

Give  
me  
your  
bones



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One thing that has been burdening my life since I can remember is this thing with reading and writing. I'm dyslexic and I'm often uncomfortable with language. I noticed that when I'm reading or writing, my nervous system is activated a bit too much for me to concentrate properly and to look and take in the letters, the words, the sentences, and to make sense of that. It's interesting to observe this on a physical level. Words have the reputation of being intellectual, but I would like to find a way where they are physical. Amplify the physical responses that language can cause.

The neuroscientist Lisa Feldmann Barrett says that we learn first through statistics, how often or regularly something happens to us and then at some point we develop concepts and ideas, categorize them and develop prototypes. Categorizing is inherent to humans, but to have emotions isn't. They are something we develop through this process. Emotions are learned. Language names things, it makes ideas, concepts, categories, prototypes.

I'm tired of feeling uncomfortable.

The first uncomfortable situations were in school. As a child we regularly had to write dictations that were graded. The teacher would read something, and you had to write it down, without mistakes. I was bad at it, but I wasn't bad enough to be identified immediately as dyslexic. In my end report after the third grade, the teacher wrote to my parents: maybe you should check your daughter, she might be dyslexic. I read that note as an adult when I looked through old papers. I don't remember my parents taking me anywhere to check it, they must have ignored it. They tend to ignore things that are difficult. When I was in third grade I wanted to get my ears pierced for earrings, so my mother said "get the best mark in two dictations, once for each ear." What a dilemma. It was impossible for me to do that and the pressure didn't help.

When I was 14, my geography teacher called on me almost every class and asked me to read a paragraph out loud from the book. This was a physical experience, I remember this heat flushing upwards in my body, I started sweating slightly and I must have been really red in the face. In this state I tried to read for my classmates, but I was panicking. It was hard for me to recognize the words and make sense of them, let alone say them out loud. I stumbled and constantly misread the texts and then I felt ashamed and probably excused myself. Nobody helped me and I couldn't help myself, I wasn't able to say "Hey, call on someone else, I can't do this."

In 2007, I was invited by Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist to an interview marathon at Documenta 12. My daughter was one year old, and I had just stopped breastfeeding. It was the first time I was separated from her. I traveled to Kassel alone to join a thirty-minute interview

with the two men. I had nothing prepared, no images, I had little practice and language at the time to talk about my work. It was a big event and neither of them knew me. Someone must have recommended me to them, probably Tim Etchells. They sat there, some assistant had printed out all the pages of my website that they desperately flipped through to find questions they could ask me. I can't remember what I said, except that it was not very much. The only thing I remember was that at the end of those 30 minutes, I was asked to formulate some wish or vision, and I said that in the very near future it will be self-evident that mothers can be equal as artists. Some audience members came up to me later and said it was courageous to expose the fact that as an artist, I am also a mother. (But that is a whole other story.) There were two other younger artists there. One of them came with a bunch of friends to support her, and the other said "I don't do public talks," and then they interviewed her without an audience. These options hadn't occurred to me.

In 2018/19, during the RESA stipend, Ilya Noé was my mentor for a year. We were in conversation a lot of the time. We didn't know each other before that, but she was there, ready and up for it. We developed a conversation practice out of necessity, because at that time I was dealing with an overwhelming personal crisis (for once not because of language) that turned my life upside down and made it impossible for me to focus on work. So this became the work.

We mixed everything: art, personal stuff, ourselves and the world, trauma, performance... everything was intertwined, a mixed bag. My life at that time was overwhelming, I had no idea what was happening to me, and I lost my sense of self. So talking with her became this practice. I felt that she gave me words, she was a witness to me trying to speak, she gave what I said some weight, by staying there, listening to me, contributing. There was no distinction between high philosophy or emotions like jealousy. This hierarchy didn't exist, and that was so refreshing.

In March 2020 the first lockdown started and my life became quite private and regular. I spent my time with a few people and intensified this exchange with them over a longer period. Since recovering from my personal crisis, I have learned and developed some tools, I have insights into life that I had no access to before.

At some point, the time was right and I felt equipped to attend to more uncomfortable things. This led me to develop the lecture performance CERTAINLY UNCERTAIN where speaking in front of people for 75 minutes was the main ingredient. I was speaking about the beginning of life, cells, the nervous system, my experience of the nervous system, and gradually the scientific merged with the personal.

After having worked for more than twenty years as an independent artist mainly working in the performing arts, I felt the need to reflect on what has happened. Not so much the content of the artistic work itself, but rather on how we actually got here today, as humans. Where have different kinds of (working) conditions led us? How did we participate in them? How did they influence our work? How did they shape our lives?

With these questions in mind, I used some support funding I had received to initiate several artists' meetings where we would talk about these issues. Finally, together with William Locke Wheeler and Agata Siniarska, I am making this book, which is the outcome of these meetings and the conversations that followed.

I extended an invitation to colleagues as well as to myself to articulate thoughts, agencies, perspectives, worries, concerns, difficulties, vulnerabilities, moments of conflict, of being overwhelmed, of coincidences or encounters that shaped our lives, some details that mattered. Where are we now? How are we now?

The voices contained in this book are from artists working mainly in the performing arts, living in Europe. The conversations are initiated by an artist, so not an institution of some kind. Since artistic research has become more and more occupied by universities with artistic PhD programs, I think it's important to meet outside of these institutions in spaces that are artist-run. This enables us to have a kind of sharing without having to relate to the university as an authority on knowledge.

Rather than responding to a certain funding system we find ourselves in, we wanted to take time to investigate and explore who we are, what our needs are and how we can cultivate the conditions we require. This doesn't relate only to funding. Sustainability also means to have companions with you, and to be a good companion.

The first meeting I initiated happened as part of RESA (Residency and Sustainability in the Arts), a pilot artistic research program initiated by the former Dansehallerne curator Efva Lilja, directed at mid-career artists. It was very meaningful to receive this support for artistic research and I'm very grateful, but unfortunately I was the only one ever to receive it as it has already been discontinued. In Swedish, resa means travel, which suited our idea of tracing our journeys through life. With this support I could organize a four-day gathering for mid-career choreographers and colleagues in 2019 in the Danish countryside where we could reflect on our respective professional trajectories and exchange on our artistic practices in a constantly changing and challenging performing arts field. In the RESA LAB meeting, we were artists talking about our experience and communication with curators and colleagues,

conflicts in teams, misunderstandings in the past, and so on. It was soothing to share and hear each other talk about what we went through... this complex mesh of expectations, ambitions, family, kids, friends, partners, relations, caring, being cared for .

My wish was to facilitate a safe context where we could listen to each other, hear each other talk about our lives. Reflecting... investigating with genuine curiosity... making space for disagreements, creating a container to let things appear, things that are mostly rushed over... because there are so many urgent things in life keeping our attention, and as a result we overlook what is important. Sometimes urgent things and important things are not the same.

In these four days in the countryside, we told each other our stories through different frames and filters, such as “When did I start to make art?” “How is my structural and financial set-up and how has it changed?” We also shared our herstories: “How was it to grow up as a girl turning into a woman?” “Did you have any role models?” We explored “our artistic journeys,” which we told each other in the evenings on sofas with wine and candles. Each of us started at the beginning of our artistic journey in childhood. One person would talk for seven minutes and then the next one would continue with their story, so each seven minutes ended with a cliffhanger. It took us three days to get to the present moment.

The storytelling that emerged in the RESA LAB influenced how we developed three further artists’ meetings: the ReachOut groups. Like the RESA LAB, I co-conceived each ReachOut gathering together with a colleague. The participants included Anna Efraimsson, Uta Eisenreich, Cuqui Jerez, Kate McIntosh, Ivana Müller, Ilya Noé, Tina Tarpgaard and myself.

ReachOut 1 (19–21 May 2021) was conceived together with Kate Mcintosh. For ReachOut 1, we thought that if we can have different stories of our past, depending on which viewpoint we filter them through, can we also tell the stories of our futures through different points of view? What kinds of futures are there? Which future matters: the next minute or the next year? The other participants were Bettina Knaup, Lina Majdalanie, Yvonne Zindel and Agata Siniarska. ReachOut 2 (20–22 August) was conceived together with Agata Siniarska, and there we attended to the present. Ginan Seidel, Sara Wendt, Irina Müller and Simone Graf participated. ReachOut 3 (8–10 November), conceived together with Bettina Knaup, is the first gathering where we looked at a specific topic: “life and non-life.” In this meeting the participants were Anne Quirynen, Katrin Hahner and Gaby Luong.

This book consists mainly of transcribed conversations and interviews as well as texts written by Agata Siniarska, William Locke Wheeler, Johanna Withelm and Bettina Knaup. The conversations were transcribed by Agata and myself and then edited by Agata and William. Gaby Luong, who participated in ReachOut 3, created the book’s visual concept and design.



This text sees itself as an outside eye, an outer perspective and an accompanying reflection on the texts assembled here.

Here among these texts and conversations can be found the trace of a shared experience of being a woman\* in the art market, in the independent scene – clues about needs, experiences, strategies, personal and shared situations in the Now. I have read these texts and have attempted to grasp them, to carve out the core of this project and put it into words. My grip on the material is not all-encompassing and is very subjective. The thoughts I put down in response are fragmentary references to individual motifs that I have picked out, that spoke to me from the pages of this book.

Working and Learning  
How do I want to work?  
Open  
yet protected,  
curious  
to learn  
without fear,  
self-determined,  
multilayered,  
in dialog with people I seek out  
(and who seek me out),  
mutually supportive,  
for the urgent matters,  
(with money in the account  
and no burnout).

The conversations collected in this reader bear witness to explorations of personal spaces, of collective art creation, of one's own position, of needs and of access to **the things one does**.

Opening oneself up to different perspectives and seeing the complexity of life – the whole shebang – and how everything is intertwined with everything. And taking on the big questions – how can this complexity be successfully unfurled in one's work? How can these moments be interwoven with one another – the good ones and the uncomfortable ones – and how can we manage not to exclude these uncomfortable feelings but rather incorporate them into artmaking? How can we learn a caring and supportive way of encountering artmaking?

Allow us to understand work and learning as strong devices and as genuinely transformative praxis: one motif that continually pops up is the state of moving (on), of **not getting stuck** within one's own artistic praxis: moving, researching, learning, creating, perpetually transporting oneself from one place to another. How do we observe the world? And how can we, in our artistic praxis, generate a narrative, an image, a vision?

The idea of working and learning as immediately connected and interdependent things can subvert the general notion of success and failure and replace it with an idea of learning. An idea that frees life a bit from value judgments.

Since in fact there is no consensus on art's universal mission, (experiencing) art can inspire us to think or feel something else apart from considerations of productivity and logics of efficiency. It can bring us to a view on things that we didn't have before. It can open up new possibilities for the world, even if they appear absurd or unproductive. It can usher in the space of the useless – a space that allows us to learn from life.

### We Are Many (Things) – On Self-Positioning in Art

I usually do a lot of things simultaneously, and in varying roles, and that's nothing special because many others experience the same thing. Sometimes I also come into contact with the same people in parallel for different projects. Then I call them up and say "Hello, it's me. Today I'm calling in my function as..."

I know a lot of people who, when asked about what they do, always answer differently according to their situation and their mood. Whatever sounds the most appropriate in any given moment.

There's this instance of struggle when one answers the question of self-positioning in art, an instance which I believe is particular to this professional field where occupational areas overlap, functions and roles frequently change according to the project, and the self-perception of one's own position can constantly be redefined, even though it also needs outside perspectives in order to exist. These multiple occupational definitions sometimes move, depending on the context and constellation, along the fringes of their ascriptions, and sometimes they mean different things. Sometimes work in the artistic field cannot be clearly defined for a variety of reasons: for example, because artistic and curatorial work always has to be thought as organizational and administrative work, and vice versa. Or because dramaturges and art educators, not to mention production managers, always already intrinsically find themselves, with their connective and communicative praxis, in an "in-between."

Perhaps the many definitions and labels of occupations in the independent scene never quite get to the core of what people really do. The pitfalls of labeling vocational fields in the art market or the independent scene also point to the topic of worker recognition and to the problem with hierarchies that are intrinsic to these definitions but also seldom really reflect working structures and team configurations.

The unreliable, glitzy aspect of these self-definitions can also sometimes create a space for self-empowerment. It is indeed possible that many new narratives exist that we can choose to adopt in novel ways. It's possible that we have different lives and take advantage of the freedom to define ourselves anew depending on the context. The things we tell about ourselves are the things that we put out into the world, and the way we position ourselves in the world is reflected from the outside, coming back to us in some form.

### Motherhood (Excursion)

Many of the protagonists gathered here, the majority of which are female\*, are presumably already used to fulfilling multiple roles.

When I became a mother in my late twenties, I felt like I had suddenly entered some kind of emotionally charged cloud of different pictures and roles and ideas of being a mother. Some of my friends without children were afraid of getting written off. Because from that moment on, I was probably going to talk about little more than diapers, sleepless nights, and breast feeding mishaps. I tried, therefore, to do this as little as possible, in order to avoid getting on anybody's nerves. I didn't want to be reduced to being a mom. I wanted to be as good at everything else as possible, as quickly as possible. After my daughter turned one, I resumed and completed my university studies. In parallel, I began working. I got a portion of the work done, like all mothers I know, during evenings and at night.

These days none of this really concerns me that much. But every now and then I'm still gripped to the bone by that guilty conscience, that fear of letting everyone down: friends, colleagues, employers, and above all, my child.

The simultaneity of different roles and changing definitions is also a feminine\* phenomenon which intensifies when the mother role joins the already manifold me's – along with all the questions surrounding the care work that is interwoven with professional work. And even if we claim that our society is more progressive nowadays when it comes to equal rights, it is still no question that the pandemic has drastically exacerbated existing inequalities and has shown how much the role of the caregiver remains a female\* one. Perhaps we should fundamentally rethink paid employment and structure it such that caring for and attending to become doable rather than becoming the private problems of mothers left to to juggle their work-life balance.

It may be that the romantic maternal image of yore still holds sway in the sense that the potential of a woman should be exhausted and care work should be simultaneously idealized and undervalued. It is therefore necessary and timely to think of motherhood not as nature's fulfillment of life but rather as cultural and historical construct – to demythologize motherhood and care work and recognize everybody's state of dependence as human contingency.

REACH OUT 1  
13 May 2021 at 6:18 PM

Dear Agata, Bettina, Lina, Yvonne,  
How are you?  
As part of the "Reconnect" funding I received, I would like to organize a group of three-day meetings in 2021. These "Reach Out" exchanges will be attended by different participants and each one is initiated together with a fellow artist, this first one with Kate McIntosh. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will focus on people living in Berlin for now.  
The Reach Out gatherings open a space of exchange with fellow artists, choreographers, producers, researchers, and curators who tend to work interdisciplinarily in the fields of performance and visual art. We would like to create a space where we can reflect on concerns that feel urgent in each of our lives/practices, and to explore them by sharing time, space, meals, experiences, practices, strategies, methods and knowledge with each other.  
This first Reach Out focuses on possible futures. Based on our professional and personal experiences, how do we imagine our futures? What future stories can be told? How can we live sustainably in the "independent scene"? The exchange follows a guided but open form which is receptive to all kinds of imaginative responses and is knitted together by the group itself.  
I hope you are in good spirits and good health.  
Looking forward to hear back from you.  
All the best,  
Eva and Kate



## Being Together

When I reflect on sustainability, I first think of conserving resources, of carbon footprints and fruit flies hovering over buckets of compost. Maybe sustainability also means being together.

Positioning oneself, demanding one's own space and occupying it as a matter of course. And: opening the door to one's own space, letting others in, sharing rooms. We are responsible for ourselves and for what we do, for all the complex things – and always symbiotically interwoven with the outside and the outside with us.

Endlessly: where do we stand now? Where do we, with our respective views, meet? And: everything is intertwined and everything constantly changes.

Being together as a form of sustainability. The protagonists act in dialogical spaces, in collective self-reflection, and comprehend work as a social act. This includes working methods that are founded on strategies of **asking**, and a strong network based on colleagues and friends. Or trying out artistic processes in which leadership and steering, for example, happen collectively and action and reaction always occur simultaneously – comparable perhaps with a process of movement that unfolds not from A to B but constantly between A and B, or even between A, B, C, D, therefore circulating any amount of places in all directions.

The question of responsibility is also a part of the question of sustainability. For so-called mid-career artists, this also means asking oneself how responsibility toward the younger generation of artists can look – how can knowledge be passed on to younger protagonists, how can the way be paved, and how can working methods be established in which togetherness and solidarity are possible? If we were young people, what would we expect from experienced artists? How would we want them to be?

The Reach Out meetings generated a place for these collective processes of thought and reflection, a place where varying needs came together, where a generosity of speaking and listening prevailed, and where the protagonists within the encounter did not evaluate and were not evaluated. In this sense, they collectively created a discursive-sensory place wherein productive and unproductive, logical and absurd, forward-looking and resistant thoughts have space. An open place of curiosity, listening, exchange, and learning.

## Space for Allowance

Anna Efraimsson, Uta Eisenreich, Cuqui Jerez, Kate McIntosh, Eva Meyer-Keller, Ivana Müller, Ilya Noé, Tina Tarpgaard  
From a conversation held in 2019

Eva Meyer-Keller: It's wonderful that you all came here to Nykøbing and I'm excited to spend four days together. I already know all of you except for Tina. You were warmly recommended by Evfa. I've known all of you for a while, meeting you at different times in my life in different professional contexts. Since you all live in different countries, this is an opportunity to see you and bring us all together. There's already a base of trust, so I hope we can talk honestly and directly. It's also been a pleasure to see some of you finally meet each other for the first time.

I'm not quite sure what we'll do here yet. I don't have a mission, just a gut feeling. When I told a curator my thoughts and wishes for this meeting, he said "So you're going to gossip about all the curators you've met in your life?" Let's see. Maybe we'll do that too.

### EXPERIENCE

Kate McIntosh: I have three thoughts that resonate in my brain. One thought is about "usual suspects" or established artists, which we were already talking about. It's making me think about the topic of inclusion/exclusion, being all female, being at a certain age with a certain level of experience – let's put it that way. And I am curious about what is really generated by this matrix.

Eva: What do you mean by matrix?

Kate: Matrix as factors: usual suspects, female, at a certain age, not unexperienced, all those kinds of things. It's a question hovering in the back of my mind – and related to that is this question of what we expect, what we want from more experienced people in the field – artists, art workers. What is needed from them, actually? Why are they still here? Why are we still here? What are we able to give back? I wonder how to take care of inexperienced or younger people. So there's the question of how to train people into jobs or how to share information with people that don't yet know how to access things. It's a real skill to understand what support and possibilities one has available to share with other people. It is a skill, I think it's a muscle. Can we develop it on the imaginative level and on the practical level? I was thinking, in circumstances where there are enough resources, it becomes possible to generate support between us because there's not a high level of competition – so

then the imagination is more free to understand how to mutualize and so on. But it's also an important skill in the inverse, when there are not enough resources. Then the only way to get anything done is to find out how to support each other without resources. And the last thought, which is the third one, is this thing about tools: what were the actual financial tools that allowed us to even get started as artists? Sometimes it's because your family had enough money to support you through university or could buy you a house, or maybe your family had other ways to give you support that got you through. Or you found housing paying very low rent for years, and maybe that's the only reason I could be an artist. Otherwise I would have to do another job. I thought about that and about our histories, and this idea of tools and what it is now when students come to you and ask: how can I actually do it?

Ivana Müller: I am just now thinking about an experience I had here: this importance of storytelling and the idea of shared experiences as a format which is not given from the outside but comes from within. I think that's very necessary. The same is true, for example, when you think about artistic formats in that way. If they're organized with some kind of external institutional platform, they will never work. It has to come from within. I'm thinking that we all have incredible knowledge together and we're smarter when we think in these constellations. I also think there is something very soothing in this environment. The soothingness also comes from the fact that there is no motion of territory. It's all very fluid, because in this context we don't have this kind of motivation or desire to move together. We're not in the same frame of direction. There is no confrontation. There's actually no need to stand one's ground, to defend it as one thing. I think this is a much better position in life. Very often, especially when you are a younger artist, everybody has to know what your position is. Because the market wants to produce you almost as a product. You're almost like a label and everything that can be projected onto that. I'm really thinking about this. I was telling you about this idea of a tree. You know, a tree is one entity, a whole organization, and I think there's a lot of intelligence in the idea of taking root like a tree and staying put. It produces a much more interesting way of thinking or even navigating.

## STORYTELLING

Ilya Noé: There are a couple of things I would like to share as well. Some of them intersect with a few things Kate and Ivana have mentioned. One of them is the possibility of trying to operate in a different mode of not-presentation and not-production and see what emerges from there. Storytelling is a big thing, and I've actually written about it in terms of oral history. I wrote a whole thing about the ethical perspective of oral history, about what is excluded from histories in spite of still being valid forms of knowledge and evidence. And I was thinking about the importance of co-witnessing each other. Just being there and listening to each other's stories and what that does to you not only as the co-witness but also as the person being witnessed. Because there's this kind of mutual investment. Lives being lived, and the knowledge this generates, knowledge that's normally not valued at all. And so it's also something that kind of challenges top-down approaches. If we've been talking a lot about this mode of practicing forms of horizontality, then I think this is one of them. There's also how we share this with others, with younger generations. I want my stories to actually serve others. I'm thinking of young artists, that I would like them not to go through the shit, some of the shit, that I've gone through.

Anna Efraimsson: I am basically deeply tired, and it's so great to be able to be tired in a place. This is a place where I can relax, with you. And I'm also observing that I'm somehow having different insights on different levels. So I'm observing myself more. I have made a lot of notes on what I need in my life and my work life, also what the field needs, on a small level but also on a global one.

Uta Eisenreich: Listening to your stories yesterday, I realized that the performing arts have such a different modus operandi than the fine arts. I ask myself whether it would be a fruitful cross-pollination to take tools and strategies people have developed in one field and apply them within the other.

Another thing I thought about is this notion of professionalism and operational bases. I don't work with producers. I'm my own person. The gallery I work with is financially not so well off, but it has a broad content, a good discourse, good colleagues, integrity and sinceren-

ess, and it's "living the thing." And the same goes for the academy I work at. It's going well in that school. Everyone is giving a lot more than is asked or paid for. Whenever I teach at a German university and listen to my friends who are professors there, they complain about an excess of meetings and formalities that take the fun out.

We don't have any of this. We go eat pancakes at someone's place and talk. It's more about making stuff. So I was wondering whether it is that simple, that you choose between freedom and integrity with modest payment and an uninteresting institutional structure with good payment. It shouldn't be that way.

This seems a bit of a topic that resonates. And I agree with Anna: meeting in this kind of health retreat experience – to sleep and eat well – is really lovely. And certainly, stepping out of this kind of coping or survival machine helps a bit to identify needs and then also fantasize about possible support structures to be organized.

Eva: I can really relate to the thing that Ivana said, that it has something really soothing. Also sharing the stories. Just hearing you, your stories and also being able to tell mine makes me feel like I'm not alone. All the stories are slightly different, but then some of them are similar, having to deal with similar issues. I'm also a bit surprised that we've talked so little about our actual work, our performances and rehearsals happening at the moment, and each of our artistic processes. So the focus here really seems to be about the surrounding things, which I was hoping would be the case. But I also envisioned the possibility of talking about our structures, what's keeping them together, the frame, which is of course inherent in our individual work. But the emphasis is not there. We have nothing to prove here. We don't have to occupy the territory. We're not in competition. We're not in conflict. So it's easy. Well, maybe not easy, but it's a whole other way of –

Uta: I think "fluid" was a good word.

Eva: Yes. And the way topics are becoming involved here – it's not exactly easy and super clear and sharp. Surprisingly, though, it finds its way, like a thick liquid that coagulates in this group. Thinking about the trajectory of time, talking about our past and how we arrived where we are today, talking about the structures that we find here

and now during this RESA meeting (RESA: Residency for Exchange and Sustainability in the Arts, a pilot program initiated by Dansehallerne in Copenhagen in 2018). What do these four specific days mean in our trajectories? How significant is this going to be? Is it a meeting? We come with questions, we choose to arrive here, we have four days to reflect and then from there we embark again. I have this interest inside me for how this can live on without being a mere sharpening of our consciousness of ethical ideas. I'm interested in the longer lasting effect – if this has a longer lasting effect, then how would it manifest?

#### AMATEURISM AND PROFESSIONALISM

Cuqui: Thinking through this passage of time or experiences – what is experience, actually – I have the need to try and defend a kind of space for amateurism, in the sense of professionalization, as it relates to what you were saying – how to be a professional in a professional environment. It's a problem sometimes. How to be in/out. What kind of freedom does it give you and in which different dimensions can you be more free or less free. This is a question for me at the moment I am in now, also in relation to what I was saying yesterday – somehow this space of resistance in trying to be a permanent amateur. Even if your artistic practice is very skilled or very sophisticated or if you gain a lot of experience. Still, there's something I was always interested about in not knowing, or trying to see what I can do that I don't know and how to explore a space of dismantling yourself, not becoming more and more professional but trying to defend or resist. Yeah, I don't find the place of resistance in the art market. I wonder, what's the potential of becoming weaker, in a way? And it's true that this is extremely tiring. In my case, that was one of the reasons I wanted to do it alone. Because this would give me the possibility of being like this for three months. This was very important for me. That's why I said on the first day that my career is a disaster, because this goes somehow against the idea of a career. However, then I wonder, what's with the passing of time? With the passing of time, you have the feeling you're in another place. The energy is different and you're tired. Maybe it's a general question, how to be able to do it so that your practice is a permanent reset of things, but without it being so tiring. And there

was something that you said, Ilya, that I was recalling before I came here – it's interdependence. Maybe in interdependency there is a space for freedom. Maybe I need a broader space for interdependence but within the same logic of not becoming more and more professional. What is "professional"? There is a part of being professional that I never wrapped my head around. So I identify a lot with many things you were saying yesterday.

Eva: Do you mean our conversation about the structure?

Cuqui: Yes, because it's not a professional structure. I think we both struggle with this, to work in that very handmade, almost amateurish way. I learned a lot from you, that maybe there is a misunderstanding or we can be more precise and more clear on this.

Ivana: I think that if you keep this idea of "professional" as a kind of rigid term that doesn't move, then it's not a very useful concept. In my opinion, professional is a very loose term. For example, I also completely feel that I work like you, every time I work with something that I don't know. I also work with people that are not at all specialists. None of the people I work with are like a dancer or like a producer. They all come from very different backgrounds. Still, this structure is stable. I think that you can work in exactly the same way you're doing, without having this kind of mess all the time. When you were saying "in or out," I would say "in between." I think sometimes you have to get out of yourself. You're still in yourself but you're also out of yourself. You can look at yourself from the outside. It's like when you make works. You can perform in your work and at the same time you direct it. That's one thing. The other thing is this idea of freedom. What was very important for me personally is to understand that I'm quite a family person. I really like this kind of family thing. This kind of stability works very well for me, because I think I have a very restless spirit. If I work in structures or live in structures that are very unstable, it's too much for me. I become crazy. So, for example, I realized that when structures are more limited, more stable, more boring, I can think better, I can articulate and feel more at ease, less stressed.

Uta: That's the exact question I was asking myself: are highly professional

ways needed to safeguard this amateur space?

Cuqui: Okay, maybe what you need is to try to create the conditions and once you have those conditions then you go in.

Ivana: You get less tired.

Cuqui: Yeah. It's great for me to hear this, but I have my doubts. I mean, it's a permanent contradiction. It's a permanent question. Yes and no. I hear you and I say yes and no to it.

Ivana: But what I was talking about is my personal need. I'm not saying this is how it should be.

Cuqui: But I wish for that!

Ivana: But maybe it's not good for you?

Ilya: Do you feel like you need to decide whether it's professional or amateurish, or is there a way, even if it's not in between, that you can dance between them?

Cuqui: Maybe it's better if I give an example. I have a piece that is called *The phenomenon of fictitious forces*. It's a piece where six thousand objects enter the stage. That's it. There's nothing else happening. The audience enters and sees those objects that fly for one hour. So the way I produced this piece – it was insane. I mean, insane! I wanted to observe how things fly. So the process was only about this, how things fly. And then I started to get more and more excited, and I started to buy things and make them fly. Then at some point I decided I need a lot of things, and this is going to be it. So it was hell. It was a real hell, a marvellous hell but really tiring. I had 1,500 euros for it. So I did the budget, how I could do it, because the economy was related to time. I knew that one second would cost me 30 cents. So I went to the Chinese market and found all the things there. It was very precarious. Every night I was going to the fabric shops, taking all these cardboard tools, and I would take it in the bus with me – something completely ridiculous.

Ivana: But that's not ridiculous. What's so ridiculous about it?

Cuqui: Because you really can't imagine the effort!

Ivana: You know, now I have a little bit

more stable organization, but when I work now with embroidery and stuff like that I go to –

Cuqui: But this was completely unsustainable, completely ridiculous. The energy. In the end, I didn't even get money. I put money in. So it was ridiculous. Then the piece – I think it's an amazing piece, but I couldn't tour it because it's so complex and I need such a big space. Everything was the complete opposite of what you think when something can be sustainable.

Anna: There's a beautiful contradiction in there – just to try to map out what's there that could help you.

Cuqui: Yeah, that's the thing. I posed this as an example of how one would not have the possibilities. It's a nightmare. I could have also decided "Okay, let's see how I am going to plan this. I'm going to do it next year." But I couldn't because I wanted to do it in an amateurish way. I had no plan... and then it was a disaster, nobody saw it. So I mean, maybe now I will do it because –

Eva: How will you go on with performing this piece?

Cuqui: It's quite a nightmare. I have to negotiate everything. But this is an example of how to deal with contradictions. The stable structure cannot produce these contradictions that bring you into places.

Ivana: I don't agree with you. You have a very wrong idea – I mean very different idea – of what stability is.

Cuqui: It isn't wrong. It's just that I want to put these contradictions on the table so we can talk about things. It's not about wrong or right. I also understand this, but then in reality, in the present – that's what I was saying in terms of the temporality of the present – there's something in the present that is not... I get very anxious when I know what I've planned for myself. Then I don't do anything, you know?

Ivana: I mean, I don't know exactly what you mean by "planning."

Cuqui: For example, as I'm trying to be more organized now, I see my agenda and I see all the meetings and other things, and it makes me anxious to try and feel and know what I'm going to do.

Ilya: So you need some kind of

instability to create the kind of friction that can really keep you going.

Cuqui: Maybe.

Ilya: I could argue with you if I would sense that it's ideological, just an ideological, political position. But it seems like you really get –

Kate: It's a gut reaction.

Ilya: It's a hard case, because it's about finding exactly how to become sufficiently stable, whatever you call stability. Being able to sustain this but still give yourself that friction.

Kate: I recognize what you're saying, and I think I have sometimes achieved it working with producers or organizers who know that their job is also to protect and support certain areas of chaos and who are skilled enough to do so. People who know that actually what they are doing is making space for a particular chaos. This is something I feel very viscerally. It's a clear agreement I have now, in such a situation, where all the organization and everything we're doing isn't because we like to be organized. It's because we're making space for supported chaos. Making sure there is enough time and there's enough freedom, and there's a pushing back of pressures, so the thing has space to fail. The thing can be messy as hell – it can just be chaos – and I can be in there, not knowing what I'm doing, feeling scared, and I think all those things join the creative process. So this possibility is very finely negotiated within my particular circumstances. At SPIN we have these artists' pots that we were talking about – pots of money for working. Each artist receives one, and then there's an extra one put aside called the "chaos" pot. And so there's a clear financial commitment to something that will be chaotic at the last minute and just come from the sky and be ridiculously unreasonable. It also represents a space for thinking and a space of possibility where we can suddenly go and say "fuck it, lets do chaos." It's also there in case of unforeseen problems. But this has to be something pretty clearly communicated with whoever it is that's more organized than you are. And the last thing in this round: something I really appreciated now is working with my current producer, and one of her backgrounds is in activism. She's interested in how to bend the institutional means that are out there in order to get things done.

Ilya: That's great.

Anna: I also want to say something, and it's been said already. What's super important is to basically define what you need. Because this is what you're basically doing now. Also what the practice needs. To me it sounds pretty clear that you maybe don't need this powerful organization, Cuqui, but you really need an assistant. So that's something you already said yesterday. Maybe you really need to plan a bit further for yourself in order to be a little more sustainable. You just need to locate those things, and then you can still do your amateur whatever that really helps you do your thing. I think it would be horrible to try and erase that to get professional.

Ivana: I think maybe these words "professional" and "amateur" are not so useful. Maybe you need to change the words that you work with. I think this word professional comes not from us, it comes from the outside. It's the jargon that's used. I really remember the first time I noticed this. It was in Holland, and they all wanted to "professionalize." For me it's not a very interesting word, in fact.

CAREER

Cuqui: Well, it's related to career. What is the profession, if you consider your practice a profession or not.

Ivana: I don't consider my work profession. I don't think that my practice is a career.

Cuqui: Yeah. That's the thing. That's why I feel a tension with "being the professional," which I am, because I live from that, albeit very chaotically. But I make my living from that, somehow. Which is a big thing to me, to be able to pay the rent from what I do. It's a big issue. And because most of the time I prefer contexts where they don't have money. That's the problem, because you don't make your living. So you're super selective and then it's like "Yeah, okay but don't be so selective because you don't have money to pay your rent." It's not so easy for me to say that it isn't about being professional or not.

Anna: I really thought that was so great, what came up yesterday. I think it was Kate who said there are so many curators who are simply not good at their job. It's another type of discussion, but it really takes away this power thing. It's more like they're

not professional. They're not doing their job properly.

Ilya: Can I ask you how you pay the rent when you can't make ends meet?

Cuqui: It really depends. I mean, there are periods when I have more work and I can earn more. But I'm constantly in debt.

Ilya: Do you take other jobs that aren't immediately related to your work?

Cuqui: No, no.

Ilya: Does anybody take jobs here, like little gigs that have absolutely nothing to do with your main practice?

Everybody: No.

Uta: I mean, if teaching is not considered a gig, then no.

Kate: When I was still a student, I just suddenly decided I'm not going to do any other jobs and I don't know how the fuck I'm gonna get through. I don't know how it's gonna work but I'm just not going to do any other jobs.

Ilya: I managed to incorporate the little gigs from outside. Right now, I'm doing a bunch of translations of scholarly papers from Spanish to English. And I'm not interested in some of it, but in general it's like "oh, okay." I'm taking it as a resource. I don't know if I'm going to use it any time soon or whatever, so I'm approaching it like it's part of a larger plan. I can't say I'm really choosing it, but I also cannot say that I'm not, but I am.

Cuqui: I try not to. I mean, I sometimes do things I don't want to do. I don't like workshops so much. It's not super fun, unless the context is really cool. And, for example, last year I was super, super, super broke. There was a moment I had this project I wanted to do – it was a kind of performative novel. And then in Berlin, because I like very much to clean – I am a very, very good cleaner – I found this app where you can be a cleaner. It's a really fast way to get money. It was very tiring to be a cleaning lady, but I enjoyed it. But this was the only exception, last year.

Ivana: And how easy is it? You have this app and then people just –

Cuqui: You use the application and you choose the cleaner.

Kate: In the cruising area.

Cuqui: It is like tinder. Then they send you a proposal and then you go. It was so fantastic, because one of the customers was a kind of architect or a gallerist, next to my place in Brunnenstrasse, and I was scared that maybe he'll be my friend or a colleague and he'll ask me "what the fuck are you doing here?" But luckily nobody came.

Eva: Do you remember what Susan Rethorst kept repeating? "Space for allowance isn't easy to come by; it doesn't just come to you. Don't take it for granted. It's a space that you need to make." These were the two quotes of hers that still resonate with me. This one and the other one is "make your situation your vehicle."

Ivana: And embracing this state of what you call chaos is, in any case, the primary precondition for making and creating.

Cuqui: Yeah, it's great. The key is that you both say that it's not contradictory to name a stable structure that can create space for care. It doesn't mean that what happens within it is not stable.

Eva: I can completely relate to that, with my idea of how I want to produce my work – completely wanting to refuse this. And it's so deep down. It's like, ugh, fuck that. I'm not joining.

Ivana: And you can have that structure. I've also had it so many times. I feel like it holds you, so you don't go crazy. You can go crazy very quickly in this world. Everything is so extreme.

Cuqui: Yeah. And tiring. Very tiring.

Ivana: Indeed. So you have to learn just a little how to protect yourself. It would be a pity for your work, which is very beautiful and fragile, not to be seen because of that. It's also part of your responsibility if you want to preserve your work.

Eva: I haven't been very well supported in recent years. I still have a network, I show my work. And it's not that I'm totally invisible. For instance, I haven't been showing my work in Belgium and France in recent years, and I'm wondering if it's maybe because I had less communication with curators there. If I had tried to talk to them myself, I may not have been successful, because in those countries curators don't usually communicate directly with artists.

Ivana: Sometimes it's really a question of networks.

Eva: But I used to show a lot in Belgium and France. I know people. I have that network.

Uta: Maybe it's due to different cultures, different values being more appreciated. For example, I noticed that language-based work with grammar and syntax is something the French love. Somehow it triggers a lot. Or maybe I'm just wondering about the natural sciences as a subject. Maybe some content resonates more in different national contexts?

Ivana: But sometimes you make a work, like *Death is certain*, and then everybody talks about it and it's easy to tour. Sometimes these producers are like sheep. They hang together. "What did you see?" And a lot of them produce the same work. You're always on the same train. Fifteen years ago – and I said this the other day – people showed my work because they thought it's interesting. And now there's always another agenda, something alongside it. All these thematic festivals about this and that.

#### ART MARKET

Eva: I agree, but I think that's not only because we grew older. This is one of the things I wanted to say. I think the field has changed. The curators curate differently, and a lot of festivals are set up in such a way that the curators actually feel like the artists and the artists just fill pockets.

Ivana: That's totally another thing I want to talk about. I think it's very dangerous. In France, for instance (and I've felt this in other places too, like Holland) the culture is starting to be dangerous for art. There are simply very strict or rigid ideas within the cultural context of what art should be, should produce, should do. How it should be inscribed. Sometimes it's atrocious. It's really fatal, because it's decided by people who come from business schools and who get to be on the inside, you know, deciding things. I prefer the constant pursuit of poetry, of something that isn't constructed according to this cultural jargon. I hate culture, really. I mean, it sounds stupid, but I see a big difference between art and culture. Like I told you before, Artaud talked about it. Basically he said that art creates new ideas and new points of view whereas culture is actually

cultivating them, monumentalizing them and then institutionalizing them. Therefore, I don't think I'm a cultural worker and I never want to be a cultural worker. I'm an artist. And for me that's very important. That's maybe the way to deal with this idea of "professional" and "amateur." For me, "culture" and "art" are more useful terms.

Kate: "Industry."

Ivana: I cannot stand that word! The "cultural industry."

Uta: We had this one topic about the void of content within institutions. Two recent cases in Holland popped up in my mind. A cultural minister was supporting radical budget cuts in the arts (that were disproportionate to other cuts, and they served some ideological agenda against subsidized artists). I read an interview about his cultural preferences. What he likes, what kind of art he's into. He listens to hard rock like Deep Purple. He likes very standard action movies. The interviewer was asking "What exactly is your competence as a cultural minister?" and he responded, "Well, I am competent to make these cuts exactly because I don't have any affinity or attachment. This is exactly why I can see it straight." And I remember a situation at the Rietveld Academy. It was the opening night of a big anniversary exhibition. The new mayor sent one of her cultural attachés, the one in charge of the culture portfolio for the city. She gave an upsetting speech about how there needed to be a bridge between industry and the arts. She listed a few success stories, for example how a dress made by a Rietveld student ended up in one of Rihanna's music videos. She highlighted the commercial hits, disregarding what the school is actually about.

Ivana: Imagine what a crazy thing it is to call something an industry in the postindustrial world. It goes to show how fast they're thinking. What is the way to resist? For example, you work with students, with young people. I think you can inform them and open them to the worlds, the places that extend to other spheres and confront them with other types of experience. Because there is a dominant way of seeing images of encounters, all those hierarchies that come through the media and the internet and so on. That's a given, and it isn't going to stop. And yet I think that people who enter an art academy have already chosen to go to these

very poorly lit, dark areas, between visible and invisible. They're already meandering.

#### ARTISTIC EDUCATION

Eva: I mentor students and I teach sometimes. I get approached by them occasionally – they're like 23, 25 – and they ask "So how do I do this with my career? Can you tell me the steps? So who do I need to contact? What do I need to do?" I really can't believe that. Of course we can talk about it, but sometimes there's such a level of entitlement and the vision that I'm going to succeed in this, earn money and have my space. It shocks me!

Cuqui: This is related to the idea of how someone becomes a professional artist.

Ivana: ...before even becoming an artist.

Uta: I know what you're talking about, and I recognize that these changes have been imposed because of the Bologna Process and then European restructuring. There's no structural support for Dutch students anymore. It is now a loan system. So my students today finish their four years with 30,000 euros debt. In our time, there was free education, and if you fucked one year up you could just redo it. And you could afford to travel the world beforehand, see what crosses your path, or start older. These kids, I don't know if we should blame them. Maybe we could question that system. This attitude is an effect. I mean, if somebody starts with the prospect of taking such a risky career choice, and on top of that has 30,000 euros debt hanging over their head, then maybe I ought to take their concerns seriously. I didn't have to endure that.

Kate: There should be discussion in the educational field about responsibility, because the fact is there's so much artwork out there and so many artists. Fine, admit it. It's true.

Cuqui: That's a big problem. That's not a *perspective* for us. That's true.

Kate: Yeah. And the education field offers way more training programs than before, pumping out qualified people to start work. What work?

Ivana: There's this promise.

Kate: There used to be an era of arts education which was mainly about





life development, and not necessarily an expectation that one becomes an artist.

Uta: Yeah, it's the mentality that you could be whatever you wanted to be.

Kate: And arts training is a wonderful resource for all kinds of lives and careers, for imagining how it could be different.

Anna: It's a site for not producing students for a market. So in that way it isn't a preparation. But we do prepare them to change their situation or somehow be aware of the market, how it works, how it doesn't work and that you have an agency to go out there, to organize and change. And I think this is somehow the only way in education today.

Uta: I came across some Facebook posts where students complained about not being prepared for the market. How their teachers are keeping them blissfully playing in the mud, insisting on the value of playing, while all of those teachers had their education for free. And it is true, none of the teachers had to deal with the neoliberal conditions as students.

Anna: There's also political pressure. In Sweden we have something called "employability": one is supposed to ascend to a certain level through artistic education. I mean, it's ridiculous. So we tried to resist. That's part of my job, to really resist those –

Uta: Oh funny. I once had a Swedish assistant, and she told me a couple of years later that this job was important to her, because it showed her that she was employable.

Ivana: Money is just one type of food that you get fed by. Money is not the only thing. It helps you survive, obviously to pay the rent, because the whole system is unfortunately based on money. But I think it's very important to recognize what other food you get from other sources.

#### POWER STRUCTURES

Eva: I want to talk about power structures, how we have benefited in different ways from the mercies of curators, which is fine, and we all continue to be. But at this point in my life, I feel tired of certain things and I'm starting to notice stuff that I hadn't before. By noticing it, I realize I do share responsibility in it, so I can respond to it. I can maybe change or at least acknowledge the situation

to vocalize it and not let it remain invisible because nobody talks about it. And it's already happening. This is nothing new. This is nothing that we're inventing here.

Kate: What would we expect from experienced artists if we were young people? What would we want from them? How would we want them to be? Giving some experience back, or inhabiting the field in a way that isn't bullshit.

Ilya: Eva and I met last year, ten months ago. We've developed a practice – which wasn't planned – of exchanging lots of stories, lots of conversations back and forth. And there was a moment when it became so clear that this is the knowledge we were sort of transmitting to each other. We recognized those stories, this knowledge and the sharing of it. It seems there were so many survival stories, both personal and professional. We started to really recognize how powerful it is to share these. It's like a form of skills, strategies for developing ways to keep going. Because one thing I really see intersecting among us hugely is the fact that we're still here. I don't know how many years you've been on the road? I was just counting. My first exhibition was 22 years ago. And I'm really surprised that I'm still standing, because I had some down days, really hard-core ones. Where did I get the energy? Where did I grab it from? For me, talking about the trajectory as a kind of mapping would really be an interesting thing. How have I managed? I still don't get it. And I'm sure you all have some crazy stories.

Eva: Maybe when you say you don't get it, it's about this thing we were discussing – how to identify the ways that were useful, helpful. How just hearing the idea and then maybe implementing it more could help you connect to other people, and so on. But I also think, and with regard to you especially, that you work a lot with how to communicate with big groups.

#### FEMINISM

Eva: I would be interested in what feminism is for you. I think feminism is a collective adventure, something really exciting that men and children and everybody is involved in. And it's not a reconciliation. It's a radical revolution, a fundamental change, not just a cleaning. It's already happening, but not enough, in my opinion. So we see lots of women

who say "yeah, but it's fine, I can do what I want." There's a real danger in this, not to see what's really going on.

Uta: It's very often a responsibility that's put on the individual woman or that women put on themselves.

Eva: And it's systemic. I talk about feminism to my son, more even than to my daughter. He's a feminist in his own understanding of feminism.

Tina Tarpgaard: You were talking about discrimination as a systemic problem as well. I think it's quite different in all kinds of ways. There was a debate around a work that was very much portraying the objective of a very white-dominated theater in an Asian family, and of course it was at the center of discussions in Germany. We are just now bringing this to Denmark. We're asking if this will ever be a question in Denmark. Feminism is considered almost condescending. If you're a feminist, people are like "oh my god, come on."

Ilya: You're a man hater.

Tina: Yes, exactly. I think it's different from country to country. Denmark is one place in the world among other places where they see the worst in the idea of feminism, which is radically shocking and very different from Sweden. It's the exact opposite of Sweden. It's interesting how the system in Denmark is clearly oblivious and doesn't want to say things. You can fix it, you can fight for it or you can do it. Basically, if you don't like the smell of the bakery, you don't need to be there.

Anna: That's super interesting to me, since we're Denmark's neighbors. But it's also interesting that although no one wants to call themselves feminist in Denmark, when it comes to women's rights, it's one of the best countries in the world. It's obviously happening not in the rhetoric but in real life.

Tina: It has roots. In Denmark, politically, the feminist movement in the 60s was mostly allied with the communist party, and I believe that in Sweden they were allied more with social democrats. So in Sweden, people's ownership of it was broader. In Denmark, it was sort of relegated to the far left, more marginalized in the political landscape. That difference in mindset meant systemic changes in Sweden to try and deal with the division between men and women in society. In Denmark it was refused,

and the result is very clear. Compared to Sweden, Denmark has very little representation of women in top positions. It's a very clear difference. It's not so interesting to deal with the specificities of different countries, but I guess they blend very much together with the histories of where we've been working and how we've been coping, seeing as we're part of a system that affects us.

Ivana: On the one hand, feminism is an extremely trendy word. People wear it like a badge. And of course there's a great need to talk about it and to see what it is, how it could change society, change our ways of being together. Maybe we could choose words that aren't hugely loaded concepts. I think we have intimate relations with some of the words we use in our practice.

Cuqui: Maybe a big, big concept can be like a frame in which we could do an exercise of appropriating it and finding some kind of subjectivity within it. Otherwise it's too big to be attached to.

Uta: I also think this big word is just a word. It's like a roadblock. You can't see the lines on the sides of the road. It obstructs thought because it's so very charged.

Ivana: Or we're coming back to this topic of the jargon that exists, that's already known in the sociopolitical context. What's important in artistic practice is the redefinition of language or of the way it's perceived. There are lots of people who consider artistic work political, but it's used as a mannerism of the political. It uses the language you hear in the media. For me, the political in the arts actually comes down to this: the more poetic you are the more political you are. Because you're finding those new languages or ways of working and being together.

Ilya: Such a loaded word for all of us. I think that culturally we come from radically different places, not even radically, but it's not hard for me to call myself a feminist. And I am really interested in why this word is so loaded in so many places and whether that's working for us or not. Is it working to support doing work, feminist work, whatever that might mean to each of us? Can we explore the word without this "Oh, feminism, why is it so loaded?" And again, I think for me, coming from Mexico and having been educated in the United States, it's as easy as winning

equal rights for women – yes, then you're a feminist. Of course there are different ways and points of intersection, and as for me, I'm even more conscious of how they intersect with other big issues.

Ivana: Maybe the question is whether you really want to call yourself anything. To me, saying "I'm this, I'm that" –

Kate: Identity politics. Which are you? Are you what you do?

Ivana: Yes, because the question that Ilya asked was why people cannot just call themselves feminists. It's hard for me to call myself anything. For example, when they ask this eternal question – "are you a choreographer?" I think all of this is very fluctuant, and in the end you have to choose and call yourself something, especially in the context where your identity is being asked for, your artistic identity, for instance, or whatever. This is part of the difficulty of labeling yourself.

Cuqui: I would like to go to the middle of this. I think I'm going to link several things that we've already talked about. First, in relation to what you said: What are the narratives? How to talk about things? Or, to be specific, how do we talk here about our positions or how we work in relation to what you said about poetics and the political? And where do you place yourself there, also in relation to terminology? One example for me, one of my biggest issues and concerns, is that I feel very impotent toward power structures and toward "career," which is totally different from what I do, what I really do. Terminology and how we talk about things in relation to what we do is very difficult for me sometimes because I'm not a theoretical researcher. I produce thinking with what I do, but I need to do to be able to produce thinking. This is my potential, but also my limitation. And I think it's important to understand how the limitations become potential, in terms of how we talk about things. And what are our different approaches to talking about things? Because I can talk about things from the perspective of what I do and what my limitations are. For me, it's different if you produce thinking as an artist – I am not working "about," I am working "in." That's an important distinction in what you're talking about. I find it very dangerous when our practice is somehow contaminated by terms that have this distance from how we

observe concepts or appropriate these concepts. And maybe that would entail the process of producing poetics, which I consider absolutely political.

Ivana: Me too.

Cuqui: And also there are two different directions in artistic work, within the political. I think this is clear for me: there are artists that are clearly working in relation to the real and other artists that are producing another real. And maybe this is something we can talk about: What is politics for you? Is it about the relation actually happening in society, or do you take another path? I'm an artist that definitely wants to produce our realities. Well, I don't know if I clarified that. Terminology is such a big thing for me that it's sometimes so dangerous how, especially in terms of power structures, we capitalize terms. And within these moments when we use terms, they effectively don't mean anything anymore because we're not able to redefine them or invent others that could be more specific or even nonspecific. If you're appropriating a concept, it means something different than if you don't.

Ilya: I feel like it's sort of a given, all these concepts. To call myself a feminist is not a big deal. But then I'm also realizing that if it is such a loaded word, then it is a big deal. Again, what does it do to call yourself a feminist, for example, rather than any other thing? I'm deeply interested in the particular experiences surrounding the difference between doing work about politics and working politically. I think this is also a quote from some male dude, and I'm totally interested in making a work about that, with it, around it, or in it. Or in the mode of working politically. Maybe in contrast to it. Not so much in opposition to it. This is something I would love to discuss here, but I'm kind of over prescribing conversations with terminology. It's not helpful at all, and it produces an unhelpful reaction. We're reacting against political correctness, which I see as society going in a direction where feminism becomes a bad word. How did that happen? In Mexico people are also using the word "feminazi" without giving it any thought. That's just horrible. Absolutely horrible. I also understand this as a sort of swing from extreme to extreme. Still, I think this terminological conversation is just general. Like, it's kind of bogging us down.

Ivana: ...even in relation to how we started this conversation by questioning the word "career." Let's think about these power structures and how artistic practice influences them rather than continually using the word and writing it in our applications. I think we should propose other words that correspond to those structures, words that have more to do with our experience.

Cuqui: This is a matter of changing, but also of how to listen, how to attend, how to observe, which is an operation that is never complete. That's what's problematic to me, this shifting of our main meanings to a different way, after which it somehow starts to sit there and eventually not mean anything anymore.

Can we have strategies other than renaming, strategies to develop different attention? How do we talk? These would be my questions.

Tina: But it's also attached to what Eva was saying at some point – this isn't a reconciliation. I think the problem is this political correctness which the feminist becomes, this thing no one can relate to anymore. But the truth is that feminism hasn't been implemented. It isn't enough as it is, and it's not a fundamental structure.

Cuqui: Because discourse goes faster than action.

Tina: So in some ways, the thing you were mentioning is about really deep work. For me, however, it doesn't really eliminate the fact that I also see a responsibility for mid-career artists to unite and have some sense of whether we share these things, a sense of what we experience. There are structures around you that are repeating themselves, and you're repeating them because you've been doing them for a while. Of course, I agree, it makes me feel like I have a responsibility to make changes. I wouldn't manage to do it single-handedly. I think it's about not discussing the whole idea of feminism but rather the problematic of why this word is becoming a bad thing. So maybe exactly the poetics of the words inside the practices is a part of digging into other strategies for making a difference. I guess this is the particular urgency I feel. It should be different for the next generations. And that's probably where the sense of feminism is. Feminism is important to me – not to say it, not to proclaim it, but to change through it.

Uta: Maybe it is true that we're all kind of makers who are more "in" the work, "in" the object, "in" the matter, instead of relating to current problems. I do have colleague artists who are very much related to existing archives, existing situations, relating to the problem, and that's a different mentality for making work. Both approaches are very important. I'm just now thinking about these word-suggestions. I remember that a friend of mine, a doctor, learned that if you need to give bad news, don't say the word "cancer" before you explain everything. Because this is a stop-word that makes people stop thinking. I feel like it might be the same situation with such charged words in our contexts. Maybe it's more about mapping our possible trajectories. It seems if you make it all too wishy-washy, then the words might have less push and less power.

Ilya: When does it help to label things and claim a word, and when not? So, what about strategies? When is it helpful to change strategies, to stay with one strategy, like labelling. I also normally don't want to label, because it kind of boxes things too much. But there is a moment when – again, sorry for the word "feminism" – I believe it's important to call myself a feminist. How do we reclaim these things? Maybe later we can let go.

#### FAILURES

Tina: We also don't often talk about failures. It's good to put the focus on that. There's always a focus on what worked out.

Cuqui: I talk a lot about my failures.

Eva: I think the failures can be very good teachers. Something is turning in my life. I had a huge crisis which turned things totally upside down, and some things came to be incredibly important. I would like this experience to become something meaningful. The crisis took over my entire life. I couldn't function, couldn't do anything for a half a year, more or less. It was like a balloon expanded throughout my entire being, leaving no space to take care of anything, even my kids. It was terrible. Now it seems after a bit of time that this didn't reduce my scope of experience. Instead, my life keeps expanding, and suddenly I'm moving out toward possibilities and areas I would never have arrived at. I would never have come here without having had this crisis. I can make this meaningful, and I can understand certain things

from a certain perspective and grow within them, and within all levels: in my private life, with family, friends and colleagues.

Ivana: There's this idea of sensing life. It's like the weather: for weather to function, you need a storm. Otherwise it doesn't work.

Kate: I've been through all these leaps, like we all have, and at the moment I'm not in crisis. I am, however, really conscious of how I'm going to create a change now, without having had a crisis. The crisis will come anyway. Parents will die... all those things will happen. So how can I make sure that I'm mobile in the interim? I'm also super aware that the crisis pushes me to very interesting things, and I find it a little frustrating when I have to wait for that. So how can you make yourself available to be in a state where you can say "I'm quite okay at the moment," and how can you stop this from being a stationary thing? I'm thinking about the storm – how to have a strong wind without having a storm.

#### MOVEMENT

Ivana: I also have had periods related to some external things, times when everything changed. For me, it was the terrorist attacks that happened in Paris. I know it sounds completely crazy, but it happened very close to our house and it changed the whole way I think about everything. It's also interesting because I lived in a war, but I've never talked about that. Everything was swept under the carpet. And then everything came back: lots of anxiety, real panic about how to go on. It happened very close by. In school we had psychological help. Lots of kids saw the shooting. It was coming out of all the pores of everyday life. That was the moment when I started to think about why it happened. I was really deep into the idea of the failure to integrate. Those guys, they grew up in France, but they were immigrants, and how does our society accommodate them? It was really tough. But then I adopted a completely different way of working or relating to what is important. And I have no idea if people can see it in the work, but it doesn't matter. I'm learning a lot from plants. This idea of rooting became a very important idea, because plants take root in order to resist. The idea of how to stay rather than where to go next is becoming almost the most important question. How not to move? How can I just be where I am

and be able to thrive so that things come to me? This question relates in a very interesting way to the question of the parcours, or trajectory. We've probably experienced it, because most of us have been travelling a lot and live in different countries. I think movement can be an interesting paradigm. Being a choreographer, I think a lot about movement.

Kate: Being a choreographer is itself a form of movement.

Ivana: Yes, exactly. And plants can move. Strawberries, for example, can move. If you don't cut their extensions, they will colonize. It's very interesting to learn from plants, I think.

#### PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

Ivana: And I started to meditate.

Eva: When did you do that?

Ivana: After the attacks, I don't know. Almost all of my girlfriends who've turned 40 have gotten into meditation. You could call it a midlife crisis. Maybe it's as simple as that. Although I think it comes from becoming very sensitive to what's happening to the world. Looking at the amount of changes, I think we live in tumultuous times. And it affects us not only individually but also collectively.

Ilya: I want to pick up on two things. What Kate was saying about crisis, being propelled by crisis, that you've even considered fabricating your crisis in order to keep going. Right now, I'm going through a series of crises which are paralysing me. The crisis has changed a lot. Yet specifically in terms of my work, I don't know exactly how I'm relating to it anymore, because I'm really doubting all this urgent shit that's really taking over. Should I go there? Should I go autobiographical? It's so heavy and I am really resisting it. So partly, I'm not really doing much work, my work. I am doing some writing about roots, but I'm making it about staying, about how to connect. Because roots also connect, like a fungus, which is one of my main areas of interest.

Ivana: The idea of roots contains movement.

Ilya: Absolutely. It's really interesting to find the operational metaphor that one needs at the moment. So how do you guys manage to keep moving, to

keep on going? Because I'm afraid. Of course I'm going to keep doing my work, but it has slowed down.

Ivana: Slowing down is an important strategy. Slowing down makes time. It's very important. It's important personally. And there's history – where do we come from and where do we go? We're on this really fast train that's headed directly for the wall. The faster we ride that train, the sooner we'll get to that place. If we stop the train and start walking next to it, we'll give ourselves a bit more time.

Ilya: My work was doing that, you know. Lots of the work I've been doing is actually about slowing down, making slow research, really taking time. And it's still confronted with this shit that came my way. I'm doing work around walking and slowing down. Right now I'm busy with trauma, and I'm not sure if I want to go there. I don't want to work about trauma. I think it's too personal. It is urgent in my life, but I don't know how to go about it with my work. I would love to hear some stories about these moments, if you work autobiographically. My work is really personal but it's not necessarily autobiographical. I'm super afraid of going there.

Cuqui: These are the questions: How do you perceive this separation? Because I think there are people who feel it more and people who feel it less. And then what does it mean, this separation between me and the world? This is what Eva said. What is this private? Of course this is a big question in the history of art. What is the relation between life and art? How do you see this relation? This is so fascinating to me, maybe not in terms of events in one's life but in terms of how difficult it is for me to separate things. It's very difficult for me to conceive of my practice as a career. That's why my career is a disaster. That's why I'm completely inefficient in my career. I'm totally broke. I cannot climb the career ladder. And since I do not think in terms of career, my logic is different. This also makes me quite happy! It's not that it's something I'm proud of, but it makes me very happy not to be able to make this separation. I am planning, I am organizing, but not about my career. What about finding the conditions to be able to do what I do and not in a frustrating way? Maybe that would be the question to posit here.

#### SYSTEMS AND EMPOWERMENT

Tina: Since you're relating to this idea of career and what that means, I'm wondering if that goes against these power structures in a way. Thinking about a career makes you consider how to succeed, how to establish yourself. But then how you establish yourself and how you succeed has to do with how thinking and doing are appreciated as being connected. And that sort of thinking and doing takes power, right? So the way you hold the idea of a sort of knowledge empowers you to exist inside the structures that surround us.

Cuqui: For me there is still a question of temporality. Let's say, when we do art, what kind of temporality do we produce and how? I feel that the potential lies precisely in being a dissident in the face of the temporality of the power structures that determine the conditions. That's precisely the problem and that's the struggle. If I try to observe what I do as producing other kinds of temporalities, then we have the possibility to perceive the time in our lives in a different way. However, this is not the logic of temporality in terms of career. It's completely different. Wasting time is very important to me. Not being efficient, which completely contradicts the market, because what kind of economy can support that? When Eva proposed this meeting, I was thinking about this "in" and "out." How can I be in if what I propose in my work is to be out? It's a struggle for me.

Ivana: I think the idea is to be in between.

Cuqui: I'm not sure what that between means. That would be a big question for me, also in relation to the idea of life and work. Because this changes over the course of your life. You can learn a lot from the position of being in. And it's great to have visibility, otherwise what the fuck are you doing?

Ivana: What do you mean by "being in"?

Cuqui: Not being isolated in my world without being able to work. To show what I do. Not being in such a precarious situation.

Ivana: Because earlier you referred to "being in the work."

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something lofty that's I really peering down onto me look-  
up to  
create bring the conditions  
use it as an argument argue with it  
make that space for ourselves yourself  
you can choose as a group how long do you want to be  
silenced silent  
(This poem is composed of edits performed in the text  
"Space for Allowance," p. 16)



Cuqui: No, I mean being in the system, in relation to the market, projects, economy, all the career tools.

Uta: I have one more question about being in your own process. I have the same struggle. I am into my work and I cannot be bothered to put a single photo on Instagram. These days, I really have the need to share differently, rather than “look at me, going there, so excited”. I can’t do it. I feel more comfortable in the world of the introvert, and I wonder how you deal with it? I wish I were two people. Or maybe I should hire an Instagram person.

Cuqui: I don’t see much value in following the rules. You can take that direction, and I’d love to be able to. My life would be a bit better. I’d rather ask how we can put that up for discussion, how we can transform our awareness of it. The temporalities we produce are different. We’re almost emptying time rather than making it fuller. Maybe what I’m saying is too abstract.

Uta: But is it something you can put into the creation of a work? I mean, let’s say I put a photo on a wall, I need to intrigue people so they’ll come look at it. You guys at least have an audience that sits in their chairs and is going to sit it out.

Ivana: But we’re responsible for the dramaturgy of time. We’re responsible for an hour. There is a kind of different relation.

Uta: Yes, but if you would like to produce an experience consisting of different perceptions of time, you have perfect conditions for that. Because your audience is going to stay put even if things get tough.

Cuqui: But maybe I’m also referring to time in the sense of research. How the hell should I know now what I’m going to do next year? How? It’s impossible. I can only fake it.

Kate: Or you’re cunning like a fox, finding ways to make the space – you spread some words around. That’s so much work, though.

Cuqui: But that’s completely ridiculous! It’s such a waste of energy, you wouldn’t believe.

Ivana: Or it’s a kind of storytelling.

Kate: I have to agree with Ivana. I think this points to a kind of responsibility of interacting with the powers in the

field, to show them what we do and how we do it, how I do it. Part of that is exactly how one writes their grant applications. It’s important to me to stay with what’s going on, to find out exactly what it is and then find a way to continue. And then I find a way to make it comfortable enough for them so they’ll trust me and we can proceed. I see it more as a tactic, a kind of tiny little way to adjust this cruise throughout the system. Maybe I’m kidding myself. I do, however, think there are opportunities to engage with the system. At the moment, I need to try and make something happen. But I totally understand the frustration.

Tina: Can I circle back to something? How do we deal with the system and make that space for ourselves while feeling the clash between us and the system? How can we empower that temporality, that knowledge located within being an artist and producing and doing? And how can that be what shapes the structure and not vice versa? Because at the moment, it’s exactly the opposite. I’m not saying we can change it overnight, but I do think it’s very interesting to discuss how the system can be changed, how the institutions can be shaped differently in the future.

Ivana: A little bit of permaculture.

Ana: I find myself in a very different situation which I would like to share with you. I have chosen to be in. Like, totally in. And to operate from within an institution or a system. And I’ve done this a few times during my career. Although I’ve also chosen at times to drop out totally. There’s so much responsibility and exhaustion to being in.

Ivana: Can you tell us what you do?

Ana: I’m working right now as a director for a dance department at the Stockholm University DOCH. It’s a very interesting “within” position.

Cuqui: My question is why we don’t work together more. Why is there this separation? There’s something very disturbing and stressful there, even aggressive.

Kate: Which separation do you speak of now?

Cuqui: How to relate to the institutions, to people that have the possibility to give me the conditions to work. There’s not a real conversation. I have the feeling I’m faking it eighty

percent of the time. Of course there’s twenty percent that’s wonderful. But in general, I have the feeling that thinking together should be a dimension of work that sparks more fascination. Thinking together should be beautiful, but it’s not. In most cases, it’s uncomfortable. I’m trying to be very honest. In most cases it’s so uncomfortable and that’s why I end up not wanting it. Why do I have to go through this discomfort and precarity?

Kate: Why do I have to precaricize myself?

Ivana: Beautiful word!

Eva: The institutions where I find the most joy in teaching are ones where I have more conversations with the people who create the program and with the students, places where something is flowing and permeable. I get really stiff, however, when I’m asked to work in German city theaters with structures where the technicians are all divided into sections and one can’t perform the other’s task. And then I’m the one who’s supposed to acknowledge the system and the hierarchy as things that function well and deserve respect.

Kate: Like a natural organization or something.

Eva: Yes! And when I don’t do it, I’m considered disrespectful. And I’m not a disrespectful person. It simply doesn’t work for me, or it even works against what I need. And if I start to tackle this, I’m called unprofessional. I’m trying to stay away from these structures as much as I can because I don’t even want to get involved. I’m not interested. I don’t even want to change that system. It’s fine if it works for itself. I just don’t want to work in it. But that is a question: am I giving myself less options?

Cuqui: I really didn’t want to confront this. For me, the question is about temporality. It’s very problematic and frustrating. How do you plan temporality? Maybe this is my own limitation, but I cannot plan the temporality of what I do – and I need to.

Uta: Writing applications and dealing with institutions requires us to structure our research and process in a certain way. It’s about having to make it quite concrete all the time. So this would be something to question. Maybe we should propose and discuss a more flexible form, a

more modular form, something more open that works in dialogue instead of having three weeks here, three weeks there.

Ivana: I have something. I think what you were saying, Cuqui, is something structural that has happened in your life. I think when you have – when we have – a problem, it’s very important to share the problem and let it become a kind of collective interest. Therefore, I think when you notice this, maybe it would be good to translate it into a very honest proposal. If you use it as an argument, like you do (because it’s very interesting and rich, philosophically speaking) then you can actually influence those structures and also eventually find better – or at least not so painful or frustrating – conditions for yourself. Of course you’re right about the conversation with certain structures being unpleasant much of the time. I don’t want that either. But it’s also important that if somebody behaves badly when I’m in conversation with them, I mean badly in the sense of disrespectfully or just taking the power position, I tell them. That could mean I’m not going to work with that person. For example, I have a really hard time going to see state officials, politicians, but even people from the government, from the French Ministry of Culture. It’s a big structure, and every now and then you have to go talk to them. I can’t stand it, and I become very rude. I found it really silly. And they’re just doing what they’re being told to do. And for me it’s dumb. But then I have somebody, the person I work with, who can speak very well. Of course you have to have the possibility to pay them. That means already giving a part of your particular time to temporality, to somebody. You have to share it with somebody who’s perhaps much closer, who isn’t immediately an institution. This is sometimes a very difficult thing for me, but in fact it’s really good. If we’re talking about sustainability, I think it’s a long process to learn how to share this work. When you’re on your own, you have to decide things, but you also control things. I think if you let go of that control, give it to somebody else and just say “okay, I trust” – this isn’t bad. It’s the first threshold.

Kate: It’s interesting too because you were saying you have the possibility to pay somebody, which is not to be taken for granted. Personally, I have to scrape together enough money to

give it to somebody else in order to delegate. And I suddenly started to realize, no, actually part of their job is also to pay themselves, to get the money themselves. It's a collective effort. I'm fully in favor of delegation as well, because I just don't have certain skill sets. It's stupid for me to pretend I do.

Eva: I would love to talk more about that. What does that mean, this delegated job? How can this be meaningful? What is it fulfilling? How is it to work with you as a producer?

Kate: Someone who works with many of the things I can't do. And does it way better than I could imagine doing it.

Eva: And I'm once again about to change producers, so I have a very personal interest in establishing new relationships or approaching new people.

Ivana: I never worked with just one. I always work with two.

Cuqui: This isn't a solution for me. It's maybe more about how other conditions are conceived. In this case, it's like "okay, we have to do something to create the conditions," which in this case is money for structures or whatever. For me this is luxurious, this thing that you have in Brussels.

Ilya: Let's talk about money.

Ivana: But it's not only money. I think it's about the relations and also how artistic practices are being accepted into the overall system of subsidization. I think there's also this capitalistic thing to it: "I give you this, and for this you have to give me that."

Cuqui: That's the problem.

Ivana: But I think there are ways in between. Ways you can actually do what you want to do. On the one hand, it's always public money, so of course there's the responsibility that you contribute to this, this and this. But on the other hand, there are a lot of different layers on which this happens.

Tina: But you said it was part of the discussion about the system in Brussels? I would be curious. Because I also perceived the system there as aggressive, as something lofty that's really peering down onto me.

Kate: Belgium is deeply institutional and sometimes very interesting creatively, in a good way, but it doesn't mean that for artists it can be quite that good – it's fun if one learns how to swim in those waters. So one has to be tamed or speak the language, let's say. But I also think that for art-workers, it's actually not necessarily a great place to be, unless you're ready to work in an institution. But I know many producers, project-based freelance producers who'd die in an institution. I mean, they will never work in an institution for more than a short period. And then there's no place left for them afterwards. The logic is very much about having an institutional job. That's the soup you're swimming in.

Ilya: Following this thing about funding and money, I was at TanzKongress last weekend and there was a panel about money. There was somebody who brought in one issue, because they were talking about funding structures and how to get money for projects, and then somebody said "Can we talk about poverty?" "Because," he says, "I'm looking around at the people here. I can calculate that one third of the people here are going to spend the last fifteen years of their lives maybe collecting bottles." Because there's no pension, there's no money going into social services. The people who work jobs that aren't freelance are putting money aside for retirement. But as artists, we don't have this. We don't have these funds, so we're not gonna have a retirement. So there's a precarious key that goes beyond this present moment into the future. I feel quite lucky. I feel quite privileged, but I see that it's an issue not only of how we're surviving in the moment but also of being mid-career artists looking into the future. What are we doing towards that? And this also leads into a more political point. Take, for instance, the fight of the Freie Szene (independent scene), specifically in Berlin. Talking about living wages and thinking about artists as cultural workers. And what does it take for us to actually regard ourselves as cultural workers in this fight to have a pension, a chance for a pension. There are various other things: not only funding but also money in general, sustainability, financial sustainability and also thinking about situations in different countries, how artistic work is valued and adequately or inadequately paid.

Ivana: Instead of talking about money, I think we should talk about

conditions, because money's part of it. Conditions are something that comes from us. We've all been in this line of work for 20 years or so. That means we've been able to create more or less those conditions for ourselves, and they've changed over the course of our trajectory and have sometimes been better. I would propose not going into institutional critique again but rather finding other words and other ways to talk about the conditions in which we can be artists.

Eva: Personally, I also saw that sometimes I just didn't notice things about these power structures. So there comes the time when you suddenly start to notice. Why and what made you notice? And how does that affect your thinking? Because I also sometimes feel super embarrassed that it occurred to me so late in my life. I was often a very shy woman, not taking the reins in conversations. I find it difficult to articulate important things, like how to find my way of dealing with it or find a different way of articulating, of doing, of taking space, of putting attention into something else.

Ivana: One of the reasons why there are not so many women in power structures is also because if we doubt that we're interested in doing something, we'll say no. I think it's interesting to create different ways of relating. I remember when in Iceland the whole country went bankrupt and there was this really huge crisis. What happened is there was this parliament made entirely or almost entirely of women. There was a woman as prime minister and lots of women she appointed to her government, and they basically started governing the country as if it were a family. Meaning no spending money that's not there, not trying to make profit in every case but rather trying to make it when it's feasible. I think it's very interesting as a shift. It's much easier to have these kinds of propositions in countries or communities that are smaller, when there's a lot less history of the kind of power you encounter, for example, in Germany or France. Now in New Zealand this new prime minister is just suggesting to create a budget based on the idea of wellbeing and not on the idea of GDP. I think it's a very interesting shift in the way power over, let's say, the destiny of the people that live in the country is being laid out, and it comes from women.

Ana: If you are in power for power's sake then I think you're totally wrong. It's about responsibility and self-criticism, and wanting to change something.

Cuqui: Being a facilitator.

Tina: There's another example: women after World War I. The whole society was almost entirely women, and they had to govern.

Ivana: I'm not interested in telling people how they should think. That has to do with this idea of exercising power through telling people your position. I propose questions. I guess I propose frames to look into, frames in which we can potentially develop reflections together.

Anna: How much power do we have as artists? We need to acknowledge that.

Ivana: There's an artist, Lotte van den Berg, who does this experience in silence. I was a bit reluctant to do it. She proposed it in the context of an apap (advancing performing arts project) meeting. It's actually quite interesting, because you can choose as a group how long you want to be silent together. Basically there are no rules imposed from the outside. You just stay in a room. She proposes that you sit either on the floor or in a chair. You're in a circle, but you can also decide to sit in another formation. You decide everything together, and then you stay silent. It's quite funny because you start to see people very differently.

The following text is a conversation conducted via voice messaging. The game is simple: for the duration of one hour, one person records questions while the other person listens and records answers. After an hour, the roles are reversed.

First round: May 25, 2021

Cuqui Jerez: My first question is the following: where are you now in terms of work, thoughts, life?

Eva Meyer-Keller: There has been a lot of change. At the same time, my life feels more grounded than it was before and therefore I'm more open to uncertainty. I can let myself go into different perspectives and see the complexities in life and within people, cultures – the big picture – how everything is interwoven. I would love these complexities to unfold in my work and so I'm trying to give more space to this, which feels a bit uncomfortable. I'm trying to hold back parts of my own expertise in order to grow or expand. I feel like a total beginner again. I'm focusing on strengthening the weak muscles right now.

Cuqui: When you say "now," how long is that now? How do you feel change? With what kind of temporality? How do you experience this idea of now? How often can you say that "now" to my crisis and depression. It really is changing?

Eva: Everything has a life span. A human life spans maybe eighty years. A project, maybe six months or a year. And then there are some things that are continuous, like practices. They don't really have a beginning or an end. One of the spans of time is the sensation of the moment that can be totally overwhelming, which happened to me about three years ago. In that time, I had these waves where I had no control whatsoever, but with time I managed to practice responding to them differently than I did before. It's about the ability to weave the moments together – the uncomfortable ones and the ones that feel good. Not to exclude the pain. It's about the whole spectrum of feelings, moving back and forth, and to continue moving, not to get stuck.

Cuqui: Can you talk about the idea of shift, and can you tell me what you think would be your shift at this moment?

Eva: The most relevant thing in my work so far, my driving force, has been making the ungraspable graspable. For instance, in *Death is Certain*, it's the violence of murder. I make it graspable with everyday objects by reenacting the violence with them, since everyday objects are so close to us. I'm in the middle

of a shift away from that motivation and toward leaving the ungraspable ungraspable, not to get a grip on it. This is an impossible task. I'm trying to approach this by leaving a gap between how our perception and the nervous system works. With our sensory organs, we get impressions through our eyes and ears, but they don't function as a window to the world. Perception works in a strong combination with the brain. Our brain projects onto what is sensed. So without experience, we cannot perceive. Metaphors work in a similar way. With metaphors, we use things we know. We explain something we don't know with something we know.

Cuqui: Can you explain how you use metaphors? Can you give me one or two examples? This is linked with another question: How do you see poetics? What would your poetics be?

Eva: Metaphors provide an illusion of knowledge. We therefore need to handle metaphors with care. For example, you have three arrows, they point in different directions. You can take each one, bend it and break it. If you put all the arrows in a bundle and you try to bend the bundle, they don't break, or it's much harder to break them. That's a metaphor for working together or putting different elements together. These metaphors provoke images in a way that's similar to poetry. This is done with language. I'm interested in looking at language as material, how we produce images, concepts, ideas and how they can be layered, overlaid, how they can irritate and provoke certain associations.

Cuqui: Do you ever get tired of working with objects? If yes, do you see a solution to that?

Eva: I think working with objects is fantastic, but it goes through phases. Sometimes I find myself repeating the way I was doing before. Just now, I did take a break. I put myself in a situation not to touch them and play with them but rather to play with other ideas (my weak muscles). I still need a bit of time without objects, although I think by the end of the summer I'll be reattending with a kind of fresh mind.

— switch roles —

Eva: Where are you now? How are you now?

Cuqui: I think both questions are related. The relation of life and work is becoming closer and closer. Maybe it's age, maybe it's an idea of not stating something with your work but listening to yourself and seeing how you can grow in your life through your work.

Over the last year I've felt much more stable, quite calm, due to my crisis and depression. It really feels like "after the storm" time. In terms of work, I have a similar feeling. I'm more quiet, but sometimes I get a bit scared that I'm too stable. Last year I did *Las Ultra Cosas*, which was an amazing research project that saved me from my crisis. I was able to canalize all my emotional problems through work and this made my life amazingly better – through work and through the love that I found in the work, the love for the work itself, for all the things that I was learning and also for the people that were working with me. Now I'm starting to have the feeling that I was trying to stretch that. In terms of process, I've continued to work with the same people and in a kind of continuation of that process, but there's something inside me that is not completely following that wave. Because emotionally I'm much more quiet, more *tranquilla* and flat. So now I'm dealing with this, and I'm a little bit lost. I don't want to push it in the same way that I did before. It was really emotional. I'm a little bit lost with desire right now at work.

Eva: Could you find any interest in this neutral, boring feeling? Could this potentially be something to work with?

Cuqui: Yes. That is exactly the struggle I'm in. I think that this feeling can definitely come from one's mind, in my experience, before one manages to do it consciously. Sometimes this force that drives you appears and suddenly it doesn't, but there are many things you are interested in. Working, thinking, talking. This *emotion comes from learning, and learning comes from the emotion. If there is no emotion, there is no possibility to learn*, and sometimes the emotion comes from the thing you learn.

It's not that I feel frustrated. Maybe it's about changing paradigms. How do we approach things? What are the right questions? What is the right question that makes the thing move? I think it's also about movement – research, learning, creation – it's about moving, transporting yourself from one place to another. And when you feel like there

is no movement, then you feel like you don't get moved emotionally. To be moved is about going from one place to another. *The movement should come from changing the questions.*

Eva: How can you cultivate specificity? And then how can this specificity be related to the bigger questions?

Cuqui: When I talk about specificity, I'm talking about intuition, a feeling that there is something there in a decision that I want to try, an aesthetic choice that allows me to develop certain questions, bigger questions. Specificity means thinking as a specific human being. Through your subjectivity and through your singularity – not you as an identity but your vision. That's what I love when I see other artists' work, that they brought me to a way of looking at the world that I would have not thought about. Sometimes you can have super interesting questions, but if they don't go through this subjectivity or you don't find this specific aesthetic choice, it's very difficult to develop them. *The questions don't work by themselves.* You have to translate them into a specific experience. And sometimes you have the questions more in a theoretical, philosophical or even emotional way but you need to translate them into a specific artistic practice. Paradoxically, the specificity is the most random dimension. Which is funny or interesting.

Eva: Do you see a relation between how we observe the world and how we produce attention, perception or vision in artistic work?

Cuqui: I'm not sure if I really understand the question, but I will think out loud. Maybe this gift that an artist puts out works for everybody to see. This is a gift for me, when I relate to an artwork that gives me this space. Then I have the feeling that I have a new possibility to think about the world. That's why I do art. That's probably why you do it. It's to change the world. To change the world in the realm or in the territory of the possible or in the territory of imagination. It's not like going to the supermarket. You can have aesthetic experiences in the supermarket, and a lot of artists do. But I have the feeling that there is a kind of attention, maybe artistic attention, that can be trained or developed. *The way we attend to the world can give us new possibilities of*

*the world itself*, even if it's completely absurd, non-productive. It can open this space of the non-useful. In capitalism everything needs to be useful. You can politically confront someone, but you can also politically open spaces or be a dissident in the kind of attention that is imposed. Related to this, there is something about exploring the limits of language. Maybe this way of seeing the world is about seducing that limit, or going closer to that limit.

Second round: May 28, 2021

Eva: How do you deal with the unexpected and with shattered illusions in different fields? In private life, this can be devastating. In performative work, it might be slightly different.

Cuqui: I think this is a very interesting question, and I would say you could apply it to life or work or whatever, any kind of experience. Maybe it's about substituting the idea of success and failure with another kind of space where success and failure is not possible. It's true that it is easier in a space of artistic practice, or let's say there is more freedom there. *I would substitute the idea of success and failure with the idea of learning.* This separation between life and work is sometimes obvious, because you don't have the same frame of freedom. Each time I discover something in work or in artistic practice, I believe more that art is a space that can make us learn in life. It's a space of liberation, but liberation in your own life. That's why I see less and less separation, but I see art practice as a way to liberate life, for myself as a maker but also for the world. I think that's how art can produce change in life.

Eva: Is transformation an aspect of this learning process?

Cuqui: Sometimes this space of transformation comes from opening a wider space of affect, how you get affected by the world, how to think of yourself not as somebody that has to say something or state something but as somebody that is affected by the things that come. And I think this is the only possibility of getting transformed. Through this transformation, first you start to experience, then you start to acknowledge, then you start to recognize. Maybe *the learning becomes unlearning. Sometimes it's about making more space, not adding*

*more knowledge.* So, knowledge is not an accumulation of things. I have a feeling that it's the opposite. It's about not stating things that you thought you knew but opening space to rethink them. That is the uncertainty space. Of course you know a lot of things, but it's a very different place if you position yourself into the work or into the world assuming that you know nothing. Then it means that you are very alert to every input that comes. You don't have an opinion about it. You try to embrace it as something that you can learn from.

Eva: When I think of the idea of learning, the question comes to me, why are we alive? Why are we here? Maybe a better question would be: how are we alive? Or do you have other questions that might open other aspects?

Cuqui: I'm thinking of this question in terms of how we relate to each other. How do we relate to the planet? How can we think of ourselves as planets? This is a way to ask the question from a choreographic point of view. How do bodies relate in space and time? And what can these relationships be? I'm trying to think about this question of being alive and that's why I'm researching right now on the relation between music and dance. Because for me there is a kind of essence of this question in music and in dance, especially in the relation between the two of them. What if you think of a musical score first as a vibration, a kind of energetic thing that goes through our ears and that we cannot avoid? And then there's dance, which we perceive mostly through our eyes – but what if we are involved with our bodies through touch and through the vibration of the floor? And all this happens in space and time. I'm thinking of the idea of us being alive and being surrounded by all these forces: gravity, weight, speed, disintegration, physical reactions like us as matter and also us as emotions. There is another aspect that I'm interested in: the idea of interdependence. I'm very interested in us as bodies, that we live in our life and in the world and in the universe in a completely interdependent way. How are we interdependent? *It's not that I depend on things but that I can only live because I'm in relation to all these things that are around me.* To think about life from a choreographic perspective, in music and movement, there is always a space for mystery. It can also be in language, poetry, any other kind of art of course. Painting,

sculpture. But again, there is always a mystery in it. Coming to feel how we are alive from a choreographic point of view means observing this mystery, not trying to decode it or reveal the mystery. What I'm interested in is experiencing the mystery, but not trying to put words to it. Trying to facilitate a space where the mystery can appear.

— switch roles —

Cuqui: Since we finished the last round with the idea of the mystery, I would be very curious to hear what you think about this. Do you relate to this question of the mystery?

Eva: The new project that I'm working on right now actually works with uncertainty, so maybe I'm attending to it as more of a content thing. What is it that we can't put our fingers on? Unlearning is a big thing that interests me a lot. Losing stuff in a way, losing preconceived ideas, opinions, desires and cravings. And that enables us to look at how things actually are in that moment. It's more the relation between what is happening and the perception of it, and the space in between.

Thinking about mystery, there's the temptation to want to catch it. But the work lies in not doing this. The work is to look with curiosity at what is there. *You can only be curious when you are not fearful. When you're in a state of fear, curiosity is not possible.*

Cuqui: Wow, this thing of fear and curiosity is super interesting. Do you notice that when you are scared, you cannot be curious?

Eva: Yes. I only learned this a few days ago. If I look back at moments of panic, if I really think about it, I can't actually see what's around me, even in performance situations. I'm actually not comfortable talking in front of people, but I'm trying to do a lecture performance. It's a very challenging thing for me, as a situation, and I wonder why I make myself enter this situation. I guess I want to challenge myself, but also overcome certain fears. I experience fear as a feeling that closes and narrows things, causing you to need to defend and protect yourself or run. *Curiosity is the opposite motion, like opening and extending your fingers, branching out and exploring areas you don't know.*

Cuqui: This makes me think of another emotional concept: love. I want to ask you about love, in work and in extension to many things. How do you relate to love? Is it important to you?

Eva: There is a joy in creating conditions or just being there to see something unfold and appear. And having that encounter with love. There is this one very common Buddhist practice that I'm doing right now: the Metta Bhavana, which roughly translates to "practicing loving kindness." They call love "metta," which is a bit different than romantic love, and they practice it toward all beings. You start by practicing it toward yourself, then you include a good friend, and then someone you don't know well (that's the stage when you are becoming interested in someone you don't know; you have to find curiosity and openness towards them through the little contact you have had with them) and then you pick someone that you hate, or that is difficult for you. Finally you wish them all the best. You wish them well and wish that they grow and are happy. As an artist, I see more and more the responsibility of a caring, loving, joyful, supportive way of encountering artmaking. The artistic process is not about creating something extra. It's about revealing, making something that's already there visible. It's there. It's just that people weren't paying attention. The artistic practice has a specificity. It's like a focus or a filter, where you filter things that are already there and make them visible.

Cuqui: I would like to know how you get there. Is it something intuitive, or is it something you push to go farther? I have the feeling that you work in a very intuitive way.

Eva: It goes through different phases. If I start by pushing and finding the essence, then I'll block it, or it will block me. The first beginning really lies in making a space where things are allowed to happen, where I can play around without judgement. Then I let the things or what is happening talk to me. There is sometimes a topic that I'm dealing with. It's about doing things in a slightly inappropriate way. I use objects in a certain way that is not the ordinary way, that creates some kind of irritation. Or *you cannot identify the normal way* and that perhaps causes a wider way of looking at it. Now with this new solo project, which deals with uncertainty, perception

and experience, I have tried to avoid becoming concrete – and I really only wanted to talk. Yet now I suddenly have this gut feeling that I need to reengage in objects and materials. I haven't yet tried the materials that I might try, so it's a bit risky to even talk about it. They're materials that I cannot really touch, like water and things in water, things that are in relation to other things, objects that are moved by something. Then I start by playing around in order to look at this. It might be really crap, or I discover something in it.

Cuqui: From what you've said, I'm going to make a hypothesis. Let's say tomorrow you decided to invite me to your studio. Imagine that I'm in Berlin and you want me to come do an exercise or a practice together. What would you like to share with me based on the idea of specificity? Wherever you are now with this work, with these liquids, what could your proposal for me look like, based on where you are now? What would we do if you would invite me tomorrow to your studio?

Eva: Over the last month, and maybe even year, I've been collecting stories, and they're partly from neuroscience, about the nerves: that our brain is there to hunt rather than to perceive, how we've evolved from single-celled organisms to multicellular organisms and have developed a nervous system and a brain. I've also been collecting personal stories, because I somehow have the ambition – and it doesn't need to be explicit – to *share some of my motivation and experience around wanting to expand or learn and grow from this personal crisis*, this transformation process. And then there are all sorts of metaphors, such as how neuroscience sometimes uses capitalistic speech, like *it's expensive for the body budget*. So what I would like to propose as an exercise is to take these different stories – you could also have some of your own – and work with a certain table set up. There's a glass table covered with a milky, semi-opaque paper that lets light through but isn't fully transparent, and I have an aquarium on it with a bit of water in it. There's a camera underneath. The camera films the silhouettes and shadows from under the table, and this image could be projected. So we already get two dimensions: you see the making-of and you see the image from underneath, a two-dimensional image. We would have different objects. Some of them

could dissolve, some of them have colors. I would like to find ways in which these materials can affect each other – the liquids, the colors, changing with waves, wind and air. Finding out how one thing affects another thing.



As a small child, my family lived in a two-room apartment. Although it was a small family and a two-room flat was a comfort for the lower middle class in those days, not everybody could have their own room. Naturally that person was my mother. She was just bringing me up, **just** looking after the house, why should she have a room of her own? Every evening my mother used to go to the kitchen window to smoke a cigarette and thus stop being a mother, a wife, for just a moment. Each cigarette smoked in the evening in the kitchen window was her own room, and when it was finished, her room was incinerated in the ashtray.

Virginia Woolf wrote in her text **A Room of One's Own: a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction**. I would say that every woman needs her own money and a room of her own. It doesn't matter if she is a writer, a painter, a housewife, a mother, a cook, a judge, whoever. She needs her own room – to be with herself, with her thoughts, with her body, with her needs, with her craft, with her emotions, with her imagination, her stories. Most of the women in my family never had their own rooms – they negotiated their space and their need for space with their families. And even though their needs were swept under the carpet, the desire for a room of their own sought an outlet, such as the kitchen window. The room of your own is not just a physical space, it is also time that you can give exclusively to yourself.

Through the years I have learnt how to negotiate the space or actually how to shrink it and thus shrink my needs and desires. I had a room as a child but my mother used to come there during the silent days with her husband. Later I gave it away to my sister when she was born. I used to share a room in a boarding house. During my studies in Berlin I lived in such a small room that whoever wanted to visit had to wait as I would go out to the corridor. Still this was my room and my thoughts had their space there.

Some years ago I started SE (somatic experiencing) therapy. During one of the exercises, Franziska, who led the session, asked me to stand at one end of the corridor while she went to the other end. She was supposed to approach me very slowly and I should say "stop" when I felt the difference – in the space or in my body. Throughout the whole exercise I didn't say "stop" even once. Franziska came very close to me and said: **it is not about how much you can handle, it is about noticing change and your own boundaries**. We repeated the exercise and this time I said "stop" immediately, as soon as she moved her foot. One's own room is a matter of boundaries – it is not a self-centered spa, it is a place where you feel safe, where you don't need to – you can, but you are not obliged to do anything.

When I started to live alone in a two-room apartment, I had to learn how to expand myself in the space. I was doing some simple exercises: how to move, occupying a whole corridor, how to lie down on bed in the shape of a big X, how to leave my stuff everywhere around without apologizing. It took me a while to learn that, to expand, to be bigger. I didn't know how to deal with such a comfort, not to negotiate the space, just take it.

I call my artistic practice my own room. It has its specific time and space. There I collect thoughts, images, experiences, bodies, affects, movements. This room is changing, some furniture is old but precious, some of it is trash. This is my room, I painted its walls. I am keeping it alive. The more it is mine, the more I can risk its boundaries. I can lean out of its window a lot and not be afraid of falling out. I can open the balcony inviting everything from the outside: sounds, smells, weather, stories – they are all welcome.

I can open the doors and let others in. I like to do it, it is very boring to be constantly alone in your own room. Then one room meets the other room. Perhaps they are placed in the same building, maybe even in the same flat with a shared corridor. Rooms open up to each other, building another room, a shared room. I can only build a shared room if I have a room of my own.

The idea of a shared room comes from the shared room I have with my friend Zuza. It was her and Ania's idea, coming from their shared room. The three of us also share a room. Imagine this building with all these rooms – a complex architecture. I always thought we share journeys with people. Not rooms. We travel, we do not sit in one place. Now I think with some people we travel, with others we share rooms. As a freelancer I usually travel – short projects, short friendships. It is much more difficult to stay than to travel, at least for me. I am learning to stay in a shared room. My common way is to leave. I am learning not to leave.

Through the years of practicing I built many shared rooms with many practices and many practitioners. Some of the rooms disappeared under the ground, some of them vanished, some of them are still here growing, changing their decor. These are safe spaces, safely happening in time, between our bodies. What would be my own room without the shared ones? Would that be even there? To think together, feed each other, hold hands, hug, kiss, all the romantic friendships that are happening in these rooms!

There are many ways of working together and being together. Many structures, many needs, many financial agreements. I am writing from my own experience, maybe that is not your experience. Maybe your practice and thus your life is a full open space, the ocean, or a skyscraper.

Maybe you don't need your own room. I need one very much, as much as the shared ones.

## Aging is an illusion

Yvonne Zindel, p.49

## I'm not an activist. I question things.

Lina Majdalanie, p.51

## Embroidery, the garden, and the numbers

Simone Graf, p.56

## I am a social animal

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## Because as a kid I loved to tell stories

Ginan Seidl, p.61

## How can we change as human beings from our unconscious patterns to conscious ones?

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## Aging is an illusion

Yvonne Zindel

— Agata Siniarska — How would you define yourself? — Yvonne Zindel — It depends on the context. When you're at an official event like art week, you define yourself as a curator or programmer or you name the institution you work for. It's like a caste system – either you're a freelancer or you're employed. You have to perform it for others, and I really find this problematic. With my friends I define myself as a loyal friend who happens to have three kids. These are my different lives. Because I spend time with my kids, with my kids' friends, and with friends who have kids. And when I'm alone – I'm solo at the moment – I act ten years younger and I go out dancing.

Professionally, I would define myself as a curator or an art educator. Most people in Germany, when they hear the word “educator,” think of a teacher, but I don't work in a school at all. — Agata — What do you remember from the Reach Out meeting the most? — Yvonne — I remember the question about aging: are we aging, or is this just an illusion and we actually have a thousand different lives. What does it mean to age in the context of the future? I find it a very interesting idea to think of aging as an illusion.

I feel like I'm aging. If I go dancing I need two or three days to recover. I also perceive my own aging through the aging of my kids, because they're changing really fast. But actually, I don't think we age so visibly nowadays – between 20 and 40 we look similar – at least I can't see it. I'm often completely wrong about people's age. — Agata — Is there anything about aging that scares you? — Yvonne — Yes. Two years ago my friend died of cancer, and now another friend got diagnosed with a brain tumor. I've become so close to this reality, that people are getting sick and they aren't invincible. In my twenties the idea of death was very far away. People were dying, but not me. That really changed. And I have to be here for my kids. So it scares me. Absolutely. — Agata — What does aging mean from the perspective of your profession? — Yvonne — I became too expensive. I reached the wage ceiling. The next step has to come now. New skills have to be developed, otherwise the new generation will take over. I have to do it for my family, to sustain it, and it's getting more and more difficult. Sometimes I wonder how I was doing all this without kids, living in a shared flat for 200 euros a month. And I didn't miss anything. But now it's impossible. I feel stuck with all these responsibilities – this has really changed as I've aged. I really like what Kate Mcintosch said, that there are these narratives and we're choosing them. You can have different lives. You can define

yourself differently every day.

It's also hard to keep up with all the new digital devices. What in the world can I say about social media? But I can't imagine the world without it. Recently I had a talk with a friend about whether the kids should have an iPhone and at what age. This is for our safety – having the possibility to reach them. In my childhood there was nothing like that, yet I was safe. — Agata — What does it mean to be an art educator? — Yvonne — When I studied art I was really interested in the works, but then I discovered that it's really boring to think about something that's been done already, that's finished and can only be exhibited in the museum. And then I found out that the art classes have their weekly plenum, when they talk about different things through the artworks, and then the artwork really became an artwork. I decided I must do something like this. Of course I can always make exhibitions – I choose some artworks and put them in the room – but I want to recreate this process of speaking with people through the artworks. That is why I started a series of salons in Berlin. This is a way to bring artwork to your life. To try and find a way of speaking about artwork in order to talk about your life, not just serving art markets – because that's really, really boring. At the moment, however, I'm working more as a curator. I hope when the pandemic is over that I can one day go back to the way I used to work. — Agata — Do you think that art has the power to effect social change? — Yvonne — Absolutely. — Agata — Where is art's place in our safe western social context? — Yvonne — An example – last week the museum in Dresden decided to rename famous artworks to make visible what words can trigger, and then a lot of newspapers called it cancel culture, censorship. But it's more complicated than that. I think people can't stand complexity anymore. That's why it's more difficult for art to be socially potent or important, because people aren't patient anymore. The 2013 documenta was so political, but their social media wasn't that strong. Today people wouldn't be able to stand it. But in 2013, there wasn't a shitstorm. People were interested. — Agata — What will the art market look like after the covid pandemic, assuming it ever ends? — Yvonne — I'm not sure. People who are politically roused are very serious, and the others want to have a bit of fun without reflecting on things. That won't bring the change. People don't meet anymore either, which isn't good. Maybe the only good thing is that there'll be more young people who are politically aware. But I am really worried about the climate of the discourse these days. It's aggressive and not meant to find (new) solutions. I hope that we will find a better way of communicating than social-media-driven cancel culture and aggressive debating without looking for consent.

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I'm not an activist. I question things.

Lina Majdalanie

— Agata Siniarska — **How do you like to define yourself?** — Lina Majdalanie — This has been a problem all my life. I hate writing bios. I don't know where to start, why we choose this, how to summarize in a few sentences who we are, when I don't know who I am. Since two or three years, I've had a new bio that I recently started using officially, when it's accepted. It encapsulates how I would define or present myself. I am "petit bourgeois," because this is the kind of family I was born into. I'm Marxist by conviction – that happened in my adolescence – with aristocratic aspirations, which came with maturity. Why aristocratic aspirations? Because as a lazy person, what I like about the aristocrats is that they don't do anything – or at least this is the idea, the image of them. They just spend their time on entertainment or reading or writing, researching. They don't have to work, and when they work, they work for themselves or for their own pleasure, for their culture. **I'm looking for an aristocratic Marxism or communism or socialism so I can be someone who works a minimum and enjoys life and time to think, talk, meet** – I think this is very important for political change. — Agata — But then what do you understand as work? Because what you are describing as this aristocratic stance is also something that we do a lot as artists. We read a lot, we spend lots of time on conversation, on thinking. So what's the work for you, actually? — Lina — Being under deadline pressure – when a lot of people ask you to do this and that. I'm lucky I'm an artist. I don't need to go to work every day from this hour to this hour. I don't need to be busy with all these constraining systems of working. I'm free of that, luckily. Nevertheless, there is this system in art that's also following a very capitalist rhythm: that you have to produce, that you have to prove you've produced – otherwise you cannot have subsidies. You don't have any more time for your own processes that make you arrive one day and say: I want to work on this, and only when I decide my work is ready do I want to present it, even if it takes one or three or four years. We are bombarded with requests all the time. The rhythm is unbearable. You do a work and after one year it's immediately considered an old one, and everybody wants something new – a new performance, a premiere, because your "old" work was already shown in this or that festival, this country or that theater. We are pushed to produce, produce, produce because the curators have new ideas all the time: we want you to do a work about this topic and we want you to do a work or a text or whatever about that topic. And this is a trap for all artists, beginners and non-beginners.

Dear Ginan, Irina, Sara and Simone,

In less than two weeks we are meeting in Berlin, which we are very much looking forward to.

Here is some information we would like to share with you:

#### 1. PREPARATION

Before we meet we would like you to have a voice message exchange with each other.

Use the messaging app of your choice. Take one hour for each of you.

Person 1 starts by sending a voice message with a question, person 2 answers with a voice message. Continue for one hour in this direction.

Then change: person 2 asks person 1 for one hour.

Use the silences and gaps that occur. Take your time to let the question sink in before you respond.

You can start or use the following questions and then come up with your own from the answers you receive.

— Where are you now? Physically?

— Mentally? In work? In life?

— What drives your work?

— What specifically are you busy with at the moment?

#### 2. FOOD

We will provide a vegetarian dinner on Friday evening and a picnic lunch on Saturday and Sunday. Please let us know if you have any allergies or if you would like vegan food.

#### 3. TIME SCHEDULE

Friday 20th August starting at 4 pm until late in the evening, with dinner, desert and more, if you like.  
Saturday and Sunday 21st/22nd August 11 am - 6 pm

#### 4. PLACE

Eva's studio in Berlin-Pankow

#### 5. COVID

We can provide rapid antigen tests. Let us know if you need any.  
As far as I know, at least half of the group is fully vaccinated.

We're really looking forward to seeing you on Friday at 4 pm.

All the very best,

Eva and Agata



This system doesn't give you time to nourish your own process and find your own urgencies – what you want to talk about today and how. So most of the time the system is pushing artists to be in this capitalist system of producing. Everything becomes very fast. You're reading, researching and resourcing yourself, but it's always for a project that's coming up very soon. You're doing it in a very short amount of time, like a quick dinner. — Agata — Do you think that being more established in the art market gives you more agency? Do you manage to say no to all these requirements? — Lina — Relatively, I am a person that is able to say no. But definitely sometimes you cannot say no. You say yes because there are a lot of factors that make you say yes. But I'm somebody who knows more or less how to say no. I dare to say no. But I don't think it's easy for everybody. I also have my strategies for staying a little bit low-profile. My strategy is to be less visible, and thanks to that I'm not overwhelmed with all the requirements of the art market.

It's about being a bit aside, not fully invisible of course. I would be afraid of that. But I try to be in a possible middle. Nowadays, I would like a proposition, because sometimes the proposition is coming from somebody else and I don't need to apply for it. It's about understanding your timing: when are you ready to accept propositions from others and when do you slow down, slow down, slow down as much as possible. — Agata — What is the rhythm of your artistic practice? — Lina — I think my best rhythm is to produce work every two years. But during these two years I'm touring with other works and also teaching, giving workshops. I think I need two years in order to engage in a new work or a new project or performance. Two years between each work is my rhythm. — Agata — Has your work changed over the years? — Lina — I guess so, but I can only see the change that happened some time ago, since I now have a distance to it. When I was young and had just finished my studies at the university, I did discover that all I have inherited from my education is something I don't want anymore. This is a big change that usually every artist makes in his or her early career. Later, the changes are more subtle and it's more a kind of evolution, even if sometimes you make a clear cut. But it's not a revolution anymore, compared to what happened before. Today I think my work is a big question mark and confusion, because the entire situation in Lebanon and in the whole Middle East is not easy to think about. I've always thought that in order to be able to do work, you should have a project, a proposition for the context you live in, where you come from. So when we started working in Lebanon, it was the end of the neo-liberal project on how to rebuild the country after 15 years of civil war. And everybody had a lot of critiques. Today we face a complete

bankruptcy, both economically – people lost all their money, which was stolen by the banks and politicians – and also politically and socially. We are in complete chaos, and there is no project or program or plan for the future. What can you discuss here? You can just repeat that those people ruling the country are criminals, are corrupt, vulgar, inefficient, that they don't want to be efficient and don't care about efficiency. They only care about stealing and killing.

We all know that. And we all agree on that. In order to discuss, you need a project. Either you agree on it, or you are critical, or you refuse it completely. Instead, here is a trauma. For the first time, I accept the use of the word trauma. I always refused to allow the idea of trauma to take space. Because often the work of Lebanese artists, or any artists from war-torn countries, tries to do political work but is coopted, overrun by the idea of trauma. But trauma is a psychological situation where you just suffer and express your suffering – I'm suffering, I'm suffering, please give me your compassion – which is not a political discourse or a political discussion or conversation. But at the same time, I cannot deny that the Lebanese are in a situation of trauma, even those living outside Lebanon. We know that we have to do something, but we don't know what to do. We are not able to propose a project, to propose people who could carry this project, who could negotiate this situation. We don't have plans on how we could make a different country. — Agata — Where do you see the role of art in this situation? — Lina — One year before the beginning of the revolution and the failure of the revolution and the country, we, Rabih and me, did a performance with our friend Mazen Kerbage. The "mood" of this performance was more or less like this: Fuck, everything is fucked, and we can just say everything is fucked. We are fucked up and perhaps we fucked everything up. We participate in this big catastrophe and what to do? We knew that we are headed for a dead end. We are running into the wall and we're in an impossible situation. For this time, we made a performance where we are not focusing on one particular story and deconstructing all the factors and different discourses around it. We were just here taking stock, making an inventory of all that we've done. The result was: it's a catastrophe! This was the first time we allowed ourselves to express this without any reflective discourse. After that we had the revolution and it failed and the country is completely failed now. It was like drawing a line, you know, like when you finish a text and then: end. I think it takes a lot of time to reconstruct yourself as a human being, as a citizen, as a political being who knows what to do today, what to say, how to do it and how to say it. And all the Lebanese are in this situation. The Syrians are in this situation, too. Perhaps Iraqis as well. I don't know. It

needs time to be able to stand on our feet again. And to invent a new political approach and a new artistic approach. — Agata — What is your experience of showing the work in a western context? — Lina — I don't want to generalize this context. A lot of people from the audience, our colleagues, artists, curators, are very intelligent, contributive and sensitive, and they don't reduce my work to very superficial political aspects. But sometimes Arabic people, and mainly Lebanese people, can reduce your work to you're pro-this or pro-that party. **Every country is different. Every city is different. Every theater or festival has a different kind of audience, and so they react in a different way.** So I really don't want to generalize. Perhaps it's in academia and the press where the danger of reduction is the most present, where it's easy to identify us as post-war, post-conflict, post-traumatic artists, and they immediately see the most obvious things: we use documentary, we question documentary. Of course there are a lot of levels that go invisible, but many are so open too. People from these contexts invite you to teach or make an interview with you which opens for you the possibility to expand on these narrow readings and discuss them. — Agata — Are you aging? — Lina — Oh yes. I am. — Agata — Is your work being influenced by your aging? — Lina — Not directly. It's the same with feminism. **I am feminist and I've struggled a lot with men all my life, but I didn't use this directly in my work.** I never meant to be an activist for women in my work, but I don't show women in cliché, conservative, traditional ways. The same goes for aging. It's here. It will show itself. But it's not a subject, not a direct subject. I'm not an activist. I don't fight for the right to make people aware. I question things.

## Embroidery, the garden, and the numbers

Simone Graf

— Agata Siniarska — How do you situate yourself within the artistic field? — Simone Graf — That isn't easy to answer because all this "naming," these labels – they never hit the point of what people actually do. It could be a separate discussion to try and find new names for what we actually do in the arts, and our positions should be named. Most of the people that I know in the field do so many different things. **Sometimes I think it could be fairer to give everybody the same name.** Usually I'm called an artistic producer, but I also work a lot with editing – I usually do both. There's also a part of artistic thinking in it, also a part of dramaturgy, curating – I cannot define the differences between those. Maybe

we should call ourselves a "team," an artistic team, since everybody is involved in everything. Maybe that's the task, to find something in between for everybody. — Agata — How do you work? — Simone — At the moment I work in a duo and we're each very autonomous. I'm able to make decisions. I don't need to ask too many people, but the two of us are working in a team. The team is composed of one artistic director, two producers and a publicist. When I started a job there, there was a sort of existing structure, but me and my colleague have since changed it. We changed the positions and fields of who is in charge of what. There isn't very much hierarchy in this team, although there is one in the naming, coming back to your first question. But to be honest, the artistic director should have the same title as us, and we should have the same title as this person. **We take decisions together.** We discuss a lot. The artistic director isn't so much a boss. It's almost a flat structure. — Agata — Have you ever worked as a freelancer? — Simone — Yes, I did work as a freelancer for one and a half years. I definitely prefer working for institutions because I like the financial stability. **The freelancing isn't "free" at all.** There's a lot of pressure, even though I was in a very luxurious situation. I had a long-term contract as a freelancer with an institution, and apart from that I could do other projects. So I had a kind of stability thanks to a monthly income from this long-term project. I did, however, have to pay my own insurance, and that was a lot of money because as a producer I'm not able to enter the Künstlersozialkasse (artists' social insurance). It was really a lot of money. It was nearly my rent. So I've never felt free in that sense. It was too much financial stress. I prefer knowing how much money I have at the beginning of the month and then I know this is the money I can spend. It makes me calmer and more free than if I were a freelancer. — Agata — Is there anything that freelancers could learn from institutional structures and vice versa? — Simone — I don't know if they can learn that much from each other because they actually work more or less the same way. The only difference is the money. When you work as a freelancer, you too have your structure. You have to follow guidelines for applications and stuff like that, the same as in institutional structures. For me the question is: what is free in freelancing? Does "free" only relate to your working hours, not having to be at work from nine to five? Thirty-day vacations? Having to work in the same space, your office, where you always have to be from Monday to Friday? Me, at the moment, being part of an institution, I don't have that duty. I can be there but I don't have to. I could go abroad now and work from there. If the institution is as open as the one I work in now, then I don't feel a huge difference between freelancing and institutional work. But I have the stability

of being paid regularly. And I don't have all these costs freelancers have – I don't need to rent a studio. As a freelancer, you need to rent a working space or work from home. But when you're a dancer, you can't work from home. You need a space for your training. So being a freelancer always demands a lot of effort to find money, then spaces, then people you want to work with, materials. In institutions, this is all a given. That's the main difference. — Agata — Looking at the times of the pandemic today, what in your opinion needs to change in the artistic field? — Simone — Theaters are a very special case. I think that other art fields found the restrictions and lockdowns easier to cope with. For theaters, it's a huge step, and I'm not sure if seeing performances on screen is a possible change. But in terms of the meetings, conferences, I think we learned that all these events are totally possible online, via zoom, Skype, jitsy. We don't need to travel so much. I wish for it to continue that way, to have more meetings and conferences online. On the artistic side, I find it very difficult. I'm trembling thinking about another lockdown because I'm so happy I can go to the theater and see the show. This is my passion. It gives me happiness to experience it live.

**Rethinking the structures and formats is always good**, and yet I wouldn't resign from festivals, for example. I know that festivals are stressful for the artists, with very fast setup and so on. For the organizers, it's also stressful, but I think it is a great opportunity to see the works in a short time. I still like this format, but of course there is always the question of its necessity. I am going to a festival very soon, my first festival since the pandemic started, and I'm very happy to go. I'll see three shows in one weekend and meet lots of my colleagues. Rethinking is always good, though: all these formats like **Tanzplattform, Tanzmesse** – that's a longer discussion. — Agata — What are you learning at the moment? — Simone — I've never had to work as much with budgets and numbers as I do now. The institution I work for at the moment gets its funding from multiple coffers: German, European, elsewhere. I've never done it that way – it demands extra skills. Money and numbers are not my thing. **And I just started learning to embroider. I just finished a course – a new skill!** And soon I'm starting a graphic design course. I'll learn a lot there. And my garden! Next week my mum is coming. We'll prepare the garden for a long sleep, for winter. So embroidery, the garden, and the numbers. That's where I am right now. — Agata — What stayed with you after the Reach Out meeting? — Simone — I have to say, the most significant experience was the interview I had with Ginan before the meeting started. **That was such a beautiful experience to converse with somebody you don't**

**know via voice message, somebody you've never seen once in your life whom you don't know anything about.** Those two hours are still in my mind. And one more thing: it's something Sara said when I was interviewed by the group. I still have my notes, and one reads: "saying no." I think I really learned to do that. I was always kind of good at it, but recently I've gotten better.

## I am a social animal

Sara Wendt

— Agata Siniarska — How do you define yourself? Who are you? — Sara Wendt — It is a difficult question because I'm having a little crisis around this topic these days. Before covid I would have said: I am a costume designer, that's it! Very simple! Now I have to struggle with this question because I am not working very much with costume design at the moment. **I do lots of collaborations, and for that I do not have a name.** I don't feel I am an artist in a narrow sense because there is no outcome from my work at the moment. I would say I'm a collaborator in a network of many people, mostly from the artistic field. I am a social animal. — Agata — How would you define your artistic practice? — Sara — I think **my artistic practice is based on a verbal and visual dialogue. It is based a lot on the back-and-forth movement between me and others, a kind of collage** – maybe it isn't the best word but I haven't found a better one yet. The dialogue is very much based on what is there and putting it together, trying to shape a meaning out of it. — Agata — What do you need for an artistic dialogue to happen? — Sara — The essential needs have to be covered – money, stuff like this, in order to give space and time. Thinking, for example, about the Reach Out meeting – for me the most crucial thing was that it is a meeting based on the **network of colleagues and friends.** It isn't necessary that these meetings yield a product. — Agata — What does "creativity" mean to you? — Sara — That's a basic question. I just said that the product is not necessary, but now I am thinking that for some collaborations, the product is very much appreciated. It puts the energy of the group together, keeps the group in movement and discussion. Concerning the question of creativity: I still haven't figured it out, but I think that the aspect of **fooling around is crucial in order to be creative.** Sometimes, in some contexts, it's impossible to create failure, but I've also been in places where I felt that **it's very desirable to fail and be playful.** The places where I felt the most creative were the ones that gave me lots of trust. The art market doesn't



give it to us that much. I got a scholarship to make one product, and of course I'm going to present it in the end. But there's lots of pressure from the market to fulfil all the expectations that the funding body has. — Agata — What are the challenges you experience when working with other people? — Sara — On a very personal level, the challenge is to accommodate all these emotions in the group, to give them space but not allow them to take over the project. Misunderstanding, jealousy. It's much harder than I thought it would be. On the practical level: **if you want to work with others, you need to find more money for the project to pay people.** You need more space – all these basic and practical needs when you work with others need to be ensured.

— Agata — Is sustainability in work important for you? — Sara — That's an interesting question, because when I first started to think about this topic I was thinking more about ecology and thus about the movie industry – it isn't a very ecological industry. Of course I am trying not to buy new stuff but to exchange it. That's also challenging when it comes to the aesthetics of the movie – sometimes it needs to have this impression of “shiny new.” But how can you do it through ecological means? More and more, I've started to think about **how to be socially sustainable, how to create artworks that do not follow the logic of the art market.** Because we work in the field of performance and theater, which is very ephemeral. What does it mean to be sustainable there. I don't have an answer for this yet, but I think **how we shape the social surrounding is super important – how we nurture each other.** — Agata

— Do you follow the logic of the art market? — Sara — I always feel there is a difference between the movie industry and the performing arts. In the movies there is the possibility to earn much more money than in the performing arts, and sometimes when I work in this industry I earn money in order to do other projects that are not well paid but are more interesting to me from an artistic perspective. In this way I follow the logic of the market to a certain degree through more commercial work.

When I get the budget, I try to distribute it fairly. I'm always shocked when the budget for materials is higher than the budget for wages. I'm trying to negotiate this because mostly I don't need that much money for the materials – **I try to work with materials that have already been used. I don't want to create too much waste.** I'm trying to give more support to the work than to the materials. Once, I dipped into the budget to pay for a massage for my assistant and myself because the work conditions of the project were so tough. — Agata — Does it occur to you to think about success and fame? — Sara — Of course. It's like a warm shower, getting all this attention, having all these narcissistic emotions which are completely normal. **Sometimes I feel the pressure**

**of success, but generally that's not me, I guess.** — Agata — What are your urgencies at work? — Sara — We had this question during the Reach Out session, and I've kept it in my head. I've had this little crisis ever since I felt like I lost the urgency. **It's a nice feeling to have urgencies, almost like a life force.** For me, it mostly lies in a desire to create a group, to work together with the energy of the group in a movie or a performance.

— Agata — If you picture yourself and your practice in ten years, what do you see? — Sara — I wish to be more relaxed with producing, not in the sense of laziness, but to be more focused on what I want. Now, with covid, I lost a little bit of stability in the arts, so I don't know where I see myself. It's constantly changing. — Agata — What do you remember from the Reach Out meeting the most? — Sara — I have a very clear image in my head: when we were sitting on the floor with dogs running everywhere. This warm feeling of opening up to the people that you barely know and **being connected, safe, being in a generous place.**

### Because as a kid I loved to tell stories

Ginan Seidl

— Agata Siniarska — How do you define yourself, and where do you situate yourself in the field? — Ginan Seidl — This is a very difficult question. I'm very used to presenting myself as an artist or a filmmaker and situating myself in the context where I work. On a more personal level, **it's a question of what you would like other people to know or not know about you.** I would situate myself as a filmmaker and an artist who grew up in Germany, in Berlin, and my family is spread out all over the world – that has influenced my interests and my life, my way of being in the world. I work a lot with different contexts, in different constellations, in groups, collectives, sometimes alone. — Agata

— When did you decide to become an artist? — Ginan Seidl — I started to be interested in art very early in my life, as a kid. My grandmother painted a lot and I painted with her. I expressed all that I saw, felt and dreamt in drawings and paintings. I was also writing a lot. When I was 12 or 13 years old I was writing stories to myself. Nowadays I find this very interesting, because I studied fine arts, sculpture and later on started filmmaking, where this element of storytelling came back from my youth or even from my childhood. Because as a kid I loved to tell stories. — Agata — How has your family situation influenced your work? — Ginan — Quite early I understood that my situations and socializations depend a lot on the context I grew up in, because in my family people

could grow up very differently, could have very different perspectives on religion, economics and possible futures. On the one hand, this gave me the feeling of sometimes not knowing where I belong, what the idea of home is for me. On the other hand, it helps me understand that **there are so many truths and perceptions in the world which are very important to me and crucially deserve to be researched, to be understood** more. And it helps me understand that I will never fully understand. — Agata — Is this why you started making movies? — Ginan — Yes. Maybe it was not that conscious of a choice. I always liked to travel a lot, and sculpture isn't an easy format to travel with. Video and photography are very portable mediums. — Agata — How does sculpture influence your idea of movies? — Ginan — Strongly. I was always interested in materials, the haptic and structures, and also the relation between body, sculpture, object and space – these are the subjects among my cinematic works. Maybe these works have a slightly different kind of exploration of how you express the relation between space and the object and body and movement. Or materials and the haptic. — Agata — What are your urgencies at work? — Ginan — The wish to understand, explore and access different kinds of seeing, different kinds of perception of belief systems and socioeconomic situations. **The world is more and more global and thus in some ways appears to be very flat, and I think it is important to find these differences and keep them alive. To make the diversity tangible and make things that appear to be invisible more accessible.** — Agata — Do you think art has a mission? — Ginan — I wouldn't say that art has a mission because I'm fine with people defining art differently. There are very different ideas about what art is. If it's too idealistic, then it's too hollow, and then people expect it to be political. At the same time, **art is a part of capitalism. It's part of the business, thus it's hard to make it too idealistic.** It is a part of the market. There are very different approaches, idealistic ones, more pragmatic ones. I think the mission depends on each person's perspective, which I think is also the strength of art: not to have to represent something. But at the same time it can be a powerful tool used to start an important discourse in society, make us see or feel something that we didn't see before. — Agata — How do you navigate through the art market? — Ginan — **People who do artistic work – it's a normal job.** People consume art in many different ways, so it is a capitalistic good, a service. Most people that do art have lots of knowledge, a very long and profound education. I don't know why they shouldn't earn money for what they do. Still, in Germany we can't complain. The funding system here is not that bad compared to other countries. On the other hand, many artists work a lot for funding and

exploit themselves, or they don't get funding. In art school we did a lot of things for each other without getting paid. Afterwards, especially in filmmaking, you need a crew. You won't manage to do everything yourself. And even if you do, what you can do becomes very limited. You need funding in order to proceed, otherwise you can't do your project. It starts, for example, with technical equipment. The artworks also change through these limitations. The art market and the funding system possibly make us do different art, and make us dependent, because we also have to think like a business person who has to sell their art and their image.

**I think the best solution would be if artists get a basic income and then people are supporting each other, doing things for each other.** Maybe we wouldn't get so much, but enough to have a normal living and be more free in what we do. We could also support each other's artworks. Collective work would be easier, because the funding system makes us compete with each other. — Agata — What kind of impact does art have in the world? Do you think art can change the world? — Ginan — **I think art can definitely change small contexts.** In my work, I go to different places where I meet people and of course this changes my life and their lives. Some artworks make me think something differently, feel differently. The impact of art can be very diverse. For example, the Center for Political Beauty has a big impact. I think that art has an impact in the sense that it makes changes together with other things. But it's not the right tool for everything. It can be a political tool, but it's also an aesthetic one, working on the meta level. Perhaps it isn't the best tool for reacting to actual current situations where people need support in different ways. I don't think art needs to act on all levels. We as people can be different things. **We can be artists, we can be citizens, we can do other stuff. That's a possibility. I think art is not social work and art is not activism. Art is so many things.** There are so many different ways of defining it, so it's easy to put all the responsibility on the artist to be politically engaged. — Agata — Do you feel any pressure from the art market? — Ginan — I'm in a slightly different situation, because I'm not only in the art market. I'm also in the film sector. I'm doing many things, so it's not that easy for the art market to describe what my work is. I also work in many constellations with different people, and that's not so easy for the market either. In the long run, it will probably always be an unstable situation that I have to deal with.



Dear Anne, Katrin, Gaby, Kerstin and Lina,

As discussed, we are pleased to invite you to a three-day workshop from November 8th to 10th. It's part of a series of "Reach Out" gatherings initiated by the artist Eva Meyer-Keller. Each Reach Out meeting brings together a small group of artists, choreographers, researchers, curators, etc., and is initiated together with another artist/practitioner, in this case with Bettina Knaup. This meeting will aim to foreground questions surrounding the boundary between life and non-life - a topic which appears in very different ways within each participants' work. We would like to refer to questions of the destruction of sources of life, to toxic futures without (biological) life and to narratives of origin, salvage or collapse. These questions also play a role in our everyday lives, not least through our constant interactions with inorganic matter such as plastics, which have long since penetrated every pore and organ as well as entire food chains, the deep ocean or the permafrost.

During this meeting, we wish to pursue our shared interest through exchange between art and the natural sciences, and above all by sharing our practices and the questions they involve.

We're thrilled to meet you soon!

Kind regards,  
Eva and Bettina

## How can we change as human beings from our unconscious patterns to conscious ones?

Irina Müller

— Agata Siniarska — Who are you? How do you situate yourself in the world? — Irina Müller — I am Irina. I studied at SNDO School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam from 2000 to 2004. Then I became a freelancer, working as a dancer and choreographer. In 2012 I began studying in an MA program in dramaturgy, and this process brought me to the shift from dance to conceptual work as well as to text-based theater. Looking at the last seven, almost eight years, I've been working more in institutional structures (Stadttheater), as a dramaturg. Now I'm back in the dance field working in administration, and on the side I'm trying to establish my writing practice. — Agata — How does dance and choreography feed your other practices, like the writing practice you just mentioned? — Irina — This is an interesting question. I have never seen them as different. I think our worldview is so embodied and works within bodies, so I don't make a separation between thinking and moving. For me these are very intertwined things – the way we move, the way we use our bodies influences the way we think. And the other thing is that I always felt at home in both dance and dramaturgy – I love to be a dancer and performer as well as work conceptually for other people, following certain topics into the work. — Agata — What are the topics you're busy with at the moment? — Irina — I'm mostly busy with motherhood and care work – with questions around conscious patterns and perceptions that we carry around and pass on to our children without even thinking, and what we can consciously change about it. So I am busy with the aspect of change: how can we change as human beings from our unconscious patterns to conscious ones? — Agata — How are the topics of motherhood and care work intertwined with your work? How has motherhood changed your artistic practice and your idea of work and working conditions? — Irina — Yes, both motherhood and care work are intertwined with my work. It started to be very present when I had my daughter, and it intensified conceptually and practically during a project around a novel by Elena Ferrante. She's a writer occupied with the role of women in society, especially in Italy and across different economic classes. Through this work and other factors, I started to think and write more about it, after finishing that project. When you're pregnant you're perceived as a "carrier of life." Everybody is reacting to your growing belly. Some people touch it without even asking you for permission. That's really strange. You're not only a person, a subjectivity, but also a carrier of life surrounded by

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the idea of sacredness. Everybody takes care of you, offering help. The moment the child is born, everybody is focused on the baby and you as a mother become its caregiver. This shift of attention from your body to the baby is very physical. You can feel it physically. Once again, your body is assigned a different role in society.

During the pandemic, when we were asked to stay at home, I read that most of the care work is still done by women, even though we claim that society is more progressive than in the 1950s and that women and men have more equal tasks in the family and in society. That got me interested in how much this role of caregiver is still a female thing, without much of a negotiation. I got busy with what needs to be changed in society so we can be more flexible with the perception of what the mother role is and can be. — Agata — How can we practice care in the arts, in the artistic field? — Irina — This topic has many facets and directions, but I think that working with care is a lot about the settings we create even before we start to work. This depends on so many parameters: how we are funded, which context we produce in and so on. A lot of these decisions are not up to us. I'm busy with how we can first create conditions in order to work. I think that's why the Reach Out meeting was so fruitful, because we were able to talk about all these topics not through judgment but by trying to understand the differences between us and how we can help each other understand different needs and conditions. — Agata — What aspects of the Reach Out meeting have stayed with you? — Irina — Besides Eva, I didn't know anybody in the group, and this generosity of speaking and listening with the people I didn't know stayed with me a lot – all these different stories unfolding over three days. That was an extremely nice process. To have this time and space outside of the production bubble is a very special thing. Productivity is usually measured. And here we are talking about care again. On what basis does work start: can it start with care? I think that everybody cared for the others and for the situation, which was very beautiful and supportive for the work. I read the cards again that other participants wrote for me during a task, and it helps me reflect on my work in a new enriching way. — Agata — What is your dream project? — Irina — I would like to continue what I'm working on and keep paying the bills with a regular job while writing on the side, possibly within the frame of a PhD. And then to have colleagues and friends that appreciate feedback, to exchange with them again and again during the entire writing process. This is something I would very much appreciate. It could be like writing a novel over two years with regular exchanges. So in a way it's not that complicated. In the long run, I would like to take over a house or a theater with a team of friends where it's possible to both show and produce works.

“The total mass of human-made objects has doubled approximately every twenty years since 1900. Back then, this figure was equivalent to around three percent of the biomass, or three percent of all living things. In the year 2020, lifeless matter – houses, asphalt, machines, automobiles, plastic, computers and so on – surpassed the total biomass for the first time. In contrast, over the last fifty years the biomass of all wild animals has shrunk by more than four-fifths.”

In what way do we – as artists, curators, designers, as citizens, lovers, mothers, activists, healers, teachers – respond to / interact with / relate to nonlife? How does the possibility of life’s extinction on a massive scale – through climate change and biodiversity loss, through pollution and contamination – enter our daily life, our practices, our thoughts, our bodies, our dreams?

In meandering discussions we shared our practices and followed various hunches, hints, traces, premonitions, apprehensions, foggy clouds or shadows. Our aim was – inspired by Eva’s practice – to linger in states of uncertainties rather than fixing distinctions or definitions.

We discussed various reactions to the ungraspable dimension of the climate and environmental catastrophies: the belief in technical solutions to the major environmental problems (some call it feasibility delusion) versus distraction, fear, willful ignorance and intentional externalization.

Finitude emerged as the great taboo: do we need to learn how to die, as do students of shamanistic practices, or develop a practice of ending, as scholar and activist Harald Welzer<sup>1</sup> suggests? How can we bridge various forms of knowing – from the scientific to those which are neglected, eradicated, forgotten or buried? Can storytelling teach multiple modes of uncertain knowing? While looking for answers, we encountered each other’s work:

In Evas performance *Certainly Uncertain* Eva traces the development of Life from Nonlife, and more specifically the accidents and chance encounters which led to the emergence of intelligent life on a cellular level. Water plays a central role in her performance, as well as the human brain in its plasticity and malleability. We see/hear/feel with the brain, influenced by what we already know. How then to encounter the unknown? How to refine a related practice and skill?

Anne talks about her longtime project *Venus Mission*, which brings together the mining operations in one of the worlds oldest mines (The Rio Tinto copper mine in Spain) with space exploration and the search for life on other planets such as Mars. Rio Tinto has become a test site for Nasa Researchers, as the geological and microbial conditions of the “red river” are supposedly similar to

<sup>1</sup> Harald Welzer, *Nachruf auf mich Selbst. Die Kultur des Aufhörens* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2021), p. 11.

In this quote, Welzer is referring to the results of a study by the Weizmann Institute. See also Elhacham, Ben-Uri, Grozovski et al., “Global human-made mass exceeds all living biomass,” *Nature* 588 (2020): pp. 442-444.

that on Mars. Rio Tinto has become something like “Mars on Earth.”

Bettina shares her curatorial research performing (as) waste about artists engaging with waste that remains. These artists suspend discarding, distancing, forgetting waste but also transforming and recycling. Instead they seek durational intimacy with the discarded, the dead, the wasted, they inhabit, they linger, they rest in waste and confront fundamental contradictions such as waste’s unknowability, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the necessity to know / to not forget / to care. They do so through a form of material thinking, a durational engagement with waste materials.

Kathrin – artist, musician and shaman – brings some of her light arrows – small, tear or wedge shaped, pigmented clay arrows, which she produces in large numbers and regularly places in specific landscape sites in Iceland. They form constellations, collectives, they store and transmit energies, they vibrate. In her current project-in-development she searches for a new (female?) alphabet, a new language on the edges of perception and knowledge. Her guides are the Oracle of Delphie, Ann Carson’s Antigone, and the artist Agnes Martin among others.

Gaby shares her design practice, and especially one project that brought her obsession with order, regularity and systematic principles together with what is ungraspable – love, communicated through food. Her graduation work was an impossible Dim Sum cookbook based on recipes she had learned from her mother as well as passionate master cooks. Dim Sums are meant to “touch the heart.” The cookbook dissects the Dim Sum down to the smallest detail, illuminating every conceivable dimension, tracing every ingredient’s source, counting statistical ingredient frequencies, nutritional values and more. However, they can only be recomposed in relations, which always exceed the sum of their parts.

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An incomplete list of additional ingredients of our encounters:

- a sleepy, playful dog
- lot’s of delicious food
- Noah Hutton’s In Silico documentary film
- Lynn Margulis presenting the Gaia Hypothesis to Nasa, 1984, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5m1pXX8NBM>
- Heather Davis writing about Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and other Queer futures, 2015
- Cecilia Vicuna’s performances as spatial poems
- a cacao ceremony
- time
- generosity
- poetry
- music

“truth like truth

syllable by syllable drop by drop I become who I always was

Agnes knows knew has known like whales like rain she sings silently and without force she just draws the lines in powder blue and light ochre as if moving the needle of the compass toward belonging to a wider frame”

— Katrin Hahner  
([www.katrinhahner.com/wisdom-keepers-light-arrows](http://www.katrinhahner.com/wisdom-keepers-light-arrows).)

## THAT IS MY PEN

As a child in elementary school, I only play with the girls. In the likely event that boys interrogate me – Are You A Boy Or Are You A Girl – the girls step in and retort He's Not A Girl. In spaces free of boy's sneers, when it comes to closing the ranks and defining us as a girl-only clique, the girls reassuringly say You're Not A Boy. My gender shifts, in our innocent internalization of misogyny, in our circumvention of gender codes, in our obliviousness to heteronormativity. I passively allow my gender to change and be defined in the negative to enable belonging where belonging is forbidden.

## A DROP IN WATER

I don't make much of the fact that I so often find myself the only male member of an all-women group. Despite my shifting gender, deep down I identify as gay and male. I leave my parents' house in Mississippi for Chicago. I can feel the pressure to define myself within an ocean of diverse identifications. In Mississippi people are organized according to male, female, black, white, rich, poor. At art school, people are organizing according to identity – sexual preference, gender, ethnicity, nationality, culture, politics, aesthetics, philosophy, and so forth.

## YELLOW LEATHER

I'm in art school and I live with three women: Ava, Anna and Andrea. When I'm not at home I hang out almost exclusively with lesbians. I work with lesbians and party with lesbians, though the latter is sometimes forbidden. At a women-only event, a bouncer denies me entry and says that men cannot enter, to which my friend Mirjam incredulously laughs and says, But He's Not A Man. Antonia goes into the party, gushingly apologetic. But Mirjam stays with me for a while, us two wandering the streets teaching each other rhymes in our mother tongues – Zicke Zacke Hühnerkacke. She Sells Sea Shells... us night flaneurs.

## STONE OF S

I am looking at pictures of myself in high school. I look very queer and femme. I am often mistaken for a girl. I am dating a girl but then after developing a crush on a boy, I decide I'm gay. In art school I realize that something like a gay community exists, that gays can also be butch, and I develop this inner image of myself as a gay man who identifies as a man. Still, a fey lilt from high school stays with me, and I cultivate it – unconsciously, as with most things. I have no language that will fortify a confident queerness in me, no place where I can represent an in-between. But I am nevertheless deep in the in-between, a space that I deem traumatic and that I long to escape.



I am crossing a street and a motorist sticks his head out of the window of his SmartCar and yells Blöder Schwuchtel. I flip him off and he stops his car, disembarks and tries to start a fight with me. He is twice my size. I tell him to calm down and leave me alone. There is a disconnect between how I see myself (cis-male gay), how I supposedly am (genderqueer), and how others categorize me (femme gay boy). I do not know that this disconnect is why I feel wounded when I am hated on by strangers. I do not know that you have to be consistent about who you are, that you have to know where you're coming from and how you're perceived if you want to be socioaffectively strong and well-armored. My socioaffective experience on the street is one of awkwardness and defensive CPTSD. I rabidly yell Fuck Off at a well-meaning stranger who compliments my outrageous outfit. I do not know that hate violence causes bitter unconsciousness as a defense mechanism, the fruit of unconsciousness being ambiguity – a fruit delicious to some. It feels as if my life is like being on a long distance call to a place I'll never be able to reach, a gender utopia I can only connect with through the mediation of subconscious dream and unattainable language. No matter how much change, no matter how much gender currency I feed the pay phone, a gendered robot voice keeps on saying You Have One Minute Remaining and then ends the call abruptly. You're Disconnected.

#### SEARCHING FOR HAIRY MAN PITS

It is bizarre and it is logical that I decide to work out, shave my head and grow a goatee. I have rarely, if ever, had the experience of being checked out by strangers on the street. I want a stranger to want me. I want to align my inner mainstream self with my outer appearance and come into my own as a butch cis-gendered gay man to see how it feels being Self-Congruent. Suddenly the insults from strangers stop like somebody flipped a switch. People check me out on the street. I delight in the attention. My boyfriend accuses me of consciously reaping the benefits of white cis-maleness by wearing a marker of male privilege, which he calls my Viking Beard. After I get upset with him for saying this, he backpedals and says he is jealous because he cannot grow one, and my beard is in fact his favorite part of my face. He says I am in fact not very masculine at all. He believes all and none of these contradictory things at the same time. One friend says it looks like I have glued a beard on. Another friend jovially says You're A Bear Now and then later apologizes. My boyfriend calls me a nazi in front of his friend. I break up with him soon after. I am becoming increasingly disenchanting with the cis-gendered gay men in my life. I begin to analyze myself and others. I think back to the time I was darkroom-raped

by a bisexual cis-man. I want to become my oppressor to get some power back. I am undergoing a slow and messy process of integration. I realize my ex is right about one thing. I am appropriating maleness to wield more power, to appeal to the mainstream, to underscore my privilege, to feel attractive. This is a thing.

#### TO M TEA TO A TEE

Eva is the first person I come out to as nonbinary. As I tell Eva I am nonbinary, I realize that I'm not sure I am nonbinary. The same day I confide in Eva, I shave my Viking Beard off. A week later I start to grow it back. I like my face better with a beard because it distracts from my acne scars and because I have male-pattern baldness. I read that male-pattern baldness is an effect of too much testosterone. That makes me feel better. I try again to be beardless but shaving ravages my face with zits. I try makeup but makeup ravages my face with zits. I am too lazy to shop for hypoallergenic makeup. I am too broke. I know gender isn't just skin deep. I am genderqueer like in my puberty. I am one-step-away-from-stepping-into-gender-fluidity. Agata asks me if I'm having any fun while sorting out my gender issues. I am exuding an air of stress and anal-retentiveness about all of this. As I open the ever-expanding gender dictionary with a thud and scan its pages wide-eyed, discovering genders I never knew existed, I realize that questioning and overanalyzing is like summer vacation to me. But summer vacation isn't always fun. And it doesn't have to be. And sometimes there is no summer vacation because you're in summer school. My fear of my own ignorance and the judgment of others is part of my CPTSD. It is a stark reality from which I am no longer disconnected. I am going to work this out. It's raw and fresh. I feel very immature and very inexperienced, even though I'm not.

#### STARROVER

I am lying in bed watching YouTube clips of the psychic medium Theresa Caputo. Afterwards I immediately start to meditate, being called by a woman's voice to do so. I meditate lying on my back in bed, looking up at the black ceiling, where one red light bulb hangs. My room is black because I have turned my apartment into a secret art gallery with a secret exhibition. I take pictures of the secret exhibition and write a grant application. I hope to get the money but the commission says no and doesn't say why except that my application is not one of the most excellent ones. Some of my friends get the money and survive on it for a year. I lie in my black bedroom and stare at the red light bulb with tears streaming down my face. Theresa Caputo appears and channels my dead Granny Taylor. Theresa Caputo has the same birthday as my real

mother. Theresa teaches me how to talk to and feel spirits, and she tells me to look out the window, at which point I see a crow fly by. At first I see Granny as an old woman, but then I see her as a young woman. Her soul passes through my body, giving me chills. Now the dead people really start coming. Rich and Mariana and Granny, then a bearded guy who lives in a cabin in the woods – my Grandpa Taylor. Then Giustina and Giustina. Giustina di Toscana is a boyish hermit and Giustina di Padova is erudite and wears a golden mask. They organize things. Creeper is a doctor, an indigenous woman with long hair who doesn't like rich white people. Creeper is the vines growing over the crumbling ruins of their abandoned houses. Creeper says Jimmy is a really good guy. Jimmy is my protector. The birds sing his name. Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy. Becky dies in a car accident that I can hear from a distance and then she helps me embrace life. The surgeon, who isn't human, comes to operate on me, taking blood and doing injections. The surgeon is keeping me from getting cancer and dying or suiciding or a heart attack or resignation coma. I am losing the image of my self and it feels good. Too good. I am in a ground-floor apartment and I am surrounded by women. I look around and think to myself that it's good to be surrounded by women at a moment like this. I feel like the desire to be ultramasculine might creep back in, like an old addiction trying to reclaim me. And that is okay. But from now on everything is relative and temporal. I'm laboring to decolonize my heart and mind, dismantling my own gender programming only to reconfigure it, but differently. I am updating and diversifying my fantasy reel.

#### N TO THE O

Days when I feel the most male are days when I am depressed, bitter, strained, addicted, suspicious of others, and hopeless. Days when I feel more female are days when I feel trusting, open, confident, inspired, and independent. These are fluid and open ascriptions, and they are mine alone. They are also not mine. They change from week to week, month to month. I treasure them. I step through a door into an in-between place where I can traffic in masculinity and in the very same moment incorporate a libidinous female liberation and then question both of these things actively and passively. I flip a switch and something illuminates. The Surgeon descends and envelops me in his wobbly luminescent flesh. I see that I am on the way to more than a combination of prescribed opposites. On a wall that is not a wall, there hangs a picture of my spiritual teacher Liz Randol, a Spirit Path Shaman And Lesbian Ex-Catholic Priestess Of Isis From Baltimore Residing In Guanajuato. She plants a seed of balance and transformation in me. I feel my way through a hallway where gender is socioaffective, subjective and outer-inner-fluid.

#### ALL MY NIPPLES TO MARIANA

I am never not learning – and the only way to learn is the hard way. I learn that gender is more complicated than a mere distinction between Gender Performance and Sexual Preference. Gender performance and sexual preference include multiple ranges of performativities and sexualities located flexibly along spectrums of visible and invisible, felt and worn, public and private, embodied and spiritual, and, and, and. What I used to call a Disconnect I now call a Lived Complexity. I decide I am ?ing. Having the gender and sexuality ?ing means questioning language, speech patterns, vocabularies, and time as a linear concept. Being ?ing is not about questioning the validity of any gender or sexuality and it's not about being confused or stuck or in limbo: it's about being on a lifelong quest. Being ?ing is by no means a cop-out. It changes how I fight and how I struggle. The fight changes into a peaceful negotiation, something to enjoy for the duration.

#### I WAS A TWEEN DRAG QUEEN THERESA CAPUTO

We are real, performing, artists. We are sitting in a ground-floor apartment, surrounded by dust swirling in light. We are sitting here, making a book, negotiating our identities through our art and our art through our lives and our lives through our processes. Our art is being embodied-spiritual. I am sitting here writing, a performance. I'm writing a text and it is a real embodied-spiritual thing. There is a feedback loop between this writing and this spirit-/-body. Through socioaffective speech patterns, tones and vocabularies, this writing is affecting and outlining and liberating my spirit-/-body and vice versa. I look up and they're all dancing together. They are making a book together. I am one of many of them. I'm happy that I am deciding to fully embrace the gender universe of being ?ing while working with women on a book. It is and isn't a coincidence. It is a non-coincidental co-inciding (with the emphasis on side). Alongside. Beside. And it is a process. And I don't think it's a contradiction either. Feminism is about breaking the chains of determinisms, essentialisms, reductivisms. At its core, language too, like gender and sexuality, resists determinisms, essentialisms, reductivisms. No matter what rules you apply to it, it somehow always pushes back.

#### ?ING 4EVER

I wake up panicking with racing heartbeat and I am broke and in debt again. I question whether art will continue to sustain me. I decide to get a job and I get one. It doesn't pay very much but it feels like this is what I was meant to do. I work as a geriatric nurse's assistant in a nursing home I will call G. In G, there are mostly women. They are the loudest and the funniest in G. I serve them food, help them

into bed, entertain them, bathe them. I lift them and roll them from left to right, right to left. Some of the women in G have no family, no one who comes to visit. Their suffering and their humor and their strength are limitless. They are shaped by isolation, as am I. I wonder what I can do for the women of G. Give them art? I question whether art will continue to sustain us. I am sustained by the women of G, us all creatures from other galaxies. I speak to the women who can no longer speak. They hear me and are quick to point it out by speaking with their minds and their eyes' bodies. Their spirits will guide us away from our hand-hammered apocalypse.





This project does not end with this publication. 2022 opens a new phase, which we have given the title Quest, where Eva, Agata, William and Katrin will meet regularly throughout the year, sharing their practices, opening them up to new questions, perspectives and challenges. We don't want to sit and wait for a better tomorrow.

The sun will not come out after the storm. We are here and now, floating in a mass of information and problems. We will not wait for the system to change. We want to be here, together, support each other, challenge each other, cause artistic headaches, push when we are lazy, support when we are afraid, hold hands, run together, walk together, and sometimes close our eyes and listen to the pulse of life. It's probably nothing, it's probably what a lot of people do. It's a situation created from our needs – it may seem a very small need, but we don't measure needs on scales of lesser to greater. We focus on those needs for which we want to create time and space.

Give  
me  
your  
bones



This publication is a journey of many companions – passengers of several stations. Those who have arrived at the final stop and are about to change trains together.

We decided on the title collectively. 'Give me your bones' means 'let me support you', not just support of our artistic practices but also giving space to the whole complexity of creation – making art, relationships, days, moments. Bones give structure to our bodies, they are hard and at the same time can be fragile. Our strength and dynamics are built on bones. And because so many tasks rest on our skeletal system, sometimes it's nice to stop, lean back and tell a story.

We hope that the stories here at least give some idea of the space, the smell, the sound, the dance of our meetings.

First printing, limited edition

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