

CHAPTER 1

Nora-Swantje Almes

Burst the bubble. Get your name in circulation. Sven Lütticken calls it *General Performance*: “In today’s economy, it not only refers to the productivity of one’s labor but also to one’s actual, quasi-theatrical self-presentation (...) ‘Flexible working hours’ means that all hours are potentially working hours and every encounter potentially becomes a form of networking and hence self-performance.”¹

Culturalisation of economy and economy in culture, a perfect match; a Basquiat exhibition sponsored by net-a-porter; Anne Imhof wearing Balenciaga caps; a Tino Sehgal performance for dessert at Art Basel’s HSBC dinner.

keep the contemporaryartmuseum groovy²

In June’s issue of *Texte zur Kunst*, performance artist Alexandra Pirici echoes Lütticken’s thinking in her observations of the so called art world’s preoccupation with performances, observing the phenomenon of them popping up everywhere, “almost simultaneous with its expanding role in dramatizing the potential for economic performance of different places and contexts.”³

Beyond its increasing commodification and functioning as the hollow promise of value-boosting for an attention economy, live art, with its entanglements of different disciplines, multiple layers and immediacy, mirrors a strong desire to experience physicality: “an updated version of ‘togetherness’”⁴, as Pirici writes. A live art event is also a social event, an “occasion” (Isabel Lewis), a “situation” (Tino Sehgal), an “opera” (Anne Imhof). To sum up, it is an experience that one needs, one that calls for witnesses. It requires, as Hito Steyerl puts it, “presence as in physical presence, as in attendance or being-there in person”⁵. We want to be at the party, not to hear about it the day after. In spite of feeding my generation’s FOMO and Instagram stories (label-tagging as a form of constant self-performance), live art is – foremost – the act of gathering, live art is the presence of bodies, it’s conversations as social encounters and it forms collective resistance to existing power dynamics.

Live art’s functioning sits in opposition to the operations of a conventional art institution. Unpredictable, in flux and improvised. In a panel discussion for the exhibition *TRIGGER: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* at the New Museum in 2017, poet, scholar and theorist Fred Moten stated: “It’s about the eradication of swarm, and of fuzz and buzziness (...) But what if it got to be the mess that the Museum chose to present, rather than clean up.”⁶ The buzziness, the fine lines of the in-between, the dissonances, the actual encounters and physical proximity of different realities is what is brought together in *What’s good for me is good for you?*

Katarzyna Perlak and Rebecca Bellantoni’s deeply personal explorations on the notion of friendship turn away from increasingly-performed online friendships and move towards actions of care; Monika Janulevičiūtė and Antanas Lučiūnas’s fictional characters hiking in the Tatra mountains transmute physical exhaustion into mental exhaustion tied to being in consistently unaccepted bodies under construction and their frustration with discrimination in their Baltic context;

Nora-Swantje Almes’ research explores queer-feminist performance practices in relation to censorship and possibilities of queering art institutions. As a Curatorial Assistant at Schinkel Pavillon Berlin, she worked closely on solo exhibitions by Goshka Macuga and Dominique Gonzales-Foerster and on the performance exhibition by Adam Linder and Shahryar Nashat, amongst many others. With performance artist Lulu Obermayer, Almes curated dance and lecture performances at Kunsthau KuLe for Gallery Weekend 2017 (Berlin) and is a founding member of Artist in Research programme AiR Berlin Alexanderplatz where she co-developed a collaborative Salon series taking place in different locations across Berlin. Almes is a member of the curating collective TWTMC. With London-based Lxo Cohen as Associate Curator, she has curated *What’s good for me is good for you? A physical multilogue*.

Daniel Brathwaite-Shirley’s video works explore the anxieties and utopias of transitioning while Travis Alabanza’s poems – written on the London tube – investigate issues of trans safety in public space, especially navigating through London; STASIS perform and subvert hyper-feminised gestures on stage, adding rawness and resistance to otherwise expected behavioural tropes of female bodies.

Movement can be the source of disruption. To move, to dance, to flounder, is to shake off labels and to challenge viewers’ expectations and pre-assumptions of the straight (narrative) line. Movement reshapes the overall understanding of what is considered valuable. In reframing the term “study”, and reclaiming it as a verb that can encompass “talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three (...)”⁷, Fred Moten challenges us to reconsider what we regard as intellectual activity. *What’s good for me is good for you?* is an exercise in trust with a free-flow of ideas that allow different voices to gather in a shared context.

Collectively, we ask: How can we claim or repurpose the gallery space? How can we alter the institution, which as White Pube laughingly mock as simply, “white people, white walls, white wine”⁸?

The curatorial framework of this project is heavily influenced by the idea of the fluid, ever-changing, multi-layered nature of live art and its links to ideas of queerness as queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has suggested: queerness as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning (...)”⁹. I use queering* as a term to describe ideas, actions, gestures, behaviours and structures which step out of the default setting we have been continually facing, namely white-male dominance, lean-in feminism and an (art) world built on heteronormative structures adhering to a neoliberal logic. Queering* is about providing fluid structures and giving options on the individual’s terms, from an intersectional perspective. What does this mean for a curatorial practice and for the already precarious structures depending on public funding, private donors and the mercy of political climate changes?

Scholar Sara Ahmed says “to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things. The effects of such disturbance are uneven, given that the world is already organized around certain forms of living – certain times, spaces, and directions”¹⁰.

Slipping and sliding, “failing”¹¹, are also conditions of queering*. In this sense, rather than being discouraged by the historically pre-formulated characteristics of the institution, or by the sobering statistics that curator and art writer Maura Reilly demonstrates in her book *Curatorial Activism* (Reilly, 2018), what if we constantly remind ourselves of the “pleasures of deviation”¹², the celebration in agony¹³ and the joy of movement?

1 Lütticken, S., *General Performance*, e-flux, Journal #31 – January 2012, available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/31/68212/general-performance/>, last accessed: 10.08.2018

2 Ukeles M.L., *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* Available at: <https://www.arnolfini.org.uk/blog/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969>, last accessed: 10.08.2018

3 Pirici, A., *Performance as Conjuring*, *Texte zur Kunst*, Issue No. 110 / June 2018 “Performance Evaluation” p.74, Available at: <https://www.textezurkunst.de/110/performance-conjuring/>, last accessed: 10.08.2018

4 Ibid.

5 Steyerl, H., *The Terror of Total Dasein*, *Economies of Presence in the Art Field*, available at <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/78352/the-terror-of-total-dasein-hito-steyerl/>, last accessed: 10.08.2018

6 Burton, J., *TRIGGER: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, 2017, New York: New Museum New York, p.274.

7 Moten, F., & Harney (2013), S., *The Undercommons*, p. 110.

8 Randhawa, S., Shorunke, B., Chahal, G., Fleary, S., Kolie, J., Dalliah, Z., Jean-Baptiste, L., Little, L. and McGhee, J. (2018). *The White Pube: resuscitating art criticism* | gal-dem. [online] gal-dem. Available at: <http://www.gal-dem.com/the-white-pube/> [Accessed 30 May 2018].

9 Sedgwick, E.K., *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp.5–9. 1993.

10 Ahmed, S. (2006). *ORIENTATIONS: Toward a Queer Phenomenology*. GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 12(4), p. 565.

11 Halberstam, Jack J. (2011) *Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press.

12 Ahmed (2006), p. 569.

13 In reference to Moten, F. (2017) *Black and Blur*, Duke University Press.