

Teaching Urban Art Practices in Pandemic Times

A PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT
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Introduction

Urban Art Practices In Pandemic Times unites four Brussels-based schools (ERG, RITCS, La Cambre, ULB), 39 students, 6 teachers, and 10 artists and researchers who collectively experimented with new ways of working in and with the city over a two-year period. This multidisciplinary educational and artistic experience was radically transformed by the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced us to invent other methods for exploring the city and intervening within the urban landscape. This publication bears witness to a journey which culminated in 2021 with the organisation of SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP: an online festival presenting 27 different artistic forms (<http://shutmedownliftmeup.be/>). By means of this book, we wish to share the methodology for research and creation that we adopted, the questions that drove us and the challenges that we had to overcome. In this publication—in order to allow other cultural practitioners to appropriate and test our methodologies—we have decided to put an emphasis on the tools, processes, and strategies we deployed to first understand the urban context, before being able to work within it.

The encounters between students, artists, and educators were driven by multiple factors, including the will to stimulate inter-institutional exchange and to deconstruct the compartmentalization of knowledge—bringing together urbanism, geography, (oral) history, and sociology, as well as less institutionalized practices such as situationism, slam poetry, and street art. We wanted to raise the students' awareness of how complex our experience of the urban environment can be, all the while reflecting together on the issues and specificities linked to the different media that we were using in order to address and question the city (radio, graffiti, installation, performance, etc.).

The first stage of work took place in 2020 at La Fonderie in Brussels. This former factory—now transformed into a museum of industry and labor—was particularly suited to our project: we also wanted to analyze work in the city and, more specifically, work at night. We wanted to observe and document the activities of those who take over the streets, squares, sheds, and offices at times when other workers are resting. We wanted to look at the hidden night work that makes daytime activities possible. For this first workshop, entitled *Night Shift*, we too shifted our working hours, and it was at night that, in small groups of two or three, we went around the city to meet the guards, the tram track repairers, the fish deliverers, the airport or casino staff, and the sex workers. We were able to test tools and methods on the ground that the guest sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, writers, and photographers had shared with us earlier that day. After a sleepless night, tired but enlightened

by our encounters, we spent the morning discussing the documents and questions brought back from the city. New paths of enquiry then emerged that were to be explored on the next night shift.

The workshop ended with a proposal by each group of how we could translate the gathered resources into an artistic form. These proposals were to be further developed during the following workshop, alongside guest artists with whom we would reflect upon the most appropriate ways of dealing with the collected materials. During an intensive two-week workshop, we intended to live together in an industrial building that was in the process of being reconverted. We were to continue collecting materials, all the while constantly reconfiguring our views and habits following the multiple encounters between disciplines and discussions with the artists. The aim was to propose *in fine* an artistic event that would give an account of our journey, our experiences, and what the city had taught us.

But suddenly—and unexpectedly—the lockdown was announced, and with it came new questions and challenges to overcome: How could we work together when meeting up was forbidden? How could we intervene in the city when access to public spaces was limited? How could we meet citizens if the squares and streets had been deserted?

Nevertheless, we decided not to give up, and set ourselves the challenge of finding both alternative strategies to the painful Teams and Zoom meetings and ways to engage with the urban environment all the while fully respecting social distancing measures. These measures and their consequences (contact tracing, isolation, restrictions on leaving the city, etc.) became rules of a game that was to be incorporated into our practice. We committed to trying to reinvent artistic work in a context of crisis that had left us adrift, and this led to the idea of creating the SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP festival. Together, we thought about and experimented with new ways of communicating and creating on a small scale, we developed strategies for social cohesion, we tried to create bonds in this very particular context. First, we tried to create links between students by forming new small groups every day, so that they could meet outside and develop interventions in public spaces together. Links were also created with artists via their online masterclasses: Samira Saleh, Joëlle Sambi, Myriam Van Imschoot, and Benjamin Verdonck took it in turns to communicate remotely with the students, each of them proposing experiments to be carried out during the day before meeting up in the evening to exchange questions and results. The students experimented with spoken word, singing, performance, and the collection of objects and stories as a means of creating new bonds with the city and its inhabitants.

Our book shares these materials in a raw way: excerpts from the masterclasses, collected images and sounds and complex creations. It functions as an open archive to be explored and appropriated by readers. QR codes and links act as an invitation to further your reading and discover the conversations and other productions online. Interviews and/or texts written by artists and researchers enrich the publication by deepening their remarks and sharing their approaches and feelings towards the city, and the place artists occupy within it.

With this publication, we wish to bear witness to a pedagogical experience which has enabled us to engage in more collective approaches to artistic practice. The context of confinement has pushed us to develop new strategies to build a common space for thinking, sharing, experimenting, and learning. It is these methodologies and ideas that we wish to share here with teachers, students, artists, and, more broadly, anyone who engages in processes of creation/mediation/intervention in urban spaces. The challenges encountered, the generosity of the invited artists and researchers, and the commitment and perseverance of the students have led us to exchange upon and re-evaluate our pedagogical skills and strategies. This book is also intended as a thank you to all the participants who made this beautiful adventure possible.

Karolina Svobodova

FR.

Urban Art Practices In Pandemic Times c'est 4 écoles différentes de Bruxelles (ERG, RITCS, La Cambre, ULB), 39 étudiant.e.s, 6 pédagogues, 10 artistes et chercheur.e.s réuni.e.s pour expérimenter ensemble, pendant deux ans, de nouvelles manières de travailler dans et avec la ville. Cette expérience pédagogique et artistique pluridisciplinaire a été radicalement transformée par le contexte de la pandémie du Coronavirus qui nous a obligé.e.s à inventer d'autres modes d'explorations et d'interventions urbaines. Cette publication témoigne de ce parcours qui s'est achevé en 2021 par l'organisation d'un festival en live streaming présentant 27 formes artistiques différentes (<http://shutmedownliftmeup.be/>). À travers ce livre, nous souhaitons partager les méthodes de recherche et de création investies, les questions qui nous ont fait avancer, les défis que nous avons eu à surmonter. Afin de permettre à d'autres acteurs et actrices culturels de s'approprier et de tester ces méthodes, nous avons mis l'accent sur les outils, le cheminement et les stratégies déployées pour comprendre et travailler ensuite dans le contexte urbain.

Cette rencontre entre étudiant.e.s, artistes et pédagogues était animée par des enjeux pluriels : en cherchant à stimuler des rencontres inter-institutionnelles et à décloisonner les savoirs (urbanisme, géographie, histoire (orale), sociologie, mais aussi des pratiques moins institutionnalisées comme le situationnisme, le slam, le street art), il s'agissait pour nous de sensibiliser les étudiant.e.s à la complexité de l'expérience urbaine et de réfléchir ensemble aux enjeux et spécificités des différents médias (radio, graffiti, installation, performance, ...) pour aborder la question de la ville.

La première étape de travail s'est déroulée en 2020 dans l'espace de La Fonderie, à Bruxelles. Cette ancienne usine transformée en musée des industries et du travail était particulièrement adaptée à notre projet : nous voulions nous aussi nous intéresser au travail dans la ville et, plus spécifiquement, au travail dans la nuit. Nous voulions observer et documenter les activités de ceux et celles qui investissent les rues, les places, les hangars et les bureaux aux heures où les autres travailleurs et travailleuses se reposent. Nous souhaitions nous intéresser au travail nocturne caché qui rend possible les activités diurnes. Pour ce premier workshop intitulé *Night Shift*, nous avons nous aussi décalé nos horaires et c'est la nuit que, en petits groupes de deux ou trois, nous arpentions la ville à la rencontre des gardien.ne.s, des ouvrier.e.s de maintenance des rails de tram, des livreur.euse.s de poissons, du personnel de l'aéroport ou de casino et des travailleur.euse.s du sexe. Nous testions alors sur le terrain les outils et manières de faire que les sociologues, anthropologues, géographes, écrivain.e.s et photographes invité.e.s avaient partagées avec nous plus tôt dans la journée. Le lendemain, fatigué.e.s mais riches de nos rencontres, c'est ensemble que nous discutions des documents et questionnements rapportés du terrain. De nouvelles pistes de réflexion se dégageaient alors, à explorer pour notre propre prochaine *Night Shift*. Le workshop s'est terminé par une première proposition de mise en forme artistique de ces matériaux par chacun des groupes. Ces propositions devaient être approfondies lors du workshop suivant, grâce à l'accompagnement d'artistes invité.e.s pour réfléchir avec nous aux moyens les plus adaptés de traiter ces matériaux. Durant un workshop intensif de deux semaines, nous allions habiter ensemble dans une friche en cours de reconversion, continuer à collecter des matériaux, déplacer, grâce aux rencontres entre disciplines et stimulés par les artistes, nos regards et habitudes pour, finalement, proposer un événement artistique qui rendrait compte de ce parcours et de ce que la ville nous a appris et fait vivre.

L'annonce du confinement est tombée comme un couperet, et avec elle, de nouvelles questions et défis à surmonter : Comment travailler ensemble quand se réunir est interdit ? Comment intervenir sur la ville

quand l'accès à l'espace public est limité ? Comment rencontrer ses usager.e.s quand les places et rues en ont été désertées ? Nous décidâmes malgré tout de poursuivre en nous donnant comme défi de trouver des stratégies pour éviter de reproduire les pénibles rendez-vous Teams ou Zoom, et d'investir, dans le respect des mesures de distanciation, l'espace urbain. Ces mesures et leurs conséquences (isolement des cas contacts, départ de la ville,...) sont devenues des règles de jeu à incorporer dans notre expérience. À travers la proposition de la mise en place du festival *SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP*, il s'agissait de nous engager dans une tentative de réinvention du travail artistique dans un contexte de crise qui nous laissait sans repères. Ensemble, nous avons réfléchi et expérimenté de nouvelles manières de communiquer et de créer à petite échelle, nous avons élaboré des stratégies de cohésion sociale, nous avons essayé de créer, dans ce contexte si particulier, du lien. Du lien d'abord entre les étudiant.e.s en formant chaque jour de nouveaux petits groupes, de façon à leur permettre de se rencontrer en extérieur et d'élaborer ensemble des interventions en espace public. Du lien aussi avec des artistes à travers des masterclass en ligne. Samira Saleh, Joëlle Sambi, Myriam Van Imschoot et Benjamin Verdonck ont tour à tour communiqué en distanciel avec les étudiant.e.s : chacun et chacune a proposé des expérimentations à réaliser durant la journée avant de se retrouver le soir et d'échanger questions et résultats. Les étudiant.e.s ont ainsi expérimenté le spoken word, le chant, la performance, la collecte d'objets et d'histoires comme moyens de création de liens avec la ville et ses habitant.e.s.

Notre livre partage ces matériaux de manière assez brute : extraits des masterclass, images et sons collectés et créations élaborées. Il fonctionne comme une archive ouverte pour l'exploration et l'appropriation des lecteurs et lectrices. Des QR codes et liens vous invitent à compléter la lecture par la découverte des échanges et formes en ligne. Des entretiens et/ou textes rédigés par les artistes et chercheur.euse.s enrichissent la publication en approfondissant leurs propos et en partageant leurs approches et sensibilités vis-à-vis de la ville et de la place de l'artiste en son sein.

Avec cette publication, nous souhaitons témoigner de cette expérience pédagogique qui nous a permis de nous engager dans des démarches plus collectives de la pratique artistique. Le contexte de confinement nous a poussé à développer de nouvelles stratégies pour construire un espace commun pour la réflexion, le partage, l'expérimentation et l'apprentissage. Ce sont ces méthodologies et réflexions que nous souhaitons partager ici avec les enseignant.e.s, les étudiant.e.s, les artistes et, plus largement, toute personne qui s'engage dans des processus de création/médiation/intervention dans l'espace urbain. Les défis rencontrés, la générosité des artistes et chercheur.euse.s invité.e.s, l'engage-

ment et la persévérance des étudiant.e.s nous ont permis d'échanger et de réévaluer nos compétences et stratégies pédagogiques. À travers ce livre, nous souhaitons également remercier tou.te.s les participant.e.s qui ont rendu cette belle aventure possible.

NL.

Stedelijke kunstpraktijken in tijden van pandemie verenigt vier Brusselse scholen (ERG, RITCS, La Cambre, ULB), 39 studenten, 6 leerkrachten, en 10 kunstenaars en onderzoekers die gedurende twee jaar collectief experimenteerden met een nieuwe manier van werken in en met de stad. Deze multidisciplinaire educatieve en artistieke ervaring werd radicaal veranderd door de context van de Covid-19-pandemie, die ons ertoe dwong andere methodes te bedenken om de stad te verkennen en in het stedelijk landschap op te treden. Deze publicatie vormt de weerslag van een traject dat in 2021 zijn hoogtepunt bereikte met de organisatie *SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP*: een online festival waarin 27 verschillende kunstvormen aan bod komen (<http://shutmedownlift-meup.be/>). Door dit boek willen we de methodologie voor onderzoek en creatie die we volgden, de vragen die ons dreven en de uitdagingen die we moesten overwinnen, met je delen. In deze publicatie – om andere cultuurbeoefenaars in staat te stellen zich onze methodologieën toe te eigenen en te testen – hebben we besloten de nadruk te leggen op de tools, processen en strategieën die we gebruikten om eerst de stedelijke context te begrijpen, vóór we erbinnen konden werken.

De ontmoetingen tussen studenten, kunstenaars en docenten werden gedreven door meerdere factoren, waaronder de wil om inter-institutionele uitwisseling te stimuleren en de verkokering van kennis te deconstrueren – door stedenbouw, geografie, (mondelinge) geschiedenis, en sociologie samen te brengen, en ook minder geïnstitutionaliseerde praktijken zoals situationisme, slam poetry, en street art. We wilden de studenten ervan bewust maken hoe complex onze ervaring van de stedelijke omgeving kan zijn, en tegelijk samen nadenken over de problemen en bijzonderheden die samenhangen met de verschillende media die we zouden gebruiken om de stad aan te spreken en te bevragen (radio, graffiti, installatie, performance, enz.).

De eerste fase van het programma vond plaats in 2020 in La Fonderie, Brussel. Deze voormalige fabriek – tegenwoordig ingericht als museum voor industrie en werk – bleek bijzonder geschikt voor ons project: we wilden ook het werk in de stad analyseren en, meer bepaald, nachtwerk. We wilden de activiteiten observeren en documenteren van degenen die de straten, pleinen, loodsen en kantoren innemen op tijden dat andere arbeiders rusten. We wilden een kijkje nemen naar het verbor-

gen nachtwerk dat dagactiviteiten mogelijk maakt. Voor deze eerste workshop, onder de titel *Night Shift*, verlegden ook wij onze werkroutine, en was het 's nachts dat we in kleine groepjes van twee of drie de stad rondgingen om de bewakers, de trambaanherstellers, de visbezorgers, het vliegveld- of casinopersoneel en de sekswerkers te ontmoeten. We konden ter plaatse tools en methodes uittesten die de sociologen, antropologen, geografen, schrijvers en fotografen eerder die dag met ons hadden gedeeld. Na een slapeloze nacht, vermoeid maar opgeluisterd door onze ontmoetingen, namen we de ochtend om de uit de stad meegebrachte documenten en vragen te bespreken. Zo ontstonden nieuwe trajecten van onderzoek die dan tijdens de volgende nachtdienst verkend zouden worden.

De workshop werd afgesloten met een voorstel van elke groep over hoe we de verzamelde bronnen in een artistieke vorm konden gieten. Deze voorstellen zouden verder uitgewerkt worden tijdens de volgende workshop, samen met gastkunstenaars waarmee we zouden beraadslagen hoe we het best met het verzamelde materiaal konden omgaan. Tijdens een intensieve tweeweekse workshop was het de bedoeling dat we samen zouden wonen in een industrieel bedrijfspand dat op dat moment heringericht werd. We zouden materiaal blijven verzamelen, terwijl we voortdurend onze opvattingen en gewoonten aanpasten naar aanleiding van de veelvuldige ontmoetingen tussen de disciplines, en de gesprekken met de kunstenaars. Het doel was een kunstzinnige manifestatie *in fine* voor te stellen, die verslag zou doen van onze reis en van wat de stad ons geleerd had, en ons tot beleven had gebracht. Maar, plotseling en onverwacht werd de lockdown afgekondigd, wat gepaard ging met nieuwe vragen en uitdagingen die overwonnen moesten worden: Hoe konden we samenwerken als elkaar ontmoeten verboden was? Hoe konden we in de stad ingrijpen als de toegang tot openbare ruimten beperkt was? Hoe konden we burgers ontmoeten als de pleinen en straten verlaten waren?

Ondanks besloten we niet op te geven, en onszelf voor de uitdaging te stellen zowel alternatieve strategieën te vinden voor de pijnlijke Teams en Zoom bijeenkomsten, als manieren om ons met de stedelijke omgeving bezig te houden, met volledige inachtneming van de sociale distantiëringmaatregelen. Deze maatregelen en hun uitvloeisels (contact tracing, isolatie, beperkingen om de stad te verlaten, enz.) werden regels van een spel dat in onze praktijk moest worden opgenomen. We begonnen met een poging om artistiek werk opnieuw uit te vinden in een context van crisis die ons stuurløos had achtergelaten, en dit leidde tot het idee om het SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP festival te creëren. Samen bedachten en experimenteerden we met nieuwe manieren van communiceren en creëren op kleine schaal, we ontwikkelden strategieën voor sociale cohesie, we probeerden verbondenheid te scheppen

in deze uiterst bijzondere context. Eerst en vooral probeerden we banden tussen de studenten te smeden door elke dag nieuwe kleine groepjes te vormen, zodat ze elkaar buitenhuis konden ontmoeten en samen interventies in de openbare ruimte konden ontwikkelen. Er werden ook verbindingen gelegd met kunstenaars via hun online masterclasses: Samira Saleh, Joëlle Sambi, Myriam Van Imschoot en Benjamin Verdonck communiceerden om beurten op afstand met de leerlingen, waarbij elk van hen overdag uit te voeren experimenten voorstelde en elkaar 's avonds ontmoette om vragen en resultaten uit te wisselen. De studenten experimenteerden met spreektaal, zang, performance en het verzamelen van voorwerpen en verhalen als middel om nieuwe banden met de stad en haar bewoners te scheppen.

Ons boek deelt dit materiaal op een nogal rauwe manier: fragmenten uit de masterclasses, verzamelde beelden en geluiden, complexe creatie. Het functioneert als een open archief dat door lezers verkend en toegeëigend kan worden. QR-codes en links fungeren als een uitnodiging om verder te lezen en de gesprekken en andere voorstellingen online te ontdekken. Interviews en/of teksten geschreven door kunstenaars en onderzoekers verrijken de publicatie door hun opmerkingen uit te diepen en hun benaderingen en gevoelens ten opzichte van de stad, en de plaats die kunstenaars daarin innemen, te delen.

Met deze publicatie willen we getuigen van een pedagogische ervaring die ons in staat heeft gesteld tot een meer collectieve benadering van de artistieke praktijk. De context van afzondering heeft ons ertoe aangezet nieuwe strategieën te ontwikkelen om een gemeenschappelijke ruimte op te bouwen voor denken, delen, experimenteren en leren. Het zijn deze methodologieën en ideeën die we hier willen delen met onderwijsers, studenten, kunstenaars en, ruimer gezien, iedereen die zich bezighoudt met processen van creatie/bemiddeling/interventie in stedelijke ruimten. De uitdagingen die we tegenkwamen, de vrijgevigheid van de uitgenodigde kunstenaars en onderzoekers, en de inzet en het doorzettingsvermogen van de studenten hebben ons ertoe gebracht onze pedagogische vaardigheden en strategieën uit te wisselen en opnieuw te evalueren. Dit boek is eveneens bedoeld als dankbetuiging aan alle deelnemers die dit prachtige avontuur mogelijk hebben gemaakt.



Night Shifts On Urban Practices Workshop 2019





The Art of Urban Walking

Noel B. Salazar

In 2018, The Guardian published an opinion piece entitled “Urban walking isn’t just good for the soul. It could save humanity.” (Elledge, 2018). In it, journalist Jonn Elledge argues that understanding how cities “work” is crucial, given that more than half of the world’s population live in them. According to him, walking is the best way of grasping the inner workings of urban environments and their inhabitants. As a socio-cultural anthropologist who lives and works in Brussels, I wholeheartedly agree. Reading what follows will hopefully make clear why. The practice of walking is as old as humankind.

According to some, walking is even what made us human in the first place. Throughout the ages, walking has served many different purposes, from survival to leisure. At the end of the 19th century, ethnologists were already undertaking walking trips to collect folk culture. However, they did not think of their walking as a method, and they had not received any formal training in it. While walking has always been part of the methodological toolbox of ethnographers, it would take more than a century before they started paying serious attention to walking-as-method. In the pioneering volume *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, (2008), anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst present studies of walking in a range of regional and cultural contexts, exploring the diversity of walking behaviours and the variety of meanings these can embody. Despite this type of innovative scholarship, the teaching and practical training of walking is still not well addressed, no matter the discipline.

In arts practice, too, there is a long and varied tradition of walking. Arts-based practices such as creative writing, performance, and visual arts have often explored walking as a mode of inquiry. Just think of the ramblings of the Romantic poets, often used as creativity-generators for



their artistic work. Indeed, walking aids conceptual thinking: while walking, an artist may create a painting in their mind, a composer may form a melody, and a writer may plan a book. Art, performance, and walking have been associated in numerous ways (Evans, 2012; Qualmann and Hind, 2015). Walks have been employed by artists using a very wide set of perspectives, modes of collection, and representation; it has been applied in drawing, painting, found objects, and photography and film (documentary, textual and photo journals, performance, landscape art, etc.) (O’Neill and Roberts 2019).

For a long time, the practice of walking in the arts and sciences existed as totally disconnected from each other. It would take transdisciplinary thinkers such as Guy Debord to bridge the divide. Debord and his avant-garde Letterist International collective put forward the *dérive* (‘drift’), a



playful urban walking technique meant to explore and provoke new forms of engagement with cities. This was based on the idea of psychogeography, which stresses the effects environments have on people’s emotions and behaviours. Other sources of inspiration include Walter Benjamin on *flâneurs*, Michel de Certeau on (urban) tactics, and Henri Le

febvre on rhythmanalysis. Many of these intellectuals and their innovative ideas are reappearing in the renewed contemporary interest shown by the arts and sciences in walking (Bates and Rhys-Taylor, 2017; Hall, Ram and Shoval 2017; O’Neill and Roberts 2019).

The various genealogies of walking in the arts, social sciences and humanities are now fruitfully coming together, mutually strengthening each other (e.g., Pink et al. 2010). Noteworthy is the stress on the embodied, the relational, and the (multi)sensory. Particularly the latter is important because the focus has been far too long on (only) the visual. In the words of artist Perdita Phillips (2004: 319), Walking is essential to field-work/field walking because it is a spatial practice and a bodily practice. It engages with more than just the eye. The field site will be re-corporealised by walking. Walking is pivotal to the project because on the one hand it is personal, physical, everyday, and immediate; and on the other

it is technologically simple, autonomous, and increasingly at a distance from the contemporary trajectory of high modernism. These characteristics have caused it to be increasingly left out of future modernism as simulations and cyborgs become the norm. These tensions provide impetus to re-examine walking as an art practice: it connects the field to the urban, the body to space, and the wild to the everyday.

Walking is increasingly being used by scholars and artists alike to explore and comment on how people experience the city in everyday life. The way walking is used and engaged with in research and artistic projects varies widely: participant and other forms of observation; documenting one's own walking experiences or that of others in writing, drawing or painting, photography, film, soundscape, or other art forms; asking others (either walkers or non-walkers) to do the same; walking interviews and interviews about walking; walking exercises and experiments; (counter-)mapping; thematic walks (e.g., soundwalks and smellwalks) and guided tours, etc. Depending on the constellation, the people involved become active co-creators of knowledge and/or art. Whatever tools or techniques used, it is important to apprehend affective, ineffable, and mundane moments (Yi'En, 2014).

Researchers and artists should be mindful of how walking is an embodied and emplaced practice and how their own feelings and reactions may differ from that of other people. Art educator Yuha Jung (2014) talks about "mindful walking" as a practice of sensible observation through emplaced movement. This is particularly important in contemporary urban environments characterized by superdiversity. In such complex contexts, it is enlightening to understand who is walking with who, when, and where. The same places can be used and experienced very differently by diverse groups of people. Moreover, walking at night or at noon in the same neighbourhood reveals that cityscapes have their own temporalities. Walking along with people may tell us how they walk through the city, which places they avoid, and which places they find important. We can also invite people to walk on a predefined route if we are curious how they will react to specific places or situations. The environment can always be used as a prompt to talk about particular topics or do certain things.

While being methodical and systematic certainly has advantages, it is counterproductive if walking and the study of it are too pre-determined by ideas and agendas *a priori*. Walking is an embodied way of knowing, offering sensory and perceptual awareness to everyday experiences (Irwin, 2006). It can and should be alive with surprise, imagination, and creativity when we engage aesthetically with our experiences. The unpredictability of a walk often leads to entirely unexpected outcomes. A single walk around an urban environment may evoke a vast array of

(hi)stories, imaginaries, and interpretations, all of which are intricately linked to not only individual experiences but also to larger socio-cultural and economic processes.

Sarah Truman and Stephanie Springgay (2016) give a nice overview of what walking (research) can do: (1) open space for novelty (in many different ways); (2) defamiliarize your body (in the tradition of the *dérive*); (3) mix the senses, use touch to describe smell; (4) walk like an archive (acknowledging that subjectivity is not fixed but produced through movement); and (5) propose (triggering conditions of emergence). Through a series of walking exercises, artist Blake Morris (2019) develops a practice-based approach to walking as an artistic medium. Walking always sets in motion a variety of bodily movements, intensities, and affects that unfold and extend new variations.

In sum, walking the city is a practice that seems to be favored by many scholars and artists who want to understand cities and how city life is experienced. The above makes clear why. Academics have a lot to learn from the critical walking methodologies and participatory practices that were developed in the arts. Artists, on the other hand, can enrich their engagements with walking by incorporating walking-related insights generated by scholars. Let us end where we started, with the 2018 opinion piece in *The Guardian*. Elledge (2018) argues that cities that encourage walking are actually nicer; not only from an environmental point of view (less pollution), but more interesting, too. One more reason to take walking more seriously, in research, in art, and beyond...

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La ballade des coins sombres*

Conduite par Clément Thiry et Chloé Schuiten

«Commencer par redécouvrir la ville : s'attarder là où on ne fait que passer, observer ce qu'on voit à peine, lever les yeux, faire attention à où on met les pieds...»

C'est par une «*ballade des coins sombres*» que nous avons décidé d'entamer le premier workshop : rencontrer Bruxelles de nuit et nous rencontrer en se laissant aller aux échanges informels qui stimule le cheminement urbain. Guidé.e.s par les artistes Clément Thiry et Chloé Schuiten, on se met en marche le 5 novembre 2019, au moment où la nuit tombe. Il bruine un peu, puis il pleut carrément tandis que nous remontons vers le haut de la ville historique et découvrons la cité administrative avant de redescendre le long du canal de Bruxelles. La promenade artistique aiguise notre sensibilité : des mots, des sons et des projections lumineuses accompagnent la marche. La performance constitue elle-même un exemple concret du type de démarche que les étudiant.e.s seront amené.e.s à développer à travers le workshop : une appropriation et une restitution artistique de leur expérience de la nuit urbaine, construite au fil des rencontres et exercices.

Karolina Svobodova

«On croit en l'obscurité de la nuit et au sommeil. On veut dormir de manière professionnelle puis disparaître dans les interstices urbains en abandonnant le monde des lumières. On n'a pas peur des zones d'ombres, au contraire, on y plonge. On se laisse aspirer par les coins sombres de la ville, ces espaces-rebuts oubliés de l'éclairage public qui restent en dehors de tout contrôle. On veut se sentir vulnérable. On n'a pas peur d'avoir peur. On se laisse hypnotiser par le sommeil et on traîne dans les marges à la li-



sière de l'humanité. Peu à peu se dessine un territoire photosensible qui n'appartient qu'à lui-même. On s'en imprègne afin de renouveler notre rapport au monde. On en prend soin en l'arpentant avec attention. On lui murmure des berceuses en se fantasmant activiste somnambule.»

Depuis 2016, Clément Thiry erre dans la ville la nuit. Il collecte les espaces sous-éclairés et les répertorie sur une carte. Ce sont des zones oubliées, des petits coins où s'entassent les déchets de la ville.

La ballade des coins sombres invite à la contemplation et à l'écoute en suivant un parcours de la carte. Elle est ponctuée de berceuses chantées et de textes lus à haute voix qui se morcèlent comme les bribes d'un rêve. Les promeneur.euse.s arpencent les rues endormies happé.e.ss par la dimension hypnotique de la ville ainsi mise en lumière. Suite à un récent travail d'écriture et de repérages effectué au cours de l'année 2021, il présente une nouvelle carte ainsi qu'un nouveau parcours qui se concentre sur les quartiers de Forest et d'Anderlecht.



* English translation page 120

Over empathie, vooroordelen, wandelen en Zweedse statistiek

Kurt Deruyter

Empathie of sympathie?

Een kleine anekdote ter inleiding. In 2015 gaf ik op een kunstencolloquium in de Beursschouwburg een lezing over *Halfway Home*, mijn project in Molenbeek en Kuregem. Een Amerikaans kunstenaar vroeg me waarom ik het steeds over “wij” en “zij” had wanneer ik het had over de inwoners van Molenbeek. In het publiek zag ik veel toehoorders instemmend knikken. Er

ontspon zich toen een geanimeerde discussie waarin ik de stelling verdedigde dat wanneer je opgroeit in Molenbeek in een gezin met migratie achtergrond, je wereldbeeld zo fundamenteel anders is dat het onbegrijpelijk wordt voor een buitenstaander. Je geschiedenis, je uitda-



gingen, je netwerken, je referentiekader, je mogelijkheden verschillen grondig van een “doorsnee” iemand uit de blanke middenklasse, waar zo ongeveer 99% van het publiek toe behoorde.

Als onderzoeker, kunstenaar, journalist pleitte ik om dit op zijn minst te onderkennen en niet te doen alsof we allemaal tot dezelfde leefwereld behoren. Ik noem het empathisch onderzoek. Proberen je in de leefwereld en het paradigma van de ander te verplaatsen en er begrip voor op te brengen zonder er daarom deel van uit te maken. Maar om dat te kunnen opbrengen moeten we eerst te rade gaan bij ons zelf en begrijpen hoe onze eigen ideeën tot stand komen en hoe gevvaarlijk die kunnen zijn voor de manier waarop we naar een onderwerp kijken.

Ontmoetingen: Ken jezelf en vergeet wie je bent.

Daar denken we al meer dan 2000 jaar over na. Een mens is grossso modo het product van zijn opvoeding, zijn omgeving, zijn ervaringen en zijn vaardigheden. Veel van de cruciale elementen in die vergelijking hebben we helemaal niet in de hand. Je kiest je eigen ouders niet, of de sociale context waar je in opgroeit. Of de plaats. Je moet je daar van bewust zijn om te begrijpen hoe je spontaan naar een onderwerp als een stad (en zijn inwoners) kijkt. Er zijn namelijk veel denkbeelden die we kritiekloos overnemen omdat ze uit een voor ons betrouwbare bron komen, de krant bijvoorbeeld, of omdat we ze meekrijgen in onze studies of opvoeding. In tegenstelling tot wat we intuïtief denken, beschermen universitaire studies of een succesvolle loopbaan ons helemaal niet tegen deze “commonplaces”. De Zweedse statisticus Hans Rosling klaagde onze gebrekige feitenkennis van mondiale bevolkingsgroei regelmatig aan in zijn TED-talks. Hij kwam tot de verbijsterende vaststel-

ling dat een universitair testpubliek het er eigenlijk nog slechter vanaf bracht dan een willekeurig geselecteerde testpopulatie. De reden daarvoor is net die kritiekloze aannname van ideeën die geworteld zijn in een bepaalde cultuur en geschiedenis en te weinig of helemaal niet in vraag gesteld worden.



Als we geëngageerd naar een onderwerp als de stad willen kijken, kan het alleen maar vruchtbaar zijn als we ons bewust zijn van ons eigen paradigma en de wortels ervan. En vooral dat dit niet het enig mogelijke paradigma is. Een “ander” zal bijna noodzakelijk een afwijkend beeld hebben. Empathie met die “andere” kan nieuwe interessante denkbeelden opleveren.

Beelden van de stad

Zoals ons wereldbeeld rechtstreeks voortvloeit uit allerlei factoren eigen aan ons zelf en onze omgeving, is ook ons stadsbeeld een product van ons leven en onze gewoontes. Ons werk, onze school, onze activiteiten spelen zich af in bepaalde stadsdelen die we dus frequenter bezoeken dan andere. Onze weg enaartoe loopt vaak via dezelfde paden/wegen

* English translation page 121

en zo krijgen die betekenis voor ons en gaan ons beeld bepalen. Wie vanuit Brussel-Centrum steeds via het Kanaal naar Kuregem reist, krijgt een ander beeld voorgesloten dan wie via de Bergensesteenweg reist.

Het transportmiddel speelt ook een grote rol. Te voet door de Bergensesteenweg, langs de bakkerijen, slagers, snackbars aan de Anderlechtsepoot is een heel andere zintuiglijke ervaring dan de metro nemen naar Clemenceau. Het verschil is trouwens niet alleen zintuiglijk maar ook intentioneel. De metro, de auto hebben een heel functioneel karakter, de bedoeling is om zo snel mogelijk van punt A naar punt B te gaan terwijl wandelen net uitnodigt tot flaneren, observeren en ontdekken. Het is gemakkelijker om wandelend van je traject af te wijken en in te spelen op wat je tegenkomt.

Hoe bepalen we trouwens waar we heen gaan? Dat wordt duidelijker als we een andere stad bezoeken. Of het nu voor korte duur is of voor langere duur. We kiezen een standplaats (hotel, airbnb, andere), stippelen van daar uit doelgerichte trajecten uit omdat we het een of ander stadsdeel willen bezoeken, laten ons hierbij leiden door informatie uit stadsgidsen of van kennissen of puttend uit eerdere ervaringen maar bouwen op die manier aan een beeld van de stad die we bezoeken.

Op zich is er natuurlijk niets fout mee om een stad op deze manier te bezoeken. Maar als we de ambitie hebben om een stad te *onderzoeken* stoten we op een fundamenteel probleem. Als we op voorhand bepalen wat we willen bezoeken/onderzoeken, leggen we onze patronen eigenlijk al vast en zal het beeld dat we vormen van de stad, grotendeels overeenstemmen met het idee die we op voorhand van de stad hadden gevormd.

Dit is een beetje een kip/ei situatie natuurlijk. Als we iets willen onderzoeken gaan we dat benoemen. Wat ons eigenlijk al een bepaalde richting uitstuurt. Het is dus zaak om strategieën te bedenken die ons



onderzoeksidéé procesmatig uitdagen en open te staan voor ideeën die wat rammelen aan onze overtuigingen.

Strategisch rammelen

De uitdaging wordt dus om de patronen die ontstaan door gewoontes te doorbreken. De mogelijkheden hier zijn eindeloos. De strategieën die ik zelf gebruik kan ik min of meer opdelen in twee categorieën.

Theoretische benaderingen.

1. In mijn zoektocht naar manieren om “anders” naar een stad te kijken, kwam ik uiteindelijk uit bij Kevin Lynch en zijn typologie van de stad. In de jaren '50-'60 kwam Kevin Lynch met een indeling van de stad op basis van wat hij zelf “het beeld” en de “verbeelding” van de stad noemde. Hoe bewoners en gebruikers de elementen van de stad daadwerkelijk konden “zien”. Hij is de uitvinder van de “mental map” in zijn klassieke boek *The Image of the City*. Hij keek naar de stad en onderscheidde een aantal basisvormen: Paden (paths), Knooppunten (nodes) Districten (districts) Grenzen, Afbakeningen (edges) en Bakens (landmarks). Ik gebruik zijn theorie vooral om een idee te krijgen van hoe een stad(sdeel) dat ik wil onderzoeken, functioneert. Je kijkt niet enkel naar de stad, maar ook hoe de mensen de stad gebruiken. Het geeft een inzicht in de dynamiek tussen gebouwde en beleefde stad.

2. Antropologische/ethnografische strategieën: om een empathische blik te ontwikkelen op een onderwerp grijp ik grotendeels terug naar enkele klassieke strategieën uit de antropologie. (1) Participerende observatie, (2) Diepte-interviews en (3) Tekstanalyse zijn er drie die ik voortdurend gebruik. Voor de participerende observatie probeer ik een “observatiepost” te vinden in de buurt waar ik actief wil zijn. Voor *Halfway Home* was dit een kruidenierswinkel waar ik onverdacht kon rondhangen en waar ik zelfs even gewerkt heb. Het stelt me in staat om een andere relatie op te bouwen met mijn “onderwerpen”. Ik heb graag dat ze “vergeten” dat ik een fotograaf ben. Op die manier kan ik ook gemakkelijk “diepte-interviews” organiseren zonder dat ik ze formeel zo moet aankondigen. Wetenschappelijk niet helemaal deontologisch correct maar als kunstenaar gun ik mezelf die vrijheid. (3) Tekstanalyse gebruik ik vooral om een idee te krijgen van cijfermateriaal en bestaande inzichten en die te toetsen aan het veldwerk.

“Artistieke” strategieën om een “gecontroleerde willekeur” in mijn onderzoekstrajecten te introduceren.

1. Systematisch willekeurig wandelen. Een mooi voorbeeld komt uit een roman van Koen Peeters, *Acacialaan*. Het hoofdpersonage komt in

Brussel wonen, neemt een grote plattegrond van de stad en tekent er met viltstift in het groot BRUSSEL op waarna hij elk weekend wandelend het traject volgt, dat uitgetekend is door een letter.

2. Wat ik persoonlijk heel graag doe is op wandel gaan met "locals", mensen uit de buurt die me op sleeptouw nemen en me "hun" stad tonen met de verhalen die er bij horen. Het stelt je in staat om met de ogen van de ander naar de stad te kijken.

3. *Get lost.* Zorg er voor dat je verdwaalt. Ik stippel soms een willekeurig links-rechts-links... Schema op voorhand uit en ga dat dan rigoureus volgen in de stad.

4. Herhaal wandelingen maar op verschillende tijdstippen van de dag, van het jaar. Sowieso levert een eerste wandeling me nooit het beste materiaal op. Er zijn zoveel indrukken die op je afkomen dat het heel moeilijk is om goed te observeren en al die impressies te filteren.

5. Observeer: meestal kies ik een "node" uit (zie Kevin Lynch) zoals een markt of een lokaal kruispunt of een winkel om de bewegingen van de mensen te observeren. Vaak gecombineerd met random praatjes met mensen die er passeren.

6. Zintuiglijke improvisaties: traag wandelen (schuifelen), naar boven kijken (de daken van de huizen als horizon nemen), achteruit wandelen, met de ogen dicht observeren...

Het pad en de weg en het doel.

Alles begint eigenlijk met de overtuiging dat wat je zelf weet, slechts een facet is van een kaleidoscopische werkelijkheid. Andere aspecten blootleggen, inkijk krijgen in de leefwereld van een ander, wat rammelen aan de vooroordelen van jezelf en anderen. Op wandel gaan zonder te weten waar we zullen arriveren... In onze hyperfunctionele maatschappij maken we daar misschien te weinig tijd voor. Terwijl dat soort zoektochten meestal degene blijken te zijn die het langst bijblijven.





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À propos de la gentrification*

Mathieu Van Crieckingen
en conversation avec Karolina Svobodova

KS - Dans quelle mesure peut-on (ou non) considérer Bruxelles comme une «ville créative» ?

MVC - On peut seulement dire, à mes yeux, que c'est une ville dans laquelle les autorités publiques utilisent cette expression dans leur appareillage discursif. En effet, la notion de «ville créative» pose problème : ce n'est pas une catégorie d'analyse de la ville, mais plutôt une catégorie d'action publique, de projet ou d'action sur la ville. Une ville n'est pas créative ou pas, il y a seulement des créateurs et des créatrices dans une ville. La notion de ville créative est un mot savonnette : non seulement on ne peut pas saisir ce genre de notion dans une perspective d'analyse, de plus, différents projets peuvent être mis sous la même appellation. En tant que chercheur en géographie sociale, c'est davantage la place des créateurs et créatrices dans la ville qui m'intéresse : où et comment vivent-ils ou elles, où et comment travaillent-ils ou elles. Et là, il y a une série de travaux qui montrent que les créateurs et créatrices constituent un ensemble très diversifié, et aussi que dans ce milieu professionnel les conditions de précarité sont largement diffusées, notamment quand il s'agit de trouver des lieux de travail, de répétition, d'expérimentation...

K.S - Que répondez-vous aux artistes qui s'inquiètent de participer malgré eux à des processus de gentrification en s'installant dans des quartiers défavorisés pour travailler et/ou vivre ?

MVC - L'idée que les artistes seraient les «pionnier.ère.s» de la gentrification reste très ancrée dans beaucoup de discours comme dans le débat public. Pourtant, dans le monde de la recherche, cette idée a été battue en brèche depuis bien longtemps. Par exemple, il ne suffit pas d'avoir des artistes dans un espace qui est en train d'être gentrifié pour dire que ce sont les artistes qui sont à l'origine de cette transformation. Il y a corrélation mais pas de cause à effet.

Ce ne sont pas les artistes en tant qu'artistes qui font monter les loyers, ou qui contrôlent les évolutions des niveaux de rente foncière ou immobilière. Je pense qu'il faut sortir de ce discours culpabilisant à l'encontre d'individus. La gentrification est un problème structurel qui appelle à des réponses collectives beaucoup plus qu'individuelles.

Les artistes, comme l'ensemble des habitants, sont face à des divisions sociales de l'espace qu'ils et elles n'ont pas définies. Si les artistes veulent s'y opposer, je dis toujours qu'il faut se demander avec qui on fait alliance ? Qui sponsorise les activités, avec qui on travaille, qui fait-on venir, à qui on s'adresse-t-on ? Ou encore rejoindre des groupes qui militent pour le logement social, contre la hausse des loyers, etc. Ça se règle au niveau collectif : quels mécanismes on développe pour empêcher que les loyers prennent des valeurs astronomiques, en décalage avec les capacités des gens à payer. Que l'on soit artiste ou non ne change rien ici.

KS - Quelles sont aujourd'hui les dynamiques mais aussi les tensions entre les projets culturels et la ville ?

MVC - On voit de manière nette de nombreux exemples d'instrumentalisation de pratiques, de projets, d'initiatives artistiques à des fins autres que culturelles et artistiques, des fins de promotion touristique ou de «l'image de marque» de la ville, par exemple. Le tournant qu'a pris le programme «Capitale culturelle de l'Europe» constitue un bon exemple : au début il s'agissait d'essayer de



promouvoir une culture européenne spécifique, différente de la culture américaine, artistique, etc. Mais c'est rapidement devenu un événement promotionnel dans lequel ce n'est plus la culture européenne qui est mise en avant mais bien la ville dans laquelle l'événement se passe. Des villes en manque de notoriété à un niveau international essaient, via la culture ou l'art, d'être mises en avant pendant au moins une année. On a là une instrumentalisation de la culture à d'autres fins d'action sur la ville. Si on prend le cas de Bruxelles, et plus précisément le cas de la Zinneke Parade : au départ le projet était de travailler avec les gens et de développer la culture par en bas, ça reste présent dans le projet mais quand ça a lieu, tout l'appareil touristique bruxellois se met en place pour promouvoir l'événement auprès d'un public extérieur et ça sert alors surtout à des fins de promotion touristique.

Les projets dits de «revitalisation urbaine» instrumentalisent également fréquemment l'art et la culture, à l'échelle de quartiers. La «revitalisation» ça ne veut pas dire ramener de la vie à des quartiers - qui n'en manquent pas - mais plutôt intervenir sur le peuplement de ces quartiers en rendant des quartiers populaires centraux plus attractifs pour des classes moyennes. Un exemple plus actuel, c'est le musée Kanal-Centre Pompidou. La présentation officielle de ce musée insiste sur les effets de «revitalisation» ou de «redynamisation» des quartiers avoisinants, notamment au moyen d'un discours sur la création de nouveaux ponts (matériels ou symboliques) entre les deux rives du canal. Mais si on veut créer des ponts avec Molenbeek, je ne pense pas que c'est par un musée d'art contemporain que ça va se faire le mieux. On pouvait imaginer plein d'autres utilisations de cet ancien garage. Le projet actuel vise à générer beaucoup de flux, mais principalement des flux liés au tourisme, international ou belge.

J'ai aussi l'impression qu'il y a des pratiques artistiques qui instrumentalisent l'espace urbain. La démarche de Santiago Calatrava avec la grande gare à Liège constitue un bon exemple : non seulement il est venu poser son ovni au milieu d'un quartier existant pour lequel il a fallu raser plusieurs îlots, mais il voulait également tracer une large avenue entre sa gare et la Meuse, pour avoir une sorte de perspective monumentale sur la gare. Or, entre les deux, il y avait des habitations et des commerces. Enfin, il y a aussi des démarches artistico-culturelles qui semblent taillées sur mesure pour être instrumentalisées. Ça m'avait frappé avec les éditions du festival Canal qui réunissaient différents acteurs culturels mais aussi des promoteurs immobiliers qui sponsorisaient l'événement, des autorités communales, régionales, etc. Le propos de ce festival était de mettre un coup de projecteur sur cette zone du canal en promouvant l'idée qu'elle devait devenir le nouveau centre de Bruxelles. En même temps, les habitants du quartier étaient à peine au courant, les informations n'avaient tourné qu'au sein des institutions culturelles et politiques. Mais il y a bien sûr également des projets artistiques et culturels qui essaient de questionner les usages de l'espace urbain, comme le faisaient par exemple le festival PleinOpenAir organisé par le Cinéma Nova : les équipes investissaient des lieux, effectuaient un travail d'information et questionnaient des rapports de force à travers leurs activités... Par la culture et l'art, de nombreuses autres initiatives amènent donc aussi les gens à se questionner sur des éléments auxquels ils et elles n'auraient pas nécessairement réfléchi par ailleurs.

KS - Quelles sont les questions et défis que ces relations entre la culture et le territoire soulèvent spécifiquement à Bruxelles ?

MVC - Bruxelles a un capital symbolique fort, mais très spécifique : ce qui fait l'image de Bruxelles à l'étranger, sa notoriété, c'est la présence des institutions européennes. Partout, on lit que Bruxelles est la «capitale de l'Europe». C'est une image très spécifique mais pas nécessairement attrayante pour du tourisme de loisirs - peu de touristes sont attirés par la visite de quartiers de bureaux. Dès lors, les autorités bruxelloises essaient de capitaliser sur cette idée de capitale de l'Europe et en même temps de moduler cette idée pour en donner une image plus colorée, plus culturelle, plus fun. Le projet de Musée Kanal sert aussi à ça : mettre Bruxelles «sur la carte» des villes à visiter pour l'art contemporain. J'y vois l'expression d'un souci quasi obsessionnel chez beaucoup de décideur.euse.s politiques pour le positionnement compétitif de la ville, obsession que l'on retrouve bien sûr ailleurs qu'à Bruxelles, et qui nourrit d'autant plus le sentiment que chaque ville devrait d'abord être pensée comme une entité en compétition avec d'autres villes.

Piercing through neutrality

Hans Vandecandelaere in conversation with

Karel Vanhaesebrouck

Karel Vanhaesebrouck - Do you set up your (urban) investigations according to a fixed pattern?

Hans Vandecandelaere - I try to explain complex issues and sensitive themes in a nuanced way. Instead of perpetuating the standard discourse on, for example, the “problem district” of Oud-Molenbeek or on “sex work”, I try to let a multitude of perspectives speak for themselves. But this requires thorough research, which invariably rests on two pillars. I always do some very thorough reading: I consult the scientific literature, but also reports from civil society organisations, for example. And then I do field research. In my case, that means many interviews, often several with the same person. I make fewer field observations: everything is based on oral sources. The literature review puts me on the trail of informants, who then, after a first meeting, bring me to others.



KV - How are these interviews conducted?

HV - I proceed very methodically. I never write anything in my books that I only know from one source - I always look for the most widely shared version of reality. I take quotes from one interview to the next conversation to test them again, and so I go on. So I do oral “fact checking”, from one interview to the next. Of course, I am not only interested in the facts themselves, in how things really are - although that is my core business - but also in how my interlocutors experience their reality. My interviews are always semi-structured. I have a few starting questions, but I mainly let people talk. Rather than interviews, they are widely meandering

conversations. In these conversations, facts and experienced reality are always mixed up.

KV - What role does time play in your work?

HV - I do in-depth research and want to include as many voices and perspectives as possible. So time is a very crucial factor in my work. Fast journalism does not interest me. Each interview takes at least two hours, but very often much longer. I recently did a piece for Buzz about Cureghem. Behind that one piece are many hours of research that are not necessarily immediately readable in the final result, although it is there. First I go as wide as possible, and then I narrow down. Behind that work of constant condensation, there is a lot of material. That process is only possible because of time.

KV - How does the editing process work for you, the translation from collected material to book?

HV - I allow myself a lot of freedom, also when editing my sources. I want to deliver a good book in the first place. The message has to get through. That is why I give all my discussion partners the right to reread their own interview. They are the ones who ultimately decide whether my adaptation does justice to the conversation I had with them. I work in several steps. After a while, I start printing out all the material - reading notes and transcribed interviews. I start to reread it, take a step back and try to identify *leitmotivs*. Those threads then become sub-themes and that is how I develop the framework for the book. I then bring together all the information for each sub-theme in separate documents. That is a huge task of cutting and pasting. Only then do you see what you really have, and especially what you don't have. The gaps in your own research are exposed. And so you need to have another talk. Sometimes these can be quick, more goal-oriented interviews, sometimes you have to go deeper with someone once again. Only then are you ready to start writing.

KV - How would you describe yourself? A journalist, a cartographer, an anthropologist, a researcher?

HV - I find it difficult to qualify myself. I always say that I am an author. Because I write. But I am also a journalist, but a very slow one. And I work a bit like an amateur anthropologist. I am certainly a researcher too, but I do not feel bound by academic rules. All too often, university research is framed too tightly by its own rules. I don't have to make my theoretical framework explicit in my work, it just takes shape as I go along. I find the approach in much of sociological research too rigid, too limiting. Journalism is really a different practice. I think that universities

do not invest enough in feeding the social debate. For that, they really need to communicate differently, not only in their communication with the press, but also in the way they publish their results. It is as if they do not dare to vulgarize. Let that be the task that I take on. I consider myself a bit of a “re-teller”, from science to public debate, and hopefully also in the opposite direction.

KV - Do you see your task as primarily to describe, or is it more in-depth than that?

HV - First and foremost, I want to bring up material and information, and do so in as much a nuanced way as possible. I want to report as accurately as possible. But at the same time I am not outside the reality of my research. This makes me think: what works and what doesn't? What is going wrong? What should we do? What should we do? And so the rapporteur can also become a bit of an activist. You can also read this development in my latest book about sex work in Brussels. At first, I try to “travel” as long as possible, and thus remain an outsider in my field of research. But at a certain point, my research forces me to give up that neutrality. In the last chapter of *En vraag niet waarom*, therefore, I take up a position, as a militant.

KV - So you are never disconnected from your research?

HV - Does neutrality exist? I find that a very difficult question. I strive for a form of complexity that is as multi-layered as possible, and in this way I oppose cheap, politically recoverable labels such as “problem neighbourhood” or “ghetto” or “margin”. That in itself is a form of positioning. Because I pierce through the apparent neutrality of the dominant discourse on the reality of Brussels. But my main ambition always remains the same: to expose reality by tackling complex themes that lack nuance.



**Shut
Me
Down
Lift Me
Up
Workshop
2020**



SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP FESTIVAL

Online city festival

As Belgium and many other European countries went through a second period of partial or complete lockdown and society switched back to survival mode, the question of art and the role of artists seemed to have become completely superfluous. Maybe the exact opposite is true. More than ever, our societies are in need of new strategies to restore social cohesion as an alternative for our capsular society in which we all seem to have become floating, isolated nomads. More than ever, we need new imagined spaces which can take us beyond the fatality of our everyday realities, which help us to dream, to desire, and to fight for other possible worlds. Everything is possible, even in our confined realities. We need new possibilities, more than ever. And most of all: we need to reconnect, with each other, with our neighbourhood, with reality.

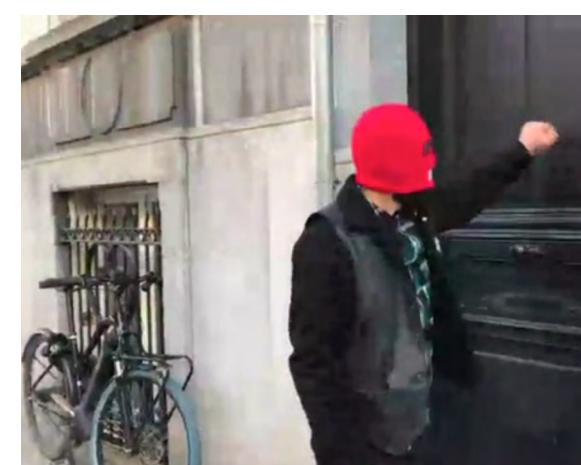
Over a two week period, students from four different Brussels-based institutions and training programs—visual artists from ERG and ENSAV La Cambre, theatre directors from RITCS, and dramaturges from ULB—worked together intensely. The first step of this experimental project was taken last year, during an introductory workshop hosted by La Fonderie, where students tested new ways of doing field research in the city. The confinement of November 2020 obliged us to fundamentally rethink the next step in our research. Rather than giving in, we decided to confront the situation head on, in the hope to create new possibilities, new windows of creativity, new cracks in a reality that seemed to have come to a stand-still.

During the first week of the workshop, the student group participated in four masterclasses led by Samirah Saleh, Myriam Van Imschoot, Joëlle Sambi, and Benjamin Verdonck. Together with these artists our students



explored new possible ways of working with and in the city and its stories. In the second work the students developed their own propositions aimed at creating links between individuals, neighbourhoods, and communities, whatever the scale. All means of expression were possible: radio, video, performance, drawing, mail art, songs, masks, parades, magical acts, television, and interventions of any kind, be they live, recorded/filmed or online.

SHUT ME DOWN LIFT ME UP was about the stories and the people of the city, about the use of artistic strategies to create new inter-human links and social cohesion. Our goal was simple and straightforward: to set up the first-ever online city festival in Brussels where we would present the results of this research. Our festival is not a showcase of young upcoming talent, nor a platform to present personal work, but it aims to develop a framework to invent new ways of reconnecting with the city and its inhabitants.



It is a gift back to the city. Its intention is dead simple and highly complicated: to give life back to the city, to re-open the minds and the bodies of

our secluded city, to create new stories for a confined city through collective research, experimentation, mutual aid, and participatory strategies.

**Students:**

Emilie Ade
Audrey Apers
Frederico Araujo
Ferenc Balcaen
Pauline Bernard
Oscar Briou
Febe Coysman
Julie Daddario
Tessa Daluwein
Jeanne Delmotte
Eduard de Vos van Steenwijk
Louis Ducamp
Evan Durand
Lucas Engels
Bérénice Gasc
Thelma Gaster
Léa Guillot

Maurane Hanff
Judith Hesselmann
Ophélie Hilbert
Gökhan Kizilbuga
Ronja Koch
Virginie Krotoszyner
Marie Lou Laforet
Marina Misovic
Elvira Nataloni
Emma Noïtaky
Nele Oeser
Agathe Perrin
Tjardo Planckaert
Céline Polart
Lucie Pousset
William Scaceriaux
Kénor Ospina
Simon Torbevens

Alexia Uzumyemez
Lynn Vandenhede

PROJECTS:

“thEATre@home”
“Memory Delivery”
“Fish in the city”
“Les feuilles mortes
se ramassent à la pelle”
“I’m happy when”
“Citizen 19”
“Still life”
“Parts of sensual balade”
“Gökhan’s mountain”
“Gökhan’s rock”
“Décroche-moi”
“Sortir de l’oeuil blanc”
“Un p’tit bout de verre”

“Mama’s open MIC”
“Slam”

“Aida likes to walk”
“Spoken words”
“Posé au 50.863491,4.32489”
“Raisonne”
“Les ptits plaisirs”
“Praten videogedicht”
“Subway rave”

DRAMATURGICAL TEAM:

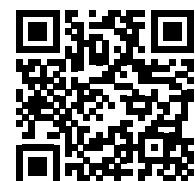
Tessa Daluwein
Judith Hesselmann
Marie Lou Laforet
Lucie Pousset



Fondation Bernheim This project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of The Bernheim Foundation,
in partnership with schools La Cambre, ERG, ULB & RITCS.

[Watch the stream](#)
[About the festival](#)

[Keyboard shortcuts](#) [Map data ©2021](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Report a map error](#)



[Link to the
festival website](#)



Samira Saleh

In conversation with
Sanja Mitrović and Erwan Maheo

Sanja Mitrović and Erwan Mahéo - Could you tell us about teaching? How important is it for you to transmit a message to younger generations? Is it the same thing to share words and ideas with an audience (on stage) and to share them with students? What would the difference be (if there is one)?

Samira Saleh - It's very important for me to be a spoken word artist, but also be an organizer in this field where I'm not only able to express myself creatively as a spoken word artist, but also be a teacher or an organizer who creates a platform for others. I make this art form accessible to young artists or artists that are new to it. So it is important for me to be both an organizer and a spoken word artist. In between these two activities, there's also teaching. I teach people who are interested in creative writing, are interested in writing poetry, and are interested in performing. This leads them to handling the tools to creatively play with words and with rhymes, the tools to perform, and the methods to use their voice and body on stage to make their performance stronger. So that's why it's so important for me to pass on a message to the younger generations, whether it is by being a humble example, by teaching, by organizing, by creating a platform. There is a difference between sharing words and ideas with the audience (on stage) and sharing it with students: people who are in an audience are often a bit more knowledgeable of what this art form is (because they visit these places where this art form is being portrayed), while students are usually very new to it and have to adjust a lot of their own ideas or stereotypes concerning spoken word.



SM EM - One year after our experience with the online workshop, what have you kept in mind? A nice memory? A strong moment? Could you tell us about something that touched you?

SS - What I strongly remember about this masterclass is that it was one of the first opportunities where I got to speak about my artistic practice. You'd be surprised but this is not a question that we, artists, talk about amongst each other, so that was very nice. But what I remember even more strongly is that it was the first online workshop that was trying to think out of the box, by doing a masterclass in the morning, and then giving this students something to work with, something to create, something tangible with freedom and time to create something by using their imagination, and then coming back later in the afternoon to see what people had done. So, there were a few students that made a short movie, there was one that went to a local shop where they were selling fries. This group awarded them with a poem. That's something that really touched me. I still have a very strong memory of it because the workshop was one of the few places, one of the few moments, that I experienced during all of the lockdown where the thinking was happening outside, where students were actually encouraged to go outside and do something rather than being forced to spend another day behind a screen in their home.

SM EM - We did a workshop via Zoom. How was this experience for you in relation to practicing spoken word "live"?

SS - The relationship was very different to practicing live. The workshop through Zoom was in some ways a lower quality experience just because we share so much through our body language, we share so much through our energies when we are physically amongst each other. I think the lockdown really taught us that.

SM EM - What difference would you make between Brussels and "another Brussels"? Could this "another Brussels" be just Brussels?

SS - I agree, it could be "just" Brussels, but the idea of "another" Brussels was sort of a play on the idea that we all experience things in our own unique way. The way that I experienced the masterclass that I gave is obviously very different from the students', because I gave the class and the students experienced it. One student might have experienced it in a certain way, and another student in some other way. We don't all have the same reality, abilities, or privileges. So "another" Brussels is not "just" Brussels, it is a chance for people to look at Brussels or look at different mini-societies that are living here through different lenses. That's what makes it a "different" Brussels.

SM EM - You said: “I want you to write a ‘love manifesto’: rules to move on in life once we’re all vaccinated and ‘free again’ in a post-Covid-19 world”. Do you consider us free now? How have these insecure times (negatively and positively) affected the position of the artist in society?

SS - Do I consider us free now, today, on November 16th 2021? No, not yet, we are still in an in-between phase where we have a lot more freedom than we had a year ago, but we are still walking on eggshells. We are not sure what the fate of the cultural sector will be if the amount of Covid-19 cases go up again. I think the pandemic has really affected artists negatively, and exposed the different spaces they inhabit. I think a lot of freelance artists suffered whereas the institutions and organisers that book us were relatively safe because they had continuous funding. I think that we, the freelancers, were in a very fragile position that we had to fight for and make people aware of. In a positive way, we have all been reminded how vulnerable our position is in this sector. We are still recovering from the after effects of all these lockdowns. Some people had a lot of time to work and create new pieces, and other people were still stuck because they were financially in a more vulnerable position. Having more time does not equal having enough space mentally and physically to create new art.

SM EM - A year after the workshop, you mentioned that you are extremely busy, but that the world of poetry doesn’t seem as “overbooked” as the theatre is (premieres, shows that have been programmed for a long time, all being shown simultaneously). How did your practice change due to the pandemic?

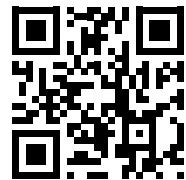
SS - It changed tremendously. Before I was an overbooked poet who had difficulties finding time between bookings and commitments whether it was for residencies or for myself personally to completely be focused on my writing. You could say that during the lockdowns I would have had more time, but instead I think the shock of everything that was happening hit me personally very hard. Being in a precarious situation where all of your gigs are cancelled, with no new dates in the future. This all made me rethink my position within the scene. It was actually wonderful, it really made me question things. I asked myself whether I wanted to continue to work like this, whether it’s Covid-19 or something else, I questioned whether I wanted to depend on organisations and institutions or the Flemish government in the same way. So, it has impacted my practice, I’m rethinking the way I act.

Links Online to Masterclass

Samira Saleh



QR link to the masterclass video



QR link to the debriefing video

"I have been working with spoken word for five and a half years now. I started when I was 21 or 22, at Open Mic. It was something I saw online. Spoken word was very popular in the United States and in the United Kingdom, with YouTube channels and collectives like Button Poetry. People were sharing a variety of videos from open mic sessions, from different artists, and different performers. It immediately captivated me. I come from a small village in Belgium called Mechelen, so the combination of conversations about race, gender, and politics with this particular art form really appealed to me. I googled "open mic Antwerp" and the first thing that came up was Mama Open Mic.

I googled it on a Saturday and they had a session on the following Tuesday. And I was like: 'Sure, I am gonna go there.'"

"Do you know what spoken word is? Have you ever performed it? Do you know any poets yourself?"

Student:

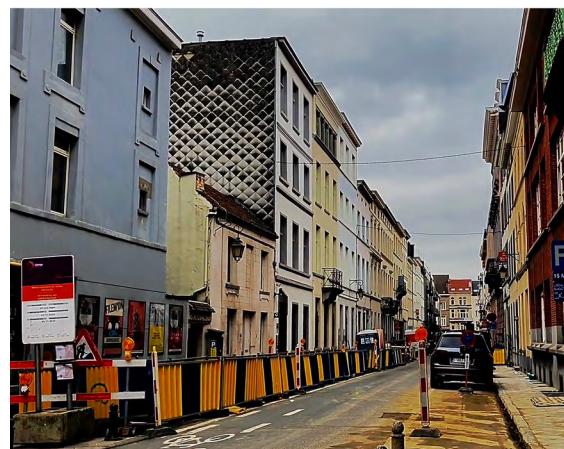
"I know that slam poetry is a form of verbal expression situated between rapping and classical poetry. It was invented in the States of United America (*Samira and some participants laugh*). I associate it with a politically conscious rhythmically spoken way to express your ideas and it is very linked to race. In what I've seen of it I associate it with Black intellectual culture, Afro-American intellectual culture."

"Thank you. That was close to a perfect explanation. The whole idea of oral storytelling started as soon as soon as we started speaking to each other, at the beginning of time. But, if we look into the specific form of spoken word or poetry it started in the United States, in a bar. The owner wanted to get more people to come to his place, so he started to organise competitions called 'slam poetry'. It's very similar to what we know today as rap battles. I understand why you connected it to race, but for me it has a broader meaning. It is connected to class, ethnic background, the identities that we carry..."

"Spoken word puts an emphasis on performance. It's very urgent, it's persistent, it's about current times. It is an embodiment of written text. That is why open mic is so popular and is one of the most common forms where spoken word is performed. Spoken word is an umbrella term: prose or beatless rap can also be seen as spoken word. I like to use it as an umbrella term because spoken word is not only about class or identity, it can also be about the things you are carrying internally - like mental health issues. It can, of course, also be more positive."

"This poem is for the love of my life: food. From the video 'Can We Please Stop Telling Girls They Can't Eat?'"

(Poetry jam)



"This is a performance I did a couple of years ago. It was the beginning of my career and I felt like I wanted to write about something. Being a hijabi spoken word artist from Holland who is fat and plus-

size are all things that were kind of difficult to talk about. People always thought that I was going to talk about my headscarf, and at the time it was a very touchy subject. I think some cultural institutions have learnt their lesson about the subject, but at the time I wanted to do everything but speak about headscarves or about my religious identity (even though I'm very proud of it!). I wanted to do something different than what was expected of me, so I used the platform to talk about things that people might not think that Muslim women deal with, like body image, internalised fatphobia, or decolonisation of beauty standards after having internalised European Western standards of beauty.

That was what I tried to introduce into this text using humour."

"It was very difficult to talk about nature because when I was asked to write this piece the Black Lives Matter protest had just happened in Brussels. It was incredible, unlike anything we'd ever seen here in Flanders. It was a huge debate on how the Covid-19 crisis would be affected by everything going on, especially by George Floyd and Brionna Taylor's murders. We also felt consequences in the Belgian context with the murders and killings of Mawda, Amine, and others...I felt like it wasn't the moment to talk about other things because there were these really pressing issues we had to deal with first."

From the video
'Slam de Natuur sessie 2
Samira Saleh
in het Mechels Broek'



Student:
"Every strike, every struggle and every fight is interconnected. Despite the massive government effort to try to find a solution to climate change and fuel use, the problem is bigger than that. If you don't start by facing older struggles like police violence and racism, transphobia, and islamophobia then we are all doomed.. Yeah that really scares me."

Samira Saleh:
"That is exactly what I was talking about. It's something that Extinction Rebellion does very well here in Belgium. They really understand that their struggle to save planet Earth is intrinsically connected with an intersection of different struggles, not just climate change. That was my plea or cry for help. The message was: If you want to help during lockdown and talk about nature and climate change you can't ignore

the different pressing life situations that are happening amongst us now, and not just here in Flanders."

Student:

"I don't fully understand why the environmental crisis is linked to racism and sexism, and social struggles. I see them as quite different."

Samira Saleh:

"I think that planet Earth itself is not responsible for the rise of racism, nor for people being murdered at alarming rates. I understand why you would ask that question."

Student:
"Racism is something very natural."



Samira Saleh:
"It isn't natural for me. I ask myself how all of these things are linked. You cannot isolate a social struggle from class, racism, and discrimination. You can't sepa-

rate someone being queer from the fact that they are also bound to a wheelchair and not able-bodied. You can't separate racism from climate change because the people in this day and age who are suffering the most are people living in the Global South, not people like us. People like us can hide away and not directly be impacted by climate change (other than the fact that it is November and it's still 17 degrees out). People in Morocco are directly being impacted and some are now stuck without an income because it hasn't been raining for years now. We can see other places in the Global South that are directly impacted because the animals are dying out. So hopefully that answers your question. There is a ripple effect at work."

"Open mics are places where whether you have a mic or not, everybody in the audience can hear you. If you have something to share at an open mic you can do it. It is usually organised very informally (...) The whole idea of an open mic event is to give a platform to spoken word artists to allow them to practice and share their poetry, and to get feedback on it. (...) In Belgium everyone is welcome to come. We do not ask you to pay an entrance fee as we do not want to discriminate." @mamasopenmic

"So, we are going to do a free writing exercise. The whole point of this is that you let go and start writing. I'm going to set a timer for five minutes. As soon as I start the timer you have to start writing without stopping. The first question that probably comes to mind is 'What should I write about?' but that doesn't matter. The whole point is that you don't have any idea what you're going to write about, nor how to start, but something just comes out. When you're stuck, when you don't know what to write about, you have to repeat the last words that you wrote until you get inspired again."

Students:

"J'aimerais vous confesser quelques doux aveux qui sommeillent en moi depuis quelques mois. J'aime le bruit des canards qui discutent entre eux, car j'ai l'impression d'entendre..."

Ik heb de indruk te horen

Ik lijkt te horen

Hoe ze tot diep in de grond boren

Steenkool en zuurkool

Door mijn hoofd mijn opa en vader in een steenkool oven.

Uitgebuit tot aan de buit en dan weggegooid au-dessus de la mer. Nous écoutons le silence, ni voitures ni passants. Je sens le vent me caresser les joues comme..."

comme j'ai envie. Entends-tu le cri de l'envie ? j'explose à l'intérieur de couleurs écarlates. Sur un papier ou sur la terre je veux écrire..."

I want to write

About you as me as us. Love the life you live?

Or change the way we live. So we live the love we deserve.

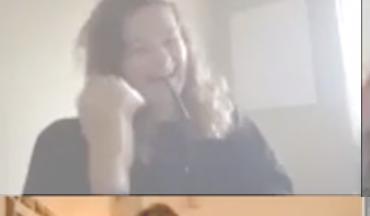
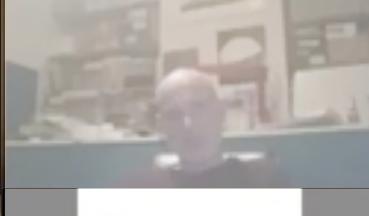
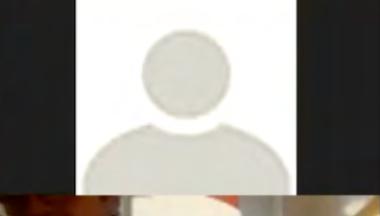
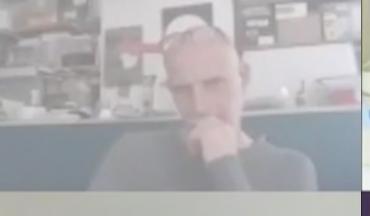
Be more dada and less tatta, the world is more than Gucci and Prada

Le monde est plus qu'Amazon et Mac Do. Nous voulons entendre les oiseaux de nouveau. Nous voulons que l'eau continue de couler et que les Hommes puissent s'embrasser. Nous voulons que... nous voulons que le prix de nos efforts, si fort ont-ils été, nous offre une liberté du corps sans désaccord. Nous voulons entendre le bruit des canards qui se marrent et entrevoir les crapauds barbares se chantant lentement derrière les nénuphars. Nous voulons dire que...

We want to say that they don't really care about us! Maybe in the end of time we will unite finally.

Now we can't...

danser jusqu'au bout de la nuit mais continuons de rêver jusqu'au bout de la vie."



Myriam Van Imschoot

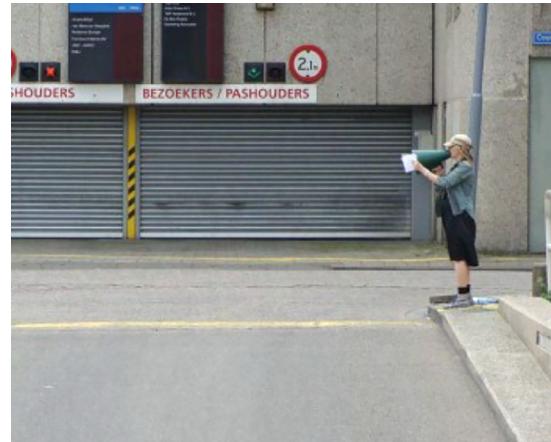
In conversation with
Cédric Noël

Myriam Van Imschoot - There was something in the invitation about students from very different departments and schools who would come together in the project, or in the set up. That was your intention, right?

Cédric Noël - Yes

MVI - I think that really inspired me a lot, the idea that these people were supposed to become a temporary community. It was very important for me to still try to see if, despite the Covid circumstances, we could still have that dream or practice of becoming a community of some sort. So, I made a kind of gigantic score. In the morning we met on Zoom, we gave instructions, and the students were given folders with exercises to do. The workshop was constructed as a major score of actions in time, with people coming from different places, apartments, homes, into the city to different spots and then finally to meet around the canal like in a sort of natural amphitheatre for listening. Then we had one sort of spectral faction of people who were not in Brussels at all. This was all actually much more exciting than you would think. I was very excited to feel that we could mobilize people, like squads in the city with secret missions and instructions. There were probably four or five places where the groups mingled, so you didn't have students from one school in one park, or a certain group in one corner. They really created mingled squads! Of course there were individuals but they all knew of each other and they could meet if they had to. The type of actions that they could do involved shouting, calling out, making each other aware of their presence. They were thinking "OK, she's in there as well". It was like a secret mission: "I need another agent."

So, the imagination of these individuals would combine by coming together in a listening experience at the canal, for example. They would arrive at four o'clock and sit there, in silence, until four thirty and then ap-



plauid the concert. We just listened together, and people gradually joined and sat after having done an afternoon of preparations and actions. It was very, very exciting. I stood on the bridge near Sainctelette, a place where people congregate. It's a very noisy area, full of movement: the cars that cross the bridge or the avenues along the canal, or the boats that go along the canal, under the bridge, the people who sleep there, the refugees who camp there. From this hustle and bustle and city noise I saw the students appear, and felt connected. That was a very strong experience, and I actually repeated it. I was interviewed half a year later for Buzz, a Brussels-based magazine, about what I like in the city, which books, restaurants and takeaways. I decided to only choose things that are freely and democratically accessible to everyone. Not consumerist things, like this book or that film on Netflix but all things that you can do for free in the city. I also proposed that we do a congregation for listening for half an hour, from four to four thirty, followed by applause. I somehow got inspired to repeat this, with strangers rather than students. The first iteration was very calm, and there was a lot of warmth. I still don't know exactly what that meant for the students; maybe that is the open mystery here! Like, did they take as much out of it as I did? Did they find it as inspiring as I do? What were their experiences? I suppose time will tell by meeting people. What I took away from the experience was that with Covid, you can always be very careful and respectful of the sanitary rules and still keep the community's imagination alive, still try to use all sorts of avant-garde strategies, and practices to overcome this culture of fear. Fear of connections or fear of meetings. It's a sort of organization to keep a belief in the possibility of a community, and it is actually possible.

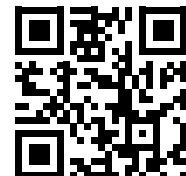
CN - Thank you for your response, it is actually very clear. We seem to move from a concrete situation like Zoom, with the instructions you prepared, towards a physical experience on the canal. The feeling of the space where the happening took place also became a political statement. There are democratic movements behind the work. There's a community movement that generated a kind of "super noise": of cars etc. I really connect with what you said; that when you were there, the sun gave off light and warmth but it was also warm because people were happy to be there. I also think it was a challenge, or an issue to take the students out of this Zoom frame that they were living in for one year, and acting as a community through this interface. I connected with the warmth of being there, as part of a challenge of being out, sharing, and doing something as a community.

Links Online to Masterclass

Myriam Van Imschoot



QR link to the masterclass video



QR link to the debriefing video

"I would like to propose something very simple to start. Take a couple of steps a few metres away from the screen that we are always glued to. Stand somewhere in your apartment in view of the camera. Choose this as your starting point and look at what is in front of you, and wave."

"On fait le signe avec la main, mais pas maintenant. On va prendre place, en faisant ça en tournant, au fur à mesure. A chaque fois on regarde ce que ça fait quand on fait un cercle autour de notre axe central. Ça change de vue, ça change le regard. Et voilà, là je fais signe avec ma main et on continue jusqu'à ce qu'on a fait tout un tour, le temps dont on a besoin pour être en relation un peu avec soi-même."

"I work with sound, voice, film, performance, and installations. Sometimes it is a big project, involving a lot of people and a lot of apparatus, sometimes my work is clandestine and really small. It unfolds in the daily fabric of life and of the city and everything I do has more or less value, on a spectrum from big to small."

"Here in this masterclass I want to focus on one particular element of my work which is long distance communication. My fascination for sound and voice and the way to use sound to communicate comes from the rooster (in French we say 'le chant du coq'). When you look closely at a rooster making a sound, its whole body is used to crow. It's not just because they are loud, it's how they use their body with such commitment that interests me."

"I have just come back from spending two weeks with my parents at the seaside. At one point there was a shooting in the park, and we were drawn to people shouting. We heard a Romani woman who was expressing grief with spectacular strength. It was a reminder of how strong shouting can be. Being loud outdoors has many functions. Sometimes you respond to the environment. In the mountains you have to use a full voice.

The mountain triggers the response. It's similar in the bathroom. We sing in the bathroom because the reverberation invites us to. So my ongoing interest is in how we inhabit spaces, how they sound and how they trigger my sounding in it. Sometimes it's very organic, like singing in the bathroom, because there is so much echo."

http://olga0.oralsite.be/oralsite/pages/Vozes_de_Magaio/

"I am walking in a landscape that is quite rural and you hear a lot of natural sounds. Running water, the wind, and my footsteps. I walk with determination. At some point you see the mountains. This is the north of Portugal. The image remains still for a little while because I'm scanning the horizon. I'm observing, I'm waiting, and I'm making myself present. I wave a white tissue. I wave, wave, wave, wave, and wave..."



Distance is not absence. Maybe something is happening but I'm just too far away to hear it. I could try to hear something, and end up not hearing it. It's really exciting, for example when you are on your way somewhere, to a party perhaps, and you ask yourself "when will I start hearing the sound from the party?" You are open and ready to hear a sound that you know exists and you are focussed on but just hasn't reached you yet. This is something I find beautiful and want us to keep in mind."

"Another important aspect of this video is the relationship between the clock and the bells which are chiming. The sound of the bells is maybe one of the most important markers of human presence in a landscape. It came before cars, airplanes, or any other sound with which we mark the environment. From the

13th century onwards, clocks became part of the landscape. They were incredibly powerful, not only because they brought in metric time but also because they were extending the notion of community, the community being everyone who could hear the bell toll. This was a revolution in terms of how people saw social action, gathering with the sound of a bell as part of a parish or a sonic community."

Wednesday November 18th 2020

Walk to a concert

(Concert performed by the city and you)

14:00 - 14:15

#1 Observation/emergence

Choose an observation post where you're comfortable for 15 minutes. The etymology of observation is observable. To serve, to attend to, to be available for/towards something. Listen openly, watch, smell odors, and feel the temperature, the wind and its texture. Listen with all your senses. Enjoy the simple fact that you are there and the world is there. Something will emerge when you feel that something reveals itself that you would not have witnessed if you hadn't taken the time. You'll see it or perceive it differently. It grows on you. It comes to you.

"You see the sun, I'm on an artificial mountain, an old coal mine. I'm sitting here, doing a little meditation and I'm listening to the sound of the wind and the birds and the people."

14:15 - 14:45

#2 Connecting actions and gestures

Observing is already a way of connecting with your environment. But there are other ways, too.

Wave: you can wave with long or short, small or big gestures. The wave is an energy you send off, an offering. It can be abstract, it can be non-addressed. Who or for what you are waving? (Perhaps you wave like the cosmonaut in the Nazca lines in Peru and nobody knows why.) You can turn towards a specific object or person (passing car, boat, cloud, person, child). You can wave to several things, you can change your addressee. I sometimes wave according to different positions on a circle. Talk to something that is not a human. Franciscus syndrome. You can talk to a bird

and other things.

Imitate a sound that you can hear. Hum or make maintained sounds in the preexisting tapestry of sounds, see how loud you can go before you become audible or leave the tapestry. Applaud something (remember the Peter Greenaway anecdote). Take a photo.

Running commentary. Go into observation mode, put on the audio-recorder and watch, observe, while giving running descriptions and comments. Take pauses, let something influence the commentary.

Student:

"I was in this small square between Belgica and the canal. I started recording on my way there. It was interesting because there were a lot of people: families, kids playing football...



When I arrived it was very quiet, I could hear natural sounds. There were a lot of very different things to hear, for example a lot of renovation work, a small group of young people who were hanging out near me, there were birds, families... I realised that I couldn't focus on just one thing.

I couldn't hear everything even if it was actually happening at the same moment. I started walking towards the canal and turned into a street. All I could hear was cars, suddenly there were just sounds of their motors. I kept walking and walking and I didn't realize that I had arrived above the construction site. I arrived on the other side of it and I could see the people working. From this other perspective I could hear them speaking, and at some moments it sounded like jazz music, not just construction machines. When I attended the concert on the canal I realised that I was much more focused on what I was seeing than on what I was hearing. I was distracted by things like birds flying by. I realized that I was approaching sound almost as a secondary illustration of something

that I had remarked visually. In my everyday life I pay much more attention to what I'm seeing than to what I'm hearing."

14:45 - 15:30

#3 Walk with eight calls

Find what your call is. Is it always the same call? Make it at least 5 seconds long! Enjoy the full sound of it. Don't shout or shriek. Accept that you might be perceived as weird but keep on doing it as if it were something that had a logical necessity. Dare to own it. Don't become defensive or an egomaniac. If people call back, accept it. It's only 5 seconds and it will disappear again. You are a temporary inhabitant of that sound space. Take note of the call, what was it and how did it feel/sound? Listen to the silence afterwards. What is the sonic space around the call, before and after. How is it different? Can you make a diary of those eight calls?

15:30 - 16:00

#4 Listening concert in the amphitheatre

Listen to everything that happens from 15:30 onwards with heightened attention. Imagine that this is a recording composed for you all to hear. You listen to the choices made, and surprising events that happen. Nothing is accidental. You keep an eye on the time. If a boat passes you wave, but don't give up listening. At 16:00 the concert is over and the applause can start. You thank the performers and the city. Some may have left, some are still present.

Student 1:

"It was really interesting to emerge from the city and go into the park because you have so many different sounds and so much activity. There were people doing graffiti and skateboarding, there were the sounds of the wind and some children running around. I don't know if it was because of the weather but it was really full of life! There was one little child running towards us and just shouting and screaming 'PAPA!', just like adults would do. That really inspired me. Then a little girl went up to Lucas and started talking to him. It was very nice to interact. When we started making sounds and really shouting, nobody seemed bothered. It was as if the entire environment

didn't change at all with our presence. Making noises like that was in a strange way very reassuring, adding sound to that environment because everyone was just ok with it."

Student 2:

"We were really shouting and no one cared... They actually even looked at us like we were normal."

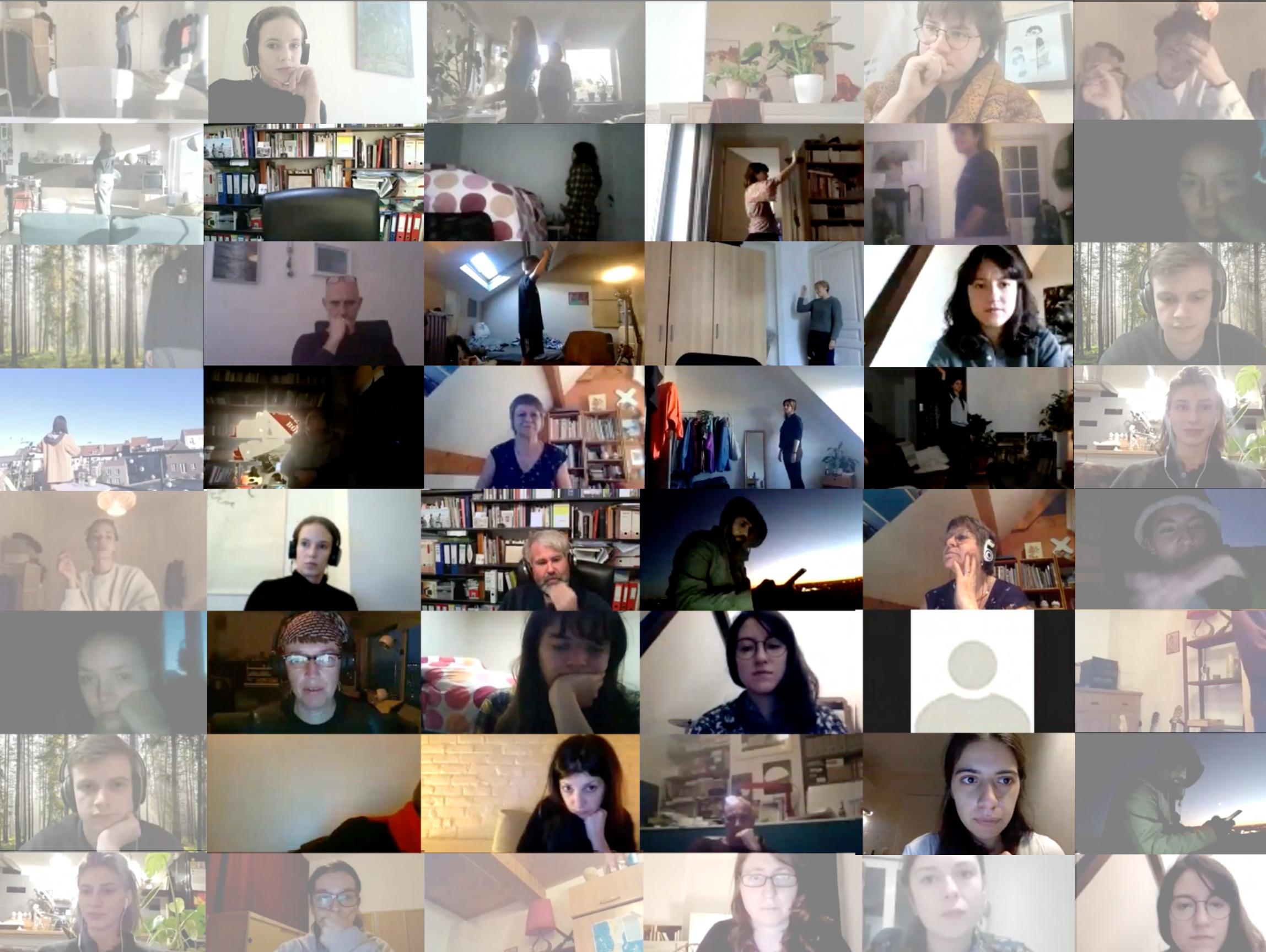
16:15 departure

Leaving

Leave one by one. Not all together. Call out when you decide to do so. Call out again when you are somewhat further away. Go home and drink a warm drink.

Student:

"During the applause, a group of guys asked me why I was clapping. I answered, saying that it was just art, nothing special. At some point another man asked me to sell him drugs. That was really powerful to me because there are so many things hidden behind that question: what does a Black presence on the street doing nothing mean? Is the Black person selling drugs? It seems like we need to find a reason to be on the street. (...) We cannot simply be in a space, we have to provide a reason for being there."



Joëlle Sambi

*
En conversation
avec Marie Feyereisen

Marie Feyereisen - Tu es très occupée avec tous tes projets qui arrivent sur le devant de la scène ; avec le recul, comment relis-tu aujourd'hui l'expérience passée avec ces étudiant.e.s des quatre établissements artistiques, un an plus tard et beaucoup d'eau ayant coulé sous les ponts ?

JS - Ah oui, il y en a eu beaucoup, de l'eau ! J'avoue qu'à ce moment-là lors de cet atelier, je n'avais aucune idée des grandes lignes du spectacle qui allait se faire et je n'imaginais pas que ce serait à ce point le tourbillon de projets et de choses hyper gaies qui se sont mises en place. Avec le recul et en repensant à ce moment-là avec les étudiant.e.s de ces quatre établissements, ce fut une journée assez particulière. J'aime beaucoup donner ces ateliers, en plus avec des étudiant.e.s dans cette tranche d'âge-là, qui sont de jeunes adultes, avec quelque chose qui suscite chez moi de l'émerveillement dans ce qu'iels peuvent restituer. Dans ce temps, j'arrive à voir à quels endroits je peux mettre un peu de sel, un peu de poivre pour qu'iels continuent d'avancer. Je trouve que c'est vraiment spécifique à cette tranche d'âge, 22-23 ans. Si je devais refaire cet atelier aujourd'hui, peut-être que j'aurais donné plus de directions, pas forcément des directives, mais des indications à suivre par rapport à l'exercice réalisé. Il aurait, de ce fait, été peut-être un peu plus resserré en termes de consignes pour qu'iels soient moins perdu.e.s dans une masse de choses à faire. Et puis peut-être qu'on aurait aussi pas mal discuté de ces nouveaux projets qui s'ouvrent devant moi et qui finalement sont aussi des projets dans lesquels bientôt iels seront également amenés à bosser puisqu'iels travaillent dans l'artistique. Voilà, il y aurait peut-être eu davantage un échange, un partage d'expériences encore plus dense, même si c'était déjà très riche comme moment.



MF - Quels étaient les éléments saillants, ce que tu relèves de cette collaboration ?

JS - Il y avait quelque chose à la fois de très beau, de très joyeux, mais aussi d'assez difficile parce qu'on était en plein confinement et qu'inévitablement, on était amené.e.s (à travers Zoom) à entrer dans l'intimité des gens. Je trouvais qu'il y avait à la fois quelque chose de vraiment joyeux avec une envie très forte de la part des étudiantes et des étudiants, mais en même temps, je pouvais sentir à quel point c'était compliqué, à cause de l'accès à Internet, du manque d'argent, etc. Je trouvais que c'était quand même dur de se trouver enfermé.e.s comme ça, de travailler sur un projet où il y a de l'émulation, qui va chercher dans les recoins de la créativité de chacun, de chacune, mais d'être entre quatre murs et de devoir produire à partir de là. C'était exigeant d'être sur des choses très concrètes pendant toute la journée, on a passé pas mal de temps ensemble à partir du moment où on s'est vu.e.s le matin et ensuite iels ont été sollicité.e.s pour le travail à faire en groupe. La plupart se retrouvaient mais c'était quand même compliqué parce certain.e.s avaient accès à Internet, d'autres pas. Aussi au niveau des ordinateurs, la question se posait : comment est-ce qu'on fait ? L'ordinateur de qui utilise-t-on ? On ne dispose pas de tout le matériel auquel on pourrait éventuellement avoir accès quand on est à l'école; je trouvais que tout cela était vraiment dur, j'avais mal pour les étudiant.e.s car il y avait cette envie d'y arriver et on était constamment dans une sorte d'empêchement du fait de la situation. Pour moi, il y avait 2 teintes - même s'il était beau ce moment de rencontre, le matin - il y avait une teinte complètement différente le soir quand on s'est retrouvé.e.s et la restitution m'a semblé magique ! C'était incroyable ! Je repense encore à ce moment particulier avec cet écran très étrange avec plein de petites cases où je voyais ce que tout le monde a proposé au bout d'à peine une journée de travail; iels ont cherché, creusé, et osé ! C'était absolument super !

Finalement je retiens davantage ce que les étudiant.e.s m'ont apporté que l'inverse, ce jour-là. C'était un atelier qui se passait à la fois dans la discussion mais aussi dans la matière. iels ont cherché cette matière, iels ont osé. On a vite fait d'abandonner ou de se dire «Ah oui, mais non, mais ça va pas...» Les étudiant.e.s ne se sont pas découragé.e.s et ça m'a nourri. Je me disais «C'est beau, ça donne envie, on ne lâche pas». Il y avait une belle énergie et j'étais vraiment contente de partager ce temps-là. Lors de la restitution du soir, chacun.e a proposé des choses tellement belles : la lumière, la musique. C'était hyper généreux. J'ai eu plein d'amour ce jour-là, j'étais hyper contente.

MF - Penses-tu que ton intervention dans ce workshop en période pandémique a freiné ou au contraire permis aux étudiant.e.s de lâcher prise ?

JS - Je pense clairement que cela a freiné, techniquement, concrètement, à certains endroits parce qu'on ne peut pas tout inventer. Il y a un moment où on est limité.e.s mais justement ces empêchements-là nous mènent à dire «Moi j'ai une machine, je peux faire quelque chose avec tel machin, je peux tester ceci». Ensuite, il y a eu un temps d'écoute exceptionnel entre nous. Donc oui, il y a eu des freins mais les étudiant.e.s ne se sont pas laissé.e.s abattre et c'est ça qui est chouette.

MF - Quel intérêt vois-tu dans ce genre d'initiative pédagogique ? Qu'est-ce qui te donne envie d'accepter et te plaît surtout dans ces workshops ?

JS - Tout d'abord, j'ai un très gros faible pour l'ERG, peut-être parce que c'est le premier endroit qui m'a fait confiance pour proposer mes textes. Je trouve que c'est vraiment super de travailler dans cette école d'art où il y a une belle énergie, quelque chose de très joyeux et de très libre. Je dis toujours que j'apprends beaucoup grâce à ce type d'activité. Quand on est jeune étudiant.e, on a toujours l'impression qu'il y en a qui savent et d'autres qui ne savent pas. En réalité, c'est une dynamique qui se répond sauf si les étudiant.e.s sont apathiques ou ne sont pas du tout dans un élan, ni dans une envie d'aller creuser, d'aller chercher. Ce n'était absolument pas le cas ici. Les étudiant.e.s me font confiance et se disent «Bon, on y va !». J'ai juste proposé quelque chose d'assez basique qui est de créer du son, de faire du texte. Ce qui m'intéresse surtout est la question «comment est-ce qu'on travaille ensemble ?» L'idée du travail collectif est ce qui me nourrit vraiment car il permet de se décentrer, de sortir de la posture de l'artiste qui crée et d'être dans un rapport plus partagé. Finalement si moi je foire, ça foire pour les autres. C'est dans cette dynamique-là que j'étais avec celles et ceux qui se sont dit «on y va» malgré les difficultés du format et du cadre.

MF - D'autant qu'on était en novembre et confronté.e.s à un deuxième confinement...

J.S. - Oui, surtout qu'on attendait ce moment, cette nuit, depuis longtemps. J'avais complètement fantasmé sur le projet : travailler de nuit, choper du son la nuit, il y aurait eu quelque chose de magique ... et puis on se retrouve enfermé.e.s, mais les étudiant.e.s ont super bien réagi !

MF - On quitte un peu le workshop pour parler de ton actualité qui nous semble abondante. Tu bosses sur et avec divers canaux de transmission tels que films, écriture et mise en scène : comment se combinent-ils dans ta pratique ? As-tu des préférences ?

JS - J'essaie toujours de mettre une dimension poétique dans la mise en scène, dans l'écriture, dans les ateliers. Le film est quand même l'endroit le plus compliqué pour moi. Je fais quelques créations sonores et cela me vient assez facilement. C'est assez drôle parce que j'ai étudié le journalisme en presse écrite et audiovisuelle à l'ULB et je suivais des cours de radio et de télé. Pour mon examen de télé, j'ai royalement raté l'exercice : c'était horrible pour moi de faire de la télé et donc j'ai beaucoup de mal avec le médium vidéo. Que ce soit l'écriture, le son, la radio ou le dessin, tout cela m'est plus facile que la vidéo. Pour le film en cours, *Pinkshasa Diaspora*, je me suis lancée en me demandant ce que je savais faire. Je pars du principe que je ne peux pas et ne sais pas tout faire. Je dois donc trouver avec qui travailler - pas dans une idée utilitariste - mais plutôt avec énormément de modestie. Si tu veux faire un film, tu veux le faire bien et par conséquent tu travailles avec des personnes qui font des films. Les idées, j'en ai, des visions, des façons de voir les choses, j'en ai, alors je commence par me poser ces questions : «Comment veux-tu le faire ?» et «Comment t'associes-tu avec les gens pour travailler ?». Donc j'essaie toujours de revenir là et parfois aussi un peu de me pousser. Pour ce film, je suis en train de terminer une formation : je m'oblige à voir des films, monter moi-même, tourner moi-même, me mettre dans la position ou dans l'œil du monteur, de la monteuse, dans l'œil du cadreur ou de la cadreuse. Cela me permet de connaître le «degré d'exigence» que je peux avoir quand je travaille avec d'autres personnes. J'essaie de prendre du plaisir et donc là, même dans le film, même quand c'est compliqué, je me dis «Comment est-ce que tu peux faire ? Comment peux-tu arriver à des choses qui te parlent ?» Ce qui me parle c'est la poésie et la performance, quand ce n'est pas droit, ni lisse, ni complètement attendu ; ce sont des formes un peu hybrides, un peu barrées, et de là, quelque chose surgit. Pour revenir au film, il va se faire comme ça, avec une thématique bien claire, bien précise, avec des interviews et des choses très classiques. Cependant, les matériaux que je vais utiliser seront le slam et la parole, parce que je pense que les choses passent réellement par là.

MF - Pourquoi as-tu choisi de réaliser ton film *Pinkshasa Diaspora* si ce canal te pose autant de difficultés ?

JS - Il y a l'idée qu'un film voyage plus facilement qu'un livre, c'est quelque chose d'immatériel. Mais à vrai dire, je fais ça par pure fierté. J'ai travaillé pendant longtemps pour Massimadi, un festival de films LGBTQ d'Afrique et des diasporas, qui a lieu à Bruxelles depuis 2012.

On programme pendant ce festival des films qui parlent des questions des homosexualités, et des films réalisés par ou portant sur des personnages LGBTQA+ d'Afrique et des diasporas africaines. Cela brasse assez large avec des films de partout ; il y a des films des Caraïbes, des films Sud-Africains, Kenyans, Nigérians etc, ... Mais il n'y a pas un seul film congolais ! Pour moi c'était inadmissible. Surtout qu'une communauté congolaise artistique importante existe, avec pas mal de cinéastes congolais.es Cependant sur la question des homosexualités, il n'y a rien ! Cela reste un dernier bastion, l'endroit où on ne va pas. Ou bien on explore cet endroit mais on le fait l'air de rien. Même ces films-là où c'est l'air de rien, je ne les ai pas vus. Je me suis donc dit « Personne ne l'a fait, alors fais-le ». Ce film va se faire. Encore aujourd'hui, j'apprends des trucs, j'apprends à transcoder, j'ai plein de disques durs et des machines. J'appuie sur des boutons et c'est épataant ! Donc *Pinkshasa Diaspora* va sortir en 2023. C'est décidé ! Cela fait beaucoup de technique, beaucoup d'à-côtés mais c'est magique. Quand tu regardes un film qui te touche et qui te parle avec des images montées de telle ou telle manière, tu vois immédiatement le travail que cela a demandé. Mes autres projets me demandent aussi du travail mais c'est peut-être parce ces autres canaux me plaisent davantage que j'y vois moins une question de labeur.

MF - Tu as aussi réalisé *Terminus*, un projet audio ?

JS - Oui, cette création sonore s'appelle *Terminus, Mourir chez Soi*, réalisée en collaboration avec l'artiste Nicolas Pommier. On l'a faite en plusieurs phases, d'abord un premier épisode pour lequel nous avons interrogé trois personnes âgées. Nous avons déjà enregistré la deuxième version mais nous ne l'avons pas encore montée. L'idée est de continuer dans ce travail-là, d'aller interroger des personnes, de faire toute cette récolte de paroles des seniors sur la question de leur propre mort et d'où ils et elles souhaitent être enterré.e.s.

MF - Quel est ton moteur ? Qu'est-ce qui te fait avancer ou produire ? L'envie de transmettre, la révolte, le partage ou la colère ?

JS - La colère c'est un gros moteur mais après, tout est contenu dans cette colère-là. Par contre le film dont on parlait tout à l'heure vient d'une vraie envie de transmettre, l'envie de situer nos existences, l'envie de participer à la narration. Quand je donne un atelier, c'est l'envie de partager, de transmettre et de militier. J'ai aussi participé à des ateliers d'écriture, et j'en ai appris davantage qu'en montant sur scène. En montant sur scène j'apprends et reçois beaucoup aussi. Mais sur scène il faut dire nos existences, il faut laisser des traces. C'est comme une grande chorale, et on est une voix dans cette immense chorale. Quand on est avec les étudiant.e.s à qui l'on dit «tu peux décider de ne pas le

faire ; mais si tu ne le fais pas, ce n'est pas grave, quelqu'un d'autre le fera mais cet autre personne là ne le fera pas pareil.» Il faut dire qu'avec toute notre humilité, avec toute notre force, ce qu'on a à dire est important, à l'endroit où on se situe, simplement, humblement, c'est tout. C'est ça qui me fait avancer : me dire que participer à cette grande symphonie, pour contrer la symphonie des autres d'en face, c'est de participer à la lutte. L'artistique c'est cela aussi : ce n'est pas juste du beau pour du beau. De toute façon, le beau, c'est beau pour qui ? Je me dis que c'est ma manière à moi, c'est ce que je sais faire. Je ne sais pas faire grand-chose, je ne suis pas très bricoleuse, mais je sais écrire, je sais un peu parler et je me suis dit tant qu'à faire, autant que ça serve.

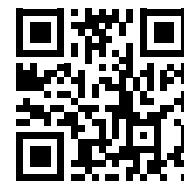
MF - C'est très beau ce que tu dis par rapport à la participation à la lutte, à la grande symphonie. Quand tu te présentes c'est souvent comme militante ou activiste et ici tu es en train de t'exprimer en termes extrêmement harmonieux...

JS - Oui, c'est vrai que je ne sépare pas les choses les unes des autres. La lutte peut être aussi bien sur une partition de musique concrète. Il y a des endroits où cela peut être plus concret que d'autres, en se demandant "Comment faire pour que mes ateliers soient accessibles au plus grand nombre ?" Il y a des endroits où c'est plus concret, plus direct au niveau de ce que cela enclenche, de ce que cela permet en termes de luttes. Il y a d'autres endroits où c'est peut-être plus diffus mais je crois qu'on y participe tous et toutes, d'une manière ou d'une autre. On ne peut pas ne pas en être. En tous cas, on n'a pas ce privilège-là. Ni toi ni moi. Tu vois, on est là. La lutte c'est de dire, c'est d'être là.

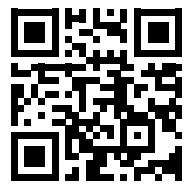
Merci d'avoir été, d'être là, Joëlle.

Links Online to Masterclass

Joëlle Sambi



QR link to the masterclass video



QR link to the debriefing video

"What's the difference between slam poetry and spoken word? In spoken word, you can add rhythm and music, while slam is dry with quite simple rules : it is you, 3 minutes on stage, no accessories, no music, no decoration. To tell your text very sharply, straight up.

"I like to navigate between these two ways of expressing ourselves: spoken word and slam; what I like most about them is the fact that everything can be used to make sound. If I take my recorder and put it on a table here or there, I'll get the sound of the fridge, the sound of the boiler. There's a rhythm in everything, just like in Dada poetry. People often think that to make spoken word, you need a band with drumkit, but that's not true. You can produce rhythm out of very little things, and sometimes you don't even need much more than your voice because you can create rhythm in the way you say your words. You write a text first and then, when you read it, you feel its musicality."

"As Samira certainly told you about the origins of slam, with Marc Smith in the end of 80's in Chicago, you had poets who wanted to make life less boring so they went to the cafés which were more democratic than "bourgeois" literature circles which were too inaccessible. The slam competitions took place in these bars, with a lot of noise like someone ordering a beer and you don't need any accessories or music, it was just you and your paper. You had 3 minutes and you say your text, you had to get started: 'bim!' You needed to grab the attention in the first sentence, the one you want people to remember. More energy comes with short sentences."

"I'm gonna share a text called 'I was not there' with you :

When they asked you, suspiciously,
why you walk like a boy,
I wasn't there, but I heard.
When they called you a tomboy,

I wasn't there, but I heard.
When they called you a dirty dyke,
I wasn't there but I heard.
When they pretended not to understand your unhappiness,
not to hear your sobs,
not to see your puffy eyes,
I was not there but I saw everything.
When they were tolerant,
I wasn't there but I was with you.
When they kept silent in the face of your distress,
I wasn't there but I heard everything.
When they shouted all their hatred at you,
I wasn't there but I covered my ears.
When they threw you out,
I wasn't there but I was with you.
When they pretended to love people "like you" because of course "you're different,
not like those others" and then laughed behind your back,
I wasn't there but I felt the weight on your shoulders.
When they didn't want someone "like you" as a teacher,
sports partner,
babysitter
or colleague,
I wasn't there but I was with you.
When they called you a pervert,
I wasn't there,
but I was with you.
When they spat at you and insulted you in broad daylight without anyone reacting,
I wasn't there,
but I felt ashamed.
When they raised their hands on you,
I wasn't there but I was with you.
When you looked up and worked hard to defend your rights,
I wasn't there but I was with you.
When you formed collectives with others like you,
I was not there but I was with you.
When you worked to the point of exhaustion to stop the violence,
I wasn't there, but I was with you.
When you filled out files and records until the end of the night,

I wasn't there but I was with you.
 When you knocked in vain at the doors of offices,
 ministries and foundations,
 I was not there but I was with you.
 When the migration officer asked you to prove you're
 a lesbian,
 I wasn't there, but I was with you.
 When you had to act as if the remarks about Jews,
 Arabs and Blacks didn't offend you in order to integrate,
 I wasn't there, but I was with you.
 When you cried in anger,
 loneliness and rage,
 I wasn't there but I was with you.
 When they hit you,
 raped you,
 killed you,
 I wasn't there but I heard
 the sound of the beatings on a body being mistreated.
 The question is,
 the question about abandonment is
 where are you when you are not there?"
 Joëlle Sambi

"With this text I wanted to show you that rhythm is everywhere: in the way you'll say it, in the way you choose your words, some of them have special associations when you use alliteration, anaphoras or repetition. The rhythm can be the musicality, and the words you choose can also create musicality."

"It's like observation; as if I was sitting and watching a scene and I saw this happen as if I was not involved in the situation: so, observation first, then with the question at the end, I'm implicated.
 When you're writing a novel or a short story, you can twist it all with just one question at the end.
 I wouldn't say that it has always to be like that, but with small things, you can completely twist the ending."

"Well, it's your turn to do it now.
 First of all, we are going to work live, creating a sentence along this structure : 'When ... I...' which will be said following each other.
 Try to pay attention to the number of syllables: it

should be neither too short nor too long, about 6 for example.

The one thing about the slam scene is 'don't apologize'. It's your 3 minutes on stage, and what you say matters. If we were in the same room right now, I could show you how to enter the stage, how you should look at the audience, how you should stand, etc. These things say 'I'm not apologizing'. It's not about being pretentious, it's just about taking space. Why? Because with slam poetry, you've written your text, those are your words that you're sharing, so you're actually giving us a gift. Be proud, say them loud, because what you have to say matters. It's open mic, other artists will perform after you, so you have

to keep and give the energy for those who are coming after you, you have to be very generous."



"This afternoon, in groups of three and taking into account the difficulty of working with six

hands, you will create a small piece using the structure 'When ... I...'. Keep the tempo, clap your hands when speaking it to feel if it fits. You should only listen to the musicality of the voice of the person before you, which gives you some impulse. Each of us reads differently: faster, slower, louder, etc. Then you should think about how to make a soundtrack. You may find a sound you like to match with the words."

"Then ask this question: what soundtrack do I create for the whole piece? It can be as simple as clapping, using glasses, or random sounds. The difficulty is keeping the same rhythm, so one person can be in charge of the recording, the other can play drums, and the third one can be the maestro. Go ahead!"

"When witches were burned I wasn't there,
 but I feel the heat
 When housewives where beaten I wasn't there,
 but I hear the blows
 When girls are crying behind their screens I wasn't
 there but I see your tears
 When Paris Hilton's sex tape was released I wasn't
 there but I feel her shame,
 huh, fame
 When porn was suddenly mainstream I wasn't there but
 I sure didn't ask for any rape on my first date
 When the condom broke I wasn't there to hold your hand
 To go through the pain of the game
 That girls play to find a way
 To stay somehow alive in all of this decay
 At least for today
 When they called her a witch I wasn't there but I sure
 wish I could have helped you to beat up that bitch
 When he said grab em by the pussy I wasn't there to
 protect you my dear but I sure wish I could have cov-
 ered your ear
 When you heard that girls have to be careful of how to
 dress I wasn't there to tell that college professor
 to fuck himself, bless
 Bless the day when you will ask me what I actually
 did, I wish to tell you to just be a kid."
 Audrey Apers

"Thank you so much for having played the game. We've heard very beautiful things, it has been so generous, considering that it was not easy to switch the camera on. We were following everything, we were with you in the bar, tracking you all the time.

I like the fact that you never lost the energy, you kept going even if you were a bit stressed with the rhythm, not knowing if you managed it."

"I like the way you used the "tray method" which was perfect from the beginning till the end: in slam poetry we say we're like waiters and waitresses who carry the tray full of glasses high and straight ahead, in a particular and constant balance. Here, saying a text, in your voice, in your attitude, you never slow down the text, you're never going down. Sometimes you don't need lots of artifice, accessories. It doesn't have to be rococo, it can also be designed soberly."

"I liked the harmony between all of you, which was also the goal of this exercise; it's not about making the best sound ever, although you made it nice, but it's how we work together and how we listen to what the other is doing and you did it brilliantly! So, now, just listen to me guys, don't stress too much. We all try to navigate things like you did, and what you did is already the best!
 Thank you!"





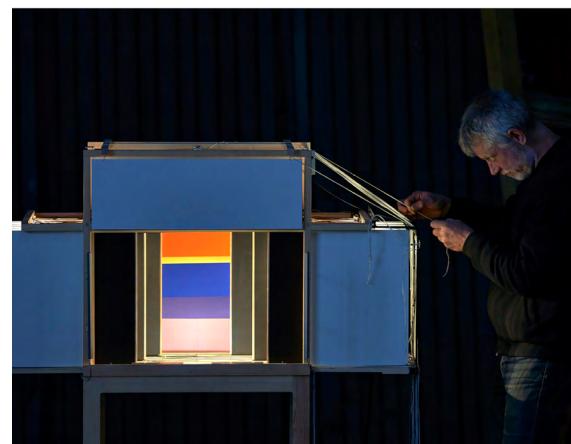
Benjamin Verdonck

In gesprek met
Karel Vanhaesebrouck

MOGELIJKHEDEN CREEËREN

Karel Vanhaesebrouck – Je bent opgeleid als toneelspeler, je schrijft, speelt en maakt sinds lang voorstellingen voor toneelzalen. Waarom ben je in de publieke ruimte gaan werken?

Benjamin Verdonck - Mijn werk ontstaat altijd uit twee krachten die dan samen een beweging gaan vormen. Soms vertrekt een project vanuit 'goesting', 'envie' – dat is een interne kracht, erg intuïtief, moeilijk te omschrijven. En andere keer is 'besoin' of 'noodzaak' de motor – een externe kracht ingegeven door de omstandigheden. Vanuit die twee polen ben ik ook beginnen werken in de publieke ruimte. Ik zag in de schouwburg mooie voorstellingen maar had het gevoel dat de mensen het al bij voorbaat met de voorstelling eens waren. En dus voelde ik steeds duidelijker



een innerlijk verlangen om op andere plekken mijn verhalen te gaan brengen, daar waar ze niet verwacht of gevraagd worden. Daarnaast ben ik steeds erg actief geweest in het links-alternatieve milieu. En in dat verband begon ik beeldende interventies te maken die aandacht dienden te generen voor politieke actiepunten, maar dat was onbevredigend, want je geraakt niet voorbij 'voor' of 'tegen'. Ik wilde mijn ambacht als theatermaker aanwenden in de concrete wereld, daar waar individuen niet noodzakelijk mijn mening delen. Gewoon 'tegen' zijn, was te makkelijk, zo bleek al snel. Als ik al een methode zou hebben, dan is het woord 'dialectiek' misschien wel het beste woord om die te omschrijven. We worden in onze samenleving voortdurend gedwongen positie in te nemen: het is 'ja' of 'neen', je bent 'voor' of 'tegen'. Maar daar komt eigenlijk nooit een gesprek van. Ik wil met mijn werk aan die patstelling ontspringen door het creëren van tijdelijke ruimtes die zich ontrekken aan die al te makkelijke opposities. *Shopping is fun*, één van mijn vroe-

gere interventies in de publieke ruimte, ging rechtstreeks in tegen onze compulsieve consumptiemaatschappij. In *Kalender* ben ik van strategie veranderd - die verandering was het resultaat van een gestage evolutie. Ik verdraaide de consumptiekalender door Sinterklaas op andere momenten in het jaar te laten opduiken, of op vreemde plaatsen. Dan gaat het niet langer om 'voor' of 'tegen' - je ontwricht een systeem door ermee te spelen, door het te omarmen. Je kan als kunstenaar een logo omarmen, om het zo te ontmaskeren.

KV – Werk jij in een stad of een buurt?

BV – Ik heb eigenlijk bijna altijd in Antwerpen gewerkt, bijna nooit op andere plekken. De connectie met de omgeving is cruciaal. Je hebt tijd nodig om een relatie aan te gaan met de ruimte waarin je intervenieert. Al te vaak reproduceert artistiek werk in de publieke ruimte stereotiepen in plaats van ze te ontwrichten. Of er wordt voor te voor hand liggende plekken gekozen: een shopping mall, of een verpauperde wijk. Voor je het weet draag je dan bij aan het systeem van 'art washing'. Of word je ingezet om symbolisch kapitaal te genereren voor een festival. Ik wil daarmee helemaal niet de goede bedoelingen van al die initiatieven te niet doen, maar ik heb wel geleerd dat een meer genuanceerde aanpak meer oplevert.

KV – Waaruit bestaat die aanpak dan?

BV – Ik neem deel aan bestaande netwerken die in een stad actief zijn. Ik probeer dus deel te worden van de stad. Daarnaast engageer ik me letterlijk in de publieke ruimte. Je ziet me aan het werk: ik neem het werkproces zelf mee naar de publieke ruimte. Aanwezigheid in de publieke ruimte is cruciaal: zo kan je andere relaties opbouwen, nieuwe mogelijkheden opbouwen. Maar ik blijf wel steeds een soort parasitaire aanwezigheid. Ik ben daarenboven geen sociaal werker: dat is ook écht een andere competentie, en die heb ik niet. Mijn werk moet steeds compromisloos kunnen zijn, en kan dus niet doelgericht zijn.

KV – Werk jij volgens een specifieke methode wanneer je de publieke ruimte ingaat?

BV – Ik vind dat eigenlijk een moeilijke vraag, omdat ik daar niet zo explicet over nadenk. Ik grijp vaak in in de dagelijkse trajecten van gebruikers doorheen de publieke ruimte, om zo een andere blik te activeren op die publieke ruimte. Eigenlijk is het een proces van gedurig proberen, van steeds opnieuw positioneren. Met mijn grotere werken probeer ik de blik van de passant te veranderen. Met de cyclus *Kalender* heb ik geprobeerd een aantal vragen in de tijd uit te spitten, bijvoorbeeld

* For English translation refer to page 132

door nieuwe verhalen te creëren, met en voor de stad. Ander werk is dan weer politiek explicieter en probeert iets te zeggen over de geopolitieke of ecologische crisis. In de vijver van het stadspark van Antwerpen plaatste ik twee voetbalgoals: het voetbal terrein is letterlijk ondergebroken.

KV – Je sprak daarnet over ‘art washing’. Hoe vermijd je als kunstenaar dat je gerecupereerd wordt, bijvoorbeeld in het kader van city marketing?

BV – Net daarom ben ik gestopt met mijn grootschalige interventies in de publieke ruimte. Alles, maar dan ook werkelijk alles, wordt omarmd door het kapitalisme. Die spanning was ook aanwezig in *Kalender*. Bij het begin van het project gaf toenmalig burgemeester Patrick Janssens me een vrijgeleide, ook al zou mijn werk zijn beleid kritisch benaderen. “We zijn mercantiel genoeg om dat aangenaam te vinden”, zo zei hij. Het gevaar van instrumentalisering is er altijd. Jouw ‘kritische’ werk wordt een onderdeel van de marketing van de stad, jouw werk in de publieke ruimte draagt bij aan de festivalisering van diezelfde ruimte. Dus moet je je tactiek steeds kunnen herformuleren. Je moet klein en wendbaar blijven. Hard roepen is geen strategie om het kapitalisme tegen te gaan, want dan word je omarmd. Ook als je nog harder tegen het systeem gaat roepen, gebeurt dat. Je blijft dus beter klein, want zo fiets je door alles heen. Je probeert te doen wat het systeem niet verwacht. Tijdens de lockdown ben ik met een wereldtournee gestart. Ik ben theater naar de mensen gaan brengen, op een bank, aan de voordeur, of op een kraan, om zo ook de balkons van een woonblok te bereiken. Op het moment dat alles stilligt, maak ik een beweging. En daarover gaat in essentie mijn werk in de publieke ruimte: mogelijkheden creëren. Wat kan er nu wél? Ik probeer met mijn werk te spreken in het moment. Ik wil dus niet langer afhankelijk zijn van randvoorwaarden. Ik probeer mijn werk nu zo te ontwerpen dat het kan spelen, wanneer het gespeeld moet worden.

KV – In jouw ‘masterclass’ vroeg je de studenten te vertrekken van een object gevonden op een wandeling door de publieke ruimte. Welke rol spelen die ‘objecten’ in jouw werk?

BV – Ik adopteer objecten, maar ik ben geen verzamelaar. Ik pik ze op terwijl ik op weg ben, naar de bakker, naar een afspraak, naar de school van de kinderen. Ze zijn voor mij niet altijd gerelateerd aan de plek waar ik ze vond. Het zijn stedelijke resten die gelinkt zijn aan mijn bewegingen in de stad. En vervolgens berg ik ze op in doosjes gerelateerd aan die trajecten: van de bakker naar het atelier, van het atelier naar het station. En de voorwerpen in die doosjes kunnen dan samengebracht

worden in een pancarte met, bijvoorbeeld, een collectie sigarettenpeukjes of kauwgomresten – samen vormen ze dan een tijdelijke collectie. Die verzamelingen zijn een soort études, oefeningen, met zelfopgelegde spelregels. Zo dwing ik mezelf anders te kijken naar mijn omgeving, dieper te kijken. En vervolgens herwaarde ik die objecten, door ze een plek te geven, door ervoor te zorgen. Daarbij gaat het niet om de veelheid – het is een ecologische oefening: ik adopteer de restfracties van onze samenleving. Soms haal ik de objecten opnieuw uit de doosjes, om ze te heractiveren, zoals in de voorstelling *Aren*. Of ik maak speciale doosjes om ze te laten zien aan anderen – zo worden ze heropgeladen met nieuwe ontmoetingen. Slechts in twee gevallen is de plaats van herkomst van het object wel belangrijk. Mijn rondellen zijn wel gekoppeld aan plaatsen, en dus ook aan herinneringen aan die plaatsen. Samen vormen ze een atlas van onbelangrijke herinneringen. En dan is er die collectie objecten die ik verzamel bij ons thuis, in Kapellen. Hier werk ik niet vanuit de stedelijke omgeving, maar met de sporen van een dagelijks leven van een aantal gezinnen. De insteek is dus veel (auto-)biografischer. Maar ook hier gaat het weer om opnieuw leren kijken naar de eigen omgeving.

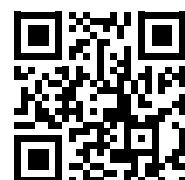
KV – Was dat ook jouw uitnodiging aan de studenten tijdens jouw masterclass?

BV – Workshops zijn helemaal niet mijn natuurlijke habitat, en al helemaal niet in de omstandigheden van een pandemie. Het was voor mij de eerste maal dat ik de verbinding maakte tussen mijn werk rond het activeren van een verzameling en het formuleren van een opdracht. Kijken naar objecten laat je toe anders naar een omgeving te kijken en zo te ontsnappen aan een geconditioneerde manier van kijken. Vandaar mijn opdracht: ga naar buiten (want dat was op dat moment van de pandemie allesbehalve evident) en zie of er iets tot jou spreekt, zoek naar dat verhaal. Ik had wat schrik dat ik die oefening wat teveel gekaderd had, door eerst mijn eigen werk te tonen. Dat bleek niet het geval te zijn. De studenten kwamen met heel verschillende objecten aanzetten, maar vooral met heel veel verschillende manieren van ‘laten spreken’. Je moet de stedelijke ruimte durven benaderen op een gestructureerde, dogmatische maar ook arbitraire manier, een beetje zoals Georges Perec zich speelse beperkingen oplegde. Die beperkingen laten je helemaal anders kijken: ze stellen je eigen blik in vraag, maar ook de manieren waarop we de werkelijkheid classificeren. Dat was de inzet van de workshop: probeer anders te kijken. Voor sommigen was dat een aanleiding voor een ontmoeting – bijvoorbeeld door op zoek te gaan naar de persoon achter het object – voor anderen een nieuwe manier om de stad in kaart te brengen. Ik herinner me bijvoorbeeld de groep studenten die aan de hand van een stukje glas de kapotte ruiten in een buurt in

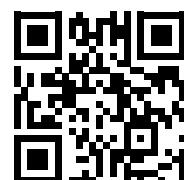
kaart brachten. De studenten ontwikkelden zo heel verschillende manieren van kijken. De opties zijn eindeloos. En misschien was dat wel het mooie aan die dag: in een context van schijnbare onmogelijkheid nieuwe mogelijkheden genereren. In de beperking, de verkleining ligt een gigantische wereld van mogelijkheden. Eén straattegel kan een kaleidoscoop aan mogelijkheden bieden. Die straattegel kan namelijk het vertrekpunt zijn van een wereldreis.

Links Online to Masterclass

Benjamin Verdonck



QR link to the masterclass video



QR link to the debriefing video

"Doing things you like to do. This is something I have kept with me since my early works."

"It is important to take care of the things you do, to have a big responsibility toward the work you inject into the public space. It is not just thinking and then doing it in the place but having a responsibility for it."

"The experience of doing things in the city, using the city as a book that speaks to you. Being driven by the city."

"Lately, I've had a lot of fun doing small things, like the small theatre in a box. I have a kind of repertoire now and I carry my box like a musician who carries his instrument and plays his instrument where-



ever he wants. I'd like to go on a "world tour" through Antwerp. I like this idea of internationalization that you can find everything in one place. Maybe you can discover more in one city rather than going from one city to another and staying only in the art bubble. There is a lot to discover by traveling in my own city. As a traveler, you have a destination but when you get there, you're open to what can happen. So being open to meetings was my main goal: to be open to meeting people and to what you want to tell in the moment. In theatre everything is so organized... I wanted to be in the moment."

"Where do you put your work and what kind of work do you put there?"

Student: "When I do things in public places, I feel this urge to take care, to do things for people and before I know it, I end up in the position of a social worker. Do you have some tips? How do you manage this situation?"

"It depends on what you do. But it is you, as an artist, who is responsible for your work. If your work requires you to have responsibility for people, then yes, you have to take that responsibility. Ask yourself: How can I engage with the place and the people if my work requires that? As an artist, I'm much more able to speak through my work than to develop social relationships. Through my work I get the opportunity to develop social relationships."



Student:
"How do you deal with rejection? Could you use it productively for yourself?"

"I must admit that there are days when I give up,... Ok it's not my day... I don't have the energy to do it.

But on the other hand, perseverance always leads to something too. That's something I've learned: You end up with something other than what you expected."

"Faire une liste avec les rejets, c'est aussi une liste intéressante, même là il y a une possibilité à inventer. What is interesting in the results it often the incidents, the accidents."

Student 1:
"People really wanted to talk with me, I feel that my story was just a pretext for people to talk."

Student 2:
"Did you have the feeling that you were playing a role

or were you being authentic when you told your story? Was it clear that it was a story, or did you tell it like it was the truth?"

Student 1:

"I felt the best way to meet people was to ask them something. I asked people: please, can you help me? I have a question about..."

Benjamin:

"The opening question is very important. When I do my little theatre-box, and I ask people: 'May I show you something?', people are suspicious. The first encounter is very important."

Student:

"It was strange to touch someone with fake news... I don't know how to feel about that..."

Student:

"Can you give me advice on how to get in touch with people on the street? I can't find people who want to talk and/or work with me."

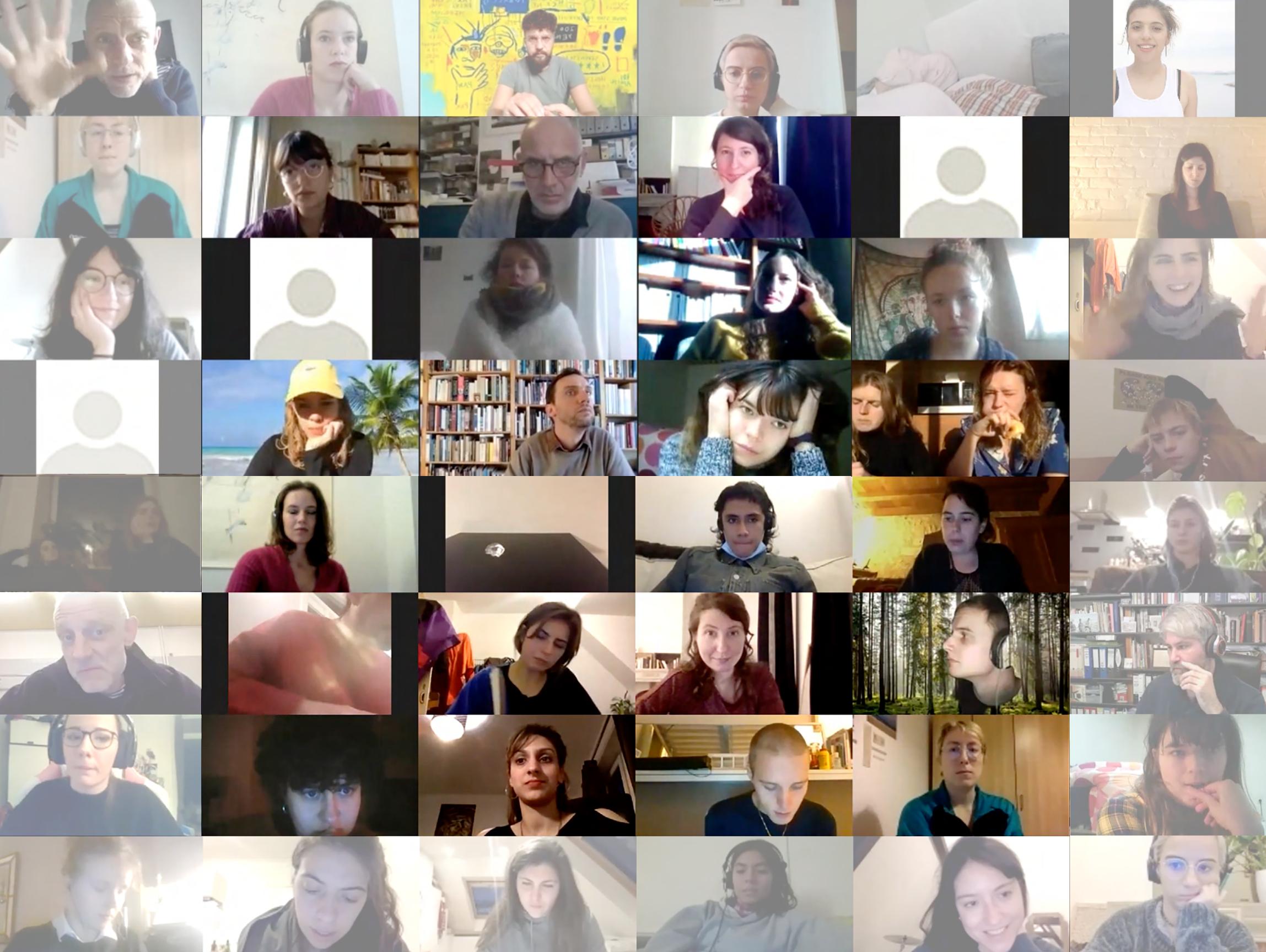
Benjamin:

"Go to a safe area, a place where you are already confident and can start. A safe haven or an airport. In Antwerp, there are different places I know well, where people pass by, and where I can try to meet people. It's not easy to talk to people just in the street. When I ask: 'Can I show you something?' people are suspicious, they immediately think that I have something hidden under my jacket...or that I want to sell them something. It's always useful to play the tricks of the street artists: show immediately your stuff so that they understand that you are not a threat to them. Most of what we do on the street has something to do with commitment, care, going a few times, gaining trust, making sure they know you, that they understand you and are attracted to what



you do. It takes time to get the story done. So take your time."







Bios

Noel B. Salazar is a sociocultural anthropologist known for his transdisciplinary work on mobility and travel, the local-to-global nexus, discourses and imaginaries of ‘Otherness’, heritage, cultural brokering, cosmopolitanism, and endurance. He is research professor in anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Leuven, where he founded CuMoRe (Cultural Mobilities Research). His ethnographic fieldwork so far has focused on Indonesia, Tanzania, Chile, and Belgium. Book publications include *Envisioning Eden: Mobilizing imaginaries in tourism and beyond* (Berghahn, 2010) and *Momentous Mobilities: Anthropological musings on the meanings of travel* (Berghahn, 2018).

Mathieu Van Crieckingen is a teacher and researcher in Geography and Urban Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He teaches in the Geographical Sciences Bachelors and Masters courses, as well as in two international programmes in urban studies: the Erasmus Mundus Master Course in Urban Studies 4Cities and the Master in Urban Studies organised jointly by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and the ULB. Located in the field of critical urban studies, his research focuses on the spatial mechanisms of social domination and the forms of resistance to them. Within this framework, he is particularly interested in the processes of gentrification from a double standpoint: “from above”, or “who produces the logics of gentrification, and how?”, and “from below”, or “who resists, obstructs or thwarts these logics, and how?” He recently published *Contre la gentrification. Convictions et résistances dans les quartiers populaires* (La Dispute, 2021).

Hans Vandecandelaere is a journalist and an author of literary non-fiction about Brussels. He made his debut with *In Brussel. Een reis door de wereld*, which is still considered a reference work for understanding the cultural complexity of our capital. He then wrote *In Molenbeek*, a new reading of the so-called “problem neighbourhood” Oud-Molenbeek, and *En vraag niet waarom*, about sex work in Belgium. In his books about Brussels he tries to offer a nuanced picture of Brussels’ super-diversity by means of literature research and interviews. Vandecandelaere does not write about the city, but always “with” the city. In this way, like an archaeologist, he exposes the various layers of the city. His books were an important source of inspiration for this project.

Samira Saleh is a spoken word performer, Agogical Sciences student and organizer. She grew up with three backgrounds, an Egyptian background from home, a Moroccan background in her immediate environment and a dominant diasporic background with Dutch roots, with the roots pulled out of the ground to find new footing in Belgium. Her artistic language is one that is direct, unfettered and uncompromising. She translates what she sees, and experiences as a Muslim woman and as a woman of colour in our society. In 2021, Samira began an artistic research project around, among other things, Islamic feminism in relation to storytelling/spoken word within the MENA region and the diaspora. She teaches at LUCA School of Arts and will artistically follow up the Seniors Slam project for Trill VZW. As an artist, she has already performed in Birmingham, Belgrade, London, and Cairo for various projects such as the Tashweesh Festival, Shubbak Festival and ‘Apples and Snakes’ *Hit The Ode*.

As a coordinator, she is also active at *Mama’s Open Mic*, a spoken word platform in Belgium that gives artists the opportunity to show their work to a wide audience.

Myriam Van Imschoot is a performance and sound artist living in Brussels. She works with voice techniques, field recordings, sound poetry, and other accessible media that enable us to telescope in what surrounds us with a sense if not of crisis then remedy and play.

Joëlle Sambi was born and spent her early years in Brussels. At the age of five, she left with her mother to grow up in Kinshasa, returning to Belgium in 2001 to study journalism at the ULB. Author of several short stories, including *Je Ne Sais Pas Rêver* (2003) and *Religion Ya Kitendi* (2005), she received the Prix du Jury Gros Sel in 2008 for her novel *Le Monde est Gueule de Chèvre*. In August 2021, she presented *Caillasses*, her first collection of poetry published by L’arbre de Diane. Identifying as an Afrofeminist LGBTQIA+ lesbian activist, Joëlle Sambi writes and raises questions about identity, norms, belonging, and powerlessness. Caught between multiple identities that merge, she inhabits the border, the strangeness of her language leading her to write poetry, slam, and spoken word. After a burnout in 2015, she experienced a radical shift, leaving her job as a communications officer to give writing workshops in various cultural and educational contexts. Recently elected as an associate artist at the National Theatre, she co-chairs the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community, the first lesbian organization in Europe and Central Asia, she is a co-founder of the Belgian Network For Black Lives, a collective that organized the first large demonstration against state racism and police violence in Belgium. She has directed and co-written two slam shows: *Koko Slam Gang*, which gives voice to a group of Congolese grandmothers aged 65 to 88, and *Angles Morts*, a one-woman show accompanied by the electronic music of Sara Machine. She is currently working on her first documentary, *Pinkshasa Diaspora*, a political poem that draws the landscape of homosexuals in the Congolese diaspora. She is currently touring with her show *Fusion*, co-directed with dancer Ntela Hendrickx. It was created in July 2021 at the Avignon Festival and mixes slam and krump.

Benjamin Verdonck is an all-round artist who lives and works near Antwerp. Both actor and writer, visual artist, and theatre maker, his art practice recklessly resists genres or classification. From theatre pieces on stage to performances in public space, across objects and art installations, to miniature mobile theatres on the go, Verdonck displays a catching simplicity in his visual language, but not in his thinking. Concerned with and distracted by what goes on in our world, he plays the game of a child with the wrinkles of a philosopher. For twenty years, he has combined on-stage collaborations with a steady yet agile visual art practice. His work is characterized by constant rethinking, rewriting, and reworking propositions on how art could co-create reality, rather than reflecting on it. In his work, he touches our consciousness with elements of playful fantasy, makes language a material, and lets space and objects speak. Far from resolving, his work has the quality of a poetic blessing that pretends no cure. Often it reveals a conscious—even activist—endeavour to tackle local or global urgencies (e.g. the ecological catastrophe, consumption, and economics) from within his work. In the search for new forms of “tafeltoneel” (literally “table scenes” or miniature theatre), Verdonck has recently been creating a series of table-sized mobile theatres. With few words but many strings, colours, geometric figures, opening doors and closing curtains, he rewires theatre to its most essential form, close-up and on a human scale. His magical “showboxes” have the potential to emerge anywhere in cities, indoors or out, to disappear just as quickly. Verdonck’s work as both machinist and protagonist reveals an audiovisual poetry that is both puzzling and tangible.

Kurt Deruyter studied both sociology and photography. As a photographer, he has a specific fascination for anthropology, landscape philosophy, and urbanity. These three elements converge in his long-term project *Halfway Home*, focusing on the dynamics and impact of migration on our society. With a slow, layered and attentive style, Kurt remains mostly absent in the role of photographer/image maker, creating a space where the viewer can and should be active, challenging clichés and stereotypes. He likes to achieve this using research methodology from anthropology and sociology. In the *Halfway Home* series he has published two books: *Halfway Home* on the texture and singularity of arrival neighbourhoods, and CARS, the first part of the trilogy *Cars, Priests & Haircuts*, on the economies found in arrival neighbourhoods. *Priests*, its sequel, is currently in production.





Traduction-Translation-Vertaling

The ballad of dark corners
Led by Clément Thiry and Chloé Schuitens
EN.
From p.26

"Start by rediscovering the city: linger where you would normally just pass by, observe what you can barely see, look up, pay attention to where you step..."

We decided to start the first workshop with a "walk in the dark" to discover Brussels by night and to get to know each other, letting ourselves be guided by the chance interactions that the urban experience offers. Guided by artists Clément Thiry and Chloé Schuitens, we set off on November 5th 2019, as night fell. It drizzled a little, then rained outright as we walked up to the top of the old town, exploring the administrative city before heading back along the Brussels canal. This artistic walk sharpened our senses while words, sounds, and light projections accompanied us along the way. The performance itself was a clear example of how the students would claim ownership of and artistically render their experience of the city at night: an approach they then continued to use during the workshop and over the course of our encounters and experiments.

-Karolina Svobodova

"We believe in the obscurity of the night and in sleeping. We sleep in a professional way and disappear in the urban gaps removing ourselves from the world of light. We are not afraid by the grey areas, on the contrary, we immerse ourselves in it. We let ourselves be attracted by the dark corners of the city, little wastelands forgotten by the street lighting that stay beyond control. We want to feel vulnerable. We are not afraid to be afraid. We let ourselves be hypnotized by sleep and we wander in the margins on the edge of humanity. Little by little, a photosensitive territory appears that only belongs to itself. We become part of it to renew our relationship to the world. We take care of these spaces by walking and paying attention. We whisper lullabies by fantasising being a sleepwalking activist."

Since 2016, Clément Thiry wanders in the city by night. He collects underlit spaces and places them on a map. They are forgotten spaces, small corners where rubbish gathers. The walks are invitations to contemplate and listen, following a meandering on the map. These meditative walks are guided by text readings and lullabies that are hints to a fragmented fiction. Walkers stroll through the sleepy streets caught in the hypnotic dimension of the city that brightens their way. After writing and preparing during 2021, he presents a new walk and new map through Forest and Anderlecht.

On empathy, prejudice, walking and Swedish statistics
An essay by Kurt Deruyter

EN.

From p.28

Empathy or sympathy?

A little anecdote by way of introduction. In 2015, at an arts colloquium at the Beursschouwburg, I gave a lecture on *Halfway Home*, my project in Molenbeek and Cureghem. An American artist asked me why I kept talking about 'we' and "they" when I talked about the inhabitants of Molenbeek. In the audience I saw many nodding in agreement. An animated discussion ensued in which I defended the proposition that when you grow up in Molenbeek in a family with an immigrant background, your world view is so fundamentally different that it becomes incomprehensible to an outsider. Your history, your challenges, your networks, your frame of reference, your possibilities are radically different from those of an "average" person from the white middle class, to which about 99% of the audience belonged.

As a researcher, artist, journalist, I pleaded to at least recognize this and not to pretend that we all belong to the same world. I call it empathetic research. Trying to put yourself in the other person's world and paradigm, and understanding these without being part of them. But in order to do that, we first have to reflect on ourselves and understand how our own ideas are formed and how dangerous they can be for the way we look at a subject.

Meetings: Know yourself and forget who you are.

We have been thinking about this for over 2000 years. A human being is roughly the product of their upbringing, their environment, their experiences, and skills. Many of the crucial elements in that equation are completely out of our control. You don't choose your parents, or the social context you grow up in. Or the place. You have to be aware of that to understand how you spontaneously look at a subject like a city (and its inhabitants). There are, in fact, many ideas that we adopt uncritically because they come from a source we can trust, such as newspapers, or because they have come to us through our studies or upbringing. Contrary to what we intuitively think, university studies or a successful career do not protect us at all from these commonplaces. The Swedish statistician Hans Rosling regularly denounced our lack of factual knowledge about global population growth in his TED talks. He came to the astonishing conclusion that a university test audience actually did worse than a randomly selected test population. The reason for this is precisely the uncritical assumption of ideas that are rooted in a certain culture and history and are too little or not at all questioned.

If we want to look at a subject like the city in a committed way, it can only be fruitful if we are aware of our own paradigm and its roots. And especially that this is not the only possible paradigm. Someone "else" will almost necessarily have a different view. Empathy with that "other" can produce new and interesting ways of thinking.

Images of the city.

Just as our view of the world is a direct result of many factors specific to ourselves and our environment, our image of the city is also a product of our lives and habits. Our work, our school, our activities take place in certain parts of the city, which we therefore visit more frequently than others. Our way there often takes us along the same paths and thus they acquire meaning for us and determine our image. If you travel from the centre of Brussels to Cureghem via the canal, you will be presented with a different image than if you travel via the Chaussée de Mons. The means of transport also plays a major role. Walking in the Chaussée de Mons, past the bakeries, butchers, and snack bars at the Porte d'Anderlecht, is a completely different sensory experience than taking the metro to Clemenceau. Indeed, the difference is not only sensory but also intentional. The metro and the car have a very functional character, the intention is to go as fast as possible from point A to point B, while walking invites you to stroll, observe, and discover. It is easier to deviate from your route while walking and to respond to what you encounter. How do we decide where to go anyway? This becomes clearer when we visit another city, whether it is for a short or a longer period of time. We choose a place to stay (hotel, airbnb, etc.), map out targeted routes from there because we want to visit one part of the city or another, let ourselves be guided by information from city guides or acquaintances, or draw on previous experiences. In this way we create an image of the city we are visiting. Of course, there is nothing wrong with visiting a city in that way. But if we have the ambition to "explore" a city, we run into a fundamental problem. If we decide beforehand what we want to visit and explore, we are already establishing our patterns and the image we shape of the city will largely correspond to the idea we had beforehand. This is a bit of a chicken/egg situation, of course. If we want to investigate something, we name it. This actually sends us in a certain direction. So, it is important to think of strategies that challenge our research idea in a processed way and to be open to ideas that rattle our convictions a bit.

Strategic "rattling".

The challenge then becomes to break the patterns that arise from habits. The possibilities here are endless. The strategies I use can be divided into two categories.

Theoretical approaches.

1. Mapping strategies.

In my search for ways to look at a city "differently", I eventually stumbled upon Kevin Lynch and his typology of the city. In the 1950s and 1960s, Kevin Lynch proposed a classification of the city based on what he called "the image" and "the imagination" of the city. How residents and users could actually "see" the elements of the city. He invented the "mental map" in his classic book *The Image of the City*. He looked at the city and distinguished a number of basic forms: Paths, Nodes, Districts, Borders, Edges and Landmarks. I use his theory mainly to get an idea of how a city or a part of a city that I want to investigate functions. You don't just look at the city, but also at how people use it. It gives an insight into the dynamics between built and experienced city.

2. Anthropological/ethnographic strategies.

In order to develop an empathetic view of a subject, I largely fall back on some classic strategies from anthropology. Participatory observation, in-depth interviews and text analysis are three strategies that I use constantly. For participatory observation, I try to find an "observation post" in the neighbourhood where I want to be active. For my project *Halfway Home*, this was a grocery shop where I could hang out unsuspiciously and where I even worked for a while. It allows me to build a different relationship with my "subjects". I like them to "forget" that I am a photographer. In this way, I can also easily organise "in-depth interviews" without having to formally announce them. This is scientifically not entirely deontologically correct but as an artist I allow myself that freedom. And finally, I use text analysis mainly to get an idea of the figures and existing insights and to test them against the fieldwork.

"Artistic" strategies to introduce a "controlled randomness" into my research trajectories.

1. Systematic random walking. A nice example comes from a novel by Koen Peeters, *Acacialaan*. The main character comes to live in Brussels, takes a large map of the city and with a felt-tip pen writes "BRUSSEL" on it in large letters, after which he follows the route marked out by a letter every weekend while walking.

2. Personally, what I love to do is to go for a walk with "locals", people from the neighbourhood who take me with them and show me their city and the stories that go with it. It enables you to look at the city through other people's eyes.

3. Get Lost. Make sure you get lost. I sometimes trace out a random left-right-left... diagram in advance and then follow it rigorously around the city.

4. Repeat walks at different times of the day, of the year. A first walk never gives me the best material anyway. There are so many impressions coming at you that it is very difficult to observe well and filter all of them.

5. Observe. Usually I pick a "node" (see Kevin Lynch) like a market or a local intersection or a shop to observe people's movements. Often combined with random chats with people passing by.

6. Sensory improvisation. Walking slowly (shambling), looking up (using the roofs of the houses as a horizon), walking backwards, observing with your eyes closed...

The path and the road and the goal.

Everything actually starts with the conviction that what you know yourself is only one facet of a kaleidoscopic reality. Uncovering other aspects, gaining insight into someone else's world, rattling some of your own and other people's prejudices. Going for a walk without knowing where we will arrive... In our hyperfunctional society, perhaps, we make too little time for this. And yet these sorts of quests are usually the ones that stay with us the longest.

About gentrification

Mathieu Van Crielingen

in conversation with Karolina Svobodova

EN.

From p.36

KS - To what extent can Brussels be considered a “creative city”?

MVC - In my opinion, we can only say that it is a creative city insofar as public authorities use the expression in their discourse. In fact, the notion of the “creative city” is problematic: it is not a category for analyzing a city, but rather a category for public action, for projects or for action in the city. A city is not creative or not, there are only creators in a city. The notion of the creative city is a slippery one: not only is it impossible to grasp this kind of notion from an analytical point of view, but different projects can be put under the same heading. As a researcher in social geography, I am more interested in the roles of creative people within the city: where and how they live, where and how they work. There are studies showing that creators make up a very diverse group of actors, and that their working conditions within their professional environment are precarious, especially when it comes to finding places to work, to rehearse, and to experiment....

KS - What do you say to artists who are worried that they are contributing to gentrification (without realising it) by moving to underprivileged areas to work and/or live?

MVC - The idea that artists are the “pioneers” of gentrification is still very much alive in many people’s minds and in the public debate. However, in the world of research, this idea has long since been debunked. For example, it is not enough to have artists living and working in a location that is being gentrified to say that it is the artists who are driving such a transformation. There is a correlation but not a clear cause and effect. It’s not the artists as artists who are driving up rents, or controlling the evolution of land or real estate rent levels. I think we need to get away from this guilt-tripping discourse against individuals. Gentrification is a structural problem that calls for collective rather than individual response.

Artists, like all inhabitants, are faced with social divisions of space that they themselves have not defined. If they want to oppose them, I always say that we have to ask ourselves who we are in alliance with? Who is sponsoring the activities, who are you working with, who are you bringing in, who are you talking to? Or join groups that campaign for social housing, against rising rents, etc. This is settled at the collective level: what mechanisms can we develop to prevent rents from rising to astronomical levels, and becoming completely unaffordable? Whether you are an artist or not makes no difference here.

KS - What are the dynamics and tensions between cultural projects and the city today?

MVC - There are many clear examples how artistic practices, projects, and ini-

tiatives are instrumentalised for purposes other than the cultural and the artistic, such as tourism or promoting the city’s “brand image”. The turn taken by the “Cultural Capital of Europe” programme is a good example: at the outset it was an attempt to promote a specific European culture, distinct from American culture, art, etc. But it quickly became a promotional event in which it is no longer the European culture that is highlighted but the city in which the event takes place. Cities lacking international recognition try to use culture or art to promote themselves for at least one year. This is an instrumentalisation of culture for other purposes within the city. If we take the case of Brussels, and more specifically the Zinneke Parade: the project’s goal was initially to work with people and develop grassroots culture... This intention remains present, yet when it is time for the parade, the whole Brussels tourist apparatus is put in place to promote the event to an international audience, and it is then used mainly as a tourist attraction. So-called “urban regeneration” projects also frequently instrumentalise art and culture, on a local scale. “Regeneration” does not mean bringing life back to neighbourhoods—which are not lacking in life—but rather disturbing the population of these neighbourhoods by making central working-class neighbourhoods more attractive to the middle classes. A very current example is the Kanal-Centre Pompidou museum. The museum is presented as having “regenerative” effects, leading to a “redynamisation” within the neighbouring districts, in particular by using discursive tactics invoking the creation of new bridges (material or symbolic) between the two banks of the canal. But if we want to create bridges with Molenbeek, I don’t think that a contemporary art museum is the best way to do it. There are so many other things the old garage could be transformed into. The current project aims to generate a lot of traffic, but it’s mainly traffic linked to tourism, both international and Belgian. I’m also under the impression that certain artistic practices actually instrumentalise urban spaces. Santiago Calatrava’s approach to the big train station in Liège is a good example: not only did he come and put his UFO in the middle of an existing neighbourhood (demolishing several housing blocks in the process) but he also wanted to draw a wide avenue between his station and the Meuse river, in order to have a sort of monumental perspective on the station. And yet, between the two, there were houses, shops, etc. Finally, there are also artistic and cultural approaches that seem to be tailor-made to be exploited. I was particularly struck by the Canal Festival, which brought together different cultural stakeholders, but also property developers who sponsored the event, as well as local and regional authorities, etc. The festival’s aim was to put the spotlight on the Canal area and push the idea of it becoming the new centre of Brussels. Yet local inhabitants were barely aware of the festival’s intentions, as the information had only been communicated to the cultural and political institutions. There are of course also artistic and cultural projects that try to question the uses of urban space, as was the case with the PleinOpenAir festival organised by Cinema Nova: they took over locations, provided information, and questioned power relations through their activities. Through culture and art, many other initiatives also lead people to question elements that they would not necessarily have thought about otherwise.

KS - What questions and challenges do these relationships between culture and territory raise specifically in Brussels?

MVC - Brussels has a strong symbolic value, albeit a very specific one: what

constitutes the image and reputation of Brussels abroad is the presence of the European institutions. Everywhere you read that Brussels is the “Capital of Europe”. This is a very specific image, but it isn’t necessarily attractive for leisure tourism: few tourists are attracted by a visit to office districts... The local authorities are therefore trying to capitalise on this idea of Brussels as the capital of Europe and at the same time to modulate the idea to give it a more colourful, more cultural, more fun image. The Kanal museum project also serves this purpose: to put Brussels on the map of cities to visit for contemporary art. I see this as the expression of an almost obsessive concern on the part of many political decision-makers for the competitive positioning of the city, an obsession that can of course be found elsewhere than in Brussels, and which feeds the feeling that each city should first be thought of as an entity in competition with other cities.

Joëlle Sambi
in conversation with Marie Feyereisen
EN.
From p.82

Marie Feyereisen - I expect you are very busy working on all your projects that are gaining popularity! In hindsight, one year and a lot of water under the bridge later, how would you look back on your experience with the students from the four schools?

JS - Oh yes, there's been a lot of water! I must admit at the time of the workshop, I had no idea what the outcome would be like. I couldn't have imagined it being such a whirlwind of projects and that we would put such cheerful things in place. Looking back and thinking about that moment with the students of those four institutions, it was a rather special day. I really enjoy giving workshops, especially with students in that age group: they are young adults who stir a certain wonder in me about their potential. And at the same time I can see where I need to put a little salt or a little pepper to keep them going. That's something really specific to this age group of 22-23 year-olds. In hindsight, I must say that if I were to do the workshop again today, maybe I would have given more directions; not orders, but indications for them to follow in relation to the exercises. It would have been a little tighter in terms of instructions so that they would have felt less lost in a multitude of things to do. Perhaps we would have also discussed the new projects which are unfolding for me in more detail, because they are also projects that they will soon be involved in somehow as artistic workers. So—although it was already a very fertile moment—there could maybe have been more of an exchange, and an even denser sharing of experiences.

MF - Which parts of the collaboration stood out the most, or made a mark on you?

JS - First, it was very beautiful and joyful, but simultaneously rather difficult because we were in full lockdown. We were inevitably forced (because of all the Zoom meetings) to enter other people's interiors and to observe them even if that wasn't the main intention, we ended up being in their private, intimate spaces. I found that the students were really joyful, and that they had strong desires, but at the same time I really got how complicated things were: working online, not having loads of financial resources. It was hard to be locked up like that, to work on a challenging project, trying to find one's creativity, all the while being stuck between four walls. I found that it was demanding to concentrate on very concrete things during the day. We saw each other in the morning and then the students went off into groups to work together. Most of them met up, but it was still complicated because some students had the Internet, some didn't. Actually, beyond access to the Internet, some didn't have computers. The questions were “How to organise?” and “Whose computer do we use?” We don't have all the equipment that we would have access to when we are at school. I found that really difficult. I felt bad for them because I felt their desire to go there, so we were constantly in a kind of forced predicament. In any case, I felt there were two phases: the beautiful meeting in the morning, which totally contrasted

with the evening when we met again. The results of their work seemed magic to me, it was incredible! I still think back to that particular moment, looking at a very strange screen full of small boxes to see what they created after not even a day's work. They searched, they explored, they dared. That was fantastic. In conclusion, I'm more interested in what they taught me than the reverse. It was a workshop that took place both via discussion and by using materials. They really sought out material to work with, they were audacious. Often we are too quick to give up or in saying to ourselves that something isn't good enough. They didn't get discouraged at all, and that inspired me. I thought to myself: «How beautiful, how encouraging, let's not give up!» They had such great energy, and I was really happy to share such moments with them. The evening performance was so beautiful: the light, the music... They were very generous, I was given a lot of love that day. I was very happy.

MF - Do you think the fact that your intervention in this workshop took place during the pandemic was restricting or, on the contrary, did it allow the students more freedom?

JS - I think it clearly slowed the process down technically, concretely. In certain moments it just wasn't possible to invent solutions to everything. There comes a time when you are limited, but the constraints lead you to say "OK, I have a machine, I can do this or that with it, I can try this out." It also led to us becoming exceptionally good listeners. So yes, there were drawbacks but the students didn't let themselves be put down, which was amazing.

MF - What interest do you see in this kind of educational initiative? What makes you want to participate in workshops, and what do you enjoy the most about them?

JS - First of all, I must admit I have a very big soft spot for the L'ERG (École de Recherche Graphique), maybe because it is the first place that trusted and invited me to share my texts. I found it is really great to work with this school; there's something very joyful there, very free—a beautiful energy in any case. Moreover, I always learn a lot from this type of activity... obviously when you are a young student, you always have the impression that there are those who know and those who don't. It's actually a dynamic of exchange, each person responds to the other. Unless the students are apathetic or have no drive to go digging, or to go looking. That wasn't the case this time at all. In fact, they trusted me, they said to themselves, "Okay, let's do this!" I proposed something quite basic which was to create sound, to write texts, and most importantly to ask the question: "How can we all work together?" The idea of collective work is what really fuels me because it allows us to move away from the centre, to leave the posture of the sole artist who creates and to be in a perhaps more shared dynamic. So, if I screw up, it screws up for the others too. It was with this in mind that they were able to say "Let's go!", despite the difficulties that the context and format imposed.

MF - Especially since it was November and we were going through a second lockdown...

JS - Yes, and we had been waiting for this moment for so long! I had been fantasising about the project and the idea of working at night, recording sound at night. It would have been magical... And then we ended up being locked inside. But the students reacted superbly!

MF - Let's close this chapter about the workshop, and move on to your current practice; you seem very busy! You work on and with various means of communication such as films, writing and theatre: how do these media combine in your practice? Do you have any preferences?

JS - I always try to include a poetic dimension in the situation, whether it's via writing or in the workshops. Film is still the most complicated medium for me. Working with sound is one of the easiest things for me, which is quite funny because I studied radio and TV journalism at the ULB. I royally failed my TV exam, and I still really struggle with the medium of video. Whether it's writing, sound, radio or even sometimes drawing, it's all easier for me than video. For my current film, *Pinkshasa Diaspora*, I'm throwing myself into it like "Okay, but what can I actually manage?" I start from the assumption that I simply can't do everything myself, so the most important thing is to find people to work with—not in a utilitarian way—but rather with a lot of modesty. If you want to make a film, you're going to want to do it well and therefore work with people who make films. I have the ideas, the vision, the ways of looking at things. So then I started asking myself, "How do you want to do this?" and "How are you going to partner with people to do it?" So I always try to remember this, and sometimes push myself a little bit too. For this new film, I'm finishing a training course where I'm forcing myself to watch films, to edit films myself, to shoot things myself, to put myself in the position of and in the eye of the editor, in the eye of the cameraman or camerawoman, etc... so that I also know what I am asking of others when I work with them. I always try to enjoy what I'm doing, so even in film, even when it is complicated, I ask myself, "How can you make this work? How can you direct this towards something that has meaning for you?" What is relevant to me is when poetry and performance are not straight, not smooth, not completely expected. I like forms that are a little hybrid, a little crazy and from which something emerges. So this new film will be made like that, with a very clear and precise theme, with very classical things like interviews, etc. However the materials that I will use are slam poetry and spoken word, because I think that's how meaning will be transcribed the most effectively.

MF - Why did you choose to make *Pinkshasa Diaspora* as a film if this medium is so complicated for you?

JS - It is indeed complicated, but I think that a film travels more easily than a book, it is something immaterial. But the real reason is...pure pride! To explain: I worked for Massimadi for a long time, which is a LGBTQ film festival from Africa and the diasporas, held in Brussels since 2012. During the festival we program films that talk about issues of homosexuality, films made by or about LGBTQ characters from Africa and the African diasporas. It's quite broad, with films from all over: from the Caribbean, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria etc...

But there are never any Congolese films, not ONE. To me that was inadmissible, especially since we exist as filmmakers. There is an important Congolese artistic community, with many Congolese filmmakers, but there's nothing on the question of homosexuality! It remains a last bastion, the place where one does not go, or if one does go there, it's always very light. But actually, I've not even seen those films that deal with the subject with such levity. So I thought, "You know what? No one's done it, so you do it!" That's really why. So it's happening! I'm learning stuff, I'm learning how to transcode, I've got lots of hard drives and machines, and I'm pushing buttons, and it's amazing. *Pinkshasa Diaspora* will be released in 2023. That's for sure! It's a lot of technique, a lot of things to deal with on the side but it's really magical. When you see a film that touches you and speaks to you because of the images and how they are edited, you realise the work that was required. Of course, my other projects are also work, but it is perhaps because I like the other mediums more that I see it as less of a question of labour.

MF - You also made *Terminus*, your audio project?

JS - Yes, that one is finished. This sound creation is called *Terminus, Mourir chez Soi*, in collaboration with the sound artist Nicolas Pommier. We made it in several phases: for the first episode we interviewed three elderly people. The idea for us was to go to interview people, to make a collection of seniors' thoughts on the question of their own death and where they wished to be buried. It's a sound-only project.

MF - What is your driving force? What makes you move forward/produce? the desire to transmit, revolt, share, be angry or ...?

JS - Anger is a big driving force but often everything remains within the anger. On the other hand, the film we were talking about earlier comes from a real desire to transmit, the desire to situate our lives, the really concrete desire to participate in the narrative. When I give a workshop, it's the desire to share, to pass knowledge on and to do something concrete; to be militant, to be aware that I was once also doing writing workshops, and that I learnt a lot more there than by going on stage. By going on stage, I learn too. I get a lot out of it, but you have to be vocal, you have to speak about your existence, you have to leave traces. Your voice is just a voice in this huge choir. However, it's a different thing when you are with students to whom you say, "You can do it," or "You can decide not to do it; and if you don't do it, it doesn't matter, someone else will do it, but that someone else won't do it the same way." It's simple: we have to keep our humility in mind, but also our strength. What we have to say and from where we say it is important, but it should also remain simple and humble. That's what makes me continue, telling myself that to participate in this great symphony; to counter the symphony of the others on the other side is to participate in the fight. That's what artistic creation is, too. It's not just beautiful for the sake of being beautiful. And who is it beautiful for, anyway? I'm just aware that this is my way, this is what I know how to do. I don't know how to do much. I'm not very handy, but I know how to write. I know how to speak a little, and I think my skills should be used for a good purpose.

MF - It's very beautiful what you said about participating in the struggle as a great symphony. You often introduce yourself as a militant or even an activist, and here you are expressing yourself in extremely harmonious terms...

JS - Yes, it's true that I don't separate everything. The struggle can be both on a musical score, and be real. There are places where we can make the struggle more real than others, by asking questions like, "How can I make my workshops accessible to the greatest number of people?" There are places where it's more concrete, more direct in terms of what it sets in motion—what the struggle leads to. There are other places where it's perhaps more diffuse, but I believe that we all participate in this social struggle, in one way or another. We can't not be part of it. In any case, we don't have that privilege. Neither you nor I. You see, we're here. Saying it equates to being there.

MF - Thank you for being with us today, Joëlle.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Benjamin Verdonck

in conversation with Karel Vanhaesebrouck

EN.

From p.98

Karel Vanhaesebrouck - You were trained as a stage actor, you have been writing, performing, and creating performances for theatres for a long time now. Why did you start working in public space?

Benjamin Verdonck - My work always arises from two forces that together form a movement. Sometimes a project starts from desire or envy, a very intuitive, internal force which is difficult to describe. And at other times necessity is the driving force - an external force prompted by circumstances. From these two poles, I also started working in the public space. I saw beautiful performances in the theatre but I had the feeling that people had already agreed with the performance in advance. And so I felt an ever clearer inner desire to bring my stories to other places, where they are not expected or asked for. In addition, I have always been very active in the left-alternative milieu. And in that context, I began to make visual interventions that were intended to generate attention for political action points, but that was unsatisfactory, because you cannot get past being "in favour of" or "against". I wanted to use my craft as a theatre maker in the concrete world, where individuals do not necessarily share my opinion. Just being "against" something was too easy, as it soon turned out. If I had a method, the word "dialectic" might be the best word to describe it. In our society, we are constantly forced to take up positions: it is "yes" or "no", "in favour of" or "against". But that never really leads to a conversation. I want my work to escape this stalemate by creating temporary spaces that escape these all-too-easy oppositions. *Shopping is fun*, one of my earlier interventions in the public space went directly against our compulsive consumer society. In *Kalender*, I changed strategies—this change was the result of a steady evolution. I twisted the consumption calendar by having St. Nicholas appear at other times of the year, or in strange places. It is then no longer a question of "for" or "against". You disrupt a system by playing with it, by embracing it. As an artist, you can embrace a logo in order to unmask it.

KV - Do you work in a particular city or a neighbourhood?

BV - I have actually almost always worked in Antwerp, almost never in other places. The connection with the environment is crucial. You need time to establish a relationship with the space in which you intervene. All too often, artistic work in the public space reproduces stereotypes instead of disrupting them. Or settings are chosen that are too obvious: a shopping mall, or an impoverished neighbourhood. Before you know it, you are contributing to the system of "art washing". Or you are instrumentalised in order to generate symbolic capital for a festival. I do not want to undermine the good intentions of all these initiatives at all, but I have learned that a more nuanced approach is more fruitful.

KV - What does that approach consist of?

BV - I participate in existing networks that are active in a city. I try to become part of the city. In addition, I literally engage with public space. You see me at work: I take the work process itself to the public space. Presence in the public space is crucial: it allows you to build up different relationships, new possibilities. But I always remain a kind of parasitic presence. Moreover, I am not a social worker: that is really a different expertise, and I don't have that. My work always has to be uncompromising, so it can't be goal-oriented.

KV - Do you work according to a specific method when you go into the public space?

BV - I actually find that a difficult question, because I don't think about it so explicitly. I often intervene in the daily trajectories of users through the public space, in order to activate a different view of that public space. In fact, it is a process of continuous trial and error, of repeatedly repositioning oneself. With my larger works, I try to change the perspective of the passer-by. With the *Kalender* cycle, I have tried to dig out a number of questions in time, for instance by creating new stories, with and for the city. Other work is more politically explicit and tries to say something about the geopolitical or ecological crisis. I placed two football goals in the pond of Antwerp's city park: the football ground is literally flooded.

KV - You just spoke about "art washing". How do you avoid being recuperated as an artist, for example in the context of city marketing?

BV - That is precisely why I stopped my large-scale interventions in the public space. Everything, really everything, is embraced by capitalism. That tension was also present in *Kalender*. At the start of the project, then-mayor Patrick Janssens gave me an almost all-inclusive licence, even though my work would consider his policy critically. "We are mercantile enough to find that agreeable," he said. The danger of instrumentalisation is always there. Your "critical" work becomes part of the marketing of the city, your work in the public space contributes to the festivalisation of that same space. So you have to be able to reformulate your tactics all the time. You have to remain small and agile. Shouting loudly is not a strategy to fight capitalism, because then you will be embraced. Even if you shout against the system even louder, you will be embraced. So it is better to stay small, because that way you cycle through everything. You try to do what the system does not expect. During the lockdown, I started a world tour. I started taking theatre to the people, on a bench, at the front door, or on a crane, to reach the balconies of a block of flats. At a time when everything is at a standstill, I make a movement. And that is essentially what my work in the public space is about: creating possibilities. What is possible now? With my work, I try to speak in the moment. I no longer want to be dependent on preconditions. I now try to design my work in such a way that it can be performed, when it has to be performed.

KV - In your masterclass you asked the students to start from an object found on a walk through the public space. What role do these objects play in your work?

BV - I adopt objects, but I am not a collector. I pick them up while I'm on my way, to the bakery, to an appointment, to the children's school. For me, they are not always related to the place where I found them. They are urban remnants linked to my movements in the city. And then I store them in boxes related to those routes: from the bakery to the studio, from the studio to the station. And the objects in the boxes can then be brought together in a composition with, for example, a collection of cigarette butts or chewing gum—together they form a temporary collection. These collections are a kind of *étude*, exercises, with self-imposed rules. Thus I force myself to look at my surroundings differently, to look deeper. And then I revalue or reactivate those objects, by giving them a place, by caring for them. It is not about the multitude—it is an ecological exercise: I adopt the residual fractions of our society. Sometimes I take the objects out of the boxes again, to reactivate them, as in the performance entitled *Aren*. Or I make special boxes to show them to others—so they are reloaded with new encounters. The place of origin of the object is important in only two cases. My *rondelles* are linked to places, and therefore also to memories of those places. Together they form an atlas of unimportant memories. And then there is the collection of objects that I collect at home, in Kapellen. Here, I do not work with the urban environment, but with the traces of a daily life of a number of families. So the approach is much more (auto-)biographical. But here, too, it is a matter of learning to look again at one's own environment.

KV - Was that also your invitation to the students during your Master-class?

BV - Workshops are not my natural habitat at all, and certainly not in the circumstances of a pandemic. For me, it was the first time that I made the connection between my work on activating a collection and formulating an assignment. Looking at objects allows you to look at an environment in a different way and thus to escape a conditioned way of looking. Hence my assignment: go outside (because at that moment of the pandemic that was anything but evident) and see if something speaks to you, look for that story. I was a bit worried that I had framed the exercise too much, by showing my own work first. That turned out not to be the case. The students came up with very different objects, but above all with very different ways of "letting it speak". You have to dare to approach the urban space in a structured, dogmatic but also arbitrary way, a bit like Georges Perec imposed playful restrictions on himself. These restrictions make you look at things in a completely different way: they question your own view, but also the ways in which we classify reality. That was the point of the workshop: try to look at things differently. For some, this led to an encounter—for example by looking for the person behind the object—for others a new way of mapping the city. I remember the group of students who used a piece of glass to map the broken windows in a neighbourhood. The students developed very different ways of seeing. The options are endless. And perhaps that was the beauty of that day: generating new possibilities in a context of apparent impossibility. Within limitation or reduction lies

a gigantic world of possibilities. A single paving stone can offer a kaleidoscope of possibilities. Indeed: that paving stone can be the starting point of a journey around the world.



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