

SCRIPTING FOR SCENOGRAPHY

*Collection of performances featuring
Baalat and her Double*



Betina Abi Habib

Scripting for Scenography

Collection of performances by Betina Abi Habib

featuring **Baalat and Her Double**

and other texts.

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Acknowledgements

To Brechtian Artaud.

I will not start with acknowledging the main actors of my primary socialization, but rather with some readings that have helped me frame the expanding discipline of Scenography and recognize its schools of thought. Reading Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*, followed by Walter Benjamin's *Understanding Brecht* has introduced me to the presence of divergences within the field of Performance, and thus of Scenography. In fact, since it can be located at the intersection of Performance and Architecture, Scenography inherits from these disciplines their problematics and dividing questions; The role of spectatorship is one of the essential ones. Brecht and Artaud have significantly contributed to its investigation, branching out into: Alienation¹ and Embodiment². As Jacques Rancière states in *The Emancipated Spectator*, "The project of reforming the theatre ceaselessly wavered between these two poles of distant inquiry and vital embodiment"(2).

However, the Artaud/Brecht dichotomy is now more than fifty years old, which does not make it obsolete, but does give it the possibility of being nuanced by others' contributions. While I followed Rancière's tackling of 'active spectatorship', I found myself imagining the spectators who would, at the same time, experience in-depth reflection on what is being performed for them as Brecht would encourage *and* feel the effect of the performance in their physical selves as Artaud would implore. I recognize the influence of both discourses in the development of my work which translates into *Baalat and her Double* as the main script of this book. Although making reference to Brecht's play *Baal* it is also reminding us of *The Theatre and its Double* by Artaud. I therefore position myself at the intersection of these seemingly opposing discourses.

To the Body.

But the attempt to achieve both embodiment of and alienation from what is performed is a physical challenge. It suggests that spectatorship is a practice that must be achieved, labored towards. Are we willing, as an audience, to perform this effort? I found some answers to this question by encountering essays and lectures by Judith Butler. How widely we perform ourselves for the external gaze, how in our turn we are the eternal spectator of others. It is through Butler's words that I came to acknowledge my body as an overlooked platform for continuous performance; One that others could spectate, have opinions on and feelings about. One of the scripts featured in this collection is *On Placemaking: The Body as a Place*; In it I attempt to look at our bodies as trained to perform and spectate.

I began to consider my body as a scenographic tool, as a performing object, as an ally to my writing. This initiated a deeper investigation into the Performance as a learning method, which led me back into Brechtian theatrical tools such as Distancing, Doubling, and eventually the

¹ Here I refer to the Alienation Effect referred to by Bertolt Brecht in his writings on Epic Theatre, whereby spectators are aware of the distance between themselves in reality and the representations before them on stage. They do not suspend their disbelief or identify with the actors performing.

² In *Le Theatre et son Double*, Antonin Artaud recognizes that Theatre involves a unique bodily experience of an event. He calls for a theatre that awakes us "Nerfs et Coeur", Nerves and Heart.(Artaud, 131)

Lehrstücke³, a form of collective script reading where the performers only have each other's bodies as performers and audience. I began to look more into the work of other artists whose practices involved the Lecture Performance . The Lecture Performance makes use of a plurilingual multimedial intuitive approach to knowledge production, transmission, and reception. By trying to decipher each of these artists' scenographic approaches, I began to develop and refine my own scriptwriting method, one that could be 'scenographic' by having specific material implications.

To collaboration.

And so, the presented scripts are not intended to be memorized by heart. They can be read alone or collectively. And if they manage to be rewritten by a reader, the new content must be communicated to others, preferably through another performance. In the end, the aim of these texts is to travel and transform. Of course when it comes to being performed, the text requires interpretation from its performers and consequently opens itself up for discussion. Nevertheless, the form of the script can suggest specific ways of being performed while preserving its collaborative aspect.

Finally, I like to think that the work I present is also collaborative in the sense that it relies on the support and contribution of peers and loved ones, emotionally intellectually and materially.

I keep in mind Henny Dorr's suggestions to recognize the elephant paths, be the contemporary fool, and her 'Brutal Breakfasts' that always seemed like a call for togetherness.

I thank Nirav Christophe for being so inspiring and energizing. Continuously sharing my work with the tutors and peers during these two years has exposed me to the importance of intuition, intellectual generosity, and the necessity to collaborate.

Lastly, and most importantly, I have to think of the long evenings eighteen years ago where I sat on a sofa with my mother, memorizing literary words and expressions that could be nicely incorporated in creative writing. If it weren't for her effort and passion, I would not have chosen to write for performance.

³Lehrstücke dates back to Brecht's work during the 1930's and has often been translated to "Learning Plays"(Schechner, 46).

Introduction

The Script for Scenography

I choose to gather scripts I have written, more specifically scripts for Lecture Performances⁴, as the demonstration of my Artistic Research. In itself, the dissemination of these scripts is a statement, as it presents the Lecture Performance in the same way as a text that could be read, adapted, and staged. In fact, it recognizes it as a theatrical style. Also, by collecting these scripts, I am disclosing my reliance on text for the development of scenographies for Lecture Performances. First comes the text, then the space, and then the text in space.

In my writing, I sometimes refer to artistic work as Lecture Performance without it being self-declared or archived as such. In these cases, I allow myself to explore the boundaries defining the artistic genre, and intend to redistribute the weight from one of its defining properties to others of its components. While one of the more evident characteristics of the Lecture Performance is its directness in addressing the audience (Ladnar 2013: 7), I am particularly interested in the recurrent use of physical support, namely text, score, instructions, or visual material which aid the performer in their Lecturing. By locating these elements, I wish to emphasize the feature of reading while delivering a Lecture Performance. In fact, *Lecture* in French, translates to the noun 'Reading' in English. The recognition of a physical element guiding the artist's performance is therefore a requirement I set to myself when investigating the role of the script in the Scenography of Lecture Performances.

Finally, while a Lecture is often delivered to a group of people interested in the thematic that the presentation promises to tackle, The Lecture Performance reveals the inevitable deception of the spectators with regards to expected learning outcomes. It shows the significance of the lecturer's language (ie: the visual, bodily, gestural, verbal) and assures that a spectator can hold no expectations of *what* will be discussed as it heavily depends on *how* it is discussed, namely, on the Scenography. Accordingly, I hope to underline spatial processes involved in the 'Lecture-ness' of the Performance. I therefore identify Scenographic Typologies which characterize the different text-to-performance relations used in the practice of Lecture Performance.

The Cold Reading Scenography (what is said is what is shown)

A cold reading in the context of the Theatre, is the unrehearsed reading aloud of a script by one or many performers. I consider a Cold Reading Lecture to be that in which the performer and or spectator are engaged in illustrating a story as it is being narrated. Where what is being performed translates the words that are being read or heard. This scenographic typology does to words what mirroring does to objects; while attempting to replicate them, it presents them in a different form. I see the work *Dying Together* (Fig.1.0) by Lotte Van den Berg/Third Space as one example of Cold Reading Scenography. Here, for example, the artist does not claim to be presenting a

⁴I choose to use the term Lecture Performance and not Performance Lecture, as a primary intention of contributing to the discipline of Performance by using the format of the Lecture, rather than a contribution to academic Lecturing with the use of performative methods. This choice is discussed by Daniel Ladnar in his 2013 thesis *The Lecture Performance: contexts of lecturing and performing* (10).

Lecture Performance, but the use of text as starting material for the communication and engagement with the audience makes it relevant to my investigation.

As soon as one enters the space, she is handed a paper and is asked to find a calm spot in the space where to read. What is written is later read aloud by the performers themselves. Little boxes with noted cards are picked one by one by the performers. They have become facilitators of a participatory constellation in which the spectators are offered to embody roles described in the cards. A young girl stands as a 50 years old scientist, and an older man sits as a microorganism. The information being offered to the spectator is tentatively embodied by that spectator, who will in the end contribute to illustrating what is being read aloud by the theatre makers. The text is therefore the starting point of the performance, but is enhanced and transformed as it is tentatively illustrated by the participants' bodies. Here, the bodies act as the mirrored image of the text.

The Duel Scenography (what is said is not what is shown)

A duel is an agreed upon confrontation between two entities or individuals. It is arranged, scheduled, and rehearsed ahead of time. Often it takes place in front of an audience. I consider Duel the Scenography in which the tension between a text and its spatial adaptation constitutes the main spectacle of the Lecture Performance. This tension contrasts the text (whether spoken or read) with the visual and temporal actions in space. This scenographic typology places physical elements as a parallel to the text, an *aside* to the words being said or read.

When Rabih Mroue, in his 2012 work *The Pixelated Revolution*, (**Fig.1.1**) appropriates footage gathered from witnesses of violence of the Syrian Regime and knits them into his own narrative, he demonstrates both himself constructing a narrative, as well as the violence from which the used visual material has emerged. He is at the same time telling a fictional story and pointing at documented ones, using fiction to indicate truths and using true documents to expose the fictional in what he tells. But the dissonance between what is told and what is seen is clearly present. It is precisely because of this opposition that the narration is so performative. And the performer can use this obvious constructedness to show indicators of realities rather than imitations of realities.

The Gestural Scenography (what is shown is what is said)

“Epic theatre is gestural. The extent to which it can also be literary in the traditional sense is a separate issue. The gesture is its raw material and its task is the rational utilization of this material.”

“The supreme task of an epic production is to give expression to the relationship between the action being staged and everything that is involved in the act of staging per se.”

Walter Benjamin in *Understanding Brecht*, 1998.p.3-p.22.

The Gestural Scenography in the case of Lecture Performance is one that presents gestures as its main language. Here the use of space is what is being said, read, heard, performed. The gesture itself is addressed to the audience as stimulating material, as content to reflect on. Far from being reduced to the use of mime or choreography, Gestural Scenography can rely on text and dialogue as gestures themselves, as quotable actions that are the product of an artistic effort, selected to confront the audience with certain thematics.

Philippine Hoegen's book *Another Version: Thinking Through Performing* is an invitation for such Scenographies to take place, with an important focus on the body as a performative tool to operate in space and in relation to other bodies. It proposes textual guides or Cahiers in which "performance and performative strategies are applied as ways of thinking through the physical." (Hoegen, 2020) (**Fig.2.0**). Here again, the Lecture Performance is explored as knowledge production through performance. Similarly, Antonia Baehr uses a score as a starting support for her performance *Lachen* or 'Laugh' (**Fig.2.1**). She sits on a chair in front of a music stand and with her right index conducts her own laughter. The variations in the laugh are in line with her finger movements. When taking a breath in between the laughs, her facial features return to a tentatively neutral expression. The laugh does not pretend to be genuine, as it is solely responding to the score sheets facing the artist. The gesture of the laugh responding to indications is the form and content being communicated to the audience.

The Lecture Epic.

In his writings on Epic Theatre, *Understanding Brecht*, Walter Benjamin describes the actor as one who, from the Brechtian standpoint, "shows the event by showing himself; and he shows himself by showing the event. He must be free, at the right moment, to act himself thinking (about his part)." (21) In that sense, Epic Theatre just like the Lecture Performance, does not claim to place life on stage. Instead, it shows itself interpreting life on stage. I therefore propose that the Lecture Performance is a form of Epic Theatre.

As an exercise to better draw the comparison between the Lecture Performance and Epic Theatre, I look at the two nominal groups, linguistically. From the first I extract 'Epic', from the second I extract 'Lecture'. I borrow them for a moment and consider them as a new entity: the Lecture Epic. What would it be? The Lecture Epic is an Epic; the long and arduous story of a hero. The Lecture Epic is epically performed; with spectacularity and monumentality. But the Lecture Epic is also borrowing from the lecture, which in the attempt of knowledge production, deconstructs, indicates, reassembles on stage. One can then consider that the Lecture Epic is made of heroic anti-heroes and spectacular anti-spectacles that speak of themselves to speak of the world. This collection of scripts tries to present examples of Lecture Epics.



Fig.1.0- *Third Space/Lotte Van den Berg 'Dying Together', Schouwburg, Rotterdam 2018.*



Fig.1.1- *Rabih Mroué performing The Pixelated Revolution, Staatstheater, Kassel, Documenta 13, June 7, 2012. Copyright: ATP/Ibraaz Publishing, 2012.*



Fig.2.0- *Philippine Hoegen 'Regarding David'. Het Nieuwe Instituut 2016. Copyright: Philippine Hoegen.*



Fig.2.1- *Antonia Baehr 'Laugh', Lilian Baylis Studio, London. Still from video titled Antonia Baehr 'Laugh' by Sadler's Wells Theatre Youtube Channel- Published January 2011. Accessed May 2020.*

Baalat and her Double

A Lecture Epic in Three Acts

Cast of Characters

Baalat Gebal: Phoenician Goddess of Byblos, Northern Lebanon.

Betina: The Lecturer, Lebanese woman in her late twenties.

Baal: Eponym Protagonist of Bertolt Brecht's 1918 play. A wicked young male poet.

Storyline: In a theatre space with a tribune, a Lecture Epic combines methods of Distancing with acknowledgement of ritual.



Chronological timeline of the cultural products relating to the performance.

Act 1

The Cold Reading Lecture



Playwright Bertolt Brecht, a European immigrant to the U.S., poses in this undated handout photo released to the media on Monday, Oct. 6, 2008. (Peter Rosen Productions via Bloomberg News/VIA BLOOMBERG NEWS)- Edited by Betina Abi Habib

Act 1

In a space for performance, Betina stands on the theatre audience tribune.

The seats are empty and she is positioned in the centre of the tribune. (Between The seats)

There is a soft light coming from the technical space behind her at the top of the tribune.

She holds a couple of stapled papers in her hands from which she reads to herself silently.

When she is done reading the first page, she raises her head to address the other attendees.

They are comfortably spread out on the main stage.

Betina: Welcome Everyone, thank you for coming.

There is stillness in her posture, in the silence, in the level of thermal comfort that most present bodies experience. The sunset has taken away with it the warmth of the space, and the natural daylight slowly lets in obscurity. Street lights and neon signs give color to the faces.

I have been looking forward to today's lecture, since it brings together two environments that I consider myself part of: Performance, and the East... Both understood from a Eurocentric perspective. Today, we all gather to look at Bertolt Brecht's relation to the Middle East. *(Looking at the audience)* Please have yourself a script to follow the cold reading.

A pile of papers is suddenly lit on the central front part of the stage, at the bottom of the tribune.

They come one by one to take their copy of the same text Betina has between her hands.

There are enough papers for all the attendees.

(Walking back and forth along the row where she stood, reading from her script) We will start by a brainstorming, name-dropping, word-dropping, knowledge battering moment, and I will ask you all to share with us; what comes to mind when you think of Bertolt Brecht? Please raise your hand before speaking so that we can all hear you.

Technical terms, concepts, historical events, opinions are shared.

Thank you. And now onto the next part of the brainstorming: What comes to mind when thinking of the Middle East?

Again, technical terms, concepts, historical events, opinions are shared.

Betina sits down at the center of the tribune.

Quite some thoughts, this sets the ground for a story I'd like to share.

*Non-melodic Piano begins to play in the background, irregular as the playing of a child
improvising.*

A few mornings ago, as I finished scrolling through news headlines on my phone, preparing to leave my bed, a friend sent me an article from the Washington Post⁵ that showed an undated photograph of Bertolt Brecht, sitting by a piano, in what could have been his studio during his exile in the United States. She knew I had been looking into his writings on Epic Theatre.

(Gesticulating) He sits, slightly leaning forward, resting an arm on the piano, and the other on his leg. Cigar pinched between his lips, he gives a subtle smirk to future onlookers- as myself.

Piano plays two high octaves of an arpeggio, once.

There is a lot in the image indicating that it is staged, with bits and pieces of The Brecht persona layed out within the portrait's visual composition. I will try describing the scenography of that image.

Indicating on an imagined vertical surface in front of her.

In the blurred background; bookshelves, a low table with indiscernible traces of daily life, the edge of a painting or tapestry hanging on the wall. In the foreground, in focus; the shining folds of his buttoned leather jacket, the white ash at the tip of his cigar, the brightness of his collar shirt, the rounded edges of the sturdy instrument, and above the piano keys... in front of sheets of music or poetry... a statuette!

[Silence]

⁵The reference to the Washington Post is only related to its feature of the photo in its article by Wendy Smith on May 16, 2014. It's relevance or reliability as a newspaper is not considered, and the intention is certainly not to promote or advertise for the newspaper itself.

A miniature, a figurine, a little female body, however you might name it! To me it was very clear. It was Baalat Gebal, Lady of Byblos, Phoenician⁶ Goddess as she is identified today in Lebanon.

Piano plays two high octaves of an arpeggio, twice.

(Gesticulating) I zoom in on my telephone screen, sliding my two fingers apart as much as I can. I know it too well to be mistaken. I have memorized most depictions of the goddess from the Bronze age to the Classical Era. From when she was identified as Hathor in Egypt to when she became Baaltis for the Greeks! This small figurine standing in *contrapposto* on the wooden edge of Brecht's piano case, was a miniature of the 1st century Bronze statue of Baalat Gebal, exhibited today at the British Museum in London. But why is this Phoenician Goddess featuring in a staged portrait of Bertolt Brecht? If it were Antonin Artaud, this could make more sense, since he was fascinated by ritual and non-western practices. But why would Brecht, Marxist Brecht, Alienating Brecht, refer us to worship and mysticism?

[Lowest octave of the same arpeggio].

I walk down to the kitchen and begin to heat the water for my daily arabic coffee. How silly that this statuette cannot escape my mind.

[Silence]

⁶ The Phoenicians as referred to today are the semitic-speaking inhabitants of current Lebanon, Syria, and North Palestine. Till today, the literature does not clarify whether they referred to themselves as Phoenician or Canaanite.

I look at the photo again, at Brecht's face. His smirk. I remember it on the book cover of his collected plays. I remember reading *Baal*, Brecht's first fully written play. Baalat Gebal. *Baal*. *Baal*. Impossible. This is silly. But it's there, right in front of me: Baalat Gebal, Ancient Semitic Goddess, posing with Brecht.

She goes down the stairs and joins the audience, looking at the back of the stage behind them.

The 1918 play *Baal* is known to have been written as a parody or commentary on *The Lonely* a drama by future nazi Hanns Johst. But I propose to you today, that it was, in reality, inspired by Baalat Gebal, the Canaanite/ Ancient Semitic/ Phoenician or however you might typify her-goddess.

Portrait photograph that had been discussed is projected at the background of the stage.

Act 2

The Duel Lecture



Google Street View of the Historical Site of the Baalat Gebal Sanctuary in Byblos, Lebanon. Photographed featuring the view from the Amphitheater by Louis Bidou, December 2017. Retrieved May 2020.

Act 2

Two masks hang down from the ceiling.

A white plaster mold of Betina's face, and a tinted silicone cast of it.

As I began to look into the etymology of the name Baal, I came upon a demon of the same name in the *Dictionnaire Infernal*, an 1818 book on demonology. This demon Bael, B -A- E- L, is only one of many demons inspired from Polytheistic Ancient Deity. Astaroth, Beelzebub, and Amon are other examples. Indeed, with the advent of Abrahamic monotheistic religions such as christianity and judaism, polytheistic semitic gods were transformed into demons of new western mythology. Together we can observe this process of metamorphosis. Here are the three phases of Baalat Gebal: from herself to demon to poet. I am Baalat Gebal, this is Bael the demon, and this is Baal the poet. Anyone would like to help demonstrate? One more person?

Two members of the audience volunteer.

They stand behind the masks, facing the audience.

She stands aligned with them.

So here are the phases of the dramaturgical transformations between us. Phase One: From Baalat Gebal to Bael: Western Monotheism transforms Eastern Polytheistic Religions into Evil. Phase Two: From Bael the demon to Baal the asocial immoral poet: Brecht equating poetry with evil.

The light is dimmer. A repeated deep breathing fills the space.

At this point, Baalat Gebal has disappeared and her female presence is reduced to victimhood in the poet Baal's 'deflowered' virgins.

Baalat Gebal: I must stop you there.

Her voice fills the space. Betina is not surprised.

[A Google Street View](#) appears as a projection behind the audience.

It shows the ruins of Baalat Gebal Sanctuary, by the sea, in Byblos, Lebanon.

Baalat Gebal: Victim I am not, and your words shall not make me so. Men have bowed, given themselves to my land and fury. The legacy I have left them with remains till this day.

The street view proceeds into the path between the ruins.

With every click on the Google street view, the sound of a wind instrument plays loudly.

Betina(addressing the audience): What remains today of Baalat Gebal in the East are some ruins reminiscent of Phoenicians presence in the Levant.

[Click]

A presence that has been overly used to defend sectarian discourses within Lebanon.

Baalat Gebal: I have offered the city of Byblos my eternal protection, and in my temple I have been honored.

[Click]

Wanderers of the world have come to visit my sanctuary that till this day holds ground in Byblos city. The people of Byblos have made proof of fidelity and cherish me still as their Phoenician ancestor.

[Click]

[Click]

[Click]

Betina*(addressing the audience)*: Phoenician ancestry has been notoriously used by both western scholars as well local christian conservatives, discriminating against Arabs, Muslims, non-Christian people.

[Click]

[Click]

Baalat Gebal: The Phoenician sailors and merchants have travelled the seas. Courageous venturers, they have confronted human evil in all its shapes.

Google street view has led us to the ruins of an amphitheater. Sea and sky lay at the horizon.

Betina*(still addressing the audience)*: You see, what Orientalism⁷ does, is that It takes what you are, and represents it however it pleases. It feeds itself from your so called identity and characteristics, and vomits them in a new unrecognizable, horrifying form.

⁷This use of the term 'Orientalism' refers to what Edward Said describes in his 1978 book of the same title. In his analysis he points out the structures and ideologies which dominate the Western approach to Eastern societies and culture.

Baalat Gebal: Show me images of myself.

Betina: All the images I know are failed replicas. I would rather ask you to reveal your true self.

Betina sits with the audience, the sun rises, and the room is filled with a warm light.

Baalat Gebal: Rise... Before you the fury of Baalat Gebal!

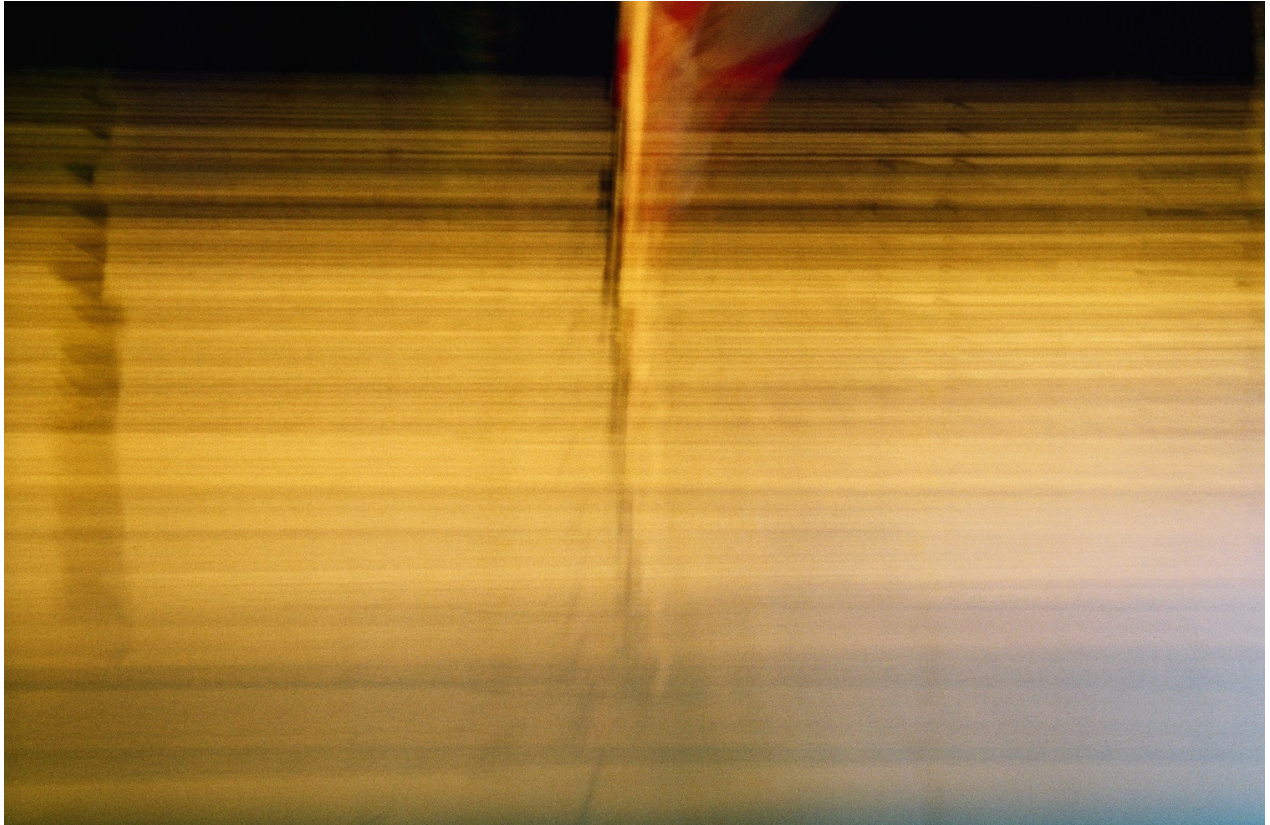
She begins to sing in repeat the Aramaic Maronite Prayer “Qadishat Aloho.”

ܡܝܢܥܐ ܐܠܗܐ. ܡܝܢܥܐ ܣܕܝܢܐ. ܡܝܢܥܐ ܠܐ ܡܢܥܐ ܕܐܢܟܗ ܫܠܦܐ
ܐܒܐ ܘܫܥܝܕܟܐ.

*The room turns back to pitch dark, and the light that remains is that of a torch that is passed on
from one person to the other.*

Act 3

The Gestural Lecture



Waving Flag (2011) by Betina Abi Habib

Act 3

Betina pushes back the steps of the tribune, enlarging the stage platform.

Baalat Gebal:

The sun rises above our feet, exposing our bodies

to our loved ones.

Warmed

by the same fire we can stand

shoulder to shoulder,

sister to sister,

sweat to sweat.

What seemed to be so far, so long to come,

so hard

to achieve

is now present, taking place.

It is happening.

She lets out a honk, one that could remind us of the cry of a goose.

Betina responds with the same cry. They begin a ping-pong of cries.

With every honk, the light in the room becomes stronger, and the voice of Baalat Gebal louder.

Baalat Gebal:

From a distance it looked thin,
struggling to appear.

Today

I can see it.

It is a Giant, glorious, passionate
and unprecedented.

The distance it has traveled cannot be traced.

It is a split, a dissonance, a revolution.

Betina is standing by the torch.

Someone in the audience gets up and stands in front of her.

Together they are now Baalat Gebal.

The participant takes some steps further and opens her arms.

She lets herself fall back and be caught by Betina.

They turn and do it the other way around:

Betina allows herself to fall back and is caught by the participant.

This continues for a few times and forms a path across the room.

They count aloud the number of times they catch the other.

After ten times together, they both stop, shake their arms and legs, jump a bit.

[Long lasting Honk]

They invite others to join. Some would rather observe.

At each honk, more people are invited and new pairs are formed.

The action becomes a collective one, pair by pair.

The audience begins to fill the stage.

The sun becomes stronger until nothing in the room is left obscure.

Epilogue

This meeting was planned during a revolution⁸ and took place in a pandemic. In planning, it aimed at contributing to the field of Scenography by challenging its separation from Dramaturgy and Scriptwriting. In place it became more personal, and perhaps consequently more political.

Baalat Gebal, more than being the double of Betina, is in herself dual. She is at the same time powerful as a worshiped female, and notoriously co-opted as a symbol of eastern christianity. She is pitiful and magnificent at once, absent and revolutionary. She is Betina's shameful christianity and her proud otherness. Baalat Gebal is both a victim of discrimination between religions and cultures and a reclamer of agency when she enters the space of representation.

The tension was released by falling into each others' arms. Being collaged into a historical photo is trivial and humorous, but also dangerous. The falsified presence of the statuette in the portrait of Bertolt Brecht was unmistakably a double edged sword employed by Betina. Of course it has its intellectual agenda, using the form of the lecture and rejecting it at the same time; employing the tools for Lecturing such as archival material then corrupting them to become unreliable. But more personally, it reveals the struggle the author has with her own duality. This collaging exposes her forcing a link between her presence in the West and her place in the East. Of course, the appropriated image is an excuse to talk about appropriation itself, but it is also more personally an opposition to Orientalism in the context of contemporary artistic practice.

My role was to show myself as a celebration of agency, poetry and ambiguity. With our bodies and our voices we demonstrated our fury and shouted for solidarity.

B.G.

Utrecht
May 2020

⁸ Here I refer to the October 2019 Lebanese Uprising that was also called the October Lebanese Revolution, particularly because of the major role of its working class.

Annex Scripts

Al-Conductor (2018)

Artist Residing (2018)

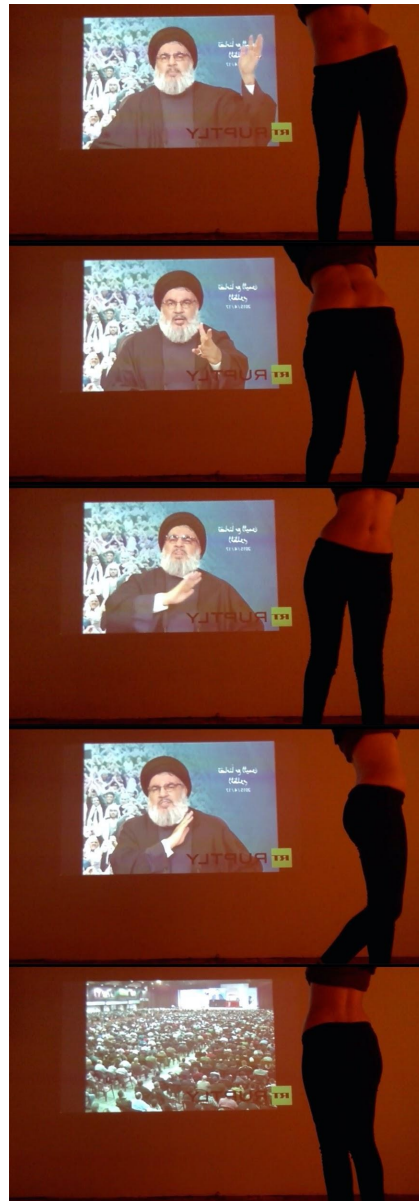
On Placemaking: The Body as a Place (2019)

The Mask as a Gesture (2020)

Phedre Under the Bridge (2020)

All selected from the [Research Catalogue Exposition](#) 'Performing Place', 2018-2020.

AI- Conductor



*The speech appears on the wall, it is a slowed down version.
The chants of the party he heads begin to play, we cannot hear the voice of the man speaking.
Instead, as the chants transform into a repetitive beat, an audience member X begins to read out
loud from a distributed text.*

X: One can only perform certain things in specific spaces.

The performer standing in front of the projections rolls up her top. X can continue.

X: Through live recording, I can, just like Hassan Nasrallah, be performing in two places at the same time.

*The hip and belly movements of the performer clearly react to the gestures of the man projected
on the wall. X continues.*

X: I can have an audience to communicate with immediately but at a distance.

X takes two deep breaths.

X: I can pretend to share an intimate space while being separated from and unaware of the viewer.

X takes two deep breaths.

X: I can seem to fit well within an image that is in fact hostile to my very existence.

X takes two deep breaths.

X: I use my body as a tool to appropriate images and transport them.

Her movement becomes faster as his gesture is repeated.

X: By layering these images with myself, I modify their spectatorship. Through this dramaturgical work of appropriation, I try to question how our bodies and spaces are disciplined. There are things one can only perform in specific spaces.

Artist Residing



Find yourself an abandoned space.

Imagine an uncanny activity to be done there.

Pretend to be doing this activity and document yourself in the process.

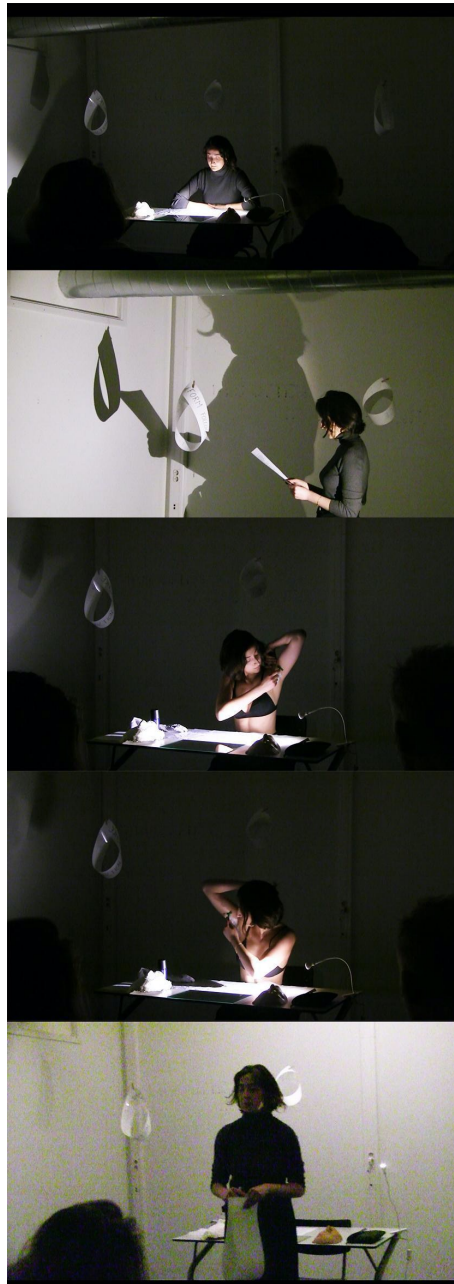
Pay attention to the composition of the images, to the contrast, dynamism, balance, focus.

Select the most beautiful ones.

Write a poem to match the photos.

Exhibit the whole as a work of Art.

On Placemaking: The Body as a place.



All of it read from a paper, which you hold in your hands as instructions. The room contains a table with a mirror, a little 'trousse' containing raisor and mousse, a little towel. Strips of text semi-rolled hang high behind the table facing the audience. On the strips you can read 'SPACE', 'FUNCTIONALITY', 'FORM', 'PRACTICES', 'FORM FOLLOWS PRACTICE'. Shedding light in front or behind them makes different parts of the text visible. Seated at the table

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for coming.

As you might already know, today I will be talking about the notion of Placemaking, a concept that has been central to my work until now.

In the coming half hour we will be looking at it particularly from the perspective of the body; The body as a place that is shaped by performance.

I will begin by specifying the context from which the term 'Placemaking' emerged, to later explain how it relates to scenography, and the body.

Turn on the table light, carry it with you and stand under the hanging strips.

Stand in front of SPACE.

In Architecture and Urban Theory, a distinction is made between Place and Space whereby Space is the abstract understanding of an environment and Place is the more specific understanding of an environment. In other words, when a space becomes significant and relevant, it can be recognized as a place.

Stand behind PLACE.

Walk back to the front of FUNCTIONALITY, FORM, PRACTICES.

While the modernists looked at our environments through functionality, and the post-modernists through form, contemporary architecture and urban theory today is more interested in the activities that takes place in our surroundings: how our daily practices shape the spaces we occupy. From this we can then suggest a slogan opposing the modernists *Form follows Function*, and rather say *Form follows Practice*.

Stand behind FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION. Erase FUNCTION and write PRACTICE.

What is practiced in a space defines its representation, it defines the image we have of it. How does this relate to performance? I suggest replacing the term 'Practices' with that of 'Performance'.

Erase PRACTICE and write PERFORMANCE.

In fact, practices are nothing more than daily performances that become habitual. We then have a new slogan: *Form follows Performance*.

Light it from all sides, turning around it. Then sit behind your desk. Flip the paper.

How does this relate to the Body?

The form which my body takes is often performed.

Take off your top, begin the foaming and spreading on the armpit.

Gently take out the razor and remove the hair under your armpit.

First under the arm that is done, wipe it with a towel.

Do the same for the second arm, always looking at yourself in the mirror.

Removing the armpit hair is not a functional way of shaping my armpit. It is a political social performance of my body, of my identity. This place has been performed, so regularly and so consistently that it has become unquestionable for some. This is why I bring it back to myself and to others as a performance.

Wear your top again, leave the table, turn on the lights, join them on a bench.

The armpit is one example of the many places of my body that are performed. Can you also think of parts, aspects or functions of your bodies that are performed?

One way Judith Butler helps us in thinking about this is by considering the external gaze. Is there something you perform with or on your body because of the expectations of the other's gaze? Can you write it down on this strip of photo-paper which we will pass around?

A discussion follows once the writings are gathered and read aloud.

More performances of other parts of our bodies are discussed and reconsidered as choreographies.

The Mask as a Gesture



1) Before you throw your old bedsheets: cut a line the length of your face.

Hang your bedsheets with a single fold.

Place your head inside the opening. Move forward and back so as to slowly pull down the sheets.

2) Make a plaster mold of your face.

Make a cast of the mold. Hang them both in an empty room, at average eye-level.

The aim of epic theatre is alienation, distancing, de-familiarization.

The audience is not asked to suspend their disbelief. On the contrary, they must recognize being in the theatre to develop opinions and reactions on what they see, hear, experience. Epic theatre, in that sense, does not pretend to be reality on stage, or the platform to reproduce the world. It refuses realism and recognizes the distance between reality and its representation.

To quote Walter Benjamin in his writings on Epic Theatre in *Understanding Brecht*:

“Epic theatre does not reproduce situations, but rather reveals them.”

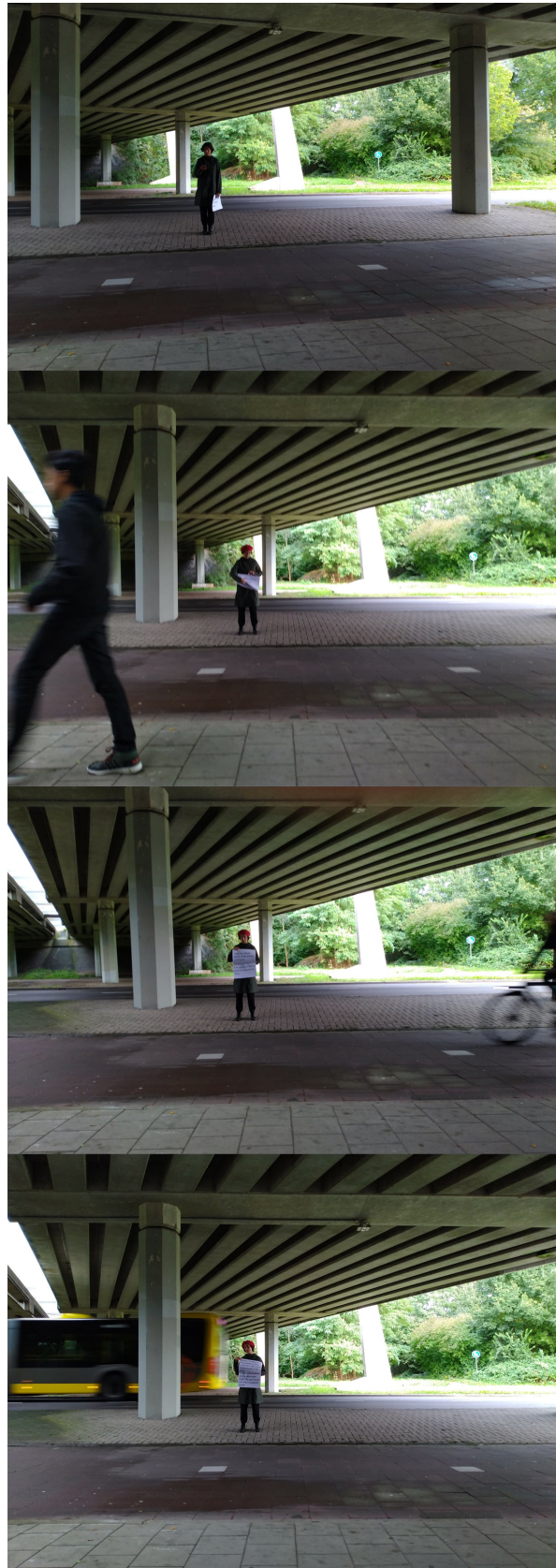
“Epic theatre, which depends on interruption, is quotable in a very specific sense. The gestures used in the process of acting [must become] quotable.”

“The actor must show the event by showing herself; and she shows herself by showing the event.

She must be free, at the right moment, to act herself thinking (about her part).”

I chose then, to quote my face, to interrupt its action by making a cast of it. The outcome is the extraction of a specific facial gesture. The mask, silicone and detailed replica of my face presents myself to myself at a distance. Here, above me, hangs a frozen moment in time of my physical features. This replica of my face I can look at as a three-dimensional object, from a distance, and from close. I get to, for the first time look at it from the side, from the top, from below, from inside. My nose is to me the most obvious feature, the one that holds my insecurities, my pride, my kindness and my anger. I was twelve years old when my mother first suggested I went for plastic surgery to improve my physical appearance. ‘You can remove the lower hanging bit between the nostrils’... ‘or maybe just hatch the bumpy bone at the top to make it more straight’. Of course my mother only meant well, she was letting me know there was the option for me to change my physical appearance if I felt uncomfortable or ashamed. She was letting me know that she would be willing to pay for such an operation out of care for my self-esteem. Funnily enough, this did not make me love my face any bit more. But I felt so insulted and surprised by this suggestion that I became angry against it. From that moment on, I had to fight for my nose. The nose of my father, of my Arabness, of my ambiguity.

Phedre under the bridge



Think of one thing you know by heart, a song a poem a quote, a story...

Print it / Write it large enough to be seen from a 4 meter distance.

Find a pedestrian path under a bridge. Stand across from it, between the pillars of the bridge.

Hold the paper slides in your hands.

Recite your text and flip accordingly so that the text can act as subtitles to your speech.

Repeat until you reach satisfying realizations on what you have wasted time memorizing.

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