



COLLABORATIVE  
ARTS PARTNERSHIP  
PROGRAMME

RESTOCK  
RETHINK  
REFLECT  
FOUR

ON  
LIVE ART  
AND  
PRIVILEGE

STUDY  
ROOM  
GUIDE



Live Art  
Development  
Agency

# the displaced & privilege

live art in the age of hostility

ELENA MARCHEVSKA  
2017



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# Introduction

LADA is a Centre for Live Art - a knowledge and research centre, a production centre for programmes and publications, and an online centre for representation and dissemination.

LADA works to create the conditions in which diversity, innovation and risk in contemporary culture can thrive, develop new artistic frameworks, legitimise unclassifiable artforms, and give agency to underrepresented artists, practices and histories.

LADA supports everyone who makes, watches, researches, studies, teaches, produces, presents, writes about and archives Live Art in the UK and internationally through projects, publications, opportunities and resources, including the Study Room, a free open access research facility. As part of the continuous development of the Study Room, LADA regularly commissions artists and thinkers to research and write Study Room Guides around practices and issues to help navigate users through the materials we hold and enhance and influence their own practices and approaches.

This guide was researched and written by the artist and researcher Elena Marchevska as part of a LADA research residency for exploring Live Art practices and methodologies in working with the displaced.

*Restock, Rethink, Reflect (RRR)* is an ongoing series mapping and marking underrepresented artists, practices and histories, whilst also supporting future generations. Following *RRR* projects on Race (2006-08), Disability (2009-12), and Feminism (2013 -15). *RRR4* (2016-18), on Live Art and Privilege, is looking at the ways in which Live Art has developed new forms of access, knowledge, agency, and inclusion in relation to the disempowered constituencies of the young, the old, the displaced, and those excluded through social and economic barriers.

The residency was also part of LADA's contribution to the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP), a transnational programme funded by the European Union focusing on collaborative practices with the aim of engaging new participants and enhancing mobility and exchange for artists.

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# Structure of the guide

The theoretical and practical research that I did for this Study Room Guide can be separated in three sections:

**1. Discussion sections** with artists, academics and organisers about issues of displacement. I focused on individuals who, by force or by choice, find themselves dealing with the issues of displacement. The work that I included in this Study Room Guide reflects on both physical and internal displacement. For all the people I had conversations with, the hardships of being displaced are both an existential ordeal and an opportunity to exercise their creativity. All of them deal very differently with the issues of displacement, nostalgia, hospitality and loss of space/country. I offer these interviews and discussions to you as a reader, as a proposition to reflect on the creative potential of displacement.

**2. ‘Misplaced Women?’ Reflective Section**, where you can find documentation of the workshop that I hosted with LADA in December 2016. Together with Tanja Ostojic we selected responses from the participants, to widen the scope of this guide and to bring different voices and experiences to the discussion. For a full version of the responses and the reflection on the London iteration of the ‘Misplaced Women?’ project, please see the website: <https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/>

**3. Provocations:** The final stage of this research was an open invitation that I extended to artists, academics and writers, to think and explore the ramifications of displacement – the disruption, confusion and instability it causes. This helped me to see how art can cut through rigid territories, political hostilities and make us see hidden histories. The contributions that I gathered are interspersed with the guide and bring the private voice of the artists in relation to the experiences of the displaced.

# the displaced & privilege

## live art in the age of hostility

ELENA MARCHEVSKA  
2017

I am frantically searching through a pile of clothing and underwear. My brother opens the door and yells at me:  
*I can't find the dog and uncle D is waiting outside. I am not leaving without the dog... What are you doing?*

I lift my head, my mind is blank. What do I take? I don't even have a bag. I grab a jumper and a cashmere scarf that my granny gave me. I start calling the dog and searching for her. I can smell the fire and the gunpowder. I want to go to the balcony, when I hear my next-door neighbour shouting:  
*Don't go out...They can see you, they can...*

I run down the stairs, my brother holds the dog, we lock the door.  
*Shall we stay? For a bit longer? It might calm down?*

*You are children, I need to take you, your parents called. If you want to come back later...*

We are sitting in the back of the car, my brother, the dog, I...a black jumper, purple scarf, bag of apples and a mobile with no batteries. What do you take with you 2 minutes before you leave your house?

“What are you going to take 2 minutes before you leave your home?”  
(Elena Marchevska, 2005)

## Introduction

I grew up in former Yugoslavia and this is a story about a cold day in Spring 2000, when I had to leave my parents' house, due to an armed conflict near our neighbourhood. I was born and brought up in Yugoslavia, a country that underwent an extreme rupture in its history in the '90s; a country that doesn't exist anymore. Being a displaced individual, I embarked on the residency with Live Art Development Agency to find ways to speak about the complexity of displacement, both as a lived experience and as an artistic concept. In *Shame*, Salman Rushdie contemplates the hopefulness of displaced people who have experienced destructive acts of history:

When individuals come unstuck from their native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same thing...the act is called secession. What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nations? I think it is their hopefulness...And what's the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one's luggage. I'm speaking of invisible suitcases, not the physical, perhaps cardboard, variety containing a few meaning-draining mementos: we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time.<sup>1</sup>

1. RUSHDIE, S. (1984). *Shame*. London, Pan books. pp.85

For someone who comes from a partitioned country, the sentiment Rushdie's describes is very resonant. The fragmentation is not only physical, but deeply psychological. I was part of the many waves of emigration from ex-Yugoslavia in the course of the last two decades. I grew up in time of 'us' and 'them', 'in' and 'out' of Europe. As argued by Nandita Sharma, 'We have open borders in the sense that people are crossing them. Border controls are much more operative once people have crossed the physical borderline. This is the major, if often invisible, mechanism of border controls.'<sup>2</sup>. Borders and the displaced are part of our everyday reality now. The discussion is hostile and poisonous, and the gloves of political correctness are off. I often think about division, control and displacement in the context of Europe and the necessity of hope as a concept, when we discuss borders. Displacement can also bring self-fulfilment and peacefulness, and as argued by Yana Meerzon: 'exile can also provoke a state of happiness and pleasure. Exilic life can provide a sense of continuity and personal satisfaction. It can trigger artistic discoveries and lead to economic fulfilment or benefit'<sup>3</sup>.

Currently the ex-Yugoslavian territory, my homeland, is used as a giant borderland with which the EU defends its territory from the 'other'. On February 24, 2016, in Vienna, Austria, the Foreign and Interior Ministers of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Croatia,

Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia signed a petition to stop the flow of migrants into the Balkan area for safety reasons, lack of resources and because the phenomenon represented a challenge to their own integration into Europe.<sup>4</sup> The petition was created in response to the so-called Balkan route that the majority of migrants were using to reach Europe. This petition points painfully to the current state of Europe: nationalism rising, the European Union questioned as an institution and political body, and ultra-right-wing politicians leading the polls. Furthermore, as argued by Zaroulia and Hager: 'we have seen the acceleration of the migration crisis, as 'tides' of people who exist 'outside' Europe find themselves trapped at its gates, while recent atrocities both 'inside' (Paris) and 'outside' Europe (Sinai, Beirut) prove the porosity of the 'Fortress Europe' and the persistence of the continent's colonial legacies'. (2016)<sup>5</sup>. However, hostile borders<sup>6</sup> are just one element of the experience of displacement. Displacement is an phenomenon that can be closely linked to issues of gentrification, homelessness, minority groups (Roma, Sinti and traveller's communities) and statelessness.

2. Sharma, N. (2015) Terror and mercy at the border. In: JEFFRIES, F. (2015). *Nothing to Lose but Our Fear: Activism and Resistance in Dangerous Times*. London, Zed Books. pp. 75-94

3. MEERZON, Y. (2014). *Performing exile, performing self: drama, theatre, film*. [Place of publication not identified], Palgrave Macmillan. pp.7

4. However, Greece, which is facing the biggest internal crisis because of a massive wave of migrants, was not invited on this meeting.

5. <https://insideoutsideeurope.wordpress.com/2015/12/> or see [P3039]

6. For more on live art and border, please see *Performing Borders: A Study Room Guide on physical and conceptual borders within Live Art*. [P3043]

## Displacement

/dis'pleism(ə)nt /

1. *the action of moving something from its place or position.*
2. */psychoanalysis/ the unconscious transfer of an intense emotion from one object to another.*

Displacement doesn't only refer to a specific place. In fact, nowadays, it has very little to do with a specific geographic location. For this Study Room Guide, I looked at artists and works in which displacement is explored through means of family, community, shared culture, race or even nostalgia for a moment/ place to which the artists somehow belonged. As argued by Maria Clara Bernal, when artists deal with the topic of displacement in their work, they embody 'Hal Foster's concept of the artists as ethnographer, according to which the artist becomes observer and illustrator of a phenomena' (2007:27). While developing this Study Room Guide, I responded both consciously and instinctively to the state of displacement that Europe is experiencing right now. With the rise of populism in the Western world, the dissatisfaction of the voting electorate has been manifested as an intense emotions against immigrants, women and people of colour. The general sense of normality in most developed Western democracies has been displaced; the perception of what actions/ words are allowed in the public sphere is being challenged. With curiosity, I asked myself how live art and performance practitioners feel about this; how they would describe this 'sudden' displacement from hidden to apparent anger and dissatisfaction? I looked back, to historical moments where we have experiences of similar situations; I hope that this guide will allow you to look forward. I deeply believe that the current instability, the lack of sense of belonging and the desire to make a change, will inspire creative potential and will become a theme for many artists.

## Privilege, the displaced and human rights

In Yugoslavia, the idea of privilege was ideologically erased by the concepts of equality and unity. These concepts were systematically supported by the provision of cheap childcare, free education and free health care for everyone. The class system was erased: the key ideological terms in Yugoslav socialism were working people and one-class or classless society. Of course, there were always some who were better off than others, but the gap between them was (at least on the surface) insignificant. I grew up with these ideas and for me the notion of privilege came to life when for the first time I needed to leave the country after the war. Macedonia, after declaring independence from Yugoslavia, was still under heavy sanctions, and the Dayton Agreement<sup>7</sup> had been signed just a few years earlier. As a citizen of an ex-Yugoslavian republic, I needed a visa to travel everywhere. Queuing in front of embassies was a normal procedure. I needed to fill out numerous questionnaires and applications, before being invited for an interview with immigration officers. These were places where security and control was performed on an everyday basis. This quickly made me realise the benefits and the privilege of possessing the right passport. The border authorities' fears and concerns about security were enacted on the people who didn't have the 'right' passport, and this points to the biopolitical horizon of the displacement. People who don't hold the right passport (or even worse don't have any sort of passport) are subjected to an array of demeaning and intrusive examinations and history checks, such as fingerprinting and medical inspections.

In the summer of 2005, I was invited by Dijana Rakocevic and Almir Kodzic to present my piece 'What are you going to take 2 minutes before you leave your home?' as part of the exhibition *Insomnia*, at Bargehouse, Oxo Tower in London.

7. The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina





*Elena Marchevska 'Insomnia' (2005) performance*

This performance piece is based on the feeling of being lost and the constant longing and desire for the place/ time/ people who were lost. I sat in a black suitcase, changing positions every two minutes. The suitcase is a representation of everything that was left and taken in a two-minute period before being forced to leave home in order to seek safety. While performing I formed friendships with Dijana and the other artists who were part of this amazing exhibition.

A few months after, I was invited to return to London, from Macedonia, and present a paper about this piece for the Performance Studies International 12: Performing Rights. However, my visa for the UK was denied due to lack of finances. The UK embassy in Macedonia thought that as a freelance artist based in a small, poor country, I didn't have enough money to support my trip to London. Of course I was devastated, but as someone who comes from the Balkan region, this decision came as no surprise. The exercise of privilege and order through visa regimes is so normalised in certain parts of the world that rejection or acceptance is just an affirmation of a complex system of politics that guard the European borders. It is not easy to enter Fortress Europe.

Unfortunately, Fortress Europe has acquired a whole new meaning since 2014. Currently, within



*Participants during the workshop Misplaced Women?, led by Tanja Ostojić in London, December 2016*

Europe, the most common use of the term is as a pejorative description of the state of immigration into the European Union. This can be in reference either to attitudes toward immigration, or to the system of border patrols and detention centres that are used to help prevent illegal immigration. The discussion about the guarding of EU borders became even more inflamed firstly by the refugee crisis in 2015 and subsequently by the UK decision to leave the Union. Geographically this widespread fear of immigration is not only confined to Europe: countries like USA and Australia are exercising increasingly rigid border controls, based on the privileges of holding the 'right' passport, citizenship, religion and skin colour.

One thing that I regret about not attending the PSI12: Performing Rights conference in London, is not being able to get involved earlier with The Library of Performing Rights. The Library was developed by the Live Art Development Agency in collaboration with Lois Weaver and Queen Mary University of London for the conference in 2006. It contains over 250 publications, videos, DVDs, CD-ROMs, brochures, digital and web-based initiatives submitted by artists, activists and academics from around the world, all of which examine the intersection between performance and Human Rights. It is, however, amazing how cyclical life is, and how with this residency I was

brought back into contact with this amazing resource. The Library of Performing Rights was the basis of my research for this project and it provided a platform to restart certain discussions around issues of borders, migration and privilege. I see this Study Room Guide as an extension of this amazing resource and as something that needs to be revisited every 10 years. In the current political moment, rhetoric about human rights is vicious and we desperately need to re-examine how Live Art can offer a context where the dispossessed, disenfranchised and disembodied can become visible and vocal; a space to represent and embody lived experiences of displacement; and a strategy to give agency to the disempowered and silenced.

### **'Misplaced Women?' - the concept of hospitality in times of hostile politics**

In her book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Judith Butler examines the conditions of seeing and visibility during violent conflict. She asks: 'Are there reasons why a population might need to see the war dead, to know how many they were, and to register some visual sign of those deaths?' She openly questions our ability to see the Others, and to see them as humans rather than an ordinary consequence of a war conflict. This can easily be transferred to the current crisis. How do we react and accept people who recently came to Europe, their movement caused by a series of conflicts, wars and natural disasters? When I was developing the concept for my residency with Live Art Development Agency, my thoughts were constantly with the people in flux, those who were crossing or waiting at borders for days, sometimes months. Vivid memories of my childhood in war-torn Yugoslavia emerged. I remembered my school friends who were refugees from Sarajevo; my work in refugee camps during the Kosovo crisis; the lines for bread and milk; cars left without petrol in the middle of the road. More than 20 years has passed, but my body

clearly remembers the fear, and at the same time the braveness, the openness to share, to give, to be there for one another. Many people opened their homes to refugees and families displaced due to war, despite being impoverished and affected by the war themselves.

It is important to discuss displacement alongside hospitality. Derrida introduces hospitality as a radical concept that offers alternative ways to treat others. His central argument is based on the 'aporia of hospitality', which has two main elements: one of owning and being empowered by that ownership, and the second of giving ownership away and being vulnerable. This brings us to Derrida's discussion of the etymology of the term 'hospitality', which is related to hostility, since the root *hospes* is allied to the root *hostis*, which interestingly means both 'stranger' and 'enemy'. Thus, hospitality, as in *hostilis* (stranger/enemy) + *potes* (having power), originally meant the power that the host has over the stranger/enemy. And indeed we see the hospitality of Western European societies being defined by exercising power over the 'strangers', defining them by impossible standards, re-erecting borders, rebuilding walls, ostracising communities. According to Irina Arishtarkova, hospitality is a radical relation, especially when compared with tolerance: it provides a framework to account for the treatment of others with limitless attention and expectation, and it entails an active gesture of welcoming, greeting, sheltering, and in many cases, nourishing.

When planning my residency, I spent a long time considering how to explore the concept of hospitality alongside research on the displaced. How to share the time, experience and knowledge with others and open up a nourishing, welcoming space? I decided that I need to invite other artists to work with me on discussing these issues and spent a long time considering projects that could be open enough to these topics. I kept returning to Tanja Ostojić's project *Misplaced Women?*,

that I first saw performed in 2009, during the Performance Studies International Annual Conference in Zagreb, Croatia. Both Tanja and I were part of the performance shift MISS|PLACED WOMEN, curated by the collective subRosa (Faith Wilding and Hyla Willis). Misplaced Women? by Tanja Ostojić is an art project that has run for 8 years now and consists of performances and workshops. It hosts contributions by international artists, students and people from diverse backgrounds. Within the project Tanja Ostojić embodies and enacts an everyday activity that signifies a displacement common to transients, migrants, war and disaster refugees. The performance instructions are simple: In a public space unpack your bag/ suitcase/ luggage and take out all of your possessions. Allow the audience and the passers-by to see the contents. Pack your possessions back into the bag. Ostojić's street performance continues to explore themes of migration, desired mobility, and relations of power and vulnerability in relation to the mobile female body, found in much of her previous work.<sup>8</sup>

This project clearly works with Derrida's aporia. Tanja hosts a safe space that allows her workshop participants to open up and share their experiences. It also invites the participants to present their ideas, by performing them in a public space. Tanja Ostojić arrived in London on a cold December morning, towards the end of my residency. She listened curiously to our stories about the changing landscape of London and the British politics, and went on a long scouting walk with artist Katy Baird.

During the two-day workshop Tanja opened a hospitable space. Participants were welcomed and guided, acknowledged and their ideas were nourished. Anecdotes were shared, objects were transformed, pictures circulated. During the two days in London, I felt that we tapped into each other's experiences of displacement and loss. Hospitality became performative, it was about slow decision making, about the labour of hosting others, and the handling of unexpected outcomes. There was a willingness to contain and to produce space for the Other out of one's own flesh and blood. We all walked together by the canal, simultaneously performers and audience. The days melted into one long discussion about what displacement means today. For me, the small acts of hope and care that each participant made created a ripple strong enough to go beyond the current climate of hostility. You can read more about the workshop in the last section of this Study Room Guide and you can watch the video documentation on the following link: [www.vimeo.com/thisisliveart/misplacedwomen](http://www.vimeo.com/thisisliveart/misplacedwomen)

8. For more information on Ostojić's work please see her books:

# Dis/Placed: In discussion with Almir Koldzic and Áine O'Brien, Co-Directors of Counterpoints Arts

**Elena:** Almir and Aine, both of you are very active in terms of writing, organising projects and curating around issue of displacement, migration and refugees. Recently I read your article for Eurozine 'Taking control of the camera' in which you problematise how visual arts, theatre, mixed-media storytelling and online journalism can sometimes dispel notions of refugees as voiceless victims. So, how did you approach this issue when creating the programme for the dis/placed event?

**Almir:** Well, the context was so different at the time because when we started dis/placed, we were actually calling people to pay attention to the fact that there was an unprecedented number of people who were displaced, and hardly anyone in the general media was talking about it. Every now and then there would be some mention of what was happening in Syria, but there was no real sense of the scope of the problem. There was no understanding that what we were looking at – from a distance – was an unprecedented crisis that was about to affect us all.

So dis/placed started from the point that we needed to do something about it. It became a week-long programme of events in response to global demographic shifts and unprecedented levels of human displacement. The programme featured over 40 artists

working across visual art, film, photography, Live Art, performance and design. dis/placed considered the experiences of people who are 'staying temporarily', sometimes for generations, in stateless limbos, detention centres, refugee camps or urban settlements – living within a country's borders yet outside its political, legal and civic life. We also invited audiences to explore the exhibition and participate in a daily programme of learning labs, workshops, performances, interventions and screenings.

Many of the artists had first-hand experience of what it means to be displaced and their work re-imagines, re-assembles histories and the multiple realities of the refugee and migrant experience. Others were curious, as engaged artists are, committed to documenting, commenting, speaking up and conjuring creative solidarities – breaking the rules of how we might perceive normality. Some of them just happened to be in places when things unfolded, ready with a camera and stubbornly persistent. Others quietly offered small pleasures, simple reassurances in a time of insecurity – telling us of recipes that have become precious links between past and present, or how on a London street where the displaced now live and co-exist, every door leads to another part of the planet.

The event happened in June 2015 and from that point on, as you know, the situation has been unravelling very quickly.

But we've also seen an explosion of interest in this area, including from a hugely increased number of practitioners working in theatre and live art wanting to act and engage with the subject.

**Elena:** It is very difficult to talk about something that is so recent and still ongoing. What is your thinking about the ethics of showing work about the refugee crises?

**Almir:** Well, this is an ongoing consideration for us. Everything we do involves thinking about these issues. It's also worth bearing in mind that the 'crises' have been going on for a long while in different parts of the world.

But this is partly about choosing who you collaborate and work with. Many of the artists we work with have experienced displacement and/or are well aware of participatory and representational pitfalls and challenges that come with working in such a sensitive subject area; and this awareness seems a great starting point for a collaboration.

In terms of more general ethical questions considering new practitioners making work in this field, it is difficult to generalise as it would hugely depend on their previous experiences of working with different groups and on what it is they'd like to do – because to write a book, create a participatory theatre piece or organise an exhibition would all require different approaches and considerations.

I think that a few good starting points would be to be honest about why they want to get involved and to share it honestly with the people who are supposed to be involved/ affected by that project; being aware of the context/ locality in which the project is to take place and to have

some knowledge of what else is happening / who else is already operating in this field in order to avoid creating parallel structures and duplication; finding good collaborators, especially those who have some experience, relevant networks or access to local or wider audiences, can make a crucial difference; and not generalising and identifying refugees only as traumatised victims or indeed assuming that displacement is a purely negative and damaging experience.

**Elena:** Yeah, definitely. Because the big institutions sometimes tend to stereotype the crisis. They are trying to help, but are not really helping in kind of representing the real issue. I am personally attracted to small projects, that more proactively promote some of the invisible issues.

**Almir:** But it's about the balance... On one hand, there is a danger that organisations who have worked in this field for a while become self-appointed gatekeepers, which is problematic in many different ways, including crucially that it can prevent the flow of new voices, energy and ideas. So, it's that balance between opening up a space for new people, new ideas to engage with this subject matter, while also finding means of providing support, guidance, networking opportunities and spaces for shared learning. Another challenge is how to make it sustainable and meaningful; how to make sure that new people and groups stepping into this space produce work that adds to existing efforts to engage the wider public in some way.

With regards to the question of big institutions and stereotypes, of course they have less room for making mistakes because of their profile and greater public pressures. But our experience of working with a number of them is that they are often well aware of their lack of expertise and keen to collaborate. For me, the more difficult and important question concerning their showing of refugee/ migrant-related work is to do with how the presented work/ artists/ voices/ groups

influence their longer term developments and institutional structures; or not.

**Elena:** You are working in close collaboration with big institutions like Southbank Centre and Tate Modern. Can you tell me about these projects?

For us, all our projects are about collaboration. Southbank Centre invited us to co-curate the exhibition *Adopting Britain: 70 years of migration*. This exhibition was part of the Southbank Centre's Changing Britain Festival. Inspired by *Tales of a New Jerusalem*, a series of books by historian David Kynaston, this festival looks at British society, culture and politics of the past 70 years. In 1951 a total of 50 percent of the construction team responsible for building Royal Festival Hall were reportedly from migrant backgrounds. As part of that collaboration we commissioned the piece *Nowhere is Home* by Manaf Halbouni. A car loaded with personal possessions is turned into a living space – an impossible home for a “modern nomad unable to belong and grow roots”. This personal piece by Manaf speaks of his transient life in exile from Damascus. It also stands as a moving testament to loss, resilience and hope for over 50 million displaced people across the world, who are often forced to hastily pack a few cherished belongings into a car before escaping war, natural disaster or conflict. The car was located at the Southbank Centre and at the V&A. And he was also driving around London generating public engagement with issues relating to global displacement. He is an artist who we are continuously talking to. So this is a good example of how things travel, and how the discussions travelled between this project and *dis/placed*.

**Elena:** Can you tell me a little bit about that connection between *dis/placed* and how you moved the outcomes from this show into the forthcoming project *Who are we?*

**Almir:** Yeah. I think that *dis/placed* was a game-changer for us because it happened at the right moment and generated an incredible response from both the participating artists and audiences. Through curating this programme we also made new connections with lots of artists and groups, many of whom we continue to work with. In some ways *dis/placed* was the beginning of a conversation that is still going on.

It was also a continuation of our collaboration with LADA. We started working with them in 2005 on our first exhibition *Insomnia*, and that collaboration has continued and evolved through various projects since then. The idea of *Who are We?* is that artists are approaching this question from a wide range of angles trying to bring us some new answers, new ways of looking at and engaging with migration and displacement.

We recently organised an Arts and Social Change Retreat, involving 50 people from the arts, culture, advocacy, philanthropy and education sectors, who came together for 3 days to think and imagine possible ways of responding to the increasing cultural rifts and community divisions in the UK. What we ended up with was a clear consensus about the urgency of working with solidarity and in more connected ways across organisations and regions. We talked about the need for more innovative local projects; for the arts and culture to be better connected with advocacy and policy. You can see highlights from this session in the form of visual notes here [goo.gl/sKsSVq](http://goo.gl/sKsSVq)

And our latest project with Tate Exchange is *Who are we?...* It is curated by Tate Exchange Associates: so, us Counterpoints Arts, and The Open University, University of Warwick and Loughborough University. This event will happen 14-19 March 2017. *Who Are We?* is a free 6-day cross-platform event, spanning the visual arts,

film, photography, design, architecture, the spoken and written word and live art, which asks who are we?

So, the idea of this project is to have a six-day program loosely based around the idea of bringing artists, practice, conversations, disruptions and workshops around ideas of migration and displacement. Obviously, the theme of Who Are We? feels very, very relevant. Not only because of Brexit ... it reflects on identity, belonging, migration and citizenship through arts and audience participation.

**Aine:** Most of the artists have submitted work that sort of crosses between participation, pedagogy and performance. Artists and practitioners come from countries including England, Scotland, Poland, Finland, Iraq, Italy, Germany, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Romania, Greece, Spain, Israel, USA and South Africa. We're collaborating with Universal Design Studio, an architectural design firm and they've come partly pro bono to collaborate with artists in object-making. So, they will help us to organize the space and to integrate the objects as part of the artists' participatory or performative work. And that's the first time we've done that, and it is really interesting and exciting.

Who are we? is very experimental in some ways, because most of the academics are political theorists and sociologists. They don't necessarily come from the arts. Which I think is kind of interesting, because, we are all forced to think differently. We matched artists with academics in order to stimulate conversations. And then there will be workshops, learning labs, screenings ... it's quite a packed week.

**Almir:** This interdisciplinary collaboration is challenging for everyone. We are moving in this space where we feel either uncomfortable or uncertain, because it requires lots of toing and froing and talking and thinking slightly differently. But from our perspective, it was important to start with the artists, from the practice, and then invite responses around that.

**Aine:** But, I think it's the artists who are asking the tough questions, and taking the risks, you know. Really stepping into risky spaces, to have those conversations. The Tate Exchange is about exchange beyond Tate, as well. I mean even for them it's a huge experiment.

**Almir:** It is important to mention that this allows us to finalise the journey of the project dis/placed. For us, Who Are We? is partly about launching a number of new commissions, which are going to be based or travel to different parts of the country. With a view to involving local audiences and triggering some sort of interaction between communities in order to generate conversations, points of connection or disconnection, but to create these spaces for people to come together around the current issues.

# Artist contribution



*Give em Hell* by Nada Prlja, 2008, Single screen video 4 min, DVD-Pal, colour, loop; Music: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony Nr. 9 d-moll*, op. 125.



*Stop the War Against Immigrants I* by Nada Prlja, 2008 7 broken protest banners; acrylic white and black paint on board, wooden sticks.

**Nada Prlja**, The video material used to create this documentary video is recorded by a hidden video camera. During the course of several days in the summer of 2008, the artist positioned protest banners with pro-immigration slogans on the streets of London and secretly recorded the unfolding scene with a camera from the opposite side of the street.

The footage of the resulting video *Give em Hell* follows a group of youngsters, who express their anger toward immigrants and their mistrust of foreigners, by smashing the protest banners (with the texts and slogans which support immigration and the notion of equal human rights for all).

The disturbing, violent scene is accompanied with music by Beethoven (*Symphony Nr. 9 d-moll*, op. 125), as a reference to the aestheticised violence of Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange*.

The banner slogans are: *Stop The Deportation*, *We Are All Foreigners*, *Stop War Against Immigrants*, *Stop Criminalising Immigrants*, *No Worker Is Illegal*, *There Are No Rights For Foreigners*.

An independent installation entitled *Stop War Against Immigrants I* (2008), features the actual

banners and wooden sticks that were broken that night on a street in London.

**About the artist** *Nada Prlja* was born in Sarajevo, and lived in Skopje since 1981. In 1998 Prlja moved to London; since 2014 she has lived between Skopje and London. She received an MPhil Research Degree from the Royal College of Arts, London, after graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in Skopje, Macedonia and previously from the National High School of Fine Art in Skopje.

*Prlja* took part in following international biennales: 5th Moscow Biennale (Film Program), Moscow (2013); 7th Berlin Biennale, Berlin (2012); Manifesta 8, Murcia (2010), International Printmaking Biennale, Ljubljana (2009) and Varna International Biennale, Varna (2008).



# Discussions (part 1)

## Inside out: Stories from the edge



The Roma, travellers and gypsies have been the subject of stereotypical representation by predominately ‘non-Roma’ artists - from kitschy, erotically charged representation of Roma woman (Carmen, Esmeralda etc.) to typecasting Roma as petty criminals and disaffected groups. Lith Bahlmann, when discussing antiziganistic stereotypes, states that they very often ‘propagate the myth of “eternal migrant”, synonymous with uninhabited passion and deceitful cunning image’ of a street criminal.<sup>9</sup> However, the Roma minorities in Europe have endured a long violent history that repeats itself constantly. The Sinti and Roma communities in Kosovo experience brutal persecution and there were two massive waves of forced expulsion in 1999 and again in 2004. The photographer Tomáš Rafa documents unprecedented hostility towards Roma community in his ongoing project *New Nationalisms in The Heart of Europe* (2009–).

9. BAHLMANN, L. (2011). *Reconsidering Roma: aspects of Roma and Sinti-Life in contemporary art*. Göttingen, Wallstein. pp.11

The most well-known part of this ongoing series is the video and performative project *Walls of Sports*, which was carried out in several Slovakian communities where local government authorities have built high cement walls to keep the Roma population away from the other citizens.

I thought it as a matter of urgency to invite Roma artists to discuss their work as part of this Study Room Guide, since we need to discuss how art refers to the current and historical situation of Roma in Europe. Although the majority of ‘Roma artists’ exhibit and perform regularly, their work remains underrepresented and invisible within international art discourse. Below you can find interviews with Selma Selman (Bosnia/USA) and Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv RJSaK (Switzerland). I was attracted to their work for multiple reasons, but mainly because they are very articulate in discussing the issues of stereotyping, by openly questioning existing art canons.

Selma Selman (b. 17 Feb 1991 in Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina) is an artist of Romani origins. Her work is representative of her life struggles and the struggles of her community. Selman utilises a multiplicity of art mediums, ranging from performance, painting, and photography to video installations in order to express herself as an individual, a woman, and an artist.

Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv (RJSaK) is the first art collective in Switzerland which is dedicated to making the Roma minority more visible in the public sphere. Based in Zurich, the group is transdisciplinary with members from the arts, acting, and design, and collaborations with guests from different fields. Since its first intervention in 2013 at a local art space, RJSaK has performed in Zurich at the Shedhalle, Corner College, Maxim Theater, and Toni Areal, as well as in other cities.

## Selma Selman

**Elena:** Selma, tell me a bit about your background. What experiences and events have nourished your thinking and artistic practice?

**Selma:** I graduated from the Fine Arts Academy in Banja Luka, department of Painting in 2014, where I studied under the supervision of Veso Sovilj, and worked with the renowned Bosnian performance artist Mladen Miljanovic. I was a recipient of the prestigious “Zvono Award”, given to the best young artist in Bosnia and Herzegovina; that won me a short residency in New York City. I also hold a Commendation of the Cultural Center for Outstanding Achievements in Art, Award for the Best Painting, Graphic design, Intermedial work from the Academy of Arts in BiH. In 2013, I participated in Tania Brugera’s International Summer Academy in Salzburg, “Arte Util” (Useful Arts). Immediately after, I enrolled in Central European University ‘The Roma Graduate Preparation Program’ (RGPP),

an intensive 10-month programme that prepares outstanding Roma graduates with an interest in social sciences and humanities to compete for places on Masters-level courses at internationally recognised universities. Currently I am an MFA student at Syracuse University, where I also work as teaching assistant.

My art is rooted in my twin Roma and Bosnian identities. Also, my work looks at the experience of being a woman and a migrant. My work is based on the creation of art - be it in the form of objects, situations, performances, or video-installations - that reaches individuals and larger communities. The most important thing is that I use my identity not to tell people that my art belongs to Roma, but that my art constitutes my reality and my way of living. Growing up in the ghetto and being identified as one of the “white” girls in the Roma community has given me a different view of the world. When I was young, I spent my childhood in the street. My ability and urge to convey these experiences manifested itself in a talent for the arts. My work as an artist also relies on research. I want to show a picture of life to a myriad of societies and cultural contexts.

**Elena:** How are you exploring your identity and history in your artistic practice?

**Selma:** My work is about Roma people, identity issues and the gender problems emerging out of this. My work is not only about Roma people, it’s actually about all of us. This is how I understand equality. I define myself as an artist of Roma origin, and not a Romani artist. The difference is subtle, but critical: through my work, I seek to speak to the universal human condition, utilising my personal background as a lens through which I can understand the entirety of the human experience. In my work, I wish to break down prejudices that essentialise my community as a collective, robbing members of their right to individual expression.

**Elena:** I agree that your work is very specific, but also very universal. In your performance “You have no idea...” there are many layers of identities, you emerge as a young Roma woman, but you also talk to a universal problem that is facing Millennials, in term of political and economic instability. Do you think there’s an advocacy role that you take on with your art?

**Selma:** Yes, for sure. The most important thing is that I use my identity not to tell people that my art belongs to Roma, but that my art is reality and my way of living... My position and task in the system of art is to make a contemporary picture that will mean something to those who want equality in society. Exploring the presence of the Roma in the society – according to me – is connected with destruction; a crash of sociological and cultural identity of human beings. In the piece *You Have No Idea / Vi Nemate Pojma*, I continually repeat the phrase, “you have no idea”. This performance is a very intimate one. It is my frustration brought to life. You have no idea – you have no idea about my life as a whole. You do not know who I am, nor do you know my happiness or sadness. You do not know about the presence or absence of pain in my life, nor how I feel at the moment that I perform this piece to a live audience. You have no idea. Though this piece refers to the specific circumstances of my life, I believe that it carries a universal message. We have no idea about the struggles that others are facing. We have no idea, but we think that we do. I am trying to find out if there is any image that can represent all my problems, my happiness, unhappiness, my origin and my people. This performance is my release - it pictures all of it. It is directly related to the audience that listens to me and that watches me. In the piece *Performing Roma flag* I’m performatively exploring what a flag means for the Roma. With this video, I wanted to bring our flag to life. The Roma flag is horizontal and composed of a blue upper layer, a green lower stripe, and a red pinwheel at the center. The blue signifies the sky, our blanket. Green is the colour of the earth, it

is a sign that we exist all around the world. The red wheel represents our movement and our struggle. How do we talk about the Roma nation, how to talk about centuries of discrimination, stereotypes, struggling and fight? Roma in Romani language means a human being. And then I’m doing something like an artist, and I don’t want to be earmarked only as a Roma artist. I’m an artist who is exploring her identity. And I think this is the way we can fight prejudice. In *Performing Roma flag* I’m attempting to do a perfect cartwheel. I’m making an erratic start. And I really couldn’t accomplish this task although I kept trying. Despite failing many times, I dust myself off and try again. And this is what I’m doing with my art as well. I’m just trying, and I cannot give up. We Roma do not have our own state. But we do have the whole world as our home.

**Elena:** You have three projects that you did in collaboration with your mother: ‘Composition: Bori, Nevjesta, Bride’, ‘Do not be like me’ and ‘Salt Water’. Can you tell me a bit more about the history of this work that you created with your mother?

**Selma:** Of course. My mother finally got her Bosnian citizenship three years ago. For 47 years we didn’t know when was her actual birthday. We didn’t know how old she is. I learned the real name of my mom when I was eighteen. I didn’t know what was her birth name. She was born in Kosovo, and then very young she had an arranged marriage. This was normal in our community, it was like you’re exchanging gold for the bride. She married my father in Bosnia, and he was seventeen at the time. In my piece *Composition: Bori, Nevjesta, Bride* I look at this situation. My mother got married at a very young age. At thirteen, she became a bride. Still a child, she shouldered the burden of a woman, taking care of everything in a family home. The “role” of the woman is to feed her children, her husband, and the entire family; she is to cook, to clean and to serve everyone silently. This is what

my mother's life looked like. I wanted to be in my mother's body – I wanted to feel her struggle in combination with my own pain. My performance portrays the tradition of child marriage, where the decision to marry is made for the child by her parents before she is even able to make decisions for herself. This performance relates an indifference to the rights of women, to the experience of a marginalised group of people, to the potency of nationalism and racism. The "belt" seen in the performance pinches my waist, so that it may be made very tiny, because a slim waist is supposedly a mark of femininity. I choose to turn my back to the audience. With my back visible, but my face hidden, I create a private self. My face is hidden as my mother's was: for forty-seven years she wore one of two masks, either the mask of a wife or a mother. For forty-seven years her real face was hidden, made insignificant and invisible to the outside world.

In the piece "SALT WATER AFTER 47" I further explore this history. In former Yugoslavia, you could travel from one republic to another without documents. But then, war started. My mother never got her birth certificate, so she didn't have any documents. She was like an illegal citizen. So, when the war started, after Yugoslavia was broken, she was stuck and couldn't travel. And I remember that she really wanted to go to the sea. As I was growing older, I understood the absurdity of her situation, that she still doesn't have documents. When I was a child I didn't think about that. I thought it's normal. And you know women are perceived as of less value, especially in patriarchal families where man is head of the house, and woman is under his rule. Culturally, the act of a woman leaving her paternal home to live with her "husband" is perceived as a marriage, whether or not it is officially recognised by the state or religious authorities. At that time in particular, there was no concept of simply "living together". Hence, at thirteen, she was unofficially married to my then seventeen-year old father, but the marriage was not state certified. After the

dissolution of Yugoslavia, she was left stateless. In 2014, after many discussions with authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, she managed to obtain Bosnian citizenship with my help. After 47 years, she received her first passport. I decided to make her wish come true. I took her on a vacation to the sea. After 47 years.

And then I said: 'Let's go to the sea', I got her a swimming suit ... she was like a child. You know, she didn't know what to do. She was scared of the water. And then I turned on my small handy camera and said "Mom, please go in the water now." And I captured that. And that's was the summary of our intergenerational and displacement battle, her first experience of the sea.

We also did a piece in response to Ulrike Rosenbach, 'Wrapping with Julia'. I sit on my mom's lap, and we wrapped around each other. Mother and daughter; I was mother, she was daughter and reverse.

**Elena:** Your pieces with your mother are very moving because they talk about displacement, statelessness and trauma, but also resilience. In a catalogue about your solo exhibition in agnès b. Galerie Boutique, Pierre Courtin says that your works 'represent something intimate, but they also speak of her family's struggle to survive. There is the beauty of the family life but also the brutality of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Roma community without legal status. For the local government, the Roma community simply does not exist!' Last summer in Rijeka, Croatia you did a piece called "A self-portrait with a washing machine" and in an TV interview about this piece you said that you learned how to dismantle a washing machine from your father. So would you like to tell me a little bit more about that piece?

**Selma:** Since I was very young I used to work with my father. To gather materials, other peoples' metal garbage. And my father would have bring home a lot of washing machines, fridges ...



*Selma Selma, Anew, performance documentation*



everything. And we would work together. And I learned what is good for selling and what we don't need... So for this piece, I used the washing machine as a tool to develop my self-portrait. This old washing machine is a small fortune, because I know how to disassemble it and select what has worth. So, I just separated all these things, I was putting good stuff for selling on one side, and then stuff for throwing out on the other side. I'm transforming my identity into masculinity and feminity. By using performance and the sounds of the tools disassembling the washing machine, I inform those people who are not Roma about us, and I address the many problems we are all experiencing today. My works are products from my everyday life. They are reality. They are not fiction. Art itself for me represents a space for personal expression and also an experiment; my need to communicate with the world. My position and task in the system of art is to make a contemporary picture that will mean something to those who want equality in the world.

**Elena:** How did you find the move to America affected your work?

**Selma:** You know, it was a challenge, because I needed to start from zero. I was extensively

participating in exhibitions, performances, lectures and residencies throughout Europe. And then the invitation to move to United States came and I arrived in a country where I didn't know anyone. So, it was a challenge. But it makes it easier to see the differences and similarities between Europe and USA, in terms of art and politics. Another thing that I found challenging about USA is that no one understands what does it mean to be Roma. Like people thought I was from Romania or from Rome, the capital city of Italy. They can only connect with the Hollywood image of a 'gypsy', like Esmeralda... I came to understand that a lot of people don't understand that we are actually a nation, you know that we exist!

**Elena:** And so what's next?

**Selma:** So there is an art project that I am just starting. Hopefully at the end of this year I'm going to India, to do research on child marriage, rape and arranged marriage. In my village arranged marriage is one of the biggest problems. Child marriage is a tradition that has survived in Roma communities for centuries... And I want to change and challenge that. I don't think that those girls like it. I don't think that my mom liked it. I also don't think that my

sister likes it. My sister was 17 when she was married, and my mom was 13. And those girls... they are so talented and so clever. And I just realised I need to do something about this. My research will explore the phenomenon of child marriage where I will compare the experiences of Indian and Roma women who experience child marriage. My research will not only cover the theoretical expression, it will be a practical project where I will help children and women in order to gain knowledge about art and fight against discrimination and tradition. I'm doing a lot of work for the community. I'm trying to establish a scholarship programme for the children in my village. I'm also working with women who don't have documents.

Because I think that it is important to take part in something that I believe in. My body stands for these emancipatory practices, and it is directly linked to the art that stems from the process of communication and confrontation. But art for me also serves as an escape from the bad things I encounter in various communities, even my own. Most importantly, art challenges me not to hide what I really am. The concept and execution of my works summon the spectators to confront the content of the work; and to better understand the intricate relations between identity, race, gender, and equality. Some might say that I am a very political artist; however, I never show the political content directly. Instead, my work indirectly pushes people to think beyond the obvious. Making people happy, smile, cry, nervous, is one way of playing a game where emotions become part of the work I create as an artist. It is therefore communal as much as it is personal.

## Roma Jam Session Art Kollektiv

**Elena:** Can you please tell me a bit more about the history of the Roma Jam Session Art Kollektive and the reasons that motivated you to come together and create socially-engaged performative work? Can you tell me a little bit more about your background?

**Mo:** Roma Jam Session Art Kollektiv met in Shedhalle, Switzerland in 2013. It was a space curated by a team from Austria (Katharina Morawek / Can Gülcü) offering a platform for dialogue and exchange. The first project was called Research Exhibition - SWITZERLAND IS NOT AN ISLAND and we were invited to participate with our work. The art works, publications and research materials that were part of the exhibition addressed the strategies of Yeniche, Roma and Sinti people in dealing with experiences with racism, how they define themselves, how they locate themselves in society and how they resist the "racist knowledge" of mainstream society and their own marginalisation. In our piece we showed conversations with Swiss Yeniche who talked about their way of life, their jobs, their self-definitions and organisations. At the centre of the exhibition was the piece Romanistan, a large-sized installation by Marki. Romanistan is the name of an imaginary (nation) state for all Roma. Roma could live there, free from structural and every day racism and equipped with all social rights that are connected with citizenship. However, Romanistan also points towards a connectivity between all Roma who live in different countries and regions of the world today - without a (state) institutional construct regulating their relations.

That summer, the whole collective (Mo, Marki, Milena and Eva) contributed to Olga Stefan's project "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Hospitality as Artistic Practice", at

the independent art space The Proposal in Zurich. To keep our identities secret we needed another structure – therefore we founded the collective. We were six people with different backgrounds: a contemporary performance and video artist, a radio drama maker, graphic designer and activist, an actress, a social worker and an office worker. After initial conversations, I designed the structure of the performance and each collective member had a room for their personal story. It was a relational piece called: Tableaux (très) vivants. Our stage was built like a traditional photo studio with a grey neutral paper background – the video projection was the interruption. The collective has transnational members who come from Switzerland, Macedonia and Serbia. Only three members are permanent: Mo, Marki and Milena.

**Elena:** You worked quite a lot in challenging established norms in art history and challenging art institutions. In your piece ‘What is the colour of your car’, you are in dialogue with Yvonne Rainer’s piece ‘Privilege’; What kind of privilege are you questioning?

**Mo:** The performance merges aesthetic strategies from propaganda, music and activism into a hybrid form. At the heart of the performance is an extract of a conversation from the film “Privileges” by Yvonne Rainer. The film was released in 1990, coinciding with the end of the Cold War. It contains a dialogue which links racism to the economic interests of the West and uses the analysis of colonialism to refute the fear of the other. We used parts of Yvonne Rainer’s Privilege where she is questioning resistance as well. We wondered how the piece would resonate after 20 years. This piece made us understand the struggles associated with resistance. The contextualisation of the history of resistance was part of the piece. The RJSaK collective is talking about privilege as a missing quality unavailable because of poor political reasoning.

**Elena:** How did you come to use performance as a tool to provoke dialogue?

**Mo:** Performance is the only medium that allows us to combine our skills. We actually play with different art forms as we please and as the project demands. Performance is a very flexible format. It is a very direct form, too. In our performances we include video, photos, sound, voices, texts, props, graphics and sometimes acting. Performance allows direct exchange with the public. Learning by doing in front of the public and with the public is possible.

**Elena:** In your piece Drive In-Drop Out, the car and the performers are working around what you call ‘GLAM: from Gallery to Geography, from Library to Liberty, from Archive to Activism, and from Museum to Multiplicity’. And how do we fight monotony in the art sector?

**Mo:** GLAM is a theoretical tool, it defines for us a theoretical framework which goes beyond the human dimension. I am still working on this theoretical enquiry. For the Drive In-Drop Out performance, I developed a performance for the collective characterised by diverse fragments of body workout and sports. The choreography was performed with music by masked participants. It was an act of self-empowerment, seeking common ground and multiplicity in artistic and political fields. The car was the carrier of GLAM definitions of activities: from Gallery to Geography, from Library to Liberty, from Archive to Activism, and from Museum to Multiplicity. For us it signifies breaking out of art conventions and embraces the inclusion of forms of knowledge which are not traditionally part of archives, museums, libraries and galleries. Diversity in the arts is more important to us as a collective than modernist white washed aesthetics.

**Elena:** Your latest piece Basic Roma, was creating a metaphorical space for the Roma language and Roma presence in Europe. Can you tell me a bit about the process of developing this show?

**Mo:** Basic Roma is staging the authentic Rom(ni) language. It is a claim that we make to bring attention to the Roma way of life, and for protection of Roma rights.

While we worked on this piece we were talking about exhibition curation in the current context of Europe. Can this piece be part of it? We discussed the personal and the political. Imagination and brainstorming helped to put performative elements together; we listened, we made trials and filmed ourselves. We engaged in a basic democratic process. We were creating a metaphorical space for the Roma language and Roma presence in Europe.

**Elena:** Marki, how this show draw on your identity and history as a Roma from Macedonia?

**Marki:** I've started to have diverse identities. In Macedonia I feel at home; but I wanted to leave, to see Europe. And now I've lived for 30 years in Switzerland, that's more than I have lived in Macedonia. I would like to go to the US; later I would like to work in India; to explore Roma roots. I feel free through practicing art; through art I am also politically active.

**Elena:** What can be very difficult with project like yours, is the ethics of discussing difficult topics in a public arena. What are the strategies that you use to deal with this and remain true to the 'story' you want to share with the audience?

**Mo:** We remain very personal, never generalising an issue. It probably helps that we work in a network, where we have the necessary information to back up the work. We use humour and Dadaist strategies to talk about human rights with artistic tools, what we call: Roma Dada Avantgarde Estetika.

**Elena:** So, you are still very active, you recently formed an association to extend your practice in various directions. What is next for Roma Jam Session Art Kollektive?

**Mo:** We are busy preparing a publication about our work and we are planning a performance festival in January 2018. We also hope to take our work beyond Switzerland this year.



# Artist contribution

## **Darja Abdirova, (story about my sister)**

There she was, on the Soviet train platform, going from Tashkent, through Chimkent, then Aktobe to Moscow. Then on a plane to Bavaria, Germany. With her second child. The first one is in Germany, safe. On the platform, waiting for an hour just to see the child for five minutes, the child's father.

No time to speak, to discuss.

"I have come to Tashkent only to pick her up. She has not seen me for three years, she is fine now, I think she is calm. I am taking her into the new world, into the world where I have to go, everything here is falling apart, you can come with us".

The father hesitates, he wants to stay in Aktobe, in the middle of nowhere in the Kazach steppe. The child starts to cry. She had been on that journey for three days and nights on an old soviet train, filled with people moving to the West, away from the crumbling empire. She doesn't understand what is happening. She has not seen her father in three years.

"Mum, can we get off and stay with him? I want to stay".

The train is being crammed with new passengers heading away from Lenin's Empire, bags are being carried on the train, she is being pushed aside by anxious people carrying all their belongings into a better world.

"Are you coming with us? I have friends in Germany, come now, I've met Americans, they can help us, you need to be brave for once".

He hesitates. The train leaves, the girl cries loudly "Papa, papa!", starts to kick and bite, is being carried into the compartment again, to sit still and enjoy the new world.

As the train leaves the platform, the father and daughter will never see each other again. He never left Aktobe, she never went to see him. Both out of anxiety.

**About the artist** *Darja Abdirova is an artist based between Germany and UK. She is currently finishing her degree at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen, UK*

# Discussions (part 2)

## Outside in

This section is dedicated to artists who deal with issues of displacement through the discourse of witnessing. The main ethical impetus behind their engagement with issues of displacement arises from their need to bear witness to the current crisis and to offer us the story of The Other. Both artists are redefining what one calls home and where one finds homeland.

The first time I saw the work of **Kimbal Quist Bumstead**, I was moved by the purity of his non-judgmental perspective. He wasn't pretending he has a solution, but it was clear that he is deeply engaged in the issues of waiting, displacement and in-betweenness. In his piece 'the Horizon is Far Away', he worked with a group of rejected asylum seekers who continue to live in the remains of an officially 'closed' refugee camp on the Tunisia/Libyan border. "Choucha" camp was established by the UNHCR to temporarily house those who were fleeing from Libya during 2011. In 2013 the camp was officially closed, and those whose asylum applications had been rejected, who were mostly from sub-Saharan African countries, were advised to return to their countries of origin. Many attempted to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe via Lampedusa, and the rest stayed living in the desert waiting for a solution. Kimbal's work is about being stateless and in-between, about how fantasy and dreams keep you alive.

**Sophie NL Besse** is a playwright and theatre director trained in both drama and therapy. She directed and produced one of the most moving pieces of performance with refugees that I have seen recently. Her work celebrates the hardship

and victories of refugees, and honours their hopes for success in their journey to new life. The piece 'Borderland' follows the personal journey of six individuals to acceptance and integration.

**Richard DeDomenici** has created a wide variety of performances that make use of conceptual art tactics in combination with an irreverent pop sensibility to critique and intervene in public behaviour and rhetoric. Richard demonstrates his commitment to a stance against standardisation and indifference by taking over a territory until its everyday users become offended or drive him away. Through his actions, he aims to perturb our usual way of thinking.

### Kimbal Quist Bumstead

**Elena:** Kimbal, tell me a bit about how you use performance in your art practice. What experiences and events have nourished your thinking and artistic practice?

**Kimbal:** I guess I see performance as a kind of methodology that runs through everything that I do. So, yeah, performance is a very important strand of my practice, but not so much performance for an audience, but performance as a tool, as a methodology. A common thread that runs through all of my work is about being a human or human stories... I suppose my own stories, but also stories of other people and subjective realities. I see the act of gathering materials as a performance, the act of interacting with someone whether as a one on one

performative situation or a performance journey or a walk with something or someone. I went through all these phases as an artist. Sometimes I've described myself as a performance artist, sometimes as a painter, sometimes as video artist... or whatever I happen to be working on at the time...

**Elena:** Yeah. But actually what is very compelling about your work, is that there are some elements that are undefinable...

**Kimbal:** Yeah, I mean this kind of inbetweenness is a strong theme within my work. And I suppose that deep down it is something really personal. I often find myself between certain things, in the sense of feeling as though I am between conflicting people or living between places. So the theme of migration and displacement is something that comes from a personal interest in this notion of being in between. It's to some extent an artistic interest and to some extent a personal interest.

I guess there are a lot of artists who would work with displacement as a theme that have their personal story around it. Whereas I don't necessarily... I live in the same country that I was born. I'm actually now in a studio about a hundred meters away from the hospital where I was born. I'm not a displaced person. But I do question the notion what is place and how does one relate to a place? What does that mean?

**Elena:** For me is interesting how distance reemerges in your work. And not only physical distance, but also distance in terms of memories. In your piece for ]performance s p a c e [, you create a delegated performance and you use a phone. You're physically removed from the piece. But you talk 'through' your audience about something that is very private, but also doesn't exist anymore, so it is a displaced memory.

**Kimbal:** That's a really interesting reflection actually. I'm really interested in traces... something that was there before. I think of it as a map of physical trace, of a journey, of an experience. I take a very conscious distance from my process, especially in my travel projects. The journey as a performance, walking physically as a performance. That's probably the strand where the distance comes in. Like setting a perimeter or a loose system.

I mean that whole idea with the delegated performance that I did was giving the power to the performer, to the audience ...to the other...

A few years ago, I did this piece in Japan with a group of curators. I invited them to my hotel room and at some point the lights all turned off, and they were sitting there in the dark and the phone rang, and I was in another hotel room. I did this performance to them over the phone... And the person who picked up the phone narrated the story to the people. And everyone was sitting on the bed and that was [laughs] really beautiful...

So, it's like a form of displacement. There is something that I feel like a real life personal reaction to being in between. Like not fitting in...

**Elena:** But also there is this sense of active searching in your work. Of how to map, how to capture memory in your pieces *Memory map* and *Mapping the Medina*, which are interconnected, and then this searching continues in your projects *Europe: The Garden (Diagonally Backwards)* and *Horizontally Backwards*... Mapping of something that was lost or potentially never existed.

**Kimbal:** Virtually everything I do could fit into the category of mapping. My drawings are a mapping of a sensory experience. The painting is a mapping of cathartic performance I do with the canvas... I suppose that both memory/traces and mapping define what I do.

I've often encountered many ethical dilemmas... Almost all the videos I've made of hitchhiking (*Europe: The Garden (Diagonally Backwards)* and *Horizontally Backwards*) I didn't have formal permission from the people. Some of them knew, because I verbally told them I'm making a project ... And I suppose my way around that was that I did not include anybody's name and also nobody's image, and also the story was narrated by myself. So nobody actually appears... It could even be fiction. I mean you can kind of believe that the journey happened, but...

**Elena:** Yes, I fully understand what you are saying, for me this project is a performative imaginary journey through Europe, USA and through this utopian green, undefined space. But, how do you look at this project after Brexit and after Trump won the elections in USA?

**Kimbal:** When I was making both of those videos or both of those journeys, I was really playing with this idea of free flow and merging. The characters almost merge into one another; places can be anywhere. There is no geographical reference at any point. Everything is on the road... It's a utopian, or dystopian, non-place. It's a place of parting through, a place that could be anywhere. The narrative is not chronological... It jumps around. So, you could be kind of anywhere... almost fantasy or a kind of a fairytale that there is this world which is not necessarily the shape of Europe or the shape of America. In both of those videos there is a bit of a mixture of utopia and negativity... I encountered a lot of racism... lot of homophobia, I met people who don't give a s\*\*\* about the environment, people who love the environment... There's a lot of contrast and conflict and I guess for me what both of these projects were about is about showing some kind of common humanity or the absurdity of humanity. Trump and Brexit are the eruption of what has been brewing under the surface for a long time. I think that to some extent the representation of people in these hitchhiking projects reflect on the

diversity and absurdity of perspectives on life and the sliding scale of what is considered 'right' and 'wrong'.

I do have a belief that this kind of way of communicating with people, interacting with people through... like hitchhiking, random acts of kindness, you know, trusting people, is something that we really need in this world, because we're so breaking down to these stateless and really fragmented niche identities. Like this is me, this is my patch, I have to hold on to this. And I think that is really scary, and dangerous.

**Elena:** In your piece *Mapping the borders of a Turkish institution*, performance walk that you did at the University of Batman, where you map the actual perimeter of the university building. But then you map a very real border between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish majority... the state... The border as an edge.

**Kimbal:** This metaphor of the border as an edge is really important. For most of it, there is an actual fence around the University of Batman, the borders are physically present. There is a Kurdish majority weren't allowed to speak their own language at their own university. When I presented my idea to the professor at the University, who invited me, who is Kurdish and makes artwork which is political in its subject matter, through fairly abstract means, he laughed and said "oh no I am going to be sacked!" He was joking, but expressed a genuine concern. I asked if it would be a problem for him if I did the performance walk and he said that I should do it, but he did not want to know anything about it or be related to it in any way. He was in fact very supportive of the idea and its message but was worried about actively showing support for it.

When I was doing the walk, I explained to the security guards that I'm just going for a walk. And they saw me dressed in traditional Kurdish clothes, and they thought that was hilarious. They



*Mapping the Borders of a Turkish Institution, Performance Walk for Camera, Batman, 2014*



*Waiting for a New Life, Photography project with Yezidi refugees using disposable cameras, Batman, 2015*

wanted to take selfies with me, and then invited me to have lunch with them in their cabin. It's risky to be too open about political views there, especially if you have a position of authority, and so I think the playfulness of the action was quite appropriate, but I think that to do this as someone who actually is part of that community, or actually Kurdish would be perhaps more significant. After speaking with the professor who invited me and some of his friends, some said that they would have liked to join me on the walk or do something similar, would never ever be able to do that because of the possible repercussions. Actually, he is now under investigation after the military coup, as many academics in Turkey now are, but I have not heard from him for a while so I am not sure how he is.

**Elena:** In terms of borders, with the last couple of pieces that you did in Tunisia and in the refugee camp, you are mapping a kind of unknown place...

**Kimbal:** Yes, it's very much a non-place.

**Elena:** It seems like it's almost the end of the world, of the civilisation, and I kind of have few questions about that, because it's very much about

refugees and physical displacement of people. In *The horizon is far away* you give voice to displaced voiceless individuals stuck in the middle of the desert.

**Kimbal:** So, Choucha camp is an officially closed UNHCR camp (which closed in 2013) and has since then been occupied by those who had their asylum claims rejected and are demanding that the UN re-open their cases. Most who are in the camp, which is still there now, have been there since 2011 or 2012 and since 2013 have been living only on donations of food and water that are given to them by occasional passing cars on the way to the Libyan border 12km up the road. One of my first reflections when I got there was about the absurd notion of a border. This place is a desert wasteland and a very surreal place which to some extent is the end of the world, at least the world which is possible for these people who are still stuck there. It was right next to the border of Libya, to which they could not return, and also right next to the sea which was gateway to Europe. But none I spoke to wanted to take the risk of the boat crossings, and many had family, friends or lovers who had died in this way. Neither could they go back to where they had

come from, nor stay in Tunisia where they were effectively 'illegal' citizens. That was really absurd that there wasn't any actual physical border, it was a landscape that was completely open and extended for miles into emptiness. It was pretty much this psychological border. I had in my mind that I wanted to make an artwork that deals with this aspect of displacement, of borders, of absurdity, of space... Thinking pretty much from the perspective of how can art be used as a tool to think about these things.

But I also I wanted to do something to help them, because I saw that they were in an impossible situation, and what could I do to help them.

The reality was that when I embarked to do this project, I didn't realise there were still people there. I had only heard that the camp was closed. I wanted to make a video about remnants of a camp that used to be there, and then perhaps tracing stories of those who had been there. But I soon realised that there are still people illegally living there.

I visited the camp a few times together with a couple of friends from Twiza (the organization that hosted my artistic residency), each time we brought food. A group of them came to Tunis to do an action outside the cinema where a documentary film which featured the camp, was being premiered at a film festival, and I then hosted them at Twiza where I was doing the residency.

When I was making the film, I was torn between the issue of artistic integrity and effectiveness. I wanted to make a work of art, not a propaganda film, nor a piece of activism, but yet at the same time I wanted to do something that could be useful.

And they were asking "What are going to do with this video?"

And I was as honest as I could be that I would show it in in some art related contexts, exhibitions, film screenings and online, that I hoped that it would raise some awareness about their situation, but that I did not see how it could really change anything.

And even now, I think about it, and I don't know... Did I do enough to help? Is there any point in making art about this?

**Elena:** Although I actually think that for me what stood out and what profoundly moved me is that we can see the human story behind. We usually don't see this. So, what is next Kimbal?

**Kimbal:** Thanks. Well, I am really interested in stories, and looking at human perspectives of something that is somehow un-measurable, ie. subjective, intimate and embodied. I have recently moved into a studio close to the area where I was grew up, and I've started thinking about traces of history, of what was there before, constructed realities and fantasies of now. I have been looking at historical maps and using them for inspiration for paintings, performances and video works. What I am kind of interested in exploring further is the relationship between place and stories, but also how those stories may be influenced by fantasy, or kind of created realities. I think this is interesting in the context of the current climate of #fakenews. So at the moment I am working on a series of semi-transparent paintings in which you can see traces of previous layers, and some video/audio works based on autobiographical material, and found stories. I am planning to combine all of this into an installation which includes both paintings and videos. I am also starting a blog called 'unmapping' which will look at stories and personal connections to spaces and places, and the relationship between landscape and desire.

## Sophie NL Besse

**Elena:** Sophie, you worked quite a lot in socially engaged theatre. You run workshops in prisons and refugee camps, and produce plays about very sensitive and urgent topics. Can you tell me a little bit more about your background? How and why did you form PSYCHEdelight? And how you came to use theatre as a tool to provoke dialogue?

**Sophie:** I started doing drama classes at the age of 10 and eventually graduated from a drama school in France where I'm from. However, I despised the reality of the job (casting, auditions, ads etc) and realised I didn't want to do that. What I loved so much about theatre was the fact that it enables people to express themselves. So I decided to use it as a therapeutic tool and trained in psychology. Once I received my license, I went to work in prisons, where I was working predominately with young offenders. That's where I first combined theatre and therapy through expressive drama workshops. It felt like the right approach for young teenagers, much better than the psychoanalyst behind a desk! Through the playfulness of theatre, they created characters that allowed them to tell their own stories. I saw these young people expressing their own lives in the improvisations that we did. These workshops were a place only for them, where no adults were allowed and I think they felt safe there, supported by the group. And this gave them courage to tell the real stories, after we finished performing. We always had a group talk moment. I did this job for 6 years and then moved to the UK 13 years ago. I started writing again and created my own company PSYCHEDELIGHT. In 2011, I did my first play "A Woman inside". This play was inspired by my work in prison. Half of my cast were women who had been trained at Clean Break, a charity teaching drama to women ex-offenders and at risk of re-offending. My aim was to push the concept of "having their voice heard" as far as possible. Some of the material was built on stories that I had heard in prison. But, I thought, why not let

them say it directly? So I started rehearsing the play with these women and 2 other "traditionally trained" actresses. We worked for 6 months. I liked the idea of the mixed cast, for me it was the first step to integration. The creation process was such a powerful journey for me and for them I think and they all did such an amazing performance!

**Elena:** Can you tell me more about your work in the Jungle? You wrote two very thought-provoking articles for OpenDemocracy about your experience there. How can you use theatre in such a context?

**Sophie:** I am French living in the UK. The Jungle touched both borders, I could not avoid it! I first went in August 2015 as a volunteer to help with donations. I went back every month doing more volunteering work until Good Chance arrived with their dome. It offered a fantastic gathering place and it enabled us to run workshops there, among many other activities (sports, film nights, etc). I did some drama and writing workshops but what worked best was the 5 days clay workshop, which was attended by both kids and adults. Great to create something beautiful out of mud.

**Elena:** You used this experience to create *Borderline*, an amazing 'comedy about a tragedy'. I must say that I was slightly puzzled before I went to see it, I couldn't find any way how to describe the current crisis in a comedic tone. But I came out full of energy and truly moved. It was informative, witty and also very tragic. Can you tell me a bit about the process of developing this show?

**Sophie:** Just like for "A Woman inside" my motto was to have "their voices heard". This time I chose devising as a tool, which I thought would be the best way to achieve this. I gathered five European performers and seven refugees. I didn't do any auditions, none of them were performers. The only thing I wanted was to have refugees from at least 3 different countries to represent the diversity of the Jungle. I organised two day workshops led

by a clown facilitator, Frank Wurzinger and an ensemble improviser, Remy Bertrand. These 2 days were an opportunity for the refugees to have a go at performing and see if they would like to do this show. And it was an opportunity for me to have a look at who was in the room and try to figure out what kind of play could come out of these 13 people and 6 languages!

We then had 6 weeks R&D where I worked in close collaboration with Frank, the clown facilitator, for the first two weeks. I wanted to create a clown based comedy to show the absurdity and the insanity of the way we dealt with the whole situation and I thought comedy would be a new and maybe more attractive approach for the audience. I also liked the idea that it would enable me to highlight the amazing resilience and appetite for life that I had witnessed in the Jungle. I wanted a place for their music, their songs, their sense of community, their incredible ability to build with nothing.

The Jungle was a proper little city with shops, restaurants, hairdresser, schools etc. All of this was built from absolutely nothing. That's where I discovered the delicious afghan cooking!! And of course I wanted to show their amazing sense of humour: the last weapon they had to deal with their tragedy. I discovered that the Arab sense of humour was as dry and as good as the Jewish one. I discovered the huge passion that the two young Afghan performers had for Bollywood movies and I was sure we could do something great with all that. Although I had no clue where to start! But they were very keen to do this project, especially to do a comedy that would show a different image of them rather than the tragic/ terrifying one that seemed to stick in the media. So I remained confident!

So for the first 2 weeks I had Frank working with me, and he was brilliant in initiating all of the cast to clowning and playfulness. It was new for most of the European performers as well. And I really liked this because no one was really in a comfort

zone. I was in writer's role, I was grabbing images and sentences here and there to try to create a skeleton of a play.

Beyond this, I was also aware of the very vulnerable place that these refugees have experienced in their everyday life. They were dealing with asylum procedures, finding a home, worrying about families back home and of course I was concerned about what this work could trigger emotionally for them. I was also concerned about the big differences in the group in terms of their life journeys. The dynamics between refugees and non refugees. But also dynamics in terms of culture, religion and of course language!

The group was split in at least 3 languages: Arabic, Pashto and English. So that was my first target: to create a sense of a group, a new community. All these differences are amazing but we needed a sense of community behind it. This work happened mainly off stage via simple things that I put in place like having lunch together during rehearsals (humus had a very important role in bonding the group!). We created a Facebook group for the team and they are all amazing at keeping it alive with everyday news, pics, jokes etc! And of course I can't thank Baraa and Naqeeb enough - they performed in the play but also helped with translations a lot! Little by little the group bonded and friendships emerged here and there which helped the work. Thanks to the trust we didn't need translation so much anymore. Misunderstandings became wonderful opportunities for more gags!

**Elena:** During the run of the show at the Cockpit, this winter, PSYCHEdelight managed to organise a series of very interesting post show discussions. What motivated you to bring together big (and small) organisations and projects that work in the field of art and migration?

**Sophie:** Well a lot of people always ask me what can they do, who can they give money to, so I thought this was a great opportunity to introduce



charities that I like and trust. I thought it was very enriching and I strongly believe that solidarity is vital in these difficult times.

**Elena:** Also, what is very difficult with project like this, where the performers are refugees, is the ethics of involving them in a public debate. What are your strategies that you use to deal with this and remain true to their (and your) story?

**Sophie:** I don't really have strategies apart from a huge sensitivity about boundaries, given by my experience as a therapist. I let them answer the audience questions but if I feel discomfort and hesitation, I intervene. What they put in the show is what they wanted to say in the way they wanted to say it (dance, words etc). It came out in a very specific context of creation and trust. It was a very long process to get there and I feel a bit "motherly" about it all. It was very brave of them to open up like that and I am very careful indeed that people in post show talks or in interviews don't force them to tell more than what they want to say.

**Elena:** So, you are still very active, you run regular workshops where you invite artists and refugees to meet and work together. What is next?

**Sophie:** We do a regular "Together workshop" every Thursday for refugees and non refugees to meet, share and have fun together. We are now starting a tour for Borderline as well! First stop: Brighton Festival at the Warren, 15, 16 and 17th of May! We are very happy to now be supported by Counterpoints Art who is organising this tour with us.



## Richard DeDomenici

Tate Exchange, a warm April day, during Who Are We? project hosted by Counterpoints Arts. I am sitting on a black sofa, in the middle of the space in between Richard and Almir... It is a chat, a rant, a break in the middle of a very busy day... Richard is observing the shed, but he is fully present in the conversation.

For this collaboration with Counterpoints Arts, he created the Shed Your Fears project, a non-denominational, non-hierarchical booth, into which two people from different backgrounds get to confess their fears to each other. In the context of recent sociopolitical upheavals, participants are encouraged to share their innermost fears, and by sharing them, hopefully transcend them.

I went into the shed with Joon Lynn Goh, both of us with different, but grippingly similar experiences. Displaced individuals, deeply affected by the current hostility, we spend long time in the shed, drinking tea, reminiscing, chatting and towards the end just being silent... So, I asked Richard to tell me a bit more about this project, before we start discussing his work on displacement. As we start talking, he pointed to the piece *Weight*, created by Season Butler and Ania Bas, just in front of us...

**Richard:** Season who's co-created this piece of work... she's one of the first people to go into the shed. She went in with a complete stranger, and she almost cried when she came out. She had a big meaningful experience.

So, in my work is all about expectations management really. That's one of my key things. She was visibly shocked, and compared to what she thought it would be like... Just because she knows me a bit... She probably thought it was going to be rubbish.

Less is more. That's another tenet of my work. You know Buckminster Fuller? He was a radical utopian engineer, designer and architect. On his gravestone it says "Call me trimtab." So the trimtab is the fin at the back of an ocean liner. It's tiny, but, because of its positioning, one tiny movement of that trimtab will affect the movement of the whole ship. And really it's a metaphor for doing more with less. Finding the least amount of effort to have the maximum impact.

I try to do the least because a) I'm lazy; and b) it's efficient. It's all about the smallest tweak you can make that will have a big effect. I don't often achieve it, but that's what I strive for. Trimtab, yeah.

**Almir:** Nice term for your work.

**Richard:** I describe myself as a trimtab, gadfly and a quipnunc. Quipnunc is a very new word which describes somebody who responds to current events, often tragic ones, with pithy, often bad taste jokes.

**Elena:** But we need jokes... Humour, carnivalesque and pop are a crucial element of your work as well. I know that some art critics and theorist might argue that this creative tools are problematic and unsavoury when you work with issues of displacement. What is your strategy to deal with this?

**Richard:** Yeah, it's the only way I know. I like to use humour in my work, because laughter is involuntary, and if you make somebody laugh then you've broken down their natural defences, and they're much more willing to engage with any underlying points in the work.

Even though sometimes there is no underlying point to my work.

But sometimes there is.

If you can make someone laugh, you can make someone think. That's not my quote, I stole that from somebody.

**Elena:** I absolutely love the humor in *Fame Asylum*, so can you tell me a bit more about how this project was developed in 2006? And also, how it resonates after 10 years? Have you thought about a reunion?

**Richard:** A sequel, yeah. A few people have mentioned this. I don't want to.

**Elena:** Because It's such a precious experience...?

**Richard:** Well, no. The experience was pretty awful. It was a tough project. Almir was involved, Refugee Week were involved, the Live Art Development Agency, Channel 4, the Refugee Council... And they all had different agendas. Like the TV production company wanted something that would be exciting and dramatic to watch... And then the boys who were involved, had a completely different entry point. Which is good, I like to have multiple entry points in art, but in this case it was hard to manage everyone's wishes I was caught in the middle and I ended up having no editorial control over the show. It was hard because I was both the topic of the program and sort of the host of the program. I originated the idea, but I wasn't quite the presenter, but at the same time I was also the subject, so there was weird kind of distance thing. Originally I narrated it but they said it doesn't work, because you sound a bit sarcastic when you speak. One of my tragedies. Anyway, it was problematic thing, but I think that it was a good thing.

And it certainly had the effect that we wanted which was to just cause people to talk about it. Provoke people into responding to it. And it really polarised the press. It was weird, the

tabloid newspapers seemed to like it the most. *The Guardian* called it "the worst idea for TV show, in the world, ever". Which I'm very proud of.

So, in a way, I still have pretty mixed up emotions about that project, but I think it was good.

**Elena:** And how did the idea come about? It was originally presented at PSI right?

**Richard:** I'd had the idea for a while, but no one would take it seriously. Everyone thought I was just joking. I was at Lois Weaver's Long Table at PSI, when there was quite a lot of free wine. I had the Dutch courage to tell everyone around the table that I had this idea for a TV show, and Almir was sat next to me. I didn't even know you. right? (Richard leans towards Almir) And you said "Well, maybe I can help you with this, Richard." So, that's how it all started.

**Almir:** Actually, my version is slightly different.

**Richard:** Oh well, I was a bit drunk, so you're probably correct... What's your version?

**Almir:** I was sitting a little bit to the side. There were all these academics mostly. And then you said "Here's my idea." You presented the idea. I thought "This guy is literally out of his mind." And then Lois Keidan said "Almir, I really want you to meet Richard." And you said "Would you be interested?" And I said "Actually I would".

**Richard:** Well, Lois has been an important figure for me. The first performance I ever did after I left art school involved blowing up balloons in a telephone box until the box becomes completely full. It was a protest against BT's decision to stop expanding its public telephone box network. It was in Cardiff city centre one Saturday afternoon as part of the festival called "Experimentica".



*Waiting for a New Life, Photography project with Yezidi refugees using disposable cameras, Batman, 2015*

It was my first gig, and Lois Keidan walks by. I've never heard of the Live Art Development Agency. And she said "Would you like to do this performance at the National Review of Live Art?" And I've never heard of the National Review of Live Art...

**Almir:** Or Live Art...

**Richard:** Well really! I'd been studying Time Based performance and stuff, but still the terminology of live art, none of us has used the term "live art", so I didn't really know what any of this means. I ended up touring that piece around the country and by the end of the year I knew everyone in the live art sector. So Lois is like my fairy godmother. Almir is one of my fairy godmothers too.

**Almir:** This is part of my identity that I'm very proud of. *(laughter)*

**Elena:** And why did you want to create *Fame Asylum*? I mean you said it was partially for the Conference, but do you have a history of displacement?

**Richard:** Well, my dad was a migrant. He came over here when he was five years old from Italy

after the war. I'm of mixed European descent.

Obviously I have a natural affinity towards the idea of migration, and it being a good thing, a positive thing. I wanted to make a piece about refugees, but also... it was also a comment on the media bubble, that parodied a banal reality TV format.

**Almir:** Wasn't there tension in these two polarities: refugees and reality TV? I think that lots of tension happened in one sense that they're refugees, which is such a politically burning issue. And then on the other hand, we have this refugee boy band performance which had a degree of ridicule to it. People never took it very seriously, at that time, they didn't think much of boy bands. So, to mix the two elements – that was, I think, where some of the tension came from.

**Elena:** Did you get comments that it's exploitative?

**Richard:** Yeah, yeah, but that was, you know, the idea really, to bring vulnerable young men into this process. I think we did quite well in preparing them, explaining to them this is just going to be a fortnight of interesting experiences, probably nothing will come of it. If we get to the final gig at Refugee Week, that's really a great achievement, and that's what we should aim for. So they all

knew what they were getting into, but that was all cut from the TV show, of course... it really makes me look like a terrible person, that show, but... you know, that's ok. I don't mind, it's fine. I don't mind looking like a bit of a dick, because of the greater good. People feel a great sympathy for the boys, because of the way I seem to be treating them, and... you know, so that helped humanise them.

Because not many people have had personal experiences of knowing people who are refugees, asylum seekers... Where do you come from... It's a loaded question, isn't it? Some people get asked that a lot.

I'm very lucky that I read as a white English guy, no one can tell that I'm only a third English. But the treatment that some people have been getting post-Brexit, it's been ridiculous. And it's ignorant as well.... Stacy Makishi, the Hawaiian performance artist... People were shouting at her "Go back to China". You know what I mean? You can't even get the ethnic origin correct when you're being xenophobic... the ignorance associated with arrogance is very obtrusive and, ugh, it's crazy times.

**Elena:** Your work #Degenitaltrification and *The Death of Social Housing* is commenting on the gentrification processes in London and the UK. How does this form of displacement affecting you and your co-workers?

**Richard:** Well, you can see just out of the window (points towards Shard), all these ridiculously phallic new structures we've got. There's a new one coming. It's gonna be called "The Undershaft". "The Undershaft". The most phallic name ever. London's ridiculous, you know.

My first two years of my life we lived in a tiny little one-bedroom flat in London. And then my parents bought a house in the suburbs for 8,000 pounds.

For 8,000 pounds you got a house in 1980 in the South East! So they got a mortgage and I grew up in the outskirts. Depending on who you ask, it either is or isn't in London. It's inside the M25, so...

But it's getting ridiculous, you know. I know so many interesting people that are moving out of the city and going to different countries. The whole area around my studio is changing... skyscrapers going up on every corner and hotels and luxury flats. The buildings near my studio are getting demolished as we speak. There's all this noise in my studio, because they're turning most of the Toynbee Estate into luxury flats now. A lot of people getting kicked out on of their studios.

So I'm trying to degentrify London. It's my latest one-man crusade. The piece that I made for the exhibition "Dis/Placed" two years ago was a street cabinet. That was my first attempt to degentrify London, making these little parasitic structures that look like street furniture, but actually you can use them to live inside. The first one was a little bit small (laughs).

The next one I'm doing is gonna be the size of a tiny house. Same concept. I'm going to prefabricate it, put it on the street, and it will hopefully look as though it's supposed to be there. And I'll stay in it and see how long I can live illegally on the street in this thing that looks like a real piece of architecture... Might be one day, might be forever..

**Elena:** Well you tackle homelessness in *Death of Social Housing*, which deals with the fact that almost all London councils are destroying social housing.

**Richard:** Yeah. It's a scandal really. It's all being sold off, people being moved out of town. They compulsorily purchase the houses. The council says they'll give you the money, the value, but it's not enough money to buy anything comparable in the city. Or you can move to a council house in a

different town... In a different part of the country, so it's breaking up communities, it's moving kids out of schools. It's ridiculous. The council's refer to it as "decanting".

Decanting! It's a terrible euphemism for social cleansing.

*Death of Social Housing* was curated by Alessandra Cianetti. She emailed me and said: "Richard, I've got a funeral cortège. It's gonna go from East London to The Barbican. What would you like to do with it?"

So it wasn't really my idea, I just kind of applied my personality to it. And now it's turned into a thing that tours around now - normally without the horses!

**Elena:** You have a long and ongoing collaboration with Counterpoints Arts, an organisation that works with refugees and migrant experiences. Can you tell me about why you think it is important to support their work and collaborate with them? And how this work opens up a dialogue with audience who voted Leave?

**Richard:** *Shed your Fears* came out of a conversation with Counterpoints Arts and their collaborators during a retreat... We sat around a table just thinking about how to get strangers who would otherwise never meet to talk to each other about their fears. I came up with the idea of a confession booth. And then Universal Design Studios designed the whole thing, and I... I've hardly done anything. I'm just sitting around.

This whole thing basically happened without me... I feel bad, but often my most successful work I have very little involvement in! This is a new way for me to work. It's interesting.

For *Shed your Fears*, we're taking a little bit of personal information from everybody, then Eleonora Belfiore from Loughborough University is going to see if there's any statistical trends that can be generated. I mean there were people who were in there for 45 minutes yesterday. I had to knock on the door and check if they're ok. So, something is happening there. It's a bit magical. I don't really understand it!

**Elena:** I mean it is almost like a meditation place. Almost like offering of a safe space. For me the shed is a proposition... It's a proposition for the future and I'm very grateful that you offered me that experience.

**Richard:** Oh, well thank you.

**Elena:** Yeah, I just felt that... yesterday I shed some fears. And I felt better.

**Richard:** Well, that's the dream - that by shedding them, we can transcend them. A lot of politics is based on fear these days. Trump and Brexit were campaigns based on fear. We all have fear, and that's fine, but when it's exploited for political gain... So, I am hoping that by talking about our fears, we can reclaim power over them, what's been stolen and exploited. Big lofty goals!

# Artist contribution



Verica Kovacevska, *The Boat is Full*, 2016. Images by Roman Richter

## Verica Kovacevska, (2016), performance

The artist asked the audience to line up in a queue in front of a desk in the gallery.

Sitting behind the desk, she asked each audience member personal questions one at a time (e.g. “Are you married”, “What is in your backpack”, “Do you have any transmissible diseases?”, etc). The artist then stamped a card for that person that instructed him/her to either take a seat or to wait outside the gallery. She attempted to process as many audience members as possible.

When the designated time ran out, Kovacevska declared ‘the boat is full’, instructing the audience that everyone, except for the seated individuals, must leave the gallery immediately.

The remaining audience of six was formally congratulated by the artist and went on to celebrate. The excluded audience was left to watch from the outside.

*The Boat is Full* reflects on the Syrian refugee crisis, the restrictive and often inhumane response from the European countries. The title of the work comes from the Swiss expression during World War II, when many refugees were denied entry and told ‘our boat is full’. This was a reference to a sinking ship and the passengers of a lifeboat refusing to allow any further survivors in their craft.

*The Boat is Full* was part of LEGS Zürich, an eight-hour performance marathon at Corner College.

**About the artist** Vera Kovacevska has a degree in Visual Art with Theater and Performance from the University of Plymouth (UK). In 2007 she graduated from the University of Cambridge (UK) in MPhil Arts, Culture and Education, and was awarded a one-year art residency at Christ’s College, University of Cambridge. She has taken part in many international exhibitions and festivals, such as *re.act.feminism*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin; *Belgrade: Nonplaces*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; *This is Not a Gateway Festival*, London; etc.

## Discussions (part 3)

In this section, I engage in discussion with artists who share similar history to mine. This section is partially about private moments witnessed with a mixture of powerlessness, desire to help, and embarrassment; an unsolicited witnessing and an unresolved memory. In 1990, the new political, ideological and economic reorganisation of Europe began: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, the decline of the Eastern bloc, the birth of new national entities. In 2016, Donald Trump was elected President of the USA. His rhetoric about immigration is inflammatory and pillar of his election was the idea to build a wall on the border with Mexico. It is 2017 and Europe is experiencing another crisis, Brexit is looming over and the right wing opposition to immigration and free movement is challenging the basic principles of the European Union. In this section I have explored how artists have grappled with the uncomfortable task of weaving memories and the new reality of crises into the fabric of their work, along with/in the ever-changing landscape of the world we live in.

**Natasha Davis** is a Croatian-born British artist based in London. Her work addresses issues of identity, cultural memory, migration and the body through performance. She also works with archive materials, creating installations and engaging with audiences by organising workshops on the theme of personal stories.

**There There** is a 50% Romanian 50% Serbian performance company, founded in London by Dana Olărescu and Bojana Janković. Their work explores topics that emerge at the intersection of personal experience and big-picture policy and politics, including immigration, immigrant and national identities.

**Roberto Sifuentes** is an interdisciplinary artist from Los Angeles and now living in Chicago, where he is a Professor at The School of the

Art Institute of Chicago. His work combines live performance with interactive technologies and video as a presentation medium. As a member of La Pocha Nostra from 1994 - 2000, Sifuentes collaborated with performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, presenting performance and installation work at over 200 venues throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

**Aram Han Sifuentes** uses a needle and thread as her tools to examine immigration, citizenship, race and craft, drawing on both personal experiences and shared cultural identity. Her work has been exhibited and performed worldwide. She earned her BA in Art and Latin American Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and her MFA in Fiber and Material Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently a Lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**La Pocha Nostra** is an ever-morphing transdisciplinary arts organisation. Based in San Francisco with factions in other cities and countries, their original mission statement (2003) read: "We provide a center and forum for a loose network of international rebel artists from various disciplines, generations, gender persuasions and ethnic backgrounds."

For 23 years La Pocha Nostra has been fully engaged in the field of performance and live art through a myriad collaborations, lectures, writings, pedagogy, activism, and digital art. They have reinvented themselves constantly in order to remain current, sexy and edgy. They operate at the intersecting points of new and old (political, cultural, geographic and conceptual) borders. Inevitably, their language, performance strategies, aesthetics, membership and location have changed with the times.



## Natasha Davis

**Elena:** Natasha, I am interested in how as a female live art practitioner you address the issues of displacement and hospitality in your work. We live in a very particular moment, which can be a difficult reminder of hostility towards immigrants, especially for someone who has experienced displacement because of wars and conflict. We both come from the same country, we were born and brought up in Yugoslavia. We share a similar history. In my work, I am particularly interested in intergenerational trauma and displacement. I left my country due to war and social/ economic instability, I carry a very specific story that I will have to share with my children at some point. The current crisis is a reminder of how quickly things can change for the worse. It definitely reminds me of the hostility and the rise of nationalism in the last decade of Yugoslavia. How do you find this current crisis affecting your practice?

**Natasha:** It's really interesting that you said this... because what is happening currently in the UK definitely brings back memories. Of course it does. You know, when I left the Balkans, I lived in Greece, and Greece has for years been turbulent. After Greece I lived in Syria, and now I'm here in the UK. So literally every place where I have lived has disintegrated in one way or another. Of course when something like this happens it really wakes up all the memories and fears and that sense of being totally out of balance, that sense of "OK, there is no stability". When your citizenship is problematic or disputed, as soon as you start crossing borders, you are unaccounted for as a human being. And this may work when you are young and you're invincible, but what happens when you need medical care, shelter...? And in my work I look at how this complex problem affects the body. Marina Abramovic, when people asked her what her home is, would answer that her body was her home.

It's all fine if you're lucky to be healthy, but when the body starts disintegrating then you realise that there is nothing that is balanced all the time, so where do you find that space of stability? That's why in Rupture I explored cancer, and I explored the decay of the body, and connected it to the decay of the land, and that became the metaphor to discuss displacement. Following on from Rupture I created two other pieces: Asphyxia and Suspended, which became part of a trilogy where body was in focus and was the starting point. So, I was looking at trauma. I was looking at the trauma of leaving the country that stopped existing at that time, the trauma of fighting for citizenship...

For me the exploration of inter-generational displacement I guess started with the fact that I am of dual background – born to a Serbian father and Croatian mother. And then the country split up. And because of my dual background neither side would give me citizenship. So, for six years I was stateless, living in Greece. When Croatia became an independent country, I applied for citizenship, as someone who was born there. But I was turned down. Serbia didn't have a representative body in Greece at that time, so that was even more complicated. But Serbian officials essentially claimed that I was Croatian, since I was born there to a Croatian mother. And Croatia claimed I was Serbian because that's where I lived last, and because my father is Serbian. And, so I was turned down, but I kept pursuing Croatia, obviously, because the consulate existed in Greece. Finally I sued Croatia, and I somehow managed to obtain citizenship. Today I don't think of this process as an active trauma in my body, not any more. But how stories like this will be passed through generations remains to be seen.

**Elena:** I want to share an anecdote with you. We went to Croatia this autumn with my children, so it was their first time visiting the country. We wanted to see The National Park Plitvice

and we drove through Krajina, very near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were road works and they rerouted our journey through small village roads. And we found ourselves driving through villages that were destroyed twenty years ago, and there were still visible remnants of this... More than 20 years on, and we were driving through ghost villages where the houses are left burned and empty. The children were very shocked and they started asking us questions. And we had to talk about it, and how we, as a family, are connected to this history. I didn't know if they were ready for this... But, someone recently asked my younger one where her family is from, and then she elaborately answered: "We are from Macedonia which was part of Yugoslavia, a country that does not exist anymore, but my mother and father were born there." A summary of tragic partition and the future of this story...

**Natasha:** So, it's not abstract anymore.

**Elena:** Yes, exactly. I mean I immediately got flashbacks of people coming to Macedonia as refugees when I saw the images of the Balkan Route. In Macedonia we had just a few sporadic armed conflicts. We never really experienced what happened in Croatia or Bosnia, but the stories are left with you...

**Natasha:** You don't need to be in a war zone to know. I mean, it was the same country.

**Elena:** One thing that I remember clearly is how naïve we were, thinking that the war in Yugoslavia couldn't happen because we were geographically and culturally in the middle of Europe. However, soon it became clear that we were left alone by the European community. Everybody was like "Oh, what is happening! It is horrible! Something has to be done". But then nothing was done. United Nations Blue Helmets were everywhere, and they were just waiting. That waiting became unbearable. And then waiting

turned into silence.... This profoundly affected my creative practice and I couldn't work or write about that history for years. So, tell me a bit more about how you decided to use performance as a tool to analyze displacement and borders?

**Natasha:** My first degree was in literature. I started with writing, later with making objects... And then, when I lived in Greece I stopped any artistic activity because I couldn't do anything. To be an artist you have to dig deep. And digging deep at that time meant opening that chasm which I desperately wanted to close. You do lose a decade of your life, in one way or another, when you are displaced. Either, you know, through waiting or through sorting your life after a series of setbacks because you need someone's decision around your migratory status or something else... But I continued working with artists, and supporting their work as a producer and occasionally as a collaborator. And that is what I did when I moved to the UK. And I actually got back into practicing when I was diagnosed with cancer. For several reasons cancer brought back the war in me. A connection emerged between what was happening to my body and what happened in the land I came from. One of the things that became really obvious was that I needed to make art work and I needed to do it in a more direct way. At first, I just started documenting cancer, and that was the starting point of the performance. In the end the audience don't even know that it's cancer; they just know that something dramatic happened in my body. And after that project, I just kept on making other work. Performance art as a very interdisciplinary form is really suitable to explore these issues.

**Elena:** Definitely. In a recent interview with Alessandra Cianneti you say that your art work is based on research but grounded in autobiographical experiences. Also, in an article that you wrote for Performance Research, with Yana Meerzon, you say that the 'theatrical encounter with an artist repeating and



Natasha Davis in *Internal Terrains*, image by Lucy Cash



*50 Rooms*, image by Natasha Davis

experiencing anew personal states of imbalance and displacement, an audience member, who may or may not have experienced such a condition themselves, can approximate the pain of the other'. But in your work you go a bit further with this conceptual invitation, you open up a hospitable space by inviting interested non-performers/audience to join your show and 'share autobiography'. What is 'shared autobiography'?

**Natasha:** Around the time when I started collaborating with Counterpoints Arts, I also started opening the space of my practice to collaborating with non-performers for the first time. This is what I did with the show *Internal Terrains*. A lot that I explore in my work is autobiography, and I became interested in the concept of shared autobiography. You know shared biography is one thing, but how do you share your autobiography is another thing. So, with the commissions from Live Collision Festival in Dublin and with Chelsea Theatre, London I started developing this participatory project, which then travelled to more than 30 venues in the UK and abroad. What I did prior to my performance in Dublin, I worked with a group of people that the festival recruited in communication with me. We worked around the issues of displacement and crossing borders. My piece 'Internal Terrains' is essentially about crossing borders, because it is quite a wide terrain. It can be geographical, it could be internal

borders, how far we stretch ourselves mentally; it could be about gender, health, age... I worked with local non-performers and explored this concept of shared autobiography by finding a connecting thread between our individual, yet similar, autobiographical experiences. I attempted in every place to have a participant-representative of a certain decade. I mainly managed to achieve this. So there would be one participant in their twenties, one in their thirties till... someone who is 88, 89, 90. That meant that people had a whole range of experiences. For some of them crossing borders was deciding, in their fifties, to announce that they were gay... somebody else was becoming deaf, someone was recovering from a suicide attempt or a drug addiction, or wanted to be thinner or to put on weight, or felt lonely. But we also found ways to celebrate our own personal strength and achievements, which were sometimes huge and other times just little private moments. We found a model how we work around those very, very delicate issues and the audience never knew whose story is whose. You know, it's poetic, it's theatre material so it's not confessional. And it's powerful. This concept most responds to the notion of hospitality, of opening the space to other people's autobiographies.

**Elena:** And how did you find this shared autobiography changed what your show is really about?

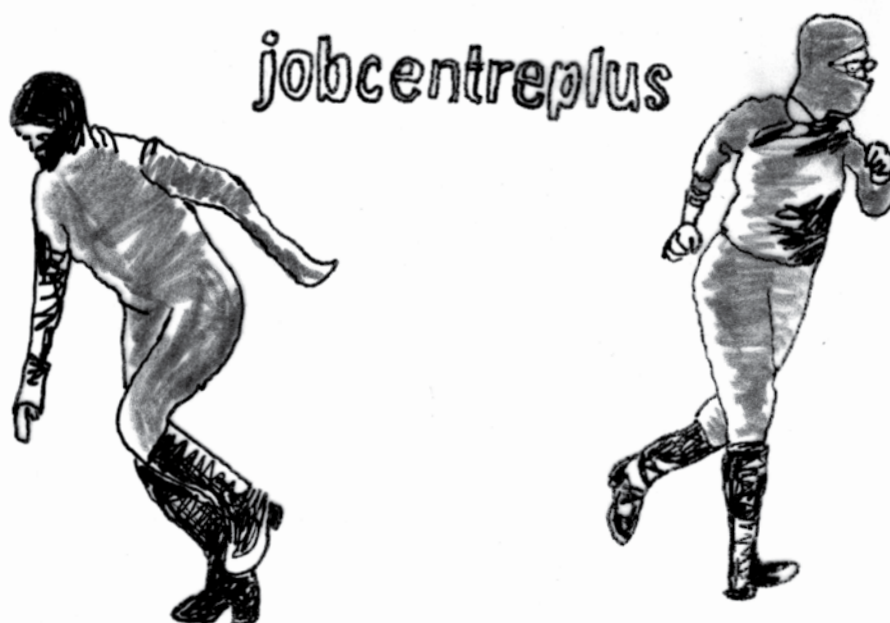
**Natasha:** I'm still discovering. And I find it very comfortable, really very comfortable. The process itself can be draining, but I find it very complementary to performing and making new work. Even though the stories, the narratives are hidden, there is definitely a line of similarity that goes through people's experiences and memories of significant events in their lives. The fragments are about separation, they are about pain, about recovery, survival, and each time I do it, it throws new light on my own part in *Internal Terrains*, and sometimes modifies slightly what is already there.

**Elena:** So what is next?

**Natasha:** I am opening a new solo performance in March, called *50 Rooms*. And I am making an installation for *Who Are We?* project at Tate Modern curated by Counterpoints Arts. In my recent work, I became interested in objects that are telling stories, so this installation will be about the body as an architectural space that holds memories. But I'm also interested to explore how an object that first lived in a performance space tells a different story in a gallery. However, what is different with this piece at Tate Modern is that I'm starting with an installation and then

the performance will follow. It's a very, very new process for me. It's a bit unbalancing, which I welcome, because placing myself out of balance has become my methodology for developing new work. Being out of balance is an incredibly fertile space, so I think working with participants also very much taps into that feeling, recognising the value of being thrown out of balance, as we are crossing borders.

It is worth remembering, however, that finding comfort in being out of balance is now obviously for me grounded in a more permanent place of stability, in which I now exist. And I can experiment with it. I don't think I would've thought about that place of being out of balance as comfort in 1992 when I got out of Yugoslavia, when everything around me was falling apart.



# Artist contribution



*Vijécnica, Sarajevo Library, Sarajevo, Bosnia*

## Nicole Zaaroura, (2015)

'A film in my purse...' was a research journey using performance as process, and untethered projections via a mobile phone projector, across the Balkans over a period of a month in 2015. It explored borders, acts of displacements, and encounter, and investigated the process and translations of performing site responsively as a chain of temporal interventions, connecting to notions of 'performing the city'.

Echoing places that had undergone shifts of political power, shifting geographical borders, displacement of memory and identity, my path moved through Mostar, Sarajevo, Tirana and Athens. Without electricity, cables, and without permission, the temporal performances became temporary skin grafts on to the cities as I travelled through by road.

Using a mobile phone projector sleeve kept in my purse, and kept close to my body, I projected a 4 minute looped film of a woman walking, itself a displaced 'pilgrimage'. 20 repeat presses, 20 small acts of memory disruption. The aesthetics of repetition and the pulse of the city.



*National Art Gallery, Tirana, Albania*

A rock, a garden, a library, a museum, a bell of melted bullets, a public square. I appeared and disappeared... the work and my body encountered new spaces fleetingly, and in turn let the work be encountered by fleeting incidental audiences within the different cultural frames. I played with connection and disconnection, and in turn it played with me.

How to be stark and invisible.



*Syntagma Square, Athens, Greece*

**About the artist:** *Nicole Zaaroura is an artist working with photography, performance, sound, moving image and installation, to explore through documented performative acts, notions of intimacy and distance, the meditative and discordant, in both public and private locations. It is a practice rooted in encounter, and an investigation into the brutal tenderness within journeys.*

## There There

**Elena:** Can you tell me a bit about your background. What experiences and events have nourished your thinking and artistic practice? And then maybe more about your duo name 'There, there', which is a quintessential English phrase, soothing and also very patronising?

**Dana:** Absolutely. I'm Dana, and I am Romanian. I studied theatre directing in Bucharest where education was very strict and focused on classical stagings. I felt stifled and uninspired so I started looking for something that could give me more freedom to try out things, but somewhere else.

And so I came to London in 2009 to do Performance Making MA. And that was quite funny because all of a sudden there was so much freedom, that it kind of started messing with my head. I had been invested in all these traditional forms that are structured, and there were all these rules, and all of a sudden the two worlds were colliding, and I realized how important that base was, and how actually you can only make disruptive, experimental work if you have a strong base.

And that's where I met Bojana, in 2009.

**Bojana:** I have a fairly similar story. I also studied theatre directing in Belgrade and I think I came here for a fairly similar reason. The Belgrade Faculty of Dramatic Arts is very traditional, and that worked well for me, but I forgot completely to develop my imagination. I also came in London to do the same MA as Dana, although we didn't actually get to work together a lot during the MA, and then once we graduated we were basically hanging out as friends, and I think we were slowly coming to this realisation of "OK, Dana is Romanian, I'm Serbian, but we're actually Eastern European here". This was a bit of a shock for me. I did not know that. And we were talking after graduating about what we wanted to do, and

because we both come from countries where a lot of theatre happens institutionally, I think that one of the first things we figured out was that now we had to adjust to how different the production realities are in UK. But mostly I think we got together around the idea that we want to make a piece about the experience of being Eastern European and the Eastern European identity and us realising what that is.

And as for the name, we were looking for a very British name I remember because we were a company of immigrants... And so we wanted something quite English.

**Dana:** But we did want something that has a double meaning, and we did want something that was half patronising, half kid-friendly.

**Bojana:** I think we made the first piece before we even had a name. I seem to remember there was a formal occasion or...

**Dana:** Someone probably asked.

**Bojana:** And I remember us sitting in a park, and juggling all these names, and then someone said 'There, there', and both of us accepted it immediately. Because there is this patronising, pretending to be nice tone to it... which is very resonant of our experiences in UK.

**Elena:** How you deal with stereotypes in your work, and also with the slight ignorance about Eastern Europeans in UK?

**Bojana:** Being an Eastern European is a very imposed and fraught identity; it's seen as very negative, and it's seen as insulting. So, part of what we're trying to do is re-claim it for ourselves, including other people who are considered to be Eastern European. It's an identity that is new to us; it's not constructed regionally. It's very dispersed, because we all speak different languages, we come from different historical

contexts and so on. One of the things we are trying to do with our work is actually make it an issue, because it's often very difficult to say "You know, being an Eastern European means being exposed to a lot of prejudice. It's an identity that's built on prejudice and 'Daily Mail' headlines. And it doesn't matter if you're Romanian or Serbian, if you're EU, non-EU, we all have this big label that gets placed on us." When we talk to people who are actually from these countries, and live in the UK, they immediately recognise it, they immediately know what we're talking about. However, the only cultural institutions who understand what we mean by 'Eastern European identity and the xenophobia associated with it, are the ones whose work is directly connected to migration. Everyone else, we usually have to convince, and often they don't believe us. Sometimes in ways that are very scary, because they pretend that this stereotype doesn't exist.

And so I think one of the things we are trying to do with our work is actually legitimise this as a problem, as a big problem that exists in this country, as there is a big population that is being exposed to prejudice and xenophobia in a significant way.

**Dana:** My first experience of leaving Romania was going to Italy when I was 17. The first thing that I saw when I walked out of the train was a wall that had graffiti on it that said 'Death to Romanians'. That was my first encounter with the West, with anything outside of Romania. So, I never thought that I would move to the UK, and the streets would be paved with gold, and people would say 'Welcome', because it was never going to be about that. It was always going to be problematic. There is this stereotype about Romanians, that they steal, they rob, they kill... I think that this is the identity that has always been imposed.

So, we kind of had to find a way to address these problems, and find a way in which these identities can be differentiated. And this is why the show is

called Eastern Europeans for Dummies... for us to explain it to the good people of UK. It sounds horrible and patronising, but there... we thought there was a need to do that.

**Bojana:** I think that part of what I am trying to say is that our work is about making the anti-Eastern European sentiment widely recognised as a problem.

**Dana:** We often discuss what differentiates white migrants, and how there are many shades of white in the world. We are white Eastern European, which is very different from white British.

**Bojana:** We don't tick any boxes, that's a problem.

**Dana:** When we performed the show before Brexit we were seen as being just a bit too harsh, just a bit too satirical, and just a bit too Eastern European. And then Brexit happened and now it's a real issue.

**Bojana:** Prior to the referendum, we did a couple of performances of Trigger Warning in Cardiff, and as soon as you step out of London, you get much wider range of audiences. And I remember coming back to London before the referendum thinking 'Why is it that 30 percent of the audience in Cardiff tell me that they're not going to vote, because they can't make up their mind! Should I be scared of this?' I think there was a big bubble in London. But then the referendum did happen, and there has been a spike in hate crimes especially against Eastern Europeans. And now, for a change, big cultural institutions are thinking of the UK's place in Europe, but I wonder if some of them will ever commission any Eastern European artists at all to reflect on this relationship.

**Elena:** And that's kind of exactly what I wanted to ask you next. In Eastern European for Dummies you are using a very British vocabulary and humor, in order to really educate the audience about rather obvious, but also invisible issues.



*There There, Eastern European for Dummies, performance. Photos: Patrícia Venâncio Oliveira*

What kind of strategies are you using in order to address the current debates?

**Dana:** What we decided to do was speak to the British public in a very British way. And that is the only way in which you can attack a problem about different identities. We created an audio guide with the most quintessential British voice. There's a reason why we made that show into a guide for dummies as you say, because we wanted the audiences to think that it was very funny, that they might want to see it. But they eventually understand that it's satirical and ironic. So I think that was the first thing that we realised – that we needed to talk about these issues in that way that attracted both Eastern European and British audiences, and then hopefully we could get both in the same room, so they could have a conversation. In our project Text Home, we used masks of famous politicians. And the British public was very, very happy to talk to us because they are not talking to Eastern Europeans, but to David Cameron or Nigel Farage and the two couldn't answer back.

**Bojana:** It's a trick. We've been here for over like seven and a half years, not a day passes by without the media highlighting immigration as a problem. I think that's where our strategy comes from -

having to trick people into taking about a subject they are tired of.

The piece Eastern European for Dummies went through several incarnations, and I think it's important to say that it's the first thing we made, and we didn't think we'd become or develop or evolve into a company that is primarily focused on exploring issues of immigration, nationality and identity.

In the version of Text Home that we made for the All Change Festival, which took place in and around Lyric Hammersmith, we ventured outside and got such a diverse audience, who would walk past the theatre building every day and never think about going in. Our aim in London, Ipswich and Cardiff, and other towns and cities, was to get Eastern European and British audiences together and to also get to speak to audiences who don't identify as performance audiences which is a great majority of people in this country. That's one of the reasons that our pieces are increasingly made for public spaces or for freely accessible spaces...

**Dana:** And what we hope with public space is that those people who were accidentally there, who came and interacted, we kind of hope that they



take something with them, whether they liked it or not. Our work has different levels, and it works so differently to different people in the audience as well. You know, most of the Eastern Europeans who come and see it, they say: “Yeah, of course, this is so normal. This is what we go through every day.” Whereas British people say, “Oh, my God, we didn’t realise it is this bad”. We became very interested in the conversations between those people.

**Bojana:** Because the segregation is so deep, you actually have to work quite hard to make people talk to each other. And so, for example, with Trigger Warning we offer games, and people are attracted to the fact that they get to spin the wheel, read the wheel, and that starts the conversation. Usually, there is someone else doing it right next to them, so they start talking to them, and then suddenly you have someone who is Eastern European, who’s been living in the UK for five years, and not really sure what’s going to happen to their lives soon, and someone who voted “leave”. There’s actually space for nuance.

**Dana:** And there’s space for nuance because the setting is so informal. People like to compete, people play games, people like to win. And they always ask us if they will get a real British passport before they actually throw the tea bags in the tea pot. [laughs].

**Bojana:** I think that people are very good at recognising the risk you’re taking in giving them this agency, in giving them this power. Walking around Manchester with a Nigel Farage mask a month after the referendum, it’s a risk, but we are saying, “It’s fine. We’re taking the risk. You can ignore us, or engage with us.” In Manchester

there was a moment when the festival organisers thought that maybe someone should keep an eye on us, because it’s Saturday, and people are coming to shop, and it’s Nigel Farage... But I think that people are very good at recognising that you’re taking the risk and that you’re letting them call the shots in a way. Increasingly our work doesn’t really exist if people don’t engage with it – but taking that risk allows us to incite those conversations between people who would never talk to each other.

**Elena:** When I saw Text Home for the first time, it reminded me of a personal anecdote, when my daughter came home from school with a mask of the Queen. She was so proud. She was wearing it all day. For us, as ‘Eastern Europeans’, it was the realisation that our child is British through and through. I want to ask you what kind of dialogue did emerge with the audience. What kind of reactions did the masks and also the games provoke?

**Dana:** With Text home we realised that people felt the need to talk, and to be listened to, and people would genuinely grab us on the streets just to start talking to David Cameron or Nigel Farage. They felt the need to vent, and we realised that people didn’t have a platform to say all these things.

**Bojana:** Our work is confrontational but puts the audience on an equal footing. I think that’s why we get this kind of political diversity. ... I don’t think our pieces work in an emotional way. I think they’re cerebral, and I think you can go home and think about this. We’re not asking the audience to hug, we’re asking them to consider having a conversation.



*Mapping 1, 2016. Photo by Janice Howard*



*Mapping 2, 2016. Photo by Janice Howard*

## **Janice Howard, (2016)**

### **Mapping 1**

She was nervous about the hedges. They had been cut and didn't look the same. You could see over the tops now into the next field.

I let her support herself on my arm. I realised that in all my adult life we'd never walked through a woodland before. I had to slow to her pace but I was happy to do so.

I remember thinking how strange it was that she was so timid, frightened of everything. The puddles had frozen and the ice had cracked. It was as if she had never seen ice before. I didn't want her to feel how anxious her reactions made me. I knew that I had to relax if she was going to.

The ground was uneven and I had to be careful to avoid the furrows. It would be easy to slip and break an ankle. It was safer to keep to a well-trodden path, apparently there was security in it.

Stop pulling, relax and keep talking.

It was the talking that I found difficult. She'd once said she didn't know what to say which at the time seemed odd, it annoyed me. I kept trying to use my voice to reassure her but I was aware she could probably hear how nervous I was.

### **Mapping 2**

The ground is covered in flint. Some of it is rounded, soft and white like the end of a new bone. It is covered in a soft chalky residue that leaves a mark. It's irregular and causes me to twist on my ankle. So far I've always righted myself. Even on a flat surface she finds it difficult to lift her feet, shuffling and dragging those annoying shoes. She's always worn shoes that are too big and lately far too small.

Can feet be honed?

I remember seeing a foot severed at the ankle. Fully formed, rounded end. I couldn't understand how anyone could do that or why they would want to. It's more difficult to keep balance when the flint is partially buried. I try to jump over it but it's everywhere. When she stumbles it causes me to jolt and I try hard to maintain my position.

**About the artist:** *Janice Howard is an artist and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Oxford Brookes University. She is currently researching how running could be used as a speculative tool within art practice to investigate personal memory and the ineffable. Conversely, she has been constructing fragmented narratives and engaging with other processes of editing to think about psychological displacement.*

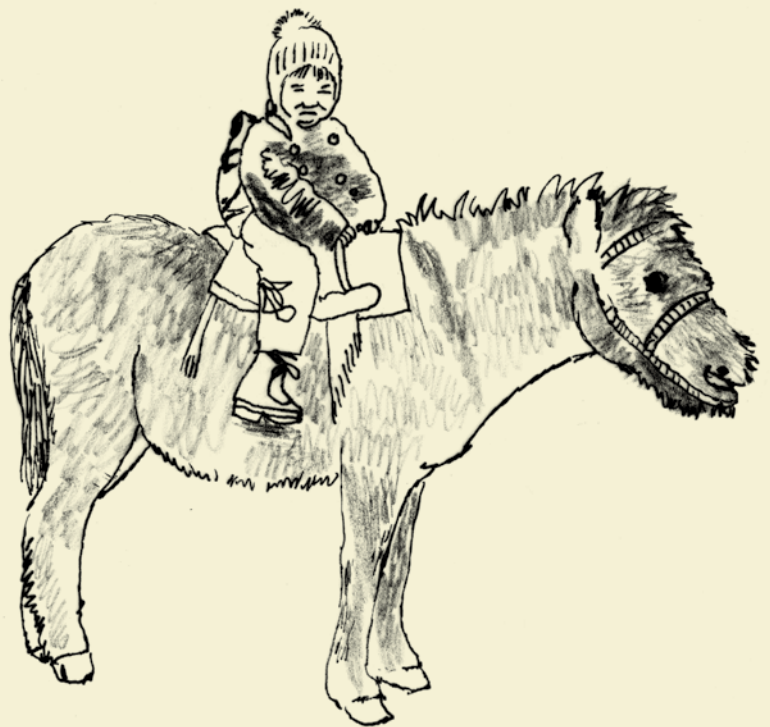
*Previous film installations have focussed on the nuance of gesture of the often unconsciously observed repeated actions of everyday life. She has used film and performance to not just represent the world of things, of phenomena, 'out there' but to embody the idea of that world becoming an image in the mind's eye. She is interested in the idea of the screen as a psychological barrier as well as a site to project into, to imagine that which is not seen.*

*Her academic career began as a Research Fellow at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff working alongside Cornelia Parker and Anthony Howell. She has been commissioned to make work for several artist's intervention projects and has exhibited at galleries and festivals throughout the UK including the Serpentine Gallery, Oriel Mostyn, Chapter Arts Centre, Stills Gallery and the Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool.*



*Still from 'Keep to a well-trodden path', 2017.*

*Photo by Janice Howard.*



## Aram Han Sifuentes and Roberto Sifuentes

I am sitting outside of Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, where I just saw the *The Official Unofficial Voting Station: Voting for All Who Legally Can't*. In this piece Aram Han Sifuentes welcomes anyone to vote, but it is made especially for those who are discontented and the disenfranchised. I was completely shocked by the statistic. In the piece she underlines the facts that there are 91.2 million people in the United States and its territories who cannot legally vote (youth under 18, non-citizens, incarcerated, ex-felons, residents of US territories, and people without state IDs). This means that 1 in every 4 people cannot legally vote. 1 in 10 people 18 years old and over cannot legally vote. We sit in the Hull House dining room with Aram Han and Roberto, while the Museum buzzes with people who are attending Open Engagement in Chicago. The atmosphere of despair, but also hope for change is palpable in the room. We discuss Trump, voting and displacement for an hour, before we go to see some more work at the conference.

**Elena:** I just voted in your piece, but as an immigrant I can't vote in the UK. I was really moved by the piece and by your talk yesterday, because I think voting is a process that we don't discuss enough. In UK European union citizens were not allowed to vote during Brexit. Those are people who live in UK for 20, 30 years. So, they were excluded from a vote that will determine their future.

**Roberto:** They are excluded from a vote that pertains to their existence...

**Elena:** Exactly. So, I felt that your piece is so important as well in terms of the US and European context. Can you tell me how you came up with the idea.

**Aram:** I am Korean, non US -citizen and I've been here for 25 years. I have my personal reasons for not applying for citizenship. But I desperately wanted to vote in this election (note: 2016 US Presidential Elections) mostly because the stakes are so high. Of course, it didn't turn out the way I wanted to, but I was thinking out loud. I really want to vote. How do I do that? How do I open up a space where everyone can vote, particularly the disenfranchised. So I did some research and initially it was really hard to find actually how many people can't vote. And then when I found the actual data, I was astounded at how many millions of people are excluded from the voting process. It is almost like one in four people.

I felt like I couldn't do something small in scale after knowing this. I really wanted to create as many voting stations as possible to collect as many votes as possible. I invited different collaborators to create voting stations with me. The actual act of creating is a part of this project. (not sure what this means but I do see something is needed here for transition.)

**Elena:** I agree, the space is very performative and it demystifies how the voting process works.

**Aram:** So, each collaborator did their own thing. The process took on many different formats. It all depended on the collaborator and their work, and what they wanted to do. We were constantly thinking about what would be the best way to get votes from disenfranchised communities that we were working with. Not all of the collaborators were just artists either. I worked with an immigration lawyer, activists, and partners from the Hull-House Museum. One of these collaborators was formerly incarcerated and currently does activism working in and out of prisons with those formerly incarcerated. So he took ballots into a prison in Illinois. Every voting station was very different, based on what type of community we were trying to get involved in voting.

**Elena:** Why did you decide to have a live art element?

**Roberto:** Really the nature of the project is to be open and inclusive. It provides voting stations open to everyone, at this very crucial political moment. This model is a kind of kit for different invited artists to use within their communities. What is that disenfranchised community? Are they undocumented or prisoners or, merely discontented voters. And what is the best way to access that community? So in a sense, the concept itself is a performance art piece.

It's a conceptual performative piece that call for innovation and site specificity. It allows the piece to take on multiple formats; an audio piece; a simple desk piece; an elaborate participatory installation; Or it can happen in a discotheque or in a border zone in Mexico. In Mexico this peice also served as a pedagogical tool where our collaborators, Cecilia and Erik, brought in students from their university and created a semester long experience for them.

Aram visited my Border-crossing class at SAIC, and some undocumented students found this project a particularly pertinent tool to address the current moment. They are under attack in the US. I mean that is just what is happening right now. These people are under direct attack and live in a constant state of fear and increasing trauma in their own homes. So we used it the voting station as a pedagogical tool. Aram came, talked about the piece, and offered ballots for the students to do whatever they want with them.

The piece was really response to the frontal assault on immigrants, displaced people, women, queers.

**Aram:** That's why the next iteration of the project will be during the Mexico election. The initial collaboration that happened in Mexico was so interesting, and I learned so much from it. Really they were the most successful in terms of how

they just geared up people to wait in line for their turn to vote. In USA, people were excited, but it didn't seem as urgent. The voting station in Acapulco had a huge line the entire day. This made me think about the gesture of voting across borders. And how important that is.

**Elena:** It is very poignant how the main messages from the project appear on the textiles during the installation in the Hull House. Aram you are also a prolific banner maker. You say on your web site that: 'Banners are a way for me to resist what is happening in the United States and in the world. It is a way to put my voice out there and not stay silent'. This spring you opened the The Protest Banner Lending Library as a space for people to gain skills to learn to make their own banners and a place where people can check out handmade banners to use in protests.

**Aram:** The Protest Banner Lending Library project is such a logical continuation, because it moves from the act of casting your vote to the act of protesting the results. The act of making a statement and being there, being forward. Because our ability to protest is minimised, cornered... Boxed in by the government, the police, laws around protests... Especially for those who are not citizens. People even get deported for getting arrested during protest. That's such a scary space to be.

**Roberto:** The act of the voting, the act of the banner making workshops, getting people together and providing those kind of tools is the pedagogical space as well. With audiences, with scholars, with activists, who all come to this space, and teach each other.

What are the strategies of the advocate and of the activist versus that of the dancer, performance artist? Where do the concerns intersect between radical queer community in Mexico City versus the political left or the political right? Where are the intersections, and where are the conflicts? Those are really some of the spaces that this

projects want to open up. We're really interested in providing new models of collaboration.

**Aram:** Definitely it is also about the ethics of making this kind of work; that's something I'm always concerned with in terms of this type of projects. That's why I create this kind of open space where anyone can participate in on any level. So, you can make a banner, and you can also check one out... I try to create spaces where power is equal as much as possible amongst all participants... how do we create these spaces together... in the various communities that we are all in and from.

**Roberto:** So the issues we're talking about here are precisely those that are happening in Europe and other places in the world. This was why we wanted to continue these projects. We don't see it as something exclusively about Trump and this moment in the US, but rather a project that can translate to the political realities in many countries across the globe.

**Aram:** Voting especially across borders is such a gesture of care. Because we care about what happens in the world.

**Roberto:** The votes that the audience casts are poetic messages, are gestures, are drawings, are like expressions into the wind. Their voices are in the air. We need to fill the air with dissent and discord and these strong voices, so that we feel that energy.

**Elena:** Roberto can you tell me a bit about your most recent collaboration with Jon Cates on the project # exsanguination? I must say that when I heard about the show, without knowing anything about it, I immediately connected to the title. I feel that the immigrants as a category are drained from their humanity/blood on an everyday basis. What motivate you to start this collaboration and tell me a bit about the show?

**Roberto:** Jon and I have been close friends and colleagues since I arrived in Chicago. The piece was really a multifaceted exploration. And the end result of the piece was an expression of pain, suffering, and, of course, healing. The bloodletting and actions are an act of healing, but also an illustration and an examination of sensationalist media culture and social media in particular.

Linking the sensationalism that takes place in the tabloids around drug violence in Mexico and in the US, on YouTube - we scroll down on Facebook pages to see like acts of extreme violence from all over the world. We take these images in for merely 10-15 seconds and then move on. And these images become mixed with all the other images that we encounter. The images of violence are mixed with the images of shopping, sports, commodity and commercialism. So in the piece we tried to incorporate those aspects of consumption into the work. We were assertive with a central theme around violence and healing.

Jon created an incredible glitched multimedia footage. A series of mediated projections, some of which were found footage. He also outfitted the whole space with multiple cameras that were capturing the event and audience live. The DFBR18R gallery, that is actually a storefront. We filled the storefront window with racks of oversized white T-shirts and tank tops. The tank tops in US culture particularly are associated with the kind of old school homeboy culture, old school Chicago youth, but also with the working class.

Inside, the gallery space contained a sixteen foot by five foot sidewalk sculpture, that had a dual function: as a runway and also as street brought inside the performance space.

Jon also created an incredible soundtrack. The soundtrack borrowed from multiple sources, from old police dramas and television, to pop music, hip hop, downloads of police radio and original compositions.

Meanwhile, I was dressed in a very basic street ware (shorts, white T-shirt) and the idea was to recreate the healing patterns of exsanguination from Victorian times and the Colombian era.

But the ultimate aim was to take those healing points and patterns and layer those on top of forensic autopsy imagery of victims of police violence. Some very specific, like Michael Brown forensic images. I used those drawings to replicate those patterns on my body with the leeches. I allowed them to bleed, and then layer a new pattern on top of my body and allow that to bleed and so on and so forth. During this I was also performing various actions on the runway that were emblematic street culture poses, busted poses, and other vernacular choreographies.

Eventually, all the leeches were laid down over my entire body and the audience was encouraged to come close, photograph, and transmit the live footage using their own social media networks. John himself would photograph and put out live on the internet all the things that were happening in the piece.

The performance tried to create a strange mythology and social media ceremony perhaps. I bled and marked the runway, and then once I left the space at the end of the piece I cleaned and mopped the whole space. The leeches continued bleeding for the next twenty hours.

The main action of the piece lasted about an hour and a half. And then we transitioned to - what I coined "A durational after party". I moved to the window display, and ironed the bloodied T-shirts to seal the blood. Put on a new T-shirt, bled, drank tequila, talked with the audience, ironed a new one and repeated that action. Eventually I created a whole stack of T-shirts for display and for sale. Back to the commodification of violence and the kind of romantic notion of violence and toughness.

**Elena:** Roberto, both you and Aram are professors at SAIC and interact with students on everyday basis. We are experiencing a radical political shift, and after the Obama era's tremendous public optimism, the question- how is this major paradigm shift going to affect your teaching and art work? Will this new zeitgeist require a new methodology? What radical pedagogical strategies you are using to discuss issues of borders and displacement.

**Roberto:** I grew up as a Chicano during the civil rights movement in the US. My parents were activists. You know, having a political voice was really why I wanted to make performance work.

I just feel that this kind of work is an ongoing live project.

I cannot change my brown skin and this will always be something that I encounter. Racism, displacement, feeling like an outsider/insider in my own home, in my own country, in my own city will always happen. I find pockets of community where I can feel really at home and not be so enguard.

The work remains constant and the art world will sometimes embrace you, sometimes not, but they are not your audience. They are not the only people we're speaking to, right?

I look at my performance work as strategy. Listening to my audiences, seeing what is driving us, figuring out new performance strategies to allow people to facilitate inclusion and listening. Pedagogically it's about creating those active politicised spaces for young artists.

## Gomez-Peña and Balitronica Gomez, from La Pocha Nostra troupe

**Proposition:** This is an open text, a theoretical jam; an ongoing dialogue. Please intervene any section you wish, reorder it, insert questions or answers wherever you feel like; add transitions, etc. Let's think of it as a living performance script.

**EM:** In the La Pocha Manifesto and in interviews you talk about the Medusa model, that allows you to have multiple production bases (physical and virtual)? This is a model that you learned/borrowed from the zapatistas. Can you maybe tell me how this model allows/assists travelling of gestures and strategies, over time and over movements?

**GGP:** Our "loose association of rebel artists" is transnational. Both, our border pedagogy and our performance practice are site and culture-specific. We are border artists and migrant provocateurs responding to specific cultural contexts in the global crisis. All the members of La Pocha have experienced migration and deterritorialisation. We are all either Latin Americans living in the North, or polycultural artists raised in between 2 or more countries or languages. We understand clearly how language, symbols, gestures and actions shift their meaning when crossing borders.

**BG:** When we start a pedagogical project, we are faced with 2 dilemmas: Who to invite to partake in the experiment and where to locate the project. When we work with "local communities" we take into consideration many factors: the political issues that they are facing, the history of the place, and even their geographical location. Is it the desert or an international metropolis?

Our local colleagues perform the role of "pocha ambassadors" and help us select the right art space and the right mix of participants. The group we form in any specific location, whether it's

Mexico, the US, Brazil, Greece or Italy must be multiracial, polygendered, trans/generational and activist-minded. And the site we choose to work in must be receptive to our politics and aesthetics, and preferably, "autonomous"; which means, not scrutinised or surveilled by the flashlights of academic or capital art world institutions.

**GP:** Effectively, to protect our students and local collaborators, the place we choose must be a "safe space" for our participants to feel comfortable pushing the limits of their identities and metiers.

We spend a lot of time curating the right participants and choosing the most suitable space. Most of the time we make the right decisions, and every now and then we fall short. But that's also okay. When we miss the mark, we believe that the "accident" can be a pedagogical challenge and epiphany, an opportunity for us to grow and develop new exercises on site.

We are currently working on a new book that expands and redefines our infamous pedagogy for "rebel artists." In this manuscript we tackle the new discoveries that we have made while touring, teaching and performing around the world over the past 7 years. It's going to be a "handbook for the rebel artist in a post-democratic society."

**EM:** Clearly your approach is considering various levels of political, cultural and geographical factors that shape the work. Does your work model take into account the different levels of privilege that artists bring with them? I am particularly interested what privilege means for you as artists that have embodied and lived the experience of displacement?

**BG:** In Pocha, we are an eclectic bunch. Saul (our co-director) comes from a working class indigenous background in Mexico City and I come from a working class Chicano and German background from the San Diego/Tijuana Border. Saul may enjoy certain privileges as an extremely



attractive “exotic” indigenous male who had living in several continents and now living in Canada, but at the same time he must endure tremendous racism and homophobia wherever he goes. Myself, as a perceived white woman, have certain privileges which often get contested when people realise that I’m actually half Mexican and extremely queer. Guillermo has written extensively in many of his books about the racism he has experienced in both the art world and in larger society, but now, at 61, he’s perceived as an “elder” and that comes with a lot of privileges that he carefully tries not to abuse. In the case of Michele, it’s different, as a young Colombian ballerina she was systematically mistreated by French, Russian, and British choreographers and that led to her eventual politicisation regarding identity and her embracing of performance art as a way to talk back to power. Since she moved to Arizona, an extremely conservative part of the US, she also became intimately connected to migrant communities of dancers and artists and often utilised her home as a sanctuary for them.

In the revolving door of La Pocha Nostra, many past members have also dealt with both strategic privilege and systematic and ongoing lack of privilege... but we don’t wish to speak for them.

**GP:** Now, how do we apply this understanding of privilege to our pedagogy? First and foremost, when selecting participants we go out of our way to locate an invite indigenous and artists of colour of working class origin. If they are queer, even better. But at the same time, as professional performance artists we also have to pay attention to the quality of their work and their degree of understanding of the culture of collaboration. An ideal workshop for us is constituted by an eclectic array of artists spanning various ethnicities, gender complexities, artistic disciplines and generations. We wish to work in a universe that looks and feels like the imaginary country we would like to live in.

Now, what happens when a hetero white upper class artist is occupying too much emotional or theoretical space in the workshop? I must confess that this often happens. Well, we have to politely speak to them in private and explain that in the democracy in La Pocha they have to learn to listen, let other people express themselves, and learn to collaborate by not always taking the lead. Most of the times this strategy works, and if it doesn’t, we have to ask them to leave the workshop.

**EM:** You state that “all nation states are dysfunctional and dated.” And while I strongly agree with this, we see the resurgence of a blind nationalism. How do you address this turn in your new work?

**GP:** That’s a very tough question to answer in a few paragraphs... I’ll give it a try: A few years ago, when the Occupy movement and Los Indignados from Spain moved to page 12 of the NY Times, and then disappeared altogether, and at the same time, harder Muslim autocrats replaced civilian autocrats in North Africa, we began to realise we were entering a new era:

The Spanish right wing won the presidential elections, remember? And fringe ultra-separatist and xenophobic “National Front” parties throughout Europe and their equivalents in Latin America began to gain momentum and slowly became “mainstream”. The old PRI party was also back in power in Mexico. What the hell happened?

**BG:** It was weird & scary: we happily voted with nostalgia for authoritarian regimes, police states and rampant corruption. We were scared shitless of the uncertainty of the future and people were voting against their own interests for authoritarian regime. Progressives were wondering: Is mankind doomed? We were thinking... nowadays it seems like “hope” can only

last for a few months, half a year maximum. Is ephemeral hope then our new condition?

**GP:** Our progressive communities were divided and full of self-righteousness. Our troupe was exhausted from crossing so many daily borders in search of alliances and reconciliation. In our own troupe, as in the larger communities of difference, what was clearly missing was a sense of compassion and radical tenderness.

But the larger picture was even more scary: This culture of hyper-sensitivity and essentialism regarding matters of race, gender, religion, and nationality, was taking place precisely at a time when the US and its “Western allies” began to bomb new countries in the Middle East causing an international refugee crisis. As a reaction, right wing parties continued to gain momentum and win elections all throughout the Americas and Europe, and ISIS became more aggressive against Europe and the US. Both sides were feeding off each other... And then came Trump.

(..)

Meantime in TV landia, a sleazy popular Reality TV show called “The Apprentice” reached the lowest levels ever of humiliation towards candid celebrity wannabes with dreams of instant power.

A humongous orange balloon with the written words “Donald Trump Enterprises and Casino” was flying in the distant cloudy horizon. It was 2015, 16, and Obama could barely keep his “cool” and sluggish democracy alive. We had not the least idea of the storm ahead... There was a new sheriff in town... like Yosemite Sam, his name sounded like a bad joke. But this belongs to another conversation.

**BG:** The fact is that now, our troupe is being forced to reinvent itself once more. The Trump/ocalypse has inaugurated a new era of ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, homophobia,

and censorship, witch hunts, and artist communities are being forced to step up and talk back.

**GP:** As a Mexican, I witness the daily deportation of migrants and activists. As artists, it’s life or death for us. Trump’s cabinet is determined to dismantle the structure and culture created by the civil rights movement and to destroy the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Department of Education.

We are living in a state of emergency. We are forced, once more, to reinvent our artistic practice.

**BG:** Our own projects are changing. We are currently creating new performances in direct relation to the state of affairs in the world. For instance, we have recently been conducting “foot-washing” ceremonies to purge the racist sins of audience members and other times, to welcome recent immigrants to the US. This piece was inspired by the Pope’s actions. We also recently performed a petroleum ritual bath “to purge the sins of Trump’s cabinet.”

**GP:** We are also restaging classic projects and adapting them to the new times. For example, “Mapa/Corpo.” We began working with political acupuncture in 2003 as a response to the US invasion of Iraq. We first started working with nude arab bodies as a metaphor for the wounded territory of the Middle East, utilising 44 needles bearing flags of the countries involved in the much touted “coalition of the willing”... Then in 2004-2007, when the bloody territorial drug wars took Mexico by surprise, we started using flags either of the countries occupied by crime cartels in Latin America or by the states in Mexico controlled by crime cartels. This series of performances were presented in over 20 different countries and was originally titled, Mapa-Corpo or “Body Maps.”

**BG:** Most recently, we have been engaged in activism against the tech industries' displacement of the working class and bohemians of San Francisco. Our project is titled, "Technotopia 3.0." In this new version of Mapa-Corpo, I have 43 flags inserted into my body (the symbolic number of students murdered in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, 2 years ago); each flag bearing the logo of the most insidious tech industries in San Francisco; those responsible for turning this ex-bohemian haven into the headquarters and dormitories for the tech industry.

**GP:** One of the current live art images that we have been using in the last three years is the image of huge pig and/or cow carcasses from the slaughterhouse intervened by the nude bodies of Saul Garcia Lopez, Nayla Altamirano and Balitronica. In Mexico the title of this piece is "Adam and Eve in Times of War". In Mexico and other Latin American countries audiences understand the metaphor very clearly and we have no problem presenting the performance. Even in French Canada (Quebec) where we performed it last month. However, in the US, we haven't found one producer or cultural institution willing to take the risk of producing such a piece. Not only are they afraid of the hardcore live imagery and its semantic implications, but also, of the extreme health and safety codes of the US.

**EM:** La Pocha practices radical tenderness and radical compassion. I also want to add to this discussion the concept of "radical hospitality." Given the present European and American political turns, in an environment marked by the Syrian crisis, questions of the contingencies of hospitality, refuge and sanctuary are ever more urgent. How do you remain open? How openness and hospitality underpins your current practice?

**GP:** Today more than ever, our primary goal is to serve communities which are under attack by the Trump administration in the US and by organised

crime in Mexico. The migrant workers, queers, women's reproductive rights, the young Latino immigrants and muslims, so called "people of color," critical artists, just to name a few.

**BG:** We are currently touring "red America" and the states in Mexico that are controlled by organised crime. It's a dangerous project, we know, but we have to do it. We need to do it precisely because we have been told by our students that our radical pedagogy works and that it can be useful to generate community and sharpen the intellectual and artistic skills of young activists and artists to help them face the scary immediate future.

**GP:** I like your idea of "radical hospitality" but I would change Derrida's concept a bit. I believe that any stranger, and this includes migrants and refugees, should be allowed to cross borders and occupy any public space they desire. It should be a human right. But, I would develop this concept even further and apply it to performance art. Performance artists create "autonomous border zones" where the transit of ideas, radical art, and human bodies, is not only allowed but encouraged. The goal for us nowadays is to welcome all demonised others into our performance universe, and this includes all the trans-national (occupied) spaces we work in, and treat young artists from all communities as true peers and first class citizens, even if only for the duration of the workshop or the performance. In our performance universe, there are no passports, no border patrolmen and no social classes. We know, it is an imaginary space, but we also know that it actually exists, even if only for the duration of a project.

**BG:** The concept of "radical hospitality" seems to be aligned with the American idea of HOLDING SPACE. By holding workshops and teachings, we can essentially create a safe space (again, even if, temporary) for the oppressed, and the outsider. When the workshop ends we always hope that the

local participants continue to create space for one another in their own community. It works most of the time. As of now, La Pocha has spawned over ten different artistic collectives and loose associations of radical artists in different countries including La Perrera in Oaxaca, the Smelly Girls in Athens, and several groups of transfeminists and anarcoqueers. We are currently helping to build a robust community of performance artists in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Tucson, Arizona. In both places, for the first time, indigenous artists are collaborating with so-called “white” university educated artists. This is our most important political project.

**EM:** Since the same beginning, La Pocha challenged traditional art world mythologies. Can you please expand on this reasoning and why still we need to operate in this way?

**GP:** My generation was very individualistic. We were groomed by the european idea of the artist as genius, we were told in art school and the academy that the performance artist was a lonely anti-hero and that our job was to constantly generate innovative models, original models of creation and new images. If we didn't do it would be deported back to oblivion. Why? The art world is obsessed with and craves for individual innovation. It's an absolute myth. Ideas get generated by entire communities not by anti-social individuals.

But we are trying to shift this narrative. In everyone of our workshops and performances we try to destabilise this old concept.

**EM:** Give me some concrete examples?

**GP:** We believe that the images and actions generated in a pocha project or in a workshop belong to all of us and can be used by whomever wishes to use them, as long as the re-frame them and contextualise them accordingly.

We also believe that the performance artist is a citizen of his/her times connected to the larger debates, and that our “place” is the world at large not just the art world. For us it is equally important to be in the art world, academia, the media, the streets or social technologies. All fronts must be utilised. We learned this also from social movements such as the zapatistas, Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter.

**BG:** The art world is also obsessed with youth. We oppose this model by giving space to 4 generations of performance artists. If you go through our performance photo blogs, you will see that we work with artists who are in their early 20s and also with artists who are 70 plus years old.

All of these are unpopular ideas in the capital art world. They only cover and study the projects of La Pocha which have taken place in famous institutions or which have been covered extensively by the mainstream media.

**GP:** As performance artists, our relationship to the Art World, in capitals, has always been ambivalent & awkward from both ends. However, this love/hate relationship has been good for both: THEY can claim they are open enough to be able to contain our madness & WE can claim the romantic positionality of being necessary “outsiders” and partial and strategic “insiders.”

**BG:** True. The Art World loves to commodify & exhibit our freedom and wild aesthetics while we desire to access their funding and infrastructure. Our desires never truly align but we somehow need one another. It's a macabre dance, a Faustian pact, in which we hope not to get burned.

**EM:** I also feel that the art institutions are re-discovering the performance art and political (again!). But, how to deal long term with this rare moments? Moments when the high profile art institutions open its doors to less privileged artist, when they are ‘embracing’ the dispossessed, disenfranchised and disembodied. What is your strategy and how do you keep being focused in this Sisyphus task to maintain your political work?

**GP:** True. Every time that the artworld is in crisis, they discover performance art for salvation. Same with the theatre world. When there was a crisis of realism and narrative representation the devised theatre movement emerged, rediscovering, the basic principles of performance art. Real time, real space. Dis/narrated scripts. Auto production etc. Now, in the last ten years new Belgium, French, and German choreographers are also re-discovering these principles. We just have to get used to being deported to oblivion and then re-discovered for the 200th time. Now, with so called “social practice” performance studies departments are paying attention to what communities of resistance (feminists/queers/Chicanos/people of color/the indigenous) have been doing for the last 50 years. We ourselves accept the Faustian pact of going once a year to a major institution, ie Tate Modern, or this year, Documenta, but when we venture into the temples of postmodernity we always doing it with the clear idea that we are temporary insiders, we dont take ourselves too seriously, and we fully know that it might be the last time we are ever invited.

**EM:** In an interview with Richard Schechner you state that globalisation has created an optical illusion of the erasure of all borders. The borders are part of our everyday life now. So what does globalisation means now for La Pocha Nostra? How does globalisation and displacement affect your work? What travels and what remains the same?

**GP:** I will attempt to answer your question from the Americas.

Globalisation has only emphasised and implemented what we already knew: the borders from North to South can be porous but those from South to North are highly policed and extremely hard to cross. For a white American, it’s easy to cross into Mexico. For a Mexican, it’s considerably harder to come to the US. For La Pocha, it is easy to go South and to work with Latin American artists but it becomes a formidable challenge to bring those Latin American artists to the North so that they can continue to work with us here in the US.

At the same time, globalisation has emphasised that what those in power want is a free exchange of products, but not of critical ideas and human beings.

**AS ARTISTS, WHAT MATTERS TO US IS THE OPPOSITE: WE BELIEVE THAT ARTISTS ARE GREAT BORDER CROSSERS AND CROSS CULTURAL AMBASSADORS.** That artists are excellent traffickers of radical ideas. In every cultural project we undertake is embedded the idea of a cultural exchange of languages, hybrid identities, and radical ideas.

For our audiences it is important to see artists from different nationalities, ethnic communities, and disciplines working together in the creation of a borderless universe. We work in the realm of imaginary activism.

# Artist contribution



*Pluto's Kitchen* by Işıl Eğrikavuk, commissioned by Open Space Contemporary and Block Universe at the Ned, London, 2017.  
Photo ©Arron Leppard, courtesy Block Universe.

## ***Pluto's Kitchen* (2017), a performance by Işıl Eğrikavuk**

A few years ago, scientists from NASA announced that the ninth planet Pluto had lost its status as a planet. Later, Pluto was declared as a dwarf planet. On the 23rd of June 2016, following a referendum, the UK declined its status as a European Union member. England will soon be declared as a non-member of European Union.

These shifting borders and geographies, and isolation from the 'other', inspired Eğrikavuk as an artist to produce a piece called *Pluto's Kitchen*. Considering Brexit not as not only a political process but also as a cultural one, Eğrikavuk wanted to consider the performance in the theme of a break-up and also take it to the kitchen, to which everyone can relate through food.

During the dinner performance, actors are seated along with the audience at the tables. During each course, actors read break-up letters, sometimes written to a lover, sometimes to Pluto or to the public, combining it with absurd gestures and quotes from Theresa May's Brexit speech.

The food also follows the stages of a relationship and a break-up, starting from ice blue cheese as an appetiser to a growing pie, a dessert in the form of a garden and finalising in a take away jar of pickles.

**Bio: Işıl Eğrikavuk** studied Western literature at Boğaziçi University (Istanbul) then went to The School of The Art Institute of Chicago with Koç Foundation scholarship for her MFA in Performance Art. She is currently teaching art and media at Istanbul Bilgi University. She also wrote a weekly column, Güncel Sanat Kafası (High on Contemporary Art) at national newspaper Radikal for three years, where she commented on the intersection of daily news and contemporary art. Eğrikavuk is the winner of Turkey's first contemporary art prize, Full Art Prize in 2012. She is also the first recipient of SPOT Production Fund's artist grant. She has participated in numerous international exhibitions, residencies, and her work has been published in both local and international journals.

# Misplaced Women? Workshop: documentation and participant's responses

## Welcoming: introduction by Elena Marchevska

It is a cold, grey December morning and I am on my way to pick up Tanja Ostojić from Heathrow airport. I am travelling on the Piccadilly line, half empty carriage, thinking about London and me. It wasn't love at first sight, that is for sure. The first time I visited London was in 2005, just one week before 7/7, to do a performance as part of the exhibition *Insomnia*, an exhibition about experience of refugees and displaced individuals. It was a hot July week, the streets were filthy. Everywhere was incredibly busy and I felt that the city was a bit too much for me... I left relieved to be off to tour a show in rural France for three months and didn't really think about coming back.

However, here I am, 12 years later, in London, again looking at displacement, at stories of migration and misplacement. This is a very critical and important moment for the UK, Europe and the world. Six months have passed since the Brexit vote, Trump has been elected as president of the USA and the world is a very hostile, inhospitable place for people on the move. Heathrow is flashy, clean, perfect, a haven for shoppers and travellers. I feel profoundly misplaced, leaning on the metal rail between taxi drivers and company chauffeurs, holding a handmade sign saying 'Misplaced Women?'. Not a personal name on my sign, not a company logo, just a question. Do I wait for someone to come, or do I wait for my situation to be resolved?



Above: Elena Marchevska holding the "Misplaced Women?" sign at Heathrow Airport London, December 12, 2016.  
Photo: Tanja Ostojić

# In a Gentrifying London Neighbourhood, Artists Connect Personal and Global Displacement

by Danyel Ferrari

**Note:** This article was originally published as an editorial, on 10 January 2017, for ArtSlant, a networking and content platform committed to providing a social perspective on art.

It's a decidedly vulnerable act many of us have experienced: the frantic search for something in your bag, bent over or on your knees in airport or a train station, personal articles spread out around you as you hunt for missing keys or passport, maybe trying to keep certain items hidden—tampons, condoms, echoes of bodies and sexuality deemed too personal for public exposure.

Berlin-based artist Tanja Ostojić's ongoing project *Misplaced Women?*, first performed in Zagreb in 2009, centers on a simple but familiar choreography Ostojić both undertakes herself and delegates to other performers: the careful unpacking and repacking of a bag, the turning inside-out of things, in public spaces. Often performed by Ostojić or her delegates in sites of transit—airports, train terminals, bus stops—the performances sometimes take place without audiences, though just as often as not, they occur under the suspicious gaze of security personnel. *Misplaced Women?* evokes not only the physical borders suggested by her chosen sites, but the borders between the personal and the public these moments expose.

Anyone who re-performs the project can submit to an archive of stories and images. Additionally, Ostojić holds workshops and invites individual artists to perform the piece or to expand on its score. Its most recent iteration took place last month, not in a liminal site of transit, but in a neighborhood in the throes of transformation. Invited by artist Elena Marchevska, Ostojić

hosted a two-day workshop at the current home of Live Art Development Agency (LADA), in the East London neighborhood of Hackney Wick. Marchevska was undertaking a residency with LADA's *Restock, Rethink, Reflect* (RRR) project, an ongoing initiative to support artists engaging with issues of identity politics and cultural diversity. Over the last decade residency themes have included race, disability, and feminism; RRR's fourth iteration, which runs through 2018, is specifically focused on questions of privilege.

As an academic researcher and artist, Marchevska focuses on questions of displacement, considering feminist and artistic interventions as strategies of "hospitality." She had invited Ostojić and fifteen participants of the *Misplaced Women Workshop* to the once "edgy" Hackney Wick for two days to take on the surrounding neighborhood as a laboratory in which to research and perform. Until the 2012 Olympic Games in London, Hackney Wick was a former industrial neighborhood of food packers and factories, increasingly populated by affordable art studios, venues, and fabrication labs. Preparation for the 2012 Games saw the construction of massive stadiums and parks in the area, followed by the sudden explosion of condo complexes, the enormous Stratford Westfield shopping mall, and awkward landscaping attempts to turn the Olympic site into "useable" parks. Along with physical changes came increased rents and the inevitable loss of arts spaces, including the important venue ]performance space[, which moved to Folkestone following complaints from residents of newly built condominium complexes.

As workshop participants unpacked and repacked their bags throughout this transformed, and transforming, neighborhood, their actions engaged and pointed to the all too common predicament of Olympic legacy neighborhoods and gentrification in general. They enacted Ostojić's basic score in posh shopping malls full



of fake snow and foliage for the holiday season; they performed in children's playgrounds surrounded by unfinished development projects and the sounds of construction—and, notably, no actual children, despite the oddly temperate December weather.

These generic pseudo-public spaces and the vestiges of old Hackney Wick became the backdrops and contexts for reiterations of Ostojić's performance encompassing both personal and more pointedly geo-political critiques. Among the fifteen participants selected by Ostojić and Marchevska from an open call were practicing artists, architects, journalists, activists, and volunteers concerned with displacement.

In one performance, UK-based, Polish-born artist Dagmara Bilon, whose practice draws on her own experiences of migration, motherhood, and art-making, unpacked a red vintage suitcase and distributed the artifacts of her own past performances—costumes, personal objects, and large papier-mâché “pussy”—to participants and audience members to carry. She then stepped into two leg holes cut into the suitcase, zipped herself inside and, blinded and in high-heeled shoes, tentatively crossed the bridge to the entrance of the Westfield shopping center. A procession of objects and onlookers followed in her wake. The piece was met with varied responses of delight and bemusement by shoppers (and suspicion by a golf-cart-driving security guard).

Nick Harris' performance, a mimed unpacking, recreated the work he does with children as a clown in refugee camps in Europe, including the former “Jungle” in Calais. His performance, which is initiated by a loud call of “*Dayira!*” or “circle” in Arabic, used to create an impromptu space in the camps, drew the attention of some workers in a food shipping business opposite the former home of ]performance space[, who came from behind a refrigerator curtain to watch.

Teresa Albor, an American artist and journalist based in London, carried with her a selection of personal effects from *The Things We Leave Behind*, a collaborative project with photographer Lais Pontes. The project creates photographic archives of lost or abandoned objects collected through their work with The Dirty Girls of Lesbos Island, an organization which collects, washes, and redistributes discarded clothing from asylum seekers arriving on the beaches of Lesbos, Greece. These items, including now-useless money from people's departure countries, family photographs, and once valued religious objects, lost or left in transit, were unpacked and carefully repacked under the watchful eyes of security guards and holiday shoppers in a temporary Christmas village in the mall, and again in the old Hackney Wick packing yards.

These varied interpretations of, and engagements with, the notion of “dis/misplacement” arise from both Ostojić's commitment to *Misplaced Women?* as a locus for discussion and experience, as well as from Elena Marchevska's investment in the feminist politics of the notion of “hospitality.” In a truly collaborative turn, both artists left the determinations of each performance to its participants. The workshop was, thus, a kind of nesting doll of various iterations of sharing space and stories; each participant's work was forged within Ostojić's archive, within Marchevska's residency, harkening as much to histories of activist consciousness-raising circles as to an arts workshop. LADA, which is itself currently threatened with relocation from Hackney Wick, also acts more as a hosting institution than a traditional gallery or performance venue, helping to support and foster new works and building archives of underrepresented projects and artists who work in live arts.

Large-scale geopolitical displacements have been the subject for many artworks in the past year, some of them extraordinarily visible and well funded. High-profile artworks, like Ai Weiwei's

life jacket installations in Berlin and Vienna, often attempt to represent the issue though monumental scale. But the *Misplaced Women?* project and its participants engage with mis- and displacement on an intimate level. Their performances draw from individual migration stories, as well as embodied experiences such as ageing, motherhood, and illness. The performers' unpackings thus resonate on a personal scale as much as they reflect the local site of a gentrifying neighborhood and open onto urgent, broader themes of geopolitical mass displacements. Collectively, these projects work to connect separately understood questions of borders and their crossings. Through a seemingly small, quotidian gesture—the opening up of a tiny, personal space in public—*Misplaced Women?* grapples with how, in turn, borders redrawn by economic and geopolitical forces themselves traverse our bodies and spaces.

**About the author:** *Danyel M. Ferrari is an artist and independent researcher currently based in Istanbul, Turkey.*



# Reflective responses from workshop participants

## Cherry Thurluck

I have moved house all my life – I’ve lost track of how many homes I’ve lived in but it’s more than 30 – mostly in the UK, but also Germany and Belgium – so I was really drawn to the idea of returning to London (which I left 2 years ago) to be part of the ‘Misplaced Women?’ workshop. And then, in a lovely moment of coincidence that felt like more than that, Tanja decided to open the workshop with a performance in front of the warehouse that used to home ]performance s p a c e[ who – like me, have also escaped London for Folkestone in Kent.

I took in the other performances with interest – the vulnerability that emptying your bag in public created for some was in stark contrast to the way others used the opportunity as a platform to tell a particular story or explore an idea. I was extremely conscious of our collective role as a mobile audience throughout and began to consider how our behaviour as audience members focused our attention away from our surroundings – even in a busy shopping mall or the rather eerie Olympic park. As we assembled and reassembled for each performance, I kept thinking about the ‘everyday’ nature of the root performance – the simple act of emptying and re-packing your bag. It is the kind of thing that could almost go unnoticed in a crowd.... So I began, slowly, hesitantly (because to be honest I am terrified of the idea of performing) and completely unannounced, to remove each unremarkable object from my bag and arrange them carefully on the bench beside me. Occasionally I looked around at the other participants, but no-one registered what I was doing as a performance, which suited me just fine. I repeated the performance four times in total that day – each iteration slightly more

exaggerated than the last and capturing the final one on camera whilst everyone ate lunch around me. I catalogued the items in my bag – nothing had been placed there specially for the workshop but I instinctively wove together a story from the random selection of objects which suddenly seemed to have real personal resonance – as if they had been on a journey with me (further than Folkestone Central to Stratford...).

**About the artist:** *Cherry Truluck is one half of live art and performance design collaboration, Lucky Bert.*

## Theresa Albor

In the frame of Tanja Ostojić’s *Misplaced Women?* workshop hosted by Live Arts Development Agency London and Elena Marchevska, Teresa Albor realised a series of two very strong performances on displacement:

December 13, 2016, The Yard Theatre, Hackney Wick, 2-4pm

December 14, 2016, Westfield Shopping Mall, near Olympic Park, Stratford, 1:45-2pm

On December 16, 2016 she wrote the following related statement:

Packing up the large objects this morning, the bright orange life jacket (child size), the beaded scarf, the soft black little girl’s jacket. The smell—part smoke, part sweat, musty, human. Then the small objects—into the orange envelopes and then the zip lock bag, the bits and pieces of jewellery, including the fragile, fragile necklace, all tangled up, hopelessly tangled up.

I imagine, the women who are preparing to be evacuated from Aleppo this morning. They are



Above: Teresa Albor performing in Westfield Shopping Mall, London, (December 14, 2016. 1:45-2pm) Photo: Tanja Ostojic



Above: Camilla Canocchi performing "Misplaced Women?... Misplaced Nature?" with bird whistles in the Westfield Shopping Mall, Stratford London, December 14 2016. Photo: Tanja Ostojic

packing up what little they can bring. Little girls (perhaps oblivious), teenage girls (dreaming of a future?), mothers (thinking of their children's needs).

Clio looks good in red so I have bought her a red dress. Libby wants a particular book for her medical studies. I put the red dress in a black box and tie a red ribbon around it. I wrap the book in silver paper.

Someone else, once carefully packed the things I brought to Hackney Wick. All these objects once belonged to others, who took risks, who are hopefully somewhere where they feel safe, where they can dream, love, argue, fall out of love, make plans for the holidays.

The mall is busy. People are trying to find things to give to others. To make them smile, to show somehow—as impossible as it might be—how much they love them.

The necklace is hopelessly tangled. I spend a good hour trying to ease the knots out. First I try to soften the snarl, gently easing the tiny chain into a loose little heap. Then I try to find the ends and see how long a length of chain is possible. But this makes the knot in the middle grow tighter and tighter. My fingers are numb from the cold, with little dents where I have been holding the

chain. It seems maddeningly simple. I picture the untangled chain. I picture it hanging around the neck of a woman. She is smiling.

Tosha needs someone to babysit. It's not easy being a single mother. She says it's hard for her, now that she has a son, to watch the news, to see woman and children, the bombardment, their desperate flight.

I feel vulnerable sitting on the cement paving stone outside the Omega watch store. Someone else has the power. A man with a vest that says "security". Calling out names: Amena, Yana, Ola, Liliane, Nour, Kamar, Lamma Dayoub, Qamar, Haya, Zeinah, Aya, Nooda, Ranim, Reem, Asil. Please be safe. What is the worst that can happen to me? What is the best thing that can happen to you?

Things I learned in the workshop:

The advantages of being our own audience: Working together, watching each other, making work for each other to see, acting as a magnet in public spaces to draw others in, acting as a protective shield when there's some question about our "right" to make work in public. Being open to each other. Allowing everyone to be at a different point in his or her process. Observing each other and learning from each other.

Explaining to security: The art of just describing what is actually happening. “I am looking for something.” “She is wrapping a present.” The power (see above) of being able to focus on an action whilst someone else does the explaining.

Gut feeling + props: The need to allow your gut feeling to direct you, to give you ideas. To have the props but then let the action evolve. But to still be able to edit one’s self, and question one’s ideas, and not to incorporate every single idea. I have so many ideas.

Also, I wanted to say how much this workshop meant to me. This was a new way for me to work with these objects– the second piece, a way to put myself into the work, to make myself a bit vulnerable. It has given me plenty to think about. Once again, thanks to Tanja Ostojić for her warmth, patience, openness– for making us all feel so safe, and so encouraged as artists.

**About the artist:** *Teresa Albor is a London-based performance and visual artist interested in how different groups of people negotiate the world. Her work is research-based and often involves broad collaboration. It can involve video/moving image, performance, installation, publication, community-based workshops, and forms of artist-led curation.*

## Camilla Canochi

In the frame of Tanja Ostojić’s “Misplaced Women?” workshop hosted by Live Arts Development Agency London, Camilla Canocchi realised on December 14 2016, a very charming 10 minute performance on displacement of nature in the context of gentrification, in the Westfield Shopping Mall, Stratford London. She wrote the following about it:

Misplaced Women? Misplaced Nature?

I unpacked my backpack at the base of a tree, planted in a flowerbed with fake plants on the top floor of the Westfield shopping mall in Stratford.

Among my belongings were five bird whistles I have been working with recently and decided to play them, one by one, while looking at the tree, allowing pauses to hear a reply, which, as I expected, never came. Call and response: it’s a game we play everyday, trying to communicate with each other, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Being in a foreign country, speaking a different language, trying to connect with people around us – this is something we have all experienced at some point in our lives. When communication fails, it’s easy to feel misplaced, isolated, lonely. Some, like migrants and homeless people, experience this much more often than others.

And then there’s nature. The area of Stratford and its surroundings – where we have toured with Tanja Ostojić and the workshop participants – that has undergone a process of complete gentrification in recent years, mostly as a result of the Olympic Games held there in 2012. The enormous shopping centre, next to the Olympic Stadium with its artificial environment, was built there for this reason. Where is the nature that once belonged there? Where are its inhabitants? Gentrification misplaces people, and nature too.

**About the artist:** *Camilla Canocchi is a writer and performance artist based in London*

## Shannon Mulvey

While discussing the experiences and issues of displacement of our workshop collective, I began to remember a story that my mother had told me of my grandparents’ assimilation into British culture and their experience of xenophobia. My grandparents on both sides immigrated from Ireland at the age of 16. Reflecting upon my 16 year old self, I could not have even conceived leaving home, never mind immigrating. Yet all of my grandparents left their small villages in rural south west Ireland to seek a better life across the water in the UK. Shortly after arriving in the UK they were welcomed by signage clearly



Above: Shannon Mulvey unpacked her bag on December 14, 2016 by the oak tree on the River Lee at the border of Hackney Wick and Stratford London, in the frame of “Misplaced Women?” performance workshop in the public space lead by Tanja Ostojić.

stating “no blacks, no Irish, no dogs” on nearly every tenement building and work place. With opportunities lacking, it was desperate times but my grandmother managed to find a small room in which she and her husband could stay. The only rule was no children. Hiding her pregnant stomach, Eileen accepted the room and continued to keep her now heavily pregnant stomach under wraps. A few months later, my uncle Michael was born. However, Michael was fully deaf and suffered from colic which caused him to scream loudly with the pain of the infection.

Trying desperately to protect her livelihood and save her family from being thrown out onto the streets of London mid-winter, Eileen tried desperately to calm her distressed child.

It was no time before the landlady; who was also Irish but had immigrated years before, found out about the child and threw the family out onto the streets.

Although Eileen and Paddy felt abandoned and alone in a new country, they knew they could always rely on the help of one thing- the generosity of the Irish community who had immigrated alongside them and become kind hearted friends throughout the process. A friend they had met on the boat over offered them a place to stay and soon they began to settle back into London life.

It saddens me that this story was reminded to me by the shared stories of xenophobia and mistreatment of immigrants discussed within our *Misplaced Women?* workshop. It is documented that the recent rise of racist attacks occurring within the UK took place immediately following the UK’s Brexit vote determining the country’s decision to leave the EU. I think it is a vital point in history in which to take action and challenge this racist rhetoric that is being promoted and to take pride in our mission as artists to make work that recognises and resists racist prejudice.

As a theatre maker, it was a truly enriching experience to be able to work collaboratively with such talented artists and to be inspired and informed by their vast and varied processes and modes of thinking and creating; which is a pedagogy I have not encountered thus far in my training as a performer. It was absolutely wonderful working with Tanja Ostojić.

**About the artist:** Shannon Mulvey has been trained on the American Theatre Arts course at Rose Bruford drama school. Whilst studying she spent an exchange semester in Chicago where she worked professionally with the avant-garde, experimental theatre company Trapdoor Theatre. After graduating in June 2016 and receiving a first class degree, she founded the theatre company Sisters of Eden, a feminist performance collective that makes work that challenges patriarchal, hetero-normative ideologies and celebrates the female form.

# Books/Catalogues/Journal Articles

Artist/ Author	Work or Book Title	Year	LADA Catalogue Number
Nick Aikens et all	What's the use?: constellations of art, history, and knowledge : a critical reader.	2016	P3109
Gloria ANZALDÚA	Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera.	1987	P3110
Maria-Alina Asavei	Calling Cards: Gallery 8 Catalogue 2013-2015, Budapest: European Roma Cultural Foundation	2015	A707
Daniel Baker and Maria Hlavajova	We Roma: a critical reader in contemporary art.	2013	P3112
Michael Balfour	Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters.	2013	P3113
Claire Bishop	Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship	2012	P2127
Amy, Bryzgel	Performance Art in Eastern Europe Since 1960.	2017	P3115
Brígida Campbell and and Marcelo Terça-Nada	Interval Breathing Small Displacements	2011	P2871
Teresa A. Carbone, Kellie Jones et al	Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties	2014	P2444
Alessandra Cianetti	Performing Borders: A Study Room Guide on physical and conceptual borders within Live Art	2016	P3043
Cynthia E. Cohen, Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, Polly O. Walker	Acting Together Volume I: Resistance and Reconciliation in Regions of Violence	2011	P3116
Cynthia E. Cohen, Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, Polly O. Walker	Acting Together Volume II: Building Just and Inclusive Communities	2011	P3117
Emma Cox	Theatre and Migration	2014	P3016
Natasha Davis	Natasha Davis: Performance Film Installation	2013	P2119
Richard Dedomenici	Collected works	2010	P0316
Florence Derieux	Latifa Echakhch	2013	P3114
Claire Doherty	Public Art (Now): Out of Time, Out of Place	2015	P2693
Anthony Downey	Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in the Middle East and North Africa	2014	P3118
Yara El-Sherbini	The Current Situation	2014	P2585
John Elsom	Cold War Theatre	1992	P1267

Fernando Escobar, Karen Mackinnon, Inez Elvia Rocha, Maria Clara Bernal	Displaced: Arte Contemporaneo de Colombia / Contemporary Art from Colombia	2007	<b>P3121</b>
Tom Finkelpearl	What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation	2013	<b>P3119</b>
Coco Fusco	English is Broken Here – Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas	1995	<b>P2024</b>
Coco Fusco	The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings	2001	<b>P0241</b>
Coco Fusco	A field guide for female interrogators.	2008	<b>P3120</b>
Coco Fusco	Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba	2015	<b>P2777</b>
Guillermo Gomez-Pena	Conversations Across Borders: A Performance Artist Converses Theorists, Curators, Activists and Fell	2011	<b>P1802</b>
Marina Grzanic	Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism & the Retro-Avant-Garde	2000	<b>P3122</b>
Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder	Rabih Mroué: A BAK Critical Reader in Artists' Practice	2012	<b>P2098</b>
Teresa Calonje, et al.	Live Forever: Collecting Live Art	2014	<b>P2522</b>
Sunil Gupta	Disrupted Borders – An Intervention in Definitions of Boundaries	1993	<b>P2015</b>
Grant H Kester	The one and the many: contemporary collaborative art in a global context.	2011	<b>P1908</b>
Emily Jacir and Omar Kholeif	Emily Jacir: Europa	2016	<b>P3123</b>
Fiona Jeffries	Nothing to Lose but Our Fear: Activism and Resistance in Dangerous Times	2015	<b>P3124</b>
Reece Jones	Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move	2016	<b>P3125</b>
Sarah Khan	Acting Up	2015	<b>A0708</b>
Shahram Khosravi	'Illegal' Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders	2011	<b>P3126</b>
Shahram Khosravi	Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran	2017	<b>P3127</b>
Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczy	Documenta 14 #1	2017	<b>P3128</b>
Ria Lavrijsen	Cultural Diversity in the Arts – Art, Art Policies and the Facelift of Europe	1993	<b>P2020</b>
Delaine Le Bas and Hannah Firth	Delaine Le Bas: Witch Hunt	2016	<b>P3129</b>
Fran Lloyd	Displacement & Difference	2001	<b>P1296</b>



Jordan McKenzie	An Englishman Abroad	2014	<b>P2663</b>
Maria Miranda	UNSITELY AESTHETICS (Editor note: Look at chapter The Borders that Crossed Us)	2013	<b>P2538</b>
Valeriu Nicolae	We are the Roma!: One Thousand Years of Discrimination	2014	<b>P3130</b>
Tanja Ostojić, Marina Grzinic and Suzana Milevska	Strategies of Success	2004	<b>P3105</b>
Marina Grzinic and Tanja Ostojić	Integration Impossible?: The Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić	2009	<b>P3106</b>
Chantal Pontbriand	The Contemporary, The Common: Art in a Globalizing World	2013	<b>P3131</b>
Paul Rae	Theatre & Human Rights	2009	<b>P1240</b>
Nisha Sajjani	Assemblage: An Art Series on Identity, Memory, and Displacement	2017	<b>A0709</b>
Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson	Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics	2015	<b>P3132</b>
Ila Nicole Sheren	Portable Borders	2015	<b>P2839</b>
Lena Simic and Jennifer Verson	BLOOD & SOIL: we were always meant to meet...	2011	<b>P2741</b>
Adrien Sina	Performing Rights	2005	<b>A0205</b>
André Stitt	Trace: displaced: Trace Collective 2008-2009.	2011	<b>P2696</b>
Tereza Teklic	Extravagant Bodies: Crime and Punishment	2016	<b>P3077</b>
James Thompson, Jenny Hughes and Michael Balfour	Performance in Place of War	2009	<b>P3134</b>
Nato Thompson	Seeing Power	2016	<b>P3135</b>
Jasmina Tumbas and Selma Selman	Selma Selman catalogue	2017	<b>P3133</b>
Sigismond de Vajay	Of Bridges & Borders: Vol. II	2013	<b>P3136</b>
Peter Weibel	Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century	2015	<b>P3137</b>
Mechtild Widrich	Performative monuments: The rematerialisation of public art	2014	<b>P3138</b>
Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager	Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance: Inside/Outside Europe	2015	<b>P3039</b>
	Land of Human Rights	2007	<b>P1175</b>
	The New Human catalogue	2015	<b>P3111</b>

<b>Video Resources</b>			
Natasha Davis	Rupture	2009	<b>D1250</b>
Natasha Davis	Suspended	2010	<b>D1842</b>
Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante	Stuff	1996	<b>V0066</b>
Guillermo Gomez-Pena	Performing Rights Collection - London - Mapa-Corpo	2006	<b>D0555</b>
Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Gustavo Vazquez	Homo Fronterizus: Recent performance video works 2008-2011	2011	<b>D1729</b>
Richard Dedomenici	Fame Asylum	2006	<b>D0838</b>
Yara El-Sherbini	Universality Challenge	2008	<b>D0970</b>
Poshya Kakil	Knitting Iron - Poshya Kakil Selected Works	2012	<b>D1846</b>
Jordan McKenzie ,	Jordan McKenzie - Occupations, 1996-2013	2013	<b>D2058</b>
Shabnam Shabazi	Sacred 2012 - Body House (vers.2)	2012	<b>D2071</b>
Shabnam Shabazi, Ernst Fischer	Sacred 2012 - Body House (vers. 2) post-show talk	2012	<b>D2072</b>
Adrien Sina	NRLA (National Review of Live Art) 2008 - Illustrated Lectures - Performance, Politics, Ethics and Human Rights	2008	<b>D1098</b>
			<b>D1099</b>
			<b>D1100</b>
Adrien Sina	Performance, Politics, Ethics and Human Rights: Screening Programme	2005	<b>D0343</b>
<b>Digital Files</b>			
Richard DeDomenici and Bryony Kimmings	Live Art Aid	2015	<b>P3040</b>
Richard Dedomenici	Fame Asylum	2011	<b>DB0062</b>
Dictaphone Group	Nothing to Declare	2013	<b>EF5156</b>
Yara El-Sherbini	Talking Heads: Yara El Sherbini	2011	<b>DB0114</b>
Adalet Garmiany and Clare Charnley	Wata / Speech - a series of collaborative performance using different languages	2007	<b>D1846</b>
Jordan McKenzie	Talking Heads: Jordan McKenzie	2011	<b>DB0035</b>



The Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) is a transnational cultural programme (2015 - 2018) focusing on the field of collaborative and socially engaged arts practice across artform and context. CAPP is made up of a nine organisation network, led by Create the national development agency for collaborative arts in Ireland.

CAPP is a diverse range of dynamic cultural and artistic organisations supporting the development of artistic projects of excellence. Partners include: Agora Collective (Germany), Create lead partner (Ireland), hablarenarte (Spain), Heart of Glass St Helens (UK), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (Germany), Live Art Development Agency (UK), Ludwig Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art (Hungary), m-cult (Finland), and Tate Liverpool (UK).

The overall goal of CAPP is to improve and open up opportunities for artists who are working collaboratively across Europe, by enhancing mobility and exchange whilst at the same time engaging new publics and audiences for collaborative practices. The different strands of the CAPP programme consist of national and international professional development opportunities, artist residencies, commissioned works, touring and dissemination, and a major showcase in Dublin (Ireland) 2018.

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