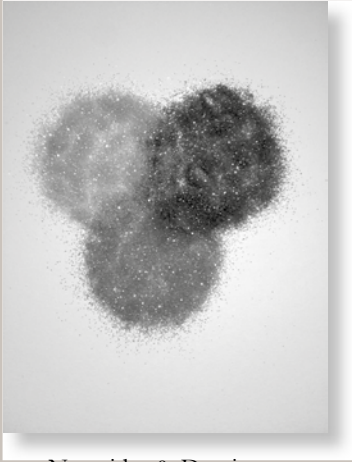
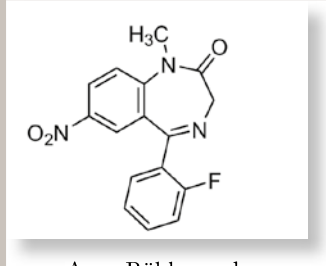


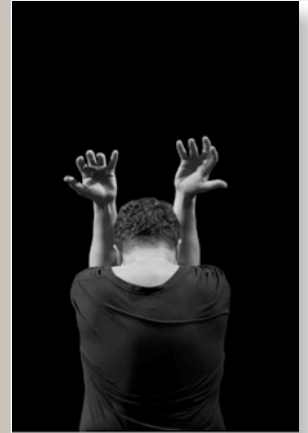
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EDITORIAL

on addressing

The body—physicality—is accorded great significance in almost all religions. In all its individuality and difference, the body always reveals itself here as a link: as one that opens up spaces for participation and sharing, as the connecting link between religion, society and politics, between the individual and the community.

In the exercise of belief, the religious takes place in physicality—and vice versa: in the body postures of the appeal and the prayer, in the gestures of worship or in meditative states, during religious rituals in public space, processions or dancers, or when extreme experiences of suffering or rapture are expressed through the body.

From 14–19 January 2013, the artistic-theoretical parcours *SCORES* placed the (dancing) in the centre of the thinking of the religious and its acts. In a physical and discursive act of addressing, in performances, lectures, films, installations and artistic work formats, it was dedicated to the bodies of religion: in the attempt to understand how the bodies of religion are formulated, projected and negotiated, it was an invitation that, precisely in the knowledge of the difficulty of making religious experience, belief and reflection shareable between the public and the private, seeks to combine the simultaneity of our experiences. Like the bodies, which—uncompleted, unfinished, beyond, projected, classified and disciplined, multifaceted, surprising, and in the process of change—are always also different.

The artistic-theoretical parcours as well as the current issue of the Tanzquartier Wien's periodical *SCORES* have been realized in collaboration with the Research-Project TRP12-G21, sponsored by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).

Editors: Arno Böhler, Walter Heun, Krassimira Kruschkova,
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DANCING IS
PRAYING WITH
THE FEET:
NOTES ON THE
BODIES OF
RELIGION

*

The text is a rewritten version of the introductory lecture that Sandra Noeth gave in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* on 16 January 2013 at the Tanzquartier Wien.

In her project *Beautiful City*¹, in 2007, performance artist Maria Pask invited a range of guests from the most varied religious and spiritual backgrounds with the call to think about how we could build a »beautiful city«—one that is not based on walls and towers but on ideas, on mutual trust, on a shared understanding of ethics. In the process she gave her guests a few questions to take with them, questions that I would like to adopt and reformulate²: How can one communicate one's religious views to others nowadays? What can be said? Where is the boundary between the necessity of sharing, imparting and the need to keep one's view to oneself? At what way do other religious beliefs challenge ours? What roles do existing structures play thereby? And what can art, what can dance with its representations, receptions and perceptions contribute to an understanding of the supposedly irreconcilable? How can we move within and with all their differences? And what are those bodies that are addressed, projected, negotiated and practiced in religion?

In the context of her project, Maria Pask produced a supplementary document: an eclectic list of books and references that deal with religion, spirituality, ethics and philosophy from various perspectives as part of her research and working process. It ranges from central, basic texts of the world religions to obscure and curious practices of belief and some random examples of artistic works and practices—compiled and identified in the awareness of the subjectivity of this perspective and the difficulty of creating this kind of uncommented neighbourhoods. We may be familiar with some of them; others we meet as quotations or in the media, and, for our part in this form or some other way, we compile, record, supplement or erase—and perhaps sometimes mention and invoke them too quickly.

The list as a figure, however, like an inventory or a performative score, allows contrasting standpoints to meet and coexist—without bringing them directly into conflict—and draws attention to the hybrid and dynamic aspects of concepts, practices and visions that appear to be clearly positioned in the context of the practice of individual, collective and institutional religions. It is thus

¹ See: www.beautifulcity.de

² Ibid.

not about an absolute idea but about the (perhaps sometimes uncomfortable) readiness and desire to question—and possibly to change—generally accepted norms and emotional as well as intellectual parameters that determine our relationship to ourselves and our coexistence with others. Beyond its selectivity, in the midst of the current debates on inter-religious dialogue, on political and religious activism in all the iconographies and vicariousness, the list invites us to examine our personal views and our knowledge. What it shows—also in consideration of the relation between the body, corporeality and religion—is not only the limitation, irony and the imprecision that are inherent in all generalisations. What shows *itself* is a controversial, broad field *without* fixed territory, *without* fixed boundaries. It stretches between utopian and ideological surfaces which turns the body into an epistemologically always Other—up to concrete experiences that describe the richness, the diversity and the poetry of the physical dimension of the practices of belief: of a field that has grown historically and, under the influence of more recent experiences and lifeworlds, is in a state of constant change. Just as the question of the bodies of religion, which in the same way are subject to and help shape this process of re-definition. Addressing, speaking about religion thus can only be undertaken as a parallel act between self-questioning and the analysis of our own preconditions and the examination of our knowledge in the framework of wider contexts.

The problem of representation is one that is virulent in various religions. It indicates how closely the question of religion, its rejection or acceptance, might be related to the question of identity and the communal, to personal but also national and socio-political affiliation. In this context the body in its very physical sense, as a means of expression and communication, comes into play often, such as in recently medially transferred and intensified discussions on the »return of religion«, in a most stereotypical way³, disregarding the ethnocentric, gender-oriented and ahistorical aspects of the (Western) debate.

At the same time, the relationship between religion, representation and identity construction is always

³ See: Jan Assmann: *The Price of Monotheism* 2009.

associated with complex ethical questions, above all when situated in a political context. Thus, the Indian-born English writer Kenan Malik doubts that it is really religion that is »coming back« when he writes: »(...) *the return of religion is as illusionary as was the death of God in the first place. God is nor more alive than he was dead then. Rather the very meaning of religion has changed.*«⁴ It is understandable that a decoupling of belief and politics, of public and private, of religion and science that started in the 19th century and unfolded also under the impact of the ideologies of the 20th century as well as the rejection of concepts of the absolute, has significantly changed what we describe as religion. And with it—in a time of uncertainty in which many people experience alienation from one another but also from existing social institutions—the authorities that provide people with security and orientation, with a sense of who we are, where we come from and where we are going (religion, science, political philosophy etc.) have changed as well. According to Malik: »*Many themes traditionally associated with religion—a sense of fatalism and of powerlessness in the face of cosmic forces; an embrace of eschatology; a view of the world in terms of good and evil: a belief in sin and, indeed, in original sin; guilt as motivation for action; the expression of penitence; a fear of human hubris; a retreat from reason into the comforts of myth—have now become secularized, and provide the building-blocks of non-religious, and indeed anti-religious, ideologies.*«⁵

In the course of the obsession of modern societies with difference and authenticity, and in reaction to developments and the experience of »dis-location« and »dis-affection«, religion was no longer necessarily and primarily associated with God. Such a religion is not reserved for religious institutions but, precisely in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts, has been occupied by a range of subgroups and movements. Alongside various other concepts, such as the nation-state or culture, these movements gained identity-forming functions and significance—and they often had nothing more to do with religion but marked a breach with it and became new alignments of contemporary conflict in the place of religion. Malik speaks of a »disconnected religiosity« that is no longer primarily linked to the maintenance of a

⁴ Kenan Malik, *The God Wars in Perspective*, in: M. Hlavajova/S. Lütticken/J. Winder (eds.), *The Return of Religion and Other Myths*, 2009, p.119.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 131.

tradition but is available through the mass media, »à la carte, from scratch«. In the last two centuries, he suggests, this has led to Western societies becoming *less* secular *without* becoming more religious.

Consequently, it is not sufficient to meet the complex question of the religions with the understanding of a particular religious belief or to charge religion with everything that we encounter in other fields. Rather it is a question of assuming a lateral perspective, a perspective that takes account of and integrates non-religious aspects. The process of differentiation, classification and identification, which also takes place through religion, no longer seems to be motivated so much from »outside, i.e. in distinguishing from the others, but increasingly takes place within one's own group and surroundings. Physical attributes, gestures, movements, ritual actions, etc. acquire a pivotal role here, as they are frequently associated with identity and as they embody religious and non-religious belief through daily practice. And yet, regardless of all differences and individuality, religion also seems to express something that connects us: the addressing of a »we«.

A PRAYER, OR: A BEING TOGETHER THAT DOES NOT BELONG TO US

»Dancing is praying with the feet,« says a Jewish tradition, and in almost all religious practices there are forms of prayer, of appeal, of addressing God. Internalised or expressed, formalised or freely formed it is always also a physical act of putting oneself into a relation, between intimacy and being together in public, a moment of concentrating, of transcending what is everyday life, but as well of belonging to something that nevertheless does not belong to us. Because in the moment in which we raise our voices—which seem to us so individual, so personal—in the physical act of praying, in the repetition of the familiar, the security of the prayer, in the meditation, it no longer completely belongs to us. In the moment of letting go, it projects or rather creates a community—tangible or intangible—that is always already a different one. Religion and specific

experiences associated with it—such as praying, mourning, caring or joint celebration—address the question of belonging, of affiliation. Naturally, it will not suffice to describe religion as a form of social cement and so to neglect the fact that religion played an important role in the development of our civilisations even before the emergence of the modern state. And in this sense it has deeply influenced our present-day life (from the legal system to moral issues or to our institutions, from questions of participation to questions of integrity). The different and complex movement practices, body concepts and forms of expression through dance that were developed in connection with various belief systems and which today are subject to constant change, in permanent reaction to their environment, are exemplary of this.

It is precisely this belonging that interests the artist Paul Chan when he considers what art today can contribute to the understanding of the religious. Art, he writes, is »an attempt to think the world as incomplete.« »The constellation of things in a home—including art—creates a network of uses and meanings that connects us to a place and grounds us to a sensible reality. Things are things because they help us belong in the world, even though their place in our lives can sometimes dispossess us from being at home with ourselves.«⁶

While establishing and reflecting on the relation between »art« and »things« he states that art—and so also performance and dance—*uses* things in order to gain presence, to become noticeable and perceptible, but it is the *incompleteness* of art that differentiates it from things: unlike things that fulfil their »thingness«, become a whole and are thereby distinguishable from one another, art never becomes a whole. Because even if it exists and is not just an illusion, it is unclear how it is put together and becomes what it is. According to Paul Chan, there is always a kind of misunderstanding inherent in art—a misunderstanding about what it is and what it wishes to be, a tension, an irreconcilability: »Its (i.e. art's) full measure reaches beyond its own composition, touching but never totally embracing the family of things that art ought to belong to, but does not, because it refuses (or is unable) to become a thing-in-itself. [...] In other words, whatever the content in whatever the form, art

⁶ See: Paul Chan: *What Art Is and Where It Belongs*, in: M. Hlavajova/S. Lütticken/J. Winder (eds.), *The Return of Religion and Other Myths*, 2009, p. 58.

is only ever interested in appearing as one thing: as freedom.»⁷

This incompleteness, this misunderstanding, the irreconcilability and the unfinished that Paul Chan discerns is also with the bodies of religion. They are always simultaneously more and less than their representation, their images and words. They always first relate to the other. They never allow themselves to be completely occupied—they nest within the tension that marks our affiliation to and our separateness from the other. And it is precisely here that the challenge that the bodies of religion pose to a fast life formulates itself, inasmuch as the interdependences and the fact of being networked have achieved value both in the concrete sense and in the ethical substance.

Arts (just like religion) are more than the attempt to create spaces of transformation and the attempt of freeing from the limits of everyday life. They reflect the transformation processes in the orders of the world and simultaneously share responsibility for them and are dependent on them. The instance of affiliation, the community, which we are addressing, has also changed and multiplied with it, because it is no longer primarily determined by relations to other people but also to the things they possess. Thus, belonging always also means being possessed—with regard to social and material aspects just as much as to incomprehensible, intangible thoughts and feelings.

Paul Chan demands of art: *»If art is made to belong, it seems to me that it is the poorer for it. This is especially the case when art is meant to belong to art itself. Echo reconciles. By forsaking the freedom realized in its own inner development, art affirms the illusionary reconciliation brought on by the state of belonging, when in truth it holds the greater potential of expressing, in a kind of nonjudging judgement, just how unfree his belonging really is.—Art is and has been many things. For art to become art now, it must feel perfectly at home, nowhere.«⁸*

AN ADIEU, AND A BEGINNING—AN ADDRESS

In his graveside speech at the Pantin Cemetery in Paris at the end of 1995, with the words *»trembling—out of the middle of the night«⁹* Jacques Derrida addressed his

⁷ Ibid. p 60-61.

⁸ Ibid. p.70.

late friend and teacher Emmanuel Levinas with an *adieu*. An *adieu*, a farewell, but also an opening, a turning towards—*à Dieu, towards God*—an authority, an experience that precedes our language: towards an unconditional ethic. Understood as the basic principle of our acting and being together, it is precisely this act of unconditional address to the other which today, in societies that consist of the most varied ethnic and religious groups, repeatedly confronts us with the pressing problems of our time. The act of addressing—whether direct and focused or like an animated whispering, a secret, an intimate exchange—is also a central movement of the religious, a movement that takes place in and through physicality. Religion—and the bodies of religion—works with this (physical) figure of addressing: in prayers, rituals and staging, in processes of identity and of affiliation, or in thinking of another, non-material body.

But who is addressing whom in such a moment? And in whose name would we dare make such an address? The *»à-Dieu«*—the turning to God as Derrida puts it with Levinas—does not mean an end for us, is no finality. It means *»to speak straight on, to address oneself directly to the other, and to speak for the other whom one loves and admires, before speaking of him.«¹⁰* The address, the apostrophe, is not just a rhetorical figure. Rather it is a decision that criss-crosses our language, where words fail, where they refer to themselves. In its call it greets the other beyond existence and is guided by the urgency that leads to the other and not to a fresh return to ourselves. It awaits an answer that lies within us, that never comes to an end.

It is *»an innocence without naiveté, an uprightness without stupidity, an absolute uprightness which is also about self-criticism, read in the eye of the one who is the goal of my uprightness and whose look calls me into question. It is a movement towards the other that does not come back to its point of origin the way diversion comes back, incapable as it is of transcendence—a movement beyond anxiety and death.«¹¹*

Addressing is also central when placing the (dancing) body at the centre of a thinking of the religious and of action connected with it: the concrete physical dimension of religious experiences and practices as much as the

⁹ Jacques Derrida: *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999, p. xi.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 48, quoted by J. Derrida: *Adieu*, p. 3.

attempt to interpret those bodies that are drafted, negotiated and projected etc. in the context of different religions. In the process, the body is subject to a double act of violence, in that it is as subject to the hegemonial body conception of modernity as it is to the view of tradition. In words, forms and images it is the object of various media and live narratives—and nevertheless its own language often does not belong to it. But the body disturbs and destroys this absence of possession when it breaks out of itself in movement, in being moved. It is more than the question of performability, representation or comparison, more than the search for identity and understanding of the world, or the charging of the religious with truth. In their movements of inscription and embodiment, in the moment of mobilisation, the bodies of religion themselves are the search for an own language—physical and discursive acts of empowerment.

At the basis lies an attitude that is willing to question and inspire, a desire to change commonly accepted norms and the way we live in relation to others and to ourselves. Dealing with the contemporary embrace of religion in the context of dance and choreography is an attempt to think religion with and through art and not only jumping onto a fashionable topic. The contributions in this publication are therefore specific and always also singular examples that are based on the most diverse backgrounds, methods, experiences, etc. and cannot be broken down or generalized; they are interested in the concreteness of every experience in order to open up to the dialogic, to a speaking that provides an agonal space, the »as well« instead of the »or«. As Jacques Derrida writes: *»This is an experience [...] with all thoughts that are sources, for I will never stop beginning anew to think with them on the basis of the new beginning they give me, and I will begin again and again to rediscover them on just about any subject.«*¹²

Like our list at the beginning, it is a kind of cautious and provisional inventory of the bodies of religion, which themselves are not completed texts but ever changing answers to a world in the process of change, an ever new challenge to self-questioning of our own relationship. Religion, though, is not a safe place of truth

¹² Jacques Derrida: *Adieu*, p. 22.

and insight, but a physical, ethical, personal, collective, socio-political act of addressing. In this sense, it is about questioning the bodies of religion constantly anew—and not to reach a quick answer in order to simplify or distort, which would ignore the complexity of religion as well as the complexity of the body. It is an invitation that, precisely in the knowledge of the difficulty of making religious experience, belief and reflection shareable between the public and the private, seeks to combine the simultaneity of our experiences. Like the bodies, which—uncompleted, unfinished, beyond, projected, classified and disciplined—are always also different. And then, quite in the sense of the choreographic, in the process of movement in space and time, if the bodies of religion resist any separation of physics/metaphysics, of matter/mind, of spiritual/rational,—to work on our capacity to think plurality in its very singularity and to follow the idea that every act of addressing, of turning towards is also an act of dancing.

FALLING Prey to Sleep

So far nobody has determined what the body can do;
that is, experience has so far taught nobody what the body can do and
what it cannot do by the laws of Nature alone, in so far as Nature
is considered as corporeal only, without being determined by the mind.

(Spinoza)

*

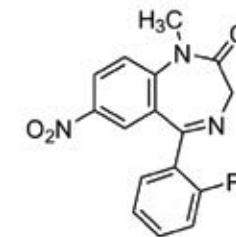
The following text is the abridged print-version of a
lecture, presented by the Vienna-based philosopher Arno
Böhler in the course of a lecture-performance titled
FALLING Prey to Sleep, performed together with actress
Susanne Valerie Granzer in the frame of
SCORES No 6: on addressing, on 17 January 2013 at
Tanzquartier Wien.

The stage of the lecture-performance is simultaneously the space for the audience. A large, dark curtain separates the stage from the classical auditorium, so that the performance space with its dark walls gives the impression of being in a huge black box.

In the middle of the stage is a sleeping area, where a woman lies on a small cot, covered with a blanket, obviously dormant. Dark cubes are scattered around. They serve as seats for the spectators.

The light is very dim when the audience enters. Only one spot sheds light on Susanne Valerie's cot, which is placed on an ancient Persian prayer rug. She has taken strong sleeping pills before the performance started. Now she lies there, on stage, in a deep, sound sleep. A camera projects her picture on two video-screens on alternate sides of the stage. While the audience takes a seat, nothing is heard except the uncanny sound of the breath of a man who sits next to the cot. It is the philosopher Arno Böhler matching sleeping Susanne Valerie. After a while he starts to read the prescription of Flunitrazepam, the pills she has taken before the performance. Meanwhile the live video-projections of the sleeping woman are replaced by her death mask.

Arno:



Flunitrazepam is a benzodiazepine used as hypnotic,
sedative, skeletal muscle relaxant drug.
It is the fluorinated methylamine derivative of nitrazepam.

Flunitrazepam is considered to be
one of the most effective benzodiazepine sleeping pills.

Just as with other hypnotics,
it should be used only on a short-term basis.

Like other benzodiazepines,
Flunitrazepam's pharmacological effects include sedation,
muscle relaxation,
reduction in anxiety,
and prevention of convulsions.

The philosopher Arno moves away from the cot and goes to a music stand to start his lecture. A spotlight follows his movements in the dark.

Arno: Lecture—Part 1
Thinking in fast sleep

At least in the western tradition of philosophy we are used to assume that one has to be awake in order to think and do philosophy.

I would like to question this widely shared assumption in this talk by asking myself, together with all of you: What happens with our common image of thought, and the understanding of ourselves, once we have started to deconstruct this assumption? I indeed assume that this question is not a harmless one. Rather, I guess, it *hits* the common understanding of our-selves and strongly attacks our generally shared image of thinking. For this reason it functions like an event—a hit or a radical caesurae in respect to the way we are used to perceive ourselves.

Let me explain shortly what I mean by this. Usually we are used to focus our interest on matters of everyday occurrences during daytime. We are much less concerned with what happens while we are sleeping.

Isn't this strange?

Every night our bodies fall prey to sleep—probably the most *hidden* and *secret* state of being that we all share—however we rarely care and reflect about this condition of our existence.

Isn't this strange?

We show so much interest in everything that shows up in our minds day by day, but we feel uneasy to think upon the recurring state of ourselves, in which we perceive rather *nothing* than *something* anymore. To *forget* this regularly recurring state of mind in which we are actually all *out of mind* obviously seems to be a widely shared tendency. Even philosophers seldom reflect upon this phenomenon.—Probably, because they are also frightened to lose their minds while falling into a deep sound sleep?

Isn't this uncanny?

Susanne Valerie: Off-text of her sleep

The audience can hear her off-voice. Parallel the text is projected on two video-screens.

In the abyss of a deep sound sleep, the whole world has gone

Every body knows this

One rather perceives nothing than anything anymore

There exists no sense of I-ness anymore:

Neither of my self, nor of the world that surrounds me.

The entire world has gone

And I have left myself.

I have become radical absent to myself

For myself, while I felt in a dreamless sleep

Escaping my mind, re-entering my mind

Falling asleep, waking up again

Day by day, night by night

Over and over again...

Arno moves through the audience to the second music stand and continues his lecture.

Arno: Lecture—Part 2

Kant: At Midnight—Being out of Mind

In his *Critic of Pure Reason* Kant argued that nobody is able to experience anything anymore if one's mind has stopped the application of the twelve fundamental categories, ready at hand in our minds to be actually used by them. These twelve categories are very basic concepts for Kant. They allow us to experience the world, for example in respect to the notion of *quantity*: being one, many or all. Without applying such basic notions in relation to certain sensations, Kant argues, one would be *entirely blind* to any experience, because one would not be able to distinguish just one single entity from another. Therefore, he claims, nobody would sense anything at all if one had lost one's capacity to make use of the twelve fundamental categories ready to be performed by our mind in order to experience something; *they* enlighten the world for us, according to Kant, and *they* make the world *apprehensible* to us. Only on the basis of their application somebody is able to hear, see, smell, touch and

taste anything at all *by oneself*. Our entire mental being depends on the successful performance of this most funda/mental operation always already at work in our minds whenever we are awake. For Kant this shows evidently that the whole world, as we experience it during daytime, is always already one that is *enlightened* by the light of the basic categories at work in our minds. Because it is their application only what makes sensation intelligible to us, so that the world around our bodies becomes bright, transparent and intelligible *for ourselves*.

Isn't it most astonishing then that once a day this operation is in fact brought to an end by the time, when somebody is falling into a dreamless sleep and stopped to apprehend anything at all anymore? At least once a day animated bodies even seem to desire deeply to be out of their mind and enter the wonderland of a dreamless sleep in which they perceive almost nothing anymore. The same happens to us with related phenomena like fainting or dying. In all such instances experience teaches us that somebody falls into *an absence*—a black out—, suddenly somebody is *blind* to the world; both to the surrounding world as well as to one-self. Given, as Kant said, one could claim that our minds have lost their capacity to make use of the twelve basic categories in such instances. As a consequence, somebody's mind is no longer capable to localize any single entity in contrast to any other.

On the other hand, experience teaches us that even in the deepest depth of a night, favorably at midnight, when the application of our basic categories rests and somebody's mind has entered the stage of a dreamless sleep, our bodies are still alive. Neither have they disappeared while our self-awareness has been reduced to almost nothing, nor do our bodies rest while our minds are slumbering. On the contrary! They are *highly active* during the night, even then when our minds have stopped to operate in the dreamless stage of our sleep-wake-circle. For example, all vital functions which are necessary for an animated body to survive are still carried out by the secret wisdom of our bodies, although our minds sleep. One does not stop breathing, for instance, at any stage of a sleep-wake-circle. Even beyond—or, to be more precise—even below the control of our mind-faculties one can usually trust the force of life at work in the cellar regions of our bodies that it will successfully take care for the survival of our bodies on a subconscious bodily stage even in the absence of our minds, when we have fallen into a dreamless sleep.

Isn't this surprising?

Arno: Lecture—Part 3
Deleuze: Encountering the Virtual—at Midnight

Let us name this state of matter, in which a body is still alive, but without any sense of self-awareness, somebody's *virtual* condition. Corporeally one is still *there*—a sleeping body does not disappear only because it has fallen into the black box of a dreamless sleep—but one is *actually* not self-aware anymore of one's bodily existence in the sleep modus of oneself.

Susanne Valerie: Off-text of her sleep

The audience can hear her off-voice. Parallel the text is projected on two video-screens.

In the virtual stage of being
 One is actually closer to the absence of oneself
 Than to the presence of oneself
 Night by night
 Day by day
 One enters the black box of the virtual
 Falling prey to sleep, waking up again
 Escaping the world, reentering the world
 Day by day
 Night by night
 Isn't this strange?
 Rather to be nothing than something
 Rather to be absent than present
 Rather to be gone, than here
 Over and over again...
 Isn't this strange?

Arno:

Night after night our bodies exercise this performance of reducing our self-awareness virtually to nothing. Thereby they proof nothing less than the existence of the virtual and its significance for our lives. Because, most surprisingly, this break, in which somebody is quasi *ob-scene*, as Krassimira Kruschkova probably would say¹—is precisely one of the most funda/mental *needs* of anybody to survive. At least at some times,

everybody is *forced* by the very Nature of one's bodily life-force to *simulate* a state of being that very much resembles the stage of death.

Simulating death—simulated death?
As if one was dead²
As if somebody was dead already before one is dead
In advance
In a simulated, fictional manner
Virtually dead
Not yet, but soon
Perhaps very soon—très bientôt!³

Virtually every night animated bodies do simulate this stage of being in which somebody encounters the virtual plane of one's corporeal existence virtually without oneself. Even human beings, who are so proud of their minds, are *compelled* to perform this funda/mental body-exercise over and over again for the sake of their survival (»Über-Leben«).

Isn't this strange?

The philosopher addresses the audience very directly.

»Can you explain to me why this has to happen to us all? What is the meaning of this iterative event that haunts us virtually every night in the course of our repetitive personal encounter with the virtual?«

Obviously, we are not at all free to decide, whether we would like to fall asleep or not. In reality we are rather *forced* to sleep, virtually in a machine-like manner. Sooner or later this will happen to us all. This is precisely the reason why I emphasized the term »FALLING« in the title of this lecture »FALLING prey to sleep«. If somebody tries to act against this basic matter of anybody's life, everybody will inevitably experience that *the compulsion to sleep* overrules our will to stay awake, in fact quite soon. Even if one tries to remain awake by using chemical drugs, one will, without fail, face strong side effects after a relatively short time.—This is the fact because in this case (»in diesem Fall«) somebody would miss the virtual stage of being, in which one is not only subject to sleep and rest but as well *regenerating*.

Isn't this wonderful?

We seem to be able to regenerate even in the absence of our minds? However, then our sleep-modus cannot be adequately called a *deficient* condition of our bodily existence only! One does not only *lose* one's self-consciousness in this stage of everybody's life, our bodies also get the chance to attest their secret knowledge to *regenerate* themselves in particular in the dreamless stage of somebody's mind. For sure, one loses the self-awareness of the world and of one-self while falling prey to sleep. But something is obviously *not sleeping at all while our minds are slumbering*. Our experience verifies this regularly: One usually *recovers* by virtue of a deep sound sleep. If somebody was prevented from sleeping for a longer period of time, it would be a torture for him! Everybody knows this—

Isn't this astonishing?

Usually we feel fresh after a deep sound sleep. Reenergized and revitalized, liberated from several tensions experienced in the daytime.

Isn't this a piece of good luck?

But how should we call this most welcome *force* that recovers our bodies, while we have been falling out of our minds into a dreamless sleep, favorably at midnight? What is its name? Has it a name? Do we know it, this force, which forces us to sleep?

Arno: Lecture—Part 4

Spinoza: The nocturnal performance of sleepwalkers

Baruch de Spinoza, the philosopher of immanence—Deleuze therefore called him the Christ of philosophy, because he refused any compromise with the idea of transcendence—, is a good example of those rare philosophers who did not forget to reflect on bodies in their sleeping mode. Namely in his *Ethics*, in the course of his philosophical struggle with René Descartes, he presented us with another thoughtful image of bodies which are out of mind but still operative: the performance of sleep-walkers. Their animated bodies walk, but

without being mentally aware, at least at present, of what they are actually doing.

»For no[body] so far has had such an accurate knowledge of the [fabric] of the body that [s/he] can explain all its functions; to say nothing of the many things that are observed in the lower animals which far exceed human sagacity, and of the fact that sleepwalkers do many things in their sleep that they would not dare to do whilst awake. This shows sufficiently that the body can, by virtue of the laws of its own nature, do many things at which its mind is astonished.« (Spinoza, Ethics, Third Book, Scholium Prop. 2, p. 167).

What astonishing propositions!—A body can operate without being guided by the mind, Spinoza says. It can work and function even out of mind, just by following the laws of its very own bodily drives! But how is this possible? How can a body move through space and time without controlling the performance it is performing, in a mindful manner? Who is performing the walking of this walk?

Such questions necessarily arise, since sleepwalkers obviously act in an unconscious, machine-like, rather than in a self-conscious fashion. Like the sun shines, so do they walk their walk. No mind commands them to do so; neither the mind of God nor of any other external or internal subject. Being condemned to shine and driven to walk, the sun and the sleepwalkers just follow the most fundamental drive of their bodily existences; neither of them *has decided* to do what they are actually doing. Therefore one cannot separate the subject of the proposition »*the sun shines*«—that is, *the sun*—from the predicate *shining*. Nor can one separate the subject of the proposition »*the sleepwalker walks*«—namely *the sleepwalker*—from the walk s/he is doing. There exists no *doer* at all behind the performance of such an action. For thinkers like Spinoza, Nietzsche or Deleuze, to mention just some, the doer is just a fiction, generated for the sake of moral reasons in order to make a body responsible for what it is doing. In fact, a body just performs what it has to perform according to the driving force (*conatus*) which operates, rules, commands and manages the design of somebody's deeds in accordance with somebody's very own Nature.

This was the great provocation of Spinoza against the theologians of his time, when he claimed our world not to be the creation of a subject nor the outcome of a conscious plan of a demiurge. Because for him it is rather the expression of the self-revelation of Nature herself, in herself, through herself and out of herself, without a beginning and end. Nobody can make her stop doing so. Like a spider produces its web out of its own body, Nature dances her creative dance eternally, because she is simply driven, forced and compelled to act creatively *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, once and for all—in an infinite rather than a finite mode in accordance with her creative bodily Nature. She was operative already before we came into existence, and she will be operative after we will have passed away. Or, to bring an old ironic Viennese saying on the table: The period of time somebody *has not been* alive is infinitely more permanent than the time one *will have been* alive in the end. But this also means that, *before* somebody has been alive and *after* somebody will have been alive, anybody has been *virtually* present only and will be *virtually* present only for oneself.

Again the philosopher addresses the audience very directly.

»But what does *virtually* signify in this context? Do *you* have any idea? What should it mean *to be* in respect to the time we have not yet been and will not be bodily existent anymore? Is this what Heidegger called the forgettingness of being? That this question does not make any sense for us anymore, despite the fact that we are mortal beings? Is this theology? Is this still philosophy?«

Arno: Lecture—Part 5 Nietzsche: The Deepest Depth of Midnight

In addition to Spinoza, once again, it was Nietzsche who escaped the oblivion of the phenomena of »night« and »sleep« in the western canon of philosophy. He is so often *the great Other* in respect to our traditional western canon of doing philosophy. Maybe because he practiced philosophy as a matter of art, of dance—as an arts-based research matter—rather than a science. Therefore, perhaps, the Tanzquartier Vienna is a most proper place to speak of him and his philosophy.

Arno walks to the cot, where Susanne Valerie is still in her deep sleep on stage.

To give an example: In his philosophical poem *Thus spoke Zarathustra, The Drunken Song*, Nietzsche explicitly faces the challenge to ask himself, probably in the name of all of us, what happens to us during midnight? (By the way, a question addressed to Heidegger: »Did Nietzsche therefore not overcome the forgettingness of being?« I will ask Heidegger this question after my death, if I will get the opportunity.)

To be able to listen and hear the drunken song performed in the abysmal depth of our bodily lives at midnight, one first has to calm down and become silent, according to Nietzsche.

Arno sits in front of Susanne's cot, listening to the off-text of her sleep. A picture of Nietzsche FALLING prey to madness is projected on the two video-screens.

Susanne Valerie: Off-text of her sleep

The audience can hear her off-voice. Parallel the text is projected on two video-screens.

Nietzsche, *The Drunken Song*

»Still! Still!

Here things are heard that by day may not become loud;
but now, in the cool air,
when all the noise of your hearts too has become still—
now it speaks, now it is heard,
now it steals into nocturnal, over-awake souls. [...]
Do you not hear how it speaks secretly, terribly, cordially to you—
the old deep, deep midnight?«⁴

Arno:

Somebody who is ready to listen to this drunken, probably most silent and sensitive song of anybody's life, favorably performed at midnight in a highly relaxed bodily condition, first has to calm down to hear, what she—the old deep, deep midnight—speaks to us. Most secretly, terribly, cordially. Because only after the noise of our heart has been tuned down somebody is in fact prepared to *sense* the drunken song performed in the middle of a night. Nietzsche seems to believe

that the extra-ordinary orchestration of this sonorous performance actually takes place reiteratively in everybody's life night after night, but that only few of us are actually able *to ourselves visit* and *apprehend* this most stimulating performance. That means, we actually sense it every night, but unfortunately almost everybody seems to lose his or her self-awareness during this performance. Only some nocturnal over-awake souls, he says, gain a personal, that is, a self-reflexive access to this most discrete event in the deepest depth of our bodily lives, due to *their calmness—still! still!*—that allows them to enter and sense this extra-ordinary stage of being virtually nothing.

Patañjali, an Indian philosopher who designed the Yoga-Sutra roughly between 350–450 CE, tells us a very similar story. Yoga, he writes in Yoga-Sutra 1.2, can be defined as *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*—Yoga is the calming down of our embodied mind (*citta*), in which its activities (*vṛtti*) are forced to rest (*nirodha*). — An experience which Indian philosophy too describes as highly stimulating, energizing, gay and bright.⁵ Sweet as honey. As if our sensual experience was withdrawn from external objects into the most secret affairs of our bodily lives—somebody's drive to survive (»überleben«). Usually Indian philosophy calls this conversion of our sensual activities *pratyāhāra*. Yoga-Sutra 2.54 describes *pratyāhāra* as a retreat of our sense organs (*indriya*), in which they start to *simulate* (*anukara*) the Nature of our Self virtually in opposition (*prati*) to their ordinary function in daytimes.

Do we face the secret resource of a religious experience of bodies here? Right here, where over-awake souls awake to the drunken song the old deep, deep midnight unveils to us, whenever she speaks to us? ...Secretly, ...terribly, ...cordially, ...to me, ...to you?

Not as a transcendent voice we encounter out or even beyond our own bodily existence, but as the drunken voice of midnight that can be heard only by calm bodies in their most relaxed bodily stage?

Arno sits besides the cot on the ancient Persian prayer rug and addresses the following pillow talk to Susanne Valerie.

Still! Still!

Because now, when our nervous system is subject to rest

and our whole body has entered its sleep modus
a usually unheard conversation can be heard
a delicate night-song of our souls,
in which every body reveals its most secret longings, desires,
drives;
a night song shows up in a silent way.
One can hardly hear it.
But some can!
When it steals its way into nocturnal, over-awake souls!
Do you hear it?

Arno to the Audience

Thank you.

Susanne Valerie is still sleeping.

¹ Krassimira Kruschkova (Hg.), *Ob?SCENE. Zur Präsenz der Absenz im zeitgenössischen Tanz, Theater und Film*, Tanzquartier Wien: Wien 2005, S. 9–29.

² Cf. Jacques Derrida, *As if I were Dead. An Interview with Jacques Derrida*, Turia + Kant: Wien 2000.

³ Cf. Arno Böhler, »Gut ist es, an andern sich / Zu halten. Denn keiner trägt das Leben allein«, in: Patrick Bauer, Bernd Bösel, Dieter Mersch (Hg.), *Die Stile Martin Heideggers*, Alber Verlag: Freiburg/München 2013, S. 158–177.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for all and None*. Translated and with a preface by Walter Kaufmann, The Modern Library: New York 1995, pp. 319–320.

⁵ Cf. Arno Böhler, *Open Bodies*, in: Axel Michaels, Christoph Wulf (eds.), *Images of the Body in India*, Routledge: New Delhi 2011, S. 109–122.

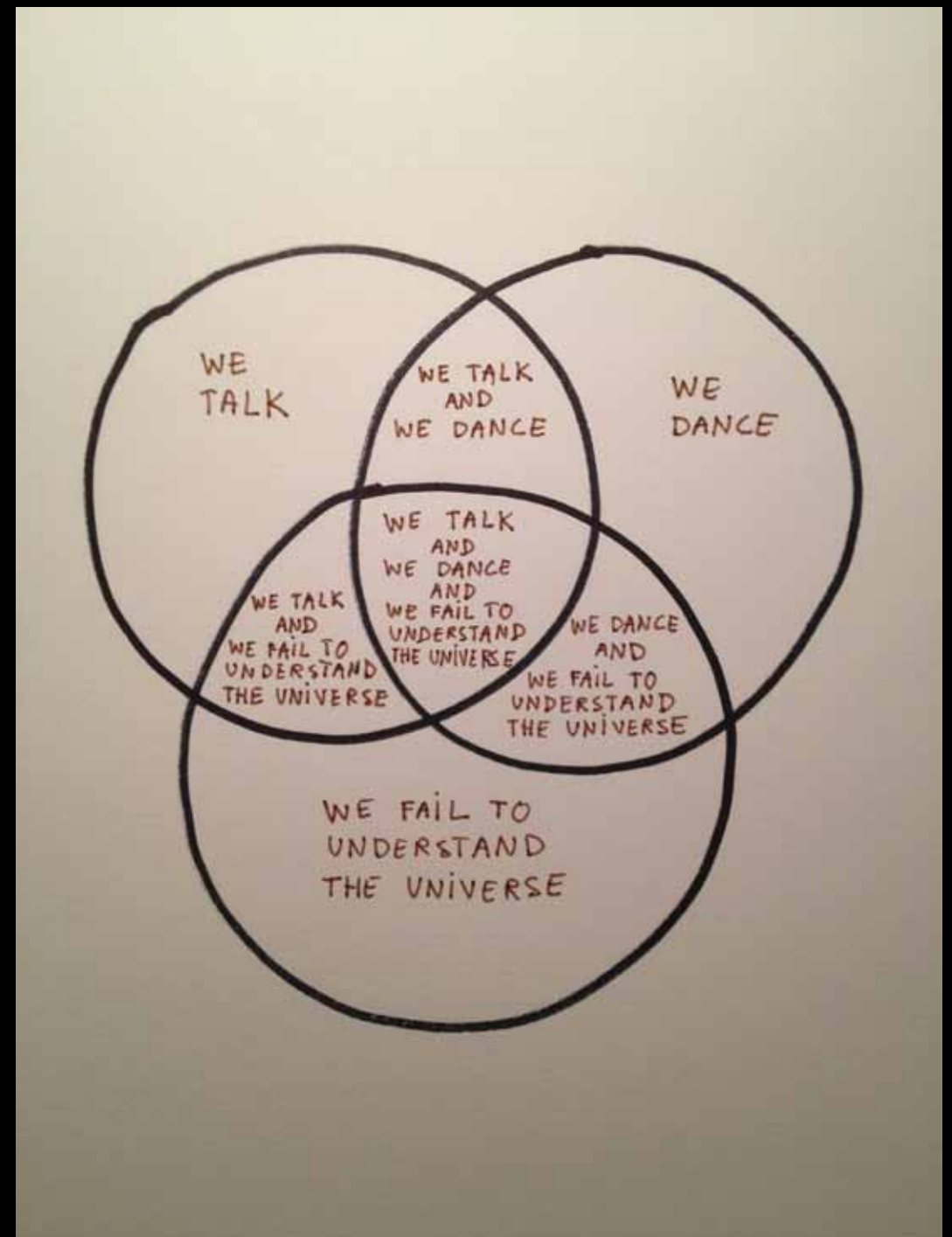
SPEAKING OF



WHICH

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Navaridas & Deutinger's lecture performance *SPEAKING OF WHICH* was presented on 16 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at Tanzquartier Wien.





Speaking of which, according to Moore's law, in computer hardware, we observe a doubling of computing power every two years.



This means sooner or later we will get to a place where simulating a few billion people will be as easy...



...as uploading a cat-video from your phone.



Even our contemporary ability to run realistic simulations is not anymore the issue.



The issue is to argue whether we might already be living inside a simulation.



There is a theory which says that a »programmer« from the future designed our reality.



And there are astounding similarities between our reality and the reality of video game environments.



The Universe is pixelated in time, space, volume, and energy.



There exists a fundamental unit that you cannot break down into anything smaller. This means the Universe is made of a finite number of these units.



This also means there are a finite number of things the Universe can be. It is not infinite...



...it is computable. And if it only behaves in a finite way when it's being observed, the question is: Is it being computed?



Then there is a mathematical parallel: If two things are mathematically equivalent, they are the same.



So the Universe is mathematically equivalent to the simulation of the Universe. Unless...



...you believe there's something magical about consciousness...



...you have to assume that at some point it can be simulated by a computer, or in other words, replicated.



There are two ways one might accomplish an artificial human brain in the future.



One of them is to reverse engineer it, but it would be far easier to evolve a circuit or an architecture that could become conscious.



Perhaps in the next 10 to 30 years, we'll be able to incorporate artificial consciousness into our machines. If you make a simple calculation using Moore's law...



...you'll find that supercomputers within the next 10 years will have the ability to compute an entire human lifetime of about eighty years, including every thought ever conceived during that lifetime, in the span of a month.



In 30 years, a PlayStation will be able to compute about 10,000 human lifetimes simultaneously in real time, or about a human lifetime in one hour.



So right now, we're at the threshold of being able to create a universe, and we in turn could already be living inside a simulation, which could be in turn yet another simulation...



...and our simulated beings could also create simulations.



So, if there is a creator, and there will be a creator in the future, and that's us, this also means if there's a creator for our world here, it's also us.



This means we are both God and servants of God, and that we made it all.



It's almost too much.



Speaking of which,...



* texts extracted from Ben Makuch: *Whoa Dude, Are We Inside A Computer Now?*, VICE Magazine, Weird Science Issue, September 2012

WILL RAWLS

L E A P O F
F A K E , O R ,
T H E D A N C I N G
P R I E S T :
S P E C U L A T I O N S
O N A D A N C E
A S D O U B T I N G

*

The research-workshop *Fake It Until You Make It* by Will Rawls took place at Tanzquartier Wien from 14-19 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing*.

In the beginning of the week, on the first day, I asked which dancers were religious. No one raised a hand. It seemed appropriate that those who would attend *Fake It Until You Make It*, a quasi-spiritual dance workshop, would have no organized, pious agenda. However, they did have the speculative belief enough to sign up which is perhaps already a definition of religiosity and of the pursuit of extended body consciousness. Signing. Upwards. We started by sitting on the floor and warming up with stretches and breathing, a beginning that has also become a sign and signature of contemporary dance: To work with gravity as a principle of efficient movement, of communing with what we know is there and will remain conscious of—the ground and our non-negotiable relation to it. However, the proposal for the workshop was geared towards a kind of inefficient, indirect or excessive doing—to pretend as a means to approach a non-self-consciousness or even sloppy consciousness in which a physical practice becomes no longer equal to itself and begins to approximate an imaginary, which could be equal to anything. And in the case of the workshop this anything changed from day to day—from profanity to love. My conceit was that by practicing the same daily exercises together, we might possibly move away from the strict principles of up, down and center of gravity or self, and instead lateralize consciousness and physical experiences among and within the others.

On the fourth day, a Catholic priest admitted to his belief in God after spending two days dancing anonymously among us. In light of his admission, I suddenly felt like more of a fake than ever. We had spent days investigating which transcendent experience could be reached by dancing to techno music, or by making a slow motion pilgrimage across the studio, focusing on the portentous buzzing of the fluorescents overhead. It seemed to be working in whatever way this could be measured. But religious realness and speculative dancing seem fundamentally at odds; the former practice, as Sandra Noeth states in her opening address of *SCORES No6*, belongs to a particular praying community which is »always already a different one«, and the latter practice attempts kinetic communion while maintaining a rather ambivalent commitment to difference. Contemporary dance can serve as an international passport for bodies of all practices but this catholic (in the sense of inclusion and

breadth) variety belies a process of inclusion that cannot be fully completed. Whatever is learned or taken away from a workshop will set down roots in a dancer's body and personal, national or aesthetic context differently. This generates a kind of multi-valent value in the communal signing up, destabilizing the adhesion and cohesion within a group even as one participates. To strike a balance between being together and honoring the individual take or approach is the paradoxical practice of a dance workshop. Signing up for this dancing is always already a difference from one's context, from other bodies (the ones who could not or did not sign up) and, in the co-operation of the dancing, there is also a differentiation from one's own body—a difference that is in the process of being assimilated. Furthermore, if one is praying then one enacts the movements of address, so in this context, if dance is the prayer, what does it address beyond our various individuated concerns for our bodies or other known (terrestrial) bodies? I kept asking people to dedicate their dancing to someone or something beyond the room—which produced this 'knowing extension' within the group—a reach past the anatomical, a commitment to the invisible, an acknowledgement of the imaginary. If the priest was accepting this assignment in a context different from his church then I assumed that he was also choosing a different path to the invisible, to his God, and perhaps this changes what the god looks like when one arrives at its threshold. That we all can choose an figure of address when required, even if that figure is undoubtedly different from the figure of our neighbor, operates as a unison of different imaginaries, composed of diverse movements. Like several bodies each physically illustrating a different part of a techno song.

In spite of their differences around difference, both religion and dance employ the gestures and language that contour the invisible. I asked the priest what faith was. He said that he decided to become a priest when his wife died and that faith was a horizon beyond which one continues to believe. So, in a sense, faith is that moment or that training beyond which we continue to invest our selves, actions and thoughts towards the horizon of the unknowable. Faith is the threshold for extension and the practice of doubt. It is the commitment to and trusting release of the addressee. It is perhaps also an apt instruction for looking at and thinking about dance.

Could dance, as it is experienced and witnessed, be defined as the practice of doubt with choreography as its score?

It is current to refer to (and do) choreography as an extended practice or as an extended field, but I am not referring to the extension of choreography as the distribution of a newspaper or text (INPEX, The Swedish Dance History) or as the organization of protest (Occupy Wall Street), though it is also these things. These and other moments (too numerous to name here) indicate when choreography extends speculation and re-configurative thought into actions for bodies within other disciplines and fields. In the extended field, choreography can borrow from other systems of knowledge to apply analogous thinking to the dancing body—dance can speak through or stand in as the practice of ethnography, biology, capitalism, anti-capitalism, ecosystem or religious experience within which configuration the body produces thought in relation to these disciplines, and in relation to itself. All knowledge that we access in these situations mediates and sustains itself through references to that which is not the dancing body but could be likened to the dancing body. This knowledge, like the ground, is a situation to which dancers choose or find themselves placed into conversation. But what emerges over time is the fact that the dancing body is still not these things, is not these knowledges. It is different. It belongs to none completely. This is not to say that bodies are not ethnic or religious or neo-liberal or punk or queer but there is still the horizon at the edge of the extended field, beyond which it is possible to believe that the body can pass into doubtful relation. And this difference is different from that of having a different god—it is actually very similar to having the same god, which is the over-extended difference of the body in relation to what we ourselves can even know about ourselves, our gods. Žižek states in a recent interview, »A true work of art, the definition of it is that it survives decontextualization.«¹ Dance (is an art) that survives this analogous conversation between itself and other fields, which is ultimately a survival of de-contextualization and re-contextualization. Dance is welcomed back into the truth of its own ambiguity at the end of the dance.

Choreography in this case would be that which can reach the edge of a field or knowledge, like a prayer does, and then, like a prayer, extends into the doubtful, scores the imaginary. Rather

than fixing meanings, this choreography would raise the ground for more questions. It becomes a tool not for gaining (on) knowledge but for reformulating belief in close connection to disbelief and make-believe. It becomes a tool for questioning the dancing body's existence and meaning rather than confirming it. This choreography motivates the body to move its masses, *en masse*, through space to a somewhere or something else that is both here and not here, that is not analogous but utterly other. In a dance workshop, this otherness is the common addressee even as it remains an obscure goal.

In June 2012, during a rehearsal for *This Variation* for DOCUMENTA (13), Tino Sehgal said, »Clarity must be produced.« This was in reference to the role and value of the philosophical tradition in constructing an experience, I might say, of one's existence, which is always rooted in the ambiguous. As a criterion for knowledge or as a criterion for framing an artwork, this makes sense. But if clarity should operate as a criterion for the meaning of dancing itself then dance is doomed because what dance does most effectively is produce ambiguity. This ambiguity stems from a web of well-recognized phenomena—the disappearance of the gesture, the non-linguistic character of movements, the unfolding over time and space, the gap between intention and execution, the variability of an spectator's perspective, visibility and context, the question of ability and inability. These factors collaborate such that a singular gesture can be repeated thousands of times and still be lost on the eyes and words of a watcher. Although one might not understand what a dance is communicating one knows that it is trying to communicate, that it is happening. This will to communicate, implied by dancing (and perhaps by all religious acts), heedless of the lack of proof of a reception, also raises the question of belief, as the priest characterizes it—belief without understanding, extension *towards* without proof *from* the other side. Dance is not *like* faith; it is faith. We might, in the end, as believers and dancers, only be extending towards and beyond ourselves, but to have faith in this case is no small thing. 'This dance is happening' might be as much as one can say about a dance. But this very statement acknowledges dance's right to belong to perception in spite of, or even because of, its unknowable nature. Dance is the dutiful horizon of the field of perception—the movements by which perception constitutes itself and its boundaries. So if dance is to produce

one clear thing, it is the belief in the body and the fact that it might lead you somewhere you cannot predict but can only follow. And in following, one might also have to fake a sense of direction.

The horizon as a figure of thought is not a point in space but many points that the eye draws while watching, seeing, looking. If this horizon launches into motion via the choreography then the eye must follow and draw in several dimensions at once. One of these dimensions might also be the dimension of not perceiving that which moves—this could be due to either stillness on the part of the dancer or distraction on the part of the watcher. And perhaps it is not always the eye that watches, but perhaps the heart, or the ears, or the mind, or the knee. I imagine this is where having a common god comes in handy, in that it provides the comfort that many prayers are still gesturing towards a particular beyond or set of dimensions instead a towards a general sense of beyond or general dimensionality. But if this general sense of beyond, of ambiguity, of doubt, is allowed to be the goal of dancing, then the eye can be a witness in much the same way as a congregation might witness a baptism or a rite—through an affirmation by one's presence without necessarily understanding the mystery.

By the fifth day of the workshop—the day we were dancing for love of any kind—we were still dancing to the same series of techno songs and still managing at some point to work ourselves into a ridiculous, sweaty frenzy. At the end of the dancing we were all in different places, positions and moods but were in general agreement that we had arrived at a sense of love. Maybe we were faking it for the sake of the others. If so, then this faking was also equal to faith—it is something you do for the others.

Speaking of love, the priest's arrival at faith was also deeply linked to the loss of his love, the death of his wife. The mechanism of his faith is about following the other, the one who is familiar and utterly un-followable, to the other's side. This faith hinges on her disappearing body, which is much like the dancer's. Hers is the body that has passed below and beyond the ground that he knew; it became his calling and his source of doubt. And perhaps dancing, in its dimensionality, is the best horizon to embody alongside his search via other means, such as the logos of prayer. It is the dancing body that can become ambiguous and still return. Further, in his movement towards the horizon, the priest has also transformed his faith into a

practice by which to provide an example to others, whose gods might be different. Although I did not get a clear sense of how he carries out his priestly duties within his church, the mechanism of his faith is far too personal to impart directly on another—the particular loss of his wife is what makes him eternally different from the other prayers. But the public address of his prayer, to this and to the other side, functions as a score that others might follow. Or fake it until they make it. But by his very presence in the workshop, the priest validates the faking of the others, their differential make-believe, their dance of doubt.

¹ Slavoj Žižek, interview with Joshua Cohen, *New York Magazine*, November 11, 2013, p. 14.

GÉRARD MAYEN

REPRESENTATIONS,
ON THE
EDGE OF
THE SACRED



*

Radhouane El Meddeb's und Thomas Lebrun's performance
Sous leurs pieds, le paradis was presented on
19 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing*
at Tanzquartier Wien.

All photos (c) Agathe Poupeney



Radhouane El Meddeb is on all fours on stage. His members are far apart. His head spilled forward. It oscillates in all directions with sharp movements, gyrations, desertions, returns, as if suspended from the neck with all its weight. As for the basin, it oscillates wildly too, shaken by waving jerks, from top to bottom, from bottom to top.

In that sequence of *Sous leurs pieds, le paradis* [Under their feet, heaven], it is difficult not to discern an animal resurgence in Radhouane El Meddeb's posture. He is the cosignatory choreographer and only solo performer of the piece. His posture is therefore incongruous, unusual, if not bewildering with regard to the sacredness that tinges the piece.

Indeed, *Sous leurs pieds, le paradis*, takes its title from a verse of the Koran, which praises the maternal posture, thus situating the ways of transcendence in female steps. Rather free from that directly religious reference, Radhouane El Meddeb deports his own sacralisation of the female onto the evocation of the great diva of the universal Arab song that was Oum Kalthoum in the twentieth century.

Throughout the whole piece, the recording of the endless *Al Atlal* (1965), the famous lament of the Egyptian singer, inspired by the ravages of love breakup, is broadcast in full. Because of its duration, its anchorage in all ear memories, this bitter song still resonates with the monumental dimensions of its legendary performer, by then at the height of her glory.

Against such a background of magnificence, what is Radhouane El Meddeb doing on all fours? This will not be his only unexpected gesture, since he will also propel himself with a hand on his butt, eventually getting completely naked before he ends up in the drape of a stage curtain.

With that suggestive bluntness, those quirky daring gestures, the artist bypasses the figure of the monumental diva. He outlines his own territories, irreducible to those marked out on the marble of Arab history. He doesn't imitate the diva; nor does he compare with or projects on her, as many critics have written. He lets her visit him. Provoke him. Sometimes demonize him.

Although inhabited by a myth overloaded with history, carrying a strictly Arab collective identity, doesn't Radhouane El Meddeb's approach make it circulate and live elsewhere, in the space of representations that produce it? A definitely contemporary approach.

Frozen upright as he enters on stage, his first gestures at the call of the first musical notes, his arms slowly raised with stately dignity introduce a ceremonial significance. But from then on one has to listen to the way in which the threnody ceaselessly evolves in the inexhaustible logics of its own volutes. So that the danced performance gives up translating it, preferring to follow it on a path of *échappés* and cousinship.

The two discourses, of the singer and the dancer, voice and gesture, wrap up in a braid pattern where both could actually remain fully autonomous, yet cross each other from time to time, here in the emphasised rhythmic accent of a hip-swaying, there in the suspension of a cold spasm.

That dance burns itself standing, and the arms rotate soberly, clearly, all around the subject, with the gravity of a stabilised balance, haunted by calls. For the dancer starts wandering on stage. In a kind of looping, the patterns of his gestures seem recovered; his steps sucked backwards, bent arms striking one another, or else stretched out behind the chest in a prevented shaken flight.

That body is seized, crossed, seized again, overwhelmed, deported to the margin, the edge, where it sometimes overflows and pours out. Larger forces surprise it, tense and sag it, so it must expel, expunge. The sacred is immense. A huge problem. Many are the obstacles placed on the path that leads the living performer Radhouane El Meddeb to the figure of Oum Kalthoum, gone forever.

She was the Nasserist voice of an Arab world by then claiming an upcoming state modernity. That is not the world in which El Meddeb lives. She was the burning-hot voice, consumed by the sensualities of a thrill made of languidness; a texture that El Meddeb no longer has many opportunities to recognize these days. She was a woman, the star of all consecrations, the unifying emblem of a unanimous culture having very little in common with the off-the-ground research pathway of a contemporary artist who has left his Tunisia.

It is certainly not a relationship of immediate closeness, or just a straight-line projection, that is to be searched between El Meddeb and the superstar he evokes. It is rather a tangle of impossibilities, escapisms and exasperations, assaults and excitement that inhabits the piece *Sous leurs pieds le paradis*. It is the piece of impossible unities, cracked fusions, crooked

identities. Its contemporary transport displaces the act of living entirely in the field of representations, which by then condition life forms.

Perceived through this bevelled reversal of perspectives, it is not surprising that this piece with sacred resonances agrees to produce a rosary of gestural incongruities. They show the separation operating in the relation of their subject to the others and the world, but also to himself, in the auto-fictional performativity of his corporeality. Creative life can only be in the movement of knowing oneself constituted by one's own narration.

In the same year, at the same festival, the same artist was working on an unusual performance in which he faced the wound of having been physically absent from the events of the Tunisian Spring. Experienced by him only through the screens, wouldn't those events remain, however, the most important of his life?

That is what he expressed, though looking strangely absent, by obstinately cleaving his way through the mass of spectators he had gathered for the occasion. Observing one another as much as they gazed at him, the spectators were confronted with their own status of fake actors of history, only by the proxy of its reconstitution in the media. All fully living in the globalized space of their representations.



ELISABETH SCHÄFER

TAKING —
UNTAKING

ON »UNCLES AND ANGELS« /
BY NELISIWE XABA
AND MOCKE J. VAN VEUREN



*

The performance *Uncles & Angels* by Nelisiwe Xaba
and Mocke J. Van Veuren was presented on 16 January 2013
in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing*
at Tanzquartier Wien.



Taking-Untaking. There is no escape from the endless images of the same. Take them. Don't take them. The untaken. Thrown up on the screen. One of thousands, always the same. There is only one. The same picture of *a woman*. As if there is no difference. No difference between women. She, herself, the other: all the same. Multiplied several times over in an ingenious game.

All in one. One being all. And all being tested.

Are they REAL virgins? Are there real virgins in Austria, too? A question posed right in the beginning of Nelisiwe Xaba's and Mocke J. Van Veuren's dance-performance »Uncles and Angels« on screen. Xaba is seen back-lit behind the screen en pointe while birds tweet and a hymn plays. In the following she darts in front and behind the screen assuming various female poses which Van Veuren manipulates into a montage of multiple »Xabas« appearing on screen, with whom Xaba the dancer, the performer interacts on stage again. The poses are reminiscent of ballet positions or drum majorette/cheerleader routines. A crutch towards the audience exposes the female body to the gaze. What gaze? What is to see? What is to prove? What to testify—between two legs of a body?

»Uncles and Angels« is shattering as a political comment and as a poignant gesture in the line it takes about the traditions that highlight questions of chastity, virginity testing and a traditionally desirable purity of the female body. It is not, that we have to talk about traditions merely belonging to the past of patriarchal cultures. Maybe to our surprise traditions like Venda Domba dance or the Zulu Reed Dance were re-established in the late 1980s in KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland, i.g. As a celebration, it promotes and preserves the custom of keeping girls as virgins until marriage. Being a tourist attraction at first glance, it unveils itself as an oppressing instrument of power used in the name of a morally esteemed fight against the AIDS crisis and the spread of HIV.

The South-African choreographer and dancer Nelisiwe Xaba and the filmmaker Mocke J van Veuren are deconstructing this superficially gesture of retaining cultural heritage and reveal how contemporary problems are demonized in the very traditional patriarchal manners.

Marches, sequences of drum majorettes, or a group of little girls, in their puffy white dresses, defined with beadwork, who chat, sitting next to each other, and dance, tucking their skirts into the legs of their panties. Indeed: *She* plays several

characters, but remains a projection, ONE picture of herself, to herself, to us, others, the audience, and so on.

It is NOT a community of woman appearing on screen, but it is their common unity, a unified picture and a unifying test. Is there still a certain piece of skin protecting an untouched inside to be touched soon, to be occupied and owned, to be conquered. Is it still there? Remained untouched: the invisible interior skin of a female body. Is there still hymen, the virginal membrane, but also the consummation of the traditionally practiced union of two bodies, foremost heterosexual bodies. Hymen, as a protective screen, as an invisible veil, it stands between the inside and the outside of a body. As a skin is always something that stretches between inside and outside enabling first and foremost a con-fusion of bodies. So, hymen both implies communion and hinders this communion; it is both barrier and interaction. Hymen is a fusion that abolishes contraries. But hymen is also the fold of a mucous membrane that keeps confusing the opposites of the inside and the outside. It is skin opening the very field of difference (cf. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, 209–218).

It is not a matter of choice here. Hymen is neither fusion nor separation, but stands between the two. Neither inside nor outside, but between the two. »It is an operation that both sows confusion between opposites and stands between the opposites at once« (Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, 212). And it is the »between« that counts. It outwits, as Derrida says, all manner of dialectics. And as an operation it is not to be testified like a status is testified. It takes place, but it is not there: here and now. The intensity of intimacy arises within the unknowing, not without any knowing: »We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I've never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations, we make two. Really, two? Doesn't that make you laugh?

An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one.«
(Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 207)

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JALAL TOUFIC

‘Â S H Û R Â’;

OR, TORTUROUS MEMORY AS A
CONDITION OF POSSIBILITY OF AN
UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE

*

Jalal Toufic’s videos *Lebanese Performance Art; Circle: Ecstatic; Class: Marginalized; Excerpt 3* (2007) and *The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day* (2005) and the lecture ‘*Âshûrâ*’; or, *Torturous Memory as a Condition of Possibility of an Unconditional Promise* were presented on 18 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at Tanzquartier Wien.

Acknowledgments

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Can one still give and maintain millenarian promises in the twenty-first century? But first, a more basic question: can one still promise at all?

Al-Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and the son of the first Shi'ite imâm, 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib, was slaughtered alongside many members of his family in the desert in 680. This memory is torture to me.

»I am not allowed to weep, because I'll become blind were I to do so,« says old Victoria Rizkallah at the end of my video '*Âshûrâ': This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, 2002. But wouldn't losing the ability to weep be even more detrimental and sadder than going blind? I would prefer to (be able to) weep even were I to go blind as a result of that—to weep over going blind? Isn't that better than becoming inhuman? »For others too can see, or sleep, / But only human eyes can weep« (Andrew Marvell, »Eyes and Tears«).

But, basically, one can say *this memory is torture to me* of every memory, since each reminiscence envelops at some level the memory of the origin of memory, the torture that had to be inflicted on humans in order for them to be able to remember. If we feel a tinge of pain, a pang, when we remember it is not necessarily because the past vanishes, is no more (Einstein's relativity and Dōgen's Zen tell us otherwise in two different ways),¹ but because each memory reactivates in us however faintly the genealogy of the establishment of memory. In Twelver Shi'ites' yearly ten-day commemoration '*Âshûrâ'*, we witness a condition of possibility of memory, in a Nietzschean sense.

»To breed an animal *with the right to make promises*—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is it not the real problem regarding man?

»That this problem has been solved to a large extent must seem all the more remarkable to anyone who appreciates the strength of the opposing force, that of *forgetfulness*. Forgetting is no mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression ...²

»Now this animal which needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of *robust* health, has bred in itself an opposing faculty, a memory, with the aid of which forgetfulness is abrogated in certain cases—namely in those cases where promises are made ...

»How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?

»One can well believe that the answers and methods for solving this primeval problem were not precisely gentle; perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his *mnemotechnics*. »If something is to stay in memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory³—this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth.⁴ One might even say that wherever on earth solemnity, seriousness, mystery, and gloomy coloring still distinguish the life of man and a people, something of the terror that formerly attended all promises, pledges and vows on earth is *still effective* ... Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them),⁵ the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example),⁶ the cruelest rites of all the religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties)—all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.

»If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been the means to, then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of customs, autonomous and supramoral (for »autonomous« and »moral« are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises* ... And just as he is bound to honor his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the *right* to make promises)—that is, all those who promise like sovereigns, reluctantly, rarely, slowly, who are chary of trusting, whose trust is a mark of *distinction*, who give their word⁷ as something that can be relied on because they know themselves strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents, even »in the face of fate«—he is bound to reserve ... a rod for the liar who breaks his word even at the moment he utters it.

»... Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been bought! How much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all »good things!«⁸

The preservation of the events of 'Āshūrâ' takes place at two levels: in '*Ālam al-mithâl* (The World of the Archetypal Images), aka '*Ālam al-khayâl* (The World of the Imagination),⁹ where they are, in a transfigured version, eternal, outside the corrosive, dimming sway of chronological time, as well as the labyrinthine temporality of the realm of undeath, where al-Husayn would run the risk of forgetting who he is, of forgetting himself; and in historical time, through the bodily and emotional tortures endured during the yearly ten-day commemorative ceremony,¹⁰ which are the means to breed in the human being,¹¹ a forgetful creature (»And verily We made a covenant of old with Ādam, but he forgot, and We found no constancy in him« [Qur'ân 20:115]), a historical memory. But the memory that the ceremony of 'Āshūrâ' is trying to maintain is not only or mainly that of the past, but the memory of the future, that of the promise of the coming of the Mahdî, the Shi'ite messiah, as well as the corresponding promise of Twelver Shi'ites to wait for him. The exemplary promise has until now been the messianic one, for at least three reasons. First, it has been the longest lasting, spanning centuries, even millennia. Second, it has been maintained »in the face of accidents, even »in the face of fate«: Twelver Shi'ites have maintained the promise to wait for the successor of al-Hasan al-'Askari, the eleventh imâm, who died in AH 260/873–74, even though the latter apparently left no son, and even though the occultation of the presumed twelfth imâm has by now persisted for over a millennium; and they have maintained their expectation that the twelfth imâm will fulfill his promise to appear again. Third, it implicates a supramoral, antinomian attitude. Hence Sabbatai Zevi's »strange actions,« which included causing ten Israelites to eat »fat of the kidney« in 1658, an act that is strictly prohibited by the Torah and punishable by *excision* (getting cut off from among one's people); reciting the following benediction over the ritually forbidden fat: »Blessed are Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden«; and abolishing, in 1665, the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz. Hence also the Qarmatîs' sacking and desecration of the Ka'ba in 930 and then their abolishing of the Sharî'a during the Zaka-riyyâ al-Isfahânî episode in Ahsâ'. And hence the Nizârîs' abolishing of the Sharî'a starting with the proclamation by Hasan '*alâ dhikrihî'l-salâm* (on his mention be peace) of the Great Resurrection in Alamût on 8 August 1164 from a pulpit facing west, a direction opposite to the Ka'ba in Mecca, the direction toward which all Moslems have to turn during their prayer.¹² The basic and ultimate promise is to wait for the messiah, who, truly sovereign, supramoral, will initially break the Law, including the »laws« of nature¹³ (indeed his miraculous coming notwithstanding his death or millennial occultation is often announced by supernatural events »such as the rise of the sun from the west, and the occurrence of the solar and lunar eclipses in the middle and the end of the month of Ramadan, respectively, against the

natural order of such phenomena«¹⁴), then, upon establishing redemption, altogether abolish the Law, which applies only to the unredeemed world, thus allowing his initiates to be resurrected into a lawless world.¹⁵ The ceremony of ‘Āshûrâ’ is the flipside of the belief in the promise of the hidden imâm. I would thus wager that the introduction of the ceremonies of ‘Āshûrâ’ and of Ta‘ziya coincided with a period when Twelver Shi‘ism was not on the rise but, on the contrary, when the continued belief in the coming of the Mahdî was in danger of extinction. From this perspective, the condemnation of these ceremonies by many Twelver Shi‘ite ‘ulamâ¹⁶ is either shortsighted or else implies that they would like to fully supplant the Mahdî. Were ‘Āshûrâ’ to be discontinued across the Twelver Shi‘ite community, then sooner or later the memory of the promise of the occulted imâm would fade away.

The basic reason the ceremony’s participants hit themselves and self-flagellate¹⁷ is not some unreasonable feeling of guilt for not succoring imâm Husayn and his family around 1300 years ago, but that such cruelty is a most efficient mnemonic. Some may object that the morality of mores, etc., has already born fruit, namely the one who can promise on the basis of his ability to remember, and that therefore there is no longer any need for such a cruel mnemonic. This would be the case for promises of normal spans (but not for one that spans millennia),¹⁸ and were we not reaching a point where the immemorial process, described by Nietzsche, by which humans succeeded to a large extent to create a memory for themselves is beginning to be reversed. As Jean-Joseph Goux points out: »Every society has produced, exchanged, and consumed, but it is only in the modern era in the West that the economy has been separated from all religious, political, and moral ends in order to constitute a system ruled by its own laws, which are those of market exchange.... The exchange destroys the bond produced as it proceeds. The equivalent exchange is without memory and without obligation. It is a relation that cancels and neutralizes itself at the moment of its fulfillment.«¹⁹ And Paul Virilio, the thinker of dromology, writes: »*The acceleration of real time*, the limit-acceleration of the speed of light, not only dispels geophysical extension ... but, first and foremost, it dispels the importance of the *longues durées* of the local time of regions, countries and the old, deeply territorialized nations ... Past, present and future—that tripartite division of the time continuum—then cedes primacy to the immediacy of a tele-presence ... This is ... the time of light and its speed—a *cosmological constant* capable of conditioning human history.«²⁰ We started with a flighty mind attuned only to the passing moment; then we had a torturous process of thousands of years of pain and sacrifices to inculcate in humans a memory, and consequently a deep time; but we have now reached someone who is being conditioned by the hegemony of market exchange over all

other ends, and programmed by telecommunications at the speed of light, for example TV (on average in the USA, children aged 2 to 11 watch about 23 hours of TV per week, and teenagers watch about 22 hours per week),²¹ to hear and see a live »event« anywhere in the world of globalization only to instantly forget about it: Rwanda, then sports, then a commercial for a soap brand, etc.; and to restrict his or her interaction with others to an economic transaction, »which by its symmetry and instantaneous reciprocity ... is without fidelity or commitment, an abstract relation that exhausts the disaffected mutuality it implies, without leaving any trace.«²² In order to describe the human being at the beginning of the twenty-first century in front of his TV, we can instead of resorting to Virilio’s contemporary terms revert to the terms Nietzsche was using to describe man in prehistory: »partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment.« We (or more precisely the West) will more and more be able to accurately predict through computer simulation,²³ but we (or more precisely the West) will less and less be able to give promises.

23 March 2002
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Betty, Paris:

As for the book you volunteered to give me as a gift and promised to send to me, Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, one of the lines in the first edition of my first book, *Distracted*, says: »My apology turned out to be unnecessary, for he had already forgiven my age«: isn't youth the age when one gives so many promises—including to oneself—that remain unfulfilled—at least for a long time? Promising is one of those actions that seem to be the easiest—after all, it is a performative (see J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*)—when actually it is the most difficult since unnatural: »To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?« (Nietzsche).

Best
Jalal

Jalal Toufic, *'Āshūrā': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Beirut, Lebanon: Forthcoming Books, 2005; available for download as a PDF file at: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>), 9–16.

¹ Dōgen: »An ancient Buddha said: »For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.... / For the time being three heads and eight arms. / For the time being an eight- or sixteen-foot body....« »For the time being here means time itself is being, and all being is time. A golden sixteen-foot body is time ... »Three heads and eight arms« is time ... Yet an ordinary person who does not understand buddha-dharma may hear the words *the time-being* this way: »For a while I was three heads and eight arms.... Even though the mountains and rivers still exist, I have already passed them ... Those mountains and rivers are as distant from me as heaven is from earth.« It is not that simple. At the time the mountains were climbed and the rivers crossed, you were present. Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away« (»The Time-Being« [uji]).

² Cf. »Freud does not consider this amnesia [infantile amnesia] to be the result of any functional inability of the young child to record his impressions; instead, he attributes it to the repression which falls upon infantile sexuality.... Just like hysterical amnesia, infantile amnesia can in principle be dispelled; it does not imply any destruction or absence of registrations of memories ...« (J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, with an introduction by Daniel Lagache [New York: Norton, 1973], 212–213).

³ Among other factors, we can call the long primeval period the »prehistory of man« for the following two complementary reasons. The first is that he had a flighty mind and was attuned only to the passing moment, and so was unable to produce the deep temporality of past/present/future required to construct a history. The second reason is that most of the torture to inculcate in him a memory, i.e., the most atrocious and frequent torture, was happening then, with the result that that period, the most traumatic of all, was and still is repressed, and consequently is not included in our history—it is as if it were humanity's *infantile amnesia*.

⁴ Nietzsche's words apply far better to the distant past, for man could then withstand much more pain because he was much more superficial, whereas now, having to a large extent succeeded in creating a memory for himself and therefore being (temporally) far deeper, with few exceptions intense pain easily and quickly traumatizes him, ushering in repression and consequently post-traumatic amnesia.

⁵ A long-term memory of the addressee of the promise is a precondition even for the promiser. Thus one of the conditions for God's promise to Abraham is that the latter create a memory for himself: »Then God said, »Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.« ... The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, »I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed ...« (Genesis 22:2–18).

⁶ Clearly castration is here theorized from a different perspective than the one encountered in most feminist film criticism drawing on psychoanalysis (see Laura Mulvey's »Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema«).

⁷ At the base of all language, at least once originally forgetful humanity has achieved the long-term memory that is a prerequisite of promising (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*), is not communication per se, but promising, thus the idiomatic expressions *be as good as your word* (to keep a promise [Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms]); *give your word* (to promise [Ibid.]); *man/woman of your word* (someone who keeps their promises [Ibid.]) (I wonder why we say »I give you my word« but we don't also say: »I give you my image«).

Does »In the beginning was the Word« (John 1:1) also mean »in the beginning was the promise« since to give one's word is to promise? In the beginning God gave his Word, and it was that one day humans will be able to give their word, to promise. Has this promise disappeared with the Nietzschean death of God?

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale/*Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann; edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 57–62. I rearranged the order of one of the quote's paragraphs.

⁹ More specifically in *al-khayâl al-munfasil*. Ibn al-'Arabî »calls the intermediate world of imagination »discontiguous imagination« (*al-khayâl al-munfasil*), since it exists independently of the viewer. And he names the soul along with the faculty of imagination »contiguous imagination« (*al-khayâl al-muttasil*), since these are connected to the viewing subject« (William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989], 117). The notion of *khayâl munfasil*, of an imagination independent of the viewer, which we find not only in the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabî but also in Shi'ite theosophy, will regain currency with the advances in and spread of virtual reality; in Andy and Larry Wachowski's Gnostic film *The Matrix*, 1999, the vast simulation called the Matrix is an example of *khayâl munfasil*, while what each of those within the Matrix, i.e., within the *khayâl munfasil*, subjectively imagines is a *khayâl muttasil*.

¹⁰ Many of those present at the assemblies of 'Āshūrâ' cover their faces with their hands. When they remove their hands one often can see that they were crying. But sometimes, one suddenly espies through a gap between their fingers that they are yawning! In part these yawns are not the effect of boredom at hearing yet again the same stories of the atrocities, but of sleepiness, as these assemblies take place from around 9 p.m. till around midnight. This yawn has the same unsettling effect as the small spot of corruption in the otherwise uncorrupted corpse of a saint: »Ruysbroeck has been buried for five years; he is exhumed; his body is intact and pure (of course—otherwise, there would be no story); but 'there was only the tip of the nose which bore a faint but certain trace of corruption.' In the other's perfect and embalmed figure (for that is the degree to which it fascinates me) I perceive suddenly a speck of corruption. This speck is a tiny one: a gesture, a word, an object, a garment, something unexpected which appears (which dawns) from a region I had never even suspected, and suddenly attaches the loved object to a *commonplace* world.... I am *flabbergasted*: I hear a counter-rhythm: something like a syncope in the lovely phrase of the loved being, the noise of a rip in the smooth envelope of the Image« (»The Tip of the Nose,« in Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill and Wang, 1978], 25). The sleepiness affecting these yawning participants is of the kind that affected the three disciples Jesus Christ selected to accompany him for prayer. He asked them: »Stay here and watch with Me« (Matthew 26:38). He moved *a stone's throw* (Luke 22:41—how incisive is the laconism of this *a stone's throw*) and prayed. Returning to them, he found the three sleeping: »What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?« (Matthew 26:40). Three times does he leave them to pray, each time, upon returning, finding them sleeping. »Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed ...« (Matthew 26:45).

¹¹ »Respecting the derivation of *insân* [a human being], authors differ ... : the Basrees say that it is from *al-insu* [sociability], and its measure is *fi'lân*; ... some say that it is from *înâs*, signifying »perception,« or »sight,« and »knowledge,« and »sensation« ... and Mohammad Ibn-'Arafah El-Wâsitee says that men are called *insiyân* because they are seen (*yu'nasûn*, i.e., *yurawn*) and that the jinn are called *jinn* because they are [ordinarily] concealed (*mujtannûn*, i.e., *mutawârûn*), from the sight of men ... some (namely, the Koofees, *Misbâh al-Fayyûmî*) say

that it is originally *insiyân* (Ibn Barri, author of the *Annotations on the Sibâh*, with Al-Bustî, *Misbâh al-Fayyûmî, Tâj al-'Arûs*.) of the measure *if'lân*, from *an-nisyân* [forgetfulness], (*al-Misbâh*), and contracted to make it more easy of pronunciation, because of its being so often used.« The entry *alif nûn sîn* in Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 volumes (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 1980).

¹² The Great Resurrection of Alamût lasted till 1210.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche: »I beware of speaking of chemical »laws: that savours of morality.« *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 630.

¹⁴ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mabdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 158.

¹⁵ I find this period so unjust that it seems to me there are, beside the revolutionary one, two exemplary responses to it: a messianic one and a Gnostic one. The first demands waiting for the messiah (»which is the best of actions during his occultation«), who will in the end fill with justice a world only *transiently* filled with injustice since it is essentially and ultimately good, being created by God, the good God. The second demands the disinvestment from this *demonic* world, which has nothing to do with the good God, but was created by a demiurge.

¹⁶ For example Muhsin al-Amîn: see *Thawrat al-tanzîh: Risâlat al-tanzîh, talîhâ mawâqif minhâ wa-arâ' fî al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Amîn*, ed. Muhammad al-Qâsim al-Husaynî al-Najafî (Bayrût: Dâr al-Jadîd, 1996).

¹⁷ Many a flagellant's slap against his chest is as sober as the flapping of a bird's wing during flight.

¹⁸ While we should be willing to pay the price for the ability to give promises, and therefore for the memory that is a precondition for promises, should we make sure that promises do not span centuries or millennia, given that the price of such promises is exorbitant?

¹⁹ Jean-Joseph Goux, »Subversion and Consensus: Proletarians, Women, Artists,« in *Terror and Consensus: Vicissitudes of French Thought*, ed. Jean-Joseph Goux and Philip R. Wood (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 37 and 39.

²⁰ Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 118–119.

²¹ 1992 figures; they were 28 hours per week and 23.5 hours per week, respectively, in 1986 (1986 Nielsen Report on Television). According to the Center for Media Education in Washington, DC, watching TV is the #1 after-school activity for 6 to 17 year olds; each year most children spend about 1500 hours in front of the TV and 900 hours in the classroom; and by age 70, most people will have spent about 10 years watching TV.

²² Jean-Joseph Goux, »Subversion and Consensus: Proletarians, Women, Artists,« in *Terror and Consensus: Vicissitudes of French Thought*, ed. Jean-Joseph Goux and Philip R. Wood, 39.

²³ Indeed live prematurely in the future through virtual reality using the simulation of extremely powerful computers.

FUCKHEAD

D I E L Ü C K E



(c) Peter Bittermann

D E S N I C H T S

*

The performance *Die Lücke des Nichts* by Fuckhead was presented on
18 January 2013 in the frame of
SCORES No 6: on addressing at Tanzquartier Wien.

There is no theory or artistic strategy behind our doing. The actions are meaningless, happen however truthfully and with devotion. The band is a sentimental, established and easily understandable form. It acts as playing field, as tool, as initial spark, as justification for performative practices and rituals, which temporarily are to suspend space and time. Those happen before and with the audience in year-long practice. They result by improvisation, from instinct, from dilettante imitation, by appropriation or reinterpretation of artefacts from cultural history, by excess, from negligence or senselessness. The goal is the reaching of collective physical and mental states of intoxication. In special moments, the step succeeds beyond intoxication. Consequently, rhythm, deep base frequencies, repetitive structures, stroboscopic light and darkness are important elements of the »events«. The individual of the musician is changed in the performances beyond recognition. He acts as canvas, projection surface and particularly as a fragile vessel of a volatile soul. We transform, dissolve or merge these bodies. Actor and participants do not identify themselves any longer with figures or personalities. They dream in the collective, whereby the doors to the unconscious open more easily. Symptomatically, we recurrently design archetypes. Physical and mental integrity of the participants and the audience are a priority. Pains are alarm signals and, beyond a certain degree, unwanted.



(c) Kurt Prinz



(c) Peter Bittermann



(c) Stefan Rindfleisch



(c) Peter Bittermann / Following pages (c) Kurt Prinz



NEDJMA HADJ

A N D P O E T I C P O L I T I C A L B O D I E S

O N T A O U F I Q
I Z E D D I O U ' S D A N C E

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Taoufiq Izzediou has presented his solo *Aleef* in 2011 and his performance *BA BO BI* in 2012 at Tanzquartier Wien.

His work *Rev'Ilusion* was partly created in residence at Tanzquartier Wien.

Dancing bodies in the Arab world are often perceived and represented on the backdrop of their ancestral heritage and hence are related to religion and traditional forms of expression. However, it's important to reveal the actual variety, richness and creativity of the materials which choreographers and dancers keep on developing in the friction between their local cultural heritage and universal forms of expression. Contemporary dance in the Arab region is a vivid *lived* art, incorporating current challenges and opening up to new translations and representations of a changing society.

Paradoxically, the constraining socio-political context within the region has been a catalyst for remarkable projects, particularly in the field of dance. In almost all countries of North Africa and the Middle East, the political regimes remained for decades dictatorial, spreading fear and imposing limitations for modes of expression they don't approve. This situation leads to reactions and initiatives within the civil and artistic field. As a consequence, various dance creations and practices have contributed to the construction of a realm of trust and freedom of expression for the artists and the public; sharing a space of freedom that could escape and exist beyond frozen limits; as an attempt to stay in dialogue with the challenges resulting from the social and political changes which occurred the last few years.

Contemporary dance in the region manages to celebrate, heal, show, seduce and express the richness of its heritage through movement and body language. Working in continuity with its legacy, it integrates old and new in a ceremony of rebirth of all the layers that compose it.

Dancers have an ability to be aware of this, to integrate it in their bodies and in their material, preserving continuity with the new artistic territories they open. Taoufiq Izzediou dwells on this continuity, creating new dance languages in the region and beyond.

Based in Marrakech, Taoufiq Izzediou balances his work between his creations, the development of a platform for contemporary dance, and the training of young dancers. In the last years, this impressive set of activities granted him recognition for his contributions in the dance field and in the construction of a

contemporary culture. At this key moment, characterised by change, a contemporary history is being written collectively, quickly, before other political issues could erase it and make it disappear. There is an urgency to document, to make voices heard, bodies exposed, and to create. We can perceive a kind of violence, almost a physical rage to be performed in Taoufiq's work. But it doesn't recall to quick answers.

In that way, Taoufiq's project *100 Pas Presque* is a request: a request to mark a pause on a main public space in the heart of the crowded and chaotic city of Marrakech. »In this city, at the heart of its crowd, I ask to stop and see, I impose this act as a statement towards today's condition« said Taoufiq about *100 Pas Presque*.

During the last international dance festival *On Marche*, all the participating artists and dancers were invited to perform *100 Pas Presque*, without any rehearsal. Only one meeting session was organised, where Taoufiq explained his simple and minimalist request. In this project, he gives almost only one direction/instruction to the dancers: to slow down and move 100 meters along the public square for one hour. That way imposing another rhythm is questioning the existing one. In this performance in public space, he manages to draw a new relation between time, body and space. In a way, he's digesting the urgency, creating a poetical performance for the audience, the people passing by, and the dancers. He's asking the dancers to co-perform, joining in this pause, being conscious with the people around. A traditional music ensemble accompanies this one-hour performance. Starting from a frozen and silent state they will reach in the last meters an explosion of joy. After a long moment of isolation, the audience, the musicians and the dancers become an entity.

100 Pas Presque is concerned with the act of the choreographer Erdem Gündüz in Taksim Square, on June of the same year. The artist stood silently for eight hours, facing a portrait of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern, secular Turkey. Hundreds of others joined him on the square, before being dispersed by police.



Image of the project *100 Pas Presque*, Marrakech, March 2013 (c) Hamouda



Erdem Gündüz, June 2013, Taksim Square, Istanbul.
(c) Reuters/Marko Djurica

Both performances show a critical distance from what happens in the two hectic cities during the political changes and the repression, simply by slowing down and standing still—a powerful act and statement. These two performances deal with shared resistance, although in a different light: as a celebration of a common sense of belonging and as public commitment. It's a crucial part of Taoufiq's work, of his vital need to integrate in his own context.

In *Aleef* the last solo creation of Taoufiq, we can trace back this need of belonging and of shared experience with elements of heritage and legacy. The solo contains various references to the history and contemporary situation of the region. The gnaoua music is one of those references. It's a very mystical music, known by all in the region and beyond, with African and religious influences. In *Aleef*, this material component is transported in an actual relationship between Taoufiq and the musician Adil Amimi, where sometimes they argue, but also sustain each other physically and emotionally, sometimes they take distance to stay more independent, inhabiting the material, the music in the individuality of each of the artists. The artistic vocabulary that they build up acquires a poetic dimension by being isolated, or given another scale and then confronting it to the body language.

Urgency as a dramaturgical dimension

Emergency floods the stage. A stage lacerated by strong and intense movements. Movements of protest and poetry. Insolent movements, liberated from censorship and borders. Bodies filled with realities, in continuous movement, until exhaustion. Bodies filled with joy, consciousness, knowing, and strongness. Bodies in trance to accomplish a vital, necessary elevation. A seismic stage with bodies as shock waves. A world penetrated by monsters and angels. A new trance to escape from demons inhabiting our world. Protest, fear, anger, poetry, illusion... A great ensemble to honour dance, to celebrate it. They take us away with them, upwards.

Taoufiq is part of this generation of artists witnessing and responding towards the 'activist culture', without giving up the

autonomous position of his artistic expression. These artists are constructing strategies of translation, creating works of elevation (local and global). This kind of research is one of the main dramaturgical lines in his parcours, which we can trace back to his projects in public space and on stage. The stage is able to absorb and digest urban, political and poetical bodies within the performances.

Bodies continue to express themselves in the streets and on stage. The body is political, poetic, a breath of life and dreams. Dance stimulates and follows the changes dealing with urban bodies as much as with bodies on the stage. There are links to be imagined between bodies protesting in the Arab world and those on stage. The new temporalities of movements, the new look onto oneself and onto others are the ingredients of the dance work. In these creative movements, a shared experience has been conveyed. This shared experience has generated movements of protest in Egypt, in Tunisia and beyond. The collective movements have liberated individuals and created spaces of freedom. These collective movements are mainly visible in public space, especially in the streets. The rich material of these urban spaces represents gathering as much as solitude or anonymity. Stage bodies or urban bodies, the street nourishes them.

*Whose bodies do we expose? What bodies do we expose? Which bodies liberate us and which bodies confines us?
What can we share? Anger? Violence? Poetry? Fear?
Are dancer's bodies forced bodies? To what? To commitment?
To expectations? To illusions and dreams?*

These are the questions approached in the last creation of Taoufiq, *Rev'Ilusion*, presented in August 2013 in Marseille.



(c) Dimitri Tsiapkinis



(c) Hamouda

BALANCE

T
H
E



(c) Laurent Philippe

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N

ONESELF

*

Nacera Belaza's *Le Trait. Pièce en trois temps* was presented on 8 and 9 March 2013 at Tanzquartier Wien.

When I look at my pathway as a whole, I have the feeling that I have drawn a straight line, with each of my pieces punctuating a way that I had to accomplish, as if there had been no deflection. When you deviate, you know it, you feel it; this is what the artist must counter with all her forces. The line between two points is necessarily tense, relentlessly. Each piece has therefore been an exhortation to more freedom. It is as if, throughout these years, I had sought to accomplish one single thing, a single gesture that covered, all by itself, the questioning of a lifetime. By repeating the same gesture, you work on yourself. What ends up defining a work, it seems to me, is the tension by which it is crossed; what I have done so far is perhaps similar to that image of the straight line with no hollow or deflection.

Very soon we may be driven by a deep desire for freedom though not being free; for that you have to do away with a certain amount of ties. The piece *Le Cri [The Scream]* coincided with the moment I took the risk and became, at the same time, aware of what my »gesture« was. The previous pieces have to some extent prepared me, led me to that place of convergence, as if they had showed me my centre, the Centre.

Seeking to repeat the same action, you realise that it is impossible to repeat yourself, since repeating amounts to going further in oneself, digging the same furrow as one gets away from the initial gesture. That is why, piece by piece, I start from the same empty space, from the same two bodies; the only thing that differs is the inner journey and so the story it tells. With each new creation, I have the feeling that I welcome more and more space and freedom in me, I do not seek to renew myself in the sense that I would want to do something different, new, but rather an end, once and for all, to this gesture, this word that requires from me more and more precision, perfection, balance.

Bringing the reflection and the work to a certain point naturally releases a new space. The fact of persisting in the same spot does not necessarily lead to repetition but to digging, going further. Conscious repetition highlights our behaviour regarding one and the same action, making us see the many mechanisms in ourselves that reduce or distort the first action.

What differs fundamentally is the space that you get in yourself, by revealing yourself to your own eyes. I realise that the works that I most admire are those where the artist has sought, throughout her whole life, to nuance the same intent, to make it more accurate, more obvious; she has not tried to avoid repetition, she wanted to say the same thing »better«, as if she were approaching her target. One should perhaps, in order to be honest, create only one piece or novel and retouch it incessantly.

The body definitely holds, to my eyes, the role of a Mediator between visible and invisible dimensions, like an envelope given to emptiness. When I look at it I do not see it, or at least not only it. The body only exists, for me, through its relation to space, in and out of itself. Becoming this receptacle of emptiness, it has the power to reveal us the invisible; through its ability to listen like a sensor, it makes us hear better. I can therefore say that for me the body only exists through what it reveals.

Movement does not exist in itself either, separated from its counterpart, immobility, which completes and reveals it. To bring about a certain »movement«, we have to detach ourselves from a voluntary and purely mechanic action in the body, you have to act in accordance with the flows that are already present in yourself and in the space, in order to let yourself be traversed and carried by them; movement is thus omnipresent, once again it is revealed by the body. I could do the same analysis of immobility, it is present at the core of any movement, it is actually an essential component of movement. Amongst the things we learn from work, the underlying reality of things is very often opposed to the idea we have of them: too big a wish to understand makes you dissociate what shouldn't be dissociated. Movement and immobility participate in the complex functioning of all living things. I do not dissociate any of these components, I try to inscribe them in the same network of meaning.

That's why I always try, above of all, to stay tuned, »listening« to what traverses me, in order to let the most accurate gesture come to me, the one that would fit in the continuity of what already exists. I have the feeling that I am constantly matching elements, materials, sounds to one another; so the first action is really that of »listening«, the opposite of an intentional action, a let go that helps you finding the point of balance, the point of agreement upon which the whole should be based.



(c) Antonin Pons Braley



(c) Antonin Pons Braley

Although all my pieces are very carefully written, it is essential never to rely on a position or knowledge, it is a matter of remaining in a sort of state of permanent »floating«, both physically and mentally; these suspended times also exist in life, they give us the feeling, for a short moment, of hesitating between two roads; during that lapse of time, reality is no longer defined in the same way, as if it had lost its contours. In the beginning, that »not knowing« came from the fact that I am an autodidact; when you learn on your own, nothing of what you do is validated by the outside; you rely on your intuition, on a knowledge that is not there yet, so you walk with no certainty. Thereafter, I consciously preserved that state of body and mind, I have even tried to transmit it but I must admit that it remains one of the most complex things to share. How to tell the other that she must never rely on what she knows? We learn because we want to know, once we know, we don't want to not know anymore.

I realised quite late that the notion of time was a central one in my work, for it is only when you manage to acquire an overall view of your own work that you are able to discern more clearly the nature of your own »concerns«; you think you work on an object which is external to you until you realise what really makes you work. I actually realise that everything in my pieces—the soundtracks, the nature of light, the bodily matter—says »what goes away«, »is erased«, as if the process of life itself were printed in the core of the artistic object. So that object becomes the vehicle of a process of erasure, of disappearance, and the pathway that we perceive throughout my pieces undeniably resonates with that of life.

My concern has always been to integrate the body in a global frame, in what I call its relationship »to the whole«. Indeed, for me the body cannot be reduced to its physical matter; its energy, its breath constantly inscribe it in a wider circulation... So for the most part my work operates at the level of the body's interior and the space that surrounds it; the body as we perceive it is only a tiny part of what is at work. It is essential, in my work, to make the body's »invisible« dimension perceptible. The spectator shouldn't be facing a body, but be as well in relation to what completes us, that is to say all the elements with which we

can dialogue, be in touch: space, air, light, darkness, music... what is called spirituality is what escapes us, that void, that breath that gives us the feeling that what we are resonates with the universe.

My path is therefore more akin to a questioning about the very sense of life; carried in this way, the word is detached from our own personality, forcing us to rise up to spots of ourselves where it becomes possible to have a glimpse of the world detached from our affect, the world without us, somehow.

ALI MOINI

R U M I ,
A H O R S E
A N D M Y
M E M O R Y

*

Ali Moini's performance *My paradoxical knives* was presented
on 17 January 2013 in the frame of
SCORES No 6: on addressing at Tanzquartier Wien.

ever since I remember reading Rumi poems, they remind
me of a horse running.
a brownish horse that runs



close your eyes and just imagine the sound of its nails,
running!



so now, as if you had opened your eyes, look at the
horse—follow his movement

of course I imagine that I am moving with it, in a certain
distance, I can turn around it
I hear the sound it produces
it's brownish

and I hear its breathing as well
it's an audio composition which is super alive for me

so, coming back to our eyes which are wide open,
looking at the brownish horse that runs
as if it tried approaching something which is not so close
and not easy to reach
it tries hard and it runs fast

and of course no-one is riding it
it's just us, watching

and its face
its nostrils open and close, and it breathes with a certain
rhythm which suits the composition
its big strong eyes gaze at the front and don't blink at all

and the mouth which trembles by its movement and its
teeth tightly pressed against each other, as if it was angry
or willing something, for a strong reason

and its muscles which are beautifully shaped and show
off its strength

and we hear it running and running and running
brownish firm creature.



and the sound of its nails sings:

mordeh bodem, zende shodam
mordeh bodem, zende shodam
mordeh bodem, zende shodam

gerye bodam khande shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

morde bodam, zende shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

morde bodam zende shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

morde bodam zende shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate eshq aamad o man

dowlate payande shodam
dowlate payande shodam
dowlate payande shodam

dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate payande shodam

dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate payande shodam

mordeh bodem, zende shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate payande shodam

mordeh bodem, zende shodam
gerye bodam khande shodam

dowlate eshq aamad o man
dowlate payande shodam



it says:

hey sky do not turn without me
hey moon do not shine without me
hey earth do not grow (greens) without me
hey time do not pass without me

it's a part of one of Rumi's poems that seems to contain
a sort of

association with cosmos

that I wrote on the floor

all has to do with circling, repetition and life

does it seem that Rumi looks a bit self-centered?

isn't he right in a way?

isn't it that he doesn't want the moon and the earth, the
time and the sky doing their job if he, Rumi, were not
existing? why does he say that?

or is it just a normal and simple way of saying that he
does not care about anything if his love is not there
anymore?

is he talking directly about his love or himself?

or does he mean that he want to be alive, susurrating and
whispering the name of his love with each breath?

but I chose just a part of the poem

actually the poem begins with :

*you who walk elegantly, dearest!, do not go without me
you who are life for the lovers, do not pass through the garden
without me*

so it's sort of a love poem which associates and simulates
love to any obligatory or necessary fact in the cosmos

and I wrote it on the floor
but not all of it
just the parts about association and simulation of a fact
which is built on the cosmos' obligatory existence

but I do not talk about any love
though, I am talking about something that exists
and I am representing it in the composition

danger!
attraction!
fragility!

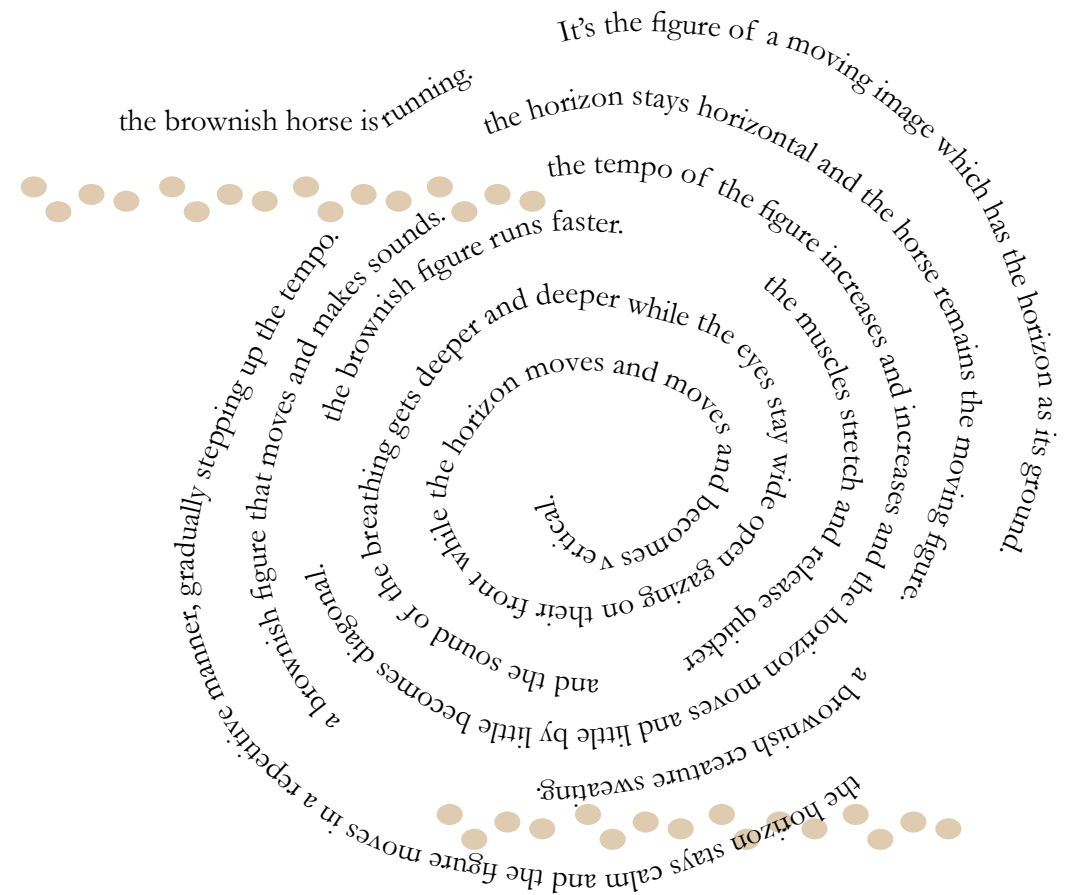
sharpness of the knives and smoothness of the air
created by my turns
the fragility of my body and skin next to the knives
and my eyes which tremble
and my breathing which gets faster and faster
and my mouth which opens to sing what is written on
the floor and you see my teeth
and my skin which is brownish
and my muscles which are not strong

and I write in cyclic pattern of course
a cycle that surrounds my body
and I turn
and I turn
and my skin is brownish
and I sweat
and I turn slowly
as if I will turn forever
and I ask the sky not to turn without me

is it the sky which turns or the earth on which I am
standing?

is there a danger existing all the time, everywhere
is it that much obvious that we do not consider it?
and everything produces danger, including each of us of
course?

I might be dangerous for me, you or anyone else!
and this danger is that much attached to us, non-
negligible and non-revocable that wanting it not to exist
means that we wouldn't be existing.
how does potential danger transform into actual danger ?



there is a metal plate on the floor
a bit bigger than two meters on each side
there is a text written on it in white
in a circular shape
written in Persian and English

hey sky do not turn without me
hey moon do not shine without me
hey earth do not grow without me
hey time do not pass without me

there are some knives in different sizes, each of them
attached to a rope and placed besides one another
precisely in parallel to each other
the knives are placed on one side of the written text

a guy enters the scene
wearing a special costume, made of some ropes, which
covers just some part of his body
he is almost naked
he places himself in the middle of the circular written
text, facing the knives which are on the floor
he sits down, and precisely attaches the knives on his
costume
he stands up
he turns very slowly around himself looking at the
people around him, who are watching him.
eye to eye
he turns and he looks,
he turns
and he turns
the knives get lifted by his turns
the knives rise up in the air
they collide with one another and produce very metallic,
sharp and clean sounds
the text written on the floor gets wiped off by his feet
while he turns
and he sings
he turns and he sings
his breath gets deeper and louder
and the sound of the breathing mixes with his singing
and the sound produced by the knives

he slows down
and the knives slowly fall down
they touch the metal plate
and he turns slower and slower till he stops

he takes the knives off his costume
and leaves
the metal plate which is clean, there are some knives
lying on it in an unorganized manner

RITU SARIN AND TENZING SONAM

SOME
QUESTIONS ON
THE NATURE
OF YOUR
EXISTENCE

SINGLE - CHANNEL VIDEO PROJECTION
25 MIN, COLOR, SOUND
COMMISSIONED BY THYSSEN -
BORNEMISZA ART CONTEMPORARY

Some Questions on the Nature of Your Existence, 2007 focuses on the processes and rituals of Buddhist Tibetan debate, which are based on set rules of syllogisms. Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam investigate this complex system of learning, as a tool to gaining knowledge of the most fundamental concepts of Buddhism, based upon conveying wisdom and values through traditional rituals.

*

The film *Some Questions on the Nature of Your Existence* by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam—a commissioned work by TBA21 / Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary—was presented on 17 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at Tanzquartier Wien.

THE MIND GLADIATORS OF TIBET
by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam

Just as in dependence upon a mirror
A full image of one's face appears,
The face did not move onto the mirror;
Yet without it there is no image [of the face].
(Nagarjuna, 2nd century CE)

The late afternoon sun sets aflame the golden roofs of Drepung Monastery in South India.¹ The traditional Tibetan architecture of its many temples and assembly halls recreate an illusion of old Tibet. After the heat and torpor of the day, thousands of monks emerge from their rooms into the debating courtyards. In pairs or in groups, they begin to engage each other in a dialectical exercise that evolved more than a millennium ago in the great Buddhist monastic universities of North India. Soon, the courtyard is alive with the sound of staccato handclaps and animated voices. Part dance, part ritualized movement, and part a mind-training exercise of great profundity, the debaters challenge each other on the finer points of Buddhist metaphysics. Their excited cries and exclamations reverberate with the revolutionary ideas propagated by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago.

As always, when witnessing this spectacle, I am struck as much by its dance-like movements and gestures as by the sheer enthusiasm and passion with which its participants apply themselves. But what is it exactly that they are debating? This is as much a mystery to lay Tibetans like me as it would be to outsiders, for the language of Tibetan Buddhist debate is far-removed from the everyday speech of ordinary life. As a Tibetan growing up in exile in India, I was fascinated by this esoteric tradition and impressed that so much physical vigor and excitement could be brought to bear upon what is, ultimately, an intellectual exercise.

When Ritu and I decided to make a film on the subject, our immediate challenge was to decipher the language of debate ourselves, to try and understand its mechanisms, and the

philosophical tradition that underpinned it. How could we demystify the process of debate without oversimplification? How could we convey the continuing relevance of this ancient tradition to contemporary society without getting bogged down in obscure didactics and recondite abstractions? It seemed that without some comprehension of the basic Buddhist concept of interdependence—the idea that there is no independent existence, and that everything arises out of an infinite cycle of cause and effect—there would be no way to convey a sense of what Tibetan Buddhist debate was about. With this in mind, we decided to focus on a number of debates that would take as their starting point some of these concepts at a very simple level.

Debate topics are always stated in the form of syllogisms², and some of the ones we chose were:

This world we live in is dependently originated, because it arose in dependence upon causes and conditions. Take the sprouting of a seedling, for example.

This body of ours is dependently originated, because its continued existence depends upon the continued existence of its parts. Take the continued existence of a tree, for example.

This mind-body combination of ours is subject to disintegration because it is a phenomenon that does not remain static right from its coming into being. Take the last moment of a dying flame of an oil lamp, for example.

With the help of the abbots of Drepung Monastery, we selected pairs of monks who were already renowned for their debating skills. When we showed them the topics we wanted them to debate on, they jokingly told us that these were beginner's topics. Yet, once they started, there was no stopping them. They hurled themselves into the discussion, animated yet fully concentrated, obviously enjoying themselves and totally oblivious to the fact that they were being filmed. It seemed amazing and marvellous to us that the mere act of engaging in such rigorous intellectual exercise could be so exciting and fun to these monks. In some other reality, they might be boxers or tennis players, locked in furious competition, yet here, the

rewards were not fame or glory or money, or even the satisfaction of having won; here the ultimate goal was simply the training of the mind with the sole aim of getting closer to comprehending and ultimately, experiencing, the teachings of the Buddha.

Night descends swiftly on Drepung Monastery. Under the light of fluorescent lamps, the excited cacophony of the debating monks rises to a crescendo. Swept by the momentum of their complex and carefully laid out arguments, these gladiators of the mind continue late into the night, slugging it out in the arena of abstruse philosophical inquiry. At least for the moment, here in a remote corner of southern India, these monks seem untouched by the demands of the material world, and Tibet's profound Buddhist tradition seems well and alive.

¹ Drepung Monastery was one of Tibet's largest monastic universities. Located in the hills on the northern outskirts of Lhasa, it was established in 1416 as an institute of higher Buddhist education. At its zenith, Drepung housed some 10,000 monk students who came not only from all over Tibet, but also from China, Himalayan India, Mongolia, and the Mongol regions of Eastern Russia. The Chinese Communist takeover of Tibet in 1959 resulted in the destruction of all but a dozen of Tibet's 6,500 monasteries, and in the closure of Drepung, with most of the monks being either killed

or imprisoned. One of the Dalai Lama's first tasks on coming to India was to ensure the preservation of Tibet's Buddhist heritage. Several of Tibet's great monasteries were re-established in exile, among them Drepung, which was transplanted in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. Today, Drepung Monastery in India is a thriving institute of more than three thousand monks. Meanwhile, in its homeland, the original Drepung Monastery, after five decades of Chinese control, has been reduced to a shadow of its former self.

² The Tibetan meaning of syllogism does not strictly conform to the Western definition. »In this system of reasoning, two forms of argument are used to defeat wrong conceptions and generate clear understanding. These are syllogisms (*prayoga*), consisting of a thesis and a reason stated together in a single sentence, and consequences (*thal 'gyur, prasanga*), an argument structurally similar to a syllogism but containing a word indicating a logical outflow of an opponents own assertions (*thal, prasajyate*).« (Daniel Perdue, *Debate in Tibetan Buddhism*, 1992)

Tibetan debates involve two parties: a defender, who answers, and a questioner. The roles of defender and questioner imply very different commitments.

The responsibility of a defender is to put forth a true thesis and to defend it. Hence, the defender is accountable for the truth of his assertions. The questioner, on the contrary, is responsible only for the questions he puts forth. His questions must be well articulated, must logically follow from the points already made, and must be relevant to defeating the defender. Their truth content is irrelevant, however, for his task is not to establish a thesis but to oblige the defender to contradict either previous statements or common sense.

The debate starts with a ritual invocation to Manjushri, the celestial bodhisattva patron of wisdom: *Dhib ji ltar chos can*. This invocation can be translated as *Dhib* [the seed syllable of Manjushri]; *in just the way the subject*.

After this ritual invocation, the questioner proposes the topic of the debate in the form of a question, which seeks to elicit the defender's thesis. The defender answers, stating his position. The questioner may then immediately begin the debate, or he may seek auxiliary explanations to clarify the position of his adversary. The point of this crucial preparatory phase is to establish a starting point for the debate, an area of agreement between the two parties.

Once the two parties believe that they agree on the understanding of the terms of the debate, the main part can unfold through questions and answers. The questions are meant to draw out the consequences of the defender's statements in order to oblige him to contradict himself or to take a blatantly absurd position. To

succeed, the questioner must be able to take apart his opponents statements and to draw out unwanted consequences. His opponent, the defender, must for his part attempt to block these contradictions by making further distinctions.

It is in this framework that the debate unfolds strategically. The questioner tries to force his opponent either to contradict himself or to contradict common sense. To do so, he must be able to break down complex arguments into simple elements that can be expressed in a chain of well-formed consequences that follow each other logically. He must also keep track of the position of his adversary and where he wants to take him. The defender must figure out the questioner's strategy and thwart his efforts.¹

¹ Excerpted from Georges B. J. Dreyfus: *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2003), p. 211.

The first edition of the text has been published in *The Collection Book*, edited by Eva Ebersberger and Daniela Zyman, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König (2009), S. 378ff.

Photo: Courtesy of the artists / Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna



Ritu Sarin and
Tenzing Sonam
*Some Questions
on the Nature of Your
Existence*, 2007



LEJLA MEHANOVIĆ

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NOTES ON NADIA EL FANI'S
» LAÏCITÉ, INCH'ALLAH «

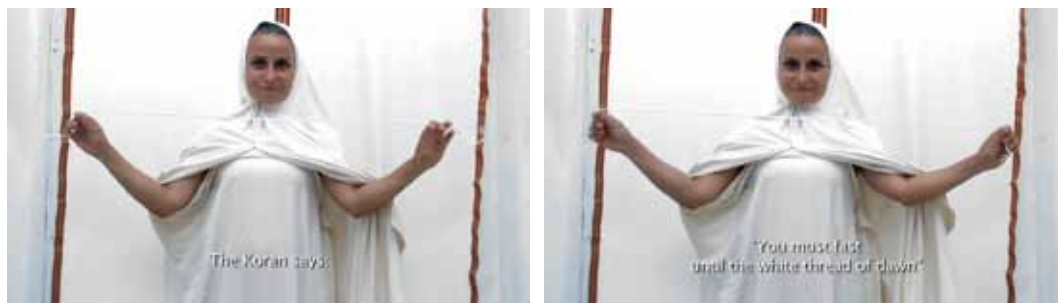
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Nadia El Fani's documentary film *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* was shown on 19 January 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at Tanzquartier Vienna.

All photos: Stills from *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* (2011), directed by Nadia El Fani, K'IEN Productions.



Actually, Nadia El Fani's film should be called *Ni Allah, Ni Maître* [Neither Allah, Nor Master]. But after numerous controversies, which the work in her homeland Tunisia, where the film was misinterpreted as an attack against the Islam, sparked off, the director modified the title in *Laïcité, Inch'Allah*. This is at first also a concession to those forces which at the end of June 2011 stormed a screening of the film, destroyed the Afric'Art cinema in Tunis, put the director of the cinema into the hospital, and threatened the audience. The director herself received death threats after she professed in a television interview to being an atheist and stated to be at war with the Islamists—not literally, but in the philosophical and political sense. The new title is however also a very precise and subtle anticipation of Nadia El Fani's cinematic pleas for a laicist constitution and society in post-revolutionary Tunisia. *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* is a fomenting cinema and an open demand—even if this demand, by the use of the Arab »Inch'Allah«, a current idiom which signals hope and can be read as expression of an attitude of submission before God, is weakened to a desire. Thus Nadia El Fani, in her documentary film, not only appears as annalist of the events shown, but becomes even the protagonist by provoking discussions in front of a camera, asking unpleasant



questions and exceeding those spatial borders behind which reveals what should not be visible for the public. Against this background, her constant physical presence in the film, her visibility means always also vulnerability.

In *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* visibility is on two levels of crucial significance: on the one hand in the sense of the separation of the private and public area due to an entanglement of politics and religion. On the other hand—and that is addressed by El Fani clearly in only one scene in the film—to make the visibility of those possible whose existence is mostly denied in public representations in »the West«: those who do not correspond to the picture of the allegedly Islamist, fundamentalist Arab-Muslim world spread in the media. In order to make aware of the dangers of the entanglement of these two spheres—the political and the religious—El Fani set her shootings, in August 2010, deliberately during the Ramadan, directly before the outbreak of the »Jasmine Revolution« in Tunisia, which forced the dictator Ben Ali to flee from the country in January 2011. The time was purposefully chosen thereby: because during the Muslim month of fasting with all its rituals and strict regulations concerning the own body, so the director in her film, the power of religion on the society reveals itself most clearly.

The pictures that El Fani catches in *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* bear witness to the social, cultural and political penetration of everyday life by religious practices. The chamfering regulations during the Ramadan give now new circadian rhythms and change above all the urban life of Tunis. The roads are deserted at certain times of day, the windows of coffee houses and restaurants are covered and the alcohol departments in supermarkets just as hidden behind curtains. With a view behind these curtains El Fani suggests however that everyday life is not really suspended at all during the Ramadan, but only takes place no more in the public space.

2001 wrote the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his book *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* about the underlying structure of belief in our allegedly secular culture:

»That is to say, in our officially atheistic, hedonistic, post-traditional secular culture, where nobody is ready to confess his belief in public, the underlying structure of belief is all the more pervasive—we all secretly believe.«¹

Nadia El Fani observes similar mechanisms in the Tunisian society, only in opposite direction: One may do (nearly) everything, even not believe, but please secretly. Because although the adherence to the month of fasting is neither legally ordered nor threatened with sanctions for disregard, it seems to have been established nevertheless as a social obligation. The superordinate authority thereby: the public. The consequence: the practice of a double game, which the director interprets as bigotry, sneakiness and double moral. Uncompromisingly and plainly she confronts the discussion participants with her criticism of the creeping islamization of Tunisian society. The archive footage from the 1960s shown in the film suggests that the country, of that time, seemed to have a much more open attitude in its relation to the Islam. How this return of the religious is to explain, the director in *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* only suggests, namely with religion—in this case the Islam—as identity creating attribute. Because already during the shootings, thus still before the fall of Ben Ali, so El Fani in an interview, it appeared that the Islamists gained more power and the regime again used religion in order to stem this power. The game that the government plays is, according to the director, a double one: on the one hand it fights against the Islamists and at the

¹ Slavoj Žižek: *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis) Use of a Notion*. Verso (2001), p 88.



same time it uses religion in order to refer to a uniform identity to strengthen social cohesion. Why however the Islamists—and not only in Tunisia—gain more power, thereupon El Fani does not try an answer. The urbanist Stephan Lanz writes in an essay about the alleged fall of secular urban movements and the so-called boom of, among others, Islamist movements of the last years:

»Because religious or religious-political organizations seem to follow often another—post-colonial inspired and directed against Western conceptions of modernization—understanding of emancipation. (...) It is the striving for justice, for a third way beyond capitalism or communism, or—in the case of diaspora communities—for a ›third area‹ (Homi Bhaba), characterized by hybridity, beyond marginal minority status and assimilation into the majority. This refers to respective national societies—and here to the fight for social and civic rights or against a corrupt and authoritarian elite—as well as, from a post-colonial point of view, to global power structures—i.e. to the fight against global structures of exploitation or cultural imperialism and thus the discrimination of other values: (...)«² Against this background one could ask whether laicism, which El Fani demands for Tunisia and which actually developed from Catholicism and its relationship to the state in Europe, could serve as a model for the Islam in Arab countries. But the idea, to which El Fani and her fellow combatants in *Laïcité, Inch'Allah* tie, is above all the ideological neutrality of the state, in order to secure thereby the legal equal status of all religious, political and philosophical opinions, an idea whose realization can be based exclusively on social consensus. Because despite all criticism at the social conditions in Tunisia, the director draws nevertheless an optimistic picture of a country which seems open towards the idea of freedom of consciousness and discusses this also openly:



»A Catholic by my mother, a Muslim by my father, thank God, an atheist, as the song goes, I can't bring myself to accept that religion runs our daily lives and our relationships. Atheist, heathen, apostate. Going out of religion, as the expression goes, is punishable by death in Islam. Today, these issues can at least be debated publicly.«³

²Stephan Lanz: *Neue Götter und Gläubige in der Stadt. Thesen und Fragen zum veränderten Verhältnis zwischen dem Städtischen und dem Religiösen*. In: *dérive* No 40/41, *Understanding Stadtforschung*, p 34.

³Nadia El Fani in *Laïcité, Inch'Allah*

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The text is an adapted version of Ulrich Bielefeld's lecture *Belief, Religion, Society* referring to the performance *Soli Deo Gloria* by Annegret Schalke, Lee Meir und André Scioblowksi. The lecture as well as the performance have been presented on 19 January 2013 in the framework of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at the Tanzquartier Wien.

Hearing the voices of the performers, a memory came to my mind. In my younger years I stayed for some weeks in a Bavarian cloister. At five in the morning I went with the Benedictine monks into the chapel, just to listen to their singing, their praising of the Lord. For half an hour I heard for the first time 12th century unison chant. It brought me to music—not to religion.

All of us heard the music, we saw the performance, movement, dance. It started with Bach—well-known Western music—praising and representing the Lord, composed to the honor of God—s.d.g. (*soli deo gloria*). However, during the time of Bach, the music meant a revolution in inner-musical terms too. We don't really know how this music did sound like on the instruments and in the playing techniques of the time. We know a little how it was perceived. But we do know it was a revolution. And at the time the music was composed, to listen to it was a rare experience, far away from everyday life. That makes it at first glance kind of self-evident and obvious that music was related to another world—a non-mundane, non-profane world. Such a beauty couldn't be of this world.

But concepts of music change with time and context. If we look, for example, to India, we find that music there is conceptualized as ›given‹. The melodies are supposed to pre-exist in the natural horizon—you can find them in the sky. The musician has to learn the way to find the melodies and so musical education is related to finding yourself—to leave the 'I' and to relate to the endless horizon of pre-existing, given melodies that can be found practically, empirically in the traditions of the ragas. The musician has to learn the given music in order to find new melodies on the horizon.

The relation of Western music to the 'other' world is different. It is about a way of representing, not of being. The music reflects in its inner harmonic structure the creation itself. In representing the beauty of creation, music honored the Lord and became sort of creation's crowning glory. Combined with the rareness of musical experience, the complexity and the rational inner structure of music became the symbol of the Genesis. Bach was a renovator of music, a constructor of a system that rationalizes the concept of music and in doing so

praises the Lord: s.d.g. Today, the world of Bach is gone. But thanks to technology we can hear his music regardless of time and place.

But not only has the concept of music changed. Religion itself and the relation to religion have changed fundamentally. To put it in a nutshell: In Bach's time religion was everywhere, while music was rare. Nowadays, music is everywhere and religion is rare. At least European everyday life and work is rarely connected to religion, despite all ongoing changes. At the time of Bach nearly any action was religiously connoted. Today, religion does matter—time and again and more and more. It makes sense to define religion as an inner-worldly made distinction between this world and another world.

To differentiate religious from non-religious acts, institutions and beliefs, we have to presume that we speak of religion whenever this differentiation is made. Religion has the universal competence to make sense out of an idea, out of our individual or often collective lives, to refer out of the real world to another world. This difference has not disappeared but lost its determining forces, at least but not only for European societies. Religion came back as a private habit and thus we observe an increase of diverse forms of religious beliefs, attitudes and organizations. Still, the outer world is blended out of the world we're living in, that means out of its determining functions. The world is no longer a magic garden, a »Zaubergarten« in Max Weber's famous words. The past belongs to history and the future has become, to formulate it in »inner-worldly« terms, a development or progress. New forms of religious habits often are related to the present, but lost the function to make sense out of the past and, first and foremost, out of the future. The outer world is always yet to come; future is always intertwined with hope. But future comes as part of the world, and that is the reason for the failure of all the religions of the last days proclaiming the end of the world. Future conceptualized as progress or as development leads us trying to know what comes and how it comes. The future is never to be reached but development and progress have to come—after all that work, all our efforts, all the harm and suffering—as part of this world and as part of our lives. In the secular world, future and hope have become inner-worldly expectations. Religion in this world has changed sides: from the power of representing the 'other

world' religion now has become individual choice and practice. Hope and future can and will have a re-entry in the other world exactly as before, but come now from the inner world of myself—the real one.

And now we hear the minor chords of Bach sung with words and phrases by Lee Meir, Annegret Schalke and André Sciobowski. We all know the words: »Don't be a maybe«, a slogan from a cigarette advertising. The well-tempered chords of Bach representing religion as another world are now combined with phrases out of the advertising world of commodities. We can easily understand this as a kind of »Ersatz«—a replacement. The interpretation seems to be obvious: Commodities even combined with chords representing the power of glory don't reach the other world. They are things in this world, gone in the future, nothing than smoke. The only confidence we could have is the earthly hope that there will be more of the same, e.g. that we will have commodities tomorrow. Put it that way, we gain a classical critique of consumer society.

We can make a further step. As mentioned before, in a traditional society—let's take the abstract term—religion was ubiquitous. But music was not only rare as a good to listen to, as a commodity it didn't exist at all. It only changed into this form in the first stage of modernity. Recording techniques and radio brought music into a form for sale, changing it from a luxury good to a bargain. The all-existence of music is historically very new—due to its digital form. Today, music is always at hand—whether we are driving or travelling, it is available in every public and private situation. The digital form of the former commodity of music transforms it into a common good. The character of music changed again, from a rare experience to a commodity and, finally, a common good, always at hand (ear). What once was priceless is now free for charge. What is always available can only be limited virtually. Music shares this character with a special good: money. Modern money as money of credit is without limits, we can produce lots of. Only individually we may have too less or too much. As a number, as paper, in all its existing forms, it is unlimited. We need to regulate it, to limit the virtually ubiquitous good. The need for regulation is part of the problem. We dispose over goods that are no more limited in themselves. Music, even

Bach's music, became unlimited, a digital common good, virtually everywhere. To hear music is now an ordinary everyday experience, religion became extraordinary. Ordinary religion, which used to be everywhere, made a truly worldly thing sacred: power. The earthly power of the world became sacred by God's blessing. The secular society is a post-religious society where religion has become an individual decision. The individual belief is religious when it operates with the distinction between »world« and »non-world«. But the distinction made on an individual level does not affect the society in a structural, foundational or constitutional sense. Even the United States with all its churches and denominations are a secular society, though a very religious one.

Can we imagine a re-entry of religion in our world as a constitutional fact of society? One strategy could be to make out of mundane things sacred ones. If we do so, the problem of »Ersatz« lurks behind every corner. We can find it in the version of the advertisement we've heard in the holy language of the music of Bach. Another strategy we all know is the institutionalization of all the yesterdays as part of our contemporary life. There is no society so engaged with history than ours, sometimes for good reasons. Through history channels, books, etc. we are overwhelmed by all the history and histories of yesterday and what the past may tell us about the future. A third, different strategy is to regain the concept of future directly from the past—that is, to deny the differentiation processes and to rebind politics and power—economics, justice and law—to religion. We could call it: fundamentalism. The post-secular society we are living in is not non-secular, it has to arrange with religion in a secular environment. Fundamentalism is a concept of religion facing a secular world. Even in this case, religion does not come back in its old historic forms, the re-entry in our present society is to be seen as reaction upon the structure of the secular society. It is part of a secular society becoming post-secular. An interesting question would be: What's about societies becoming post-secular without ever being secular ones?

I mentioned three strategies to make profane things holy again. The first is the sacralization of commodities. Any kind of object can be chosen, but the point of culmination is

to sanctify commodities as such. The second strategy is to transform history into the core of contemporary times. The third way is trying to recombine power, politics, law, justice and/or economics again with religion—to re-institutionalize a post-secular »Zaubergarten« or, even worse, the rule of religion. All these strategies are signs of a post-secular society. The carnival of commodities, the historization of contemporary lives and the re-binding to religion, these all are strong tendencies in our societies.

In conclusion, we can observe a fourth way. The re-institutionalization of hope, the special hope that even tomorrow there is a life to live. We cannot know the form of it, but we have to trust in the possibility and live in a way as if there is a future today,—because, after all, we know that tomorrow, hopefully, we will wake up again, hearing music, dealing with commodities and with the re-entry of religion. A religion which, itself, is not about representing the other world anymore.

OLIVER STURM

THE PRAY-O-MAT PROJECT



A PRAYER MACHINE FOR
URBAN SPACES

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Oliver Sturm's installation *Gebetomat / Pray-o-mat* was presented from December 6 2012 to January 31 2013 in the frame of *SCORES No 6: on addressing* at the Tanzquartier Wien in the foyer of the Hall G.

All pictures (c) Oliver Sturm

My *body of religion* is a modest contribution to the history of religions and has more or less the shape of the Kaaba in Mecca: It is cubic, has one square meter of surface area and is 2.15 meter high. Unlike the Kaaba it is red and has a bright hood from plexiglass as roof, like a halo. The design is modern, sober and functional, and nevertheless aesthetic—a kind of neo-Bauhaus church. One can sit down in it for—depending on—a spiritual retreat, to pray or merely to inform about praying. Children love the cab, because tones come out and one can hide oneself therein.

The *pray-o-mat* is an automat for listening to prayers. In the automat are audio recordings of 320 prayers in 65 languages, arranged according to the world religions and further religions. Over a touch screen the user can navigate through a menu, head for and select prayers. After s/he has selected one, it rings out over loudspeakers. I have four of such automats in circulation, one of it in England. Originally one had to throw money in, but since the automats stood in different church institutions, I had to deactivate money insertion gradually. »It's hopefully clear to you, Mr Sturm, that we cannot take money for prayers in the Catholic Church,« I was told. In the *pray-o-mat* at the University of Manchester one can read beside the coin slot: »Donations welcome«. Of course money insertion is part of the artistic concept and not a bad trick in order to make money.

From an artistic point of view the *pray-o-mat* is the copy or parody of an automat. From an urban development perspective it is a service automat for passers-by. It is a hermaphrodite that changes its meaning depending upon context: a piece of art, which has coincidentally also a value in use. Normally one gets oneself cigarettes, Cola or chewing gums at the automats. With this they are prayers. I am often asked, what are my intentions with the *pray-o-mat*: Is the *pray-o-mat* a critical comment to perversions of automation, is it a contribution for clearing-up over the variety of praying, is it an exclamation mark to point out that stressed people should not forget internal contemplation, is it the desperate attempt to become famous or does the inventor simply want to make money? Perhaps all of this together. The truth is: I don't know. Somehow the idea has fallen from the sky.





Personally, I think that over the years the *pray-o-mat* becomes charged with its content and is by praying, which constantly takes place in it, kind of spiritual ›radioactively contaminated‹. Similarly magic thinking seems to prevail also with the critics of the *pray-o-mat* that become from time to time noticeable. I regularly get accused that I took up to tone archives the unique prayer of the Scientology church: Scientology is not a religion at all, they say, and is it not a little delicate to put this prayer uncommented at the disposal?

The high point of this criticism was the Scientology scandal, which the *pray-o-mat* had created last year in Hamburg. Mrs Caberta, the sect commissioner of the city, said in an interview to the *Hamburger Abendblatt* (4.11.2012), the *pray-o-mat* was an advertisement for Scientology. The *Wedeler Tagblatt* reported:

›The highest sects guard of Hamburg, Ursula Caberta, didn't have to be asked twice and suddenly read the art project the riot act. ›There is no place for it here, Scientology uses religion only as camouflage‹, she warns. Also the art may not spread a so lax ›bad, inhuman ideology‹. Furthermore, the Pray-o-mat carries out advertisement for Scientology, rants Caberta who led for 17 years the Hamburg working group Scientology and proceeded with sharp criticism against the heirs of the sect founder Ron Hubbard. The Berlin artist Oliver Sturm, who created the Pray-o-mat, disagrees. ›How

advertisement for Scientology is to be made here? By acoustic contamination? By the prayer as gateway drug?‹, he asks. ›Then I would have had to take out also the Voodoo singing.‹ (Wedel-Schulauer Tagblatt, 6.11.2012)

The party of the Greens—stroke by the virus of political correctness—has in the Hamburg Senate thereupon posed an officially so-called ›Kleine Anfrage‹ (short inquiry)¹, whether the *pray-o-mat* is rather a misdirected interreligious dialogue. The result was that the Hamburg Central Library called off the emplacement of the *pray-o-mat*, because it wanted to save annoyance with the city. In the meantime the Greens have back pedaled, because they noticed on what fragile ice they move. Two things at this procedure are interesting and satisfy me as an observing artist deeply:

The one is the still active rest of magic thinking in the consciousness of the yet enlightened sect commissioners and the Greens. It is the conception of indoctrination by mere acoustic listening, the idea that by mere listening to a Scientology prayer, by becoming touched acoustically, one runs into danger to fall for this sect. Sigmund Freud has in *Totem and Taboo* very clearly demonstrated how magical thinking believes that the touching of something tabooed contaminates with something dangerous. ›The expression taboo is particularly suitable for this (...) undifferentiated and intermediate meaning of the demonic, in the sense of something which may not be touched, since it emphasizes a characteristic which finally adheres both to what is sacred and to the unclean, namely, the dread of contact.‹²

The other remarkable thing of this political procedure is the foolish confusion of religion and art. The *pray-o-mat* is a piece of art and takes up for itself the freedom of the art. Thus it sets everything that is in it between quotes. One cannot forbid Joseph Beuys to use in his works of art dead hares. The reproach by the sect commissioner Mrs Caberta and the short inquiry of the Greens in the Hamburg parliament which state that the *pray-o-mat* carries out advertising for Scientology is based on a profound misunderstanding of art. It is as if the anti-smoker league would be outraged over a burning cigarette on a painting of Edward Hopper and wants, with the reference that it

¹ *Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg*, Drucksache 20/5749, written question of Christa Goetsch, member of the Hamburg Parliament, 5.11.2012.

² Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London: Routledge, 1919 (cited 2013 Oct 24). Available from <http://www.gutenberg.org>. See also: *Taboo and the ambivalence of emotions*, loc. cit, pp. 30–124.

acts thereby around cigarette advertising, to banish it from the free Hanseatic city Hamburg.

Worthy of consideration is in this context the following experience: I stood last year for a longer time in connection with a businessman from Dubai who wanted to show the *pray-o-mat* in the United Arab Emirates. When our negotiations had already very far prospered, he admitted that the project would only be realised, if I agreed to remove the Jewish religion from the automat. Thus the project did not come about. In Pakistan I would have to remove the Ahmadiyya, in Iran the Bahá'í, in Turkey the Yeziden etc. The perception of the hazard potential is very perspective, and all hazard potentials charged and added one could set up in the end an empty automat.

I dare once the statement that the *pray-o-mat* is the smallest »multi faith space« in the world. All religions of the world are potentially represented in it. The *pray-o-mat* sound archives contain only genuine, authentic prayers, which were spoken with fervor at the moment of recording. It will be constantly extended in the future.

The prayers in the automat are to a considerable degree authentic, because they are genuine and represent an audible dialogue of the soul with God. We contemporaries are magically attracted by the authentic, because our daily perception runs to a large part over techniques of reproduction and is constantly on the way in the unauthentic. The more genuinely the description is the more it satisfies us. At the same time the automat gives us an illusion of availability. We participate in the praying of others without having to spend greater mental effort. Everyone can decide for herself/himself whether s/he uses the automat as prayer area or as info box.

Nevertheless, it's not quite right to say that there are prayers in the *pray-o-mat*. There are only images of prayers: audio recordings, frozen prayers, as it were, which are at any time callable and repeatable. In a certain way they are robbed of their soul, although they affect us so much. How can they affect us to such an extent, when so much is missing from the actual physical-spiritual procedure of praying: the prayer attitude, the prayer situation, the whole physical-ritual procedure of praying—all

that is absent, much less the heart of the whole, the dialogue with God. What affects us is the mystical body of the voice, which also affects us physically in the reproduction by the loudspeaker. The sound is physical and carries the transcendent experience of the service even into the small sheet metal church of the *pray-o-mat*.

In the course of my searches for the *pray-o-mat* project in Berlin I discovered a complex and wide network of religious communities, groups and sects, which is to a large extent withdrawn from public perception. A meeting with a Hamburg waste water engineer, recently on an airport, suggested the comparison with the catacombs of the urban underground to me. He told me about the quiet and amazingly pure world of the sewers and halls under the city of Hamburg, which, at the beginning of the last century, had been equipped by the construction workers with partially affectionate, fresco-like works of art. To my question, what exactly he does for a living, the engineer answered that he was responsible for the fact that plague and cholera do not break out.

Sometimes I asked myself, whether faith is possibly in the psychological apparatus of humans an impulse, similar to sexual impulse or hunger: an impulse that provides meaning. A Sufi Sheikh answered me that the thing was very easy, that every human being, also not religious ones, could only act if s/he believes in what s/he does. Those who don't believe are dead.

A L L I N V O L V E D

NACERA BELAZA ^(DZ/F)

After studying literary studies Nacera Belaza dedicated herself to dance and established her own company in 1989. Since then she has been collaborating with other artists, giving workshops and developing own pieces, which have been presented internationally. Selection: *Le Cri*, *Les Sentinelles*, *Le Temps scellé*. Furthermore Belaza is establishing a dance platform for collaboration between Algeria and France.

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FUCKHEAD ^(A)

is an Austrian industrial-noise-core-band that has been founded in Linz, combining music with performing arts elements. Members: Siegmund Aigner, Didi Bruckmayr, Dieter Kern, Michael Strohmann.

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presenter and producer of contemporary dance (a. o. Tanzwerkstatt Europa), founded Joint Adventures in 1990 and fostered programs for structural support and artistic programming of contemporary dance productions (BRDance, Nationales Performancenetz, Tanzplattform Deutschland, Access to Dance, Choreographic Captures). From 1999 to 2003 Artistic Director of luzerntanz at the luzernertheater. Since the 2009—2010 season, he has been Artistic Director at Tanzquartier Wien.

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is a dance critique, researcher and author. He holds a degree in Dance Studies (Université Paris 8) and mainly works on the analysis of performances and the critical reflection of their creation. Recent publications a.o. on choreographer Mathilde Monnier and her aesthetic as well as contemporary choreography in sub-Saharan Africa. He is a Feldenkrais practitioner.

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NAVARIDAS & DEUTINGER ^(E/A)

is a Graz based performance group. Marta Navaridas and Alex Deutinger both studied translation and interpreting before studying dance and choreography. Since 2007 they have been developing text-based performances. Selected works: *Look at Them Now!*, *Your Majesties*, *Fandango and Common Consciousness*, *Speaking of Which*, *On the Other Hand*.

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RITU SARIN and TENZING SONAM ^(IN)

have been making films on Tibetan subjects for more than 20 years. Working through their film company, White Crane Films,

they have produced and directed several documentaries: *The Reincarnation of Khensur Rinpoche* (1991), *The Trials of Telo Rinpoche* (1993), *A Stranger in My Native Land* (1997), and *The Shadow Circus: The CIA in Tibet* (1998), *Dreaming Lhasa* (2005). *The Sun Behind the Clouds: Tibet's Struggle for Freedom* (2009).

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OLIVER STURM ^(D)

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<http://www.jalaltoufic.com>.

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