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Marc Buchy en Katya Ev

Colette Dubois

Entretenir vaut mieux



Marc Buchy, *Twist & Tango*, installatie (detail), New Space, Luik (BE), 2022. © Marc Buchy

Marc Buchy (°1988, Metz) en Katya Ev (°1983, Moskou) delen de ruimte van New Space in Luik. Ik ontmoette de twee kunstenaars en de curator, Dorothée Duvivier, voor het eerst op 8 februari, dus nog voordat Poetins troepen Oekraïne binnenvielen. Katya Ev¹, geboren in Moskou, bracht haar jeugd door in Oekraïne. Het spreekt voor zich dat de huidige situatie de kunstenaar diep raakt. In een reactie daarop heeft ze ondertussen een aantal elementen van haar project gewijzigd; ik heb ze in het verslag van dit interview geïntegreerd.

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Katya Ev, *Ne rein faire contre remuneration*, performance, New Space, Luik, 2022, © Katya Ev



Marc Buchy, detail van *Twist & Tango*, installatie, New Space, Luik, 2022, © Marc Buchy

De twee kunstenaars plaatsen performance, protocol en gebaar centraal in hun artistieke praktijk. Ze opereren buiten het klassieke tentoonstellingsformat en de voor de hand liggende plaatsen, om bestaande structuren, instellingen en controlesystemen te deconstrueren. Allebei stellen ze de systemen achter de begrippen artistiek werk, creatie en waarde in vraag. Hun voorstellen, dikwijls conceptueel en minimaal van aard, zijn radicaal in de manier waarop ze de beleving van de werken door de bezoeker verstoren. Tot slot werken ze ook allebei op een schaal 1:1 en integreren ze vaak het nemen van risico's in hun werk. Dorothee Duviser, curator van de tentoonstelling in New Space in Luik², zegt dat de twee elkaar al hadden ontmoet voordat ze voor deze tentoonstelling gingen samenwerken, maar dat ze elkaar nauwelijks kenden en dat ze hier geen gemeenschappelijk werk presenteren. Marc Buchy: 'De afbeelding op de affiche en de flyer is het enige werk dat we samen hebben gemaakt. Het is een soort samenvatting van onze twee oeuvres. Ik denk dat je ons initiatief echt als organisch moet bekijken. We presenteerden elk onze ideeën met betrekking tot de ruimte en de beschikbare middelen, en het bleek al snel dat verschillende thema's en interesses elkaar overlappen. Het resultaat is vrij intuïtief, al lijkt het misschien op twee dingen die gewoon naast elkaar zijn geplaatst (zoals het beeld voor de communicatie dat ze samen hebben gecreëerd), een soort montage in de ruime zin van het woord.' Katya Ev vult aan: 'Er zit een bepaalde symmetrie in die ik interessant vind. Beide voorstellen zijn zowel 'sculpturaal' als performatief maar dan zonder 'performer' in de klassieke betekenis van het woord. In beide gevallen staat de beleving van de kijker/bezoeker centraal. Er zijn ook formele overeenkomsten, het idee van 'reizen' wordt gesuggereerd, de manier waarop de werken zijn geconstrueerd, met een centraal element en subtiele interventies.' In beide gevallen zijn de ingrepen verwant aan de readymade. De esthetiek van de tentoonstelling is bewust eenvoudig gehouden, functioneel en lowbrow, want buiten de circuits van de kunstwereld om. Deze notie van tweevoudigheid, van dualiteit, neemt een bijzondere vorm aan in de link die de werken leggen met de buitenwereld: tussen New Space en de wijk.

Marc Buchy: *twist et tango*

De praktijk van Marc Buchy is conceptueel en neemt de vorm aan van protocolaire toepassingen die dikwijls een samenwerking omvatten. Hij produceert twee categorieën van werk: aan de ene kant werk dat hij volledig beheerst en dat vaak valt onder wat hij 'een holle autobiografie' noemt, aan de andere kant werk dat een eigen bestaan leidt vanuit het protocol dat door de kunstenaar is ingesteld. Meestal houdt hij zich bezig met zeer specifieke thema's. Voor deze tentoonstelling werkte hij op een eerder spontane manier.

Tijdens de eerste bijeenkomst bij New Space plaatste hij een auto in de exporuimte. 'In mijn praktijk probeer ik de tentoonstellingsplaats te overstijgen, zowel in tijd als in ruimte; ik wilde bij New Space graag een voertuig tonen en dat werd het hart van het project', zo zegt hij. Buchy bezit een oude Twingo, geërfd van zijn oudtante in 2017. Wanneer de ruimte gesloten is, wordt de auto bij New Space binnen

geparkeerd. Op de grond zijn met verf twee parkeerplaatsen aangebracht. Tijdens de openingsuren staat hij voor de ingang; de parkeerplaatsen blijven leeg en de autosleutels worden binnen opgehangen, beschikbaar voor het publiek. Je zou dus met de auto kunnen wegrijden. Ik wijs hem erop dat dit echt zou kunnen gebeuren: iemand vertrekt met de auto en brengt hem misschien wel nooit meer terug... 'Misschien ben ik een beetje naïef', antwoordt Marc Buchy. 'Het klopt dat ik in mijn intellectuele of fysieke werk vaak dingen op de proef stel.' Het werk is bedoeld om bezoekers de kans te geven achter het stuur van de auto te gaan zitten en te luisteren naar de tape van de discussie die hij voerde met de filosoof en socioloog Jan Masschelein over een dubbele vraag: kan een kunstwerk een school zijn en kan een school een kunstwerk zijn? 'Het interessante aan Jan is dat hij met zijn studenten op een experimentele manier omgaat. Hij organiseerde verschillende tochten in steden. Zijn leerlingen gaan daarbij allemaal een andere kant op. Zo leggen ze samen met anderen een portret van de stad vast.' Het gesprek werd opgenomen in de Twingo tussen New Space en een uitkijkpunt op een heuvel in de stad, waar ze allebei een foto maakten met hun mobiele telefoon; deze beelden werden in de zonnekleppen van de auto geschoven.

De auto wordt op die manier 'een intellectuele sculptuur, een mentale sculptuur in relatie tot de verkenning van de ruimte en een potentiële sculptuur binnen de stad Luik'. De verschillende tijden overlappen elkaar: je luistert naar een opname die plaatsvond in de auto te midden van uiteenlopende objecten - van de oudtante, van de ouders van de kunstenaar en van de kunstenaar zelf, waaronder een paar versleten witte sneakers met dubbele veters, 'wandelschoenen waarmee je kunt stappen, maar waar je ook mee kunt struikelen.' De kunstenaar heeft op de motorkap van de auto een embleem aangebracht dat verwijst naar zijn serie *Ainsi à l'infini*, een sleutelhanger die deel uitmaakt van zijn *mundi*-project; de reactivering van *Réactance* (de omgekeerde bediening van een lamp bedoeld om beweging te detecteren) zal het apparaat voltooiën. 'Hierdoor kan ik verschillende thema's die in de afgelopen jaren in mijn werk aanwezig waren samenbrengen', zegt hij.

Katya Ev: *de « rien »*

De performatieve praktijk van Katya Ev draait vaak om een 'geconstrueerde situatie', verwijzend naar Guy Debord, dat wil zeggen een opeenstapeling van concrete parameters: de plaats, de juridische elementen, de middelen voor verspreiding enzovoort. Haar werk speelt zich af in de openbare ruimte of in een instituut waar ze een bepaalde situatie uitdaagt. 'Er zit altijd een sociaal-politieke dimensie in mijn werk', zegt ze.

Bij New Space brengt Katya Ev een variant van de performance *Visitors of an Exhibition Space Are Suggested to 'Do Nothing'*, die ze toonde op de tentoonstelling ter afsluiting van een cursus aan het HISK. Die handelde over de neoliberale codes en die van een institutioneel hedendaags kunstevenement, en hield het midden tussen een galerieruimte en de esthetiek van een start-up. Bezoekers konden, door het ondertekenen van een contract waarbij ze zich

Wat is 'niets doen'? Bepalen wat 'niets' is, is een ontologisch totaal onmogelijke taak. De oorlog tussen Rusland en Oekraïne leidt nog tot een andere brandend actuele bedenking: zoals curator Dorothee Duvivier opmerkt, roept 'niets doen de vraag op over onze onmacht, ons onvermogen om te ageren, in te grijpen, de slachtoffers te helpen en te ondersteunen'.

ertoe verbonden om minimaal een uur niets te doen, op een comfortabele stoel plaatsnemen die beschikbaar werd gesteld voor een minimumuurloon (10,25 euro bruto per uur), waarna ze een loonstrook ontvingen. 'Aanvankelijk was het een reactie op de druk om veel te produceren, ook voor kunstenaars. Door met een contract en een loonstrook te werken, maak ik dat dit in het rijksarchief belandt', aldus de kunstenaar. In Luik zal de voorstelling die nu de « rien » heet, rekening houden met de geschiedenis van de plek – ze zal het woord 'rien' noteren op een muur van de garage, tussen de al aanwezige teksten – en met de plaats ervan in de volkse wijk, om zo een ander publiek aan te spreken. Katya Ev neemt deel aan het project *Art au Centre*³, waar ze een poster toont – een readymade van een sterk uitvergroete 'te huur'-poster met de woorden 'Ne rien faire contre rémunération' (Nietsdoen tegen vergoeding) en een telefoonnummer. Deze interventie verbindt de performance met het verhuurmodel. Als ik haar erop wijs dat het inderdaad ook een kwestie is van het verhuren van haar lichaam, wat gelinkt is aan prostitutie, is Katya Ev het daarmee eens en ze verduidelijkt: 'Voor mij was deze voorstelling interessant vanwege de confrontatie tussen 'niets doen' en class privilege'. Het gaat om het deconstrueren van het idee dat 'niets doen' tijdverspilling is en dat hier radicaal tegengesteld is aan het idee van *otium* dat door de oude filosofie wordt bepleit en vervolgens in het westerse denken op grote schaal werd ontwikkeld: een aristocratisch privilege verkregen door de uitsluiting van anderen. Katya Ev: 'Door het toekennen van een symbolische waarde – via een financiële waarde – biedt deze performance iemand tijd en ruimte om zichzelf te zijn. En die kwestie van verhuur is een knoop, het is alles of niets. Biedt deze performance ruimte om te rusten of activeert ze deze dimensie van het lichaam?' En wat is 'niets doen'? Bepalen wat 'niets' is, is een ontologisch totaal onmogelijke taak⁴. De oorlog tussen Rusland en Oekraïne leidt nog tot een andere brandend actuele bedenking: zoals Dorothee Duvivier opmerkt, roept 'niets doen de vraag op over onze onmacht, ons

onvermogen om te ageren, in te grijpen, de slachtoffers te helpen en te ondersteunen'. De discussie die we daarmee op gang hebben gebracht, toont hoe gelaagd de voorstellen van Katya Ev en Marc Buchy zijn. Wie of wat is er aan het werk? Zijn de mensen die plaatsnemen in de fauteuil of in de Twingo performers? Zijn het deelnemers? Wie kijkt er en hoe kijkt je? Al deze vragen rezen bij het uitwerken van de protocollen die de twee kunstenaars hebben bedacht. Al deze vragen zullen gedurende de duur van de tentoonstelling blijven bestaan. 'Ik weet niet wat er gaat gebeuren. Ik weet wat Marc voorstelt, wat ik voorstel, maar dat is het dan ook. Hoe het publiek onze twee voorstellen zal koppelen, moet nog blijken', aldus Katya Ev.

- 1 De kunstenaar bezorgde ons een tekst waarin ze haar standpunt over deze oorlog uiteenzet. Zie pagina 49.
- 2 Sinds 2002 bezit de vzw In Cité Mondri een interactieve sculptuur in Féronstrée en een collectie hedendaagse kunst die momenteel bestaat uit meer dan 135 werken. De vereniging heeft ook twee tentoonstellingsruimtes, SPACE en NEW SPACE. Die tweede ruimte is een 500m² grote voormalige garage van de gerechtelijke politie waar men met andere vormen van kunst en nieuwe tentoonstellingsvormen kan experimenteren. Ze ligt aan de Rue Vivagnis en vormt samen met RAVI, Le Corridor, L'Image Sans Nom, La Comète en E2N een echt centrum voor hedendaagse creatie.
- 3 Het project *Art au Centre* gebruikt de ramen van lege commerciële panden om er werken van hedendaagse kunstenaars te installeren.
- 4 Het contract, opgesteld in samenwerking met een jurist van de Caveat-structuur, specificeert slechts één ding: 'het 'niets' wordt lichamelijk uitgevoerd via de aanwezigheid van het lichaam en het nietsdoen wordt uitgevoerd met diepe ernst en toewijding.'

Entretenir vaut mieux, Marc Buchy en Katya Ev, tot 8 mei 2022, New Space, Luik, www.space-collection.org

Steun aan Oekraïne

Voor mij als Russisch staatsburger, afkomstig uit Odessa, is Oekraïne een immens persoonlijk drama. Russisch zijn betekende voor mij nooit alleen onderdaan zijn van de Russische staat; het houdt ook in dat ik een gemeenschappelijke achtergrond en cultuur deel met Oekraïne, de Baltische staten en andere voormalige Sovjetrepublieken. En nu gaat het nog veel verder. Geconfronteerd met de gruwelen die Vladimir Poetin begaat, verzet elke vezel in mijn lichaam zich om Russisch genoemd te worden. Maar in plaats van mij beschaamd in stilte te hullen, wil ik mijn verantwoordelijkheid opnemen.

Ik ben enorm bevoorrecht dat ik vrijuit kan spreken en ik spreek in de naam van velen: ik steun Oekraïne en betuig mijn oprechte en diepe solidariteit met het Oekraïense volk, die we altijd onze 'broeders' hebben genoemd, en ik veroordeel de verachtelijke militaire invasie van de Russische staat in Oekraïne.

Miljoenen Russen zijn geschokt door de feiten en kapot van deze menselijke tragedie en al het veroorzaakte leed. Het is in Rusland verboden om het woord 'oorlog' te gebruiken, op straffe van criminele vervolging: verschillende media moesten noodgedwongen stoppen omdat ze weigeren deze oorlog een 'speciale militaire operatie' te noemen.

Nooit eerder werd de publieke opinie in Rusland op dergelijke schaal onderdrukt. Mensen die zich uitspreken tegen de oorlog worden ontslagen, wie deelneemt aan anti-oorlogsmanifestaties (brieven, demonstraties, individuele acties, artistieke uitingen enzovoort), kan vervolgd worden, en elke hulp aan Oekraïners wordt beschouwd als 'verraad aan de staat' en bestraft met tot twintig jaar gevangenisstraf. De Russische staat liegt over de hele lijn en gaat zover om het leger uit te rusten met draagbare crematoria om zo het aantal menselijke slachtoffers te minimaliseren.

Ik roep op tot solidariteit met en steun in welke vorm dan ook voor de slachtoffers van deze verwoestende oorlog en voor kunstenaars, activisten en andere slachtoffers van de Russische staat die anti-oorlogsstandpunten hebben ingenomen. Ik ben actief betrokken bij diverse initiatieven en ik ben van plan om door te gaan en mijn uiterste best te doen met de bescheiden middelen die ik als mens ter beschikking heb.

Katya Ev

Katya Ev, *Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'*, vue d'exposition. In a Long Blink of an Eye, HISK, site Gosset, Bruxelles 2020 © Katya Ev

VISITORS:



NE RIEN FAIRE, TOUT GAGNER

“Book your slot to ‘do nothing’”, apostrophe intrigante faite au visiteur, cette injonction à ne rien faire donne le ton de la performance proposée par l'artiste KATYA EV (Moscou, *1983; vit et travaille à Bruxelles et Paris) au sein d'*In a Long Blink of an Eye*, exposition des diplômé-e-s de l'HISK (*Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten – Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts*) en son nouvel espace bruxellois¹. Ainsi montrée pour la première fois du 17 décembre 2020 au 31 janvier 2021, la pièce *Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'* (il est suggéré aux visiteurs d'un espace d'exposition de ne rien faire) se veut une réflexion conceptuelle sur l'incassante productivité induite par le consumérisme contemporain avec, en filigrane, une critique fine des pratiques de rémunération des artistes.



“L'objectif de ne rien faire peut être atteint en s'abstenant de toute action”, écrit-elle. Elle note avec pertinence que cet acte ne peut être défini que par la négation, comme si cette acceptation ne pouvait être exprimée par le langage. Dans la langue française, le terme le plus proche pour décrire ce qui est proposé par la performance *Visitors* est sans doute l'oisiveté. Or l'oisiveté, proche de la paresse, a une connotation parfois péjorative et, bien souvent, bourgeoise; elle convoque des figures littéraires comme Oblomov ou Emma Bovary. Dès la Rome antique, l'*otium*, qui peut être traduit par les loisirs de l'esprit, a été établi comme un privilège de classe. Seules les élites ont toujours eu le confort de profiter d'un temps désintéressé pour façonner leur esprit et mieux comprendre le monde, ce que Cicéron nommait l'*otium cum dignitate*, le repos dans l'honneur. Mais depuis le premier siècle avant Jésus-Christ, les cartes des classes sociales ont été généreusement rebattues et, aujourd'hui, l'absence contrainte d'activité est devenue un signe de pauvreté. L'œuvre montre qu'il y a socialement deux façons de vivre le ne rien faire, l'une étant bien plus précaire que l'autre; les artistes le savent bien et c'est ce que Katya Ev souligne subtilement. La possibilité de prendre une pause d'introspection à durée déterminée par soi-même est un luxe qu'elle offre à ses visiteurs. Elle permet d'expérimenter ce que les Chinois nomment le *wuwei*, un état de présence, de réceptivité, de disponibilité qui ne peut être considéré comme de la passivité. Comme l'indique l'annexe au contrat, “L'activation d'un espace intérieur en connexion profonde avec le soi, tout en s'essayant tranquillement, en ‘ne faisant rien’, révèle un potentiel émancipateur.” Mais encore faut-il parvenir à lâcher prise.

Pendant ce moment de détachement d'un quotidien effréné offert ici, j'ai davantage eu l'impression de me remplir la tête plutôt que de me la vider. J'ai été extrêmement surprise par le flot de pensées qui m'a soudainement submergée, comme si je vivais un léger *bore-out*, ce nouveau fléau du monde du travail contemporain où l'ennui au bureau finit par épuiser mentalement et physiquement. Perdue dans mes émotions, je me surprends même à m'assoupir. Je parviens à rester un peu plus d'une heure, comme la moitié des participants, et apprendrai par la suite que l'autre moitié n'a presque jamais dépassé les dix minutes.

Toutes les interrogations spontanées sur le rien faire mènent aussi à une réflexion plus large sur la dualité activité / passivité. L'invitation faite par Katya Ev à ne rien faire rend le visiteur très actif, puisqu'il est obligé de se confronter au tumulte de ses pensées, souvent mises en pause par le rythme hyperactif qu'imposent nos sociétés contemporaines. La stimulation est en effet rendue permanente par nos interactions dématérialisées, l'information disponible en continu et les réseaux sociaux, nous rendant ainsi passifs à notre propre conscience. Les hôtes, choisis par l'artiste pour leurs capacités d'accompagnement des participants à plonger dans un état de profonde connexion à soi, peuvent les guider vers un état d'apaisement s'ils n'y parvenaient pas par eux-mêmes. Il est vrai que la posture du “ne rien faire” peut mettre mal à l'aise: non seulement performer le rien n'est naturel pour personne mais en plus, dans ce dispositif, cette in(activité) se fait aux yeux de tous.

Katya Ev, *Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'*, vue d'exposition. In a Long Blink of an Eye, HISK, site Gosset, Bruxelles 2020 © Laura Cortin Stabarakis, Manuel Wetscher

¹ Établi depuis plusieurs années à Gand, l'HISK dispose en outre, depuis 2020, de ses propres locaux à Bruxelles, plus précisément dans l'ancienne usine Gosset à Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. In a Long Blink of an Eye, exposition inaugurale, s'y est tenue du 17 décembre 2020 au 31 janvier 2021. Pour plus de renseignements sur ce cursus de beaux-arts, post@pibone.in.arts-visuals.hisk.edu.

² www.doingnothing.website.
³ Mona Chollet, *Chez soi: une odyssee de l'espace domestique*, Paris, éditions Zones, 2015.



Comme le démontre l'autrice Mona Chollet dans son essai *Chez soi*⁴, le domicile est le lieu où il est le plus socialement acceptable de ne rien faire. Elle cite Gaston Bachelard qui légitime la pratique du repli de soi dans un cadre intime: "La maison abrite la rêverie, la maison protège le rêveur, la maison nous permet de rêver en paix. Il n'y a pas que les pensées et les expériences qui sanctionnent les valeurs humaines"⁴. Lovée confortablement dans le fauteuil en cuir de *Visitors*, j'essaie de me familiariser avec l'environnement pour tenter de m'y fondre. Mais, dans un espace d'exposition, la propension au rêve est quelque peu mise à mal par la présence des autres visiteurs. Immobile, à distance, le performeur est comme réifié, regardé par le public au même titre que les éléments de mobilier habillant l'espace. Le titre de l'œuvre, considéré in extenso, semble brouiller les pistes. "Visitors of an exhibition are suggested to 'do nothing'": de quel visiteur parle-t-on? Est-ce le visiteur qui choisit de ne rien faire ou le spectateur observant la scène qui est le plus inactif? C'est, en tout cas, l'une des questions que je me pose en sentant un regard presque voyeuriste sur ma méditation au cœur d'un espace public. Resté que, par leur simple présence, les visiteurs-spectateurs donnent une existence objective au fait de ne rien faire.

L'écho que trouve ce projet dans le ralentissement inhérent aux confinements de cette dernière année n'est que fortuit. Sa genèse est plus ancienne. Elle part d'une réaction aux pratiques courantes de rémunération des artistes dans le système artistique actuel. "Je constate avec exaspération et désarroi que les institutions témoignent d'une compréhension très partielle de ce qu'implique le temps de travail artistique en proposant des honoraires loin d'être équitables", m'a confié Katya Ev lors d'un entretien. Initialement imaginée pour être présentée au Paris Art Lab, la performance *Visitors* a particulièrement bien résonné avec la situation dans laquelle se sont retrouvés tous les artistes de la promotion 2020 de l'HISK. Leur dernière année à Gand s'est soldée en grande partie par une assignation à résidence, sans possibilité de travailler dans les lieux culturels qui font fréquemment appel à eux.

Reporté à une date indéterminée, le projet a finalement amené l'artiste à le concevoir en tant que performance déléguée, diffusée sous forme de publication dont chaque exemplaire serait un contrat. Il suffira à l'acquéreur de le lui renvoyer signé pour que la performance soit activée. Cette publication participant d'un projet à long terme, la pièce présentée à l'HISK en est, en quelque sorte, une version bêta. L'échelle de réalisation de la performance autorisée contractuellement par l'artiste est, quant à elle, extrêmement variable: seuls quelques paramètres essentiels de mise en espace et de respect des règles sociales en vigueur sont obligatoires. Prévoyant de porter sa publication à deux mille exemplaires, Katya Ev souhaite faire sortir la performance du strict cadre du centre d'art, l'ouvrant à des canaux non institutionnels. Dans ce contrat, il est indiqué que l'artiste doit être rémunérée au prorata du nombre d'heures d'inaction des participants. Tant qu'il est au moins égal au salaire minimum en vigueur, le montant de rémunération des participants choisi par le délégataire reste libre, peu importe son statut. Cette clause assure en tout cas à l'artiste de percevoir sa rémunération.

Ayant envisagé *Visitors* comme une proposition de nouveau modèle socio-économique diffusable à grande échelle, Katya Ev montre comment l'artiste peut aussi influencer sur le monde en s'attaquant à l'appareil juridique qui le régit. Sa performance a en effet été conçue dans la stricte application du droit en vigueur. Pour son concept initial et la publication à venir, elle a souhaité explorer le contrat comme nouvelle forme artistique et a eu pour cela besoin de s'entourer de juristes à même de comprendre tous les enjeux de la performance. Le cheminement juridique a été long. Les deux contrats de délégation et de cession de droits d'auteur ont finalement été rédigés à plusieurs mains, par Nicolas Crestani, avocat en propriété intellectuelle, et par l'équipe de *Caveat*, projet de recherche basé à Bruxelles comprenant artistes, chercheurs et juristes, dont l'objectif est de repenser les pratiques et relations de travail déterminant la condition des artistes. *Caveat* souhaite éveiller les consciences de tous les acteurs du monde culturel afin de "contribuer au passage

Katya Ev, *Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'*, vue d'exposition in a Long Blink of an Eye, HISK, site Gosset, Bruxelles 2020 © Katya Ev

d'une économie à une écologie de pratiques artistiques"⁵. En ce sens, l'ambition de sa recherche est de créer des alternatives plus durables de collaboration, en élaborant des cadres juridiques valables pour des artistes dont le travail s'intéresse au phénomène contractuel.

En 2018 par exemple, *Caveat* a soutenu l'installation *Zero Hour* de Sofia Caesar, projet dénonçant la précarité des contrats dits de "zéro heure", phénomène en recrudescence qui voit l'employé s'engager, en quelque sorte, à être à tout moment à disposition de l'employeur. Dans ce cas, comme dans celui de Katya Ev, le groupe de recherche se positionne tel un coproducteur de l'œuvre, mais pas au sens traditionnellement entendu dans l'art contemporain. *Caveat* ne fournit pas de soutien financier mais bien un accompagnement, un soutien pratique, voire moral. Les artistes aidés sont nommés "producers", c'est-à-dire des "utilisateurs produisant de la valeur en utilisant ce qu'ils ont produit eux-mêmes"⁶ d'après le terme inventé par le théoricien des médias australien Axel Burns. Par ces liens de "produçage"⁷, l'objectif de *Caveat* est de créer une relation de longue durée avec les artistes, au cours de laquelle le partage de savoirs et de compétences permet de repenser les solidarités dans le monde de l'art, avec moins de prédation et plus d'horizontalité. *Caveat* organise aussi des *reading rooms* durant lesquelles des projets soutenus sont débattus collectivement et forment le point de départ d'une discussion plus large sur les pratiques socio-économiques dans l'art contemporain. Une prochaine *reading room* sera dédiée au contrat préparé pour *Visitors*.

Ce travail sur le contrat mené avec *Caveat* a produit une réflexion quant à la meilleure façon de traduire le prisme conceptuel de Katya Ev en un langage juridique, tout en jouant sur les ambiguïtés de la loi et ses interprétations actuelles, lesquelles suivent bien souvent un agenda politique sous-jacent. Julie Van Elslande, juriste chez *Caveat*, a élaboré le contenu du contrat en utilisant tous les interstices et vides juridiques existants. Par exemple, il ne s'agit pas d'un contrat de travail mais d'un contrat de prestation afin d'éviter que l'artiste ne devienne employeuse; les parties ne sont jamais qualifiées autrement que par "vous" et "je", conférant ainsi une certaine ambiguïté au cadre de leurs obligations respectives. La coproduction de *Visitors* eut aussi pour effet de montrer à quel point le droit est une matière vivante, avec laquelle l'on peut jouer pour atteindre des buts autres que la seule législation. Une fois mis en pratique, il peut ouvrir à des questionnements sociaux

plus larges que le cas d'espèce qu'il vient régir. C'est un trait reconnaissable de l'artiste, habituée à produire des pièces subversives, tenant sur le fil de la légalité. En plein état d'urgence post-attentats du 13 novembre 2015, sa performance *Augenmusik* (achetée par le M HKA en 2020) a vu déambuler dans Paris des performeurs portant silencieusement un gyrophare de police, objet symbolique des forces de l'ordre, pourtant disponible dans le commerce.

Pour *Visitors*, le tour de force du contrat imaginé par l'artiste et *Caveat* est de rendre valable le fait de ne rien faire dans le système capitaliste. En ce sens, il est intéressant de noter que ce projet produit par l'HISK a donc été financé par des subsides émanant du gouvernement flamand. En rémunérant le spectateur pour le temps passé à ne rien faire, la performance s'attaque à l'argent, valeur centrale du capitalisme, dans la plus grande antinomie. Adoptant toutes les spécificités de son système, elle a même prévu une rémunération à 200% les dimanches et jours fériés.

En offrant le droit de ne rien faire, Katya Ev s'inscrit à contre-courant de ce que la société hyper productiviste attend de son *homo economicus*: "*Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'* déconstruit l'idée de ne rien faire comme étant du temps perdu, mais aussi la productivité comme valeur" précise-t-elle sur le site "doing, nothing"⁸. Par ces incitations au ralentissement, elle s'inscrit également dans une histoire de l'art affirmant l'importance du "ne rien faire" comme l'avait mis en lumière l'exposition *New Ways of doing nothing* à la Kunsthalle de Vienne en 2014, en accord avec la formule du Bartleby de Melville: "je préférerais ne pas". Qu'il s'agisse de l'éloge de la paresse par Kazimir Malevitch dans *The Truth of Mankind* de 1921, de la figure du flâneur chez les situationnistes ou, plus récemment, des œuvres d'Edith Dékyndt questionnant le sommeil et la veille, les propositions artistiques sur la question se posent essentiellement comme des réflexions ou des images sur le "ne rien faire" en tant que geste non productif.

Au visiteur, Katya Ev en propose une expérience concrète et légale. En outre, elle lui accorde une grande part d'autodétermination: il peut partir quand il veut. En théorie, il peut ne jamais perdre sa mission rémunérée. N'est-ce pas là, au fond, un nouveau modèle bienveillant des relations de travail qu'a imaginé Katya Ev? Poser un cadre d'obligations mutuelles en laissant au salarié le loisir d'être maître de son temps de travail? Et donc, peut-être, décider de faire ou de ne rien faire, pour toujours.

Claire Contamine



Katya Ev, *Visitors of an exhibition space are suggested to 'do nothing'*, vue d'exposition in a Long Blink of an Eye, HISK, site Gosset, Bruxelles 2020 © Katya Ev

4 Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, Paris, PUF, 1957.

5 "contribute to a shift from an economy to an ecology of artistic practices" source: <https://caveat.be/pages/about.html>

6 "users producing value as they use", source: <https://caveat.be/producers.html>

7 Définition de "produçage" par son inventeur Axel Burns: "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement", source: <http://produçage.org/produçage>

8 doingnothingwebsite.com/conceptual-prism

Claire Contamine est une curatrice basée à Bruxelles. Titulaire d'un master en histoire de l'art contemporain et d'un master en droit public des universités de la Sorbonne et Panthéon Assas à Paris, elle a travaillé comme assistant curator au Palais de Tokyo puis comme responsable de l'équipe curatoriale de RIBOCA2, la deuxième édition de la biennale d'art contemporain de Riga. Elle travaille actuellement comme chargée de production des expositions et programmation radio à Kanal Centre Pompidou. Elle fait également partie du collectif 10N, espace d'exposition temporaire ouvert en novembre dernier à Uccle.



Katya Ev

VISITORS OF AN EXHIBITION SPACE ARE SUGGESTED TO 'DO NOTHING'

PAYMENT NOTE N°2021-1-9/3

Date: January 9, 2021

Between

Ekaterina Vasilyeva

Paris, France

Siret:

VAT ID:

and

Steyn Bergs

Born on April 7, 1987, 6600, Belgium

1000, Belgium

1180, Steyn-Bergs, Belgium

steyn.bergsg@proton.com

National register number:

Bank details:

Object: payment for 'doing nothing' as agreed upon in the Contract for 'Doing Nothing' N°2021-1-9/3 d.d. January 9, 2021

Steyn Bergs requests from Ekaterina Vasilyeva the payment for 'doing nothing':

on the date: January 9, 2021

starting time: 14:45

end time: 15:46

1 hour x € 10.25*

Total amount to be paid: €10.25

Payment method: Cash

Ekaterina Vasilyeva agrees and proceeds to immediate payment of the requested amount.

For proof of payment:

Ekaterina Vasilyeva

Steyn Bergs

* Belgium's general minimum wage upon CAO (collective labour agreement) n° 43 of the National Labour Council, which sets the absolute national bottom amount for wages. These apply when there are no other specific sectoral agreements on minimum wages. On Sundays and national holidays the compensation is 200%.

(x,y)://www.doingnothing.website/data-form

(1,3)
+ Steyn
+ NOTHING/
Notes on DOING:
+ Katya Ev's
Visitors of an
Exhibition Space
are Suggested to
'Do Nothing'

For all its deadpan self-explanatory qualities, the title of Katya Ev's *Visitors of an Exhibition Space are Suggested to 'Do Nothing'* (2020, henceforth *Visitors*) does not mention what is in fact a crucial aspect of the work: that it employs legal tools to explicitly frame 'doing nothing' as productive labour.¹ A participatory performance piece, it indeed suggests visitors to do nothing, but not without first meticulously spelling out the conditions that 'doing nothing' will be both subject to and enabled by. Upon entering the exhibition space, visitors first encounter a reception desk where they are explained the parameters of the piece. If a spot is available, it is possible to take part and 'do nothing' for any amount of time, and to be financially compensated for every full hour spent in and on the performance. Before commencing, visitors sign a contract that was developed by Ev in close collaboration with a lawyer, and which is legally valid and binding. After the performance, they are remunerated and receive a proof of payment. They are reminded that, now they have sold their time and labour-power to the artist, they are responsible for paying all applicable taxes and social contributions.²

The 'act' of 'doing nothing' itself takes place on a chair placed in the exhibition space and can consist of anything, insofar as the contradictory and ultimately impossible proposition to 'do nothing' must be interpreted and navigated by each visitor as they see fit. Nonetheless, some instructions are given: visitors are invited to be attentive to themselves as well as to their surroundings, to try to be fully 'present.' As such, the performance is supposed to facilitate and foster a pleasant, positive experience of 'doing nothing' marked—again, contradictorily—by a kind of plenitude. This experience, the website for the work states, possesses a "generative emancipatory potential."³

In these notes, I want to begin to rise to the challenge not only of taking this claim seriously, but also of considering and examining it alongside the work's emphatic equation of 'doing nothing' with productive labour and its concomitant, and acute, emphasis on legal regulation. For, as is evident, the putatively emancipatory 'act' of 'doing nothing' here is compromised and contaminated from the outset by capitalist relations, and is threaded through state and legal apparatuses that enable and reproduce these relations—most conspicuously, the labour contract.⁴ What to make of the work's simultaneous foregrounding of legal regulation and the emancipatory potential it would contain? And how to conceptualize this emancipatory potential when it is so clearly entangled with precisely those things that one would imagine we need emancipating from? These contradictions, which *Visitors* all but flaunts, strike me as especially fruitful and instructive for attempts to move beyond a simply and straightforwardly oppositional understanding of emancipation. One limitation of such an understanding is that it tends to become reductive and binary in equating political emancipation overly or exclusively with an antithetical attitude towards something one is either entirely for or against—with the former option supposedly signaling complicity, and the latter requiring critical distantiation and immunization. Another is that it may often not be so viable under the present conditions of neoliberal

1. In the Marxist critique of political economy, the definition of productive labour does not hinge on the quality, character, or content of the labour performed, but rather on the social relations it is embedded within. Roughly speaking, labour is considered productive when there is a more or less formalized relation between a seller and a buyer of labour (a worker and an employer), when surplus-value is created, and when that surplus-value is appropriated by the buyer of labour. I apply the term here, even though the situation staged in *Visitors* does not meet this last criterion. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 1041-1044.

2. My description and discussion of *Visitors* is based on my own experience with the work within the context of the group exhibition *In a Long Blink of an Eye* (HISK Gosset Site, Brussels, 17 December 2020 – 31 January 2021), which is where the work was first shown. It is important to mention, however, that Ev has enabled for up to 2000 "delegated enactments" of the work to take place. This means that anyone interested in (re-)staging the work can do so, on the condition that they sign a legal agreement developed by the artist and her lawyer. This agreement stipulates certain terms for the delegated enactments (including instructions relating to the exhibition space and the performance's set-up), so that these can take place without further direct involvement on the artist's behalf, and can be developed in a variety of ways as long as the agreement is respected. See: www.doingnothing.website/delegated-enactments.

3. "doing nothing," *Visitors of an Exhibition Space are Suggested to 'Do Nothing'*, accessed February 18, 2021, www.doingnothing.website/doing-nothing

4. This is also what, in my view at least, sets a work like Ev's apart from Jenny Odell's propositions for 'doing nothing' in her theory/self-help book *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. While Odell is wary of romanticizing 'doing nothing' and, like *Visitors*, points to the many complications and challenges it entails, she nonetheless often ends up reproducing a sharp antithesis between participation in the neoliberal (and technologized) attention economy and resistance against it. Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn & London: Melville House, 2019).

5. Anna Watkins Fisher, *The Play in the System: The Art of Paratextual Resistance* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2020), 16.

6. "doing nothing,"

7. "I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the café a quarter of an hour late. Pierre is always punctual. Will he have waited for me? I look at the room, the patrons, and I say, 'He is not here.' Is there an intuition of Pierre's absence, or does negation indeed enter in only with judgment? At first sight it seems absurd to speak here of intuition since to be exact there could not be an intuition of nothing, and since the absence of Pierre is this nothing." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Washington: Washington Square Press, 1993), 9.

capitalism, where those committed to emancipation are inevitably part of and reliant on systems "whose conditions they have little or no ability to negotiate."⁵ I therefore want to confront and engage the contradictions present in *Visitors* directly, in an effort at thinking how—if at all—claims to emancipation, such as the one staked by the work, might currently be furthered and achieved through artistic and aesthetic practice.



I have asserted, but not yet demonstrated, that 'doing nothing' in *Visitors* is not just subject to, but also *enabled by* the legal framework and conditions advanced in and by the piece. Here, a look at the contract and the paratext accompanying the work is in order. Consider, for instance, this particularly glorious mobilization of the perverse poetic potential of legal-administrative language, on the webpage that explains the premises of the work: "In whichever way 'doing nothing' is enacted concretely, the contract signed by participants formally recognizes that what they are doing is what 'nothing' is."⁶ The pragmatic solipsism of contractual and legal circumscription here substitutes for rather more lofty meditations on the ontology of 'nothingness'. The performativity of legislative utterances is what makes the impossibility of 'doing nothing' appear as available and renders it practically realizable—but not really, as participants in *Visitors* will naturally experience first hand. In this context, it is worth recalling the example of the perception or experience of the absence of a friend in a café, which philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre uses in *Being and Nothingness* to demonstrate the dialectical entwinement of appearance and non-appearance, and ultimately of being and nothingness.⁷ Somewhat like Sartre's absent friend, the contract and the discursive framing of *Visitors* affords a kind of perception of nothing(ness), and sets off a series of reflections on the paradoxical nature of such perception.

But *Visitors* is also, and in ways that are perhaps more significant for my purposes here, reminiscent of feminist philosopher Cressida J. Heyes's interest in a particular kind of liminal experience that she terms anaesthetic time in her book *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge*. The experience of anaesthetic time is liminal not only in that it mediates between different states, but also because it itself teeters on the edge of what can or cannot be accounted for as (having an) experience. Sleep, passing out, and the self-administration of anaesthetic drugs—both licit and illicit—are all phenomena that Heyes discusses at some length in this regard. But one example, discussed in the introduction to the book, seems particularly valuable in relation to *Visitors*. Here, Heyes describes an advertisement for a float tank—or sensory deprivation tank, where one floats in salted water in complete silence and darkness—that promises the possibility of experiencing nothing while also, quite ironically, stressing the productive dimension of the experience. Heyes mentions that while the promised benefits of the float tank fall "under the headings of relaxation and meditation, broadly construed," the advertisement also insists that such relaxation and

meditation are beneficial for one's work performance: "Some people, we learn, have 'drafted whole portions of books while floating.'"⁸

For Heyes, the float tank demonstrates not only the possibility of withdrawing from experience, but also the ambiguous political import of such forms of withdrawal. It is clear that the float tank is not only a characteristic product of the so-called experience economy, but is also valued precisely to the extent that the experience of 'nothing' would enable productivity. At the same time, insofar as it offers some refuge or respite from what Heyes calls postdisciplinary time—characterized by an excess of stimuli, a proliferation of demands and tasks, and a general sense of temporal fragmentation—anaesthetic time for Heyes is supremely political. If withdrawal into anaesthetic time falls short of qualifying as emancipatory in any immediately recognizable sense, and is likely to be perceived instead as mere escapism, then this is because it troubles the conventional understanding of political agency as the exclusive domain of fully autonomous and self-sovereign individuals. Heyes, however, resists seeing the conscious or unconscious decision to detach from experience only in such terms. She wants to salvage the ambiguous emancipatory qualities of anaesthetic time, and to consider and propose it as a political tactic for the refusal—however flawed and problematic—of conditions which do not allow for escape or effective resistance. Anaesthetic time, for Heyes, presents a form of emancipation (albeit a temporary one) that does not rely so intensely or exclusively on opposition against or negation of its object.



In *Visitors*, 'doing nothing' is expressly valorized; it is claimed to possess an emancipatory potential, which would reside in its capacity to activate "an inner space in deep connection to the self." One can certainly be skeptical of this use of therapeutic-meditational rhetoric, or indeed of any appeal to the virtues of supposedly direct and unmediated corporeal experience. But then what is crucial is that this use and this appeal in *Visitors* are complicated by the explicitly avowed intrusion of political economy and the juridical system alike. The work seems to insist on having it both ways—emphasizing the positivity and fullness of the experience of 'doing nothing' while also indexing its imbrication with capital and law. Somewhat analogous to Heyes's treatment of the sensory deprivation tank and of the political valences of anaesthetic time more generally, then, it engages the political character of contemporary experience—including aesthetic experience—in its complex ambiguity.

As such, the work poses some pressing questions for critical cultural theory—which, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued, is often disproportionately driven by a 'paranoid' hermeneutics of suspicion and is therefore likely to be impatient with political compromise, complicity, and ambiguity, favouring instead strategies of critical distanciation and determinate negation.⁹ Yes, the experience of 'doing nothing' here is compromised and contaminated by capitalist relations, as I have written,

8. Cressida J. Heyes, *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2020), 8.

9. Concomitantly, and importantly for my discussion of *Visitors*, what Sedgwick terms paranoid readings also tend to be especially reluctant to ascribe significance to (aesthetic) pleasures and the forms of betterment and relief they might offer. "Reparative motives, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure ('merely aesthetic') and because they are frankly ameliorative ('merely reformist'). What makes pleasure and amelioration so 'mere'? Only the exclusiveness of paranoid's faith in demystifying exposure: only its cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of gender roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions)." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 144.

but does that automatically mean that one should disregard or dismiss its potential emancipatory yield? Should consciousness of the capitalist nature of 'doing nothing' be seen as necessarily foreclosing all politically desirable (side-)effects in advance? And if some visitors do experience something they want to describe as a deep connection to the self, then is this experience or its significance qualitatively lessened because of its subsumption by the juridical-economic complex? The knee-jerk response of the critical critic would be a resounding "yes", but the wholly unironic certainty with which *Visitors* insists simultaneously on the beneficial nature of 'doing nothing' and its entanglement with both the market economy and the law is enough to make anyone think twice.



While I hope already to have shown how 'doing nothing' in *Visitors* is not at all tantamount to mere passivism or escapism and offers some distinct—if also thorny—political possibilities, objections might still be raised about the apparently individualistic nature of the experience the work affords. Considering that this experience is so explicitly personalized and premised on interiority and a depth model of subjecthood, one may well wonder about how, if at all, it could become communicable—how 'doing nothing' might provide common ground for politically significant activity or praxis. But while individual experiences with *Visitors* may all be unique, they are also likely to be considerably similar. It is ultimately rather improbable, for instance, that someone would *not* experience and make sense of the work as a more or less determinate and strategic retreat from what Heyes terms postdisciplinary time.

Recall, also, that this supposedly unique and intimate experience is both preceded and followed by an entirely standardized administrative procedure—the signing of the contract, receiving payment—and therefore emphatically conditioned by the impersonal mechanisms and procedures of both the juridical system and capitalism. It remains, at root, an economic transaction. Rather than subvert, transgress, or destabilize the legal and economic frameworks that increasingly regulate life, *Visitors* takes a work-to-rule approach. In so doing, it tests the limits of these frameworks, probes them for inconsistencies, and evaluates what emancipatory experiences are residually possible—or may indeed be newly available. In its affirmation of an outspokenly immanent form of emancipation, Ev's work attests to an arguably less dualistic, but certainly more realistic, understanding of the ambiguous political valences of both artistic production and aesthetic experience at the present time—when compromise and contamination by law and capital cannot be phobically avoided, but need unfortunately to be recognized and reckoned with as the everyday normality for most of us, most of the time.

For all its deadpan self-explanatory qualities, the title of Katya Ev's *Visitors of an Exhibition Space are Suggested to 'Do Nothing'* (2020, henceforth *Visitors*) does not mention what is in fact a crucial aspect of the work: that it employs legal tools to explicitly frame 'doing nothing' as productive labour.¹ A participatory performance piece, it indeed suggests visitors to do nothing, but not without first meticulously spelling out the conditions that 'doing nothing' will be both subject to and enabled by. Upon entering the exhibition space, visitors first encounter a reception desk where they are explained the parameters of the piece. If a spot is available, it is possible to take part and 'do nothing' for any amount of time, and to be financially compensated for every full hour spent in and on the performance. Before commencing, visitors sign a contract that was developed by Ev in close collaboration with a lawyer, and which is legally valid and binding. After the performance, they are remunerated and receive a proof of payment. They are reminded that, now they have sold their time and labour-power to the artist, they are responsible for paying all applicable taxes and social contributions.²

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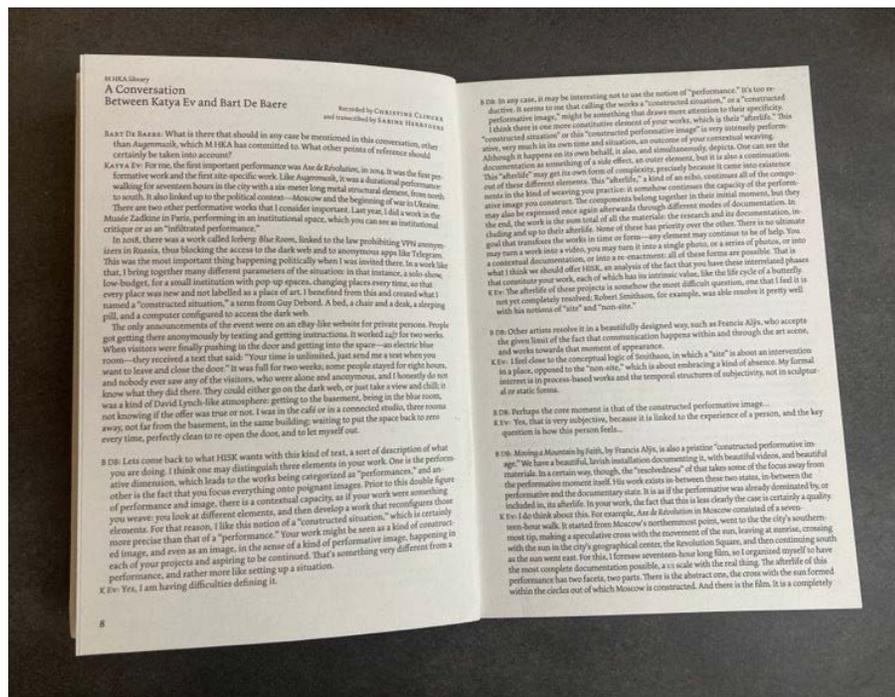
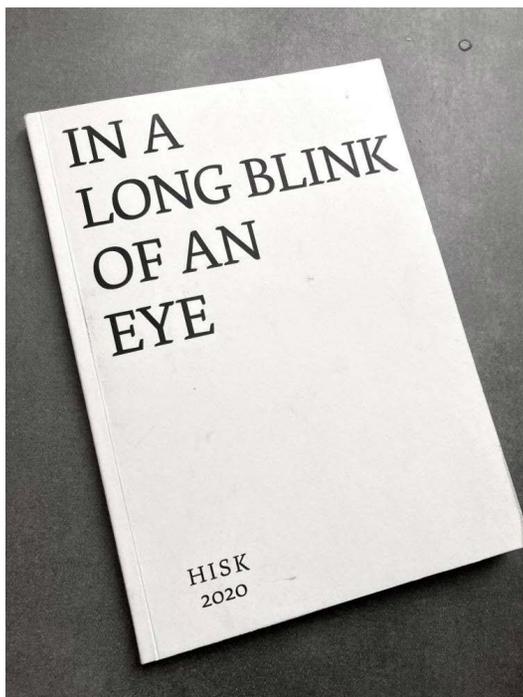
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capitalism, where those committed to emancipation are inevitably part of and reliant on systems "whose conditions they have little or no ability to negotiate."⁵ I therefore want to confront and engage the contradictions present in *Visitors* directly, in an effort at thinking how—if at all—claims to emancipation, such as the one staked by the work, might currently be furthered and achieved through artistic and aesthetic practice.



I have asserted, but not yet demonstrated, that 'doing nothing' in *Visitors* is not just subject to, but also *enabled by* the legal framework and conditions advanced in and by the piece. Here, a look at the contract and the paratext accompanying the work is in order. Consider, for instance, this particularly glorious mobilization of the perverse poetic potential of legal-administrative language, on the webpage that explains the premises of the work: "In whichever way 'doing nothing' is enacted concretely, the contract signed by participants formally recognizes that what they are doing is what 'nothing' is."⁶ The pragmatic solipsism of contractual and legal circumscription here substitutes for rather more lofty meditations on the ontology of 'nothingness'. The performativity of legislative utterances is what makes the impossibility of 'doing nothing' appear as available and renders it practically realizable—but not really, as participants in *Visitors* will naturally experience first hand. In this context, it is worth recalling the example of the perception or experience of the absence of a friend in a café, which philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre uses in *Being and Nothingness* to demonstrate the dialectical entwinement of appearance and non-appearance, and ultimately of being and nothingness.⁷ Somewhat like Sartre's absent friend, the contract and the discursive framing of *Visitors* affords a kind of perception of nothing(ness), and sets off a series of reflections on the paradoxical nature of such perception.

But *Visitors* is also, and in ways that are perhaps more significant for my purposes here, reminiscent of feminist philosopher Cressida J. Heyes's interest in a particular kind of liminal experience that she terms anaesthetic time in her book *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge*. The experience of anaesthetic time is liminal not only in that it mediates between different states, but also because it itself teeters on the edge of what can or cannot be accounted for as (having an) experience. Sleep, passing out, and the self-administration of anaesthetic drugs—both licit and illicit—are all phenomena that Heyes discusses at some length in this regard. But one example, discussed in the introduction to the book, seems particularly valuable in relation to *Visitors*. Here, Heyes describes an advertisement for a float tank—or sensory deprivation tank, where one floats in salted water in complete silence and darkness—that promises the possibility of experiencing nothing while also, quite ironically, stressing the productive dimension of the experience. Heyes mentions that while the promised benefits of the float tank fall "under the headings of relaxation and meditation, broadly construed," the advertisement also insists that such relaxation and



HISK publication *In a Long Blink of an Eye*, 2020 - [A Conversation Between Katya Ev and Bart De Baere](#)

A Conversation Between Katya Ev and Bart De Baere

Recorded by Christine Clinckx and transcribed by Sabine Herrygers
M HKA library / HISK publication *In a Long Blink of an Eye*, 2020

Bart De Baere: What is there that should in any case be mentioned in this conversation, other than *Augenmusik*, which M HKA has committed to. What other points of reference should certainly be taken into account?

Katya Ev: For me, the first important performance was *Axe de Révolution*, in 2014. It was the first performative work and the first site-specific work. Like *Augenmusik*, it was a durational performance: walking for seventeen hours in the city with a six-meter long metal structural element, from north to south. It also linked up to the political context—Moscow and the beginning of war in Ukraine.

There are two other performative works that I consider important. Last year, I did a work in the Musée Zadkine in Paris, performing in an institutional space, which you can see as institutional critique or as an “infiltrated performance.”

[...]

BDB: In any case, it may be interesting not to use the notion of “performance.” It’s too reductive. It seems to me that calling the works a “constructed situation,” or a “constructed performative image,” might be something that draws more attention to their specificity.

I think there is one more constitutive element of your works, which is their “afterlife.” This “constructed situation” or this “constructed performative image” is very intensely performative, very much in its own time and situation, an outcome of your contextual weaving. Although it happens on its own behalf, it also, and simultaneously, depicts. One can see the documentation as something of a side effect, an outer element, but it is also a continuation. This “afterlife” may get its own form of complexity, precisely because it came into existence out of these different elements. This “afterlife,” a kind of an echo, continues all of the components in the kind of weaving you practice: it somehow continues the capacity of the performative image you construct. The components belong together in their initial moment, but they may also be expressed once again afterwards through different modes of documentation. In the end, the work is the sum total of all the materials: the research and its documentation, including and up to their afterlife. None of these has priority over the other. There is no ultimate goal that transfixes the works in time or form—any element may continue to be of help. You may turn a work into a video, you may turn it into a single photo, or a series of photos, or into a contextual documentation, or into a re-enactment: all of these forms are possible.

[...]

BDB: A question I often ask myself is why a person takes on this very strange and lonely job, being an artist: why does a person decide to move into art? What is the value that gives you the courage to do this? What makes you do this?

K EV: The answer to that is constantly evolving. I moved from Moscow to Paris, and also from being a brand manager in a multinational American company, Procter & Gamble, to making art. I had experienced how high capitalism works from the inside, with all its internal mechanisms, and it

drove me crazy.

{...}

BDB: You work on the borderline between what society accepts and what it doesn’t. You must be quite aware of the fact that there are always conditions, in contrast to our Western societies, which grotesquely pretend that society is free. How do you imagine that political, cultural, and societal changes may affect your work?

K EV: My work draws its origins from them. It is a constant, fluid back and forth. I couldn’t imagine my works as unrelated to the novelty of the historical presence.

BDB: Instead of starting from an analysis of a context, it starts from an acknowledgment and a rendering visible of the conditions. If we compare your methodology with Femen—you’ve already offered a beautiful and very consistent answer with the synapses, but I’ll ask this again all the same—we notice that they work with an output-oriented effectiveness. Is that something you would consider for your work?

K EV: My work makes use of the activism model, yes, it belongs to that family.

BDB: One of our reference artists in Antwerp, Guy Mees, was a hero for us because he was the ultimate anti-hero. We have one of his works from the 1960s in the collection. It is called Lost Space, a prism made of embroidery with black light emanating from its inside. He once said to me: “If I were an American artist, I would have made it room-size, but I’m not.” For him, the reduced model was the right scale. In activism, as I experience it, you have a topic, you turn the topic into a specific goal, and you take a path the authorities do not expect. One of the important components in this is the mediatization. Femen is an extreme example of that, in a most precise way. For you, the mediatization is part of it, as is the amount of people who see the work in an art context afterwards. But it is not the ambition. You count it in, but it is not—at least, so it seems to me—part of the performative image. It is something that may or may not happen.

K EV: You’re right, I am not very interested in mass media. For Axe de la

Révolution, it just happened, I didn't expect it at all, it was crazy. In this specific situation, the performance was seen as such a contestation and transgression that all major television stations came. Actually, I would rather not have gotten that much attention because, in such a tense context, our actions could have landed us in jail. Since then, I've moved my focus away from activist performance and towards the subjective experience of time and temporal structures, in an almost phenomenological sense.

Still, activist artists remain an important influence. I like Alexander Brenner, an artist and activist based in Moscow, for example; in a famous performance at the Pushkin Museum, Brenner was naked and shouting, crying: "Why did you not invite me to this show?" It was super radical, but also super fun and humorous. It is very subtly political, in his case. Or Anatoly Osmolovsky, who, with the activist group E.T.I., used human bodies to write a vulgar Russian word for "dick" on Red Square. Of course, they were counting on media attention, but there is an immediate symbolic efficiency in the proposals. For me, the media effect is only secondary. What interests me is how a work responds to the place, site, or situation in which it happens.

BDB: If we go through the classical notions of performance, I have a list of them here ... the body does not exist as a body but as an experience, and as an actor in the image. The space is a holistic here and now, with all its capacities and all its specificities, expectations, limits, laws, and regulations. I'd name this form "a constructed performative image," but such a description becomes nearly a mathematics of words. It wants to become something and the something is very focused and precise. If we look at the documentation, it seems that for the afterlife you don't have an answer, but always a multitude of possibilities.

K EV: No, I don't have an answer, and it bothers me: I would like to have one. There may be the afterlife in the form of a new event ...

BDB: Like a re-enactment, or like what we did with Augenmusik in Ghent...

K EV: Not necessarily. There are broader possibilities still. It may be a performative conference, or any type of live modality. In the case of Axe de la Révolution, I once did nothing more than narrate it through a series of one-to-one conversations with the public. That was for a solo show that lasted

two weeks. Or it can be a very distance re-enactment, because the works are so site-specific, and their site-specificity is part of their nature, so the re-enactment has to contain that as well. It has to keep the key problematics and formal elements of the initial work, though the mise-en-scène can change completely. That is the first modality. A second modality is the archive, in an indexed way. A third are the new and autonomous artworks that come out of or strongly echo the initial performance, as when elements of the performance (documentation, props, etc.) are transformed into a new work. It could be a sculptural work, a video, or an installation. If I were to use Robert Smithson's terms, this would be a kind of "non-site." However, it is very paradoxical to try to render the evasive and shifting nature of a performance—an event—within the static form created for an exhibition space. We can almost say that the site-specific practice works against its own final location, be it a museum or a gallery. Another way to think of a site-specific practice for me is through an analogy with the notion of a readymade, a found object: I am working with a "found place" (a term used in environmental theater), or even a "found situation." This is about approaching the context: the geography of a place, its social, political, and historical dimension—outside of representational terms.

-- > Full version of the conversation [here](#)

En garde by John C. Welchman

1.

One of the key operating parameters for (*Le Plus Objet des Objets*) is *stealth*. While the event was announced in a formal invitation in January 2020 as the last in a cycle of four associated performances some weeks after the opening in October 2019 of an exhibition at the Zadkine Museum in Paris ('Instant de la Matière'), no further information about it was posted. There was no associated wall text or handout; and during the ensuing event the artist herself did not directly enter the space. Visitors could see no stage or performers—nothing that pointed to anything answering to the event; no visible trace, in fact, of something that to all appearances seemed not to be taking place. Visitors were only alerted to the possibility that they had been unwitting participants in, or witnesses to, the event when they left the space and were given a numbered and stamped slip of paper attesting to their presence and imbrication in whatever it was that had transpired. This *Accusé de Participation* functions, simultaneously as a receipt and attestation, but also—as both the French original and its English translation suggest—as a means of *accusation*.

But more than *stealth*, the action was subject to plausible deniability, as the officers of the museum and the exhibition's curator, brushed-off or deflected any inquiries about the event and seemed—or claimed—to have no knowledge about it. *Stealth*, redundancy and deniability thus combined to frame the event as a kind of fraud or deception; or the very least, a secret of some kind ordained by a non-disclosure agreement that was itself undisclosed.

2.

Katya Ev's set-up replaced and augmented all of the invigilating and supervisory staff who would normally work at the reception desk, the security station outside the galleries and, as attendants, in the exhibition galleries themselves. Normally numbering around half a dozen, for her opening night event, Ev commissioned eleven performers, camouflaging them in plain sight in the same kind of casual-smart attire that their opposite numbers in real life might have worn; and effectively replicating their "standard" age and gender profiles. From within these disguises, however, the surrogate protagonists represented a cross-section of individuals chosen because of their capacities to simulate, order or even control the rhetoric of exchange associated with a public situation: some were theatrically-trained actors or performance-seasoned musicians; and the group included the head bouncer from an underground techno-music club and a dominatrix.

The artist's careful selection of "actors" offered partially to preempt the concept of a performance directive. She relied on a number of key capacities, orchestrated by a combination of personality and profession, including the ability to instruct or command in ways that were not ostentatious or conspicuous; an awareness of the formality, ritual and *politesse* of the museum space, so that the actors could inhabit the protocol of a guard, using a plausible repertoire of gestures and phrases associated with the function. But effective simulation of museological normality was at the same time overcoded by action mandates that subtly flouted or exceeded this basic framework of reference by recourse to a manner that, as the artist puts it, "would be delicately subversive, or absurd, or inadequate." By way of instructions that might be mildly contradictory, or repetitive, or accompanied by gestural or linguistic accents that somehow exceeded—but only in small increments—the visitor's threshold of expectation or awareness, Ev sought to precipitate and unravel the coercive constitution of art-denominated institutional space.

The "training" of the performers was a kind of interactive seminar predicated on "rules of engagement" that emphasized a number of strategies giving rise to a general mode of situation-correlated exaggeration. The impersonating guards would respond both proactively and reactively to the social horizons of behavior that unfolded around them, interposing facetious even ridiculous routines of advice and prohibition sanctioned by and drawing on their unquestioned authority. A visitor standing some distance from an artwork might be enjoined to "please move closer . . . a bit more, please." When performed seamlessly, this patent reversal of the usual injunction in museums to "stand back" and "keep your distance" might itself appear completely normal; and reluctant viewers would—unselfconsciously—find themselves in compliance. Ev marshalled an array of these control conditions: the nature and direction of viewer itineraries; behavior modifications; and a spate of cautions and warnings. Each was enacted and delivered by drawing on the resources of authority and conviction vested in the vocational arbitration of professional invigilation and secured by unquestioning public sanction.

19. *En garde*, text by John C. Welchman, 2020, about Katya Ev's infiltrated performance, (*LE PLUS OBJET DES OBJETS*), 2019, commissioned by Musée Zadkine, Paris, France for the exhibition 'Instant de la Matière' curated by Azad Asifovich.

3.

(*Le Plus Objet des Objets*) addresses the opacity, arbitrariness, and secrecy of the rule-governed orchestration of museum or gallery space. It foregrounds the over-riding mechanism of control by which these zones are ordered and disciplined: that of surveillance. To this end, it magnifies and italicizes the consequences of the coercive regimen by giving rise to counter-mandating episodes fraught with humor, parody, contradiction and even intimations of punishment. Above all the project reveals the contours of the manufacture of consent by way of conformist obedience—a declaration more remarkable because most of the museum-going public would never imagine that their volition could be short-circuited or deferred.

At the same time, the title, (*Le Plus Objet des Objets*), borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, points to the nesting of objects within hierarchies or groups; and, beyond this, to the defining relationality between subject and object. By foregrounding the structures that underwrite and manage social objectification within the museum as a system of objects, Ev points to a fundamental transmutation between orders of identification as objects are consumed by tactical subjectivities; subjects are objectified by routines of surveillance; and the event itself inhabits its invisibility by way of transgressions transacted through covert masquerade.

John C. Welchman is professor of art history, theory and criticism in the Visual Arts department at the University of California, San Diego. His most recent publications include the first two volumes of his collected writings: *Past Realization: Essays on Contemporary European Art* (Sternberg, 2016) and *After the Wagnerian Bouillabaisse* (Sternberg, 2019); *Catching Mayhem by its Tale*, vol. 2, *Paul McCarthy: Caribbean Pirates* (Hauser & Wirth, 2019); *Tala Madani: Shit Moms* (Vienna Secession, 2019); and the monograph, *Richard Jackson* (Hauser & Wirth, 2020). He is also editor of *On the Last Afternoon: Disrupted Ecologies and the Work of Joyce Campbell* (Sternberg, 2019).



© HLN

Performance art with a flashing blue light draws attention to the hard-hit cultural sector

AALST Three performers took a walk to Netwerk Aalst on Saturday evening with a flashing blue light in hand. They did this as part of the 'Still Standing for Culture' campaign and the 'New Songs for Old Cities' exhibition in Netwerk Aalst on the Houtkaai. As part of Still Standing for Culture, there were almost 200 actions by artists across the country to draw attention to the injustice with which they are treated.

Rutger Lievens 21-02-21, 13:40 Last update: 21-02-21, 18:22

09-04 Timmermans Aalst introduces new coach Idner Mertins. "He is hungry and ..

09-04 Silke van Varenbergh (Independent) opposes Province Psychiatric Centre in...

09-04 New asphalt layer for Gendestraat: "But have they forgotten to asphalt a strip?"

09-04 **RA** Johan Van Nieuwenhove Ge-VR, newly list: "Always Peking leader..."

09-04 **RA** "Feud" between Dendermonde and Aalst about Ros Balaard even lives on L...

[ALL MESSAGES](#)

International symposium as an exhibition space for visual arts

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Friday 13/12 in UFO (Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 33 9000 Gent) from 7.30 pm to 10.30 pm.

Saturday 14/12 and Sunday 15/12 in Zebrastraat (Zebrastraat nr 32, 9000 Ghent) from 9 am to 7 pm.

You can register for the symposium via <https://webappsx.ugent.be/eventManager/events/Arbeidendemocratie>.

More info on crescendo-s.eu/nieuws and facebook.com/events/389509278594210

Anyone who sees someone walking down the street with a police flashing light in the late afternoon of Friday December 13, sees a moment from a performance by the Russian artist Katya Ev. Twelve people then walk from all corners of Ghent to the main auditorium of Ghent University, where a symposium starts at 7:30 am with fascinating dialogues from 3 perspectives (economic, identity and city) with, among others, the Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis.



(c) Katya Ev, (c) photo Mathilde Geldhof / Camille Le Chatelier

The theme of the symposium is 'Labour and Democracy'. It was initiated by two friends, the Ghent emeritus professor of anthropology Rik Pinxten and Jan De Tremerie. It is organized by Crescendo-S in collaboration with 't Zal Wel Gaan, Ugent, the city of Ghent and DIEM25. Pinxten asked M HKA director Bart De Baere, a fan of his, to complement the symposium with a visual art section. De Baere invited three artists, the Russian Katya Ev (ekaterina vasilyeva), who knows Ghent well as a resident of the HISK, the Ukrainian Alevtina Kakhidze and the Greek Danae Stratou. They each make performative and socially oriented work in very different ways. The outcome is a fusion of symposium and visual art.

Katya Ev's contribution is a concentrated version of her performance *Augenmusik*, which took place in 2016 in Paris while the terrorist attacks were still reverberating there, as an image of urgency. She had twenty-four performers

HART Magazine (BE), [Internationaal symposium als tentoonstellingsruimte voor beeldende kunst, 2019](#)

ARTROZE

Door Jan Braet

Jan Braet kijkt naar kunst en het leven, in bloei en verval, zoals de rozen. Deze week de expo **Over my (dead) body** in galerie Geukens & De Vil, Antwerpen.

Na haar plotse overlijden vorige zomer prezen medestanders haar 'onverschrokkenheid' en haar 'kwetsbaarheid', twee eigenschappen die ze omschreven als 'machtige wapens tegen het onrecht'. De Oekraïense Oxana Shachko, medeoprichtster van de militante feministische groepering Femen, werd amper 31. In 2014 had ze de groep verlaten en was ze haar land ontvlucht als opgejaagd wild. Ze vond asiel in Frankrijk en vestigde zich in Parijs, waar ze zich toelegde op een oude liefde, het schilderen van iconen. Curator Azad Asifovitch presenteert er een tiental in de expo *Over my (dead) body*, aangevuld met sculpturen van Katya Ev en tekeningen van Sofie Muller. Op de smartphone toont hij me Shachko's allereerste icon, gemaakt toen ze negen jaar was. Een madonna, helemaal volgens de eeuwenoude regels van de kunst geschilderd: met tempera, eigeel en bladgoud op hout.

Op het eerste gezicht lijken de kleine anachronistische iconen die ze in haar laatste jaren schilderde pure afrekeningen met een diep religieus verleden, zo heiligschennend en uitdagend zijn ze. Een vrouwelijke Heilige Drieuldigheid op sneakers speelt doodgemoedereerd roulette. De naakte Christus aan het ene kruis vertoont een erectie, de andere gekruisigde is een naakte vrouw (de voorstelling van naakte martelaressen was absoluut taboe in de iconenschilderkunst). De aartsengel Michael van zijn kant verschijnt gewapend met een kalasnikovgeweer. En sommige provocaties zijn niet eens zo gratis, beweert Azad Asifovitch: zo zou de orthodoxe kerk belangen hebben in de gok- en de wapenindustrie. Maar Shachko's stijl is zo delicaat, de uitdrukking van de figuren zo vroom en zacht, dat het effect uiterst ambigu is, alsof er aan de snoeiharde satire toch een oprecht verlangen naar een zuivere religiositeit ten grondslag ligt, vergelijkbaar met die van de middeleeuwse iconenschilder Andrej Roeblev, voor wie Oxana Shachko een grote bewondering koesterde.

Ook haar landgenote Katya Ev verontruste enkele keren de publieke orde toen ze met Hanna Subovka heel Moskou van noord naar zuid afliep, gewapend met een zes meter lange metalen staaf, of in Parijs vierentwintig zwaailichten en sirenes van de politie liet mee-

→
DRIEULDIGHEIDSICOON
van Oxana Shachko,
medeoprichtster
van de militante
feministische
groepering
Femen.



dragen in een stille optocht. Maar in *Over my (dead) body* zorgt Ev met een ingetogen beschouwing over lichamelijke voor een mooie sculpturale aanvulling bij Shachko's iconen. Een maag, een nier, een baarmoeder en een long, licht geabstraheerd, in gips gegoten en glad gepolijst, vormen evenveel in het rond gestrooide organen van een *Corps Eclaté*. En voor de kamer van de galerie die vanwege het stucrelief op het plafond de *bonbonnière* wordt genoemd, zocht ze een geraamte van een bed in Louis XVI-stijl uit. Ze vulde het met melk, symbool van goddelijke levensdrank, zuivering en moederschap. Melk is bederfelijk, wie deze *Dôme du Silence* bezit, zal regelmatig het bed moeten verversen.

Sofie Muller sluit naadloos aan bij de onverschrokken omgang met kwetsbare lichamelijke en het gebruik van natuurlijke middelen. Geplaagd door een hernia was ze lange tijd niet in staat om sculpturen te maken. Ze tapte haar eigen bloed af voor een reeks kleine tekeningen op albast. Daarbij vertrok ze van levende modellen van wie ze in potlood de contouren schetste en onderwierp die al tekenend aan soms hallucinante vervormingen, in een toestand tussen wildgroei en bederf. Op de getekende lichamen bracht ze met het penseel bloederige vlekken aan die hun eigen vorm zochten: grillige landschappen, roodbruin en ook schimmelgroen door de oxidatie van het bloed. Een onweerstaanbare drang naar echtheid dreef haar, zo zei ze. ●

Tot 22 juni.

De naakte Christus aan het ene kruis vertoont een erectie, de andere gekruisigde is een naakte vrouw.

Knack Magazine (BE), Jan Braet, 'Over my (dead) body', 2019

August 13, 2014, 08:19 / Life style

Ekaterina Vasilyeva and Ganna Zubkova crossed Moscow with a pipe for the sake of art

Ekaterina Vasilyeva and Ganna Zubkova carried a heavy beam through Moscow. Their performance 'Revolutionary Axis' is one of the cutest art events of the summer

Olga Kabanova

Read it later

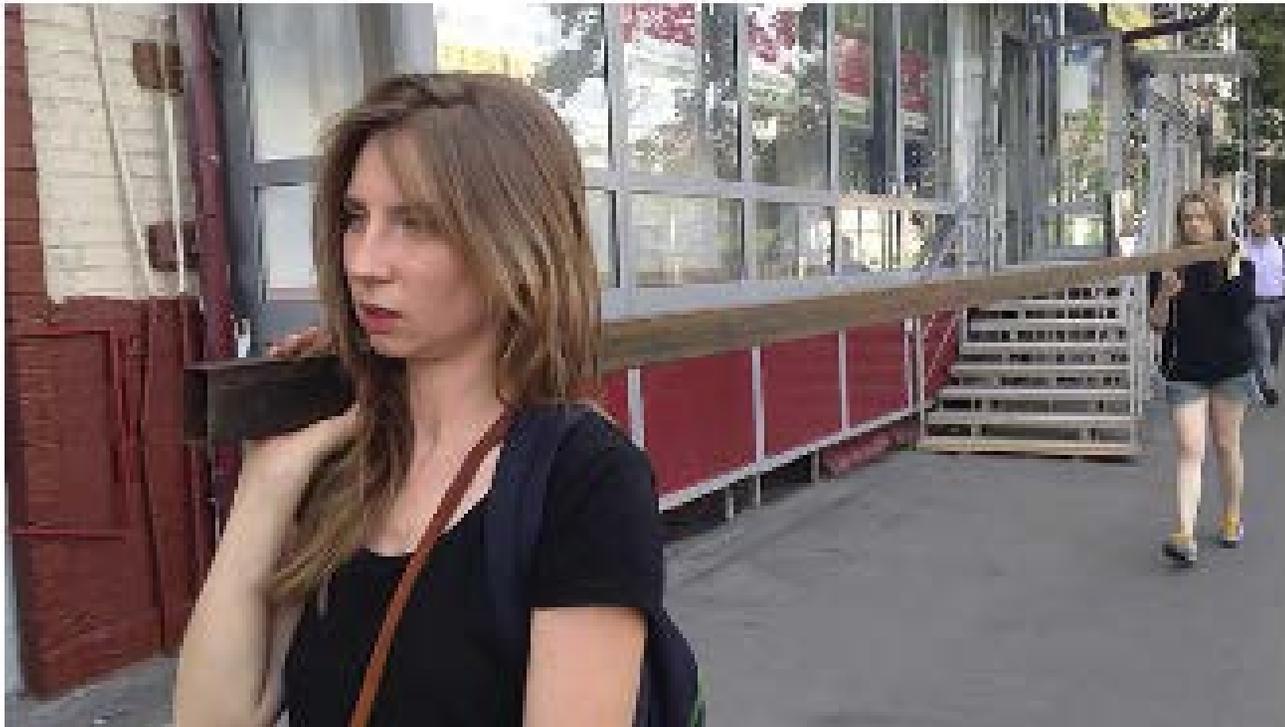


Photo: [www.fotojournalist.com](#) / The work of artist "Revolutionary Axis" / Ekaterina Vasilyeva



Construction of new projects of skyscrapers in Moscow

.....

ВЕДОМОСТИ [The construction](#)



Why is construction cost so high?

Large housing developers are working to standardize design solutions

In Moscow, every day you can find the remains of a once-research institute buildings for offices, there will be enough work for years to come



Лавров пообещал помощь

Министр иностранных дел Сергей Лавров пообещал помощь в восстановлении разрушенного храма в Сирии.

В Сербии ввели обязательную вакцинацию от гриппа.



Балку сделали мировой осью

Рыночное искусство. Чтобы провести акцию, художники пролегли через всю Москву с грузом на плечах.

Сила Духов. Несмотря на жаркую зноя, участники акции в Санкт-Петербурге прошли через всю Москву с грузом на плечах.

Решение «Бритоголовых москвичек» суд объявил вне закона

Судья отклонил иск о признании недействительным решения группы «Битые».



Васильева опять удерживают

Павел Васильев, отец 17-летней девочки, которую задержали в Москве, продолжает бороться за ее освобождение.

«Баррикады» ушли с молотка

Средств на строительство храма в Москве «Баррикады» продали с молотка за 120 млн рублей.

Жертву свадьбы просыпали

Павел просыпал невесту муку, когда она вышла из церкви.

Жизненные перемены

Павел Васильев решил изменить свою жизнь.

«Сражи лорды против нашей акции не возмужали. Видно, у них хорошо развито чувство вкуса».

«Это искусство, а не просто игра», — объясняет Павел. «Нам важно было выдержать все трудности».



Выставка «инет» Андрея

METRO, «A Bar transformed into the world axis», August 12, 2014

PRESENTE

Ekaterina Vasilyeva (nata nel 1983 a Mosca, vive e lavora a Parigi) e Hanna Zubkova (nata a Mosca, vive e lavora tra Minsk e Mosca), lavorano insieme dal 2014. Partendo dall'indagine delle forme di comunicazione, delle ambiguità linguistiche e culturali e procedendo con dei dati di fatto (architettonici, geografici, sociali e caratteristiche politiche del luogo), le artiste costruiscono progetti performativo-discutivi.

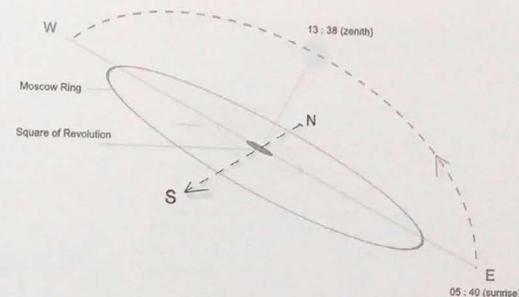
Axe de Révolution (Asse di rivoluzione, 2014) è una performance, della durata di 17 ore, di Ekaterina Vasilyeva e Hanna Zubkova, durante la quale le artiste camminano in silenzio per 45 Km, attraversando Mosca, dal punto più a Nord della città, sulla strada ad anello, fino all'estremo punto a Sud, mentre portano una sezione di metallo pesante rettangolare, lungo 6 metri e del peso di 13,5 Kg. Camminando attraverso la struttura urbana circolare di Mosca, che nella sua forma ricorda il modello eliocentrico di Copernico, le artiste disegnano una croce seguendo la traiettoria del sole. L'ambivalenza del titolo fa riferimento alla parola "rivoluzione" e allo stesso tempo, al termine latino, coniato da Copernico, che sta per il costante moto circolare, un capovolgimento drastico (di solito in senso politico).

Axe de Révolution è un esempio importante di performance astratta, che trova la sua origine all'interno di un contesto specifico e trova intensità emotiva e significato soltanto in relazione a esso. Dopo la restrizione estrema mossa dalla politica interna e il ritorno di uno stato di violenza nel 2011, l'anno 2014 per la storia contemporanea russa è diventato un punto di non ritorno e ha tracciato un assetto nuovo: la guerra in Ucraina, l'intensificarsi di guerre mediatiche e propaganda, il confronto economico con l'Europa, il graduale isolamento e la crescita della retorica di destra, sono alcuni degli aspetti. L'atto di trasportare una trave di metallo pesante per le strade della capitale russa, cita diversi aneddoti della realtà politica, storica e culturale: Lenin che trasporta una trave insieme ai lavoratori, l'1 maggio del 1920; il tran tran dovuto ai lavori di costruzione, tipico del panorama di Mosca; relazioni di potere stabilite dalla pianificazione cittadina. In questo clima di isteria che ha prevalso sullo spazio mediatico convenzionale, la performance è stata percepita da molti come un'azione di protesta politica. Ha toccato il nervo giusto, provocando la paura di un'altra rivolta contro lo stato. Un buon numero di giornalisti, compresi quelli della televisione di stato, che normalmente ignorano l'arte contemporanea, è arrivato a riprendere il corteo. Per la performance *Axe de Révolution*, il duo è stato nominato per il premio Kandinsky nel 2015. (KK)

Ekaterina Vasilyeva (born in 1983 in Moscow, lives and works in Paris) and Hanna Zubkova (born in Moscow, lives and works in Minsk and Moscow) work together since 2014. Through questioning forms of communication, linguistic and cultural ambiguities and proceeding from factual data (architectural, geographic, social and political characteristics of the place), the artists construct performative-discursive projects.

Axe de Révolution (Axis of Revolution, 2014) is a 17-hour performance by Ekaterina Vasilyeva and Hanna Zubkova, during which the artists silently walked 45 km through Moscow from the very North point of it on the orbital highway to the very South point, carrying a 6 meter long 13,5 kilo heavy metal structural element of rectangular section. Walking across Moscow's circular urban structure, that in its shape reminds the Copernican heliocentric model, the artists drew a cross with the trajectory of the Sun. The ambivalence of the title refers to the word 'revolution,' at the same time as a latin term, coined by Copernicus, meaning circular motion and its everyday use – a drastic overturn (usually in political sense).

Axe de Révolution is a powerful example of an abstract performance, that originated in the specific context and only gains emotional intensity and meaning in relation to it. After extreme tightening of the internal politics, and return of state violence in 2011, 2014 became the point of no return in the contemporary Russian history and drew a new setting: war in Ukraine, escalation of media wars and propaganda, economical confrontation with Europe, gradual isolation and rise of right wing rhetorics are among its features. The act of carrying a heavy iron beam through the streets of the Russian capital references several layers of political, historical and cultural reality: Lenin carrying a beam together with the workers on the 1st May, 1920; the routine of construction works in Moscow landscape; power relations set by the city planning. In the climate of hysteria that took over the mainstream media space, the performance was perceived by many as a political protest action. It touched the nerve, provoked fear of another anti-state revolt. A number of journalists, including the ones from state television, normally ignorant to contemporary art, arrived to cover the procession. In 2015 for the performance *Axe de Révolution* the duo was nominated for Kandinsky prize. (KK)



Schema tridimensionale
della performance
Three dimensional scheme
of the performance

Ekaterina Vasilyeva & Hanna Zubkova,
Axe de Révolution, 2014
Video
17'00" In situ

PRESENT

OPENING EXHIBITION

THE END OF THE WORLD

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