹

Time, in this case, is always in the present. There is no past, and there is no future. There is only the now of an exquisite sexual sensation that goes on and on. The drugs allow the Narcosexuals to stay at the edge without ever coming. There is no climax, no point, by which time can be marked. "You never come, really... What should we do tomorrow? Do I have money in my account? It's irrelevant... We, we don't need time anymore."¹² Time is at a standstill in the Narcosexuals, yet, simultaneously an endless loop (because the script, which, along with Verhoeven's essay is available to the audience in the form of a booklet that is handed out at the exit, repeats itself again and again) in which past, present and future revolve. Verhoeven considers himself to be part of this culture, but he did some research. He interviewed fourteen English men who were experienced with Chemsex. He consulted three carefully curated academic articles, all of which concluded that, although drug use and promiscuous sex was seen as an evil that needed to be eliminated, most gay men derived benefits from this practice.¹³ Sharif Mowlabocus, author of "Fucking

Text," *Dries Verhoeven*, website, accessed 12.02.2024.

¹¹ Verhoeven, "Narcosexuals," website, accessed 12.02.2024.

¹² Verhoeven, "Narcosexuals," website, accessed 12.02.2024.

¹³ The three articles consulted by Verhoeven include P. Weatherburn, F. Hickson, D. Reid, S. Torres-Rueda, and A. Bourne, "Motivations and values associated with combining sex and illicit drugs ('chemsex') among gay men in South London: findings from a qualitative study," *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 93, 3 (May 2017): 203-206; Maitena Milhet, Jalpa Shah, Tim Madesclaire and Laurent Gaissad, "Chemsex Experiences: Narratives of Pleasure," *Drugs and Alcohol Today* 19, n.1 (2019): 11-22; Sharif Mowlabocus, "Fucking with Homonormativity: The Ambiguous Politics of Chemsex," *Sexualities*, 26, n.5-6 (2023): 585-603.



FIG. XI



FIG. XII

with Homonormativity: the Ambiguous Politics of Chemsex,” even went so far as to argue that “chemsex is antithetical to the political economy of late capitalism, and to homonormativity.”¹⁴ If homonormativity is based on the time of capitalism and the workweek, then narcosexual time is based on a refutation of those values. Chemsex time is always the present. There is no past and no future. There is also no one who isn’t white, able bodied and thinnish, even if they lack the muscular (and relatively hairless) gym body that have been prized by gay male culture. As one/all of the narcosexuals put it:

I look sexy
I mean: My body is ok, but I’m not arrogant.
We’re not in the gym.
Happy smile on my face.
(smiles)¹⁵

There is one black man, who, in this context, has become normalised within a world of western homonormativity. As the theorist Rahul Rao has argued, “in seeking to win recognition for a diversity of sexual identities to which individual selves might have access, contemporary LGBT activism is both enabled by and further entrenches ontologies of personhood originally forged in conditions of colonial modernity. Thus notwithstanding the respite from compulsory heterosexuality that it can bring, to swap one sexual orientation for another, as coming out purports to do, is still to play by the rules of the empire of sexuality.”¹⁶ Queer white male culture normalises black and brown queer male culture into a western ideology where the black, brown, and other-than-abled-white-bodies (fat, sick, old, unathletic, neurotypical, and disabled) are absorbed and disap-

peared. *The Narcosexuals* chronicles the new gay male world after AIDS, after the Bathhouses, after ACT UP (and safe sex), and after Covid. Covid probably never mattered too much, because the young protagonists of *The Narcosexuals* are mostly in the low risk category. So it was not so much Covid, but the social distancing policies that resulted in the closure of indoor spaces, that created this moment of endlessly looped sexual pleasure.

PAPER LANE – Olga de Soto

The Narcosexuals is a durational piece. The actors repeat the script (which is only around eleven pages) for six hours while twerking, jerking, and overdosing but never climaxing. If, as Judith (Jack) Halberstam suggests, “queer time is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within post-modernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance,” then durational performances, that defy the capitalist logic of actions that move towards a mutually recognized goal, can also be considered queer, in the sense that they thwart clock time movement.¹⁷ This was certainly the case with Olga de Soto’s *Paper Lane* (FIG. XI-XII), an exquisitely paced performance where de Soto carefully separated a long strip of paper by tearing it in half. De Soto, a choreographer, dancer, and visual artist, employed a carefully calculated minimalist gesture in order to make two clean halves from a roll of paper. The performance began with de Soto unrolling the paper into the space and taking off her shoes. Holding the paper with one hand and tearing the paper with the other while crouching on the part of the paper that had not yet been torn, de Soto, dressed in a coverall



FIG. XIII

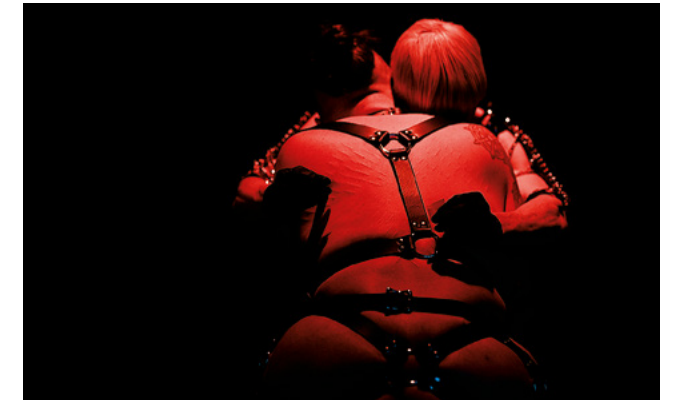


FIG. XIV

that suggested the labour involved in this seemingly simple action, moved slowly down the length of the paper until there were two pieces instead of one.

Halberstam has suggested that the “experience of duration makes visible the formlessness of time,” which in turn demonstrates that time is not a natural progression but a construction, much like space and identity.¹⁸ De Soto is influenced by the German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa, who has called for a radical deceleration of time in his book *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late Modern Temporality* (NSU Press, 2010). The forces of social acceleration which have been internalised in a late capitalist economy are stronger than deceleration—hence de Soto’s decision to decelerate her own movements in the hope that the festival audience would decelerate as well. It worked. By the end of the performance, the audience was completely focused on de Soto. When the last bit of paper separated and de Soto stood up, there was relieved laughter before the applause.

DEVOTION – Cassils and S.J. Norman

Devotion (FIG. XIII-XIV), by Cassils and S.J. Norman, could also be understood as an action in which presence and being present informed the nature of the performance, for which the artists sat together from sunset to sunrise, in a meditative state, using the Anapanasati technique to witness their own and each other’s breathing bodies. Both artists are trans people, and both artists came of age before or just as trans people were becoming visible. Growing up, they had no references for what they were. Now, as Trans visibility has finally increased, their governments are passing laws to erase them again.¹⁹ The performance

took place between these two artists based in North America/Australia just as an increasing number of laws against gender affirming care and gender recognition were being passed at the local and state level that aim to eradicate trans individuals.²⁰ The performance incorporated a ritualised knife play, with each artist holding a sharpened blade that was used to make a small incision anytime their attention strayed. The idea was that the ebb and flow of attention was mapped on the artist’s skin by the end of the performance.

The collaboration between Norman and Cassils was an interesting pairing: Cassils is better known for work that tests the limits of the ability of the body to perform. In the past, Cassils has wrestled with a block of clay (*Becoming An Image*) and built up their body with steroids and rigorous weight training over a period of weeks (*Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*). Norman’s work is much more quiescent, as exemplified by *Knowledge of Wounds S/kin* co-curated with Joseph M. Pierce of the Cherokee Nation, which was about bringing people together for an interchange of knowledge that operates at the intersection of Indigeneity, sexuality, gender, and the body. *Devotion* was premised on the awareness and attention of the two artists, who sat in chairs that held them upright and very close to one another. The piece, which began at sunset, was very dark, with not much lighting. For the audience, who had formed a circle around the performers in a gesture of witnessing, the actions were difficult to access, simply because it was so dark and the actions were so subtle. The time, however, was elastic and infinite, suggesting gatherings of different First Nations peoples that had taken place prior to written history. *Devotion* was meant to imply

¹⁴ Mowlabocus, 585.

¹⁵ Verhoeven, “Performance Text,” website, accessed 21.02.2024.

¹⁶ Rahul Rao, *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), xix-xx.

¹⁷ Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Space: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

¹⁸ Halberstam, 7.

¹⁹ In 2013, the term gender dysphoria replaced gender identity disorder with the release of the

diagnostic manual DSM-5. “Gender Dysphoria,” *Wikipedia*, web. Accessed 19.02.2024.

²⁰ Lawmakers in 37 states in the U.S. have introduced 142 bills to restrict gender-affirming health care in 2023 alone.



FIG. XV

a different knowledge of trans masculinity, one that was defined by magic and spirituality rather than psychiatric textbooks.

Devotion spoke to another kind of queer time, one that, in this case, once again evokes a past, a present, and a future. The action of attention and cutting, so subtle that from the vantage point of the audience it was really difficult to tell what was happening, was about staying present. Judith/Jack Halberstam has argued that the transgender body is a contradictory site in postmodernism, noting that “as a model of gender inversion recedes into anachronism, the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfilment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility.”²¹ This notion of the transgender body, a notion refuted by Halberstam, has something in common with the cyborg: always young, thin, and white. In *Devotion*, Cassils and Norman situated their specific bodies: muscular Canadian queer activist and First Nation Koori (Aboriginal) of Wiradjuri descent, both identifying as trans masculine, and both in need of having a body and a space in which they can comfortably exist.

Devotion was an important, if not entirely successful piece. Much of what was happening was not apparent to the audience due to the lack of lighting. Some of the action was hard to follow—why was Cassils on their hands and knees in the yoga table top pose for so long, and why did they appear to cut each other at the beginning of the ceremony? Equally unfortunate was the scheduling for a Saturday night, which resulted in many people leaving for the closing party or because they had to leave early the following day. The question that this performance raised is how to make a performance that requires an incredible degree of attention between the artists, but is also accessible for the audience.

²¹ Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Space: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 18.



FIG. XVI

A DIFFERENT NORTH – Adam York Gregory and Gillian Jane Lees

As *Devotion* was beginning, another durational piece, *a different north* (FIG. XV–XVI), was concluding in the second-storey of KANAL Centre Pompidou. For twelve hours from 10:00 to 22:00, Lees had carefully and meticulously arranged 360 small compasses along two lines drawn with white tape on the second floor of the space. Lees made each compass by hand, meticulously adding water, a cork, two steel needles that bisected each other, and a cover to a clear plastic Petri dish. York Gregory, who had devised the compass, had calculated the exact ratio of water to cork and needles that would produce a compass pointing true north. The installation, once completed, was stunning. The two rows of evenly spaced compasses, placed on the lines made by the tape, recalled the fiction of linear perspective, which purported to translate the three dimensions of the world into a two dimensional facsimile that is completely believable.

As it turns out, the certainty of a true north is as much a fiction as the veracity of linear perspective. York Gregory, who conceptualises the performances for the duo, collated and assembled over 100 books of interviews that he had conducted about the different Norths that people had encountered. Lees, whose training in ballet informs her elegant movements, embodies the work, initially installing 360 compasses over twenty-four hours, and, for *a different north*, over twelve hours.

The beauty of Lees’s movements, informed by her background in classical dance, transform quotidian actions into something more. As with de Soto, Lees is mesmerising because her movements, even with trainers that are sturdy and practical, remain those of a dancer. Equally compelling is the *raison d’être* for *a different north*.



FIG. XVII

York Gregory writes:

There is more than one North.
There is a Magnetic North, and True North.
There is the North in Northern, and the North that is further away, just past other Norths.
North is an orientation, a direction, and a location.
Your North might be an idea, or a place, a story, a picture, an accent, a memory or a song.
Every human is their own compass, with their own North.
A Different North is a project about collecting and sharing Norths, it charts new Norths and forgotten Norths. Norths that are changing and ones that will soon be lost.²²

GILDED – Monali Mehrer

a different north addressed many of the questions raised by Monali Meher in her performance *Gilded* (FIG. XVII–XVIII). In a durational performance that addressed sustainability, identity, migration, borders, barriers, loss, and the endless cycle of exploitation of natural resources, Monali Meher worked with material associated with India, a continent that is currently considered the Global South (a category that has replaced the appalling designation of the Third World or developing countries but essentially holds the same hegemonic and racist connotations as the previous designations). Meher, who completed her degree in Mumbai, India, considers herself an artist of the diaspora, currently living in the global north, but continuing to metaphorically address the conditions in the Global South. In *Gilded*, Meher used materials such as spices, tree branches and fabrics

²² Adam York Gregory and Gillian Jane Lees, *a different north*, Adam and Gillian, web, accessed February 22, 2024.



FIG. XVIII

to suggest a process of decay and regeneration, a process that ironically suggests western notions of the Global South. For approximately three hours, Meher, who had gilded herself with gold leaf, laid on the floor covered with tree branches and fabric, moved piles of turmeric, a spice associated with Indian cuisine, and then, wearing one of the branches, moved around the space—a room with a fireplace (unused) in the Maison des Arts, a contemporary arts centre housed in a bourgeois 19th century house in the centre of Brussels. *Gilded* was one of the few performances that asked the audience to consider the stakes of being gilded in the postcolonial landscape of the 21st century. Does it refer to the preservation, on the part of the hegemonic, imperial culture, of “Indianness,” which has all but disappeared after years of colonialism? Or might it reference the vibrancy of countries and continents that have retained their traditions in spite of the advent of the British Empire? Time and duration, in the case of Meher, becomes a question of resiliency in the face of oppression. Her performance is a testament to endurance, concluding with Meher back where she started, lying down and covered with shells.

Meher is addressing colonial, rather than queer, time, but the two have much in common. Clock time, which is closely aligned with hegemonic western constructions of space is antithetical to times that exceed and bleed into clock time, such as the time of the migrant worker, the stay-at-home wife, the migrants/refugees, and the sick and the destitute. Halberstam suggests that the time cycles that we have naturalised (leisure, inertia, recreation, work/industrial, family/domesticity) are also spatial practices that reflect movement, either diasporic or domestic.²³

²³ Halberstam, 10.



FIG. XIX

MERCI COURAGE — Clémence Péguy

In the context of denaturalizing cycles of time and space, Clémence Péguy's performance *Merci Courage* (FIG. XIX-XX) raises interesting issues in terms of who is experiencing duration and how that experience unfolds. Péguy's performance took place in a private apartment with the performance consisting of Péguy and the solo audience member. Péguy, garbed in a checked suit and wearing orange sunglasses and Pippi Longstocking braids, initially seems relatively safe. The solo participant is invited to lie down on a comfortable massage table and close their eyes. Péguy requests that she and the participant come up with a safe word, and then begins *Merci Courage*, which turns out to reside with the viewer, rather than Péguy, who begins with gentle actions, always explained, that are performed on the participant. Eventually the actions become more invasive—Péguy threatens to cut the participant with a knife, and places two industrial clips on the participant's toes. The final action involves placing a plastic bag over the participant's face. Péguy is careful to leave enough space that the participant can still breathe, but it is necessary to work at breathing.

Péguy understands this work as being about control that is in the hands of the participant rather than Péguy. At any point, the viewer can say the safe word, and Péguy will stop the performance. To a certain extent, *Merci Courage* harks back to the lesbian sado-masochistic practices that were made popular in the late eighties and early nineties by writers such as Pat/Patrick Califia and artists such as Catherine Opie and Della Grace (Del La Grace Volcano). For those participants who don't have that particular understanding of a queer past, *Merci Courage* reflects instead a very disturbing progression of torture that has much in common with accounts of political prisoners in Argentina and Chile. Péguy's inoffensive demeanour reinforces that perception as the partici-



FIG. XX

part is not expecting to be injured until Péguy places a black plastic garbage bag on their face. One of the secrets of torturing someone successfully is to always catch them off guard.

In Péguy's *Merci Courage* the duration is determined by the participant. Very few participants made it to the end of the performance. The success of Péguy's *Merci Courage* lies not in that it permitted viewers to take agency, as Péguy suggests in the video interview produced by Trouble prior to the festival, but that it demonstrated the line between agency and powerlessness. Queer time has been constructed by theorists such as Halberstam as benign, progressive and radical, but that is not always the case. Queer time should be understood as disorientating and disturbing, a time that literally pulls the rug out from under you. Queer time is not queer if it doesn't queer the person who experiences that time. *Merci Courage* accomplished that.



The Narcosexuals © Willem Popelier

LIVE LOAD

—Mark Požlep

Good evening to everyone,
Please step inside.
One by one, please find your place.
You can stand or you can sit down on the floor, or on the
mattress if this is more convenient for you.
Welcome, welcome.

31.08.2023 > 02.09.2023 - GHENT > TURKU

Can we fit anybody else in ?

Ok, I would just like to ask the assistant to close the door.
If anyone has problems with claustrophobia, I would
suggest stepping outside.
Still, if anyone feels bad during the trip, we can open the
door and let you out.

How do you feel in this box?

This is a twenty feet cargo container – 6.06m long, 2.43m
wide and 2.59m high. Standard ISO containers come in
two sizes, 20 feet (6.06m) and 40 feet (12.12m)

Who would think that a box like this could completely
change our reality?

Shoes, the clothes we wear, phones, cars, bicycles,
drugs... the food we eat, it's all produced somewhere else.
Somewhere else where the labor is cheaper.
Whether in parts or already assembled, these goods are
transported to us in these boxes.

I
I was invited to the New Performance
Turku Biennale under the umbrella of
Time for Live Art, where the experience
of a slow travel trip from Belgium to
Finland became the material for a new
artistic production.

Given that Antwerp, Belgium is an
important European port as is Turku
in Finland, my initial idea was to travel
from Antwerp to Turku by ship. As
waterways are now mostly used for
transporting freight, I decided to send
myself from Antwerp to Turku in a
container. To put myself in the chain of
transported goods.

Talking with the New Performance
Turku team, we knew from the outset
that this would definitely be "mission
impossible", for it is addressing many
problematic questions linked to human
trafficking, health regulations, safety,
insurance, you name it. But we still tried.

Our approach to major European ship-
ping companies such as MSK, Maersk,
CMA CGM and Finnlines was strictly
commercial. We tried to convince them
to legally take me on board and use my
stay in a container as an advertisement
that their transport is so good that they
could even ship live cargo.

No luck there.
Someone told me, "If you want to ship
yourself in a container, you'd better
throw your passport away."





II

Next step was to organize a travel from Belgium to Finland on a cargo vessel. While browsing the web for cargo ship travel, I came across these types of ads:

Travelling on a cargo ship is a unique experience. Whether you love the sea, are conscious of your carbon footprint, don't like flying or simply prefer to sail in a relaxed atmosphere, away from the crowds, then travelling by cargo ship is the right choice for you.
(Advert for cargo shipvoyages.com)

Ever since the Covid pandemic, passenger travel on these vessels is no longer allowed, unfortunately.

The only remaining option for sea travel was a passenger cruise ship. I boarded the *Finnlady* in Travenmünde in northern Germany.

III

Finnlady sails from Travenmünde to Helsinki. The duration of the trip is 32 hours. It is a Ro-Ro/passenger ship. Ro-Ro means roll-on roll-off, intended for transporting cargo on wheels. It is almost 219 meters long and 30.5 meters wide.

Recently, it has been used more for cargo than for passengers. There were at most twenty of us. Sea enthusiasts, elderly couples, and a mother with a baby who are going on a hike in Lapland. One passenger caught my eye, he was traveling with a double bass almost twice his size. His name was Gustavo, from Portugal. He was escorting the double bass to Helsinki. The bass is too fragile and too expensive for air travel. Gustavo is 22 years old and plays double bass at the Berlin Opera. Given that his instrument was not good enough for the audition, he had borrowed this one in Helsinki, and was now returning it to the owner.

The other passengers were truck drivers, mostly Germans. They kept together, smoking and drinking outside on the deck. The place we stumbled upon was a sauna. Sauna and a cold jacuzzi. I heard that when there were more tourists the jacuzzi was warm, but ever since the truck drivers started sleeping inside, they turned off the heating.

I wished the sea passage could have lasted longer. As the ship is so big, sailing is smooth, accompanied by the steady murmur of the engine. The sea is littered with cargo ships of all kinds, disappearing beyond the horizon. Dinner is served in empty halls surrounded with big square windows overlooking the grey, foaming Baltic Sea.





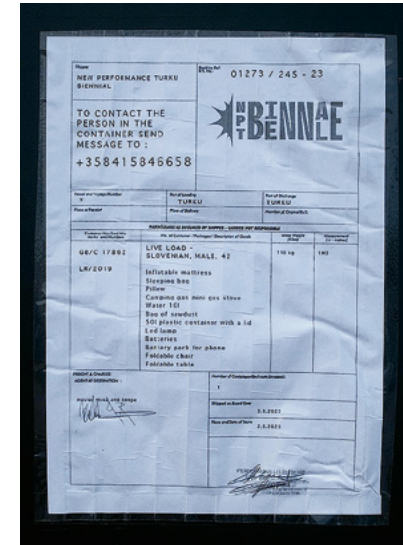
IV

Finnlady brought me to this box, to the shipping container that we are now standing in. In order to follow the original concept, I decided to spend the same amount of time as I did when travelling overland from Belgium to Finland in a shipping container.

Shipping containers were invented in 1956 by the American truck driver Malcolm McLean. Before that, goods were loaded in barrels, sacks and wooden crates. Ships spent more time at port than on the sea. In 1956,

he bought 2nd World War tankers and converted them to carry containers above and below deck. On 26 April 1956, a tanker named *IDEAL-X* was loaded and sailed from Port Newark, New Jersey to Port of Huston, Texas. In 1966, containers were first used in international transportation and thus started the era of containerization. As transport costs started to fall to extremely low levels, producers moved from high wage to low wage countries, eventually causing wage levels in all countries to change.

I entered the container on Sunday, September 3, at 9 p.m. and left on September 6, at 8 a.m. It was the same as my trip from Belgium to Turku, my stay was 59 hours. I did this in order to experience the solitude of this hollow, metal, square box filled with so many stories. Experience becomes part of the process. It leaves a mark in the room. Be it smell, energy, presence... something remains, experiences leave traces.



V

The average number of containers on a ship is about 15,000. Closed and sealed upon loading and only opened upon delivery, each container is accompanied by a manifest listing its contents. The manifest is called a house of bills and includes the STC form (said to contain) a detailed list of the materials that are in the container. Approximately one in ten containers is checked.

Here is the listing for this container:

- Live load
- Slovenian, male, 42
- Camping bed
- Sleeping bag
- Pillow
- Camping gas mini gas stove
- Water 10l
- Bag of sawdust
- 50l plastic container with a lid
- Led lamp
- Batteries
- Battery pack for phone
- Finnish sim card with data

In addition to the STC form, I also added my phone number with the text: If you want to contact the person inside the container, send a message to this number: +358415846658

During my stay, I was contacted only by a 28-year-old female from Finland.



VI

My container was closed and placed on the town square. It didn't make any sound, it didn't move, it didn't emit light, but still with a live load inside. From the outside, it remained what it was before, a closed metal box.

In another case, this closed container could have been a misplaced container with seven refugees who tried to come to Italy from the Balkans, but ended up in Turku a month later. Or 100,000 flip-flops from China.

Given that there was no light, day and night were not really different. I could feel it by the temperature change and the sounds. The nights were cold and I slept wrapped in a sleeping bag with a woollen cap on my head, and during the day I sat inside in just my underwear and I was still sweaty. Outside the container, life went on according to its established rhythm. Work began on the construction site, children went to school, postmen drove motorbikes, street cleaners

drove cars with brushes, businessmen arranged business affairs in Russian and Ukrainian, a ship passed along the river, someone turned on an electric drill, from the inn came increasingly loud laughter. There was an old lady with a dog, two drunk youngsters, an elderly person smoking and coughing, motorbikes, some bicycles and even more increasing laughter from the inn, mixed with occasional screams. City silence, distant sound of cars, animal sounds and construction works.

The mind plays funny games, my biggest fear was that someone would try to enter from the outside. Sometimes the people at the door would talk in a language I couldn't understand, sometimes they would bang on the wall and ask if anyone was inside. Sometimes they would pull on the door and try to see if the door would open. In those moments I tried to be quiet and pretend I wasn't there. That it's just a metal box.

EMMA

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New Performance Turku Biennale

September 5-10, 2023
Turku, Finland

Coming Together The Time of Politics

Jennie Klein

New Performance Turku Biennale 2023, curated by artistic director Leena Kela and co-curator María Villa Largacha, was a sprawling performance festival that was sited mostly along the Aurajoki River, which runs through the centre of Turku, Finland. Bicycles, taxis, and buses were necessary modes of transportation as many of the performances took place in unconventional locations, including a waste disposal plant, the passenger tube of Silja Line Terminal, a children's park, and the Turku Art Museum. The theme of the festival was Coming Together, a theme that Kela and Villa Largacha took very seriously.¹ NPTB was structured so that different audiences and artists could literally come together in the same physical space and engage in politically charged dialogue that referenced some of the most pressing issues at that time, including war, immigration, borders, authoritarianism, nationalism, race, racism, global warming, waste, and the desecration of the planet.

Kela and Villa Largacha sought artists whose work engaged both the art world and the community at large. In an email to the author, Kela recalled that "we decided quite early on that the theme of Coming Together could be an umbrella for the different societal issues we wanted to address."² For Kela and Villa Largacha, coming together represented the ability to reconnect and reconvene after the pandemic, as well as the importance of using physical sites to do so. New Performance Turku 2023 can be understood as being structured around political time, defined by Stephen Skowronek as "the years that unfold between periodic resets of the nation's ideological trajectory. It tells of the state of the political movements contesting national power, of the expectations of the mobilised polity."³ NPTB was an ambitious festival packed with multiple performances, lectures and events. It is to the credit of the curators and organisers that the theme of Coming Together was honoured so gracefully and effortlessly. Conversations, collaborations, and cooperation facilitated coming together for the audience and artists alike.

¹ A symposium, "Coming Together: Artist & curator talk" on Thursday 12-14, moderated by this author and featuring Kela, Villa Largacha, Every House Has a Door (Matthew Goulsh, Linn Hixson, and Essi Kausalainen), Mark Požlep, Jamal Gerald, Sajjan Mani, curator and art historian Christiana Galanopoulou, and Exchange Live Art (Ana Matey and Isabel León) was scheduled along with the performances.

² Leena Kela, email to the author, March 15, 2024.

³ Stephen Skowronek, "What Time Is It? A new president might want to wear two watches, to track both secular and political time," First Year 2017: where the next president begins, 2017, Accessed 22 March 2024, <http://firstyear2017.org/index.html>.



FIG. I

The premiere: Every house has a door in collaboration with Essi Kausalainen

The Biennale kicked off with the premiere of *The Fossil Record* (FIG. I), a collaboration between Every house has a door/Lin Hixson, Matthew Goulish, and Sarah Skaggs, and the Finnish artist Essi Kausalainen.⁴ The performance took place on a raised stage flanked by two long benches where the performers sat when they were not performing. The 52 minute performance was about fossils as a form of resurrection and revival. Animals that once lived on the earth but had become extinct due to a catastrophic natural event or the inability to evolve quickly enough to evade human predators can become fossils, the preserved remains of plants and animals whose bodies were buried in sediment. *The Fossil Record* was about reversing the process and bringing the Fossil back to life, animating and activating these remains through colourful patchwork costumes, music, and movement.

Even in biblical accounts, resurrection after death is generally an uncanny affair that results in great confusion and even misery, particularly in horror stories such as W.W. Jacobs' 1902 "The Monkey's Paw," or Stephen King's 1983 *Pet Sematary*. By contrast, resurrection is joyful, collaborative, and transformative in *The Fossil Record*. Even snakes are welcomed, with the tiny and harmless Green Oklahoma River Snake making an appearance towards the end of the performance. *The Fossil Record* was one of a series of performances based on *The Carnival of the Animals*, a 14-part musical suite composed by Camille Saint-Saëns in 1886 for children.⁵

The genesis of *The Fossil Record* was a café meeting in Prague with Goulish, Hixson, and Kausalainen. Goulish proposed that they collaborate to make 14 performances that corresponded to the 14 movements in Saint-Saëns' musical suite. Every house has a door had collaborated with Kausalainen on the performance *Scarecrow*, a piece about inter-species communications and human-plant and human-animal relations. All three had enjoyed the collaboration which was coming to an end. Hixson and Kausalainen readily agreed. In keeping with the posthuman approach that informed *Scarecrow*, the three artists updated the categories to reflect animals that are endangered or extinct (the Green River Snake replaced the Swan). Saint-Saëns had insisted that the work should not be published in his lifetime, fearing that it would detract from his reputation as a serious composer. All of the performances, save one, of this piece during his lifetime were semi-private, and often accompanied by musicians wearing masks of the heads of the animals that they represented. Goulish, Hixson, and Kausalainen were intrigued by the masked performances, and resolved to re-do this piece with contemporary animal costumes, designed by Kausalainen. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic interrupted their plans.

"Three years ago," Kausalainen wrote, the pandemic broke our carefully woven pattern of coming together: of thinking, traveling (sic), walking and eating together.⁶ Collaborative performances that were intended to be viewed in person were instead experienced remotely. The movement *Characters with Long Ears* turned into a series of photographs of performers wearing "long ears" crafted by Kausalainen and shipped from Finland to Chicago, where they were

Kangaroos, Aquarium, Characters with Long Ears, Aviary, Pianists, Fossils, The Swan, Finale. *The Fossil Record* consolidated the last four movements of the suite: Aviary, Pianists, Fossils, and The Swan.

⁶ Matthew Goulish, Lin Hixson, and Essi Kausalainen, "Letter from Turku," *Every house has a door Newsletter*, #4.3, (September 29, 2023), accessed online 22 March 2024.

⁴ The performance was comprised of nine performers: Goulish, Elise Cowin, Kenya Kao Ra Zen Fulton, Bryan Saner, Kausalainen, Julia Rima (the clarinet player), Ahti Leppänen, Etna Ruscica, and Villa Ruscica.

⁵ The 14 movements included the Introduction and Royal March of the Lion, Hens and Roosters, Wild Donkeys (Swift Animals), Tortoises, The Elephant,



FIG. II

modelled by members of Every house has a door. These photographic portraits of performers wearing Kausalainen's large ears are hauntingly beautiful, pointing to the presence of the animal in the human and the lack of human contact during the pandemic. Coming together again to perform *The Fossil Record* seemed like an impossible dream.

The impossible dream was realised when everyone came together to perform *The Fossil Record*, the perfect choice for the festival premiere. The process of making the performance pointed to the collaboration and dialogue that was the theme of the festival. Hixson and Goulish (along with performer Bryan Saner) were founding members of the iconic Chicago performance collective Goat Island (1987-2009), whose motto was "we have discovered the performance by making it." Every house has a door has continued to create performances through collaborative improvisation. The content was timely. The performance was about the extinction of countless animal and plant species as a result of carbon emissions and global warming. Global warming is depressing, but Kausalainen and Every house has a door managed to deliver a performance that was full of hope, with brightly coloured costumes and young local actors that represented a generation that could reverse the damage. It was a joy to be at the opening reception that followed. Mask optional, free champagne, and trans comedian Jamie MacDonald making everyone laugh at his jokes about trying to integrate with his partner's Finnish parents and his loss of a hairline as a result of testosterone.

Community and Collaboration

Many of the performances involved collaboration, either on the part of the performers or the audience. Exchange Live Art/Ana Matey and Isabel León paid homage to the mid-20th century art collective Fluxus. Like Fluxus, Matey and León make action art and refer to their performance descriptions as "scores." *The Score's Party* (FIG. II), a performance in



FIG. III

honour of the 10th anniversary of their collaboration, was an homage to the spirit of Fluxus. For *The Score's Party*, Matey and León collected the performance "scores" that resulted from their residencies, workshops, and performances and exhibited them in the Arts House near the city centre. The performances that occurred 14-18 daily, were private and public actions based on the scores selected for the exhibition. Audience members were encouraged to add their own scores to the exhibit, scores that Matey and León would perform in Turku or at a later date.

Two other performances that were based upon collaboration and audience engagement took place at the Arts House at the same time that Matey and León were performing. Yasen Vasilev's *Impossible Actions* (FIG. III) was a collaboration between Vasilev, a Bulgarian choreographer based in Brussels, and local Finnish dancers, theatre makers and non-professional performers, who were given a series of tasks that were designed to test the limits of the performers' stamina and ability, as well as interrupt unconscious habits and expectations of movement.⁷ The performers were invited to activate, change and adapt a score for a physical solo based on their bodies and social-political background. What was interesting is that, in spite of the fact that the performers were mostly moving in unison and often taking very similar poses, they all looked completely different and individualised. Tuomas Laitinen's *Audience Body* (FIG. IV) was a performance that was literally embodied by the audience who moved around the space engaging with objects that were designed to be read—scrolls, large books, letters, and submerged water proof diaries. Over the course of 100 minutes, the audience changed the appearance of the space by unrolling the scrolls, assembling boxes, and tearing up a love letter. *Audience Body* was performed twice on Saturday. The traces of the first performance were

⁷ The performers included Salla Talvikki Nieminen, Heidi Horila, Rebecca Laube-Pohto, Laura Jantunen, Lehmus Murtomaa, Sonja Karolina Aaltonen, Valtteri Haliseva, Evgeny Kostyukov, Veera Alaverronen, Matilda Helena Lindström, Antti Seppänen, Tashi Iwaoka.



FIG. IV

left in place for the second performance, creating an interesting juxtaposition between the evidence of the activities of the first audience and the activities of the second audience, who had to move around a very different space than the pristine space encountered by the earlier audience.

Peeling an Onion (FIG. V) by Lotta Petronella & Gabriela Ariana, the final performance of the festival, had the audience help make their dinner. It took place before a very small audience at the Elävän kulttuurin Koroinen ry/Kahvila Koroinen, a bucolic cultural centre on the river. For the three-hour performance, Petronella and Ariana sang and told stories while the audience members peeled and chopped onions that were added to the soup that was served at the end of the performance. The ritual of preparing the onion and the tears that inevitably resulted were intended as ritualistic actions that promote grieving. As the audience peeled and diced, Ariana told of growing up in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship where people secretly gathered to make communal meals in defiance of the laws that prohibited these actions.

The Public Sphere

Most of the collaborative work at New Performance Turku was premised on the idea that the audiences wanted to be part of the festival. Indoor performances with limited seating required advance reservations, which were necessary but unfortunately limited the number of people who could actually see and participate with the piece. Several artists participating in New Performance Turku intentionally chose public spaces in which to perform. Diego Bianchi's performance *REWINDING* (FIG. VI) took place on a busy pedestrian street lined with restaurants and department stores and close to the market square. Bianchi collaborated with local Finnish performers who made action art in the display window of a bookstore, the shoe display in a department store, the walkway for



FIG. V

shoppers, the Marimekko store, a cafe, and a revolving glass door, where startled shoppers encountered Bianchi with a third, artificial leg attached, walking in an endless circle (the revolving door was the only way to exit, so the shoppers used it anyway).⁹ The audiences for these performances were mostly locals out shopping on Friday and Saturday who were taken by surprise. Many of them stayed and watched the performers misbehave with chairs, clothes, shopping carts, and the store windows.

A very different community performance simultaneously took place a few blocks away that began at the Rautatien puisto/Train Station Park opposite the entrance to the station. Jean Lukkarinen, a researcher in cultural history, carrying a portable microphone, took participants on a tour of queer Turku, beginning with the park, which, it turned out, was a site for cruising. The performance/lecture *The Streets of Turku: A Queer Perspective* (FIG. VII) created a geography of queer relationships, actions, and movement in a city that is better known for its lovely riverfront that includes parks, restaurants and bars, most of which are primarily heterosexual spaces. As it turns out, there were, and have always been, queer spaces as well, some of them hidden in plain site, such as the sites of private homes where queer people gathered, and other that were always public, such as the Train Station Park. What is particularly interesting is that the queer geography of Turku was one that was more or less created in the late 19th century. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has noted in *Epistemology of the Closet*, homosexual acts were not new at that time. What was new "was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of

⁹ The performers included Oona Leinovirtanen, Anni Suvanto, Alisa Alho, Susi Kaukonen, Veera Leppänen, Lisa Holmen, Mads Floor Andersen, Anna Lemberg, and Silja Eriksson.



FIG. VI

implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence."⁹ What made this walking performance lecture so interesting is that it literally reinscribed the pervasiveness and extent of queer, or homosexual, presence, a presence that had gone unsaid, but not unacknowledged, for many years.

Environmental Activism: Rejecting the "Human First" model

Since 2005, gustaf broms's work has been informed by posthumanism, which decenters the placement of humans above other life forms and rejects the view of humans as autonomous and fully defined individuals. broms' *untitled (worlds of becoming)* (FIG. VIII-IX) was a durational performance that took place in an empty storefront in the town centre. Wearing his "uniform" of blue shirt and pants, broms moved around the space, gradually filling it up with video projects, sculptures, animal bones, and an old suitcase. He periodically became part of the installation, lying on the ground with a tree emerging from his solar plexus, posing as a tree man with branches obscuring his face with an animal skull, and smearing his body and hair with clay. The performance closed at 1 a.m. with broms leading an impromptu parade around the streets, which by this time were mostly deserted.

broms, who lives and works in the Vendel Forest, has been concerned with the exploration of the nature of consciousness, "the dualistic concept of 'I,' as the biological reality of being in the BODY, and MIND, as the perceived experience of the flow of phenomena."¹⁰ Two experiences have shaped broms' career.

⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 2.

¹⁰ Homar Performance Art Festival, "Gustaf Broms, Sweden"



FIG. VII

The first, in 1991, was when he burned all of his art work, and realised that the action and remaining ash outdid all that he had ever made. In 2005, he made a series of works using objects that were too heavy to move. Both of these experiences made him realise that the finished object was much less interesting than actions. In choosing the storefront, broms was aware that his performance installation would be experienced by random visitors who might or might not know about the festival. broms hoped that the performance would lead to other people experiencing the same realisation at which he had arrived regarding the importance of honouring—and saving—the planet. In the artist's statement that was published in the NPTB programme, broms wrote that his work is about finding oneself in the ecosystem, a realisation that leads to the process "of becoming, 'I' refers to as 'my body', a structure made up of more non-human than human cells, —Who speaks to Who from Where?"¹¹

broms asks a very good question. The green and blue planet on which humans, animals, and plants live is in trouble, threatened by years of industrialisation and technology. Writing for the London Museum of Natural History, Katie Pavid has suggested that "these human impacts have unfolded at an unprecedented rate and scale. This period is sometimes known as the Great Acceleration. Carbon dioxide emissions, global warming, ocean acidification, habitat destruction, extinction and widescale natural resource extraction are all signs that we have significantly modified our planet."¹² The single most compelling issue today is how to stop and even reverse climate change, an issue that many of the art-

<http://www.hoomar.com/artist/gustaf-broms>
Accessed 31 March, 2024.

¹¹ gustaf broms, "untitled (worlds of becoming)," New Performance Turku Biennale 5-10.9. 2023 (Turku: NPT Biennale, 2023), 6.

¹² Katie Pavid, "What is the Anthropocene and Why Does it Matter?" Natural History Museum/Discover,



FIG. VIII

ists participating in NPTB addressed in their work. *Danger Danger* (FIG. X) by environmental activists Wilhelm Blomberg and Milka Luhtaniemi (who devised the performance but did not perform), took place in the Turku Art Museum. For *Danger Danger*, which was billed as a workshop on dealing with challenging emotions as a result of climate change, Blomberg instructed the audience on civil disobedience tactics in a museum setting.

The performance began with a video of the British activist group Just Stop Oil throwing soup on Vincent Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery in 2022 in London, an event that made the national news.¹³ Blomberg then proceeded to lead the audience on an activist tour in the Turku Art Museum while showing them how to misbehave in a museum. Unlike Just Stop Oil, Blomberg and Luhtaniemi had permission from the Turku Museum of Art to do the performance, which was advertised on the museum's web site. Blomberg's intervention was much gentler than that of Just Stop Oil, demonstrating modes of "misbehaving" where no art was destroyed. Audiences were encouraged to crawl, roll around and rest in the gallery under the supervision of Blomberg and a museum employee. They were NOT encouraged to damage or even touch the art work.

Joanna Rajkowska took a very different approach for her performance *I, Earth* (FIG. XI). Using a strategy that recalled Ecofeminist protests from the seventies and eighties, Rajkowska anthropomorphized the Earth,

¹³ Damien Gale, "Just Stop Oil Activists Throw Soup at Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*," *The Guardian*, 14 October 2022. The painting, which was covered by glass, was unharmed. The activists were arrested and removed from the National Gallery.



FIG. IX

giving her a voice that allowed her to express her displeasure with the humans that had caused all of this destruction. Rajkowska commissioned a group that included environmental scientists, writers, botanists, and shamans and asked that they step outside of themselves and "become" Earth, embodying Mokosh (Mati Syra Zemlya, Matka Ziemia) the soil.¹⁴ The Earth, as it turned out, was not happy.

We feel your petty little wars.
Your puny explosions.
But your wars will only bring about
your end sooner.
Your time is almost up.¹⁵

At the same time, the Earth was still the Mother, albeit a Dark Mother who brought death and decay along with growth.

You! Where are you going in such a hurry?
Stop. Rest. In me. I am your body.
I am your nourishment.
I'm a slow rhythm to settle into. Respiratory.
Breathe. I'm you.¹⁶

¹⁴ Anna Chudzik, Andrew Dixon, Francis Joy, Yanara Friedland, Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman, Hanna Ojanen, and Urszula Zajaczkowska produced texts that were by turns really angry and very sad. Set to music by Antti Tolvi and given a voice or voices by Ola Kozioł, Andrew Dixon, and choir members Anna-Maija Ihander, Arttu Punkkinen, and Tommi Penttinen.

¹⁵ Andrew Dixon, song lyrics for *I, Earth* by Joanna Rajkowska, unpublished programme for 2023 performance at New Performance Turku. 9 September 2023.

¹⁶ Hanna Ojanen, song lyrics for *I, Earth*, 9 September 2023.



FIG. X

The "voice" of the Earth, although channelled by human writers and performers, emerged from within a crack on the surface of the land, a crevice 4 metres deep that runs through solid rock on an island near Turku. "Earth" spoke (in English) with an angry screech or a many voiced swell of anger, literally emerged from the crevice, which was too deep for the audience to see the performers who had gathered there. Rajkowska writes, "The origin of the performance *I, Earth* was a deep concern about the destruction of our planet's ecosystems. It is more than just concern—it is irritation, rage and despair... My performance proposed a rather different approach to this energy—namely, instead of analysing or disabling it, it will rather incarnate it or personify it."¹⁷ Rajkowska's anthropomorphised Earth was unwilling to accept that fate that the Anthropocene anticipated: a polluted, unlivable planet of scorching temperatures and little or no water. The Earth was angry, and not willing to be eviscerated and destroyed. She will live, but humans will become extinct.

I curse you!
I was, I am and I will be!
You
Perish!¹⁸

¹⁷ Joanna Rajkowska, *I, Earth*, Joanna Rajkowska, <http://www.rajkowska.com/en/ja-ziemia/>, accessed 3 April 2024.

¹⁸ Anna Chudzik, song lyrics for *I, Earth*, 9 September 2023.



FIG. XI

Climate Change and Social Inequities

Not everyone is affected equally by the changes in the Earth's climate. Climate change exacerbates social differences in wealth, race, ethnicity, gender, and age. The populations that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change are the populations whose lives are the most precarious. Sajan Mani's performance *Stilt roots to postpone the end of the world* (FIG. XII) addressed the precarity of the rural Dalit caste in India, who are disproportionately affected by climate change. *Stilt roots to postpone the end of the world* was a homage to a Dalit man who had planted trees to prevent erosion. Dalits, also known as untouchables, are excluded from the fourfold varna of caste society and considered to be part of a fifth caste—the lowest caste in the Hindu/Brahmanic system. Despite efforts to improve the status of the Dalit, they continue to experience discrimination and lack of access to resources today. Mani grew up in Communist Kerala, "surrounded by books that were printed in Moscow in the Malayalam language."¹⁹ Communism in Kerala, a state on India's tropical Malabar coast, played a big role in social reform, empowering the lower and working class people, supporting the agrarian revolution, and ultimately produced a more egalitarian socio-political landscape. Kerala's Communist government was able to ameliorate disparities in class, but not in caste. Much of Mani's work has addressed Dalit activism. *Stilt roots to postpone the end of the world* was performed on the Aurajoki riverside with two divers. Over the course of several hours, two divers entered the river and brought up sediment and trash, which Mani used to paint himself and a large white canvas propped on the stairway to the river. The performance ended with Mani donning a diver's suit and entering the water. Mani's performance was inspired

¹⁹ Sajan Mani, "Caste-pital," *e-flux journal* 135 (April 2023). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/135/530869/caste-pital/>



FIG. XII



FIG. XIII

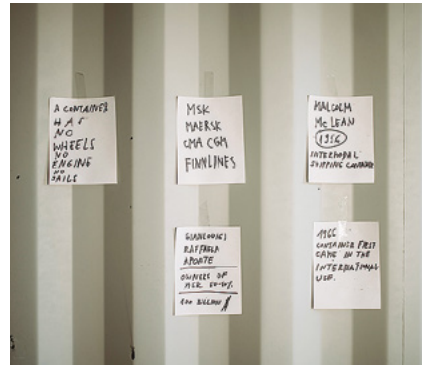


FIG. XIV



FIG. XV



FIG. XVI

by the work of a Dalit activist, Kallen Pokkudan, who planted Mangrove/stilt roots on Kerala's shores to prevent erosion. Pokkudan, known as the Mangrove man, received numerous awards for his work.

In his work Mani has sought to use indigenous strategies as a means by which the dire effects of climate change can be countered. Mani is very interested in addressing shared, multispecies cosmologies. His experience as a Dalit growing up in Communist Kerala taught him that there is no simple, overarching solution to oppression, which must be addressed from a variety of positions. Mani's performance *Political Yoga: Environmental Justice Edition* (FIG. XIII) is part of an ongoing research project that examines how social, cultural, and geopolitical power imbalances are perpetuated in personal meditation and body practices. The discipline of yoga is rooted in Brahmanic tradition and even today is closely aligned with class and privilege. With one free yoga class at a time, Mani explores the potential of a decolonized and inclusive yoga school that is available to everyone.

Education for the Socially Engaged

Pablo Helguera, in his seminal book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* has argued that "it is no secret that standard education practices—such as engagement with audiences, inquiry-based methods, collaborative dialogues, and hands-on activities—provide an ideal framework for process-based and collaborative conceptual practices."²⁰ If socially engaged art will make a difference, then dialogue is key to this process. This framework of education, engagement, dialogue, and hands-on activities was employed by Mark Požlep in conjunction with his per-

formance *Live Load*. When approached by Time for Live Art to make a piece about slow travel, Požlep proposed using a shipping container to travel from Gent, Belgium, where he is based, to Turku, Finland, where he would lecture and perform in the container. In doing so, Požlep had wanted to use the container for "performative research to question social, economic, and environmental implications of containerization."²¹ Požlep's *Live Load* (FIG. XIV) did not go as planned. Požlep was unable to find a shipping company that would agree to transport a live load, due to the health implications. Forced to abandon his first plan, Požlep chose instead to embrace the research and pedagogical implications of containerization. To reach Turku, Finland, Požlep booked passage on a RoRo ship, which he boarded in Travemünde, Germany.²² Požlep's container/home, which he had been unable to occupy, was rented in Turku, where it was installed close to the Maritime Museum. Požlep spent the same number of hours in the container as it had taken him to travel from Belgium to Turku. The container was accompanied by a House of Bills that included a manifest, listing what it contained, and an STC (said to contain form), listing that the container held a live being. Požlep entered the container on September 3 at 9 p.m. and left the container on September 6 at 8 a.m., exactly 59 hours.

The second part of the piece was Požlep's lecture performances, which began outside of the container and included information about how these containers were used to efficiently ship raw materials and goods around the world. Požlep spoke about what it was like to live in a container, which was very interesting since containers have recently been proposed as a solution for cheap housing. During the day, the shipping container became unbearably hot. During the night, the

²¹ Mark Požlep, *Live Load*, 2023, artist's web site, <https://pozleplemark.com/works/live-load>.

²² A RoRo ship derives its name from the type of cargo that it transports. RoRo is short for rolls on/rolls off, and is designed for transporting cargo on wheels.

shipping container became really cold, even though the outside temperature was relatively moderate. Požlep navigated these extremes in temperature by stripping down to his underwear by day and donning all his clothing, including his coat, by night. The lecture performance included a "tour" of the shipping container, which was quite claustrophobic after 12-15 people and Požlep entered the space. It was very dark, with only chinks of daylight visible at the sutures of the container. There was so little room that people had to sit on the bed. Using the light on his phone, Požlep showed his audience around the 20 foot container. There was a bed, a sand toilet, and notes on the walls that documented the performance.

Požlep's *Live Load* was as much about meaningful dialogue as it was about researching containerization. Dialogue, and community, according to Helguera, is central to making socially engaged art. Helguera notes correctly that "there are as many kinds of participation as there are participatory projects, but nominal or symbolic interaction cannot be equated with an in-depth, long-term exchange of ideas, experiences, and collaborations, as their goals are different."²³ Jamal Gerald's *You See...* (FIG. XV-XVI), a one-to-one performance that was inspired by Gerald's discovery of privilege and the conversations that ensued from that realisation, was an incredibly powerful performance in which Gerald allowed his audience to talk about a series of really difficult topics. Over the course of 3 days, Gerald facilitated 24 30-minute conversations. Gerald began with a few questions, and then asked the participant to select one of six cards that were placed face down on the table at which they both sat. Once the card had been turned, Gerald invited the participant to talk about what that particular word meant to them. Talking about the meaning of each of the six words—race,

gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and religion—was really difficult. Ellen Friis, director of liveart.dk, left the performance feeling untethered.

This work almost broke my heart today, because my mind was trying to answer each of his tough questions about race, gender, religion, class on his behalf too, while he did not say a word. Feeling shaky, raw, ignorant, privileged and about to cry afterwards.²⁴

Gerald decided to do *You See...* in order to create a safe space where people could feel comfortable having these conversations and then continue these conversations with other people. Within 30 minutes, Gerald was able to create a space in which meaningful and profoundly life altering dialogue was able to happen. This elegant, minimalist performance, in which Gerald intervened very little, was profoundly transformative to those who were able to participate. If one performance could be said to have encapsulated all that Kela and Villa Largacha meant when they decided on the theme "Coming Together," it was this performance, a performance that demonstrates the possibilities of what might happen when humans (and non-humans) come together.

²³ Helguera, page 13.

²⁴ Ellen Friis, "Instagram Post," 9 September, 2023.

BEAR, MY LOVE – Dash Che



Dash Che and the Bear while travelling, November 2023. © the artist.

For this project I slow-traveled from Helsinki to Athens with a huge suitcase with the Bear for two weeks. I crossed nearly 3000 km, passed through twelve countries, took nine buses, one boat, two trains and one car. Nearly every day I went to a public space and wrote a love letter to the Bear meditating on questions of love, belonging, lovelessness, loneliness and toxic attachment (to a human, to an idea, or to a country).

08.11.2023 > 22.11.2023 - HELSINKI > ATHENS

This performance represents the accumulation of all these events that took place during my trip and beforehand.

Letter #1 (Estonia)

bear my love,

I am sitting across the table at the cafe bus station in Pärnu, Estonia. Your body is spread out on the chair and you are disguised as an extravagant fur coat.

I'm also having a shot of Jägermeister. Ordering strong liquor, when unsure what else to order, has been a thing.

So, Bear my love, you and I have traveled across the sea and then further into Estonia, and now even deeper into Estonia's very bottom.

You are a typical brown bear among those present in the European region. What's special about you is that you are solely mine. I spend every day crawling in and out of your insides. We research our love for each other this way. Being so close. Nearly one.



Letter #3 (Estonia)

bear my love,

This is my third letter to you. Even though you are sitting in front of me I find myself a bit distracted. Other people are witnessing our interaction, talking in the background.

Bear my love, I have been having multiple conversations about this adventure I have with you and how it is fitting with the current deadening situation around us. You and I safely can travel through Europe held together by art structures, my whiteness, my documents and financial support. This project, carried in the name of performance art, has space to express itself, all while I turn hopeless each day. I am indulging in my love to you while living and my love for others is collapsing.

How does this love translate into my love for others?
Is this love political? Can my daily interactions with you and through you politicize the space around us, the space within us?

So many horrible things are done in the name of love: whether it is love for the nation, for specific people, for power, for a belief- system, or for money. What can I do about that?

Writing this love letter to you, I question love altogether.

Letter #4 (Estonia)

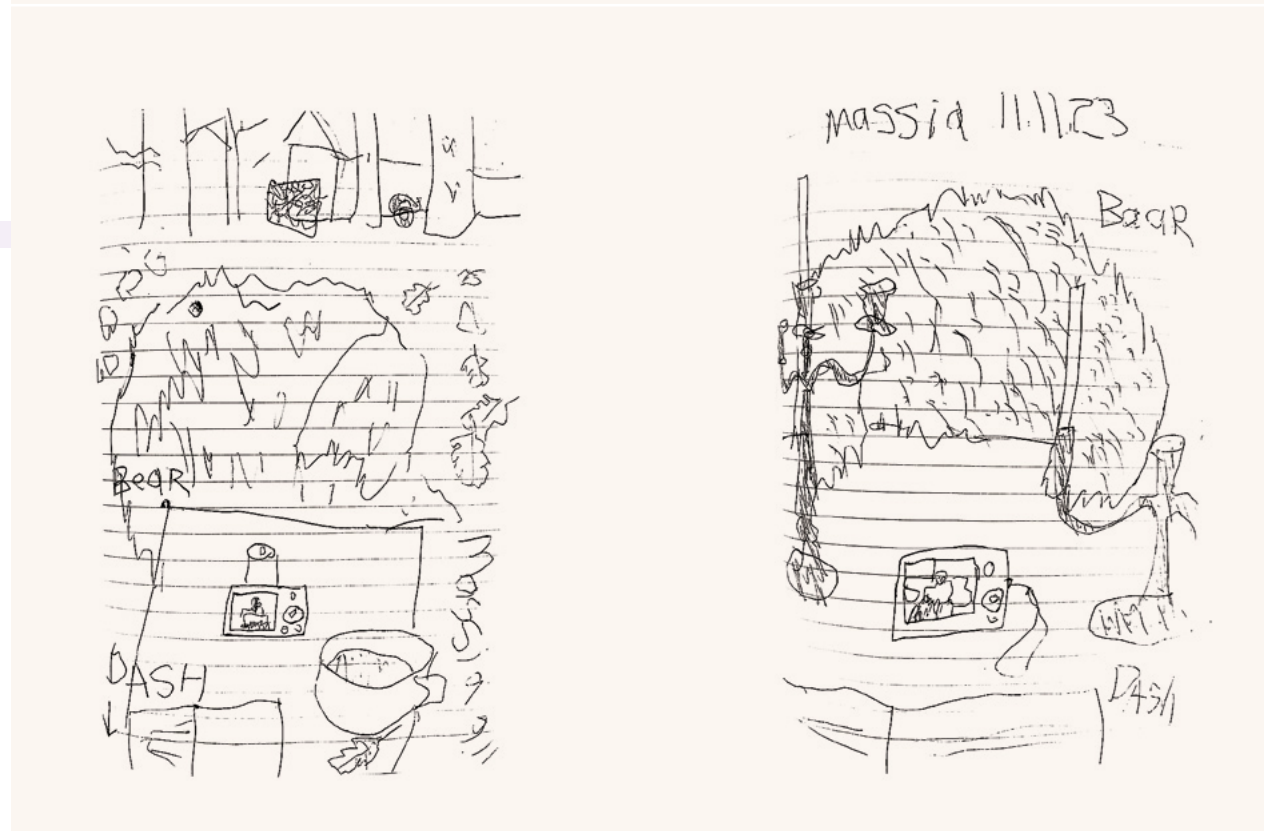
bear my love,

I have been enjoying your presence here in the library, spread out in your wide body on the couch. The couch across the one where Dandelion, the cat, rests.

I have been thinking about you sharing the space with another fluffy thing, the cat. The cat looks suspicious of you moving around. When you and I were lying on the carpet in the library yesterday afternoon reading that book about bears in medieval Europe I tried to lure the cat in but it refused to approach too close.

So do you think, my love, this cat creature is territorial and is jealous of another furry one? I mean, really, whenever there is love there is also jealousy, right?

You enjoy knowing that I am yours. That when I leave you, I always keep you in my sight or mind, that I always come back. Maybe this is true love? When you know that I am staying with you forever.



Letter #5 (Riga, Latvia)

bear my love,

We are in Riga together and you are sitting here in front of me at Kozy Eats. I'm bearing the situation suddenly exposed and mildly uncomfortable with your huge fury presence at the very busy cafe on Sunday.

I enjoy this continuity in our one-sided correspondence. Today is day number five and we keep moving from table to table at various locations. I enjoy traveling with this "being in love narrative" with you, taking care of you and maybe feeling a tiny little bit less lonely knowing that there's always another day for this encounter. You are a very familiar body, the closest to me now. Codependent love letters aside, I am just simply expressing gratitude for your being and sticking around.

Last night my new acquaintance Mailo and I were sitting here at the neighboring table speaking about gender, artistry, being a queer artist, as well as places to be and to live in. We spoke about Russians in Latvia and how the situation is so complex that Mailo refuses to see it as black and white. But some Russians, also displaced generationally and who relocated to Latvia to replace the deported or escaped Latvians, those Russians, not all but many, still miss those Soviet and lost privileges, refuse to learn Latvian, yet want Latvia to be a part of Russia but also keep all the benefits of

Europe. Some of them live forever with the alien status meaning lacking both Latvian and Russian citizenship. The tension is ongoing. I remember telling Mailo that my whole life is about the exhausting dance of distance and proximity to and from Russia. Anything and everything I have done in my life in terms of relocating elsewhere, building a life elsewhere was in relation to Russia.

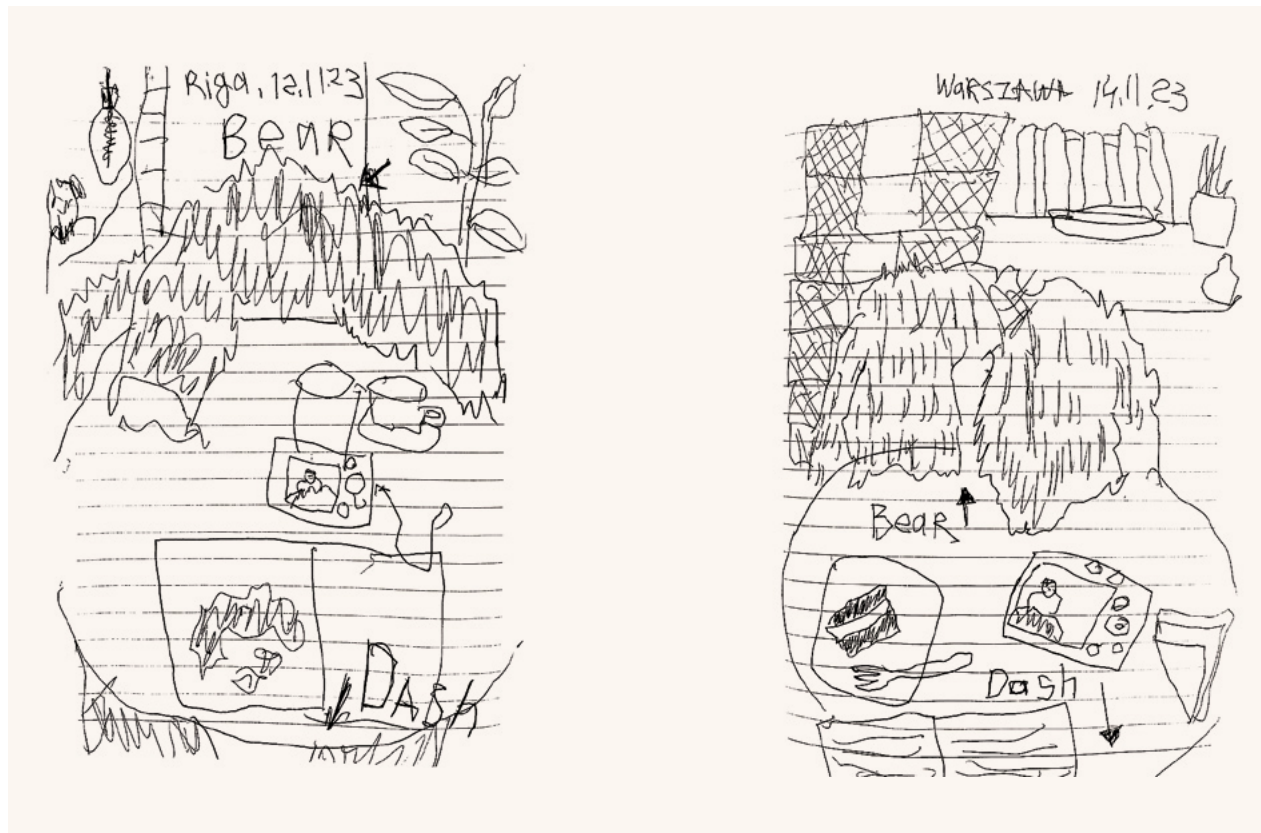
Now I'm attempting to explore this attachment with you, Bear. In no time I'm projecting those bonds onto our connection. Yet, I'm not leaving you or terrorizing you, or punishing you the way that Russia has done to me and those like me. We somehow carry that body history but maybe trying some other kind of love, right?

Tomorrow we are going to Warsaw, you will be packed inside the blue Ikea bag, pressed inside the silver suitcase during this 12 hour road journey.

Letter #6 (Latvia)

bear my love,

We are in Riga on our way to Warsaw. I am fully wet, carrying you through the rain and those Socialist concrete structures of stairs and underground paths. You are so heavy. It is breaking my body. Now we are on display at a bus station cafe. You are spread out on the cafe chair in front of me. The thrill is so high that no words of love come easily. There's a TV screen on my right and pop songs with the word "baby" are playing. A nearly perfect setting. A Russian-speaking person at the cashier register. It feels almost too simple that I can easily enter this parallel world just by using that language in the country that was a part of a large colonial project. I use English with you, dear Bear, I pretend that it is neutral, because it's the only other language I know besides the one that is so contested here in this place. Your body is welcomed here as just another traveler's item. A huge soft coat of love, so comforting on my travels, always there for me to hide in, to conceal the very national identity I'm taking out of the "queer" suitcase.



Letter #7 (Poland)

bear my love,

You stayed in the suitcase all morning, both of us are fully wiped out after this long bus ride. What happens to love when there is all this tiredness? I feel no love, sorry. Even this chocolate cake feels fake. Maybe tomorrow will be different.

Letter #8 (Poland)

bear my love,

We are still in Warsaw. It has been exactly one week plus half a day on the road. The reason we walked into this very expensive cafe is its name. It is called "White Bear" with a polar bear painting just above your headless body. So, how do you like your new head? We are clearly addicted to each other, Bear. You are my limb and I'm yours. We are each other's hearts, we are conjoined twins. I need you and cannot live without you. And I want you to need me in the same way. If you leave me I'll kill you. If I misbehave you punish me, but keep me. We will eat each other till we are no more. I've lived through it too many times and it's all too familiar. But it's so delicious. When I listen to another pop song I feel a sweet painful sting of desire in my stomach. I want you like that, to be mine. I want you like that all over again.

Letter #9 (Hungary)

bear my love,

We just arrived in Budapest. I'm exhausted, my nose is running and my head is spinning a bit. Did I get sick, my Bear? Did you make me sick?

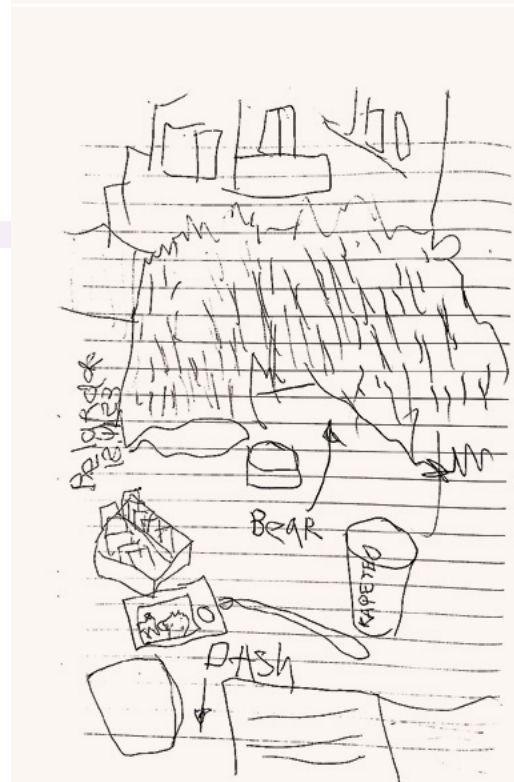
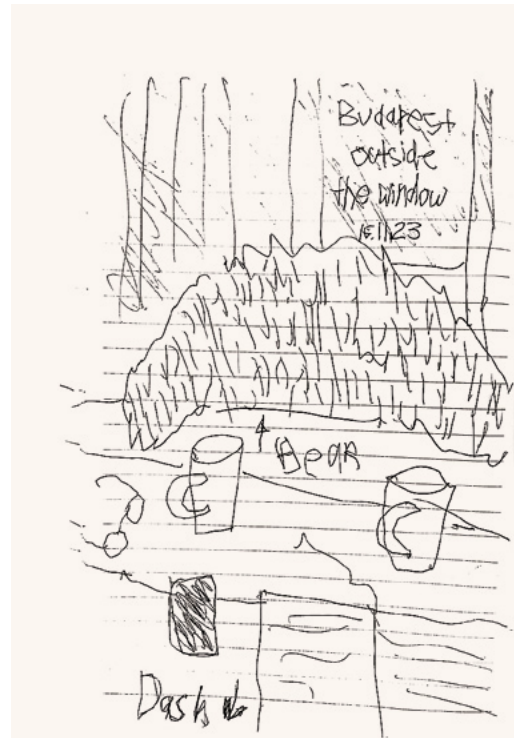
Letter #10 (Belgrade, Serbia)

bear my love,

Every time I have felt that I've come to some kind of edge on this trip, there is always more. Like getting sick last night, sick and emotionally unwell. You were out of the suitcase and I was weeping next to you, fully and totally exhausted. Maybe a small fever, foggy head, slept many hours and woke up past the doom state. We can do it. Just a bit of this trip left and I can again return to the adventure mode. Adventure mode is open to love mode: loving new, curious, even when things do not go well. Like the strain of these more and less horrible flats that I have been staying at. I feel like I have to skip and not see the last two countries, not give them any attention so I can survive on this trip, attend to this body demanding my time, loving my body and not putting any love towards a new place.

How to love a new place by giving it time, by turning toward it, by turning to its many sides and edges? I find myself not able to regulate, I put too much focus on keeping it together logistically. Make others responsible for my unwellness—this is a total love collapse.

We are sitting outside, it is cold but there is something about not being fully inside this hip cafe production, being somewhat on the margins that is good for me. Ready to get up and continue. Maybe looking forward to the comfort of Airbnb, coming back, making food out of things I bought last night, finishing packing, meditating and leaving. Feels ecological in this setting even if I did not encounter any local experience.

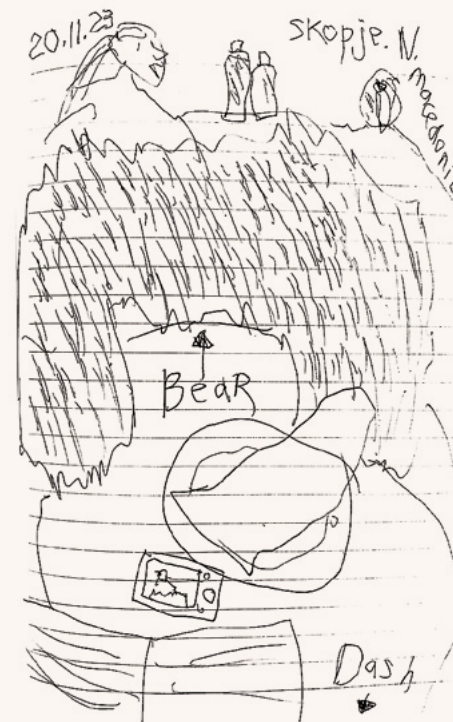


Letter #11 (North Macedonia)

bear my love,

We are almost there, just one more night, two more buses. Skopje.

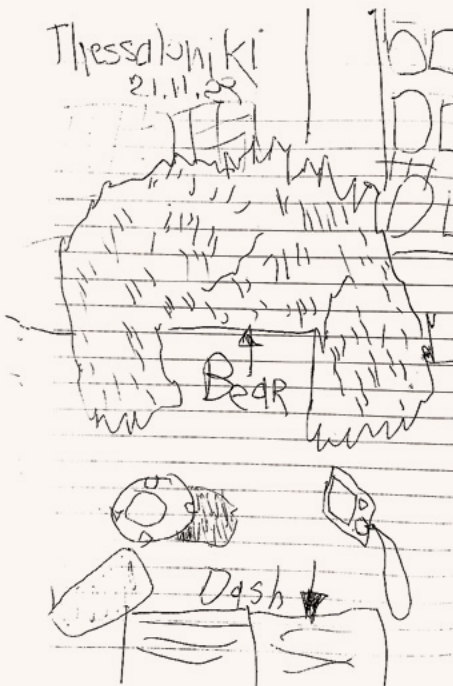
This writing is less and less about love and more about how I'm surviving sitting on the side of the road with huge bear luggage watching bus station hustle. Everything is moving, half-relaxed, half-predatory. Once you and I arrive in Athens, we're going to take lots of tender time together.



Letter #12 (Thessaloniki, Greece)

bear my love,

We are in Greece. My body is already expanding, less tightness, more ease. Easier to open up to a stranger, to feel space for loving. There's joy again, like the bitter strip of this lovelessness is somewhere behind. We are in Thessaloniki. Onward to Athens. Body truly relaxes in the warmer climate. Warmth looks good on you too.



Letter #13 (Athens, Greece)

bear my love,

We visit this church a lot. You lie on the steps resting. You like the church. Project of love. Project of patriotism.



Pärnu, Estonia



Massiaru, Estonia



Massiaru, Estonia



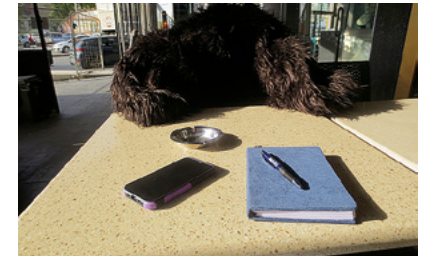
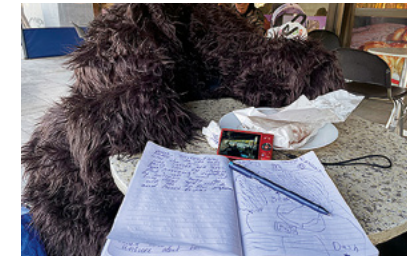
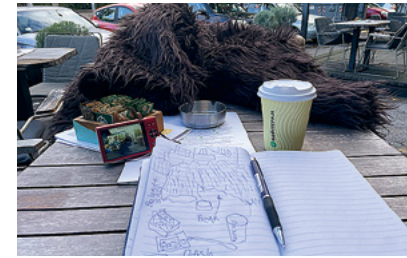
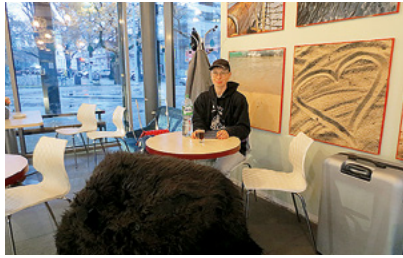
Massiaru, Estonia



Riga, Latvia



Riga, Latvia



Warsaw, Poland



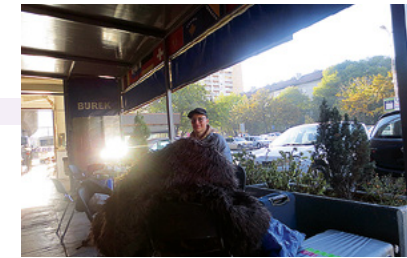
Warsaw, Poland



Budapest, Hungary



Belgrade, Serbia



Skopje, North Macedonia



Thessaloniki, Greece



MIRfestival

November 24-30, 2023
Athens, Greece

Fond Reflections: A Space for Tenderness

Jennie Klein

MIRfestival, curated by Christiana Galanopoulou, is a biennial festival of experimental performance, live media events, concerts, and interventions in the urban space that take place across the geography of Athens, Greece. The festival is named after *Mir*, the first modular space station, operated by the Soviet Union and then by Russia. “Mir”, or “Мир” in Russian, means “world” and “peace,” and had been deactivated in 2001, seven years before the first MIRfestival took place. Galanopoulou made *Mir*, and what it represented, the conceptual foundation of the festival, writing that MIR is “a system in orbit, parallel to other systems, like the Soviet (and later Russian) orbital station it shares its name with. Passing by artists, creators of ephemeral and unique works, stop on MIR for a while to emit their signal before they continue their trip in time and space. MIRfestival is situated on the cutting edge of the new creation, on the provocation of the unexplored, on the violence of birth, on the acuteness of claim.”¹

Galanopoulou’s use of *Mir* has shifted it from being a physical site to a metaphorical conception of the elliptical circulation of bodies, actions, ideas, and time. The city of Athens becomes the physical location on and through which the concept of *Mir* operates. Planet Earth, rather than outer space, is now literally *Mir*’s natural environment, since *Mir* fell back to earth after being deactivated. *Mir*’s mission, rather than *Mir* itself, has become the site of all that is experimental, challenging, and daring. Beginning in 2008, Galanopoulou/MIRfestival has created an event/space where artists and audiences, foreign and local, come together to share and exchange their vision of the world, free of recrimination, condemnation, and judgement. Artists, or, as Galanopoulou playfully calls them, MIRnauts, are invited to chart their own path through Athens, which is part of planet Earth, making a performance especially for it, before departing to “continue their trip in time and space.”

As a curator, Galanopoulou strives to produce meaning out of performance work that is presented in the festival and, via this meaning, to create spaces of free thinking for the citizens about citizenship itself. She chooses artists whose artistic practices reflect her concerns about participatory citizenship. The artists that she selects make work that gently, and often playfully, guides the audience to a heightened awareness (or subconscious realisation) of the potential for authoritarianism and repression by supposedly democratic regimes. Galanopoulou selects artists, and performance sites, that empower people to become participatory citizens in a democratic society.

¹ Christiana Galanopoulou, “Mirssion,” www.mirfestival.gr web, accessed 25.05.2024.

She is, in her words, “trying to fight the darkness.”² This aim is reinforced by the title of MIR 2023: *Fond Affections: A Space for Tenderness*, a riff on This Mortal Coil’s song “Fond Affections,” from the 1984 LP/CD *It Will End in Tears*. The song “Fond Affections,” ends with the melancholic refrain “Let’s All Sit Down and Cry.” The title of the festival optimistically proposes the ability to see the future in order to understand and reshape the past. “MIR,” Galanopoulou writes, “has always been a space of freedom, a space of breathing for the artistic creation, where artists and spectators share visions of the world and of the reality ready to doubt, to propel themselves to new horizons, to see new realities arise.”³ This space for breathing is a utopic space, a tender space, a vulnerable space, and an accepting space. MIRfestival sets up this space for the expression of grief, with the hope that through mourning for what and who is no more, a channel will be created for a connection with the generative powers of rebirth and renewal. Galanopoulou, who is interested in the underlying connection of politics and poetics, paraphrases T.S. Eliot, when she asks how we can inhabit a destroyed planet. “How could we manage to make the dead earth fill with flowers?”⁴ It will become clear by the end of the festival that this is both a metaphorical and a literal question, one that must be answered sooner rather than later.

² Christiana Galanopoulou, email to author, 29.06.2024.

³ Christiana Galanopoulou, “MIR 2023: Fond affections: a space for tenderness,” in Christiana Galanopoulou (Ed.), *MIRfestival 2023*, 5. (English version)

⁴ Galanopoulou, “MIR 2023,” 5.



FIG. I

**Despina Sanida Krezia
DOWN TO UNDER
– Under the Stoa**

The opening night of MIRfestival featured the frenetic and mesmerising performance *Down to Under* (FIG. I), choreographed by Despina Sanida Krezia and performed by Sanida Krezia and Eleni Roberts Kazouri. The site of the performance was a part of the ancient wall of the city of Athens under a building in Aristidou street, that remained intact in a 1950s glass and steel Stoa designed to house individual shops under a building. In ancient Athens, a stoa was a classical portico or porch, a partially enclosed, roofed structure that included a wall of columns, allowing people to enter and exit the structure with ease. In modern Greek stoa means both a porch and an underground passage. The site in which Sanida Krezia and Roberts Kazouri performed had little resemblance to an ancient stoa. Deep underground and accessible only by a steep, narrow ramp that included warnings in several languages regarding access, *Under the Stoa* looked more like a cave than a street. Once there, the audience was confronted with two angry women dressed in trainers, dirty, paint-streaked jeans, and t-shirts, moving frenetically around a slanted subterranean space filled with detritus that looked more like a cave than anything else. The music, composed by Panos Alexiadis, was loud, energetic, and fast-paced, a perfect foil for Sanida Krezia’s choreography of pumping fists and rapid, staccato movements. The two performers used the entire space, climbing ladders, changing their shirts, spray painting graffiti, and slamming cement blocks to the floor or beating the blocks with baseball bats. Spray paint was used liberally, with the artists painting matching frowning faces on the backs of each other’s shirts. The entire effect was compounded by the flashing strobe lights.



FIG. II

Sanida Krezia’s choreography was informed by the types of movement and actions that she had observed in urban underground music-based subcultures, such as hip-hop/rap, emo, noise, hardcore, and punk. Sanida Krezia refined those movements and with the support of dramaturg Elena Novakovits organised the placement of the dancers in relationship to the space. *Down to Under* was full of movement, sound, light, and youthful energy motivated by social injustice and fuelled by anger. The performance did not need the setting of the subterranean street to convey all of this—the repeat performance staged at Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels in April 2024 as part of *(Pas si) Fragile!*, although performed on a scaffolded platform and ramp, had the same feeling of immanent social disobedience that was simmering under the surface as the version performed in Athens. What was different was the feeling of the space under the stoa in comparison to the cavernous Halles de Schaerbeek—claustrophobic and physically dangerous for the audience and the performers, a place where anger could potentially spill over into violence.⁵

**FOND AFFECTIONS:
Stelios.exe live
and Spyros Kourvaras
– in a secret forest**

Fond Affections, named after the song by This Mortal Coil, was a mini-event that was part of MIRfestival 2023, a one-day bus excursion that began and ended at Space Baby, the festival hub. After boarding the bus, the audience were transported to a secret wood, a pine-covered forest on the outskirts of the city of Athens that had been badly damaged by the catastrophic forest fires in July and August 2023. The forest, considered to be the “lungs of Athens”, in addition to being a popular spot where Athenians go to cool off in the summer, helps to cleanse the air by

⁵ The stoa was not actually physically dangerous, rather, it felt that way.



FIG. III



FIG. IV



FIG. V



FIG. VI

absorbing heat. On the way to the site, at the moment it was clear for everyone that the “secret forest” would be a burned forest, Galanopoulou gave a synopsis of the devastation wrought by the wildfires. In response to the death toll in 2019, the right-wing government that subsequently came to power made the decision in 2021 and 2023 to evacuate the local people rather than allow them to help fight the wildfires. Lacking on-the-ground knowledge of the trails and access points to the mountainous areas, the firefighters were forced to rely on antiquated equipment that was woefully inadequate. For their own reasons, the Greek government basically allowed the forests to burn, making Greece number one country in the EU in terms of burnt surface. In 2023 alone, 11% of the total surface of the country was burnt (not to add what was burnt in 2021 and all the recent years)⁶. As the bus approached the charred landscape, Galanopoulou played *Fond Affections* by This Mortal Coil, because the devastated forest was enough to make anyone cry.

The audience, upon disembarking, were directed towards a grove of trees (FIG. II), where they gathered for the haunting melodies of stelios.exe (FIG. III). Three months later, the odour of burning wood and underbrush remained, as did the burnt trees and soot streaked soil. The damage done to the forest was appalling, even more so because it was so preventable. Stélios Lazarou/stelios.exe had performed at the opening night party. There, he created a bridge between Renaissance and post-club music, two genres that are three centuries apart, but, according to stelios.exe, are “linked by their abrasive, expressionist

writing.”⁷ The concert played in the forest felt very different. The audience, some of whom remained in the grove of trees and some of whom had moved further away to enjoy the warmth of the winter sun, sat quietly listening to *live in a burnt forest*, which was more elegiac than club. Lazarou’s haunting musical performance, which included excerpts from the 15th-16th century Spanish Renaissance manuscript *Cancionero de Palacio*, seamlessly combined the past and the present.

Cancionero de Palacio was a songbook that included the work of many composers and 458 songs with varied themes.⁸ Lazarou appeared to have chosen melancholic songs for *live in a burnt forest* (FIG. IV), an appropriate choice for the Athenians who had participated in the MIRfestival for many years. In 2021, Galanopoulou, in deference to Covid restrictions, had programmed all of the events outdoors, including several near the site of the secret forest. Just a few months later, the site was devastated by the unchecked wildfires, and then devastated again in 2023. *live in a burnt forest* was followed by a 20 minute excerpt from *Natura Morta (a dance less)*, choreographed by Spyros Kouvaras and performed by Kouvaras and Christina Karayanni. *Natura Morta* was choreographed to original music by Giorgos Kouvaras, Spyros Kouvaras’ late brother and collaborator. The performance at the secret forest was deceptively simple, a performance reduced to the actions of two people who responded to one another,

⁷ stelios.exe, “stelios.exe,” <https://www.stelios-exe.com/>, accessed 02.06.2024.

⁸ The Renaissance manuscript was transcribed and published in 1890 by Francisco, Asenjo Barbieri, who titled the collection of songs *Cancionero musical de los siglos XV y XVI* (Musical songbook of the 15th and 16th centuries), *Cancionero de Palacio*, Wikipedia, accessed 06.06.2024.

surrounded by a ravished, yet still beautiful forest. *Natura Morta* means still life. If translated literally into English, however, it also means dead nature. The performance of *Natura Morta* allowed for both of these interpretations. Dressed in black, the performers came together and drifted apart, ultimately doing a series of *demi-détournés* in opposite directions that allowed the dancers to move out of view of the audience. The performance was meant to serve as a *memento mori*, a reminder of the inevitability of death. *Natura Morta*, according to the programme, was two dancers suspended in grief and ecstasy, trauma and healing, paying a last farewell.⁹ In the context of the devastation to Mt. Parnitha, the performance meant something more—a last farewell, followed by a resurrection. The forest, although frightfully abused, was still not dead. Just as the memory of Giorgos Kouvaras was resurrected and revived by *Natura Morta*, so too was the memory of the forest revived.

Ingri Fiksdal DIORAMA – Sculpted Quay of Flisvos

Ingri Fiksdal’s *Diorama* (FIG. V-VI) took place at sunset on the Flisvos Seafront Sculptured Quay, Paleo Faliro. In her large scale, outdoor pieces, Fiksdal has questioned the relationship between humans, who have lived on Earth for a relatively short amount of time, and the deep time of geology, including rocks and fossils, asking what humans might become in a post-Capitalocene era when life has changed radically due to the impact of the industrial and technological revolution. The title of the piece, *Diorama*, refers to

⁹ Spyros Kouvaras, “Natura Morta (a dance less)”, in Christiana Galanopoulou (Ed.), *MIRfestival 2023*, 21.

two inventions that happened during the industrial revolution that justified the use of natural resources in the name of progress. The first, a diorama, was a 19th century theatre with a revolving platform for spectators who were awed by large landscape paintings that were displayed alongside real objects and controlled lighting. The diorama theatre was introduced to Europe by Louis Daguerre, who was responsible for the daguerrotype, the second invention, which he hoped could be made large enough to replace the painstaking work of painting the large panels.

Fiksdal’s *Diorama*, by contrast, had none of the technological magic that caused the English painter John Constable to condemn the diorama as “without the pale of art, because its object was deception.”¹⁰ As befits a diorama that is intended to be post-industrial/Capitalocene, *Diorama*, with its soundtrack (composed by Jenny Hval and Lasse Marhaug) of industrial noises and indecipherable whispers, gestured to a future in which humans were becoming fossils and the Earth was once again overrun with water. *Diorama* recalled the famous Situationist graffito in response to the May 1968 worker’s uprising in France: beneath the pavement, the beach. The humans, all but unrecognisable as humans in the fantastic costumes that Fredrik Floen had designed, crawled and slithered around Nella Golanda’s Sculpted Quay, seemingly intent on re-entering the ocean water of the Saronic Gulf. Several discarded parts of costumes were actually blown into the water, with the result that the final image of the performance was the carapaces floating out to sea, seemingly disappearing into the spectacular sunset.

¹⁰ John Constable, quoted in Vic, “The Diorama: 19th century entertainment,” *Jane Austen’s World* blog, November 18, 2011.



FIG. VII

**Dash Che BEAR, MY LOVE
– Church of St. Nicolas,
Asklipiou Street**

Bear, my love (FIG. VII-VIII) is a performance that was generated while Dash Che travelled from Helsinki, Finland, where they currently live, to Athens, Greece. Che was one of four artists who were asked to slow travel as part of the project “What Time Is It?” organised by Time for Live Art.¹¹ Over the course of several days, Che travelled by ship and bus while carrying a large bear suit that they had previously used for their performance *M*otherland: stack of rules and a big collective feeling* which took place at the Children’s Culture Center Seikkailupuisto (Adventure Park) in Turku. Both *M*otherland* and *Bear, my love* explore the love attachment to a country and the meaning of patriotism. As a post-Soviet Union child in the nineties, Che spent many happy hours at abandoned construction sites that had been turned into improvised playgrounds. As a Russian American queer nonbinary dance and performance artist, Che has continued to be fascinated with playgrounds, particularly with how different playgrounds affect and shape the body, making that body into a citizen and a patriot. For *M*otherland*, Che, who was wearing Bear, romped through the Seikkailupuisto, with the audience gamely keeping up until they reached the miniature town where Che-Bear jumped onto a foot-powered wooden race car and began driving faster and faster until they crashed.

In contrast to *M*otherland*, *Bear, my love* was much more contained and introspective, a meditation on belonging, love, and patriotism. Russian American

¹¹ The other three artists were Theano Metaxa, *Deadlines*, Trouble and MIRfestival (discussed later in this essay), Mark Požlep, *Live Load*, *New Performance*, Turku, and Gaëtan Rusquet, *Along the Way, Among Others*, Glej, Infinite Present.



FIG. VIII

Che was too much for the Seikkailupuisto, alarming unsuspecting children who were not aware that a playground could be experienced that way, and violating the traffic regulations of the miniature town. Finnish Russian American Che, after having travelled through several countries by bus and boat, was much more in tune about what it means to belong to a country. During the journey, Che made drawings and photographs with Bear, and also wrote a series of love letters. As they wrote in the programme, “the coat of love envelops my body. Attaches to my skin and enters it like ingrown hair. ...I feel in love. I leave my own body and join the collective one.”¹² The letters that Che wrote to Bear deal with many things, including who does and who does not belong, how is privilege visualised, and how can we think about, and conceptualise, patriotism, even when we don’t approve of the actions of our mother country. Bear is Russia, whose national animal is the Eurasian brown bear. Bear might also be Finland, Che’s adopted country, whose national animal is also the Eurasian brown bear and whose language Che does not yet speak. Finally, Bear might also be California, whose state animal is the grizzly bear. Che lived in California as an undocumented immigrant until they became a citizen, long enough to learn English and to label themselves on their web site as Russian American. Once they became an American citizen, the longing for “the bear” brought them to Finland, a new homeland which borders Russia. The performance was very different this time. Encircled by the audience, who read aloud from Che’s love letters written during their travels, Che engaged with Bear, crawling into the headless pelt, stumbling around blindly, and blowing up a white balloon.

¹² Dash Che, “Bear, my love,” *MIRfestival 2023*, p. 31.



FIG. IX

Bear, my love took place in the courtyard of the Church of St. Nicolas, a looming Greek Orthodox Church on a hilltop that is fronted by a steep staircase (which provided seating). According to Galanopoulou, this courtyard had been a gathering place for anarchists and people who were disaffected with the government during the lock-down of the pandemic. Although the web page for the church suggests that its policies and priests are anything but progressive, the church became known as a meeting place for the politically disaffected whose anger was fuelled by a desire for justice and equity.¹³ During Covid, as the bars were closed down, the courtyard also served as an outdoor gathering place for young people who had no place to go, disobeying the governmental restriction of gathering. Working with Galanopoulou, Che chose the Church of St. Nicolas because the site was both a project of patriotism and a project of love.

**Off Site:
Theano Metaxa DEADLINES
– From the oldest cemetery
in Athens to Space Baby,
MIRfestival hub**

Theano Metaxa, also part of “What Time Is It?”, travelled from Athens to Brussels, Belgium, while accompanied by an unusual collaborator—supposedly the skeletal remains of a man who had possibly lost his life in battle during the second World War. Although Metaxa regarded the skeleton as Paolo, it was, in reality, a plastic skeleton. When approached for this commissioned performance, Metaxa wanted to travel with someone who was no longer alive. After

¹³ The church’s website includes a statement that the ordination of women is not acceptable. <https://www.agnikolaos.gr/arxiki-selida> accessed 07.06.2024.



FIG. X

searching for a companion at the oldest cemetery in Athens with no luck, Metaxa decided to travel with the skeleton of an Italian soldier who lost his life in a shipwreck in 1944 at Cape Sounion. After discovering Paolo at Cape Sounion, Metaxa travels with plastic Paolo to Bari, where many of the soldiers who lost their lives in WWI are buried. She crossed Europe with an imaginary companion to draw attention to the unidentified soldiers who lost their lives in the WWI and WWII and to the migrants who have lost their lives while trying to enter the EU or U.S., who have drowned.

Metaxa makes with *Deadlines* (FIG. IX-X) a multi-layered work, questioning acceleration as an idea and at the same time interested in understanding what political conditions are necessary for people to have agency or possibility over their own lives. What is human and what is non-human, and how do we differentiate between these two categories? As she journeys on trains, busses, taxis, and boats, Metaxa attempts to arrange for the same accommodations for herself and Paolo. At times, Paolo is permitted to travel like the human that he had once been. At other times, Paolo is unceremoniously stowed with the luggage. How is it that Paolo, who was clearly a living human at some point, no longer qualifies as human, and cannot travel in the same spaces that Metaxa accessed with ease? Metaxa turns to the writings of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben on the state of exception and the idea of the bare life that results from the creation of that state, which allows humans to be stripped of all agency. The question for Metaxa is how to return agency to those who have none. Aided by Metaxa, Paolo unsuccessfully petitions the EU Parliament to recognise the Mediterranean Sea as a monument to the many nameless people, who, like Paolo, have lost their lives and remained unburied and unmourned in the ocean waters.



FIG. XI

Although Paolo's petition was not successful, it was still important as it was the first step in which Paolo had shifted from being a plastic object to being an imagined subject. Metaxa decides that Paolo's favourite poem is "La Bambina di Pompei" by Primo Levi. The poem begins with an image of a small child in Pompeii, preserved by volcanic ash, with arms outstretched as though reaching desperately for her mother. In the poem, this small girl becomes another—a Dutch girl who wrote a diary while hiding from the Germans, and another—a Japanese school girl who was two years old when the Atomic bomb was deployed and died in agony ten years later. Levi, who survived internment in the concentration camp, used these young victims to suggest that the anguish felt by their deaths was everyone's anguish, an anguish that should expand to include all of the other senseless deaths as a result of war, bigotry, and intolerance. Like Levi, Metaxa's desire is that through re-humanizing one innocent victim, the anguish that follows should include compassion for all of those who have been deprived of their humanity. Metaxa took Paolo to the remains of the Pompeii amphitheatre, where she reads/performs "La Bambina di Pompei." She took Paolo to Brussels, where she tried to enter the European Commission and the European Parliament with Paolo and performed a first draft of a performance based on her travels. Finally, she brought Paolo to Athens, Greece, where Paolo and Metaxa shared their story.



FIG. XII

Off-Sites in Troubled Times

MIRfestival 2023 took place during uncertain times. While the Covid pandemic continued to haunt the festival and the entire Europe, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, wreaking havoc. Dash Che, a genderqueer, nonbinary post-Soviet diasporic citizen, felt compelled to state their opposition to the invasion. A little later, protesting against the occupation of Gaza by Israel and the continual attacks on Palestinian people, Hamas orchestrated a terrorist incursion into Israel in order to make the world pay attention, a goal that they achieved at the expense of many lives. As of this writing, the people of Gaza continue to suffer needlessly and terribly, pawns caught in a conflict not of their making. The beautiful and ancient forests in Greece remain blighted by fire. The inability to recognize the humanity of migrants and immigrants continues today, with President Biden issuing an executive order that permits the Border Patrol and the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) to close the border and force asylum seekers to return to Mexico/South America. Meanwhile, authoritarianism, fuelled by anti-immigration, sexism, racism, and homophobia is on the rise.

Three performances addressed these issues either directly or indirectly. Betty Tchomanga's performance lecture *Une leçon de ténèbres* (FIG. XI-XII), made especially for MIR, traced the artist's return to Africa, a journey into the metaphorical and problematically colonial "heart of darkness," where she encountered the disappeared, the ancestors, and the ghosts of her father's Cameroonian ancestry. In this subtle combination of documentary and performance, the documentary part traces how colonialism is at the foot of the ecological disasters of our time. In the performative part, an impossible to describe haunted dance with krump elements, connects voodoo as a resistance act with the traditions of the omnipresence of spirits, and the artist's dance practice with street dances of the black people, used as a protest



FIG. XIII

to racial discrimination. Sofia Kouloukouri's *Electric Wrath* (FIG. XIII) was a dance/workout about feminist anger and agency. The performers, all women, used an induction coil device that converted their kinetic energy into electricity that illuminated the action, which was produced by the ten performers, who managed to move in unison to convey a flashing vision of collective feminist wrath. Eva Meyer-Keller's *Death is Certain* (FIG. XIV), involves mutilating, torturing, and otherwise violating a box of strawberries, most of which are only partially recognisable at the end. *Death is Certain*, which Keller performed in a very matter-of-fact style in the early 2000s, initially pointed to the banality of evil, which is found in bureaucrats rather than tyrants. For the 2023 iteration, Keller added a twist, arranging for her teenage daughter to mutilate the strawberries instead. The banality of evil had turned into the innocence of evil, a good reminder that many things that cause great harm are initiated by good intentions.

While on the journey to the secret forest, Galanopoulou suggested that all she/Greece could do was cry, using the refrain of *Fond Affections* "let's all sit down and cry," implied that in front of the destruction of the world caused by late capitalism, our reaction could be to sit down and mourn in order to get connected to the power of regeneration. Actually she did much more than that. Galanopoulou programmed and, together with the MIRnauts (the artists and her team), created and produced a festival that, in spite of everything that had happened in the past few years, looked back at the past in order to imagine a better future, a future in which one could hope.



FIG. XIV



ALONG THE WAY, AMONG OTHERS — Gaëtan Rusquet

During this slow travel, I sought out the pleasure of being lost, of knowing and yet not knowing, trying to be displaced and moved by others, and, in doing so, question whether it moved others as well. The possibility of the encounter, sharing time. When do we stop to count what we give? With the others—humans or more than humans—, the body, the motion of the eyes caressing the territories and the landscapes.

This journey was also an opportunity to question the notions of work and pleasure, gift and sacrifice.

What is it to be touched, moved, cared for, what is it to spend time with a body, give attention.

Is there a transaction, what is the deal? And is it possible to measure the outcome of it?

I bonded with water as an ally, a medium and a travel companion. Carrying and carving memories and emotions, offering different paths, with the sea, the river, the canals, the snow, the rain, the tears, the fluids of the body.

As a strategy to get lost, I tried to let people advise me, or choose for me on what was the best path and itinerary to go to Ljubljana. I resisted the urge to plan it. This became an awkward negotiation between the desire to make it relevant and meet expectations, and the reality of the chaos I organized. Therefore how could I stay present in the very moment?

Saturday 13th of January

Saturday morning, I decided to travel by train and stay the closest to the straight line between Brussels and Ljubljana in order to arrive there.

Brussels>Germany>Austria>Slovenia. I cannot respect the task, there is no straight line between Brussels and Ljubljana. It's January, it's rainy and cold. When do I stop to follow my task? Liège is almost on the way, so I decide to visit friends I haven't seen for a long time. Travel is also about pleasure, right?

It's raining non stop. I make a first stop on the way to see her and her son in Liège. Their presence is comforting, although I fear to do something wrong, I fear to do the wrong choice. I flabbily let her choose for me the next stop. I don't sleep, I sweat, I cry.



Sunday 14th of January

First insomnia, I wake up. I try to be social. I think about traveling. I feel I'm making a mistake. She says I could also go through Italy, Italy is pretty, more sunny than Germany, and the food is good. I change my plans. I go to Italy, passing through Switzerland. I take the train, It's still raining. The next stop is Basel. The city is clean, windy, first traces of snow, I hear the sound of the fountains, I sleep.



Monday 15th of January

I wake up in Basel, the weather is changing. I work a bit in the hotel before leaving for Italy.

I think to go to Milan, it's on the way, I could also stop in Lugano beforehand. I don't know... I search for a client, I find a client, I meet the client, I give him what he wants. He wants pleasure. I fuck him. He pays me. I leave. I walk on a bridge, I look at the Rhine, the current and the wind are drawing impossible shapes and patterns.

I push a snowball along the top of a hedge. The snowball grows till it's too heavy for the hedge. It disappears between the branches. I make a new snowball and start again. I do it for a while.

I search for a sauna on the river. The sauna is open only for women. I'm disappointed, I go to the train station.

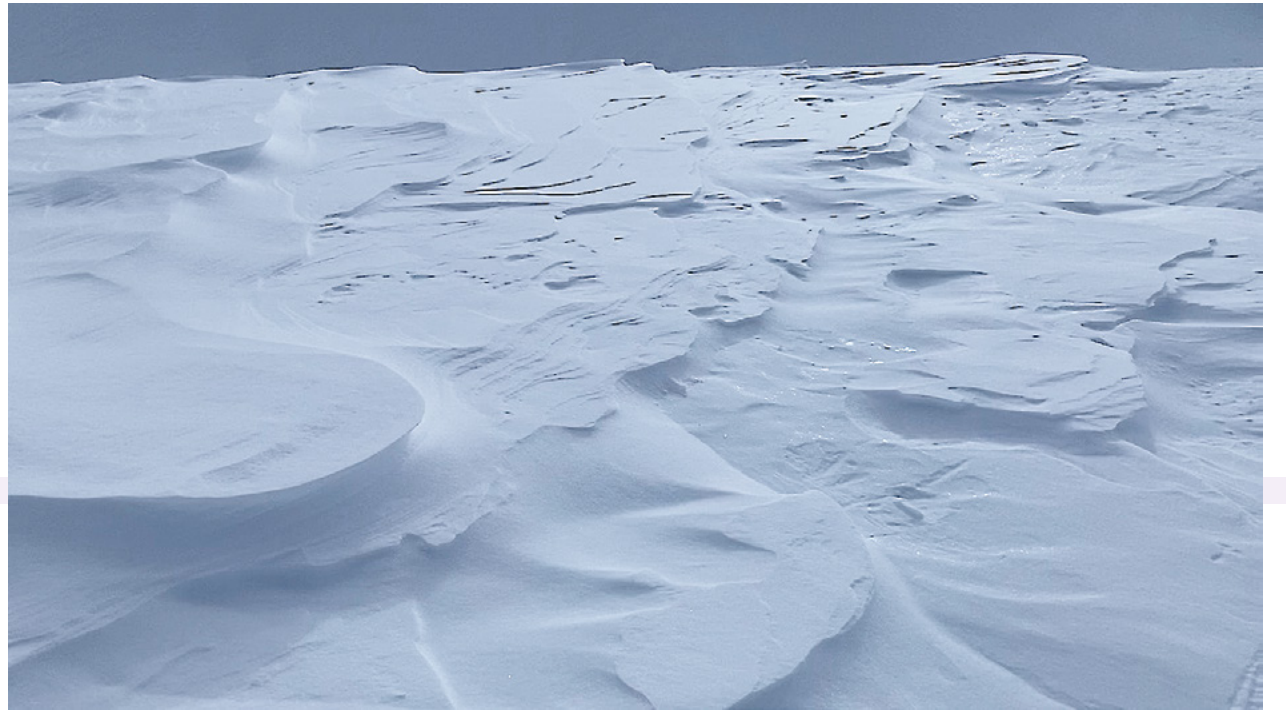
She says I didn't let her know I had started the trip. We could have prepared it together. I say I want to be lost, and I manage to do it. I feel bad and sad. She says she could have put me in contact with great people on the way, but through Germany. I feel guilty. I'm depressed at the train station.

I call him to find comfort. He tells me I could go see some mountains on the way. Mountains are beautiful, they elevate the mind. He asks me why I don't search for water. I want to work with water in Ljubljana. Then why not search for a thermal bath. I want hot springs. I want to heal. I change my plans.

I go see her at the ticket office, she tells me to go to Leukerbad, on the way to Milan. I take the train, I arrive in Leukerbad at night.

I wait for a bus in Leuk, I hear a torrent, I seek the torrent. I can't see it with the city lights. I only see branches, not the trunk, the roots or the ground. I record the white noise. I rock slowly my body to comfort myself with the sound. I take the bus, I walk, I find a hotel, I sleep, I cry.







Tuesday 16th of January

I wake up, the black choughs are drinking from a gutter. A slow dance through repetition. From the water to their throat.
I take the cable car. I put on snowshoes, I walk. I'm alone, the sound of the snow makes music, the snow is beautiful, frozen fluids, impossible shapes.
I see a meteor in a cloud. Rainbows in it. This is the second time I see one. This one is magical.
I come back to the hotel.
We talk, she says she knows people in Venice, not in Milan, that I should go to Venice.
Venice is good for the soul.
I ask her if there is snow in Ljubljana. I could work with it. She says there is no snow. I hope it will change.
I go to the thermal bath, I seek for rest, a sauna and a cold pool. I try to take pleasure and care for my body. I feel guilty, I don't enjoy it. This doesn't work.
I go to the restaurant, the food is good, I am lonely.
I go to sleep, I can't sleep.



Wednesday 17th of January

I go to the bus. I take the bus, the snow is falling, we go down the valley, slowly, it turns to rain. I take a train, I take a second train. It's still raining. I see the lakes, the rain, the sea, and I arrive in Venice. I call her, I ask her. I tell her I'm tired, and anxious, I fear to choose the wrong path, and I feel all the choices that I make are wrong.
She tells me there is no wrong path, all paths are part of the divine. That there is no possibility to be out of the divine, out of the love. She says we're all wounded beings, and interrelated. She says I'll always make someone unsatisfied or satisfied—including me—by the choice I make, or I don't make. But in the end, all choices are perfect. Let's be cuddled by nature, be part of the whole. I find calm, peace, I rest. I walk in the city. I wonder about the path of the ground and the path of the water, and how those paths are overlapping in Venice. I wonder how the access to the private spaces—side door, side track, or theatrical doors—are articulated with those networks. From the body of the architecture, to my own body, how can I allow the path of the water to be part of the creative process in the following days?



Thursday 18th of January

I visit the Guggenheim Foundation,
I discover the workshop is full, I'll have
people to work with during my time in
Slovenia.
I read Jenny Holzer on a marble bench.
It feels close to me:
"I don't think, I bury my head, I bury your
head, I bury you, my fever, my skin,
I cannot breathe, I cannot eat, I cannot
walk, I'm losing time.
I smile, I touch your hair, you are the
one, you are the one who did this to me,
you are my own, I show you, I feel you,
I ask you, I don't ask.
I'm losing ground, I cannot stand it, I cry,
I cry out, I bite, I bite your lip, I breathe
your breath, I pulse, I pray, I pray aloud.
I smell you on my skin, I say your name,
I cover you, I shelter you, I run from you,
I sleep beside you, I smell you, on my
clothes, I keep your clothes."

I take the train to Ljubljana.
It stops raining.
I arrive at night. I walk. I'm calm, I rest.



Friday 19th of January

I wake up in Ljubljana. It's snowing heavily.



The workshop and the performance

Although I thought I would connect with humans during the slow travel, I mainly was in relation with the non-human, but struggling with human relations and expectations, mainly with my own. I also felt that all the intentions that were set at the beginning of the project came into place during the slow travel, the workshop and the performance. The workshop was part of the journey, to share sensations, concerns and bring them in relation to each other. Then with an audience for the performance. While questioning intimacy, desire, pleasure, boundaries, and care, it felt like we were both in relation with matter and energy, connected to the tangible, the spiritual. The slow travel and the relation to water stayed with us during the process. As a common ground, a medium between our bodies, connecting them sensually, to the desire, the care, the landscape, and all the sensations and memories it arouses.



Infinite Present

January 24-26, 2024
Ljubljana, Slovenia

What It Means To Live

Jennie Klein

What durational performance always does, then, is remind us what it is to live. Alongside the laughter and the tears, the bizarre repetition and the beads of sweat trickling down the performers' foreheads, durational performance is about breathing.

Dan Hutton

Dan Hutton, "Drama Matters: What Do We Mean by Durational Performance?", *Litro Magazine*, 20 June 2014, web.

The title of the festival already suggests that it will encourage reflections on the notion of physicality in the intense duration of the present moment, overriding the past kind of duration, on the time of history, a linear, continuous time that encompasses the past, the present, and the future.

Mara Anjoli Vujić

Mara Anjoli Vujić, "Infinite Present," curatorial statement, festival brochure and web site.

The inaugural iteration of *Infinite Present*, curated by Mara Anjoli Vujić, took place in January 2024 at Glej Theatre and Cukrarna Gallery, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. As Vujić indicated above, the festival was curated in order to emphasise the way that performance art both stretches and condenses time so that it becomes elastic and malleable, rather than linear. With live performance, Vujić suggests, past, present, and future no longer moves seamlessly along, with the present becoming the past and the future becoming the present. Rather, the present is always present, hence the title of the festival. Vujić's emphasis on time suggests that many of the performances could be considered durational, a term that suggests a warping, lengthening, or shifting of time, so that the actions of the artist seem to be untimely, or out of sync with time.

Durational time, as demonstrated by the work of Olga de Soto who performed at Trouble festival¹, can be seen as queer time, in the sense that it defies the neoliberal, capitalist logic of clock time in order to decelerate the action. This can sometimes result in a performance that lasts a very long time, a performance that requires stamina and endurance, or a performance in which the actions are drawn out. Durational performance does not have to last for hours, or even days, to remind us, as Hutton suggests, what it is to live, to breathe, and to be present. This kind of interaction between audience and artist requires a certain level of intimacy and attention, and a willingness on the part of the curators, to allow time for the artists and the audience to stay with the piece with the understanding that the plan will be followed.

The understanding of duration, and endurance which can be durational, as an event that is planned and executed, has much in common with ritual actions. Durational performances remind us what it means to live because they tap into ritualistic actions that allow for energy to be exchanged, forces unleashed, and activities triggered. This commitment of the artists and the audiences can be seen as participation in a ritual event.

¹ See the essay "Queering Time", pages 23 to 32



FIG. I

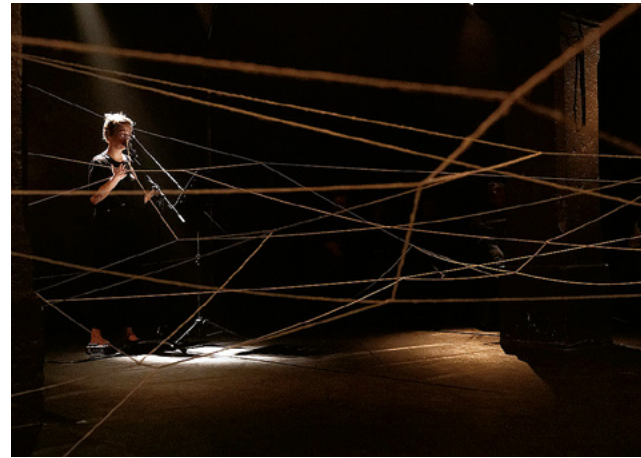


FIG. II

AREA OF WEAVED SPACE

Richard Schechner has argued out that there is very little difference between ritual and theatre/performance, noting that the “functions of theatre identified by Aristotle and Horace—entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education (including political education), and healing—are also functions of ritual.”² Live artists have often used durational actions in order to challenge hegemonic constructions of spiritual and religious identity and posit alternative ritualistic practices instead. Many of the performances for Infinite Present involved ritualistic acts. *Area of Weaved Space* (FIG. I-II), performed by Lučka Centa, Tery Žeželj, and Urška Preis was devised to create a temporary gathering where people literally wove themselves together in the space of the Glej theatre. In a performance that harked back to feminist ritual performance work from second wave feminism, Centa, Žeželj, and Preis alternated reading texts (in English) that drew on an oral history of women’s communities, knowledge that was passed down from mothers to daughters, and the art of weaving, which has been closely associated with women since prehistory. The women who were not speaking created a woven structure reminiscent of a spider web, that linked audience and artists.

Area of Weaved Space recalled the use of ritual by artists such as Donna Henes/Spiderwoman, Betsy Damon/*The 10,000 Year Old Women*, and Mary Beth Edelson, all of whom sought to rewrite patriarchal history in light of the work of Marija Gimbutas, who, based on her findings from excavations that she conducted in “Old Europe” at the end of her career, argued that Prehistoric European Culture had been

matriarchal and had worshipped a Mother Goddess and other female deities that were connected to nature. Matriarchal societies were peaceful rather than war-like, and basically egalitarian. Centa, Žeželj, and Preis were referencing this culture in their performance, which, like that of Henes, Damon, and Edelson, was meant to posit an alternative to patriarchal capitalist society and its construction of linear time. Instead, the artists proposed a non-linear, circular construction of time that allows for care-based work. This idea of circular, nonlinear time was evident in Centa’s performance *To Sense a Body*, performed in a small space off-site from Glej Theatre. As with *Area of Weaved Space*, *To Sense a Body* challenged patriarchal notion of the primacy of vision by proposing that the audience experience the performance aurally rather than visually. The audience experienced the performance while blindfold, with Centa creating an environment of percussive sound that passed through and around the sight deprived audience. As with *Area of Weaved Space*, the audience was challenged to find knowledge through unaccustomed channels.

LIQUID PORTAL

Liquid Portal (FIG. III-IV) is part of a series of performances by Guadalupe Aldrete that explore the intergenerational nature of somatic memories.³ Somatic memories, also known as body memories, are physical sensations of discomfort, unease, and pain that linger in the body after a stressful or overwhelming experience, particularly when the experience is traumatic. Aldrete, formerly known as LaLa Nomada, began by making performances and art installations that references her somatic memories



FIG. III



FIG. IV

of her own birth, such as the performative installation *Piel con Piel* (2021), which took place in the former obstetrical hospital “Sammelweisklinik” in an underwater delivery room. Through her auto ethnographic research on her somatic memories of her own birth, Aldrete gradually realised that somatic memories were not confined to one generation or one person, but could in fact be inter-generational and even cultural. *Liquid Portal* is an exploration of the way in which Aldrete’s generational history has imprinted itself on and through her body. The performance began when Aldrete, clothed in a pink, Grecian-style chiton, stepped onto a cloth of gold that had been spread on the floor, carrying a large bowl on her head into which was placed a small clay vessel containing burning coal, a substance that Aldrete uses frequently in her performances. Aldrete then knelt on the floor, and poured the contents of a bottle of very black ink into two bowls, once of which she drank, and the other a container for the ink that she painted on her body. After removing the chiton and suspending it above the space, Aldrete walked around the space holding the remains of the large bowl of ink, imprinting her body on the chiton, into which she eventually climbed, continuing to drink and spill the ink on her body while using the chiton as a hammock/womb. The performance concluded with Aldrete lying prone on the cloth of gold, after having poured the rest of the ink on her head and knelt over the brazier.

Prior to *Liquid Portal*, Aldrete had created a series of performances that were part of the *s./t. series* 2014-2020. The title of the series refers to Aldrete’s compulsion to chew, press, or pulverise charcoal, a substance that materialises her family and her ancestry, beginning with her father, who worked at an oil refinery. Aldrete is a Mexican citizen living in Vienna, subjected to the racism and nativism that is on the rise in Europe and is the subject of her 2022 performance/video *Soft Aliens*, made in collaboration

with Andrea Vezga. Through her research she has become the repository of her family’s violent indigenous and colonial histories. Working with coal and its products, such as ink, is hard on the body. Griselda Pollock has suggested that psychic trauma resides, or colonizes, a subject that cannot know it and cannot name or represent the event or events with which it was initiated. It is a permanent absence. Art, Pollock argues, is a representation that returns the unknown traumatic event through temporising and spatializing, which in turn creates a necessary distance from “the overwhelming, undigested thingness of trauma as perpetual but unsigned presentness.”⁴ Art, Pollock suggests, is able to create a new space of encounter.” *Liquid Portal* is the ritualistic presentation that engages with trauma in order to stop the cycle. Aldrete’s body is the medium through which that trauma is acknowledged.

² Richard Schechner, “Ritual and Performance,” *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture, and Social Life*, Tim Ingold, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 613.

³ The series was not named on the Glej programme, however, the performance has much in common with the Aldrete’s *s./t. series* (2014-2020).

⁴ Griselda Pollock, *After-effects/After-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 3.



FIG. V

ALONG THE WAY, AMONG OTHERS

Gaëtan Rusquet, who devised this performance from a workshop that he conducted prior to the festival, is the fourth artist who agreed to undertake slow travel as part of “Time for Live Art.” Rusquet’s journal, which is available in this publication, suggests that slow travel was an exercise of endurance for him. Rusquet deliberately relinquished control and allowed others to make the decision about each leg of his journey. The release of control left Rusquet feeling unmoored and beside himself. At the same time, Rusquet found pleasure in the liminal state of not knowing and of allowing things to happen to him. The title of the performance alludes to Rusquet’s mental state while travelling—unsure of where and when he would go, and among others but not sure of his reception. As he travelled from Brussels to Ljubljana in January weather, Rusquet asked himself the following questions, questions that he also posed to the participants in his workshop. “When does the moment we stop counting what we give occur? What is it to be touched, moved, cared for reciprocally? When do I give attention to a body?”⁵

The biography Rusquet submitted to *Infinite Present* states that he is interested at how one fits into a place, and that he seeks a ritualised form that brings the relationships between people and place into play. Performance, for Rusquet, is a liminal moment in which the relationships between performers and the audience are brought into play, “revealing their connectivity and power to act.”⁶ *Along the Way, Among Others* (FIG. V-VI) was a really beautiful ritual with snow

⁵ Gaëtan Rusquet, *Along the Way, Among Others*, Glej website, accessed 19.06.2024.

⁶ Rusquet, *Along the Way*, Glej website, accessed 19.06.2024.



FIG. VI

and water that addressed trust, caretaking, cleansing, purification, and rebirth. The performance began with Rusquet bringing a large snowball into the performance space. During his slow journey, Rusquet had thought of water, and the forms that water takes. A serendipitous snow storm that blanketed Ljubljana just before the festival, enhancing the beauty of the city, provided the (frozen) water that was needed for this performance. What followed was an exchange of water, with Rusquet and Ayla Heier creating a human fountain, projecting water mixed with saliva into one another’s mouth. There was an incredible scene of bathing and cleansing—a ritual act of purification that required a great deal of trust and care on the part of all participants. The performance ended with those who had been bathed being wrapped in warm blankets. This action recalled the work of Joseph Beuys, who, according to his own mytho-biography, had been wrapped in grease and felt by the Tatars when his plane was shot down. It also circled back to Rusquet’s interest in giving attention to a body and how to accomplish that attention. The careful and respectful bathing of the people who offered their bodies made clear what was at stake in an exchange such as this.



FIG. VII

A SUPPER WITH THE ARTIST

Tomislav Brajnović’s *A Supper With The Artist*, performed with Sven Moro and Igor Anjoli, was a 90 minute participatory performance on the last evening of the festival. Brajnović believes that the form of art is less important than its content. Art should be used to undermine state propaganda, authoritarianism, and the plethora of conflicting information delivered on various social media platforms. *A Supper With The Artist* began as the Urban Picnic Project in Zagreb in 2000. The installation became a platform for gathering people and interested passersby in a public space. The Urban Picnic Project, a forerunner of *A Supper With The Artist*, had an object—the table—that drew people’s attention because it was placed out of context. Over time, the character of *A Supper With The Artist* changed, and the art was left behind. The meaning of the piece lay in its setting—a table, good cheese, bottles of good red wine, and no expectation that something “artistic” was going to happen. Brajnović has done several of these suppers, including a supper that took place at Brajnović’s hilltop Studio Golo Brdo in 2009. Guests came with red wine, a wild boar was prepared and served, and the evening ended with music and dancing.⁷

For the performance at Glej, Brajnović had refined *A Supper With The Artist*. In the intervening 15 years, Brajnović had obtained three abandoned vineyards along with a small vineyard at Studio Golo Brdo, and now produces his own wine in small quantities. The wine is used for *Suppers* or other related art work. *A Supper With The Artist* offered red Reset wine and white Malvasia Reset. The meal included cheese, meat, and seafood purchases from local farmers and fishermen. Anjoli, a master chef based in Rijeka

⁷ There is a video of this event, titled *Festa*, available on Vimeo.



FIG. VIII

(Croatia), was responsible for making the dinner. The audience were responsible for deciding which dinner they preferred: beef or seafood. Brajnović had two additions for this performance. First Sven Moro, an architect who had done a residency at Golo Brdo, gave a 20 minute lecture-performance on a new climate model, demonstrating that climate change is a prelude to a return to the pre-flood state, described in the Bible as a watery vault/greenhouse effect that protected the Earth and provided a subtropical climate.⁸ Second was the addition of a very large 5.0 bottle of Armagedon (spelled with one d on the bottle) Wine, which looked to be about 5 litres, but was called 5.0 due to being in its 5th year of production (Brajnović started the Armagedon series in 2019). Armagedon refers to the destruction of what Brajnović considers to be modern religions: concern with the accumulation of wealth and status symbols, blind patriotism, and the rise of identity politics. Brajnović uses the term Armagedon, a Biblical final battle between good and evil, as a kind of shorthand for his quest to cut through the surplus noise of material and media culture and reverse the damage that has been done to the planet and to the sentient and non-sentient beings that exist on it. The celebratory offering of the 5.0 jug of Armagedon, red wine that recalls both Passover and The Last Supper, speaks to the ritual nature of the meal. Reset, the title of the red and white table wine, is a critique of the state of humanity and the digitalisation of contemporary culture and addresses the need for humanity to reset—live simpler lives that are not dominated by the white noise of media culture.⁹

⁸ Moro’s performance [or lecture?] caused some controversy due to the context and the delivery of the performance.

⁹ For more information on the history of *A Supper With The Artist* see Saša Nabergoj, “Tomislav Brajnović: An Artist Is a Living Museum: Curator’s Text,” Loški Muzej, web site, accessed 20.06.2024.



FIG. IX

UNTITLED (WANDERINGS) and WORKSITE 101/3

Duration, as Edward Scheer argues, “implies a specific construction of time, a deliberate shaping of it to effect a particular experience for the viewer or the audience,” however, it can also be the “quality of time experienced in the doing of an action rather than simply the quantity of chronological time that a task might consume,” a definition that points more towards the experience of privation that is more often closely associated with endurance art.¹⁰ The two categories are not mutually exclusive, however, there is a difference. Duration does not necessarily mean that the artist is suffering or experiencing undue hardship. A durational performance does suggest that time will be bent, queered, or slowed down. Endurance performance, like duration, can also disrupt neoliberal, post-capitalist clock time. And, as Scheer points out, the literal chronological time of endurance is less important than the experience of privation on the part of the artists and sometimes the audience as well. Endurance means that the artist or artists are willing to take on a difficult and even painful task for a prescribed length of time. In her book on endurance art, Lara Shalson has argued that performing endurance is a deliberate practice that is undertaken according to a plan to which the artist commits “with intention and will.”¹¹ The contrast between duration and endurance could be seen in two performances that took place at Cukrarna Gallery on the second night of the festival. Martine Viale’s *Untitled (Wanderings)* (FIG. IX-X) explored the deliberate shaping of time to create an experience for the audience. Tajči Čekada’s and Ivana Kalc’s



FIG. X

Worksite 101/3 used endurance as a political strategy to bring attention to the manner in which people in power dehumanise people who don’t hold power.

Viale performed *Untitled (Wanderings)* for three hours, an exquisite performance in the cavernous lobby of Cukrarna Gallery. Viale is best known for her incredibly subtle and sensitive public performances that create encounters with passersby. The glass-walled street-level lobby/entrance of Cukrarna Gallery was the perfect site for a January performance. With little more than several tables, some glass vessels (some of which were filled with water), rolls of paper that probably were used to create receipts, a stack of paper, a spool of thread, a needle, a pile of sugar, sugar cubes, candles, and a lighter, Viale moved through the cavernous space making subtle changes to the objects that were placed on and around the metal tables set up in the lobby. On her website, Viale has written that “the work is about a circular process which was gradually creating a sensitive map through the development of variable and ephemeral situations.”¹² Viale views her performances as emanating from her body, creating a circle that grows in size through the end of the performance. In *Untitled (Wanderings)*, she deliberately changed the space of Cukrarna Gallery through her interventions. Viale’s objects were all related to Cukrarna Gallery in some way. Everything was white (as is the interior of Cukrarna Gallery), piles of sugar and sugar cubes referred to the original use of the Cukrana Gallery, a former sugar refinery, and all of the actions were intimate in a space that is beautiful yet also intimidating. Viale seemed to realise this, taking pains to weave the space together with sewing thread, which, in one case was sewn through the coat lapels of an observer, the artist Slaven Tolj.

¹⁰ Edward Scheer, “Introduction: The end of spatiality or the meaning of duration,” *Performance Research* 17, n.5: On Duration (2012), 1.

¹¹ Lara Shalson, *Performing Endurance: Art and Politics Since 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 8.

¹² Martine Viale, *Untitled (Wanderings)*, MARTINEVIALE action art, web, accessed 23.06.2024.



FIG. XI

Tajči Čekada’s and Ivana Kalc’s *Worksite 101/3* (FIG. XI-XII), which took place in the Parterre Gallery, was the third iteration of a performance that first took place at the abandoned prison on the island of Goli Otok (Bare Island), a barren, uninhabited island that was used as a prison for political dissidents when Croatia was part of Yugoslavia. The prisoners were forced to labour in a stone quarry regardless of the weather, which could reach 40°C in the summer and below freezing in the winter, while buffeted by the bora winds. The prison was entirely inmate-run. The hierarchical system forced inmates into beating, denouncing, humiliating, and shunning each other. Inmates who cooperated were given better treatment.¹³ Goli Otok was the men’s prison, while the nearby Sveti Grgur island was later converted into a women’s prison. Today, Goli Otok, and the abandoned prison, has become a tourist attraction. *Worksite 101* is meant to serve as a reminder of what Goli Otok had been, a performative reenactment of the trauma that the prisoners endured.

Wearing very few clothes and covered from head to toe in clay, Čekada and Kalc walked into the austere space of the gallery towards two piles of large stones that were placed approximately 10-15 metres apart. Slowly and painfully, the duo began transferring the heavy stones from one pile to another, crossing paths as they transferred the stones. The action of the piece referenced the work imposed on the prisoners, who were forced to carry heavy stones from one pile to another and then back to the original pile. The clay with which the artists covered their bodies was a reference to the stone quarry and pottery where the inmates were forced to labour, required to do useless tasks as a form of punishment and humiliation, a form of psychological and physical torture that was eventually imprinted on the bodies of the men forced to endure this existence. During the performance, Čekada and Kalc appeared to be increasingly uncom-

¹³ “Goli Otok,” Wikipedia, accessed 27.06.2024.



FIG. XII

fortable, shivering uncontrollably as they carried heavy rocks from one pile to another, a sisyphian task that was over before the end of the hour due to the exhaustion of the artists.

Using the example of the performative demonstrations by the mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Diana Taylor has argued that “trauma expresses itself viscerally, through bodily symptoms, reenactments, and repeats. The fact that we cannot neatly separate trauma from post-traumatic stress points to the centrality of the reiterated effects that constitute the condition.”¹⁴ For *Worksite 101/3*, there was a re-performance of an initial traumatic event that occurred between 1949 and 1989 (the years during which Goli Otok functioned as a prison) and a performance of the trauma of the labour economy, which does not acknowledge the work and contributions of artists, particularly women artists. To be “disappeared”, dehumanised, and discounted is traumatic, so much so that the effects of that trauma will manifest themselves in the actions of the body.

LJUBLJANA 25.1.2024

Slaven Tolj’s performance *Ljubljana 25.1.2024* (FIG. XIII-XIV), which took place in the Parterre Gallery, initially did not seem to be a durational performance. The performance was only 30 minutes. Tolj did not deliberately injure himself as he did in his 2002 performance *Nature and Society* when he strained his neck trying to break apart a pair of antlers by banging them against a wall.¹⁵ The performance was quiescent. Nevertheless, *Ljubljana 25.1.2024* was excruciating to watch. The setting was austere: two

¹⁴ Diana Taylor, “Trauma and Performance: Lessons from Latin America,” *PMLA* 121, n.5 (October 2006), 1675.

¹⁵ This performance is described by Amy Bryzgel in “Slaven Tolj,” *Performance Art in Eastern Europe*, Wordpress, accessed 28.06.2024.



FIG. XIII



FIG. XIV

chairs, two photographs placed on the ground, and a computer playing a video. Tolj entered the space and proceeded to disrobe, carefully folding his clothing and placing the clothing on one chair while he sat on the other, legs crossed. Nonverbal, naked, and deliberately and heroically vulnerable, Tolj sat between the video and the photographs. The video included footage from the late artist Tomislav Gotovac and Tolj's father. It referenced events that were deeply personal for Tolj, including the Croatian War of Independence, the loss of Gotovac and his parents, and his childhood. The two photographs were the work of Pavo Urban, who had perished while documenting the 1991 siege of Dubrovnik (where Tolj lives) by the Yugoslav People's Army. One photograph was of a 1988 performance by Tolj. The other photograph was recovered and developed from the camera that was found on Urban's body after his death. In the festival programme, the description of the performance indicated that Tolj had recently experienced severe health problems that impaired his mental acuity and his verbal fluidity. It is up to Tolj, verbally and cognitively impaired, to hold the memory of his life and the lives of the people he had lost. The performance concluded with Tolj, still mute, re-dressing himself in the order in which he had undressed. The following evening, the video of the performance was screened at Glej, after which the only copy of the performance documentation was given to Tolj.

Trauma, according to Taylor, "is a durational performance that "is known by the nature of its repeats... We speak of trauma only when they produce the characteristic aftershock. Trauma, like performance, is always in the present. Here. Now."¹⁶ Durational performance, which repeats over and through time, is one way of addressing and interrupting the horrific

cycle of trauma, which is manifested in the body. In his lifetime, Tolj has experienced a great deal of loss, including, most recently, the loss of his memory and ability to speak. The duration that is addressed in this 30 minute performance is one that is repeated from trauma that is imprinted on the body rather than articulated by words. Tolj's posture reflected the trauma of what he had lost, however, it was not the version of Tolj enjoying the festival as Viale sewed the clothing he was wearing into the environment that she was creating. The performance worked as an interruption of trauma, a way of remembering, a way of continuing to live.

Infinite Present, the first festival collaboration between Glej theatre (as a producer) and Cukrarna Gallery (coproducer), was beautifully curated, allowing for an exchange between artists and audiences. Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued that in "a performance, aesthetic experience does not refer to a 'work', but springs from what is emerging between the participants, from their bodies. It seems that the emergence of what happens is more important than what happens, and in any case more relevant than any meanings that may be attributed to it."¹⁷ This connection between participants, between bodies, is durational, and happens in a present that is infinite.

¹⁶ Diana Taylor, "Trauma as Durational Performance," *The Rise of Performance Studies: Rethinking Richard Schechner's Broad Spectrum*, James Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, editors, (Houndmills Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 243.

¹⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 26-27.



Untitled (Wanderings) © Nada Žgank

REST

AS

RESISTANCE

Christiana Galanopoulou
Mara Anjoli Vujić
Antoine Pickels
Leena Kela

Introduction

The “Rest as Resistance” workshops, to which the four following texts refer, were destined to those working in the arts and/or art students, and presented to the participants as follows:

“The machine is tired and exhausted”, said philosopher Bayo Akomolafe in 2020, talking about humans in times of catastrophe and crisis. What are the results of over-exploitation on the bodies of art workers (and especially those of live arts) in the capitalist world? During the past few years many thinkers have turned their ecological concerns into reflection about de-growth. Changing the internal rhythm of the human body is a first and quite demanding step. How do we live this over-exploitation? Are we aware of it? What does it mean “to slow down”?

Slowing down doesn't only refer to the function of speed, but to awareness. It changes the experience of time. It means not accepting to be a machine, but to be present and to acknowledge the presence of others. Can we actually rest? Can resting be an active form of resistance to the sense of productivity and endless progress?

Things initially got underway in Brussels in April 2023 with a small committee, in which we closely examined our practice as art workers and those contradictions that we have to confront in the exercise of our professions. Though we try to resist in our own individual ways, we are often subjected—against our will—to a system of growth and profit which leaves scarcely any space for “quality time.” The festivals we organize have given us a platform with which we can directly address our concerns. During our get-together, we also looked at a video work by Leena Kela¹ which interrogated similar themes. And, for the first time, we rested together, each one of us in his, her, or their corner.

¹ Leena Kela, *Rest of Time*, video, 9' 33", 2021.

In Turku, Finland, in September of the same year, we were joined by a group of young curators, students and professors in Live Art. In no time our conversations led us to scrutinise how rest has been denied to those on society's margins—whether because of their gender, race, social class, disabilities, neurodiversity. It became evident that neither space nor time for rest is ever given any consideration for those most in need of rest, quite the contrary. We looked at several artists' works which spoke of rest as a form of resistance, often from a peripheral standpoint.² And we ourselves rested, sharing a quiet and a sweet time.

In December in Athens, we were joined by a cohort of local artists or practitioners and examined how rest and crisis were inter-related. How could one possibly rest when constantly confronted with crisis, on every level, from the global to the personal? We carefully appraised several images of artistic rest staged as resistance in the political realm. We picked up words or stones to rest with, and subsequently shared our experiences. Given how we were evoking a state of crisis, many participants at the Athens workshop could strongly feel how important rest was on a collective level.

In Ljubljana, Slovenia, in January 2024, we delved a little deeper into this collective aspect of rest. In a bid to initiate our thought processes, we looked at three images before resting—one of an artistic collective and two of homeless refugees sleeping on the streets in Brussels. On this occasion our objective was to reflect on how collective our rest resistance could be. Thanks to the presence of those in-the-know—primarily those deeply involved in the production, creation and presentation of live art—the conversation that emerged following our rest brought us back to basics, to how our workshops had all begun: the over- and self-exploitation of art

² The works mentioned and/or discussed at the workshops included: *Hodo. The Resting Assembly* (Associação Portuguesa de Cenografia), *Can I Help You? Public Selfcare System* (Rhiannon Armstrong), *A Crash Course in Cloudspotting* (Raquel Meseguer Zafe), *I Have No Time and Artist at Work* (Mladen Stilinovic), *Reindeer Safari* (Toissisa Tiloissa), *Symphony of a Missing Room* (Lundahi & Selti), *Garden Speaks* (Tania El Khoury), *The Bed Piece* (Yoko Ono and John Lennon), *One Year Performance 81-82* (Tehching Hsieh), *Who Will Make Me Real* (Raeda Saadeh), *Empty Beds* (Eran Weber) and *The Night. Visioning a Post-Capitalist Future* (Hello Earth!).

workers. We found ourselves emboldened, however, with a more collective strength to face this challenge, coupled with a new sense of combativeness.

We don't in any way want to conclude this process which remains a "rest-in-progress," for we know we have not yet realised our objectives. From now on we would like to commission and present artworks which answer these questions by opening up spaces and times for both rest and resistance.

That adventure, however, is for another day. For now, we just want to share with you what we started envisioning in light of our shared experiences at these workshops.

A. P.



Resting in Ljubljana, 25.01.2024 © Nada Žgank



Rest of Time, Leena Kela (2021), screenshot



Resting in Turku, 06.09.2023 © Leena Kela



John Lennon and Yoko Ono in bed in the Hilton Hotel, 25.03.1969. © Eric Koch / Anefo

A CALL FOR POLITICAL ACTION

—
Christiana Galanopoulou

At the core of the concept of the “Rest as Resistance” workshops lies a call for political action which had to be contextualised by the curators, for it appeared strangely related to rest at first glance. During the introduction to all four workshops, we exposed our thoughts, ideas, and a historical approach of the content to participants, mostly workers in the artistic world. What does it mean to be exploited or to exploit oneself in the neoliberal version of late capitalism we live in, in the western world?

In order to make our ideas clear, we opted to use as a vehicle the article “The Project Horizon: on the Temporality of Making” by Bojana Kunst,³ in which the author explains that in the artistic world of western Europe of having “projects,” plans for collaborations and future projects not yet realised, is even more important than the produced works themselves. Kunst sees this situation as the result of an over-exploitation of the self, for artists have to project non-existing works in the future and work hard to apply their ideas with countless proposals to funding bodies and supporting institutions. The temporality involved in art professionals in realising their projects is thus associated with their financial state and to all that is connected to that—social and otherwise. Walking a step further, we associated the general fatigue and exhaustion that our respective professional fields complain of, namely to permanently suffer—especially after the pandemic—from the over exploitation of the self in the neoliberal and post capitalist societies we live in. The very act of resting, wrongly associated with laziness and the negation of production, seems to be a way to demand the time and energy we need in order to fight for better living conditions and for political change.

³ In Silvia Bottiroli, Giulia Polenta and Marzia Dalfini (Eds.), *How to Build a Manifesto for the Future of a Festival*, issue 1 of 4, Santarcangelo, Santarcangelo Festival Internazionale di Teatro in Piazza, 2015. Rewritten version of an article published earlier in *Maska* journal.

As we worked on rest from both a theoretical and practical point of view during the workshops with people from a variety of art fields, especially from the artistic communities in each host festival city, we proposed discussions and text readings from Tricia Hersey’s *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*⁴, finding parallels in her book about rest in the context of revendicating the rights of black people. We also proposed examples of some recent works of art dealing with the issue of resting in public space. We separately researched and ended up with a corpus of inspiring live art works from the 1960s until today, which we discussed with the participants.

The need to rest and to resist was definitely common amongst participants, and the discussions that sprung up in every workshop touched upon the burning issue of the over-exploitation of art workers both by the social structures and by the individuals themselves. But soon a new question came up. Even if we solved all the problems linked to having rest accepted and we all had perfect resting conditions in public and private space alike, would it be even possible to rest in a society full of injustice? What kind of rest could one have when we receive all the information about the world’s fundamental injustices, wars, famine and people suffering? Michel Foucault’s treatment of the idea of resting in a context of injustice in the society in the *History of Madness* also came up as part of our discussions. At the four workshops, we spoke about the idea of resting in public space as a form of social and political resistance: resting as opposed to doing, not doing anything and making space for the good practices of others as opposed to forcing a method of reaction, connecting with nature, slowness, de-acceleration as opposed to producing at all times and at all costs.

⁴ Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*, Little, Brown Spark, New York, 2022. Hersey is the founder of the organisation The Nap Ministry.

SUBVERSIVE POTENCY

—
Mara Anjoli Vujić

In the context of the Time for Live Art project, the exploration of time naturally led to a consideration of the relationship between art and ways of working. In an era characterised by hyperproduction and acceleration, many—and not just artists and cultural workers—feel the pressure of time scarcity, a scarcity which extends beyond merely experiencing artwork or leisure activities; it permeates our relationships, our connection with nature, our pursuit of knowledge, and our ability to engage in spontaneous endeavours. Despite this scarcity and amidst the rush to experience everything, finding time to rest has become increasingly challenging. The resulting exhaustion and burnout afflict many, signalling a chronic condition of contemporary life.

This predicament prompts a critical examination of the conditions and status of artistic labor. Bojana Kunst's book *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (2012) was theoretically instrumental in raising awareness about the need to reconsider modes of production in the arts. Similarly, the book *Revolution at Point Zero—Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (2012) by the theoretician and activist Silvia Federici (who dedicated forty years of work to organizing the Wages for Housework movement, as well as to terrain research the topics of the international restructuring of reproductive work and its effects on the sexual division of labor, the globalization of care work and sex work, the crisis in elder care, the development of affective labor and the politics of the commons) sheds light on the historical exploitation of bodies, particularly women's bodies. The most resonating standpoints Federici brought to the light are the recognition of housework, a natural attribute for women as an act of love or labour of love, as unpaid labour. Federici's insights, particularly regarding unpaid labour as a labour of love, resonate within the realm of art pro-

duction, where individuals often (are forced to) undertake multiple roles for insufficient compensation. These discussions prompt a re-evaluation of laziness as a form of subversive resistance against the relentless demands of capitalism. While distinct from rest, the pursuit of collective rest, even within the framework of an art festival, represents a small act of resistance against the roles enforced by capitalist ideology.

In framing the workshop Rest as Resistance I was also inspired by the work of Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinović, particularly his piece "Artist at Work" (1978) where he humorously photo-documented himself asleep, fully clothed, during broad daylight, where he explored the concept of laziness as autonomy and resistance. His ironic commentary on an artist working while asleep is nowadays seen not only as a position of resistance to the ideology of work and the necessity of leisure and doing nothing for creative work, but also as a literal realisation of the total overlapping of work and life, in which even sleep is included. Through the workshops conducted across four different countries, we delved into Stilinović's concepts, alongside those of fellow artists integrating sleep and rest into their artistic endeavours. These sessions demonstrated the fusion of work and life where collective sleep was a crucial exercise, highlighting the subversive potency inherent in the act of collective resting.

NEITHER
EFFECTIVENESS
NOR
EFFICIENCY
—
Antoine Pickels

Even though separated in time, those moments during which we got together during the “Time For Live Art” festivals still resonate in me. For me, that strangely utopian continuous space was an exceptional place of freedom, because of the condition it posed in its sheer “uselessness.” It neither sought effectiveness nor efficiency. And yet, I wasn’t the one who had asked for it in the first place. Still, I needed it. As with many other co-workers in the world of the arts and culture, I’ve often been stretched to the limit in terms of workloads, and a sense of an approaching burnout. Yes, I, too, badly needed to unwind, and used these four workshops to do just that: Take a rest. But in those moments of rest, my mind started to wander. And “like those lessons that we laboured in vain to learn overnight and find intact on waking next morning” (Marcel Proust, *Le Côté de Guermantes*), I, too, on waking up discovered that I had learnt a few things.

I recall during our discussions in Brussels how we focussed on producing and presenting art. We had found our workloads overloaded on account of being forced to communicate via social networks and having to deal with services (both public and private) that had been transformed into a permanent do-it-yourself model. Caught in the trap of a job devoted to the arts and considering ourselves fortunate, we continually accept the worst conditions “for the sake of art,” thus subjecting ourselves to the demands of a neo-liberal philosophy.

At our second get-together in Turku, I recall how we debated the polemical discourse about rest: for some rest was inaccessible, for others it was even forbidden. Racialized people shared with us

their ancestral memories; their ancestors were considered lazy, for example, whenever they tried to rest. And what was to be done for those with disabilities, unable to find a safe spot in which they could rest in public spaces or at their workplace? Or for women whose domestic chores are never taken into consideration and for whom rest is out of the question? And how rest is systematically equated with laziness—the hallmark of a criminal (and criminal because they are poor)... After this pretty tough discussion, I had a wonderful nap.

During our third session, in Athens, I thought I could hear in the distance the tumult of the bombings and the cries of the victims in Gaza—perhaps this was because the Mediterranean was within earshot. How can you rest if you are worried? I remember feeling a shared vulnerability as the city outside seemed to threaten us. Memories of a restless rest, disturbed by a “card game” we didn’t play, but which made us think about what was causing us to worry. Memories of that feeling of solidarity that seemed to be forged between us in our vulnerability. Memories of the strength we could find in this solidarity.

And then in Ljubljana, at our fourth workshop, I remember how we wanted to invent a collective rest, a feeling of resistance that could be produced *by* and *during* our rest. Everyone’s agendas were different, each one of us expressing some kind of doubt or feeling perplexed in some way. Yet it struck me that while we were resting—and afterwards as we exchanged our individual impressions—we succeeded in uniting these different agendas and doubts into a kind of collective resistance. Because we were all striving for some form of collective resistance in the first place—and had found the confidence in each other to achieve it.

A
RADICAL
ACT
OF
TRUST
—
Leena Kela

Talking with colleagues in the art scene, I discovered that we have a lot in common. Many of us wake up in the middle of the night, feeling restless and alert, our hearts beating fast. Some of us have difficulty falling asleep in the evening. We feel dead tired but unable to rest. We don't have enough time to rest because of too much stress, too much work, or too many scattered tasks. We are unable to calm down and rest because we feel insecure and worry too much about the future, the political situation, wars, climate change, financial insecurity, our own health or the illness of a loved one. So many reasons and so many stories with a similar end result: exhaustion.

How can you slow down and rest when life around you is speeding up?

Slowing down can be practised gradually. It is an act of awareness, of being present. Slowing down is not about stopping being active, but it is about stopping rushing about. When in a rush, you scramble from one task to the next and at the end of the day you can't even remember what the day or the week or the month it is. Slowing down involves facing those patterns and aspects of life that would otherwise go unnoticed. Slowing down is a way to rest. And rest doesn't just mean sleep, the body-mind can also find rest while awake. Rest is a state of calm that regenerates the exhausted.

Could we collectively find ways to rest and help each other to slow down?

Resting collectively means resisting that inner voice that tells us to be faster, more productive, more durable. It also entails taking up space to make resting a collective performative act, resisting those social norms of how we come together. Whenever a room is full of people resting, communication happens through the sounds of breathing, bodies slowly moving and changing position, and maybe even someone snoring. It is a way of sharing, of being together, of helping each other to slow down. As one person falls asleep, another can let their mind wander and think about whatever might not otherwise have room. For me, resting together is a radical act of trust, vulnerability, and care. It is a way of understanding that we are not only intertwined and interconnected as human beings, but also as bodies among other non-human bodies that also need to regenerate through rest, cooperation, and nourishment.

The Rest as Resistance workshops took place indoors, only with those participating, and without an audience present to encounter the resting bodies. But what if we had decided to rest in public spaces? Not only would we have put ourselves at risk of being disturbed, but depending on the context, it could have been a thought-provoking act. A group of people passing the time and sleeping in a park might provoke a different reaction than to people sleeping in busy places like a metro station, a market square, or a street. Yet, these are places where homeless people congregate to rest. Given that rest and sleep are a basic human need, could making it a public performative act, an activist movement, help us collectively slow down?

Let's occupy public spaces by resting. Let's resist by refusing to exhaust ourselves and support each other through the power of rest!

"The times are urgent, let us slow down",⁵ African proverb.

⁵ Báyò Akómóláfé, *A Slower Urgency*, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/a-slower-urgency>

Colophon

RELIVING TIME Minutes from a Time of Live Art

Authors

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