Thematics

Come Together

On different approaches of becoming a community

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We were thinking, proposing and dealing with practices that empower becoming as a fundamental potential, a means for an endless unfolding, practices that don't produce a general truth.

Rana Hamadeh interviewed by Lilia Mestre
Sara Manente interviewed by Rana Hamadeh
Anca Mihulet & Delia Popa interviewed by Sara Manente
Lilia Mestre interviewed by Anca Mihulet & Delia Popa

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Thematics Residency
Come Together

Introduction — Lilia Mestre and Elke Van Campenhout

The Thematics series brings together artists and theorists with different backgrounds to work through a 'theme', a knotty problematic where different questions and practices meet and can be transformed through this encounter. What about potentialising this concept and focusing on the very act of coming together as the core of the residency? 'Come Together' aimed to discuss art and art practices under the current pressures and struggles of the contemporary market. During two months, all participants focused on the encounter of difference and on a hybrid myriad of media for change. All were interested in art practices that empower and potentialise another way of life. Practices that give visibility to the 'not yet' and sustain it as a source of autonomy and therefore criticality. We were thinking, proposing and dealing with practices that empower becoming as a fundamental potential, a means for an endless unfolding, practices that don't produce a general truth.

'Come Together' created environments in which to voice difference as something we all share, to put bodies in relation to other bodies, to embody the body as a power to affect and be affected, to experiment, play and open up an ethical field of relationality. We wanted to take paradoxes as potentialities, to contaminate each other, re-imagine the sexual drive of the coming together as a political drive.

Within the larger context of 'Come Together', a series of workshops were organised under the name 'Schizophrenic Bodies'. This series constructed an experimental territory for assembling different ways of coming together; of being simultaneously in different bodies, or in different time and space zones; of redefining our sense of belonging, not only to our bodies, but also to different spaces, other understandings of our 'selves', diverse set-ups for playing with our 'doubles', and generally putting into question our understanding of the difference between 'doubling' and representation, between being and not being 'there', having a voice or lacking presence.

Thinking 'Schizophrenic Bodies' put into question the economy and valorization of exchange, when the other is no longer recognisable or embedded in a clear demarcation of merit or usefulness. Dealing with complete, unpredictable bodies, in constant imbalance between diverse worlds, communication changes its character and has to be reinvented altogether.

The body is no longer split into 'personal', 'professional', 'social' and other parts, but dwells in an endless limbo of (dis)individuation, in the practice, in the slowness of being together, in discovering the simultaneous construction and dissolution of (new) frontiers and (temporary) social monster bodies.

Theorist Peter Pal Pelbart presented the exclusive Ueinzz Theatre Company he is part of in São Paulo, Brazil, a company bringing together very different participants that on stage are all actors. He put in perspective Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'body without organs' and Agamben's concepts of 'biopolitics' and 'bare life', to mention but a few, in relation with our societal order and aim. With theatre-maker Robert Steijn, we continued working on the perspective of a body without organs as a disorganised body resisting any kind of societal recuperation. Vera Mantero shared with us her work methodology that functions as a chart for opening up combinations between bodies, words, objects, images and thoughts, and rethinking them in assemblages, a method that empowers the hybrid body as a body that can act and think. With Brandon LaBelle and Luis Guerra we worked on the notion of the 'double', questioning unity as an absolute form. In each of these encounters we tried to come to an overlapping of, and exchange between, practice and theory, placing ourselves in a field of references that produce unexpected exchanges and reasoning.

It seems that 'Come Together' is not just a two-month experiment but a way of thinking art practice and encounter in order to develop other sensible(s) that are obstructed by institutional and result-driven protocols. The movement between people, ideas, practices and the way they propose the folding and unfolding of life need attention and time.

This publication is the result of a dialogue that took place over two months of experiment and thought, of the meeting of very diverse practices, (mis) understandings and ideas. There are a series of domino interviews with the Thematics participants Rana Hamadeh, Sara Manente, Delia Popa and Anca Mihulet, as well as Thematics curator Lilia Mestre. Texts by some of the workshop leaders are also included: Peter Pal Pelbart, Robert Steijn in conversation with a.pass coordinator and researcher Elke Van Campenhout, Brandon LaBelle and Luis Guerra.

The Schizophrenic Bodies workshop series was jointly organised by Bains Connective and a.pass (advanced performance and scenography studies) and in partnership with RITS and CAMPO for the workshop of Vera Mantero and PAN / The Belgo-Congolese Third Space with Toto Kisaku, Johan Dehollander, Jovial Mbenga, Stefanie Claes and Geert Opsomer.

We also wish to mention the guest artists of Plankton #46 (a public event halfway through the residency) Pieter de Buysser, Miriam van Imschoot and Spiritual Master Premodaya for their input into 'Come Together'.

INTERVIEW of Rana Hamadeh
by Lilia Mestre

The closest term to relate 'alien' to, in this sense, could be 'out-worldly'. The constellations of images, texts, nightmares, events and personal encounters I set myself the task of chronicling in the form of cartographic networks within 'Alien Encounters' certainly do share some element of 'out-worldliness'. 'Out-worldliness', in the context of these narratives, conflates two registers of meaning. The first is the obvious physical-spatial register, which describes a vectorial 'outward' motion with regard to the territorial imagining of the worldly. The accent is on 'Out':

'OUT'-worldliness

While the second is a juridical-discursive register that expresses the worldly *in terms of* and *as* a legally constituted space – 'worldliness' being the embodiment and articulation of the discursive power of the law. The accent is on 'Worldliness':

out-'WORLDLINESS'

'(...) to be stripped of citizenship is to be stripped of worldliness; it is like returning to a wilderness as cavemen or savages... They could live and die without leaving any trace'.

Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, *quoted in: Philippe Leclerc and Rupert Colville, 'In the Shadow'*, Refugees: UNHCR Magazine, *Geneva, issue 3, no. 147, 2007, p. 5.*

Lilia Mestre: You have been working for some time on the project 'Alien Encounters' and the notion of 'alienness' and its relation to the territorial. In your approach you say you want to complicate the notion of 'alienness'. Can you explain this desire?

Rana Hamadeh: 'Alienness' is, I believe, an under-theorised notion that, distinguished from the Marxist concept of 'alienation', has to be thought in both legal and spatial terms. Not to be confused with the notion of the 'other' either, which has been theorised and widely debated within and across post-colonial discourses and subaltern studies as well as within psychoanalytical discourses. I am trying to think of the term 'alien' away from any identitarian framework – which, perhaps in spatial terms, could also mean beyond an exclusively territorial understanding of space. 'Alien', to my understanding, is not an identity – a subject or an object – that demands to be defined. I do not want to know who or what the alien is. I do not want to think of 'alien' as a noun, but as an adjective or adverb that describes a dynamic of relations rather than a state of being.

Therefore, to speak of the narratives within this project as 'out-worldly' is to point out this inextricable conjunction of the legal and the spatial which forms the tangential nodes at which these narratives essentially touch one another. Of course, it is not only the conjunction of the legal and the spatial that requires our attention while reading the different episodes of the project. But it is mainly the attempt to interrogate and challenge the juridical formations of the worldly, through the *gesture of moving 'outwards'*. Hence the focus in this work is on extra-planetary space.

Initially inspired by Sun Ra's film *Space Is the Place* (1974), which proposes an African American exodus into outer space in response to racial injustice, 'Alien Encounters' aims to read such a gesture of 'moving outwards' in terms of a wider and more current critical lens. I try to contemplate and further complicate the notion of 'alienness', where the alien is viewed, on one hand, as an outcast with regards to the law, and, on the other, as an extraterrestrial. I try to construct imagined alternative topographies of the contemporary world order based on the proposal to 'provincialise' planet earth — a proposal that aims to shift the spatial and discursive paradigms that constitute our contemporary understandings of the worldly. Bringing together elements from science-fiction film and literature, modernist architecture, contemporary migration and capital flows, colonial legacies and cold-war aesthetics, the project asks whether it is possible to think of extraplanetary space as a possible space of dissent, i.e., a space that can engender new understandings of notions such as right and justice. My main claim is that justice is first and foremost a spatial category before being a legal one.

LM: Your work method consists of long-term research periods that lead you from story to story, creating an ever-growing constellation/mapping of materials that speak by themselves but also create other meanings and perspectives in relation to each other. This temporality proposes an open end to those stories, because they can always be continued, but it also provokes their relation to other emergent situations you come across. Can you elaborate on your work method and the mapping?

RH: For the past couple of years, my practice has been influenced by a specific interest in discursive as well as *curatorial* approaches to art, where the 'curatorial' becomes an artistic form in its own right, rather than an apparatus to 'manage' or 'put into order' artistic production. In the light of this interest, I have been working mostly on long-term discursive projects that involve different levels of collaboration/cooperation with other artists, writers and designers, and with people from outside the cultural field such as illegal immigrants, civil servants and … my parents. These projects, such as 'Graphis No. 127', or 'Alien Encounters', are umbrella projects that comprise several works that share a departure point, yet have different research trajectories and artistic articulations.

The departure point for these projects can be a particular object, image or event that has a symbolic historic or political significance. I try to re-address the narratives around such objects of departure, and create the conditions by which these narratives can be collectively shifted, reconstructed and appropriated.

For that, I conduct conversations — either public conversations that become the performance itself, or private conversations that I would publicly re-enact. The conversations are not only based on oral or textual correspondences, but also on a visual exchange of associations, which include for instance works contributed by other artists, family photographs, found objects, texts, or news clippings. I collect such associations, and I shuffle them and play around with their content, generating narratives that change context with each new sequel.

As regards mapping, I would say that this interest has become more literally manifest in my latest project, 'Alien Encounters', in which my work method and the content of my work become inseparable, if not identical. The project departs from Sun Ra's proposal to provincialise planet earth, which implies the provincialisation of the paradigm of ground and horizon. Yet the provincialisation of planet earth, which constitutes the geographic, gravitational, and orientational basis for the 'worldly' as I mentioned above, is not just a theoretical project to be discussed in the content of the work. Rather, it tries to question the methods of the curatorial, which is a spatial practice in the first place. Claiming that my work as an artist is 'curatorial' does not mean that I am interested in the profession of 'curating', but rather in questions of spatialisation: how to attach a new set of archival references to a practice; how to establish, and collapse, relations among narratives, visual material, places, events, histories and ideas; how to disburden oneself from the task of assigning meaning to such material that is

based on representation, and generate instead a different value system that is based, perhaps, on the levels of struggles and clashes involved in the visibility and invisibility of such material — to think through a different spatial paradigm. Mapping, in this sense, becomes the ground for rethinking the map: i.e., the ground for rethinking cartography, geography, topography, representation, meaning, and the fragmentation imposed on us by contemporary culture. To think of mapping beyond the paradigm of ground and horizon opens up a new way of approaching narrative — this method asks how the narrative functions rather than what it means.

LM: I'm also curious about the way you bring together your personal story in the making of your work. There is a tangent between your history, your physical (territorial) position and what you encounter. I have to think about the picture of your family under the arch of Kiev (a futuristic monument) as a starting point of your research. How do you relate your personal story with your research?

RH: Coming from a war-plagued politically complex context, I use my personal history as a hatstand on which to hang my question marks. All my works begin with a spark from my personal history: something intimate like a memory, a family photograph, a book from an uncle's library, a taped conversation found on a cassette, etc. I can only connect to the world through my own experiences, which I then launch back at the world in the form of historically and politically significant narratives. After all, I do believe that family history can never be dissociated from political history.

One of the starting points for 'Alien Encounters' was a photograph of my family posing proudly in front of a metal rainbow-like monument in a setting that looked somehow like another planet. The photograph was taken in 1983, the year I was born, in front of the Friendship Arch in Kiev – a monument built by the Russians to promote Russia's 'friendship' with the Ukrainians (who secretly called it the 'Yoke'). What were my parents doing under a metal rainbow in Kiev, somewhere at the peak of the Lebanese civil war? How can I narrate through such aesthetics the history of the Arab left, for instance, as well as the ramifications of such history in the present? Is it that 50,000 Syrian citizens have been murdered by the Ba'ath regime in the recent uprisings, for instance, as a consequence of my own enchantment with this photograph? An absurd question? No, it is a very realistic question.

This photograph and other objects from my childhood – such as Yuri Gagarin and Sputnik Christmas balls, which my aunt gave us as a gift after her return from her studies in Moscow – established a clear association between my dreams of going one day to another planet in outer space and being politically associated with 'the Left' in Lebanon. In 'Alien Encounters', I question this association. I claim that thinking about outer space cannot be dissociated from the colonial rhetoric of adventure and exploration, nor from cold-war fetishization of futurity. Bringing together elements from science fiction, colonial legacies, modernist and cold-war architecture, cold-war aesthetics, mining and transport histories, Arab revolutions, as well as narratives from my personal history, I try to map out new relations that suggest a bold short circuit between seemingly unrelated aesthetics, political events, histories and geographies.

LM: You also use several media that are part of a discursive and curatorial practice. Again I find the idea of constellation present in the multi-formal aspects of the work, which reflect on the content they carry. Can you explain the assemblage of the various media?

RH: As I often invite other artists, designers, theorists and people from outside the cultural field to intervene in my work, I see that this opens up my work to different forms and formats of presentation including (lecture) performances, installations, audio- and text-based works, cartographic projects, artist publications, theoretical texts as well as public conversations. As the umbrella projects are in the first place an excuse for me to exhaust my material, I see the multi-formal aspect of the projects as a natural content-driven choice or consequence of that desire to exhaust material. Just as exhausting my narratives through repetition and through testing them out each time in a different combination or sequel, I also try to exhaust the ways and possibilities by which I relate to these narratives. I think the main question should be: why the hell do I like to exhaust things – work on them over and over, as if they never ended? I am never satisfied with what any medium has to offer. Perhaps this insistence on re-working the material in different forms comes from my desperation to articulate something I cannot really articulate. Is it a dumb manifestation of constant optimism? A constant hope that the next time, something will have the chance to be articulated differently?

LM: I would like to shift the questions towards ideas that arise in your work.

In a presentation you gave to the 'Come Together' participants, you introduced the concept of 'public' through Jürgen Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Can you elaborate on the relation between the concept of 'public' and the 'Come Together' Thematics?

RH: I was interested in the Thematics invitation to 'Come Together' particularly because of my question: how is it possible to 'come together' without the burden of the 'happy ending'? How can something emerge for real through the encounter of five artists, away from the illusion that 'we have finally formed a community'? No love and peace here. No jargon on the 'democracy' of coming together, 'transparency' of coming together, or common grounds fireworking as a result of coming together. I am not so much interested in common grounds, but I am interested in the encounter – just the physical coming together. Ah, nice, I just remembered our conversation when you told me about wanting to sexualise the title, so that it is about 'coming' on one hand, and 'together' on the other. This in particular is my take on the Thematics: the 'coming' becomes not only a verb that culminates in an encounter, but rather an event, a happening that emerges as a result of the encounter: our intersections, our voices, our different temporalities, etc.

This brings me to the other part of the question regarding the notion of 'public'.

Terms related to 'community' and 'togetherness' are generally brought forth within the cultural field as already moralised categories. The question that the cultural field asks is usually 'how to become a community' rather than 'why and what for'. This moralization, in my view, stems directly from our celebration of the notion of 'public'. 'Public' – whether we are talking about it in terms of space (public space), modes of governmentality (public institutions, public property), law (establishing the public good), modes of spectatorship (public as audience) or otherwise – is taken for granted as describing the *transparency* of our togetherness, a notion assuming the single layered-ness, homogeneity, simultaneity and synchronicity of where we're coming from and where we're heading. Taking this particular take on the notion of 'public' as a premise for our understanding of community and 'coming together' is, in my opinion, what creates pockets of political impotence and compliancy.

Habermas's text was therefore only an introduction that could open up a discussion among us regarding the historicity of the notion of 'public' – that public is a term that cannot be absolute and timeless, but is always relational and related to the political at its root. Habermas's text reminds us that the history of the notion of public cannot be dissociated from the history of mastery and slavery, coloniality, gender and class, etc. It was both a text that gave us a lot of historical information, but was also a teaser and could undo our assumptions about the notions discussed during 'Come Together'.

LM: In that same presentation you also spoke about the idea of 'perversity' that you are elaborating on as the potential of being several things at the same time, being at several places at the same time, distorting meanings, being un-graspable, being without defined utility. This concept comes from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Can you explain your interest in the perverse?

RH: Perversion is a concept that drives my entire practice. *The Logic of Sense*, an early book by Gilles Deleuze, is a big inspiration to me. In it, Deleuze elaborates on the literary and logical paradoxes in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which has also inspired my work immensely. He speaks of sense and non-sense, not from the perspective of what we might understand as 'common sense' versus that which is not commonly considered *sound*. Sense and non-sense do not correspond, to my understanding, to meaning and meaninglessness, but rather to the potency or impotency of meaning as it is produced. Sense, in these terms, becomes that which moves meaning in a direction (sense here relates in my opinion to directionality and orientation), while non-sense becomes that which opens up the possibility of the directionality of meaning, without or before its actuation (e.g., Alice becoming both bigger and smaller at the same time). Deleuze, in his analysis of Pierre Klossowski's work, describes the perverse as 'this objective power of hesitation in the body, this paw [of a fetus] which is neither right nor left'. This description is an attempt to un-frame the ways we think of deviance from the restricted economy of value that can only take into account that which can be determinate or determinable about meaning. It is an attempt to un-frame deviance from abnormality and pathology, which, to me, is the kind of political and ethical project that drives me – but most of all, I see it as a visual and intellectual project.

Coming from a country whose disputed identity drove its citizens into an unsolvable civil war, makes me ask whether the Lebanese are setting themselves up to the question. The notion of perversion, as I see it, could be a tool for discovering a different set of questions – something that can engender a different political struggle beyond an identitarian frame.

LM: To conclude, 'Come Together' gathered artists and theorists from different backgrounds and practices with the idea of proposing a field for discussing and practising the idea of the becoming community. What interested you in the proposal and what is your position towards that idea?

RH: I like Pablo Esposito's take on the notion of community, which he opposes to that of *immunity*. He says, 'As we know, in bio-medical language one understands immunity to be a form of exemption [esenzione] or protection in relation to a disease. In juridical language immunity represents a sort of safeguard that places the one who holds it in a condition of untouchability vis-à-vis common law. In both cases, therefore, immunity or immunization alludes to a particular situation that protects someone from a risk, a risk to which an entire community is exposed'. Therefore, the Italian thinker actually describes the community as the risk taker, as the category conditioned by its capacity to fall ill and be contagious. This is a take that I like. What we are dealing with most of the time today are immunities rather than communities – an obsession with security that has turned whole societies into introvert matryoshkas. Through 'coming' 'together', the way we discussed it before, the possibility of becoming a community is that of becoming open, through our encounter, to each other's intellectual, gestural and linguistic diseases.

Inhuman Polyphony in the Theatre of Madness

Peter Pál Pelbart

We are the Ueinzz Theatre Company, set up in São Paulo, Brazil, 15 years ago. Lunatics, therapists, performers, maids, philosophers, 'normopaths' – once on stage no one can tell the difference. It's a sort of Ship of Fools, adrift inside – and outside - the artistic circuit. We rehearse every week, we've produced four theatre pieces, we've given over 200 performances, we travel a lot throughout Brazil, and also abroad, and this is part of our magnificent curriculum. But this concreteness does not guarantee anything. Sometimes we spend months in the stagnation of insipid weekly rehearsals. Sometimes we ask ourselves if in fact one day we will ever perform again or go back to performing. Some actors disappear, sponsorships dwindle, scripts are forgotten, and the very company itself seems like some intangible virtuality. And then, all of a sudden, a date for a performance appears, some theatre becomes available, a patron or sponsor shows up, and there is just the glimpse of a season, with an invitation to perform in the Cariri or in Finland. The costume designer spruces up the dusty rags, actors who had disappeared months ago reappear, sometimes even running away from internment ... But even when it all 'happens', it is on that fine border that separates building from collapsing. We move alongside Blanchot's acute intuition that the basis of a work is unworking ('désoeuvrement'). And we follow Foucault's hypothesis that with the historical decline of madness's aura and its subsequent transformation into a mental illness, madness reappears as unreason, i.e., as redress, the absence of work, as 'absolute rupture of the work'. I would place our performatic trajectory on that moving limit, between madness and unreason, like a steep experiment over the abyss, where chance, ruination, passivity, and neutrality speak: the outside.

First example: we were going to perform 'Daedalus' at a major Brazilian Theatre Festival. The cast was about to go on stage. Each actor was getting prepared to utter in Greek the combative clash that begins this piece one 'cannot make head or tail of' –according to the complimentary review of one critic from the São Paulo press. I wait, tense; in my head I go over the words we are supposed to throw at each other in menacing tones and frenetic rush.

I am scanning the audience when I notice that our narrator is standing a few metres away from the microphone – he appears to be disorientated. I go up to him, and he tells me that he has lost his script. I slip my hand into his trousers' pocket, where I find the complete bundle of papers. The actor stares at the papers, which I hold up to his face. He seems not to recognise them. He puts on and takes off his glasses. And he murmurs that this time he will not take part in the play – that this was the night of his death. We exchange a few words and a few minutes later I am relieved to see him back at the microphone. But his voice, which was normally tremulous and stirring, is now slurred and washed out. In the middle of a scene in which he plays Charon, he suddenly walks right across the stage and heads for the theatre exit. I find him sitting in the street, deathly still, murmuring the demand for an ambulance – his time has come. I kneel down beside him and he tells me: 'I'm going to the swamp'. The situation lightens up after that and we negotiate: he will accept a cheeseburger from McDonalds instead of the ambulance. I hear the final applause coming from inside the theatre, and the public starts to exit through the small door that leads to the street, where both he and I are. What they see as they exit is Hades, king of the underworld (my character), kneeling at the feet of the living-dead Charon. And for this we receive the respect of each member of the audience who passes by us, because, for them, this intimate scene seems to be part of the performance. The whole thing by a razor's edge. It is by a razor's edge that we perform, it is by a razor's edge that we don't die. Work, unkworking, absence of work.

Let's go back a few years. It is the Company's very first rehearsal, at the 'A Casa' Day Clinic, where our group began. In a theatrical exercise on the different methods of communication between human beings, all the members of the group were asked in turn which other languages they spoke, apart from Portuguese. One patient, who never spoke and who only produced a sort of nasal sound, like some discordant mantra, replied immediately, with a clarity and assurance quite uncommon for him: German! Everyone was surprised, as no one knew that he spoke German. And what word do you know in German? 'Ueinzz'. And what does Ueinzz mean in German? Ueinzz. Everyone laughed – this is the language that signifies to itself, that folds within itself, an esoteric, mysterious, glossolalic language. Inspired by material collected from the laboratories, the directors, Renato Cohen and Sérgio Penna, brought their proposed script to the group: a group of nomads, lost in the desert, goes out in search of a shining tower, and on their way they come across obstacles, entities, and storms. When they come across an oracle, he must indicate to them, in his sibylline tongue, the most adequate course for the pilgrims to take. The actor is promptly chosen to play the part of the oracle: it is the one who speaks German. When asked where the tower of Babel is, he must reply: Ueinzz.

The patient quickly gets into the role, and everything goes well together: the black hair and moustache, the small, solid body of a Turkish Buddha, his mannerisms, both aloof and schizoid, the look, both vague and scrutinising, of someone who is constantly in conversation with the invisible. It is true that he is capricious, for when they ask him: Oh Great Oracle of Delphi, where is the Babel tower?, he sometimes replies with a silence, sometimes with a grunt, and at other times he says Germany or Baurú (in the state of São Paulo), until they ask him more specifically, Oh Great Oracle, what is the magic word in German, and then, without fail, comes the Ueinzz that everyone has been waiting for. The most inaudible of patients, the one who pisses in his trousers and vomits in the director's plate, is charged with the crucial responsibility of telling the nomadic people the way out of Darkness and Chaos. After being uttered, the sound of his answer must proliferate through the loudspeakers dotted about the theatre in concentric circles, amplifying in dizzying echoes Ueinzz, Ueinzz, Ueinzz. The inhuman voice we could not hear finds in the scenic and ritual space a magical and poetic effectiveness. When the piece was given that sound as its name, we had difficulty imagining how it should be spelled. The invitation went with 'weeinz', the folder had 'ueinzz', the poster played with transcribing the word in a wide variety of possibilities, of Babel-like proportions. Today we are the Ueinzz Theatre Company. We were born out of an a-significant rupture, as Guattari would say.

Our penultimate piece was inspired by Batman and Ítalo Calvino. It was called Gotham-SP (São Paulo), an invisible or mythological city, taken from comic strips, cinema screens, and the most persistent deliriums of one of our actors. Every night in Gotham-SP, from his tower, the mayor yells indiscriminately at tycoons, prostitutes, and psychiatrists. He promises worlds and wealth, control and anarchy, bread and cloning. The emperor Kublai Khan, nearly deaf and nearly blind, is the recipient of lost voices. A single resident repeats in her cubicle: 'It's cold here'. A passenger requests the company of a taxi driver on a rainy night and recites fragments from Nietzsche or Pessoa. The decadent diva searches for that impossible note, Ophelia comes out of a water barrel after her beloved, the angels try to understand where they have just landed, Joshua, revived, demands a new order in the world... Singular speeches that clash in inhuman polyphony, sonorous, visual, scenic, metaphysical... Dissonant voices and semiotics that no emperor or mayor manages to orchestrate, much less suppress. Each of those beings who appear on stage carry their icy or torrid world on their fragile bodies... One thing is certain: from the bottom of their pallid isolation, these beings seek or proclaim another community of bodies and souls. A community of those who have no community, as Bataille says, a community to come, as Blanchot says, an inoperative community, says Nancy, a community of celibates, Deleuze will say, the community that comes, concludes Agamben.

Allow me to mention a final fragment extrapolating from the realm of the theatre. We were invited by François Tanguy to a week-long get-together with the actors from the Théâtre du Radeau in the south of France in a project of reciprocal affectation. One day, one of our actors asked Laurence, one of the actresses from the French company, to marry him. Taking this request performatively, she said yes. She got dressed in a wedding veil, while the groom sported a sumptuous cape of green velvet, like a Russian prince, with a gigantic mask of a deer on his head. The guests wore exotic wigs, and in a magical atmosphere, something at the edges of reason and unreason, reality and fiction, art and life was both dislocated and held together, ritually and performatically.

I would now like to propose a theoretical leap which in my opinion brings all these episodes together. What is at stake in this theatrical, paratheatrical, or performatic device is the singular, unreasonable subjectivity of the actors and nothing else. That is, what is being staged or acted out is a manner of perceiving, feeling, dressing, positioning oneself, moving, speaking, thinking, asking questions, offering or removing oneself from the gaze of the other as well as from the others' enjoyment. It is also a way of representing without representing, associating whilst disassociating, of living and dying, of being on stage and feeling at home at the same time, in that precarious presence, at the same time concrete and intangible which makes everything extremely serious, and at the same time 'neither here nor there', as defined by the composer Livio Tragtenberg – leaving in the middle of a performance, crossing the stage, bag in hand, because your part has now come to an end; one moment, letting go of everything, because your time has come and soon you are going to die, the next entering and getting involved in every scene like a sweeper in a game of football; then conversing with your line-feeder who should be hidden, and revealing his presence, then turning into a toad... Or then grunting or croaking, or like Kafka's nomads in *The Great Wall of China*, speaking like magpies, or just saying Ueinzz…

I can't stop thinking that it is this life on stage, 'life by a razor's edge', that makes the peculiarities of this experience. Some in the audience are under the impression that they are the living-dead and that real life is on that side of the stage. In fact, in a context marked by the control of life (biopower), the methods of vital resistance proliferate in the most unusual of ways. One of them consists in literally putting *life* on stage, not bare, brutal life, which, as Agamben says, is reduced by power to the state of survival, but life in the state of variation: 'minor' modes of living, which inhabit our major modes, and which, on stage or off, gain scenic or performatic visibility, even when one is on the edge of death or collapse, on the edge of stuttering or grunting, of collective hallucination or limit-experiences. Within the restricted parameters which I referred to, here is a device – among others – for a hesitant and always indecisive, inconclusive and without promises, experimentation for changing *power over life* into *power for life*.

Permit me to put this in a broader, more contemporary, bio-political context. On the one hand, life was assaulted by power. To put it another way, power penetrated all spheres of existence, mobilised them in full, and put them to work. From genes, the body, affects, psychism, but even intelligence, imagination, creativity, all has been violated, invaded, colonised, if it was not directly expropriated by the powers. The various mechanisms through which they are exercised are anonymous, scattered, flexible, and rhizomatic. Power itself has become 'post-modern', undulating, a-centred, netlike, molecular. With that, it has a more direct effect over our ways of perceiving, feeling, loving, thinking, even creating. If before we still imagined that we had spaces that were protected from the direct interference of the powers (the body, the unconscious, subjectivity), and we had the illusion of preserving in these areas some independence, today our life appears entirely subsumed in those mechanisms of modulating existence. Thus even sex, language, communication, oniric life, even faith, none of these still preserve any exteriority in relation to the mechanisms of control and monitoring. To summarise it in a sentence: power is not exercised from outside, nor from above, but more as it were from within, steering our social vitality from head to toe. We are no longer struggling with a transcendent or even repressive power; it concerns more an inherent, productive power. This biopower does not seek to arrest life, but to take control of it, to intensify it, to make the most of it. Therein lies our extreme difficulty in resisting: we hardly even know where power is, or where we are, what power dictates to us, what we want from it; it is we ourselves who take on the task of administering our own control. Power never got so far or so deep into the kernel of subjectivity and of life itself as in this contemporary biopower.

But when it appears that 'everything has been dominated', as the lyrics of a Brazilian funk song say, at the end of the line there is a suggestion of a U-turn: that which appeared to be subdued, controlled and dominated, i.e., 'life', reveals in the process of expropriation its indomitable power, no matter how erratic that may be. Let's just look at one example. Today capital no longer needs muscles and discipline, but inventiveness, imagination, creativity; what some theorists call invention-force. But that invention-force, which capitalism appropriates and which it puts to work for its own benefit, does not emanate from it and in the end it could even do without it. It is what is being noted here and there: the true source of wealth today is people's intelligence, their creativity, their affection, and all that belongs, as is obvious, to each and everyone, not to capital, nor to the State, nor to the sciences, nor to the media, nor to institutions. That which appeared to be entirely subsumed by capital, or reduced to mere passivity – 'life', 'intelligence', 'affection', 'sociability' – appears now like an inexhaustible reservoir of meaning, a source of forms of existence, an embryo of directions that extrapolate the command structures, the calculations of the established powers, formatted subjectivity.

It would be the case to tread these two major routes, bioPower and biopower, like in a Moebius strip. Thus, if today capital and the governmentality that corresponds to it enter life on a scale never seen before, and saps its creative strength, the opposite is also true: life itself hits back, revived. And if the ways of seeing, feeling, thinking, perceiving, dwelling, dressing, of situating oneself, no matter how singular these may be, become an object of interest and capital investment and molecular monitoring, they also become a source of value that can, by themselves, become a vector for valorization or self-valorization or even of deviation. For example, when a group of prisoners composes and records their own music, what they show and sell is not only their music, nor their harsh life stories, but their style, their perceptions, their disgust, their caustic sarcasm, their way of dressing, of 'living' in prison, of gesticulating, of protesting – their life, in short. Their only capital being their life, in their extreme state of survival and resistance, that's what they capitalised, self-valorized and produced value. Taken from this point of view, if it is clear that capital increasingly appropriates subjectivity and forms of life, subjectivity is itself biopolitical capital, which virtually everyone increasingly has the use of, whether they are those so-called marginals, so-called lunatics, prisoners, or indigenous peoples, but also anyone and everyone with a singular lifestyle that belongs to them or which is given to them to invent – with the political consequences yet to be determined.

It's clear that biopower and the new mechanisms of governmentality make individual and collective life an object of domination, of calculation, of manipulation, of intervention, if not of fetishization or aestheticization -- and that there is a corresponding capitalisation in this process. But it is necessary to add, at least in the case of so called 'minorities', that life resists such control mechanisms, and reinvents its coordinates of enunciation and self-enunciation. In the case of madness – and perhaps that is the meaning of 'unreason-subject-of-itself', as evoked once by Foucault – this happens in two simultaneous movements. On one hand, madness de-subjectifies itself according to unexpected lines of forces, undoing familiar, professional, social, national, and religious identities – blurring borders, dismantling limits. On the other, it tries singular, plural, collective and inhuman methods of subjectification. In this paradoxical movement, madness escapes the double straight jacket that imprisoned it, cutting through the limits which the subjectifying objectification would have imposed. If madness, as we know from Foucault, was expelled from the social collective, locked away and silenced in the seventeenth century, and then, with the advent of psychiatric medicine in the nineteenth century, became a mental illness, and consequently the object of moral, later psychological, and finally medical treatment, a schizoid flow never ceased to cut through the limits which scientific rationality reserved to it. That flow slides through the entire social body, schizophrening the surroundings, and is disseminated through the most varied domains, including through collective, political and poetic practices, according to the sharp intuition of Deleuze and Guattari.

Therefore, it would be necessary to insert our experience in that fluctuating lineage which goes from the history of madness to the schizoid flow, and which runs into the realm of the performing arts. This is how it intuited, since the beginning of our trajectory, by one of our theatre directors, Renato Cohen, a well-known theorist and proponent of performance art in Brazil, who passed away recently. Commenting on his experiences with our company, whose activities he occasionally defined as a *work in progress*, Cohen wrote: 'The actors of the Company have a rare ally on their side who destroys representation in its most artificial sense: time. The time of the uncommon actor is mediated by all his dialogues; it is traversed by subtexts which become the actual text itself. In dialogues, the reply does not come immediately, nor is it rational; rather it goes through other mental circuits. There is a delay, a scenic slowing down, that puts the whole audience producing. The actor, in an intuitive manner, moves between Stanislavskian identification and Brechtian distancing. And he becomes excited by the applause of the audience; he performs his dramatic "bullfight" by measuring forces with the audience and with his own inner shadows'. This is not the fictional time of representation, but the time of the actor or performer, who enters and exits his character, thus allowing other dimensions of his acting to be seen: 'It is in that narrow passage from representation to a less deliberate acting, with its space for improvisation and spontaneity, that live art treads, along with the terms "happening" and "performance". It is also that tenuous limit where life and art approach one another. As one breaks away from representation, from fiction, a space opens up for the unpredictable, and therefore for the living, since life is synonymous with the unpredictable and with risk'[1], says Cohen, inadvertently getting close to Foucault's last formulation, in a text on Canguilhem, where he defined life as an error, something that is errant. In the group's experimentation, several movements confirm this insight. 'Actors who abandon their positions in order to attend the others' scenes, and then resume the dramatic sequence again. Actors who give lengthy monologues, and who also abandon them without finishing their sentences. Such strident distribution of errors, of discoveries, of script reinvention, is built in front of the audience. The performance then becomes a ritual, where everyone witnesses the impossible going on, the curved bodies dancing, the inaudible voices that gain amplified strength thanks to the electronics installed for the performance'[2]. The microphones are visible, since the 'sound that remains in the sub-conscious is the sound of the media – the sound of television, of radio, of electronic music, of the computer'. Others, even without a microphone, do not impose their voice and are barely heard, whether because they do not possess the vocal technique or because they have difficulties in speaking or due to problems with their diction. Speech loses a little of its weight with all the different elements that make up the scene, thus giving space for other speeches (corporal, for example)[3], in a disjunction between 'bodies without voices and voices without a body'[4].

Of course there are resonances here with the work of Bob Wilson, as the various elements on stage acquire the same weight, with no hierarchy, as they do also with Cunningham, by the way. Each one with a life of its own: the music, the dance, the speaking, the light, without any one being subordinate to the other; but all juxtaposed, even if together they form a fantastic whole with pictorial scenes and emotions that are derived more from the unconscious than from intelligence[5]. Paraphrasing Jacó Guinsburg, the heterogeneous elements that make up that 'de-totalitarianized' *Gesamtkunstwerk* are submitted one by one to a process of 'neutralisation', which silences the utilitarian character of these same elements and modifies them into new material – ready to be reintegrated into the whole in a less conventional way[6]. More than creating a formal and organised poetic structure, this is about transcribing gestures and words that are spoken and thought in contemporaneous contexts, thus using a type of unconscious reservoir of our culture. The fact that an incoherent text is produced is not in itself a problem, because there is no narrative development here, as all the activity on stage is maintained in a state of permanent 'absolute present' by the continuous stimulation of the performer's energy[7]. All that energy, together with the free manipulation of the scenic codes, reinvents the art-life relationship in a tension boundary – in contrast with the symbolic time of the theatre. 'Visual landscapes, textualities, performers and luminescences in a scene of intensities in which several creative procedures circulate without the classical hierarchies of text-actor-narrative'[8]. By recovering the ambivalence between reason and unreason, says Cohen, the field of drives, of unconscious irruptions, of sinister places, of transverse narratives is legitimised in atmospheres of abstract intensity, critical attacks, mental landscapes, derivative processes, resonant indices and abrasions.

Well, I could finish this reflection on our experimentation in that rising, aesthetic tone, but then I would be leaving out a partnership that shifted our trajectory, and that somewhat put it in a kind of suspension. It concerns a project with a Franco-Argentine artist, Alejandra Riera, who proposed to the group a 'Survey about the/our Outside'. The device was simple: a group outing every day for ten days to some place in the city suggested by the actors, where the group would approach someone of their choice – pedestrian, street vendor, student, police officer, anonymous, homeless person – and directly fire at them any questions that came to mind. In an unusual situation where the interviewee ignores everything about the interviewer – but sometimes perceives a certain strangeness – the rules of a journalistic interview are reversed and everything starts to go wrong, without anyone managing to detect the reason for the derailing. Places start skidding, the personal, professional or institutional masks which everyone dearly holds onto fall to the ground, allowing a glimpse of the unusual dimensions of the disturbing 'normality' which surrounds us every day, as the artist used to say.

With a displaced camera that puts into question the anchoring point of discourse, a hiatus is created between image and speech, and thus a suspension in the automatism of comprehension.

Let us take one minuscule example. We were in front of the Legislative Assembly in São Paulo and talking with a peanut seller. One of our actors asks him what the magic of that place is. The street vendor does not understand, and asks if the interviewer wants to know how much he earns. 'No, I wanted to know what is your happiness here?" "I don't understand', says the peanut seller. The actor, a little agitated by his interlocutor's deafness, asks him point blank: 'No, I want to know what is your desire, what is the meaning of your life'. Then everything stops, there is a suspension in the dialogue, a silence, and we see the man sinking into a dimension that was totally other, far from any journalistic context. And he replied, quietly, with a certain difficulty: 'suffering'... This is the basis without a basis of the entire conversation, the disaster which already occurred, the exhaustion which cannot be spoken of; it is the bitter isolation of a man cornered in front of a monumental building which represents an unshakeable, but nonetheless empty power; it is all that which only appears by means of a sudden interruption, triggered by a sort of vital irritation. An interruption provoked by the one who is supposed to be drowned in his own abyss – the crazy actor. And here everything shifts, and the spectator suddenly wonders what side life is on, and if that question still has any meaning, since it is nothing but a whole context of misery which emerges from this unusual dialogue. What causes an eruption is the psycho-social instability upon which everything else rests; and also, for fleeting moments, the germs of something else. In making the situation schizophrenic, for a time there is the impression that everything may become derailed: functions, places, obeisance, discourses, representations. Everything may fall, including the device itself. Even if we meet what was there from the start – suffering, resignation, impotence – we witness disconnections that make a so-called normality flee, along with its linked automatic reactions; and also the evocation of other possible bonds with the world. As Riera says, this is not social reporting, nor a survey with humanist ends, but the recording of an experiment. It has no make-up, no claims to denounce a situation, and no inclination towards aesthetics. At the end, we do not really have a proper documentary, or a film, but an unusual object, a trace of an event which when seen may trigger other events -- as was the case when some fragments were shown in the La Borde clinic, where Guattari once lived, in the presence of dozens of patients and psychiatrists, including the founder of the clinic, Jean Oury. In the enormous central hall of this decaying castle, late one Friday afternoon in September 2008, the people were waiting for the 'Brazilian film' made by a theatre group, according to the rumour that was going around. But there will be no 'Brazilian film', nor any 'documentary', nor any 'film', nor any 'theatrical piece'.

Absence of work. How to explain this without disappointing such high expectations? The weekly meeting ends, the hundred people seated in the auditorium turn towards the screen already stretched, the windows are closed in order to allow for the showing of the 'Brazilian film', and Alejandra Riera compliments those present and straightaway points out that she does not intend to show any film. She explains that that is only an experiment, that it is very difficult to talk about this... and instead of giving a talk on the project, on her intentions and her logic, as one would expect, she confesses that she has experienced great difficulty working lately... that in the end she could not manage it any more... to work or to build... Imagine the effect of this talk on people who long ago had abandoned the circuit of 'work', 'projects' and 'results'. She then adds that lately all she could manage was to take things apart. She does not even refrain from taking apart the tools with which she once worked, such as the computer... And she takes from her handbag two plastic bags with fragments of the disassembled keyboard: one of them contains the alphabet keys, the other the functions (del, ctrl, alt, etc.). She then passes around the transparent plastic bags containing the pile of pieces so that they can be circulated among those present. The spectacular expectation of a film gives way to an extraordinary complicity with an artist who does not call herself an artist, who does not bring her work, who confesses that she is not able to work, who shows the remains of her computer, pieces that have been dismantled, evoking a project whose impossibility is immediately made known, leaving only the impasse, the fiasco, the paralysis, the exhaustion that is common to us all, whether we are lunatics or philosophers, artists or psychiatrists... Only once the link between 'art' and 'audience' is short-circuited, once the glamour or entertainment or culture or work or object which could be expected from that 'presentation' of images is undone, and the central protagonist who leaves the stage is 'de-individualised': only in this way can something else occur – not an event, but the effect of a suspension. A projection of fragments can even take place, or a controversial discussion, at times accusatory or visceral, that drags into the night, into the twilight of the auditorium which no one has taken the trouble to light up and which ends with the hilarious question from a patient: 'Do you all have a project?' As if reconnecting to Alejandra's initial speech, in which she confessed her difficulty in working, in constructing a project, in doing work, or to Blanchot's intuition on the required common ground between art and unworking, or Foucault's idea about the relationship between madness and work breaking down. Perhaps this is where we can find a performative exhaustion of the project or of the work, so that inaudible voices and improbable events can emerge in that rare conjunction between art and madness, schizoid flow and the suspension of the world.

Decades ago, Foucault was seduced by infamous men and their insignificant, inglorious lives, men who by a game of chance were illuminated for a brief moment in the floodlights of power which they came face to face with, and whose words then appeared to have been traversed by an unexpected intensity. Perhaps we no longer find those resplendent, although inessential, lives; those poems-lives, 'particles endowed with more energy the smaller and more difficult to detect they are'. Diluted between the multiple mechanisms of anonymous power, the words do not enjoy that theatrical resplendence and fleeting vibration which Foucault savoured in the archives – it is banality which takes centre stage. But from within, signs of singularity appear to confirm the desire for something else. As Deleuze used to say, even before the term biopolitical was coined, we are all in search of a 'vitality'. Singular, collective, anonymous, plural, suspensive, intensive, unworking – within an undefined boundary, each time reinvented, between exhaustion and a fleeting vision.

The current members of the Ueizz company are: Adélia Faustino, Alexandre Bernardes, Amélia Monteiro de Melo, Ana Goldenstein Carvalhaes, Ana Carmen del Collado, Artur Amador, Eduardo Lettiere, Erika Alvarez Inforsato, Fabrício de Lima Pedroni, José Petronio Fantasia, Leonardo Lui Cavalcanti, Liliane Oraggio, Luis Guilherme Ribeiro Cunha, Luiz Augusto Collazzi Loureiro, Maria Yoshiko Nagahashi, Oness Antonio Cervelin, Paula Patricia Francisquetti, Pedro França, Peter Pál Pelbart, Simone Mina, Valéria Felippe Manzalli.

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1 Renato Cohen, *Performance como linguagem* (Performance as Language). São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002, p. 58. Also Ana Goldenstein, in 'Performance and Madness: Accompaniment to the creative process of the Ueinzz Theatre Group'.
2 Renato Cohen, release, SP.
3 Ana Goldenstein, op. cit.
4 Flora Sussekind, in "A imaginação Monológica" (The Monologue Imagination), in Revista USP, July 1992, op. cit. by Renato Cohen in Work in Progress na cena conemporânea (Work in Progress in Contemporary Theatre), São Paulo, Perspectiva, 1998.
5 Jacó Guinsburg, Os processos criativos de Bob Wilson (The Creative Processes of Bob Wilson) published by Perspectiva, São Paulo, 1996.
6 Ibid.
7 Jacó Guinsburg, Da cena em cena (From Scene to Scene), published by Perspectiva, São Paulo, 1986, p. 23.
8 Renato Cohen in Work in Progress na cena conemporânea, op. cit. p. XXIV.

VS

monarchical logic: power is external central & identifiable oppressor. Now

Today Power as a RHIZOMATIC nature (there is no more external enemy to fight). Power are strategies.

BIO POWER. FOUCAULT
Power decides what life means
The body is itself an instrument of control.

"Nuda vita" = BARE LIFE
life restricted to the strict
reduced to its biological functioning.
necessary for its biological functioning.
Survivors

AGAMBEN "muzelman"
empty bodies, indifferent bodies
"non human" lives

BIO ASCETISM
Obsession with the perfectability of the body. Tirany of the perfect body. FASCIST BODY.

ROBERT STIJN
where did our desire to die go?

Exercise: TO DIE

ZIZEK Post metaphysical survivalist posture of the last man. We are kind of POST-MODERN ZOMBIES.

a SUBJECT is a personal form (VS universal) and it shapes all our experiences

la moule of BROODTHAERS. but there are some exterior forms that dissolve that moule for worse or for better.

ARMORED BODY

VS

POROUS BODY

PETER PAL PELBAERT

CATASTROPHE
as a place for being born
birth = death

= loss of meaning

ARTAUD refuses his own biological and cultural body. He claims to be born again.

What can intensify life?
SPINOZA To affect and to be affected

"the body is that which cannot take it anymore"
David Lapoujade

instead of accepting to become thick-skinned we should learn to say "STOP!" in the discursive practice. We should learn to create "vessel of silence" (Deleuze) → a place where something can be prepared

DELEUZE · GUATTARI
SCHIZOPHRENIC BODY
Body without organs

CLEAN

ROBERT STIJN
- DO I HAVE A BODY?
- AM I A BODY?
- DOES A BODY HAVE ME?

for example
- dancerly, in control, upright, choreograph
- improvised, less recognizable
- starting from ticks, falling uncontrollable

fuck the space

DAVID LAPOUJADE
"SYMPATHY is the relation with the becoming other of the other"

"Je est un autre"

GODARD
"being alone to be part of a conspiracy"

DELEUZE "We are a desert" populated with tribes

— what is an encounter?

BARTHES
"how to live together?"
"how to live alone?"

EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO
"indian communities"

INTERVIEW
of Sara Manente
by Rana Hamadeh

Rana Hamadeh: One of your works shown during your presentation was a video that somehow paid homage to the history of performance. You had two performers, female and male, re-enact in an intimate setting several of the iconic performances made since the 1960s. You made clear, however, that you preferred not to call your interpretations of these performances 're-enactments'. Could you expand on the video you made and on your particular take on the notion of re-enactment?

Sara Manente: The video was made in collaboration with the two performers, Ondine Cloez and Michiel Reynaert. We were inspired by approximately 50 performances from the 1960s to 2000. Around the time of shooting, a lot of people were using the term 're-enactment' but our aim was not exactly to re-enact. For us it didn't make sense to enact a past performance *as such*. Of course there is a certain *nostalgia*, but we wanted to be critical of this too: for us it didn't make sense to re-enact the past *as such* because the power and resonance of those acts are lost now; on the contrary, there is already a second degree with the idea of the *copy* itself. So there is no sense in taking the same risks and doing literally the same things now. Nevertheless the resonance and power of those acts are still very present in our idea of performance and in our work, so much so as to make us feel powerless sometimes.

For us, to go through all that material was a procedure that functioned almost as a ritual and at the same time as research into a basic situation: two people in a room doing simple actions and the relation between bodies and space. Lastly, there was a strong interest from our practice of contemporary dance, i.e., about the limit of sense production and about body in terms of figures and abstraction, or space and resistance, for example. We tried to give new life to that physical material by stripping it of what we called the *context*: the political meaning and historical reference of each performance. In practice we did all those performances with a series of restraints: as few objects as possible (some returning from time to time like a hat or a bottle of ketchup), natural light, the same background and at least one alteration from the original. We asked ourselves: what is the nature of action as a medium and how can it function without any or as little context as possible? It was more a matter of *re-doing* than re-enacting, stressing the idea of *work* more than the event. The result is a collection in which the memory of iconic but also unknown and unrepeated performances is moved to an everyday situation – an action – and can be seen as something new, lighter maybe.

RH: Getting back to that same video, we were discussing whether or not there are distinctions between visual artists, dancers and theatre-makers when it comes to the frame of spectatorship. You work at the conjunctions of these three worlds. Do you believe in any disciplinary distinctions and limitations when it comes to methodologies of work as well as modes of spectatorial engagement?

SM: Yes, I believe there are distinctions and I don't like the term *multidisciplinary*. I attended a Fine Arts Academy for one year and I realised how *relative* those worlds are. It's the same when you go to a museum: you have a different mood and attention than when you go to a theatre. These fields are specialised like any other working field. It is precisely because there are distinctions that we should on the contrary challenge the frame of spectatorship by not becoming sectarian. What I mean is: I do use work methodologies from other disciplines to enrich my own and hopefully enrich the mode of spectatorial engagement relative to my discipline too. Of course there are limitations and misunderstandings but the risk on the other hand is of being generic, wanting to put things into the same categories or just the opposite, adding a bit of this and a bit of that and apparently creating something 'new' or 'multidisciplinary'. For me it is an exercise: as a spectator, to try to change my point of view and my mind, and as a maker, to try to take the interesting things from other fields and see what is triggered. The exercise I am practising is being specific to the work I am doing and to the situation it is being presented in and this is not always easy.

RH: I am interested to hear more about your take on choreography. You use the limitations of the space to write movement upon the dancers' bodies. Choreography shifts therefore from the act of inscribing movement within a body towards setting the conditions that allow or deny such transcription to happen. Do you agree with this and how do you think about this in terms of your work?

SM: Yes, you describe very well what I was doing in 'Lawaai Means Hawaai'. For me this piece represented a sort of *tabula rasa*, getting 'back to basics' to understand where choreography comes from, how it is made. I had the idea of an automatic choreography that would appear and would always be different by setting certain conditions. It was a way to take *contingency* into account. The dance quartet 'Faire un Four' coming after the trio, developed from the idea that the body is in fact already inscribed with movement: a dance technique, a teacher, a choreographer but also a performance you saw or hate, a performer you like. 'Faire un Four' is more specifically about the *creation* of a dance, of your own dance, which is almost like a social process in which the idiosyncratic is still more evident. We ended up making improvised solos, which are *homages* and can change at every performance and from there develop a common vocabulary by copying,

imitating, deconstructing the material in the moment. In fact there is no original and no origin but a more organic sedimentation of references, gestures, intentions, etc. I am interested in dance because it always implies a complex relation between abstraction and figuration, between action as such and a sense that I can invest in it.

RH: Your latest research focuses on telepathy. On one hand, in the performances, telepathy seems to open up a space for discovery and speculation. On the other, it seems to produce another sort of tension related to claiming authority upon others' thoughts as well as generating a situation of invasiveness and penetration of others' private mental space. Could you describe the project you are working on and reflect on the relation between performer and audience with regard to crossing the borders of the private, the shielded and unsaid?

SM: The 'telepathy' is a satellite project to another project called 'This Place', in collaboration with Marcos Simoes. We are designing different articulations from the same format: basically we take the idea of *telepathy* or *extrasensory perception*, which means distant experience, such as communication of feeling through the mind, without talking or without being in the same place etc. We believe that to a certain degree this is happening all the time; we just don't pay attention to it. For example between us, as an artistic couple, there is a lot of mutual understanding in the work; some artistic couples claim that something like a third entity is created between two artists working together. We became interested because of its versatile and performative quality and the capacity to create a situation, which is clear to all the people involved as public or performers. We discovered that it provokes something in the audience, both whether they are sceptical or want to believe the magic. We have several articulations already. For example, looking him in the eye, I mentally transmit an instruction — like 'move an object!' — to Marcos, who performs it; the audience can see the message as a form of subtitle. Vice versa, Marcos can transmit it to me. During Plankton #47, we asked some volunteers from the audience to perform the message that Marcos and I sent them and the rest of the audience witnessed the experience (text and action). In another version, which is closer to what you are referring to, Marcos and I 'read' out loud the audience's thoughts.

I don't think we are invasively penetrating the audience's mind: we seriously try to do it but we realise that it is speculation.

I don't think we are claiming authority upon others' thoughts either; on the contrary, in all those fragmentations of the 'telepathy' form there is a critical claim about authority: in a way I can perform more freely or differently or with a different sense of responsibility if I am performing what I think you ask me to do instead of what I decide to do or what you simply tell me to do. In those 'scenarios' (more are planned for the future) I think there is a very direct, even if unspoken, connection between the audience and the performers: the audience is there to make sense of what is happening, to put things together and it is also willing for the thing to happen 'right'. The audience is 'telepathically' sending the same message too via its attention, concentration, expectation: I think there is a sort of strong magnetic field in that moment. The performers are in a very fragile situation but at the same time they cannot fail. It is perhaps a provocation of what a performance is, but it is more about creating a common mental space than invading the audience's intimacy.

I thought the situation of Plankton #47 was ideal to try out something like this. For me, 'Come Together' was all about the tension between a temporary idea of community and a porous perception of identity. *Time* was a key factor because in order to 'come together' we need to find time to devote to the other. As artists, we are supposed to be 'always' available; in the economic world they are using our 'fluid identity' as an example for flexibility but there is also the risk of lacking agency or drive. The idea of 'coming together' is the idea of gathering, as a statement of resistance against an economy that is alienating us.

The creation of a common mental space is a resource to make a performance together even without reaching a consensus, just by the fact of being there together.

RH: Based in a bilingual country like Belgium, where language is a main issue of contestation, in what ways do you relate (or not) your work to the problems of language (in the broad sense), particularly when language becomes a direct political tool for defining identity, causing divisions rather than communication.

SM: In my work, I treat language as a material more than a tool. I wish language could be performed like an action or have the same place as a movement but of course it is always perceived as more powerful in a way. In 'Faire un Four' the performers improvise a list of words, which are synonyms or homonyms or belong to the same family: the sense is equally intended as meaning, sound and direction. They use different languages and play with similarities and translation. At the end of the piece they give a *name*, which means identifying a singularity, give an identity, by looking at the audience: they try to find a name that fits a person. For the first sample of the presentation at Plankton #47, I worked with Lilia Mestre on an exercise involving moving and talking. The talk is of course influenced by the way the body moves: the logics of the discourse and of the movement caused friction. We ended up with a kind of interview about the Thematics topic 'Come Together'. I didn't want the discourse to dominate the whole situation so I decided for the presentation to write an interview from our short research and have only the *examples*, only the concrete things if we can call them so.

Finally we talk about a pack of dogs, puzzles, scrabble, collage... I like the way Agamben, in *The Coming Community*, talks about *example* as the one concept that escapes the antinomy of the universal and the particular, antinomy that has its origin in language (because of the linguistic capacity and necessity to transform singularities into members of a class).

Belgium is the country where, until now, I could speak and learn more languages than any other. People often speak more than two languages so the bilingualism acts like a facilitator in learning other languages. I think that if there are problems of communication it is not necessarily due to the bilingualism but to language itself or rather to people.

RH: What do you 'not want'?

SM: The answer to this question is either very personal or a manifesto. In a way, for me, the work is an answer. On the other hand I can try:

I do not want to renounce diversity and complexity.

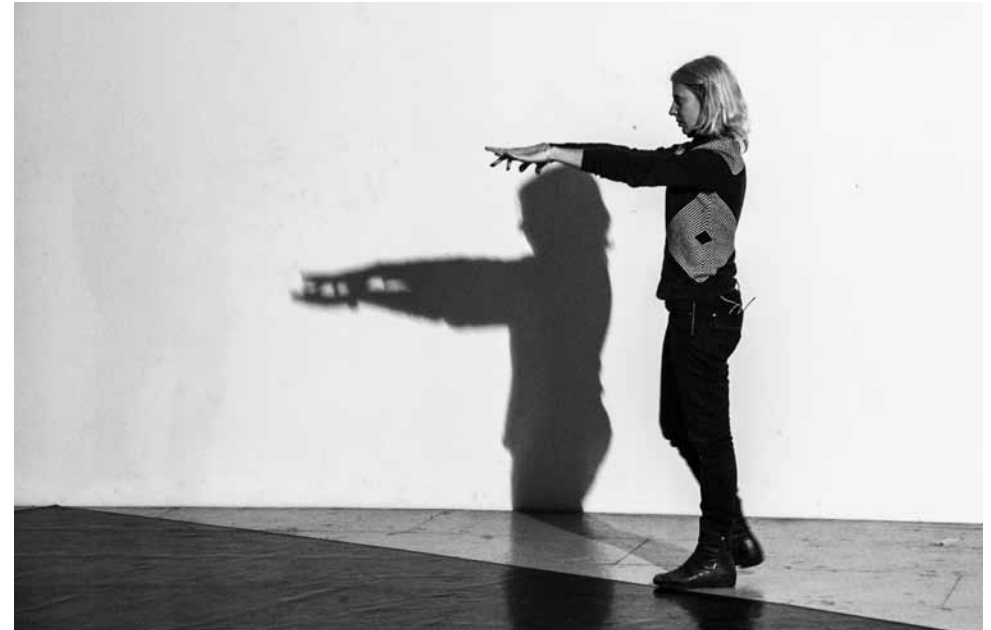I do not want to enter into an economy of simple virtuosity.

I do not want to always depend.

I do not want to see the same pieces everywhere.

I do not want to be unsettled.

I do not want to renounce to dance because it is difficult to see it.

I do not want to feel alienated by capitalism.

I do not want to hear 'this is no time for taking risks'.

I do not want to surrender to a dynamic of time that makes it impossible to 'come together'.

RH: What could be the politics of whatever singularity, i.e., of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist), nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community, such as that recently proposed in France by Maurice Blanchot), but by belonging itself?

SM: I would like to end the interview with a quote from Agamben's *The Coming Community*, which was part of the reader for Thematics. This passage gave us a lot to talk about and I don't believe we arrived at any agreement on what the author really means. It is interesting to say that maybe all our sharing of practices revealed differences in the way we do, see, read and mean things. It is mostly in the differences that the commonality resided during our discussion on topics like 'public', 'community', 'hybridism', 'alien' and 'marginality'. But this is maybe a new idea of community, like the hybrid body, a community not due to a condition of belonging (positively or negatively) to an identity, a community that is ungraspable and more a potentiality to become any and all communities.

'The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organisation' (Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 84)

Research in collaboration with Michiel Reynaert, Lilia Mestre and Marcos Simões

BLANCHOT "THE UNAVOWABLE COMMUNITY"
necessity of words like community, common,
communism = Myth

tend to?
lean?
bend?

we incline towards the other

LATOUR "REASSEMBLING THE SOCIAL"
the ever shrinking meaning of the social
SOCIAL = - "to follow" - "following someone
then enrolling & allying, - "having something
in common" - social contract - "live politely in society"...

J.L. NANCY "THE INOPERATIVE COMMUNITY"
the myth interrupted
the myth communicates the common,
the being common (it reveals the
community to the community itself,
therefore it finds it)
founder fiction: myth of community,
myth of communism.

interrupted
community

communion
common
communism
community
communication

passion for community
is spread, absence
of community can
provoke a contagion,
propagation, inoperativity
communication of the
community itself

DEBORD "SOCIETY of
SPECTACLE"?
AGAMBEN
ch. 13 "Shekinah"
expropriation of human
alienation of human
sociality itself

COMMUNITY

AGAMBEN
"COMING COMMUNITY"
ch. 19 "Tiananmen" = relative absence
of content in their demands provoked
an even stronger violence from
the state. COMING POLITICS = struggle
between the state and the non state
(humanity) → the state cannot tolerate
that the singularities form
a community without
affirming a defined
communal identity.

GUATTARI/ROLNIK
"molecular revolution
in Brazil"
reactivation of the
public life in the form
of micropolitical
vitality.

WHATEVER
singularity

WHATEVER:
the coming being
is whatever being =
being such that it always
matters rather than it
does not matter which.

IRIT ROGOFF "WE: COLLECTIVITIES,
MUTUALITIES, PARTICIPATIONS,
EMERGENT COLLECTIVITY"

NANCY
"being singular
plural"
WE are meaning
(there is no
meaning if
the meaning
is not shared)

alienation of the language/
expropriation of the common
risk: the word is expropriated from what
it reveals. communication vs communicability.

Temporary
being together
in a simultaneous
space-time
(exhibition for ex.)

H. ARENDT
"SPACE of APPEARANCE"

AGAMBEN
"Means without ends" → GESTURE: exhibition of a mediality
Gesture presents means without becoming ends.

Response to Vera Mantero's workshop

Chris Dupuis

"The Thinking Body" was a process of exploring the movements and actions going on inside us and finding ways to bring them out through movement, voice, breath, and writing. The intention was to bring us to a particular "state of consciousness" (presumably one where creativity happens). The workshop typically followed of pattern of beginning with an improvised physical exploration (either structured or free form) followed by writing (either structured or free form).

The workshop marked a turning point in my research process, shifting it toward an examination of my writing practice. Although I work in multiple disciplines (performance, video, photography, text, and interventions) writing forms the creative basis of my work. It is the place where my ideas start and where I figure out problems in my process. The workshop became an examination of the physical, psychological, and technical conditions under which I usually engage with my writing practice and a space to challenge existing ideas about when, where, and how I write.

Writing by hand in a notebook was initially frustrating for me because I can type much faster than I can handwrite.

Writing by hand forces me to slow down. It often means I can't get my thoughts out quickly enough before they fade. But writing by hand also forces me to change how I think. In a way, I have to pay more attention to my thoughts. I have to make a conscious effort to slow them down so the method I am using to record them can keep up. I usually think of the ability to think and record quickly as an asset. But through this workshop I began to examine the value of slowing down.

This reminded me of Anton Ehrenzweig's concept of "low vision" detailed in his essay Unconscious Scanning. The work examines how we can often see more clearly by seeing "less clearly"; softening our focus allows us to see a larger picture. Having an active writing practice for over ten years, I have a clear and consistent way of doing things, which leads to a consistent (often predictable) voice and approach. Since writing forms the basis of my practice, bringing into question how I do it has the potential to affect my entire creative output.

DAY ONE:

Group Physical Work:

Four people, one on the floor, and three surrounding them. Begin by massaging the person's body with your body. Use your hands, arms, feet, legs, torso, head. Press into their body with your body. Gradually the person on the floor begins to resist, to push back against the massage. The surrounding people resist the resistance. Find where your *strength* is today. Push back with your whole body. Find what's strong and what's weak. Push back against them until you find yourself free.

Solo Writing Exercise:

Free-form writing after physical work. Write for ten minutes. Stop. Reread the writing looking at:

Form.

Content.

Meaning.

Acceptance/Contradiction.

Structure.

Images.

Objects.

Sounds.

What do you notice?

Free-form writing makes odd associations.

It's easier after physical activity—the writing flows more freely.

Physical work always starts from what my body needs—when certain muscles are tight my impulse is to release them.

I always look for connection in group exercises—always trying to find my place within the group, meet people eye to eye, figure out who I am in the room.

The connection always comes when I'm *not* looking for it.

Judgement is always present. Acknowledge it and move on.

I like moving backwards/with eyes closed. It gives me permission to not know what I am doing/where I am going.

I never want to stand out in these exercises. I think of myself as part of a composition.

My biggest challenge is to be in the present moment.

DAY TWO:

What are your fundamental issues of existence?

Things that intrigue me. Things that repulse me. Things I defend. Things I am against. Things that move me. Things I can't bear.

Some things we can agree to disagree about. Some things we can't.

I matter a lot to a small number of people. In the big picture, I don't matter at all.

I embrace loneliness but I fight exclusion.

We must consider the experience of other people (or try to).

Life is a way for DNA to reproduce itself.

No one knows when it will end. No one knows what comes after.

Politics: the systems by which people make decisions collectively.

Wanting to believe that things could be different.

What are your fundamental issues of art making?

What do you want from the art form? What are the ways material emerges? What are the ways of working with that material? Formal interests. Structures. What is the work that is missing from the world? Is this what you need to create? What am I not interested in/avoiding? Why do I do this? What is at stake in this art form?

My art comes from a desire to connect to not be alone.

I became an artist to solve this problem. Now I keep solving it over and over.

I also want to solve/raise/point to problems in the world… things I think should be talked about that are not being talked about.

I'm not interested in entertainment.

I'm not interested in doing the same thing someone else is, unless I can do it better.

Challenges in art making:

Confidence.

Following through on ideas.

Knowing the difference between self-criticality and self-doubt.

Feeling like I'm in the wrong place/time.

Doubt.

Balancing life and art.

Giving myself what I need.

What is at stake in the art form?

We have a job to do.

We are in a position to have our voices heard.

We can choose how to use them.

What other people said:

Trying to not be in a hurry all the time.

Finding love, generosity, and sincerity.

Finding the way home.

Hope is the most devastating experience.

Returning to a value system not based around money.

Questioning 'perfection'.

Finding 'intensity'.

The tension between grasping something and getting lost.

Challenging our insecurities.

Big nature makes us feel small.

To keep feeling the 'tremor' inside.

The struggle against indifference.

DAY THREE:

Gather the following:

A text of four to five lines which is important to me.

A text that I like the sound of (preferably written by someone else).

A object or two from my issues.

Five minutes of writing on tendencies and fixations.

A sound or music.

One to two images from my writing.

Two to three actions, movements, or behaviours (my own or someone else's).

DAY FOUR:

Free Writing (While Other People Do A Movement Exercise)

Why do I resist this kind of work? Do I not take it seriously? My immediate response is to say, 'It's not my process'. I feel like I can't do it 'right'. When I encounter resistance my response is always to say, 'It's not my process. I don't work like that'. I want my own way into things. I'm attracted to things that have a certain elegance… a certain solitude. Is that the right word? It's always a stretch for me to show things and I never want to show things I don't feel confident about. I feel like this is not my way of working and therefore I can't trust the product. But this is also not the kind of 'product' I like. It's hard for me to see work as not having a 'product'… a finality. This way of working doesn't feel like it allows space for me to make something I feel good about.

I feel like it's a structure I don't know how to create inside. If I have a goal, rules, etc… I can work within them. But I always resist these complete free-form modes of creation.

DAY FIVE:

Presentation:

We find ways to agree to disagree. Compose a series of systems that interact with each other. A starting point we all begin from. An end point we arrive at when we are each individually ready. We begin by taping papers to the floor and walls. Each has text, action, memory… arrive at that point and perform what's on the page. Move to another page and perform again. Do what you want. Don't do what you don't want.

One common moment we agree on… *The T/SION Game* (that's 'shun')… presentation, lubrication, participation, celebration, station, caution, hesitation, legislation, illumination, segregation, correction, application, vacation, cancellation, connection, invention, consolation, experimentation, mutation, location, function, junction, recommendation, question, discussion, action, reaction, unification, elation, faction, action, nation, equation, situation, determination, evaluation, elimination, erection, masturbation…

INTERVIEW
of Anca Mihulet and Delia Popa by Sara Manente

Sara Manente: Can you describe your artistic collaboration as 'brothers'?

Anca Mihulet: The 'brotherhood' is a condition we have assumed in a rather playful way since 2010, when we started working together on the issue of marginality. It served to demonstrate the material condition of our relations as persons working with situations and discussing situations that actively concerned us. What I learnt from the 'brotherhood' is that you have to be there to understand how reality really looks, going beyond the appeal of aestheticising the visual information. Also, for me, the 'brotherhood' Delia and I developed drove us beyond the artist-curator relationship that doesn't always appear new and experience-based. This 'brotherhood' allowed us to develop stories, collect multiple perspectives, and sometimes be unpredictable.

Delia Popa: I'll start with an anecdote related to this idea of 'brotherhood'. In fact, it initially came to my friend Isil Egrikavuk and myself while studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. As everyone there thought we were siblings, we used to answer the recurring question 'Are you two sisters?' with 'No, we're brothers'. That's how we discovered the greatly bonding and empowering appellative 'My brother'.

Anca and I have since developed the possibilities of this way of symbolic gender-swapping into a social and artistic experiment. As Anca mentioned above, since 2010 'Poli and Mano' have explored hidden areas of society which we, as let's say middle-class women / art workers, would normally be unable to access in such an unmediated fashion.

We entered these two characters* and experienced directly on the street how it feels to be them. That, I think, gives one a certain sense of freedom, but also a certain understanding of being this other person, with its risks, inconveniences and, of course, advantages. The fact that we are doing this in our reality, as opposed to in a film, for example, challenges other, random 'characters' to become involved in some way. That became clear in the second part of our exploration, in 'Poli and Mano: Chapter II', developed during the Thematics residency at Bains Connective.

SM: How do you discuss and take decisions together?

DP: We discuss and then we take decisions together.

AM: Decision making (when it occurs, it is not a definite feature of our collaboration) is generated by our discussions and a common experience at a particular moment. For me, it is more about interpreting the specificity of a certain event, making the decision part of the process, and not emphasising what exists after drawing the line.

SM: How did you relate your artistic 'brotherhood' with the invitation to 'Come Together'? What do you think about the empowering sense of belonging of your collaboration and the idea of community discussed during the Thematics?

AM: I interpreted the idea of 'coming together' as a gathering of professionals departing from various realms of the creative system, based on the concept of invisible connectivity within different layers of experience, while creating common knowledge. And this type of setting – which is not necessarily balanced – can take us closer to the performative nature of the artistic act.

I would start by answering your question with an interesting quote from 'Art is Place', a text by the Indian historian Kaushik Bhaumik that I recently received from a Pakistani artist with whom I am collaborating, Mehreen Murtaza: 'Today, unfortunately, we have a "scene" defined only by artists/ artists-to-be and a few others who are either economically- or media-worthy. There is too much art and very little else in the art scene today. One does not lament the demise of communities (for art communities exist today as well) but a certain connect the artist had with life. The place of art was one where the ordinary and art grew together through the passage of many kinds of life. There was a time when the art "scene" could enrich and ennoble many kinds of lives other than the famously artistic one. One also frowns at art's self-willed sundering its relationship with that rather vague domain of experience and life – wisdom...'

DP: Our project at Bains Connective focused on the following question: What can be an instance of marginality in Belgium at large and in Brussels in particular?

The most striking thing about the city, to me, during this stay, although I had visited it four times previously, was the feeling that the city is, partly, a vast 'Gare du Midi', the Brussels South train station. I had the feeling of being in a place of transit and I also had the recurring experience of getting physically lost. This time, as I had already visited the touristy part of the city, I could focus on how it feels to take the tram everyday, to change at Midi, work and just be a temporary citizen of Brussels. I had the feeling that marginality is almost everywhere, in a sense.

At first we thought about researching the Arabic community or the more familiar Romanian community, but those ideas just melted away when we walked through Matonge, the African area in Ixelles.

There we went to a wig shop and met a male hairdresser, Eric, who convinced us to braid our hair with artificial extensions. In spite of its coincidental and relatively spontaneous nature, the hair braiding became a truly valuable tool for us to feel closer to the African community in Brussels and for me also to begin a research project on the history of Congo and Belgium in particular, via history books and documentary films, a project I have continued beyond the residency.

Many Africans responded to our new look by smiling or waving at us. It had a certain quality, I think, that went beyond style or fashion and to which people felt inclined to respond.

AM: Working under several formulas during the Thematics – within the brotherly context with Delia, encountering performers, visualising experience with a curatorial potential, and the organic exploration of Matonge – brought me face to face with a spontaneous process of dedifferentiation that drew me back from my normal practice. For me, deciding to have braided African hair meant that entry into a specific community comes as a result of negotiation, and on various occasions belonging to a community is a temporal process, more like an impulse and not a linear activity. In our lives, we oscillate between communities and networks, trying to find a balanced setting that accepts our dedifferentiated self that is representational. In my case, after removing certain layers, I chose to stop at the hair – somehow traumatise the hair and make it not mine, transform it into 'community hair'. In this sense, I lived for two weeks with hair that was not necessarily mine (even at the physical level, the hair was made out of plastic and it hurt when touched) due to the social determination to have a sense of community. In the end, the community was an African salon in Matonge where for six hours I observed in a mirror people moving around the passion for hair.

In conclusion, the sense of belonging and collaborating within a community is a combinative process of 'being there', the desire to be accepted, and also a percentage of trauma.

DP: Besides this performative research, we also tried to meet and interview as many people from the African diaspora as we could. Since Belgium has a colonial history in what is now called the Democratic Republic of Congo and many African immigrants here are Congolese, we attempted to meet Congolese especially.

I had attended part of a Thematics workshop called 'PAN / The Belgo-Congolese Third Space', with four Congolese actors and directors and three Belgian artists. The workshop focused on a contemporary movement in Congo called 'La Sape'**, which inspired our physical intervention on our personal appearance. We then interviewed one of the workshop leaders, Jovial Mbenga, who divides his professional activities between Kinshasa and Brussels. Another African artist we had the chance to talk to and discuss ideas of identity and community with was the Nigerian writer Chika Unigwe, who lives in the Flemish part of Belgium. We were also hoping to meet Sarah Vanaght, a Belgian artist and film-maker who has made several films about Belgium and Congo, but time did not allow it.

This workshop also made me look deeper into the recent histories of Congo and Belgium from King Leopold II's private ownership of the 'Congo Free State' to Mobutu's dictatorship and the long-lasting war in the DRC that has claimed over five million lives.

The research naturally took us to the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. The leaflet we got when entering the museum states: 'Fascinating overview of the colonial history of the Democratic Republic of Congo'. I was saddened and, to be honest, enraged by the collection of taxidermy animals that 'welcome' the visitor as s/he enters, and by the above attitude towards one's recent history, visible in small details at least. It seems to me (and again this is a personal observation based on my physical and emotional encounter with that space) that Belgium's public and official space has not 'humanly' dealt with this history yet.

So I hope this answers your question about community and coming together, as discussed during the Thematics.

Sometimes you go looking for apples and you find grapes. I think this is valid for gatherings as well as for personal encounters and projects. We went looking for marginality and a community, and we also found an instance of 'the centre' itself and, in my case, a sense of isolation. But I think we're still on the axis we were moving on...

SM: Can you explain how you worked during the residency until the final presentation at Plankton #47? How did you come to the decision to give a durational performance? Which experience did you propose to the audience?

AM: Maurice Blanchot, in his essay 'The Gaze of Orpheus' wrote: 'At first sight, the image does not resemble a cadaver, but it could be that the strangeness of a cadaver is also the strangeness of the image... What is left behind is precisely this cadaver, which is not the world either — even though it is here — which is rather behind the world... and which now affirms, on the basis of this, the possibility of a world — behind, a return to backwards'.

This fragment comments on the proximity of visuality that dilutes the content and the sense of the action at the core of each image or sequence of images. Our work during the residency led us to a final action that was supposed to be vulnerable and not fully translatable into image, an action that is intimate enough to create the decomposition of thinking — it is as if we have arrested the image, meaning that the

image is always there but has to find the right moment to produce itself. On the other hand, the repetitive act of un-braiding the hair in front of spectators was meant to create tension and impossibility on both sides — the performer and the audience. It was not meant to produce spectacle, but self-reflection, to raise questions rather than give answers.

Some years ago, I read some thoughts by Daniel Birnbaum on not documenting all artistic actions, leaving some blank spaces for the unexpected. In the two weeks of wearing the African braided hair, we constructed a durational performance that collided with our everyday existence, generating moments that were never documented, becoming elements of the story (African people interacting with us, even asking from what part of Africa we came).

DP: Regarding the final presentation, I don't think it was a matter of a durational or other performance. It became the appropriate form. We wanted to make the audience witness our performance on the streets of Brussels, and also to mark the end of that research. The residency ended in a most formal and definite way for me: my hair extensions and temporary identity were stripped away gradually, during three hours before an audience.

SM: How close is your interest in marginality to the idea of exoticism?

AM: Marginality can be exotic, as exoticism can be marginal; both marginality and exoticism are tempting social conditions that shouldn't be mixed. Likewise, exoticism without marginality has less representativeness.

While exoticism adds a layer of mystery to things, it can become a condition of marginality — a situation needs to be thought exotic before being considered marginal. In our practice, the two concepts can help us identify situations that require reflection more than a powerful judgement or classification.

DP: Well, first of all I think they are both concepts. They don't really exist in lived experience. The moment you meet someone from a 'marginal' community you see that they are the centre of their life at least. Or they can be a central figure in their community, so they are less marginal than your imagination or prejudices lead you to believe. Exoticism also exists as a package we receive from the media or mesmerising storytellers. It doesn't hurt in sizable doses. It can just be a symptom of curiosity. The intent is very important. As long as you are ready to deal with a certain reality that comes to you, you don't abuse others; you just borrow some of their skills.

SM: Which one is the 'story of recognition and representation' of otherness in your performance and in your experience?

AM: Recognising and representing are two separate actions that regard the validity of a situation in a context. In our case, the random discovery of African hair in Matonge opened up a completely new universe. The procedure of getting fake hair that had been attached and braided to our own hair offered us an instrument of understanding — from the practical manner of attaching braids to the power of hair in different African communities.

For me, the braided hair represented *small Africa*, and therefore a politicised structure, but at the same time it was a symbol of certain urban mythologies — as I started to visually connect to African women whom I met accidentally and who had similar hair as mine. Their reactions made me aware of the hair and also made me proud of 'my new hair'. The hair had been brought to an expanding context that was controlled and historicised when we went to the Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. While on the streets we were getting reactions to hair, in the museum we had to objectify our presence, so we took pictures with some of the exhibited objects — and this simple action made us look like extras in a world that doesn't belong to us, but that we have temporarily appropriated through the hair.

DP: I think that, after several encounters with what I call 'Discourse = what is said' and 'Experience = what is meant', as discussed above, our project was directed towards a confrontation between 'representation' and 'recognition'. I don't relate this to any particular idea of 'otherness', as I do not operate in these terms, but with terms such as 'true' or 'untrue', 'real' or 'unreal'. These come mostly from what I feel. I don't think I ever feel 'otherness', but I sometimes feel pain in others, or beauty or separation or kinship, say.

For me the story you mention was in the play between a highly representational static image and a partly familiar, partly foreign 'ritual' happening before the audience.

I will now share an internal monologue I am having about the image we staged at the final presentation:

An animal in a museum meant to represent power over an idea of wilderness in perhaps the following logic: 'This is big, beautiful, untamed and alive, so I killed it, skinned it and made it look beautiful in death, so you can look at it and tell me how big, beautiful, powerful and alive I am? People take pictures in the museum with this elephant, in order to gain these qualities. It is quite in the logic of magic. We believe we will be transferred qualities through association with an image. The question for me is, whose qualities do we want to obtain? The animal's, the hunter's, or both?

Continuing the analysis, our own photograph with the taxidermy elephant relies on the magic of the image, but in a rather twisted way. We are women, we wear traditional African braids — not exactly your traditional hunters — and we are quite serious and hardly proud of ourselves in the photograph.

So then, how are we to relate this to the public 'ritual' of 'un-braiding'? Honestly, I don't exactly know. It is a process of taking apart, of un-doing. Undoing representation? Identity? Perhaps it is a way of dealing with this 'immense weight' I was talking about. Instead of 'becoming African', I was becoming myself again, white, European, Romanian.

Had I become African at any point during the wearing of the braids? I doubt it. I think I just became more observant. I connect the 'story of recognition' to the German term 'unheimlich', the somewhat familiar and strange and unknown. All of them were present in the performance I think, as in our experience.

I think we sometimes need some un-doing in order for 'discourse' and 'experience' to get closer.

SM: In the introductory text to your performance you mention 'the law of the good neighbour'. Can you elaborate? How do you relate this to artists and their environment?

AM: When Aby Warburg used this quote in relation to the books in his library he wanted to leave the possibility for the reader to go through the books in the library, not just look at the one book he desires. Usually that bit of truth that the reader is looking for can exist in the silent book that is placed near the desired book. And only by going through its pages can one discover the missing information, that invisible liaison. To a large extent, looking around, scouting, and opening closed doors is part of our research method.

Aby Warburg's concept for his library is closely related to the art world as he didn't arrange the books chronologically, but based on concepts, on connections that existed only in his mind. Apart from this aspect, the visual impact of the display of books was strong, and at the same time debatable, while many critics consider Aby Warburg's vision as the debut of visuality.

DP: I think the quote about Aby Warburg was a perfect metaphor for our experience of the Thematics. As I said earlier, you find something in the proximity maybe of what you were initially looking for. I am not sure what you mean by 'artists and their environment'.

*'Poli and Mano' are two male characters discovered and impersonated by Delia Popa (Poli) and Anca Mihule (Mano). In 2010 the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu was sponsored by Rosia Montana Gold Corporation, a mining company pursuing a dangerous and controversial mining project in Romania. As Anca and Delia were shocked by the aggressive sponsorship / gold-mining promotion campaign, they decided to offer a direct response in the form of ironic stickers. As Sibiu's centre was under 24/7 video surveillance and the risk of being identified was high, Anca and Delia decided to use two male alter egos to navigate the city more easily at night-time. Thus Poli and Mano were 'born'.

'Poli and Mano (…) come from separate families from the infamous Bucharest neighbourhoods Pantelimon (Poli) and Ferentari (Mano). They address each other with "brother", are extremely loyal and dedicated to their friendship, have their own ways of greeting each other, verbal codes, and visual interests, and they listen to Manele and to house music; in addition, Poli and Mano are justice-makers, and as such they react when a brother is treated unfairly simply because his language is not sophisticated enough or because he is listening to Manele'. Anca Mihulet 'How old are you and what do you like to do best? Or wondering if marginality is an inconvenient', article in *The Long April: Texts on Art*, no. V, July 2011.

** **La Sape as stated in** 'PAN / The Belgo-Congolese Third Space' introductory text: SAPE (*La Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Élégantes*, or Society for the Advancement of People of Elegance). They consider themselves members of a sort of science and religion which 'escalate into real fashion contests and potlatches in which youngsters would display their European fashion designer clothes, in an attempt to outdo each other'.

I and Not I

Luis Guerra / Brandon LaBelle

Leave me alone.

I'm thinking about the scene in *Duck Soup*: Groucho Marx appears before his own image – a double, dressed like him, who attempts to follow and reflect back Groucho's movements. Groucho thinks he stands before a mirror, seeing his own image, his own animate body gesturing back, in unison to his own. Unbeknownst to him this gesturing reflection is in fact another person, a different body, an echo of the first. At the same time, Groucho doubts what he sees; he begins to test this reflection, adopting certain poses, crouching and then hopping, from left to right, then back again, waiting for his own reflection to falter. What ensues is a play of doubles, until it becomes unclear who is directing who, which figure stands as the first and which as the second: the double and the original start to perform as a single body embedded within the logic of the schizo – *I am already a double.*

I am not that 'I' that *my body* pronounces (in a kind of dark utterance expelled by a form without lungs, born like Celan's poem); that I is a ( ) inhabited by an evident disappearing.

I am not, which is to say that I is an *I* born erased, which inhabits an in-between, an interstitial condition which condemns any subjectivity to a non-domicile site. Erased and without domicile, becoming a space for a doubleness that doesn't mirror any one-situation body, but working like an open space which multiplies the absentee. So a sound, which names an evident disappeared, doubles in infinity what was born erased, and it embodies its potential resistance to forgetfulness. The pronouncement of a sound then as the only possible double which doesn't mirror but extends.

An echo that may return as the other of oneself.

A situation S, in a moment which is a ( ), into which a ( ) has just vanished. Then which entails the condition of being as (()).

Where then does the double reside? Where then does the double inhabit? But in-between, at interstitial codes, a double without mirrored body, a double as a path, through which what was thought of as an origin (the idealistic-romantic I) has gone forever and its disappearances have been opened by the potential of doubling. The 'I' has entered a stammering condition. A stammering unsubjectivised condition, through which every space of repetition potentialises a possibility, an infinity of doubles residing in different bodies.

The double is a fundamental performance of the self, of being a body; it is to be subject and object in one, and to experience singularity as a greater animate condition.

The double de-performs every possibility of *a* self and the being. In fact, a double exposes the erased condition of the being as an empty space, a zero. The double, or rather, the doubling condition is a constant becoming, a constant metamorphosis, an infinite splitting.

Bioy Casares recalls that a heresiarch from Uqbar said: 'Mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of men' (J. L. Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, 1941). A double appears to be a resemblance, a shadow, a host which inhabits the projection of an original, but a double is more than a remnant which extends the 'original-other'. The double increases the potential of reality. Borges talks about the doubling of lost objects, a methodical fabrication of something that has been lost or discarded, not just one time, but in different times, developing many objects as necessary, even becoming doubles of doubles, duplications of duplications to infinity. Repetition which doesn't resemble any origin...

Magic.

Psychomagic.

Kiss me.

Doubling is a black art.

Doubling is a dark art.

I also want to consider the carnivalesque, and the legacy of the Feast of Fools, as a primary arena for doubling. Echoing the figure of the court jester, fools were employed by the royal court as a form of entertainment; they were there to tell jokes, amuse the monarch, make music or perform acrobatic stunts. But fools were also expected to offer criticism of the monarch; they were allowed to challenge the monarch with differing opinions, and to point out wrongs perpetrated: to occupy the periphery; to comment, critique, entertain; to shadow, but to participate absolutely: to have a place by being out of place. The fool then is already a double operating to supplement the central position, the body of the monarch, the law, appearing as a black reflection. Carnival extends such operations toward that of the public realm, supplementing the religious ordering of Lent with a preface, that of lawlessness, of suspended sociality, where paupers pretend to be kings, clergymen take off their clothes, wives dance with other men, fornicating, defecating, and donning the dress of others. The carnivalesque is thus precisely a platform for subverting the established order in which the double figures as a vehicle of transgression.

The being out of place, without fixed abode, nomadly eventing, a fortuitous encounter, a form which is not a certainty to any concept but nonetheless resides as a central figure.

Doubling as an education on otherness.

A doubling which can't be oppressed by the naming as such.

I feel you under my flesh.

Me. Etc.

Alien-undocumented-undecidable-indomiciliado

The double may be seen or heard as the beginning of criminality, haunting, ghosting; as a performative of possible resistance. In this way, it is clear how difference itself is fundamentally dangerous; it carries with it the very possibility of a violence that might overflow to challenge, subvert or undo established orders. It might be what guarantees conversation, and true intimacy, yet it does so by wielding a particular power whose final form is always in flux. The differentiating otherness of the double may unleash that which hovers just below the skin, or the nation. Such enactments are additionally found in the Hauka movement originating in Ghana. Appearing as a ritual of mimicry, with Africans mimicking white colonial officers, Hauka delivers a complicated echo: captured in a film by Jean Rouch in 1955, *Les maîtres fous*, a group of men possessed by the spirit of white power adopt the military movements of British soldiers, donning officer uniforms, saluting each other and even commanding orders. As Michael Taussig suggests, their mimetic appropriation of the European colonizers performs to destabilise the relation of master and slave;

doubling here both incorporates, literally, into the flesh the order of the whites while playing back in a form of parody. A sort of radical miming that may undo the lines that keep such order in place.

The double is myself yet suddenly unnamed; the I suddenly with an unexpected echo.

An I and a Not I.

Schizo-flesh.

The mime.

Like the crafted mimicry of Pierre Menard[9], which not only reproduces, re-writes the *Quixote* of Cervantes, word by word, in old-fashioned Spanish, but rather produces, by doubling it, a new *Quixote*, identical to the old one, but richer due to its own historical context. Menard's *Quixote* has accumulated history since 1602, unlike Cervantes's *Quixote*, which just describes what was happening at the time. Equal but different because another, an extension, the simulacrum, the double becomes more 'real', a sedimented reality which overwhelms reality as such. Like a fake check, or fake money, inflates meaning by adding its own existence to the communicational flow. Here, the evental cut is produced by an anomaly which can't be perceived by the status quo. An anomaly which occurs as if it were 'normality', exposing the arbitrariness of symbols, and certainly de-layering the patterns of control. A copy, a double, like a ghost, tracing throughout the walls of society.

Pierre Menard not only re-writes the *Quixote* but also produces a new one, without changing a word of it. Like Duchamp's 'Bottle Rack', that object is and is not what it is, doubling reality without adding, producing an anomaly that shakes the conditions of knowledge production. What a double constitutes is a state of crisis, an anomic space, a subtraction.

A double is a threefold negation – of the idea of the original, of the idea of the self, and of the idea of state.

9 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', originally appeared in Spanish in the Argentine magazine in May 1939. The Spanish-language original was first published in book form in Borges's 1941 collection *El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (The Garden of Forking Paths), which was included in his much-reprinted *Ficciones* (1944).
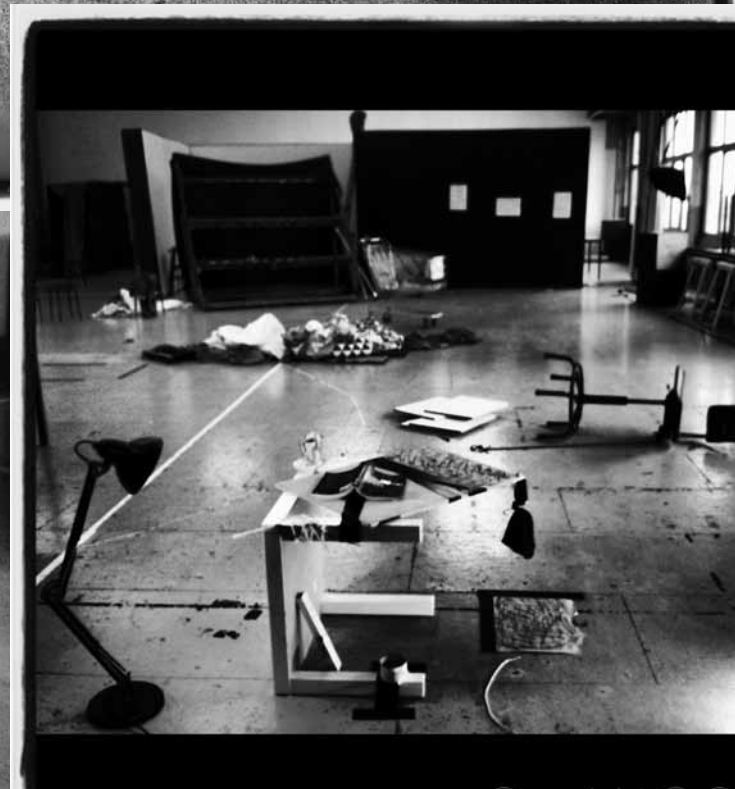
INTERVIEW
of Lilia Mestre
by Anca Mihulet
and Delia Popa

Anca Mihulet / Delia Popa: Could you discuss the ideas that prompted Bains Connective to create the Thematics residency programme? It may be interesting to start from there.

Lilia Mestre: The idea underlying Thematics was to formalise the practice of encounter and exchange that were the basis of the organisation as an artist collective. From the start Bains Connective has founded its activities on the gathering of artists from different practices and backgrounds in order to challenge, develop and articulate experimental artistic approaches. As a collective of artists we wanted to confront, discuss and share our methods and ideas. We also wanted to work thoroughly on the process of creation and invest in an environment where one can work continuously instead of depending on deadlines and co-productions or commissions, which imply working in a fragmented way and towards the making of a product.

The idea of Thematics came from the realisation that many artists which apply for the residency programme want to engage in a working period with other artists interested in a similar approach to reflect and practise beyond deadlines and to question ways of presenting work.

So we thought about a set-up where the articulation of one's practice can receive more attention and become a tool for work. The publication accompanying the Thematics programme is also a tool to elaborate on the artistic approach.

AM/DP: What do you think the 'local performance community' can gain from the presence of international artists? How did you envision the setting for them to start a dialogue and how would you describe the way this came to be embodied in the 'Come Together' residency?

LM: The line between the local and international is not so clear in Brussels. Many artists come from different countries and many work in the international context due to residency opportunities, co-productions and venues such as galleries and theatres. The local group of artists is not steady. There is quite a large group of international locals at least in the performing arts.

Perhaps the situation here is that of guest and host — those who know more about a certain context and those who know less — and in these exchanges something happens.

The flexibility of the artist as the perfect worker within capitalist parameters sometimes doesn't allow people to stay longer in one place and exchange and reflect with others on ways of producing, researching, presenting, etc. Gathering people who live in different places and come from different social, cultural and political backgrounds for a couple of months with the aim of sharing, hopefully allows to go further in considering these parameters.

We are here talking about not-knowing as a possibility to reinvent and rediscover one's own practice and at the same time get beyond the personal work and connect with a larger context.

I see it as a study framework for each of the artists, for the organisation itself and for the understanding of the system we construct together. One important thing is that the artists in residency applied for these residencies and are interested in this kind of exchange. I don't think this format can work for the mere sake of it, if the artists do not engage in the criticality of their ways of producing and are not seeking to place their practice in relation to other practices and contexts.

The Thematics programme proposes a two-month residency where the artists work side by side and meet regularly (minimum once a week) to present their work, exchange knowledge, etc. This is the basic framework of the residency. The aim is not to draw conclusions out of the differences between the artists, but to propose a dialogue where the interests of each become apparent and delineate the development of the residency itself.

In 'Come Together' it happened as in the other residencies, through meetings and exposure. I don't know whether one can quantify these exchanges.

To answer your question concretely in terms of the local and international, the international artists have a different relation to the residency since they are in unknown terrain and connect things differently; they open up relations. The local artists know the terrain and add the context

they build up. The exchange goes both ways, not just from the outside to the inside but vice versa, and other ways of looking arise at that very meeting point.

AM/DP: Undoubtedly, movement remains one of the utmost mechanisms to engage us socially, create visibility as well as the awareness of our bodies in relation to us as individuality, and in relation to others. In the same sense, movement can be an organism of manipulation. How would you define movement as manipulation?

LM: Forced movement. Non-emancipatory. Totalitarian. Dogmatic. Immobility.

AM/DP: Migration represents a socio-political movement that is part of a flowing process of renewal, conflict, regeneration of expectations, solitude, and community re-evaluation. What influence do contemporary forms of migration have on culture? As a performer and cultural manager, do you see culture in relation to migration as part of an integration process, or as confrontational?

LM: The process of social transformation is very complex. I would say that migration accentuates and materialises it because we see difference and identity in a very obvious way. I exist in contrast to what I'm not. I exist 'more' because I'm not like the other. The identity created through the group is perhaps the basis for the generalisation of difference, which I don't think is very helpful. On the other hand, if one moves it is because one is searching for something. One identifies and dis-identifies through relations with others and this is the basic process of becoming one. Culture is a living process that evolves on the basis of these encounters.

several communities

several identities

several communities

I am part of a multitude

a problem or enigma

PUZZLE

Sarai
small one: you can make it by looking at the picture (IMAGE)
vs
big one: you have to look at the missing shape (RELATION)

relation between the pieces is important

IDENTITY

Tarde in Latour "Reassembling the social"
"to differ is to be"

u'hA:
I am a mother,
an artist,
a curator,
a lover
and at the same time these things coexist

for example COLLAGE

artwork via assemblage

how can we make a new collage?

or which is the drive to COME TOGETHER?

a piece of puzzle looks indistinct at first sight

how does a piece of puzzle feel like?

the minimum difference

or same = beloging to something bigger

community?

difficult to say something as my identity is scattered

fragmentation

is it coming together only via talking, writing, reading?

COMMON

what we share
what we have
same

Elke in Latone
"I am artist,
politically engaged,
without money
and I still like
fashion.
(about artists today)

to have agency is more difficult

being there same time same space

In my work as an artist and coordinator of an arts laboratory, movement and exchange are very important factors in doing something. My latest piece, 'Moving You', lays out the movement and agency of 'things' in the process of becoming; it proposes the singularity of each 'thing' (object, person, thought or constellation) in a singular moment. Culture is embodied experience, and that is where I see the possibility of asking questions, of not taking things as a given. I see the redefinition and re-evaluation of relations as a point where things happen and change, where integration, confrontation and contingency cohabit as a process of always redefining the social.

In this way 'Come Together' wanted to reflect on this becoming community that is not dependent on identity, consensus and cultural background but on the lowest common denominator: difference. Is this a possibility?

AM/DP: How does Bains Connective see the role of an arts organisation as possible mediator between international artists/guests and the wider Brussels arts scene and institutions/individuals that are necessary for the respective research projects? Is this something you would promote, or is it outside the scope of a residency programme?

LM: I can only respond to this question in the frame of Bains Connective. I don't know what it is like to produce, promote or network projects which would imply an infrastructure that acts upon the support necessary for the achievement of a product.

In the case of Bains Connective, the set-up is to disengage from those contexts and take a look at the process and method of artistic practice, the work itself, and to consider the way we expect a work to be developed and where we inscribe our practice. The network we propose is through collaboration with other organisations, in the case of 'Come Together' mainly with a.pass, RITS and CAMPO, by inviting artists to contribute to the programme by giving workshops and presenting work in the Plankton, halfway through the programme. 'Come Together' had many visitors who enriched and opened up the spectrum of the residency. I also think that beyond the organisation the participants play a great role as mediators for interest in the work itself.

AM/DP: At some point in her book about the possible failure of modernism, Suzi Gablik mentions the ecological obligation of the artist not to pollute the world with more objects. In a creative world saturated with art production, how does a performer define the realm of interest that usually goes beyond the object or even beyond a clarifying view of reality?

LM: I don't know if I understand your question properly, because I don't know if you are distinguishing between an object and a performance, a distinction which I don't really make... or if you mean products and their capacity to take over all kinds of other relations with things, feelings, ideas and even creativity itself. I'll take my second guess and will give my opinion about art as a commodity. I'm not very familiar with the work of Suzi Gablik but I understand she's putting forward an art that goes beyond the making of sellable products that are recognised by their capacity to sell more than by their relation to society and the political context in which they are embedded.

Much as I observe and agree with her statement, it's an old story by now, which may have its apogee in our times because of the crisis it created. I acknowledge (as she does) a lot of art initiatives that go against this capitalist protocol and engage in formats that are inclusive rather than exclusive. Projects which, rather than betting on specialised and effective art products, engage in the specificity and resonance of artistic practice, open up to the view and knowledge of others, to plural formats and levels of reality; projects that engage in their process, in the confusion of their definition and outcome and propose the engagement of all parties involved.

In this I would include the performance as what is constructed in-between, along the way, as what contaminates and gets contaminated. If I think about your project in 'Come Together' I think about such practices of encounter that question identity and becoming – in your case, trying to put oneself in the skin of another and engaging in repositioning one's own social status.

AM/DP: In our view, coming from the field of visual arts, the performance community we encountered at a.pass and RITS seemed to have a background primarily in theatre and other performing art forms. What were the expectations of Bains Connective with regard to the meeting of these different worlds?

LM: I would not use the word expectations to describe what Bains Connective is proposing because there is no one goal to be achieved in those terms. I would rather say that we set up an opportunity to meet with others, other formats and contexts.

The a.pass participants do not come exclusively from performing art forms; on the contrary there is a wide range of practices in the postgraduate programme. On the other hand, the RITS students do indeed come from theatre. The scope is rather simple: what arises when we gather people that are in different places and spaces in the art-making world? What brings it all together is art-making and indeed the performance or performativity of it, the ways it manifests itself. And in this we question values, aesthetics and ethics, which I think is the most exciting part of it, together with the making of it.

AM/DP: The 1960s brought a revolution with regard to body and movement. Zdenka Badovinac, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, organised an exhibition and published a book in the late 1990s entitled Body and The East: From the 1960s to the Present, in which she discussed particular artistic forms that emerged in Eastern Europe during communism – street actions ending in police interventions counterbalanced by actions happening in the apartments where the artist would take the risk of making a critical statement against the oppressive regime. Due to the lack of resources, the body was the strongest weapon in generating the discourse and demonstrating freedom of expression. In the same period, in New York, Trisha Brown was experimenting improvisation and decomposing everyday movements in her choreographies, performing outdoors, working with unexpected space conditions, and adapting body movement to the context. How would you explain the similarity between the above situations at a time when there wasn't any real communication between Eastern Europe and America?

LM: This is interesting because it sends us back beyond the generalisation of identity being sustained by the idea of what is similar. One would say that for something of the same order to emerge one would need to have the same background, history or context. In those two different places without any apparent direct relation artists had the necessity and urgency to bring their practices explicitly into relation with the social-political environment they were living in. I think it has to do with the manifestation and persistence of resistance. The critical drive to understand and share how things function, what kind of power is at stake and the kind of life it proposes. The necessity to be political in what one does.

On the other hand, we are talking about two power structures – the USSR and the USA – which were fierce opponents in their conception of the world, but shared the desire to be imperial, to create a system that would control the entire world. They also had a strong relation in terms of intellectual knowledge, mainly in science. If one takes into account the high intellectual background of both countries and the way that was taken seriously in terms of education, one could speak about the practice in the acts of experimentation and writing that were disseminated one way or another. I'm not sure about the directness of such dissemination but there were surely some intellectual leaks.

AM/DP: How would you define the public presentation of the work of the guest artists in terms of bridging the art worlds that came together in the workshops proposed by Bains Connective?

LM: The workshops were tools to think schizophrenic bodies as possible critical bodies, bodies that simultaneously belong to different time and space zones, have different fields of experience and cohabit with those differences. If I relate this utterance to Plankton #47 and the intention of 'Come Together', I would say that the works resonated such bodies. One must also add that the artists involved in the residency were already working with these parameters, so I see the relation between both (workshops and participating artists) in terms of contamination and resonance and the fact that all the works bring the 'temporary community' gathered around the individual practices or the final event to the experiential realm.

All the presentations portrayed bodies constructed out of different parts, relating to plural realities. In your work 'Poli and Mano: Chapter II: An Exploration of Alter Ego-Ing in Reference to Marginality', you continued to develop the idea of the alter ego, this time in relation to the Congolese community in Brussels, creating an in-between zone that is not factual but rather experiential and dependent on the contexts it finds. Sara Manente worked very differently, taking the context of the residency to explore the idea of community.

She was inspired by Agamben's *The Coming Community*, part of the list of texts and also referred to in Peter Pal Pelbart's lectures, and decided to work on a performance interview with me to discuss the issues of 'Come Together'. This performance interview consisted in multitasking (talking and dancing) in order to bring forth a third, temporary, contextual situation which included uncertainty, vulnerability as well as a strong state of being. This exercise was inspired by Vera Mantero's workshop. And in her extended research projects, Rana Hamadeh works with different formats like performance, discursive and curatorial practices, interviews, maps, etc., which she constantly assembles and modifies. I can imagine that Peter Pal Pelbart and Vera Mantero were influential.

AM/DP: 'When arriving in …….. (new city), wander, looking for someone who could be you. If the meeting happens, walk beside your doppelgänger until your pace adjusts to his/hers. If not, repeat the quest in ……. (next city)'. This represents one of the provocations behind Francis Alÿs's ongoing piece based on the idea of the doppelgänger, the exploration and mapping of the incomplete human being looking for that someone else that can bring him/her closer to completion. How do you answer the quest for the double in your performances?

LM: It spontaneously makes me think of Brandon LaBelle and Luis Guerra's workshop where they discuss the double as a dialogical other that questions the idea of the original and the self, therefore having the possibility of becoming a critical tool.

In my own work the double has taken on several forms, some more tangible than others. In my first solo, titled 'Untitle Me', I was alone on stage but used video and photographic representations of myself to create a dialogue. In my latest piece we relate with objects, thoughts and movement as extensions of each other, which I see as a way of getting closer to completion.

But if I think in general terms and in relation to all the practices I engage in, I would say that collaboration is the most common form of double-ing, a desire to write and un-write at the same time, to take a position and be destitute of position, to engage in a third place that emerges from inter-subjectivity.

Practïsïng the Schïzophrenïc Body

A dialogue between Elke Van Campenhout and Robert Steijn

How do we construct a schizophrenic body in practice? In the workshop 'Schizophrenic Bodies I', theatre-maker Robert Steijn and theorist Peter Pal Pelbart looked into the schizophrenic body as a very specific territory for coming together: a zone of constant negotiations of time and space, of the (non)self and (non)sense of a centre of experience. From a practice-based and theoretical perspective respectively, both addressed the question of the 'body without organs' – the disorganised body resisting recuperation into any kind of societal norm or organisation, the body undone, on the way, oblivious to its own self-affirmation.

Some weeks after the workshop Robert Steijn talked to Elke Van Campenhout in a quiet Thai restaurant.

Elke Van Campenhout: You were invited to give a workshop in the 'Schizophrenic Bodies' series, and we talked about these as specific forms of coming together: not only with other people and ideas, but also as an experimental field for the construction of different relations within oneself. From the beginning you opted for a physical approach to construct or experience these bodies. It would be interesting to talk about these practices, about the concreteness of trying to construct a schizophrenic body.

Robert Steijn: I'll start with an anecdote. In my practice I once invited a shaman who talked about communicating with objects. He argued that everything is animated, that all things have a soul, and he proposed that we meditate on the central heating system. In the discussion afterwards people evoked the piping, heat, water circulation, etc. But I talked as if I *was* the central heating system. Because that is what I often do in my practice: I turn into something I am not. I chose to speak from the position of the central heating system, whereas he wanted to envision the materiality of things, the space, the surroundings. And he told me it was dangerous to work as I did, that it was schizophrenic. What he meant by that is that there are different parts in your centre of perception, and that it is dangerous to be able to shut one off.

EVC: Would you say this is a practice of displacement?

RS: I don't know, maybe more a practice of dissolving, like a kid who becomes other things all the time. For me mostly the practice is a dialogue. When I do the 'Deer Dance', or the dance with Sebastian, I try to envision their position and what that would mean. But at the same time I also imagine the communication between the two of us, talking to them, and that is a very blurry field. Or sometimes it's easier to put myself in the corner of the space and look at myself doing the 'Deer Dance'.

EVC: Why exactly do you think it was so difficult for this shaman to allow you to identify with the heating system, or with an object?

RS: I think that for him it was problematic to no longer make the connection between you and the surrounding world, but instead to become part of the surrounding world, losing your self.

EVC: And what do you think this self would be then, from his point of view?

RS: I think the loss of self means madness in his case. In meditation, or when I meditate, there is always a centre of observation. I have problems identifying this with a self, or whatever the ego is, but I'm interested in how you can objectify your perceptions out of your subjective experience. I know that when I meditate or dance I make less of a story about what I'm doing than when I'm not in that state. I can just hear a sound without thinking about the car that produces it, without imagining the street. Or you think about a car as a petrol-driven machine, thinking about traffic, about the machinery of the car instead of having this image of the busy street. Or another example: in theses practices there is a body that can cry, but no emotional identification with these bodily states.

For me schizophrenia has everything to do with the fact that you accept *your* reality as *the* reality. I feel that in my mind I can choose to have different belief systems operating simultaneously in my body.

EVC: Does that mean that a schizophrenic body is a delusional body?

RS: When schizophrenic people hear voices they take them for real. I once did this voice-over practice: I let my mind speak through different voices and followed their commands. At one point one of them ordered me to jump from the 4th-floor balcony of my hotel. And at that point another voice, which was 'me', spoke up, saying the game had to stop.

EVC: So it was a game? You were inducing these different states?

RS: No, for me it was not a game. I was exploring my mind. And in that experimentation this force, this fear, the fear of jumping in front of a train, became very real.

EVC: But how do you induce these states?

RS: It is very practice-based. I constructed these characters out of hallucinations that I had using ayahuasca and mushrooms, and then I gave them names, and started writing with them on the computer. And later I took them with me on a holiday to Italy, walking in the mountains.

EVC: But do you really talk to them? How do you keep them alive?

RS: It's very funny somehow. I start to fantasise and at a certain moment, they just take over. It is not so much in the voice, although in the 'Deer Dance' I do play with this a bit. But I feel another energy, another way of thinking, and a very different sense of touch. One of them, for example, was a man from Siberia; he was quite fat, and always drunk, and this gave me a completely different sense of my body.

EVC: Are they ever inspired by people you meet?

RS: Never. They are pure imagination. But I did trail them to the places they came from.

EVC: To find them.

RS: Yes. Or to find the landscape out of which they were born. When I met another shaman he asked me if I worked with characters. I said yes. Are there three? And is one always connected to fire? I said yes. And then he said that this is a very normal pattern for people doing this practice, that you always come back to three characters. One related to the sex, the roots, a being sitting at a fireplace. Another related to empathy, the heart. The third connected to an empty landscape, the mind, more intellectual. The Turkish guy was connected to the heart. I read a lot of books, and then I sleep on them, but of course they return in my imagination, and this character was connected to Sufi dancing. Once I was in an ayahuasca session, and I had to vomit, and instead of walking to a bucket, I fell down in the middle of the circle. 'Waking up' I was in a Turkish village dressed in white, and all the people around me were also dressed in white.

The imagination of the heart is hot, passionate, but also soft; it can break. But in the heart there is no you and me; the heart can go through walls. Sometimes I feel this energy is endless and expanding; this is the energy I use for the 'Deer'.

RS: And the mind?

RS: Well that's funny, I don't remember. It is already some time ago. But I remember it was a snowy landscape. At the time I wrote poems about my mother; she was covered in snow, and she had lost her definable form; there was only white. The mind, I remember now, was a woman.

EVC: And the third one?

RS: That was a man living in the woods; he's the one related to sex: he was a lumberjack who was always making fire. Very manly.

In this practice I learned to do these voice dialogues: I would ask a question, and then just wait for the answer to come. It was the heart character telling me to jump. And it was I, the observation point, that said this went far enough. I find it comforting to know that there is a system in your body that warns you about danger.

EVC: It is hard somehow not to call this a self. But you would say it is a vantage point? A perspective that always allows for some distance? We talked about many different selves in the workshop, though depending on different contexts, discourses, philosophies. And also about displacing this sense of self in space.

RS: I see my self as the weather. And I see my path as a kind of self-realisation.

EVC: But how can the weather realise itself?

RS: By tuning into the weather. So you don't suppress it. That's what I try to do on stage, what I try to communicate. Accept who you are or be who you are. But for me more importantly is to go beyond aesthetic and moral censorship. To step out of the social order. Like Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to'. Who are you, if you don't take up your social function, if you don't follow the expectations of who you have to be, and what you are supposed to say.

EVC: Following the weather seems tautological. You have to become yourself by following the self that you are constructing at the same time. Whereas what interests me is how you get from this self-allowance to the breaking-up of the social code, of the coming together. How does this conception of the weather allow for a self-inflicted violence that puts you apart from your social context?

There is something missing there. Because the schizophrenic body in a social context is a violent one: wanting to enter this body is about breaking your own presumptions about what or who you are.

RS: To return to the schizophrenic body and the self: I feel that in everybody there is an open potential to be a lot of bodies, a lot of characters. On the other hand, there is still something that manifests itself through this becoming. I cannot deny that I have a history, a certain experience, and this is a filter which gives a certain insight into the potentials that unfold themselves. I feel that the older I get, the more these filters open up, allowing these different potentials to appear. For example, the very quest for authenticity blocks this potentiality.

And then desire comes in: what is desire? Does one desire this status quo of being comfortable in what you think you are? Or is it desire that makes you break up this state? How do we arrive at these moments that we desire to become something else?

EVC: But does this desire have an orientation point? Or is it the practice of producing desire that you desire? Do you desire to become different? Or does the practice of desiring simply change you? Not towards anything specific. I have the feeling that a goal-oriented desire strictly speaking doesn't exist.

RS: I think desire is about breaking the current situation. I often have the feeling that there is a constant potential for change. Some people say that how we are has a lot to do with how we are in the womb. First we are very dependent on the surroundings, then we get bigger, and then we have to go through a violent exit. The desire is the moment just before this delivery, when you want to become something else, moving towards your surroundings.

EVC: This is a good example, given the violent nature of the exit and the not-knowing what is to come that accompanies it. But also because it is such an extreme example of a radical ontological change: going from being part of a body to becoming a body of your own. So to return to schizophrenic practices: what is the function of that violence in a desiring practice? How does that work? For me discipline is important. The provocation of the comfort of the practice.

RS: This desire comes for me from alienation. I'm looking for re-intensifying, the intensity of living. I could say that you always desire something that is not there.

EVC: I think desire desires itself.

RS: I think it desires life. It wants to grow. It's interesting to think about nature: growth is not just accumulation. In nature growth is accompanied by death. And that is what makes it violent. And it is pure movement; nothing is fixed. You never arrive 'there'. How I see the schizophrenic body in performance is as a hollow body. Emotions go through it, but it is not an emotional body. Since it is hollow there is no identification with emotions or thoughts; they just go through.

EVC: So they are not pointing out their own authenticity. They are just markers: markers of intensity. They are not referring to themselves, as hollow bodies they are not representing any kind of interiority; they are pure exterior.

RS: When I take ayahuasca, I feel really good in my body. I like having my body, and being alive, but it is not something that makes me Robert in my perception. It is just a human species. When people compliment you on your work, who are you to take that as a personal compliment, to be proud of that? That has to do with our social awareness. The fear of not being seen is a very strong fear, and I question where that comes from. And by meditating this question of not being seen evaporates, because you see from another centre. So what is that centre that wants to be seen?

EVC: I was now thinking about desire in sexuality. A desire that can only be fulfilled through the eyes or the body of the other: you only recognise yourself and your fulfilment through the desiring of the other, which means that you transform through the other's body, that you trust that body as the mirror in which you can recognise yourself. This desire is in a way fuelled by alienation, by the confusion between one body and the other. The exact location of the desire is at that point dubious: it no longer belongs to one or the other. And its orientation seems lost in a constant merry-go-round of relocations. In other words: in sexuality you lend out your desire to get it back significantly transformed and alienated from what you would have identified as 'your own' desire. And in turn this desire entering your body again transforms you. I would say that sex in that way is an inherently schizophrenic practice.

RS: I'm now thinking about unconditional love of course. I would ask whether this opening up of the body, sexuality as an opening up, is conditional or unconditioned?

EVC: I think that at this point, when we speak of transformational practices, the act has to be unconditional.

RS: Let's return to the discipline, the surrendering, the giving-up to open up new sides of yourself – by regulating your food intake, through regular meditation, by disciplining your life to get to other states, another way of being in your body.

EVC: Yes, if we combine desire and discipline, I think we come to another, and quite specific, kind of practice. Here we talk about the production of a desirous energy that is far from the sexual one evoked above, since it is in no need of recognition. The relation between the practitioner and his desire is here no longer narcissistic. If we think about silent practices in convents or in Buddhism, or about transcendental meditation, or even about Reich's orgasm machines, the desire is projected outwards, a pure gift. Or a practice that doesn't need anything other than itself.

RS: That's what I mean by unconditional; it is only sending out. In meditation desire is seen as something you have to disarm. But then desire is only seen in terms of likes and dislikes: if you like something you want to have it. But that is not the desire I'm talking about. For me the desire is precisely to *do* the meditation itself. I feel that the older you get the easier you step into the desire to become another body. I was in Thailand, in a meditation centre, and I observed that the younger people saw it as a mind trip: it was very hard to keep their meditational desire going, not to drift off to the beach or have sex. Then you see that meditation is really about dealing with this Buddhist question of how to escape suffering. The people that stayed in the discipline for ten days were the ones that had faced serious love-sickness or illness or had lost children…

When do you get the desire to change, to transform? This fetus in the womb, where does it get the desire to get out? Or where does this desire come from to discipline your body into its transformation? I saw that a lot of people learn to meditate to accept that there is a lot in life that you cannot control. But I do the 'Deer Dance' for very selfish reasons: because of a broken heart. I really had to get out of my body, I had to soften: my body had to soften, my voice had to soften. Because otherwise I could not live in the world in which that rupture took place. For me this is interesting, this point where you slip into the 'I want'. I was always envious of transvestites, because they knew how to transform and codify this – going out, being the star of the evening, having a male body, and completely entering femininity, the movements, the voice. Whereas I had no idea how to become something else, another body in which I could survive.: And now I only know that this has a lot to do with silence and a lot to do with crying.

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