





# #6

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## Art Research Envelope

Intro: Art Research Envelope #6

The Polyphonic Voice of Artistic Research  
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RUTH ANDERWALD +  
LEONHARD GROND

“Can you hear me?” is often the first sentence in an online meeting. Not only seeing but also listening to each other can create a space of intimacy and togetherness, as it did, for example, throughout the pandemic or in times when we find ourselves removed from family, friends, and colleagues. Voices create closeness and strengthen relations. A voice, however, has many faculties: it may break or rise, steer us, mislead us, motivate or hinder us; it can be the voice of an animal or fellow human; the inner voice in our heads, the artificial voice of a navigation system or digital assistant, the empathetic voice of a friend, the pleasurable murmur of social settings; it can be the imagined voice of the narrator in a book, an actor’s voice filling a character with life or a commentator interpreting events... Listening to a voice speaking, we encounter the “sphere around it, which includes all its hearers: an intimate sphere or area, limited both in time and space”, as Ursula Le Guin explains in *The Wave in the Mind*. Listening to a voice creates attention, and direction, shaping the perception of space and time. Allure or warning, we coordinate the voices we encounter; we orient and direct them according to our perception. We turn away from shouting so that we can hear the whispering. We respond with somatic space positioning, different levels of appreciation and openness, and the ensuing sense-making processes. Which voices do we heed? Especially when it comes to artistic research, this question is of **political** but also artistic, methodological, and metaphorical importance.

ALEXANDER  
DAMIANISCH

It’s **political** because listening challenges the sensory perception of the present, the encounter with the other. Every touch from someone is also of someone. Artistic research has the quality of broadening the scope for the formulation and understanding of meaning since hardly any other practice is so centrally supported by sensual interaction. This is precisely what artistic research offers to the research landscape in general, to make a difference by expressing differences. And that is a central aspect of its political power.

Over the past 20 years, the voices that have advocated and criticised artistic research have also shaped the practice into a field of academic, trans-disciplinary, and action-based research that challenges hegemonic discourses and the perception of artistic and curatorial practices. Moreover, it **challenges** conventional research approaches, communication and funding.

**Challenging** is hardly ever a finished process; it is a constant attempt to make visible different concerns and thus peculiarities, until they can become certainties and thus turn self-evident in the various realms of the possible. The marginal must prove itself until it has established itself as sovereign. We are all too aware that sovereignty, especially in the aftermath of Corona, is merely temporary. This is why the process of voicing mentioned earlier is another attempt to stay on the ball.

In 2023, we explored curatorial and display strategies for the Public Colloquium; after returning from the pandemic and reclaiming the collective space and a community in presence at the ZFF institute in 2022. For the Public Colloquium 2024, we are **experimenting** with performative practices of lecture and lecture practices in performance art, which means exploring practices of voicing for artistic research.

**Experimenting** also means that in addition to the breadth of artistic methods, represented in their diversity by all the colleagues and their research projects, the aim was also to try out specific forms of mediating art and research, with the idea that mediation is and/or can be content-forming. Our colleagues shape this exchange not only content-wise but form-wise too. The connection and solidarity of the colloquium remained strong and made it possible to create a field of productive interference. This collective not only sought to broaden the panorama of understandings through artistic research, but also to offer new experimental forms of practice. This makes the PC comparable to new engaged forms of developing funding opportunities; it aims to extend the ways of the epistemic through artistic practice beyond the established and expected, while always remaining curious.

The lecture performance developed in the 1960ies, as part of conceptual and performative artistic practices to explore the nexus of knowledge, embodiment and art. The lecture performance or performance lecture moves along the tightrope (or tripwire?) between artistic and academic ecologies inviting to **voice** more than factual concern.

**Voicing** must sometimes break boundaries, and the ground must be prepared for leaving the dimensions of the familiar. Neither the TED Talk traverses what is formally possible, nor does the academic keynote format as such aim to convey understanding; rather, it is the artistic research public colloquium that seeks to go further, to provide room for unheard voices.

Over the past decades, lecture performances developed to include academic and non-academic modes of knowledge transfer as an embodied artistic-research practice, accommodating performative, visual, somatic, musical, or poetic approaches to epistemology. Allan Ginsberg holds that “the highest form of epistemological research [is] the use of rhythmic language to rouse the senses, arouse perceptions, and arouse sense of inner space, to alter all of consciousness itself.” (Ginsberg 1974, p. 28 ff) For him, this requires not only to examine the material form that thoughts take but to “examine thought” and find ways to “not get lost in it.” (Ginsberg 1974, p. 31) Beyond that, this solicits “examining epistemology under very specialized circumstances, using language to discuss the limits of language.” (Ginsberg 1974, p. 29) In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us of the language and terms that we are missing, especially in scientific contexts, as scientific “terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.” (Kimmerer 2020, p. 49) Similarly, Katherine McKittrick warns against **limiting descriptiveness** and argues for more inclusive modes of reflection and the use of non-discriminatory and inclusive languages. Becoming inclusive, however, means thinking and speaking differently and “attending to a whole new system of knowledges, [...] demanding and participating in practical activities of resistance and encounter, disobedient inquiries, wonder, and anti-colonial thinking.” (McKittrick 2021, p. 150)

Indeed, **unlimited descriptiveness** is of interest. Possibilities for such are found in artistic practices, and they are shared as a promising gift to the field of research. It is a truism to state once again

that the separation of research into art and science was a productive mistake, and going back to an earlier moment helps, in some cases, to understand better what might be possible. Isn’t it bizarre to assert the artistic quality of scientific phenomena when the distinction is revealed as a disguise of promises to please the power structures of the past (which are still praised by some today)? Look how educated we are! Don’t look at the messy stuff in the background of our stiff family portraits. Everybody knows that this stuff is the foundation, it is the structure that creates the surface (I always found the wooden structure of the actual canvas of Las Meninas and the way it shines through the paint much more interesting than the people portrayed, because after all, the canvas remains an object). So, why do we need to consider and rejoice in the creativity of so-called scientific research, when we know that the beauty of truth is so well hidden behind the limits of documentation? The blurred lines offer much more truth regarding the mysteriousness of the world, including the world of research.

Artistic research does not come out of nowhere but is based on histories, practices, skills, and cultures, and is directed toward future practices, knowledge, and skills. The claim to the artistic and to research are contested in artistic research. The research in artistic research “withdraws from allocating any cohesion, cause, determination or function that standard forms of research might entail.” (Beech 2021, no pagination) Artistic practice is accompanied by reflective practices of reading, exchanging, documenting, and theorising. In this way, non-linear, speculative, intuitive, multi-perspective ways of thinking and working in artistic research can enable a critical approach. Film curator Philippe-Alain Michaud once said to us: “Art must widen the notion of art,” similar to the way research widens the spectrum of the known. What is then the responsibility of artistic research? Is it first a responsibility to itself as a field? Adrienne Rich adds: “Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work. [...] Responsibility to yourself means that you don’t fall for shallow and predigested books and ideas [...]” (Rich 1977, p. 610). We should add, however, that artist-researchers feel a responsibility not only to their field, sources, and community, but also to their subject and output. Responsibility has been one of the key points of our reflection with the ethics platform. Taking a circular approach, we aimed to collect and systematise experiences in the tension between artistic research and ethics. Again, many voices in terms of colleagues and background material, from art to philosophy to law, made up the discussion. As a discipline at the intersection of scientific and artistic modes of research and thinking, we could argue that artistic research necessarily produces polyphonic voices. This can be exemplified by this Envelope, and by the PhD in Art programme itself, and its formation of a polyphonic *Community of Practice*. The term polyphonic already hints at the interrelatedness of the voices present, whether their parts are harmonious, contrapuntal, or otherwise related.

As a matter of fact, the first move to inclusion is “to voice something”, but in what connection does this take place? Polyphony feels right. Is it a reach out activity, speaking, shouting, crying or another way to be verbally present? Voicing is the aim to create, activate or find new relations, like a ripped neuron looking for its buddy while crowing together again. This takes time, and this is very relevant. Thinking about this helps to understand, and it helps to reconnect the broken threads again. But is not only about the other, it is already an affirmative practice toward the researching self, to state a position is to guard it with the force of voice. The voice is the medium where the object and subject fall into one, only the vector of intent make the task clear, pushing of pulling. We believe that with Artistic Research this differentiation between performing and the performed becomes irrelevant. So isn’t “voicing” always the result of a reflexive practice? So if we find ourselves in a dynamic environment of negotiating change, Ginsberg writes “to alter”, then it is about giving something a form. In other words, it is about “formulating” something. It does not have to be the language that expresses something, but it is always the desire to make oneself understood, which sense is to be addressed via whichever senses. In this world, artistic research takes art seriously, it strives to communicate together. It is particularly in the era of “do you hear me” that the performative competence of the arts is increasingly being taken into account. There is still a lot of potential hidden here, beginnings have been made, but the obligatory recourse to the rigorous attention of artistic researchers must be taken up even more. It is always about mediating something, which becomes painfully tangible in the spatial or temporal present when the other is missing. And it can be explored through artistic practices. It is about the declination of “altered states”, about “states of becoming”.

To conclude: we understand this PhD in Art programme as facilitating an ecology of epistemic solidarity within these states of becoming. This ecology invites individuals from diverse backgrounds to work together on individual and collective projects. Each participant brings a unique perspective and insight to the group, enriching and advancing our

collective and individual understanding, creating the polyphonic voice of the diversity of artistic research. Epistemic solidarity means cultivating a shared understanding and knowledge among a group of diverse learners and involves “practices of supporting others (with whom one recognises similarity in a relevant aspect) as knowers. To qualify as solidarity, these practices must involve certain costs (such as spending time, giving up a privilege, or accepting risk for oneself)” (Pot 2022, p. 685). It entails respecting and recognising how multiple perspectives, voices, and experiences enrich our understanding of a subject or question, leading to more comprehensive insights in a sustainable and generative environment of learning. The voices of artistic research are found first and foremost in the voices of learning.

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### List of participating projects

- Sanja Andelkovic: Voice-Shifting as a Method: Eco-Gods in Future Orthodox Chants, Supervisor: Gerhild Steinbuch
- Margit Busch: A Garden for a Fish, Supervisor: Virgil Widrich
- Johanna Bruckner: Xenopoetic De/Compositions: The Affect-Body as Interface, Supervisor: Jakob Lena Knebl
- Andrew Champlin: Technique Concerns: Ballet Practice Against the Western Archive, Supervisors: Ruth Anderwald + Leonhard Grond
- George Demir: Ancestral Junctions: On the Expansion of Ancestral Mythologies, Supervisor: Hans Schabus
- Rah Eleh: Xenofuturism: A Proposal for a Liminal Futurism, Supervisor: Bouchra Khalili
- Wolfgang Konrad: Before the Truth in Documentary, Supervisor: Luzius Bernhard
- Joseph Leung: Digital Angst – An Artistic Ethnography of the Relationship between Anxiety and Digital Culture (from Hong Kong to China and the World), Supervisor: Gabriele Rothemann
- Cristiana de Marchi: Casting a Shadow. On Disappearance, Emptiness, and the Haunting Power of Absence, Supervisor: Judith Eisler
- Jo O’Brien: Confusion: As Resistance, as Relationship, and Towards the Relational, Supervisors: Ruth Anderwald + Leonhard Grond
- Marthin Rozo Castaño: Art and Conservation in the Post-Conflict, Supervisor: Cristina García Grinda + Efrén Díaz Moreno
- Konstanze Stoiber, Untitled, Supervisor: Brigitte Felderer
- Fabian Weiss: Ideal Self: How We Use Photography and Technology to Present and Optimise Ourselves, Supervisor: Margarete Jahrmann
- Ksenia Yurkova: Figures of Reticence as a(bio) political Strategy, a Forced Necessity, and the Impossibility of Artistic Expression, Supervisor: Jakob Lena Knebl
- Conny Zenk: RAD Performance – Driving Voices of Resistance, Supervisor: Ruth Schnell

### Credits (projects)

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Look up! I am no canopy- I am a messenger, 2022  
performed at The 59th October Salon (Belgrade Biennale, Serbia)

Sanja Anđelković 2024  
Voice-Shifting questions



## **Question I: Choirs and their democracy: Open letter<sup>🐛</sup> to the International Professional Animal Communicators Association Group<sup>🐛🐛</sup> (excerpt)**

“ I made this piece and I discovered... not only did I enjoy doing it, but I also felt like I have uncovered the key to democracy. ... I know that music may be the last thing we have in the world where people get together and build something with their neighbors without asking themselves: “How much money do you make?... I am going to make my decision based on the economic bracket you fall under. No one in a choir ever says... I don’t like the politics of the person sitting next to me, so I am going to be singing badly! This is where we are in the world, where this is the only space where this democratic faith still exists”

– David Lang in conversation with Richard Carrick, Berklee College of Music

*Dear International Professional Animal Communicators Association Group,*

*I’ve been meaning to write for a while now. It has occurred to me that what David Lang has mentioned seems very relevant. His words lead me to ask: what about the insects? What democratic qualities can a choir of cicadas represent? And how do I embody them ? These questions are important to me, as I have been trying my best to understand how to coherently bring myself to sing. The experience of singing has changed since I encountered the cicadas. Since that encounter, something has shifted in me, and moved me to dissociate in order to then associate again in different ways. Something in me just doesn’t feel the same anymore. Even when I speak, I cannot communicate. I think in staccato. I don’t speak or sing that way, of course. Only sometimes I do, when I struggle connecting to my vocal apparatus. There are notes I know well, but the notes they sing/utter, I cannot visualize. It is easy to count the notes within a minute, but to differentiate the messages – that is up to you.*

*I am writing this letter as I wish to speak to the President of the International Professional Animal Communicators Association Group, appointed to the sector for cicadas. I wish to break the silence on this matter. This maybe an attempt to outsource my concerns, but I am afraid that I cannot handle this matter alone.*

*My choir experience in an Orthodox church over the past ten years has taught me a lot. I have seen the juxtaposition of values and nation building across Orthodox church contexts more closely intertwined than I would have liked.*

*You see, many questions smother me, and to overcome them I urgently need your help. The matter is delicate, and the consequences detrimental.*

*I am looking forward to your reply at your earliest convenience ,  
Sanja*

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<sup>🐛</sup> This is the first of many letters that are a part of my PhD experiential learning practice in getting to know different aspects of insects (cicadas specifically). The letter is poeticized for the Envelope addition.

<sup>🐛🐛</sup> This is a group of almost 300 international animal communicators who are interested in getting together to create an association for the animal communication profession - led by Dr. Cara Gubbins. This group hopes to soon bring together its 15 volunteer steering committee members and local membership from three global zones, including North & South America, Europe and Africa, and Asia & Australia.



A few months ago, I began my research fellowship in the Arts & Science program at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, one of the world's most renowned centers for scientific research. I would like to share my initial experiences of this environment in the context of my dissertation's aesthetic approach and research focus.

On the second page, you can see visual material I have produced as part of my ongoing research on interfaces, which focuses on both the relationship between affect and machine learning as an alienating and transformative aesthetic. My project explores the influence of AI on moments of desire and its opportunities for agencies. Using AI and social media footage, I produced a video that examines responses to user representations in failed and ambiguous encounters with AI, asking how images of machine learning change our understanding of the world. How do people view these images and their (failed) promises, and how are changes in imaging being articulated, distributed, and circulated?

I arrived at CERN on a rainy day. A registration card at the entrance granted me access to this high-security enclave. Once inside, orientation was difficult; I steered a course through streets consisting of block buildings, some reminding me of old factories and warehouses. I couldn't imagine what, if anything, might be inside. But it also occurred to me that CERN seemed to be an interface of colliding experiences and knowledge in transition, like a junction between the outside world and the knowledge within. Scientists come and go regularly to work on experiments.

A theoretical physicist introduced me to his field of study: inside the colliders, which are specially constructed rings under the earth, many kilometers in length, particles collide at nearly the speed of light, either splitting into smaller parts or creating new particles. The physicist tells me that scientists at CERN study the more "interesting and new particles", those that are unknown, unfamiliar to physics, or seemingly do not abide by the laws of physics. These experiments, he told me, help us to understand the behavior of such particles and provide insights into how their interaction with other particles could lead to different relationships between machine and medium, depending on whether their charge is negative, positive, or neutral. The results form a kind of code that allows systems to interact repeatedly and to be quantified and computed, which helps in creating interfaces for data transportation and translation. The stranger the behavior of the particles, the more complex the interfacial interactions. The greater the number of unknown particles, the more complex it is to translate them into knowledge, and the more extensive the scope for imagining realities beyond binary concepts.

# Improbable Interfaces: Ambiguity, Affect and the Corporeal

As a blueprint for affective computing, this study draws on an interdisciplinary interest in the nonverbal, often transsubjective, and sometimes unconscious dimensions of embodied experience and knowledge, including feeling, sensation, and attention. Pioneered by Rosalind Picard in the early 1990s, the turn to affect in AI research has helped to advance the knowledge, understanding, and development of systems to sense, recognize, categorize, and react to human emotion (Lee 2016, 18). What remains unresolved, and of particular interest to me, are the machine learning techniques that have not yet been developed to detect non-standard situations in the monitoring of the operator parameters. What characterizes the non-standard situation here, and what do these techniques tell us? How do they represent the world and provide feedback?

Speculation and uncertainty are the primary guiding principles for most scientists and are inherent in their research and interpretation of reality. However, humans maintain an ambiguous relationship with increasingly autonomous technological tools and their translation into virtual images. My practice at CERN is thus concerned with the interpretation of data through interfaces and the impact of their ambiguities on public discourse: How can data interfaces be used to explore, expose, and make use of ambiguity? How can artistic practice inform new frameworks for understanding the ambiguities inherent in data interfaces? These questions guide my investigations, in which I view each step along the data science route as an opportunity to create different data-driven narratives and new ways of engaging with them.

To conclude, I am interested in the alienating potential of the "in-betweens" of interfaces that allow possibilities to co-exist, and wish to bestow corporeal agency to the liminal space of a non-narrated, improbable world. My work includes a queer-feminist contextualization of algorithmic developments and data science. I try to broaden the understanding of technology as a cultural and affective agent and focus on its performative aspects. I reflect on the fragile threshold between imagination, affirmation, and the frustration of technology as an interface of a visual, embodied experience, asking how science-led transformations can challenge how people interpret the world beyond binary regimes of agency, gender, and utopia.

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# JOHANNA BUCHNER



4

Also, on the left side, near the window, you can find a raised table with a laptop and a **microscope**. The microscope is an entrance to the numerous miniature worlds and dramas that exist and unfold within the microscopic dimensions of the fish garden. The aforementioned **bookshelf** contains books like “What a Fish Knows” by Jonathan Balcombe, who argues for considering fish as conscious individuals in order to cultivate a new relationship with them, and “Garden Futures: Designing with Nature,” a publication accompanying an exhibition of the same name in which the curators claim that gardens are miniature worlds that represent our understanding of nature and serve as places where the future is imagined and shaped, and “The Future: A Very Short Introduction” by Jennifer M. Gidley, who argues that there is not just one future, but multiple possible futures that can be explored and created.

ENERGY

microscope

bookshelf

TIME

3

Opposite the entrance (the “time” side) of the fish garden laboratory, the windows reveal that it is daytime. Additionally, the **clock** on the wall gives temporal orientation. On the wall, you’ll also find traces of the former inhabitants of this place: a hole in the wall, and the **sentence** “das wars” with the **date** 2.10.20, and “das wird’s,” with the date 24.11.23, added by me. On a protruding cable duct, two **puppet dinosaurs** seem to be conversing lively. This side serves as a portal for time travel and is closely connected to the bookshelf on the left side

clock

hole

sentence/  
date

dinosaurs

fish garden

educational  
chart

MATTER

IZMC bag

folder box

place to rest

2

To the right of the fish garden laboratory is a **place for rest**, daydreaming, reflection, or relaxed observation. The construction is on wheels so it can be moved to other areas of the room. You’ll also notice a hanging file **folder box** that represents order and discipline. On the wall is an **educational chart** of a carp (zebrafish belong to the carpoids), including bones and intestines, and a **bag** from the International Zebrafish and Medaka (IZMC) Course I attended last September. These materials relate to a chapter on zebrafish in science.

SPACE

1

If you are familiar with the transmap, you know that the usual compass directions (N/S/W/E) are replaced on the transmap by space, time, matter, and energy. This directional orientation also plays a role in the fish garden laboratory. You enter it from the “space” side and immediately encounter the **fish garden**. The garden is observed on a daily basis and awaits the establishment of routine practices and regular protocols.

Lastly, I would like to mention books by Jacob von Uexküll, such as ‘Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen. Bedeutungslehre’ (A foray into the worlds of animals and humans – with a theory of meaning). Uexküll’s concept of ‘Umwelt’ leads to biosemiotics, the study of the processes of meaning-making in the living world.



Else’s Riddle: Tracing Clues Along a Tour

Else

I encountered Else for the first time when I was musing over my master’s thesis. That was in 2016. She introduced herself to me as Else Sibil Someone and said she is a transcientist and comes (or should

I say “will be coming”) from the future. At first, I thought I might have gone nuts, but then I cooled down, because apart from the strangeness of the whole experience, our conversations were, and still are, exciting and reasonably sane. So, I stopped worrying about going crazy. Transcientists, she told me, are researchers trained to think and act beyond, across, and through disciplines. They look at processes and have the expertise to be sensitive to the various relationships that create phenomena. And they possess a highly developed sense of aesthetics.

Else was so convincing that I dedicated my master’s thesis to her and potential transcientistic research methods. I worked on mealworms and mealworm beetles, and delved into wormholes, translabs, and transmaps<sup>1</sup>. After completing my master’s, I felt that I had contributed enough to the transcientistic idea, and instead of delving into wormholes, I became a passionate outdoor ping-pong player. But Else returned.

Else’s riddle

When Else returned (to me, her absence felt like more than two years), she carried on as if she had never been away. Maybe she had never left. Everything I had done in the meantime fitted in perfectly with her plans, so I suspect that Else had had her fingers in the pie all along.

In the meantime, I had acquired an aquarium and some fish, seemingly for no particular reason. It’s simply that I’m fascinated by underwater worlds and also wished for some living company at home. The fish I chose were zebrafish. All the fish literature I studied described them as hardy species, easy to keep and breed, making them suitable for beginners. Of course, I was also intrigued by the fact that zebrafish have managed to expand their habitat to many fish facilities and laboratories worldwide, and have made a career as a model organism in biological and medical research.

“A garden for a fish,” Else said.

Me: A garden for a fish?

Else: A garden for a fish!

Finally, I understood. This was meant to be an assignment, a riddle I should solve. Else expected me to make sense of this garden for a fish. I also understood that resistance at this point was futile.

A garden needs a place

If we are to talk not just about metaphorical gardens but about a garden that can be experienced with the senses, it needs a physical place. I kept the fish and a growing number of containers with small aquatic biotopes on industrial shelves in my living room. It crowded my flat. I imagined the fish garden as a semi-public place, a laboratory with traces of individuality, open to visitors for exchange. Working in the space and receiving visitors was laborious.

I don’t know if Else had her fingers in the pie again or if it was just a lucky coincidence, but I was offered a place at Palais Rössl, a newly formed studio community in a house in Vienna’s 4th district. The biotopes, the fish, me, and a few other things moved there.

To transport the aquariums, you must empty them. The fish travel in a bucket, which is a stressful experience for them. Except for one, they have all turned quite pale (yes, they can get pale), but after an hour or two, they regained their shimmering black and gold stripes.

They arrived at a place where their garden could grow.

8.02.2024 / 9:34

Me: What do you think about the new home for the fish garden?

ESS: I think it is perfect.

Me: I like the place too. I have already had visitors.

ESS: And?

Me: They enjoyed the place as well.

ESS: And how is your gardening practice developing?

Me: It feels chaotic, as I described in the last issue of Envelope (Envelope #5).

ESS: As far as I remember, you described it as only seemingly chaotic, but ideally in the form of “a flow, a natural happening,” in which things are accomplished, if I may quote you.

Me: That is true when I am dealing with matter. Things somehow find each other, but words and thoughts... that’s difficult.

ESS: And what if you treat words and thoughts as things?

Me: I would not know how. When I interact with the material, the material speaks to all the senses. My whole body is involved. When I write, the sensory input and motoric activities are unrelated to the content. When I am in a space, I can feel the relations, the gravities, the arrangement in a moment. A text develops over time. It would be more like a mental walk.

ESS: So why don’t you just develop your text like a walk through the garden?

Me: I like that idea.



<sup>1</sup> Margit Busch, IF-THEN-ELSE, Welcome to Transcieny, master thesis, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Art & Science programme, Vienna 2016  
University of Applied Arts Vienna, Kunsthalle Wien, (eds.), Margit Busch, If-then-else: Welcome to Transcieny, Preis der Kunsthalle Wien 2016, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2016



# Dancing with Lions

ANDREW CHAMPLIN

What is our responsibility to traditional artistic techniques we practice and teach today? Ballet techniques, for example, carry a system of representation that expects to satisfy the white, upper class, heterosexual gaze of the classical era. Despite ballet's *lionized* status as classic, its techniques are practiced by individuals and groups who refute dominant power structures, and seek alternative meanings of power than domination<sup>1</sup>. For generations, dance artists have been embodying ballet as knowledge that structures their individualized performance practices in the midst of these tensions<sup>2</sup>. In my project, I want to create new ways of seeing ballet that affirms self-determined labor and demystifies the power-over model. My research aims to challenge the technique's system of representation by articulating it as a form of intimate power that moves from the inside, outward, touching others and inscribing spaces with sensitivity along the way.

A dancer in tights and a leotard enters stage right, takes a seat at the chair just left of the center; picks up the microphone from the microphone stand and looks out into the field of spectators who are sitting in various places around the room. Dancer scans the audience.

My project is a reflection on the changes that happened in my mind, body, and spirit when I began studying with the ballet teacher Janet Panetta in New York City in 2010. I aim to examine ballet technique practices from the position of a dancer's embodied striving, mapping longing in the body, and between bodies. Perceiving ballet as an unfinished artifact requires examining excess, and teaching ballet is an opportunity to confront the status quo. What is not seen and invisible becomes as valuable as what is. The excess is messy.

The dancer's facial expressions subtly shift. Although he has not spoken yet, we see fragments of mischief and shyness. Overall he is calm. He appears composed. He appears to be grounding himself, steadying his breath, at ease, in sync with his audience's tempo. He actively looks into their eyes, appealing to the power of mutual recognition, as if he is asking himself, *What is authentic here? How can we trust each other?*

Unlike on the proscenium stage, in my teacher Janet's classes, I felt safe to be vulnerable and polyvalent. As I struggled to keep a facade of invulnerability in place, she came close, looked me in the eyes and smiled knowingly. Her skills as a technician met her willingness to share power. She was literate to self-preservation as text written on the body, and instructed technique as a companion to the doubts that pervade the dance lifestyle, which asks people to never give up on themselves as they normalize situations of physical risk. Perceiving my inclination to conceal my insecurities, she advised me in the opposite direction, which was care. Her familiarity with defensive shields warmly disarmed me. Without speaking she reassured me, "it's ok, you can learn this too".

Janet's authority was the kind that anticipates students' fear of aggression from the teacher. We could call this score, also mythologized in Hollywood scripts, the conventional image of ballet training: a physical practice operating at the limits of torture. Reimagining and redrafting this score, Janet's teaching invented ways to allow dancers their own agency. As Paulo Freire describes the non-antagonistic relationship possible between teacher and student, with Janet, authority felt like being supported<sup>3</sup>. In her classes, I was able to apply technique to my dancing in a self-determined way. The power of her teaching was the way her deep knowledge unfolded through the repetition of her exercises, instructions and actual touch. Through her hands, you felt the knowledge, not as overbearing, but weight-bearing, sensitive and capable. With the instructions laying open, explored one-by-one, it became my responsibility to refold the techniques into my own dancing body.

The dancer removes a piece of paper tucked into the neckline of his leotard. He reads a name, first and last, at which point a member of the audience raises her hand. He goes on to the next name. Again a hand raises. He goes down his list noting who is present and who is absent with a pencil that was tucked into his wig.

In "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Audre Lorde discusses eroticism as knowledge "deeply born"<sup>4</sup>. As a child, the source of my creativity was the feminine, which I was required to reject in the puritanical United States. I understood ballet as a prime example of our masculinity-favoring culture. When I started training in ballet, when I was four, the feminine was my place of striving and so I felt at odds with the culture. As a boy, I was often the favorite in ballet classes and auditions—an indication of heteropatriarchal conventions being observed in the dance environments where women and girls are the majority. Being subject to favoritism, my personal experience with homosexual desire and chronic injury as a teenager felt like the universe telling me 'you will never rise to the occasion of your gender' and 'it is your fault that you are in pain'.

The dancer is white and male, in his early thirties. He wears colorful tights covering his feet. He sits cross-legged, a position he maintains as a projector slide illuminates the wall behind him. The projection displays an image of a book open to a page entitled "Common Variations in Types of Feet." The book is placed on the ground, framed at its bottom edge by a pair of somewhat dirty white sneakers, presumably of the photographer standing above the book.

The dancer speaks:

*Sometimes, I take pictures of books and forget to record the author and title. This particular book on ballet technique shows two illustrations of a lower leg and foot extended as if stretched out on the floor. A horizontal dotted line illustrates the arch shape of the foot. The representation of the floor and the dotted line communicate how near the pointed toes are to the floor. One drawing is titled "Acceptable," and the other "Unacceptable." Below these illustrations are actual photos of dancers standing with their legs extended in a tendu side, showing the profile of their legs from below the knee to the toes stretching toward the floor. The four images claim a spectrum of examples of dancers, from having a good foot to an unacceptable foot; ankle is unable to stretch fully.*





Dancer uncrosses his legs, stands and walks over to a podium closer to the audience.

*I see myself in both illustrations... the right...*

Dancer puts his right leg on the small podium, just below hip level, and stretches his knee and toes to a point revealing a body contour that visually matches the "acceptable" illustration.

*...and the left...*

Dancer puts his left leg on the podium and stretches his knee and toes to a point revealing a body contour that visually matches the "unacceptable" illustration.

*Encountering these images is a somatic event. I recoil. I shimmer. I am asymmetrical. I was born with too little space in the womb. Shortly after birth I was given a plaster cast to correct a foot that was tucked too tightly. These facts have always accompanied my ballet practice.*

Dancer takes his left leg off the podium.



After leaving the competitive environment of a top ballet conservatory at age eighteen, injured, I knew I wanted to stay friends with ballet movements. But I was hurting. I think the moment it became clear that I could befriend ballet again practically, was when I learned techniques with Janet Panetta. In the beginning of my studies with Janet, the impingement in my ankle made me anxious every class. One exercise in particular helped me understand ballet as holistic.

Dancer turns to the side and demonstrates his own instructions in profile with his hands lightly touching his shoulders.

- *From an outwardly rotated standing position, lengthen one leg forward with the top of the big toe aiming toward the floor.*
- *Rotate leg inward to parallel, isolating the movement in the hip socket while stabilizing the standing leg, lifting head up in opposition to the floor.*
- *Soften the muscle and bend behind the knee slightly, allowing your heel to go up into your ankle.*
- *Lengthen your calf muscle away from your thigh, making space in two directions to stretch the leg.*
- *Rotate your leg outward again, maintaining the newly discovered volume<sup>5</sup>.*

Having spent so much time with ballet, I thought it should be possible to be my own authority on the subject. But I was haunted by the aesthetic imperatives and authoritative voices which kept me on the outside of the artform. Like the intertwining of dance and dancer, ballet is inscribed by those who study it and vice versa. Adedola Akinleye attests that, "heteronormative, classed narratives of the [colonial aesthetic] of ballet can pervasively drown out the spectrum of human sensibilities that dance can so ably exemplify, but the working class, non-White, Queer constituents who have loved and danced ballet steps have legacies of their own that prevail—albeit often as part of 'underground', invisibilized cultural histories and communities"<sup>6</sup>.

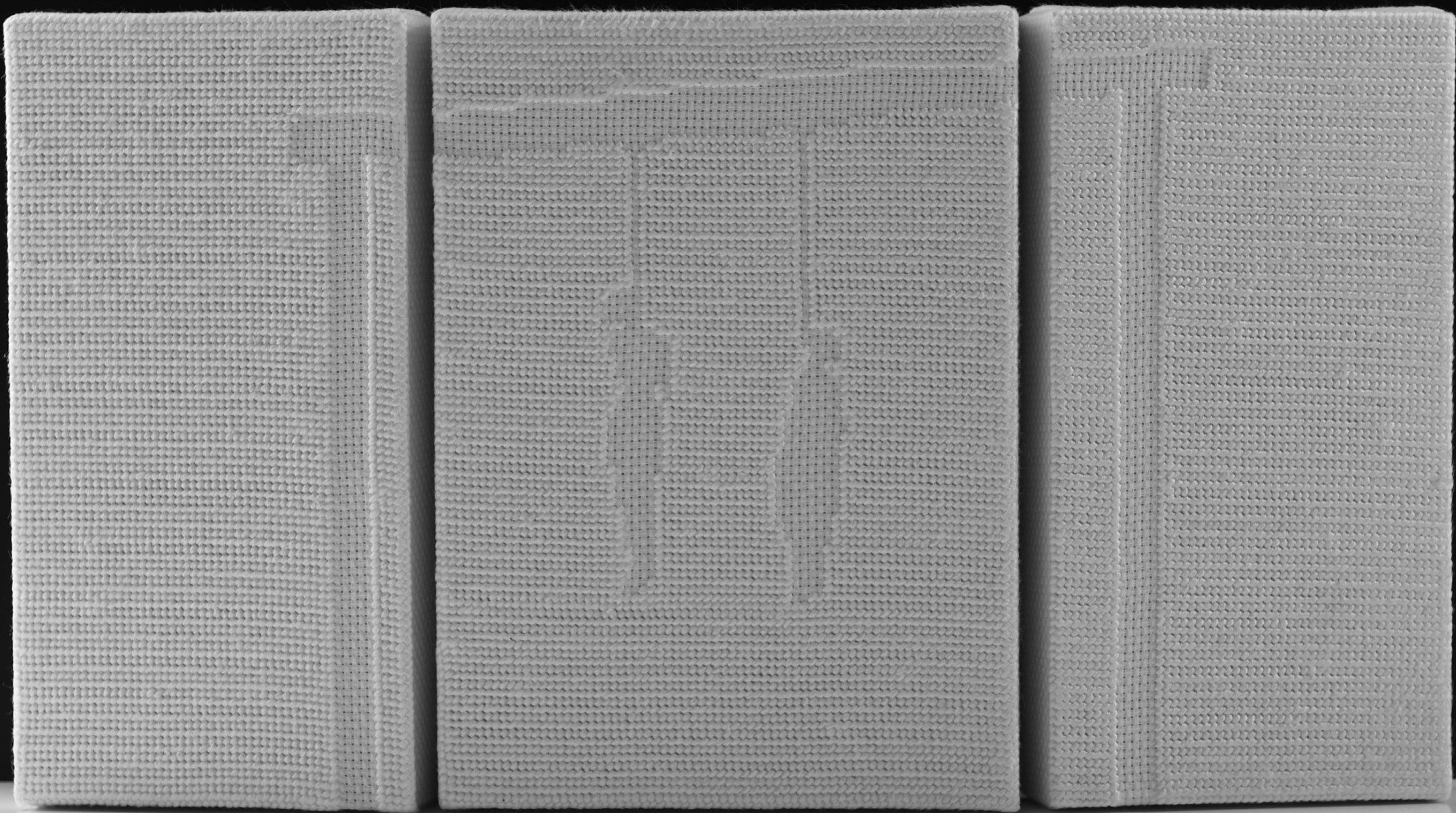
In the past, I tirelessly imagined correcting my asymmetrical feet. I even dreamed about having a serious accident where my left foot would be broken so that the doctor could reconstruct the line of my arch to appear more crescent-shaped, like my right one. I realize that in my youth, I was increasingly interested in making conventionally pleasing images at the expense of my body's innate wisdom. And now, after progressively unlearning behaviors that lead to injury and studying ballet for the sake of feeling powerful for who I am, I know ballet requires new ways of seeing, beyond superficial. Pain is an erotic knowledge that has drawn me to others. Sara Ahmed points out that "it is through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface and fixity is produced. To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and border is to suggest that what 'makes' those borders also unmakes them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others"<sup>7</sup>.

The dancer returns to face his audience and asks:

*Would you like to try?*

1. Gottschild, B. D. (1998). *Digging the Africanist presence in American Performance: Dance and other contexts*. Praeger. 2. Akinleye, A. (2021). *(re:) claiming ballet*. Intellect. 3. Horton, M., Freire, P., Bell, B., Gaventa, J., & Peters, J. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversation on education and social change*. Temple University Press. 4. Lorde, A. (2019). *Sister outsider*. Penguin Books. 5. Janet Panetta, ballet exercise from the workshop, "Deconstructing Ballet," at ImPulsTanz Vienna International Dance Festival (2013). 6. Akinleye, A. (2021). *(re:) claiming ballet*. Intellect. 7. Ahmed, S. (2015). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.





# The material Thickness of Time

Cristiana de Marchi

[...]

**The Junior Mourner (JM):** What do nostalgia and mourning have in common?

**The Professional Mourner (PM):** In both nostalgia and mourning, you will experience the irreversible nature of loss and the need to recover what you have lost.

**JM:** Would returning to the place where the loss is physically embedded allow us to recover what we have lost and provide some solace?

**PM:** The place of return is an impossible place, an absolute absence because there is no place to which you can return. Those who disappeared and the space they used to occupy will continue to morph and shift. The trauma of absence cannot be simply repaired by return. This excess, this growth that happens when a person is cut out of place and left out for decades, means that fitting the person back into the cutout will not work. Merely returning is not reparative; forms have continued to grow, and cultures continue to develop... An excision of this excess is not enough.

Chorus:

It is the living who bear the consequences of the disappearance of the dead, beginning with the funeral rite of burial, with its symbolic farewell of the deceased from the living.

Without this ritual, death can seem even more atrocious than it already is. This is what happens in wars, in epidemics: mass graves make death anonymous. This second brutal death is added to the first, the natural death: the death of the body coincides with the death of the name, while in the funeral rite, we want to recognize the symbolic value of the name as what survives death.

It is the dead, not the living, who make the longest demands: We die forever...

**JM:** How do I detach from the disappearance? How do I separate from it?

**PM:** The disappearance of the Other whom you are mourning, does not coincide with the separation from the Other. The times of disappearance and separation are disjointed: the pain of mourning shows that the lost object is still present, a shadow that adheres to our lives.

**JM:** ...his absence is the most disturbing form of his presence. It continues to exist in the most violent form of regret, of memory, of yearning nostalgia, in short, of a void that is impossible to fill. So how do I materialize "a loss that is impossible to fill?"

**PM:** Think of the very work of mourning itself, through its intensity and manifestation, as a potential way to materialize the Absent.





Chorus:

"How can someone be influenced by something that does not exist?"

**PM:** Consider the difference between grief and the work of mourning: grief is a reaction to the trauma of loss that can be denied or experienced in different ways and at different times, but the work of mourning is psychic work on the experience of loss that will ultimately free you from the weight of your pain. The work of mourning always implies a movement of disidentification from the lost object as a prerequisite for making separation possible.

**JM:** But the work of mourning requires closeness to the dead. And, it is solitary work ...

**PM:** The labor of missing lies in structuring and sustaining a conversation with an absence made uncannily present when it is tangibly unavailable. But this emptiness is not a negative, or passive absence but rather an inaccessible presence, an object in excess, physical, even if "intangible." The labor performed by those left behind, that of missing the disappeared because they have outlived them is one of addition, not subtraction.

**JM (in a dreamy, subtle voice):** ...missing the undead... the discomfort of knowing they exist, yet are inaccessible...

**First theatrical appearance – the mathematician:**

A "negative absence" can be thought of as two negatives, and two negatives cancel each other out to form a positive, in maths as well as in speech.

**Second theatrical appearance – the fortune teller:**

"An object in excess" would be an inaccessible presence, not an absence, but an unattainable presence.

**Third theatrical appearance – the sculptor:**

The labor of missing becomes an almost sculptural process of working with the excess of absentees – a push and pull with a surplus of absence.

**JM:** This time that separates... the trauma of the loss and its symbolic elaboration, this in-between time, is that properly the time of the work of mourning?

**PM:** Yes, the time needed for the introjection of the loss allows for an effective farewell to the dead person. The transition between the first and the second death is made possible by the work of mourning, the transition between the irreversible disappearance of the object and the separation from the object. First and foremost, this in-between time excludes the possibility of rapid mourning. There is no work that does not imply the material depth of time.

Chorus:

In the work of mourning, remembering necessarily also means suffering, and passing through waves of psychic pain is inevitable. It is a slow metabolization of the loss through our memory and the psychic pain that it entails. The insistent presence of absence does not oppose the development of life but becomes a way of placing within us the object that is no longer with us.

## Lesson #1

(as a running luminous display, acting as a panel)

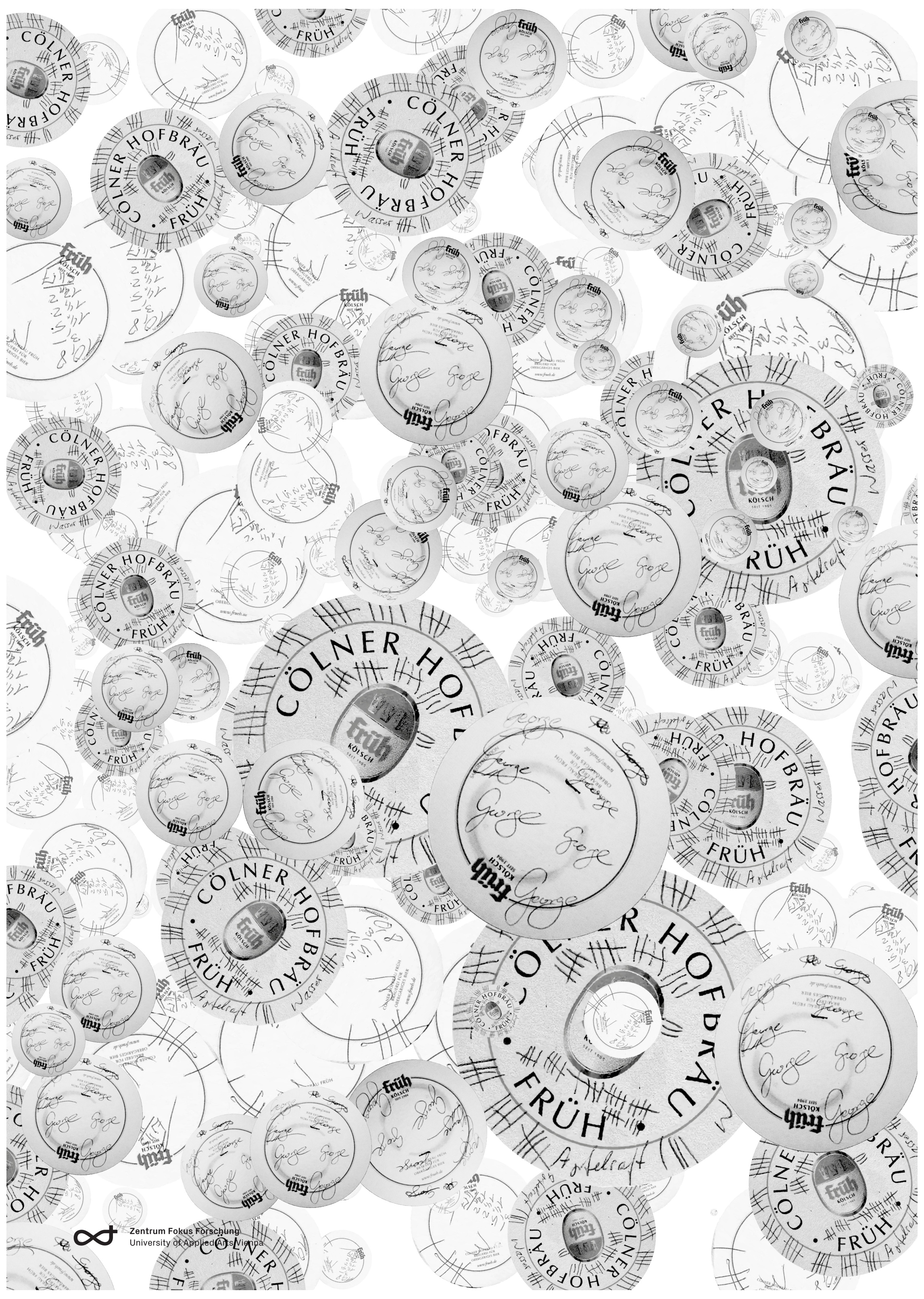
The work of mourning imposes on the subject a processing time that cannot be measured or defined a priori. We only know that the absence of the object has to be crossed and recrossed several times before it is registered symbolically. The work of mourning never proceeds according to a progressive linearity but rather through an oscillation between the present absence and the absent presence of the object, between the past and the present.

[...]



Cristiana de Marchi is an artist and writer who interrogates the void.





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# be our Guest

## serving Ancestral Anecdotes on the rocks

Corç George Demir

The act of gathering, preparing and serving food and drinks as communal hospitality to nourish one's body and soul through ancestral recipes, traditions and communities is essential to the human condition. Whether influenced by biological or chosen family structures, socio-economic class, political beliefs, religious or perceived ethno-cultural affiliations, geographies or nation-states. The wide variety of ways in which people come together, what they consume, and how they consume is inherently shaped by the fragments of their socialisations and has, therefore, always posed a threat to dominant societies. Divergent affiliations must, consequently, be regulated and controlled. In these deeply spiritual and complex ancestral practices that connect, transform and hybridize histories, lies the potential to transform and reshape dominant narratives of ancestral formations.

*On high seas and before the Köbes, we are all in god's hands. (cf. Karl May, 1884)*

About 15 years ago, I became a descendant of an ancestral lineage of labourers, thinking I was only starting a job. As a bartender and waiter in Cologne, Germany, I was initiated into the traditions of the so-called Köbes, the long-established servers of the Rhineland area. The job title Köbes is the Cologne version of the German name Jakob, speculated to have come from pilgrims returning from their journey along the Camino de Santiago (in German: Jakobsweg) to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. They earned their travel money in Cologne's breweries and talked about their long journeys while serving their guests. Traditionally, the Köbes is grumpy and borderline rude, though always with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. Their attitude could be explained by the fact that the historical servers (having themselves returned from pilgrimage) did not know who the supposed higher-ups in the social hierarchy of brewery guests were, and thus treated everyone equally.

**Immediately, I was introduced to a specific set of rules that had been handed down for centuries:**

**I. We are a Wirtshaus, not a Gasthaus. We (the "Wirt") are always right, not the customers ("Gast").**

**II. If you don't like someone, kick them out.**

**III. We are a family, so we take care of each other.**

**IV. Keep the drinks coming.**

**V. Put on the show of your life.**

*"Every table is like a new performance – an opportunity for a performance, you know. I didn't have to be myself. I could be whoever I wanted to be and then try to get as much money as I could. It was like a game. I like those kinds of games."  
(Aubrey Plaza, 2019)*

**I.** To always be right requires, first and foremost, an idea of who this constructed "we" is and an agreement on what "right" should look like. It's about creating a shared identity and negotiating how the space should feel. It's the responsibility to guide the time spent together between servers and customers.

Jam-packed hip-hop night at the bar.

Guests: Can we get two Cosmopolitans, please?

Me: How about two bottled beers?

Guests: Um...but we want Cosmos.

Me: I don't think. They come in those annoying, fiddly glasses. If I made you two, you'd completely spill them the second you turned around, and I'd have to annoyingly make them all over again.

You will have the beers and it's gonna be a much more fun night for all of us.

Guests: \*they feel like there's friendly banter happening for the rest of the night and making tips rain\*

**II.** The responsibility of guiding the shared time and space together also implies the ability to recognise when certain people do not want to follow the rules agreed upon that night. This not only puts the constructed "we" to the test but also creates an "other" that is different from "us."

Guest: One beer.

Me: One beer what?

Guest: Nothing. Just a beer.

Me: A beer and what?

Guest: That's it!

Me: A BEER, PLEASE AND THANK YOU!

Guest: \*tips an absurd amount of money out of embarrassment\*.

Me: Thank you very much.

**III.** The team you work with becomes kind of a chosen family with whom you spend most of your time, created by an intimate bond of extreme stress, exhaustion and euphoria.

This family bond is most deeply cemented in a gesture of mutual care, when a shot of vodka is handed to you unsolicited in a stressful or overwhelming situation.

Also, the moment when all the guests have left and it's just us and servers from other bars who come by after their shifts, the first cigarette is being lit inside and our own music is blasting from the speakers. That is the wind-down of ultimate intimate connection.

**IV.** Nights with low traffic are the worst. We are mostly just standing around, while our energy levels drop, which is why the quality of our service slowly deteriorates. Every bartender and server prefers a busy night because time flies and you enter into a symbiotic workflow with your co-workers.

This symbiotic interactivity deepens over time, putting the entire team into an almost trance-like state where routine gestures and movements, such as the specific way you begin to twirl a bottle opener, take a bottle out of the fridge, shake a cocktail, or stack the glasses, turn into an intricate intuitive ballet in which everyone moves around and through each other without any verbal cues. You become an organism, knowing the individual characteristics of each cell and its role within the collective being.

**V.** Putting on a show is basically just another version of being in charge of the space and creating the atmosphere. You get to control everyone's night through the theatre play you put on for the guests but most importantly for your own entertainment...and tips.

The easiest and most common show is to create inside jokes on the spot with certain guests, making them feel as if they are somewhat a part of what's going on.

A more advanced version of a performance is to divide the crowd between you and your co-worker, creating a kind of solidarity with you and inciting competition with the other side and their server. In this way, you create a temporary army that is entertained on the one hand, while competing on the other to see who can be the faster, funnier and better server. This is obviously being measured by who gets the bigger tips, which eventually end up in our pockets equally anyway.

sooo quick question: where are you REALLY from?



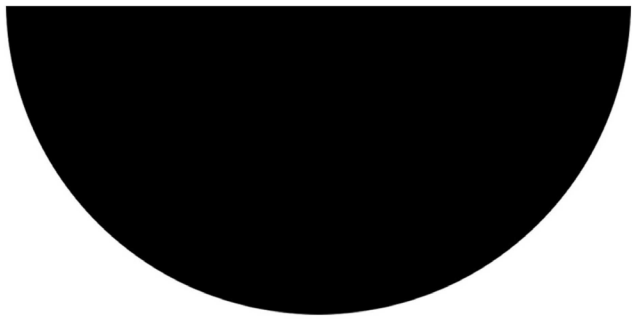
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# פְּטוּרִיזְם וְכִנּוּן פְּטוּרִיזְם:

**DISRUPTING NATION-CENTRISM**





**The global community has been ravaged** by a plague that killed millions. Amid our loss and grief, we are being gaslighted by the technocratic capitalist agenda to labor towards emulating a normalcy we once knew but has been detrimental to our very existence. Today, our cities are experiencing a rise in crime, war, migration, and housing crises, which have led to extreme poverty, homelessness, and displacement. Inflation is causing starvation, artificial intelligence is causing droughts, climate change is triggering catastrophic wildfires and floods, earthquakes are annihilating our cities, there is no clean drinking water in the promised land, children's remains are unearthed, state violence is policing women and minorities, the proliferation of nationalist ideology has led to at 21st-century genocide of an imprisoned ethnic minority, and we await our demise as a deranged man hovers his trigger happy finger over a nuke. If this sounds like the setting of a dystopian science fiction novel, regrettably, it is not. This is our current global reality, which makes it difficult to conceive of a better future.

Given the bleakness of our times, it is no surprise that we are seeing a trend toward utopian futuristic thinking and cultural production in the global mainstream of contemporary art. The aesthetic pattern does have its pessimists, who have made acute observations and articulations regarding the homogenization and the Anglo-centrism of these artworks and their makers. Critics of the genre also argue that it centers the experiences of the racialized and marginalized diaspora in the West and European world and fetishizes Western technology rather than amplifying Indigenous technology and epistemes. These are clear pitfalls of ethnic futurisms, but we should not dismiss the movement in its totality and overlook the intersectional possibilities offered by the diverse repertoire of practitioners in this genre. These proposals contain promising solutions and profound critique of power that we can harness to enhance the quality of our collective existence and transcend borders, nations, and languages. These panaceas can be remixed, reconfigured, and reimagined to attend to the idiosyncracies of various localities. One must steer away from the universalization of a racialized experience and a one-size-fits-all solution because the reality is that we do not all experience the world in the same way. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this renaissance of futurist aesthetics is topical and posits a reactionary response to the racial, gendered, economic, environmental, and socio-political pressures of our time.

How can counter-futurism be conceived as an emancipatory field of thought, research, and practice? Working definitions of counterfuturism have been articulated by Kodwu Eshun, Jussi Parriika, and others, but I will add to this discussion by articulating that it can be situated in the context of decolonial, antiracist, and intersectional temporal imaginaries.

The prefix "counter" foregrounds an opposing stance to hegemonic and hierarchical discourses that continue to reinforce the dehumanization of the other, the other being any subject who deviates from the default norm and privileged ethnic group in a particular region. Moreover, counterfuturism can be posited against the history of European futurism, such as Italian Futurism, which notoriously championed fascism, exclusionary nationalism, sexism, fetishized war, and technological advancement. Through the lens of counterfuturism, we can take a resistive stance and offer a decolonial, antiracist, intersectional standpoint as we can reflect on the horrors of the past while moving toward building a harmonious future. Counterfuturism provides us with the vocabulary and tools to look at the past, present, and future with a critical and intersectional lens. It reminds us that the work toward harmony, equality, and reconciliation involves a continuous and active practice that is never "finished." However, certain futuristic patterns are at risk of imagining the ethnic and racial position as both universal and stagnant in the future. Indeed, Sinofuturism, as articulated by Lawrence Lek, and Gulf Futurism, as proposed by Sophia Al Maria do present a stagnated dystopian future. They posit that the future is now and visibly apparent in the rapidity of technological development, hypercapitalism, and in architectural and urban design. On the other hand, Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism, as seen in the works of Sun Ra and Skawennati, for example, propose a vision of the future and temporal possibilities that emphasize indigenous knowledge, technology, and practices of pre-colonial contact. They travel across dimensions, time, and space to reconnect with ancestors and call forth deities and mythological figures. These practices are not stagnant or frozen in time. Instead, they suggest a future that shifts power relations through the reclamation of time, figures, language, and knowledge that colonizers erased during the cultural genocide of the Americas.

As described in the Introduction, the horrors of the present day have caused many of us to catastrophize the future. Therefore, any vision of peace, stability, and call for access to basic needs such as housing, food, and water appears to be a leftist utopic vision rather than an essential human right. But what would a utopian future look like, and would we all agree that this is the future we want? Economists argue that we are in a late capitalist era and we await the inevitable collapse of capitalism, but they have failed to offer us a sound solution for the future. What happens after this collapse? Will this future resemble Lilith's quest in Octavia Butler's Dawn or June's in Margaret Atwood's The Handmade's Tale, or do we all become hunters and gatherers and sustain ourselves on crops, spending nights with our commune eating dinner over a livewood table?

To achieve any of the goals set out by counterfuturism and to start to pave the way for an inclusive future, we need to address the main criticisms of the movement. We also need to develop greater forums for collective and cross-cultural dialogue and knowledge production to include the peripheries who thus far have been omitted from existing repositories of knowledge.

In response, I have created the panel "Futurity and Futurism: Disrupting Nation-Centrism" which consists of distinguished artists, activists, and scholars assiduously establishing a discourse and visual repertoire of counterfuturisms in the international cultural landscape. The conversation will add to the burgeoning field of counterfuturism and meditate on the intersection of speculative storytelling, autonomy, race, gender, spatiality, temporality, and technology. Building on the pathbreaking work of Afrofuturist theorists and practitioners (Butler, 1987; Dery, 1993; Sun Ra, 1974; Womack, 2013; Eshun, 2003), the roundtable will examine the trajectory of counterfuturism since the 20th century, its relevance in contemporary discourse, and the emancipatory possibilities and world-making of the framework. The following is a list of prompts that I have written to generate a dynamic conversation on the topic:

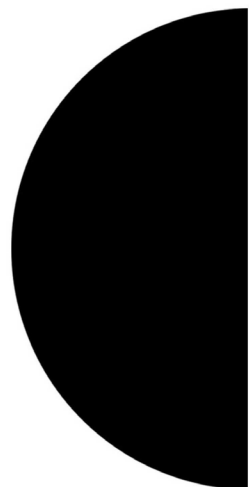
**What is futurity? And how is it distinct from futurism?**

**What are the legacies of counterfuturism? What are its limits? How do we achieve the emancipatory promises of this framework? Is futurity a potential answer to those limits?**

**How are cultural practitioners using the tools and aesthetics of futurism to carve a space for racial and ethnic autonomy and sovereignty in the future?**

**What are the aesthetic and visual properties that make up our collective imagination and understanding of progress in the future? Are these properties anchored in the colonial fetishization of science, progress, and technology?**

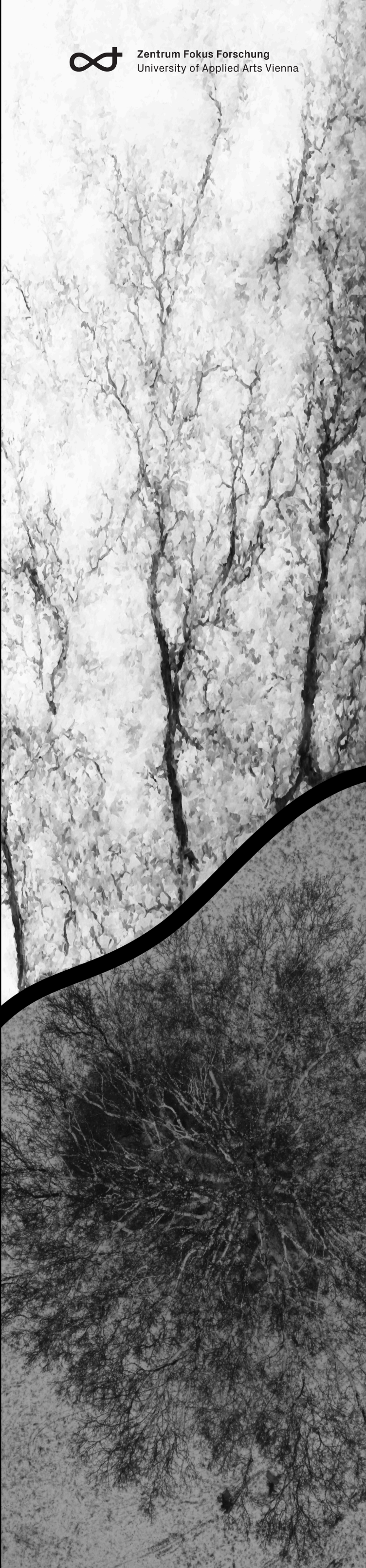
**Do the spatiotemporal shifting capabilities of speculative time travel allow us to disrupt nation-centrism by connecting us to multiple localities, communities, and time periods in which we find ourselves?**







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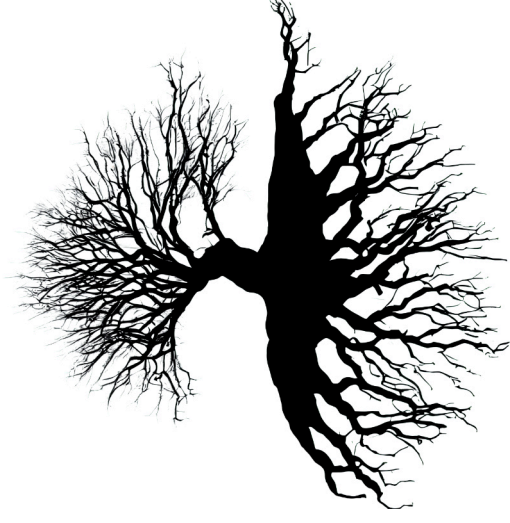
a performative  
documentary



# AN ORDINARY TREE

Wolfgang Konrad

My first memories of the tree are connected to the first picture I took. After that first picture, I continued to document this place without a specific reason. Seven years later, the images of the place were not revealing much. When I decided to take a daily picture, something strange happened.



The closer I tried to get to the tree, the more distant it seemed. The journey to the tree became more important than the tree itself. .  
The days I couldn't visit became more memorable.  
And the stories of pictures never taken became more vivid.







# POST-DIGITAL ANGST - On Post-digital “Alterity” and “Hostility”

## Otherness in the Post-Digital Age

Facilitated by the development of digital communication, we are ever more aware of the presence of the Other in the digital milieu, yet it seems paradoxical how one could also feel individuated and isolated simultaneously. The realization of the Other, is at the same time the simultaneous desolation of oneself. As one immanentizes such experience of Otherness, they become what Emmanuel Levinas called the “*Other in the same*” (l’autre dans le même) (Levinas, 1974/1991, p. 25), thus alluding to “alterity” as an inherent and integral part of our subjectivity and existence. Are we not always under the exposure of alterity while anxiously struggling with it? *How should one respond when confronted with the Other?* This is precisely the question that underlies our intersubjective Angst. The sound of a notification, often paired with a vibration, essentially functions as a punch from the Other. Hearing the sound and feeling the vibration often exposes us to an affective intensity, an anxiety. The prompt of a notification reminds us of the Other; that something and indeed, someone remains out of reach - perhaps a future event to come or a person who seeks contact. Either way, it remains a call from the Other, who awaits our response.

## On Post-Digital Hostility

In the face of the intersubjective Angst that sources from the Other, the Stranger, it might be common for one to react with hostility. For Karen Horney, Angst and hostility share a reciprocal relationship, generating and reinforcing each other (Horney, 1937, p. 72). When confronted with a potentially hostile world, one is understandably “helpless” (Ibid, p. 60). For Horney, such an experience of “helplessness” in the midst of an “overpowering danger” remains the source of Angst. It is common for such Angst to reciprocally provoke a “reactive hostility,” leading to the production of an “explosive affect” beyond one’s control (Ibid, p. 67).

The persistence of hostility remains a major issue in our online culture, where hostility often escalates into violence perpetrated through social media. While such symbolic violence often takes the form of hateful content, the dynamics of violence in the digital milieu are

much more nuanced. The potential of Angst lies in its ability to be transmitted, with Angst functioning as both an intrapsychic and interpersonal affect. Thus, the dispersal of one’s Angst could become a form of “violence,” in the sense that whoever is subjected to such dispersed Angst could be violated and traumatized. While major trauma is often the result of direct violence against the individual, we can often encounter micro-trauma from sensitive content circulating online. On the one hand, such sensitive content could serve as a source of thrill, where individuals get a sense of excitement. On the other hand, it could lead to Angst, which could be highly traumatic. By sharing and responding to such content, one enters a chain of violence, which could induce the further spread of such “explosive affect”.

The ease of digital communication has obscured its expressive power, and it is a matter of ethics, when one should consider the content we share online. Alarmingly, the current online culture involves a high level of *reaction* without substantial *reflection*. While it is natural to be captivated by affective content, one should also approach such content as “affective handle” for further contemplation. As the post-digital age is saturated with aesthetic content (e.g., memes and reels), the ability to extract knowledge from aesthetics through cognizant reflection has become quintessential. What makes us feel also warrants us to think, and it is through contemplation that *Angst* becomes *Achtung*.

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# Legibility

Joe O'Brien

*(to be read aloud, quietly, or with others)*

I want to begin with a story. It's a story of making out, of being made out, of becoming able to be made out, and of not making out.

I want to begin with a story of demands for legibility, and of the hazy responses we offer in return.

I want to begin with a story like this, but a story like this is a hard thing to do. It's hard because stories promise sense. Stories promise sense, they promise sense that can be shared and sense that can be made – and the problems with these promises?

*They're problems of making out.*

And I don't even mean making out meaning –

*meaning is a whole different story.*

I just mean making out what is said or written, depicted or done. If you want to make meaning on top of that, well,

*that's not my problem.*

But the problem of writing, speaking, making, and gathering clearly?

*That, that is my problem.*

In a sense, it's a problem of scribing, of scribing, inscribing, and re-scribing. And the thing is, I'm not a good scribe

*My writing is messy, my thoughts are hazy, and sometimes I can't speak.*

It's no small problem to scribe legibly, but the legibility of the scribing has a lot to do with how the making out goes.

Because the thing about making out – about making out, trying to make out, and being made out – is that it's happening all the time.

What's worse, that whole process is wrapped up in a big mess of legibility and desire. And, as soon as you start pulling those threads apart, there's all these questions that start spilling out,

like

*"who or what desires or demands my legibility, and what's at stake in being made out here?"*

or

*"how does producing myself as more or less legible in this moment abet or interfere with the commodification of difference and its interpolation into systems of economic value accrual and dispossession?"*

and

*"is my physical and/or material safety at risk right now if I render myself more fully – more illegibly?"*

It's all a bit confusing really, or at least I hope it is.

*I hope it is.*

I hope it is because I'm trying to grasp confusion amidst all this talk of legibility, but confusion is tough to grasp. I mean, there's the confusion that sits just beyond the limit of what is understood, and the confusion that institutions and systems deploy to fatigue and control. But, what about confusion in other forms?

*What about the confusion that we perform or make present? What about the confusion that's felt in our bodies – as, and through, disorientation?*

*What about the confusion that we don't chase away or try to resolve, and what about the confusion which has made itself at home in us?*

This is the confusion that I call to, this is the confusion that I am trying to make out.

This confusion which exceeds its own expression, this confusion which resists legibility. This confusion that is as unwieldy as it might be useful, and this confusion that is as tough to hold as it is present.

Perhaps this confusion is ungraspable. Perhaps it is that queer thing which always fails to materialise when desired. Perhaps this confusion refuses to be made legible, and perhaps illegibility is its potential.

Perhaps confusion in this way – as presence, as performance, and as embodiment – cannot be grasped or captured, but perhaps it can be gestured towards?

Not pointed to,

*but scribed more circumspect;*

not held or conjured,

*but spoken of in its absence;*

and not sought out alone,

*but gathered in, close together.*

This confusion has potential. This confusion has the potential to delay efficiency and extraction, to enquire about practice and procedure, to refuse obligations, to fail expectations, to resist legibility, to think feeling and feel thinking, to gather co-conspirators, to gesture towards futures, and to work together to draw them closer.

This confusion is a queer-crip story, its performance is unresolved and uncertain, its presence is political and interventive, its arrival is unbidden and arbitrary, its is navigation collective and communal, and its illegibility is its safety and potential.

This confusion is a hazy response to demands for certainty. This confusion is not wholly legible.

*This confusion is a story that cannot be told.*







# ART AND CONSERVATION OF MORE-THAN-HUMAN ENTITIES IN THE POST-CONFLICT

Marthin Rozo Castaño

**Key terms:** Art and science, environmental conservation, transdisciplinary work, post-conflict, Colombia.

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in Colombia in 2016, territories that were inhabited by indigenous communities, farmers, and guerrilla groups have faced a contradictory situation. Land restitution has, in part, been a corrupt and arbitrary process that has attempted to alleviate land dispossession during the conflict. Large areas are now in the hands of multinational mining companies, or a few landowners dedicated to cattle raising, planting African palms, and other monocultures that affect biodiversity negatively.

For non-humans, the presence of guerrilla groups created a different kind of peace. These armed groups took refuge in forests and jungles and indirectly protected other beings that inhabited these places. In the Colombian context, which is so socially fractured by the conflict, the concept of “peace” takes on ambiguous meanings in different social groups. This situation shows that human peace is not the same as non-human peace.

Biologists are now finding new species in these previously inaccessible areas. With the arrival of tourism, multinational corporations, cattle raising, large-scale agriculture, and illegal deforestation, biodiversity is at risk, and protection measures are not strong enough. Conservation is a complex task; the more disciplines involved, the better.

For my Ph.D. in Artistic Research, I am investigating different ways to accompany and strengthen conservation processes through art. Building bridges of dialogue through art with biologists and indigenous communities in Colombia to conserve biodiversity and traditional knowledge is one of my main interests. I question the notion of “conservation” in the context of biology and project it in a broader sense, working with isolated species and including whole ecosystems with human and non-human presence to achieve more sustainable approaches.

In this context, I’m exploring the creation of links with artistic and scientific spaces to create support networks and approaches to conservation from different angles.

As part of my research, I am part of a team of herpetological biologists. We are developing several research projects on Gorgona Island on the Pacific coast of Colombia. It is an honor to be the only artist in a group of biologists working on conservation. It is something I always wanted to do, and now I am doing it through art.

My role is to develop ways of communicating the research projects to the communities around the island. I have complete freedom to do this as part of my PhD research. My challenge is to break with the traditional way of doing scientific visualization and bring in sensitive elements of artistic research to create more engaging and complex ways of communicating through my artistic work.







**KONSTANZE STOIBER**  
**There Have To Be Bells**

Opening: Friday, January 26, 2024, 6 p.m.  
Vienna 1, Domgasse 6

The opening sequence of Ingmar Bergman's film *Fanny och Alexander* from the year 1982 shows the young protagonist, Alexander, engrossed in play. In the candle-lit scene he is cautiously – as if in a stage-performance – shifting figures around in his toy theatre, creating a variety of perspectives and relationships. The shooting script of this film is displayed in Konstanze Stoiber's exhibition *There Have To Be Bells* and refers to a similar spatial situation that the artist creates with her presentation at Domgasse 6. In this historic space characterized by its Baroque architecture, she has carefully positioned recent works together with loans from St. Stephen's Cathedral as if they were stage props. In their arrangement and inter-relationships they capture and prompt reflections on Christian themes that have undergone fundamental changes in the course of temporal and societal transformations. As in *Fanny och Alexander* we encounter anachronistic religious customs and collective habits, which Konstanze Stoiber links with the history of the gallery and that of the neighboring Viennese Cathedral of St. Stephen.

Possibly the most important symbol of the Cathedral (to which the Galerie St. Stephan, founded in 1954 by Monsignore Otto Mauer, owes its name) is the so-called *Pummerin*, St. Stephen's great bell. Originally cast from cannon balls and re-installed following the destruction of the Cathedral's roof timbering in the Second World War, the bell stands for the construction of an identity-forming cultural narrative. The bell's clapper, which was replaced in 2011, is a central element in the exhibition and, together with the pieces of red glass from the Cathedral's Singertor [Singer Gate] which are also on display, forms in Konstanze Stoiber's own words, "fragments of experiences of the sublime". Mystical experiences thus receive a spatial enhancement – the incidence of light from the heavens is enhanced by the intensive colors of the stained-glass windows; or the miracle of the conversion of Saint Paul, to be seen on the Singertor, is enhanced by the extraordinary dynamism of its portrayal in the medieval relief.

Around the religious objects Stoiber groups works of her own. The two diptychs – oil on canvas – act as an atmospheric stage-set and thematize the interaction of staging, liturgy and dramaturgy. Conceptually, they refer to the conversion of Saint Paul and are marked by the topography of the Holy Land and of an imagined journey through the landscape of Syria. This mental scenery is supported likewise by desert flowers that the artist collected in the Negev and the Judean desert regions and which she displays in an historic showcase reminiscent of the presentation of religious relics.

The focus of Konstanze Stoiber's presentation is on a European society informed and shaped by Christianity and its institutions. Her exhibition asks how identity-forming and societal rituals have changed during the process of secularization and how much impact and influence historical religious sites still have on our current-day experience.

**GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN**  
**ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER**

**KONSTANZE STOIBER**, born 1999 in Vienna, lives and works in Vienna.

Stoiber completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Fashion Design and Painting at the Parsons School of Design, New York City and Paris. She is currently participating in the Artistic Research PhD Program at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna.

Her most recent exhibitions include: September. Reminiscence of a Journey to the Holy Land, Department for Biblical Studies, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna, Vienna (solo) (2023); She Only Likes Violence, Galerie D., Romainville, France (solo) (2022); and the Parsons Paris Graduate Show: YMCA, Paris (group) (2021).



# YoungerForLonger™



Zentrum Fokus Forschung  
University of Applied Arts Vienna



# **Fabian Weiss**

## **Ideal Self: How We Use Photography and Technology to Present and Optimize Ourselves**

Supervisor: Margarete Jahrmann

### **Supersapiens. Or: The search for a new definition of a lifespan.**

In contemporary Western societies, the quest for longevity has become a central preoccupation, shaping societal values, ethics, and the very fabric of human existence. This pursuit is not merely a quest for added years but a profound philosophical and technological exploration of life, its meaning, and its implications for the collective human experience. The relentless advance of medical science, combined with a growing awareness of healthy living, has sparked an unprecedented interest in extending human life. Longevity is no longer confined to myth or fantasy as it was in the past; it is a tangible goal being pursued through cutting-edge research, bioengineering, and a variety of wellness practices.

This aspiration for extended life, however, comes with profound philosophical considerations. At its core, the quest for longevity prompts a reevaluation of the fundamental nature of human existence. What does it mean to live a full life? Is longevity synonymous with a meaningful existence, or is it merely an extension of biological functions? And when can we already speak of life today? These questions delve into the heart of philosophical inquiry, demanding reflection on the interplay between quantity and quality of life. But it also prompts us to question what life actually is: does it have to consist of flesh and blood? Can it be improved or even completely transferred to another thinking technical entity? Can we be reanimated as disembodied spirits, an eerie future that has become a reality in the form of a growing field called cryonics? In their work on transhumanism and the future of humanity, the philosophers Nick Bostrom and Stefan Sorgner, but also entrepreneurs like Bruce Duncan, are pushing the boundaries of what "human" is or can be and how we have to reassess humanity in light of emerging connections between technology and biology. In addition, scholars such as Leon Kass and Francis Fukuyama have contributed to the discussion of bioethics, raising questions about the consequences of manipulating human biology.

Meanwhile, ethical dilemmas are emerging as the pursuit of longevity intensifies. The possibility of extending life raises complex questions about the distribution of resources, accessibility, and the poten-

tial to exacerbate social inequalities. As scientific breakthroughs enable some to access life-extending technologies, ethical considerations of equitable distribution and social justice become paramount. Moreover, it is not only the definition of life that is changing, but also the definition of the "good life" itself. The pursuit of longevity is challenging conventional paradigms and leading to a shift toward a more individualistic and temporally extended understanding of personal fulfillment. As individuals strive for extended vitality, societal values may evolve, redefining success, achievement, and the markers of a well-lived life.

Generational dynamics will also change in the wake of the current quest for longevity. With the prospect of dramatically extended life spans, relationships between different age groups may undergo significant recalibration. Traditional roles and expectations associated with different life stages may become blurred as individuals pursue prolonged careers, education, or family responsibilities. The prospect of intergenerational harmony or tension looms large, prompting society to rethink established norms and structures. In this area, the work of sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman (Baumann 2017) sheds light on the fluidity of modern societies and the challenges posed by shifting norms.

But these discussions on an ethical or societal level are few and far between, and yet we still mostly yawn at the self-experiments made public by flamboyant and outspoken people like Dave Asprey, Bryan Johnson, Ray Kurzweil, or Craig Venter. Splashy headlines declare humanity either doomed or saved, depending on the specific mix of technology and public opinion: Elon Musk's neurotechnology company, Neuralink, has developed implantable brain-computer interfaces that have been quickly labeled as part of humanity's doom (Drew 2024), while Oliver Zolman's reverse aging procedures, including young blood exchange, are winning praise and admiration (Mikhail 2023). But what we lack is a balanced and nuanced debate on this topic, involving experts, entrepreneurs, academics, and researchers alike, which considers the implications for all of us, rather than waiting for the technology to trickle down to the masses from the ventures of American billionaires.

The tension between promoting individual longevity and addressing collective challenges raises questions about societal priorities and the ethical obligations of the privileged in an interconnected world. In navigating this complex terrain, the ethical dimensions of life-extending technologies come to the fore. Considerations about the consequences of manipulating human biology and the implications for personal autonomy and identity require rigorous examination. Thus, balancing the desire for longevity with broader societal

responsibilities should become a central philosophical issue in our societies. A holistic approach to longevity must go beyond the mere extension of biological life. It requires a nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness between scientific progress, ethical considerations, and societal values.

Right now, the very essence of what it means to be human is at stake as our societies enter uncharted territories, raising profound questions about the intersection of technology, humanity, and ethics. The contemporary longing for longevity unfolds as a profound philosophical exploration with far-reaching implications for society. As humanity stands at the crossroads of unprecedented possibilities, a holistic and reflective approach is indispensable in navigating the complex landscape of longevity. My Ph.D. project advances this debate by bringing together different actors in the field (experts, entrepreneurs, scientific researchers, philosophers, and users) to contrast their views and thoughts, while also highlighting how our bodies are more and more guided by technology and algorithms (Weiss 2022, pp. 70-101). It raises the question of how the perception of body and age is shaped in our society, which is complicated by a range of technologies and the omnipresent need for optimization and longevity, and asks how we are being perceived when we change the visible age factors of our bodies. By presenting a different visual narrative and looking behind the façades of polished advertising images, my project will invite a general audience to engage with different narratives and positions and thus participate in a constructive exchange on highly controversial issues surrounding factors of longevity research.

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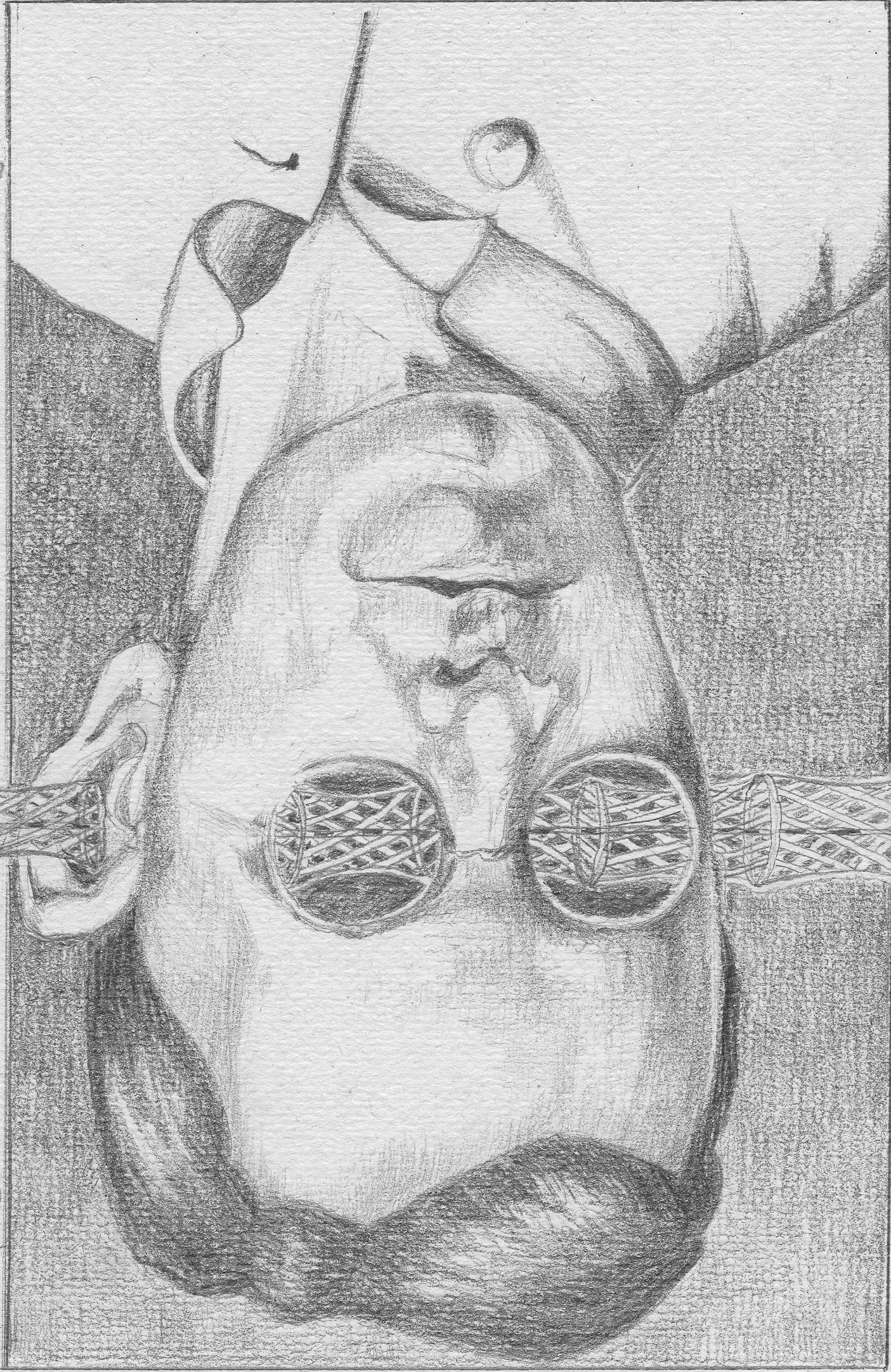


Ksenia Yurkova

Weak Strategies or Strategies of the Weak

Central Institute of Labour (CIL),  
to arrange time, workspace,  
of labour more efficiently

When I established the  
my task was not only  
and physical aspects



the firmware of human's  
a perfect body-machine.

I literally reorganised  
Psyche that inhabited



Ksenia Yurkova

## Weak Strategies or Strategies of the Weak

Suddenly we found ourselves in a situation where we could not speak freely. Perhaps we have always lived with this limitation, but it has never been apparent until now. We detect something only when it is already absent; to notice this absence, we must already be deprived of our voices. Individual, unrestrained, nonconformist, complex expression—a feature that marks your presence—makes you a political subject. Can you be an artist without being a political subject? Even in the deepest state of escapism, denial, oblivion, and inner exile, our voices will subconsciously find a crack to squeeze in and reveal themselves. This is how I became interested in figures of reticence in rhetoric.

Having focused on studying the method of visual rhetoric in my research, I divided it into three planes. I decided to look at it as a **strategy**, then as a **necessity**, and finally as an **impossibility**. Exploring this reticence seems challenging because, at first glance, it might seem that I am exploring the realm of the invisible, moving into the field of pure speculation about what might have been in place but was not. This would only be partially accurate. In linguistic theory, the figure of reticence (sometimes called the figure of omission) is constructed in such a way that it demonstrates by itself the lack of what should have been implied.

I start from the context and my own positionality towards the context. *Post-Iron*, the first movie in a row of three, marks the starting point of a reflection, in which my peers and I find ourselves caught between two dominant discourses. The first one is totalitarian and constituted by dictatorship and explicit violence, the second, no less totalitarian, is constituted by an oppositional political establishment. This establishment shapes the actual image of the moral stance and grounds it in agreed-upon simplified linear narratives of historical or civilizational choice. Can we claim that any finite historiography and self-enclosed vision of the future contains the features and logic of conspiracy theory?

As an artist, one inevitably works with the subject of history while being simultaneously drowned by it. We are all historical subjects. But what does it feel like to be on “the wrong side of history”? What happens to the voice when you experience this great separation from your symbolic “significant other”? Will the baby be able to inflate its lungs for the first yell?

The film uses and reclaims the method of over-identification (as well as the aforementioned cynicism, post-irony or intellectualization) and works at the intersection of speculation and didactic documentary with guest experts. Using the language, tropes and narratives of conspiracy, the film aims to take the genre to the point of absurdity and self-debunking.

Situated in the mockumentary genre, the film exploits true facts of Soviet and Russian history unknown to the general public. It creates a fictional narrative, building patterns out of disparate, unrelated phenomena and events to form a new linear narrative that explains the current state of affairs in an easy-to-swallow form. These include, to name a few: the Central Institute of Labour by Alexey Gastev and the invention of psycho-technics and “industrial gymnastics”; a project of Proletkult; the following emergence of an aviation and rocket-building project; the creation of a chimp-human hybrid by Ilia Ivanov; the methodological school of thinking of the father and the son by Shchedrovitsky, and its connection

with members of the present Russian government; the role of Soviet TV mind controllers like Allan Chumak; a few unknown programs of bio-, nuclear- and psycho-weapon inventions, and some others events that occurred sporadically and independently on the timeline of history but are forced together into one coherent narrative. This is material to be discussed with the “experts” protagonists.

We are all used to the first level of conspiracy theories fueled by propaganda, such as the theories of the Dulles Plan<sup>[1]</sup>. However, if we agree that this is a construct that must work for the inner consumer, we find ourselves in a gap of uncertainty —since the true intentions are not known, the vacuum of an invisible but hostile ideology needs to be filled. This is where second-level conspiracy theories come to the rescue: linearly constructed fragmentary facts from the biographies and events of second-order officials, scientists, philosophers, and texts that inevitably lead to an exoticized view.

In 2022, the world, pacified by cheap energy from the former “Evil Empire,” encountered shock, amazement, and a complete lack of scientific explanation of what was happening. Putin’s aggressive war and the subsequent media war suddenly demanded moral mobilization, dividing history into past and present as if to undo the complexity of personal view and opinion. Not only this war but every other war that has been chosen to be heavily broadcasted. In this constellation, the impossibility of speech that I addressed at the beginning of my text can be interpreted as the impossibility of a political subject to speak in complex terms and or refuse to speak in primitive terms.

The film aims media war suddenly demanded moral mobilization, dividing history into past and present as if to undo the complexity of personal view and opinion. Not only this war but every other war that has been chosen to be heavily broadcasted. In this constellation, the impossibility of speech that I addressed at the beginning of my text can be interpreted as the impossibility of a political subject to speak in complex terms and or refuse to speak in primitive terms.

[1] According to which CIA chief Allen Dulles had developed a plan for the United States to destroy the Soviet Union during the Cold War by secretly corrupting the cultural heritage and moral values of the Soviet nation. Herman, Michael (2013). *Intelligence in the Cold War: What Difference Did It Make?* New York: Routledge. pp. 89–100.







# SPIRAL BIKE – mobile concerts and sound art in public space

Riding a bicycle not only connects me to various districts and neighborhoods of the city, but also offers a unique perspective on the urban landscape. Suddenly, I become part of the diverse soundscape and constant flow of vehicles that define our urban environment. Through my involvement in cycling movements, I had the opportunity to encounter numerous communities, especially in European and Asian cities such as Vienna, Graz, Ljubljana, Timisoara, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul and Yogyakarta. In this way, I become part of a music scene and cycling community in each city. These include FLINTA\* cycling communities, fixed-gear nightrides, and hardcourt bike polo tournaments. In addition, my artistic practice focused on performing art with bicycles, especially in public spaces working with sound and participatory concepts of interaction. Experiences in creating artistic projects such as *Soundrides*,<sup>1</sup> *SPIRAL BIKE*,<sup>2</sup> *Velodrome*,<sup>3</sup> and *BIOSPHERE*<sup>4</sup> have provided a diverse outlook on cycling engaged performances and mobile concerts in public space.

## In what ways can public space be reclaimed through sound art, performance and collective cycling?

A current project I would like to highlight is *SPIRAL BIKE*, which takes place in the Viennese bicycle spirals. Bicycle spirals are circular ramps on bridges that allow cyclists to cross the Südbahnhof Bridge, Brigittenauer Bridge, and Prater Bridge with their bicycles. Entering a spiral means perceiving cyclists above and below you and for me this has been always a powerful collective moment. The center is characterized by an open space and when you stand in the middle and look up, it is like standing in an arena and looking into a circular panorama with several platforms.

Multiple cyclists and soundbikes inside the spiral, create a distinctive spatial sound experience. Sound takes center stage, not just by moving around us but through ascending and descending the spiral with the performers. This creates a unique auditory experience and allows the spatial perception of sound through different choreographies on bikes.

Moderation is a significant part, and I consciously invite the audience to listen and try to direct their attention to the urban space and the various auditory experiences. At the same time, the audience can take on different listening positions and explore the location itself. It creates a relaxed atmosphere where many things become possible, which would not be conceivable in a traditional concert hall. Our perception is sharpened, and sounds are recognized as part of the city, traffic, and infrastructure, becoming visible as layers of the performance.

As part of the *SPIRAL BIKE* project I invited various artists such as Jerobeam Fenderson + hans3d, Gischt, Fabian Lanzmaier and Jakob Schauer to collaborate and play with various technical configurations. The initial rehearsals took place with two Soundbikes near the Ernst Happel stadium in Vienna's Prater. Our first setup was with just two speakers so that we could initially work with the sonic characteristics of the Soundbikes. A performance at the *Reclaim!*<sup>5</sup> festival (STWST Linz, 2023) already involved two Soundbikes.

Since every rehearsal also requires performers to ride the Soundbikes, the second rehearsal for the Brigittenauer Bridge included choreographic rehearsals and a small setup of four Soundbikes. The focus of the rehearsal was to understand the sonic properties of the bike spiral and the movement of the Soundbikes within the urban architecture. The performance then involved two

to four Soundbikes on the ground and two to four riding Soundbikes, with the artists deciding how to divide their setup based on their experiences during the rehearsal. In addition, I developed different movement scores for the performers on the Soundbikes, sketching and test riding the choreography together with experienced performers and bike messengers.

The Südbahnhof Bridge, due to its architecture and acoustic conditions, presented a more challenging environment and required an extension with a multi-channel speaker ring on the ground, consisting of eight speakers and two subs in total, in addition to the six mobile Soundbikes. Similar to previous performances at *Velodrome*,<sup>6</sup> the ring could also be played as a separate layer. During the rehearsal, both the ground speaker ring and the Soundbikes were tested in the architecture of the Südbahnhof Bridge a few days before the performance.

*SPIRAL BIKE* was the first art project in the typically closed inner area of the bike spiral of Südbahnhof Bridge. Although it would have been simple to jump over the fence, entry into the location required permission. Rehearsals were possible with the agreement of the city of Vienna. However, many unknown parameters cannot be rehearsed, primarily because the concert space of the bike spiral also serves as a public space, and the bridge must remain accessible and open for regular traffic. Of course, this creates interesting situations and sounds as well. The surrounding and acoustic aspects of the architecture and the soundscape of the city provide a setup for compositional ideas, movement, and choreography, as well as interaction and participation of the audience.

These movements are simple but can have diverse acoustic effects. For example, when a swarm of sound bikes descends the spiral at high speed compared to slow movements while ascending. The choreography and number of performing cyclists is derived, among other things, from movements in the *Cycle Circle Dance*<sup>7</sup> (*Radreigen*).

The idea that performers ride up and down during each concert, carrying sounds through the levels of urban architecture creates a unique concert setting. The audience is free to move within the spiral or simply sit in the center and observe what is happening in and around the spiral. It is a traffic junction where a lot happens, both visually and acoustically. When a person on a skateboard passes by a Soundbike, or a car driving over the bridge, these sounds as the soundscape of the city, overlay and expand the compositions and live performance.

The feeling of collective experience becomes even stronger when it is an unknown place that is usually not used as a concert space. Performances in public space not only create a different setting but also enable participation and mobility of the audience in contrast to the classic performance or concert space. Situations that are not possible in the concert hall become commonplace in public space, such as an audience driving past or a change of location and movement during the concert.

The short, almost flash mob-like appearance of a Soundride creates curiosity among passersby. Usually, a very diverse audience is joining the ride and therefore I pay particular attention to mixes of different styles. Soundrides with Ventil Records,<sup>8</sup> Eastbloc Sound,<sup>9</sup> or arooo.records<sup>10</sup> are also examples of collaborations with experimental labels and DJs.

Our mobile screen printing workshop, is inviting the audience to print their T-shirts, and was dedicated to the statement: *CAR IS OVER*. The poster says: *Respect Existence or Expect Resistance*. It aims to describe an inclusive and feminist city, a city that prioritizes public transport, cycling, and walking routes. A city in which cars take up less space and which becomes a living space for us.

## How can cities be reimagined through collective listening?

Conny Zenk is an artist and artistic researcher exploring hybrid contexts between performance, video, sound art, and urban space. Her work includes projects in Asia and Europe, numerous collaborations in audio-visual experimental concerts, and transdisciplinary and transcultural forms of action in public space. She is the founder of the art project *RAD Performance*.

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- 10 RAD Performance, Mix by Sara Zlanabitnig, arooo.records, <https://soundcloud.com/rad-performance>, <https://on.soundcloud.com/bbTrF>

